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Summary record of the 737th meeting

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Chair: Ms. Ahmed Hassan (Vice-Chair) (Djibouti)

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In the absence of Ms. Farani Azevêdo (Brazil), Ms. Ahmed Hassan (Djibouti), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

General debate (*continued*)

1. **Ms. Izzo Jackson** (United States of America), speaking via video link, said that the United States was committed to resuming its leading role in refugee resettlement. A robust refugee admissions programme was critical to its humanitarian and national security objectives; it was a touchstone of the current administration's aim of reinstating safe, orderly, humane and lawful migration policies. The United States planned to admit up to 125,000 refugees in fiscal year 2022 (October 2021–September 2022), the highest number in almost 30 years, and she hoped that other Member States would make similar commitments.

2. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic demonstrated that the biggest crises did not respect borders and required collective action. Her Government had supported programmes to address the effects of the pandemic on gender-based violence, mental health and education, and the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration alone had contributed \$447 million to the COVID-19 response in 74 countries; of that sum, \$215 million had been given to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). It had also quadrupled the number of agreements entered into with non-governmental organizations better placed to address specific gaps in the COVID-19 response.

3. Migration and displacement resulting from climate change would only worsen, particularly for vulnerable groups, and an effective, strategic response was required. She commended UNHCR on its strategic framework for climate action.

4. Addressing the protection challenges faced by vulnerable LGBTQI+ persons was a vital part of her Government's commitment to advancing the rights of LGBTQI+ persons around the world. Her Government looked forward to making a commitment related to LGBTQI+ persons of concern at the High-level Officials Meeting in December 2021, which might include additional referral and sponsorship pathways for LGBTQI+ refugees to be resettled in the United States. She pledged its support to the protection of humanitarian workers assisting the forcibly displaced and called on parties to armed conflict to fulfil their obligations under international humanitarian law. The United States would lend its full support to humanitarian organizations, promoting their independence and neutrality.

5. **Mr. Spasovski** (North Macedonia), speaking in a pre-recorded video message, said that North Macedonia greatly valued its long-standing partnership with UNHCR and was committed to adopting global best practices, particularly based on the experience of the European Union. It was a signatory to key international instruments, including the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its Protocol and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. It had also ratified, and strongly supported, the global compact on refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and had met most of the relevant commitments. Despite the fact that Kosovo had been deemed a safe country of origin, North Macedonia continued to welcome refugees from Kosovo.

6. With the active involvement of UNHCR, North Macedonia had been among the first to comply with the European Commission's recommendations with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic and had begun to conduct asylum interviews online, while adhering to the timelines set out in legislation and protecting the health of asylum seekers and staff. The pandemic had not significantly affected cooperation between countries along the Western Balkan route or with European agencies. An operation to monitor the southern border involving police officers from eight European countries had been in place since 2015.

7. The proper implementation of the European Union's New Pact on Migration and Asylum would increase the efficiency of migration management and the security of borders throughout the region; most migrants who entered the Balkans illegally had previously crossed the European Union's external borders illegally, and effective border control at the borders of Greece and Bulgaria with Turkey would reduce numbers. In the face of the impending humanitarian disaster in Afghanistan, his Government had agreed to accept, on a

temporary basis, Afghan civilians who had worked for peace in that country, including employees of the United Nations and their families.

8. **Mr. Dhoulkamal** (Observer for the Comoros) said that thought should be given to whether the world had drawn the correct conclusions from the redrawing of borders and decolonization of the recent past, as well as whether UNHCR possessed the tools necessary to respond to growing and ever-changing humanitarian challenges. It fell to Member States to take stock of forced displacement, a disaster which primarily affected the most vulnerable. No law or force was sufficient to contain the waves of desperate persons seeking to exercise but one right: the right to life. Only collective action by States would be enough to resolve the global issue of forced displacement.

