



# General Assembly

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## Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Sixty-seventh session

### Summary record of the 698th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 5 October 2016, at 3 p.m.

*Chairperson:* Mr. Staur..... (Denmark)

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

**General debate** (*continued*)

1. **Mr. Gherahtu** (Observer for Eritrea) said that, since becoming independent, Eritrea had made great progress on the path to development. However, it faced multiple external challenges, such as the occupation of part of its territory by Ethiopia, the sanctions imposed by the United Nations Security Council, the belligerent stance of some countries and the destabilizing actions of international human trafficking networks. Against that backdrop, managing migratory flows was not straightforward. The governments of some countries lured Eritreans of working age into migrating, including by granting preferential, biased treatment to their asylum applications. Fortunately, the number of economic migrants leaving Eritrea had declined significantly because the Government had been able to create new opportunities for potential migrants and had raised awareness of the dangers of migration. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was tarnishing the image of the country by presenting erroneous statistics on the number of refugees and internally displaced Eritreans. International migration was caused by several factors, including global economic inequalities, asymmetric trade relations, environmental degradation and conflicts within and between States. Population displacement was also used in campaigns to smear and destabilize certain States. It was necessary to establish a global approach to governing migration that protected the rights of migrants and refugees, facilitating their integration into the host countries and encouraging voluntary return.

2. **Mr. Alakhder** (Observer for Libya) said that his country supported the statement made by the Government of Sudan on behalf of the Group of African States. He noted with regret that neither the High Commissioner nor the Secretary-General had mentioned the plight of Palestinian refugees in their statements. The international community faced unprecedented challenges that must lead to greater solidarity and coordination. It was necessary to help States affected by internal or external conflicts to find peaceful solutions and to support countries that were victims of natural disasters. Libya was undergoing a major political and economic crisis and was obliged to cope with a proliferation of weapons and the actions of out-of-control extremist militias. In Sirte, the conflict with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) was ongoing. The health system was severely overstretched and the humanitarian situation was deteriorating, causing further suffering to Libyan citizens and foreign nationals present in the country. However, the national reconciliation initiative was progressing and displaced persons from Tawergha would soon be able to return to their homes.

3. **Mr. Beregoi** (Republic of Moldova) said that, although his country was not on the main migration routes, it had registered a sharp increase in asylum applications over the past two years and was taking all necessary measures to prepare for a potential influx of refugees. The Republic of Moldova had harmonized its legislation with the *acquis communautaire* of the European Union and guaranteed to provide refugees with access to health care, education and financial support to help them integrate into Moldovan society. In addition, it was making significant efforts to tackle statelessness and had granted citizenship to over 200,000 persons with Soviet passports who were at risk of becoming stateless.

4. **Mr. Doudech** (Tunisia) said that his country supported the statement made on behalf of the Group of African States and welcomed the efforts of the international community to provide collective responses to the challenges posed by the mass displacement of persons. Commitments must be translated into concrete actions and the international community, the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other partners must strengthen their coordination in order to address the root causes of mass displacement and facilitate the integration or reintegration of refugees. In

2011, Tunisia had provided relief to over 800,000 refugees and displaced persons fleeing the conflict in Libya. The support of the international community had been valuable in that crisis and continued to play an essential role in strengthening the capacity of Tunisia to respond to humanitarian crises.

5. **Mr. Masi** (Observer for Malawi) said that his country fully supported the statement made by the Government of Sudan on behalf of the Group of African States. Malawi, which was a party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1969 Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, conducted an open-door policy and had been taking in refugees for over 40 years. It accommodated over 30,000 refugees from the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa and continued to receive more than 300 additional persons per month against a background of increasing mixed migratory flows. The country's food aid agency faced growing difficulties in fulfilling its mandate. The Government called on the international community to assist it by resettling refugees in other countries, supporting the Malawian food aid agency, encouraging the voluntary return of refugees from the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region and releasing additional funds to support programmes aimed at making refugees more self-reliant.

