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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS
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Fifty-eighth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 616th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 4 October 2007, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. MTESA (Zambia)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS ON THE WORK OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE
(agenda item 5) (continued)

(a) INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION (continued)

1. Mr. BEAU KEITA (Guinea), expressing strong support for UNHCR reforms, said that his country had been making huge sacrifices for more than a decade in hosting many refugees from the West African subregion, especially from Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau and most recently Côte d'Ivoire, to the detriment of Guinea's own socio-economic development. The humanitarian situation had deteriorated following the massive influx of over 2 million refugees and the rebel attacks of 2000 and 2001, which had resulted in a large wave of internal displacement. The Guinean economy had already been harmed by the current structural adjustment policy, and he expressed the hope that he could count on the support of the international community, especially development partners, to address the impact of the refugees' prolonged presence.

2. He welcomed the tripartite agreement between Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, which had enabled the voluntary repatriation of refugees to the latter two countries. A programme had been established for the local integration of refugees who had chosen to remain in Guinea, numbering 8,000 in camps and 50,000 outside camps living close to the borders with Sierra Leone, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. In addition, a census had been carried out of refugees in cities, in collaboration with partners in the field, in order to develop long-term, durable solutions for different refugee situations.

3. Despite those achievements, host countries needed much stronger international support to address the difficult post-crisis phase. In that regard, he thanked the High Commissioner for drawing attention to the heavy burden borne by host countries, including Guinea, and urgently appealed for greater support from UNHCR and donors in burden-sharing and addressing basic socio-economic needs of refugees in Guinea. He furthermore called for an international meeting on solidarity with Guinea to help that country to deal with the protracted refugee situation, to find specific solutions for the urgent environmental rehabilitation of areas hosting large numbers of refugees, and to support other initiatives such as centres for affirmative action on human rights and a bilingual English-French centre in Nzérékoré.

4. His Government was committed to voluntary local integration and had enacted legislation, aimed, inter alia, at granting long-term refugees access to cultivable land and development opportunities. An initiative to create a farmers' training centre had been undermined by the destruction of facilities in the former camps of Kountaya and Télioro. The Government had taken the necessary steps to punish the guilty parties and intended to pursue the initiative using other facilities. He thanked the humanitarian organizations in Guinea and UNHCR in particular for their unstinting efforts to protect refugees in his country.

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

5. Ms. NORTON (Canada) said that partnerships were particularly important in reducing administrative costs and ensuring that the needs of beneficiaries were met. UNHCR should review which activities it should deliver directly and which of them could be delivered through its implementing partners. She expressed support for the recommendation by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) that UNHCR should analyse the impact of the recent shift towards direct implementation.

6. In the light of the significant increase in numbers of persons of concern in 2006, notably IDPs, UNHCR should clearly define persons of concern and should continue to consider opportunities for other agencies to deliver services directly related to their respective mandates using their own funds. She expressed support for the proposed new budget architecture, which would improve financial oversight and accountability and protect resources allocated to core mandate activities.

7. Despite recent advances, progress was still necessary in the introduction of a culture of results-based management, particularly at the field level where investment was necessary to ensure understanding of the methodology and value of the approach. The results reported must be clear and measurable, with benchmarks, regular updates and linkages to resource availability. She welcomed the five real-time evaluations of UNHCR performance in the cluster system, and encouraged UNHCR to undertake evaluations of its operations.

8. She expressed concern that only 68 per cent of UNHCR offices complied with minimum operational security standards, and only 42 per cent in Africa. UNHCR should work with the United Nations Department for Safety and Security to devise safe and effective ways of fulfilling its duties while safeguarding the security of its staff.

9. Mr. AL-AGHBASH (Sudan) said that he shared the High Commissioner's concerns that lack of funding for operations in Darfur would result in a deterioration in the already difficult situation faced by refugees there and in southern Sudan, so that programmes would be discontinued and the voluntary return of some 20,000 refugees delayed. He expressed the hope that donor countries would help to ensure continuity of those programmes, as envisaged in the tripartite agreements concluded with neighbouring States, and that the necessary resources would be provided to guarantee basic services so as to make returns sustainable.

10. Mr. JOHNSTONE (Deputy High Commissioner) said that Guinea was one of a group of countries that had taken on enormous responsibilities without necessarily receiving sufficient support from the international community. He joined the representative of Guinea in appealing for funding, and pledged to work with Guinea in that endeavour. He also welcomed the tripartite agreement that Guinea had concluded and commended Guinea on its outstanding work in repatriation and local integration.