9. The crucial role played by UNHCR was reflected in its support for vital care and protection for those living in extreme hardship. His Government was firmly committed to the policies and instruments required to place human rights at the heart of its actions, as illustrated by its ongoing dialogue with civil society and its work with partners to prepare itself for the effects of migration, a challenge that spared no country. Indeed, the Comoros had recently experienced influxes of refugees from countries of the Great Lakes region and neighbouring States, and his Government was therefore working to ratify and implement legal instruments relating to the rights of refugees and stateless persons.

10. **Mr. Alhada** (Observer for the Niger) said that it fell to all States, international organizations and relevant actors to address forced displacement given the frequent human rights violations that it entailed owing to its links to terrorism and transnational organized crime. His Government reaffirmed its commitment in that regard and wished to convey its gratitude for the actions of UNHCR, in particular the visits by the High Commissioner and initiatives in the countries of the Sahel, where conflict had caused mass migration. The arrival of refugees, internally displaced persons, asylum seekers and returnees in the Niger had reached unprecedented levels and was worsened by the consequences of their lengthy stays in host communities, particularly in terms of health and security.

11. In cooperation with UNHCR, his Government had adopted initiatives to promote refugees' social integration via the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, three aspects that must be addressed simultaneously. A mechanism had been established to implement that approach. Determined to combat terrorism, his Government had adopted a policy of resettling internally displaced persons in their places of origin, which would also ensure the State's effective presence via its representatives and providers of basic social services.

12. Work was under way in relation to the voluntary return of refugees from Nigeria, in partnership with the Nigerian authorities under a tripartite agreement between the two countries and UNHCR. A similar agreement existed with Mali, and his Government had made commitments to increasing coordination between security and humanitarian actors for the protection of displaced persons under the intergovernmental platform known as the Bamako Process. The Niger continued to receive refugees from Libya, many of whom were later settled in countries in Europe and North America; he thanked those countries and encouraged others to follow their example. His Government had recently adopted a national migration policy under which the asylum system was being reformed, and a round table on funding for the related plan of action would soon take place.

13. Only international solidarity would improve the management of forced displacement and thus avert a humanitarian disaster. Unless the situation in the Sahel and surrounding areas stabilized, Africa and Europe would continue to experience mass migration. There was therefore an urgent need to address the root causes of the situation to ensure the safety of all and create the necessary conditions for sustainable development.

14. **Princess Lindiwe** (Observer for Eswatini), commending the work of the High Commissioner in responding to humanitarian crises in conflict zones and the work of UNHCR in Africa to address refugee crises in Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, said that Eswatini would continue to support UNHCR initiatives through its participation in regional groups, such as the Southern African Development Community. Although the plight of refugees and asylum seekers had been neglected during the COVID-19 pandemic, Eswatini had continued to process their applications and provide health care and vaccination to them. The Regional Office for Southern Africa provided ongoing support

to develop the action plan to implement her Government's pledges on refugees and on the eradication of statelessness. The Government had also pledged to strengthen its refugee status determination procedures, and it welcomed the financial and technical assistance received in that regard. Since the adoption of the Refugees Act, cases had been processed efficiently.

15. The Government was committed to protecting the rights and dignity of persons of concern and had continued to hold asylum interviews both in person and remotely during the pandemic. Its pledge concerning livelihoods was being implemented with the support of UNHCR, and it particularly appreciated the appointment of an implementing partner with significant experience in livelihood projects. The pledges made at the 2019 high-level segment on statelessness were being implemented following the approval of a national action plan and consultation with key stakeholders. A study on statelessness, commissioned with the assistance of UNHCR, was ongoing, as was a project to map all individuals in the country so that those at risk of statelessness could be identified. Her country remained open to cooperation, and it pledged its continued support for the work of UNHCR to ensure the protection of asylum seekers, refugees, stateless persons and those at risk of statelessness.

