



General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/AC.96/SR.631
8 October 2009

Original: ENGLISH

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Sixtieth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 631st MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 29 September 2009, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. DUMONT (Argentina)

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

GENERAL DEBATE (continued)

1. Mr. SEIN (Observer for Myanmar) said that a total of 236,495 persons had been returned from Bangladesh to Myanmar's northern Rakhine State between 22 September 1992 and 29 July 2005. Illegal migrants had fled to their countries of origin in order to avoid the nationality verification procedures. With 6,365 persons yet to be repatriated, the reception camps had been kept open in a spirit of good-neighbourliness.

2. During his visit to Myanmar in March 2009, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees had explained the humanitarian principles guiding his work and his view of the respective roles of UNHCR and Governments, with Governments prioritizing the security of the State and people. He had witnessed delivery of humanitarian assistance at the grass-roots level and recognized the importance of supporting the Government's efforts to improve the reintegration of returnees through sustainable rural development programmes. Myanmar had demonstrated its commitment to continued cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), including by agreeing to a further extension of its memorandum of understanding with UNHCR.

3. Mr. GUTH (Observer for the European Commission) said that in the context of the new pressures on UNHCR, with climate change and conflict representing long-term factors of large-scale displacement, the transition to needs-based budgeting and programme planning allowed the Office to remain flexible and focus increasingly scarce resources on areas of greatest vulnerability. He strongly encouraged UNHCR to share its data on the actual needs of beneficiaries with a wide cross-section of humanitarian actors in order to avoid duplication in humanitarian needs assessment. It was to be hoped that the common European asylum system that was taking shape under Sweden's presidency would promote the European Union's commitment to resettlement worldwide.

4. Ms. SEGURA HERNÁNDEZ (Costa Rica) expressed support for the UNHCR structural reform process and satisfaction with the results achieved, allowing for a more effective response to the growing and variable demands on UNHCR services. She welcomed the decentralization of UNHCR operations, particularly in Latin America, and reiterated the need for all States to work with UNHCR to overcome the challenges to the fulfilment of the UNHCR mandate. In that connection, the issue of urban refugees, a matter of particular importance to Costa Rica, required a durable solution.

5. The Migration Act, which Costa Rica had adopted in August 2009, defined the role and protection mandate of the authorities and included special protection provisions for the victims of trafficking. The promotion and observance of the highest standards of protection underpinned the Act.

6. Costa Rica had begun to implement its agreement with UNHCR on reopening an office to build its capacity in refugee status determination and to improve the national asylum system. She urged all States to continue improving their national protection capacities and called on UNHCR to keep such improvements among its priorities.

7. Costa Rica had been chosen to host a regional conference in November 2009 on refugee protection in the context of mixed migration. Such activities facilitated the creation of an appropriate environment and cooperation between States and other actors in the search for solutions to the problems of refugees and others in need of international protection.
8. Ms. NYATANYI (Observer for Rwanda), welcoming UNHCR reform and the good collaboration in place with Rwanda, said that 3 million Rwandan refugees had been repatriated and successfully reintegrated since the 1994 genocide, reflecting the priority the Government had attached to the issue. The establishment of national rehabilitation and stabilization programmes, together with recovery and reconciliation initiatives - including the Gacaca justice process and innovative participatory planning - had opened the way for social healing and had helped create a secure and stable environment. Based on swift progress achieved, an appeal had been made for the application of the cessation clause as an incentive for repatriation of the remaining Rwandan refugees who had refused to return.
9. Rwanda stood ready to collaborate with international efforts to achieve durable solutions to refugee situations and their root causes. It was also committed to regional and other efforts to address the problem of internally displaced persons (IDPs).
10. Mr. BARAHAWI (Observer for Afghanistan) said that although 5 million persons had been successfully repatriated to Afghanistan, more than 3 million registered Afghan refugees continued to be hosted by Pakistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and other countries. After more than three decades in exile, those Afghans were hesitant to return to an uncertain future; significant changes in the environment for return had contributed to lower voluntary repatriation figures in 2009. The elections held in August 2009 had, however, constituted an important achievement after years of security challenges.
11. The Government would continue to cooperate with the international community on refugee and IDP issues through its Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation. An inter-ministerial committee was now working with UNHCR to ensure that return and reintegration affairs were included in the planning and implementation of national development programmes. It was to be hoped that the international support expressed at the International Conference on Return and Reintegration held in Kabul in November 2008 would be translated into an honouring of commitments. Particular thanks were due to Pakistan and other host countries for their continued generosity towards Afghan refugees. International support was also required for the provision of basic services in the returnee townships currently under development. A national scheme was also under way to allocate land to entitled returnees.
12. Despite the efforts of Afghan and international forces, the security situation in Afghanistan had deteriorated due to Al-Qaida terrorists, with 250,000 persons now internally displaced. The difficult context had not deterred the Government from continuing to work with UNHCR to respond to the protection and assistance requirements of IDPs. Some 5,346 IDPs had been returned to their places of origin in 2009, but much remained to be done in the areas of reintegration and development.
13. Returns since 2002 had placed great pressure on the country's absorption capacity. Deteriorating security, landlessness, homelessness, unemployment and limited basic services discouraged return. Many returnees furthermore continued to lack access to health, education,

