

**Executive Committee of the
High Commissioner's Programme**

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Summary record*, Tuesday, 9 March 22, at 3 p.m. (hybrid)

Chairperson: Mr. Salim Baddoura (Lebanon)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Regional activities and global programmes *(continued)*

a. Regional updates *(continued)*

iv. Europe *(continued)*

1. **Ms. Voicu** (Romania) said that her country condemned in the strongest terms the unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine by the Russian Federation's armed forces, an unprecedented attack on the principles and norms of the United Nations charter, international law and the fundamental rules for international conduct in existence for 75 years. She called on the aggressors to respect the United Nations charter, international humanitarian law and human rights, and to protect civilians and guarantee safe, rapid and unhindered access to humanitarian aid. Romania firmly supported Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, and remained determined to assist Ukrainian citizens fleeing regions affected by military attacks. On behalf of all Romanian citizens, she expressed her country's full and profound solidarity with the Ukrainian people in such a difficult period.

2. As a neighbouring country, Romania had rapidly responded through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism with medical supplies, medicines, food, and other humanitarian aid in kind. Romania had decided to facilitate transit and provide basic utilities and accommodation for a significant number of persons of other nationalities, members of diplomatic missions and humanitarian convoys. Her Government had recently approved an aid package for Ukraine worth €3.4 million.

3. Romania was responding to the crisis in close coordination with the European Commission, EU Member States, other international partners and international organizations. Romania supported a robust humanitarian response from United Nations agencies for Ukraine and neighbouring countries, and was committed to work with all humanitarian partners. Her country was already working with UNHCR, the Red Cross, IOM, UNICEF, Romanian civil society and ordinary citizens. Both the Executive Director of UNICEF and the High Commissioner had visited Romania in the past week, and their dialogue at the highest level had consolidated their excellent cooperation.

4. Romania congratulated the High Commissioner on his personal involvement in developing a combined global effort for Ukrainian refugees and all those affected by the conflict. During his recent visit to Bucharest, her country had announced the decision to operate a logistics centre – a hub – in Romania for coordinating all humanitarian assistance to Ukraine. From the very beginning, the Romanian Government had put in place a national centre for coordination and command, and a taskforce on operational coordination to deal with all issues related to the current humanitarian crisis. More border points had been opened, to work 24 hours per day, and her country's consular offices were working to issue all necessary travel documents.

5. Romania provided refugees with accommodation and humanitarian assistance. Besides the accommodation established by local authorities or offered by civil society and citizens, there were already 13 mobile camps in place in different regions, providing 3,511 places for refugees. As of 8 March, 319,969 Ukrainian citizens had entered Romanian territory, and 234,369 had left. For children, the Ministry of Family, Youth and Equal Opportunities, together with the National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of the Child and Adoption, had established mechanisms to help them, including those lacking parental protection. The Ministry of Education had allowed all Ukrainian children in need and young refugees to enrol in the Romanian education system. Forty-five schools, 10 high schools and 3 universities held classes in Ukrainian.

6. It was an extremely difficult political and security environment for Europe and worldwide. Exactly two years after the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the global situation remained dire, as many healthcare systems were overstretched and needed to find adequate solutions. The pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine had added a new layer of challenges to the pre-existing crisis by limiting access, reducing the possibility of human contacts and distressing host communities. The only way forward was making good use of principles and instruments held in common: respect for engagements, consolidated multilateral action and solidarity. As an emergent donor, a relocation State and a promoter of the humanitarian agenda, Romania was firmly committed to protecting refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons and stateless persons. In 2021,

her country had contributed almost €2.8 million to the common European effort in that area. In its national capacity, Romania had already contributed €90,000 in 2022 to UNHCR activities such as improving the humanitarian situation of Rohingya refugees and those in Chad.

7. **Mr. Stournaras** (Greece), speaking via video link, said that under the shadow of appalling developments in Europe, the international community was witnessing the atrocities of a war once more, resulting in the abominable loss of innocent lives, the suffering of an entire nation and massive forced displacement. Such scenes were not a desirable image of twenty-first century Europe. He joined the United Nations Secretary-General in deploring the abrupt deterioration of the humanitarian situation, which had severe implications for the population because of damage to critical infrastructure, residential buildings, health infrastructure and loss of livelihood.

8. Greece strongly condemned the Russian Federation's unprovoked and unjustified attack on Ukraine as a flagrant violation of international law and fundamental principles, while undermining and seriously threatening global peace and security, including the United Nations charter. In that respect, Greece firmly supported Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence. Revisionist actions jeopardized the European security architecture, putting at stake fundamental European values.

9. Blatant violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, as well as brutal attacks against the civilian population resulting in the death of thousands of civilians, including 12 members of the Greek ethnic community in Sartana and Bugas in the Mariupol area, must cease immediately. Mindful of the victims' families, Greece continued to support Ukraine with humanitarian assistance.

10. UNHCR and other humanitarian partners in the field had commendably decided to stay and deliver, defying severe life-threatening operating circumstances to mitigate the war's devastating humanitarian consequences. Safety, protection and freedom of movement for humanitarian workers must be guaranteed, in accordance with the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law. It was crucial to ensure safe passage for humanitarian convoys, and for civilians to leave conflict areas through humanitarian corridors.

11. He praised neighbouring countries for keeping their borders open, and for their generous assistance to refugees fleeing Ukraine. Greece stood ready to offer accommodation, temporary protection and access to the labour market, thus contributing to the humanitarian chain. The first 100 refugees from Ukraine had recently arrived in Greece.

12. Ensuring the safety and human rights of asylum seekers and refugees was at the core of Greece's migration and asylum policy and procedures. Greece remained committed to actively protecting the EU's external borders, in full respect of international and EU law as well as the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, and preventing any abuse of the asylum system. Law enforcement agencies, the Hellenic Coast Guard and other relevant authorities were continually acting to protect and save human lives, in full compliance with their international obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea and the International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue, and in accordance with EU legislation.

13. He firmly rejected any effort to instrumentalize the suffering of human beings as a political strategy for geopolitical purposes. Actions by certain States constituted a violation of their obligations under international law to combat criminal networks on their territory which were abusing people in dire conditions. In conclusion, the unfolding situation in Ukraine had clearly shown the imperative need for more equitable burden and responsibility-sharing to guarantee the necessary solidarity towards countries hosting and supporting refugees, including front-line EU Member States.

13. **Mr. Putzer** (Holy See) expressed profound sorrow and great concern regarding the war in Ukraine. Pope Francis had sent medical supplies to assist the Ukrainian population through the Office of Papal Charities, wanting to be present among those suffering there and meet the refugees through Cardinal Krajewski, the Almoner and Cardinal Czerny, interim Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. On the other hand, several Catholic organizations were offering their assistance.

14. Faced with the tragic suffering of mothers fleeing with children, families being separated, unaccompanied children and the elderly uprooted from their homes, the Holy See renewed its gratitude to Ukraine's neighbouring countries, and in particular Poland, for their generosity in welcoming people in need as a true family of nations. The Holy See also welcomed the EU's decision to offer temporary protection to refugees fleeing Ukraine as well as assistance to stranded third-country nationals. There was an urgent need for humanitarian corridors and safe passages as well as community-based sponsorships of individuals and families, in order to save lives and prevent criminal exploitation from creating even more victims of human trafficking in such a rapidly evolving situation.

15. While Ukraine was a priority, the many other situations requiring urgent humanitarian assistance across Europe and the world should not be forgotten. As highlighted by UNHCR, there were increasing reports of expulsions and often violent pushbacks of refugees and asylum seekers at Europe's land and sea borders. Everyone had a right to asylum from violence and persecution, and there was an absolute prohibition of forced return to a place of danger. The protection of human lives and non-refoulement must be respected in all cases without exception. In that regard, it remained concerning that a number of countries had increased the burden of host communities through an unsustainable strategy of externalizing asylum procedures to avoid direct responsibility. He recalled that the response of neighbouring countries was only as strong as that of the international community as a whole in extending financial and technical support to first responders and struggling local populations.

16. Wondering how to prevent further atrocities and forced displacement, he said that everyone, in a spirit of international solidarity and human fraternity, must address its root causes through constant, sincere engagement towards disarmament; courage and political will; ending conflicts that bred hatred and violence; and striving for peace, reconciliation and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Holy See renewed the Pope's appeal to reject war as a means to settle disputes. Dialogue and negotiations were still possible, but the greater the procrastination and human losses, the harder reconciliation would become. The tragic absurdity of conflicts all over the world must stop. The sacredness of life must be respected in all contexts and at all times. As the Pope had affirmed, there would be no peace without sharing and acceptance, without a justice ensuring equity and advancement for all, beginning with the most vulnerable.

