



# General Assembly

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## Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Seventy-second session

### Summary record of the 739th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 5 October 2021, at 3 p.m.

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

## Contents

General debate (*continued*)

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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 3.20 p.m.*

**General debate** (*continued*)

1. **Mr. Molina** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), speaking via video link, said that Venezuela had a long tradition as a place of refuge for people fleeing war, hunger and persecution in Europe and the Middle East. It had hosted thousands of Colombians driven into exile by 70 years of conflict. It had also received waves of refugees from across the region who had been forced to flee their countries as a result of the torture, death and enforced disappearance that had been sponsored under the decades-long national security doctrine of the United States of America up until the 1990s.

2. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) should review its roles and responsibilities, as it had taken on responsibilities outside its mandate. There was a need to reopen discussions on the concept of refugees, which had been instrumentalized by politics and the media, and on the notion of economic migrants. It was important to distinguish between refugees and economic migrants. Double standards had been applied. The inherent right of people to migrate or seek international protection must be recognized as such: as a right. Migration must not be treated as a business and migrants and asylum seekers as commodities. Those issues should be discussed in depth at the Economic and Social Council, for example, and Venezuela stood ready to engage with others on the issue.

3. **Mr. Stournaras** (Greece), speaking also on behalf of the Geneva Group of Friends to Eliminate Sexual Harassment, said that UNHCR operated in environments shaped by power imbalances and deep-rooted inequalities that were conducive to sexual misconduct. The leadership's strong stance and the adoption of the Office's 2020–2022 strategy and action plan to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment were therefore highly commendable. All reports of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment must be duly investigated and result in disciplinary action if confirmed. Effective mechanisms were needed to prevent offenders from being re-employed. It was encouraging to learn of investigations into sexual misconduct and the Group looked forward to the finalization and wide distribution of the announced e-learning package on investigative processes.

4. Prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment and further progress in organizational culture change remained critical. The network of 400 focal points in UNHCR field offices could play an important role in identifying and supporting victims and survivors. UNHCR should continue to discuss the matter with the Executive Committee, sustain its strong inter-agency engagement and work towards a joint approach across all United Nations entities. UNHCR staff carried out difficult tasks in challenging circumstances. The Group of Friends would continue to help ensure that staff, partners and the people it cared for were treated with dignity and operated in an environment free from any kind of sexual misconduct.

5. **Mr. Figueiroa** (Brazil), speaking also on behalf of the country members and observers of the Quito Process on the human mobility of Venezuelan nationals in the region, said that the members had made further progress in the implementation of joint programmes to safeguard the dignity of more than 5 million Venezuelan refugees, despite the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Focus had been placed on access to education, health, information and psychosocial support for children and young people. New mechanisms to facilitate family reunification had been set up, asylum systems strengthened and services for refugees and migrants improved.

6. Additional efforts were needed to build capacities to combat trafficking in persons, including through the establishment of a regional coordination mechanism to prevent such trafficking and provide assistance to victims in the light of the multidimensional crisis in Venezuela. Within their limited capacities, countries had included Venezuelan refugees in their pandemic response plans, embarked on large-scale regularization programmes, created employment opportunities and ensured access to health care and education.

7. International support was more critical than ever to finance humanitarian operations and alleviate the burden on national health, education and social security systems. Existing regional platforms could be harnessed to facilitate the inclusion of refugees and migrants in post-pandemic recovery programmes.

8. The pledges undertaken at the International Donor's Conference in Solidarity with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants organized jointly by the Government of Canada, UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration were greatly appreciated. In the current context of mounting crises, the region was committed to continue to provide a humanitarian response based on respect, humanity and dignity to Venezuelan displacement, facilitated by the Brazil Plan of Action and supported by the international community.

