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Summary record of the 740th meeting

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Chair: Mr. Baddoura (Vice-Chair).....(Lebanon)

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In the absence of Ms. Farani Azevêdo (Brazil), Mr. Baddoura (Lebanon), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.

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

General debate (*continued*)

1. **Ms. Mansfield** (Australia), noting that equitable access to vaccines for all would be critical in bringing the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic to an end, said that the Government of Australia thanked host countries for including displaced people in their vaccination programmes. Her Government was committing up to 60 million vaccine doses to regional countries by the end of 2022, along with a variety of material and technical support measures. Humanitarian assistance was being provided to crisis-affected and displaced communities across Myanmar and in Bangladesh, including COVID-19 preparedness and response activities and life-saving assistance for the most vulnerable. In Cox's Bazar, her Government had supported Rohingya refugees and host communities by expanding health facilities, improving water, sanitation and hygiene facilities and providing protection services.

2. Australia had committed \$A 65 million in immediate support to countries bordering Afghanistan that were hosting refugees – including the \$A 5 million already contributed in support of the Afghanistan Situation Supplementary Appeal – and would provide a further \$A 35 million by the end of 2024. An initial 3,000 places had been allocated under the country's long-standing humanitarian programme, which would give priority to persecuted minorities, women and children and those with close links to Australia. The ceiling of 13,750 places in the Australian resettlement programme reflected the Government's ongoing commitment to the best possible settlement support for new and recent humanitarian entrants, who should have the best possible opportunities, including through finding a job, learning English and integrating into the community.

3. **Mr. Czech** (Poland) said that the gravity of the situation in Afghanistan required a careful and coordinated response from the international community. The Government of Poland had granted 113 temporary humanitarian visas to Afghans, in addition to resettling a number of persons who had worked for the Government or its international partners. The Government had, in 2002–2019, made contributions totalling over US\$ 45 million to development in Afghanistan, in addition to making substantial donations to humanitarian crises across the Middle East through various international and regional organizations, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

4. There had been more applications for international protection than in the previous year and some migrants had tragically lost their lives. They were the victims of the use of migration as an instrument to exert political pressure on European Union member States. The Government of Poland sought to assist all needy persons in the country and had sent aid convoys to help the authorities of Lithuania cope with the flow of migrants in an irregular situation from the territory of Belarus. It was incumbent on the international community, in particular the United Nations, to take action to prevent a humanitarian crisis in Belarus.

5. **Ms. Kauppi** (Finland), noting that it was important to remain committed to Afghanistan, said that her Government had suspended development funding, but would continue humanitarian aid and had recently contributed €3 million in support of the Afghanistan Situation Supplementary Appeal. The Government had increased its refugee resettlement quota for 2020 and 2021; in the light of the situation in Afghanistan, it was considering a further increase for 2022. In order to counter xenophobia against migrants and refugees, civil society and volunteers were given an active role in integrating refugees into Finnish society.

6. The SEREDA project, a major research initiative on sexual and gender-based violence against refugees, had shown that over 70 per cent of forcibly displaced women had experienced such violence. Gender-based violence services with adequate staff and resources must therefore be in place from the outset of any response. The Government of Finland encouraged all donors to provide non-earmarked funding, which enabled UNHCR to respond to crises without delay. Lastly, with reference to the statement made by the European Union on the expulsion of United Nations officials from Ethiopia, her Government wished to express its strong support for the Organization's operations in that country.

7. **Ms. Neocleous** (Cyprus) said that it was essential to guarantee the unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan and assistance to neighbouring countries. Any attempt to instrumentalize the plight of refugees at the external borders of the European Union for political purposes was unacceptable.

8. Cyprus had the highest number of applications for international protection per capita of all States members of the European Union, the majority entering Cyprus illegally from Turkey, via the Turkish-occupied area of the island. Against that backdrop, readmission agreements needed to be respected and fully implemented by all parties without discrimination, as did the European Union-Turkey statement of 18 March 2016. Nevertheless, in order to meet its international obligations and implement the global compact on refugees, the Government was cooperating with the European Union and UNHCR on reforms to process applications for international protection more efficiently. Conditions at reception centres had improved, as had the quality of the services provided. Asylum seekers enjoyed free health care, including mental health-care services; vulnerable persons were given priority, including women and girls and possible victims of torture.

9. **Ms. Duncan** (New Zealand), speaking in a pre-recorded video message, said that New Zealand had been one of the first States to provide emergency funding to UNHCR in anticipation of its support for internally displaced persons and refugees in Afghanistan. The international community must continue to support the countries neighbouring Afghanistan, which had already been hosting more than 2 million Afghan refugees before the Taliban's seizure of power, and all countries and communities hosting large populations of refugees and the internally displaced.

10. While her Government was committed to working with UNHCR and the international community to resettle refugees with priority protection needs, the COVID-19 pandemic had disrupted the country's Refugee Quota Programme; refugee resettlement was taking place when safe for refugees and for New Zealanders. There had been good progress in implementing the extended Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship Category pilot scheme, which complemented the Refugee Quota Programme. Implementation of the country's various Global Refugee Forum pledges had also been affected by COVID-19; her Government remained committed to achieving them as soon as possible.

