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Summary record of the 697th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 5 October 2016, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Mr. Staur (Denmark)

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

General debate (*continued*)

1. **Mr. De Aguiar Patriota** (Brazil), speaking on behalf of Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay, said that by adopting the Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action in 2014, Latin American and Caribbean countries had committed themselves to strengthening their cooperation to continue to respect the highest standards of protection at the national and international levels, paying particular attention to the situation of unaccompanied minors. The implementation of the Plan of Action over the coming 10 years would help to ensure that sustainable and innovative solutions were found for refugees and displaced persons, as well as to eliminate statelessness through the UNHCR campaign. The countries of the Northern Triangle of Central America — El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras — were the beneficiaries of several UNHCR projects on care for irregular migrants and protection of refugees and displaced persons. In August 2016, those countries had pledged, through the San José Action Statement, to address the structural and multidimensional issues related to mixed migration flows and to seek long-term solutions with the help of their partners. In addition, the Latin American countries welcomed the peace process in Colombia and encouraged the Government of Colombia to continue its efforts.

2. **Mr. Šuc** (Slovenia) said that between mid-October 2015 and March 2016 more than 477,000 refugees had transited Slovenia, which was equivalent to a quarter of its population. Slovenia had provided care for those refugees in a responsible and efficient way, while fully respecting humanitarian principles, paying particular attention to the most vulnerable. More must be done with regard to conflict prevention and efforts to eliminate racism, xenophobia and extremism. In that regard, an education programme on human rights and the rights of child refugees had been established in Slovenia. Furthermore, Slovenia was participating actively in the European Union relocation scheme and had thus far filled 13 per cent of its quota. Slovenia remained committed to fighting trafficking in persons and had participated — and would go on participating — in the EUNAVFOR MED operation. The Government's aid for refugees had increased, with some €1.8 million allocated since the beginning of the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic. Its contribution to appeals for humanitarian assistance for refugees and displaced persons had doubled since previous years, and its support for UNHCR programmes would continue in future.

3. **Ms. Maurás** (Chile) said that Chile fully supported the statement made by Brazil. Two new laws had been adopted in Chile to guarantee better protection for refugees and promote their integration. Under the first such law, 20 June had been proclaimed World Refugee Day and 18 December International Migrants Day. One of the laws entitled child refugees to acquire Chilean nationality at the same time as their parents without having to wait until the age of majority. Furthermore, Chile had developed a resettlement plan for Syrian refugees, as a contribution to alleviating the humanitarian crisis in the Middle East.

4. **Mr. Blockert** (Sweden) said that Sweden endorsed the statement made on behalf of the European Union. Sweden remained one of UNHCR's main donors and its core contributions were not earmarked. At the United States Leaders' Summit on Refugees, it had pledged \$17.5 million to the UNHCR/International Organization for Migration (IOM) Emerging Resettlement Countries Joint Support Mechanism. Sweden also intended to increase its annual resettlement quota by 1,500 places. Noting that women and girls were particularly vulnerable in humanitarian crises, he welcomed the fact that UNHCR had signed the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies, an initiative that Sweden was currently chairing, and encouraged other States and international organizations to join. Sweden wished, however, to see UNHCR do even more to prevent

and respond to sexual and gender-based violence. Lastly, he would welcome information on how work to implement the “grand bargain” was progressing.

5. **Mr. Ambrazevich** (Belarus) said it was important for UNHCR to remain apolitical in word and in deed. In recent years Belarus had been faced with an influx of Ukrainian refugees. More than 160,000 Ukrainians were currently in Belarus, which was one of the countries that hosted the largest number of refugees in relation to the size of its own population. While the Government of Belarus was doing its utmost to respond to the needs of the refugee population, it considered that UNHCR assistance to host countries should be determined on the basis of the real contribution made by those countries affected. He thanked UNHCR experts for the legal assistance they had given to help improve Belarusian asylum law, and requested technical support to assist Belarus in acceding to the statelessness conventions.

6. **Mr. Chávez Basagoitia** (Peru) said that Peru aligned itself with the statement made by Brazil. Emphasis should be placed on the positive contribution made by refugees to inclusive growth and sustainable development. In that regard, Peru was ready to contribute to the development of the global compact on refugees and to the implementation of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework. Peru urged the High Commissioner to engage in a transparent consultation process to seek consensus between the various international institutions and organizations operating in the humanitarian sphere, without losing sight of the fact that humanitarian assistance had a specific logic and specific objectives, which did not always tally with those of development cooperation.

