

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

Distr.: General
8 September 2023

English only

Standing Committee
Eighty-seventh meeting
14–16 June 2023

Held at the Hôtel Mercure, Geneva

Summary record,* Wednesday, 14 June 2023, at 10.10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Kadra Ahmed Hassan (Djibouti)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Opening of the meeting (including briefing on the Chairperson's recent field mission to Colombia)

1. The **Chairperson** declared open the eighty-seventh meeting of the Standing Committee. She was delighted to announce that, following the decision by the United Nations to expand the Executive Committee membership from 107 to 108 States, Angola had been elected by the Economic and Social Council on 5 April 2023 as a member of the Executive Committee. She suggested that the request by Malaysia to participate in the present meeting as an observer be granted.
2. *It was so agreed.*
3. Prior to the formal adoption of the agenda, she wished to report on her mission to the UNHCR operation in Colombia, in her capacity as Chairperson of the Executive Committee, from 8 to 12 May 2023. She introduced a brief video which highlighted the areas and people visited. She was accompanied by Marco Formisano, Senior Liaison Adviser in the Regional Bureau for the Americas and Mercedes Jakupi, senior official from the ExCom Secretariat. Ms. Laura Arango, Counsellor at the Permanent Mission of Colombia to the United Nations Office at Geneva, had also joined the mission. The Chairperson expressed deep appreciation to the Government of Colombia for the warm welcome extended to her during her visit; to Ambassador Gustavo Gallón who had briefed her on the historical and current context prior to her departure; and to UNHCR colleagues who had ensured the success of her visit. The UNHCR team in Colombia was exceptional and she wished to recognize its commitment and service. The Chairperson of the Executive Committee had not visited the Americas region since 2007. The mission was all the more pertinent given that Colombia was one of the co-convenors of the upcoming Global Refugee Forum.
4. The purpose of the mission was to understand the complex humanitarian challenges in Colombia with respect to mixed movements of refugees and migrants, internal displacement and the impact they had on statelessness and on the protection risks faced by indigenous, Afro-Colombian and other vulnerable groups; to observe the work of UNHCR in coordination with other United Nations entities and partners, particularly the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in the context of mixed movements; to gain appreciation for the effective way in which Colombia had managed the situation of forced displacement, particularly with respect to inclusion and durable solutions; and to help raise awareness of the need for enhanced support for the efforts made by Colombia, particularly in the lead-up to the Global Refugee Forum in December 2023.
5. She had chosen to visit Colombia because it represented a microcosm of the challenges related to forced displacement, with a proactive and ambitious Government that was determined to address them. It was a country of paradoxes, being both a producer of displacement and a progressive host country, providing temporary protection status to some 2.47 million Venezuelans. The Government was politically courageous but had limited resources. While suffering from nearly 60 years of armed conflict, it was both vibrant and resilient. The Government was committed to addressing the situation of forced displacement through sound public policy, a legal framework, action in defence of victims, including reparation and efforts that supported inclusion, the enjoyment of rights and equality. In her meetings with ministers, she had learned about the Government's peace strategy which "privileged human life" and the guarantees afforded to the victims of displacement. The work of UNHCR in supporting the Government was highly valued, although it was noted that the limited resources for implementation represented a major challenge.
6. She visited Necoclí where she witnessed the refugee and migrant situation first hand, including transcontinental movements. She learnt about the protection risks to which migrants and refugees were exposed, including exploitation, gender-based violence, extortion, physical violence, dehydration, drowning, family separation, tropical diseases and recruitment by irregular armed actors. She saw how UNHCR and IOM were working together on the ground as co-leaders of the Interagency Group on Mixed Migration Flows, including in Necoclí where, together with the Colombian Red Cross, they were providing legal support, medical and psychosocial support, translation and interpretation services, information on risks and hazards that might be encountered and alternative integration opportunities, as well as humanitarian assistance.
7. She visited internally displaced Colombians living in informal settlements in Turbo. Provision of property titles by the Government, a process supported by UNHCR as well as the legalization of the settlements was providing stability and solutions for victims of forced

displacement and contributing to the aim of consolidating peace in Colombia. It was also leading to improved living conditions and access to public services. In her interaction with those communities, she learnt of their preoccupation with the preservation of the environment which, through her, they wished to communicate to the Executive Committee. She also visited the port city of Buenaventura where she observed high rates of displacement, particularly among Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities due to the presence of armed gangs and irregular armed groups. In a visit to the Santa Fé neighbourhood, which was home to 22,000 refugees and migrants, she spoke with community leaders who were empowered to advocate for the rights of the population and saw how artistic, cultural and sports activities, supported by UNHCR, were reducing protection risks for youth. In Buenaventura, she met with the mayor, local Ombudspersons and representatives of displaced communities and learned about pilot mediation efforts with irregular armed groups. She stated that there was hope that efforts in Buenaventura could be used as a national model for peace. Before leaving the country, she held a round-table discussion with Ambassadors and representatives of Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico and Panama, who communicated their shared challenges and the need for a regional response to the phenomenon of mixed movements. In every discussion in Colombia, she heard of unanimous appreciation for the contributions of UNHCR, which was seen as a critical and vital partner. Throughout her visit, the key messages of hope and determination were palpable. She concluded that it was clear that Colombia could not shoulder the responsibility alone but required accelerated support to succeed in its peace plan and to advance solutions in the hope that the communities affected would one day find justice, peace and equality. The public and institutional will was formidable and stronger than the challenges on the road ahead.