11. He agreed with the representative of Canada on the need to reduce overheads and administrative costs and to enhance partnerships. While persons of concern needed to be precisely defined, establishing such definitions was not always a simple matter. It was often

difficult even to define refugees, for example when political circumstances resulted in mass displacement of persons who were not subject to direct political persecution. UNHCR was striving to clarify such definition issues, but had much to do, especially in terms of its responsibility for IDPs. He also shared the view that a culture of results-based management was essential, complete with methodologies, standard operating procedures and clear benchmarking. The challenge was how to balance that need with the ability of UNHCR to respond to situations rapidly. There was no excuse for lack of security in UNHCR facilities and more needed to be done in some areas. He intended to issue a set of standards on the living conditions of staff around the world.

12. It was unacceptable that the current budget shortfall for southern Sudan could mean that some 20,000 refugees would not be resettled, and he would make every effort to prevent that from happening. Since the Sudan repatriation effort came under the UNHCR core mandate, in the absence of extra funding through the supplementary appeal for the Sudan, he would examine the possibility of using funds from the current Annual Budget that had not been expended by the end of 2007 and that could be replenished in early 2008. However, Annual Budget funds could not be reallocated for Darfur, since the situation there involved IDPs and UNHCR had committed to separate funding of IDP activities. The challenge would therefore be to meet the requirements in Darfur within the context of that commitment and without encroaching on refugee programmes. He encouraged the Sudan to further build on its cooperation with UNHCR.

13. Ms. CHENG-HOPKINS (Assistant High Commissioner for Operations) said that the emergency response capacity of UNHCR had been strengthened since the Lebanon crisis in 2006. A three-tier approach to staffing had made it possible to deploy over 300 staff within 72 hours. The introduction of a fast-track procedure for deploying staff to deal with emergency situations had reduced the time required for reassignment by half. A total of 125 emergency staff had been deployed to date in 2007, mainly to Africa. Stockpiles of emergency relief items had been increased in Dubai and Copenhagen, there were sufficient levels of non-food items to respond to an emergency of 500,000 persons, and measures had been put in place to pre-position stocks of emergency relief items in areas where forced displacement could potentially occur. Management of the UNHCR supply chain had also been enhanced, and UNHCR had cooperated with its emergency operational partners on logistics to ensure complementary delivery. The revised resource allocation framework would, as of 1 January 2008, allow up to \$10 million to be made available from the Operational Reserve for emergencies, thus enabling a faster response than at present.

14. With regard to IDP operations, she welcomed the fact that the majority of Committee members agreed, on balance, on the benefits of enhanced engagement by UNHCR. As the real-time evaluations had shown, the commitment of colleagues on the ground was strong and operations were having a positive impact on the lives of IDPs without detracting from UNHCR refugee programmes. The new IDP cluster leadership roles had made UNHCR a more predictable, accountable and effective partner.

15. Of her three priorities for 2008, the first focused on durable solutions. She welcomed the ongoing use of the Framework for Durable Solutions, which encouraged cooperation between humanitarian and development actors and enhanced their capacities and action to address the

impact on host areas. She called for support for Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire and Zambia in their commendable efforts to effect the reintegration of returnees and the local integration of refugees. A critical review of UNHCR return and reintegration policy had been undertaken to identify what UNHCR could uniquely contribute and to ensure that expectations of what it could achieve were realistic. While, in the short term, UNHCR had to undertake immediate interventions in regard to repatriation, in the medium term, the responsibilities for creating conditions conducive to sustainable reintegration were less clear and should be shared between humanitarian and development actors. In that regard, UNHCR should act as a catalyst in creating a "community of action", involving Governments, NGOs, development partners and communities. She intended to continue to review other aspects of the Framework for Durable Solutions in the context of the "Delivering as One" initiative and the Peacebuilding Commission.

16. Her second priority was mainstreaming IDP activities, particularly in light of the phasing out of the Global Cluster Appeal in 2008. Donors' commitment to the appeal to date had facilitated capacity-building, training and stockpiling of relief items, but it was necessary to maintain and reinforce those gains.

17. Her third priority was decentralization and regionalization. Much had been done to map out the structures envisaged for the coming years, and a review was planned with a view to reconfiguring and optimizing UNHCR field operations. Renewed efforts would be made to prioritize and identify unmet needs through the annual review of country operation plans. The need to refocus attention on education would be met in the coming months. She reaffirmed her commitment to ongoing assessment and design of UNHCR operations.

