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Summary record of the 592nd meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 4 October 2005, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Martabit..... (Chile)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

General debate (agenda item 4) (*continued*)

1. **Mr. Kramarics** (Austria) said that his country aligned itself with the statement made by the representative of the United Kingdom on behalf of the European Union; he wished to add a few remarks, however. Firstly, despite the real progress achieved, including in terms of refugee return, Austria was concerned by the large number of protracted refugee situations where refugees had been living in camps for years or even decades. Secondly, with regard to the ongoing debate on UNHCR's role in the collaborative approach to internal displacement, his country supported its efforts to follow a more consistent and predictable policy on assistance and protection. It encouraged UNHCR to reach out for new partners and work more closely with host governments, donors, other international organizations, NGOs, and the representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on the human rights of internally displaced persons. Thirdly, Austria too considered that protection was a key aspect of UNHCR's work in that area, and supported the establishment of a new post of Assistant High Commissioner for Protection.

2. Finally, as part of the fiftieth anniversary of its accession to the Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, Austria had celebrated World Refugee Day on 20 June 2005 with a symposium, during which its Foreign Minister had recalled the country's firm commitment to tackling the root causes of refugee movements, to offering protection to people in need, and to searching for lasting solutions.

3. **Mr. Ree Iversen** (Denmark) said that his country also wished to align itself with the statement made by the representative of the United Kingdom on behalf of the European Union, and supported the proposal of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee on a strengthened collaborative approach to the issue of internally displaced persons, who were probably the world's largest group of vulnerable people. Redistributing responsibilities among the competent agencies was bound to be a step forward in establishing a reformed and more transparent humanitarian system. If UNHCR was to be effective in assuming its lead role in the three clusters of protection, emergency shelter and camp management in conflict settings, it would need additional resources, that might possibly be found through such mechanisms as the expanded Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF) and the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP). The new collaborative approach to internally displaced persons had to be open to non-United Nations actors, for example NGOs that were already very active in looking after displaced persons and the International Committee of the Red Cross, which had a more established presence in Darfur and the Sudan than most United Nations agencies. While Denmark remained committed to UNHCR's "4Rs" approach to post-conflict situations, based on the principle whereby sustainable repatriation and reintegration could only take place if there was a clear link to rehabilitation and reconstruction, it nevertheless sought more clarity and commitment from all partners and looked forward to the review of the approach in the pilot countries.

4. In another area, Denmark strongly supported the Convention Plus initiative and considered it was now time for UNHCR to reflect the initiative in its operations and take it to the field. Like Japan, it favoured facilitating development assistance with the aim of finding long-term solutions to endlessly protracted refugee situations. It hoped that good practices would emerge from the discussions at the High Commissioner's Forum in November 2005. The transition from the relief phase to that of development activities was of prime importance. In that respect, it was essential for countries of asylum and countries of origin to include displaced persons in their national development and poverty reduction plans. Likewise, displaced persons should be taken into consideration in efforts to reach the Millennium Development Goals, and refugees and returnees should be taken into account in the discussions evolving around the proposals for a peacebuilding commission. Denmark

welcomed the Executive Committee Conclusion on Local Integration, an appropriate solution for large numbers of refugees, as it did the High Commissioner's commitment to make Africa, where refugee repatriation and reintegration needs were enormous, a UNHCR priority.

5. **Mr. Gigaba** (South Africa) said he strongly condemned the Bali bombings and wished to declare his country's unequivocal support for the Indonesian people. Expressing South Africa's full alignment with the statement by the representative of Nigeria on behalf of the African Group, he added that only a holistic approach to the challenge of refugees and internally displaced persons, with development at its core, could yield durable solutions. Any approach not underpinned by that perspective could engender xenophobia, hostility, social exclusion and discrimination, especially in developing countries that did not have the socio-economic resources to enable them to pursue the local integration that was vital to the principle of international and human solidarity. For local communities, the integration of refugees and asylum-seekers had to be synonymous with rich cultural experiences and significant economic benefits, and not seen as a nuisance. Such a stirring of consciences had to involve partnership with local government, the private sector, labour unions and NGOs. Failure to achieve local integration could have harmful political and social consequences and, in many developed nations, had already been exploited by far-right political parties.