11. **Mr. Garcia** (Philippines), highlighting his country's commitment to burden and responsibility sharing, said that the Philippines had welcomed Afghan nationals without hesitation. Moreover, the Government was piloting a complementary pathways programme to help the Rohingya community, which went hand in hand with approaches by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations designed to help restore democracy in Myanmar, while also providing humanitarian relief.

12. The Refugee and Stateless Persons Protection Unit under the Department of Justice coordinated policymaking and implementation in respect of persons of concern. During the COVID-19 pandemic, programmes had been run to offer refugees access to employment and legal assistance, among other things; eligible persons of concern were also provided with social protection services. The aim was to integrate such persons into communities and, to that end, engagement with civil society and community organizations helped the Government to identify and address those communities' needs.

13. Aware of the impact of natural disasters and climate change, the Government of the Philippines welcomed the High Commissioner's focus on climate-induced displacement. It had been mainstreaming disaster resilience in all policy areas and levels of government and was, in partnership with UNHCR and other United Nations entities, running pilot projects on prevention, displacement and recovery.

14. **Mr. Izquierdo Miño** (Ecuador) said that one in five persons of concern to UNHCR was in the Americas and, following the exodus of nationals of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela from their home country, 1.9 million of them had at least passed through Ecuador. The 430,000 Venezuelans who had remained in Ecuador had free universal access to basic services, including health care and education. Furthermore, 220,000 of them enjoyed regular migration status, which facilitated their economic integration. A regularization process was planned for the remainder, to be accompanied by a strategy of job creation, social protection

and recognition of foreign qualifications, and by initiatives to combat discrimination and xenophobia.

15. Mechanisms for enhanced responsibility sharing between States were needed. The Government of Ecuador was a driving force in the search for joint solutions to the crisis, one example of which was the so-called Quito Process to deal with Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the region. Nevertheless, greater support from the international community was essential because the funds pledged at the International Donors Conference in Solidarity with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants in 2021 fell far short of the country's needs: as of September 2021, Ecuador had received just 15 per cent of the US\$ 237 million that it required under the 2021 Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela.

16. **Mr. Moerzinger Pagani** (Uruguay) said that Uruguay had traditionally been a place of refuge for persons in urgent need of protection. Even under the most stringent public-health restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the country had kept its doors open to migrants and persons in need of international protection. A simplified virtual process for examining new asylum applications had been developed during the pandemic. A coordinated protocol of testing and, where necessary, quarantine had been established for those entering the country on humanitarian grounds. Even before receiving their documentation, migrants and refugees had been included in the country's vaccination plans, under the same conditions as nationals of Uruguay. While the Cities of Solidarity initiative was being run successfully in the country, the Government would need steadfast support from the international community if it were to implement new resettlement plans, such as the Sustainable Resettlement and Complementary Pathways Initiative.

17. **Mr. Ferzli** (Lebanon) said that Lebanon was deeply concerned about the steady increase in the number of forcibly displaced persons and the parallel decrease in the scale and scope of durable solutions. Humanitarian meltdown and unbearable pressure on host communities could be expected if those trends were not addressed promptly. Lebanon therefore called on States to renew their commitments to multilateralism under the global compact on refugees and to translate the principles of burden and responsibility sharing into concrete action that alleviated pressure on host communities and created conditions conducive to voluntary repatriation.

18. Like other countries neighbouring Syria, Lebanon had been bearing the brunt of the huge refugee crisis. It remained committed to protecting and assisting its neighbours, but, over the past decade, the well-documented pressures on its infrastructure, economy and vital sectors had reached intolerable levels, plunging the country into an acute economic and financial crisis in which extreme poverty was rife and international support, while commendable, was largely insufficient. With no end to the crisis in sight, the increasing vulnerability of displaced Syrians was being matched by a steep decline in the living conditions of their host communities. To prevent that volatile situation from spinning out of control, a more pragmatic and less politicized approach was needed. Durable solutions were vital to avert chronic instability and misery, and, for Lebanon, since local integration could not be considered and resettlement initiatives had proved anaemic, durable solutions meant cooperation in removing the impediments to a safe and dignified gradual return to the parts of Syria where life had returned to normal for all displaced Syrians currently being hosted in the country.

19. **Mr. Grima** (Malta), in a pre-recorded video statement, noting that increasing numbers of Afghans had been trying to reach Europe as the situation in Afghanistan had worsened, said that Malta wished to express its support and sympathy for all those who had been forced to leave their homes. The situation in the central Mediterranean also remained precarious, with arrivals from Libya reaching 41,659 to date in 2021, up more than 80 per cent on arrivals in the same period of 2020. In that year, Malta had received more first-time asylum applications per million inhabitants than any other European Union member State bar one and, to date in 2021, had already received nearly 800 more. The number of arrivals were stretching the country's resources to the limit, and its reception capacities were under pressure. In that context, it was grateful to those States that provided assistance with the relocation of persons who disembarked in Malta and looked forward to continued engagement with its partners in Europe to ensure the right balance between solidarity and

responsibility. Malta had always advocated for solidarity mechanisms that reinforced burden sharing and for predictable relocation mechanisms, having supported the global compact on refugees since the outset. It thanked UNHCR for its invaluable support and assistance, which it hoped would be further strengthened in the future.

20. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that he strongly supported Lebanon's call for States to deliver on the responsibility- and burden-sharing commitments they had assumed under the global compact. Lebanon shouldered an unbelievable load of refugee-hosting responsibilities and, in view of the crisis in the country, efforts to alleviate that burden should be redoubled. He agreed that more substantive investment in humanitarian assistance for those who returned, and in areas of return, was needed in order to address the strategic obstacles to return more systemically and create the right conditions. Noting that the description of resettlement as anaemic was apt, he encouraged resettlement States to step up their activities.

21. He thanked Australia for having committed to increased aid for Afghanistan, and to resettlement and other burden-sharing measures, and for having reminded States of the importance of continuing assistance for the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, whose plight must not be forgotten as the focus turned to Afghanistan. New Zealand was also to be commended for its resettlement efforts and merited particular praise for its efforts to increase private and community sponsorship for resettlement, which was something UNHCR was trying to encourage in all countries. The Philippines had also shown great generosity in making space available to receive Afghan, and possibly also Rohingya, refugees. UNHCR counted on the cooperation of the Philippines and other members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations for its work inside Myanmar, where the human rights situation remained very challenging and conditions were not yet conducive to return. It also counted on the support of States which, like the Philippines, faced climate-related challenges for its efforts to address climate displacement.

22. He wished to thank Poland for providing assistance to the different crises in Afghanistan, Yemen, and the Syrian Arab Republic as well and to second its remarks regarding the migration situation closer to home. In that connection, he wished to reiterate one final time that refugee and migrant flows should never be manipulated for other purposes and urged States to give UNHCR and other organizations access to persons affected by such practices so that help could be provided and solutions found. Finland was also to be commended for its support to Afghanistan, as well as for its focus on gender-based violence and disability inclusion. UNHCR would shortly be adopting new areas of focus to guide resource allocation and gender-based violence would certainly be one of them, while the participation of refugee athletes in the recent Paralympic Games had provided a timely reminder of the importance of disability inclusion for refugees that he hoped would ultimately percolate down to refugee programmes. Cyprus and Malta faced many challenges, some of them shared. UNHCR remained available to help to build the capacity of both countries to deal with the flows that had disproportionate impact on them, as small island nations on the borders of Europe, paying particular attention to complicated question of rescue at sea.

23. Ecuador was to be congratulated for its commitment to regularizing the situation of half of the Venezuelan population present in its territory. He agreed that addressing the vulnerability of the migrant population was a priority and reiterated the call on the international community to ensure that resources reached the region quickly. Lastly, noting that regional crises called for regional responses, he thanked Uruguay for having drawn attention to important regional initiatives such as the Quito Process and the comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework known as MIRPS.

24. **Mr. Boutadghard** (Morocco) said that the COVID-19 pandemic had curbed growth and cost millions of jobs throughout the world but had failed to stop violence and military conflict. To support efforts to combat the pandemic, Morocco had provided humanitarian assistance to Yemeni and Lebanese refugees and medicines and protective equipment to around 20 African countries. It had also set up a field hospital near Tunis and had funded a new hospital and intensive care unit in the Gaza Strip, the latter an expression of its unwavering support for the Palestinian people. At the domestic level, Morocco had become a benchmark for refugee hosting owing to its inclusive asylum policies. Asylum seekers and refugees received comprehensive support, including access to COVID-19 vaccination

programmes, registration and identity documents, education and training; 90 per cent of migrant children went to school, which was higher than the global average, and the approximately 900 refugee children born in the country since 2015 had been immediately registered and issued with identity documents.

25. Morocco wished to express its alarm about the miserable situation of the refugees who had been confined to camps in Algeria for almost 50 years, for undisclosed political reasons, in violation of international humanitarian law. Responsibility for their plight lay with the Government of Algeria, which had been receiving long-term international aid to support the camps but failed to properly maintain them. Morocco could not be held responsible for the deplorable conditions within the camps, which had been further exacerbated by the diversion of funds and devolution of responsibilities to armed separatist groups, expulsions and family separation, and the unilateral closure of land and air borders that prevented the free movement of Algerian residents in Morocco and Moroccans in Algeria. Furthermore, the population of the camps had never been properly registered – an abnormal situation without precedent in the history of UNHCR and the United Nations.

26. **Mr. Cornado** (Italy) said that Italy wished to express its concern about the continuing increase in the number of forcibly displaced persons in the world attributable to conflict, the effect of the pandemic, violence, extreme weather events and natural disasters and in particular about the recent developments in Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Mozambique, which were adding to an already grim picture. In those exceptional circumstances, Italy continued to show solidarity with those in need, mobilizing increased financial resources to ensure a timely and effective emergency response, and, as the current President of the Group of 20, to tackle the numerous multifaceted challenges that the world was facing. It believed that global challenges called for shared and coordinated responses and that political will as well as financial support was vital if the plight of displaced persons was to be addressed effectively.

