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Summary record of the 671st meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 2 October 2013, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Arango Olmos

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

General debate (*continued*)

1. **Mr. Moraru** (Republic of Moldova) said that his country had made a commitment to the European Union to harmonize its legislation and adopt best practices in relation to refugees and asylum. He welcomed the launch of the asylum systems quality initiative project, in April 2012, with the support of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and European partners. It was one of the largest international projects ever conducted for the long-term enhancement of the national asylum system. He also welcomed the results of the training and quality pilot project, implemented in the field of asylum in Eastern Europe. He also stressed the importance of cooperation with the European Asylum Support Office, which organized training sessions on refugee status determination and facilitated access by Moldovan experts to online training modules provided by the European Union.
2. **Mr. Smorodin** (Russian Federation) said that his country had participated actively in bilateral and international humanitarian assistance initiatives for Syrian refugees. In addition to providing financial support for UNHCR operations in Syria, it had also decided to give \$10 million to the Lebanese and Jordanian authorities to help them to cope with the influx of refugees into their territories. In 2013, the Russian Federation had granted asylum to 600 Syrian refugees. In accordance with the commitments it had assumed in 2011, the Russian Federation intended to improve its asylum system and its refugee legislation, to assist in returning internally displaced persons in good conditions and to develop a social assistance programme for them. The State was also developing its network of temporary reception centres and would henceforth issue biometric documents to refugees. He said that individuals who had been granted refugee status could apply for Russian citizenship. Between 2008 and 2013, Russian citizenship had thus been granted to more than 156,000 stateless persons.
3. **Mr. Cucić** (Serbia) drew attention to the needs of over 200,000 internally displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija. According to UNHCR data, there were some 97,000 extremely vulnerable displaced persons in Serbia. Since 1999, only 1.9 per cent had been returned to Kosovo and Metohija in appropriate conditions. He was also concerned at the considerable influx of asylum seekers, predominantly from Syria, that Serbia was facing.
4. **Mr. Finol** (Venezuela) said that his country received approximately 2,500 asylum applications every year, of which 98 per cent were from Colombian nationals. He explained that the new Labour Code recognized equal rights for refugees and for nationals. Migrants and refugees also enjoyed the same services as Venezuelan citizens and several thousand had benefited from the programmes of the Great Venezuelan Housing Mission. In accordance with the commitments it had undertaken in December 2011, Venezuela had started to coordinate public policies on refugees at the national level, which involved 30 public institutions working together to ensure better recognition of all the human rights of refugees. He welcomed the increased rate of recognition of refugee status, which had resulted from the inclusion in the decisions adopted by the Venezuelan State of the broader definition of “refugee” contained in the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees.
5. **Mr. Knutsson** (Sweden) noted with satisfaction the commitment of UNHCR to the Transformative Agenda and its participation in the development of the relevant protocols and implementation plan. He urged UNHCR to step up its efforts to combat fraud and to ensure the effective allocation of funds within the organization. Sweden was one of the European Union Member States with the highest number of asylum seekers and one of the main financial partners of UNHCR. It intended to continue making unearmarked contributions to the organization and remained ready to respond to emergency appeals that might be made in the course of the year.

6. **Mr. Alexandris** (Greece) said that, given its geographical position, Greece faced a particularly significant migration flow. It was currently home to 800,000 registered migrants and about 350,000 irregular migrants. Despite the economic difficulties caused by such migratory pressures, the State was issuing six-month renewable residence permits to Syrian refugees. Greece had revised its national plan of action for the reform of the asylum system and migration management to ensure that the system complied with international standards relating to refugees and human rights. The plan provided, in particular, for an effective voluntary repatriation policy and reintegration measures. In the light of the economic crisis affecting the country, implementation of the plan would depend largely on the support provided to Greece, especially by the Member States of the European Union.

7. **Mr. Tchariè** (Togo) said that his country had ratified the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the Organization of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa (1969). Various measures were being taken to improve the protection framework applicable to the more than 23,000 refugees of 19 different nationalities living in the territory. The country also planned to adopt legislation amending Act No. 019/PR of 20 December 2000 on the status of refugees and to ratify the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. He noted that, despite the return of peace to Togo, 18,000 Togolese refugees still lived abroad, which reflected a clear desire not to be repatriated.