16. **Mr. Mmusi** (Observer for Botswana), speaking in a pre-recorded video message, said that Botswana had received unprecedented numbers of asylum seekers since April 2021. In cooperation with stakeholders, and with technical advice from UNHCR, his Government was working towards a durable solution. It had also adopted measures to provide protection against COVID-19 and care to refugees and asylum seekers, including screening and vaccination. The Government was undertaking a review of key operational matters and had adopted a cash-based initiative to replace the distribution of rations. Consultations with refugees and other stakeholders on that initiative were under way.

17. The efficiency of the refugee status determination process had improved greatly and there were no backlogs. The process was undertaken by the Refugee Advisory Committee, which met regularly, and work was being undertaken with the UNHCR Regional Representative for Southern Africa to organize a capacity-building workshop for Committee members. Refugees in the Dukwi camp received grants for livelihood projects, thereby reducing their reliance on Government rations. The closure of the UNHCR office in Botswana had not caused significant problems; his Government enjoyed a cordial relationship with the Regional Office in Pretoria and welcomed UNHCR's technical support and assistance.

18. **Ms. Kayisire** (Rwanda), speaking via video link, said that the discussion and commitments resulting from the High Commissioner's visit to Rwanda in April 2021 would improve the well-being of persons of concern and environmental protection in refugee camps. Ninety per cent of the approximately 127,000 refugees in Rwanda, who came principally from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi, lived in refugee camps and depended on humanitarian assistance.

19. During the COVID-19 pandemic her Government had continued to assist refugees and asylum seekers, including through: vaccination; the safe and dignified voluntary repatriation of more than 29,000 Burundians, with the ongoing assistance of the authorities of Burundi and UNHCR; the reintegration of around 1,400 Rwandan refugees; the evacuation of 133 refugees and asylum seekers from Libya under an emergency transit mechanism; and the resettlement of almost 63 per cent of the latter in third countries. That mechanism would be extended for two years and the number of refugees and asylum seekers accepted at any given time increased to 700. In response to a decrease in funding for food aid, her Government had provided targeted assistance to the most vulnerable refugees, including an enhanced livelihood programme, with the assistance of the World Food Programme and UNHCR.

20. The Government had made good progress in fulfilling the commitments that it had made at the 2016 Leaders' Summit on Refugees on the eradication of statelessness and at the Global Refugee Forum. Nevertheless, further effort was required to increase employment and economic opportunities for refugees. Her Government remained committed to cooperation on the protection and well-being of persons of concern.

21. **Ms. Baikoua** (Observer for the Central African Republic), said that the response of UNHCR to the COVID-19 pandemic had been remarkable. Her Government was determined

to fulfil its commitment to the approximately 11,000 refugees it hosted, including around 250 recent arrivals from South Sudan who required urgent assistance. Furthermore, there were an estimated 712,000 internally displaced persons in the country.

22. Her Government, in cooperation with UNHCR, had organized the safe and dignified return of around 20,000 Central African citizens. Insecurity had led to the suspension of repatriation operations, and it was hoped that they would resume later that month. The Government's security sector reforms and disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation programme would enable the mass return of refugees and displaced persons to the country. In addition to the distribution of COVID-19 kits, the field offices were working to facilitate returnees' reintegration and to provide them with the necessary identity papers. Regular status determination procedures had been conducted in 2021, and the Government continued to receive asylum requests.

23. The Government had committed to ensuring that the steering committee for durable solutions and strategic committee for the return and reintegration of displaced persons and refugees under the Office of the President were up and running, with the support of UNHCR. She welcomed the initiative to establish a platform to support durable solutions in the Central African Republic. However, the lack of funding for programmes and of development actors in areas where conditions were favourable were a cause for concern. It was vital that greater resources for her country were mobilized.

24. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that he welcomed the restoration of a safe, orderly, humane and lawful migration policy by the United States of America. UNHCR, a long-standing partner of the country, would continue to contribute to those efforts, including with regard to complex issues such as the strengthening of the asylum system. UNHCR was deeply grateful for the country's extraordinary financial support, and its resettlement quota set an extremely important precedent. The United States Government's climate displacement priorities were in keeping with the work of UNHCR.

25. Turning to the statement by the representative of North Macedonia, he commended the Government on its continued examination of asylum claims and protection of refugees during the COVID-19 pandemic and thanked it for its support for the European Union's New Pact on Migration and Asylum; it was important that European States that were not members of the European Union acknowledged the Pact, which would affect the continent as a whole.

26. Although UNHCR programmes in the Comoros, Eswatini and Botswana were relatively small, it was encouraging to hear those States' appreciation for its efforts during the pandemic. He particularly welcomed the representatives' mention of cash-based solutions, technology and pledges relating to livelihoods and statelessness. UNHCR stood ready to provide technical assistance to the Government of the Comoros in ratifying conventions. The Niger was an extremely generous host country, despite experiencing influxes of refugees from several neighbouring countries and its own internal displacement. UNHCR would support the Government's plans to resettle internally displaced persons, ensuring that all resettlement was voluntary. He commended the Government on its ongoing commitment to welcoming refugees from Libya.

27. Similarly, he welcomed the extension by the Government of Rwanda of the emergency transit mechanism for refugees and asylum seekers who had been evacuated from Libya, its pragmatic adaptation of its assistance in the face of cuts to food aid, its vulnerability assessments and its ongoing dialogue with the Government of Burundi on solutions for refugees from that country. He would welcome renewed tripartite arrangements in the region, including all Governments concerned.

28. He commended the Central African Republic for its commitment to resuming repatriation efforts; operations had been suspended shortly after his visit to Bangui two years previously, and he hoped that the situation in the country would allow for sustainable resettlement. The platform to which the representative of the Central African Republic had referred would mobilize resources and the support of development actors.

29. **Mr. Brophy** (Ireland), speaking in a pre-recorded video message, said that his Government's approach to the ever-growing crisis of forced displacement was driven by a

desire to protect citizens, improve humanitarian conditions and respect international humanitarian law. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, his Government had increased its support for UNHCR, including its core funding. He acknowledged the generosity of countries that hosted high numbers of refugees, many of which faced their own development challenges. The Global Refugee Forum had galvanized efforts to address refugees' needs, and he hoped that the High-level Officials Meeting would provide new opportunities for learning. His Government's presidency of the Security Council had highlighted key drivers of displacement, including climate change.

30. The High Commissioner's recent visit to Afghanistan had underscored the complexity of the challenges in that country and the wider region that had caused the internal displacement of more than 5 million persons, with a further 15 million at risk. The High-level Ministerial Meeting on the Humanitarian Situation in Afghanistan had underscored the need for immediate action, and UNHCR was well placed to implement the pledges made there. The United Nations and its agencies must maintain their presence in the country, and the international community must continue to engage with Afghanistan and its people. His Government had introduced a programme that would allow 500 former or current Afghan nationals to benefit from family reunification in Ireland. His Government had pledged significant funds to the UNHCR response in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries. UNHCR continued to play a leading role in international protection during the COVID-19 pandemic, and his Government would continue to promote its work.

31. **Mr. Sirleaf** (Observer for Liberia) said that his Government had undertaken a verification exercise among Ivorian asylum seekers and refugees living in Liberia. As a result, around 57 per cent of that group had returned voluntarily to Côte d'Ivoire. Additionally, more than 18,000 Ivorian refugees had chosen to return home following the last survey on durable solutions, with more than 4,500 returning so far that year. His Government was a signatory to the Abidjan Joint Declaration on the Updated Roadmap for Comprehensive Solutions for Ivorian Refugees and remained committed to implementing other relevant international instruments. The voluntary repatriation process for Ivorian refugees, which would continue until the end of 2022, while taking all the necessary health and travel precautions. The Government of Côte d'Ivoire had also implemented measures to ensure returnees' safety.