6. South Africa was convinced that development and humanitarian assistance were not mutually exclusive. UNHCR should act as a catalyst in developing a coordinated, coherent and integrated approach to post-conflict peacebuilding and reconciliation, so as to ensure that the repatriation of refugees was sustainable. South Africa continued to host many refugees and asylum-seekers, who were free to settle anywhere in the country and enjoyed a range of rights, including the rights to work, to study, to medical care and to some social services for children. His country favoured the adoption of the draft Conclusion on Local Integration. For the past two years, South Africa had, with Switzerland, co-chaired the Convention Plus Core Group on Addressing Irregular Secondary Movement, which had allowed all parties concerned to understand better the challenges and complexities of the phenomenon. His country called on partners from the developed world to take note of the concerns of countries from the South and to help them discharge their responsibilities to protect those in their territories.

7. **Mr. Sandu** (Romania) said that his country associated itself with the statement made by the representative of the United Kingdom on behalf of the European Union, and that his statement was intended to highlight certain aspects of Romania's approach to complex questions on the agenda. Given the close link between security, development and the observance of human rights and democratic values, Romania was determined to contribute actively to the reform of both the United Nations and UNHCR, in order to increase the efficiency of all their actions in consolidating that link. It was respect for that very principle of solidarity and burden-sharing that had motivated his country to offer assistance to over 400 Uzbek refugees. His country reaffirmed UNHCR's important contribution to protection and assistance worldwide, and was convinced that a common commitment to respect for the principles of protection was the backbone for a fair sharing of responsibilities. It was from that standpoint too that his country supported the establishment of a Common European Asylum System by 2010 and a transposition of the Hague Programme of November 2004. Romania's future membership of the European Union meant the development of integrated border management in line with European standards. That included: improving the control and management of the European Union's external frontiers; speeding up the EURODAC fingerprint database procedure and implementation plan; setting up a clear legal framework for police cooperation to strengthen the fight against corruption; and intensifying coordination and cooperation between the relevant institutions in asylum-related matters. After adopting the relevant

legislative measures and good practices, Romania would be able to provide technical support and expertise to neighbouring States, to help them consolidate their national asylum and border management systems. In that context, UNHCR might consider granting regional responsibilities to its representatives in Bucharest. Romania supported the objectives of the Report of the Standing Committee on promoting trans-border dialogue between States on both sides of the new external European Union border, and would participate in a meeting on the subject on 10 October 2005.

8. **Mr. Jatta** (the Gambia) said that his country, despite its limited resources, took in many refugees from the subregion; they now represented 0.42 per cent of its population of 1.4 million inhabitants. The Gambia therefore counted on help from the other Member States under the principle of burden-sharing. His country was sorry that many refugees' countries of origin viewed the granting of asylum as an unfriendly act, and urged the Committee to underline the fundamental importance of the asylum principle. It fully supported the High Commissioner's call for a strengthening of UNHCR's international protection capacity, including in the area of human resources. It applauded the Office's initiatives in promoting durable solutions, because it would be tragic if refugee status were to be permanent. The resolution of lingering conflicts on the African continent should continue to receive high priority from all States. More specifically, the Gambia would like to see continued support for reconstruction efforts in Sierra Leone and Liberia, as well as elsewhere. Similarly, peace should be consolidated in Senegal so that Senegalese refugees could return there.

9. **Mr. Skelemeni** (Botswana) said that his country had assumed the presidency of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in August 2005. He recalled that UNHCR was at present providing assistance and protection to 17 million refugees around the world, a great many of them in Africa, and that would continue as long as conflicts lasted in Darfur in the Sudan, the Great Lakes region and the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Despite the relative peace and stability that it enjoyed, Southern Africa was burdened with large numbers of refugees. The international community was therefore asked to propose effective conflict resolution measures that would not only alleviate the refugee situation but also promote durable situations for refugees.

10. Botswana supported the High Commissioner's initiatives aimed at addressing the plight of internally displaced persons. The latter had in common with refugees the fact that they were vulnerable, particularly through poverty, which exposed them to abuse and disease. The SADC region was estimated to host about 2.9 million internally displaced persons out of roughly 13 million in the whole of Africa. The two figures should fall as peace and stability came to certain areas. Although it was aware that the primary responsibility for addressing the needs of displaced persons rested with individual governments, Botswana nevertheless urged the international community to assist in the resettlement, reintegration and protection of internally displaced persons and refugees alike. In that context it welcomed the creation of the post of Assistant High Commissioner for Protection. At the meeting of SADC Commissioners of Refugees held in Botswana from 21 to 24 August 2005, the member States of SADC had been urged to sign up to international instruments on refugees and humanitarian law.