8. **Ms. Ludlow** (Mexico) said that her country had adopted legal provisions adapted to the new challenges faced with regard to asylum. A facilitated procedure was now in place for refugees who wished to change their place of residence, for instance. The institutional mechanisms providing protection and assistance to refugees, in particular victims of human trafficking or sexual violence, had also been improved. Measures had been taken to ensure that refugees had access to federal social protection programmes, and specialized medical and legal services were provided to unaccompanied minors.

9. **Mr. Condé** (Guinea) said that his country was working actively to repatriate Ivorian refugees, in cooperation with the UNHCR National Offices, pursuant to the tripartite agreement signed for that purpose by Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and UNHCR. He called on the international community to support the local integration of refugees in Guinea. In that connection, he regretted the drastic reduction in financial resources allocated to UNHCR's Guinea programme. He also drew attention to the alarming situation of Sri Lankan asylum seekers.

10. **Mr. Atageldiyev** (Turkmenistan) said that an international conference on refugees in the Muslim world had been held in Ashgabat, in May 2012. Based on the results of the conference, Turkmenistan, with UNHCR support, proposed to systematically share with the parties concerned its practical experience with regard to the naturalization of stateless refugees. It was prepared to cooperate with UNHCR in organizing a high-level meeting on the subject in 2014. In 2005, a presidential decree had resulted in the naturalization of 13,245 refugees and the granting of residence permits to 3,053 refugees. In 2011, the immigration authorities had implemented measures to reduce statelessness, which had provided the opportunity for people living in Turkmenistan who were stateless or did not have a valid identity document to find a second home in Turkmenistan. Several steps had been taken to enable those persons to lead a normal life, for instance, by granting them plots of land in rural areas.

11. **Ms. Bermúdez Arciniegas** (Colombia) said that her country had committed itself to compensating victims of armed conflict under the Victims and Land Restitution Act. Displaced populations would be allocated plots of land or would receive land grants and financial support to build housing and sanitation facilities. The State had received 35,000 applications in that respect, covering more than 2.8 million hectares. Eighty-six priority areas had been targeted and 7,100 applications were being processed. Special support

mechanisms had been established under the programme *Familias en su Tierra* (Families on Their Land) in support of 14,600 repatriated or resettled families in 16 departments. In 2012, after more than 10 years of forced displacement, 532 members of the Emberá Chamí indigenous community had been repatriated to their ancestral lands. On 19 November 2012, Colombia had acceded to the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

12. **Mr. Swalens** (Belgium) said that his country was fully committed to the principle of a sound and coherent common European asylum system, but that it also attached importance to specific situations such as that of refugees and displaced persons on the African continent. The State had supported interventions in situations of forced displacement, particularly in the Sahel and Great Lakes region, and encouraged all efforts to achieve durable political solutions, peace and the security and development of the populations concerned.

13. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) commended the significant improvements in the asylum systems in Moldova, Mexico and Togo. He emphasized the excellent relations between UNHCR and the Russian immigration authorities. He noted the remarkable achievements of the Russian Federation and Turkmenistan in reducing statelessness. He stressed the importance of the initiative taken by Venezuela to coordinate public policies on refugees at the national level. He noted the exemplary cooperation between UNHCR and Sweden and, in particular, the substantial, unearmarked contributions made by that country. He assured Greece of the full cooperation of UNHCR in the reform of the asylum system and called on the State party to show compassion for Syrian refugees. He recognized that the support provided by UNHCR to Guinea was inadequate and assured the State party that the necessary steps would be taken to address that situation. He reiterated that Colombia had adopted the most advanced institutional framework in the world on internally displaced persons. He drew attention to the essential role played by Belgium in the development of the common asylum system and its strong support for UNHCR activities in the Great Lakes region.

14. **Mr. Reddy** (India) said that it was important not to neglect protracted refugee situations and to create the necessary conditions for voluntary repatriation, particularly through bilateral and regional dialogue. The Indian Government had recently granted refugees in urban areas the opportunity to apply for a one-year renewable visa, which increased the protection space considerably.

