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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 601st MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 3 October 2006, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. FUJISAKI (Japan)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

STATEMENT BY THE HIGH COMMISSIONER AND GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4)
(continued)

1. Mr. FUST (Switzerland) commended the activities of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) over the past year, including the Office's new involvement with internally displaced persons (IDPs), particularly in the light of the precarious financial conditions under which they had been carried out.
2. Switzerland attached particular importance to three points raised in the High Commissioner's opening statement. First, reference had been to "mixed" migration flows. Switzerland believed that it was crucial to retain the distinction between refugees and migrants in order to curb irregular migration and ensure that refugees were given the international protection they required. Protection remained the core function of the UNHCR mandate, and Switzerland would support all measures to strengthen it.
3. Secondly, while Switzerland believed it was the primary responsibility of States to assist and protect IDPs, it supported the collaborative approach, which better satisfied the needs of such persons. In 2005, the Swiss Government had encouraged UNHCR to make a more systematic commitment to IDPs, provided that such a commitment did not adversely affect its basic mandate to protect refugees.
4. Significant efforts to protect IDPs had been made by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and within UNHCR. Switzerland was satisfied with the temporary solution for funding specific programmes in the pilot countries selected. However, clear, coherent and realistic guidelines for the Office's IDP-related activities relating to IDPs still needed to be established.
5. Thirdly, Switzerland supported the current reform process, which should enable UNHCR to carry out its protection mandate more efficiently. The proposals outlined at the recent meeting of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee seemed reasonable. However, additional information on the operationalization of protection in the field would be welcome. So far the debate had focused on potential savings, outsourcing and staff management, but not on the added value of restructuring, particularly with regard to protection, the efficiency of the organization and the technical integrity of its programmes.
6. He congratulated Dr. Akio Kanai on winning the 2006 Nansen Refugee Award and pledged Switzerland's continuing support for the Nansen Committee.
7. Mr. U AUNG KYI (Observer for Myanmar) said that the challenges of complex refugee-related issues in many regions of the world could not be tackled by UNHCR alone, but required the moral and financial support of the entire international community.
8. The voluntary repatriation of refugees from Bangladesh to Myanmar's Northern Rakhine State had been conducted in two parts. The first part had been the bilateral repatriation process carried out by the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh from 22 September 1992 to 29 April 1994, during which some 54,571 persons had been repatriated. During the second part,

which had been carried out with the involvement of UNHCR from 30 April 1994 to 30 September 2006, a total of 181,924 persons had been repatriated. Although repatriation grants had been increased, the last repatriation movement had taken place on 28 July 2005. However, in view of the good-neighbourly relations between Myanmar and Bangladesh, reception camps had been kept open.

9. The problems of refugees in countries on Myanmar's eastern border were mainly family-related or were the result of their support for armed insurgent groups. As a result of his Government's efforts and goodwill, 15 of the 17 armed insurgent groups had already laid down their arms. Diplomats and resident representatives of international organizations in Myanmar had seen for themselves that the persons who had willingly agreed to abide by the law and cooperate with the Government were reaping the benefits of peace and development. His Government was confident that, if the remaining armed insurgent groups adopted a similar attitude, they could also contribute to the prosperity and development of their regions.

10. As a result of bilateral cooperation, steps were being taken to repatriate illegal migrants and workers from Myanmar abroad. Temporary passports and work permits were being issued to facilitate the legal employment of such persons.

11. Myanmar sincerely wished to resolve all refugee-related issues with UNHCR support and in cooperation with all concerned on the basis of goodwill and friendly relations.

12. Mr. HENRIKSON (Sweden) expressed support for the priorities and commitments set forth by the High Commissioner in his opening statement. Sweden supported the Office's role within the cluster approach, including the task of coordinating the protection of and assistance to internally displaced persons. The number of such persons remained worryingly high, and although UNHCR had provided invaluable assistance on specific occasions in the past, many IDPs still received little support. While he agreed with the High Commissioner that the costs of IDP-related operations should in due course be integrated into the annual programme budget, he emphasized that such costs should not detract from the resources used for the protection of refugees. In that connection, Sweden would welcome further discussion on the idea of the two-tier budget, as proposed by the Director for Structural Management and Change. Changes in the humanitarian environment and new responsibilities vis-à-vis IDPs would have implications for the type of skills and resources required by the Office. In the light of the current imbalance between administrative and operational costs, the need for restructuring UNHCR was evident.

13. Sweden supported the current reform process, which would help the Office to respond even better to the humanitarian needs of refugees and IDPs. Nevertheless, it was important to establish a clear timetable for the implementation of reforms and the results to be achieved. While the ultimate objective of the reforms was greater efficiency and better use of resources, in the short term the process may incur certain costs. Donors must be made aware of the situation and be prepared to provide financial support.