11. **Ms. Svensson** (Sweden) said that her country backed the statement made by the representative of the United Kingdom on behalf of the European Union, but she wished to add a few words on four pressing topics. Firstly, it should be recalled that protection lay at the core of UNHCR's terms of reference, there being no other organization in the world shouldering such a task. Sweden welcomed the High Commissioner's efforts to strengthen its protection activities, among other things by creating a new post of Assistant High Commissioner for Protection. She also welcomed the conclusions of UNHCR on complementary forms of protection, which should help meet protection needs in cases not

covered by the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Secondly, more should be done to solve protracted refugee situations by repatriation, local integration or resettlement. Sweden, which had long been a resettlement country, considered that more had to be done in that area. It was also desirable for the European Union to adopt a common resettlement programme, so as to find a lasting solution for refugees and share the burden on host countries. In that context, the Latin American regional resettlement initiatives within the Mexico Plan of Action should be closely followed. Another way was by finding ways and means for development assistance to target refugees in host countries as well as upon return and, in that regard, attention should be paid to implementing the recommendations in the *Statement of Good Practice in Targeting of Development Assistance for Durable Solutions to Forced Displacement*.

12. Thirdly, UNHCR should improve its humanitarian response, in particular for displaced persons. The suggested cluster approach should lead to better protection of and assistance to civilians, should define responsibilities, and improve responses to humanitarian emergencies, avoiding gaps and shortcomings like the mistakes made in the Sudan and northern Uganda. The proposals resulting from the humanitarian response review concerned the entire international community, so more States, NGOs and other international agencies should be actively engaged in the process. Finally, resources should be increased. UNHCR needed additional funds for displaced persons, because funds for refugee protection could not be drawn on for the purpose. UNHCR, generally, required more resources and Sweden called on countries to increase their contributions. For its part, UNHCR had to strive for ever greater efficiency in its operations.

13. In conclusion, Sweden warmly welcomed the progress towards establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund to which it would be contributing \$40 million. The Fund was an important mechanism to enable the humanitarian system, including UNHCR, to respond more rapidly to new crises and allocate funds to those that had been neglected.

14. **Mr. Owusu-Ankomah** (Ghana) said that his country's election to the Committee was recognition of Ghana's efforts in peacebuilding and refugee protection, not only in West Africa but across the entire continent. Ghana was playing an active part in UNHCR activities and was a refugee host country of long standing, fully respecting international and regional instruments governing refugee situations. Those efforts would have been in vain had it not been for UNHCR's leadership role, which had, for instance, made a salutary impact on the situation in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Peace in those two countries had been restored through the collaborative efforts of all stakeholders, who now had to ensure that there was no relapse. It was also important for the progress achieved in repatriating Liberian refugees from Sierra Leone not to be undone by a lack of resources.

15. In line with the principle of responsibility and burden-sharing, Ghana was continuing to host refugees, despite the effects on the country's already fragile economy and environment. It was important for the international community also to apply that principle, and to continue to give financial support to the good work of UNHCR. To implement its refugee assistance programme during the period 2004–2006, Ghana had prepared a strategic policy, which was constantly being updated as a function of need, in a joint effort with UNHCR, the NGOs concerned, and the refugees themselves. In view of the numerous conflicts in West Africa, Ghana had put in place measures to receive refugees from neighbouring countries, especially Côte d'Ivoire.

16. Ghana was looking hard for durable solutions for refugees. Thus, it had hosted a subregional seminar, with assistance from UNHCR and the Government of the Netherlands, aimed at making voluntary repatriation more sustainable. However, no lasting solution could be found to the problem without serious efforts to address the root causes. That was why it was investing without reservation in programmes aimed at bringing peace and stability, the bedrock of development, to the region. It was to be hoped that the future

peacebuilding commission would speedily become operational, and that the international community would continue to support peace initiatives in Africa. For its part, Ghana would continue to honour its commitments to refugees, and bring its experience in that area to bear on discussions in the Executive Committee.

17. **Mr. Ali** (Bangladesh) said he welcomed the emphasis the High Commissioner had put on the link between aid and development. UNHCR should encourage attainment of the Millennium Development Goals adopted in September 2000 to promote development and reduce poverty. It was, however, important to ensure that the provision of assistance was not driven by political or other considerations. The reduction in funds for humanitarian assistance channelled through multilateral agencies was also a matter of concern as it could seriously hamper the work of agencies like UNHCR. Bangladesh considered that UNHCR's core budgetary needs should be funded through the regular budget of the United Nations, with the means found for extrabudgetary funding when warranted by the situation.