6. **Mr. Al-Henzab** (Observer for Qatar) said that his country was committed to cooperating with the international community to address the root causes of mass displacement and had established partnerships with various international organizations to support refugees. It was essential to provide education to children to enable countries affected by protracted conflicts to be rebuilt. Qatar had founded the "Educate a Child" initiative, which aimed to reduce the number of children who did not have access to primary education. Since 2012, it had provided assistance to 260,000 children. At the end of 2015, Qatar had established a new partnership with UNHCR to enable 450,000 children to enrol in school over a period of three years. It had also helped to rebuild schools in Palestine and the Syrian Arab Republic. Lastly, the Qatar Development Fund had launched the QUEST initiative in late September. The aim of the initiative, which had a budget of over 100 million United States dollars, was to provide five years of education and training to approximately 400,000 Syrian refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey.

7. **Mr. Magagi** (Observer for the Niger) said that his delegation supported the statement made by the Government of Sudan on behalf of the Group of African States. The Niger was surrounded by hotbeds of tension in Libya, Mali and Nigeria, and accommodated over 460,000 forcibly displaced persons on its territory. It was difficult for the country to address the multiple socioeconomic and political problems created by that situation and the impact that it had on the development plan, national and international security and the protection of human rights at a time when it must continue its fight against the terrorist group Boko Haram. A tripartite commission comprising representatives of the Government of Mali, the Government of the Niger and UNHCR was working to facilitate the voluntary return of Malian refugees. The processing of requests made by forcibly displaced persons from Nigeria was proceeding normally. As for Rwandan refugees, four families had recently obtained Niger nationality and other applications were under consideration. It was important for the international community to allocate sufficient resources to care for refugees and to address the root causes of displacement, including endemic poverty, discrimination and religious intolerance.

8. **Ms. Jackson** (Bahamas) said that the Government of the Bahamas conveyed its support to the other Caribbean countries affected by Hurricane Matthew. The New York Declaration recognized that human mobility was caused by many factors, including environmental ones. Being a geographic gateway between the Caribbean and Florida, the Bahamas was a major transit point for illegal migrants in the Caribbean. The Government

of the Bahamas was seeking to strike the right balance between, on the one hand, protecting its borders and national security and, on the other, respecting international obligations and human rights. In order to avoid loss of life and make the best use of labour mobility, it was necessary to develop a secure and humane legal system for managing migration. Legal migration could bring significant economic, cultural and political benefits to both sending and receiving States. Meanwhile, concerted efforts should be made to tackle illegal migration as no one country could face the challenges that it posed alone. In that regard, the agreement between the International Organization for Migration and the United Nations and the adoption of the New York Declaration were encouraging steps.

9. **Mr. Cabrera** (Ecuador) thanked UNHCR for the support that it had given to his country after the earthquake of April 2016. With 60,000 registered refugees and over 200,000 asylum seekers, Ecuador, despite its limited resources, hosted more refugees than any other country in Latin America. There were no refugee camps in the country: refugees were directly integrated into society and received the same social security benefits as Ecuadorian citizens. According to UNHCR, 79.21 per cent of refugee children and young people had access to education, 77 per cent of refugees in need of medical care in the past six months had been given coverage by the public health services and 51.5 per cent of refugees considered their housing conditions to be satisfactory. In addition, Ecuador had ratified the residence agreement for nationals of Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) member and associate member States and, in an example of regional cooperation on migration, had established bilateral migration agreements with Peru, Venezuela and Colombia. In 2010, following the earthquake that had struck Haiti, Ecuador had declared a five-year migration amnesty for Haitians. The country was also implementing the Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action. Lastly, in view of the fact that 80 per cent of asylum seekers were Colombians, Ecuador welcomed and encouraged Colombia's efforts to achieve national reconciliation.