14. Sweden welcomed the establishment of the Global Migration Group, which would promote a more coherent and coordinated approach to the issue of international migration.

15. Protection was the core function of the UNHCR mandate. The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol were the foundation of international protection, and their ratification and implementation were crucial to safeguarding the right to asylum. The European Union's efforts to establish a common European asylum system were based on the full application of the Convention. UNHCR played a key role in developing asylum systems and in upholding and developing international refugee law. The international community must recognize and support the vital role of UNHCR in identifying those in need of international protection among mixed migration flows. Resettlement was the only viable solution for such persons. Sweden had been a resettlement country for more than 50 years and would remain committed to resettlement. He urged other countries to become resettlement countries.

16. The value of UNHCR efforts would be measured by its field operations. Sweden supported the idea of geographic priorities, with a focus on Africa. Cooperation was needed to protect the world's refugees and resolve protracted refugee situations. Durable solutions to refugee crises must be found, and voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement must be explored in any given situation.

17. Mr. LEBEDEV (Russian Federation) said that, on the whole, his delegation shared the High Commissioner's views on the future activities of UNHCR and was convinced of the increasing importance of its core functions in dealing with current problems of mass migration. He stressed the fundamental role of the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol, and the need for member States to comply with their obligations under those instruments. He commended member States and UNHCR staff for their assistance in emergency operations conducted under extremely difficult conditions in conflict areas, such as Lebanon and the Sudan.

18. The enormity of the challenges in the area of international protection and the increasing demands on States to ensure the quality of administrative and legal procedures relating to refugees and asylum-seekers must not be overlooked. There were cases in which asylum procedures were politicized, where applicants alleged that they were the victims of political persecution, when in fact they had committed or been involved in crimes. Some States had even granted asylum to persons involved in terrorist activities or in disseminating terrorist propaganda.

19. Careful consideration of mandated refugee status was required. Thus far, the Russian Federation had not received a clear explanation of the grounds on which UNHCR granted mandated refugee status to persons in States that complied with relevant legislation and procedures, including the consideration of such matters by the courts. Many problems arose because such status was granted before a judicial review could take place.

20. The Office's greater commitment to dealing with the problem of statelessness would not achieve the desired results without the support of States, which must recognize that statelessness restricted the rights of persons, was humiliating, discriminatory and undemocratic, even under the guise of "non-citizenship". The Russian Federation welcomed the Executive Committee's draft conclusion on the identification, prevention, reduction of statelessness and protection of stateless persons, the adoption of which would enable UNHCR and member States to step up efforts to resolve the problem. It also welcomed efforts to deal with mixed population movements. However, a change in the current arrangements for funding operations involving IDPs did not seem advisable.

21. He noted with satisfaction the Office's reaction to the Russian Federation's comments on the importance of mounting opposition to the abuse of refugee status, and suggested that regional cooperation should be encouraged in that connection. The fact that the legal and humanitarian aspects of the problem had been overshadowed by political considerations was a matter of concern. The continuation of the Eurasian programme on forced migration should improve coordination among the relevant national services in the region in handling migration flows.

22. Mr. BORG (Observer for Malta) said that the large-scale irregular migration in the Mediterranean region was straining the capacities of a number of coastal States, including Malta. Between 2004 and 2005, the number of irregular migrants arriving in Malta had increased by 30 per cent, and between 2005 and mid-September 2006 arrivals of irregular migrants in Malta had increased by over 45 per cent. In future reports on the subject, the High Commissioner should include information on the efforts being made by countries of origin, transit and destination, including assistance extended to such people, sea and rescue operations to prevent tragedies, and measures to curb irregular migration. Between 2004 and 2005, the number of applications for asylum in Malta had increased by 17 per cent, which made Malta the State with the second highest number of applications in the European Union.

23. The untenable situation facing Malta and other Mediterranean countries required an urgent response from the international community, since ignoring or insufficiently addressing the phenomenon of illegal immigration jeopardized the rights of genuine refugees and persons requiring protection under international law. UNHCR should give its full support to countries like Malta, which were fragile on account of their density of population and small size. Malta required support not only to alleviate the financial burden of providing for the basic needs of illegal immigrants, but also to combat the criminal organizations that benefited from illegal immigration.