32. The verification exercise had also prompted 4 per cent of Ivorian refugees to opt for local integration, and the Government of Liberia had worked with UNHCR and the European Union to acquire land on which shelters were being built. The Bahn Refugee Camp had been converted to a settlement that offered electricity and health and education facilities. The Government had pledged to support refugees' education and remained committed to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol and the Organization of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. It would be grateful for the continued support of UNHCR as it carried out refugee status determination procedures for Ivorians who might choose to remain in Liberia once the cessation clause was invoked.

33. **Mr. Szijjártó** (Hungary) said that his Government played an active role in the work of the Executive Committee and desired an open dialogue on migration and asylum. The migration crisis of 2015 had seen 400,000 persons violate the borders of Hungary. In Western Europe, the failure of social integration projects had given rise to parallel societies. The crisis had sparked a major debate on migration in Europe which had been reignited in the light of the international community's failures in Afghanistan and the waves of migration that could follow.

34. His Government believed that the root causes of migration must be addressed and the conditions created that allowed potential refugees to remain in their places of origin. It had established an agency dedicated to that purpose that had enabled 250,000 Christians in the Middle East and Africa to remain in their communities; those communities would have been destroyed if instead it had encouraged them to leave, fulfilling the goal of the terrorist groups that persecuted them. His Government also participated in the UNHCR project in Yemen.

35. Under international law, those fleeing their countries of origin had the right to remain temporarily in the first safe country that they entered. They did not have the right to cross

numerous safe countries, and, given that Hungary was surrounded by such countries, his Government rejected those who violated its borders. Migration and asylum policies fell strictly within the competence of individual States. While some Governments believed that migration was beneficial for them, his believed that it posed many risks, and he urged mutual respect for differing positions. His Government stood ready to participate in the future work of UNHCR.

36. **Mr. Guillond** (Congo) said that his Government had provided COVID-19 vaccination for a large number of refugees. Rising violence and persecution around the world was increasing displacement, and the Congo had welcomed more than 5,000 Central Africans between December 2020 and January 2021. His Government had recognized their status as prima facie refugees. The Congo currently hosted more than 50,000 refugees and asylum seekers from 23 countries, an increase of around 7,000 on the previous year. The assistance provided by his Government must be supported by greater political will, and he called on the international community to find durable solutions to humanitarian crises. His Government strongly welcomed the call made by the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for the resumption of tripartite meetings.

37. His Government was strengthening the country's legal framework to provide ongoing support to refugees. Its work to combat statelessness included the establishment of auxiliary civil registry offices in health-care facilities and the creation of a national committee to coordinate the civil registry. With support from the UNHCR representation in the Congo, refugees had been included in a project that provided temporary financial support to poor households.

38. **Mr. Simbachawene** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that the adaptation of UNHCR to new circumstances was commendable. Although it was known for its generosity towards refugees, the United Republic of Tanzania, like many host nations, faced challenges in providing asylum and durable solutions with the scant resources available. Of the almost 256,000 refugees and asylum seekers in the country, the vast majority of whom were from Burundi or the Democratic Republic of the Congo, more than 206,000 were dependent on humanitarian assistance. His Government's preferred durable solution was voluntary repatriation, and refugee services were provided in strict compliance with international obligations.

39. His Government remained committed to cooperating with UNHCR and humanitarian actors, including the Government of Burundi, and was determined to protect the asylum system from abuse by social and economic migrants. The international community must increase its support for areas of return and for reintegration programmes in Burundi; the majority of that country was safe, and it was economic and social hardship, rather than violence, that many Burundian refugees in the United Republic of Tanzania feared if they returned home.

