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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Sixtieth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 629th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 28 September 2009, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. DUMONT (Argentina)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (continued)

1. Mr. MATTEI (France) commended the staff of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for continuing to deal with successive humanitarian crises in a significantly deteriorated environment. The global economic crisis, the continuing food crisis and the impact of climate change challenged UNHCR to adapt its mode of operation. France fully supported efforts to strengthen security in the field, where reduced humanitarian space and worsening security meant that staff were increasingly targeted. It was equally committed to ensuring protection for civilian populations and supported the efforts of the Security Council Expert Group on the Protection of Civilians, which should focus on strengthening mandates for civilian protection in peacekeeping operations.
2. France was committed to meeting the challenges posed by humanitarian crises through guarantees of effective access to populations, as a means of preserving humanitarian space, strengthened coordination with all stakeholders, including military personnel, and a global coordination strategy that would allow humanitarian personnel to identify prospects for reconstruction and development as soon as emergency aid had been delivered.
3. France, which enjoyed fruitful cooperation with UNCHR, had recently concluded a framework agreement on cooperation with UNHCR, which was now being implemented. It furthermore valued the expertise of UNHCR in the European context, in particular with regard to the development of a common European asylum system and the promotion of resettlement of refugees in the European Union.
4. As the recipient of a large number of asylum applications, France was aware of its responsibilities and during the past year it had again become a country of resettlement. It encouraged all Member States to facilitate the adoption of the conclusions on international protection as swiftly as possible.
5. France supported the UNHCR reform and rationalization process, which would sharpen the focus on the objectives defined in the UNHCR mandate and strengthen coordination with other agencies. France was determined to continue providing UNHCR with financial support, despite its own budgetary constraints; its contribution would remain unaffected so as to allow UNHCR greater flexibility. As some donors were unable to increase their contributions, UNHCR should continue to mobilize other sources of finance.
6. Mr. KITAJIMA (Japan) expressed his appreciation for the dedication of UNHCR staff in a situation where displacement of persons was becoming more complex and protracted and the number of urban refugees and persons displaced by natural disasters was growing, while humanitarian space was shrinking and security was deteriorating in many places. Japan strongly condemned the kidnapping and killing of UNHCR staff and other humanitarian personnel and commended the High Commissioner for his leadership of the organization at a difficult time.
7. The situation of Somali refugees in Kenya was a priority humanitarian concern. A solution for those living in the overcrowded camps was urgently needed, before the rainy season began. Japan was cooperating with the host Government and the local community to that end and had

contributed to UNHCR activities in the camps. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) was also exploring the possibility of providing assistance in regard to the water supply, self-reliance initiatives and local government capacity-building, in order to reduce stress on the local community and multiply the impact of the assistance.

8. Durable solutions for refugees depended upon a successful return and reintegration process, which in turn depended on the empowerment of refugees through education, vocational training and self-reliance. Such an approach was consistent with Japan's notion of human security. Japan was currently working on that basis with UNHCR in a number of countries and hoped to continue to provide effective assistance.

9. The Japanese Government had decided to start a resettlement pilot project in 2010; intensive preparations to receive the first group of refugees were under way, with support from UNHCR, traditional resettlement countries and others.

10. He welcomed the reform process and new budget structure of UNHCR, which would increase organizational effectiveness and maximize assistance to beneficiaries. It was now time to consolidate the changes and monitor their impact in order to deepen understanding of UNHCR activities and strengthen relations with all stakeholders.

11. Mr. SCHWEPPE (Germany) said that his Government was concerned at the plight of millions trapped in protracted refugee situations worldwide and regretted the lack of progress on the adoption of the related draft conclusions. He looked forward to participating in further negotiations in order to finalize the draft conclusions on protracted refugee situations and thus pave the way for durable solutions for those situations.

12. Conflicts were increasingly prolonged and harsh, affecting civilians, particularly women and children, damaging infrastructure, disrupting socio-economic development and preparing the ground for further violence. In addition, climate change and resource constraints were exacerbating the already hostile environment in which humanitarian actors operated. Germany was profoundly grateful for the commitment demonstrated by UNHCR staff in dangerous circumstances. However, it saw little cause to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions at a time when humanitarian space was shrinking, access to humanitarian assistance was often blocked and humanitarian personnel were being targeted.

13. Greater effectiveness and efficiency was needed in order to confront those challenges. Therefore, Germany strongly supported the reform process, in particular, results-based management. While it also supported the Global Needs Assessment process, and the decision to base the UNHCR 2010/2011 budget on Global Needs Assessment data, it considered, however, that it might prove difficult to mobilize funding from traditional resources to cover the 50 per cent increase in the budget compared to 2009. Germany welcomed the efforts of UNHCR to broaden its donor base and thus reduce its dependence on a small number of large donors. Moreover, the transparent and inclusive approach envisaged in the Global Strategic Priorities would be essential, as funding was unlikely to match identified humanitarian needs. Germany encouraged UNHCR to focus its assistance activities on its core mandate and to engage other actors in the search for sustainable solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

14. Humanitarian aid needs were growing faster than funding. Germany therefore strongly supported the United Nations coordinated humanitarian system with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) at its centre. UNHCR had been an outstanding partner for Germany in providing humanitarian assistance around the world and as a valuable adviser on refugee and asylum issues.

