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

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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 611th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 2 October 2007, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. MTESA (Zambia)

CONTENTS

GENERAL DEBATE (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (item 4 of the agenda) (continued)

1. Mr. MUNGAI (United Republic of Tanzania) said that his country associated itself fully with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of African States, and that it supported the restructuring of UNHCR to make it a more efficient and cost-effective organization. Even though, since the democratic elections in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, voluntary repatriations had intensified, particularly in the framework of the tripartite commissions established with Burundi and UNHCR and with the Democratic Republic of the Congo and UNHCR, the United Republic of Tanzania continued to receive very many refugees: around 462,000 in September 2007, 233,000 of them in camps and 228,000 in settlement zones. In that context, the support provided by the international community, especially Denmark (which funded an effective programme for managing natural resources and water, biogas supplies and vocational training in refugee reception areas), was particularly welcome. His country nevertheless appealed to the international community to increase financial and logistical support for repatriation and reintegration in countries of origin.
2. In responding to refugee problems, the United Republic of Tanzania implemented three traditional durable solutions, namely, voluntary repatriation, resettlement and local integration through naturalization. Experience had taught it that voluntary repatriation remained the preferred solution, especially if accompanied by incentives such as the provision of food rations over the medium term and payment of cash subsidies. His country viewed the return of refugees to their home country as a sovereign and an inalienable right; it was not acceptable to continue living in refugee camps once peace had been re-established. The United Republic of Tanzania was currently working with UNHCR and the Burundi Government to find solutions for each of the 200,000 Burundi refugees who had been in the country since 1972. Voluntary repatriation was encouraged, but most of the refugees apparently preferred to opt for naturalization, a process that could not be completed expeditiously without additional funding.
3. With regard to international protection of refugees, while his country continued to comply with the principle of non-refoulement, it considered that, in order to avoid expulsions, UNHCR and its partners on the ground should sensitize refugees and asylum-seekers to the importance of compliance with the law and legislation of host countries. The Tanzanian Government, which was currently faced with a massive influx of irregular migrants from the Horn of Africa, particularly Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea, was finding it difficult to follow the legal procedure applicable in such circumstances, namely, detention followed by expulsion. It therefore welcomed the High Commissioner's idea of convening a special meeting on the protection of new arrivals.
4. Mr. DABETIC (Republic of Serbia) endorsed the statement made by the representative of Portugal on behalf of the European Union and recalled that Serbia, notwithstanding its economic difficulties, currently hosted more than half a million displaced persons: some 210,000 from Kosovo and Metohija, 100,000 refugees, and 200,000 persons who had been naturalized but still needed assistance with integration. Approximately 7,500 persons were still to be found in reception centres in Serbia. The displaced persons present in the country, who came from 31 ethnic groups, had Serbian nationality and enjoyed the same rights as their fellow citizens. Consequently, they had access to education, health care, the labour market and the

country's political and social life. The most vulnerable had been offered shelter. Their living conditions, like those of refugees, remained very difficult, however, particularly in regard to housing. Notwithstanding the contributions by the European Union, UNHCR and some Governments, Serbia still needed additional financial resources.

5. Mr. Dabetic stressed that, after an eight-year-long international presence in the province, very few persons had returned to Kosovo and Metohija. In order to step up returns, the international community must create all the necessary conditions and guarantees for durable return, in particular the right to life, freedom of movement and land, economic and cultural rights. The future status of Kosovo and Metohija should guarantee, inter alia, recognition of the fundamental rights of all the national communities without discrimination.

6. In pursuit of its efforts concerning voluntary repatriation and local integration, Serbia was now amending its Refugee Act of 1992. A new law on citizenship already allowed refugees to acquire Serbian nationality. Serbia remained convinced, however, that voluntary repatriation was the best long-term solution for the populations still present in its territory. An asylum law was due to be adopted by the end of the year and, with UNHCR assistance, the first reception centre for asylum-seekers should shortly open its doors. Serbia hoped that the implementation of the Sarajevo Declaration, which the representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia and Montenegro had signed, would help resolve the last remaining problems concerning the recovery of pre-war real property and recognition of the land and tenant's rights of refugees. Regrettably, the process had virtually stalled, since many key issues had not been included in the road map for Croatia.