40. He called for urgent action to address the environmental impact of large numbers of refugees in the country, particularly alternative energy sources for camps and host communities. He wished to convey his Government's gratitude to the High Commissioner for his ongoing support in relation to environmental degradation and security issues in refugee camps, and to a number of Governments for allowing refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to be resettled in their countries. He urged other States to support resettlement programmes, reiterated his Government's firm commitment to supporting refugees and called on other stakeholders to do the same.

41. **Mr. Gevorgyan** (Armenia), speaking via video link, said that large-scale military aggression unleashed by Azerbaijan against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh had triggered a humanitarian crisis that had yet to be addressed appropriately by the international community. It had caused the forced displacement of more than 91,000 people to Armenia, and more than 40,000 people had lost their homes and property, which were currently occupied by the Azerbaijani armed forces. Many had become victims of repeated forced displacement since having fled the ethnic cleansing committed by Azerbaijan in the 1990s.

42. As new crises had erupted in various parts of the world, the plight of the displaced people from Artsakh seemed to be neglected. Despite UNHCR efforts, displaced persons from Artsakh continued to be largely deprived of international humanitarian assistance.

Effective solutions must be found that did not cause further displacement from the region. The politicization of humanitarian access to Nagorno-Karabakh was unacceptable; he called on the international community to ensure unconditional access to the entire territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, including areas that were occupied by Azerbaijani forces and had been ethnically cleansed of their indigenous Armenian population. Currently, the people of Nagorno-Karabakh were able to receive international assistance only in Armenia, which encouraged forcibly displaced persons and those at risk of displacement to move and stay in the Republic of Armenia.

43. The 2020 ceasefire agreement provided that a neutral approach must be adopted in facilitating access by UNHCR to the region in its work to supervise the return of internally displaced persons, and his Government would cooperate with UNHCR to that end. His Government would support a full peace process in response to the conflict that should address the return of Armenians to their homes in all parts of Nagorno-Karabakh.

44. **Mr. Guillermet** (Costa Rica), speaking in a pre-recorded video message, said that Costa Rica had continued to protect and integrate refugees during the COVID-19 pandemic by including them in a range of measures aimed at the wider population, including vaccination. A new migration category had been created that would allow Venezuelans, Cubans and Nicaraguans to remain in the country legally if they did not qualify for any other category. An agreement had been signed between UNHCR and the Costa Rican Social Security Fund to provide coverage to 6,000 vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers.

45. The automatic extension of temporary asylum seeker and refugee identity cards and work permits had been authorized for asylum seekers whose documentation had expired, and new permits could be requested online. Refugees and asylum seekers could continue to access job placement services and were targeted by a programme offering employment opportunities. The support of UNHCR in improving online services at all stages of the refugee system had accelerated the processing of asylum applications. His Government continued to provide assistance to refugees and asylum seekers living in poverty or extreme poverty, along with social benefits to allow children and adolescents to remain in education. Refugees and asylum seekers also benefited from a programme that provided financial assistance to workers in the formal and informal sectors who had been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

46. His Government continued to work towards its five pledges on statelessness, including through initiatives aiming not only to prevent statelessness, but also to provide durable solutions for those declared stateless. The solid constitutional framework of Costa Rica ensured that no child was born stateless; indeed, it had been the first country on the American continent to adopt regulations and procedures to determine the status of stateless persons. Furthermore, legislation had been adopted to protect cross-border indigenous peoples' right to Costa Rican nationality.

47. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the Costa Rican Government's ongoing commitment to solidarity and international cooperation had been in evidence during his recent visit to the country, and he hoped that other States would follow its example. Liberia had historically hosted large numbers of Ivorian refugees, and UNHCR would support it, and all other host countries, to promote voluntary repatriation. At a recent meeting, he and the President of the United Republic of Tanzania had agreed to take a comprehensive approach to protection and solutions with a view to expanding dialogue to the wider region, for example by including the Government of Burundi in discussions on support for voluntary repatriation. He looked forward to dialogue with the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania on the numerous other challenges that the country faced.