15. Mr. CUCIĆ (Serbia) said that his delegation wished to associate itself with the statement made by the representative of Sweden on behalf of the European Union. His Government supported the current reform process and the introduction of improved security measures. Indeed, some UNHCR staff who had lost their lives had been Serbian nationals. Serbia had the largest number of refugees and IDPs in Europe. While the number of refugees had decreased substantially since 1996, mainly as a result of local integration, 210,000 IDPs continued to reside in Serbia, some for more than 18 years. The number of residential centres for IDPs would be reduced during the coming year.

16. Serbia was the only European country with a protracted refugee situation. In order to resolve that situation, all European countries needed to ensure that the refugees were guaranteed access to all their rights in their countries of origin, including property, employment and pension rights. Moreover, additional funds would be needed from the international community.

17. His Government appreciated the support provided by UNHCR in preparing for the upcoming international conference on durable solutions for refugees in Europe due to be held in Belgrade in November 2009. The conference could support a regional approach to finding durable solutions for refugees in the region. Serbia supported the current work on the draft conclusion on protracted refugee situations and hoped that it would soon be completed.

18. Mr. KABWEGERE (Uganda) expressed appreciation for the support given by UNHCR in protecting refugees and displaced populations worldwide and, in particular, for the High Commissioner's campaign for the success of the upcoming Special Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the African Union on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons in Africa which Uganda was privileged to host in October 2009. The Summit would seek solutions for the perpetual problem of forced displacement in Africa and could change the course of African history if successful in doing so.

19. The process of voluntary repatriation of Sudanese refugees in Uganda had been highly successful and his Government was currently working to make an equal success of the voluntary repatriation of Rwandan refugees. Uganda intended to support a cessation clause for the Rwanda caseload at the appropriate time.

20. He recalled that repatriation was linked to rehabilitation of the environment and infrastructure in areas that had hosted refugees. Uganda strongly believed that UNHCR should continue to partner Uganda in order to address the issue of post-repatriation rehabilitation. In that connection, Uganda was receiving a steady influx of Congolese whose numbers had overtaken the previous caseload of Somali and Sudanese refugees combined. It therefore requested an increase in funding for its refugee programme.

21. The High Commissioner had provided valuable support in addressing the protection needs of IDPs in Uganda, rebuilding social services and physical infrastructure and restoring normality

in the areas affected by the Kony insurgency. Although a small number of IDPs remained in the camps, the situation was drawing to a close. At the same time, Uganda was again being threatened by the prospect of devastating floods, a bleak situation for many citizens. Although the Government was doing its utmost to prepare the population, further assistance was needed.

22. Mr. SAMARASINGHE (Observer for Sri Lanka) said that his Government enjoyed excellent cooperation with UNHCR, in particular in the current context of the assistance being provided to IDPs. The situation of recent and long-term IDPs in Sri Lanka was improving as a result of the Government's efforts, supported and supplemented by UNHCR.

23. The Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on human rights of internally displaced persons, Mr. Kālin, during his recent visit to Sri Lanka had observed conditions in welfare villages and preparations for resettlement. Sri Lanka welcomed his constructive, open and frank approach as the Government sought to fine-tune its responses to the challenges that it faced. The Government had taken note of the concerns expressed about camp conditions, freedom of movement and other protection issues.

24. The Government of Sri Lanka was working to reconstruct the foundations of a peaceful democratic social order, of which reconciliation and development were an integral part. An effective solution for IDPs was key to the success of that initiative, and return to normal life was essential to prevent and mitigate potential future conflict. Therefore, it was important to rehabilitate and ensure the security of war-affected areas before resettling IDPs. Those IDPs who had identified themselves as members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam were being housed in special rehabilitation centres and a separate office had been created to assist them. Policy framework had been drawn up to allow for the social and economic integration of ex-combatants and their full participation in building the new Sri Lanka. However, the Government had been cautious about releases and freedom of movement, as unidentified members of the Liberation Tigers remained in IDP camps and the Government had a responsibility to guarantee the human rights of the entire civilian population, not only those of IDPs. Attempts to characterize welfare centres and relief villages as "internment camps" were unjustified. Once IDPs had been screened, registered and profiled, greater freedom of movement would be restored.

25. The multi-party Committee on Development and Reconciliation had been created in order to address post-conflict issues in a pluralistic and inclusive manner and to promote national healing and political accommodation within a democratic framework that would ensure long-term stability. After almost three decades of internal conflict, Sri Lanka needed to rebuild its institutional foundations in such a way as to foster and preserve its societal diversity and to promote and protect human rights. Although the immediate focus was on those directly affected by the conflict, the long-term goal was to create a new nation where everyone was free, equal and hopeful about the future.

26. Ms. OVERVAD (Denmark) expressed her Government's support for UNHCR reform, which would improve the organization's impact on beneficiaries, and emphasized the need to maintain the momentum. She welcomed the Biennial Programme Budget 2010-2011, as it was based on real needs and the new Global Strategic Priorities and incorporated results-based management, in line with Denmark's own priorities.