8. The representative of **Colombia** thanked the Chairperson of the Executive Committee and UNHCR staff for having chosen the region of the Americas, and Colombia in particular, to carry out their enriching visit. He further thanked UNHCR for having included the Permanent Mission of Colombia to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva as part of the delegation. In choosing Colombia, there was a recognition that the country was going through a humanitarian emergency that needed to be addressed with a human rights-based approach and in accordance with the principle of shared responsibility. The speech by the Chairperson and the video were deeply moving and illustrated the fact that the most vulnerable must not be left alone. Colombia had lived through a war lasting many decades, and human rights violations, together with armed conflict, continued to be the country's biggest challenge. Inequality was another challenge that needed to be worked on if peace was to be achieved. Colombia had one of the highest numbers of internally displaced persons who were victims of the armed conflict and their plight was being addressed through a national development plan with the support of UNHCR. During the visit, the Chairperson had witnessed lasting solutions to forced displacement and how young people, through sports, culture and education, were finding alternatives to falling into the hands of illegal armed groups. He thanked the Chairperson for having acknowledged the commitment of the Government and civil society since, as she had pointed out, that the humanitarian challenges could not be faced alone.

9. He further elaborated that despite the challenges it faced, Colombia had chosen an open-door immigration policy and had worked for several years on the regularization and integration of the mixed migration flows, complying with international obligations in the field of human rights in a spirit of solidarity and recognizing that migrants brought added value to society. Highlighting the situation in the very dangerous jungle of Darién, he pointed out that migrants from 107 countries had arrived in Necoclí to cross the jungle. Nationals of many countries and from several continents were putting their lives at risk and women, children and even newborn babies were exposed to multiple dangers including sexual exploitation and human trafficking. In May, more than 1,000 people had crossed the jungle each day. As a co-sponsor of the second Global Refugee Forum, Colombia invited the international community to identify needs and work on commitments that could be carried forward to the next Forum. The basis from which to generate commitments was in place, together with the permanent dialogue between Missions in the Americas. As Colombia's Ambassador and a human rights defender, he expressed commitment to hold frank and sincere dialogue in order to find the best way to jointly address the challenges facing the region of the Americas and Colombia. As emphasized in the video, everyone could do something to help. All ingredients for peace were present, but they required support.

10. The **Chairperson** reiterated her deepest gratitude to the Ambassador, UNHCR and to the Government of Colombia which had so generously hosted her visit. The commitment of the Government of Colombia to achieve the ideals set out in the Global Compact on Refugees was commended. She urged the international community to strengthen its support for Colombia and

for the life-saving operations of UNHCR and partners in the country and to use the opportunity of the Global Refugee Forum to do so.

Adoption of the agenda

11. **The Chairperson** drew attention to the draft decision on budgets and funding set out under agenda item 5(a) and invited any members wishing to make amendments to submit them in writing as soon as possible. The agenda was adopted as presented.

Opening remarks by the Deputy High Commissioner

12. The **Deputy High Commissioner, UNHCR**, said that she had found the report of the Chairperson on the latter's visit to Colombia and the reply of the Ambassador a particularly moving and appropriate way to begin the meeting. Just a month ago, she herself had stood on a riverbank in Darién, near the border between Panama and Colombia, where every few minutes a small canoe would arrive carrying families making their way to the Lajas Blancas temporary transit centre in Panama. They were exhausted, the children too tired to cry, walking up the steep riverbank in a silent procession. Every person she spoke to had described the trauma of their journey, of relatives left behind in the jungle, too weak to keep walking, of not knowing the dangers that lay ahead, of loved ones who had been robbed, sexually assaulted or killed. Many people had said that their choice was between death in their home country or facing danger through the jungle.

13. Similarly, in Sudan (the), families had been forced to flee their homes and communities. Since mid-April, close to two million people had been displaced inside and outside of Sudan (the). Almost half a million people had sought refuge in Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia and South Sudan ; UNHCR was grateful to those countries and others that continued to receive Sudanese refugees.

14. Currently, 110 million people around the world had been uprooted from their homes because of conflict, violence and persecution, with the additional 19 million people between 2021 and 2022 representing the largest yearly increase ever recorded. In 2023 alone, there had already been the earthquake in Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic, drought in Somalia and conflict in Sudan (the). New displacement had been added to that in Ukraine, Afghanistan and the long-standing crises in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), among many others. Conflict, climate and cost of living were interrelated and compounding drivers of displacement, occurring at a time of global financial fragility. In that context, UNHCR was grateful for the generous financial support provided by Member States to help meet escalating needs. It enabled UNHCR and more than 1,100 partners to provide life-saving protection and aid on the front lines of displacement. There were 22 active emergencies at the present time, with a further 20 countries assessed as being at high risk of emergency. The ability of UNHCR to deliver was contingent on the support of Member States, the clearest example being the Ukraine response, where it had been possible to implement new solutions, such as finance and cash hubs. The use of blockchain technology had been piloted to provide digital currency payments to Ukrainian families.

15. The contributions of Member States had a real impact on the lives of refugees but the reality was that fewer resources had a deeply negative impact. A dramatic funding shortfall was predicted in the current year, possibly amounting to hundreds of millions of dollars. While Ukraine continued to receive generous support, most other crises remained critically underfunded, resulting in the reduction of cash assistance in Lebanon and food ration cuts in Bangladesh. She had recently witnessed the desperation of one million people in the Cox's Bazar refugee camp. In the Central African Republic, already one of the most underfunded operations of recent years, UNHCR's support to help manage the recent influx of refugees from Sudan (the) had been hampered by the inability to budget beyond a few months at a time. Without additional commitments, the progress made in refugee inclusion and in stabilizing population movements could potentially be undone.

16. In the context of limited resources and ever-growing humanitarian needs, UNHCR was committed to being as effective, efficient and transparent as possible. Indeed, a major driver for the modernization of its structures and systems was the search for efficiency. The Organization's transformation, embodied by the flagship business transformation programme, was nearing an inflection point with the imminent launch of the new cloud-based enterprise resource planning solution, Cloud ERP. The new system would enable real-time and data-driven decision-making and the management and oversight of UNHCR's supply and financial processes. Final preparations for the system's launch included the training of key users, final testing and data migration, the provision of information sessions for all regions and the planning of a hypercare period immediately following the launch, during which enhanced support would be provided. All remaining business transformation programme systems were scheduled to become operational

before the end of 2023. UNHCR's rigorous work in recent years to bring all its systems fully into the digital age was therefore nearing completion.

