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Summary record of the 741st meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 6 October 2021, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Ahmed Hassan (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 p.m.

General debate (*continued*)

1. **Mr. M.O. Kah** (Observer for the Gambia) said that his Government called on donors to increase their funding and support for the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and encouraged UNHCR and its partners to provide technical assistance to Member States to avert a humanitarian catastrophe in the face of overwhelming numbers of refugees. The pandemic had cast doubt on whether the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development would be achieved and challenged countries' ability to provide adequate social services. He therefore called for increased support for host countries in vaccinating their populations, including refugees and other persons of concern. Increased support for refugees in areas such as education, health and housing was required to strengthen their resilience.

2. The Gambia hosted more than 4,000 refugees and asylum seekers, principally from Senegal and countries of the Economic Community of West African States. The majority had settled in rural areas, where they enjoyed the same access to socioeconomic activities and social services, including COVID-19 vaccination, as Gambian citizens. Transparent refugee management required capacity-building for institutions and individuals, and he therefore called on UNHCR to provide technical assistance to enhance the capacities of the Gambia Commission for Refugees.

3. **Mr. Nkosi** (South Africa) said that the seventieth anniversary of the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees provided an opportunity to reflect on whether refugees received the protection that the Convention sought to provide. A firm supporter of the five core directions of the UNHCR Strategic Directions 2017–2021 document, his Government provided protection for refugees despite the COVID-19 pandemic, in response to which it had launched a system that allowed asylum seekers and refugees to request permit extensions online. It had also partnered with UNHCR to strengthen its capacities to address the backlog of asylum appeals.

4. Cognizant that resources remained far below the required levels, his Government continued to provide voluntary contributions to UNHCR, along with contributions to humanitarian appeals and other humanitarian funding mechanisms in the United Nations system. He called on UNHCR to provide international protection to refugees in the occupied territories of Western Sahara and humanitarian assistance for the Sahrawi people in Western Sahara and Algeria. Moreover, humanitarian personnel must enjoy unhindered access to that group.

5. The spread of COVID-19 would be halted only if vaccination was offered to all, but many refugees and asylum seekers around the world were excluded from vaccination programmes. His Government planned to partner with UNHCR and neighbouring countries to end statelessness in the region via a project to enable those displaced by war to reacquire or confirm lost citizenship. Lastly, he called on the international community to unite to provide international protection to those in need during the global recovery from the pandemic, and to address the root causes of forced displacement.

6. **Mr. Hashim Mostafa** (Observer for Iraq), speaking in a pre-recorded video message, said that during the COVID-19 pandemic his Government had prioritized internally displaced persons, working with a range of stakeholders to alleviate their suffering and strengthen their economic and social rights, for example by providing replacement identity documents and financial compensation to those affected by terrorism. His Government's efforts had led to a significant drop in the number of internally displaced persons, although more work was required in terms of resettlement and voluntary return, and a national plan had been adopted to that end. It was also working to clear liberated areas of the explosive remnants of war and to rebuild health-care facilities.

7. Iraq also hosted significant numbers of refugees, who received health and education services. He called for greater solidarity and burden sharing in the international community

and for the strengthening of relations between UNHCR and host communities via support for national systems.

8. **Mr. Aspelund** (Iceland), noting the significant increase in forced displacement in the previous decade as a result of extreme poverty, conflict and extreme weather events, said that his Government welcomed the recommendations put forward in the recent report of the High-level Panel on Internal Displacement. His Government advocated for fair and equal access to COVID-19 vaccination for all and supported the advance market commitment mechanism for COVID-19 vaccines launched by the Gavi Alliance. Special attention must be paid to the inclusion of refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless persons in vaccination and health-care initiatives.

9. The pandemic had brought about a stark rise in gender-based violence around the globe, and a strong focus on women and girls was required in all UNHCR activities. Similarly, his Government supported the rights of LGBTI+ persons forced to flee their countries for fear of persecution. The situation of those two groups in Afghanistan was particular cause for concern, and his Government had recently provided flexible funding to UNHCR to meet the needs of vulnerable Afghans. It would also assist Afghans who wished to leave the country.

10. Iceland would continue to participate in burden and responsibility sharing and had honoured its resettlement commitments for 2020 and 2021, despite the pandemic. It would continue to work closely with UNHCR to provide durable solutions to refugees. It fully supported work by UNHCR to end statelessness by 2024, as illustrated by its recent accession to the United Nations statelessness conventions.

11. **Mr. Tressler Zamorano** (Chile) said that his Government had recently entered into a headquarters agreement with UNHCR that would strengthen cooperation between the two parties. His Government's actions on migration aligned with the five core directions of UNHCR and addressed both migrants and host communities. Chile had ratified a range of international instruments relating to refugees and statelessness and had adopted legislation on refugee protection, while seeking to fulfil the three pledges it had made at the Global Refugee Forum in relation to statelessness, refugee workers and family reunification, through the adoption of legislation and the creation of new institutions, including a body to determine statelessness.

