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Summary record of the 738th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 5 October 2020, at 9.30 a.m.

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

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The meeting was called to order at 9.35 a.m.

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

General debate (*continued*)

1. **Mr. Mwiimbu** (Zambia), speaking via video link, said that Zambia had kept its borders open despite the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. It was now host to some 102,000 asylum seekers, refugees and other persons of concern, almost double the number in 2016. In accordance with the comprehensive refugee response framework, his country continued with its policies of inclusion, placing national resources such as land, social services and economic opportunities at the disposal of refugees in a whole-of-government approach. However, the increase in the refugee population had exerted immense pressure on the country's capacity for care and protection, and that had been exacerbated by a \$12.3 million funding shortfall in 2021.

2. His Government continued to consult widely in the search for ways of providing alternative legal status and ensuring socioeconomic inclusion for more than 23,000 former refugees from Angola and Rwanda. It was committed to finding durable solutions but had been hampered by policy, administrative and financial challenges. Zambia was seeking additional support from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other donor partners and the international community in order to move ahead with local integration.

3. During the pandemic, the displaced population had grappled with the loss of income, food shortages and a feeling of abandonment due to the health restrictions, while those entrusted with their welfare had had to help them cope with displacement and a health crisis at the same time. His Government had therefore aligned the COVID-19 responses with district initiatives and improved health services in refugee settlements. Having averted serious outbreaks, it had embarked on campaigns to tackle vaccine hesitancy among the refugee population.

4. Zambia had continued to make steady progress in implementing the comprehensive refugee response framework, for example by extending the Farmer Support Input Programme to include refugees, former refugees and the host community. Through empowerment initiatives to enable refugees to participate in farming activities, the Government and its partners intended to build capacity by skills training, injection of start-up capital in small businesses and seed distribution.

5. Progress had been made with the national action plan to deal with statelessness and steps had been taken to accede to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness in support of the #IBelong campaign to eradicate statelessness. Efforts were also being made to ensure that refugees and former refugees were included in the new civil registration strategic plan.

6. **Mr. Morales López** (Colombia), speaking in a pre-recorded video message, said that the Americas accounted for 85 million of the worldwide total of 220 million COVID-19 cases, and some 47 per cent of total deaths. In addition, the exodus from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela had become the world's largest wave of forced migration, with over 5.6 million persons having left their country since the beginning of the humanitarian crisis. Colombia had nevertheless maintained its policy of solidarity and, having welcomed more than 1.8 million Venezuelans, now hosted the world's second largest migrant population after Turkey.

7. In the hope of turning migration into a factor for the achievement of development and facilitating economic integration, Venezuelan migrants and refugees had been granted temporary protection status. At least 1 million were expected to receive their temporary protection permits by the end of the year. According to the Special Administrative Unit for Migration of Colombia (Migración Colombia), 1.2 million persons had been registered in the Central Register of Migrants. In addition, his Government continued to work on the backlog of 29,000 refugee status applications, while also meeting the needs of persons in transit through the country, who were often at greater risk.

8. In August 2021, Act No. 2136 had been passed, outlining a comprehensive policy on migration that included elements of international protection and obligations in respect of political asylum. It complemented the Children First (Primero la Niñez) Programme, under which 70,000 children, born in Colombia of Venezuelan parents after 2015, had been granted Colombian nationality.

9. UNHCR had been a staunch ally, setting up shelters for migrant survivors of sexual and gender-based violence in the past three years and supporting the construction and operation of a mother and child centre. His country was grateful to UNHCR and the international community for their valuable support, particularly in ensuring a comprehensive response to the mixed migration flows from Venezuela.

10. **Ms. Esmeralda Bravo C. Da Silva Mendonça** (Observer for Angola) said that a fairer and more equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines would guarantee better protection for refugees, who were for the most part concentrated in developing countries, where poor hygiene and limited space posed a particularly serious health risk in a pandemic.

11. Recognizing that States had the primary responsibility for protecting all persons on their territory, Angola had taken special measures to mitigate the impact of unprecedented drought on people in the south of the country, some of whom had been forced to take refuge in neighbouring countries. It was also a key player in efforts to forge a lasting peace in the Central African, Southern African and Great Lakes subregions, which would pave the way for the realization of the goals of the 2030 Agenda in respect of refugees. Angola also continued implementing the regional programmes of action of the Southern African Development Community and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region on the elimination of statelessness. Children born to refugees in Angolan territory were now duly registered.

12. Since the National Refugee Council was now fully operational, it had been possible to complete the process of adopting a cessation clause in respect of 3,626 former refugees of various nationalities, with a view to integrating them fully into their communities.

13. **Mr. Starović** (Serbia), speaking in a pre-recorded video message, said that he wished to thank all those, especially UNHCR and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, who had contributed to the regional housing programme to find durable solutions for displaced persons and refugees. Some 6,000 families had been provided with housing to date.

14. However, there remained some 200,000 internally displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija in Serbia, for whom the conditions for sustainable return had still not been met after more than 20 years, and who represented the most protracted internal displacement situation in Europe. Fewer than 2 per cent of the group had achieved sustainable return to their homes in Kosovo and Metohija. The remainder were hostage to unresolved issues, to the extent that those who had undertaken, as part of their mandate, to provide protection, preservation and restitution of that group's rights had failed to do so.