17. While digital technology could be a powerful engine of innovation, growth and inclusion, it could also be harmful to institutions and people – through misinformation, hate speech or breaches of privacy. UNHCR had been an early adopter of artificial intelligence, including natural language processing and predictive analytics. The Organization was currently exploring, with the research laboratory OpenAI, a tailored and controlled application of ChatGPT to UNHCR cases in the search for further efficiencies. UNHCR's efforts in piloting or deploying digital technology were underpinned by its commitment to the responsible and ethical use of technology in line with data protection and privacy principles.

18. UNHCR relied on independent oversight to provide an unvarnished view of how the Organization's transformation was progressing, highlighting achievements and critically identifying risks and blind spots. The Evaluation Office was conducting a global evaluation of the Organization's decentralization and regionalization, to be completed in 2024. The Office of Internal Oversight Services was currently conducting an audit of the business transformation programme. Work was being carried out in conjunction with the UN Advisory Alliance to measure the impact gains of the programme, and meetings would shortly be held with the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee. In addition, the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network was conducting in 2023 a comprehensive assessment of UNHCR's effectiveness and efficiency. The Organization aimed to not only evolve and advance – sharing its successes and hopefully learning from its mistakes along the way – but to do so as transparently as possible.

19. It was true that UNHCR deliberately took measured risks in carrying out its mandate, which was grounded in a strong risk management strategy, and continued to operate in many areas inside Sudan (the), often at great risk. It was a humanitarian, apolitical agency with a mandate to protect, even in suboptimal environments. The Organization had to be able to operate in a variety of politically complex, dynamic and insecure contexts around the globe to protect and find solutions to displacement. UNHCR was not cavalier in its approach, however, nor naïve about the risks its decisions entailed. She understood the additional scrutiny given to UNHCR's programmes when operating in those difficult environments; to that end, as much information as possible would be provided in a continued spirit of transparency and collaboration. She encouraged the same culture of transparency within the Organization itself. The cultural dimension of its transformation was perhaps the most challenging to achieve, given its diverse workforce of 20,000 people. Changing behaviour in a complex, multicultural organization was not an easy task, but had been embraced, underpinned by the values of integrity, accountability, perseverance and humility.

20. If taking risks was part of the Organization's DNA, so was accountability. To that end, a culture was fostered whereby all were encouraged to speak up to report misconduct, and in particular sexual misconduct. She was proud that NotOnlyMe – a new platform for survivors of sexual harassment – had recently been launched, which it was hoped would be a safe space for survivors to record their experience. Through NotOnlyMe, survivors could choose to be notified if the person who had sexually harassed them had also harassed others. With that knowledge, it was hoped that survivors would feel empowered to take action and report misconduct. Early indications are that the platform was working as designed, and it had sparked the interest of the wider United Nations system. In addition, the 2023–2025 strategy to prevent and respond to sexual misconduct would soon be launched. She thanked Member States for the trust they had placed in UNHCR; the Organization needed their trust and support more than ever to fulfil its protection mandate. Death or danger could not be the only choices available to refugees; there was also hope, and UNHCR could help nurture that hope.

International protection

21. The **Assistant High Commissioner for Protection**, accompanying her remarks with a PowerPoint presentation, said that 2023 marked the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which recognized two crucial human rights: the right to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution and the right to a nationality. The root causes of the rising numbers of forced displacements were often found in breaches of those rights and other human rights that the Declaration was designed to protect, including the right to equality; to life, liberty and security; to protection from discrimination and arbitrary arrest or detention; and to education, work and

freedom of movement. To respect those human rights was to address the root causes of refugee flight in the spirit of leaving no one behind.

22. The scale of forced displacement and international protection needs globally was staggering, with more than 110 million people forcibly displaced throughout the world – a figure that had doubled in 10 years. The numbers included those fleeing the most recent eruption of conflict in Sudan (the). Of the global total, 35.3 million were refugees, while 62.5 million people were displaced in their home countries. Conflict and violence were the primary drivers of displacement; over two thirds of all refugees and others in need of international protection had fled from Afghanistan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Ukraine or Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of). UNHCR had declared an unprecedented 35 new emergencies in 2022.

23. The impact of the recent conflict in Sudan (the) on the civilian population had been devastating. Over 3.5 million people were now displaced within Sudan (the) itself, joining 1.1 million refugees who were currently hosted in the country. Some 1.2 million people were newly displaced within Sudan (the) and nearly 380,000 had fled to neighbouring countries – Central African Republic, Chad, Egypt and Ethiopia, among others.

24. She had recently witnessed first-hand in the Democratic Republic of the Congo the crowded and unsafe conditions for the 6.3 million people displaced within the country, along with half a million refugees. Conflict had forced families – mainly women and children – to leave their homes and villages to live in cramped makeshift shelters or with generous, though poor, host communities. In addition to food insecurity, violence continued: attacks in the last few days alone had killed 45 people, 12 of whom had been burned alive in their shelters. Protection needs for that humanitarian disaster were just 29 per cent funded thus far, illustrating the dire financial constraints placed upon UNHCR's work.

25. The grim picture of protection needs was nonetheless lightened by remarkable examples of solidarity, inclusion, and compassion by governments and civil society as they shared the burdens and responsibilities for people who had been forcibly displaced. Despite the rise in refugee numbers, many countries had kept their borders open to those in need of international protection. The right to seek asylum continued to be respected by most countries, providing a lifeline for millions. In stark contrast, a few countries sought to shift responsibility for assessing refugee claims to other, usually poorer, distant countries. Unilateral policies that denied territorial access in order to claim asylum were both inconsistent with international law and failing as a deterrent.