7. Mr. AKBAR AKBAR (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan) stressed that the year 2007 was a turning point for the repatriation programme; after five years of massive returns (over 5 million persons), Afghans were now hesitant about returning to a country where the population faced many difficulties, in particular in gaining access to water, housing and employment. Even though 340,000 Afghans had returned voluntarily from Pakistan, there were still 3 million in Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Afghan Minister for Refugees and Repatriation was still working closely with UNHCR to facilitate the reintegration of returning Afghans, and discussions were under way with the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan on the modalities for the Afghans' return, the closure of camps and the search for durable solutions that were acceptable to all parties.

8. The Government continued to work for peace and prosperity in Afghanistan. Some positive outcomes had been achieved: Afghans had easier access to health services; infant mortality had declined; some 5.4 million children, 35 per cent of them girls, now attended school; and the number of mine victims had fallen by 55 per cent. Nevertheless, living conditions remained difficult. The security situation had recently worsened again in the east and south-east of the country, some important regions of the country had become difficult to gain access to and therefore eluded any form of control, and the number of internally-displaced persons had risen (by 15,000 to 20,000 in 2007). In addition to the climate of insecurity, Afghanistan's capacity to absorb a large number of returnees remained limited. The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, in its annual report on the social and economic situation in the country, had stated that the Government continued to experience major difficulties in achieving the minimum objectives set for primary education and access to affordable and good-quality medical treatment and to safe drinking water. Accordingly, the Afghan Government had adopted a national

development strategy focused in part on the reintegration of returnees. In that framework, ambitious land-allocation, road-building and water-supply programmes had been implemented, with the support of the international community, in particular UNHCR and the United States of America, in a dozen pilot locations, and with a total budget of 5 million euros.

9. In conclusion, Mr. Akbar Akbar thanked the international community, UNHCR, United Nations institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for their generosity and support for his country's reconstruction. He hoped that the High Commissioner would visit Afghanistan in 2008.

10. Ms. ESSIEN UDOM (Federal Republic of Nigeria) said that she endorsed the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of African States and thanked UNHCR for its assistance with local integration projects in her country. The Governments of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria, together with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and UNHCR, had signed a multiparty agreement on the local integration of Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees who had chosen not to return home. The Nigerian Government, in conjunction with ECOWAS and UNHCR, had begun preparations for an international conference of the parties, to be held in Abuja, to allow for an exchange of views and the establishment of a work plan for implementation of the agreement. Nigeria invited the High Commissioner to attend the conference, and requested assistance from UNHCR and its partners in implementing the multiparty agreement. Nigeria thanked UNHCR for its intervention and signature of an action memorandum for the reintegration of Nigerians repatriated from Cameroon to Gembu (Taraba State), which had helped to defuse tensions in the region. She noted that UNHCR intended to end its project in Gembu in 2008.

11. Nigeria was concerned by the growing pace of internal displacement, particularly in Africa. With a view to dealing with that phenomenon, the Government had decided to embark on a risk-mapping exercise, and it supported emergency operations and efforts to eradicate underlying poverty through, inter alia, microcredit, sanitation and safe-drinking-water projects. To that end, it had created a humanitarian cooperation platform, consisting of NGOs, which helped with the integration of refugees in areas affected by conflict and which could be extended to include all West Africa. Nigeria played a central role in peace and security, not just in West Africa but throughout the continent, a role which entailed a significant but vital material and financial investment on its part.

12. Ms. MOLISE (Lesotho) said that her country fully associated itself with the statement by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of African States. Her delegation supported the stress on strict compliance with the principle of non-refoulement, which was a vital part of the Convention, and welcomed the fact that, at the urging of the Executive Committee, UNHCR and its partners were now taking steps to respond to the needs of internally displaced persons. She saluted the work which UNHCR and its staff had done in that regard, notwithstanding the constraints on the organization. She also welcomed the outposting of certain UNHCR administrative functions with a view to greater financial rationalization.

13. While the delegation of Lesotho recognized the complexity of the link between asylum and migration, it took the view that UNHCR was not a migration agency. It was concerned by the large increase in the number of refugees (over 10 million) currently of concern to UNHCR. Further efforts should be deployed and new forms of assistance found to deal with that

phenomenon. Since the refugee problem was in constant evolution, sufficient flexibility must furthermore be built into UNHCR programmes to allow for their application in emergency situations. In conclusion, Ms. Molise said that the human rights violations observed in some countries of Africa, but not only Africa, could no longer be tolerated. In that connection, the Darfur crisis called for concerted and prompt international action.