10. **Mr. Bah** (Observer for the Gambia) said that the majority of refugees living in his country were integrated into Gambian society and that the Government continued to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to refugees and persons of concern to UNHCR. The Ministry of the Interior, through the Gambia Commission for Refugees, had held discussions with the Immigration Department on the issuance of new long-term residence permits to refugees who had chosen to integrate. Eventually, such persons would be able to obtain Gambian nationality. The Gambia had ratified the two United Nations conventions on statelessness and the country team based in the Gambia had developed a national action plan approved by the Government in order to end that phenomenon. In order to identify persons who were stateless or at risk of becoming so, the Commission for Refugees, in collaboration with the country team for statelessness, relevant stakeholders and UNHCR, planned to conduct a survey of children born in the Gambia who were without birth certificates. He thanked the Embassy of the United States of America in Banjul for enabling six child day-care centres to be set up in six refugee host communities through the Julia Taft Refugee Fund. The centres in question provided children with care and education while their parents worked on the land.

11. **Mr. Boutin** (Observer for Haiti) said that his country was currently in the path of Hurricane Matthew, which had already claimed many victims and caused more than 15,000 people to be displaced. Between January and August 2016, over 100,000 persons had been sent back from the Dominican Republic, placing great strain on the reception facilities set up by his Government. In 2015, the Government had drafted guidelines on migration policy for 2015-2030 which had called for the creation of conditions that would enable the population to remain settled.

12. **Mr. Mukashev** (Observer for Kyrgyzstan) said that, since acceding to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, his country had adopted appropriate legislation and

established procedures and mechanisms for defining refugee status. Since 1993, Kyrgyzstan had provided international protection to 20,000 refugees. The granting of Kyrgyz citizenship formed part of the long-term measures implemented in that regard. The tragic events that had taken place in June 2010 at the national and regional levels, which had resulted in loss of life and the displacement of many persons, had shown Kyrgyzstan the meaning of the words humanity and compassion. The Government condemned those States which, in flagrant violation of article 1 of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, continued to grant political refugee status to Kadyrjan Batyrov and Maksim Bakiev, who had been convicted of serious, non-political crimes in Kyrgyzstan and were wanted by the Kyrgyz authorities. Kadyrjan Batyrov had been convicted by the Supreme Court of Kyrgyzstan for organizing inter-ethnic conflict and murdering more than two persons on ethnic grounds in June 2010. He was also wanted by the Russian Federation and Uzbekistan.

13. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) welcomed the efforts made by the various countries and their support for the activities of the Office.

14. **Mr. Ehouzou** (Observer for the African Union) said that the African Union supported the statement made by the Government of Sudan on behalf of the Group of African States. During the World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016, the Union had presented a Common African Position on humanitarian effectiveness. In 2017, it would organize an African Conference with the aim of adopting a 10-year plan to implement the Common African Position. On 6 December 2016, it would hold a conference of States parties to the Kampala Convention, which would aim to examine the challenges to be overcome in strengthening that regional instrument. The African Union supported the High Commissioner's call to increase funding for refugee operations in Africa, which accounted for only 20 per cent of overall budget requirements.

15. **Mr. Hemou** (Observer for the Economic Community of West African States) said that ECOWAS fully supported the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and the commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in May 2016. In order to address the multiple humanitarian challenges facing West Africa, ECOWAS had taken a number of initiatives involving the development of strategies, policies and programmes to implement the humanitarian mandate set out in the regional legal instruments. UNHCR and ECOWAS had collaborated on the ratification of the Kampala Convention, the implementation of which would help to resolve some of the problems caused by the repeated attacks carried out by the Boko Haram terrorist group, which had forced more than 2 million people to be displaced within their countries and several hundred others to become refugees. The draft action plan drawn up at the Ministerial Conference on Statelessness in the ECOWAS Region, held in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire in 2015, would soon be presented to the ECOWAS statutory bodies. In 2006, the technical and financial support provided by UNHCR had made it possible to set up the ECOWAS emergency response team, which had been deployed in Mali in 2014 to support the humanitarian operations of the Community and the activities of UNHCR in that member State. ECOWAS was working to strengthen that response mechanism in order to improve its effectiveness in West Africa.