24. Over the past 18 years, criminal exploitation and unregulated human trafficking across the Mediterranean had resulted in the death of some 3,600 persons. UNHCR could make a crucial contribution by working more closely with countries of origin, transit and destination to halt such criminal and inhumane activity. He welcomed the Office's role in the Geneva Migration Group and the proposal on the establishment of a global migration forum. He hoped that the holistic dialogue launched during the General Assembly's High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development in September 2006 would continue to find support among States Members of the United Nations, agencies, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

25. His Government was doing its utmost to raise awareness of the grave situation it was facing and had made great strides in addressing the phenomenon of irregular migration. At the national level, it had established the necessary legal framework and administrative capacity, and had increased the staff of the Office of the Refugee Commissioner. At the regional level, it was working closely with neighbouring States to ensure greater involvement of countries of origin, transit and destination.

26. Malta looked forward to participating in the high-level conference on migration, which would be held in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya later in 2006. The High Commissioner's 10-Point Plan of Action to Addressing Mixed Migratory Movements was a step in the right direction. While the Plan of Action was global in nature, it would evidently have to be adapted to specific regional and national contexts.

27. Mr. AKBAR (Observer for Afghanistan) said that Afghanistan's strategic location at the heart of the Asian continent meant that, if there was security in Afghanistan, there was security in the world. He therefore urged the international community to cooperate with Afghanistan, particularly in the return of Afghan refugees. As a result of two decades of war, some 8 million Afghans had been forced to seek refuge in Pakistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and other host countries. More than 1 million people had been internally displaced, and the problem persisted in the Helmand and Khandahar provinces. He called upon the international community to continue its assistance to Afghan refugees. UNHCR was providing commendable services in the host countries and Afghanistan.

28. Recent noteworthy developments in Afghanistan had been the election of a new president, the establishment of the rule of law and of a national army and police force, the reform of the judicial system and the appointment of an attorney-general. Although almost 5 million refugees had been repatriated, 3.5 million refugees were still outside the country. The reasons for that situation were the shortage of basic facilities, the absence of job opportunities and the lack of security in some provinces.

29. A total of 49 settlements had been established for landless refugees returning to Afghanistan, and 33,136 plots of land had been allocated to families in need. The lack of resources to build shelters, drill wells and provide basic social services had resulted in considerable hardship for returning Afghan refugees, and he called on donor countries and organizations to support his Government's efforts to solve returnees' problems. Many refugees did not wish to be repatriated, since security was poor in areas where suicide bombers operated and where schools had been destroyed. The Government of Australia had donated US\$ 7.5 million to build 1,400 shelters, which would be offered to returnees' families in Kabul.

30. Mr. VERROS (Greece) said that he hoped that UNHCR would assume its new role as cluster leader for IDPs and would establish efficient ways of providing protection and assistance to those who required it. Planning, preparation, improving operational capacity and increasing funding were the main challenges facing the Office. The Office's assumption of new responsibilities should not be to the detriment of its core mandate for the protection of refugees.

31. He welcomed the Office's rapid response to the crisis in Lebanon. Greece had covered the transport costs from Athens to Cyprus of a UNHCR humanitarian mission to Beirut. The Greek Government had agreed to the transfer of surplus funds from its contribution to aid for refugees and IDPs following the tsunami in Sri Lanka and Indonesia, for use in the UNHCR annual programme in those countries. He was particularly concerned at the increased number of displaced persons resulting from the humanitarian situation in Darfur.

32. The constantly increasing phenomenon of mixed flows required immediate action to assist people in need of international protection and to combat illegal migration. Asylum and migration policies must be part of a balanced, coherent and long-term strategy. The members of

the Executive Committee should participate actively in the Office's structural and management efforts. UNHCR should enhance cooperation with its strategic partners in order to attain the highest protection standards and achieve durable solutions for refugees and IDPs.

33. Greece welcomed the Executive Committee's resolution on women and girls at risk, which would pave the way for more efficient protection of that particularly vulnerable group. The Greek private sector had responded to UNHCR funding appeals, and the commitment of civil society would increase the effectiveness of long-term assistance, rehabilitation and reintegration programmes.

34. Mr. DA COSTA PEREIRA (Portugal) commended the efforts of UNHCR to find regional solutions for refugees, IDPs and other people of concern, and welcomed the successful return of Angolan refugees from Zambia, the Central African Republic and South Africa to Angola, and of Sudanese refugees to southern Sudan. At the same time, Portugal was concerned at the situation and developments in Darfur.

35. UNHCR should continue to improve its cooperation with international agencies. The humanitarian reform that was currently under way should be used as a tool to maximize the efficiency of humanitarian assistance in the field. An increasing number of countries were already benefiting from the cluster approach, and the new coordinated humanitarian response had been particularly valuable.

