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Summary record of the 736th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Monday, 4 October 2020, at 9.30 a.m.

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 09.40 a.m.

Opening of the session, adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters
(A/AC.96/LXXII/1)

1. **The Chair** declared open the seventy-second session of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and welcomed a new member of the Executive Committee, Malawi. The continued growth and broad geographical representation of the Executive Committee, which now had 107 members, was welcome, particularly in view of the global challenges facing the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which called for broad and cohesive responses.

2. The number of persons around the world who had been forced from their homes had more than doubled since 2010 to reach 82 million. In 2020 alone, 11 million persons had been displaced due to emergency situations and continuing conflicts. The resulting challenges for humanitarian organizations were significant and had been complicated by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The global compact on refugees was proving vital; States and other stakeholders were encouraged to sustain momentum in that regard, including through implementation of the commitments made at the Global Refugee Forum in 2019 and during the lead up to the High-level Officials Meeting due to take place in December 2021. The Executive Committee should play its role as a catalyst in that respect.

3. *The agenda was adopted.*

4. *A short film entitled A Letter to My Future Self – Foni Jones was projected.*

Statement by the High Commissioner

5. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the world was experiencing a difficult period, with multiple crises erupting or worsening daily. The COVID-19 pandemic had demonstrated the interconnectedness of individuals, yet the world had failed to share vaccines. Insufficient action was being taken in response to the climate emergency as consumption and production destroyed the planet shared by all. Men were fighting, at particular cost to women and children, and communities, countries and regions were being shattered by conflict. Humanity was clearly heading in the wrong direction, despite all indications of the need to change course and cooperate. Egoistic politics that embraced a “me first” approach, while helpful to win elections, had been disastrous in terms of forging effective global responses to global threats and undermined the very ideals espoused in the Charter of the United Nations. The human consequences of such action, and inaction, were evident in the forced displacement and humanitarian and refugee crises that affected those who were marginalized and excluded by such an approach.

6. The failure to deal equitably with the COVID-19 pandemic had resulted in a world divided between the inoculated and the exposed, with disastrous consequences for those on the margins of society. Persons working in the informal sector, including refugees, had been the first to lose their jobs, while women had suffered the most, given reports of increased gender-based violence and countless girls unable to return to school. In Lebanon, 55 per cent of refugees had been living in extreme poverty prior to the pandemic; that figure had since increased to 90 per cent, and 45 per cent of their Lebanese hosts had also fallen into poverty. There were growing overlaps between climate change and forced displacement – approximately 90 per cent of mandate refugees and 70 per cent of internally displaced persons were from the countries most vulnerable to the climate emergency. Unchecked, unresolved conflicts had led to a devastating rise in the number of persons forcibly displaced in the previous decade and 1 million children had been born into exile in the previous three years. Countless other persons had died far from home. Those trends called for robust conflict resolution efforts, to avoid reaching the figure of 100 million forcibly displaced persons.

7. Conflict continued to be the greatest problem faced by UNHCR. Millions of Afghans had been uprooted for more than 40 years and new developments had created new challenges. His visit to Afghanistan the previous month had made clear the need for large-scale,

unconditional humanitarian assistance, rapid solutions to prevent the collapse of public services and the economy, and constructive engagement with the Taliban on key rights issues, including women's and minority rights. Those solutions needed to be achieved within weeks to avoid aggravating the crisis, which would lead, in all likelihood, to extensive internal, and possibly external, displacement. He shared the concerns of neighbouring countries in that regard, especially the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan, whose hospitality had been stretched to the limit, and of countries such as Turkey, which hosted 300,000 Afghan refugees in addition to over 3.5 million Syrian refugees. While he continued to count on the continued generosity of those host countries, he joined with their plea to take all possible action to prevent another Afghan crisis, and for greater international assistance to strengthen their responses and preparedness.

8. Two further examples demonstrated how unresolved conflicts magnified situations of forced displacement and challenged the capacity of humanitarian organizations. In the Central Sahel, the complex links between development, good governance, climate action and security must be addressed simultaneously, alongside increased humanitarian assistance, to address the consequences of a growing crisis, which included forced displacement. The parties to the conflict in Ethiopia must abandon military confrontation in favour of political negotiations in order to prevent the humanitarian crisis in Tigray and other regions from spiralling out of control and leading to greater forced displacement, in a context in which aid personnel faced unacceptable difficulties, as the recent expulsion of humanitarian staff had proved. In other places, too, the absence of avenues for reaching solutions trapped civilians in conflict, in situations that humanitarian aid could not solve, such as in Yemen and the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