9. **Mr. Constant Rosales** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), speaking also on behalf of the like-minded group of countries, Belarus, Cuba, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Laos, Nicaragua, Russia, Syria, Yemen and Zimbabwe, said that humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence were critical elements of the UNHCR mandate. Recalling the details of that mandate and Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, said that the group considered it important for UNHCR to continue supporting countries in developing durable solutions while addressing the needs of persons of concern. At the same time, they condemned the political instrumentalization of international protection, refugees and migration and rejected the narrative of securitization that had been imposed on the issue of human mobility by some countries for domestic political reasons. Respect for States' inalienable right to choose their political, economic, social and cultural system was the basis for peaceful coexistence.

10. Illegal unilateral coercive measures imposed on developing countries were among the structural causes of human mobility. Voluntary repatriation remained the preferred solution in most refugee situations and fostering conditions for informed, safe, voluntary and dignified return must be a priority. Measures to alleviate the suffering of refugees in large-scale movements or protracted situations should be complemented by efforts to address the structural causes of human mobility and promote durable solutions.

11. Member States must engage in security cooperation, diplomacy, development, and promotion and protection of human rights and refrain from discriminatory action against refugees. The international community should take effective action to end unilateral coercive measures, thus facilitating effective responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

12. **Ms. Martínez Liévano** (Mexico), speaking also on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean Group, said that inclusive and equitable access to vaccines and socioeconomic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic remained a tremendous challenge. 2021 had brought devastating natural disasters that had reaffirmed the gravity of the climate crisis. In that already complex setting, Latin America and the Caribbean had seen a significant upturn in human mobility associated with a steep rise in people requiring international protection, which had stretched countries' capacities to the limit. Those common challenges could only be addressed through dialogue, responsibility sharing and sustained international cooperation.

13. The pandemic was no excuse for failing on the commitment to deliver rights-based protection to refugees. Instead, it had driven the digitalization of asylum procedures, expediting proceedings. More innovative responses were needed to strengthen international protection, with a focus on asylum-seeking children and other vulnerable groups, and the Brazil Plan of Action provided a useful road map. The countries in the region were implementing programmes to grant refugees access to education, employment and health care, including vaccination, thus facilitating their socioeconomic integration. States must prevent and combat discrimination, racism and xenophobia to ensure that refugees and asylum seekers enjoyed the full spectrum of human rights.

14. The current situation had put institutions and host communities to the test. While the global compact on refugees could help generate more effective global alliances, regional cooperation mechanisms had also proved of great value in facilitating joint action and responsibility sharing. Sustainable development was critical to tackle the structural causes of forced displacement and provide durable solutions. Inclusion and resilience would be fundamental in the post-pandemic era.

15. **Mr. Cherif** (Chad) said that Chad was host to more than 1 million refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons and returnees. It was a heavy burden and the COVID-19 pandemic an additional challenge, but his Government remained committed to providing international protection to those in need. Notwithstanding the dire lack of resources, the country had remained highly resilient throughout 2021 and kept its borders open to thousands of refugees. The new law on asylum adopted in 2020 was an additional tool to help Chad live up to its commitments.

16. In the quest for durable solutions, the promotion of voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity must continue. In order to combat statelessness, Chad had mounted a large-scale campaign to provide birth certificates, identity papers and travel documents to refugees and internally displaced persons. Greater international support was needed to maintain the country's capacity to alleviate the plight of refugees and reduce the burden on host communities.

17. **Mr. Macdougall** (Canada) said that international attention to humanitarian needs in Afghanistan and for greater engagement with neighbouring host countries were crucial. Canada had committed to doing its share, including by resettling Afghan refugees. At the same time, refugees elsewhere that were awaiting humanitarian and political solutions must not be forgotten. Strong political leadership and dialogue were needed to identify and address the root causes of humanitarian crises and create durable, rights-based solutions. Member States must redouble their efforts to leverage the potential of the triple nexus of humanitarian-development-peacebuilding responses.

18. In light of the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on refugees, the inclusion of all persons of concern in national vaccination campaigns of host countries must be a priority. The pandemic had underscored the need for global solutions to global problems and greater responsibility sharing was paramount. Canada stood ready to support UNHCR and others through various avenues.

