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Summary record of the 703rd meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 3 October 2017, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. McCarney..... (Canada)

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

General debate (*continued*)

1. **Mr. Nyut** (Observer for South Sudan) said that South Sudan kept an open door policy and was currently hosting 280,000 refugees from neighbouring countries. Although the country was facing its own internal challenges, it had provided asylum to 10,000 people. On 17 June 2017, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees had attended the signature of regulations on refugee status eligibility, adopted pursuant to the 2012 Refugee Act. South Sudan welcomed the adoption of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), which it was implementing through best practices, such as allocating agricultural land to refugees. South Sudan had also issued identity cards to the refugees living in camps and urban centres to allow them to enjoy their full rights in the country.

2. South Sudan's policy was to promote the settlement of refugees in safer places and to encourage self-reliance. The relocation of refugees from the Yida settlement to the Pamir camp, established in 2016, therefore remained a priority. The Government was committed to ensuring the civilian character of all the refugee camps in its territory in accordance with the international refugee standards. On 14 December 2016 the Government had launched an independent process of national dialogue with a view to putting an end to all forms of violence, re-establishing national unity and improving relations between the people and the Government. In addition, South Sudan was committed to the high level revitalization forum led by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) as part of the implementation of the Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan. Recently, as a result of joint efforts by the Government, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian agencies, internally displaced persons had been able to return to their homes. South Sudan urged the international community to step up its efforts to help ensure the return home of more displaced persons.

3. **Mr. Quartey** (Ghana) said that the refugee programme in Ghana focused mainly on protecting refugees and guaranteeing their economic and psychosocial well-being. Ghana therefore consistently carried out contingency planning to ensure that refugees were adequately catered for in emergency situations. With government support, the Ghana Refugee Board was implementing faster and more reliable procedures for determining refugee status. In order to reduce refugee dependency, the Government had instituted a jobs solutions strategy aimed at creating job opportunities for refugees and host communities. As part of that strategy, throughout 2016 Ghana had strengthened its engagement with bilateral and multilateral partners in order to obtain funding for livelihood activities for both refugees and host communities. In accordance with the provisions of the New York Declaration, Ghana was pursuing a policy of providing the same social services to refugees as it did to Ghanaian citizens, such as national health insurance and free compulsory basic education. Refugees also benefited from government policies to alleviate poverty and improve the living conditions of the most vulnerable. Furthermore, the Ghana Refugee Board was working on the inclusion of refugee children in the free senior high school policy. In addition, the responsibility of providing sanitation services in refugee camps and settlements had also been covered by the national budget. He requested UNHCR to increase the funding that it provided to Ghana and added that Ghana aligned itself with the statement made by Togo on behalf of the African Group.

4. **Mr. Alemi Balkhi** (Afghanistan) said that since the establishment of the National Unity Government in Afghanistan, nearly two million Afghan refugees and migrants had returned to the country. In 2016, 1,470,000 individuals had been repatriated; however, the figures were expected to be lower in 2017, due to problems arising from terrorism, a lack of basic infrastructure, limited investment in projects for returning refugees and internally displaced persons and reduced assistance. Afghanistan welcomed the initiative taken by Iran and Pakistan to register and regulate Afghan refugees, and asked for that regional solution to be extended. Afghanistan had also reached a cooperation agreement with the European Union that had led to the repatriation of migrants. He thanked the German Government for having ended the forced deportation of Afghans following its appreciation of the situation in Afghanistan.

5. In addition to refugees, there were still more than one million internally displaced persons in Afghanistan in need of humanitarian assistance. The Displacement and Returnee Executive Committee was responsible for implementing the policies of the High Commission for Migration and the Sub-Committee of the Council of Ministers as part of the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework and the national priority programmes. That Committee anticipated that \$590 million would be needed each year to meet the needs of returning refugees and internally displaced persons.