16. **Ms. Eren** (Observer for the Organization of Islamic Cooperation), said that, according to the latest UNHCR Global Trends report, the OIC member States were having to cope with the presence of almost 37.7 million refugees and displaced persons, i.e., two thirds of the total number in the world. When account was taken of the 5.2 million Palestinian refugees registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), more than 70 per cent of the displaced persons in the world lived in OIC member States. The countries in question had been extremely welcoming towards refugees: 7 of the 10 countries with the largest refugee populations belonged to OIC and bore more than their share of the responsibility for

refugees globally. OIC welcomed the efforts made within the framework of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees developed by UNHCR, as well as the collaborative paths marked out by UNHCR and three OIC member States — Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran — to enable millions of Afghans to be repatriated safely and in decent conditions. OIC also supported the High Commissioner’s Global Initiative on Somali Refugees. Lastly, her Organization welcomed the new campaign launched by the Secretary-General of the United Nations entitled “Together: Respect, Safety and Dignity for All”, which aimed to combat negative stereotypes and xenophobia, in particular against Muslim refugees.

17. **Ms. Bonzon** (Observer for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) said that the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies welcomed the New York Declaration and its reaffirmation of the legal obligations inherent in the protection of refugees, such as respect for the principle of non-refoulement and the right to seek and enjoy asylum. The Federation urged States to take the necessary measures to ensure that migrants and refugees were able to travel in safety and dignity and, within that framework, were protected against accidents and attacks and were not separated from their families and subjected to trafficking and abuse. Once they reached their destinations, migrants and refugees must be able to exercise the rights accorded to them by national and international law. The Federation also called on political leaders and the media to combat the rise in xenophobic and racist discourse in the public sphere. The experience and reflections of Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers would be put at the service of efforts to develop a new global governance framework for migrants and refugees.

18. **Ms. Pictet-Althann** (Observer for the Sovereign Order of Malta) said she was pleased to note that the New York Declaration made specific reference to religious bodies. The Sovereign Order of Malta was at the forefront of efforts to provide assistance to refugees and displaced persons in conflict-affected countries and destination countries for asylum seekers. Within that framework, it provided humanitarian assistance to refugees and displaced persons in the north of the Syrian Arab Republic and in Iraq, Turkey and Lebanon. Since 2008, the Sovereign Order of Malta, together with teams of doctors, nurses and first-aid workers, had also maintained a presence on the island of Lampedusa and on Italian coastguard vessels operating in the Strait of Sicily. It was also present in Germany, where it managed 140 reception facilities for refugees, and in Austria, where it carried out activities aimed at integrating migrants and refugees into the local population. In 2015, the Sovereign Order of Malta had provided psychosocial support to 4,000 persons displaced as a result of the conflict in Ukraine.

19. **Ms. Silva** (Observer for the United Nations Development Programme) said that UNDP was committed to undertaking various actions in the area of displacement and migration, including: working closely with Member States and other organizations of the United Nations system to ensure that displacement and migration issues were taken into account in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in countries where UNDP supported the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; increasing the support given to governments and United Nations country teams in their efforts to integrate migrants, internally displaced persons, refugees and the needs of host communities in national development plans, strategies and United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks; and helping at least 30 countries to analyse and address the drivers and root causes of migration and forced displacement, such as conflicts, climate change, environmental degradation and poverty.

20. **Mr. Bowers** (Observer for Mercy Corps International), speaking on behalf of NGOs, said that conflict constituted the main driver of forced displacement. For that reason, NGOs called on stakeholders to double, over the next two years, the amount allocated to peacebuilding and conflict mitigation in humanitarian aid budgets established by bilateral

and multilateral donors. They also requested that funding arrangements for refugees should be modified, including through the establishment of funding mechanisms that made it possible to intervene on the ground within 72 hours of the outbreak of a crisis. They warned of the dangers inherent in the erosion of respect for the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and asked the successor to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to encourage States that had not yet acceded to the Convention to do so. Finally, they called on States to end the practice of detaining children and to implement alternatives to detention for entire families.

21. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) welcomed the efforts of the African Union, ECOWAS, OIC, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the Sovereign Order of Malta, UNDP and NGOs.

22. **The Chairperson**, summing up the general debate, said that a large number of States had made progress in addressing and eradicating statelessness, including by acceding to the two relevant conventions, amending their legislation and implementing regional initiatives, such as the Abidjan Declaration of Ministers of ECOWAS Member States on Eradication of Statelessness. In other areas, as emphasized by the delegations, there were a number of measures that needed to be taken, including: addressing the root causes of displacement; intensifying efforts to find sustainable solutions; ensuring that repatriations were genuinely voluntary; continuing to provide protection to persons who could not return to their countries; and strengthening assistance to host communities.

#### **Rights of reply**

23. **Mr. Akzhigitov** (Russian Federation), exercising his right of reply, said that the politicized discourse of Ukraine aimed to shift the responsibility for the situation in Ukraine to third parties. Thousands of Ukrainians had been forced to flee their homes and the Ukrainian authorities had not taken the necessary measures to enable them to return home. As part of the Russian Federation, Crimea was now in a much better position than when it had been part of Ukraine. The Government of the Russian Federation had established mechanisms to protect the human rights of Ukrainian refugees in its territory and made regular financial contributions to UNHCR to support operations in Ukraine. It called on the Ukrainian authorities to focus on resolving the serious humanitarian crisis that Ukraine was facing, to respect humanitarian agreements and the rights of internally displaced persons and to address the causes of mass displacements of people. In order to address the situation of displaced persons and refugees from Ukraine, it was necessary to find a political solution and impose an effective ceasefire in south-eastern Ukraine in accordance with the Minsk Protocol.

24. **Mr. Klymenko** (Ukraine), exercising his right of reply, said that the Russian Federation was misleading the international community and spreading false information about the events in Ukraine and the region. Ukraine reaffirmed that it had been attacked on its territory by the Russian Federation, as proved by the satellite imagery and information provided by bodies such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations. That attack was the main cause of the humanitarian crisis in southern Ukraine and had given rise to the forced displacement of populations. The Russian Federation was providing arms and ammunition to mercenaries in south-eastern Ukraine and supporting illegal armed terrorist groups that were further destabilizing the region. There was a direct link between the attack carried out by the Russian Federation and the displacement of 1.7 million Ukrainians in their own country.

25. **Mr. Akzhigitov** (Russian Federation), exercising his right of reply, said that the highly politicized nature of the statement of Ukraine had nothing whatsoever to do with the agenda of the current meeting.

**Consideration of reports on the work of the Standing Committee (agenda item 4)****(a) International protection**

26. **The Chairperson** invited the participants to watch a film, featuring the UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador Cate Blanchett and other artists, in which refugees showed the objects that they had chosen to take with them when they had fled their countries.

27. **Mr. Türk** (Assistant High Commissioner (Protection)) said that the international refugee protection regime was more necessary than ever but faced formidable challenges. It could be seen how, time and time again, deterrence policies could turn into policies of mistreatment, how detaining migrants was in fact a very costly measure, and how forcing people to live a life of dependency was counter-productive. It was incongruous to implement non-entrée policies on the one hand while wishing to benefit from globalization on the other. It was for all those reasons that collective and multilateral frameworks had been established to support those countries that hosted nearly 90 per cent of the refugee population. However, glimmers of hope were emerging. The Nansen Initiative had been approved by 109 States in 2015 and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change contained a section on population displacement. More recently, the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants had paved the way for the development of a global compact on refugees, aimed at addressing the issue of refugees in a fairer and more comprehensive manner.