19. The decision of Colombia to grant 10-year temporary protection status to Venezuelan refugees was praiseworthy. Canada supported the implementation of the global compact on refugees in Central America by participating in the comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework (MIRPS). In the promotion of durable solutions, particular emphasis must be placed on women and children and victims of discrimination on grounds of sex or gender identity. The world's most marginalized children and youth required additional support to ensure that the impact of the pandemic did not leave them even further behind. Canada therefore promoted education for refugee and internally displaced children and advocated for gender-responsive, equitable solutions in a global context of limited resources.

20. Meaningful participation of refugees in the work of the international refugee system was crucial. Canada engaged with refugee-led organizations and was funding eight research chairs on forced displacement in the global South to further amplify refugee voices and generate a localized knowledge base for localized responses. It had also included a refugee adviser in its delegation.

21. **Mr. Barry** (Burkina Faso) said that recurrent terrorist attacks and security incidents in Burkina Faso had led to a sharp increase in the number of internally displaced persons, estimated at more than 1.4 million. The Government's Expanded Emergency Plan for the Sahel for 2019–2021 sought to improve safety and legal security for refugees and internally displaced persons and facilitate access to social services. The security situation remained challenging, particularly in the Centre-Nord and Sahel Regions, and the international community's support was greatly appreciated and desperately needed.

22. More than ever, efforts to curb migration flows and forced displacement must address their root causes. The geographical location of Burkina Faso made it a country of transit and destination of displaced persons. Legislation and an action plan had been drawn up to address the heightened risk of statelessness.

23. Burkina Faso was grateful for the High Commissioner's tireless advocacy for additional resources for countries of the Sahel. One of the main causes of the contemporary scourges afflicting humanity was poverty, which could only be addressed through development. He urged development partners to support his country by helping to finance

the implementation of the National Plan for Economic and Social Development for 2021–2025.

24. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the sustained solidarity and hospitality of Chad, despite the challenges it faced, were truly commendable. Its call for additional resources had been well noted and he would convey the dire need of resources in Chad and many other African countries to donors. Chad might wish to participate in the solutions initiative that the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and UNHCR had launched for the 7 million displaced persons in Sudan and South Sudan which, by addressing the situation of refugees in those two countries, would also yield benefits for their neighbours.

25. He was keenly aware of the tremendous challenge of internal displacement in Burkina Faso, which was a top priority for UNHCR. Humanitarian and development assistance were needed as much as security, but the balance must not be shifted to security efforts. Poverty was at the root cause of the violence, which could only be curbed through poverty alleviation.

26. UNHCR was grateful to Canada for its continuous, predictable and meaningful support. Its championship of a wide range of important causes was a shining example to others.

27. The history of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela as a refugee hosting country was not forgotten. Still, the region was currently facing different types of challenges and other countries hosted Venezuelan refugees. While the best solution would doubtless be their return once the conditions were met, at present, they required international protection. The role of UNHCR in that context was clear and its actions were motivated by the commitment to alleviate the plight of Venezuelans in situations of vulnerability. UNHCR was grateful to the members of the Quito Process for their solidarity and regularization and other efforts.

28. UNHCR greatly appreciated the support of the Geneva Group of Friends to Eliminate Sexual Harassment for its campaign against sexual misconduct.

29. With regard to the comments made by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela also on behalf of the like-minded group, he said that UNHCR took a non-political view on sanctions and did not politicize its work. Member States must help the organization maintain its neutrality.

30. **Mr. Bonnafont** (France) said that, sadly, the UNHCR mandate remained relevant. The organization had once again proved its capacity to deliver humanitarian responses in highly complex environments. The current crisis served as a reminder of the international community's moral responsibility to protect refugees, especially women and children.

31. Not all States had the same capacity to face the challenges posed by displacement, climate change, natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic. It was therefore crucial to address socioeconomic inequalities, support refugee-hosting countries and include refugees in national pandemic response strategies.

32. France had a long-standing tradition of solidarity with countries in crisis, support for humanitarian operations and refugee hosting. It also supported durable solutions by honouring its commitments in regard to resettlement, regularization and repatriation. In addition, France delivered political support for the implementation of international humanitarian law. During its forthcoming presidency of the Council of Europe, France would work to strengthen European cooperation with UNHCR, including in the context of the European Humanitarian Forum, to be held in January 2022.