6. A presidential decree making it easier for returning refugees to acquire land in Afghanistan was being prepared. As Afghanistan was a party to the Convention and Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, the Government had plans to enact a refugee law incorporating all its international obligations. That law would soon be published in the Official Gazette.

7. **Mr. Au** (Lesotho) said that Lesotho aligned itself with the statement made by Togo on behalf of the African Group. Assisted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Lesotho had embarked on consultations on the global compact on refugees. The Government was in the process of reviewing its National Strategic Development Plan with a view to including the issue of migration, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063. The policy of the Lesotho Government was that refugees should not be confined to camps; they should be integrated into society and must have access to health care, education and other basic services. Refugees were included in the national population register, which meant that they could be issued with identity and travel documents. The children of refugees could therefore easily enrol in school and their parents could enter the job market. Lesotho reaffirmed its commitment to helping refugees and asylum seekers, pursuant to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, the African Refugee Convention, and the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa.

8. **Mr. Sesay** (Observer for Sierra Leone) said that in 2016 Sierra Leone had ratified the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, following which the Government had organized a consultative workshop on the preparation of a national action plan for the prevention and eradication of statelessness. The Government had also established a national steering committee on statelessness and had adopted an act on civil registration, under which all individuals living in Sierra Leone would be registered. Identity cards would soon be issued to the entire population, which would improve the situation of stateless persons. The Government was also taking action to find sustainable solutions for Liberian refugees. In December 2016, the Liberian authorities had reviewed 191 cases and had issued Liberian passports to the individuals concerned. However, they had rejected the requests of 266 persons, to whom Sierra Leone had then issued documents granting them access to basic social services and employment. In July 2017, Sierra Leone had amended its Citizenship Act to allow Sierra Leonean citizens to pass on their nationality to their spouses and children. The Government was also working on an amendment to its 2007 refugee law to make the asylum system fairer and more effective. Lastly, in cooperation with the International Centre for Migration Policy Development, the European Union and the Economic Community of West African States, the Government had developed a national labour policy as part of a project to support the free movement of persons and migration in West Africa.

9. **Ms. Dinga Dzondo** (Republic of the Congo) said that the Republic of the Congo aligned itself with the statement made by Togo on behalf of the African Group. The Government was working to establish a legal framework to afford refugees proper protection and to respond to humanitarian emergencies and internal displacements arising from natural disasters and social unrest. It had therefore prepared a bill defining the status of refugees and establishing a national asylum system, and a draft memorandum of understanding between the Government and the UNHCR Representation in the Republic of the Congo. The Republic of the Congo was hosting 58,000 refugees and was providing them with health-care and education services. The Government was also working on ways to guarantee refugees' autonomy. The Republic of the Congo welcomed the fact that UNHCR and the World Bank had set up a single funding window for internally displaced persons and host communities. The Government reaffirmed its commitment to working

with UNHCR, including on the implementation of cessation clauses for Rwandan refugees. A tripartite meeting to review that issue had been held in Brazzaville on 26 and 27 September 2017. Currently 31,449 refugees from the Central African Republic were living in the Congo, and their situation was a matter of great concern. Around 600 of those wished to return home.

10. **Mr. Barandagiye** (Observer for Burundi) said that Burundi aligned itself with the statement made by Togo on behalf of the African Group. To support the work of UNHCR, Burundi had prepared and implemented the instruments needed for the application of its asylum and refugee protection policy. Burundi currently hosted 63,886 asylum seekers and refugees, of whom 37,926 were living in camps and 25,940 in urban areas. Refugees wishing to leave the country were issued with biometric travel permits by the General Commissariat for Migration. As all existing refugee camps were full, the Government was planning to open a fifth camp. Refugees living in camps received assistance from a number of humanitarian partners, under the auspices of UNHCR and the National Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons. Burundi requested all organizations that were able to do so to assist with the management of refugees and that training for trainers be organized for the staff of the National Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons. As the implementation of the refugee resettlement programme launched in 2013 had been delayed for reasons beyond the Government's control, the latter urged all countries to fulfil their pledge to relieve Burundi of some of its burden.