shelter and water. The Government was sensitive to the changing political environment in the region and remained committed to finding durable solutions acceptable to all parties with priority given to a voluntary and gradual return process.

14. Mr. HANNAN (Bangladesh) said that viable approaches to durable solutions to protracted refugee situations had long been identified; there was no need to reinvent the wheel. It was to be hoped that a balanced outcome of negotiations on the draft conclusion on protracted refugee situations would thus soon be found. Bangladesh had hosted Myanmar refugees for more than two decades now. Considerable numbers continued to languish in camps owing to a protracted stalemate in the repatriation process. His Government had always underscored the need for dialogue with Myanmar to sustain the voluntary returns. It appreciated the Office's efforts to build an enabling environment in that connection in Myanmar's northern Rakhine State and continued to work with UNHCR to improve basic services in the camps. Fiscal and policy constraints did not, however, allow such efforts to be integrated into national development strategies. Voluntary repatriation had always been the preferred solution, since local integration was not feasible. Bangladesh could not be expected to assume additional responsibilities beyond its limits; the concerns over shrinking humanitarian space globally should not be mitigated by placing unwarranted burdens on existing spaces. He urged UNHCR to intensify efforts to reduce environmental degradation in the refugee-impacted areas and to assist affected host communities in Bangladesh.

15. The shift to results-based management promised to significantly enhance the efficiency and accountability of UNHCR and clarify its protection mandate. Bangladesh had always supported the Global Needs Assessment process and hoped that future Global Strategic Priorities would accord due priority to unmet needs in specific protracted refugee situations. It was concerned lest the greater autonomy now being accorded to field operations should lead to a gap in communication with headquarters that might create a gap between policy and implementation.

16. His delegation had listened to the High Commissioner's arguments for leading the protection cluster for persons displaced by natural disasters, but was not yet convinced that UNHCR should become involved in areas that had a proliferation of international and regional actors as well as an already well-defined framework for action. It had similar reservations about any enlargement of the Office's responsibility to cover climate change-induced displacement scenarios. UNHCR should remain focused on its mandated areas where it had comparative advantages.

17. Mr. TAUBNER (Observer for the Council of Europe) said that, over the past decade, cooperation between the Council of Europe and UNHCR had developed into a comprehensive partnership. Through its Strasbourg office, UNHCR cooperated with Council of Europe bodies on torture, racism and social rights issues and enjoyed observer status in bodies dealing with migration, legal cooperation, Roma and Travellers and human rights. In that way, both organizations were kept abreast of developments in areas of mutual concern. The focus of their cooperation was mainly on standard-setting, development and capacity-building, in particular through joint assistance programmes in Council of Europe member States. Increasingly, the Office was invited to intervene as a third party in proceedings of the European Court of Human Rights, while cooperation with the Council of Europe Development Bank showed how humanitarian assistance and long-term development operations could be successfully combined. Most recently, the Development Bank had supported the UNHCR operation in Georgia. In

October 2008, UNHCR and the Bank had signed a new cooperation agreement allowing for long-term financial cooperation, primarily in European countries hosting large displaced populations.