26. Compounding conflict-driven displacement, recent drivers had included the drought in Somalia, food insecurity across Africa, global inflation, dwindling economic opportunities, earthquakes in the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye and floods in Pakistan. The World Bank's World Development Report 2023 estimated that 40 per cent of the world's population – 3.5 billion people – lived in places that were vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, thereby fuelling yet further conflict and displacement.

27. Against that background of rising protection needs, UNHCR had sought sustainable solutions that responded flexibly and pragmatically to a rapidly changing global environment. Creative thinking was required more than ever to ensure effective protection. The traditional solutions for people who were forcibly displaced had been voluntary return to the country of origin when requirements of safety and dignity were met, local integration in the host country, third-country opportunities for resettlement, family reunion, labour mobility, education and community sponsorship.

28. While most refugees and internally displaced persons hoped to return to their towns, villages and communities, voluntary return had been deterred for reasons including protracted conflicts, political instability, lack of basic services and limited opportunities to work. It was important to rebuild trust in order to facilitate voluntary returns. While some 5.7 million internally displaced persons had returned to their place of origin in 2022, representing an eight per cent increase compared with 2021, only 339 refugees had been able to voluntarily return to their country of origin in 2022, down by 21 per cent compared with 2021. It was necessary to continue to both support countries hosting refugees and address root causes in countries of origin.

29. Durable solutions were also to be found in the form of third-country solutions through resettlement, complementary pathways and family reunification; UNHCR's road map to that end was ambitious and aimed to cover three million refugees by 2030. In 2022, the number of refugees who had been resettled had increased by 49 per cent compared with 2021; however, for each refugee who had been resettled or returned to his/her country of origin there were 16 new ones.

While family reunification in a third country was one of the most effective protection solutions, obstacles to reunion included fees, high costs and documentation requirements.

30. Labour mobility provided a mutually beneficial solution where a job matched refugees' skills with the growing workforce needs of many countries. In addition to lack of recognition of qualifications, however, a major impediment for refugees competing in the international job market was the lack of travel documents. The idea of refugee travel documents recognized internationally had already been promoted by Fridtjof Nansen, the High Commissioner for Refugees of the League of Nations, in 1921. Member States might like to consider expressing their support at the Global Refugee Forum in December 2023 for a twenty-first-century version of the original "Nansen passport".

31. Voluntary returns, resettlement and regular pathways thus did offer solutions for the forcibly displaced. In reality, however, such options benefited very few. The practical solution for most forcibly displaced people, whether refugees or internally displaced persons, was inclusion within their host communities on a non-discriminatory basis. Inclusion meant access to health, education, food security, livelihoods, freedom of movement and valid documentation. Inclusion placed a severe financial burden on host communities, however, and international support for hosts was therefore required. Civil society and local communities played a crucial role in inclusion, acting as the protection front line. In addition, local authorities, cities and mayors had an essential part to play in ensuring the meaningful integration of displaced people.

32. Yet another aspect of inclusion arose for people who were stateless. Displacement arising from conflict and violence in turn led to the risk of statelessness when papers were lost or birth registration was not possible or for other political and legal reasons. Without nationality it was difficult to access health care, register children in school, open a bank account or get work. While 4.3 million people had been reported as stateless in 95 countries, statelessness remained largely invisible and underreported. However, with political will, nationality could easily be granted, fostering genuine inclusion. UNHCR's #IBelong campaign to end statelessness had seen some significant success, with the support of Member States. A concerted push was now imperative in order to make sustained progress.

33. The scale and complexity of global forced displacement was fast outpacing the solutions adopted in response. New and holistic thinking was urgently needed to address the root causes of displacement while also ensuring urgent emergency protection. One of the most effective initiatives by UNHCR had been to support responsibility-sharing through collaboration with development actors, specifically development banks, international financial institutions and regional and national development agencies in the spirit of the humanitarian–peace–development nexus. As a result, concessional grants and loans to some 23 refugee hosting countries had been facilitated, releasing billions of dollars for development and poverty reduction. Development funding helped host countries support the costs of inclusion.

34. Another more recent initiative supported by UNHCR was to take a "whole-of-journey" approach to protection, or a "panoramic view" of mixed movements of both refugees and migrants. Protection and solutions for people forcibly displaced must be available at every stage of their journey. People on the move, whether refugees fleeing conflict or migrants seeking opportunities, travelled across many different countries along their route, often without access to basic services or protection. Without documentation or visas, they were vulnerable to arrest and detention, trafficking and gender-based violence, especially in the case of women and children. Taking a holistic approach, with support from UNHCR and IOM, international organizations, NGOs, local authorities and civil society could provide "joined up" protection across travel routes. By means of fast screening upstream along the routes, it was possible to accelerate access to asylum, or to resettlement, or to migration pathways. The United States of America had recently announced a programme in that regard, which could also be of interest to other countries to identify the most urgent needs of people en route and provide information about regular, safe and legal pathways. It was important to point out, however, that a whole-of-journey approach could not be adopted at the expense of the right to territorial access to claim asylum.

35. The Global Compact on Refugees continued to provide a coherent strategy to support host countries and find durable solutions. In the run-up to the second Global Refugee Forum in December 2023, were the aspirational commitments under the Compact producing concrete outcomes for those in need of international protection, and was the commitment to equitably share the responsibilities and burdens of refugees more than a one-line slogan? While UNHCR was encouraged by examples of world best practice, it was also acutely aware that a great deal more

needed to be done to translate the Compact into action and measurable impacts. The Forum would provide an opportunity for the international community to demonstrate solidarity and shoulder a fair share of the burden in refugee protection. UNHCR counted on the continued commitment and support of the Member States to make the Forum a success.

a. Note on international protection

36. The **Director of the Division of International Protection, UNHCR**, introducing the High Commissioner's Note on international protection, said that the document was set against the background of the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 14 of which was the earliest expression of the right to seek and enjoy asylum. The Note described the global situation in 2022–2023 regarding asylum and international protection, including access to and enjoyment of human rights by refugees, asylum-seekers, returnees and internally displaced and stateless persons. It described the positive measures and practices of many States and partners, as well as the challenges and gaps UNHCR saw worldwide. The Note had been prepared pursuant to UNHCR's mandate to supervise the application of refugee law and protect the rights of persons under the Organization's legal responsibility.