18. The High Commissioner had also spoken of the need to encourage durable solutions across the range of UNHCR operations. Bangladesh nevertheless wished to recall that a framework for such solutions needed UNHCR to cooperate closely with the United Nations Development Programme, the World Bank and other partners. The concerns of refugee host countries needed to be considered carefully, and UNHCR should ensure it did not duplicate the efforts of other United Nations development agencies. What was more, voluntary repatriation should always remain the preferred lasting solution, although there might be exceptional circumstances requiring resettlement in third countries or local integration. Whatever the situation, the host countries had to have the right to adopt any mechanism they chose. By pushing for specific agendas, UNHCR was running contrary to the spirit of burden- and responsibility-sharing. Finally, Bangladesh regretted that the document *Update on UNHCR's operations in Asia and the Pacific* painted the situation of the refugees from Myanmar on its territory so gloomily. The Myanmar authorities had consistently expressed a desire to take back the refugees. Terming the situation hopeless, however, and encouraging talk of local integration and self-reliance for refugees would not encourage them to return.

19. **Mr. Koloma** (Mozambique) said he associated his country with the statements made by the representative of Nigeria on behalf of the African Group and by the representative of Botswana on behalf of the Southern African Development Community. His own country, consistently with UNHCR policies, had facilitated the local integration of 1,650 refugees and asylum-seekers in different provinces. In December 2004, with the aim of improving assistance and protection, Mozambique had, with the help of UNHCR, launched a registration programme that had succeeded in issuing identity documents to 7,244 refugees, 5,586 of them housed in Maratane camp. However, it had been difficult, for lack of resources, to provide proper assistance to the growing number of refugees from the Great Lakes region, particularly as voluntary repatriation was slow. More coordinated efforts were needed, in particular from UNHCR regional and country offices.

20. The Executive Committee was meeting at a time when world leaders were gathered in New York to examine the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. It was an opportunity for UNHCR to work towards those Goals and implement them in its humanitarian activities, so as to create a sound foundation for durable development. It was also UNHCR's responsibility to safeguard the principle of refugee protection and find lasting solutions for refugees in protracted displacement, to prevent refugee movements becoming a source of tension among States. The creation of a post of Assistant High Commissioner for Protection would undoubtedly help strengthen the role of UNHCR in that respect. Mozambique noted with concern the funding shortfalls that could compromise UNHCR activities, particularly in Africa, and encouraged the agency to broaden its funding base, so that it could provide enough protection to refugees and react in emergencies. For

its part, Mozambique would continue working in collaboration with UNHCR to alleviate the suffering of refugees and improve their living conditions.

21. **Mr. Himanen** (Finland) said that his country aligned itself with the statement by the representative of the United Kingdom on behalf of the European Union. With regard to internally displaced persons, whose number was greatly increasing, he welcomed the cooperation between agencies dealing with the problem, but stressed that UNHCR should not weaken its core work on the protection of and assistance to refugees. The great majority of refugees were people fleeing human rights violations. That was why UNHCR's work had to be holistic and should not just assist refugees, but should also aim at promoting democracy, strengthening economic and human development, and preventing and resolving conflicts. It was also important to improve and strengthen the international protection regime. That was why the creation of a new post of Assistant High Commissioner for Protection was a welcome move. The Agenda for Protection was an effective instrument, as was the Convention Plus initiative based on the former. The framework for strategic use of resettlement would be useful to the European Union, which was giving priority to the concept in its protection programmes. Resettlement, one of the three durable solutions to the refugee problem, was still comparatively little used.

22. Finally, Finland welcomed UNHCR's adoption of a two-year workplan to ensure implementation of recommendations relating to the security of staff and refugees, a question that had raised much concern at the previous Executive Committee meeting. Vigilance was still needed, for, despite the very good work done by UNHCR, many refugees, especially women and children, still faced violence and exploitation.

23. **Mr. Shoukry** (Egypt) said he supported the statement made by the representative of Nigeria on behalf of the African Group. During the past year, UNHCR had done remarkable work in Africa despite limited resources and difficult security conditions. It was important to exploit current peace processes to promote the voluntary repatriation of refugees. So far as funding was concerned, Egypt wished to stress the need for enough resources to ensure the protection of refugees, and strengthen the reception capacity of host countries in order to give effect to the principle of responsibility- and burden-sharing. Donor countries had to provide constant support to repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction activities, but should also not forget that the lack of resources had a serious impact on the economies and security of host countries. It was therefore important for UNHCR to expand its funding base.