28. Although they were two distinct groups, refugees and migrants shared common ground in that they had both undergone traumatic experiences and were at risk of becoming victims of human trafficking and xenophobia. UNHCR would share the lessons learned throughout the process leading to the adoption of a global compact on refugees in 2018. International solidarity was a notion that should lie at the heart of the global compact as it was a key part of the contract established between and among nations. Vitriolic opposition to the arrival of new refugees and migrants had been seen here and there, couched in concerns about security issues and integration capacity, further fuelling racism and xenophobia. The idea of retreating into identity politics was counterproductive and could even be dangerous. At the same time, however, the leaders of several countries had made it clear that refugees were the first victims of violence and extremist groups and must not be placed under general suspicion. Others, for their part, had called for the adoption of tougher policies on asylum and immigration. In December 2015, in response to that situation, UNHCR had issued a guidance note entitled “Addressing security concerns without undermining refugee protection”. It was essential to promote an integrated approach that both took security concerns into account and upheld international standards on refugee protection. In such a security environment, the sole response of the authorities had often been to place asylum seekers and irregular migrants in detention. Yet detention could not and must not be an option.

29. Sexual and gender-based violence remained a primary cause of insecurity for refugees and internally displaced persons throughout the world. Conflict-related sexual violence was a form of persecution that should lead States to grant refugee status to the persons affected. According to UNHCR, the number of such cases had risen from 18,245 in 2014 to 26,632 in 2015. The global campaign to end statelessness that had been carried out by UNHCR since 2011 was beginning to bear fruit. Over 49,000 stateless persons had acquired nationality in 2015 and, since then, at least nine States had amended their laws and policies to prevent or address statelessness. Refugees and migrants must have access to employment and education and be able to reunite with their families in the host country to enable them to become less dependent on welfare in the long term. Child refugees, who made up more than half of the global refugee population, must have access to education. UNHCR would continue to work with States and partners to address the obstacles that made it difficult for refugees who had entered a country illegally to enjoy the right to

family reunification. Resettlement operations and the establishment of humanitarian pathways were central to the efforts made by UNHCR to find solutions and encourage States to assume their share of responsibility towards refugees. Over the past 10 years, UNHCR had resettled over 1 million people in 30 countries and planned to resettle 170,000 in 2017.

30. **Mr. Plangprayoon** (Thailand), speaking on behalf of the Friends of the #IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness, a group of United Nations Member States which had been meeting regularly since October 2015 to support the goals of the campaign, welcomed the recent resolutions adopted by the Human Rights Council on the right to a nationality and the efforts made by UNHCR to ensure that that issue received greater attention in the Council. UNHCR should continue to grant priority to that aspect of its mandate in all operations, since the global crisis caused by mass displacement increased the risks of statelessness. UNHCR should also continue to provide technical support to States in their efforts to implement the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness 2014-2024. The Friends called on all States to take resolute measures to combat statelessness and protect stateless persons. They also asked UNHCR to convene a global mid-term conference to assess the progress made by the Global Action Plan and to encourage States to fully implement it.

31. **Ms. van Etten** (Netherlands) said that her country strongly supported measures to increase the self-reliance and prospects of refugees. It was important to provide young refugees with access to secondary education and training while ensuring that the training was tailored to the needs of the market. The Netherlands believed that the private sector could play a major role in improving the livelihoods of refugees in the long term.

32. **Ms. Lindblad** (Sweden) said that her Government was convinced that refugee resettlement was an essential means of protecting vulnerable and desperate people in search of safety and long-term solutions. For that reason, the number of annual places provided under the resettlement programme would be increased to 3,400 in 2017 and would reach a total of 5,000 by the end of 2018. Sweden fully supported the work carried out by UNHCR to prevent and combat sexual and gender-based violence, to which displaced women and girls were particularly exposed. She hoped that priority would continue to be given to the protection of children.

*The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.*