14. Mr. AL-DHABBI (Yemen) said that host countries, especially the least developed countries, faced as they were with the large increase in the number of refugees worldwide fleeing from conflicts and civil wars, found it difficult to play their role. In the past five years, almost 10 million additional refugees had required some form of assistance. Yemen reaffirmed its commitment to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, and strongly supported the strengthening of partnerships between UNHCR, Governments, the United Nations and other international organizations, regional organizations and NGOs. It welcomed with satisfaction the structural and administrative reforms on which UNHCR had embarked and the pressure put on donors to fund assistance by host countries.

15. Yemen was currently contending with a massive influx of refugees from the Horn of Africa, in particular Somalis fleeing from 16 years of civil war. In spite of its particularly difficult economic situation, it was endeavouring to bear its humanitarian responsibilities towards its neighbour by welcoming the refugees and offering them safety and shelter. Thus, Yemen hosted some 700,000 refugees, most of whom had come in the hope of a better life, a situation that had created certain tensions in the country. In conclusion, Mr. Al-Dhabbi encouraged organizations and donor countries to increase aid to the countries hosting Somali refugees, including Yemen.

16. Mr. HUSSAIN (Bangladesh) said that he shared the High Commissioner's concern about the recent increase in the global refugee population, but noted with concern that little or no progress was being made to find durable solutions for protracted refugee situations. His delegation was surprised to learn that UNHCR had initiated an exercise to determine which of the protracted refugee situations could be resolved rapidly and would therefore be given priority: all such situations should be given priority. Bangladesh had been hosting refugees from Myanmar for decades, and UNHCR had acknowledged the efforts of the Government to improve their situation. Since the context in the country - a high population density and limited resources - precluded integration, the best solution for the refugees would be voluntary repatriation. Bangladesh encouraged UNHCR to work with the Myanmar authorities towards that end.

17. The delegation of Bangladesh viewed UNHCR reform not as a cost-cutting exercise but rather as a means of committing more resources to the persons and host communities that the organization was supposed to help. The proposed budget structure should help to meet the needs of refugees, displaced persons and other categories of persons of concern to UNHCR more effectively. An effective "firewall" must be created for the funds intended for refugees. If, as the High Commissioner had emphasized, the twenty-first century was one of "people on the move", refugees were the core of the UNHCR mandate and should remain the priority. UNHCR must not lose sight of the fact that there were organizations, processes and initiatives that were better placed to deal with issues such as mixed flows and development.

18. Mr. SWE (Myanmar) briefed the Executive Committee on the current situation regarding the repatriation in the north of the State of Rakhine of former inhabitants of that area who had been refugees in Bangladesh. Around 47,000 families, or approximately 235,000 persons, had been repatriated since the repatriation process had begun in 1992, while slightly over 1,000 families (around 6,400 persons) had yet to be repatriated. Myanmar had kept the reception camps open, out of consideration for its good-neighbourly relations with Bangladesh, but there had been no returns since July 2005. It seemed therefore that the remaining persons, for various reasons, were not cooperating in the 15-year-long repatriation process. UNHCR could perhaps help them to find a country in which they could settle.

19. With regard to persons living on the other side of Myanmar's eastern border who, in the main, either had family ties with, or were sympathizers of armed rebel groups, the Government of Myanmar remained convinced that the problem could be resolved without humanitarian intervention, if the armed groups were willing to recognize the Government's sincere efforts and good will. In that regard, some members of armed groups who had agreed to return to the side of law and order and to cooperate with the Government in the future development of their region had returned to Myanmar, where they now lived normal lives.

20. Mr. MAHAMAT BACHIR (Chad) said that the prevailing situation of insecurity in eastern Chad, where there were around 240,000 Sudanese refugees, 45,000 refugees from Central Africa and 5,000 urban refugees of different nationalities, was jeopardizing humanitarian operations there and preventing development of refugees and host populations. That insecurity had reached its apex at the end of 2005 when 180,000 Chadians living in the region which hosted Sudanese refugees from Darfur had been displaced internally. All those vulnerable groups, together with the persons providing them with humanitarian assistance, were endangered by that situation of insecurity, which the not inconsiderable means employed by the Chadian Government had failed to eradicate. Chad therefore appealed to the international community for additional support to enable it to guarantee comprehensive security for those populations.