24. It was also essential to keep improving the protection of refugees at the international level and to target development assistance at developing countries that gave shelter to refugees. In that respect, the new post of Assistant High Commissioner for Protection should strengthen the role of UNHCR and provide better coordination for activities both at UNHCR headquarters and in the field. Egypt would continue to provide active support for UNHCR activities. Its unrelenting commitment to refugees stemmed not only from its international treaty obligations but above all from its culture of solidarity and humanitarian protection, a feature of his country in the Mediterranean Arab world.

25. **Mr. Yimer** (Ethiopia) said he supported the statement by the representative of Nigeria on behalf of the African Group. He considered that solidarity with countries like Ethiopia that had incurred great environmental damage by taking in large numbers of refugees would enable the communities concerned to refocus on their own problems, including poverty reduction and underdevelopment. It was likewise crucial for the international community and development partners to focus attention on the need to bridge the gap between humanitarian relief and development assistance, especially in post-conflict situations. In that regard, Ethiopia welcomed UNHCR's consultations with other agencies in the United Nations system on strengthening the inter-agency collective response to internally displaced persons, while hoping that UNHCR's participation in such an initiative

would not undermine its protection mandate or the funding of refugee programmes. With regard to the Convention Plus initiative, although some progress had been made, particularly at the theoretical level, much remained to be done in terms of delivering real benefits on the ground. UNHCR should continue to explore all possibilities for implementing the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Somali Refugees, one of the Convention Plus initiatives, since it would help sustain recovery inside Somalia and thereby create a situation conducive to the return of refugees. Ethiopia supported the proposal to establish a post of Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, which would create a credible interlocutor on protection issues at the most senior level of the United Nations. Similarly, it welcomed the move to a biennial programme and budget cycle.

26. In respect of the refugee situation in Ethiopia, the process begun in 1997 of repatriating some 250,000 Somali refugees to Somaliland had now been completed. In that connection, Ethiopia commended UNHCR, the World Food Programme and the Somaliland authorities for their assistance and cooperation. As to the 82,000 Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia, the peace agreement signed between the Sudanese Government and the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement had opened the door for their repatriation, and Ethiopia was ready to work with the Sudanese Government and UNHCR to that end. It was also important to bear in mind the pressing need to rehabilitate the environment and certain parts of the infrastructure following the refugees' departure. In conclusion, his country reiterated its commitment to working closely with UNHCR in seeking comprehensive and lasting solutions to the problems of refugees, particularly in the Horn of Africa.

27. **Mr. Bruni** (Italy) said his country fully associated itself with the statement made by the representative of the United Kingdom on behalf of the European Union, and paid homage to those whose dedication was helping in the delivery of assistance and protection to refugees worldwide, but whose efforts came sometimes at the price of their lives. He considered that the outcome of the humanitarian response review recently commissioned by the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator was also a key step forward. Intervention in the humanitarian domain must be made more effective and the system must be made more predictable, to ensure better responses to crises. In that connection, his delegation saluted the efforts to establish an inter-agency cluster mechanism, where UNHCR would act as lead agency, for conflict-generated internally displaced persons, and repeated its support for the establishment of a post of Assistant High Commissioner for Protection.

28. Because of its geographic location in the Mediterranean, Italy was highly exposed to migration flows, and the large number of would-be immigrants arriving on its coasts once again raised the acute problem of the exploitation of asylum policies for economic and migration-related purposes, a trend encouraged by international organized crime networks and detrimental to the interests of persons in genuine need of protection. The Italian delegation therefore encouraged the High Commissioner to continue to strengthen cooperation with the United Nations agencies and international, regional and non-governmental organizations in the area of asylum and migration, so that asylum could be preserved as an institution and remain a central tenet of democracy.

29. His delegation took note of the budgetary estimates for 2006 and commended UNHCR's efforts to stress needs-based assessments and broaden its funding base, which seemed to have already brought noticeable results. There was still room for improvement of resource management but the progress made in formulating strategic goals and a more effective results-based budgeting process was to be welcomed. His delegation reiterated its interest in and support for UNHCR's priorities for action during the 2006 budget period.

30. **Mr. Kurttekin** (Turkey) said that his delegation shared the High Commissioner's analysis of the gap between the relief and the development phases and the importance of the decision to establish a peacebuilding commission. The High Commissioner had also rightly

referred to the mistrust still prevailing in the international community and the intolerance often whipped up by populism, racism and xenophobia as being among the problems and challenges of the present day. All such problems had their link to refugee situations. The change of attitudes that was called for more than ever in the modern world required dedication, seriousness and statesmanship. The Turkish delegation fully agreed with the High Commissioner that, given the international climate, the promotion of tolerance, reason and democratic values had to be a priority.

