



# General Assembly

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## Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Sixty-fourth session

### Summary record of the 669th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 1 October 2013, at 3 p.m.

*Chairperson:* Ms. Arango Olmos (Colombia)

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

1. *The participants were invited to watch a short film on the field activities of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).*

#### **Statement by the High Commissioner**

2. **Mr. Guterres** (High Commissioner for Refugees) said that UNHCR and its partners were being stretched to their limits by the tragedy in the Syrian Arab Republic and other ongoing crises elsewhere in the world. In 2012 and 2013, UNHCR had deployed over 840 people on emergency missions across the globe and, in the previous year alone, some 130 airlifts had delivered 12,000 tonnes of emergency relief items, roughly four times as much as in 2010. Supplementary appeals for funds to respond to new emergencies and other unforeseen needs had secured contributions of nearly US\$ 700 million in 2012 and US\$ 1.4 billion in 2013.

3. Six factors enabled UNHCR and its partners to provide protection and assistance to so many people. First, the solidarity and generosity of host countries and local communities; more than 80 per cent of refugees were hosted by developing countries. Second, financial support from donors, whether in the form of voluntary contributions (US\$ 2.3 billion in 2012) or private sector support (which had risen from US\$ 21.7 million in 2006 to US\$ 170 million in 2013). Third, partnerships, such as those with the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank, as well as those created to implement the Transformative Agenda in the field and to pursue the Structured Dialogue with NGO partners and the Red Cross and Red Crescent societies. The Regional Response Plan for Syrian refugees was a testing ground for many of these partnership arrangements.

4. Fourth, the effectiveness of UNHCR action was linked to the internal reform process, which had brought about a drop in Headquarter costs of from 14 to 8 per cent of overall expenditures and in staff costs of from 41 to 26 per cent between 2006 and 2012. UNHCR operations had doubled since 2006, yet the number of staff had increased by 13 per cent globally and fallen by 32 per cent in Geneva. Since 2006, UNHCR had increased its 72-hour emergency-response coverage capacity to from 250,000 to 600,000 beneficiaries. The modernization of its human resource management processes was ongoing, notably through the activities of the Global Learning Centre in Budapest. Fifth, the focus on innovation was enabling the organization to do more with less. Projects included the construction of a transitional housing unit, which had been developed with the IKEA Foundation and was being field-tested in Ethiopia and Iraq, and the Community Technology Access project, which offered refugees online education and livelihood opportunities through teleworking and mobile payment arrangements. A crowd-sourced platform called UNHCR Ideas had been established to gather additional proposals. None of the recent achievements would have been possible without the dedication and professionalism that UNHCR staff had shown under difficult working conditions.

5. He expressed particular concern about "globalized refugee populations", a phenomenon which saw the same community spread across dozens of countries around the world and which tended to produce the most protracted exile situations. The most visible global refugee populations were Afghans and Somalis. Even though some 5.7 million Afghan refugees had returned to their country since 2002, there had still been over 2.6 million spread across 82 countries at the end of 2012. The Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, which had been launched in 2012, involved the Governments of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan, as well as UNHCR. The strategy focused on sustainable reintegration in Afghanistan and on supporting host communities. More than 1.1 million Somali refugees were currently registered in 109 countries. Although there had recently been encouraging progress in Somalia — prompting the spontaneous return of

thousands of internally displaced persons, members of the diaspora and refugees — there had been upwards of 50,000 new internally displaced persons and over 20,000 new refugee arrivals in Somalia in 2013 alone. UNHCR would be giving more systematic support for spontaneous returns and would be working with Somalia and major host countries to ensure the success of the Global Initiative for Somali Refugees.