REPORTS RELATING TO PROGRAMME AND ADMINISTRATIVE OVERSIGHT AND EVALUATION (agenda item 6)

18. Mr. CRISP (Head of Policy Development and Evaluation Service), introducing the report on evaluation and policy development (A/AC.96/1043), said that the three key elements of the Service's work were examining, understanding and ensuring delivery. The Service had taken an integrated approach to its principal functions, bringing the tasks of policy development and evaluation to bear on four key issues: IDPs and the challenges of humanitarian action; the reintegration of displaced populations and the peacebuilding process; the linkage between refugee protection, asylum and international migration; and the protection of refugees and other persons of concern to the Office.

19. As one of its main objectives was enhanced capacity, the Service had acquired a full complement of staff and had seen its consultancy budget increase considerably for 2008 and 2009. Another objective, increased output, had been met by the completion of eight evaluations, including five real-time evaluations of the Office's IDP operations, preparation of major policy statements and 15 research papers on issues related to refugees, humanitarian action and migration. In order to ensure that the Service's work was of maximum relevance to the needs of UNHCR beneficiaries and the concerns of senior management, the High Commissioner and two Assistant High Commissioners had been directly involved in formulating the Service's work programme to focus activities on a limited number of key operational policy issues. The

objective of sustained transparency had been met by placing all reports in the public domain, by making a commitment to open dialogue and through the planned introduction of a new UNHCR evaluation policy based on norms and standards developed by the United Nations Evaluation Group. Stronger cooperation with other stakeholders was important in ensuring that independence did not result in isolation and in promoting a culture of evaluation and critical analysis within UNHCR. An illustration of such cooperation was the launching of an independent evaluation of the UNHCR response to the problem of sexual and gender-based violence.

20. The final, overarching objective pursued by the Service was that of improved organizational performance. To that end, the Service had brought a more coherent approach to the process of policy development and dissemination in UNHCR, which would bear fruit in more effective programmes, improved partnerships and better resource mobilization. Significant strides had been made in integrating the evaluation and policy development functions. He did not share the doubts that had been expressed about the Service's dual mandate. More progress needed to be made, however, in ensuring the effective utilization of evaluation findings and recommendations. To that end, UNHCR field offices would be reporting on their implementation plans and activities, and the Service would continue to use the real-time evaluation model and incorporate its findings into broader policymaking and planning processes.

21. Problems and challenges affecting the contribution of the Service to improved organizational performance included: the need for a system to track and analyse the longer-term implementation of evaluation recommendations; the need to reinforce the linkage between evaluation and other key functions such as results-based management and staff development; and the lack of capacity to undertake more conventional country programme evaluations. Those problems and challenges would be given priority attention in the short term, as would the issue of environmental displacement and migration.

22. Mr. MOUYAL (Denmark) urged UNHCR to further strengthen its evaluation functions and knowledge management. He welcomed the real-time UNHCR evaluations of IDP operations and the cluster approach, and the planned evaluation of UNHCR reintegration programmes. It was crucial to strengthen evaluation of humanitarian interventions.

23. Ms. RUIJTERS (Netherlands) commended UNHCR on its internal evaluation of policy, management and implementation and welcomed its real-time evaluation of IDP operations, which were valuable for future policymaking. She wondered whether the Service had a sufficient budget to carry out its demanding range of tasks, and expressed doubt about its independence, given that it combined evaluation with policy development. What safeguards had been incorporated to guarantee its independence? She looked forward to the paper on repatriation and reintegration on refugees, which could be of use in developing early recovery policies.

24. Ms. NORTON (Canada) echoed the comments made by the representative of Denmark. A healthy evaluation function was essential. She would be following with interest the implementation of the new evaluation policy and attached importance to the issues of

evaluation, recommendations, integration and implementation. She looked forward to reading the paper on environmental refugees and requested information on the periodicity of the Service's workplan.

25. Mr. CRISP (Head, Policy Development and Evaluation Service) said, in response to the comments by the representative of Denmark, that UNHCR was committed to joint evaluations with stakeholders within and outside the Office. He welcomed the support expressed by the representative of the Netherlands for real-time evaluations. He was also conscious of their limitations and would be examining lessons learned from the five recent real-time evaluations to evaluate the effectiveness of the methods and procedure used. A broader initiative, led by the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), looked at the use of real-time evaluations by humanitarian agencies in general. He intended to take stock of the Service's budget position, once the benefit gained from the increased consultancy budget had been maximized.