15. It was high time to help them. The experience gained from the regional housing programme for refugees, and the models and tools developed in that context, could be applied, with certain modifications in the case of the internally displaced persons. He called for the understanding and support of international partners in resolving the protracted situation of displacement in the region. Serbia itself was ready to support all internally displaced persons in resolving their situation, whether through the implementation of return and integration programmes or through the distribution of donor assistance and the implementation of a programme modelled on the regional housing programme.

16. **Mr. Mahmoudi** (Islamic Republic of Iran), speaking in a pre-recorded video message, said that, despite the numerous economic and social problems caused by an eight-year war waged against the country, unjust sanctions and unilateral coercive measures, the Islamic Republic of Iran had played its part in hosting many more than its fair share of refugees for more than 40 years.

17. The current escalating instability in Afghanistan was the product of two decades of foreign presence in that country under the pretext of fighting terrorism, an occupation that

had caused the destruction of assets and infrastructure, brain drain, internal displacement and, in particular, the displacement of millions of Afghan migrants beyond the country's borders.

18. In the light of that situation he wished to mention his own country's recent bitter experience. UNHCR and certain members of the international community advocated accepting asylum seekers as soon as possible in crisis and emergency situations. Unfortunately, in practice, when such asylum crises subsided, they had no motivation and no plan to achieve a sustainable solution or the voluntary repatriation of refugees. Host countries were left with various problems and international humanitarian responsibilities were shared even more unequally.

19. Displaced persons and asylum seekers passed through the Islamic Republic of Iran in transit to European countries. To date the country had received more than 3.5 million Afghan citizens, including those in an irregular situation, incurring exorbitant costs in dealing with unauthorized border crossings, with no cooperation or support, and with contributions from international organizations and donor countries that covered only 5 per cent of the refugees' needs.

20. Under the prevailing conditions, therefore, it would no longer be possible for his country to accept displaced populations. Given such difficult circumstances, it was now time for the international community to respond to the following demands of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

21. The first, urgent, request to the international community was that it should address the root causes of refugee flows and, in particular, end destabilizing actions once and for all.

22. Secondly, UNHCR, and the international community in its humanitarian action, should help empower people to exercise their right to return to their homeland, from the outset of a refugee situation. UNHCR should significantly step up its action to promote, facilitate and coordinate voluntary repatriation, in accordance with its Statute and previous decisions of the Executive Committee.

23. Thirdly, more serious attention should be paid to sharing the burden of what was a global responsibility, through resettlement in third countries, especially European Union member countries.

24. Fourthly, in response to its own continued support for refugees, the Islamic Republic of Iran called for a commitment by UNHCR and the international community to provide adequate and equitable support, and for a clear and coherent programme to obtain a durable solution to the problem.

25. Fifthly, his country should not shoulder more than its fair share of international responsibility. He urged the international community and the High Commissioner to take concrete steps to end unjust burden sharing and prevent further economic and social problems for countries like his, which hosted a large number of refugees.

26. Lastly, in a context of inhumane sanctions and the COVID-19 pandemic, the Islamic Republic of Iran expected all parties to contribute to meeting the costs of refugees with mutual proportionate responsibility sharing. It was ready to cooperate with UNHCR and the international community to agree on a sustainable and fair approach.

27. **Mr. Nguema Ndong** (Observer for Equatorial Guinea) said that nationality conferred a sense of identity and created a legal bond between the individual and the State that permitted the enjoyment of a range of rights. To deny an individual nationality could effectively destroy his or her life. Accordingly, his Government had launched a process to regularize all foreigners resident in Equatorial Guinea, including children born in exile and displaced persons.

28. He welcomed the fact that a growing number of African States had ratified the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention), the only legally binding regional instrument to protect and support internally displaced persons.

29. It was necessary to redouble efforts at the global level to counter separatist and nationalist ideologies that hampered the search for durable solutions to the suffering of

vulnerable groups in Africa, which was a matter of ever-growing concern for international peace and security.

30. **Mr. Diarra** (Mali) said that the crisis in Mali that had started in 2012 had triggered significant population flows. The number of internally displaced persons had risen from 78,000 in 2012 to 378,000, while there were just over 154,000 Malian refugees in neighbouring countries. The number of spontaneous returns, as registered in 115 municipalities, was 84,000, representing 24,000 families originating mainly from 5 regions. In addition to the mass population movements, there had been numerous victims of the armed conflict and of violence against women, as well as recruitment of child soldiers and the destruction of basic social infrastructure. His Government, in cooperation with UNHCR, had created a technical committee to work on the incorporation of the provisions of the Kampala Convention into domestic law.

31. In order to facilitate the return of Malian refugees, his Government had signed tripartite agreements with UNHCR and the Governments of Burkina Faso, Mauritania and the Niger. The agreements dealt with the exchange of information between the parties regarding the situation in the host countries and the prospects of safe and dignified voluntary return.