9. Some parts of the world had rejected refugees, including through walls and violent pushbacks, refusals by powerful countries to rescue persons at sea, increasingly restrictive laws, greater use of detention, including of children, and xenophobic rhetoric. Proposals to outsource asylum obligations to other countries were a fundamental breach of basic responsibility sharing and a source of concern, as were instances of States encouraging refugees and migrants to make dangerous journeys to other countries for political ends unrelated to those persons' need for protection. While so-called mixed movements were complex phenomena and States were entitled and obliged to manage their borders, the indiscriminate rejection of persons crossing borders, including on public health or security grounds, was incompatible with the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and other international laws. Good border management did not preclude the fair and fast processing of asylum claims or the admittance and support of persons in need of international protection. Those not in need of international protection or deserving of other humanitarian considerations could be returned in full compliance with their human rights and dignity. The New Pact on Migration and Asylum, proposed by the European Commission, while not perfect, presented a final chance for Europe to agree on a common system. Discussion concerning movements from and within Central America and Mexico must also be pursued. The comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework provided one forum in which to craft responses and seek solutions, while UNHCR continued to engage with countries in the region, including the United States of America, on strengthening asylum systems, stabilizing displacement flows and ensuring that international protection was granted to those who needed it.

10. In previous years, he had reported on efforts to seek solutions even when peacemaking was a work in progress, since hosts bore a heavy responsibility in protecting and assisting refugees. That was the case with the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, for example, the Burundian refugees in the United Republic of Tanzania and other countries, and the Somali refugees in Kenya. Stronger support for host countries must be coupled with redoubled efforts to find just, dignified and durable solutions at the source of those crises. For example, some Syrian refugees and a large number of displaced persons had returned to their areas of origin in the Syrian Arab Republic, where they received minimal support; others hesitated to return due to fears of poverty and deprivation. He therefore reiterated his plea for more humanitarian assistance and greater support for critical services and infrastructure, like health and education, for those returning to the Syrian Arab Republic. Meanwhile, UNHCR would continue to work with the Syrian Government to remove obstacles to return, including in the areas of safety, security and rights. The importance of donors staying the course to support

Syrian refugees and their host communities could not be overstated and would enable the continued generosity of host countries, especially Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon and Egypt.

11. Progress had been made in some contexts, such as South Sudan and Sudan, where, under the leadership of the two governments and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), with the support of the World Bank and the European Union, among others, UNHCR was stepping up its response to arrive at solutions for more than 7 million refugees and displaced persons. On a recent visit to Juba and Khartoum he had observed the two Governments' commitment to making progress in that regard – a commitment that had been translated into national strategies and must be extended to States in the region and other partners and donors. In other places, temporary solutions – pending voluntary repatriation or other permanent outcomes – had allowed for protection and dignified lives in exile and had strengthened social cohesion with host communities in countries of asylum. The decision made in Colombia to grant temporary protection status to over 1.7 million Venezuelans was exemplary. Alongside the benefits to Venezuelans in Colombia, the Colombian Government had highlighted the security and economic benefits of that decision to the State. Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, Peru, the United States and Uruguay were following suit and working to regularize or offer temporary protection to Venezuelan refugees and migrants. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNHCR would continue to support those and other host States through a platform with more than 300 partners and in growing cooperation with international financial institutions. He strongly advocated for solutions to forced displacement, even at a time of multiple crises, and welcomed the focus on solutions by the High-level Panel on Internal Displacement. Opportunities for solutions were present in Colombia, Mozambique and Iraq, and UNHCR stood ready to provide expertise and resources for that purpose.

12. Given that resettlement was a solution that had been much neglected in past years, the United States Government's intention to raise the resettlement quota to 250,000 refugees from 2022 was welcome. Taking note of States that had maintained or increased their resettlement programmes – including Canada, Sweden and Norway – he encouraged all States to increase their quotas and expedite departures, as a gesture of responsibility sharing. Many States, such as Mexico, Italy and Canada, had implemented third-country solutions, known as complementary pathways, to welcome specific categories of persons such as students or athletes, or the United Kingdom and Australia, to help skilled refugees gain access to work permits. The Government of the Netherlands had pioneered remote processing of family reunification applications. Further efforts by States were both needed and possible.

13. He welcomed the accession of Iceland and Togo to the statelessness conventions and work by States, including Chile, Kenya, Namibia and Uzbekistan, to eradicate statelessness. The greatest opportunity for solutions came when peace was achieved and countries of origin and asylum worked together to find solutions for displaced persons. The Government of Côte d'Ivoire had set an example, alongside the Governments of Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania and Togo, in demonstrating the political will to implement a comprehensive road map of solutions for Ivorian refugees, some of whom had been displaced for decades. The aim was to promote further voluntary repatriation and reintegration of Ivorian refugees and support the acquisition of permanent residency by those wishing to stay in host countries. That regional effort should be applauded. In the light of the fundamental and durable changes in Côte d'Ivoire, he was pleased to recommend a general cessation of refugee status for Ivorian refugees, to take effect on 30 June 2022. In the meantime, UNHCR would continue to stand with Ivorians and strengthen the support provided to States in the region as they implemented the solutions strategy and cessation clauses, including by helping them ensure that the required documentation was made available. Strong donor support was needed, including from development actors, for all countries concerned.