27. The pandemic might have delayed certain pledges but had not prevented Italy from strengthening its partnership with UNHCR and continuing to make significant financial contributions. Its resettlement and relocation programmes were continuing; it had relocated additional refugees from Ethiopia and Lebanon and had given more young refugees the opportunity to study in Italy under the University Corridors for Refugees Project; and it had helped to evacuate around 5,000 Afghans following the fall of Kabul. It remained actively committed at the collective level, believing that the international community should redouble its efforts to alleviate human suffering and provide for the basic needs of asylum seekers, refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless people, not only in a spirit of solidarity and responsibility sharing, but also with a view to shining a spotlight on those who were often unseen, unheard and unknown. It encouraged UNHCR to maintain the momentum and to further expand its donor base, notably through increased engagement with the private sector and relevant international financial institutions.

28. **Ms. Pipan** (Slovenia) said that Slovenia had been providing humanitarian assistance for refugees through various international organizations, including UNHCR, and had recently pledged an additional contribution for the Afghan people. In 2021, it had been focusing its aid efforts on displaced persons from Syria, Yemen and Palestine and on Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Brazil and, through NGOs, had initiated two humanitarian projects in Lebanon benefiting Syrian refugees who were victims of gender-based violence. It was also providing targeted support for refugee children in Slovenian schools. As the current President of the European Council, Slovenia was focusing attention on the humanitarian needs of vulnerable groups, including forcibly displaced persons, and access to water, which was one of the priorities of its Presidency. With regard to the migration situation in Europe, it wished to emphasize that attempts to instrumentalize or orchestrate flows of migrants and refugees across the external borders of the European Union for political reasons were unacceptable. Cooperation with international organizations, including UNHCR, was key to optimizing efforts and maximizing synergies, especially in tackling the root causes of forced displacement; the creation of safe legal pathways for those who needed protection was of the utmost importance and positive outcomes could be secured only through multilateral cooperation and mutually beneficial partnerships.

29. **Mr. Sterk** (Bulgaria) said that Bulgaria was also deeply concerned about the record high levels of forced displacement and the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, and that,

against that backdrop, it would be working with national partners towards durable solutions and providing financial and other support for the UNHCR response. The disproportionate effects of the pandemic on vulnerable groups, including women, girls, persons with disabilities and persons of concern to UNCHR, were another source of concern; the disruption to education for refugees had been alarming, and it had been necessary to step up efforts to prevent, mitigate and respond to sexual and gender-based violence. Bulgaria welcomed the UNHCR five-year action plan for disability inclusion, conscious that means of delivering protection and assistance in humanitarian settings were still insufficiently adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities. It also wished to express its serious concern about attempts to use refugees, asylum seekers and migrants as instruments through which to exert pressure on third countries; such actions were inhumane and contrary to international humanitarian law.

30. Bulgaria commended UNCHR for consistently advocating for the inclusion of persons of concern in national vaccination plans, health responses and other services intended to mitigate the negative impacts of the pandemic. It welcomed the comprehensive reform of internal UNHCR structures, systems and processes and the shift in favour of results-based management. It looked forward to the High-level Officials Meeting in December, which would provide an opportunity to review progress towards achieving the goals set under the global compact on refugees and fulfilling the pledges made at the high-level segment on statelessness in 2019.

31. **Mr. Obeidat** (Jordan), speaking via video link, said that his country had a long history of providing a safe haven to those seeking asylum and took pride in treating refugees as human beings and not mere statistics. Despite the challenges of accommodating 1.3 million Syrian refugees for more than 10 years, his Government continued to ensure refugees' access to basic services, including education and employment, in a national context of elevated unemployment and pressure on every sector. Refugees had also been included in the national COVID-19 response plan. There was a severe deficit in the 2021 funding of the national response plan for the Syrian crisis; the commitment of friends and partners was invaluable in that regard. Collaboration between UNHCR and the Ministry of Health had seen refugee physicians working as United Nations volunteers, while cooperation with the Ministry of Education had helped refugee students to access online learning.

32. He echoed the call by the High Commissioner for the international community to recognize the importance of greater solidarity and support. Burden and responsibility sharing should be reinforced. Unprecedented global crises like climate displacement compounded existing challenges and the effects of climate change posed an additional threat to displaced persons and refugees. New ways were needed to respond to those crises as one world. Collective will would remain a key driver in seeking solutions to protracted situations. Although resettlement figures were modest and voluntary returns below expected levels, more should be done to facilitate refugees' return to their countries of origin.

33. **Mr. Bekkers** (Netherlands) said that gratitude was owed to the countries hosting the majority of refugees worldwide, the front-line workers and local governments supporting those forced to flee, and the staff members of UNHCR for their tireless work. His Government would continue to provide financial and policy support and stood ready to help UNHCR with the challenges it encountered. The principles set out in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees remained relevant; all States should fulfil their obligations under international law and uphold all rights, including the right to seek asylum. The plight of refugees must not be exploited for political gain. A strengthened common European migration and asylum policy was needed and should be based on the principles of responsibility and solidarity, and the primacy of human dignity in ensuring the protection of those in need yet enable the prevention of abuse of that system. Recent events had underlined the need for reform and he welcomed the attention paid by UNHCR to internationally displaced persons. His Government also looked forward to working with others to implement the recommendations made in the report by the High-level Panel on Internal Displacement.