12. Chile had participated in regional and multilateral coordination mechanisms to address the more than 5 million displaced Venezuelans, working with UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration and civil society to refine its response to the crisis, in which host communities played a vital role. Chile had lent its support to the international response to the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, recently receiving a group of Afghan families and issuing more than 100 emergency travel documents. It was working with UNHCR and other international partners to assist those affected by the situation, to whom it would endeavour to provide all necessary support.

13. **Mr. Johnson** (Togo) said that the efforts of the High Commissioner and his team to mobilize funding and mount a response to the COVID-19 pandemic were commendable, and he welcomed the participation of a team of refugees at the recent Olympic Games. Refugees in his country coexisted peacefully with the local population, and his Government was committed to identifying durable solutions. To that end, it had taken an active role in the regional meeting that had resulted in the Abidjan Joint Declaration on the Updated Roadmap for Comprehensive Solutions for Ivorian Refugees; it was committed to implementing the road map and the conclusions of the meeting. The Government's strategies to find durable solutions for refugees included the granting of Togolese nationality to children born in Togo to long-term refugees. Togo had recently acceded to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and had adopted a national action plan to eradicate statelessness in the country.

14. **Ms. Rodríguez Mancía** (Observer for Guatemala) said that UNHCR was one of her Government's strategic partners, thanks largely to its support for the comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework (MIRPS) platform, which had recently worked to involve local governments in providing access to employment and training for persons of interest, strengthen institutions tasked with protecting children and adolescents in border areas and

develop partnerships between the public and private sectors to include migrants and asylums seekers in labour markets. Links had also been forged between the MIRPS support platform and other regional mechanisms, including the Regional Conference on Migration. As pro tempore Chair of the support platform, Guatemala was committed to innovative approaches and joint initiatives with international partners and key actors. She looked forward to the participation of the High Commissioner in the forthcoming annual meeting of the support platform.

15. No country could address displacement alone, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the natural disasters that had affected her region. Cooperation, including financial cooperation, must increase. She was grateful for the efforts made by Canada to garner the support of a range of actors for host countries' activities in the area of protection and solutions for displaced persons. Her Government looked forward to hosting the meeting of the members of the support platform in November.

16. **Mr. Andisha** (Afghanistan) said that he wished to thank UNHCR and all Member States for their support for the population of Afghanistan, particularly those that had participated in the ongoing evacuation effort. The COVID-19 pandemic, the failure of diplomatic efforts to bring peace to Afghanistan and the recent military takeover of the country had brought the economy and government institutions to the brink of collapse. Afghanistan was entering an era of acute poverty, and without international support the population faced a humanitarian crisis.

17. Welcoming the considerable humanitarian support pledged during the flash appeal of September 2021, he reiterated the need to ensure that humanitarian support reached the population of Afghanistan via transparent, effective and independent mechanisms. Despite dedicated evacuation efforts, stringent visa requirements meant that many Afghans had been left behind. He urged States to expand eligibility criteria for those at risk, open borders, facilitate resettlement and halt deportations. UNHCR must increase its resettlement capacity, particularly in Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, to reflect the increase in at-risk persons in Afghanistan.

18. Past humanitarian operations in Afghanistan had demonstrated the need for designated United Nations-controlled safe zones throughout the country. Humanitarian assistance must be delivered to all parts of the country equally. The communities of Panjshir and Andarab, the people in the areas that had been under siege and other vulnerable groups, including women, should also receive humanitarian assistance as a matter of priority. An inclusive Government must be established through a meaningful political settlement in order to address the root causes of the humanitarian crises and conflict in Afghanistan. Only respect for the fundamental rights of all Afghans would create lasting peace.

19. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that UNHCR was grateful for the strong support of the Gambia for the Office's resource mobilization efforts and would follow up on the plea for support to the Gambia Commission for Refugees.

20. The progress made in South Africa with regard to refugee backlogs was encouraging, as were its efforts to strengthen its asylum system. The country's commitment to being a peacemaker in the region was also appreciated.

21. He commended Togo for its commitment to implementing refugee status cessation for Ivorian refugees. He welcomed the accession of Togo and Iceland to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons. The vigorous pursuit of Iceland of gender issues and the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons, and the action taken in support of that position, including resettlement, were praiseworthy.

22. Iraq had made unrivalled progress in reducing the internally displaced population, but additional efforts were needed to create safe conditions of return, including by eliminating discrimination against returnees.

23. Every effort must be made to address the escalating humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. A collapse of the State would cause further hardship and must be avoided. The discussions with the Taliban must include women, minorities and others. He had heard the plea for increasing resettlement capacities. While UNHCR was doing everything possible to

increase capacity, finding solutions was particularly challenging in the light of the highly complex situation, but efforts to that end would continue.

24. The forthcoming establishment of a UNHCR office in Santiago would improve cooperation with the Government of Chile, which hosted a large number of Venezuelan refugees. Its renewed commitment to address statelessness and the solidarity extended to Afghan refugees were commendable.