36. There was a need for enhanced coordination among countries of origin, transit and destination, to ensure greater harmonization of national migration policies. New and bold solutions were required to deal with the problem of mixed migration flows, particularly in the context of migration from Africa to Europe. Further efforts were needed to ensure IDP protection in armed conflicts. Assistance was required to ensure the safe and sustainable return of IDPs in Timor-Leste.

37. The Portuguese Government commended the High Commissioner's efforts to ensure efficiency and financial stability in his Office, and welcomed his recognition of the need for reform. Consideration should be given to reducing the high number of supplementary programmes outside the annual programme.

38. Mr. BACHIR (Chad) said that the crisis in the Darfur region demonstrated the complexity of the refugee problem, which could be solved only through an integrated approach by all States, the United Nations and the African Union. The President of Chad had made considerable efforts to find a peaceful solution to the situation in Darfur through impartial mediation. Chad was currently sheltering over 250,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, mainly from the Sudan and the Central African Republic. Over 800,000 Chadians were affected by the presence of refugees and were living in deplorable conditions in southern and eastern Chad. As a result of support from UNHCR and Chad's other development partners, refugees in Chad continued to receive multisectoral assistance in accordance with their needs. In spite of difficult social and economic conditions, Chad had upheld its commitment to burden-sharing. Under an agreement with UNHCR, Chad was providing police officers to ensure security in refugee camps and in the homes and workplaces of humanitarian staff.

39. The international community should take measures to relieve the burden on host countries and to provide assistance and protection for refugees, displaced persons and host populations. In that regard, Chad had made considerable sacrifices to uphold its international commitments. The international community should also assist countries of origin in establishing appropriate conditions for the return and reintegration of refugees. Efforts to conclude a tripartite agreement to bring stability to the Darfur region should be encouraged.

40. The current session of the Executive Committee afforded an opportunity to raise the awareness of the international community and UNHCR of the situation in Chad and the constraints faced by the Government, and to encourage humanitarian partners to increase their assistance with a view to strengthening activities and programmes for refugees, IDPs and local populations. The Government of Chad was making particular efforts to ensure the security of local populations, refugees, displaced persons and all humanitarian personnel in Chad. He called on all donors to provide further resources for UNHCR to enable Chad to deal with humanitarian emergencies. Chad was committed to facilitating the rehabilitation and voluntary repatriation of refugees in the context of efforts to find durable solutions to the refugee problem in general and to the ongoing refugee situation in Africa in particular.

41. Mr. LA Yifan (China) said that, although over the past year the number of refugees worldwide had declined, the situation remained serious, and emerging conflicts constantly gave rise to new waves of refugees and IDPs. The principle of burden-sharing was particularly important, since many developing countries were hosting increasing numbers of refugees. Efforts should be made to address the root causes of refugee-generating situations in order to find durable solutions.

42. The number of IDPs worldwide had increased considerably in recent years. United Nations agencies and international humanitarian organizations had coordinated their efforts to provide protection and assistance for IDPs, and UNHCR had played a lead role in those efforts. Mixed migration movements placed considerable strain on asylum systems, and measures should be taken to ensure that asylum systems were not abused, and that those who were genuinely in need received timely and effective assistance.

43. China welcomed the plan for structural and management reform within UNHCR and hoped that the transition would be smooth and effective. The Chinese Government attached particular importance to international cooperation and the exchanges of experience in refugee operations. In 2005 and 2006, China had served as a coordinator for intergovernmental Asia-Pacific consultations on refugees, IDPs and migration, and had organized seminars on Asia-Pacific consultation with assistance from UNHCR. China was committed to regional consultation, and to exchanges with UNHCR and other relevant agencies to encourage regional dialogue, and would continue to contribute funds to UNHCR operations.

44. Mr. GUTERRES (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the reform of UNHCR was not intended solely to reduce spending, but rather aimed to ensure that a greater proportion of funds were allocated to operations in the field, and to improve the quality of services provided to refugees and other target groups. He called on all Governments to ensure that UNHCR staff were granted access to areas where populations needed support. Strong partnerships were required with all members of the Executive Committee. The Greek initiative

to reallocate resources earmarked for tsunami relief to meet other needs was a good example of the flexibility required to deal with changing refugee situations. He looked forward to the establishment of a true Chinese asylum system.

45. Mr. MEEUWEN (Belgium) said that his Government was particularly interested in the voluntary repatriation of refugees that had taken place in the Great Lakes region of Africa over the past year. Although there had been positive developments, the region continued to require sustained political attention and considerable resources. A significant proportion of the Office's programme budget should therefore be allocated for that purpose. Belgium recognized the essential contribution of host countries in prolonged crisis situations. UNHCR should continue to play a primary role in accompanying refugees in the context of voluntary repatriation, promote the cause of refugees in development forums and work to ensure that return and reintegration were more systematically integrated into national development plans.