34. The COVID-19 pandemic had led to a shadow pandemic of domestic violence affecting women and girls that must be addressed. All stakeholders should support access to sexual and reproductive health services. His Government had pledged to provide annual funding to support the joint work of the United Nations and international financial institutions

through the Prospects Partnership, which included UNHCR. The role played by UNHCR in tackling the system-wide problem of sexual exploitation abuse and harassment was appreciated. The report on the investigation into abuse in the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the international response to the Ebola virus disease crisis demonstrated that the United Nations should do more to protect the vulnerable. Increased engagement on the issue of mental health and psychosocial support was appreciated and should be further developed.

35. The commitment of UNHCR to the Grand Bargain on humanitarian financing was welcome, as it provided an essential framework for humanitarian action. His Government intended to provide significant funding to all partners and called on others to do the same. Predictable, flexible and unearmarked funding would enable UNHCR to respond effectively and quickly to unpredictable situations. With respect to the situation in Afghanistan, his Government had pledged support for the humanitarian fund and the regional refugee response plan. Female United Nations workers must be able to remain professionally active in the country and safely engage in aid responses. Sufficient support was also needed to tackle other crises, including the growing vulnerabilities of refugees and host communities in Lebanon. The situation in Ethiopia was also a cause of particular concern. All countries must allow United Nations partners to execute their humanitarian mandate and refrain from restricting access, including through the expulsion of aid workers. Disregard for humanitarian law should be condemned and UNHCR should use its connections to remind all warring parties of their responsibility to allow unhindered access to those in need.

36. **Ms. Batistić Kos** (Croatia) welcomed the update by the High Commissioner and his focus on sustainable solutions. In the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, advocacy by UNHCR for the inclusion of refugees in national vaccination plans and access to health services was commendable. Her Government had participated in the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access Facility and had worked bilaterally to provide vaccine doses to other countries. With the support of partners including UNHCR and the Croatian Red Cross, health care and information on COVID-19 was provided to asylum seekers and refugees in her country. Education remained a priority both at home and abroad, and the enrolment of refugees in tertiary education had increased over the previous five years. Refugees and asylum seekers were included in national recovery plans and those who had been affected by the pandemic were provided with benefits and helped to find work.

37. Action was needed to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable persons, especially women and girls with respect to domestic abuse and access to education. In 2021, against a backdrop of rising numbers of forcibly displaced persons, her country had relocated families from the Syrian Arab Republic and Afghanistan. Approximately 70 per cent of persons granted asylum in her country subsequently left for other destinations, however. Recent months had seen attempts by States to instrumentalize the situation of migrants and refugees, which was unacceptable. Her Government remained committed to preventing abuse of the asylum system of the European Union and supported the New Pact on Migration and Asylum proposed by the European Commission. A pilot project monitored the conduct of border police when dealing with refugees and asylum seekers and her Government stood ready to share its experience of managing migration flows in order to strengthen the partnership with Western Balkan countries. The high number of displaced persons and the fact that a high percentage of countries experiencing the impact of climate change were also facing situations of displacement demonstrated that humanitarian assistance was not enough. She therefore welcomed the efforts of UNHCR to take a holistic approach, particularly work on the Strategic Framework for Climate Action. The Global Refugee Forum had been fruitful and focus must be maintained on the global compact on refugees.

38. **Mr. Lee Taeho** (Republic of Korea) said that global solidarity was needed in the face of the soaring number of persons in need and the uneven impact of global challenges such as climate change. Given the protection challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, pushbacks at borders were a cause of grave concern. The principle of non-refoulement established in the 1951 Convention must be upheld. Efforts by UNHCR to set up the Asylum Capacity Support Group were commendable, as was cooperation with a broad range of other United Nations agencies, given the need for varied expertise to address the complex reasons behind displacement. The lessons learned from those partnerships should be shared with the

wider humanitarian community. Calls for protection must be paired with the search for durable solutions and action in that area was encouraging. He expressed support for the three regional platforms, and as a core member, for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries in particular.

39. Proper support was needed for host communities to ensure equitable responsibility sharing in line with the global compact on refugees. His Government had pledged to focus greater attention on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and was exploring opportunities for pilot projects on health and education in South Sudan. The work of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development on South Sudan and Sudan was particularly interesting; UNHCR should continue to share progress in that regard. It was vital that humanitarian actors and aid workers were provided with the full access and protection from threats needed to carry out their important work. The Asia-Pacific region was among the least represented in the UNHCR workforce. In view of the recent regionalization and decentralization of UNHCR, the regional imbalance in its workforce needed to be addressed.