6. During the previous year, a number of key challenges and trends with regard to protection had been observed, namely, the risks and dangers faced by refugees, asylum seekers and others travelling in mixed migratory flows; the increase in irregular maritime movements; the rising pressure on the institution of asylum, even in the developed world; and the greater focus on sexual and gender-based violence; through, for example, the United Kingdom initiative on preventing sexual violence in conflict. Encouraging progress had been made on the problem of statelessness since the 2011 Ministerial Meeting: 29 countries had acceded to the two conventions on statelessness and significant reforms of their nationality laws had been carried out by Côte d'Ivoire, the Russian Federation, Senegal and Zimbabwe. The sixtieth anniversary of the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons would be an opportunity to focus on the everyday impact of statelessness, as seen in the dire predicament of the Rohingya in Myanmar, who, in ever-growing numbers, were making perilous boat journeys to other countries. Eradicating statelessness within a decade was an ambitious goal, but one which he believed could be achieved through joint efforts by all sides.

7. Given that it was increasingly difficult to mobilize funding for operations to serve internally displaced persons, participants in the Dialogue on Protection Challenges in December 2013 would be examining persistent gaps and possible solutions for the protection of internally displaced persons. In addition, UNHCR was working with national institutions and community-based organizations to pursue more integrated approaches that anchored the refugee response within the broader framework of national and local development efforts. It was also expanding the use of cash-based interventions, which gave refugees a greater sense of normalcy in their lives, stimulated local economies and allowed people to see refugees as more than just a burden.

8. Finding durable solutions for refugees and displaced persons remained the ultimate goal of UNHCR, and its biggest challenge. In 2012, the number of new refugees had again exceeded that of people who were no longer displaced. There were some encouraging cases, however; in Nepal more than 100,000 Bhutanese refugees had been referred for resettlement since 2007. In Africa, more than 300,000 Angolans, Liberians and Rwandans had been helped to return home, and progress had been made in the Balkans and the Americas. In several regions, the use of legal migration frameworks could offer refugees in protracted situations an alternative path when traditional durable solutions were unavailable. Resource constraints meant that there was a need to make better use of scarce funding rather than measures that perpetuated long-term aid dependency.

### General debate

9. **Ms. Zappia** (Observer for the European Union) said that UNHCR should continue to work within the framework of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and under the guidance of the Emergency Relief Coordinator. In June 2013, the European Union had completed the legislative framework for the establishment of a common European asylum system. Its goal was to ensure that hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers received effective, equal and fair treatment. In addition to the Regional Protection Programmes, the European Union had set up the Joint European Union Resettlement Programme for 2013 to provide durable solutions to refugees worldwide.

10. **Mr. Comissário** (Mozambique), speaking on behalf of the African Group, paid tribute to Sister Angélique Namaika, the 2013 winner of the Nansen Refugee Award. He

said that he welcomed the inclusion of Côte d'Ivoire in the group of pilot countries for implementation of the decision of the Secretary-General's Policy Committee on durable solutions. He expressed his deep appreciation for the assistance provided to refugees in Africa and commended UNHCR and the African Union for organizing a symposium on citizenship and the prevention of statelessness and conflict in Africa.

11. **Mr. Robelo Raffone** (Nicaragua), speaking on behalf of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, said that Nicaragua had ratified the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons in 2013 and that many countries in the region had carried out various activities relating to protection and asylum; for example, Costa Rica, Panama and Brazil had designed some key strategies to regularize the status of refugees.

12. **Mr. Henshaw** (United States of America) reaffirmed his country's commitment to assisting Syrian refugees and recalled the importance of international solidarity and burden-sharing. Global responsibility could not be properly shared without coordinated humanitarian responses. In that connection, data-sharing and coordination with the United Nations system were of key importance, as was support for the roll-out of the Transformative Agenda of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. The previous week, the United States had launched an initiative called "Safe from the Start" which would initially provide funding for UNHCR and for the International Committee of the Red Cross for specific humanitarian activities to prevent gender-based violence from the very onset of an emergency. In 2013, the United States had also given over US\$ 1 billion to UNHCR, almost US\$ 300 million more than in 2012, and had allowed nearly 70,000 refugees to resettle in its territory.