46. The High Commissioner should continue his efforts to increase protection for women, children and the elderly and to integrate gender criteria into all activities. It was particularly important for young refugees to have access to all levels of education. The Belgian Government commended the activities of the Office's operational partners, and encouraged UNHCR to continue its efforts in the areas of coordination and cooperation, particularly at the country level. It supported the Office's lead role in the cluster approach. The successful implementation of that approach would require additional resources, which should be included in the programme budget. Although the Office's financial situation had improved over the past year, UNHCR should continue its efforts to broaden the donor base. A greater proportion of the programme budget should be allocated to operational activities. He hoped that informal consultations would resolve some of the existing budget shortfalls. Belgium wholeheartedly endorsed the Office's structural reform, and pledged its support for all UNHCR activities.

47. Mr. CHILIGATI (United Republic of Tanzania) said that the signing of a peace agreement between the Government of Burundi and the last remaining rebel group, which had taken place in the United Republic of Tanzania in September 2006, had given new hope for the large-scale voluntary repatriation of refugees from Burundi currently residing in the United Republic of Tanzania. The international community should continue to support the establishment of sustainable peace in Burundi. The democratic elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo indicated that there might also be large-scale voluntary repatriation of Congolese refugees from the United Republic of Tanzania. UNHCR and the international community should increase financial assistance to the repatriation exercise and absorption capacity in Burundi, develop amenities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and address development needs in host countries.

48. His delegation agreed with the High Commissioner that action to address the problem of mixed migration flows should take account of regional and national situations. The United Republic of Tanzania would continue to preserve asylum and identify people of concern to UNHCR, particularly in the context of measures to curb illegal immigration.

49. In the context of the Strengthening Protection Capacity Project, which was being financed by Denmark, government officials at the local, regional and national levels, as well as NGO staff working with refugees, were being trained in refugee protection. The Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative had replaced UNHCR in providing support for young

refugees wishing to pursue higher education. Education was a reliable protection tool and additional donor support in that area was of paramount importance. With regard to burden-sharing, he thanked the United States Government for its offer to resettle 10,000 Burundian refugees currently residing in Tanzania in the United States.

50. Funding was the key to the success of UNHCR programmes. It was therefore crucial for donors to honour their pledges, and for non-traditional donors to contribute their support. His Government thanked the High Commissioner for his visits to the Great Lakes region and encouraged him to sustain his efforts in that regard.

51. Mr. MARTABIT (Chile) said that Chile strongly supported the activities carried out by UNHCR to assist the 24 million displaced persons worldwide, particularly the over 3 million IDPs in Latin America. The activities carried out under the Mexico Plan of Action to enhance refugee protection and implement durable solutions to internal displacement were particularly relevant in that regard.

52. Chilean refugee and asylum policy was based on respect for the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers. Chile recognized the principle of non-refoulement, had decriminalized illegal immigration and provided support for refugees in need of travel documents. Moreover, since the establishment of the Recognition Commission and the signing of the Framework Agreement for the Resettlement of Refugees in Chile with UNHCR in 1999, Chile had been firmly committed to participating in the Solidarity Resettlement programme, which was being implemented in cooperation with Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay and with the financial assistance of the United States and Norway. Chile had established a special refugee and resettlement unit within the Aliens and Migration Department of the Ministry of the Interior in order to ensure effective coordination of the programme. The Chilean Government had recently approved a US\$ 200 million direct aid package to assist the growing number of asylum-seekers, especially from Colombia. The National Congress was currently considering legislation on the establishment of a social assistance fund for refugees. His delegation welcomed the forthcoming deployment of a solidarity resettlement programme selection mission to Costa Rica.

53. His Government was pleased with the High Commissioner's efforts to reform UNHCR and agreed that the Office's resources must first and foremost benefit populations of concern. Inter-agency cooperation between UNHCR, other United Nations agencies and the wider humanitarian community to address IDP situations through the new cluster approach was also a positive development, and he stressed the invaluable contribution made by NGOs in that area. Decentralization, rationalization and cost-reduction at headquarters would help to make additional resources available to those in need. He hoped that a consensus would be reached on mainstreaming IDP activities into the UNHCR annual programme budget.

54. Mr. GROVER (India) said that his delegation welcomed the High Commissioner's efforts to build protection and emergency response capacities, reduce statelessness, preserve asylum and undertake structural and management reforms. It was important to sustain the momentum created by declining numbers of refugees and increased voluntary repatriation. His Government welcomed the emphasis placed on repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction, which would alleviate the socio-economic burden on host countries. Cooperation between humanitarian and development agencies and funds would facilitate the establishment of favourable conditions for sustainable repatriation and returns.