25. The comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework was a useful tool to address situations of displacement and mixed migratory movement in Central America and Mexico, strengthen national asylum systems and prevent migration flows.

26. **Mr. Okaniwa** (Japan) said that the situation in Afghanistan was cause for deep concern. Japan supported the engagement of UNHCR with the Taliban to facilitate secure humanitarian operations. As a member of the core group of the support platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries, Japan would fulfil its humanitarian responsibilities in partnership with UNHCR, including by providing generous financial support.

27. Mindful that Afghanistan was far from being the only other humanitarian crisis, Japan supported the emergency operations of UNHCR in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Ethiopia, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Myanmar. It had provided partnership grants for projects in Bangladesh and Pakistan, allocated part of its UNHCR core contribution to support the Colombian temporary protection scheme for Venezuelans and supported the COVAX Facility. The High-level Officials Meeting to be held on 14 and 15 December 2021 would provide an opportunity to enhance the momentum created by the global compact on refugees and take stock of pledges implemented.

28. Japan welcomed the sustained efforts of UNHCR to improve integrity and risk management mechanisms, the progress made in the implementation of the business transformation programme, and the new budget framework. His Government would be grateful to be kept up to date on developments in that regard.

29. The participation of 35 refugee athletes in the 2021 Summer Olympic held in Japan had raised public awareness of the 82 million displaced persons around the world.

30. **Mr. Virabutr** (Thailand) said that Thailand, too, had contributed to humanitarian relief operations in Afghanistan. At the same time, it was gravely concerned over the developments in Myanmar, where humanitarian assistance was direly needed, and prepared for a potential influx of people fleeing the violence. As repatriation of displaced persons from Myanmar had stalled during the COVID-19 pandemic, Thailand had focused on preventing COVID-19 infection and other communicable diseases in temporary shelters. Skills development for displaced persons was also ongoing. COVID-19 infection rates in shelters had been low and vaccinations had commenced. Pending longer-term solutions, the national screening mechanism, which would be operationalized in 2022, would help distinguish people in need of international protection, paving the way to legal residency and access to basic services.

31. Statelessness was a top priority and in early 2021 the Government had approved revised criteria for the determination of legal status, which would facilitate the process and remove bureaucratic barriers.

32. The situation of persons displaced from Rakhine State remained a concern. Thailand remained vigilant about smuggling and human trafficking, while standing ready to deliver humanitarian assistance. The international community must support host communities, address the root causes of displacement and identify sustainable solutions.

33. **Ms. Kiruthu** (Kenya) said that Kenya was currently hosting more than half a million refugees, with numbers increasing over the past year. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, it had continued to provide and included refugees in its pandemic response plans.

34. Kenya remained committed to refugee protection. At the same time, there was an urgent need to find lasting solutions and in April 2021 Kenya and UNHCR had agreed on a road map for the closure of the Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps by 30 June 2022. The

deregistration and verification process had commenced, and international support would be greatly appreciated.

35. As the COVID-19 had increased the already heavy burden on refugee-hosting countries, the international community must accelerate the momentum towards durable solutions, redouble its efforts to address emerging conflicts and protracted displacement situations, and enhance voluntary repatriation and resettlement. In a landmark decision, Kenya had recently granted citizenship to 1,670 stateless members of the Shona community and 1,300 stateless persons of Rwandan descent.

36. The High-level Officials Meeting would be an opportunity to assess whether the international community was on track in the implementation of the global compact on refugees in spite of the pandemic and emerging and protracted displacement situations.

37. **Mr. Dockendorf** (Luxembourg) said that the causes of displacement were increasingly complex, and the COVID-19 pandemic had reaffirmed the need to include persons of concern in health emergency response plans.

38. The situation in Afghanistan illustrated that long-term solutions were an indispensable complement to immediate protection. Third-country resettlement would be an option for very few and there was a desperate need for complementary protection options. The people and Governments of Iran and Pakistan had generously received Afghans, some of them for decades, and the international community had a moral responsibility to support host countries in the region.

39. The instrumentalization of migrants and refugees by States was entirely unacceptable and a potential violation of their human rights.

40. As a signatory of the Grand Bargain on humanitarian financing, Luxembourg would provide financial and other support for effective local humanitarian action. The satellite-based telecommunications platform of Luxembourg “emergency.lu” facilitated connectivity for UNHCR and partners and helped improve the delivery of basic services in refugee camps in the Niger, Chad and Venezuela. The humanitarian-development nexus must be strengthened further, with a focus on innovative, inclusive solutions for refugees and host communities.

41. Luxembourg supported needs-based budgeting and recognized the need to review UNHCR financial regulations. It fully supported the development of a next generation of UNHCR strategic directions that would enable stronger responses to the impact of climate change, gender inequality and sexual violence and strengthen advocacy for international protection.