17. **Mr. Proffen** (Argentina) said that notwithstanding the request that the issue of human rights in Ukraine not be politicized at the Standing Committee, it was important not to detract from the grave seriousness of that humanitarian situation: Argentina stood in solidarity with the population of Ukraine and was concerned for the nearly 2 million Ukrainian refugees, and grateful for international assistance provided to them. In light of the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Ukraine, a way must be found to put an end to the pointless and still avoidable suffering from the conflict. Argentina would grant Ukrainian refugees and their families visas on humanitarian grounds through its migration office, so that they could legally remain in Argentina regardless of their nationality.

18. **Mr. Hermann** (Brazil), extending his country's deep condolences to Ukraine, whose situation further exacerbated the global challenge of providing protection and solutions for the largest refugee population since the Second World War, thanked host countries for their fundamental role in providing the necessary sustained and predictable support on the basis of shared responsibilities. In line with long tradition, Brazil would grant humanitarian visas to affected Ukrainians and stateless persons via its embassies in Bratislava, Bucharest, Budapest, Prague and Warsaw. That latest measure was part of a broader humanitarian visa policy which had already benefited those affected by crises in Haiti, the Syrian Arab Republic and Afghanistan. His country had also provided more than 11 tons of humanitarian aid to Ukraine in the form of food, water and medical supplies. International refugee and human rights laws forbade discrimination against refugees by race, ethnicity, nationality, disability, age, migration, or any other category. As the High Commissioner had stressed, nothing could replace guns being silenced for dialogue and diplomacy to succeed. He called for the immediate cessation of hostilities and for a political solution avoiding further violence and displacement.

19. **Mr. Olfato** (Philippines), recalling his country's statement at the General Assembly emergency session the previous week, strongly condemned the invasion of Ukraine, a humanitarian crisis requiring massive assistance commensurate with its scale. He echoed the Secretary-General's

appeal for respect of humanitarian principles and calls for ensuring safe access to humanitarian assistance by the most effective means. The region in question might be far from the Philippines, but the welfare of its displaced peoples was close to Filipinos' hearts. The response to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of persons in Ukraine, in the immediate, medium and long term, was a test of the international community's humanity. The people of Ukraine, UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies and aid workers on the ground deserved full and determined support in addressing without discrimination the needs of refugees, migrants and other vulnerable persons.

20. **Ms. Heesun Shin** (Republic of Korea) condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine as a clear violation of the United Nations charter, and expressed solidarity with the people of Ukraine. Her country's hearts and minds were with those suffering from that unjustifiable attack at one of the darkest moments in world history. The deeply worrying rise in civilian casualties from continued heavy military actions by the Russian Federation within Ukrainian territory must stop immediately. Russia must withdraw from Ukraine, immediately halt its attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, and seek peaceful resolution through dialogue and democracy. Most importantly, safe passage for civilians with access to safe places should be guaranteed while securing immediate, safe and unhindered access to humanitarian assistance. She joined UNHCR's call for the protection of unaccompanied and separated children fleeing the conflict in Ukraine. The Republic of Korea remained committed to supporting people in need across Ukraine and neighbouring countries, whose generosity and burden-sharing was commendable. Her country was in close discussion with UNHCR and other international aid agencies on effectively administering an initial \$10 million fund recently allocated for Ukraine, and had adopted legal safeguard measures for Ukrainians in her country, allowing them to stay and work until their safe return was guaranteed.

21. **Ms. Shao Wu** (China), speaking via video link, said that it was vital to uphold the United Nations charter, respect each country's sovereignty and territory, and retain the principle of the indivisibility of security, while accommodating each party's reasonable security concerns. Disputes must be settled peacefully through dialogue aiming for long-term peace in the region by building a European security mechanism that was balanced, effective and sustainable. China encouraged the holding of peace talks and had been in close contact with each party in order to play a constructive role in them, mediating with the international community when needed.

22. A large-scale humanitarian crisis must be prevented. To that end, the Chinese Foreign Minister had made a number of proposals: a policy of neutrality and fairness avoiding politicization of humanitarian actions; helping displaced persons from Ukraine to settle; meaningful civilian protection to avoid secondary humanitarian disasters; safe and smooth humanitarian assistance, including by providing fast, safe and unhindered free access to humanitarian aid; ensuring the safety of foreigners in Ukraine and allowing them to return to their own countries safely; and support for the United Nations in its coordinating role in providing humanitarian assistance to Ukraine, such as by the United Nations Crisis Coordinator for Ukraine. China was willing to continue contributing to solving the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine. The Red Cross society of China would provide emergency humanitarian supplies worth ¥5 million, including food and basic necessities. The first shipment had arrived that day, and the rest would be delivered to the Red Cross in Ukraine as soon as possible.

23. **Mr. Glassey** (New Zealand) unequivocally condemned the unprovoked and unjustified attack by the Russian President's regime on Ukraine, which represented a clear violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The alarming and rapidly worsening humanitarian consequences of the Russian Federation's actions were already severe, with many of them tragically impacting innocent civilians. New Zealand commended Ukraine's neighbours, who had generously welcomed civilians fleeing the conflict. It was a significant burden, and his country was heartened by the early solidarity shown. He further commended UNHCR for its intention to stay and deliver in Ukraine and its response since the crisis had escalated, including its support to those who had fled the country. UNHCR and its humanitarian partners should prioritize a localized and inclusive humanitarian response, empowering Ukrainian communities and prioritizing assistance for potentially at-risk populations, including women, children, persons with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ persons and the elderly.

24. New Zealand was committed to working with partners to provide support to Ukrainian communities impacted by Russia's invasion, and had made an initial contribution of \$NZ 2 million towards the humanitarian response the previous week. More, however, must be done, and his country

was actively considering options for further humanitarian support, to be announced shortly. He called on Russia to urgently ensure safe passage for civilians away from the conflict and to take all possible steps to protect civilians, in line with international humanitarian law. The Russian President must cease the invasion, and Russian forces must halt all attacks, including those against civilians and civilian objects. Russia must also provide humanitarian organizations with the security guarantees needed to operate, ensuring humanitarian actors access to communities in need. New Zealand stood with the people of Ukraine at such an incredibly difficult time.

25. **Ms. Costa Prieto** (Uruguay) reiterated her country's condemnation of the violation of Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence as a consequence of the Russian Federation's military aggression, which constituted a flagrant violation of international law. Consequently, Uruguay renewed its call to Russia to put an end to hostilities. Her country deeply regretted the conflict's impact in terms of loss of human life, including children. Civil infrastructure such as hospitals and schools should not be targeted, according to international humanitarian law. On that basis, she recalled that all parties in the conflict had the legal obligation to guarantee that military operations were planned and conducted in such a way that civilians and civil infrastructure were protected, and all necessary precautions taken to avoid more deaths, injuries or people obliged to flee. She welcomed the efforts of UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations to support host countries in receiving, so far, up to 2 million displaced persons from Ukraine. The parties involved should continue striving to resolve their differences by exclusively peaceful means through diplomatic negotiations.

26. **Mr. Ferzli** (Lebanon) said that the huge refugee and displacement crisis currently unfolding in Ukraine and neighbouring countries was of great concern. With the conflict raging, the crisis would involve the most terrible humanitarian consequences. Lebanon had the sad privilege of being able to measure first-hand the additional ramifications of an uncontrolled, large-scale refugee crisis. All the more alarming was the fact that the world was already afflicted with countless protracted refugee crises, and if the numbers of displaced persons continued to grow, a tipping point would be reached where the international community could find itself unable to cope, causing significant destabilization. Lebanon therefore called for concluding the diplomatic efforts to reach a peaceful solution for the country, so as to allow for the return of all Ukrainians displaced from their homeland. In conclusion, he commended the generosity of Ukraine's neighbours, who had promptly opened their borders to people fleeing conflict zones – many Lebanese among them – and had provided them with protection and relief.