48. He had noted the call of the Republic of the Congo for solutions to refugee flows. Such solutions often depended on political developments in countries of origin, although potential solutions must be examined that could influence those developments. He appreciated the increased financial contributions made by Ireland and its representative's highlighting of the importance of renewing existing commitments, and entering into new ones, at the upcoming High-level Officials Meeting. While UNHCR was ready to assist in the return of all those displaced during the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, both parties must agree upon the manner in which it undertook that work.

49. Referring to the statement of the representative of Hungary, he said that UNHCR agreed that most persons were better off remaining in their places of origin. However, the very specific reasons for which they moved, which often related to violence, persecution or discrimination, must be addressed. Moreover, the crossing of borders by those seeking safety did not constitute a “violation”, as stated by the representative, and viewing their movements as such would hinder efforts to provide protection. The social integration programmes that had failed had lacked sufficient resources, and UNHCR strongly advised that States invested in those programmes to reduce social tensions. While it was the sovereign right of Hungary to refuse to participate in responsibility sharing, he warmly welcomed the ongoing commitment of most other States, including those with very few resources.

50. **Mr. Comberbach** (Zimbabwe), welcoming the continued delivery of assistance and protection to refugees, asylum seekers and stateless persons by UNHCR despite the COVID-19 pandemic, said that his Government called for strengthened international protection for persons of concern in Africa and positive engagement with countries that hosted refugees. It supported the High Commissioner’s call for the international community to seek durable solutions and his proposed renewal of the Strategic Directions document for a further five years. That document remained relevant, and their linkages to the global compact on refugees should be examined at the first High-level Officials Meeting.

51. His Government remained committed to its international obligations in safeguarding human welfare and protecting refugees and asylum seekers, who had been included in its COVID-19 vaccination programme. As part of efforts to promote self-reliance among refugees, his Government had entered into a partnership with UNHCR and the African Development Bank on an irrigation project at the Tongogara Refugee Camp, which was also the site of a hydroponics programme in cooperation with the World Food Programme intended to raise awareness of climate change and environmental protection among refugees. Zimbabwe would soon host a regional symposium on climate change and forced displacement that would enable UNHCR and other United Nations entities to establish mechanisms to respond to natural disasters that caused forced displacement.

52. **Mr. Holte** (Norway), speaking in a pre-recorded video message, said that Norway took a comprehensive approach to the protection of refugees and other displaced persons. Recent events in Afghanistan illustrated the need for a strong United Nations agency to protect persons of concern. His Government supported the global compact on refugees and would work to promote inclusive refugee policies and improve international burden and responsibility sharing. The High-level Officials Meeting should consider lessons learned, for example through the Clean Energy Challenge, when determining the way forward.

53. The humanitarian and socioeconomic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic included setbacks in gender equality and increased gender-based violence, and he urged UNHCR to spare no effort in reversing those changes. He commended UNHCR for its response to the pandemic and supported the conclusions of the Executive Committee on international protection and durable solutions in the context of a public health emergency. UNHCR should spearhead the follow-up to the grand bargain 2.0 initiative and would be a key actor in implementing the recommendations of the report of the High-level Panel on Internal Displacement; the current record numbers of internally displaced persons had galvanized international support for finding solutions to the issue, and sufficient resources must be allocated.

54. His Government supported initiatives that improved refugees’ access to jobs and livelihoods, and those that promoted their social and economic inclusion. The safeguarding of those initiatives required a strong framework for the return of persons not in need of international protection. Norway also supported the UNHCR three-year strategy on resettlement and complementary pathways and urged Member States to offer resettlement options to refugees. Norway supported the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness 2014–2024 and urged States that had not yet done so to take action to end statelessness by 2024. His Government’s work in the Security Council prioritized the protection of civilians, and it would continue to provide unearmarked funding for assistance to persons of concern.