27. Beyond mere protection, durable solutions were needed for displaced persons and host countries. Hence, strategies for self-reliance should be supported, preferably in the framework of national development plans. Protection challenges for host countries in managing mixed migration flows should be met by strengthening the capacities of migration authorities in host countries and adopting a multi-faceted approach that included national and international stakeholders. The improvement of conditions for refugees and affected local populations in regions of origin was furthermore a priority issue. Denmark encouraged other countries to incorporate the methodology of its region-of-origin programme, as well as other policies on mixed migration, and was ready to share its experiences with other countries wishing to do so.

28. Denmark looked forward to the upcoming dialogue with the High Commissioner on urban refugees and hoped that it would give added impetus to UNHCR and other partners that sought to provide protection and durable solutions to displaced persons.

29. She urged Bhutan and Nepal to resume bilateral discussions in order to facilitate the voluntary return of Bhutanese refugees to their country and she expressed the hope that the concerned parties in Kenya would find a swift solution for the Somali refugees in Dadaab camp and for the host communities.

30. The integration of climate-related issues into the work of UNHCR was a commendable initiative; those issues would affect the organization's work over the years to come and finding solutions to the challenges involved was a collective responsibility. In that connection, the impact of United Nations reforms and the "Delivering as One" initiative should lead to more opportunities for reintegration activities and better inclusion of displaced persons in national development plans. As partnerships were key to a more efficient response on the ground, Denmark welcomed the strengthened partnerships between UNHCR and non-governmental organizations with proven capacity to implement humanitarian and early recovery programmes and, also, with OCHA.

31. Mr. KAJWANG (Kenya) said that recent visits to Kenya of the High Commissioner and other senior UNHCR officials had allowed for a valuable exchange of views with the Government and other stakeholders on refugee protection challenges. Kenya had a long tradition of hosting refugees from neighbouring countries and continued to receive the bulk of refugees from Somalia, where renewed fighting had recently prompted further population displacement to neighbouring countries. The monthly inflow of 5,000 Somali refugees to Kenya had led to intolerable levels of overcrowding in the Daadab camp.

32. He welcomed the commitment of the High Commissioner and development partners to improving living conditions in the camps, as well as the emphasis on addressing the needs of refugee-hosting communities and restoring an already fragile environment which had suffered considerable degradation. The massive refugee inflows had also had a devastating impact on Kenya's economy. The Government was, moreover, contending with threats from extremist groups as well as the proliferation of small arms and light weapons along the porous border with Somalia. Despite such challenges, due consideration was, however, being given to the allocation of additional land to help ease congestion in the camps.

33. The international community, for its part, should pay greater attention to the search for a durable solution, namely, the restoration of a stable Government to ensure law and order in

Somalia. UNHCR should take the lead in raising donor awareness to that end, in particular through the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination. The impact of piracy on international commerce also required urgent international attention, as did the threat posed by terrorist cells in Somalia.

34. IDPs had become a problem for Kenya during the post-election violence which had erupted in early 2008; the technical and other support provided by UNHCR in that connection had been most welcome. The resettlement programme had proved a success and he was pleased to report that the remaining IDP camps would be closed within two weeks.

35. Mr. LEE Sung-joo (Republic of Korea) welcomed progress made by UNHCR with regard to its reform process, in particular the successful introduction of needs-based budgeting through the Global Needs Assessment. The establishment of the Global Strategic Priorities also promised further to enhance operational performance. Future priorities should include the development and strengthening of regional and international partnerships, not only to prevent duplication, but also to achieve system-wide synergy.

36. The sheer magnitude of the statelessness problem called for more active efforts; a workshop would be held on the issue in Seoul in November 2009, co-hosted by UNHCR and Korea University, at which comprehensive research on IDPs undertaken by the Ministry of Justice would be made public. Another priority for UNHCR should be to develop its age, gender and diversity mainstreaming strategy, in particular to benefit displaced persons with disabilities who were experiencing mounting difficulties. The establishment, in the Global Strategic Priorities, of specific targets to enhance the independence of such persons was a welcome step.

37. With regard to progress achieved at the domestic level, Kenya's recently revised Immigration Control Act institutionalized supplementary protection based on "permission to stay on humanitarian grounds". It also allowed asylum applicants to work in the event of a processing delay and provided for the establishment of a refugee assistance centre.

38. Mr. SCHAAPVELD (Netherlands) said the deliberate attacks against field staff resulting in several highly regrettable deaths underscored the complex circumstances in which UNHCR operated. Balancing the urgent needs of vulnerable populations with staff safety was an increasing challenge for the organization.

39. Each refugee crisis required a different mix of solutions; in responding to emerging crises, UNHCR should collaborate on common needs assessments with other stakeholders. The situation in Pakistan, for example, called for efficient system-wide coordination as well as reliable partnerships with implementing partners. The Netherlands particularly welcomed the key role played by UNHCR under the cluster approach, which should embrace all humanitarian actors.

40. The protection dialogue with parties to conflict promoted by the High Commissioner had provided impetus for identifying durable solutions to protracted situations based on a multi-dimensional approach. More work remained to be done in that connection. Refugee host countries such as Kenya made a considerable contribution to sheltering persons displaced as a result, inter alia, of situations such as insecurity and drought. Those countries carried a significant burden and should thus play an integral role in devising solutions.