32. Despite the efforts to implement the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in cooperation with the international community, the northern regions of Mali, and the regions of Ségou and Mopti, continued to be affected by the activities of terrorist groups, intercommunal violence and climate change, giving rise to the forced displacement of populations. His Government was trying to secure the affected areas in order to allow administrative and technical services to resume, but enormous challenges remained. The implementation of the Agreement would be a major step forward and he called on all partners to help his country with that process.

33. Notwithstanding the very problematic context, his country had taken humanitarian action to create the conditions for the return of refugees and internally displaced persons. Regional emergency plans had been funded and implemented, permitting major infrastructure projects to be launched in areas such as education, drinking water provision and health, as well as income-generating activities. His Government wished to express its profound gratitude to all those partners who had provided assistance.

34. **Mr. Maphathe** (Lesotho) said that, in line with the pledges it had made at the Global Refugee Forum, the Government of Lesotho had, in 2021, reduced naturalization fees for refugees so that those who wished to fully integrate into society and become citizens could afford to do so; five refugees had become naturalized in July of that year. Refugees had been recruited as doctors and places had been set aside for refugees in higher education institutions. In order to prevent statelessness, the Government was running outreach programmes to register the births of people living in remote areas, including persons of concern. It had launched a programme to raise awareness about the causes and effects of internal displacement and was exploring ways of collecting data on internally displaced persons.

35. The COVID-19 pandemic had hit persons of concern hard. Some had lost their homes and livelihoods, forcing them to rely on government support for subsistence, while others had returned to reception centres with limited space. Gang warfare and targeted killings were affecting families and causing internal displacement, in particular of women and children. While the Government applauded the financial support provided by UNHCR and the African Union, Lesotho needed additional resources in order to protect persons of concern effectively. In particular, the Government called on UNHCR to provide assistance in coping with the asylum seekers who continued to flock to the Kingdom's borders coupled with internal displacement and statelessness.

36. **Mr. Rundu** (Estonia), speaking in a pre-recorded video message, said that the Government of Estonia was concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian situations in Afghanistan, parts of Syria and Yemen. The Government commended UNHCR for its protection of refugees and internally displaced persons in such situations and welcomed its focus on durable solutions, bringing together humanitarian, development and peace actors.

37. The Government was very concerned about the instrumentalization of migrants and refugees; the issue was of the utmost importance in respect of preserving the integrity of the external border of the European Union. The exploitation of vulnerable persons for political reasons and the orchestration of their movement across borders was a very worrying trend that must be prevented.

38. In line with its pledges at the Global Refugee Forum, the Government was focusing on the education of internally displaced and refugee children in order to prevent them from becoming a lost generation. It had also seconded a national expert to the UNHCR Global Data Service because it took the view that innovative solutions – such as better and more secure identification and registration of persons in need or interoperable databases to help predict large-scale population movements – could increase the efficiency and timeliness of crisis responses. Estonia was committed to assisting UNHCR as a donor contributing flexible funding and UNHCR could continue to count on its support.

39. **Ms. Di Giovanni** (Holy See), speaking in a pre-recorded video message, said that displacement within and across borders was one of the most pressing challenges that the world faced, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, by a lack of adequate funding for host countries and by countries of destination shifting responsibility for large, mixed flows of migrants and refugees. The situation of migrants and refugees represented a crisis of solidarity; the global compact on refugees would succeed only if it garnered the necessary political will.

40. The Holy See urged all States to adopt measures such as the granting of humanitarian visas, individual and community sponsorship programmes, humanitarian corridors for the most vulnerable and guarantees of family reunification. However, addressing the causes of conflict and instability was a prerequisite for the success of such measures. The Holy See was grateful to all countries that had welcomed refugees from Afghanistan. The response of countries in close proximity to such crises was only as strong as the unity and effectiveness of the international community's support. The Holy See, stressing that humanitarian crises were often exacerbated by economic sanctions, which, more often than not, affected mainly the more vulnerable segments of the populations, called for the relaxation of such sanctions. More reflection and action on the impact of climate change on forced displacement were needed. Lastly, the Executive Committee must ensure access to health care on a non-discriminatory, comprehensive basis, founded on the right to life for all, from conception to natural death.

41. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), focusing first on Africa, said that he agreed that more resources should be found for durable solutions for the pending cases of former refugees from Rwanda and Angola in Zambia. The decision by the Government of Lesotho to reduce naturalization fees was welcome; UNHCR would work with the Government to tackle the internal displacement it had reported. He wished to underscore the important statement by the Government of Angola on the fair distribution of vaccines and on the fact that many countries were hosting large numbers of refugees, in addition to their populations, and therefore needed greater support for their public health measures. He noted the delegation's reports of drought-related displacement in the south of the country. He also wished to commend the Government on its peace-building efforts in Africa. He welcomed the frank and constructive statement made by the delegation of Equatorial Guinea about the difficulties posed by the pandemic. It was important to stress that public health measures in response to COVID-19 were and had to be compatible with the response to the migration crisis. He urged the Government of Mali to continue working towards peace, without which durable returns of refugees would be difficult to bring about, notwithstanding the tripartite voluntary repatriation agreements that it had reached with the country's neighbours.