13. **Mr. Muyej Mnageze Mans** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that the Government had spared no effort to end the suffering of the population in the east of the country and thereby to facilitate the repatriation of Congolese refugees in neighbouring countries and the return of the more than 2.6 million internally displaced persons. In line with its commitment to burden-sharing, in early 2013 the Government had welcomed Central African nationals who had fled from events unfolding in their own country. The international community had urged the Government to open a humanitarian corridor to allow all persons fleeing Rwanda, including members of armed groups, to pass through. Yet, the Democratic Republic of the Congo continued to pay the price, as no durable solution had been found to address the issues arising from the refugees' presence in the country. The Government of Rwanda had asked for the cessation clause to be applied by 30 June 2013 and the tripartite commission which represented Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and UNHCR had met to discuss repatriation of the refugees. However, the commission was having difficulty raising funds for the repatriation plan that it had prepared and submitted to UNHCR for consideration. The repatriation plan for Angolan refugees was facing similar problems, despite the fact that the Democratic Republic of the Congo had agreed to apply the cessation clause. He called on UNHCR to review its position on those matters in order to ensure that the refugees did not find themselves in an insecure position.

14. **Mr. Baloch** (Pakistan) said that more than 3 million Afghan refugees had been living in Pakistan for over 30 years. Their repatriation was a priority for the Government, which had nonetheless extended their temporary residence permits until 31 December 2015. He called on the international community to commit to taking immediate and concrete action to repatriate the refugees, whose protracted stay threatened to cause social unrest, given the socioeconomic hardships that the Pakistani population was facing. To date, hosting the refugees had cost Pakistan over \$200 billion. Yet, the international community paid scant attention to the issue. He lamented the fact that the Government of Afghanistan had done little to promote the voluntary repatriation of its refugees.

15. **Mr. Bošković** (Montenegro) said that his Government would be ratifying the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness by the end of 2013 and that it had adopted several strategic documents on refugees and displaced persons, including a strategy for durable solutions to issues relating to displaced and internally displaced persons. The strategy provided for two durable solutions, namely, integration into Montenegrin society and voluntary return to the country of origin. Under the Foreign Nationals Act, refugees and displaced persons could regularize their legal status in Montenegro. The Government was strengthening its cooperation with the Governments of countries of origin with a view to securing the release of identity documents needed for the procedure. To communicate directly with refugees and displaced persons on the ground, it conducted information campaigns and, with the support of several partners, it was implementing a regional housing programme for refugees, especially those from the former Yugoslavia. It was determined to shut down collective centres for refugees. A residential centre for asylum seekers would be opening its doors by the end of 2013.

16. **Mr. Mohamud Ali** (Somalia) said that Somalia was committed to creating, with the support of the international community, the conditions needed for the safe and dignified repatriation of Somali refugees, especially those who had been living in Kenya for over 23 years. The Governments of Somalia and Kenya, in cooperation with UNHCR, were developing the tripartite legal framework for the voluntary repatriation of those refugees. Areas that would host internally displaced persons had also been identified.

17. **Ms. Mukantabana** (Rwanda) said that there were four refugee camps in Rwanda. They housed 75,000 refugees and asylum seekers, of whom 99 per cent were from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and 80 per cent were women and children. The influx of Congolese refugees continued to grow; since April 2012, over 35,000 asylum seekers had crossed the border between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda. The Government had taken steps to build a fifth camp for them. Measures had also been taken to protect women and girl refugees against sexual violence and to provide a broader array of refugee services, such as education for children. The Government was committed to repatriating all its nationals who lived abroad as refugees and had adopted a comprehensive solutions strategy for Rwandan refugees.

18. **Mr. Kaiyamo** (Namibia) said that, pursuant to the Constitution, the Government of Namibia granted asylum to foreign nationals who had a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of their political opinions, race, religion or membership of a particular social group. The national asylum policy had been brought into line with the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1969 African Union Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. Namibia observed the principles concerning non-refoulement and voluntary repatriation.