26. The Service had a high degree of methodological independence and operational autonomy. The steering committees for major evaluation projects comprised a variety of stakeholders, including NGOs, Executive Committee members and other United Nations partners. While the Service did not enjoy institutional independence, as it was part of the Executive Office, the advantages of that arrangement outweighed the disadvantages, in that it allowed direct access to the High Commissioner, the Deputy High Commissioner and the Assistant High Commissioners, and thus made it possible to feed evaluation findings and recommendations into the policy and planning process. With regard to the comments by the representative of Canada, he cautioned against the term "environmental refugees". The workplan currently covered the period July-December 2007 but incorporated a number of projects that would still be under way in the first half of 2008. Discussion on the periodicity of the workplan would be welcome.

27. Mr. ASOMANI (Inspector General), introducing the report on activities of the Inspector General's Office (A/AC.96/1042), said that his office had completed 20 inspections and 4 compliance missions in the past year and had identified a number of recurring issues affecting the quality of management of UNHCR operations. A summary of those findings, and of a number of good practices observed during the inspections, was provided in the report. The compliance aspect of the inspection work was finally bearing fruit. The dedicated Senior Inspection Officer responsible for compliance since May 2006 had been able to provide more prompt, accurate feedback to inspected offices and more systematic follow-up on the implementation of inspection recommendations. Overall, compliance had been good, with non-compliance largely due to insufficient resources for full implementation of recommendations.

28. In order to clarify roles and responsibilities, the Inspector General's Office, the Internal Audit Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services and the UNHCR Policy Development and Evaluation Service had jointly set out their respective objectives, areas of competence and methods for conducting inspections, audits and evaluations. Inspectors examined the management aspects of programmes but there was a need for more systematic and regular evaluation of programme content and delivery, and that matter was being reviewed by the Oversight Committee. The memorandum of understanding signed in 2006 between UNHCR and the Office of Internal Oversight Services marked an important step in improved cooperation, including in inspections.

29. He provided information on the new electronic survey instrument being introduced in order to further reinforce and develop inspection capacity. The new survey technique would give increased emphasis to staff familiarity with the Code of Conduct, protections afforded under the whistle-blower policy, the frequency of visits by senior staff to refugee camps, and conditions governing the use of UNHCR resources. It would also enable inspection teams to carry out a preliminary analysis of the way an operation was managed, facilitating early identification of problem areas and of management trends that could benefit from policy review and/or development. The tool would be introduced in the new inspection cycle starting in January 2008. There were also plans to develop a risk analysis tool to enable his office to retrieve and analyse information from various sources and more effectively target operations urgently requiring inspections. Ways of ensuring more effective composition of inspection teams were being studied, including the creation of an inspection roster. The use of multifunctional teams continued to pose a number of problems such as the release of relevant staff from Headquarters.

30. Concerning investigations, the overall trend had changed little. A total of 126 cases had been registered and 100 cases, including some registered in prior years, had been completed. Dealing with misconduct, including fraud in the processes of refugee status determination and resettlement, and sexual exploitation and abuse, remained a priority. Credible reports of such misconduct, which represented approximately 20 per cent of the investigation caseload, were responded to rapidly. Cases of sexual abuse and exploitation received special attention; during the reporting period there had been six investigations of such cases, which had so far resulted in two staff being charged with misconduct.

31. Cooperation with the Legal Affairs Section of the Division of Human Resources Management had intensified, and a review of investigation findings and sanctions for the period 2004-2007 had recently been carried out. The review highlighted the need to continue to improve coordination and to ensure consistent application of standards throughout the entire disciplinary process.

32. The largest category of reports of misconduct involved harassment/abuse of authority and discrimination, accounting for approximately 21 per cent of all cases in 2006 and a similar percentage in 2007. Two reports in that category related to discrimination and racism. Sexual harassment accounted for 3 per cent of the total cases registered, a figure that had remained constant since 2003. An essential safeguard concerning whistle-blower protection had been in place in UNHCR for some time; the issue of retaliation was specifically addressed in an administrative instruction. Reprisals for reporting possible misconduct or disclosing related information to his office were defined as misconduct and promptly investigated. Nevertheless, a comprehensive policy on whistle-blower protection was necessary, and was being developed.

33. Investigations had shown that the risk of fraud was shifting away from UNHCR staff to third parties claiming to represent the Office. Although his office did not have competence for external fraud, it worked closely with the Division of International Protection Services and the regional bureaux on follow-up. With increased inter-agency cooperation, his office was also now able to assist other agencies with their investigations into fraud in United Nations operations.