41. The Netherlands had helped finance the massive local integration and return operation for Burundian refugees undertaken by the United Republic of Tanzania, a solution that had served to strengthen regional stability. In Afghanistan, UNHCR, for its part, had facilitated the largest ever return operation, demonstrating the value of cooperation with other international organizations. The “Delivering as One” initiative was key to ensuring the effective transfer of responsibilities to United Nations development actors in the transition from relief to development.

42. The Netherlands was particularly concerned by the sharp increase in the number of IDPs worldwide. It supported the mainstreaming of IDPs in UNHCR policy and would be co-financing the forthcoming African Union Special Summit to be held in Kampala in October 2009.

43. Internal UNHCR reform mechanisms were now in place and staff would need to adapt to the new structures, while lessons learned in the field would require efficient and effective follow-up at headquarters. The regionalization and decentralization processes under way made accountability all the more important. The transition to needs-based budgeting was most welcome, but flexibility would be required to balance the needs of different categories of persons of concern. The global economic crisis made it all the more important for both traditional and new donors to contribute more generously to UNHCR, particularly with un-earmarked funds. In that connection, an initiative undertaken by UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Government of Romania which merited the support of Member States was the establishment - in Timisoara, Romania - of the Emergency Transit Centre for refugees facing immediate protection risks pending resettlement processing.

44. It was to be hoped that the joint resettlement programme proposed by the European Commission would substantially increase the number of resettlement places in the European Union, thereby demonstrating greater solidarity with over-burdened host countries in regions of origin.

45. UNHCR should be commended for managing to deliver despite having to balance human needs against institutional feasibility; its inspired, committed work had an immediate and positive impact on the lives of millions.

46. Mr. HIMANEN (Finland) said that Finland continued to hold UNHCR in very high regard. Indeed, UNHCR was the largest recipient of Finnish humanitarian aid, which was un-earmarked on principle. His delegation particularly appreciated the manner in which UNHCR implemented its twofold mandate of protection and standard-setting, together with its important contribution to the development of a joint European resettlement programme. A common European asylum system would ensure equal treatment of all asylum-seekers as well as a better sharing of protection responsibilities among European countries.

47. UNHCR must be adequately resourced to meet the increasing challenge of IDPs while continuing its traditional work with refugees. Since 80 per cent of the world’s refugees and IDPs were in developing countries ill-equipped to deal with them, international humanitarian assistance was particularly crucial.

48. The Secretary-General, in his report on peacebuilding in the immediate aftermath of conflict (A/63/881-S/2009/304), called for a strengthening of the Organization’s response in the

immediate aftermath of conflict and an earlier, more coherent response from the wider international community. Despite the recognition that sustainable return and reintegration of refugees and IDPs was a core element of transition, UNHCR still had difficulty obtaining sustainable funding for its transition activities, however, shrinking humanitarian space was an issue of particular concern. The principles of neutrality, humanity and independence must be respected by all and safe access must be provided to all refugees. Moreover, international protection of refugee women and girls must be assured, including through gender mainstreaming in all UNHCR protection programmes.

49. Finland commended UNHCR on its efforts to: mainstream gender issues into all protection programmes; address the current and future impact of multiple global crises on refugee situations; accelerate internal reforms; and move towards needs-based budgeting. Transparency of needs-assessment and prioritization processes could be further improved, and inter-agency cooperation and coordination strengthened. The cluster approach to planning and budgeting was welcome and the close cooperation with OCHA and partner agencies in that framework should continue. It was to be hoped that UNHCR would keep Member States abreast of developments relating to the transition towards a field-oriented and decentralized mode of operation.

50. Mr. GUTERRES (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), responding to the various issues raised, said that the representative of France had highlighted two key issues for UNHCR action: ensuring that protection of civilians was consistent with the various protection mandates of United Nations peacekeeping missions and guaranteeing the autonomy of humanitarian space as well as universal respect for humanitarian principles.

51. The pilot resettlement project mentioned by the representative of Japan made an important contribution to doctrines of protection and assistance based on the concept of human security. As the representative of Germany had suggested, UNHCR should not assume full responsibility for development, the environment or peacebuilding, but play a catalytic role by progressively involving other partners. Indeed, that view was consistent with the third pillar of the agency's new budget structure.

52. In Uganda, UNHCR was helping the Government to provide post-repatriation support to refugee-impacted areas and to strengthen the protection capacities of local communities, including in remote areas. All too often, humanitarian actors were concentrated in capitals, and he strongly encouraged all Member States to promote humanitarian outreach to remote areas, where problems were often worse.

53. In 2008, UNHCR had sought to broaden its donor base. A contribution of \$30 million had been provided by the United Arab Emirates to the programme in Pakistan and other countries of the Gulf were also becoming involved in UNHCR activities. Increased private sector support was also essential.

54. He wished to assure the representative of Serbia of his commitment to facilitating returns in the Balkans and to ensuring that all refugees' rights were recognized. The international community, particularly countries of the region, should do more to resolve a situation which should not be allowed to exist in such a prosperous continent.

55. His first country visit as High Commissioner had been to north-west Uganda, where he had been impressed by the absence of refugee camps and the humane and generous treatment extended to refugees. Accommodated in villages, refugees were allowed to farm the land, attend school and use local health facilities. He appealed to the international community to provide support not only for emergency situations, but also for post-repatriation rehabilitation in the affected areas in Uganda. UNHCR, within its own limited resources and capacities, was committed to supporting the Ugandan Government in raising awareness of the needs of local populations.