27. **Ms. Filipenko** (Ukraine as observer) said that it was currently the fourteenth day of an unprovoked and unjustified aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine. That invasion was not only a barbaric attack on her country, but also an attack on the United Nations charter and international humanitarian and human rights law, against the entire world order. The Russian President's actions had inflicted unspeakable suffering on all residents of Ukraine. The number of people forced to flee their homes grew hourly. According to recent official estimates, Ukrainian refugees already numbered more than 2 million, along with countless internally displaced persons.

28. As the High Commissioner and many speakers had noted, the Russian assault had brought about the most rapidly evolving refugee crisis in Europe's recent history. The most vulnerable civilians – women, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities – were trying to escape from the horrors of war, of a kind which Europe had not seen since the Second World War. She expressed Ukraine's sincere appreciation to UNHCR and all humanitarian partners for supporting efforts to alleviate the suffering of innocent civilians. The solidarity and immense assistance provided to refugees by Ukraine's neighbouring countries – Poland, Moldova, Slovakia, Romania, Hungary – in those unprecedented circumstances was truly priceless. Ukraine also greatly valued the support expressed and practical assistance provided to vulnerable populations by so many Governments and people around the world. Friendly support in such difficult times would always be remembered by Ukrainians.

29. Russia had not only caused a massive exodus of civilians from Ukraine; its armed forces continued to prevent them from leaving their places of residence by shooting at unarmed civilians. Only two days previously, eight people had been shot by the Russian military while trying to escape the town of Irpin in the suburbs of Kyiv. Such appalling news came every day as Russia, planning to occupy Ukraine in three days, became more and more desperate in its attempts to break the unbreakable spirit of the Ukrainian people. Russia's military aggression not only killed Ukrainians,

but also threatened thousands of foreigners in Ukraine. While they had been warmly welcomed in her country, the Russian invasion had subsequently put their lives at great risk.

30. Ukraine underlined that discrimination of any kind, including that based on race, skin colour or nationality, was unacceptable, also concerning foreign citizens crossing the State border. Her country took very seriously all allegations of unequal treatment, and continued to prioritize supporting foreign citizens in leaving Ukraine as safely and quickly as possible. Russia had effectively taken hostage over 2,000 students from almost 30 countries by blocking their evacuation from the severely shelled Ukrainian cities Sumy, Chernihiv, Mariupol and Kherson. They currently included 659 students from India, 400 from Nigeria, 160 from China and 144 from Turkey, as well as students from many other countries including South Africa, Singapore, Saudi Arabia and Kazakhstan.

31. The international community, through a united voice from all continents, should urge Russia to stop attacks on civilians and allow humanitarian access and safe passage from the besieged cities. Another crisis was looming over Europe: Russia's attacks had caused the Chernobyl nuclear power plant to lose its electricity supply. If it was not restored, the cooling system for spent nuclear fuel would stop and might lead to a radiation leak. Russia should be called upon to cease fire and allow repair units to restore the power supply before it was too late.

32. Ukraine called on members of the Executive Committee to respond resolutely to Russia's war against the Ukrainian people and against humanity. Article 4 of the UNHCR statute stated that the Executive Committee should consist of representatives of States to be selected on the basis of their demonstrated interest and devotion to the solution of the refugee problem. The question should be asked whether Russia, whose unprecedented armed aggression against a United Nations Member State had created the worst refugee crisis of the century, and continued to instrumentalize the issue of refugees to promote its aggressive policies, should be a member of the Executive Committee. The answer was no. Ukraine strongly believed that a country that did not respect, and even attacked, the fundamental principles of the United Nations did not deserve a seat at such locations.

33. **Ms. Rodriguez Mancía** (Guatemala as observer), condemning the Russian Federation's flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations, international human rights and international humanitarian law, said that a peaceful solution guaranteeing respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, human rights and global peace and security was urgently needed. The Russian invasion of the sovereign territory of Ukraine had claimed the lives of thousands, destroyed infrastructure and livelihoods and resulted in 2 million refugees. Her country assured UNHCR of its support in addressing the grave, unprecedented humanitarian situation. With the aid of the comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework (MIRPS), her Government was strengthening its refugee system. In the coming weeks, Guatemala stood ready to welcome dozens of Ukrainian families and to assist victims of the conflict. The international community must respond to emergencies without delay.

34. **Ms. Sundberg Diez** (International Rescue Committee, NGO group statement), speaking via video link, said that the unthinkable Russian attack on Ukraine had resulted in a devastating war, civilian deaths, huge humanitarian needs and the displacement of 2 million people. In that context, all States should facilitate safe passage and adequate reception for refugees, ensure the provision of durable, predictable protection status and deliver humanitarian assistance to Ukraine. Moreover, States should disseminate accurate, accessible, and gender- and age-sensitive information, especially given the high numbers of women and children fleeing the country. Protection must be offered without discrimination, including to non-Ukrainian nationals seeking safety.

35. Welcoming the European Union's decision to offer temporary protection to Ukrainian refugees, she said that the tragedy must serve as a lasting reminder of European values and of joint accomplishments in refugee protection. In that perspective, other displacement situations, and the fate of asylum seekers elsewhere in Europe, must not be neglected during the Ukrainian emergency. Across Europe, many States were increasingly failing to comply with asylum norms and obligations with apparent impunity. Some sought to externalize their protection responsibilities, keep asylum seekers out and return them to danger, while others sought to suspend asylum rights and refuse protection to arrivals at borders. Not only did such actions display a disregard for international protection norms and undermine the credibility of European States, but they also constituted a grave rule of law crisis within the European Union. In the United Kingdom, the Nationality and Borders

Bill also undermined the right to seek asylum. Such trends also shaped responses to crises beyond Europe. During the Afghanistan emergency in 2021, European leaders had stoked fears over possible arrivals to the continent and had focused on maintaining refugees near Afghanistan. To address existing challenges, she therefore called on European governments to take 10 actions:

1. **Ensure access to territory for asylum seekers and address human rights violations at European borders:** While the European Union’s proposal to establish monitoring mechanisms at borders was welcome, given the increasing prevalence of illegal and dangerous pushbacks, such mechanisms needed to be effective and truly independent. The European Commission must also uphold the rule of law and hold States accountable for violations, including by withholding funding or launching infringement procedures.
2. **Ensure access to fair asylum procedures for people seeking international protection, no matter the circumstances and without undue restrictions:** The application of the “fiction of non-entry” in the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, States’ growing reliance on “safe country of origin” and “safe third country” concepts to deny asylum applications and the broad use of accelerated border procedures were regrettable. Talks of derogations from asylum and reception obligations in cases of so-called migrant “instrumentalization” risked inflicting irreparable damage on European asylum norms.
3. **Ensure humane and effective reception systems in Europe which respected personal dignity, protected mental health and supported inclusion into societies:** Restrictive and isolated accommodation for asylum seekers was becoming the norm and had devastating effects on well-being and inclusion prospects. On Greek islands, staying in so-called closed controlled access centres often amounted to de-facto detention. States should reject such models, end migration-related detention, and invest in community-based accommodation.
4. **Establish a fair, predictable and sustainable responsibility-sharing system, centred on relocations:** National failures to invest into asylum and reception systems and an absence of solidarity within the European Union forced States to adopt reactive and emergency postures when needs arose. Solidarity with States of first arrival and with refugees must be placed at the core of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, including through the establishment of a predictable responsibility-sharing system.
5. **Significantly expand safe and regular pathways to protection, including through European refugee resettlement pledges:** Resettlement to Europe has yet to resume at scale despite the region’s affirmed ambitions to lead global resettlement efforts in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. States must urgently deliver on pledges, make ambitious commitments and admit refugees through a range of pathways, including by adopting the long-overdue Union Resettlement Framework. Resettlement through the emergency transit mechanism in the Niger and Rwanda should also be accelerated.
6. **Place refugee protection and humanitarian principles at the centre of the European Union’s external action:** The European Union should address the needs of people on the move and refrain from instrumentalizing development aid to enhance third countries’ cooperation on migration management or return and readmission agreements.
7. **Show greater humanitarian leadership beyond the European Union:** As global humanitarian needs had continued to grow, enhanced humanitarian aid and diplomacy would be required to ensure unfettered humanitarian access and champion international humanitarian law with a view to addressing chronic emergencies worldwide and their impact on civilians.
8. **Act urgently to address deaths and pullbacks in the Mediterranean:** To prevent further loss of life, and abide by international law, the European Union must immediately re-establish a dedicated search and rescue capacity. European States must also stop criminalizing actors helping those in need at sea and on land, especially NGOs. All returns to unsafe ports should stop and the European Union should prioritize the swift release of migrants from Libyan detention centres while supporting alternatives to detention.
9. **Invest in refugee integration and inclusion:** States must fully implement the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027. States should also mainstream inclusion objectives across policy areas and guarantee the meaningful involvement in policymaking and responses of refugees, migrants and the organizations they lead.