11. In April 2015, Burundi had adopted bills on accession to the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. The Government was currently considering a bill on the withdrawal of its reservations to the Convention and Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees. Furthermore, the Government intended to engage in talks with Oman to settle the problem of Omani nationals at risk of statelessness who had been living in Burundi for many years. The Government requested the international community to increase its assistance to Burundi in order to help it improve the conditions it offered to asylum seekers and its procedure for determining refugee status.

12. **Ms. Mbaikoua** (Observer for the Central African Republic) said that of the 4.5 million Central African citizens that made up the country's population, 592,245 were internally displaced and a further 513,676 were living as refugees in neighbouring countries. Despite the challenges it faced, the country had never closed its borders and was currently hosting 531 asylum seekers and 11,501 refugees.

13. The Central African Republic was a party to the Convention and Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees and to the Organization of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. In December 2007 the country had adopted Act No. 07.019 on the status of refugees, which, alongside the abovementioned international instruments, constituted the legal framework governing support for refugees and asylum seekers. Moreover, an interministerial committee had been set up to find sustainable solutions to refugee-related issues. That committee was responsible in particular for dealing with citizenship applications from Rwandan refugees. Out of the 50 applications received thus far, 14 had been accepted.

14. The bodies responsible for considering applications for refugee status had met four times since the beginning of 2017 and 85 per cent of refugees had identity documents. The National Commission for Refugees had been tasked with raising awareness among and training commissariat, police station and border control staff with regard to issues such as freedom of movement and the rights and obligations of refugees. Furthermore, the Government was making every effort to issue refugees with biometric passports.

15. Around 900 refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo had returned voluntarily to their country. With the support of UNHCR, the Central African authorities had helped 54,000 internally displaced persons to return home. In addition, more than 35,700 refugees from the Central African Republic had returned home in 2017.

16. **Mr. Hajyyev** (Turkmenistan) said that an international conference had been held in Ashgabat in 2012, following which the Ashgabat Declaration on Refugees in the Muslim World had been adopted. In view of the fact that 70 per cent of the world's refugees hailed

from Muslim and African countries, Turkmenistan should continue to work with UNHCR on the implementation of the Declaration.

17. At the initiative of Turkmenistan, for the first time ever a team composed of refugees had participated in the fifth Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games. Believing that sport had always been a catalyst for peace and friendship, at the thirty-sixth session of the Human Rights Council Turkmenistan had assisted in the preparation of a joint statement calling for the participation of refugee teams in the Olympic Games. He said that his country wished to go even further and had begun to prepare a plan of action in cooperation with the United Nations and other international organizations. Turkmenistan also proposed that an international conference should be held on the question of the importance of refugees' participation in the Olympic Movement.

18. **Mr. Hovakimian** (Armenia) said that his country would continue to play an active part in the preparation of the global compact. Around 20,000 Syrians had been forced to flee to Armenia, which had become the third country in Europe with the largest number of refugees in relation to its population. The Armenian Government had been working to address the urgent humanitarian needs of refugees through a range of emergency aid and integration projects, such as the provision of free medical assistance, the offer of scholarships and residence permits, and the allocation of decent housing. Working with UNHCR, the Government had also introduced a microcredit system to help refugees set up their own businesses.

19. The thirty-year-long conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan had reached a peak in April 2016, when an Azerbaijani military offensive had led to the displacement not to say flight of thousands of civilians. As a result of the swift reaction of the Government and the UNHCR Representation in Armenia, most of those civilians had been able to return home. Nevertheless, the influx of refugees presented a considerable challenge for Armenia, in view of the country's socioeconomic situation and levels of foreign aid, which had remained insufficient, despite the many appeals to the international community and donor organizations.