56. On the subject of Sri Lanka, he recalled that it was always a challenge to win a peace once a war was over. UNHCR was engaged in frank dialogue with the Sri Lankan Government on camp conditions, the importance of early and voluntary return of IDPs and other issues of concern. It was also committed to supporting the national demining programme.

57. UNHCR was not a migration management agency; it recognized the right of all countries to define their own migration policies. However, such policies must be asylum-friendly and guarantee fair treatment of applications. All countries of origin, transit and destination must furthermore uphold the obligation to protect. In that connection, he would be interested to learn about Denmark's recent experience in providing assistance to refugees.

58. He welcomed the representative of Kenya's assurance that the Kenyan Government was considering allocating additional land to address the problem of camp overcrowding. The crisis in Somalia had a dramatically destabilizing impact on several neighbouring countries and Somali refugees were now a worldwide issue. Any interruption of humanitarian assistance in Somalia would have a particularly disastrous impact on the region; the World Food Programme (WFP) was faced with a very difficult task. During his own visit to Somalia, he had underlined the importance of a political solution as well as a comprehensive, "five-pronged" approach to dealing with the massive inflow of refugees to Kenya. UNHCR was committed to improving the situation in the Kenyan refugee camps and to supporting host communities. An important security package had been agreed, but a proper screening process was needed, as was a stronger police presence. UNHCR fully acknowledged Kenya's national security concerns and important role not only in providing asylum space, but also in promoting economic and social development in the subregion.

59. He welcomed the provisions on asylum that had been recently introduced in legislation of the Republic of Korea through the Immigration Control Act. UNHCR was committed to enhanced involvement in refugee issues in the Asia-Pacific region, and would work with its partners toward that end. He looked forward to working closely with the Republic of Korea as a global partner.

60. Referring to the statement by the representative of the Netherlands, he said that UNHCR wanted greater flexibility in budget spending in order to help as many population groups as possible. It recognized that it must demonstrate the highest levels of accountability and transparency in order to obtain unearmarked contributions.

61. Referring to the statement by the representative of Finland, he said that the issues facing refugee women and girls, including gender-based violence, were a priority for UNHCR, as

reflected in its policies and resource allocation decisions. Since domestic violence, for example, was a serious problem, even in countries that were not experiencing a conflict situation, greater emphasis should be given to the issue.

62. Ms. RODRIGUES (Mozambique) said that the plight of refugees and displaced persons in the context of mixed migratory flows remained a major challenge for the international community as a whole and for UNHCR, which she commended for leading the search for durable solutions to the many and intractable problems overwhelming refugees, displaced persons and others in distress. UNHCR staff in the field were confronted with growing challenges and she supported the continuing efforts aimed at addressing them.

63. Conflicts continued unabated in many parts of the world, generating further displacement. Africa was the continent most affected by those tragic situations, which were exacerbated by the world financial and economic crisis, steady environmental degradation and natural disasters. While she welcomed the achievements scored by several programmes carried out in Africa in 2008 and 2009, she emphasized that many challenges lay ahead, including the need to tackle the root causes of displacement. That the focus of the forthcoming African Union Special Summit to be held in October 2009, was the adoption of a convention on refugees, returnees and IDPs in Africa, demonstrated the commitment of the continent to the rights of those in need. The year 2009 marked the fortieth anniversary of the adoption of the Organization of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. Together the two should secure sustainable solutions to the specific problems faced by Africans and provide all refugees and IDPs with a more secure environment in host countries or in countries of origin.

64. Her Government, with assistance from UNHCR, had succeeded in delivering programmes benefiting more than 7,500 refugees in Mozambique, including in areas such as education, health, agriculture, income generation and training. Social welfare services, including measures against sexual and gender-based violence mainly focused on assisting unaccompanied children, single mothers and vulnerable persons. Local integration programmes had also been carried out for urban refugees throughout the country.

65. With regard to durable solutions, levels of participation in repatriation programmes remained low and, as far as resettlement was concerned, Mozambique needed to be given more opportunities to focus on those really in need of local integration. Mozambique remained committed to guaranteeing protection and assistance to all asylum-seekers and believed that concerted actions by all partners would greatly facilitate its efforts to meet its commitments.

66. She expressed appreciation for the High Commissioner's 2008 dialogue on protracted refugee situations and encouraged it to continue. She welcomed the progress made by the global and regional UNHCR programmes, and thanked UNHCR and the international community for the vital support being provided to Mozambique to enable it to serve the best interests of refugees and affected groups.

67. Ms. MIRACHIAN (Italy) commended the High Commissioner and his staff for their work in the face of growing challenges and welcomed the reform process under way. She wished to

pay a tribute to the UNHCR field officers who had lost their lives in the line of duty and to applaud the tireless efforts of humanitarian workers. She furthermore expressed strong support for the High Commissioner's initiative on protracted refugee situations.