40. **Mr. Rahman** (Bangladesh) said that developing countries continued to bear the major share of the global refugee burden. Protracted refugee situations affected host countries' development efforts, a reality compounded by the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic. Enhanced international cooperation and assistance for refugees, forcibly displaced persons and their host communities was needed, based on the principle of responsibility-sharing and a comprehensive, solution-oriented approach. Strengthened efforts were needed to address root causes and create environments in countries of origin that were conducive to sustainable and voluntary return. Durable solutions were, regrettably, somewhat overlooked in the work of UNHCR. In view of the announcement by the High Commissioner that the five strategic directions of UNHCR were to be renewed for a further five years, he called for a greater contribution in the interests of persons of concern, including through sustainable solutions and voluntary repatriation.

41. His country hosted more than 1 million forcibly displaced nationals of Myanmar from the Rohingya community. They were provided with humanitarian assistance and were included in the national COVID-19 vaccination programme, despite existing national challenges, the gap in funding for the joint response plan for the Rohingya humanitarian crisis and the additional pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic. The prolonged stay of the Rohingya community in Cox's Bazar had endangered the region's social, environmental and security situation. The crisis had been created by Myanmar and its solution also lay in Myanmar. The shift in attention from the Rohingya crisis to the political crisis in Myanmar would embolden the perpetrators and undermine efforts to ensure justice for the Rohingya community. He called on the international community to take meaningful action for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of the Rohingya community to Myanmar. UNHCR must step up its engagement and activities in Rakhine state to create an environment conducive to repatriation. The imbalance in geographical representation at the different professional levels within UNHCR should be addressed by recruiting more international staff from underrepresented countries.

42. **Ms. Milačić** (Montenegro) said that the COVID-19 pandemic had highlighted the inequalities and poverty that affected the most vulnerable, including refugees, displaced persons, asylum seekers and other persons of concern. The failure to make the COVID-19 vaccine a public good had exacerbated other inequalities and poverty induced by the pandemic had particularly affected women and girls. As a member of the Geneva Group of Friends to Eliminate Sexual Harassment, her Government called on UNHCR to continue its inter-agency engagement in that regard and appealed to all United Nations organizations to develop a common approach to protection against sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment.

43. The COVID-19 pandemic had shown the need for a global response to global challenges, a human rights-based approach at the heart of post-pandemic recovery and enhanced international cooperation and solidarity based on inclusiveness, justice, equality, human dignity and transparency. She commended UNHCR for its demonstrated ability to deliver in increasingly challenging environments, with personnel often risking their own safety and well-being, and its advocacy for the inclusion of persons of concern in national

immunization plans, health responses, education and other services to mitigate the effects of the pandemic, and for combating gender-based violence and discrimination.

44. UNHCR was provided support and expertise for capacity-building in the Western Balkans region to help countries move towards the provision of meaningful protection and sustainable solutions for refugees and asylum seekers. In 2020, in partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNHCR, the European Union had launched a regional project to address the challenges in migrant and refugee response in the region. While the Montenegrin asylum system had proven resilient, a number of improvements had been made, including to data collection and processing, legal procedures and reception capacity and facilities. New integration measures included assistance with finances, language acquisition, education and employment. Support was provided for the voluntary return or reintegration of internally displaced persons from the former Yugoslav countries, while persons who did not qualify as refugees received subsidiary protection.

45. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), responding to comments, said that the international initiatives announced by Morocco were welcome, including those in Gaza, which were outside the area of operation of UNHCR. The policies for reception and management of migration flows were praiseworthy. Regarding Saharan refugees in Tindouf, UNHCR would continue to work in that location. It was to be hoped that efforts to find a political solution to that protracted crisis would be resumed. The invaluable role played by Jordan, as a haven of stability in the region, in hosting a large number of refugees over decades should be recognized. That State's hospitality, based on inclusion in public services, should not be taken for granted and the continued mobilization of resources was therefore important. Resources should be mobilized, in particular, for countries hosting Syrian refugees and in the areas of potential return inside the Syrian Arab Republic.

46. Reference to the Asylum Capacity Support Group was particularly welcome, as was the message from the delegate of the Republic of Korea on the importance of United Nations partnerships. UNHCR worked in various areas with a number of other United Nations organizations, including IOM, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The support of the Republic of Korea for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees and interest in the solutions strategy for South Sudan was appreciated. Although UNHCR did not work with representation quotas, it was important to have a global workforce and the appeal to consider recruitment from underrepresented regions had been noted.

47. While sustainable solutions made up a large share of his responsibilities, the ability to take action on voluntary repatriation to Myanmar was limited by political developments. Nonetheless, UNHCR continued to push for and explore solutions, even while peacemaking was under way. Returns could not take place against the will of displaced persons, but UNHCR was doing all it could to insist that the solution to the Rohingya crisis lay inside Myanmar. The hospitality shown to the Rohingya community by Bangladesh was appreciated, and attention to issues such as education and livelihoods for refugees would provide greater stability for the host region.