18. Mr. Ó CEALLAIGH (Ireland) said that Ireland had been honoured to welcome the High Commissioner to Dublin earlier in 2009 and shared his concerns about the shrinking of humanitarian space. He echoed the importance of respect for the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence in that regard and he expressed deep appreciation to the UNHCR staff who continued to provide essential assistance despite the growing difficulties they faced. He extended his sympathy to the families of the three UNHCR staff members who had died tragically in 2009 and to UNHCR.

19. Welcoming the High Commissioner's report on the progress made on implementing reform in UNHCR, he stressed that the focus must now shift to consolidation of the gains already made. He also welcomed the new budget structure, together with the introduction of needs-based budgeting, and expressed the view that the Global Needs Assessment and the development of Global Strategic Priorities would enhance the Office's ability to prioritize funds and advocate for populations of concern.

20. Ireland consistently favoured the process of reform aimed at improving the capacity of the humanitarian system to respond to emergencies and welcomed the Office's involvement in that process. He urged the Office to remain fully engaged, including through the cluster approach, in efforts led by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to strengthen the Humanitarian Coordinator system.

21. Both donors and agencies relied on credible and timely data on needs to be able to make impartial and efficient decisions on the allocation of resources. He therefore welcomed the work of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Force on Needs Assessment and encouraged UNHCR to play a full and active role in that work.

22. Ireland continued to play an active role in promoting greater efficiencies and coordination across the United Nations system and welcomed recent progress made, in particular with the establishment of a new gender entity. He commended UNHCR for its continued engagement in the "Delivering as One" initiative at the field level, and hoped that the organization would participate in the forthcoming country-level evaluations of the initiative.

23. Legislation was before the Irish parliament on replacing the existing arrangements for processing asylum applications with a single procedure whereby the grounds for seeking protection and those for a request to remain in the State would be considered together. Preparations were being made to introduce the new protection arrangements, including the provision of extensive training to staff, with the assistance of UNHCR.

24. Mr. SEI (Côte d'Ivoire) expressed his regret at the tragic deaths of UNHCR officials in Pakistan in a cowardly attack on persons carrying out a humanitarian mission.

25. He recalled the need for peace and stability to make durable solutions possible for refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons. In that connection, his Government, with UNHCR support, had drafted an action plan on voluntary repatriation of Ivorian refugees which

would become operational once tripartite agreements had been signed by Guinea, Liberia and Mali. At the same time a manual on asylum procedures had been produced for asylum-seekers in Côte d'Ivoire

26. Ensuring that the rights of refugees were respected was essential to the success of the integration process, as were better assistance in the areas of health, education and work and rehabilitation of refugee-impacted areas. In that connection, UNHCR, Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia had signed an agreement on mobilizing funding to rehabilitate areas affected by the mass presence of refugees. His Government hoped that UNHCR would continue to support the Government's efforts to raise funds for the project.

27. The Government was pursuing local integration programmes and developing frameworks to improve the living conditions of refugees and others by, for example, issuing identity cards to refugees aged 14 and over and guaranteeing them access to services and freedom of movement in Côte d'Ivoire. An integration programme for Liberian refugees was being finalized and required funding for its implementation.

28. The Government had established a legal framework for the protection of IDPs, together with a national reintegration fund and a committee on the restitution of property. A voluntary return programme had furthermore been put into effect, with funding from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Ivorian-Swiss Fund for Economic and Social Development. The grave humanitarian challenges that Côte d'Ivoire faced could only be overcome with international support.

29. Ms. PICTET-ALTHANN (Observer for the Sovereign Military Order of Malta) said that the Order, through Malteser International, delivered assistance in 120 countries, including in response to some recent crises that had generated displacement. For example, Malteser International had deployed medical teams and distributed hygiene kits to more than 28,000 IDPs in June and July 2009 in the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan. It was now supporting the IDPs who had since returned to their homes, by sending in medical teams to deliver treatment and primary health care and by running hygiene campaigns to prevent the outbreak of waterborne diseases.