14. Since the introduction of the global compact on refugees, the "whole of society" approach had borne fruit in a number of areas, including the more than 1,400 pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum in 2019, which the High-level Officials Meeting would take stock of in December 2021. Among the Forum's positive outcomes were the three regional platforms – the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework, the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries and the IGAD Support Platform in the East and Horn of

Africa – which had proved useful in taking a regional approach to refugee responses and the search for solutions, including in times of crisis. They would soon be joined by a fourth platform that would address displacement related to the Central African Republic.

15. The global compact had brought displacement into a more prominent position on the development agenda, and refugees were now included in development organizations' programmes and interventions for economic growth and poverty reduction. That had an impact on the Office's work, for development actors could meet the medium and longer-term needs of refugees and host communities in a way that humanitarian assistance could not. It had also helped improve data collection and evidence-based analysis of trends in forced displacement through the UNHCR-World Bank Joint Data Centre.

16. That cooperation had advanced the inclusion agenda, a centrepiece of the global compact and a key driver of pledges at the Global Refugee Forum. Governments accepting displacement-related development assistance had been able to include refugees in national programmes and services even before durable solutions were found, thereby raising the standard of living of both refugees and host communities.

17. The World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and the African and Asian development banks had all committed resources to support host countries. They were additional resources, which complemented humanitarian assistance and the interventions of other United Nations partners aimed at strengthening the resilience of displaced populations yet did not detract from development aid destined for any specific country. He called on development actors to increase the share of grants made available to refugee-hosting countries so that both host communities and refugees, who had all suffered the consequences of COVID-19, could be included in social and economic support packages.

18. Another outcome of the compact and the Forum had been unprecedented growth in support from the private sector and private individuals. Businesses were contributing expertise and know-how, while the number of private individuals giving to UNHCR had doubled since 2015, standing at nearly 3 million donors and accounting for around 11 per cent of total income (over \$535 million) in 2020.

19. He was grateful for the continued support of Governments, and especially that of the largest donors, the United States, the European Commission and Germany, and the support of the donors of unearmarked funding. The previous year's total income had come close to an unprecedented \$5 billion.

20. One significant Forum-related success had been the cooperation between States, development actors, educational institutions and other partners in supporting refugees' access to tertiary education. Despite the pandemic, the proportion of young refugees enrolled in higher education now stood at 5 per cent, up from 1 per cent a few years previously. It was important not to lose momentum in investing in refugee education.

21. To better structure its work to curb climate displacement, UNHCR had recently published its first Strategic Framework on Climate Action. That framework rested on three pillars: support for States on law and policy on climate-related displacement; strengthening of operations to respond to the adverse effects of climate change, help the displaced and their hosts resist climate shocks, and prepare for future climate-induced population movements; and reduction of the Office's own carbon footprint.

22. Work already under way included reforestation projects, the use of more environmentally and locally appropriate shelter products, solar solutions and the use of predictive technologies to better prepare for future displacement. UNHCR was also taking innovative steps to reduce its own emissions and was working with the private sector to obtain cheap, clean energy for its offices. With the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), it had established a green financing facility that would permit all 530 field offices to transition to clean energy by 2030, by which time also much of the global fleet of 6,000 vehicles would have been replaced by electric vehicles. He urged other donors to join that effort.

23. Internally, matters relating to integrity remained a priority, notably fighting sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment, and continuing efforts to achieve gender parity,

promote diversity and inclusion in the workforce and avoid any form of racism and discrimination.

24. Much work had also been done on reforming processes and systems, in the interests of efficient decentralization and effective operations. Decision-making was being decentralized as close to the points of delivery as possible, and risk management and oversight were being improved. A suite of enhanced interfaces would link human resources, finance and other systems in order to better support operations. Other reforms were gradually reducing the time UNHCR personnel and partners – especially non-governmental organizations (NGOs) – spent on paperwork so that they could focus on substantive work. The organization-wide data and digital transformation effort was intended to inform decision-making, including as part of the improved planning and budgeting processes, which were now driven from the ground up in order to ensure better linkages between resource allocation and impact.

25. The five strategic directions - protect, respond, empower, include, solve – launched in 2017 to guide UNHCR in delivering on its mandate, remained effective and would therefore be renewed for another five years. Current challenges, however, called for greater investment in a number of areas, and further discussions in that regard were being planned.

26. Throughout its 70 years, UNHCR had been on the front line in many emergencies, standing with refugees, the displaced and the stateless and striving to protect and assist them and find solutions to their plight.