33. **Ms. Eilon Shahar** (Israel) said that the current challenges required creative solutions, use of new technologies and innovation. The COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated the plight of displaced persons, who were often hesitant to seek health care out of fear or lack of information. Israel had offered free testing and treatment, regardless of a person's migration status, with an assurance of safe conduct.

34. Her delegation would welcome additional information on the implementation by UNHCR of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy. Member States should be kept up to date on programmes and measures taken within the organization. It would also be useful

to know whether persons with disabilities and their representative organizations participated in the design and implementation of those programmes and measures.

35. She commended UNHCR on its strong commitment to eliminating sexual misconduct. Israel welcomed the UNHCR policy on a victim-centred approach in its response to sexual misconduct, which should be shared with other United Nations entities.

36. Israel supported its focus on the challenges faced by LGBTIQ+ persons in need of international protection, its acknowledgement of the mental health and psychosocial support needs of displaced persons, and its recognition of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in that regard. Additional information on the implementation of the updated UNHCR guidance, *Working with Older Persons in Forced Displacement*, and its results would be welcome.

37. Given the crucial relevance of UNHCR, member States must refrain from politicizing its work. States Members of the United Nations should support the work of UNHCR and not hinder it from carrying out its mandate by pursuing political agendas.

38. **Mr. Alghunaim** (Observer for Kuwait), speaking in a pre-recorded video message, said that the continued and protracted humanitarian crisis and the non-observance of international humanitarian and human rights law threatened international peace and security. The international community's slow response had cast a long shadow and had exacerbated humanitarian crises. More robust joint action to improve the situation of internally displaced persons and refugees in host countries was needed, and international efforts must continue to address the negative consequences of COVID-19. It was incumbent on all member States to shore up the efforts of UNHCR. There were some 20 million refugees under the mandate of UNHCR around the world and a further 7 million Palestinian refugees under the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Coordination between international and regional agencies and organizations must be enhanced to improve the situation of the affected populations. Diplomacy, dialogue and mediation were the only way to progress from emergency relief towards sustainable development. The State of Kuwait remained committed to supporting the results-based, unbiased and transparent action of UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies. The country was a generous donor to international organizations and had made a substantial contribution to the international response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

39. **Mr. Soualem** (Algeria) said that the number of displaced persons was growing exponentially, while COVID-19 continued to increase their vulnerability and pose additional obstacles to voluntary repatriation. Global, durable and inclusive solutions were needed to create the conditions to allow for the return of displaced persons in a secure and dignified manner. Algeria continued to work to consolidate peace and security, especially in the Sahel-Saharan region, and to share its experience in national reconciliation. In that vein, Algeria had hosted a meeting of ministers from neighbouring countries of Libya in August 2021 and headed the Monitoring Committee for the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali emanating from the Algiers process as part of its commitment to achieving and maintaining stability in those countries.

40. For the past 46 years, Algeria had hosted refugees from the non-autonomous territory of Western Sahara in camps near Tindouf. They had been the first refugees under the UNHCR mandate yet some of the least visible. As they were dependent mostly on humanitarian aid, Algeria had spared no effort to guarantee them protection and assistance, even within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. He was concerned by the significant delay in the recognition by UNHCR of the true number of refugees, which far exceeded the official figure of 90,000. While an inter-agency study conducted in 2018 had estimated a total of 173,600 refugees, the number was likely to be higher still as a result of the displacement of Sahrawi refugee families from liberated territories into the camps since the breaking of the ceasefire between the Kingdom of Morocco and the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguía el-Hamra y de Río de Oro (Frente POLISARIO) in November 2020. It must be accepted that the needs of Sahrawi refugees cannot be met with protection and assistance alone; the root cause of their forced exile, namely the illegal occupation of their territory, must be addressed. The international community must therefore work towards a durable solution to allow the refugees to return voluntarily, through the United Nations settlement plan for Western Sahara

and the organization of a free and fair referendum on self-determination to guarantee the inalienable right of the Sahrawi people, including refugees, to decide their future.