30. Malteser International had been providing aid in IDP camps in Sri Lanka since March 2009, in the form of hygiene articles, hygiene advice, vitamin supplements for undernourished children and drinking water. Malteser International also supported other humanitarian agencies in Sri Lanka and was concerned about severe hygiene and shelter problems during the forthcoming monsoon season. She welcomed the advocacy efforts of the Humanitarian Coordinator in Sri Lanka to encourage the authorities to apply humanitarian principles, to improve camp conditions and to ensure unimpeded humanitarian access and freedom of movement. The process of releasing screened IDPs from camps should be accelerated.

31. The Order of Malta had continued to provide basic health-care services to some 90,000 IDPs in Darfur. In July and August 2009, Malteser International had distributed food to around 150,000 persons in South Kivu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in Myanmar it continued to assist the victims of Cyclone Nargis. In Thailand, it guaranteed basic medical care for 33,000 persons.

32. The Order of Malta was alarmed by the deterioration of the security situation for refugees, IDPs and humanitarian workers and urged States to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law in all circumstances.
33. Mr. GUTERRES (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that on his recent visit to Myanmar a programme of action had been launched to prevent additional outflows and to make voluntary repatriation and reintegration a success in the north of Rakhine State. UNHCR was committed to enhancing its presence in the region and its cooperation with the Government on the programme.
34. Turning to the statement by the observer for the European Commission, he said that the large European Union contribution to the UNHCR budget was extremely important for the development of UNHCR activities worldwide. The European Commission supported UNHCR in many areas, including the internal reform process. He had taken note of the concerns raised, in particular that the UNHCR reform process should enhance other reform processes. The instruments developed would be made available to partners, such as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Force on Needs Assessment. All stakeholders must work together to ensure that the needs assessment system did not represent the lowest common denominator.
35. He welcomed the provisions on asylum included in the new Costa Rican Migration Act and the emphasis given to victims of trafficking, who were not always sufficiently covered by protection legislation. He recalled the enormous economic and social progress that had been made in Rwanda and said that he had taken note of the Government's interest in the cessation clause and would discuss the matter with it in the near future. It was time to look at cessation not only in Rwanda, but also in other post-conflict countries.
36. Afghanistan's legal and policy framework for refugees, returnees and IDPs was one of the pillars of the Afghan national development strategy. There was a gap between the theory of land allocation scheme system and the practice, which was understandable given the complexity of the security situation. The Government must work with the international community to bridge that gap and to make return a more attractive option by creating the conditions for successful reintegration.
37. Responding to the representative of Bangladesh, he said that although voluntary repatriation was the preferred solution, local integration was also an option. Host countries might not consider it a viable option, as in Bangladesh. In other countries the situation might be different, however, and those countries needed international support to shoulder the burden.
38. In the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, different agencies were responsible for internal displacement. While UNHCR led the protection cluster, it had been decided to opt for ad hoc solutions to natural disasters, depending on the capacities of the cluster members and on the host State. In the protection cluster, the responsibilities of UNHCR were well understood but at country level the situation was not clear. UNHCR needed to bridge that gap, in consultation with other organizations and at the request of the States concerned.

39. UNHCR did not want a climate change mandate. The concept of climate change refugees had not been adopted and the impact of climate change on displacement required further discussion, since the issue was complex and multifaceted. Bangladesh was likely to be adversely affected by climate change and should have full international support in preparing for that eventuality; however, it was not an area where UNHCR would have a mandate.

40. It was easier to enforce specific refugee rights when a global human rights framework was in place, and the work of the Council of Europe was important in that regard. UNHCR relied on the rulings of the European Court on Human Rights and had received exemplary support from the Council of Europe Development Bank.

41. He expressed appreciation for the financial and other support provided by Ireland, particularly in view of the country's complex budgetary situation, and had taken note of the concerns expressed about the various aspects of United Nations reform, a process to which he was fully committed, not for its own sake but for the results that would be achieved.

42. In response to the representative of Côte d'Ivoire, he pledged his continued support for the voluntary repatriation of refugees to and from Côte d'Ivoire, for local integration initiatives and for efforts to solve refugee problems and defend the rights of internally displaced persons. Lastly, he expressed deep appreciation to the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, which did invaluable humanitarian work around the world and in partnership with UNHCR.