55. While he commended the High Commissioner's commitment to addressing the situation of IDPs and stateless persons, he stressed that such efforts should not be detrimental to the Office's core mandate. UNHCR involvement in IDP protection must take place within clearly defined limits and at the express request by the State concerned only, unless that State was manifestly unable or unwilling to discharge its responsibilities. When examining the possibility of mainstreaming the supplementary budget of the IDP programmes with the annual programme budget, UNHCR must ensure that IDP-related activities were not carried out at the expense of refugees.

56. The principle of non-refoulement and the right to asylum must be preserved. It was therefore important to build capacities to identify persons in need of international protection in mixed population flows. In addition, greater emphasis must be placed on examining the root causes of refugee movements, including extreme poverty in developing countries, with a view to finding durable solutions. When determining a person's refugee status, UNHCR must comply strictly with its mandate. Terrorists and criminals must be prevented from abusing asylum systems and the international protection regime. The Office's participation in the Global Migration Group and the follow-up process to the High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development should help reach a consensus on the promotion of regular migration in an orderly, safe and non-discriminatory manner, and thus curb irregular migration and its associated risks.

57. He commended the Office's current structural and management reforms. The adoption of a needs-based austerity budget for 2007 was crucial to ensuring the transparency, predictability and sustainability of core activities. UNHCR must work to broaden its donor base and recognize the in-kind contributions made by many host countries in the developing world.

58. Mr. YIMER (Ethiopia) commended UNHCR for its successful repatriation of millions of refugees, its rapid response to humanitarian crises, and the valuable support that it provided in the registration of refugees. Ethiopia had begun registering refugees and asylum-seekers in the context of the UNHCR Project Profile campaign; refugees and asylum-seekers had been provided with identity cards and fingerprinted in order to facilitate the planning of repatriation activities.

59. UNHCR was becoming increasingly involved in IDP protection. The Office's expertise in the area of protection, provision of emergency shelter, camp coordination and camp management greatly enhanced strategic humanitarian action plans and relief efforts for hundreds of thousands of IDPs. While the cluster approach was a useful tool for improving humanitarian relief coordination, the issue of funding remained critical. UNHCR must set aside sufficient resources for its IDP-related activities without diverting resources earmarked for refugee protection.

60. Refugees and asylum-seekers often moved from one country or continent to another alongside people whose reasons for moving were different and not protection-related. Such mixed population flows frequently took place without proper documentation, involved human trafficking or people smuggling and left refugees and migrants vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Although many States regarded such movements as a threat to their sovereignty and security, States' measures to curb irregular migration must not prevent refugees from receiving international protection. The UNHCR 10-Point Plan of Action was an important instrument for

protecting refugees from refoulement and human rights violations. Efforts to address the problem of mixed flows required the full cooperation of affected States, government bodies, regional and international organizations with relevant mandates, and local and international NGOs.

61. He commended the Office's efforts to strengthen partnerships with Governments, other United Nations agencies, NGOs, the private sector and the refugee community. Its cooperation with the World Food Programme and its annual consultations with NGOs were exemplary. Ethiopia welcomed the structural and management reforms begun in early 2006 and the Office's commitment to results-based management.

62. UNHCR was chronically underfunded, and that situation had a negative impact on its refugee programmes. In Ethiopia, budget cuts had made it impossible to meet minimum standards of assistance; sectors such as agriculture and income-generation and community services had been abandoned. The cutbacks had extended to UNHCR policy priorities, such as women, children, the environment, health, sanitation and water. The capacity of African NGOs to operate effectively had been reduced to a level that was no longer sustainable. The lack of reliable funding had diminished the credibility of UNHCR and had strained its relations with refugees, Governments and NGOs. He called on the donor community to make every effort to provide sustained, predictable funding to prevent UNHCR from becoming critically weakened.

63. In March and April 2006, some 2,542 Sudanese refugees had returned from Ethiopia to southern Sudan in safety and dignity. Unfortunately, owing to budget constraints, the repatriation operation had been halted. In the past year, over 7,000 people, mostly from Eritrea, had sought asylum in Ethiopia, which brought the total number of refugees in Ethiopia to more than 103,000. The current crisis in southern Somalia could cause a new influx of refugees. While Ethiopia remained committed to providing asylum and searching for durable solutions, its efforts could be achieved only with donor support. He called on the international community to continue assisting UNHCR in the discharge of its vital humanitarian mandate.