European States and institutions must also take steps to tackle xenophobia and discrimination.

10. **Address statelessness:** Although host to some half a million stateless people, who were often denied access to fundamental rights, European States still lacked an adequate policy response and were still generating statelessness owing to the lack of ineffective implementation of safeguards against childhood statelessness in their nationality laws. The region should thus commit to meeting the #IBelong Campaign objectives to eradicate statelessness by 2024 and implement the pledges of the High-Level Segment on Statelessness.

36. **Ms. Moreau** (Director of the Regional Bureau for Europe, UNHCR), thanking NGOs for their valuable input during the Ukraine crisis, noted with appreciation that despite the extraordinary pace of migration witnessed in Europe, States had resolved to keep their borders open. She called on all States to continue to do so, including non-frontline States. As the numbers of refugees increased over time, the latter would be required to relieve the burden of host countries by supporting settlement and family reunification. Moreover, she commended the impressive mobilization of local host communities which, as the primary interlocutors for refugees, must be included in all multilateral discussions.

37. As durable solutions were yet to be identified, she underscored that all persons fleeing Ukraine should be granted immediate safety, regardless of their profile, race or nationality. UNHCR would continue to monitor the situation, mindful of its impact on encumbered frontline States, which would require enhanced reception capacity and inclusion support. Should the situation worsen, higher numbers of arrivals with varying profiles could be expected to arrive in Europe, potentially requiring a more coordinated and negotiated response and a more systemic solution to strengthen national health and education systems in host countries. In the mid-term, it was hoped that the European spirit of solidarity would prevail and improve the situation for all refugees and asylum seekers.

38. Responding to members' comments on safe passage, she underscored the importance of relocating citizens whose lives were at risk. Millions of people, including third-country nationals, were in urgent need of reliable and predictable safe passage and life-saving assistance. UNHCR and its humanitarian partners stood ready to take action as soon as agreement on the vital issue of safety guarantees for safe passage had been reached. Furthermore, responding to members' questions on aid mechanisms, she noted that that aid channelling and distribution for Ukraine was being conducted through a centralized mechanism within the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

39. With regard to categories at risk, UNHCR was coordinating protection capacity with its sister agencies in line with a "one-stop-shop" approach, mindful that working with people on the move presented unique challenges. In particular, UNICEF was employing the "Blue Dot" concept to ensure safe spaces for families and provide referrals and counselling. Moreover, UNHCR and UNICEF had stepped up their child protection and gender-based violence capacity in each country, had launched numerous help pages in different languages across the region and had strengthened communications on social media to signpost services for the most vulnerable. To ensure protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, UNHCR would work with child protection, gender-based violence and community specialists and was considering emergency deployments for certain locations. The needs of vulnerable people remained at the heart of the protection response of UNHCR and its sister agencies, which would work to fill gaps and, crucially, avoid duplication. Summing up, she extended her gratitude to States for having pledged additional financial support which, while addressing the refugee crisis in Europe, would ensure that core funding was not diverted from existing crises and refugees in need.

v. **West and Central Africa**

40. **Ms. Mutuli** (Director of the Regional Bureau for West and Central Africa), speaking via video link, said that recent political instability had created great uncertainty in West and Central Africa, a region already grappling with myriad challenges that had forcibly displaced large populations. Faced with the risk of further displacement in the central Sahel and further south, UNHCR was working with relevant Governments to re-evaluate the risks and revise contingency plans.

41. In December 2021, UNHCR had declared a Level 2 emergency in Chad in response to the sudden influx of refugees from Cameroon's Far North. The approach decided upon had facilitated relocation and settlement in and outside of camps. In that regard, UNHCR was continuing to establish formal sites to relocate refugees away from the border and was monitoring delicate inter-ethnic issues. Within Cameroon, UNHCR was working with the Government and other actors on the emergency response to new IDPs and on solutions to address tensions over resources, notably water. A supplementary budget had been established and an appeal launched, while an inter-agency Regional Refugee Response Plan for the year ahead would be initiated.

42. While the protection environment across West and Central Africa remained very fragile, UNHCR had scaled up protection monitoring with the strong support of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. In the central Sahel, key protection data was being analysed to ensure evidence-based programming and supplement cross-border coordination by joint analysis with the support of the Danish Refugee Council. Following its pilot phase, the project was being expanded to other countries in the region.

43. Turning to solutions, she commended Liberia and Benin for having taken formal steps towards invoking the cessation of refugee status for Ivorians. UNHCR would continue to work with Governments to ensure that all other actions in the comprehensive roadmap for solutions for Ivorian refugees were implemented and that all refugees understood their options. UNHCR would also continue to work with Governments to address the forced displacement of refugees and IDPs. In that regard, she looked forward to the regional ministerial meeting on solutions for the forcibly displaced, including refugees from the Central African Republic, which was due to be held in Yaoundé in April 2022.

44. Recalling that the Sahel was particularly susceptible to the effects of climate change, she noted that UNHCR had conducted a preliminary internal review of its climate mitigation and adaptation strategies following the publication of the Strategic Framework for Climate Action. Having reviewed its operations in the central Sahel, UNHCR planned to expand to conduct similar reviews in other regional countries, ahead of developing a regional climate action plan.

45. Furthermore, alongside the gradual roll-out of the Business Transformation Programme, UNHCR was ensuring that changes to simplify and optimize policy were implemented in the field, including at the sub-office level. Measures were also under way to implement a revised policy on accountability to affected populations. In that context, experts supplied by the Division of International Protection were working with countries in the region to provide staff and beneficiaries with a fuller understanding of the policy changes and manage the expectations of beneficiaries, including women and girls. The health, well-being and safety of all staff, many of whom worked in very high-risk environments, remained paramount.

46. **Mr. Ahmad** (Chad on behalf of the Africa Group), speaking via video link, recalled that his country continued to face immense challenges in providing protection and assistance to over 1 million forcibly displaced persons from the Sudan, the Central African Republic, Cameroon and Nigeria, as well as migrants, displaced people in the Lac Province and returnees from the Central African Republic and Nigeria. Since 2021, the country had welcomed thousands more refugees following clashes between communities in Logone and Chari in Cameroon's Far North. Despite the serious humanitarian situation, Chad would continue to uphold its tradition of welcoming forcibly displaced persons from neighbouring countries, who comprised more than 3 per cent of its population and placed it among the 10 largest host countries worldwide – and among the largest host countries in Africa – by number of refugees.

47. Deeply troubled by the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Ukraine, and particularly by the discrimination suffered by African citizens, his Government called on all European countries and humanitarian actors to respect international human rights and humanitarian law and extend assistance to all refugees, irrespective of citizenship, ethnicity or migration status.

48. While grateful for the support for forcibly displaced persons from UNHCR and its partners and donors, he called for enhanced support to the Sahel region, which faced distinct security and climate change challenges.

49. **Ms. Clifford** (European Union group statement), noting that the humanitarian crisis in the central Sahel was among the worst worldwide, said that violent extremism, organized crime, intercommunal violence and conflict in many areas presented growing needs in a shrinking humanitarian space, resulting in increasing levels of forced displacement, which had reached record

levels in Burkina Faso in January 2022. Meanwhile, the situation in the Lake Chad Basin remained deeply troubling, particularly in north-east Nigeria. After 12 years, the conflict remained one of the largest and most protracted crises worldwide. Violent attacks, including on aid workers, had left hundreds of thousands of IDPs without assistance. Safe and unhindered humanitarian access, as well as protection and freedom of movement for affected civilians, must be ensured. In particular, she noted that camp closures in Maiduguri ran contrary to the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa and impeded already limited access. The forced displacement crisis in the Central African Republic, following continued post-electoral violence, must also be denounced. Supportive of efforts to promote comprehensive regional approaches across the continent, the European Union thus welcomed the Support Platform established to address that crisis.

