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Summary record of the 686th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 6 October, 2015, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. McCarney (Vice-Chairperson) (Canada)

Contents

General debate (*continued*)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

General debate (continued)

1. **Mr. Mohamed** (Djibouti) said that Djibouti, which was a transit and destination country, had established a permanent refugee status determination body. Since the onset of the Yemen crisis at the end of March 2015, Djibouti had received more than 25,000 Yemenis and third-country nationals; 3,900 Yemeni refugees had been formally registered as refugees *prima facie* and placed in the Marzaki camp in the district of Obock. Djibouti had also served as a platform for the delivery of humanitarian aid to Yemen. He recalled that an appeal for funding had been launched in June 2015 to support refugees from Yemen.

2. **Mr. Chikawe** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that the United Republic of Tanzania endorsed the statement delivered by Rwanda on behalf of the African Group and was committed to maintaining its open-door policy. It was currently hosting more than 100,000 Burundian refugees, and a further 200,000 had been naturalized the previous year. The social and economic integration of those refugees would require massive infrastructure investments, which could be made only with the backing of international development partners.

3. **Mr. Acuil** (Observer for South Sudan) said that South Sudan endorsed the statement delivered by Rwanda on behalf of the African Group, and thanked the Chairperson of the Executive Committee for his visit in April 2015. South Sudan was hosting 265,000 refugees — 51,000 more than in 2014 — and kept its borders open to asylum seekers and refugees. Parliament was currently looking into ratifying the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.

4. In September 2014, South Sudan, in collaboration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), had resettled 461 asylum seekers from a protection of civilians site in Juba to a refugee camp. It was currently organizing the resettlement of more than 70,000 refugees from Yida to the Ajuong Thok camp in the county of Panrieng. A new camp to accommodate 20,000 people would be set up in Pamir. South Sudan called on the international community to provide financial support for the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

5. **Mr. Subari** (Georgia) said that, over the past two years, Georgia had received 3,500 asylum seekers from the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq, Ukraine and Afghanistan, of whom more than 1,100 had been granted refugee status, while the others were continuing their journey to countries in Europe. As part of the European Union (EU) visa liberalization process, Georgia had introduced several legislative reforms. It was currently drafting a new bill on the regulation of the asylum system.

6. In the wake of the conflict in the early 1990s and the war of August 2008, hundreds of thousands of Georgians had been internally displaced. Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region remained under Russian military occupation, and the fundamental rights of the Georgians living there were seriously infringed on a daily basis. The Georgian Government was concerned at the increase in the unlawful detention of persons crossing the occupation line and at the obstacles encountered by those wishing to do so. The situation had deteriorated since the signing of the so-called integration treaties and the illegal installation of barbed wire fences along the occupation line. Although the Georgian Government tried to offer accommodation to all internally displaced persons (IDPs), some 60 per cent of whom had stated that they felt fully integrated into society, around 45,000 families still lived in very precarious conditions. He noted that Georgia could not implement all its IDP support programmes without the backing of international donors.

7. **Mr. Barandagiye** (Observer for Burundi) said that Burundi endorsed the statement delivered by Rwanda on behalf of the African Group. At the end of August 2015, the country had been hosting 56,791 refugees and asylum seekers, of whom 33,883 had been living in camps and 1,302 had been at risk of statelessness. Burundi had begun to issue machine-readable biometric travel documents, in accordance with the standards of the International Civil Aviation Organization. The resettlement programme, which had been launched in late 2013 and had enabled 1,437 refugees to reach Canada, the United Kingdom and other receiving countries, was ongoing. There had been no recorded voluntary repatriations to the Democratic Republic of the Congo since the start of 2015.

8. In April 2015, the Burundian Government had adopted bills on accession to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. It was currently considering a bill on the withdrawal of the reservations that it had made upon accession to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees. Burundi was committed to holding talks with Oman in order to find a definitive solution to the issue of Omanis who had been living in Burundi for several years and were at risk of statelessness. As to legal matters, it was finalizing the instruments of ratification of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention).

9. **Mr. Kalilani** (Observer for Malawi) said that Malawi pursued an open-door policy and was currently hosting more than 23,000 refugees from, inter alia, Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It was working to strengthen its monitoring systems so as to combat illegal immigration. Given that the World Food Programme could distribute only half-rations in 2015, help from the international community was essential in providing full rations to those who needed them, despite the pressure stemming from the crises in the Syrian Arab Republic and elsewhere.

10. **Ms. Mupfumira** (Observer for Zimbabwe) said that Zimbabwe endorsed the statement delivered by Rwanda on behalf of the African Group. She stressed the importance of tackling the root causes of displacement and said that the protection of refugees and asylum seekers had been included in the national social protection strategy. As at 31 August 2015, Zimbabwe had been hosting 9,950 refugees and asylum seekers, 88 per cent of whom resided in the Tongogara refugee camp.