31. With regard to the fall-off in the numbers of asylum-seekers, the Turkish delegation considered that the international community and UNHCR would be able to meet the needs of genuine refugees more effectively if they could make progress in preventing exploitation of the asylum procedures, without jeopardizing protection of victims in need. Donor contributions were an important element of multilateral efforts for continuing the positive trend in refugee returns. Burden-sharing should also continue to be a key element and, in that regard, the views of developing countries, in particular the countries of Africa and Asia, should not be left unheard. His delegation supported the creation of a new post of Assistant High Commissioner for Protection and every effort of the international community to improve the security of UNHCR staff. It reiterated Turkey's support for UNHCR's work and its determination to continue contributing to achieving common goals.

32. **Mr. Choi Hyuck** (Republic of Korea) said he welcomed the many encouraging developments since the last session of the Executive Committee, but remained concerned at the protracted sufferings of refugees and other persons of concern in many regions, including East Asia. He urged UNHCR to maintain its efforts to provide protection for such persons through constructive engagement with the States parties concerned. He supported the proposal to establish a post of Assistant High Commissioner for Protection and applauded the continued efforts to enhance UNHCR's efficiency through targeted planning, results-based management, effective oversight and an accountability framework.

33. In 2004, in addition to its annual contribution, the Government of the Republic of Korea had contributed \$1 million in assistance for refugees and displaced persons in Iraq, and was planning to contribute a further \$2 million to UNHCR under the same heading in 2005. It hoped to be in a position to increase its annual contribution to UNHCR in the foreseeable future. The Republic of Korea recognized the need to improve UNHCR's capacity to respond to emergency situations and welcomed the enhanced efforts in staff training, the establishment of early warning systems and rapid deployment. It noted with satisfaction that UNHCR was incorporating in its work such global priorities as the mainstreaming of gender equality, the protection and care of refugee children, reproductive health, locally-based community development and the prevention of sexual violence. It trusted that UNHCR would pursue that agenda through coordination and partnership with other stakeholders, including the relevant international agencies, NGOs and local communities.

34. **Mr. da Rocha Paranhos** (Brazil) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Ecuador on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries. It welcomed the emphasis the High Commissioner had put in his introductory statement on protection, and backed the creation of a post of Assistant High Commissioner for Protection. It also endorsed the High Commissioner's stated intention to incorporate Convention Plus in UNHCR activities, as a means of enhancing the protection of refugees, as well as improving the capacities of countries to do so, especially as 80 per cent of the world's refugees were hosted in developing countries. It was important in that context for the root causes of forced displacement to be taken into account.

35. His country, which shared the High Commissioner's view that asylum was a central tenet of democracy, was building a constructive agenda on refugees, based on the belief that strong national and regional asylum systems contributed to the consolidation of

democracy globally. As the High Commissioner had stressed, intolerance was posing a major challenge for the international humanitarian community in its efforts to protect refugees and safeguard the asylum system. In Brazil, a nation built on the basis of ethnic diversity and tolerance, large communities of people of the most diverse origins lived peacefully together. That tradition of tolerance was reflected in its legislation on refugees, and the country was currently host to refugees from 57 different countries, drawn from every religious and ethnic background. The implementation of legislation on asylum was a joint endeavour by the Government and civil society, which were equally represented on Brazil's National Committee for Refugees. NGOs such as CARITAS played a fundamental role in the reception and integration of refugees and the private sector was also increasingly taking part in the process, with the Committee awarding a "solidarity label" to firms employing refugees.

36. The Brazilian asylum system did not use the refugee camp approach, but favoured the local integration of refugees. It was, however, a demanding policy for a developing country. The process of integrating and promoting the self-reliance of refugees had to be based on sustainable resettlement and refugee policies. It was therefore crucial for refugees not to be seen by the local community as competitors who were a drain on the public purse. In that respect, UNHCR and the international community would have to support developing countries in their efforts at local refugee integration. His delegation noted that the Executive Committee was about to approve a conclusion on local integration, the first ever on the issue. Finally, it wished to express its satisfaction that the High Commissioner was to visit Brazil in November 2005, which should help consolidate the fruitful and friendly relations between the country and UNHCR.