27. He wished to pay tribute to UNHCR colleagues past and present who had given so much in that service, often involving great sacrifice. In recent months 18 colleagues had been lost to COVID-19 alone. He also paid tribute to the Office's close partners in United Nations agencies, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, national and international NGOs, and especially a growing cadre of community-based – often women-led or refugee-led – organizations.

28. Despite the terrifying challenges it was important not to lose heart, but rather to take inspiration from the courage and resilience shown by uprooted people. It was necessary to work together with courage and humility, and in a true spirit of solidarity, putting the common good before individual and national considerations, for there to be a chance to succeed.

29. **Mr. Sougouri** (Burkina Faso), speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, said that the COVID-19 pandemic and the general increase in forced displacement around the world had seriously strained the international protection mandate of UNHCR. The Group of African States commended the Office for its resilience and adaptability in responding to global and regional emergencies with limited resources, implementing a variety of measures to address the needs of vulnerable persons of concern in areas such as food security, education, public health and shelter.

30. The problem of internal displacement was becoming ever more acute in Africa: in the Sahel there were around 7 million internally displaced persons. In addition, refugees generally in the region had been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Yet UNHCR, determined to implement its strategic priorities, had adjusted to the context and, in collaboration with the concerned countries, the regional integration organizations and the other actors on the ground, had managed to find appropriate responses. It had also continued to ensure the voluntary return of thousands of refugees or facilitate their resettlement and integration in national systems despite the closing of borders by States wishing to stem the spread of COVID-19.

31. The Group of African States was nevertheless saddened by the hardship caused by the worldwide increase in forced displacement. Africa remained one of the hardest hit continents, and the latest alarming figures served to highlight the need to address the root causes of the problem in Africa. In accordance with the principle of international solidarity promoted by the global compact on refugees, he called on the international community to support home-grown African solutions, which could represent a more sustainable response to African humanitarian challenges. Humanitarian action should be linked to the establishment of a political environment that favoured economic and social development. The Office's

international protection mandate required durable solutions to protracted situations. Voluntary repatriation remained the best solution and he commended the Office's work with countries of origin to ensure a safe, dignified and sustainable return.

32. He welcomed African countries' efforts to address statelessness, and to implement the global compact, by means of legal and institutional measures. The Group encouraged UNHCR to continue to assist African countries in meeting their international commitments, by mobilizing the necessary financial and technical support from the various stakeholders.

33. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, he condemned the persistence of discriminatory, xenophobic and sexist practices against refugees, and particularly against the most vulnerable among them, namely women and girls, children, older persons and persons with disabilities. National vaccination programmes should take due account of persons of concern to UNHCR as a matter of good practice.

34. African countries had demonstrated their firm political will to widen the range of durable solutions for refugees, but in order to do so, and to allow UNHCR to effectively discharge its mandate, adequate resources were needed. The Group of African States reiterated its appeal to the international community to secure adequate and flexible funding for UNHCR operations in Africa and encouraged UNHCR in its efforts to expand its donor base. It further appealed to the international community to increase unearmarked funds with a view to fully covering the 2021–2022 biennial programme budgets.

35. **Mr. Gamaleldin** (Egypt), speaking on behalf of the Group of Arab States, said that the Group was concerned at the persistence of migrant and refugee flows. Given that developing countries hosted more than 86 per cent of those flows, it was necessary to redouble efforts to share the burden and provide humanitarian assistance.

36. Despite the significant economic challenges arising from the pandemic, the Arab States had continued to protect refugees fleeing old and new conflicts, in accordance with international law. The crises in the region had resulted in 17 million refugees, around half of them children. It was a heavy burden to shoulder, one that had economic, social and other effects. Increasing numbers of people had fallen into poverty and yet, as part of their COVID-19 response strategies, the host countries had nevertheless tried to provide refugees with health services. In partnership with UNCHR and other international organizations, they had ensured access to school, provided identity papers, protected women and girl refugees and made provision for employment. Voluntary contributions to charities had been encouraged and, with the support of the Islamic Development Bank, zakat funds had reached more than 1 million refugees in the previous year.

37. For those reasons it was important to preserve the humanitarian nature of UNCHR and ensure that it distanced itself from political controversy. UNCHR must avoid drafting any document that might lend itself to misinterpretation.

38. There should be vaccines for all against COVID-19, and refugees and internally displaced persons should also have access to vaccination and health services in host communities.

39. In the view of the Group of Arab States, the solutions and responses proposed by the Executive Committee were appropriate. He welcomed the convening of the High-level Officials Meeting in December to match pledges made at the 2019 Global Forum on Refugees. Though private-sector and other bodies were to participate in the meeting, Governments should continue to play a central role.