21. The situation in eastern Chad had been somewhat calmer since the beginning of 2007, and the Chadian Government, with its partners, had resumed the deployment of the multinational force which had begun in 2004. On 7 August, the Security Council, by its resolution 1769 (2007), had authorized the deployment of a hybrid United Nations-African Union force in Darfur. In that context, all vital parameters should be taken into consideration, including equipment, resources and logistics to facilitate the fulfilment of the mission, and the prospects for stable political and security conditions in the subregion.

22. Mr. SONKO (Gambia) said that his country had long played host to many refugees from neighbouring conflict zones. The some 10,000 refugees currently in Gambia mostly came from the Casamance region (Senegal). They lived near the border but efforts were being made to resettle them in camps elsewhere in the country. Many had yet to receive their refugee card, largely owing to a lack of funds for the production of the cards. The importance of identity papers for refugees to enable them, inter alia, to enjoy all the rights associated with their status, could not be overstated. Gambia appealed to UNHCR and the international community to provide it with additional support in managing refugees and issuing identity documents, particularly for refugees from the Casamance region. With the help and cooperation of the

Governments concerned, ECOWAS, UNHCR and other international organizations, Gambia had repatriated most of the refugees that it had received, after the cessation of hostilities. Plans were being studied to resettle and facilitate the integration of refugees who had remained in Gambia.

23. Mr. GUTERRES (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), responding to the previous statements, thanked the representative of the United Republic of Tanzania whose country hosted one of the largest refugee populations. He agreed that the international community must do much more to support the efforts of the United Republic of Tanzania, particularly with regard to the five priorities which had been mentioned concerning refugees and refugee communities in the United Republic of Tanzania and other countries of the region. UNHCR strongly favoured voluntary repatriation programmes which both encouraged refugees to return to their country of origin, in the case in point Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and helped to create in those countries conditions of durable and effective return that allowed returnees to regain their place in society. Mr. Guterres thanked the representative of Serbia for his very full comments on the problems encountered with regard to returns and integration in the Balkans in general and Serbia in particular. UNHCR fully supported the Sarajavo process on refugee returns and appealed to all the States concerned to resolve the outstanding problems, bearing in mind their difficult political aspects.

24. With regard to Afghanistan, UNHCR unreservedly supported the efforts of that country's Government to integrate activities guaranteeing the viability of returns; 400,000 Afghan refugees would return to the country in 2007, and it was very important to create the right conditions for full and durable social reintegration. Mr. Guterres applauded Nigeria and the other countries of the region for their courage and determination in promoting local integration of residual groups of refugees from Sierra Leone and Liberia. He welcomed the resolute commitment of Lesotho to the principle of non-refoulement; the representative of Lesotho had rightly stressed the need for the international community to abide by that fundamental precept, which was the cornerstone of the refugee protection system.

25. Mr. Guterres wished to stress the deep appreciation of UNHCR for the generosity and exemplary attitude of Yemen in granting *prima facie* refugee status to all Somalis who, often in tragic circumstances, crossed the Gulf of Aden bound for Yemen. He recognized that UNHCR and the international community did not provide Yemen with sufficient assistance in that effort. UNHCR was committed to finding ways of improving its efforts there. Negotiations had begun with the Red Crescent Society of Saudi Arabia on joint action to help refugee populations in Yemen. Mr. Guterres assured the representative of Bangladesh that the situation of the Rohingya refugees was a priority that must be addressed in a comprehensive manner through durable solutions. He confirmed that the current reform was not a cost-cutting exercise but was designed to make better use of resources in order to help those for whom the resources were intended. The objective of the new budget was indeed to create a "firewall" and to enhance the capacity of the Executive Committee members to guide and oversee activities.

26. In response to the representative of Myanmar, Mr. Guterres said that, for UNHCR, prevention was always preferable; however, prevention necessarily implied political solutions, solutions which he encouraged the country to implement as far as possible in order to resolve the problems identified. UNHCR was fully committed to finding durable solutions to address the situation of Rohingya refugees definitively. It was also willing to cooperate with Myanmar to tackle the problem of displacement in the east of the country; to do so, he would clearly need

better access to the affected areas. Mr. Guterres expressed his admiration for the generosity and cooperation shown by Chad in seeking to provide a secure humanitarian space in the east of the country. UNHCR would develop its programme in Chad not just for refugees but also for Chadian IDPs who had unfortunately not been able to benefit from the same level of support from the international community. Lastly, the High Commissioner saluted the efforts of Gambia to devise modern and comprehensive legislation on refugees.