68. In recent years the Italian Government had introduced a resettlement policy, steadily increasing the number of refugees allowed to resettle in Italy. The number of resettlement places was set to rise sharply in 2009, while in 2008, more than one third of all asylum applications had been approved. As for the situation of refugees in the Mediterranean region, she was aware of the concerns and criticisms expressed by UNHCR. The rights of all migrants, irrespective of their legal status, must indeed be upheld. However, Italy was facing unprecedented migration challenges with massive inflows of migrants potentially affecting domestic public order. Moreover, the Italian authorities continued to rescue thousands of persons at sea. It was for those reasons that Italy was pushing for a stronger European migration policy, including in relation to asylum-seekers.

69. Efforts to combat human trafficking should be strengthened through stronger cooperation with neighbouring countries, and programmes to help countries of origin to improve their socio-economic situation. Italy's commitment in those areas was undisputable, and she expressed appreciation for the outstanding contributions of UNHCR and others in addressing that problem.

70. Turning to the humanitarian crisis in Somalia, she expressed support for the consolidation of Somali institutions, but called for more resolute action by United Nations agencies and Member States to deal with the situation. Italy supported the regional approach promoted by the Group of Eight (G-8) to the situation in Afghanistan, which was one of unprecedented complexity, and remained fully committed to the humanitarian cause.

71. Mr. MUNDARAÍN HERNÁNDEZ (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), speaking on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, recalled that the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees would be celebrated in November 2009 and it would soon be the fifth anniversary of the Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action. The Plan of Action expressed a shared political will to tackle the growing and complex problem of refugees and IDPs in the region, and he therefore welcomed the decision to continue to use the Plan of Action as the strategic framework for UNHCR work in Latin America. In that connection, domestic legal frameworks needed to be strengthened to benefit persons in need of protection and improve humanitarian assistance in border areas and among local populations.

72. He welcomed the progress made by the Global Work Plan for IDP Operations and the mainstreaming of age, gender and diversity criteria in UNHCR global programmes. However, the focus on IDPs should not divert attention from refugees, who were central to the UNHCR mandate.

73. UNHCR should encourage Governments to reflect on the profound differences between migration and refugee policies and the realities in the region, in order to clarify trends and facilitate the formulation of coherent policies. The factors that led to displacement in Latin America should also be analysed.

74. Regional strategies to find durable solutions for urban refugees had scored a number of successes, with UNHCR providing significant support by identifying self-sufficiency and local integration projects, stimulating social and economic development in border areas, and developing resettlement programmes. Despite the progress made, the Mexico Plan of Action confronted a series of challenges, however, in particular, a shortage of resources. International cooperation remained essential for the sustainability of the Plan.

75. Turning to the decentralization process, he welcomed the establishment of the regional office in Panama, which should improve the regional response capacity of UNHCR and provide operational support. UNHCR should give priority to increasing its response capacity, particularly in the light of the current global crisis, taking solidarity and international cooperation as the starting point for solutions to humanitarian problems.

76. Mr. HILALE (Morocco) said that the High Commissioner had recently visited the Tindouf camps where he had witnessed at first hand the deplorable humanitarian tragedy that the inhabitants had endured for over three decades. In the Moroccan Sahara, the High Commissioner had witnessed the tragic cases of separation which affected all families there. Through UNHCR confidence-building measures, some families had been able to meet their relatives for the first time in the Moroccan Sahara. He appealed to UNHCR to find durable solutions for Tindouf.

77. At the beginning of the conflict, Morocco had appealed for the voluntary return of those persons forcibly driven to Tindouf - voluntary repatriation being the preferred solution in such a situation. UNHCR had also launched a voluntary repatriation campaign, but the Algerian authorities had forbidden it from informing those in the camps of their right to voluntary return. Algeria had thus been deliberately opposing repatriation for 30 years, not for humanitarian, but for political, reasons. Moreover, Algeria had not implemented the solution of local integration either. Algerians from around Tindouf had been driven to the camps in order to artificially inflate the numbers and 20,000 of them had then been allowed to benefit from local integration. Saharans of Moroccan origin had been discriminated against, however, and excluded from that durable solution.

78. The third option, resettlement, had never been offered at Tindouf. Given the current humanitarian stalemate, UNHCR should take all necessary measures to inform the camp populations of their right to opt for that solution.

79. Morocco strongly rejected Algeria's politically motivated opposition to voluntary repatriation. It would never accept the denial of the camp inhabitants' legitimate right to resettlement. Camp conditions were unbearable and, as there was no prospect of voluntary repatriation or local integration, UNHCR was under an obligation to proceed with resettlement.

80. Algeria had abdicated its international responsibility in favour of the Frente Polisario, which had militarized the camps and set up tribunals to try those who challenged its authoritarian rule or who attempted to escape. The camps could no longer be considered refugee camps, as the human rights were continuously violated there with the knowledge and open complicity of the host country.

81. Algeria's obstruction of the UNHCR mandate at Tindouf was morally intolerable, politically unacceptable and legally wrong. The role of UNHCR should not be limited to food

aid, but must be widened to include protection and, in particular, durable solutions. Since 2002, UNHCR had successfully repatriated 10 million displaced persons and had resettled over 65,800 refugees. Yet, at Tindouf, it seemed that refugees had been sentenced to lifelong exile.