43. Mr. SESAY (Observer for Sierra Leone) reaffirmed his support for the ongoing reform of UNHCR, the Global Needs Assessment initiative and practical measures to find lasting solutions to the plight of refugees, including by addressing the root causes of displacement. He welcomed the support UNHCR provided to enable Sierra Leone to meet its obligations in the area of refugee protection.

44. Despite the difficulties presented by Sierra Leone's economic and political situation, progress had been made in the local integration of refugees, who were provided with shelter and livelihood assistance. Local communities had agreed to share land with refugees and relevant legal arrangements were being finalized. UNHCR support and technical guidance had facilitated the implementation of legislation on refugees and the creation of an infrastructure to deal with applications for refugee status, including an appeals committee. The Office had also arranged sensitization sessions for Government officials, following the invocation and coming into effect of the cessation clause in respect of all Sierra Leonean refugees abroad, and was supporting efforts to provide refugees who had opted for local integration elsewhere with passports, so as to protect them from statelessness or loss of nationality.

45. Despite some positive developments, major challenges remained and must be tackled appropriately. A worrying number of refugees had yet to receive shelter and livelihood support under the local integration scheme, and international support was needed to help those persons to become relatively self-reliant while UNHCR was still operating in Sierra Leone and to continue capacity-building in the refugee infrastructure for the next five years. The Government was keen to see further transfer of responsibility for refugee protection from UNHCR to national institutions.

46. Mr. SOUSSOKO (Observer for Mali), underlining the challenges presented by refugee flows, particularly in Africa, said that Mali's long borders had made it a transit country for refugees, particularly from Central Africa and the Great Lakes region, for more than a decade. Some 15,000 refugees of 15 nationalities were currently registered in the country. Since 2008, the Government had been working with UNHCR to find sustainable solutions for refugees from Mauritania and Sierra Leone. Three-quarters of the 10,483 Mauritanian refugees registered had chosen voluntary repatriation, while 468 refugees from Sierra Leone had opted for local integration and now enjoyed equal access to basic services with Malians. Nevertheless, additional UNHCR support would be required for capacity-building to ensure effective local integration and proper registration.

47. Mali had for some time been considering amending its legislation on refugee status to take account of the creation of an independent appeals committee and international instruments on statelessness. It would welcome exchanges of information about experiences in formulating national policy on those matters and on the adoption of a common, integrated approach to asylum mechanisms and to the problems posed by mixed migratory flows. Dealing with populations displaced by conflict in Africa was a complex task but his Government was fully committed to working with UNHCR to make progress. He expressed condolences to the families of UNHCR staff killed in the line of duty. Such actions should not go unpunished.

48. Mr. SMORODIN (Russian Federation) said that reducing the number of stateless persons was often not helped by the actions and legislation of individual States. The problem of statelessness was of great importance not only to UNHCR but also to the Russian Federation, which had granted Russian citizenship to more than 200,000 stateless persons between 2006 and 2009. More than 50,000 had been granted permanent or temporary residence rights, which was a step towards possible future citizenship. UNHCR should assist States faced with mixed migratory flows to improve their asylum procedures, with a view to harmonizing or even unifying them. In that regard, he expressed gratitude for the support which the Russian Federation had received from UNHCR to improve relevant legislation and train staff working with refugees. The number of persons seeking asylum in the Russian Federation had grown steadily in recent years, particularly in 2008 as a result of the conflict in South Ossetia.

49. In view of the global economic crisis, UNHCR should focus on activities that fell within its mandate, only providing assistance to States in their work with internally displaced persons when those States were unable to tackle the problem alone. He welcomed UNHCR reforms to improve the organization's efficiency.