27. Mr. LEON GROSS (Spain) noted with concern that many refugee situations remained highly topical, such as the situation in Chad and the Sudan, where UNHCR was endeavouring to remedy the humanitarian consequences of the current crisis, or the situation of displaced persons in Iraq and refugees in neighbouring countries, including Syria and Jordan, which deserved praise for their generosity and assistance. UNHCR also sought to resolve protracted crises. The situation in Western Sahara was a case in point, and Spain was actively involved in the search for a definitive solution to that dispute in the framework of the United Nations. A better negotiating climate should be established by strengthening confidence-building measures between the parties so as to alleviate the suffering of the population in the Tindouf camps.

28. With regard to UNHCR reform - an undertaking designed to meet such challenges more effectively - Spain approved the outposting of some functions, the strengthening of regional offices, the creation of new offices and the creation of effective and modern administrative functions to reduce current expenditure and allocate more resources to respond to the urgent needs of refugees. UNHCR must deal with two strategic challenges, namely, mixed migratory flows and the problem of internally-displaced persons. Spain welcomed the fact that the dialogue on protection due to be held in December 2007 would focus on protection in the context of mixed migratory flows. If control of migratory flows was necessary in order to foster orderly migration and prevent individual abuses, progress was also needed in developing protection measures for larger-scale migratory flows. Stronger cooperation should be established with host countries to enable them to provide more effective protection. The current migration phenomenon furthermore required the development of effective and rapid modalities of cooperation between UNHCR and other organizations with direct competence for those issues. On the question of internally-displaced persons, UNHCR should continue to consider how best to work with other international organizations to meet the challenges associated with that issue. Spain appreciated the work done by UNHCR in Colombia, where it funded two projects for the management of which UNHCR had rightly won recognition on the ground. Lastly, Spain welcomed the progress achieved with regard to the return of Mauritanian refugees, and intended to support UNHCR activities pertaining to the return and integration programme for those refugees.

29. Monsignor TOMASI (The Holy See) recalled that many forcibly displaced persons were still being subjected to human rights violations and that the number of refugees had again increased in 2007, reaching over 10 million, while the number of displaced persons exceeded 24 million. If an approach resulting in specific measures of assistance and protection was to be adopted, refugee and asylum policies must emphasize the centrality of human dignity and human rights. Priority should be given to uprooted persons, which could be effected through more effective coordination of the implementation of existing protection tools. New tools could furthermore be developed to fill existing gaps, particularly with regard to vulnerable groups such as women, girls, children and older persons.

30. The human rights perspective had two advantages: it meant that the duty to protect went beyond narrow national interests, and that Governments and other social sectors had a duty not to accept the forced displacement of persons from their homes. It also made it possible to define the criteria and measures to be applied from the moment that a person was forced to leave his home to that in which a durable solution was found for that person. More particularly, further stress should be placed on conflict prevention, consolidation of peace and dialogue and reconciliation, not just as a moral imperative but also as a more rational solution in cost terms.

31. Reinforcement of the necessary institutional capacities for refugee protection remained a priority in the light of current United Nations and UNHCR reforms, but it could be extended by creating monitoring mechanisms or expert groups to devise specific ways of guaranteeing more effective implementation of refugees' rights as defined under the 1951 Convention. Receiving refugees was a basic gesture of humanitarian solidarity on the part of every individual. That was also a view taken by His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, who regularly recalled that everyone had a duty to shelter and to protect the rights of his fellow man.

32. Mr. BARTELS (Ghana) recalled that, following the restoration of peace in Liberia, in September 2004, Ghana had signed a tripartite agreement on the voluntary repatriation of Liberian refugees. By the expiry of the agreement, on 30 June 2007, only 2,000 refugees had been repatriated, as compared with a projected figure of 19,000. Ghana currently hosted some 28,000 registered Liberian refugees, to whom should be added a further 15,000 who were undocumented. The situation in Liberia had clearly improved, the war was over and the conditions which had justified the population's exile no longer obtained. In 2006, Ghana had warned that more time would be needed for the refugees' departure, but its appeal had not been heeded. He therefore requested that, in future, the opinion of countries hosting refugees should be taken into consideration. With regard to initial support for refugees before they returned to their country of origin, the amount of \$5 offered to Liberians to cover transport costs was insufficient to encourage voluntary repatriation by other refugees. Ghana asked the High Commissioner to continue to assist those who had chosen not to leave before their status was defined.