48. The chairing of the Group of 20 by Italy and the invitation to brief G20 ministers was significant, as were the initiatives outlined, including those relating to Afghanistan. He welcomed the increased financial contributions from the Government of Italy, the commitment to resettlement and the complementary pathway through university corridors – an initiative that other countries should embrace. The support of Slovenia during its presidency of the European Union was also appreciated. Water management was an important issue in the hosting of refugees, particularly since large numbers of refugees were often hosted in areas deprived of water. The support expressed by the delegate of Bulgaria for upholding the 1951 Convention and tackling gender-based violence and disability inclusion was noted. He welcomed the commitment to reviewing the fulfilment of all pledges related to statelessness, including examination of the remaining reservations to the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and of its ratification.

49. He thanked the Netherlands for continuing to honour its pledge under the Grand Bargain to make unearmarked contributions. He encouraged Croatia, as one of the countries

with external borders of the European Union, to deal with the refugee issue in a manner that was mindful of its own and the Union's security but was also respectful of the protection needs of people, bearing in mind the pushbacks that had been observed elsewhere around the borders of Europe. Montenegro had been exemplary in the subregion in strengthening its asylum mechanism to deal with the mixed flows affecting the Western Balkans.

50. **Ms. Tichy-Fisslberger** (Austria), said that she wished to express her country's high esteem and gratitude to all UNCHR staff for their unwavering commitment and tireless efforts, and to the High Commissioner for his inspiring leadership. Austria was glad to be able to rely on UNCHR as a resilient and adaptable partner.

51. She especially valued the Office's efforts to guarantee the security of women and girls and protect them from sexual and gender-based violence, and to promote gender equality and sexual and reproductive health rights.

52. She commended its work in the area of education. It had helped more than 930,000 students in 74 countries to follow distance and home-based learning and supported access to education for children with disabilities during lockdown.

53. Her Government had decided to allocate €1 million each to the UNCHR operations in Cambodia and the Syrian Arab Republic and €10 million to its operations in Afghanistan and in neighbouring countries hosting Afghan refugees and had increased its core contribution to UNCHR by €1.65 million.

54. As a party to both United Nations conventions on statelessness and a member of the Group of Friends of the #IBelong campaign, Austria welcomed the commitments by many States to end gender discriminatory laws and safeguard against childhood statelessness and commended the recent achievements of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kenya and Uzbekistan in reducing statelessness.

55. **Mr. Aala** (Observer for the Syrian Arab Republic) said that, although recent developments in the COVID-19 pandemic had shown that a coordinated effort was needed if developing countries were to gain fair and equitable access to vaccines and to the necessary resources to address the consequences of the pandemic, some countries had moved in the opposite direction. By prioritizing a selfish political agenda over humanitarian considerations, they helped erode multilateralism and undermine efforts to address the root causes of the crisis.

56. One of the pillars of the UNHCR mandate was to assist governments in facilitating refugees' voluntary return, which was the most realistic and durable solution. That implied providing support to countries of origin, in line with the principles of the global compact on refugees, to help them create favourable conditions for the return of refugees to their country and of internally displaced persons to their homes.

57. In that context, his Government continued its unremitting efforts, within its available resources, to secure the appropriate conditions for dignified return. To that end, a set of legislative and executive measures had been taken to simplify procedures. Returnees who had left the country irregularly could have their situation regularized within 72 hours.

58. Despite certain countries' political exploitation of the situation and media smear campaigns against his country, cooperation with some friendly countries had made it possible for refugees to return. An estimated 5 million internally displaced persons had moved back to their areas of origin since July 2021, while the number of shelters had fallen to 139, from 618 in 2012.

59. The High Commissioner's forthcoming visit to Damascus would be an opportunity to look at ways of enhancing cooperation and support for his Government's efforts to create a favourable environment for the return of Syrians. He hoped that the High Commissioner would play an active role in helping to remove obstacles such as the unilateral coercive measures that were adversely affecting various vital sectors.

60. **Mr. Eheth** (Cameroon) said that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, countries hosting refugees had had to make an additional effort to include vulnerable persons in their national plans to combat the virus. Cameroon currently hosted 458,000 refugees, including 300,000

from the Central African Republic and 118,000 from Nigeria. Most of those living outside the camps did so in harmony with their host communities.

61. The economic impact of the pandemic had shown that it was time for a radical change of paradigm in the matter of refugees. The constant shortfalls in funding meant that countries needed to shift away from the humanitarian aid approach towards greater economic empowerment. Cameroon itself had certain reservations about opening new camps for refugees, and it attached importance to including refugees in employment and health provision. It had signed an agreement with the International Labour Organization and UNHCR on access to decent work for refugees and asylum seekers. Under another agreement signed with UNHCR by the Ministry of Health, refugees would be covered by the national health system. They were also covered by the coronavirus response and vaccination plans.

62. Under tripartite agreements signed with UNHCR and the respective countries, 3,000 Nigerian refugees had returned home and many Central African Republic refugees were planning to do so.

63. Cameroon was grateful for countries' humanitarian efforts and he thanked the United Nations and UNHCR, whose partnership had made it possible to provide decent living conditions for refugees. He appealed urgently for funds to help the refugees in his country overcome the adverse impact of the pandemic.