15. **Mr. Seilenthal** (Estonia) expressed the hope that the UNHCR Strategy for strengthening a culture of security 2013–2015 would be implemented successfully and that the modernization of human resources management would reinforce UNHCR's emergency response capacity. Estonia confirmed its commitment to fighting sexual violence and ending impunity for such acts through financial contributions.

16. **Mr. Mussa** (Observer for Malawi) said that the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic should not cause that of other refugees in the world to be overlooked. Malawi hosted 20,500 refugees and asylum seekers, and some 300 refugees and asylum seekers crossed its borders every day. It therefore urgently needed financial assistance for those persons. In addition, there were Rwandan refugees affected by the cessation clause and rejected asylum seekers. In the past year, more than 180 refugees had resettled in a third country.

17. **Mr. Nduwimana** (Observer for Burundi) said that there were 53,708 refugees in his country, including 6,584 asylum seekers. With UNHCR assistance, the Burundian authorities had established two transit centres, in Bujumbura and Cibitoke, to receive asylum seekers from the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. A fourth refugee camp, with a capacity of about 13,000 persons, had been built in Cankuzo. Despite the

considerable progress made to date, growing insecurity in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and the decreasing funds allocated to UNHCR operations in Burundi could jeopardize the implementation of Burundi's asylum policy.

18. **Mr. Hassan** (Observer for Chad) said that there were 422,727 refugees and asylum seekers and 200,000 internally displaced persons in his country, and also more than 30,000 persons who were not registered at the country's borders. An asylum bill would be submitted to the National Assembly after its adoption by the Council of Ministers. Difficulties persisted in securing the 18 refugee camps, particularly the Sudanese and Central African camps, and in ensuring the safety of humanitarian personnel, owing to the many political and social crises in the region.

19. **Mr. Coulibaly** (Observer for Mali) expressed the deep gratitude of the Government of Mali to UNHCR, especially the UNHCR Office in Bamako and Regional Office in Dakar, for their ongoing support throughout the security and institutional crisis experienced by the country between March 2012 and August 2013. The Government of Mali wished to rapidly conclude agreements with host countries and UNHCR in order to enable hundreds of thousands of refugees and internally displaced persons to return home. Despite the crisis, the Government had not ceased its activities to protect the 14,176 persons who had come to Mali to seek asylum and, in 2012 and 2013, it had repatriated 165 Ivorian refugees. Furthermore, under the cessation clause for Liberian refugees, arrangements had been made with the Liberian authorities and UNHCR to issue Liberian documents to the 112 refugees who had chosen local integration. With regard to Rwandan refugees who had decided to apply for citizenship, the Government was supporting them until the process was complete. Conversely, the situation of the 7,813 Mauritanian refugees who had applied for voluntary repatriation had not progressed at all in the past year. Lastly, consideration was being given to signing and ratifying the international instruments on statelessness in the reasonably near future.

20. **Mr. Kussumua** (Observer for Angola) said that his country was striving to regulate the right to asylum in order to clearly define the conditions and procedures for granting refugee status, to establish a mechanism for coordination between the competent national organizations and to define the role of each one so as to ensure the effectiveness of the system. Accordingly, a preliminary bill on the right to asylum and refugee status had been prepared. Many steps had been taken in an attempt to resolve the situation of the Angolans who had no longer enjoyed refugee status since 2012.

21. **Mr. Darakhvelidze** (Observer for Georgia) said that his country intended to ratify the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness by the end of the year. He stressed the need for 272,000 internally displaced persons to be provided with durable solutions, particularly with regard to housing, which could not be achieved without the support, especially financial, of the international community. His Government was seriously concerned at the installation, by the occupying power, of electric fences along the occupation line, which resulted in the displacement of many persons. It was very important that the international community should speak out about the situation and take the necessary steps to put an end to it. In that regard, he commended the recent statement made by the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization calling for the removal of the barriers.