20. **Mr. Giorgadze** (Georgia) said that there were currently 433 refugees and 1,082 humanitarian status holders in Georgia. As their integration was one of the Government's priorities, a centre had been set up to help them learn the national language and become familiar with the country's legal system and history. A new law on international protection had been adopted to strengthen procedural guarantees for asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection.

21. Georgia was actively cooperating with UNHCR and other international organizations on socioeconomic assistance and asylum with a view to improving its asylum procedures.

22. It was worth noting that 276,189 persons had been internally displaced in Georgia as a result of the occupation of 20 per cent of its sovereign territory by the Russian Federation. As those displaced persons were unable to return home safely, the Government had implemented housing programmes, as a result of which around 40 per cent had received accommodation. Following the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, Georgia had begun to move from a status-based to a needs-based system of assistance.

23. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) thanked the representative of South Sudan for having focused on the hospitality that his country had shown despite its difficult situation and said that it was important that the authorities and the opposition should continue to work towards ensuring peace for all, including refugees and internally displaced persons. The closure of the UNHCR Representation in Sierra Leone was an encouraging sign and the measures taken with regard to statelessness had led to considerable progress in West Africa. He welcomed the fact that the Republic of the Congo was currently receiving funds through the funding window of the International Development Association, as well as the efforts made by the Central African Republic to shelter refugees and facilitate the voluntary return of internally displaced persons and refugees.

24. He was concerned by the fact that more than 400,000 Burundians were still being hosted by neighbouring countries and said that UNHCR would continue to support their voluntary return to Burundi. He joined Afghanistan in thanking Pakistan and Iran, which had been taking in refugees for years, and said that secure conditions needed to be ensured for the return of internally displaced persons and refugees and that development aid must be increased.

25. UNHCR was prepared to cooperate and to propose further initiatives and solutions to the problem of refugees and internally displaced persons in the Muslim world. Lastly, he recalled that the solution to the problem of internally displaced persons in Armenia and Georgia could only be of a political nature.

26. **Mr. Neufville** (Observer for Liberia) said that Liberia aligned itself with the statement made by Togo on behalf of the African Group. The number of refugees and asylum seekers in Liberia had reached 11,986, of whom 11,896 were from Côte d'Ivoire. The voluntary repatriation of Ivorian refugees had resumed in December 2015 and so far 26,438 had returned home safely and with dignity. Liberia had made the search for durable solutions a strategic priority for the first semester of 2017, focusing on the voluntary repatriation of refugees. The second semester of 2017 would be spent integrating refugees into the country's education and health systems. An estimated 5,000 Ivorian refugees had been expected to opt for integration into Liberian society by the end of June 2017, but many more remained, which had made the integration process difficult to implement. UNHCR had proposed that Liberia should adopt the Alternatives to Camps policy as a way of fostering social cohesion among refugees and the host community. To that end, control of the health and education facilities of UNHCR had been handed over to the relevant ministries and incorporated into the national system. Liberia's efforts and the progress made since the end of the civil war had been eroded by an Ebola outbreak in 2014 and the Government had frozen staff recruitment. That was why Liberia had appealed to UNHCR to absorb the cost of the salaries of teaching and health-care staff for 2017. The Government would continue to look for durable solutions for refugees from Sierra Leone by the end of December 2017 and for the remaining 63 refugees of mixed nationalities, some of whom were not eligible for Liberian nationality because they were not of Black descent.

27. **Mr. Olongopongo** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that the Democratic Republic of the Congo aligned itself with the statement made by Togo on behalf of the African Group. The Democratic Republic of the Congo practiced an open door policy and had thus received more than two million refugees as a result of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, as well as hundreds of thousands of refugees from Angola, South Sudan, the Central African Republic and Burundi. A 2002 law granted refugees the same rights as the country's own citizens, with the exception of civil rights. The great majority of refugees were settled in communities rather than in camps. The Government had granted refugees hundreds of hectares of land to make them independent. However, the Democratic Republic of the Congo considered that protecting refugees and assisting the States that received them was a shared international responsibility, a principle that should be effectively applied to African countries. The Government regretted that the lack of funds prevented it from implementing durable solutions for the more than 200,000 Rwandan refugees on its territory, thereby entitling it to invoke cessation clauses. The Democratic Republic of the Congo requested the support of UNHCR to find a solution to the situation of the 10,880 former Angolan refugees who had opted for repatriation but who were still residing in the country without a defined status.