37. **Mr. Ali** (Uganda) said his country associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Nigeria on behalf of the African Group and welcomed the emphasis placed by the High Commissioner on linking refugee assistance with development. On the other hand, he regretted the lack of concrete steps taken to translate the Convention Plus initiative into practice, and called upon other stakeholders to embark on a new dialogue to push the agenda forward. His Government had taken steps to integrate refugees into its poverty eradication action plans and also to provide refugees with access to its social services. He thanked the Danish Government for earmarking \$15 million, and UNHCR for its part in establishing a fund to improve food security and livelihoods for refugees and host communities. Other development partners were invited to lend their financial support to improve access to social services and poverty eradication.

38. The year 2003 had been earmarked as a year for voluntary return and sustainable reintegration of refugees in Africa, partly because of positive developments in the political situation; however, Uganda continued to receive refugees. The international community should in that respect continue to support the peace processes in order to bring about sustainable peace and stability in the region. Uganda encouraged recent initiatives to streamline inter-agency collaboration in respect of internally displaced persons. The country had about 1.4 million such persons, forced to flee by attacks on civilians by rebels of the Lord's Resistance Army, but its response to the situation had remained largely ad hoc, as it received only limited external support. Uganda was one of the few countries with a national policy on internally displaced persons, and backed the formulation of a regional protocol on them as part of the ongoing International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the objective being to streamline assistance to internally displaced persons in the region.

39. Uganda's assistance to refugees had never been quantified but its scale was significant given the large amount of land allocated for refugees and their impact on the environment and social services. That was why development partners should provide additional contributions to refugee-hosting countries. Convinced that lasting solutions could

be found for refugees only through partnership, Uganda's hope and wish was that it would be able to fulfil its commitments to enable refugees to live normal lives and enjoy their rights.

40. **Mr. Kessedjian** (France) said he associated his delegation with the statement made by the representative of the United Kingdom on behalf of the European Union. On the crisis in Darfur, where worsening insecurity was exacerbating the working conditions of humanitarian aid workers stationed in the area, France fully supported UNHCR's activities in the Sudan and Chad, including the emphasis it put on reducing disparities between the treatment of refugees, displaced persons and local communities. It also supported efforts by the African Union both on the ground and in the search for a political settlement, and hoped that the Abuja discussions would lead speedily to a lasting peace for the whole country.

41. The French delegation welcomed UNHCR's decision to establish a resettlement service, given the usefulness of such an approach for some refugees, although care must be taken to ensure that hope of future resettlement should not perpetuate situations of vulnerability. It again stressed the importance of registration as an instrument of protection, whatever the situation, and assured the High Commissioner of its determination to maintain the authority of UNHCR to allow it to get on calmly with its work. France supported the proposal to create a post of Assistant High Commissioner for Protection. It also joined with all the delegations that had so forcibly said that in no circumstances should the protection of displaced persons be provided at the expense of that of refugees. It was on the basis of negotiated solutions, taking into consideration the resources and staff available, that all parties could agree on what they were each really capable of in the short term.

42. In 2003, France's *Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides* (French Office for Refugees and Stateless Persons) (OFPRA) had processed 62,000 asylum applications, while the Ministry of the Interior had dealt with 28,000 under the territorial asylum heading, i.e. a total of 90,000 applications. In 2004, OFPRA became the sole channel for processing asylum applications, recording 65,600, or an overall fall-off of 27 per cent in asylum applications. Despite that, France still received more asylum-seekers than any other country in 2004. The Act of 10 December 2003, adopted in agreement with the European Union, provided better protection for asylum-seekers, broadening the scope of application of the 1951 Geneva Convention by including persecution by non-State agents in cases where the authorities of the country concerned could not provide protection. The same act also instituted a new form of protection: "subsidiary protection", which permitted persons to reside in France if they were exposed to certain grave threats if they returned to their country of origin for reasons other than those foreseen in the Geneva Convention. Worthy of note was the fact that UNHCR representatives sat on the Board of OFPRA and its Appeals Commission. In conclusion, he announced that an additional sum of 1,745,000 euros would be provided to UNHCR, bringing the total contribution of France in 2005 to more than 10 million euros, or an increase of more than 12 per cent over 2004.

43. **Mr. Azam Dadfar** (Afghanistan) said that no one understood the importance of international protection more clearly than the millions of Afghans displaced in the course of the past few decades. Afghanistan had recently acceded to the two main instruments of humanitarian law, the 1951 Geneva Convention and its 1967 Protocol. Since the signing of the Bonn Agreement nearly four years previously, Afghanistan had made clear progress in building democracy and securing social and economic stability. Many challenges remained along the way, however, and security in parts of the country remained a challenge. The ongoing development efforts would require time and resources to yield tangible results, which meant that Afghanistan still needed the support of the international community, if it was not to relapse into conflict and instability. For a fourth consecutive year, the volume of repatriation to Afghanistan remained high. Since early 2002, a total of 4.2 million refugees had returned to the country, essentially from Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Although since 2002 over 1 million internally displaced persons had been able to return to their places of origin, some 140,000 were still in camps, mostly in the south of the country. With the support of the international community, the Government of Afghanistan would like to find lasting solutions for such persons by the end of 2006.