64. **Mr. Alwasil** (Observer for Saudi Arabia), speaking in a pre-recorded video message, said that he was grateful for the tremendous efforts made by UNHCR in providing assistance to refugees across the world and alleviating the difficulties and challenges they faced. It was important to facilitate the voluntary return of refugees to their countries.

65. His country was proud to be a major donor of humanitarian aid to UNHCR. Despite the economic difficulties around the world, Saudi Arabia continued to play a role in development. In addition, it had given shelter to refugees, integrating them and providing them with free health care. It had helped other countries around the world to build infrastructure and provide shelter, food and medical assistance to refugee camps. It was important to work together to find collective solutions to the refugee and displacement crisis: there were no unilateral solutions.

66. **Ms. Díaz-Rato Revuelta** (Spain) said that the pandemic had created difficulties for everyone, but especially for the most vulnerable groups, whose numbers were growing even as the resources to care for them were shrinking.

67. Like others, Spain had been forced to adapt. Since 2015 it had seen a considerable rise in applications for international protection and in irregular arrivals by sea. In 2019 a peak of 118,000 applications had been reached. In 2020, despite travel restrictions, there had been more than 116,000 applications, 87 per cent of them from Latin America, making Spain the third largest host country in the European Union.

68. In order to expedite applications, additional staff had been recruited and data processing systems enhanced. In 2019 and 2020, more than 6,000 applications for refugee status and more than 80,500 for temporary residence permits on humanitarian grounds had been processed.

69. In a spirit of burden sharing, Spain had also helped its partners to boost their capacity to take in migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, and to combat illegal migration and human trafficking rings.

70. In Latin America, in solidarity with Venezuelan refugees and migrants, Spain had allocated €100 million for the period to 2024, as support both in their own country and in the countries of the region. In addition, during its term as Chair of the MIRPS support platform, it had organized capacity-building courses to improve host countries' ability to meet the needs of those displaced in Central America and, in Costa Rica, had taken part in an event that had raised €110 million. She thanked all those who had contributed to the success of those initiatives.

71. In Afghanistan, Spain had supported efforts to assist families and had allocated €20 million in humanitarian aid to meet the civilian population's immediate needs. It would continue to support neighbouring countries in their efforts in that regard.

72. In contexts such as Afghanistan and Ethiopia, humanitarian access must be secured. Spain aligned itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union condemning the recent expulsion of seven United Nations personnel working on the ground in Ethiopia.

73. She commended UNHCR for its work in protecting sexual and reproductive rights. Women and girls must be at the heart of the response to the refugee problem and she welcomed the Office's work to combat sexual and gender-based violence.

74. **Mr. Chen Xu** (China), speaking in a pre-recorded video message, said that, in order to address the root causes of mass refugee flows and create conditions for the return of refugees, countries should focus on development and promote the shared values of peace, equity, justice, democracy and freedom. Differences should be settled through dialogue and consultation so as to prevent upsurges of refugee flows caused by war and turmoil. External military intervention and the so-called democratic transformation had sown the seeds of endless troubles.

75. The international community should support the work of UNHCR and the United Nations. UNCHR and other United Nations entities should play a coordinating role in addressing refugee issues and providing humanitarian assistance so as to effectively implement the global compact on refugees and improve global refugee governance.

76. In the context of the pandemic, countries should adopt the concept of a community of common health for humankind and strive to include refugees in their national health systems, epidemic responses and vaccination programmes. Developed countries should honour their aid commitments, support the vaccination programmes of host developing countries and ensure the accessibility and the affordability of vaccines. UNCHR needed to strengthen its cooperation with WHO to prepare for a possible resurgence of the pandemic in the coming winter.

77. In order to help Afghanistan with reconstruction and development, China had announced an aid package of 200 million yuan, including an initial 3 million doses of vaccine. The countries responsible for the current situation in that country should do some serious soul-searching and take concrete action to ease the difficulties facing the Afghan people. Neighbouring countries such as Pakistan and Iran deserved recognition for their assistance to Afghan refugees.

78. Reflecting the importance it attached to international cooperation on the refugee issue, China had supported African countries in fighting the pandemic, through its South-South assistance fund. It would continue its humanitarian cooperation with UNHCR and supported its efforts to improve refugee governance.

79. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that he very much appreciated the increase in the financial contribution of Austria. He thanked Austria for noting his Office's investments in education.

80. He was grateful to Spain for strengthening its capacity to deal with asylum applications. He recognized the role Spain had played in MIRPS and in response to the Venezuelan refugee crisis and was grateful for its attention to matters relating to women and girls and sexual and reproductive health.

81. UNHCR would continue to work with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to deal with the obstacles preventing the voluntary return of Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons. He agreed that more support needed to be provided in the areas of return inside the country itself and he appreciated the legislative efforts to that end.

82. He thanked Saudi Arabia for its determination to remain a generous donor to UNHCR operations.

83. The strong support of China for the global compact on refugees was always welcome. He appreciated its representative's comments on the need to include refugees in vaccination campaigns and to support campaigns through better vaccine equity.

84. It was important to support Cameroon in its work to include refugees in services and in the labour market. UNHCR would continue to support Cameroon and its neighbours through tripartite agreements.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.