42. **Mr. Jgenti** (Georgia) said that the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19 was a valuable tool to meet the needs of vulnerable groups amid the global health crisis. Georgia was grateful for UNHCR support to vulnerable populations in the Russian-occupied Abkhazia region of Georgia since the outbreak of the pandemic.

43. Georgia had provided increased support for displaced persons and strengthened its asylum system. Since 2021, it had received some 10,000 asylum seekers, 1,400 of whom had been granted international protection. International protection holders were entitled to education, employment, monthly benefit allowances and health care, including the full range of COVID-19-related services. During the pandemic, asylum procedures had been conducted in strict compliance with health measures.

44. Hundreds of thousands of Georgians expelled from Russian-occupied territories in the course of ethnic cleansing continued to be deprived of the right to a safe, dignified return and the Russian occupation prevented the protection of persons on the other side of the occupation line. During the pandemic, the closure of the occupation line, restriction of movement and discrimination against ethnic Georgians had aggravated the security and human rights situation of the conflict-affected populations. The contribution of UNHCR to addressing those populations’ humanitarian needs was greatly appreciated.

45. **Mr. Tamulaitis** (Lithuania), expressing grave concern at new and recurring conflicts, ever-more disturbing forms of violence and persecution, the growing need for humanitarian assistance and the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, said that security risks and

access restrictions further increased vulnerabilities. Global attention needed to focus on areas such as Ukraine and Georgia, where people were fleeing zones of Russian aggression and were in desperate need of solutions.

46. Lithuania was deeply concerned about the actions of Belarus at the European Union's external borders. Those apparent endeavours to destabilize European member States by means of irregular migration of third-country citizens were compounded by the repeated attempts to spread misinformation about the crisis in international forums. Belarus bore the full responsibility for that humanitarian crisis and the international community must strongly condemn such instrumentalization of migration. It must also engage with Belarus to ensure it assumed full responsibility for third-country citizens.

47. **Mr. Cordova** (Observer for Honduras) said that the COVID-19 pandemic had deepened socioeconomic inequalities and spotlighted weaknesses in global health emergency response. In that context, decisive implementation of the global compact on refugees, predictable and sustained support to refugees and host communities, and enhanced opportunities for durable solutions were vital. Cooperation, solidarity, joint action and fully assumed shared responsibility were indispensable.

48. The High-level Officials Meeting should be used to assess progress and realign commitments to emerging challenges.

49. As one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change, Honduras had witnessed its most devastating effects in late 2020. The hurricanes had had a devastating effect on the economy and further exacerbated the health crisis. In light of those challenges, greater emphasis must be placed on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, while identifying durable solutions that went beyond the traditional humanitarian assistance model.

50. Honduras had long recognized the phenomenon of internal displacement and created a unit for the protection of internally displaced persons, established forcible displacement as a punishable offence, embarked on the identification and registration of abandoned property, and analysed the profile of displaced populations. The central Government worked closely with local authorities in the development of local responses. At the regional level, Honduras participated in the comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework. The pandemic had reaffirmed the need for additional and predictable resources to enable the UNHCR to carry out its crucial mandate.

51. **Mr. Winder** (United Kingdom) said that the term "challenging year" did not begin to describe the enormity of tasks the humanitarian community had encountered in 2021. The commitment of UNHCR to stay and deliver in the most difficult and dangerous situations was truly commendable. Paying tribute to host countries and communities that opened their borders and homes to persons fleeing from conflict, persecution and violence, he said that the United Kingdom supported refugees and their hosts through generous targeted and unearmarked financial contributions.

52. Climate change had been a cruel multiplier of existing vulnerabilities, driving further displacement, and the participation of humanitarian agencies in the forthcoming twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change would be highly valuable.

53. In 2020, the United Kingdom had launched a call to action to prevent famine and, during its presidency, the Group of Seven had adopted the first-ever famine prevention and humanitarian crisis compact. In Ethiopia, the deliberate destruction of facilities and objects essential to civilian well-being, exacerbated by a denial of humanitarian and commercial access, was driving the famine risk. The United Kingdom condemned the recent expulsion of United Nations officials and called for a ceasefire to allow for unfettered access for humanitarian assistance.

54. In Afghanistan, economic collapse and reduced access to critical services could trigger a humanitarian catastrophe and lead to regional instability. Coordination and consistency among United Nations partners were critical. The United Kingdom was doubling its aid to support Afghans in the region and neighbouring host countries. Under its Afghan citizens resettlement scheme, the United Kingdom would resettle a total of 25,000 Afghan refugees over the coming years.

55. His delegation welcomed the ongoing commitment of UNHCR to organizational reform. The benefits of decentralization were already apparent and further progress towards an even more effective and efficient organization with coherent priorities, effective controls and transparent decision-making would be useful.

56. The High-level Officials Meeting would provide an opportunity to build on achievements and identify priorities, opportunities and decision points for the coming biennium.