44. Ensuring sustainable resettlement for returnees remained a challenge for the Afghan authorities; shortage of employment, housing and land being some of the constraints. The Government had undertaken to distribute land to landless returnees in their provinces of origin. Although the situation was no longer an emergency and the country was moving into the development stage, the need for humanitarian assistance still remained crucial, in view of the ongoing repatriations, as was shown by the return of over 100,000 refugees following the closure of camps in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Many Afghans remained abroad, with Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran still hosting about 6 million of them, not all of them refugees. Afghanistan called on all stakeholders to strengthen their cooperation and seek a comprehensive solution to the many problems bound up with the situation. In conclusion, Afghanistan renewed its gratitude to the countries that had hosted Afghans for many years, and to all countries who were continuing to assist them in their efforts to build a stable and democratic Afghanistan.

45. **Mr. Aung** (Myanmar) said that for the past 10 years his country and UNHCR had been collaborating on a voluntary programme for returnees from Bangladesh. Thus, in the wake of bilateral agreements between Myanmar and Bangladesh, between 30 April 1994 and 31 August 2005, a total of 236,495 persons had been repatriated to Northern Rakhine State, and a total of 5,704,162 dollars had been disbursed. The voluntary repatriation programme was being successfully implemented as a result of excellent collaboration among all concerned and the generous assistance of donors.

46. Myanmar had more than 3,000 miles of land borders with neighbouring countries. Its eastern frontiers were particularly porous and it was hard to control the flow of illegal migrant workers. However, such bilateral migration issues were being managed by Myanmar and Thailand in a spirit of close cooperation. Thus, workers from Myanmar who had migrated to Thailand in search of a better future had been reunited with their families. The authorities would seek assistance from UNHCR if the need arose.

47. **Mr. Nassour** (Chad) referred to the problem of refugees from the Sudan and the Central African Republic living in Chad and the effects of the massive influx of refugees, viz.: environmental degradation, rising living costs, problems in sharing scarce resources, social instability and infiltration by uncontrolled elements that made for insecurity in refugee reception areas. Since the Darfur crisis, more than 250,000 Sudanese had found refuge in the border areas between the Sudan and Chad, whilst, in the south of the country, more than 40,000 refugees from the Central African Republic had been housed in camps. Most of them were vulnerable persons (women, children and the elderly), covered by national and international protection.

48. Chad, with its more than 30 years' experience of civil war, understood the sufferings of those forced to flee hearth and home. Local populations had accepted the refugees unstintingly, and had made sacrifices to welcome them and share their meagre resources with them. At the same time, the humanitarian organizations that helped only refugees created an imbalance between them and the host population and tensions between the communities. So far as security was concerned, in the east and south of the country the situation was more or less out of hand for the local communities. In the east, armed militias were making repeated incursions into the frontier areas between Chad and the Sudan and sowing terror. In the south, armed groups were roaming the countryside and stopping the villagers from cultivating their lands. In such circumstances, famine was only to be expected. According to reports from the local authorities in areas hosting refugees, more

than 1 million Chadians were directly or indirectly affected by the Darfur crisis and the situation in the Central African Republic.

49. Chad intended to continue providing aid to refugees on its land and reaffirmed its determination to shoulder all its responsibilities under the international treaties it was party to. At the same time, with more than 250,000 persons to look after in the east and more than 40,000 in the south, and given the paucity of resources available to its National Commission for Reception and Assistance, its capacity was being sorely tested. The delegation of Chad therefore appealed to all to support a strengthening of the Commission's capacities. The recent visit of the High Commissioner to the Sudanese refugee camps in eastern Chad testified not only to the support to refugees provided by UNHCR but also to the efforts of the Government of Chad in general in relation to humanitarian assistance.

50. In conclusion, Chad reaffirmed its total and unshakeable desire to work alongside the United Nations on behalf of refugees, regardless of nationality or race. Voluntary repatriation of refugees in security and dignity remained a concern for Chad's authorities in the context of efforts to find lasting solutions to the problems of refugees in Africa and the world.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.