82. During the High Commissioner's recent visit, Algeria had confirmed its decision to veto any census at Tindouf and thus had ruled out voluntary repatriation. The traumatic impact of prolonged exile was keenly felt, particularly by the most vulnerable, while the feeling of despair in the camps could be used by terrorist networks operating in the region.

83. Morocco could not stand idly by, while its citizens grew up and died as hostages confronted with the bitter choice between exile and risking their lives to escape. Those persons must be set free. His request for resettlement would have no impact on the political settlement process. Future beneficiaries of resettlement would retain their right to participate, in due course, in any referendum on a solution that might emerge in connection with the Moroccan initiative on autonomy for the Sahara region within the framework of Moroccan sovereignty and territorial integrity.

84. He called on UNHCR to sound out the countries that might offer resettlement places and invited it to inform other United Nations agencies which could contribute to the humanitarian operation. He thanked donor countries for generously providing food to the camps and he called on Algeria to assume its responsibility, to show compassion and to respect the humanitarian values that it had always claimed to defend.

85. Mr. SOUALAM (Algeria) requested the representative of Morocco to address only the agenda item under discussion.

86. Mr. KAZAURE (Nigeria) expressed support for continued UNHCR efforts to increase efficiency, assess needs, and mobilize resources to meet those needs. Nigeria had taken integrated and sustainable measures to mitigate the negative impact of forced displacement on development, including by strengthening institutional capacity to manage mixed migratory flows within a humanitarian framework.

87. The UNHCR policy of discouraging permanent camping and the growing need and desire of groups to improve their living conditions through income generation had given rise to alarming urban refugee situations that presented increasing challenges. UNHCR should develop a strategic programme to provide effective and efficient protection for urban refugees. For its part, Nigeria had taken steps to provide care and maintenance by establishing a resettlement centre in Zing, Taraba State.

88. In the face of persistent internal displacement in the region and subregion, Nigeria had acted to consolidate community-based development projects to prevent and mitigate deplorable humanitarian situations. Efforts were being made to enhance the role of civil society groups and the security system in humanitarian activities and to seek assistance from charities in implementing programmes in conflict flashpoints. Through its seven-point agenda, the Government promoted peace, stability and global security as a means of achieving the Millennium Development Goals, and it was committed to honouring all its obligations in support of UNHCR activities.

89. Mr. GARZÓN (Colombia), expressing support for UNHCR and the streamlining of its activities in order to meet future challenges, underlined the importance of cooperation between the Office of the High Commissioner and other United Nations bodies. Colombia was fully committed to seeking medium- and long-term solutions to the problem of forced displacement of its citizens, caused largely by violence by illegal armed groups. Working with UNHCR, it had made progress in applying relevant legislation and registering internally displaced persons, thereby facilitating their integration and access to State services. In July 2009, the Government had agreed a two-year plan for 2010-2011 in line with the Mexico Plan of Action and the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

90. Colombia had a strong legislative framework to provide protection for internally displaced persons, with a focus on increasing resource allocation. At all levels, measures to improve the situation of internally displaced groups in areas such as education, health care, protection of land and property, displacement prevention and improved documentation and registration, were carried out with the active participation of those concerned. The two-year plan for 2010-2011 provided for joint work with UNHCR to improve registration and deregistration criteria and determine how long a person could be considered internally displaced. UNHCR would hold six-monthly meetings with the Colombian authorities to monitor and evaluate the development and implementation of the plan.

91. Expressing appreciation to neighbouring countries which, with UNHCR technical assistance, had provided humanitarian support to displaced Colombian citizens, he requested that the figures presented in recent UNHCR reports be adjusted to reflect the situation more accurately and enquired about the criteria used to classify individuals as refugees. He welcomed the High Commissioner's receptiveness to Colombia's request concerning an agreement with Ecuador, to be concluded under UNHCR auspices in order to permit joint humanitarian activities to benefit Colombian refugees in Ecuador, and expressed support for the decision to continue using the Mexico Plan of Action as a guide for UNHCR work in Latin America.

92. Mr. SOUALAM (Algeria), affirming his country's continued support for the work of the High Commissioner, welcomed the progress being made to improve the efficiency of UNHCR, particularly in the face of ever growing demand for humanitarian assistance worldwide, further increased by natural disasters, conflicts and economic and demographic factors. It was to be hoped that the forthcoming African Union convention on internally displaced persons would help to reduce the worryingly high numbers of such persons.

93. Developing countries shouldered a heavy burden in providing assistance to refugees with only limited resources. Their sacrifices should be recognized and they should be supported in tackling the problems they faced in that regard. The initiative of reforming UNHCR and rationalizing its spending was particularly welcome insofar as it supported developing countries. Given the high number of recipients of UNHCR assistance, an urgent appeal should be made for donor funding for the 2010-2011 biennium to ensure that the priorities identified in the Global Needs Assessment could be addressed.

94. Welcoming the High Commissioner's particular focus on protracted refugee situations, he said that Algeria continued to host a large number of refugees from Western Sahara at Tindouf pending international recognition of their right of self-determination. Contrary to the claims made by the representative of Morocco, Western Sahara was not internationally recognized as

Moroccan territory. As the High Commissioner had seen during his recent visit, the situation of the refugees there was grave. More aid was provided by Algeria than by international sources. He therefore welcomed the reassessment of budget projections for 2010-2011, in the hope that it would contribute to improving conditions. The confidence-building measures to allow contact between refugees and their families in Western Sahara were a positive step and should be carried out in the most straightforward way possible. Algeria would continue to provide assistance to the refugees and called on the international community to do likewise.