50. Turning to the wider region, she noted that other African countries continued to face significant challenges of forced displacement, due to protracted and escalating conflicts across the continent, exacerbated by the impact of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. The European Union attached great importance to its relationship with the African Union and, having consolidated their joint vision for 2030, the two parties had thus agreed to enhance cooperation for peace and security, including by tackling root causes of conflicts, instability and forced displacement, and to work more closely to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law. The parties had further committed to find durable solutions for refugees and asylum seekers in need of international protection and to revitalize the tripartite task force established with the United Nations, with a view to strengthening asylum systems to provide adequate reception, protection and integration.

51. The European Union attached great importance to addressing forced displacement, having dedicated €8 billion in funding to that end. In line with its Team Europe approach, it had provided almost 145 million COVID-19 vaccinations to Africa and had committed a further €425 million to ramp up the pace of vaccination in the region. Nonetheless, a longer-term approach was also required. In that regard, she welcomed UNHCR's increased collaboration with development actors and financial institutions, including the World Bank Group and the African Development Bank, along with its efforts to broaden its technical expertise at a regional level to support country offices to advocate for inclusion in national schemes.

52. Noting that internal displacement continued to burden several African regions, she welcomed the recommendations of the High-level Panel on Internal Displacement and looked forward to the finalization of the draft Action Agenda on Internal Displacement. The European Union would consider how those challenges could be met collectively during its upcoming chairmanship of the Platform on Disaster Displacement.

53. The European Union set great store by UNHCR's advocacy of international humanitarian law and principles and its work to ensure that the return of refugees and IDPs was voluntary, safe, informed, dignified and sustainable. While its commitment to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment across its programmes and workplaces was commendable, UNHCR was urged to strengthen its gender-based approach to prevent, mitigate and respond to sexual and gender-based violence, combat human trafficking, child labour, forced marriage and other risks facing women and girls, and prioritize meeting the needs of the most vulnerable. In that respect, States must provide flexible and predictable funding to allow UNHCR to respond to new and changing needs and operational requirements, which should be met with increased efficiency, effectiveness, visibility, transparency and accountability. Supportive of UNHCR's efforts to broaden its donor base, the European Union called on other States to make contributions to its efforts.

54. **Mr. Hajiyev** (Azerbaijan), speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, noted that the 18th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in Baku in 2019, had had a specific focus on refugee issues. In its Final Outcome Document it had recalled with appreciation the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, the precursor to the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, and the Global Compact on Refugees. Refugee problems were becoming increasingly widespread and complex, and required sustained attention and effort from the international community. UNHCR was therefore an important representation of the political will to operationalize the principles of responsibility and burden-sharing. Measures to alleviate the suffering of refugees must be accompanied by dedicated efforts to address the root causes, with a view towards durable solutions. It was also of the utmost importance to promote and protect the human rights of all refugees, so the Movement called on all Member States to avoid any discriminatory measures.

55. The Non-Aligned Movement strongly condemned the promulgation and application of unilateral coercive measures against any of its members, in violation of the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law, and expressed support for the States affected.

56. UNHCR was a unique platform for the sharing of best practices by Member States and other stakeholders, and the Non-Aligned Movement looked forward to future deliberations to secure effective implementation of the global compact on refugees. Its members were open to developing further cooperation with UNHCR and other agencies in that regard.

57. **Mr. Sougouri** (Burkina Faso), speaking via video link, said that Burkina Faso had been experiencing a security crisis since 2016, and increasing terrorist violence had led to an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. Attacks targeting both defence and security forces, as well as civilians and administrative personnel, had killed more than 2,000 people and led to massive population displacement. Data collected at the end of 2021 showed that there were more than 1.5 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and more than 1.6 million people experiencing food insecurity, all in regions experiencing security challenges that had forced them to abandon their livelihoods. The security situation had also limited people's access to basic social services, since around 3,000 schools and 100 health-care facilities had been closed. Various actions taken by the previous administration had proved ineffective at reducing the terrorist threat.

58. It was in that desperate context that the coup of 24 January 2022 took place. It had been undertaken without bloodshed and with respect for human rights. It was not in any way an affront to the democratic institutions or to the international community. Indeed, its ultimate goal was to enable the country to stand up and fight for its territorial integrity, recovery and sovereignty. As a result of the cooperative spirit of the new authorities, a transition process was immediately put into place, which led to the adoption of a transition charter on 1 March 2022. The country already had a transitional Government, and a transitional legislature was being put in place. The new national authorities fully intended to respect the country's international commitments. At such a decisive moment in its history, Burkina Faso needed its partners more than ever if it was to end the humanitarian crisis and resume its development journey.

59. The new authorities had a singular humanitarian agenda – to restore security and territorial integrity and enable the displaced people to return home and live in dignity. The Government intended to meet the urgent needs of the IDPs and vulnerable host communities in terms of food security, nutrition, health, education, and water, sanitation and hygiene, as well as protection and economic recovery. The challenges were great, due to the growing number of displaced people, the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as a crop shortage. The Government of Burkina Faso could not meet those challenges alone, so it was launching an appeal for international solidarity, in accordance with the principle of shared responsibility as laid down in the global compact for refugees. Indeed, the whole of the Sahel sub-region needed help to ward off the terrorist threat for good.

60. He thanked UNHCR for the support it had provided to Burkina Faso since the beginning of the crisis, as well as all humanitarian actors for defying all sorts of risks in order to achieve their mission. Burkina Faso remained fully engaged with the national and international partners supporting its efforts to respond appropriately to the crisis.

61. **Mr. Chemakh** (Algeria) thanked UNHCR for its work in Africa. Insecurity, violence, inhibited development, the impact of natural disasters and desertification were the main causes of forced displacement in Africa, and the complex humanitarian situation required firm engagement and strong support from the international community. He called on international donor countries to step up their contributions, in accordance with the principle of equitable and predictable burden and responsibility-sharing. Algeria was committed to supporting other African countries and would strengthen its cooperation, at a bilateral level and within the African Union. That involved constant, sincere, respectful dialogue with those countries, in addition to providing food and medical assistance to alleviate the suffering of vulnerable populations and support pandemic recovery efforts.

62. Although humanitarian aid was vital, it was not an end in itself. Global, sustainable, inclusive solutions needed to be put in place to address the root causes of forced displacement in Africa. Such measures should be taken with strict respect for national sovereignty and in accordance with the

Charter of the United Nations and the Constitutive Act of the African Union, particularly with regard to the intangibility of borders inherited upon independence.

63. Algeria remained committed to helping eliminate hotbeds of tension and to supporting peaceful solutions to the crises threatening the continent. Committed to the principle of African solutions to African problems, free of any destabilizing interference, Algeria was playing a frontline role in resolving a number of situations, especially in Libya, Mali and the Sahel-Saharan region. It was also working towards a peaceful resolution of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam crisis, in the framework of the mediation led by the African Union. Algeria was sparing no effort to help return stability to Mali, as both the leader of the international mediation and the chair of the Monitoring Committee of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, as well as in the spirit of fraternity linking the two countries. Algeria was also making efforts to facilitate dialogue between Mali and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in order to resolve the current crisis and remove the obstacles to the complete and consensual implementation of the Algiers Agreement, taking account of international requirements and the legitimate aspirations of the Malian people.

64. As African Union Coordinator on the prevention and combating of terrorism and violent extremism, Algeria had presented a new African approach that aimed to breathe new life into the effort and bolster the regional institutions and mechanisms responsible for combatting cross-border terrorism. That approach included new concepts, methods and resources to improve prevention, deradicalization and the fight against terrorism and violent extremism across the continent. By helping dialogue and reconciliation to prevail, the aim was to avoid further forced displacements and create the necessary conditions for voluntary return. In conclusion, he urged the international community to adopt a global, coordinated and inclusive approach to support the efforts of African countries with a view to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063 of the African Union.

65. **Mr. Ishida** (Japan), speaking via video link, expressed concern about the escalation of terrorism in the Sahel and the possibility of its further spread into coastal countries on the Gulf of Guinea. Millions of people had been forced to flee their homes as a result of the attacks and the destruction of public infrastructure. In line with the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, it was important to address the root causes of the ongoing conflict. The protracted humanitarian crisis in the Lake Chad region was also a concern and required crucial assistance from the international community. In that regard, Japan had provided \$39.5 million to UNHCR for its operations in the region. Japan would continue to provide assistance to IDPs and host communities in coordination with international organizations, with a view to promoting peace and stability in West and Central Africa, and would be co-hosting the Eighth Tokyo International Conference on African Development in 2022 as part of its continuing support for African-led development.