57. **Mr. Shahi** (Observer for Nepal) said that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic had reversed hard-earned achievements and uneven access to vaccines had exposed equality gaps. Refugees were included in Government's COVID-19 preparedness and response plan and Nepal had been the first country in the Asia-Pacific region to vaccinate refugees.

58. As a mountainous and agricultural country, Nepal faced a disproportionate impact of climate change. The international community must make genuine efforts to address vulnerabilities through climate resilient actions.

59. Despite its limited resources and difficult domestic situation, Nepal had been hosting thousands of Bhutanese refugees for decades. His country's efforts to find durable solutions for one of the most protracted refugee situations in the world had been hindered by the failure of Bhutan to implement decisions that had been reached. Most Bhutanese refugees had resettled in third countries and it was high time that the remaining refugees wishing to repatriate could do so in safety and dignity. Swift international action was required to guarantee their right of return and effective rehabilitation.

60. **Mr. Taihiti** (Observer for Indonesia) said that the COVAX humanitarian buffer and efforts towards more inclusive and transparent vaccine distribution were positive examples of much-needed global solidarity. The pandemic had not deterred refugees from taking difficult and dangerous journeys and Indonesia had gone beyond its duties to rescue refugees at sea. Stronger international cooperation was needed to ensure States parties' compliance with the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol. Even in times of pandemic, safe countries of origin, transit and destination must cooperate and build capacities to prevent irregular migration.

61. Indonesia followed the situations in Afghanistan and Myanmar closely. It would continue to provide support for humanitarian assistance and capacity-building in Afghanistan, highlighting the need for women's participation in political processes, and help fund humanitarian assistance in Myanmar.

62. As hosts, developing countries continued to bear a disproportionate burden of the global refugee crisis. True to the principles of responsibility and burden sharing, States parties to the 1951 Convention must fulfil their obligations and alleviate the burden on host countries.

63. **Ms. Moussa** (Egypt) said that her Government had a long-standing commitment to the protection of refugees and asylum seekers, who enjoyed complete freedom of movement and access to basic services – such as health care and education – and benefits, on an equal basis with citizens. An innovative approach to meeting their needs was being developed in consultation with UNHCR and other organizations. Other measures included access to a complaints mechanism and shelters for women subjected to violence and equal access to the COVID-19 vaccine. Access to education during the COVID-19 pandemic had been provided to refugees with expired resident permits. She expressed her appreciation for the efforts of UNHCR to address the backlog of permit registrations and renewals. The economic pressure of those commitments to refugees underscored the need for equitable burden sharing in line with the global compact on refugees; support for host countries should be commensurate with their contribution.

64. National governments should be consulted when planning assistance projects in order to align them with development efforts, provide long-term solutions for refugees and host communities and avoid the creation of parallel structures. Her Government was developing legislation to fulfil the pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum and advocated a comprehensive approach to addressing the root causes of refugee crises and to creating the conditions for return. Work was also under way on the African Union Policy on Post-Conflict

Reconstruction and Development and the Aswan Forum for Sustainable Peace and Development had called for a shift towards prevention and resolution, rather than management, of forced displacement.

65. The international community must collectively address the water scarcity and environmental degradation that were compounded by climate change and compelled people to move. The persistence of conflict and the challenging humanitarian situation in her region threatened an increase in refugee and secondary movements to North Africa and the Mediterranean. Border controls and the legal framework and strategy to prevent trafficking in persons through those routes remained an exclusively national endeavour, however. The “one refugee” approach would benefit all refugee communities without discrimination based on national origin and would require donors to address the funding gap, including through unearmarked contributions. Resettlement was an important element of responsibility sharing and should be stepped up.

66. **Mr. Meimou** (Mauritania) said that protection and assistance was provided to the more than 66,000 Malian refugees who lived in the Mbera camp in Mauritania, and urban refugees and asylum seekers. In line with the pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum, his Government was integrating refugees into the national systems for health care, social protection, water, sanitation and town planning and continued to work with UNHCR to provide civil registration, identity cards and birth certificates. Investment from partners to enhance the protection and assistance afforded to Malian refugees had also targeted improvements in the overall economic and social situation in the region of Mbera refugee camp, including for the host community. Measures to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on refugees had included cash transfers and food rations. Every effort was made to protect refugees, despite the situation in the region and the impact of the pandemic. The support of partners would be essential to meeting the commitments made by his Government at the Global Refugee Forum.

67. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the hospitality shown by Japan towards refugee athletes during the 2021 Olympic and Paralympic Games was commendable. The Japanese Government provided financial and general support for UNHCR operations, had been a prompt donor of vaccines to countries that hosted large numbers of refugees and was an important stakeholder in responses to refugees and displaced persons in Afghanistan and Myanmar, and in Africa and Latin America. Japan should continue to support the pursuit of solutions to refugee problems, including through its influence and partnerships in Asia. The support of Thailand on issues relating to Myanmar, both in terms of refugee hosting and humanitarian response, particularly in Rakhine State, was appreciated, as was the commitment to reducing statelessness. Noting the appeal for the response to outflows of people to fully respect humanitarian principles, he called for Thailand and other countries in the region to consider allowing the disembarkation of Rohingya refugees who had fled by boat. Nepal should be commended as the first country in its region to include refugees in its vaccination campaigns and for its attention to the impact of climate change on displacement. He reiterated his annual plea to Nepal and Bhutan to find a balanced solution to the remaining Bhutanese refugees in Nepal, perhaps through a combination of repatriation and local integration. The support of Indonesia was much appreciated, including on policy and in difficult circumstances, such as that of the Rohingya community and the situation in Afghanistan. He thanked Indonesia for having allowed the disembarkation of Rohingya refugees who had travelled from both Myanmar and Bangladesh.

68. Kenya was a generous host of refugees and a champion for the reduction of statelessness. The Dadaab and Kakuma Refugee Camps Road Map agreed with UNHCR would be important for reducing the dependency of refugees on humanitarian assistance, particularly in Dadaab. The international community had an important stake in addressing resettlement and the establishment of conditions for voluntary repatriation under the road map. Even after the end of the road map, no one should be pushed back to their country and the Kenyan tradition of hospitality and respect for the principle of refugee protection should be maintained. Egypt had also been a generous host to many refugees, particularly with respect to access to basic services. He supported the appeal by Egypt for greater international support commensurate to the burden and responsibility faced by that State and noted the good

practices implemented by the Egyptian Government and the analytical and preventive work it had undertaken through the African Union and the Aswan Forum for Sustainable Peace and Development. Mauritania was another State that had generously hosted refugees over many years, notably from Mali, and had taken an admirably inclusive approach. Progress in the peace process in Mali would help to put in place the conditions for the return of at least some of those Malian refugees.

69. He remained concerned about the high rate of rejection of refugees, particularly Syrian refugees, on security grounds by Georgia. UNHCR stood ready to provide the necessary support to develop the asylum system and remained committed to its work as a Co-Chair of the Working Group on Humanitarian Issues. Investment in humanitarian assistance and resettlement in Afghanistan was an area on which action could be taken immediately and in the years to come. The predictable multi-year funding mentioned by Luxembourg was particularly appreciated and served as an example to others. Welcoming the news that the United Kingdom would sustain its financial support for humanitarian operations and UNHCR, he called generally for greater funding for work relating to COVID-19. Clarity was needed on what could be achieved in terms of the resettlement of Afghans, including a better understanding of resettlement as compared to evacuation. The twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in November 2021 would provide a great opportunity to highlight the issue of climate displacement.

70. A more systematic response to the impact of climate displacement in Central America was needed. Solutions were also needed to tackle the issue of internally displaced persons. UNHCR would continue to work through the comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework to help countries in that region strengthen their systems and find solutions to forced displacement.

71. **Ms. Baghli** (Observer for the Organization of Islamic Cooperation) said that climate change combined with other factors had resulted in food insecurity and even looming famine in some parts of the world. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation, whose member States hosted two-thirds of global refugees, was transforming and bolstering its offices to focus on humanitarian activities in Yemen, provide better coverage across Somalia and play a greater role in aid coordination in Afghanistan. Aid was also being provided to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. She called on Myanmar to put in place the measures needed to allow their safe, voluntary and dignified return. The solutions-focused work of UNHCR, including with respect to climate change, was commendable. The global compact on refugees had set expectations for burden and responsibility sharing, and the humanitarian–peace–development nexus remained particularly important to many States members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

72. **Mr. Godfrey** (Observer for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)), speaking via video link, said that there was a need to consider how to contain both mindless violence and the effects of climate change, since millions in West Africa had been forcibly displaced by violence, flooding, drought and starvation. ECOWAS worked with UNHCR and other United Nations agencies and partners at the regional and country levels to alleviate the economic and social effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and displacement. ECOWAS had held meetings with key stakeholders in Nigeria and Burkina Faso to encourage the implementation and integration into domestic law of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention), as part of a focus on member States experiencing violent conflicts that had led to displacement. Those efforts would be extended to all member States as part of a regional approach to displacement.

73. In 2020, ECOWAS and UNHCR had held an information session on the global compact on refugees for the staff of the ECOWAS Commission, Court of Justice and Parliament. The meeting had ensured the provision of appropriate institutional support to mainstream the principles of the compact in national programmes. Ministerial meetings would be held in late October 2021 to adopt a regional action plan for the pledges made at the Global Forum on Refugees. Work was under way with UNHCR to return thousands of citizens who had been stranded in the Niger while trying to reach Europe.