11. **Mr. Sonko** (Observer for the Gambia) said that the Gambia had recently ratified the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, which were in the process of being incorporated into domestic law. A national action plan to eradicate statelessness had also been adopted. Moreover, refugees residing in the Gambia were no longer liable to pay the professional tax for expatriates, an exemption that facilitated their employment. From January 2016 onwards, long-term refugees would be entitled to residence permits valid for over one year.

12. **Mr. Rakouane** (Lesotho) said that Lesotho endorsed the statement delivered by Rwanda on behalf of the African Group. Although it received few refugees in comparison with other countries, Lesotho attached great importance to the work of UNHCR.

13. **Mr. Yeganyan** (Armenia) said that Armenia was a receiving country that granted the same economic, social and cultural rights to refugees as to its own citizens and facilitated their naturalization as part of a process that had been praised by UNHCR. Armenia had received some 17,000 people displaced as a result of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, in addition to hundreds of thousands of refugees from Azerbaijan. Syrian refugees could choose to be naturalized through a simplified

procedure, to follow an accelerated asylum procedure or to obtain short, medium and long-term residence permits promptly. Armenia was concerned at the restructuring of the UNHCR regional offices, as the office in Armenia played an important role in resolving the problems faced by displaced persons.

14. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) welcomed the efforts made by the various countries and their support for UNHCR activities. Noting that most of the delegations that had taken the floor were from sub-Saharan Africa and that several speakers had highlighted the very difficult financial circumstances affecting programmes for Africa, he recalled that the international community's continued assistance to UNHCR and receiving countries was vital in ensuring that the programmes implemented in Africa could function at the most basic level and offer lasting solutions. He commended Tanzania, which was a remarkable example of a stable country that was pursuing a very progressive policy with regard to the refugees in its territory. He called for international solidarity to help Tanzania and contribute to strengthening its policy.

15. **Mr. El Amin Digna** (Sudan) said that the Sudan endorsed the statement delivered by Rwanda on behalf of the African Group, and recalled that his country had received 500,000 refugees who had left South Sudan because of the conflict there, as well as other refugees from several countries in the region. The Sudan applied the provisions of international and regional instruments relating to refugees and had adopted a law on asylum in 2014. There were currently 80,000 Syrian refugees in its territory. The Sudan was also hosting 270 Yemeni families who had fled the crisis in their country. He emphasized the need to conduct a precise evaluation of the assistance required by refugees, whose arrival put a burden on receiving communities. He recalled that migration also gave rise to human trafficking, which affected every country in the world. The Sudan was working to combat the practice with the help of its international partners. A regional conference on the matter had been held in Khartoum in October 2014 and a statement had subsequently been adopted, pursuant to which the Sudan had engaged in the Khartoum Process.

16. **Ms. Yark** (Togo) said that Togo endorsed the statement delivered by Rwanda on behalf of the African Group and was currently hosting 22,000 refugees of 15 different nationalities. Steps had been taken to facilitate the stay and movement of those persons. The Togolese Government also continued to receive and reintegrate former Togolese refugees from Benin and Ghana who had refused voluntary repatriation and had not been resettled in a third country. She expressed the hope that Africa remained a priority for UNHCR.

17. **Mr. Chanda** (Zambia) said that Zambia endorsed the statement delivered by Rwanda on behalf of the African Group, and noted that it was making significant progress with regard to local integration, particularly in the case of former Angolan refugees, who had been granted residence permits. He commended UNHCR and the other organizations that had formed partnerships for refugee protection and assistance with Zambia, and said he hoped that the partnerships would contribute to the local integration programme and to managing mixed migratory movements from the Horn of Africa.

18. **Mr. Agalga** (Ghana) said that Ghana endorsed the statement delivered by Rwanda on behalf of the African Group, and that it had managed to reduce the number of Ivorian asylum seekers in its territory considerably thanks to an improved registration procedure. Thus, more than 800 Ivorian nationals had been granted refugee status in August 2015. The health and education services provided to refugees had been incorporated into the national system. Lasting solutions had been proposed to refugees from Togo, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Liberia as part of the local integration policy. Ghana had participated in the conference on statelessness held in

Abidjan in February 2015 and had undertaken to ratify the two conventions on statelessness. It had also appointed a national focal point on the matter. Ghana found it regrettable that, in September 2015, the food aid provided by the World Food Programme had been terminated. The decision would have adverse effects on the nutrition of refugees and would compromise the capacity for self-sufficiency of families involved in the “Seeds for solutions” programme. Ghana was also concerned at the fact that the 9,000 Ivorian refugees living in camps had shown little interest in returning to their country.