66. **Ms. Irish** (United Kingdom) noted that the Sahel was an increasingly challenging humanitarian context where people were facing complex issues. Growing violence and conflict were rapidly driving humanitarian needs, compounding the existing vulnerabilities of periodic severe droughts, poverty and food insecurity. Continued year-round protracted and acute needs would be both direct – caused by violence – and indirect, such as the increased use of negative coping mechanisms, some of which had a disproportionate impact on women and girls. The United Kingdom welcomed the High Commissioner's continued focus on the region, as demonstrated by his recent visit. Better understanding of complex protection issues, based on improved data, was critical for improved action and prioritized responses to the most egregious violations of international humanitarian, refugee and human rights law. The United Kingdom planned to continue its ongoing commitment to supporting regional, inter-agency, harmonized protection monitoring through Project 21, and welcomed the intent to ensure that the initiative brought together a range of different stakeholders, enabling discussions to take account of the added value of the various actors while ensuring that protection data, evidence and analysis informed policy and programming.

67. **Ms. Papka** (Nigeria) condemned the unfair and unjust treatment of Nigerian nationals and other Africans in the ongoing crisis in Ukraine, calling on UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations to ensure their protection and the preservation of their rights and dignity. She welcomed the humanitarian assistance extended to Nigerians under the Territorial Action Plans developed by the Lake Chad Basin Governors' Forum, and commended UNHCR for facilitating their return through the tripartite agreement with Nigeria and Cameroon, as well as the efforts to

conclude a second such agreement with Nigeria and Niger. Nigeria was continuing its efforts to ensure the implementation of the four commitments made at the Global Refugee Forum in 2019, by developing its GCR Roadmap.

68. The Government of Nigeria was finalizing its 2021-2025 medium-term development plan, which included budgetary provision for projects addressing the challenges of persons of concern. A Presidential Committee had also been established, under the leadership of the country's Vice-President, to address the repatriation, return and resettlement of IDPs and ensure the safe return of Nigerian nationals from Cameroon, Chad and Niger. A strategic roadmap for 2021-2025 entitled "mapping a life of dignity for all" had recently been launched, with seven key pillars focusing on social inclusion and protection programmes for persons of concern. Nigeria continued to host refugees in four states, and an ICT capacity-building initiative had been launched to assist ten thousand refugees, IDPs and migrants by ensuring self-reliance and ease of reintegration into society, including participation in the national COVID-19 vaccination plans. Furthermore, a national policy on IDPs had been concluded in order to enhance prevention and mitigate suffering.

69. **Ms. Lehoux** (Switzerland) expressed concern about the large increase in the number of refugees and IDPs in the region in 2021. She would be interested to hear the view of UNHCR with regard to the compact that was being drawn up on the management and resolution of internal displacement in Nigeria. Also, how was UNHCR engaging in North-East Nigeria to prevent forced returns? It was important for UNHCR to ensure that Nigerians in Niger had specific and detailed information about the situation, particularly in terms of security, basic services and livelihoods. That information should cover Borno State, where the Government proposed to repatriate them. Humanitarian workers in Nigeria agreed that conditions were not yet suitable for the return of refugees, in light of the attacks by armed groups since December 2021 and the extremely limited infrastructure and access to basic services.

70. **Mr. Smith** (United States of America) expressed concern about the worsening violence in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and the Central African Republic, as well as the destabilizing impact of those crises on the youth population. He called on the international community and host countries to ensure the protection of civilians and the safety of humanitarian workers across the region, as well as consistent adherence to international humanitarian law. UNHCR's progress in the prevention, mitigation and response to gender-based violence across the region was to be applauded, and further steps encouraged to strengthen sexual exploitation and abuse response and prevention frameworks.

71. The United States was committed to addressing the detrimental impacts of climate change in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin regions, through more targeted and environmentally sustainable assistance. UNHCR's collaboration with local and international partners in that regard was to be commended. There should also be continued progress to strengthen relief to development coherence, such as UNHCR's innovative work with the World Food Programme, the International Labour Organization and other partners on refugee livelihoods and economic inclusion in Mauritania and Niger.

72. Armed conflict, climate change and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic had driven millions of people into food insecurity, so she called on donors to prioritize funding for acute humanitarian needs and food security in West Africa. As national and local governments sought to re-establish stability in conflict-affected regions, there should be stronger coordination on humanitarian response and durable solutions between humanitarian, development and security actors. That included ensuring that all refugee and IDP returns were voluntary, safe and dignified.

73. UNHCR and West African governments continued to make admirable progress towards durable solutions for refugees in protracted situations. Cooperation on the Roadmap for Comprehensive solutions for Ivorian Refugees was an outstanding example of the region's commitment to long-term solutions. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and its member States were to be applauded for their leadership in the global fight to end statelessness. Seven years after the adoption of the Abidjan Declaration of Ministers of ECOWAS Member States on Eradication of Statelessness, West African countries continued to be at the forefront of efforts to adopt and implement legislation to eradicate and prevent statelessness and protect the rights of stateless persons. In closing, he thanked countries in the region for hosting refugees and for their continued work with UNHCR and non-governmental organizations to provide vital humanitarian assistance to those in need, and called on all Member States to do more.

74. **Ms. Shin** (Republic of Korea) thanked host countries in the region for their spirit of solidarity, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was concerning that the number of persons of concern, especially IDPs, was increasing, and that there were overwhelming security and livelihood challenges, especially in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. It was good to note that UNHCR was scaling up its activities in that regard.

75. She welcomed the various efforts that had been taken, despite the many challenges. Project 21 in central Sahel and Chad was a good example of a consolidated data-sharing framework for protection monitoring. There had been intensive investment in addressing gender-based violence through the Safe from the Start Initiative. Cash-based initiatives had been expanded throughout the region, and had been shown to improve living conditions and reduce stress; and lastly, cooperation activities were underway with international financial institutions to train health-care workers. The Republic of Korea encouraged UNHCR to find innovative ways to maximize the impact of those endeavours. The Republic of Korea would continue to engage with UNHCR, including through its continued multi-year commitment for the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework in Uganda, as pledged at the Global Refugee Forum. More information would be appreciated about UNHCR's strategy to address vaccine hesitancy in Africa.

76. **Ms. Dalibey** (the Organization of Islamic Cooperation as observer) noted that a combination of complex factors had triggered a fast-growing humanitarian crisis in the Sahel region and the Lake Chad basin. She commended UNHCR's work in the region. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) was also giving special attention to the region.

77. The most recent session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers had been convened in Niamey in November 2020 under the motto "United against terrorism for Peace and Development" and the Secretary-General of OIC had made one of his first official tours since taking office in the region in the past week, visiting Chad, Niger and Cameroon and meeting with Heads of State and senior officials to discuss ways to address the many challenges facing the region, and create conditions conducive to peace, security and development. OIC was also scaling up its response to the situation and had strengthened the capacity of its regional humanitarian and development mission in Niger, using a triple nexus approach. OIC had also provided financial support to countries in the region to mitigate the socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, while also providing COVID-19 vaccines. The international community must enhance its support to the Sahel region and the Lake Chad basin by addressing the root causes of the situation.

78. **Mr. Mayr** (Germany), speaking via video link, welcomed the progress that had been made with regard to voluntary repatriation and reintegration, particularly in the Lake Chad region. He also welcomed the conclusion of a tripartite agreement on returns from Niger to Nigeria. It was essential to also promote durable shelters for IDPs in the central Sahel and Lake Chad region, since the crisis was likely to last longer than the one-year life-cycle of emergency tents. Durable shelters would also provide greater safety and dignity while also being greener and more cost-effective in the long run, so he encouraged donors to provide greater support in that regard. He welcomed UNHCR's engagement in line with the Territorial Action Plans developed by the Lake Chad Basin Governors' Forum.

79. He commended efforts to reduce and prevent statelessness throughout West and Central Africa and encouraged a swift conclusion of the regional model law, which facilitated statelessness determination procedures and provided protection and solutions for stateless persons.

80. He expressed deep concern about the displacement crisis in the Central African Republic and commended UNHCR for its efforts to assist displaced people within the country and in neighbouring countries, particularly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He also commended the organization's approach to Ethiopian refugees arriving in Sudan, although there were still some logistical concerns and security challenges along the border. Concerns also remained about conditions in some Sudanese refugee camps, so efforts should be redoubled to provide durable shelter and improve the water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure. Funding gaps in the response to the refugee situation in South Sudan was also a concern, together with the decrease in humanitarian funding in 2022. Since that was the largest refugee crisis in Africa, he encouraged all partners to take action, particularly with regard to the ongoing food crisis. Further information from UNHCR would also be appreciated about the scale and shape of the Pockets of Hope pilot initiative.