28. **Mr. Beregoi** (Moldova) said that Moldova supported the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness 2014-2024 launched by UNHCR. In the face of current challenges, the Moldovan authorities had concentrated their efforts on strengthening capacities to safeguard refugees' rights, developing effective cooperation mechanisms for the integration of refugees, and developing mechanisms for cooperation with States in the region with a view to finding durable solutions in the field. Measures had been taken to tend to the needs of refugees, including those with special needs, particularly in areas such as housing, health care and legal assistance. Moldova confirmed its commitments under the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and those that it had made during the United

Nations Summit in September 2016. The Moldovan authorities were working to encourage the integration of refugees into society and the labour market. For example, integration centres had been set up and measures had been taken to ensure refugees' access to all levels of education.

29. **Mr. Naziri Asl** (Islamic Republic of Iran) requested that the Government of Myanmar respect its obligations under international law with regard to the Rohingya people and provide humanitarian assistance to their displaced population with the support of UNHCR. He recalled that Iran had been hosting many refugees for almost 40 years, providing them with protection and assistance in a number of areas, which had weighted heavily on the economic, health-care, social and security situation of Iran. Although the refugee problem was the shared responsibility of the international community, the burden was borne by developing countries with fragile economies, such as Iran. A new inclusive and transparent mechanism should be adopted in order to redistribute the workload more fairly between the different partners. Asylum seekers should be free to settle wherever they wished. The international community should adopt a plan of action to meet the needs of refugees, allocate the necessary resources and create awareness with a view to encouraging voluntary repatriation.

30. **Mr. Rwegasira** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that the United Republic of Tanzania aligned itself with the statement made by Togo on behalf of the African Group. He recalled that his country had been designated as one of the pilot countries for the implementation of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). Since gaining its independence, the United Republic of Tanzania had hosted hundreds of thousands of refugees and it continued to maintain an open door policy. More than 345,000 refugees were currently living in the country. Tanzania was already implementing the CRRF, launched in June 2017, and had set up a steering committee, which had prepared a road map setting out the country's vision for the Framework and providing strategic guidance on its implementation. The Government hoped that the experiences and views of the pilot countries would be taken into account during the preparation of the global compact on refugees. In accordance with the principle of voluntary repatriation, the United Republic of Tanzania, Burundi and UNHCR had organized a meeting of the Ministerial Tripartite Commission in August 2017, which had resulted in the adoption of a voluntary repatriation programme for Burundi refugees. Since that programme's launch, 2,344 refugees had received assistance to return home safely and with dignity. As of 30 September 2017, 24,000 refugees had registered for the programme. The United Republic of Tanzania appealed to the international donor community to support the Comprehensive Framework and its implementation in the country by supporting the definitive local integration of the Burundi refugees of 1972, who had been granted Tanzanian citizenship, by providing the Government with the assistance it needed to meet the needs of refugees in the country, by supporting the voluntary repatriation programme, and by helping UNHCR to cover the costs of receiving refugees, such as the cost of providing security and maintaining law and order in the camps.

31. **Mr. Jemal Ummer** (Ethiopia) said that Ethiopia aligned itself with the statement made by Togo on behalf of the African Group. True to its open door policy, Ethiopia was currently hosting close to one million refugees and asylum seekers from some twenty countries, including Eritrea, Somalia and South Sudan. In the face of complex emergencies and the constantly increasing number of new arrivals over the previous two months, Ethiopia called upon Member States to support the revitalization of the 2015 peace plan of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and urged all humanitarian actors to support the implementation of the Nairobi Declaration with a view to finding a lasting solution to the protracted situation of Somalian refugees.