37. In its introduction, the Note described the increasing intensity and prevalence of conflict and violence throughout the world, with humanitarian crises growing in scale and complexity. While some conflicts, such as that in Ukraine, had dominated headlines in 2022, others – including that in Sudan (the) – highlighted the need for greater attention and resources to address unfolding emergencies and protracted situations in many parts of the world.

38. States located closest to countries in crisis continued to shoulder the greatest burden and responsibility for supporting refugees. More political will and economic investments were needed to end violence, ensure stability and rule of law and build strong frameworks for protecting human rights. Those measures, rather than restrictive border and migration management policies, could prevent displacement and put in place conditions for durable solutions.

39. In the sections that followed, a number of developments and trends related to the right to seek asylum were described, including the ongoing prevalence of mixed movements; loss of life at sea; and exploitation and rights violations, including those by traffickers and smugglers. Ongoing efforts to reinforce asylum systems were described, noting that robust mechanisms to identify international protection needs remained central to States' ability to provide protection. Systems must ensure that all civilians fleeing violence and persecution had non-discriminatory access to safe territory, international protection and basic rights.

40. The Note identified practical measures to complement asylum regimes and highlighted the need for effective implementation of past Global Refugee Forum pledges to improve asylum systems, as well as the need for new, concrete, implementable pledges in 2023.

41. The section on the right to enjoy asylum discussed challenges around uneven and slow economic growth limiting the ability (and sometimes the readiness) of States to support displaced and stateless people in accordance with their rights. It was recalled that disasters had affected the ability of people in many countries to enjoy asylum and had caused further displacement, including floods in Africa and Asia and earthquakes in the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye.

42. Specific information on inclusion in national systems and economies and development action was provided, recognizing that many countries welcoming large numbers of refugees had seen a decline in living conditions both for refugees and for host communities. It was underlined that protection and development were mutually reinforcing. Concerns around laws, policies and practices excluding displaced and stateless persons from accessing their rights were described, underscoring that inclusive policies and practices could help ensure access to rights for people in vulnerable situations and with specific needs. The ways in which UNHCR and partners promoted access to services was described, recognizing the need for effective responsibility-sharing and support to host countries and communities. Key trends and advances were identified, but also concerns around child protection, education and gender-based violence. UNHCR's work in co-leading the protection expert group on internally displaced persons was described, as well as its work to support implementation of the Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement. Key developments in the area of solutions and statelessness were also summarized.

43. She drew attention to the reference in paragraph 3 that, as was clear from its subtitle, the Note had been prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner and did not necessarily reflect the views of all Member States. That fact did not represent any change in the authority or weight

of the Note as an official United Nations document issued by the High Commissioner under his mandated authority.

44. The representative of **Pakistan**, speaking on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) group of countries, said that the OIC group remained deeply concerned at the growing scale of displacement in various parts of the world, especially in OIC countries. Indeed, some two thirds of all refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced persons had their origins in OIC Member States. OIC countries hosted over half the world's refugees and asylum-seekers, thus taking on a disproportionate share of global responsibility for protecting refugees. OIC countries were also generous donors and provided generous humanitarian support and assistance to refugees, including through UNHCR. In recent years, despite the series of intersecting crises, including coronavirus disease (COVID-19), the conflict in Ukraine, climate emergencies and the ensuing acute food shortages, and the cost of living crisis, the OIC countries had kept their doors open.

45. There was broad recognition of the gaps in the international protection regime, the most obvious being the disproportionate burden- and responsibility-sharing of many OIC countries in hosting, protecting and assisting refugees. In that regard, the OIC group remained concerned at the dwindling level of international financial support for those host countries, and underscored the need for an even-handed approach to ensure that support for one situation should not come at the expense of neglecting other protracted and pressing emergencies. It was alarming that eight out of the 12 most underfunded refugee operations of UNHCR were in OIC countries, whose capacity to assist refugees and local host communities in a sustainable manner was being affected.

46. In its follow-up to the Global Compact on Refugees, the OIC group appreciated UNHCR's advocacy and partnership with development actors, including multilateral development banks and international financial institutions. However, he wished to highlight that assistance from development partners should not be channelled through loans, but should be based on the principle of equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing in a spirit of international solidarity.

47. A sound international protection regime required simultaneous pursuit of durable solutions as a strategic objective. In that regard, concerted efforts to address the root causes of displacement were indispensable, as were considered strategies to sustain peace and prevent the escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflicts.

48. Voluntary return was the solution most preferred by refugees themselves. UNHCR was therefore encouraged to continue its engagement with relevant stakeholders to generate political will for the creation of conditions conducive to returns. It was also encouraged to rekindle the spirit of international solidarity with countries of origin by helping them build capacities to reintegrate returnees in a sustainable manner.

49. The OIC group remained deeply concerned at the rising incidents of Islamophobia, disinformation and hate speech directed at refugees and people on the move from OIC countries. Such acts, including pushbacks, jeopardized the international institution of asylum and should be addressed as a priority to safeguard the rights of refugees and migrants in transit and destination countries. The pursuit of durable solutions and the principle of burden- and responsibility-sharing entailed the expansion of third-country solutions, including resettlement and complementary pathways. In that regard, it was alarming to note the wide gap with regard to resettlement needs.

50. The OIC group looked forward to the second Global Refugee Forum as an opportunity to take stock of the progress across the four objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees while also working closely with UNHCR and international partners for an integrated and comprehensive approach to durable solutions for refugees, in line with the principle of equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing and in a spirit of international solidarity.