50. Mr. SOHOU (Benin) emphasized his country's long tradition of welcoming refugees and asylum-seekers without hostility or discrimination. In 1992, more than 150,000 persons of 26 nationalities had been registered in Benin, but cooperation within the subregion had now reduced the number to around 7,000. Benin agreed with the High Commissioner that ensuring the well-being of every refugee or displaced person should be the main concern of UNHCR. It had undertaken to promote and strengthen local integration by extending the possibilities offered to refugees living in Benin who were unable to return home and wished to become more self-reliant in their host country. It had also agreed on specific measures with UNHCR to improve the living conditions and economic situation of locally integrated refugees, for example by improving infrastructure and facilities, providing income-generation opportunities and offering microcredit, and had also decided to ease the naturalization process for refugees. He

urged the international community to take account of Benin's concerns and to continue to support UNHCR so as to ensure that ambitious activities to benefit refugees could be implemented.

51. Ms. AKÓTS (Hungary) said that Hungary, which in 1989 had become the first State of the former Eastern Bloc to sign the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, had since received more than 60,000 asylum-seekers and had benefited greatly from cooperation with UNHCR. A new Act on asylum had entered into force in Hungary on 1 January 2008 and emphasis was now on monitoring its implementation. Hungary was committed to addressing the challenges of guaranteeing access to asylum in the context of mixed migratory flows and ensuring the quality of decision-making, in cooperation with UNHCR, and had already taken steps in that regard.

52. In the light of more and graver humanitarian crises, the role of UNHCR must be maintained and its protection activities strengthened. Reforms to increase its flexibility and effectiveness in responding to the needs of beneficiaries were also welcome. Hungary was proud to host both the Global Service Centre, which had contributed to achieving administrative savings and released funds for humanitarian activities, and the Global Learning Centre, and would be pleased to participate in preparing a document on the advantages of UNHCR having outsourced some of its functions to Budapest. The Hungarian authorities looked forward to assisting the two centres and to continuing their long-standing cooperation with the Regional Representation for Central Europe, also based in Budapest, to improve the situation of asylum-seekers, refugees and beneficiaries of international protection. He expressed appreciation for the assistance received from the Regional Representation for national projects to improve the asylum system.

53. Mr. OGNIMBA (Observer for the African Union), expressing appreciation for the fruitful partnership between UNHCR and the African Union and affirming the Union's commitment to strengthening it, welcomed the financial and organizational reforms under way at UNHCR. The year 2009 not only marked the fortieth anniversary of the adoption by the Organization of African Unity of the Convention governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa but would also see the adoption of a new convention on protection and assistance for internally displaced persons in Africa. At the African Union Special Summit to be held in October 2009, African leaders would consider the thorny issue of forced displacement in Africa for the first time. The event would be of great interest to all those committed to addressing the problem of forced displacement, and the planned convention would become the first international instrument of its kind. He expressed appreciation for the efforts of all States and partners involved in its preparation.

54. Africa continued to face major challenges such as armed conflicts, poverty and under-development and joint efforts to address them must continue and be consolidated. The continent was known for its hospitality and solidarity, but its countries were being swamped by the growing influx of victims of forced displacement at a time of shrinking support and assistance from the international community. He had noted with interest the various UNHCR pilot projects established in Africa and the positive initial results achieved, which should prompt the international community to increase its support for UNHCR and thereby compensate for the worrying reductions in budget allocations to projects in Africa for 2010.

55. The biennial budget cycle approved by the Executive Committee had been intended to give UNHCR more flexibility in managing resources to respond to needs. High levels of earmarked funding, in particular, restricted the transfer of resources between activities, and he urged donors not to impose conditions on their generosity. UNHCR must be allowed some room for manoeuvre in allocating funds in order to respond to changing circumstances as effectively as possible. Working together, UNHCR and its partners could transform challenges into opportunities for the good of the vulnerable victims of forced displacement. The African Union would cooperate fully with UNHCR, placing all its expertise at the Office's disposal.

56. Mr. BINZARI (Republic of Moldova) said that his delegation wished to associate itself with the statement made by the representative of Sweden on behalf of the European Union. His country's newly-elected Government considered European integration, national reintegration, the rule of law, economic growth and decentralization to be priorities. Ensuring economic growth, combined with respect for human rights and improvements to the judiciary system, would encourage the reintegration of Moldovan returnees; at the same time, his Government was committed to minority rights.