55. **Mr. Kiran** (Turkey), speaking via video link, said that Turkey had included refugees and asylum seekers in its efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and he called for the

fair and equitable distribution of vaccines. Turkey hosted extremely high numbers of Syrian refugees, who benefited from education and health-care services, and the High Commissioner had recently visited the country and observed first-hand its efforts with regard to that group. However, the challenges in his region were not limited to Syria; the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan was worsening, with half the population, along with persons in neighbouring countries, in urgent need of assistance. While his Government supported the efforts of the United Nations in that regard, those efforts alone would not prevent a humanitarian crisis or increased refugees flows. With more than 4 million refugees on its territory, Turkey had reached its capacity. At the same time, unacceptable pushbacks, which shifted responsibility onto third countries, were increasing; Greece had undertaken around 90,000 pushbacks, with impunity, in the previous four years. His Government therefore welcomed the calls by UNHCR to end such practices. The international community must unite to find equitable burden-sharing solutions, as exemplified by the global compact on refugees. The forthcoming High-level Officials Meeting would provide an opportunity to monitor the implementation of pledges and to examine a number of issues, such as the failure of cash assistance programmes to provide durable solutions. It should also consider procedures for the voluntary return of refugees given that many were prepared to return home when security conditions allowed.

56. **Mr. Deng** (Observer for South Sudan) said that the establishment of national, state and local government structures and legislative and security sector reforms had yielded considerable progress in the implementation of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan. The Agreement was a critical tool for social reconstruction and the safe return of the 2.5 million Sudanese who had taken refuge in neighbouring countries, and for the 1.6 million internally displaced persons in the country. Many of them were eager to return and rebuild their lives; the conclusion of the Agreement had prompted the spontaneous return of some 400,000 refugees.

57. The Government, UNHCR and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development were engaged in the development of durable solutions to protracted displacement, which included stepping up development assistance to host communities. Durable solutions also required building the capacities of affected populations to foster self-reliance. The availability of adequate basic services, the promotion of social cohesion and economic growth were key prerequisites for the sustainable return of refugees.

58. In 2020, efforts to find solutions to displacement had been undermined by severe flooding, locust invasion and the COVID-19 pandemic, which had led to further displacement and a humanitarian crisis. As part of the national response to COVID-19, the Government had made the necessary provision for people on the move at border points of entry around the country.

59. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that he was grateful to Zimbabwe for drawing attention to the UNHCR Strategic Directions 2017–2021 document, which helped guide the organization’s decision-making process and ensure that resources were properly allocated to achieve its objectives. The successor document would be discussed in depth with members prior to its finalization at the end of 2021.

60. The representative of South Sudan had aptly described the issues at stake when it came to finding durable solutions to internal and external displacement. In South Sudan, such solutions indeed hinged on the implementation of the Revitalized Agreement. Although the process was likely to be difficult and prolonged, it was encouraging to note that many refugees had already chosen to return.

61. He was grateful to the Government of Norway for its loyal and diverse support to UNHCR and agreed that the protection of women and girls in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the growing number of conflicts must be a priority. That was particularly the case given the loss of livelihood and education associated not only with the pandemic but also conflict situations, where rape was often used as a means of controlling territory. UNHCR was keenly aware of its responsibilities with regard to displacement and had strongly supported the High-level Panel on Internal Displacement. UNHCR would continue to provide protection, shelter and camp management, but also place increasing focus on solutions. Its vast experience in supporting refugees could be of great value to its partners.

62. Turkey currently hosted over 3.5 million Syrian refugees and its call for increased efforts to remove obstacles to their return had been duly noted. Aside from working with the Syrian Government to create the necessary conditions for a safe return, UNHCR would also enhance assistance to returnees. Likewise, UNHCR would continue to work in partnership with the Government of Turkey to prevent an outflow of Afghan refugees. Still, Turkey and other refugee-hosting countries should continue to do everything possible to provide international protection to persons entitled to it.

The meeting rose at 5.45 p.m.