42. Turning to other regions, he said that the decision by the Government of Colombia to grant temporary protection status to over 1.7 million citizens of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela was an exceptional humanitarian gesture and a courageous political decision; it set an example to other countries in the region and throughout the world. He reiterated his gratitude to the Islamic Republic of Iran for its very long-standing, strong and inclusive hospitality to millions of Afghan refugees, spanning several generations. He agreed that the

time had come for donors to support the Islamic Republic of Iran in respect of its hosting of those refugees and for more resettlement of refugees from the country's territory.

43. UNHCR would work with the European Union and with the Serbian Government, among others, on finding solutions for displaced persons from Kosovo. While the integrity of the external borders of the European Union was important, border controls and security were not incompatible with meeting the protection needs of some of the persons trying to cross those borders. He agreed with the statement by the representative of Estonia that the creation of artificial movements of refugees and migrants was unacceptable and needed to be discouraged, at any cost. While he was making no political statement on the matter, he agreed with the representative of the Holy See that sanctions should not hamper humanitarian assistance or create humanitarian problems, even involuntarily.

44. **Ms. Arondo** (Observer for Gabon) said that, in response to the migration caused by terrorism and climate change, among other global challenges, many States had closed their air and land borders. Such measures exacerbated the situation of already vulnerable persons and made humanitarian work more difficult.

45. Gabon was firmly committed to the international protection of persecuted persons who had chosen to seek asylum in the country. The National Commission for Refugees was working with UNHCR to provide the 500 refugees and asylum seekers who had chosen to settle in Gabon with the resources to rebuild their lives. In that connection, 413 long-term refugees had obtained residence permits, some children of refugees had acquired Gabonese nationality by virtue of birth in the country and some refugees had acquired citizenship through marriage. Since January 2020, 43 projects to facilitate refugees' economic integration, with 163 direct and indirect beneficiaries, had received funding. Moreover, refugees and asylum seekers were not excluded from national plans in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the vaccination plan. Particular attention must be paid to older persons, persons with disabilities, women and children. Her Government would welcome support from the international community for a programme, run jointly with UNHCR, to improve the economic integration of refugees and asylum seekers.

46. **Mr. Nkhoma** (Malawi) said that he was pleased to be attending the first Executive Committee meeting in which the Government of Malawi was involved as a full member. The Government thanked UNHCR for its excellent humanitarian operations in Malawi. However, he urged UNHCR and donors to provide funding for improvements in respect of shelter construction, health, education and access to livelihood programmes for refugees in the country.

47. His country, like others, faced global challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate emergency and the persistent conflicts that continued to affect refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons and stateless persons. The Government had observed the principle of non-refoulement by keeping its borders open, even amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Quarantine and isolation facilities had been established at points of entry and in refugee camps and refugees had been included in the national vaccination programme. In line with the comprehensive refugee response framework, refugees had been included in national development plans. In order to ensure a favourable legal environment for all persons of concern, the Government was reviewing the Immigration and Citizenship Acts, among other relevant laws, including the incorporation of provisions on stateless persons, as it had pledged to do at the Global Refugee Forum. Furthermore, it would soon be acceding to the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

48. **Ms. Lopes dos Santos Allouche** (Observer for Guinea-Bissau), speaking via video link, said that Guinea-Bissau was moving forward with the naturalization of around 10,000 refugees with a view to delivering on the commitment made to UNHCR in 2017. By the end of 2021, it expected to have issued national identity cards to around 8,000 refugees, mainly of Senegalese origin, who had been present in the country for more than two decades. It was conscious that some refugees had been unable to benefit from the naturalization programme and were still awaiting confirmation of their refugee status; ultimately, however, it aimed to open the programme up to all refugees. The Government had also been taking steps to implement the two statelessness conventions, to which the country had acceded in 2016. It had adopted a national plan for the elimination of statelessness that provided for the creation

of a commission on statelessness, and for specific action to promote the registration of children at risk that included establishing mobile birth registration units, decentralizing civil registry services and computerizing civil registers. It had also addressed statelessness in the new asylum law due to be adopted in the near future. Equal access to work, health care, education and social welfare was guaranteed to refugees under already existing asylum law, but, due to the political instability of recent years, the country had struggled to uphold those rights even for its own nationals. The Government hoped, however, that, with the support of UNHCR and other strategic partners, the challenges it faced could be overcome. In that connection, it wished to note that the decision to close the UNHCR country office in 2022 would affect the country's ability to support refugees and other persons enjoying protection under the UNCHR mandate and called for a detailed analysis of the implications of the closure that took account of the need for stability in the region.

49. **Ms. Kazakova** (Russian Federation), in a pre-recorded video statement, said that her Government appreciated UNCHR efforts to combat COVID-19 among migrants, refugees and other vulnerable persons and to work with government authorities to ensure their inclusion in national anti-COVID programmes. At a time when the scale of forced migration was unprecedentedly high, the Russian Federation believed that humanitarian activities should be conducted only with government consent, in accordance with the principles of neutrality and impartiality and with strict respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity. It also believed that the resolution of conflicts through political and diplomatic channels was key to facilitating return and preventing new waves of forced migration, and that the solution to the situation inside and outside Afghanistan thus lay in national reconciliation and reconstruction. It welcomed the readiness of UNHCR to join efforts to establish peace in Nagorno-Karabakh, as called for by the leaders of the Russian Federation, Azerbaijan and Armenia in November 2020. The Russian Federation was also counting on active UNHCR involvement in international efforts to repatriate Syrian refugees, believing that their return would contribute significantly to the reconstruction of Syria while easing the burden on host countries. It also welcomed UNHCR efforts to implement the global compact on refugees and the outcomes of the 2019 Global Refugee Forum and, given the massive scale of statelessness in certain European States, hoped that the elimination of statelessness would remain on its agenda.