81. **Mr. Omar** (Islamic Relief Worldwide), speaking on behalf of a group of NGOs, said that while many countries in the African region respected their international obligations to protect those forcibly displaced by various causes, including drought and conflict, a lack of responsibility-sharing worldwide and increasing inequalities were among the greatest challenges to durable solutions to such problems.

82. Through the COVAX Facility, some countries included refugees and asylum seekers in their national health plans but vaccination programmes remained a hugely underfunded challenge and did not yet fully include stateless communities. Additional funding for vaccine delivery costs was crucial to ensure the effectiveness of COVAX. Displaced and stateless populations had lost their livelihoods and income, and essential services, including maternal health facilities, had been hardest hit during the pandemic. Woefully underfunded humanitarian responses had led to reductions in food assistance for refugees in many countries in the region, disproportionately impacting women and children. The increase in gender-based violence as an indirect result of the pandemic, and restricted access to education, had tested international protection mechanisms. In addition, humanitarian aid was increasingly refused the access necessary to deliver.

83. His group recommended escalating advocacy for global vaccine equity; improving information-sharing regarding vaccination, including through investment in accessible vaccine information; including all displaced people in state and international relief efforts; and working to end statelessness by, for example, reforming gender-discriminatory nationality laws and establishing legal safeguards. Humanitarian and refugee response plans must be fully funded. Donors and United Nations agencies must advocate safe and unfettered access to deliver aid, including ensuring exemptions to United Nations or unilateral sanctions. It was important that donors and United Nations agencies called for flexible funding to local and national NGOs. Recognition of persons of concern-led organizations was essential to ensure the appropriate support. His group also recommended that States rejected measures that eroded the international protection system, including refoulement and detention; and that all actors increased accountability to affected populations.

84. Turning to the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes, he said that 2022 projections indicated acute risks of food insecurity and child malnutrition in the subregion, because chronically underfunded humanitarian response plans had led to devastating reductions in provision. In Somalia, for example, climate crisis events had forcibly displaced populations. In South Sudan, the slow progress of the peace talks undermined the motivation of displaced persons to return, while floods further deteriorated return options, and gender-based violence had risen during the pandemic. In Ethiopia, no sustainable solution was foreseen for the conflict in the north, and the re-emergence of drought and heightened insecurity further hindered a humanitarian response. The protracted displacement crisis in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo was growing, along with food insecurity and regular disease outbreaks. Given the NGO staff kidnappings and administrative impediments, greater commitments from authorities were needed to facilitate a response to affected populations.

85. With regard to West and Central Africa, in Central Sahel armed groups, weak governance and resource scarcity fuelled intercommunal violence and generated the displacement of millions. Insecurity and climate change were decreasing food production, and donors must mitigate the effects of widespread food shortages and engage with ECOWAS. The complex challenges of the climate crisis, intercommunal clashes and violence perpetrated by armed groups also continued to affect the Lake Chad Basin. In Nigeria, internally displaced persons and refugees were under pressure to return to unsafe areas in Borno State, but any relocation must be voluntary and access to essential services must be guaranteed. He welcomed the establishment of the Presidential Committee on the Repatriation, Returns and Resettlement of Displaced Persons, which must focus on creating durable solutions based on effective communication and data collection. In the Central African Republic, further funding must be secured, given the repeated patterns of conflict that led to widespread displacement and its consequences.

86. **Ms. Mutuli** (Director of West and Central Africa Bureau, UNHCR) thanked participants for their words of encouragement and for confirming their key priorities. She also thanked the Governments of Chad and Nigeria, among others, who had expressed their continued commitment to hospitality, and other Governments which had confirmed their continued contributions to UNHCR programmes in the region. She welcomed the support of UNHCR operations on climate

action, and the appeals made by Governments, such as the United States of America and Germany, for sustainable programmes, to include the provision of durable shelters with climate-sensitive access.

87. Concern had been expressed about the continuing closure of sites for internally displaced persons in north-east Nigeria and the protracted displacement in the Lake Chad Basin. UNHCR continued to work to ensure that the returns carried out in north-east Nigeria were voluntary.

88. Responding to the question regarding UNHCR's action in Borno State relating to the return of internally displaced persons, the High Commissioner was working with the humanitarian community to call for a better principled and organized approach to camp closures. UNHCR had established an urban outreach programme for internally displaced persons, aimed at providing better access to protection and services for such groups. It continued to work with the authorities in Borno State to ensure that people were only returned to areas where security was guaranteed.

89. She welcomed the commitment of the European Union to strengthening asylum systems, which would enhance protection and accelerate the identification of status. It would also allow for an assessment of the linkages between inadequate asylum systems and the risk of onward movement. She commended the support of the European Union for the COVAX Facility, which would contribute to increasing vaccine coverage, very low at present for persons of concern.

90. Turning to the Sahel, the situation was becoming an acute protection crisis, which was particularly impacting women and girls. She thanked the United Kingdom for its support in that regard, and especially for Project 21, through which data were gathered to inform UNHCR programmes in that area. Lastly, she welcomed Nigeria's commitment to signing the tripartite agreement with Niger that would serve as a framework to guide the safe return of refugees.

vi. East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes

91. **Ms. Nkweta Salami** (Director, Regional Bureau for East Africa, Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes, UNHCR), speaking via video link, presented snapshots of refugees that captured the complexities of displacement in the East and Horn of Africa. She said that the region comprised countries that were peaceful, were being rebuilt or were facing major conflict and political unrest. The situation in Ethiopia remained extremely challenging and UNHCR was trying to get aid through. Conflict affecting certain camps had caused further displacement. In Darfur and South Sudan, intercommunal violence had also resulted in new displacements, and women and children were particularly at risk. Political developments in Sudan were also a matter of concern. While humanitarian operations continued, the ongoing uncertainty delayed efforts to find lasting solutions for displaced Sudanese.

92. The ever-increasing impact of climate change was causing people to move from their homes or even across borders. Hundreds of thousands were at risk as a result of severe drought in Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia, while Sudan and South Sudan faced cyclical flooding at unprecedented levels. UNHCR was working to implement mitigation measures, analyse flooding trends and introduce improved shelter for displaced persons. It was building partnerships to work on anticipatory actions to reduce climate shocks. Cuts in food rations due to limited funding resulted in women and girls developing negative coping mechanisms. UNHCR was working with the World Food Programme in Rwanda and Uganda to prioritize food distribution to those most in need. Faced with protracted refugee situations, the best way to ensure food security was ultimately by investing more in livelihood opportunities. It was unacceptable for refugee or internally displaced girls to have to drop out of school or be married off because families were unable to cope.

93. Nevertheless, nearly all countries in the region had succeeded in safeguarding asylum, allowing for people fleeing persecution to be able to seek international protection. Uganda, for example, was one of a handful of countries to welcome Afghan evacuees in the wake of upheaval in that country, while it simultaneously dealt with arrivals of Congolese refugees. Rwanda had renewed its commitment to host vulnerable evacuees from Libya in an emergency transit centre that was one of the only facilities of its kind. She commended Kenya for its new Refugee Act, which expanded protection and opportunities for refugees in that country. Countries in the region had also made progress on their commitments in relation to regional agreements.

94. In December 2021, UNHCR had met with the East African Community and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development to convene the first joint Regional Protection Dialogue with States parties, with a view to strengthening access to asylum and supporting States to meet their international obligations. UNHCR was investing in strengthening the response to internally displaced persons, in close collaboration with United Nations partners. Teams in the region continued to provide all forms of support for internally displaced persons in South Sudan, Somalia and Sudan. In cooperation with the United Nations, UNHCR had significantly increased its operational footprint in northern Ethiopia, establishing over 65 protection desks to provide counselling and referrals for internally displaced persons. UNHCR offices in the region remained attuned to the critical importance of addressing gender-based violence, and sexual exploitation and abuse, while recent refugee emergencies underscored the need to ensure strong leadership and maintain vigilance with the appropriate prevention, coordination and response measures in place. UNHCR would intensify efforts to ensure a comprehensive response to those issues.