22. **Mr. Gomossa** (Observer for the Central African Republic) said that his country was home to more than 20,000 refugees and that many Central Africans had left the country or had been displaced internally following the military and political crises that had affected the country for decades. The National Commission for Refugees, in cooperation with the UNHCR Office in Bangui, had established an interministerial committee responsible for implementing durable solutions for long-term refugees, including voluntary repatriation. The Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo had opted for the

organized repatriation of refugees in the Batalimo camp, as the latter had wished. Concerned at the problem of statelessness, the Government, in cooperation with UNHCR, had established a framework for ratifying the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and for setting up a mechanism to facilitate the issuance of birth certificates to displaced persons. He called for greater mobilization of the international community in support of urgent humanitarian action in the Central African Republic.

23. **Mr. Hannan** (Bangladesh) said that around 28,000 Muslim refugees resided in two camps in the south-eastern part of the country while awaiting their repatriation to Rakhine State, in Myanmar. A durable solution must be found to the situation, which had arisen 35 years before. The outcome of the most recent annual consultations between the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Myanmar and Bangladesh was encouraging, as the Government of Myanmar had pledged to take back the refugees as soon as the situation in Rakhine State had stabilized.

24. **Mr. Idder** (Observer for the Niger) thanked the UNHCR Office in the Niger for its support in managing some 50,000 Malian refugees that the country had taken in and for whom it had built three camps and two reception areas. Moreover, as a result of the recurring atrocities committed in northern Nigeria by the Boko Haram sect, the Niger was home to around 37,000 Nigerians who were settled with host families in Bosso and its surroundings, in the border region of Diffa.

25. **Mr. Silima** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that the closure of the Mtabila refugee camp following an orderly return demonstrated what the international community was able to achieve. The Tanzanian authorities were also in the final stage of the naturalization and integration of all Somali refugees who had applied for Tanzanian citizenship. He reaffirmed the commitment of his Government to resolving the situation of the 162,000 Burundian refugees who had fled their country in 1972.

26. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) welcomed the efforts made by the various countries and their support for UNHCR activities. He supported the appeal made by the observer for Malawi that the international community should not neglect other crises, particularly in Africa. He drew attention to the considerable success of the voluntary repatriation of approximately 500,000 Burundians. He referred to the substantial improvements made in Georgia with regard to the living conditions of internally displaced persons and conditions of asylum, and also the reduction of statelessness, and said that UNHCR would continue to provide cooperation in order to meet the humanitarian goals that had been set. He noted that Georgia was planning to become a member of the Executive Committee.

27. **Mr. Sirleaf** (Observer for Liberia) said that the number of Ivorian refugees in his country had been reduced to 58,000 and that security at the border between Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire had improved significantly. Liberian citizenship had been conferred on 300 former Sierra Leonean refugees who had opted for local integration. Furthermore, nearly 1,700 biometric passports had been issued to former Liberian refugees who had settled in asylum countries. With regard to Liberians who had returned to their country, a number of reintegration projects had been earmarked in the areas of agriculture, housing and training.

28. **Mr. Tarawalie** (Observer for Sierra Leone) supported the statement made by Mozambique on behalf of the Group of African States. With regard to Liberian refugees subject to the refugee status cessation clause from June 2012, efforts were being made to ensure the conclusion of cessation activities, including exemption and the local integration process. The Government of Sierra Leone intended to assume full responsibility for refugee protection and conclusion of the cessation process in 2014. It nevertheless needed continued financial, logistical and technical support from UNHCR. Sierra Leone, which

had in the past hosted and integrated refugees from Syria, was receiving new refugees as a result of the conflict in Syria, but did not know their number, which had not been registered.

29. **Mr. Melchenko** (Observer for Belarus) said that a memorandum of understanding had been signed in January 2013 between the Ministry of the Interior, the UNHCR Office in Belarus and other partners to allow independent monitoring by international and non-governmental organizations of access to the asylum system for foreigners in Belarus. Recently, the number of applications for refugee status or additional protection had increased significantly. The applications related to Syrians, but also many Afghans. Given that his country's financial resources were limited, emphasis should be placed on seeking sources of funding with UNHCR.

30. **Mr. Dhungana** (Observer for Nepal) said that Nepal's efforts to find a lasting solution to the problem of Bhutanese refugees through bilateral negotiations remained stalled owing to the non-implementation of the agreed decisions by Bhutan. Refugees in camps were still waiting to return to their homeland. Nepal wished to see resumption of the process of resolving the issue, repatriation of the refugees to Bhutan and closure of the refugee camps at the earliest possible date.