50. The Russian Federation encouraged long-term residents to apply for citizenship and approximately 800,000 stateless persons had become Russians since 1992. In addition, asylum had been granted to over 15,000 persons from 54 different States. Migration laws were currently being revised and a new law on asylum had been drafted to replace the Refugee Act, which would help asylum seekers and persons granted asylum to integrate into Russian society. Four types of asylum were envisaged under the new legislation: refugee status; temporary asylum; political asylum; and temporary protection. Temporary protection had been introduced in response to the country's recent experience of hosting emergency mass arrivals. Recently amended legislation allowed for temporary identification documents to be issued to stateless persons to enable them to regularize their legal status and seek employment. In addition, deadlines for many migration-related procedures had been suspended under COVID-19 legislation to allow foreign nationals to remain legally in Russia during the pandemic. The Russian Federation believed that those measures would provide significant support for persons needing help in the difficult epidemiological situation.

51. **Ms. Delgado Peralta** (Mexico), in a pre-recorded video statement, said that Mexico had granted refugee status to 77 per cent of all refugees present in the country, which was one of the highest rates in the world. It had continued to welcome refugees and offer humanitarian assistance and protection during the COVID-19 pandemic and had recently agreed to receive certain groups of Afghan nationals. Its refugee system and host communities were therefore under considerable pressure. Although most migrants and refugees entering the country continued northward to the United States of America, growing numbers were opting to seek international protection in Mexico, which was increasingly becoming a country of destination as well as a country of transit. It had received 77,000 refugee applications involving persons from more than 90 different countries of origin to date in 2021 and expected that number to reach 110,000 by the year-end. In response to the growing pressures, Mexico was working with UNHCR to build the capacity of the Mexican Commission for Refugee Aid, was modernizing its refugee-processing systems with

technical assistance from Canada and was promoting labour market integration with partners from the private sector and local government. Thus far, it had managed to place more than 10,000 refugees in work. Conscious that children made up one in five of all refugees in Mexico, it had recently approved legislative amendments that should facilitate the protection and regularization of unaccompanied minors. It had also amended nationality laws to streamline Mexican nationality procedures and thus prevent statelessness. Addressing the underlying causes of migration in the region, for example by promoting growth opportunities in communities of origin, remained a hugely important part of all efforts to ensure that migration was voluntary and never forced.

52. **Mr. Huseynov** (Azerbaijan), speaking via video link, said that three decades of hosting exceptionally large numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons had given Azerbaijan vast knowledge and experience of dealing with large-scale displacement. It had built a total of 115 modern residential complexes across the country to accommodate those numbers and 315,000 refugees and internally displaced persons had so far been provided with improved housing. However, notwithstanding the exemplary care and attention afforded to the displaced population, dignified and safe return on a voluntary basis remained the best long-term solution, and, in Azerbaijan, that possibility was linked to the settlement of the conflict with Armenia. Armenia had been occupying 20 per cent of Azerbaijani territory for almost 30 years, preventing any resolution of the internal displacement problem, but, in 2020, after a 44-day war that had forced a further 84,000 people to flee their homes but had resulted in victory for Azerbaijan, conditions conducive to safe, dignified, and voluntary return had at last been established. Azerbaijan was now working to restore infrastructures in the liberated territories, prioritizing the smart village and smart city concepts, and to prepare for the arrival of the first wave of returnees at the start of 2022.

53. The return of internally displaced persons and reintegration of the liberated areas within the national economy was one of the country's five socioeconomic development priorities for the decade ahead. The region would no longer be referred to as Nagorno-Karabakh, pursuant to a presidential decree issued in July 2021, and the name would disappear from the country's political and geographical map – an important decision that should be taken into account in any future references to the area. Unfortunately, the area had been contaminated with huge volumes of land mines and, in violation of fundamental human rights, Armenia had so far refused to provide full maps of their location. The mines therefore continued to compromise the inalienable rights of hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons, including their right to a safe and dignified return; since the end of 2020, mine explosions had killed or injured more than a hundred Azerbaijanis, including persons returning to their homeland for the first time in 30 years. Azerbaijan would nonetheless continue its endeavours to ensure a voluntary, safe and dignified return, and, to that end, had agreed to allow a UNHCR assessment mission to visit the country. In the coming years, Azerbaijan hoped to establish a new model for the post-conflict rehabilitation and reintegration of displaced populations and to transform the once abandoned land, with UNHCR providing support throughout the return and reintegration process as it had done since the beginning of the crisis.