34. As part of efforts to improve the efficiency of investigations, consideration had been given to the implications of the decentralization process, which called for new skills to meet new investigation challenges. Investigation techniques increasingly reflected changes in information systems, in particular the Management Systems Renewal Project (MSRP). His office had issued three management implication reports highlighting the risks that potentially compromised the integrity of MSRP controls, although no staff misconduct had been identified. Greater decentralization of control activities was also being considered, including through enhancement of forensic computer skills to take advantage of information technology resources that could be accessed remotely.

35. Two ad hoc inquiries were under way. The first dealt with the use of a European Commission grant for a UNHCR voluntary repatriation programme; he was not in a position to provide any further details on it at present. A second inquiry into the shooting of a UNHCR driver in Afghanistan in May 2007 had found that security measures taken before and after the incident had been adequate, erring on the side of caution.

36. Ever conscious of the need for improvement, his office was conducting an in-depth review of its operations. An independent expert had been commissioned to review and provide guidance on its inspection work. A similar exercise was planned for the investigation function.

37. Mr. BIRDSALL (United States of America) welcomed the publication of UNHCR inspection reports, which ensured greater transparency and the opportunity for UNHCR and partners to devise strategies to overcome shortcomings. He stressed the importance of the timely publication of reports and suggested that progress reports on project implementation in the field might also be considered.

38. Additional efforts were required to improve the overall management of UNHCR and he therefore stressed the need to implement the recommendation on balancing the rights and interests of staff against the requirements of country operations and the Office as a whole. He expressed concern that the Inspector General's Office had found unclear responsibilities and reporting lines in various operations and the hope that the implementation of decentralization and regionalization would rectify the situation. A further concern was that there had been little change in the number of cases of misconduct reported. UNHCR must take steps to ensure that new staff were aware of and abided by the Code of Conduct. It was to be hoped that the improved investigation capacity, controls and post-investigation audits would swiftly reduce the number of cases.

39. Mr. ASOMANI (Inspector General) said that his office had a system to ensure the prompt implementation of inspection recommendations under the supervision of a designated staff member. He agreed, however, that there was room for improvement and he would keep the Executive Committee informed of progress in the rate of implementation, as appropriate. Introductory and refresher courses on the Code of Conduct were now a regular feature of UNHCR activities. A decline in the number of cases of misconduct reported could be attributed to the success of such courses.

CONSIDERATION AND ADOPTION OF THE BIENNIAL PROGRAMME
BUDGET 2008-2009 (agenda item 7) (A/AC.96/1040 and A/AC.96/1040/Add.1)

40. Mr. JOHNSTONE (Deputy High Commissioner), introducing the biennial programme budget for 2008-2009, pointed out that the biennial programme budget, which he supported, had been drawn up in large part before he had taken office. He drew attention to the fact that the operating assumptions were subject to the current extraordinary exchange rate fluctuations, although a decline in the United States dollar would be of some net benefit to UNHCR. He recalled that, in the light of discussions in the Standing Committee, the sums for the "New or additional activities mandate-related" Reserve (NAM) should be revised to \$75 million and \$50 million for 2008 and 2009 respectively. The latter figure would be increased, if necessary, following an evaluation of NAM utilization in 2008. Almost the entire sum of \$50 million allocated for NAM in 2007 had already been utilized, hence the request for an increase to \$75 million. He explained that NAM differed from the Operational Reserve in that it was a contingency fund for unbudgeted activities requested by donors using funds not pledged in the Global Appeal. However, it was not entirely donor-driven.

41. Comparing the revised budget for 2007 with the proposed budget for 2008-2009, he observed that, in real terms, the latter was very restrictive and did not even keep up with current inflation levels. He was dissatisfied at having knowingly to request a level of funding that would not achieve the objectives of the UNHCR mandate. In subsequent years, he hoped to be able to present clearer and more realistic budgets, with, for example, details of unmet needs. However, it was preferable to have a conservative budget and then revise it in the course of the year, than to allow overspending and have to cut back later.

42. The request for a lower budget did not necessarily mean fewer funds for refugees. With the steady reduction in staff costs and the additional savings resulting from outposting, which were not reflected in the proposed biennial budget, there should in fact be more funds for refugees than in 2007.

43. Responding to a question raised earlier by the representative of the United States concerning the Supplementary Programme Budget for the forthcoming biennium, he said that he had no idea what the requirements would be for 2009. However, approximately \$96 million was needed for programmes launched in 2007 which would run over into 2008, and on that basis, the total projected requirements for 2008 would amount to approximately \$412 million, similar to the level for 2007. In future, under the new integrated budget structure, the supplementary programme budget allocations would be presented as part of the biennial budget and the Executive Committee members would be in a better position to assess the overall situation and report to their Governments accordingly.