51. While the OIC group appreciated the clarification in paragraph 3 of the Note that the Note did not reflect the views of all Member States, a clearer distinction should be made between those documents that had been negotiated by Member States and those that had not. The OIC group underlined its reservations over continued attempts to insert non-consensual and non-universally agreed terminology such as "sexual orientation and gender identity" in conference papers of the Standing Committee and Executive Committee, including the Note on international protection. The group reiterated its objection to such attempts owing to their misleading normative impact and potential legal complications.

52. The OIC group looked up to UNHCR as an apolitical humanitarian organization delivering on its mandate, in line with the principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence, and had

repeatedly expressed concerns over the increasing politicization of the humanitarian environment at UNHCR owing to the divisive effect of such controversial and non-universally agreed terminologies in UNHCR texts.

53. The OIC group therefore registered its firm objection to any unilateral interpretation of the grounds of discrimination as stated in paragraph 16 of the Note, as it was not consistent with existing international law, including the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, its Protocol and the international human rights treaties.

54. The representative of the **European Union** (group statement of the European Union and its Member States) said that he was speaking on behalf of the European Union and its Member States, and that the candidate countries North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, Ukraine and Bosnia and Herzegovina, together with the potential candidate country Georgia, aligned themselves with the present group statement.

55. The European Union and its Member States took note of the challenges facing UNHCR in responding to the growing needs of refugees and other persons of concern, as described in the High Commissioner's Note; reiterated their steadfast commitment to international burden- and responsibility-sharing; and expressed appreciation for the dedicated leadership of the High Commissioner, the critical work of Office staff and partners around the world, in often difficult circumstances, and the solidarity and generosity of the countries and communities that continued to host or welcome new arrivals of refugees and internally displaced persons, in spite of their own challenges and often limited means.

56. The European Union and its Member States continued to have first-hand experience of the challenges of a major displacement crisis as a result of the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine. Close to 4 million of the nearly 15 million persons driven from their homes since the start of the war, the vast majority being women and children, were currently registered for temporary protection in European Union countries – and enjoying access to housing, health care, education, social welfare and labour markets there. At the same time, the European Union's support for the humanitarian needs of the millions of Ukrainians who were internally displaced remained robust. The European Union and its Member States would stand by Ukraine and its people for as long as it took to end the conflict.

57. The focus on Ukraine, however, had not diverted attention away from the other major forced displacement crises in the world. The European Union and its Member States remained leading donors of assistance to displaced persons and their host communities, which accounted for some 80 per cent of the European Commission's humanitarian budget each year. Meanwhile, the Commission continued to adopt a nexus approach in abiding by its commitment to preventing the protraction of existing crises and putting an end to aid dependence; and some 1.5 billion euros had been invested in support for refugees, to internally displaced persons and host communities and to efforts to address the root causes of forced displacement, including through innovative funding for support platforms, contributions to the UNHCR-World Bank Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement and support for the implementation of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) protocol on the free movement of persons in the IGAD region.

58. European Union Member States had received nearly 1 million applications for international protection in 2022, far more than before the COVID-19 pandemic, and protection status had been granted to close to 400,000 primarily Afghan, Syrian and Venezuelan asylum-seekers (40 per cent more than in 2021). They remained committed to improving procedures while safeguarding all applicable rights, ensuring respect for the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol and providing safe and legal pathways to protection for those fleeing war and conflict. The European Union-supported resettlement programmes helped more than 115,000 to find protection since 2015, including through the emergency transit mechanisms in Niger (the) and Rwanda. Member States had pledged to admit and resettle over 29,000 people in 2023 and they welcomed global efforts to increase complementary pathways, with a particular focus on socioeconomic inclusion.

59. The European Union and its Member States were concerned about the sharp increase in irregular migration and the increased willingness of migrants to put their lives at risk, deploring the increased number of unscrupulous criminals, human traffickers and smugglers abusing people on the move; and were committed to saving lives by stepping up search and rescue efforts, while supporting the voluntary return and reintegration of those not qualifying for international protection. Partner countries were urged to continue to scale up efforts to curb irregular migration; to counter human trafficking and smuggling, in full respect of the migrants' human rights; to

cooperate in readmitting nationals whose asylum applications had been rejected; and to strengthen political and financial support for sustainable voluntary returns and reintegration, which was key to ensuring a functioning asylum system.

60. All stakeholders had a part to play in addressing the multiple, complex challenges of forced displacement. The second Global Refugee Forum the following December would be an opportunity to enhance burden- and responsibility-sharing, and to develop wide-ranging solutions to improve the self-reliance and facilitate the voluntary repatriation of forcibly displaced persons. The European Union and its Member States therefore expressed appreciation to UNHCR for its hard work in preparing the event and its efforts to share best practices and mobilize transformational new pledges and commitments. They strongly supported the Office's multi-stakeholder approach involving the meaningful participation of refugees and refugee-led organizations, which would hopefully help to mobilize new partners, including non-conventional donors, for burden- and responsibility-sharing; and they were committed to working within the European Union's regulatory and financial frameworks to enhance the outcomes of the Forum with high-quality pledges and the showcasing of past achievements in humanitarian and development-related interventions for forcibly displaced persons.

61. The representative of **Egypt** (Arab Group statement), recognizing the link established in the High Commissioner's Note between the protection of refugees and displaced persons and the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, said that Arab Group States, which included some of the largest host countries in the world, had always welcomed those forced to leave their countries of origin and granted them access to the same basic services as their own citizens. They regarded it as a shared responsibility to assist host countries in managing asylum crises, among others, and in seeking inclusive durable solutions of the kind prescribed by the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, which gave asylum-seekers the right to basic services, protection, settlement and a nationality. The voluntary, dignified return of refugees and internally displaced persons, which Arab Group States had always cooperated with UNHCR to support, was only possible if the root causes of forced displacement were addressed in countries and communities of origin. Efforts to facilitate such returns had, in spite of responsibility-sharing under the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, fallen well short of the expected outcomes and a greater focus was required on promoting reintegration and tackling the root causes of mixed movements through a holistic approach that took into account the political, humanitarian and security-related contexts in the region. A number of Arab States were countries of origin rather than transit or destination countries, which raised the key question of securing borders, and cooperation with the governments concerned.