31. **Ms. Dupuy Lasserre** (Observer for Uruguay) associated herself with the statement made on behalf of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States. On the subject of statelessness, the Uruguayan bill on the recognition and protection of stateless persons was being considered by Parliament. Under the bill, anyone who applied for stateless status had the same access to basic services as a national and would have a temporary identity document.

32. **Mr. Okio** (Observer for the Congo) endorsed the statement made by Mozambique on behalf of the Group of African States. The Congo provided international protection to more than 60,000 refugees and asylum seekers. In 2013, more than 8,000 Central Africans had entered Congolese territory following political upheaval in the Central African Republic. Regarding the voluntary repatriation of refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to date more than 100,000 refugees had been able to return, through cooperation between the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and UNHCR. As to Rwandan nationals, the Congo had declared the cessation of refugee status from 30 June 2013 and almost all Rwandan refugees had opted for exemption. With regard to Angolan refugees, the declaration of cessation in 2012 had not fostered voluntary repatriation.

33. **Ms. Pictet-Althann** (Observer for the Order of Malta) said that, over the past year, the Order of Malta had provided assistance to Syrian refugees in Turkey and Lebanon, to the displaced within Syria, to Malian refugees in the Sahel region of Burkina Faso and to displaced persons in Mali. In Uganda, the Order had established health posts along the border between Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It pursued its emergency medical aid for internally displaced persons and populations in violence-prone areas of the Haut-Uele district in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In Asia, the provision of health services to the Karen living in refugee camps in north-western Thailand remained a priority and emergency relief had been provided to 4,000 displaced persons from Rakhine State in western Myanmar. In north-western Pakistan, near the border with Afghanistan, the Order was planning a primary health-care project designed for internally displaced persons and Afghan refugees.

34. **Mr. Gonçalves** (Observer for the African Union) associated himself with the statement made by Mozambique on behalf of the Group of African States. The African Union was reinforcing initiatives to resolve existing conflicts and consolidate peace where it had been achieved. It was also pursuing conflict prevention, action against terrorism and disarmament, reform of security sectors, protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations,

and maritime safety and security. In the search for peace and security on the African continent, it noted with satisfaction that in West Africa, thousands of refugees or displaced persons were able to return peacefully to their areas of origin or to other areas.

35. **Mr. Chen** (China) said that it was important to preserve the impartial and objective nature of the protection regime in order to prevent any abuse. China supported the internal reform of UNHCR and encouraged it to increase the geographical representation of its personnel in order to enhance its representativeness. With regard to Syria, China had contributed more than \$11 million in humanitarian assistance to refugees through various channels. An additional \$15 million should be provided in the form of emergency relief and \$2 million in the form of a cash grant to UNHCR for displaced persons in Syria and Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

36. **Mr. Eklu** (Observer for the Economic Community of West African States – ECOWAS) noted that successful cooperation had been achieved between ECOWAS and the African Development Bank as part of the local integration and rehabilitation programme for displaced persons who had returned to Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone. In cooperation with UNHCR, ECOWAS was promoting the signature, ratification and implementation of the Kampala Convention. In the aftermath of the crisis in Mali, ECOWAS had provided \$4.5 million in humanitarian assistance to mitigate the effects of internal displacements in Mali and to alleviate the suffering of Malian refugees in Burkina Faso and the Niger.

37. **Mr. Chemaly** (Observer for the Danish Refugee Council) urged the United Nations and donors not to neglect humanitarian crises in parts of the world other than the Near East. He further urged States to ensure international protection for refugees fleeing across borders. He also encouraged UNHCR and States to promote legal frameworks, policies, funding and coordination for internally displaced persons, and to improve support for refugees and displaced persons living in non-camp settings. He called on UNHCR and Member States to better help host communities and to more systematically support capacity-building by local partners. He urged all States to refrain from arbitrary detention and strongly encouraged UNHCR, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs to enhance their application of the principles of partnership in their daily interactions.

38. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) welcomed the efforts made by the various countries that had made statements and their support for UNHCR activities.

The meeting rose at 6.20 p.m.