44. Ms. BELLO De KEMPER (Observer for the Dominican Republic) drew attention to the statement in the High Commissioner's report on the biennial programme budget for 2008-2009 (document A/AC.96/1040, para. 189 (c)) that priority would be given to the situation of stateless children in the Dominican Republic. The Government of the Dominican Republic played an active role in international efforts to find a solution to the protracted crisis in Haiti, which had humanitarian, political and security implications for both States. However, her Government

could not continue to shoulder the burden without international cooperation. At present it provided assistance by, for example, ensuring that Haitians had the same working and living conditions as Dominicans. Furthermore, 99 per cent of all foreigners receiving health care in the Dominican Republic were Haitians. Haitian tourists also received treatment free of charge.

45. Notwithstanding the assistance provided, her Government had one reservation: relevant legislation relating to nationality must be upheld. Pursuant to the Constitution of Haiti all children born of Haitian parents were Haitian citizens, irrespective of their birthplace. However, under the relevant legislation of the Dominican Republic all children born in its territory must be duly registered and given the opportunity to acquire nationality with the assistance of the appropriate diplomatic or consular offices. Her Government therefore considered that it complied with its national and international obligations and had by no means encouraged statelessness.

46. Mr. MINAMI (Japan) said that UNHCR must prioritize its activities, enhance its partnerships and improve the efficiency of its operations. He expressed support for the proposed programme budget for 2008-2009, provided that the regular budget would be taken up by the Fifth Committee during the United Nations General Assembly. UNHCR should furthermore comply with the recommendations of ACABQ to ensure greater transparency in future budget presentations, by, for example, including charts showing the grades and numbers of posts, and developing a more results-based management structure. He looked forward to improved standards and indicators for better reporting of achievements and shortcomings in the next budget, as recommended in the internal audit. He would also welcome further information on unmet needs, in particular how needs were identified and why they were unmet; he wondered whether it was due solely to a lack of financial resources.

47. The current budget process did not give the Executive Committee enough time to examine the budget documents properly, partly on account of late submission. He was glad to hear that the Deputy High Commissioner was taking the matter seriously and looked forward to improvements in the next budget.

48. He supported the proposed new budget structure, which should strengthen the Executive Committee's governance and oversight roles, promote results-based management and provide the necessary flexibility in the field. He also supported the Board of Auditor's recommendation on a strict policy with regard to staff in between assignments (SIBAs), with a view to limiting the costs to the Office. According to ACABQ, in 2006, the number of SIBAs in UNHCR had increased to 162, and more than half of them were not working. That figure had decreased slightly in 2007. He asked when the outposting of functions to Budapest would be reflected in the budget, and recalled that his Government had increased its non-earmarked contribution to UNHCR. He encouraged the Office to continue to diversify its funding base.

49. Ms. CROMPTON (New Zealand) expressed satisfaction with the consultations on budgetary matters held over the past year, in particular in the Standing Committee, and said that she hoped that the members would reach a consensus in the coming months on the new budget structure. She welcomed the Deputy High Commissioner's intention to prepare budgets on the basis of unmet needs in future and to present the membership with relevant information in that regard.

50. Ms. KOOPMAN (Netherlands) said that she supported the proposed biennial programme budget for 2008-2009 and commended the High Commissioner on a well-organized and informative report on the subject. She expressed regret at the decline in the number of NGOs with which UNHCR cooperated in 2007, and requested clarification in that connection.

51. Mr. JOHNSTONE (Deputy High Commissioner) said that while he was aware of the protracted problems in Haiti and their impact on the Dominican Republic, without further information he could not comment on the situation of stateless children born in the Dominican Republic. Referring to the statement by the representative of Japan, he said that he agreed with all the ACABQ recommendations. There was certainly a need for a staff/posts assessment to ensure that staff at UNHCR had the right skills to carry out the Office's mandate. However, there seemed little point in doing that prior to the launch of the Field Review.

52. He was particularly concerned about the SIBAs issue, which was far more complex than it seemed. Approximately 80 per cent of such staff were reportedly employed by UNHCR at present. Situations had even arisen where he had tried to place them on regular posts and had been informed that their services were indispensable to UNHCR. The problem of the more than 150 persons for whom there were no longer posts could not be addressed through the posting process alone. Some of the persons concerned were highly qualified; others required retraining, while the rest might no longer be needed. Under the regulations in force there was no mechanism for removing the latter category on the basis of performance evaluation. At present SIBAs were costing UNHCR over \$2 million per month - which could be usefully spent on refugees.