33. Ghana currently hosted over 43,000 registered refugees, mainly from West Africa, and called on UNHCR and the international community to help it to bear that heavy burden. Their support was necessary for the integration of such a large number of refugees, including former combatants, which raised serious security problems. Lastly, Ghana had recently experienced severe flooding, which had caused the displacement of 300,000 persons; he thanked the international community for supporting it in its hour of need.

34. Ms. JOINER (African Union (AU) Commission) observed that the situation in Africa had improved, since many refugees and displaced persons had been able to return home to Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, southern Sudan, northern Uganda, Liberia and Sierra Leone. The situation of refugees remained precarious, however, particularly in Somalia, the Sudan (Darfur), the north of the Central African Republic and the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. One of the main challenges was the protection of civilians in armed conflict and of refugees and victims of forced displacement. The AU took the view that displaced persons should be more involved in decisions regarding their protection, including peace, planning and reconstruction processes. With regard to Darfur and Somalia, while the work of the peacekeeping forces of the AU Commission was effective, attention must

nevertheless be drawn to the fate of displaced civilian populations and the need for greater international aid in those countries. The AU Ministerial Conference on refugees, which had been held in Ouagadougou in June 2006, had considered the question of responsibility for long-term protection and had stressed the need to enhance refugee protection in conformity with the Convention of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) of 1969 Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa.

35. In the framework of the implementation of the recommendations adopted by the Ouagadougou Conference, the Commission had commenced preparations for the first special summit of AU Heads of State and Government on refugees and repatriated and displaced persons. The summit, which was due to be held in September 2008, would focus mainly on forcible displacement in Africa and durable solutions for that problem. The AU Commission was also actively involved in developing a comprehensive legal framework for protection and assistance for displaced persons which could be applied to situations specific to the African continent. The AU was concerned by the slow decline in the asylum system in Africa caused by lack of financial resources, and it therefore again called on all humanitarian actors to work with UNHCR and mobilize the necessary resources for the countries in greatest need, such as Angola, Mozambique, Sierra Leone and Liberia. Lastly, since the problems associated with climate change were acquiring an increasingly global dimension, the AU was developing a policy and an operational framework to respond to the needs of victims of natural disasters in Africa.

36. Mr. LEBEDEV (Russian Federation) recalled the need to draw up guidelines for UNHCR action over the coming years, and indicated that the Russian Federation was contributing thereto by endeavouring to act in an open and transparent manner, including with regard to the strengthening of the legal framework and improving practices relating to recognition of refugees' rights. The Russian Federation approved of the structural and budgetary reforms which UNHCR had undertaken with a view to rationalizing staff costs, regionalizing structures and improving management. The sectoral approach was an effective tool for responding to emergency situations, particularly in the event of massive population movements and whenever emergency help was required. When refugees were at the centre of a crisis, it was clearly for UNHCR to take the lead in operations. As far as forced internal displacement was concerned, the responsibility for the related problems lay with the Government of the country in which it occurred, and other States must confine themselves to providing assistance whenever it was requested.

37. With regard to the international dialogue on protection issues, the focus should be on statelessness, since the number of stateless persons worldwide was high, particularly in South Asia, some neighbouring countries of the Russian Federation and Central Europe. Latvia and Estonia had created the concept of "non-citizenship" in order to avoid inclusion in the list of countries with a large number of stateless persons; for all the experts, however, both statuses were in fact identical. There were 250,000 non-citizens in Estonia (10 per cent of the population) and 380,000 in Latvia (17 per cent). UNHCR should renounce its reticence concerning that issue and coordinate efforts to resolve the problem. The European Union should also recognize its responsibility in that regard.

38. The Russian Federation had modernized its asylum legislation and had taken measures to improve legal practices in order to guarantee refugees' rights. It did not always agree with UNHCR about refugee status, but it strongly supported the policy pursued by UNHCR in recent years concerning the return, voluntary-repatriation and resettlement strategy. The shift to a biennial budget and reform of the UNHCR budget should allow for better planning, greater transparency, tighter budget control and expansion of the donor base, in the interests of all.

39. Mr. MUMBA (Zambia) said that he associated himself with the statement made on behalf of the African Group by the representative of Morocco. He welcomed the fact that the High Commissioner had attended the summit of the Heads of State and Government of the South African Development Community (SADC), thereby demonstrating the commitment of UNHCR to resolving refugee problems in SADC member States and elsewhere in Africa. Zambia thanked UNHCR and the international community for their financial aid, which had been used for the rapid repatriation of Angolan and Congolese refugees. It also thanked UNHCR and the Danish Government for giving priority to refugee registration.