7. **Mr. Kumar** (India) said that India welcomed the global lending facility launched recently in New York, which would allow middle-income countries hosting large refugee populations to benefit from concessional financing arrangements, a long-standing demand of the developing countries. India supported the efforts made by UNHCR to leverage the strengths and comparative advantages of United Nations agencies and to establish partnerships with local and national stakeholders to ensure the effective implementation of its programmes. India urged UNHCR to strengthen those partnerships to ensure that affected populations and host communities had ownership of the process and the solutions.

8. He noted with satisfaction that UNHCR had taken measures to simplify its procedures and governance mechanisms through the “grand bargain”, a step which India had long been advocating. UNHCR should continue to demonstrate creativity in adopting innovative technologies and new ideas that would have a significant and positive impact on the situation of refugees.

9. **Mr. Mukongo Ngay** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that the Democratic Republic of the Congo associated itself with the statement made by Sudan on behalf of the Group of African States. The Democratic Republic of the Congo had ratified all the refugee conventions and respected the principle of non-refoulement. Since the 1990s, the Democratic Republic of the Congo had hosted some of the world’s largest groups of refugees from Rwanda, South Sudan, Burundi and the Central African Republic, among others. That situation had resulted in the internal displacement of some 2 million Congolese and the emigration of around 500,000 more. He expressed grave concern that the international community was failing to apply the principle of shared responsibility and had ordered the opening of a humanitarian corridor through which refugees and armed men could enter. Furthermore, lack of funding was impeding the implementation of sustainable solutions for some 250,000 Rwandan refugees. That notwithstanding, the Democratic Republic of the Congo considered that the global approach to the refugee situation advocated at the recent Summit in New York was a step in the right direction.

10. **Mr. Hoscheit** (Luxembourg) said that Luxembourg subscribed to the statement made on behalf of the European Union. Luxembourg was planning to increase its non-

earmarked and lightly earmarked contributions from 19.3 per cent to 40 per cent by 2020 at the latest, and to increase its direct funding to local institutions to 5 per cent. A new multi-year partnership agreement with UNHCR was currently being concluded for the period 2017-2021, in order to guarantee the Office greater predictability in funding and continuous and reliable support. The “emergency.lu” project, on which Luxembourg had signed a preliminary memorandum of understanding with UNHCR in 2012 and which consisted in supporting humanitarian operations by providing an Internet connection, would be an integral part of the new partnership agreement. In 2016, under its strategic partnership agreement with UNHCR, Luxembourg had contributed €6 million to various humanitarian programmes, as well as providing a voluntary contribution of €1.5 million to the UNHCR headquarters budget. Luxembourg had also made a voluntary contribution of €500,000 for UNHCR programmes in Afghanistan.

11. **Mr. Correia** (Observer for Angola) said that Angola endorsed the statement made by Sudan on behalf of the Group of African States. With the support of UNHCR and host countries, Angola had allocated around \$82 million to repatriate and resettle more than 500,000 Angolan refugees. Furthermore, it was working closely with host countries to facilitate the social integration of more than 60,000 Angolan refugees who had chosen to remain abroad. Angola, which was hosting more than 15,000 refugees of various nationalities, needed UNHCR support to be able to meet the needs of those people. A national strategy for refugees had been implemented, which was based on voluntary repatriation, local integration, and maintaining refugee status in exceptional cases. In 2015, an asylum law had been adopted in line with the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

12. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) welcomed the efforts made by India, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Sweden, Belarus, Brazil, Chile and Peru, and their support for UNHCR activities.

13. **Mr. Diané** (Guinea) said that Guinea associated itself with the statement made by Sudan on behalf of the Group of African States. Owing to armed conflicts that had erupted during the 1990s in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d’Ivoire, Guinea had been faced with a large-scale influx of more than 800,000 refugees, and had discharged its duty of solidarity towards them. There were currently some 6,000 refugees and asylum seekers in Guinea, as well as 2,000 former refugees who had chosen to remain and to integrate into Guinean society. Guinea, Côte d’Ivoire and UNHCR would resume the process of voluntary repatriation of refugees from Côte d’Ivoire as soon as possible.