64. Mr. SALLE (Central African Republic) said that, as a firm supporter of international solidarity and human rights, his country had long been a destination for large numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers from other African countries. The international community's support was crucial in that regard, and he thanked donors and United Nations agencies for their tireless efforts to share the burden of hosting large refugee populations. The establishment of the National Commission for Refugees demonstrated the importance that his Government attached to the situation of asylum-seekers. His country's asylum policy would be implemented in strict compliance with humanitarian law. National legislation on the status of refugees was currently being drafted.

65. His Government was committed to reconciliation and peace. Since 15 March 2003, over 10,000 Central African refugees had returned home. The Central African Republic was making considerable efforts to live in peace with its neighbours.

66. He welcomed the many activities carried out by UNHCR to assist refugees in the Central African Republic, including voluntary repatriation operations, workshops on the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, registration activities and assistance in the areas of health and education for refugees. While he commended UNHCR and the international community for

their ongoing support for durable solutions and lasting peace in his country, he pointed out that the Central African Republic required additional support to fulfil its humanitarian obligation to newly arrived refugees from Darfur.

67. Ms. FORERO UCROS (Colombia) said that Colombia was continuing its efforts to address the problem of large-scale displacement resulting from the activities of illegal armed groups. In that connection, she welcomed the support provided by UNHCR, United Nations agencies, donors and the international community to prevent displacement and protect the displaced.

68. The situation in Colombia was extremely complex. Violence had been exacerbated by the impact of international drug trafficking and related crimes, which financed the actions that affected the civilian population and caused displacement. The destruction of coca plantations and the promotion of alternative development had therefore been made a priority. The Government was committed to promoting and protecting human rights and international humanitarian law, and was endeavouring to protect civilians from the violence that caused their displacement.

69. As at 31 August 2006, more than 1.8 million persons had been registered as displaced; the real number of IDPs was estimated to be even greater. As a result of measures taken to reduce underregistration, in 2005 an additional 136,000 displaced persons had been registered. Since 2004, inter-agency activities were being carried out to promote socio-economic development in the main regions of origin of displaced persons. However, additional efforts were necessary to improve cooperation between local and central government bodies.

70. Most displaced families had received basic humanitarian assistance, over half a million displaced persons were eligible for health care, and increased budget allocations for IDP programmes had improved displaced children's access to education. Some 120,000 displaced families had benefited from the Families in Action programme, which focused on education for young displaced persons and sought to combat systemic poverty. Some progress had been made in the area of income generation, vocational training, housing and access to land. Since 2002, 135,158 displaced persons had returned home under a plan for sustainable return or resettlement.

71. Coordination among aid agencies and Governments was essential for ensuring an effective inter-agency response to situations of internal displacement. UNHCR had provided valuable support to the Presidential Counsellor for Social Action responsible for coordinating IDP-related activities. In order to enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance to IDPs, special emphasis should be placed on coordination with government institutions and support for economic recovery, particularly with regard to housing and income generation. She thanked other Latin American countries for their support in resettlement operations carried out under the Mexico Plan of Action. Support from donor countries was crucial to the effectiveness of such operations.

72. Ms. FERNANDO (Sri Lanka) said that her Government had cooperated with UNHCR for nearly 20 years in addressing situations of internal displacement. Although the High Commissioner's visit to Sri Lanka in July 2006 had been overshadowed by fear of resumed

hostilities by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, he had been able to assess the political complexities of the situation, meet with leaders from across the political spectrum and offered useful advice to the Government in dealing with an intractable armed group.

73. UNHCR engaged in fruitful cooperation with the local authorities responsible for coordinating humanitarian action. The Government's response to conflict-related and tsunami-related IDP situations was based on equity, and its objective was to find durable solutions. A UNHCR-supported project had been implemented to find permanent homes for some 600 displaced persons, and a seminar on confidence-building measures was being organized for all stakeholders.

74. Mr. BURAYZAT (Jordan) said that, while Jordan was not a party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, it respected the provisions of that instrument and had hosted many refugees. During the recent crisis in Lebanon, UNHCR had demonstrated its ability to respond to the needs of both IDPs and those who had fled the country. His Government supported UNHCR efforts to establish efficient partnerships in order to develop local capacity to guarantee protection for mixed flows of asylum-seekers and refugees. The relationship between countries of origin, transit and destination required clarification, and steps should be taken to ensure that transit countries did not bear the burden of refugees and asylum-seekers alone. Governments should improve coordination of activities to protect IDPs and should work more closely with NGOs.