40. Finding durable solutions to the problem of migrants and refugees was very important but so was voluntary return, particularly in North Africa and the Middle East. Resettlement to third countries had fallen short of expectations, so cooperation must continue, not least to avoid the closure of borders. Reintegration of refugees must also be facilitated. The tasks should be shared.

41. The difficulties and the problems arising from climate change could exacerbate migration phenomena. That was why refugee status needed to be determined in accordance with international rules. A distinction should be made between those who were displaced for that reason and those who could not be considered refugees.

42. **Ms. Knudsen** (Observer for the European Union), speaking also on behalf of the candidate countries Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia, said that the European Union was deeply concerned at the recent developments in Afghanistan. It stood by the Afghan people and remained committed to supporting them in their own country and neighbouring countries. In addition to enhancing the humanitarian response inside Afghanistan and in the region, support could be provided in the form of resettlement, and by permitting humanitarian admission on a voluntary basis for vulnerable persons such as women and children.

43. The European Union was concerned at the disproportionate effect of the pandemic on refugees, asylum seekers and other persons of concern to UNHCR and commended UNCHR for consistently advocating the inclusion of such persons in measures to mitigate the negative impact of the pandemic. Since December 2020, the European Union had exported nearly 700 million vaccine doses to 55 countries. With €3.2 billion in pledges, it remained, along with the United States, the main financial donor to COVAX, the vaccines pillar of the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator.

44. The European Union was particularly concerned about the impact of the pandemic on women and girls, including the alarming increase of sexual and gender-based violence, and other forms of violence and abuse. It urged UNCHR to step up prevention and mitigation efforts and to support access to sexual and reproductive health-care services and mental health and psychosocial care. It was alarmed by the disruption of education for refugees, particularly girls' education, and encouraged UNCHR and States to increase access to education and to livelihood opportunities, and to address the needs of persons in vulnerable situations.

45. The Executive Committee conclusions on international protection and durable solutions in the context of a public health emergency were timely and highly relevant and would send an important message of support and guidance. She hoped that the proposed text would be adopted by consensus.

46. The right to seek asylum and the principle of non-refoulement were enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. In recent months attempts had been made by States to exploit the vulnerability of human beings for political purposes. The instrumentalization of migrants and refugees by States was unacceptable and a violation of fundamental European values and principles. The European Union condemned any attempt to instrumentalize migrants and refugees by orchestrating their flow across European Union external borders for political motives.

47. While reiterating its commitment to saving lives and supporting those in need of international protection, as confirmed in the new pact on migration and asylum proposed by the European Commission, the European Union also wished to ensure the effective return of those with no right to stay, and to step up efforts to combat migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings.

48. It was important not to lose the momentum generated by the first Global Refugee Forum towards strengthening global solidarity and burden and responsibility sharing. She looked forward to the High-level Officials Meeting, which would be an occasion for taking stock of the commitments and pledges made and for identifying opportunities and priorities for the future.

49. The European Union appreciated the High Commissioner's internal transformation initiative, which had grown into a comprehensive reform of structures, systems and processes. It welcomed the fact that regionalization had helped to deliver quality responses during the pandemic, by providing greater support to operations. It also commended the efforts to strengthen integrity and oversight functions, risk management and programming based on results. The European Union encouraged UNCHR to continue clarifying roles and responsibilities with other United Nations entities as well as investing in new partnerships.

50. **Mr. Israfilov** (Azerbaijan), speaking on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, said that the Movement's member States wished to express their support for the global humanitarian role played by UNHCR in addressing the problem of refugees with a view to achieving durable solutions. The Non-Aligned Movement reiterated its deep concern

at the rising number of refugees worldwide, displaced by conflict and disaster, and urged Governments to take responsibility for providing assistance to refugees and to host communities and countries. Voluntary, safe and dignified repatriation of refugees on the basis of free and informed choice remained the preferred solution in most cases. The priority was to create conditions for such repatriation, while fully respecting the principle of non-refoulement.

51. Measures to alleviate the suffering of refugees and forcibly displaced persons must be in line with the established principle of burden and responsibility sharing. Eliminating the root causes of displacement was the best means of achieving the durable solutions sought under the global compact on refugees, including planning from the outset of a refugee situation. States bore primary responsibility for promoting durable solutions for internally displaced persons, including their voluntary return in conditions of safety and dignity. Any measures that prevented displaced persons from returning to their homes, in particular illegal settlement policies, should be avoided. In line with the principle of burden and responsibility sharing, the Non-Aligned Movement called for international donors to provide adequate and immediate humanitarian assistance to countries hosting large numbers of refugees, including with regard to vaccines for refugees against COVID-19. It expressed its strong condemnation of unilateral coercive measures against States members of the Movement that were imposed in violation of the Charter of the United Nations and international law and urged States to take action against such measures with a view to ensuring effective national responses to the pandemic.