41. Convinced of the primacy of international law over any attempt to impose colonialism, Algeria supported the efforts of the Secretary-General of the United Nations to restart negotiations and was in favour of the decision of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union to call for direct discussions between the Kingdom of Morocco and the Saharan Democratic Arab Republic to find a definitive settlement for decolonization.

42. **Mr. Ambrazevich** (Belarus) said that the number of forcibly displaced persons had increased considerably over the previous decade, mostly as a result of wars and conflicts. Since the problem could not be tackled without first addressing its root causes, Belarus had advanced the idea of setting up a global dialogue on security, where States, including the major Powers, could agree on principles of international relations.

43. The closure of the UNHCR office in Belarus did not signify the end of cooperation. He hoped to count on the support of UNHCR in acceding to the two statelessness conventions and in providing assistance to migrants at the country's border with the European Union. There had recently been increases in the flows of asylum seekers from Asia, via Belarus, to Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. The actions of those countries were cause for alarm because, instead of acting in accordance with the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, they had violated the refugees' rights by forcing them to return to Belarus and had absurdly claimed that Belarus was in the process of staging a war. He urged the Governments of those countries to refrain from making spurious claims and comply with their obligations under the 1951 Convention.

44. **Mr. Majawar** (Yemen) said that the war imposed by the Houthi militias on the Yemeni people had resulted in a major humanitarian crisis. Under the current circumstances, 24 million people were in urgent need of food, water and medicine and 4 million people had been displaced. Many of the Yemeni refugees abroad lacked refugee status. Since February 2021, Houthi militias had staged attacks in the Governorate of Ma'rib and had looted aid intended for displaced persons.

45. In March 2020, the Government of Yemen had announced a plan to deal with the pandemic, including the creating of field units. The Government worked with donor States through the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility in order to obtain and distribute vaccines.

46. In spite of its difficult circumstances, Yemen abided by all international instruments related to refugees. It had granted refugee status to persons from Somalia and other States in the region and provided them with protection and services in line with the principle of burden sharing. Nevertheless, treatment of Yemeni refugees abroad by representatives of UNHCR had been substandard: they were given invalid documents and monetary assistance that was much lower than that received by refugees of other nationalities. Expressing his appreciation for the assistance and support from friendly States, he called on the international community to abide by its commitments, contribute to burden sharing, work towards durable solutions, allocate additional humanitarian and financial resources and give equal treatment to Yemeni refugees.

47. **Ms. Jardfelt** (Sweden) said that her Government lived up to its responsibilities towards asylum seekers and maintained its quota to resettle 5,000 asylum seekers every year. Sweden was proud to be one of the leading donors of flexible and unearmarked funding, which allowed UNHCR to address unpredictable situations and to use resources efficiently. Her Government strongly encouraged other donors to increase their flexible funding contributions. Given that exposure to COVID-19 among refugees and forcibly displaced persons made them even more vulnerable, Sweden supported a robust multilateral response to the pandemic through the COVAX Facility, to which it was the largest contributor per capita.

48. The situations in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Syria, the Sudan and the Sahel region were examples of the interplay between climate change and conflict, which drove displacement. Sweden commended UNHCR for stepping up climate action efforts, including through the adoption of a new strategic framework, and supported its clean energy challenge. The global

compact on refugees was a collective responsibility and the High-level Officials Meeting in December 2021 would help ensure continued progress on the compact's objectives. The publication of the report of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Internal Displacement was welcome since protracted displacement required a concerted system-wide response and close cooperation among United Nations agencies.

49. UNHCR and its staff were to be commended for their honourable decision to continue providing protection and humanitarian assistance to the affected population of Afghanistan despite the highly unpredictable and challenging circumstances. Sweden was deeply concerned by the situation in Yemen and, at an event co-hosted by Sweden, Switzerland and the European Union, an additional \$3 million had been contributed to UNHCR in Yemen. The conflict in Tigray remained a cause for serious concern and her Government had been shocked that several senior United Nations officials leading the humanitarian response had recently been expelled. It was imperative to ensure safe, rapid and unhindered access for humanitarian actors.