54. **Ms. Suleiman-Ibrahim** (Nigeria) said that Nigeria continued to provide protection and assistance to refugees, returnees, stateless persons and other persons of concern and, at the end of May 2021, had been hosting over 70,000 refugees and around 1,600 asylum seekers. An average of 3,300 persons entered the country from Cameroon through unmanned border points each week, and the migration authorities had also registered, and recommended that refugee status be granted to, 1,435 asylum seekers from the Niger. Since Nigeria had abolished its encampment policy, about 70 per cent of refugees lived in host communities and 30 per cent in settlements.

55. The needs of persons of concern and host communities were taken into account in the country's Economic Sustainability Plan and the National Development Plan for the period 2021–2025, with the latter envisaging the construction of resettlement cities each offering around 400 two-bedroom housing units. Work was nearing completion on three such projects and land had been acquired for similar projects in three more States. Other measures envisaged included the establishment of migrant and refugee resource centres, transit camps offering a safe haven in critical locations, and, with support from Qatar, learning centres in

camps for internally displaced persons. In addition, databases were being extended and updated in order to produce credible and accurate statistics for planning purposes; field offices in critical areas were being upgraded and expanded; three new field offices, each staffed with 13 protection officers, had been established to facilitate the registration and monitoring of Cameroonian refugees and asylum seekers; and a standard operating procedure for Cameroonian refugee operations had been drafted that would serve as a guide for the identification of combatants and ex-combatants.

56. Nigeria was also working to promote birth registration and minimize statelessness. Refugees and other persons of concern would in the future be issued with a national identity number, and Nigerian banks had already begun to accept refugee identity cards and convention travel documents as proof of identity. In addition, financial empowerment and self-sufficiency was promoted through programmes such as Project Reliance, offering access to loans, and Project Zero Hunger, designed to curb food insecurity. A national policy on internal displacement had been approved by the Federal Executive Council, and Nigeria was actively involved in regional and sub-regional efforts to address the root causes of displacement. The Nigerian authorities endeavoured to include persons of concern in decision-making and, in conjunction with UNHCR, ran sensitization and advocacy campaigns to raise awareness of best practices. The Government had also been working on vaccine distribution with the National Primary Health Care Development Agency with a view to ensuring that the most vulnerable segments of Nigerian society had access to much-needed protection against COVID-19. In a further demonstration of the country's openness to refugees, the Minister of the Federal Capital Territory had recently signed the Cities #WithRefugees solidarity statement, making Abuja the 267th city in the world to declare its solidarity with refugees, and Lagos was expected to join the list of signatories before the end of 2021.

57. She wished to take the opportunity to thank UNHCR for its abiding commitment and sterling performance in Nigeria, where the number of forcibly displaced persons was increasing at an alarming rate of almost a million a year, and to appeal for continued support for efforts to find durable solutions for all persons of concern. The challenges ahead were immense, and could not be overcome without the help of local and international partners.

58. **Mr. Laferte** (Brazil) said that the COVID-19 pandemic had had a devastating impact, as measures designed to reduce the spread of the virus had dramatically reduced the income of those with fewest resources. The Government of Brazil had maintained that the health and socioeconomic crises should be tackled simultaneously, through multidimensional policies that encompassed health, the economy and social protection. The country was currently hosting over half a million Venezuelan migrants and refugees, all of whom received assistance under the "Operation Welcome" initiative and had full and equal access to public services, labour opportunities and social benefits. More than 50,000 of them had been granted recognized refugee status and a further 150,000 had legal permission to remain. Because all Venezuelans were documented on arrival, it had also been possible to include some of them among the beneficiaries of an extraordinary US\$ 60 billion cash transfer programme introduced to assist the low-income population. In addition, more than 58,000 migrants and refugees had received support for voluntary relocation to Brazilian cities offering better labour and social integration possibilities. Overall, approximately US\$ 400 million had been disbursed under Operation Welcome.

59. Brazil had also granted refugee status to over 10,000 nationals of countries other than Venezuela, including Haitian citizens and persons affected by the conflict in Syria. Furthermore, through its embassies in the Middle East and Moscow, it stood ready to offer humanitarian visas to persons affected by the crisis in Afghanistan, prioritizing applications from women, minors, older persons and persons with disabilities. Brazil remained firmly committed to human rights and international solidarity and believed that political will and creative solutions were imperative to ensure the protection of the most vulnerable.

60. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that he wished to commend Gabon on its work to promote refugee inclusion and integration and to congratulate Malawi for having joined the membership of the UNHCR Executive Committee. He also wished to second the two countries' appeal for greater support for their inclusion efforts. Guinea-Bissau merited resounding thanks for its efforts to naturalize thousands of

refugees, to combat statelessness and to strengthen its asylum system, which provided a shining example of what could be achieved despite limited resources. He assured the Government of Guinea-Bissau that UNHCR would continue to support those efforts, whether from its country or regional office. Nigeria was to be thanked for its work to address the complicated causes of displacement in the country and surrounding region, which often had its roots in the Boko Haram crisis, as well as for its efforts to ensure that returns were voluntary and sustainable, to improve asylum, displacement and statelessness management systems, and to conclude tripartite agreements with neighbouring countries hosting Nigerian refugees. UNHCR stood ready to support all those efforts.