95. In a globalized world, the scale of mixed migration made it difficult to distinguish genuine refugees from illegal migrants. He welcomed the UNHCR efforts to find new ways of responding to the needs of affected populations. The forthcoming session of the Dialogue on Protection Challenges should help to clarify the distinction between refugees and economic migrants without derailing UNHCR from its original mandate.

96. Mr. AVOKA (Ghana) said that Ghana was proud of its record of welcoming refugees and asylum-seekers and remained committed to cooperating with UNHCR and to honouring its obligations under relevant international instruments. Africa had once been known for producing refugees, but the efforts of leaders and development partners to strengthen democracy and the rule of law were changing the situation. Solutions had been found for well over half the 42,000 refugees registered in Ghana in 2006, and the process would continue. Nevertheless, the country had a large residual caseload, and he appealed to UNHCR to continue to exercise its mandate over those refugees who had opted not to return until durable solutions were found for them. Although the Government was open to the option of local integration, the security implications of integrating large numbers of people, compounded by the continuing influx of refugees, necessitated further discussion with UNHCR. Ghana valued peace and stability as essential to development, and he expressed the hope that the international community would continue to support national and regional efforts to eradicate conflict in Africa.

97. Mr. WANG QUN (China), welcoming the UNHCR reforms and the organization's cooperation with other international and national partners, expressed the view that refugee problems could only be solved by tackling the root causes, although he acknowledged that the situation was aggravated by economic factors, climate change, extreme poverty and natural disasters.

98. The situation facing UNHCR field staff was deteriorating, presenting a severe challenge to the organization's work. Only through constant engagement to preserve peace and security and achieve development and prosperity could the problem of refugees be prevented and solved. Since no country could solve the problem alone, countries of origin, host countries, resettlement countries and those providing assistance must cooperate with each other and with international organizations, in a spirit of solidarity and shared responsibility and with equitable consultation and close coordination.

99. Developing countries received 80 per cent of refugees, and UNHCR should continue to play a bridging role, encouraging developed countries to provide more technical and financial assistance, while always acting within its mandate. China hoped to strengthen its cooperation with UNHCR and to continue contributing to international protection for refugees.

100. Mr. GUTERRES (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), responding to the points raised, praised the open-minded approach taken by the Government of Mozambique, particularly with regard to self-reliance and local integration, in dealing with a complex refugee situation characterized by a high frequency of secondary movement. Mozambique's exemplary stance on the "Delivering as one" initiative had benefited all concerned, and he looked forward to further cooperation with the Government on promoting voluntary repatriation and resettlement more effectively.

101. He expressed appreciation for the candid and constructive remarks by the representative of Italy. Emphasizing the positive dimensions of Italy's work in the area of refugee protection and cooperation with UNHCR and reaffirming the right of every country to determine its own migration policy, he reiterated the need to ensure that would-be asylum-seekers were not sent back to areas where protection would not be forthcoming if it was required. He expressed the hope that dialogue with the Italian Government and more effective European cooperation would allow the issue to be dealt with adequately.

102. Turning to the comments by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, he recalled Latin America's long-standing tradition of refugee protection and the importance of the Mexico Plan of Action. He expressed great interest in the proposal of analysing the differences between policy and reality in migration and asylum in the region and said that he looked forward to working with the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in that regard.

103. Welcoming the support provided to urban refugees in Nigeria, he emphasized the importance of the Government's seven-point agenda in preventing refugee problems. Prevention was undoubtedly the best solution.

104. Although Colombia had one of the most advanced legal frameworks for protecting displaced persons, it still faced serious challenges, and he looked forward to continuing to work with the Colombian Government and other organizations in addressing them. He particularly encouraged cooperation between Colombia and Ecuador on the issue. UNHCR did not have its own figures for the number of refugees or displaced persons, relying instead on official data gathered by other bodies. There was a need to examine the difference between internal displacement and internal migration or urbanization and benchmarks should be set to determine when a person should cease to be classified as internally displaced. UNHCR would be interested in working on such issues with other organizations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross.

105. In response to the representative of Ghana, he emphasized the value of the dialogue held between UNHCR, the Government of Ghana and countries of origin in finding solutions to refugee problems in Ghana. He endorsed the comments of the representative of China regarding avoiding the root causes of displacement. Although the problems were humanitarian in nature, the solutions would always be political.

106. During his recent visit to Morocco and Algeria, progress had been made in several areas and much fruitful discussion had taken place. With regard to the complex situation at Tindouf, he reiterated the principle that a solution could only be reached in the political arena. In its actions, UNHCR took account of the needs, concerns and rights of the people involved. It could not be assumed that the status quo would last indefinitely. As an impartial organization, UNHCR not

only provided care and maintenance but also invested in people, for example through bursaries for study abroad. He recalled the enormous potential benefits for individuals and society of arranging visits between separated family members. The system was strictly administered by UNHCR to prevent any abuse, but he hoped it could be extended to benefit as many people as possible. He reaffirmed his commitment to cooperating with both Governments, despite the political differences between them.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.