50. **Mr. Al-Mansouri** (Observer for Qatar), speaking in a pre-recorded video message, said that the COVID-19 pandemic had had a terrible impact on health, the economy and the social situation of refugees and migrants in particular. It was vital to remove all obstacles to the distribution of vaccines to all.

51. All States had a responsibility to address the root causes of forced displacement. Strategic partnerships must be strengthened to ensure that responsibility and costs were shared and to help humanitarian organizations alleviate the suffering of refugees worldwide. Qatar provided humanitarian assistance, including health care, and made efforts to ensure access to education and employment opportunities for young refugees. The country had made a significant contribution to support UNHCR operations and endeavoured to mediate conflicts to find durable solutions. Efforts must be made to ensure that aid, including vaccines, reached the people of Afghanistan. Assistance must be provided to the thousands of people who had fled the country, and the Qatar Foundation had made valuable contributions in that regard. It was important to strengthen the global compact for refugees, undertake additional efforts to tackle COVID-19 and refrain from playing politics with humanitarian assistance and support for development.

52. **Mr. Mahmoud** (Sudan), speaking in a pre-recorded video message, said that the transitional Government was striving to build peace and stability to bring an end to conflicts in the country, in line with the goals of the December revolution and the Juba Peace Agreement signed in 2020. Such conflicts had led to the displacement of over 2 million people in Darfur and other regions. The Sudan also hosted a large number of refugees, mostly from South Sudan but also other countries in the region, including the Central African Republic, Chad, Ethiopia and Syria. There was a constant flow of refugees into the Sudan, despite the economic difficulties faced by the country and the COVID-19 pandemic. His Government was thankful for the support provided to refugees in the country by United Nations agencies and donors. It was important for the support to continue and for the responsibilities and costs associated with refugees and internally displaced persons to be shared equally between States. Unfortunately, a substantial portion of the funds that had been pledged by the international community to support refugees had not been received. He hoped that the initiative that was being considered by UNHCR to find durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced people would be discussed at a round-table meeting in the near future.

53. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the solutions initiative mentioned by the representative of the Sudan would be further pursued: in November 2021, a ministerial discussion would be held under the auspices of IGAD and political support would be sought at an African Union summit in Addis Ababa in early 2022. UNHCR had strengthened its presence in the Darfur region and, in cooperation with the Government, taken a stronger leadership role on protection issues in the Sudan.

54. Since Kuwait had been a strong supporter of UNHCR operations in relation to Syrian refugees, he hoped that the country would continue providing generous financial support. He also wished to thank Qatar for its considerable support, not only from the State but also the philanthropic sector. It was also the only country in the Middle East and North Africa Region



that had instituted a core contribution to UNHCR. He was particularly grateful to the Government of Qatar for the role it had been playing in Afghanistan in delivering humanitarian support, evacuating at-risk persons and engaging with the Taliban on many of the issues that the Office had highlighted, and for facilitating his own visit to Afghanistan.

55. Although the humanitarian situation in Yemen remained dire, UNHCR had a presence in the country to help the displaced, in particular, and the refugees from Somalia and other countries. With respect to the statement made by the representative of Yemen about the treatment of Yemeni refugees, it might be that host States, rather than UNHCR, had been treating Yemeni refugees differently from other groups of refugees; however, UNHCR endeavoured and would continue to avoid any such disparities.

56. The positive commitment by Algeria to crises in Libya and the Sahel was helping to calm tensions that posed a major challenge for humanitarian engagement. The country's commitment to its asylum obligations was welcome, whether for Western Saharan refugees or for others.

57. Turning to Europe, he said that he wished to thank France for its commitment to humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan, which must be provided quickly and unconditionally; engagement with the Taliban on the country's future was also necessary. He was grateful, too, for the particular focus of the Government of France on climate displacement, which UNHCR would continue to discuss with the International Organization for Migration and other agencies.

58. He wished to thank Sweden: as the world's leading donor of unearmarked funding to UNHCR, the country set an example for other States to follow.