62. All displaced persons, without discrimination, had the right under international law and the Universal Declaration to seek asylum and international protection. Arab Group States, concerned about restrictions on entry and the denial of that right, as reflected in the High Commissioner's Note, and stressing the need to address new types of discrimination, welcomed the progress that some States had made in improving their asylum systems. They called on UNHCR to circulate a comprehensive overview of how to ensure further progress and implement durable solutions within an effective humanitarian response, including with respect to the integration of asylum-seekers into the national systems that allowed them access to basic services. While steadfast in their support for the protection and well-being of refugees, internally displaced persons and others of concern to UNHCR, the Arab Group States stressed the need for sustainable, holistic solutions to address also the concerns of host countries; the integration of refugees should not be prioritized at the expense of third-country solutions.

63. Arab Group States were ready to shoulder their responsibilities in regard to finance and development matters and the implementation of durable solutions. The safe, dignified and voluntary return of refugees to their countries of origin, which remained the ideal solution, required a redoubling of efforts to eliminate the root causes of their displacement, with UNHCR and the international community striving to increase the resources and establish relevant programmes with humanitarian and development partners.

64. The representative of **South Africa** (Africa Group statement) welcomed Angola to the Africa Group as the 108th member of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme.

65. Turning to the High Commissioner's Note, the Africa Group acknowledged the challenges to the Office's mandate across the world and the continuous strain that that put on its response capacity; with forced displacement situations on the increase owing to conflicts, climate-induced

disasters and human rights violations, and with socioeconomic distress, poverty and intercommunal inequalities likely to deepen as a result, 2023 was set to go down as a tragic year for UNHCR in Africa. It was important to remember, in the 75th anniversary year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that a person's right under international refugee law to leave home, become a refugee, seek asylum and ultimately return to her/his country of origin was a human right, too.

66. African countries had long been the biggest hosts of forcibly displaced persons, even though they were struggling, as low and middle-income countries, to meet their protection needs. Solutions for the cessation of refugee status therefore needed strengthening to tackle the root causes of conflicts and pave the way for resettlement and voluntary returns, and their sustainability relied on an understanding of the nexus between peace and security, development, human rights and humanitarian assistance.

67. The Africa Group believed that it was time to talk about the root causes of displacement attributable to human rights violations, among other things, and called for future Notes on international protection to reflect the balance in responsibility-sharing among Member States; recognizing host countries and countries of origin both had an obligation to uphold the rights of refugees in a dignified manner in order to contribute to progress towards the cessation of refugee status. In view of the levels of discrimination and xenophobia detected in the treatment of refugees of African descent on other continents, however, future Notes should also reflect some of the incidents where refugees had been denied protection on account of their racial background. Meanwhile, developing countries, particularly in Africa, still lacked the capacity to effectively respond to and prevent the climate-change-induced natural disasters and environmental risks indirectly driving current displacement patterns and compounding the existing challenges. The solution, according to the Africa Group, lay in adaptive capacity- and resilience-building at the national and local levels, as it was the countries affected that were primarily responsible for preventing, preparing for and responding to displacement. The Group noted with appreciation the collaboration between UNHCR and other United Nations agencies to ensure that humanitarian assistance reached the most vulnerable communities.

68. On statelessness, which remained a major problem in the region and a potential hinderance to access to basic rights, the Africa Group was committed to ensuring that no one was left behind by the continent-wide initiatives under way to resolve the issue and ensure the right to a nationality.

69. Taking note of the proposed multi-year workplan for Executive Committee conclusions, as presented by the Rapporteur, the Africa Group would have preferred it if Member States had formally deliberated on the impacts on host communities of hosting, protecting and assisting refugees so that the voices of those communities were heard, had an impact and were taken into consideration by the Executive Committee. Africa and African people, who had long welcomed and embraced nations on other continents and whose humanity ("*botho ba rona*") was entrenched in their values, faced a complex humanitarian situation, counted on the solidarity and collaboration of the international community in finding sustainable solutions to support the refugees that they hosted.

70. The representative of **Poland**, aligning his delegation's remarks with the European Union group statement, expressed appreciation to UNHCR staff for their work in implementing the Office's mandate to stay and deliver in the many challenging situations caused by wars, persecution or dramatic climate events.

71. Further to the assertion in the High Commissioner's Note that States located closest to countries in crisis continued to shoulder the greatest burden and responsibility for supporting refugees, Poland was the leading European Union country in terms of assisting Ukrainian refugees since the start of the Russian Federation's war of aggression against their country. Now home to over 3 million Ukrainians, with 25,000 more crossing the border from Ukraine every day and more than 1.6 million having been registered for temporary protection, Poland, according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, had spent 8.36 billion euros – around 1.5 per cent of its gross domestic product – in humanitarian assistance for Ukrainian refugees in 2022. It was also supporting internally displaced persons in Ukraine, sending mobile medical units, constructing temporary housing and providing 2.5 million euros in funding for humanitarian projects delivered by NGOs. The humanitarian consequences of the destruction of the Kakhovka dam in a Russian-occupied area of southern Ukraine, with people uprooted and agricultural land flooded and the prospect of a fresh wave of internally displaced persons, was seriously concerning.

72. To facilitate the integration of Ukrainian refugees, those who were legally resident in Poland had full access to the labour market, with the recognition of Ukrainian academic diplomas; they could register as unemployed jobseekers; they could set up and run a business; and women with preschool-age children were offered additional day-care services, among other services, if they wished to return to work. In terms of access to education, students had the right to continue their education in Polish schools; children could benefit from Ukrainian education online; and Ukrainian teachers were employed as teaching assistants at Polish schools. Lastly, Ukrainian refugees, including persons with disabilities, had access to the Polish national health system, including mental health services, and the social welfare system.