61. Many of the issues raised by the delegate of the Russian Federation had been discussed on his visit to Moscow in June 2021. Mediation efforts and the solutions-oriented approach to displacement issues relating to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict were appreciated. The Russian Federation would continue to play an important and positive role in resolving that crisis. The Russian Federation also had an important role to play in resolving the Syrian refugee crisis. UNHCR would continue to support efforts to improve asylum systems and practices.

62. UNHCR greatly appreciated the fact that it had been designated by the parties to the ceasefire agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia as the organization to facilitate the return of all persons who had been displaced during some 30 years of conflict. It would continue to work with the two countries and assess the prospects for returns to Nagorno-Karabakh on mutually agreed terms between the two parties. He appealed to all concerned to avoid politics at the present forum. Members were present to discuss only humanitarian aspects of the situation.

63. Turning to Central America, he wished to recognize the long-standing tradition in Mexico of granting asylum, which was continuing with its welcome of Afghan refugees. Regional challenges remained, however, and the sharp rise in asylum applications submitted to Mexico in recent years were transforming it into a destination country for refugees and not merely a transit country. UNHCR would continue to provide bilateral support to Mexico, including through the comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework. Action on workforce inclusion were of particular interest, as were the significant efforts made to reduce statelessness, which could serve as an example in the region and around the world.

64. He commended the Government of Brazil for the continuation of “Operation Welcome” and efforts made to deal with asylum claims, including recognition of Venezuelans as refugees. Gestures made towards persons in need of protection from other conflicts, notably in the Syrian Arab Republic and Afghanistan, were a much appreciated contribution to global responsibility sharing.

65. **Mr. Gobeza** (Ethiopia) said that his country hosted more than 900,000 refugees and had a long-standing open-door asylum policy. More than 300,000 new asylum seekers had arrived during the COVID-19 pandemic. Efforts to contribute to peace and security in countries of origin continued. Refugees were provided with access to civil registries to minimize the risk of statelessness. Measures had been taken to include refugees in national COVID-19 response mechanisms, including vaccination plans. Education was provided to encourage self-reliance among refugees, and more than 200,000 refugees were enrolled in education, including at the tertiary level. To alleviate the challenges faced by Eritrean refugees in the Tigray region, alternative land had been provided for a new camp. In addition, the requirements for urban refugee status had been eased, leading to more than 14,000 refugees in Addis Ababa receiving such status and assistance in opening a bank account. The Government had recently taken steps to ensure that refugees were included in national job creation plans, which would enable them to take part in its plan to create 14 million jobs in various sectors in the following five years. The international community was invited to help Ethiopia achieve that goal in a manner that would benefit both refugees and host communities.

66. Voluntary, dignified and safe return was the most favourable and durable solution for refugees. More than 600 Ethiopian refugees returned from Kenya in 2021 and his Government would continue to repatriate citizens who wished to return home. Adequate and sustainable support was needed for the return and reintegration process, however, to reduce the risk of internal displacement and remigration. Strengthening the humanitarian–

development–peace nexus was important to addressing individuals’ vulnerabilities before, during and after crises. As a founding member of the United Nations and firm proponent of multilateralism, his Government valued cooperation with UNHCR and other United Nations agencies, donors and partners. The importance of upholding the principles of impartiality and neutrality so as not to undermine the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ethiopia could not be overemphasized. In a context in which contributions from the international community were dwindling, it should be noted that his Government’s commitments could only be realized with further tangible support from the international community.

67. **Mr. Attafuah** (Ghana) said that refugees and asylum seekers were included in the public programmes to address the impact of COVID-19, including vaccination. In the interests of vaccine equity, more vaccines must be made available so that protection could be offered to all residents, including persons of concern. The steps taken by UNHCR to address the protracted refugee situations in his country were welcome, and his Government remained committed to ensuring the successful implementation of the related programmes. Indeed, it had participated in a West African working group to update the Roadmap for Comprehensive Solutions for Ivorian Refugees at a recent ministerial meeting in Abidjan. His Government would fulfil its obligations under the tripartite framework to ensure adherence to the road map’s timetable. Voluntary repatriation of refugees had been encouraged, despite the pandemic, by granting safe passage to refugees while adhering to all health protocols. Access to land border crossings was provided to refugees under the auspices of the Tripartite Commission for the Voluntary Repatriation of Burundian Refugees.

68. The significant contribution of UNHCR to infrastructure provision in 2020 had helped to merge the service provided to refugees with existing national systems. That would help to integrate refugees in the education, health care and security services customarily available to the public. Redevelopment in the Buduburam Refugee Settlement had been suspended pending the safe transport of approximately 400 refugees to a different location due to lose their homes under the redevelopment plans. Alternative shelter and assistance to settle into their new homes would be provided.

69. **Mr. Arlindo De Abreu** (Mozambique) said that the support provided by UNHCR in his country to persons internally displaced by terrorist attacks in the northern province of Cabo Delgado was appreciated, and had also helped to mitigate the impact of two cyclones. The visit by the Assistant High Commissioner for Operations and the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection was also welcome; humanitarian support was saving lives and making a difference. The speedy development of the internal displacement situation in his country had called for an immediate governmental response. A national strategy for internally displaced persons had therefore been approved in September 2021 with the aim of better assisting that group of persons.