32. Ethiopia's refugee response was currently based on three policies: "out-of-camp", encampment and local integration. It should be noted, however, that the encampment policy was due to be phased out within ten or so years as the other two policies were gradually put into practice. The goal was to adopt a development-oriented approach through job opportunities and increased access to social services, with a view to achieving refugees' self-reliance, and to promote resilience by fostering holistic socioeconomic development in areas hosting refugees.

33. Since September 2017, Ethiopia had been carrying out institutional and legislative reforms to implement the nine commitments that it had made in 2016 during the Leaders' Summit on Refugees (including the "out-of-camp" policy, local integration, the issuance of work permits and access to education), and the application of CRRF. Similarly the vital events and national identity card proclamation had been amended to allow refugees to register their vital events. Despite the progress achieved (including an increase in the school enrolment rate, the construction of new irrigation infrastructure and preparations for the jobs compact, which should provide jobs for 30,000 refugees) several challenges remained, particularly with regard to the funding of the measures needed. Only 25 per cent of the \$335.4 million required for Ethiopia's refugee response plan for 2017 had been funded. Ethiopia encouraged the speedy implementation of multi-year, multi-partner planning to ensure the predictability of funding and the expansion of cash-based interventions and institutional capacity-building in countries implementing the CRRF.

34. **Mr. Konaté** (Observer for Mali) said that Mali aligned itself with the statement made by Togo on behalf of the African Group. Mali continued to carry out aware-raising and information campaigns in neighbouring countries to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of refugees. The work of the Group of Five for the Sahel, which had been operational since 2016, would enable refugees to return home safely. So far, 60,373 Malians had returned home; 403 Ivorian refugees had voluntarily returned to Côte d'Ivoire, while 17,543 Mauritanian refugees were still receiving protection and assistance. He thanked the host countries for their show of solidarity and hospitality, and appealed to the international community to support Mali's efforts to ensure the effective return of refugees.

35. **Ms. Nzaou** (Observer for Gabon) said that Gabon aligned itself with the statement made by Togo on behalf of the African Group. The work of the National Commission for Refugees had led to a considerable decrease in the number of asylum seekers: from 1,909 on 1 January 2017 to 104 on 30 August 2017. Gabon was currently hosting 957 refugees and had made the search for durable solutions one of its priorities. Gabon planned to carry out campaigns to raise refugees' and long-term asylum seekers' awareness of voluntary repatriation, the possibilities of local integration, the acquisition of a residence permit and naturalization.

36. **Mr. Visespochanakit** (Thailand) said that, in October 2016, Thailand had successfully facilitated the return to Myanmar of a pilot group of 71 persons thanks to the cooperation of the Government of Myanmar and the support of UNHCR and IOM. Preparation for the voluntary return of a further 247 persons to Myanmar had already begun. However, there were more than 100,000 nationals of Myanmar still remaining in Thailand.

37. In July 2017, the Government had set up a committee to explore the possibility of ratifying the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Thailand was committed to ending statelessness by 2024, in the light of the Cabinet's decision in December 2016 to grant stateless persons born in Thailand the right to apply for Thai nationality. Thailand was therefore a strong supporter of the UNHCR #IBelong campaign and of cooperation between UNHCR and IOM in the preparation for the adoption of the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration and the global compact on refugees.

38. **Mr. Nandago** (Namibia) said that Namibia aligned itself with the statement made by Togo on behalf of the African Group. His Government was alarmed by the news that the budget for Africa would once again decrease in 2018, although no drop was expected in the number of refugees. Namibia felt, however, that CRRF would ease the pressure on host countries, enhance refugee self-reliance, expand access to third country solutions and support the right conditions for the return of refugees in safety and with dignity.

39. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) welcomed the efforts of the various countries and their support for the activities of UNHCR. He had taken note of all of the points raised and said that it was important that every country and every region should show support for the global compact on refugees and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.