74. **Mr. Stefanek** (Observer for the Council of Europe) said that his organization enjoyed excellent relations with UNHCR and had jointly held an international conference on statelessness and the right to nationality in Europe in September 2021. The Council of Europe was committed to working with its member States to fulfil the pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum and during the high-level segment on statelessness. In May 2021, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe had adopted a plan to protect vulnerable groups in the context of migration and asylum for 2021–2025. As Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees, he would be responsible for coordinating that work and advocating for effective multilateralism built on existing cooperation with partners, including UNHCR. The plan was based on the premise that all migrants were vulnerable and focused on identifying and responding to vulnerability, ensuring access to justice, fostering inclusion and seeking cooperation between member States and with international bodies, such as UNHCR. Pledges to end statelessness and participation in international conferences and technical meetings were also part of implementation and many of the planned activities would focus on refugee and migrant children. The action plan was particularly timely in the context of the Taliban's assumption of power in Afghanistan and its immediate consequences, particularly for women and girls. The Council would continue to implement the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe recommendation on guardianship for unaccompanied and separated children in the context of migration by adopting a new set of guidelines on age assessment for children in migration and promoting the Council of Europe project to develop a European qualifications passport for refugees.

75. **Ms. Ferris** (Observer for the International Olympic Committee (IOC)), speaking via video link, said that a fundamental goal of Olympism was to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind. The commitment of IOC to individuals and communities affected by displacement was evident in the Olympic Agenda 2020+5, the successor to the Olympic Agenda 2020, which included a recommendation to reinforce support for displaced persons through sport, and in the participation of an IOC Refugee Olympic Team in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. The long-standing partnership between UNHCR and IOC had led to the launch of the Olympic Refugee Foundation, which delivered sports programmes in several countries and had convened the Sport for Refugees Coalition, with the aim of ensuring safe and inclusive access to sport for all refugees. Close collaboration with Governments was needed to overcome legal and administrative barriers to sport for refugees, such as quota regulations and documentation requirements. Sport should be embedded in national and regional refugee frameworks, and refugee athletes should be guaranteed access to vaccination campaigns and unrestricted travel to sports competitions. Through the Olympic Refugee Foundation, IOC intended to establish a team of leaders, businesses, coaches, athletes and displaced young persons to enable those affected by displacement to regain a sense of belonging, develop their skills and rebuild their lives through sport. The support of UNHCR and Member States would help IOC achieve the goal of 1 million young persons affected by displacement participating in safe sport by 2024 and deliver on the shared commitment to the global compact on refugees, which recognized the role of sport in social development, inclusion and well-being.

76. **Ms. Angama-Anyetei** (Observer for the African Union) said that the African Union Commission sought to prevent and resolve conflicts and establish a culture of peace. Efforts to that end included the provision of financial assistance and support to implement African Union policies and instruments that affected refugees and internally displaced persons, including the Kampala Convention. The African Vaccine Acquisition Task Team had been established to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic through vaccination, including of refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless persons.

77. The lack of financial resources to address displacement in Africa had reached alarming proportions, with funding gaps of over 70 per cent in a number of countries. The Commission was therefore planning to host a humanitarian summit and donor pledging conference to raise the required resources. She called on the international community to provide appropriate, predictable and accessible funding to address the challenges of displacement.

78. The decision by some Governments to externalize their asylum protection obligations ran counter to the spirit of the global compact on refugees and was a cause of deep concern.

All States parties to the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees had a responsibility to provide international protection to persons in need of it. Africa continued to shoulder the burden of 85 per cent of the world's refugees, whereas only 15 per cent were hosted by developed countries. Institutional reform and the effective mobilization of broader, all-inclusive investments in protection were needed. She invited partners to participate in the Peace Fund and the establishment of key institutions, such as the African Humanitarian Agency, the African Development Agency and the African Medicines Agency.

79. **Mr. Devictor** (World Bank Group), speaking via video link, said that the World Bank Group remained committed to supporting host countries in their efforts to care for refugees. It was critical to collectively step up efforts to support implementation of the global compact on refugees and the commitments made at the Global Refugee Forum. The growing forced displacement crisis highlighted the importance of work on conflict prevention and resolution, which the Group supported through the so-called fragility, conflict and violence envelope of the nineteenth replenishment of the International Development Association (IDA19). In cooperation with UNHCR, the Group had deployed more than \$3 billion for projects in 18 countries through the Global Concessional Financing Facility for middle-income countries and IDA19 windows for host communities and refugees in low-income settings. The Group hoped to continue its efforts towards protecting livelihoods and supporting communities and Governments under the forthcoming IDA20.

80. The World Bank Group was working with partners, including at the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access Facility, the African Union and United Nations agencies to provide broader access to COVID-19 vaccines. The introduction of regional support platforms led by host countries could shape the international response to some of the most protracted and complex refugee situations; the Group stood ready to support those efforts.