59. He hoped that the Government of Belarus would continue granting UNHCR access to the country's border so that it could help with managing the flows of asylum seekers and refugees mentioned in the delegation's statement. While he recognized the increasing tensions on that border, it was important not to instrumentalize people for political reasons.

60. **Ms. Stasch** (Germany) said that access to health systems and to public and social life for new members of a community were the bedrock of the global protection system. Moreover, States should meet their international obligations, respect the human rights of displaced persons, migrants and refugees and refrain from instrumentalizing migrants and refugees for political purposes.

61. Germany strongly supported the United Nations and its staff in Ethiopia. He called on the Government of Ethiopia to reverse its decision to expel senior United Nations officials.

62. Prevention and resolution of violent conflicts, sustainable peace and an end to persecution represented the only way to end crises, such as the one in Afghanistan; humanitarian assistance could not resolve the root causes of displacement. Ways of anticipating needs, protecting humanitarian workers and employing innovative financing and private sector funding would, if found, improve humanitarian assistance provision and delivery.

63. The commitment of UNHCR to addressing all forms of exploitation, abuse and harassment was commendable, in particular its new victim-centred approach. However, when such incidents involved individual United Nations staff members, as had been the case recently in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, they caused tremendous damage to the Organization's reputation and work, not to mention immeasurable harm to those targeted and victimized.

64. Germany demonstrated the importance of burden and responsibility sharing by hosting one of the world's largest numbers of refugees, asylum seekers and other persons benefiting from subsidiary protection and by being one of the largest financial contributors to UNHCR. Other member States and actors should examine critically whether they could increase their capacities and resources in the international community's joint effort to meet the needs of refugees and other persons of concern. As co-convenor of the Global Refugee Forum, Germany remained dedicated to the Forum's follow-up process and legacy. His Government encouraged other States to become co-convenors and increase their engagement in preparation of the next Forum.

65. **Mr. Macieira** (Portugal), paying tribute to refugees' contributions to Portuguese sport and society, said that Portugal would continue taking its share of responsibility in relocation programmes and participating in rescue operations in the Mediterranean. Since 2015, his Government had been working closely with UNHCR on the collective effort to create legal and complementary pathways for persons in need of international protection. Resettlement and integration had been conducted in partnership between the public sector, private enterprise and civil society at all levels.

66. Safeguarding the right to seek asylum and the principle of non-refoulement was more important than ever. The Government of Portugal condemned any attempt to instrumentalize migrants and refugees.

67. It paid particular attention to education in emergencies. Higher education played a crucial role in conflict-affected countries' early recovery and lasting reconstruction. Among other initiatives, the Government of Portugal supported the Global Platform for Higher Education in Emergencies and its rapid response mechanism, which offered scholarships to young refugee and forcibly displaced students, enabling them to continue their studies. An initiative for Afghan female students was being developed under the Platform.

68. **Mr. Stournaras** (Greece) said that Greece appreciated the long-standing UNHCR presence in the country. The Government was successfully running the accommodation component of the Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation Programme and was on track to assume responsibility for its cash component. UNHCR was cooperating with municipalities and local authorities on social inclusion and integration of refugees and migrants into local communities. Under the voluntary relocation mechanism, over 4,000 applicants for and beneficiaries of international protection had been transferred to 14 other European States, including some 1,000 unaccompanied minors. The Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors was responsible for accommodation and relocation of unaccompanied minors residing in Greece and for their social integration and adequate institutional protection; it also had an emergency response mechanism for unaccompanied minors in an immediate need. The so-called protective custody of unaccompanied minors in police stations had been abolished in December 2020.

69. With respect to the COVID-19 pandemic, persons of concern had been included in national health responses, vaccination campaigns and social protection plans on an equal basis and without any exclusions.

70. All reception facilities would be gradually replaced by modern multipurpose reception and identification centres; the new centre on the island of Samos had opened in September 2021 and four more on other islands would follow by the end of 2022. While the authorities were determined to protect the borders of the European Union, they always acted in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and other relevant maritime conventions. Greece condemned the unacceptable instrumentalization of the suffering of human beings to advance political agendas, including when such attempts were made against other European Union member States.