53. Savings anticipated from the outposting of functions to Budapest had not been factored into the budget pending the results of the appeal for funds to cover the start-up costs of the new operation. If those costs were covered by donations, the savings would be duly reflected in the budget. The question of mainstreaming would become moot under the new budget structure.

54. Currently, in the budget structure there were ambiguities that complicated discussions with donors. He thanked the delegation of the Netherlands for its support for the move to the new structure. It was in the interest of UNHCR to ensure that NGOs had reliable funding. It was not necessarily desirable to have a large number of NGOs working with UNHCR; it was more important to ensure that those that did work with it were as effective as possible, and that NGO partnerships were the right size.

Draft general decision on administrative, financial and programme matters

55. The CHAIRMAN drew the attention of the Executive Committee to the draft general decision on administrative, financial and programme matters, which would include approval of the total budget requirements for the 2008-2009 biennium, amounting to some \$2.2 billion, together with the total revised budget requirements for 2007, amounting to about \$1.06 billion. It would furthermore authorize an increase in 2007 and 2008 of appropriations for mandate-related new or additional activities. He took it that in the absence of any objections, the Committee wished to adopt the decision.

56. It was so decided.

REVIEW OF THE ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS WITH NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS (agenda item 8)

57. Mr. THOMPSON, Rapporteur of the Annual Consultations with Non-Governmental Organizations, said that some 270 NGOs had attended the Annual Consultations, which had discussed three themes: partnership and accountability, future steps in durable solutions and special situation focuses. On the first theme, emphasis had been placed on the Principles of Partnership adopted by the 40 agencies of the Global Humanitarian Platform. For the Platform to succeed, the key principles must be internalized and jointly implemented at every level. It was also necessary to minimize the impact of the competitive funding environment created by donor States, which affected the quality of partnerships. There must be greater feedback between NGOs and UNHCR on the implementation of the Principles. The plenary session had discussed ways to enhance collaboration between States, UNHCR and NGOs, recognizing that NGOs were now able to contribute directly to the conclusions process. In that regard, NGOs had welcomed the expressed wish of the High Commissioner to include them in the dialogue on protection challenges. The Global Consultations on International Protection could serve as a model for such participation. The High Commissioner had invited NGOs to join a reference group to lead discussions on the internal reform that would comprise a review of field operations.

58. NGOs had expressed their concern at the erosion of asylum space in an environment characterized by rising intolerance, heightened State security concerns and increasing migration, and called for more advocacy to reverse that trend. The “externalization” of border controls was also of concern. Without access to territory for people in need, asylum systems would be meaningless. The lack of a common language and a common framework among humanitarian agencies for addressing protection problems was also recognized as problematic. With regard to best-interest determinations for children, it was agreed that identification, tracing and monitoring must first be put in place so that the determinations were effective. In that regard, they should be seen as comprehensive child protection tools and not mere resettlement devices.

59. At a session devoted to the creation of safe schools and learning environments, it had been pointed out that creating child-friendly, healing environments could help to reduce violence and exploitation and that funding for education at all levels was key to ensuring protection. NGOs had also noted the need for UNHCR to strengthen the quality and independence of the internal appeals system for refugee status determination.

60. At a round-table event, it had been stressed that promoting self-reliance was crucial in protracted situations and that current livelihoods programmes tended to be based on short-term thinking and lacked proper analysis of the local economic context. The massive gaps in the provision of water and sanitation services in the majority of refugee camps had serious effects on the lives of refugees, and several ways had been identified to address the problem by making an effort to meet standards rather than merely providing whatever resources were available from existing budgets, by buttressing technical capacity and improving design, monitoring and evaluation skills within UNHCR and by providing more clarity on coordination of services to prepare for new refugee crises.

OTHER STATEMENTS (agenda item 9)

61. Mr. ISHAK (Chairman of the UNHCR Staff Council) said that there could be no doubt that UNHCR staff should be fully involved in efforts to build a more effective UNHCR. Both the High Commissioner and the Deputy High Commissioner had shown consideration for the views of the staff, but more could and should be done to demonstrate that UNHCR wanted to think, plan and act together with its elected staff representatives. The staff representatives had been elected following an unprecedentedly high turnout, largely because of a strong and popular demand for genuine reforms and internal renewal.