95. While the health risks of COVID-19 were being managed, and refugees were included in many national vaccination plans, the social and economic impacts of the pandemic still persisted, and for many refugees would be insurmountable. Despite lost momentum due to COVID-19, significant progress had been made on the Global Refugee Forum pledges. Rwanda, Djibouti and Uganda had progressed with refugee inclusion efforts, and Burundi had joined other countries in the region, announcing eight new pledges. She looked forward to supporting pledges and the implementation of Global Refugee Forum commitments.

96. In a complex region, UNHCR remained motivated to find solutions. In 2021, over 65,000 Burundian refugees had been assisted to voluntarily return home. That was one of the highest facilitated returns of refugees globally in 2021. It was vital to invest in areas to which refugees returned, in order to ensure that entire communities could access essential services and rebuild their livelihoods. UNHCR remained equally committed to the Solutions Initiative for Sudan and South Sudan, in coordination with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). Despite the prevailing problems, there were possible solutions, and some of the refugees and internally displaced persons concerned were returning to “pockets of hope”. Together with partners, UNCHR was working to develop an area-based approach to facilitate their reintegration. Throughout the region, UNHCR was seizing opportunities to develop and strengthen strategic partnerships for solutions, including with various stakeholders. It worked closely with countries to identify ways to reduce the risk of statelessness. Progress was being made and in Kenya, for example, 51 persons had been granted citizenship in 2021.

97. She emphasized that attention was paid to the integrity of the management of programmes and resources, and audit recommendations were used to strengthen controls and ensure accountability for donor-provided resources and affected communities. UNHCR placed importance on the welfare and safety of its staff, particularly in conflict areas, and staff in the region continued to stay and deliver, despite COVID-19 and the insecurity. Thanking delegates for their support of UNHCR’s work in this region, she underlined the need for additional resources to address the very critical gaps in UNHCR’s operations. Such gaps increased the vulnerability of already vulnerable populations, and she therefore counted on the continued financial support of States parties and their invaluable political advocacy to address the myriad challenges and seize emerging opportunities in the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes.

98. **Ms. Clifford** (European Union) said that the fragile situation in the Horn of Africa region had been further exacerbated by the conflict in Ethiopia. Despite recent encouraging developments, she remained extremely concerned about the situation in northern Ethiopia and the lack of meaningful access to most of Tigray. Human rights and humanitarian principles must be respected. She called on UNHCR to ensure the protection of refugees and respect for the principle of non-refoulement. Safe and unhindered humanitarian access must be ensured to all areas in need. It was vital to scale up assistance and ensure cooperation with the United Nations and all humanitarian organizations on the ground.

99. In Sudan, it was essential that UNHCR used its core protection mandate to ensure adequate registration, documentation and assistance to all people seeking asylum. Her group remains fully engaged in the IGAD Support Platform and welcomed the Solutions Initiative for Sudan and South Sudan, which might plant the seeds for durable solutions. Efforts must be strengthened to provide durable shelter and improve the water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure, particularly in certain

camps in east Sudan. With regard to South Sudan, the consequences of floods and conflicts were a cause for concern, because conditions were not conducive for large-scale assisted returns of refugees and displaced populations, particularly in the light of the decrease in several donors' humanitarian funding for 2022. Her group continued to support the peace process and reforms. In Somalia, where the humanitarian crisis continued to deteriorate, access was limited and the adverse effects of climate change exacerbated needs. The European Union and its Member States continued to support aid organizations to deliver life-saving assistance to the most vulnerable. Lastly, regarding the Great Lakes region and more specifically Burundi, the repatriation process of refugees continued, and UNHCR's advocacy of voluntary repatriation processes was appreciated.

100. **Mr. Eituhami Yassin** (Sudan), speaking via video link, highlighted the importance of joint efforts to identify solutions to address the suffering associated with displacement and ensure that all persons could live in dignity. His country received large numbers of refugees, as much of the territory was open to them. It was necessary to adopt measures to enable safe returns for such refugees. In that regard, a meeting was currently being held in Nairobi among various parties concerned, with a view to adopting appropriate regional measures. His country urgently needed assistance, because of the increasing number of refugees and asylum seekers. Over half the refugees in his country lived in open areas, and most depended on the free public services. Their living conditions were poor, and they had inadequate access to health and education services. Sudan was subjected to the climate crisis: refugees had contributed to deforestation, which had accelerated environmental deterioration, and the rise in pollution had contributed to various other catastrophes. It was essential to increase technical capacities and implement action plans to deal effectively with the current challenges.

101. **Ms. Rasmussen** (Denmark) said that the updates testified to the challenge of forced displacement and its many interlinked drivers on the African continent. Fragility, conflict and socioeconomic challenges were exacerbated by the impact of COVID-19. There was an obvious need to address those challenges through a triple-nexus approach. Furthermore, the impacts of climate change were keenly felt in many regions. There was a clear need to strengthen resilience among the most vulnerable populations, and to address the environmental impact of forced migration and the tension it caused within host communities. She commended UNHCR for its more comprehensive focus on climate action.

102. It was important to continue to strive for more inclusive responses to forced displacement. Her Government was committed to that end, and had allocated \$30 million to exploring new approaches in Kenya in the following years. It looked forward to cooperating with UNHCR and other partners in that regard. She expressed deep concern about the devastating humanitarian situation unfolding in Ethiopia, including the lack of humanitarian access. Immediate and unhindered humanitarian access must be secured to all people in need.

103. **Ms. Kiruthu** (Kenya), speaking via video link, said that her country was committed to refugee protection and was currently hosting over 500,000 refugees from across the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes. She called on the international community to redouble efforts in the search for solutions. The number of refugees resettled in 2021 had increased slightly by comparison with 2020. However, in the spirit of the Global Compact on Refugees, the international community must enhance the scope of resettlement programmes if the expected number of settlements was to be achieved in 2022.

104. Refugee status was not permanent, and resettlement in third countries was not only an effective mechanism for burden and responsibility sharing, but also a contribution to easing the pressure on refugee host countries. Voluntary repatriation to countries of origin remained the preferred lasting solution. Her country therefore continued to advocate sustained efforts to create decent conditions in countries of origin. She welcomed UNHCR's continued commitment to the I-Belong campaign on statelessness and its acknowledgement of the signing of the country's new refugee law in November 2021, which ushered in a new legal framework for the management of refugees in Kenya.

105. Her Government looked forward to continued engagement with UNHCR in the implementation of the Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps roadmap, and she hoped that efforts in that regard would be enhanced. Kenya was firmly committed to the protection of refugees, and protracted crises must not be forgotten in the wake of new emergency situations.

106. **Ms. Kibere** (Uganda), speaking via video link and expressing appreciation for the update on the East and Horn of Africa region, said that her country was the largest refugee-hosting country in Africa, with over 1.5 million refugees as of December 2021. It was important to question whether the international community was sharing the burden of refugees around the globe.

107. In Uganda, settled refugees lived peacefully alongside nationals. Through the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, Uganda had developed response plans for various sectors, although no funds had been allocated by the international community to that end. She called upon the international community to support such causes, to permit the peaceful coexistence of refugees and nationals. United Nations funding for Uganda's refugee response had decreased over the previous four years and averaged only 47 per cent. Funding for refugees per day was now below the poverty line. The 2022 funding allocation meant that Uganda would receive the least funds in proportion to its refugee population. She would like to know more about the method by which it had been calculated that just over \$114,200,000 should be made available for a refugee population of over 1.5 million.

108. It was crucial to identify a lasting solution to the deforestation caused by the refugee community as a means of obtaining fuel for cooking, which was provoking hostility within the host communities. The United Nations should accelerate its interventions to find a lasting solution to climate threats. In view of the adoption of the Global Compact on Refugees, which placed the burden of providing infrastructure and services on the international community, the United Nations should establish a mechanism to prevent Ugandan taxpayers from shouldering the burden of care for refugees. What mechanisms were in place in the event of a funding pipeline break from partners? The COVID-19 pandemic had placed a particular burden on refugee-hosting countries. In Uganda, as of January 2022, fewer than 1 per cent of refugees and nationals had been fully vaccinated. Resources should be mobilized to support the COVID-19 response as part of action for refugees. COVID-19 prevention measures should also be promoted in schools.

109. Her Government reiterated its support for refugees. She called upon UNHCR and the international community to respect their international obligations and to develop low-cost projects for voluntary repatriation on a humanitarian basis. She called on the governments of countries of origin of refugees to find lasting solutions to address the causes of fleeing.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.