70. Progress had been made on the conduct of a study on statelessness, which would be finalized by the end of the first quarter of 2022, with the support of UNHCR. The study would help to map statelessness in order to make appropriate interventions, in line with the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness 2014–2024. Efforts had been made to increase access for refugees to education, health care and work, including the construction of a secondary school in Maratane Refugee Camp.

71. Refugee movements were changing: as the situation in countries of origin improved, requests for voluntary repatriation were increasing and arrivals of asylum seekers were falling. The first joint operation on voluntary repatriation to Burundi had been completed in September 2021, with the cooperation of UNHCR and the Government of Burundi, and work had started on a second operation. One further trend was the move of refugees from camps to urban areas. The time had come to consider an out of camp policy for refugee assistance; UNHCR support would be appreciated.

72. **Mr. Kashikola** (Namibia), speaking via video link, said that conflict and repression had caused large population movements in recent years. Life as a refugee was hard and the majority of refugees were women and children. The time for change had come. Efforts by UNHCR to provide humanitarian assistance in the Great Lakes region of Africa, the Horn of Africa and the Middle East were commendable. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic must be mitigated by continuing to observe the health protocols issued by the World Health

Organization. In that regard, the generous provision by UNHCR of personal protective equipment for use in the refugee settlement was appreciated and, in 2020, no deaths due to COVID-19 had been recorded among refugees and persons of concern.

73. Progress had been made on the pledges made by his Government at the Global Refugee Forum in December 2019, including work on quantitative studies on statelessness. Although tripartite engagement between his Government, UNHCR and the Government of Burundi had been postponed due to travel restrictions linked to the pandemic, work on voluntary repatriation would continue. Local integration efforts for Angolan refugees were in the final stages; most of them had been integrated in an area of their choice. Given the ongoing flow of asylum seekers from countries in the Great Lakes region, he urged UNHCR to develop mechanisms to address the factors driving migration.

74. **Mr. Imamberdiyev** (Turkmenistan), speaking via video link, said that the efforts of UNHCR to support global peace and security were appreciated and his Government reaffirmed its support for international initiatives to that end. His Government had made progress in the work of supporting refugees and eradicating statelessness and had participated in a number of international dialogues on the topic in 2021. A national review had been established on progress under the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration that included statistics and information on citizenship, and the International Conference on Statelessness Eradication in Central Asia had been hosted jointly with UNHCR. Other international efforts included participation in the UNHCR high-level segment on statelessness and the first Global Refugee Forum.

75. In September 2021, his Government had reported on its efforts to grant citizenship to stateless persons and, in celebration of Turkmen Independence Day, the President of Turkmenistan had granted citizenship to more than 9,000 stateless persons. Close cooperation with UNHCR had brought a number of initiatives to fruition, including a bill aimed at facilitating naturalization and status determination procedures. The registration of births, including births to undocumented parents, was guaranteed and a common electronic registration system would be introduced, with the support of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Programme. Information on the protection of stateless persons and the eradication of statelessness had been disseminated in the mass media. His Government intended to eradicate statelessness in his country by 2024. He called on the international community to support refugees and their host countries and to consider the Ashgabat Declaration of the International Ministerial Conference of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation on Refugees in The Muslim World as inextricably linked to implementation of the global compact on refugees.

76. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), responding to comments, said that Central Asia and West Africa were the regions in which most progress had been made on the eradication of statelessness. Work on that issue by the Government Turkmenistan could serve as example to other countries and regions. The long history of exile from Namibia and that country's subsequent experience as the subject of one of the first major repatriation operations undertaken by UNHCR meant that it could contribute valuable experience to help resolve crises in the subregion and beyond. He welcomed the details provided on how to deal with refugee and asylum-seeking population movements in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Efforts in Ghana with a view to the repatriation of Ivorian refugees and an end to refugee status for those who would stay in Ghana after the related cessation clause came into effect were encouraging.

77. Noting the situation of displaced persons in Cabo Delgado in northern Mozambique, he said that the recent visit by the Assistant High Commissioner for Operations and the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection was a sign of the commitment of UNHCR to addressing that issue. The situation, including in terms of security, appeared to be improving and it was clear that the Government of Mozambique was committed to addressing the possibility that a large number of persons were permanently displaced. The repatriation of Burundians, mentioned by a number of speakers, was a significant regional challenge. Despite the continuing fragility of the situation in Burundi, there were opportunities to find solutions to that long-standing refugee problem.

78. Ethiopia hosted 100,000 refugees from neighbouring countries, in addition to Eritrean refugees. The important role of Ethiopia in the establishment of the global compact on refugees and the convention of the Global Refugee Forum should not be forgotten, alongside the important work achieved in the country. In terms of emergency response, priority was placed on Eritrean refugees, whose existence was greatly affected by the conflict in the Tigray region. The issues included the transfer of affected persons in the camps to safe areas, access to those who had dispersed following the events of 2020 and the granting of protection to Eritreans who had moved to urban centres. As part of the United Nations inter-agency response to the humanitarian situation in Tigray, UNHCR was focused, in particular, on internal displacement. In that regard, urgent improvements in access to the population in need were required.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.