19. **Mr. Guterres** (High Commissioner for Refugees) said that UNHCR fully supported the efforts of the European Union to set up a common asylum system and a new resettlement programme, as well as the implementation by Montenegro of its regional housing programme. It intended to assist Rwanda in resolving any issues arising from the application of the cessation clause. He was thankful to the United States for its invaluable support and acknowledged the inadequacy of UNHCR measures to help the Democratic Republic of the Congo to cope with the problems stemming from the presence of refugees in that country. He wished to assure the Congolese Government that UNHCR would do what it took to correct the situation. He said that he regretted that few effective measures had been taken to integrate Afghan refugees into Pakistani society and that scant assistance had been provided to host communities. UNHCR would do more to mobilize the international community to address that issue.

20. **Mr. Abdollahi** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that several million Afghan refugees who wished to return home could not do so because little had been done to encourage them

to return. He regretted the lack of health-care infrastructure and services in Afghanistan. In 2012, only 1,272 Afghan refugees had been resettled in a third country. The presence of refugees in the country for the past 30 years had cost the Government several billion dollars. He urged the international community to help the Government to set up the mechanisms that had been discussed at the International Conference on Afghan Refugees held in Geneva in 2012 in order to ensure the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees.

21. **Ms. Chohan** (South Africa) said that she endorsed the statement made by the representative of Mozambique on behalf of the African Group and that South Africa had been striving to resolve the situation of South African citizens who had not been registered during the apartheid era. The Government, with the assistance of various stakeholders such as UNHCR, intended to develop, standardized biometric registration systems for sharing data across countries in the region and the continent and to thereby improve the lot of refugee communities in Africa, whose members often fell victim to trafficking and other heinous practices. On the recommendation of UNHCR, the Government had recently applied the cessation clause for Angolan refugees. There were, however, a number of obstacles facing the countries involved; it was imperative that UNHCR should set up an adequate assistance mechanism.

22. **Mr. Béké** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that he endorsed the statement made by the representative of Mozambique on behalf of the African Group and that his country wished to receive the assistance from the international community in order to cover the costs of reintegrating repatriated refugees. The parliament of Côte d'Ivoire had recently given its approval for the Head of State to ratify the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons. Some 10,000 Liberian refugees had been able to return home following the application of the cessation clause on 30 June 2012.

23. **Mr. Linklater** (Canada) called on all States to facilitate international refugee protection and to work in partnership with UNHCR to that end. He said that Canada supported the "Light Years Ahead" initiative, which was designed to improve refugee protection through innovative solutions to lighting and energy problems. Canada welcomed innovative programmes, such as the Transitional Solutions Initiative, for refugees in protracted situations. It firmly supported UNHCR efforts to expand existing partnerships, especially with the private sector within available resources. In connection with United Nations inter-agency collaboration, Canada attached importance to the Transformative Agenda and to the use of tools such as real-time evaluations and lesson-learning.

24. **Ms. Lepel** (Germany) said she endorsed the statement that had been made on behalf of the European Union. Many UNHCR field staff took great risks in extremely difficult and dangerous circumstances. Adequate compensation packages should be provided for them. Germany commended UNHCR for its active participation in the Transformative Agenda and called for standardization of the organization's arrangements for work with its implementing partners, as that would greatly enhance accountability. She commended UNHCR on the steps taken to analyse future displacement patterns and gaps in the protection system, and said that she supported the Transitional Solutions Initiative and the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees. On financial matters, she said that, in an era of globalization, emerging powers should be aware of their new responsibilities. She welcomed the systematic efforts by UNHCR to broaden its donor base. Lastly, she said that the newly established resettlement programme of Germany benefited 300 persons per year.

25. **Ms. Batistić-Kos** (Croatia) said that UNHCR played a key role in the implementation of the Regional Housing Programme and in the establishment of a durable, fair and comprehensive resolution of the region's refugee situation. Given the fundamental change in the region's circumstances, she said that it was time to consider the possibility of

implementing the provisions of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees regarding cessation clauses. She commended UNHCR for taking the lead in that connection.