57. Since becoming a member of the Executive Committee, his country had adopted a progressive and efficient Asylum Act in 2008. It was implementing two projects to address the medical and housing needs of refugees, reconstructing the accommodation centre for asylum-seekers and organizing courses for beneficiaries. In addition, it was implementing a medical assistance project for refugees with UNHCR, with which it had also recently signed a memorandum of understanding on border monitoring. His country would also benefit from the mobility partnership that it had signed with the European Union.

58. In developing its asylum system, his Government had realigned its objectives at all levels and made drafting the Integration Act its top priority. Other priorities included: consolidating the asylum system; developing the partnership with UNHCR on asylum projects; elaborating and implementing a regional information exchange project on asylum-seekers and refugee status determination (RSD) procedures; finding means of delivering travel documents to refugees; and exchanging experiences and best practices at regional and international levels.

59. Mr. CHIPAZIWA (Observer for Zimbabwe) said that Zimbabwe remained committed to its international obligations under the refugee conventions to which it was party. His delegation encouraged UNHCR to increase coordination with member States, in order to maximize benefits to beneficiaries. The dire challenges that had faced Zimbabwe in 2008 were being overcome. Inflation had been brought under control and food and commodities were widely available. However, unemployment remained high.

60. His Government was conscious that protecting refugees was the responsibility of States, as reflected in its incorporation into domestic law of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the 1967 Protocol thereto, and the Organization of African Unity refugee convention of 1969. The majority of refugees and asylum-seekers in Zimbabwe lived in the Tongogara refugee camp, while the remainder lived in urban areas, mainly in Harare. Eligibility interviews were conducted periodically at Tongogara camp. All adult refugees and asylum-seekers were fully documented.

61. Zimbabwe continued to experience irregular migration and mixed migration flows that put pressure on its refugee programme. It was not easy to distinguish genuine refugees from economic migrants who frequently disappeared shortly after their initial registration as asylum-seekers. His Government had cooperated fully with UNHCR to find durable solutions for refugees and facilitate resettlement to third countries, and would continue to do so.

62. Mr. BA (Observer for the Organization of the Islamic Conference) said that it was appropriate that the guest of honour of the sixtieth session of UNHCR should be the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, as the economic, social and cultural rights of refugees must be adequately protected in order to guarantee those persons a decent life and dignity.

63. Beyond the global problem of refugees, attention was increasingly being drawn to the situation of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and urban refugees. More than wars and conflicts, other scourges such as extreme poverty, the effects of climate change and food and energy crises had become major causes of population movement; means and methods of intervention would need to be adjusted accordingly. The increasingly precarious working conditions of humanitarian workers in the field were cause for concern and, on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), he wished to pay a tribute to the victims of terrorism and expressed condolences to their families.

64. He reiterated the commitment of OIC to supporting UNHCR in the many challenges that it faced and emphasized the need to share the heavy burden borne by host countries and UNHCR. In addition to funds for urgent humanitarian needs, solutions for joint resettlement and voluntary repatriation needed to be found. Therefore, OIC reaffirmed its commitment to holding a joint conference with UNHCR on the situation of refugees in its member States, which bore a considerable burden in dealing with large refugee and IDP populations. In the same spirit, it welcomed the prospect of the Special Summit on refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons in Africa.

65. Mr. GUTERRES (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that UNHCR appreciated Sierra Leone's systematic and significant efforts to build an effective modern asylum system. Even as it emerged from conflict, that country was granting protection to refugees from elsewhere in the region and offering them the possibility of local integration. Since December 2008, the cessation clause had been applied to Sierra Leone, signalling not an end but the beginning of many different activities, that were necessary to guarantee the success of the local integration process.

66. The great generosity of Mali, which had welcomed refugees into local communities where they shared the meagre resources of the people, was to be commended; the announcement of Mali's accession to the Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons and the improvements to its asylum legislation were also welcome. The Russian Federation had made considerable efforts with regard to statelessness and had submitted its draft proposals on improvements to its national legislation. The Office would engage actively in cooperation with the Federal Migration Service in that regard.

67. There had always been exemplary cooperation between UNHCR and Benin, which was an admirably well-organized country. Benin had given protection to a large number of refugees, although their number had now been reduced as a result of successful voluntary return programmes.