40. Zambia, having noted a constant decline in refugee services, particularly health and education services, hoped that UNHCR would allocate sufficient resources for access to those services. Mr. Mumba cautioned against the premature interruption of humanitarian assistance for refugees, which developing countries hosting a large number of refugees would construe as de facto non-recognition of refugee status. It was therefore necessary to continue on the basis of the burden-sharing concept. Lastly, even if the implementation of the Zambia Initiative had stalled, the Zambian Government was convinced that its underlying principles could provide viable long-term solutions.

41. Mr. CHIPAZIWA (Observer for Zimbabwe) strongly criticized the High Commissioner for referring to a shared interpretation with the Governments of southern Africa, implying that Zimbabweans seeking asylum on grounds of persecution should be accorded refugee status and that they were persons suffering from hunger who could not supply the needs of their families. His delegation was very concerned by such speculation, since two countries of southern Africa, far from saying that they needed assistance in order to receive Zimbabweans, had actually reproached the High Commissioner on that subject during his visit to the region. Why had he not asked to visit Zimbabwe, instead of implying that Zimbabwe was the only country to produce economic migrants, omitting to mention that it had been offering asylum to all kinds of refugees for decades? Mr. Guterres would have done better to ask who was responsible for the ills of Zimbabwe that had led to the existence of those migrants.

42. Mr. MOUPONDO (Observer for the Democratic Republic of the Congo) welcomed the visits to his country by Ms. Cheng-Hopkins, Deputy High Commissioner for Operations, Mr. Mtesa, Chairman of the Executive Committee, and Ms. Kamara, Director of the UNHCR Africa Bureau. He expressed regret on behalf of his Government and the population of Moba for the incidents on 1 August 2007 which had prevented the visit by Mr. Mtesa, who was going to the area to meet Congolese refugees returning from Zambia. The incidents had prompted the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations to order the evacuation of

United Nations personnel and to close down the UNHCR Bureau, thus suspending refugee repatriation operations. Severe sanctions had been imposed on the instigators and tough measures had been taken to avoid the recurrence of such outrages. His Government therefore requested that the UNHCR Bureau in Moba should be reopened and that the refugee repatriation operations in the province of Katanga should be resumed.

43. With repatriation flows moving in two directions since 2004, the Democratic Republic of the Congo still had some 200,000 refugees on its soil, and over 300,000 of its nationals were still refugees in neighbouring countries. For Congolese who returned to their home country the main difficulty was reintegration in their native environment. The Kinshasa Government invited the international community to support it in that process with a view to achieving resettlement in the best conditions, and to assist in the local integration of refugees who chose to settle in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Governments of Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo had made a political commitment, at the meeting held in Kampala from 15 to 17 September 2007 in the framework of the Tripartite Plus Joint Commission, to negotiate tripartite agreements with UNHCR to prepare for the return of refugees present in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and thus bring the wanderings of the populations in the Great Lakes region to a definitive close. The agreements would remain a dead letter, however, as long as peace and security had not been re-established in potential areas of repatriation. The local population, which was being persecuted, inter alia, by armed groups, was fleeing, thereby increasing the number of internally-displaced persons, estimated at around 6 million. For those persons, the Kinshasa Government had recently set up a national humanitarian coordination Commission to promptly devise strategies for managing that phenomenon. Lastly, Mr. Moupondo highlighted the need for the international community's support to help his Government to pacify the eastern provinces, particularly North and South Kivu.

44. Mr. O'CEALLAIGH (Ireland) affirmed his country's commitment to the cluster-responsibility principle. One third of the funds released by Ireland for the 2007 appeal had gone to UNHCR, with which it had concluded an official partnership agreement allowing it to assist the organization in its humanitarian efforts by placing experts at its disposal. The Irish Government, which was convinced that the changes at UNHCR would allow the Office to perform its vital functions more effectively, had significantly increased its contribution to UNHCR, amounting to over \$20 million for the first time in 2007. The Government had also begun working on a multi-annual framework agreement, based on the 2008-2009 global strategic objectives, in order to guarantee UNHCR greater stability during the transition phase.