71. In continuation of its fruitful cooperation with UNHCR, the Government was providing an initial amount of €400,000 exclusively to support a protection initiative in Tripoli, which addressed the needs of the most vulnerable communities, such as internally displaced persons and young people.

72. **Mr. Jespersen** (Denmark) said that his Government's latest humanitarian pledge demonstrated its continued commitment to the people of Afghanistan. It had also recently demonstrated its commitment to global vaccine solidarity by announcing its aim to donate more than 6 million doses through the COVAX Facility. The Government's new development strategy emphasized supporting fragile countries and regions affected by conflict, instability and climate change. Although a small country, Denmark was the seventh-largest donor to UNHCR, the vast majority of its funding being unearmarked and flexible.

73. In order to tackle people smuggling, the international community needed to offer people additional help in their regions of origin. Refugees' primary route to protection in Europe should be through legal pathways, including the United Nations resettlement quota

system, and the effective return of persons found not to be in need of international protection must be ensured. A new, fair and humane asylum system under international law was needed.

74. Denmark condemned the unacceptable instrumentalization of migrants and refugees by orchestrating their flow across borders for political purposes.

75. Refugees and host communities alike needed more support. Inclusion in national education and health systems, access to labour markets and freedom of movement for refugees would enable additional development funding for host countries.

76. UNHCR must prioritize efforts to prevent, mitigate and respond to sexual and gender-based violence. Denmark urged UNHCR to increase its support for sexual and reproductive health and rights, including increased access to services, and for mental health and psychosocial support.

77. **Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve** (Belgium) said that, in 2021, Belgium had increased its flexible core contributions to UNHCR up to a limit of €10 million per year. Over 60 per cent of the country's humanitarian funding went to core funding and flexible funding.

78. Outlining the negative secondary effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and girls, he said that the resulting crisis could represent a significant setback to the empowerment of women and girls, so a sustained effort on the part of Governments, donors, civil society and humanitarian actors was needed. He encouraged UNHCR to listen to women when organizing its actions, while continuing to apply its zero-tolerance policy towards sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. UNHCR should also make use of sex-disaggregated data.

79. Protection should be at the heart of humanitarian action, but support and funding remained insufficient. Belgium called on all Governments, donors, civil society and humanitarian actors to increase their support and funding for protection and advocacy. It was clear that humanitarian aid, while indispensable, was insufficient; 11 years after the start of the Syrian conflict, long-term political solutions were needed to resolve the crisis.

80. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the representative of Israel had focused on the important issues of combating sexual misconduct and abuse, and on that of mental health in refugee situations.

81. Turning to European Union member States, he said that he wished to thank Germany, since the country was currently the second largest bilateral donor to UNHCR, had increased resettlement numbers, had engaged in many UNHCR responses worldwide, set an example for other countries in respect of the reception and integration of refugees and was a co-convenor of the Global Refugee Forum. Moreover, Germany played a leadership role in the debate within the European Union on migration and asylum. He also wished to thank Chancellor Merkel as an individual for her support of UNHCR. Portugal too had very open resettlement policies and was very active in all international forums relating to the work of UNHCR. He was very happy to be able to hand over programmes to the Greek authorities because the deployment of UNHCR in an operational role in Greece, in 2015, had been due to the extraordinary circumstances at the time; the work done since then justified a return to more normal cooperation. Although Greece had made clear that it wished to uphold international principles, he stressed that protecting the border of the European Union must not translate into practices that compromised the protection of refugees. He was grateful for confirmation of the contributions of Denmark, which had become a very significant donor and an important partner on key initiatives, including joint projects with development actors. While UNHCR was not opposed to modernization of the asylum system, as the representative of Denmark had suggested, such modernization needed to be in line with fundamental principles and European and international law. Lastly, he wished to thank Belgium for emphasizing unearmarked flexible funds, an issue that went hand in hand with the need for donors to support protection activities, which were the most difficult to fund as they were often not visible, despite their centrality to the work of UNHCR.

*The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.*