52. **Mr. Bessler** (Switzerland) said that UNHCR and the global compact on refugees were more crucial than ever for forcibly displaced populations. While the COVID-19 pandemic had changed the world, the core principles of the compact remained fundamental to the protection and assistance of refugees and host populations. Under the leadership of the High Commissioner, UNHCR staff had made remarkable efforts towards adopting innovative solutions to enable them to reach the most vulnerable during the pandemic. The new practices that had been introduced, which gave refugees themselves and their local partners a central role, should be retained and strengthened, even when the pandemic was over.

53. Following the lockdowns, ensuring that millions of refugee and displaced children returned to school was a key challenge. It was difficult to think of a more durable solution than investing in the education of minors. During the Global Refugee Forum, Switzerland had committed to the Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies, which sought to draw on the potential of “International Geneva” by fostering political dialogue and synergies between stakeholders in the field of education in emergencies. There had been considerable progress with the Hub: it now had 26 members and its new offices would soon be opened. Switzerland had also worked to uphold the resettlement commitments it undertook at the Forum and had restarted resettlement in August 2020, once travel restrictions had been lifted. The country had also, until June 2021, co-hosted the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement and would, in December of the same year, be hosting the High-level Officials Meeting, at which it would be important to identify promising strategies and practices, along with areas in which efforts needed to be redoubled; the Government was fully committed to the success of that meeting. Moreover, Switzerland and UNHCR had collaborated to create the Geneva Technical Hub, which involved Swiss academics and experts in finding innovative, environmentally friendly and durable solutions for displaced populations and their host communities.

54. Switzerland strongly condemned the expulsion of United Nations humanitarian workers from Ethiopia and underscored the importance of unimpeded access to the areas of the greatest humanitarian need. The Government welcomed the firm commitment of UNHCR to Afghanistan but was concerned about the country’s worsening crisis and had provided an additional 33 million Swiss francs, part of which was for UNHCR and the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees. The Government welcomed the report of the High-level Panel on Internal Displacement and called on all stakeholders to redouble their efforts to implement its recommendations.

55. **Mr. Aselo Okito Wa Koy** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that, owing to persistent armed conflicts in the eastern part of the country, there were over 900,000 refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo divided between countries such as Angola,

Zambia, the United Republic of Tanzania, the Republic of the Congo, Uganda and South Africa; those conflicts had also resulted in large numbers of internally displaced persons. The eruption of the Nyirogongo volcano in Nord-Kivu Province had caused further internal population displacements. Despite the Government's efforts, with support from the international community and fellow citizens acting out of solidarity, the needs of internally displaced persons were not being met, which was making the country less appealing to potential returnees. In response to that situation, a state of emergency had been declared in Nord-Kivu and Ituri Provinces in May 2021. The resulting military operations, conducted in some host areas in the east of the country, were aimed at tracking and neutralizing armed groups; numerous areas had been recovered and were now able to host returnees.

56. The Democratic Republic of the Congo called on the Governments of the Republic of the Congo, Namibia, Burundi, and Rwanda to revitalize the respective tripartite agreements already reached with those countries and with UNHCR in order to enable the voluntary, safe and dignified return of refugees. The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo planned to take advantage of the return of peace in the Central African Republic to repatriate, on a voluntary basis, the Central African refugees living in Nord-Ubangi and Sud-Ubangi Provinces. His Government called on all neighbouring countries, in turn, to do everything in their power to facilitate the return home of fellow countrymen and countrywomen who were currently being hosted in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Meanwhile, the Government was prepared to consider asylum applications on a case-by-case basis. The Democratic Republic of the Congo took the view that refugees and displaced persons must be educated and involved in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including vaccination.

57. **Mr. Maúrtua de Romaña** (Peru), speaking in a pre-recorded video message, said that the devastating consequences of COVID-19 pandemic often far exceeded developing countries' institutional and financial capacities to respond; it was calculated that approximately 1,000 persons in an irregular situation had entered Peru during the pandemic. Nevertheless, Peru was hosting over 1 million Venezuelan citizens and had officially offered to take in any Afghan families who reached the country. That decision constituted a major national effort; since humanitarian crises and the resulting migration were a shared responsibility, it was essential for the international community to support the efforts of host countries, in accordance with the principles of international law. Accordingly, Peru urged donor countries, UNHCR and the competent international organizations to redouble their efforts to ensure that each country received non-reimbursable funding in proportion to the burden that it bore.