14. **Mr. Kará** (Czech Republic) said that the Czech Republic aligned itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union. The Czech Republic had played, and would continue to play, an active role in improving the self-reliance of internally displaced persons, refugees and host communities, in particular Afghan refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan, as well as Palestinian refugees in the Middle East. The Czech Republic was also undertaking initiatives to assist countries in the western Balkans, Georgia and Ukraine. With regard to the conflicts in the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq, the Czech Republic was collaborating actively with UNHCR. Since 2015, it had supported the electrification and winterization of refugee camps in Zaatari, Ashti and Kawergosk, through a contribution of \$3.5 million. A joint programme had been established with UNHCR to offer Czech university education to Syrian refugees from Jordan, and efforts had been made to offer access to education for children in refugee camps in Jordan, local communities in Lebanon, and war-torn regions of the Syrian Arab Republic. The Czech Republic had also cooperated with UNHCR on admission and resettlement programmes.

15. **Mr. Majawar** (Yemen) said that Yemen was facing an exceptional situation of attacks by former President Saleh’s Houthi militia, which was rejecting peace proposals, despite the recommendations made by the Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-

General for Yemen, Mr. Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed. The militia, which was besieging towns, had caused a severe deterioration in the economic, security and humanitarian situation in Yemen. More than 80 per cent of the population — 21 million people — required urgent humanitarian assistance. Furthermore, there were more than 3 million displaced persons in Yemen. The Government welcomed the support provided by the coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the Group of 18, for efforts to restore peace and guarantee security.

16. Despite the difficulties it was facing, Yemen had been granting refugee status to Somalis for more than 20 years. It was also hosting around 250,000 people registered with UNHCR who came primarily from Ethiopia, Iraq or the Syrian Arab Republic or were internally displaced within Yemen. Migrants, asylum seekers and refugees from the Horn of Africa numbered 750,000. The Government had set up programmes to assist refugees with regard to education, health care and employment. It was also providing assistance to 61,000 illegal migrants from the Horn of Africa.

17. **Mr. Cabral** (Portugal) said that, despite facing financial constraints, Portugal was sparing no effort to help overcome the problems faced by all European countries as a result of current conflicts. In the context of the joint European Union response to the current crisis, the Portuguese Government had undertaken to relocate and resettle 4,486 people, several hundred of whom had already arrived in Portugal. As a sign of solidarity with the European countries most affected by migration flows, Portugal was prepared to host a further 5,800 people. He added that the former President of Portugal, Mr. Jorge Sampaio, had been active in facilitating access to higher education for Syrian refugees through the Global Platform for Syrian Students. Lastly, he encouraged Member States to contribute more funds to UNHCR activities in Africa, which were funded at less than 20 per cent, and drew the international community's attention to the issue of withdrawal of citizenship, which was inconsistent with the human right to a nationality, yet was provided for by law in some countries.

18. **Mr. Alghunaim** (Observer for Kuwait) said that since the beginning of the Syrian crisis Kuwait had been offering all necessary assistance to the Syrian people and had hosted more than 130,000 Syrians, particularly with a view to family reunification. It had also provided assistance to Iraqi refugees and displaced persons through numerous aid activities, as well as helping countries affected by natural disasters. He reiterated his Government's support for UNHCR, thanked the Office for its unflagging efforts, and called for cost sharing.

19. **Ms. Rodriguez Mancía** (Observer for Guatemala) said that Guatemala endorsed the statement made by Brazil on behalf of a group of countries and noted with satisfaction the update on UNHCR operations in the Americas. Guatemala called for UNHCR assistance to improve the condition of facilities at the Tecún Umán Centre in the San Marcos Department on the Mexican border, particularly with regard to facilities for children and adolescents. Recalling the San José Action Statement on migration and displacement in the Northern Triangle of Central America, adopted in July 2016, she underscored the importance of solidarity, cooperation and burden-sharing with regard to migration. The international community should respond to the appeal for extra funding, made by UNHCR in June 2016, to address displacement from and to Central America and to help the authorities in countries of origin, transit, destination and asylum to use mechanisms for protecting, accepting and returning migrants, and to run awareness-raising campaigns in order to achieve lasting solutions.