68. The success of the Global Service Centre in Budapest was highly appreciated. The generous contribution of Hungary, which had provided free premises, equipment and utilities as well as assistance in recruiting highly-trained staff, deserved recognition, as did the developments in the national asylum system and the commitment with which the Government had assumed its responsibilities.

69. For the African Union, 2009 was an historic year from the point of view of refugee protection as it was the fortieth anniversary of the African refugee Convention, which gave refugees more rights than the 1951 Convention. All concerned looked forward to the adoption of the African convention on the protection and assistance of internally displaced persons. The convention was a pioneering instrument not only for Africa but also for the rest of the world, the initiative could be emulated in other continents, thereby benefitting IDPs. The African Union had shown leadership in conflict prevention, peacekeeping and post-conflict peacebuilding, all of which were of critical importance to the work of UNHCR. There would be no budget reductions for Africa in 2010; indeed, it was hoped that the new budgetary methodology would make it possible to offer greater support.

70. The Republic of Moldova was to be congratulated on joining the Executive Committee and for its efforts to create an asylum system in full conformity with international standards. Zimbabwe was to be commended for maintaining its commitment to refugee protection even during the most difficult periods of its complex political process; it has always cooperated fully with the Office for that purpose.

71. The partnership between OIC and UNHCR had always been exemplary. Most recently, the two had published a book on the direct relationship between modern, international legislation on refugees and Islamic law and tradition. The book was available in both English and Arabic and was not only an important tool for human rights advocacy but also offered a humanist perspective of Islam and its faith in human rights which could serve to dispel prejudices. The Office gave its full support to the OIC conference on refugees.

Statements in exercise of the right of reply

72. Mr. ASMEROM (Observer for Eritrea), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that his delegation had understood that the Executive Committee was a humanitarian and technical meeting at which to consider means of providing collective assistance to refugees and IDPs, in accordance with the clear and noble mandate of UNHCR. Although the mandate and activities of UNHCR had political and diplomatic implications, his delegation had not anticipated that the present meeting would be used to launch a disinformation campaign against any other country or to score diplomatic or political points. The Ethiopian delegation had used the forum to spread political and diplomatic disinformation against his country and had submitted a written statement

claiming that the current political and security developments in both Somalia and Eritrea had resulted in an increased flow of refugees into Ethiopia. As it was unclear to which current political and security developments Ethiopia was referring, he wondered whether the delegation had perhaps mistaken Eritrea for Ethiopia.

73. The Ethiopian delegation had requested funding from UNHCR for indirect financing of activities to destabilize Eritrea. He therefore wished to make it clear that the Eritreans held in Ethiopian camps whom the Ethiopian delegation had presented as refugees were not in fact refugees; they were the victims of human trafficking, carried out by the Ethiopian military in conjunction with security institutions, which had lured those persons with the promise of a better life in Europe and the United States.

74. He appealed to UNHCR to investigate further and determine how the funds allocated were actually used, as well as how and why Eritreans were crossing the border to Ethiopia. His Government was prepared to engage with UNHCR to stop the trafficking so that the Office could better serve all refugees.

75. Mr. ABEBE (Ethiopia), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the representative of Eritrea appeared to have mistaken the Executive Committee for a political body. Eritrea had become the archetypical embodiment of refugee problems; it had no Constitution, parliament or media and thousands of Eritreans were fleeing forced conscription and human rights violations in what was now the most militarized nation on earth. The Government of Eritrea should address the real cause of the problem; externalizing the issue would not meet the needs of its desperate youth, who were fleeing the country in droves.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS ON THE WORK OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE

(b) PROGRAMME BUDGETS, MANAGEMENT, FINANCIAL CONTROL AND ADMINISTRATIVE OVERSIGHT

Adoption of the draft report of the forty-sixth meeting of the Standing Committee (EC/60/SC/CRP.30)

76. The CHAIRPERSON said that he took it that the Committee wished to adopt the draft report of the forty-sixth meeting of the Standing Committee as contained in document EC/60/SC/CRP.30.

77. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 5.40 p.m.