58. **Ms. Kamissoko Camara** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that, despite the difficulties relating to the pandemic, Côte d'Ivoire, in partnership with UNHCR, continued offering refugees of various nationalities assistance and protection. She wished to reaffirm the Ivorian people's solidarity with the countries of the Sahel, where population groups were being forcibly displaced by terrorist attacks. Over 5,000 nationals of Burkina Faso had found refuge in north-eastern Côte d'Ivoire. With a view to fair burden and responsibility sharing, she called for international solidarity to enable her Government and UNHCR to meet the needs of vulnerable populations effectively.

59. Thanks to the return of peace and to national reconciliation policies, over 90 per cent of Ivorian refugees had returned to Côte d'Ivoire. The Government welcomed the High Commissioner's recommendation of a general cessation of refugee status for Ivorian refugees to take effect on 30 June 2022 and would be pleased to welcome him to the country in the coming months. The Government wished to express its thanks to those of its neighbouring countries that had signed a joint statement and formulated recommendations on realization of the cessation of refugee status. While they were free to return to Côte d'Ivoire at any time, any Ivorian refugees who had opted for local integration would be furnished with civil registry and identity documents. The Government would enhance its cooperation with UNHCR on combating statelessness, including through civil registry reforms and the introduction in 2021 of two commissions, for statelessness determination and for appeals against negative decisions.

60. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), responding to some of the main points raised, said that, while it was sadly true that many of the crises that the Committee would be discussing in the days ahead were taking place in Africa, it was also

true that some of the most outstanding examples of solidarity were to be found on that continent, often among populations with only very limited resources of their own. He wished to express his thanks to all Africans and their Governments for that remarkable solidarity and his support for the home-grown solutions that they were seeking.

61. He would like to reassure the Arab nations that the goals and actions of UNHCR would always remain apolitical, even though, due to the nature of forced displacement, it was inevitably called upon to work in politicized situations. Should any UNHCR documents be perceived as being too political, that was certainly not intentional and he stood ready to address any concerns. He also wished to note that the shift in favour of a broader approach to refugee crises and an expanded partnership base that encompassed the private sector and academia should not detract from the responsibility of Governments to support the work of UNHCR and the search for solutions.

62. The European Union was to be thanked for the extraordinary support that it provided to humanitarian operations worldwide and he urged it to continue to pursue responsibility-sharing initiatives such as resettlement. He agreed that the new pact on migration and asylum proposed by the European Commission offered a benchmark for a common approach to dealing with complex mixed migration flows.

63. In addition, he wished to emphasize the urgent need to bridge the dramatic disparity between rates of vaccination against COVID-19 in the richest countries and rates in the poorest countries, as highlighted in the statement delivered on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. That need was especially intense in countries with large numbers of refugees and, consequently, additional vaccination and health-care responsibilities.

64. As always, he wished to stress the importance that UNHCR attached to cooperation with Switzerland, in innovation, technology and education, among other areas. He thanked the country for its support as a host in Geneva and a partner throughout the world and reiterated its call to ensure that the High-level Officials Meeting scheduled to take place in December was a success.

65. He seconded the appeal of the Democratic Republic of Congo for continued support in the search for solutions to the problem of displacement, notably in the form of help to re-establish tripartite arrangements on the voluntary repatriation of refugees with a number of countries, and wished to acknowledge the very significant progress that Cote d'Ivoire had achieved in signing, with countries hosting Ivoirian refugees, the joint declaration that should lead to the cessation of their refugee status in 2022. The declaration marked a milestone in the country's history and thus constituted perhaps the most notable of the various advances he had mentioned in his opening statement.

66. Lastly, he wished to thank Peru for hosting more than a million refugees and migrants from Venezuela and to second the call of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Peru for the mobilization of greater resources for countries in the region that were hosting Venezuelan refugees.

67. **Mr. Sultan** (Pakistan), speaking via video link, said that Pakistan welcomed the international community's efforts to galvanize much-needed humanitarian assistance for the people of Afghanistan. Another crisis was looming, but, with enhanced engagement and generous economic support, a further episode in the vicious cycle of instability, displacement and exodus could be averted. While the most immediate priority was to address the situation inside Afghanistan, the international community must also increase assistance for refugee-hosting countries and should identify new development financing tools that served to mitigate the financial burden that they were forced to assume. A pragmatic approach, anchored in the pursuit of durable solutions and effective prevention, was necessary. Conditions conducive to voluntary return, which was the best and preferred solution, would also be needed, including, most importantly, an environment free from violence and political, social and economic stabilization. Sustained engagement with Afghanistan was indispensable to create those conditions.

68. Pakistan continued to provide food, medicines and other forms of humanitarian assistance inside Afghanistan, in addition to having welcomed millions of Afghan refugees over the years. Despite facing internal economic and public health challenges, it had

continued to demonstrate unparalleled generosity and hospitality throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, maintaining inclusive policies under which Afghan refugees had access to public health services, including vaccination against COVID-19, food and cash assistance, education and livelihood opportunities. The efficiency of its refugee operations should be further enhanced by the Documentation Renewal and Information Verification Exercise (DRIVE) currently under way, which would allow for the biometric registration of around 1.5 million refugees before the end of 2021. The enriched and updated information that DRIVE would provide would also be helpful in ensuring dignified resettlement and reintegration when return became possible; Pakistan looked forward to the conclusion of a time-bound, well-resourced and mutually agreed road map for the repatriation of the Afghan refugees that it was hosting.