20. **Mr. Klymenko** (Observer for Ukraine) said that Ukraine aligned itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union and expressed his Government's appreciation for the crucial humanitarian assistance provided to displaced persons in the wake of the Russian aggression. With more than 1.7 million residents of Donbass and

Crimea registered as displaced, including 170,000 children, Ukraine was the European country with the largest population of displaced persons. Despite the Government's best efforts, there was a clear need for increased humanitarian assistance from the international community, on which the Government relied, as well as financial support in the form of appropriate funding for the United Nations humanitarian response plan for Ukraine and UNHCR programmes. The situation in occupied Crimea remained dire and should be monitored closely by the international community. Furthermore, it was essential to establish a mechanism for bringing to justice a State that violated international law and fundamental freedoms, forcing civilians to flee, together with a binding international framework for protecting the rights of displaced persons. Lastly, the commitments entered into at the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul must be upheld.

21. **Mr. Saleh** (Observer for Iraq) said that, given the serious challenges posed by terrorism committed by Islamic State groups (ISIL), Iraq's needs outweighed its resources. Many measures had been taken to assist the more than 4.2 million refugees, particularly with regard to ensuring their access to health care and education.

22. Large-scale population displacements were feared following implementation of the military plans for the liberation of Mossul, the second largest city in Iraq, which was being held by ISIL. Resources would be needed to assist the affected populations. Owing to a lack of financial resources many humanitarian aid programmes had already had to be shut down.

23. Iraq was currently hosting more than 200,000 registered Syrian refugees, who were being given access to essential services.

24. **Ms. Abdulahi Mohamud** (Somalia) noted that Somalia was still experiencing one of the longest and most protracted refugee situations with 1.1 million displaced persons and nearly 1 million refugees in the Horn of Africa. Substantial progress had been made in recent years thanks to the tripartite agreement, which had resulted in the return of 30,000 refugees from Kenya and the spontaneous return of some 100,000 other refugees. According to UNHCR statistics, around 70,000 Somali refugees had stated that they were interested in returning to Somalia.

25. Several measures had been taken to offer sustainable solutions to refugees, returnees and displaced persons. Drawing attention to the closure of the Dadaab camp in Kenya, she said that UNHCR should undertake quick impact projects that would allow for an immediate response to the needs of returning Somalis. Given the progress made under the tripartite agreement, Somalia called on the international community to keep the agreement in place beyond November 2016.

26. Her Government also called upon the international community and stakeholders to intensify their efforts to contribute to genuine State-building and peacebuilding in Somalia.

27. **Mr. Kristjánsson** (Observer for Iceland) said that every country, family and individual could and should spread the message of humanity in times of human suffering. Iceland was continuing to receive an increasing number of Syrian refugees; the number of asylum applications was doubling year-on-year. Iceland was also providing assistance in the field by offering financial support to humanitarian organizations operating in the Syrian Arab Republic or neighbouring countries, as well as to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and UNHCR, to which it had made additional contributions totalling more than \$3 million in 2015 and 2016. His Government wished to conclude a framework agreement with UNHCR on its long-term contribution to UNHCR's work.

28. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) welcomed the efforts made by various countries and their support for UNHCR activities, and underscored the importance of political will in seeking solutions.

29. **Mr. Aala** (Observer for the Syrian Arab Republic) said that since the outbreak of war in Syria many Syrians had been forced to flee the country owing to the serious economic and humanitarian crisis that had ensued, as well as the terrorism that had been imported into the country, when not long ago Syria had been the third largest host country of refugees in the world. In some countries where they sought asylum, Syrians were facing exploitation, racism, trafficking in persons and trafficking in human organs, among other crimes. It was important to be aware of that situation if sustainable solutions were to be found to the serious humanitarian crisis, which had left many people uprooted both within the country (5 million Syrian people were internally displaced in their own country) and outside it. While it was necessary to promote international cooperation to respond to the urgent needs of the Syrian population, temporary fixes must not take precedence over durable solutions. In that regard, Syria was determined to create the necessary conditions for the voluntary return of its citizens and was committed to taking appropriate measures to facilitate their repatriation.

30. **Mr. Dhital** (Observer for Nepal) said that Nepal had always been a generous host to refugees, despite its limited financial resources. For more than two decades Nepal had hosted thousands of Bhutanese refugees. When the reasons for exile and migration were man-made, it should be the responsibility of the country of origin to rectify the situation. In that regard, and despite the goodwill demonstrated by Nepal, Bhutan was not implementing the decisions taken to facilitate the return of its nationals, as a result of which the process had stalled. While appreciating the efforts made by some developed countries to promote the integration of Bhutanese refugees in third countries, Nepal firmly believed that their voluntary repatriation in dignity and security was the only viable option.