19. **Mr. Nur** (Somalia) said that Somalia endorsed the statement delivered by Rwanda on behalf of the African Group, and recalled that more than 2 million Somali citizens were still displaced as a result of what was the world’s oldest protracted refugee situation. Around 1.1 million Somali nationals were displaced internally and there were 1 million refugees in countries in the subregion. The improvement of the situation in Somalia should encourage the voluntary return of refugees. The crisis in Yemen had also led to Somalia receiving an influx of Yemeni refugees, who acquired prima facie refugee status. Numerous international and regional initiatives had been launched to assist Somali refugees wishing to return to their country voluntarily, the most recent of which was the portfolio of projects that had followed the tripartite agreement signed in November 2013 by Somalia, Kenya and UNHCR, which provided that, between January 2016 and December 2019, 420,000 Somali refugees would return from Kenya. He announced the creation of a national commission for refugees and displaced persons in Somalia, and urged the States members of the Executive Committee and observer countries to participate in the next pledging conference, to be held in Brussels on 21 October 2015, and to support the reintegration of Somali refugees in their country.

20. **Mr. Gurdov** (Turkmenistan) said that his country was prepared to strengthen its security cooperation in Central Asia and Afghanistan. Turkmenistan called on the international community to support the Afghan Government and thereby contribute to the inclusion of Afghanistan in the various regional processes. In 2016, a meeting on security and cooperation in Central Asia would be held in Ashgabat under the auspices of the United Nations. He invited all interested States to participate in order to resolve the situation in Afghanistan through political and diplomatic means. Turkmenistan, which gave assistance to Afghanistan in the areas of education and health, had offered to organize an economic conference on Afghanistan in 2017 within the framework of the Istanbul Process. The aim of the conference would be to stimulate the socioeconomic recovery of Afghanistan, which would have a positive impact on the entire region and would reduce the number of Afghan refugees.

21. **Mr. Maza Martelli** (Observer for El Salvador), speaking on behalf of the countries in the Northern Triangle of Central America (Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras), recalled that, in 2014, the Latin American and Caribbean countries had adopted the Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action. The countries in the Northern Triangle of Central America reaffirmed the will of their Governments to find lasting solutions in countries of origin, transit and destination so as to prevent irregular migration within the framework of the Plan of the Alliance for Prosperity in the Northern Triangle. They requested financial support from the international community for the implementation of that Plan. He recalled that El Salvador had recently acceded to the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and that an agreement to open a UNHCR office in Honduras would be concluded shortly.

22. **Ms. Kairamo** (Finland) said that UNHCR was the main humanitarian organization supported by Finland under a multi-year agreement and that one third of Finnish funding for UNHCR was unrestricted. In addition to providing humanitarian assistance, Finland had established a national resettlement programme, under which it

received 750 refugees a year. In 2014 and 2015, the quota had been increased by 300 in order to receive more Syrian nationals. The number of asylum seekers, which had amounted to 3,500 in recent years, had already reached 20,000 in 2015 and was expected to rise to 50,000 by the end of the year. Shelter and protection would be provided to those who needed them, with particular attention paid to persons in a vulnerable situation. Refugee children were also a priority for Finland, which was funding several initiatives in that area.

23. **Mr. Hajnoczi** (Austria) said that, to date, Austria had allocated €15 million to support Syrian refugees and displaced persons in Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and the Syrian Arab Republic, and that it intended to continue that funding. The Austrian Government took part in UNHCR admission and resettlement programmes and had undertaken to admit 1,900 Syrian refugees and to offer them permanent protection. Austria had been affected by the influx of refugees to Western Europe. In September, 200,000 people had entered its territory from the Balkans. It was providing them with food and medical aid, in addition to temporary accommodation and repatriation assistance if requested, with the help of humanitarian organizations and civil society. More than 55,000 of them had applied for asylum since January 2015 and that figure was expected to reach 85,000 by the end of the year. The situation could not continue, however, owing to the country's limited reception capacity. Austria welcomed the decision of EU ministers to resettle 160,000 people and hoped that it would be implemented swiftly.

24. **Ms. Menéndez Pérez** (Spain) said that Spain collaborated actively with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and partners on the ground. In 2015, the NGO España con ACNUR had managed to raise US\$ 23 million of private funds for refugees. Moreover, the Spanish Government had just made an additional budget available to countries affected by the Syrian refugee crisis. In 2015, the contribution of Spain to UNHCR activities would be more than twice the size of its 2014 contribution. Spain reaffirmed its commitment to the protection of asylum seekers and stateless persons, and planned to continue supporting the work of UNHCR.

25. **Mr. Roekchamnonng** (Thailand) said that, in recent years, his country had had to cope with a mass influx of migrants in an irregular situation. Thailand had rescued 3,000 migrants stranded at sea and had given them medical and humanitarian aid. Having noted that, in many cases, the best solution had been to resettle those refugees in third countries, Thailand endorsed the call to expedite resettlement operations. It also called on the international community to allocate additional resources to humanitarian and development assistance in order to prevent irregular migration.

26. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) commended the Sudan, Togo, Zambia, Ghana, Somalia, Turkmenistan, El Salvador, Finland, Austria, Spain and Thailand on the efforts that they had undertaken and on their support for UNHCR activities. He emphasized that all States should draw inspiration from the treatment extended by the Sudan to refugees from South Sudan, and thanked the Austrian Government and Austrian civil society for their generous contribution to managing the refugee crisis in Europe.

27. **Mr. Apollo Kazungu** (Uganda) said that Uganda was currently hosting 493,000 refugees, which made it the African country that hosted the third highest number. The Government, aware of the consequences of the influx of refugees into Uganda, had included the issue of the protection and management of refugees in its second national development plan. Uganda had also taken out a loan of US\$ 50 million from the World Bank to remedy deficiencies in development in regions hosting refugees. Uganda had begun to issue machine-readable travel documents and had set up a refugee data management system. Moreover, in order to protect the environment, the Ugandan Government had decided that, from January 2016, new refugee reception centres

would be built using semi-permanent materials. Uganda, which was working to find lasting solutions to the refugee situation, had repatriated 1,231 Kenyan refugees. The Ugandan Government was in the process of reviewing the 2006 Refugee Act and drafting a national policy on refugees.

28. **Mr. Smorodin** (Russian Federation) said that the refugee crisis in Europe had been caused by irresponsible meddling in the internal affairs of the refugees' countries of origin, particularly Libya and the Syrian Arab Republic. There was a need to cooperate with those countries in order to facilitate their economic development, and to adopt joint measures to protect the rights of migrants and refugees in Europe.

29. Since the deterioration of the situation in Ukraine, a significant number of Ukrainian citizens had sought to enter the Russian Federation, which had national reception mechanisms that enabled it to manage migration flows effectively. To date, 394,000 Ukrainian nationals had applied for temporary asylum, more than 100,000 had applied for refugee status, 124,000 had applied for Russian citizenship, nearly 260,000 had applied for a temporary residence permit and 59,000 had applied for permanent residence. The Russian Federation had all the necessary resources to help those persons and, in 2014 and 2015, had released more than US\$ 200 million for that purpose. It was focusing its efforts on, inter alia, education, accommodation and health. In addition, it provided funding in support of the humanitarian activities carried out by UNHCR in Ukraine. It considered that a peaceful solution to the conflict and compliance with the Minsk agreements were vital to the creation of favourable conditions for the return of refugees to Ukraine.

30. **Mr. Auajjar** (Morocco) said that Morocco welcomed the efforts to assist refugees that had been made by UNHCR through its Special Mediterranean Initiative and by European countries of transit and destination. As part of its cooperation with African migrants' countries of origin, Morocco, in partnership with Spain, had organized a thematic meeting of the Rabat Process on asylum and international protection, which had taken place in Rabat on 15 and 16 June 2015. The Moroccan Government supported the initiatives to protect refugees that had been implemented by UNHCR, particularly the introduction of a biometric registration system for refugees, all of whom should benefit. In that connection, he drew the attention of UNHCR to the need to initiate the procedures required to register the populations of the Tindouf camps, in accordance with its general mandate and with recent Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2218 (2015).

31. **Mr. Obaid Abbas** (Observer for Iraq) said that, at the end of 2010, Iraq had almost managed to eradicate terrorist organizations, but the Syrian conflict had given fresh impetus to terrorism in the region and around the world. The activities of organizations such as Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Al-Qaida, which were destroying infrastructure and massacring populations, hindered the development process in Iraq and thereby caused the mass displacement of Iraqi citizens. The Iraqi Government was meeting the basic needs of displaced Iraqi nationals and Syrian refugees, and was trying to find lasting solutions. Despite the difficulties facing it, which were due in no small part to the decline in oil prices, the Iraqi Government was endeavouring to provide the necessary assistance to refugees, in conjunction with United Nations bodies, and had established a fund to compensate persons affected by terrorist acts. It called for a donor conference to be held for Iraq to facilitate the provision of support to the families entering its territory and the rebuilding of towns and regions that had been liberated. Since national infrastructure had been weakened by successive wars, the Government did not have the resources to cope with the refugee crisis. It therefore requested the international community to provide greater bilateral, humanitarian and development assistance to Iraq. Despite not having signed the 1951 Convention or the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, Iraq

continued to receive refugees. More than 280,000 Syrian nationals had thus taken refuge in Iraq, particularly in the Kurdistan region.

32. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) commended Uganda, Morocco, the Russian Federation and Iraq on the efforts that they had undertaken and on their support for UNHCR activities. He pointed out that UNHCR had to respect the sovereignty of receiving countries in the development of its biometric registration system.

The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.