81. **Ms. Pictet-Althann** (Observer for the Sovereign Order of Malta) said that the COVID-19 pandemic had accentuated the need for urgent collective action to resolve the main drivers of emergencies – protracted conflicts, climate change and food insecurity. UNHCR was an important partner for Malteser International, the humanitarian relief agency of the Sovereign Order of Malta. Most projects implemented by that agency were intended to benefit refugee and host communities equally. Activities in Africa included support for refugees from the Central African Republic and South Sudan. The situation in Afghanistan was a cause of concern and Malteser International stood ready to provide support for internally displaced persons and refugees. With respect to Myanmar, efforts were focused on the support of refugees and their reintegration, and emergency relief for conflict-affected populations. In the Middle East, activities were centred on health and social care for refugees, internally displaced persons and host communities, while in Colombia, cooperation with UNHCR focused on assisting refugees and migrants.

82. The Sovereign Order of Malta had presented the Religions in Action Compact, based on its experience in the field, at the Group of 20 Interfaith Forum in September 2021. That compact noted the importance of a holistic approach that embedded local, social and cultural values and beliefs in operational schemes and was aimed at supporting religious communities and faith-based organizations to mitigate the effects of conflict and enhance the delivery of humanitarian support.

83. **Ms. Conte** (World Food Programme (WFP)) said that the dire situation of millions of displaced persons called for the international community to join forces to meet their needs. Collaboration with UNHCR included cash-based interventions in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ethiopia, and the harmonization of cash assistance, joint procurement of financial services and better system interoperability at the country level to enhance efficiency. Funding from the United States of America had supported the UNHCR-WFP Joint Programme Excellence and Targeting Hub, which worked on needs assessment, refugee self-reliance strategies, data sharing and accountability to affected populations across eight countries. The hub facilitated the implementation of policies, while documenting experiences with a view to expansion to other areas and population groups. Alongside its collaborative efforts with UNHCR, WFP continued to mobilize funds to ensure adequate food was made available to meet refugees' immediate requirements.

84. **Mr. Cassayre** (International Development Law Organization) said that justice mechanisms should be used to address the needs of refugees, internally displaced persons, migrants and stateless persons. Weak rule of law and poor governance were drivers of migration, alongside human rights abuses and climate change. His organization's work, for example in Honduras, showed that the promotion of strong institutions and equal access to justice could help prevent displacement by reducing social insecurity and rebuilding trust. Despite the vulnerability of migrants, legislative frameworks, government policies and public institutions were not equipped to respond to their needs; efforts by his organization to support voluntary return to Somalia included legislation reviews and training for the authorities on policy implementation.

85. Globally, customary or informal justice systems, which were often rooted in cultural or religious norms that did not adhere to national constitutions or international human rights standards, resolved more than 80 per cent of legal disputes – the majority of which involved women, poor people and minority or marginalized groups. In 2019, his organization had launched global consultations on customary and informal justice to advance policy dialogue in that area and boost access to justice for vulnerable groups. Legal reviews helped to eliminate laws and policies that undermined women's rights. Rule of law and justice programmes should be expanded in countries affected by displacement and in transit and destination countries, in order to protect migrants and tackle the root causes of migration.

86. **Mr. Cruz** (Plan International) said that he was speaking on behalf of a wide range of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with diverse views. The COVID-19 pandemic had shown that hard-won progress for displaced persons and in the field of human rights remained at risk from major setbacks and the climate crisis. Policies on age, gender and diversity were underfunded and 70 per cent of the pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum made no reference to age, gender or any form of diversity. All refugees and crisis-affected communities must be given equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines, and all women and children must be able to take advantage of protection, education, health care and economic opportunities – the efforts of UNHCR and Member States in that regard were welcome.

87. He called for: all persons of concern to be included in decision-making that affected their lives; UNHCR senior leadership to mainstream age and diversity in the oversight of refugee operations and internal displacement situations; UNHCR and partners to enhance the collection and analysis of data, disaggregated by age, sex and diversity; UNHCR and donors to advocate the development of national refugee response plans that met the needs of women, children, persons with disabilities and other types of diversity; robust investment to accelerate gender equality and the involvement of women and girls and representative organizations in monitoring, planning and response.

88. The report of the High-level Panel on Internal Displacement had the potential to change things for internally displaced persons. The international community had a responsibility to advance prevention, protection and solutions for internally displaced persons by providing financial and political support to implement the panel's recommendations. Efforts by UNHCR to garner political will for that work at the global, regional and local levels were appreciated. UNHCR should also consider the panel's recommendations in the light of its policies, notably the guidance package for UNHCR engagement in situations of internal displacement, the Handbook for Emergencies and the UNHCR strategic directions for 2022–2026. Responsibility for internal displacement must be aligned across the United Nations system. The NGO community stood ready to support implementation of the high-level panel's recommendations, particularly in supporting the meaningful participation of internally displaced persons.

89. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that he wished to thank all the organizations that had spoken. The global compact on refugees had been a key theme in the debate and was a demonstration of the value of partnerships with governmental, non-governmental and international organizations and States, since the challenges of the displacement crisis could not be tackled by UNHCR alone. The High-level Officials Meeting due to take place in December 2021 would provide an opportunity to take stock of progress made.

The meeting rose at 6.20 p.m.