45. While repatriation and reintegration of refugees in their country of origin was the ideal long-term solution, resettlement should also be viewed as an integral part of durable solutions. The Irish Government had therefore increased fivefold, since 2005, the number of refugees that it received pursuant to the UNHCR resettlement programme. The Government, which was aware of the need to support resettled refugees in order to make their integration successful, had established an advice centre to help refugees to live independent lives.

46. The Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service worked very satisfactorily with the representative of the UNHCR Bureau in Dublin. UNHCR had helped to design several training modules for civil servants responsible for deciding on the admissibility of asylum applications. The Service was encouraged by UNHCR participation in the development of new national laws and was pleased to be able to cooperate with it in applying those laws following their adoption.

47. Mr. DE ALBA (Mexico) reaffirmed his country's commitment to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol as fundamental instruments of the international protection regime for refugees and asylum-seekers. Evidence of that commitment could be seen in Mexico's support for the Mexico Plan of Action and UNHCR presence on Mexican soil. Mexico had benefited from that organization's support to build up its institutional capacities in several areas of public life, including, for example, in the preparation of a draft general bill on the population containing a chapter on refugees, or in the delivery of training on international refugee law for the staff of immigration services.

48. While the Mexican delegation supported UNHCR efforts to restructure the organization and budget in order to make it more efficient, it emphasized that efforts to address the needs of displaced persons should not divert attention from the refugee problem. The steady and significant rise in the number of refugees within a short space of time remained a major problem for the international community, and particularly countries hosting a large number of refugees, and therefore the requisite resources, including budgetary resources, must be available to ensure the effectiveness of international solidarity and cooperation based on sharing of burdens and responsibilities. The Mexican delegation welcomed the holding of the dialogue on international protection, which would allow discussion of the best solutions to respond objectively and effectively to the needs in that domain. It was to be hoped that the dialogue, for which the 10-Point Plan of Action on Refugee Protection and Mixed Migration would certainly be very useful, would be an opportunity to hear the views and proposals of civil society in general and NGOs in particular. Lastly, the Mexican delegation welcomed the successful outcome of negotiations on the Conclusion on Children at Risk.

49. Mr. GUTERRES (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) thanked Monsignor Tomasi for recalling that protection must always be based on human rights. He expressed his appreciation to Mr. Leon for the close cooperation that they had enjoyed in resolving the most difficult cases relating to the link between migration and asylum. He noted the exemplary cooperation between UNHCR and Spain, which had adopted an outstanding policy on receiving refugees and informing them of their rights. He shared the disappointment expressed by Mr. Bartels concerning the small number of Liberians leaving Ghana but assured him that it was also a tribute to that country for the conditions that it offered refugees and its socio-economic success. The official end to the repatriation process did not mean that UNHCR would cease negotiating with the Ghanaian and Liberian authorities. The High Commissioner pledged his support for the remaining refugees in Ghana. He thanked Mr. Mumba for accompanying him during his visit to Zambia, where he had been able to meet Congolese refugees in the north and Angolan refugees in the west. He urged the international community to support the Zambia Initiative and, thus, to support the refugees and local communities in western Zambia and the return of Congolese refugees present in the north.

50. In response to Ms. Joiner, Mr. Guterres praised the AU for its activities aimed at preventing displacement and finding solutions that would deliver protection in conformity with the OAU Convention of 1969. He congratulated the AU on its post-conflict development and reconstruction efforts and for holding a summit on the challenge of forcible displacement in Africa. He acknowledged the relevance of the statement by Mr. Lebedev on statelessness, which was becoming a major problem: indeed, statelessness and modalities for reducing statelessness remained one of the four pillars of the UNHCR budget proposal. Addressing his remarks to Mr. Chipaziwa, the High Commissioner said that he opposed all forms of colonial exploitation and that he had merely said that most Zimbabweans fleeing their country were economic refugees who did not come under the remit of UNHCR but rather of humanitarian organizations. He congratulated Mr. Moupondo for his Government's efforts to guarantee conditions of peace and stability conducive to the return of its refugees, particularly those hailing from the regions of North and South Kivu, and he promised that the UNHCR Bureau in Moba would return. He congratulated Mr. O'Ceallaigh for the increased financial contribution which Ireland had made to UNHCR activities and its growing commitment to resettlement. He told Mr. De Alba that Mexico, which had a long tradition both as a host and a destination country, would be particularly well-placed to make a positive contribution to the dialogue on international protection in December.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.