62. Like member States, staff understood that management reform was essential to better equipping UNHCR to meet the challenges it faced. Previous attempts at reform had apparently failed. In May 2006 the High Commissioner had told UNHCR staff that the Office had been seen as becoming more rigid and less able to adapt. The High Commissioner had also called for a more open style of management, which had raised expectations that there would be greater transparency, accountability and respect for staff rules and the principles of staff-management consultation. Initially, staff members had participated actively in the change process, but they had eventually noted that the Director of Structural and Management Change had been using seriously flawed information, and they had begun to challenge the conclusions reached. The main conclusion had been that the cost of General Service staff was too high in Geneva, and that it would be necessary to outpost certain functions. The staff had been given to understand that outposting was a prerequisite for continued support by major donors.

63. There had been an issue as to the accuracy and integrity of the information used for the decision to outpost. In 2006, the High Commissioner had told the Executive Committee that UNHCR faced a “dramatic financial situation”, and that for the first time in 15 years there had been a negative carry-over. Yet, according to the information now available, at the beginning of 2006 UNHCR had actually had a much larger positive carry-over than in previous years. Similarly, in October 2006, the estimated carry-over for the end of 2006 had been a deficit of \$60 million, while the carry-over had in fact been a surplus of some \$121 million. What was “dramatic” about the financial forecasts was that they had been based on inaccurate information provided to the High Commissioner. The Staff Council was aware of other financial discrepancies, some of which had perhaps not been detected by the auditors.

64. The notion that UNHCR was spending more money on staff than on operations was flawed. UNHCR did not “spend money” on staff; it did not yet have a clear definition of operational costs and staff costs. The mandate required people to deliver protection and assistance, and the staff were the real operation. They often worked far beyond official hours, with no expectation of overtime pay or compensatory time off. They made many sacrifices for UNHCR operations. Attitudes, actions or even statements that affected their morale and motivation damaged the Office’s reputation and undermined the trust of its partners and the support of donors. The Staff Council called upon the Executive Committee to ensure that the change process at UNHCR was guided by the principles established by the plenary on Secretariat and management reform that had been created to implement paragraphs 161 to 167 of the 2005 World Summit Outcome. The reform must not be a cost-cutting exercise but rather a review that respected the nature of the United Nations and did not treat it as a commercial corporation.

65. A global staff survey published in 2007 had shown that staff had virtually no confidence in the system for appointments, postings and promotions or in senior management, and that the need for meaningful systemic reform was widely and strongly felt. Despite a series of measures aimed at correcting the appointments and promotions procedures, ensuring due process and bringing policies into line with the staff regulations, new concerns about arbitrary decisions on appointments and promotions had emerged. Staff morale was being undermined, thus affecting the Office's effectiveness. The fact that an average of 160 international staff members were without an assignment represented an extraordinary waste of resources and caused genuine distress to the staff in question. According to the survey, only 47 per cent of UNHCR staff had said that they felt that senior management acted with honesty and integrity. The figure was as low as 11 per cent in some divisions, and in the Executive Office itself it stood at just 29 per cent.

66. The fact that management operated with little transparency and on a unilateral basis resulted in uncertainty and anxiety among the staff. It exacerbated the lack of confidence and further undermined morale. Many staff believed that the structural and management change process pursued a hidden agenda. They also felt that the outposting plan had diverted the attention of top management away from essential reforms.

67. He paid tribute to colleagues from the Jesuit Refugee Service and the Humanitarian Aid Organization (INTEROS) who had recently lost their lives in Sri Lanka and Iraq, and pointed out that other security incidents had also taken place. In May 2007 a UNHCR employee in Kandahar, Afghanistan, the father of eight children, had been shot dead on his way to work. In late April, five staff had been car-jacked in Western Sahara, and had fortunately later been rescued. Lastly, on 5 May a staff member who was being reassigned from Uganda to Guinea had perished in the crash of a Kenya Airways aircraft.

68. Security threats were becoming ever more frequent. The staff appreciated the generous support given by the Executive Committee to meet the minimum operating security standards (MOSS). Pending full compliance with those standards, the Staff Council called for appropriate priority to be given to dangerous operations and for no staff to be deployed in such operations without adequate security, information and training. Staff should never be pressured to apply for posts in such locations. The Staff Council was furthermore concerned about the lack of adequate security policies in respect of national staff whose lives could be at risk because they served the United Nations.

69. UNHCR apparently lacked the ability to adequately review the conditions of service in hardship and remote locations, where family separation, work-related stress and health risks took their toll. UNHCR should ensure capacity to respond promptly and effectively to the needs of the staff, both nationally and internationally.

70. The gains in improving the status of women within UNHCR that had been achieved under High Commissioner Sadako Ogata were now being reversed, as UNHCR had in the past four years recruited more male than female staff. Without determined action, it would be impossible to achieve the goal of equal gender distribution in all categories of posts, especially at the senior and policy-making levels.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.