69. **Mr. Onek** (Uganda) said that the COVID-19 response in Uganda had been all-inclusive and that all refugees had access to vaccination. The country had received vaccination doses through the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility, but, while those donor contributions were greatly appreciated, more were needed. So far it had been possible to vaccinate only a small percentage of the population, and it was therefore crucial that UNHCR supported national efforts to obtain those life-saving vaccines for low-income refugee-hosting countries like Uganda. At present, Uganda was accommodating over a million refugees and asylum seekers, having maintained its open-door policy despite the COVID-19-related border restrictions and lockdown and welcomed over 80,000 additional refugees since the start of the pandemic. Firmly believing that no one chose to flee their country and become a refugee, Uganda had agreed to temporarily accommodate Afghan refugees and other nationals at risk following the recent developments in Afghanistan, had been one of the first countries to implement the comprehensive refugee response framework and was committed to creating an environment in which refugees enjoyed similar services to their host communities. However, it was concerned that a shift in its refugee-related policies might become necessary if refugee funding continued to decrease in spite of the increasing numbers.

70. Environmental protection, with an emphasis on alternative energy sources and improved housing, remained central to the country's refugee operations, and, in that context, Uganda was grateful for the support of traditional partners, including the World Bank, which, it hoped, would help it to further improve infrastructures for its refugee and host communities. At the same time, believing that return was the most durable solution, Uganda would continue to work towards that goal with its neighbours in the region, including South Sudan and Burundi. Lastly, Uganda urged UNCHR to continue working to improve safety and to achieve a balanced regional and gender representation among its staff, taking affirmative action in favour of candidates from low-income refugee-hosting countries as needed.

71. **Mr. Hassan** (Djibouti) said that Djibouti had been welcoming refugees since its independence and refugees currently accounted for more than 3 per cent of its population, constituting, in percentage terms, one of the largest refugee populations in the world. Despite internal social and economic pressures, Djibouti endeavoured to ensure a dignified welcome for all refugees and asylum seekers and to include them in national programmes, including the National Development Plan, and had achieved progress towards greater inclusion in a number of areas. For example, in implementation of the Djibouti Declaration on Refugee Education, two cohorts of young refugees who had successfully obtained their baccalaureates were currently studying at the University of Djibouti; around 11,500 refugees had benefited from social welfare programmes including comprehensive medical insurance; refugees now had the possibility of registering themselves for work opportunities; and a register of refugees with disabilities was being developed that should enable the authorities to cater more effectively for their specific needs. The Government of Djibouti was also considering the possibility of organizing a national conference to share good practices for refugee inclusion in November 2021.

72. Despite the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, Djibouti had continued to provide all essential services to both the established refugee population and new arrivals, according particular attention to women, girls, migrants, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups in its COVID-19 test, trace and treatment plan and its vaccination campaign. In total, 5 per cent of vaccines received had been allocated to the refugee and

migrant population. With support from UNHCR and other international partners, the country had established a contingency plan that called for external financing to support preparations for the new influx of migrants that the current crisis in the region was expected to generate. In that context, he wished to emphasize the importance of responsibility sharing and predictable, multi-year, non-earmarked funding. He also wished to express his country's concern about the reduction, and in some cases partial stoppage, of the food assistance for refugees that was provided by the World Food Programme. Accordingly, he called for renewed support for the World Food Programme to prevent any prolongation of that trend, as well as increased support for the humanitarian assistance programmes that enabled Djibouti to continue offering international protection to refugees and fostering their inclusion.

73. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), recalling that, in his opening statement, he had called for a redoubling of efforts to prevent a refugee crisis as a result of events in Afghanistan, said that he wished to thank Pakistan for its continued efforts to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance and its generosity in hosting millions of Afghan refugees. He agreed that discussions with the Taliban on complex issues, including the rights of women and minorities, would be needed to prevent implosion. He wished to thank Uganda for continuing to champion an inclusive and environmentally friendly approach to refugee operations and seconded the country's appeal for more COVID-19 vaccines. He acknowledged the need to work together to find solutions to the situation of South Sudanese refugees in particular. He would also like to thank Djibouti which, as a small country hosting large numbers of refugees, had assumed a particularly large burden, and, in that context, wished to reiterate the importance of continued support for the food assistance programmes for refugees run by the World Food Programme, in African countries above all but also in the Middle East.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.