26. **Mr. Bessler** (Switzerland) said that Switzerland welcomed the launch of the Junior Professional Officer Programme and he stressed the vital leadership role of UNHCR in crisis situations. He urged UNHCR to continue to build its management and monitoring capacities, to establish sustainable cooperation with its partners and to set up effective mechanisms to oversee the work of its implementing partners.

27. **Mr. Matthews** (United Kingdom) said that between 6 and 7 million refugees lived in protracted situations, with no clear end in sight. He welcomed the Executive Committee's decision to focus the discussion at the current session on the needs of countries where development and humanitarian actors needed to come together to build durable solutions. Regarding the coordination of humanitarian activities, the real-time evaluation by UNHCR of its Syria Regional Response Plan raised interesting and constructive points, and the United Kingdom looked forward to seeing what lessons would be learned in the context of partnership with other organizations. He commended UNHCR on its continued internal reforms and noted that its financial management procedures had been aligned with International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) and that the organization had been given a clean bill of health from the United Nations Board of Auditors. He also welcomed UNHCR efforts to attend to feedback and the concerns of implementing partners. It was to be hoped that action on the recommendations stemming from that process would be taken at various levels, including in the field.

28. **Mr. Okada** (Japan) said that the Government of Japan shared the view of UNHCR that responses to conflict situations should be planned from the outset so as to promote the early return of refugees and recovery and reconstruction. He welcomed the fact that UNHCR had input into the Transformative Agenda. It was to be hoped that UNHCR would play an active role in its implementation in the field. Japan would continue to support the Transitional Solutions Initiative, since it encouraged self-reliance and was in line with the human security approach. As for internal reforms, Japan welcomed the cost reductions made at Headquarters and the work that had been done to mobilize private funding, strengthen the audit system and enhance emergency response capacity.

29. **Mr. Getahun** (Ethiopia) said that he endorsed the statement made by the representative of Mozambique on behalf of the African Group. There were currently more than 425,000 Eritrean, Somali and Sudanese refugees in 20 camps across Ethiopia and their number would continue to rise in 2013–2014. Regarding Somalia, the international community should focus on the rehabilitation of infrastructure there and support the Government's development plan in order to bring about lasting peace. The situation of some 15,000 Eritrean unaccompanied minors living in Mai Aini camp was of great concern; no measures were being taken to address the needs of those children. The relocation of refugees away from border areas, for their own safety, should be made a priority in all asylum countries. South Sudanese refugees were now being transferred to camps located inside Ethiopia. Since 2010, the Government of Ethiopia had made arrangements for Eritrean, Somali and Sudanese refugees to pursue higher education. He appealed to the international community to provide further support for the refugee programme of Ethiopia.

30. **Mr. Anwari** (Observer for Afghanistan) said that 10 per cent fewer Afghan refugees had been repatriated in 2013 compared with 2012 and that some 2.5 million Afghan refugees still lived abroad. Over the past 10 years, there had been a number of achievements in areas such as refugee return and reintegration and the provision of education, health, infrastructure and fundamental rights to refugees. Nonetheless, 50 per cent of refugees still living in Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran had been born abroad and most of the other half had spent more than 30 years outside Afghanistan.

Moreover, nearly 500,000 Afghans were internally displaced, because of the conflict. The implementation of long-term economic and social development programmes would be key for further voluntary repatriations and stabilization of the population.

31. **Mr. Guterres** (High Commissioner for Refugees) said he agreed that support for repatriation and for host communities had been less effective where Afghan refugees were concerned. UNHCR did everything in its power to encourage resettlement. He hoped that the discussions on statelessness to be led by South Africa would yield positive results. He commended Côte d'Ivoire on its decision to ratify both conventions on statelessness; was thankful to Germany for its support and comments on birth registration; concurred with the representative of Croatia that it was time to invoke the cessation clause; pointed out that human security and peacebuilding were priorities for UNHCR, just as they were for Japan and welcomed that country's commitment towards Africa; and said that he was grateful to Ethiopia for its open border policy. A solution was being sought to the issue of unaccompanied Eritrean minors. Lastly, he hoped that the 2014 elections in Afghanistan would be conducted under favourable conditions.

*The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.*