75. UNHCR should give priority to studying the root causes of asylum and displacement, and that subject should be discussed at the meeting of the Organization of the Islamic Conference on the problems of refugees in the Muslim States to be held in November 2006. Countries that caused people to seek asylum and countries with internally displaced populations should be held accountable. The international community should focus on repatriation and guarantee the right of return to all refugees who wished to return home.

76. Mr. AMIRBAYOV (Observer for Azerbaijan) said that the asylum-migration nexus presented the international community with a new challenge. Efforts must be made to find effective methods of identifying those who genuinely deserved international protection. Such a complex task required coordinated efforts to ensure that measures taken to curb irregular migration did not prevent refugees from gaining the international protection that they needed and to which they were entitled.

77. As a country with one of the largest IDP populations in the world, Azerbaijan supported the Office's cluster approach to IDPs and its broader engagement with that group. IDP activities should be mainstreamed into UNHCR programmes and budgets. UNHCR should strengthen its cooperation with other United Nations agencies to implement the revised collaborative approach and to extend it to situations of protracted internal displacement. Azerbaijan would continue its efforts to improve living conditions for IDPs through a number of temporary integration initiatives. The continued technical and consultative assistance of UNHCR in capacity-building to strengthen the asylum system would be crucial to the success of those initiatives and other programmes for IDP and refugee protection in Azerbaijan.

78. Ms. NYATANYI (Observer for Rwanda) said that some 46,000 refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi currently living in Rwanda had expressed their willingness to return home as soon as the situations in their countries of origin allowed them to do so, and she appealed to the international community to provide assistance in that endeavour. The Government would help refugees who wished to remain in Rwanda to resettle.

79. Her Government wished to facilitate the return of the 60,000 Rwandans currently living in the United Republic of Tanzania, some of whom were resident there while others were illegal immigrants. They should be allowed to return in safety and dignity and in accordance with the provisions of international humanitarian law. Integration initiatives would be established in cooperation with UNHCR to provide accommodation, education, safe drinking water, health care and income-generating activities for refugees returning from the United Republic of Tanzania.

80. Since Rwanda had begun a development phase, she called for a new form of tripartite agreements to encourage Rwandans to return or to participate in the development of their homeland from their host countries.

81. Mr. SAIDOV (Observer for Uzbekistan) said that his Government did not understand several UNHCR statements concerning the extradition of Uzbek citizens from Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. According to the norms of international law, sovereign States such as Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan had the right to establish their own procedures for the extradition, deportation and return of persons. Under the provisions of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, Uzbekistan had the right to request the return of its citizens. The High Commissioner's interpretation of the principle of non-refoulement was unilateral, arbitrary and contrary to the provisions of article 33, paragraph 2, of the 1951 Convention. Uzbekistan had informed UNHCR that Uzbekistan's requests for extradition related only to persons who had escaped from places of detention or who had committed internationally recognized crimes. The rights of the extradited Uzbek citizens were being respected in accordance with domestic and international law, including the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The calls from UNHCR that international observers should be granted access to the extradited persons in order to ensure respect for their fundamental rights were inappropriate and provocative. UNHCR should adhere to its mandate and not interfere in States' internal affairs.

82. Since the situation in Tajikistan had stabilized, the war in Afghanistan had ended and questions concerning the repatriation of Afghan refugees had been resolved, there was no reason for UNHCR to remain in Uzbekistan. His Government therefore found it difficult to understand the criticisms that had been voiced at the closure of the UNHCR office in Tashkent.

83. Mr. GUTERRES (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the international community should focus its attention on the humanitarian crisis in the Great Lakes region and should give its full support to the local communities in host States, such as the United Republic of Tanzania, to ensure that their burdens were shared. The Solidarity Resettlement programme in Latin America provided a timely example of how resettlement could be achieved.

84. With regard to the situation in Uzbekistan, he said that his only concern was to ensure that international refugee law was fully respected and that no national legislation or bilateral extradition arrangements undermined those laws. His Office hoped that the National Centre for Human Rights would be able to guarantee full respect for the human rights of all refugees who returned to Uzbekistan.

85. Mr. CHILIGATI (United Republic of Tanzania), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that his Government had not sent any refugees back to Rwanda. The Tanzanian Government was working closely with the Rwandan Government, and had supervised the safe and dignified return of illegal immigrants only. Rwandan refugees currently residing in the United Republic of Tanzania were protected and would return to Rwanda when the time was right.

86. Ms. NYATANYI (Observer for Rwanda), speaking in exercise of the right to reply, said that her Government accepted the repatriation of illegal immigrants in safe and dignified conditions. It was concerned about the separation of families in which one partner was a Rwandan resident in the United Republic of Tanzania. The Tanzanian Government should honour its promise to review those cases.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.