31. **Mr. Reaich** (New Zealand) said that New Zealand would continue to resettle refugees in the context of its Refugee Quota Programme and support the right to seek asylum and the principle of non-refoulement. New Zealand would do its utmost to limit global refugee flows by advocating greater and earlier investment in conflict prevention, including through investment in sustainable development.

32. **Mr. Baran** (Turkey) said that Turkey had pursued an “open door policy” since the beginning of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic and was currently hosting the largest refugee community in the world (more than 3 million people, including 2.7 million Syrians, of whom 10 per cent lived in camps). All the refugees in Turkey were afforded special protection and free health care, and were granted access to the labour market under certain conditions. The greatest challenge faced at present was with regard to education. Of around 835,000 Syrian refugees of school age present in Turkey only just over a third had access to education. Turkey called on the international community to redouble its efforts to provide assistance and to give the Syrian people the necessary means to rebuild their country once the war had ended, the ultimate objective for Turkey being to create conditions conducive to their return.

33. **Mr. Aryasinha** (Observer for Sri Lanka) said that during the past 30 years many Sri Lankans had fled the country, in particular as a result of the armed conflict. Since January 2015, the Government had taken steps to create conditions conducive to their return and reintegration into society. The armed conflict had also given rise to large-scale internal displacement, which the Government was doing its utmost to rectify. In the context of its reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts, the Government was taking measures to resettle families who were still living in camps. On 16 August 2016, a national policy on durable solutions for conflict-affected displacement had been adopted. As a destination country for displaced populations from neighbouring countries, Sri Lanka remained determined to work with UNHCR to address the issues that affected them. His Government was also seeking to address the issue of statelessness and the initiatives it had taken in that regard, including

amending its Citizenship Act to address the issue of statelessness among Tamils of Indian origin, could be held up as an example by UNHCR.

34. **Mr. Razafitrimo** (Madagascar) said that Madagascar associated itself with the statement made by Sudan on behalf of the Group of African States. As a member of the Steering Group of the Platform on Disaster Displacement, Madagascar considered it important for all States and regional groups to take effective measures for disaster prevention and preparedness.

35. **Mr. Rizzo Alvarado** (Observer for Honduras) said that Honduras endorsed the statement made by Brazil. Nearly 120,000 Hondurans had already been repatriated from the United States and Mexico, having left Honduras owing to severe problems in the Northern Triangle of Central America, caused predominantly by drug trafficking. Efforts had been made to improve living conditions in Honduras and an agreement in that regard had been concluded with UNHCR in July 2016. Honduras also faced problems as a country of transit and destination. There were more than 174,000 internally displaced persons and some 26,000 displaced people from Cuba, Haiti and Africa in Honduras. Measures were being taken to provide them with the necessary assistance in centres for illegal migrants.

36. **Mr. Bagoro** (Observer for Burkina Faso) said that Burkina Faso supported the statement made by Sudan on behalf of the Group of African States. Efforts were being made to improve the living conditions of thousands of refugees (around 32,000 as at 31 August 2016) and asylum seekers present in Burkina Faso. To that end, since 5 August 2014, an initiative had been under way to issue all refugees with biometric identity cards, which had thus far enabled some 7,000 refugees to receive identity documents. Efforts were also being made to implement the tripartite agreement on the voluntary repatriation of refugees from Mali, which had been concluded jointly with UNHCR and the Government of Mali on 9 January 2015. While waiting for their voluntary repatriation to be organized, Malian refugees were offered the opportunity to return to their home country through a simplified repatriation procedure. Preparations were under way for the ratification of the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, which bore witness to Burkina Faso's efforts to address that phenomenon.

37. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) welcomed the efforts made by Member States and their support for UNHCR activities. No words could describe the scale of concern for the fate of the Syrian people, who were being subjected to daily violence. It was more than ever necessary to find a political solution to the conflict, without which more than 12 million displaced Syrians would continue to suffer the horrors of war, despite all efforts to help them. He thanked Turkey in particular for hosting such a large number of displaced persons and took note of the request to make the provision of education for Syrian refugees a priority.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.