73. Poland would continue to work in partnership with and under the guidance of UNHCR to support Ukraine and its people with access to protection, rights and solutions.

74. The representative of **Angola**, aligning her delegation with the Africa Group statement, expressed appreciation for the support and warm welcome that it had received on joining the Executive Committee family and reaffirmed the commitment of her Government to support UNHCR in its efforts to deliver on its mandate and responsibilities.

75. Regarding the High Commissioner's Note, beyond reporting on the Office's work in addressing the international protection needs of persons of concern over the previous year, its focus on the implementation of sustainable solutions and gave hope for the future. To achieve that end, the humanitarian response would have to change to cope with the rising number of internally displaced persons and the changing nature and growing complexity of crises, old and new, and the right to asylum needed constantly to be revitalized. In the meantime, internally displaced persons still faced challenges to their dignity, statelessness remained a fact of life for millions, particularly in Africa, and enjoyment of the right to return to countries of origin had yet to be ensured. Promoting peace and stability was key, to which end States, while continuing to adopt a human rights-based approach to implementing measures to secure the rights of refugees, should strive to strengthen international cooperation and foster synergies with all stakeholders. Taking note of the fact that the proposed multi-year workplan for Executive Committee conclusions would address the relevant issues, her delegation looked forward to the Office's support to ensure its effective implementation at the country level.

76. The **Chairperson** joined the Africa Group in welcoming Angola to the membership of the Executive Committee.

77. The representative of **Finland**, aligning his delegation's remarks with the group statement delivered by the representative of the European Union, expressed appreciation to UNHCR for its assessment of the current state of international protection, at a time when the numbers of those in need of that protection were at a record high and, hence, the demand for its services had never been greater. Finland applauded the Office's staff and partners for their dedicated efforts to deliver in difficult and often dangerous environments. It also expressed its deep appreciation to the countries and communities hosting the refugees and other displaced persons, as some had been for decades. They shouldered the bulk of a burden often compounded by the impacts of climate change, environmental disasters and economic distress. Greater burden- and responsibility-sharing was therefore essential, to which end the second Global Refugee Forum was a timely opportunity to strengthen the international framework and mobilize new partners for durable solutions.

78. Finland, which remained committed to supporting UNHCR in its efforts to keep the focus on the centrality of protection, especially at a time when there were insufficient resources to meet the ever-growing needs, was duty-bound to defend the basic principles of international human rights and refugee law as elements of the rules-based international order, as they were the underpinnings of the international protection system. States must stand up to any attempt to challenge those principles and ensure that displaced and stateless persons enjoy the widest possible exercise of their rights, including the right to asylum.

79. It was of paramount importance, especially with the gap between the needs and the resources continuing to widen, not to neglect the most vulnerable and at-risk groups, such as persons with intersectional identities or the more than one billion persons with disabilities globally who were disproportionately affected by conflict and violence. In regard to the latter, commendable efforts had been made towards disability inclusion, albeit with little to show for them to date, and his delegation looked forward to further reporting from UNHCR, including on its progress in implementing the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, pursuant to General Assembly resolution A/RES/77/198. Member States must maintain their commitment to that agenda, in spite of the widening gaps. While there might be other lacunae to address in terms of

the programmes and budgeting to reach persons with disabilities in crisis situations, Finland encouraged UNHCR, as the lead of the Global Protection Cluster, to foster a systematic focus on the vulnerabilities of those persons, on the risks and barriers that they faced and on the rights that they should enjoy. UNHCR was also encouraged to look into how the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities interconnected with international refugee law.

80. Finland was a staunch supporter of the Office and looked forward to further dialogue on its international protection priorities.

81. The representative of **the Islamic Republic of Iran**, aligning his delegation's remarks with the OIC group statement, expressed appreciation to UNHCR for its invaluable protection work around the world, as well as to the Secretariat for its update on the state of play.

82. The Islamic Republic of Iran, as a major host country for nearly 50 years, had gone to great lengths to provide refugees with access to adequate livelihoods, inclusive education, particularly at primary level, and basic public services, including health care. With the pace and scale of displacement having exceeded the scope of currently available solutions for the displaced, the situation in his region had been further aggravated by the political turmoil in Afghanistan since the ill-conceived withdrawal from the country of its long-time occupiers. Some 2.6 million displaced Afghans had sought refuge and been granted temporary documentation in his country since the Taliban had come to power; that, added to its existing population of 3.5 million refugees and others on the move, made the Islamic Republic of Iran the second largest host country in the world.

83. To alleviate the plight of Afghans fleeing the Taliban's stringent regulations, including the ban on female students in higher education, Iranian universities had readily opened their doors to – and enrolled – a good number of those students; the University of Tehran, for instance, had even quintupled its scholarship budget to assist them.

84. The added pressure placed on his country's infrastructure, services and resources by continuous inflows of displaced persons was compounded by the impacts of unilaterally imposed sanctions not only on its capacity to protect refugees, but also on the effectiveness of international humanitarian organizations in their efforts to support host communities. His delegation therefore expected future High Commissioner's Notes on international protection to report on the negative impacts of unilateral coercive measures on the countries targeted. The Islamic Republic of Iran was deeply concerned about the prospect of existing protracted situations in countries such as his being overshadowed by new waves of displacement.

85. Noting the “non-consensual language” used in the High Commissioner's Note, specifically the reference to sexual orientations, his delegation cautioned against the use of politically sensitive, controversial notions, concepts and wording that served only to undermine the Executive Committee's work.

86. The Islamic Republic of Iran reiterated its appreciation to UNHCR for its efforts in discharging its duty to alleviate the suffering of refugees.

87. The representative of **Nigeria**, aligning her delegation's remarks with the Africa Group statement, acknowledged the many challenges that UNHCR had faced in striving to assist and protect persons of concern in its response to the 35 emergencies declared in 2022, as described in the High Commissioner's Note. It had also noted the efforts, through related programmes, to raise awareness in Nigeria of the protection risks of dangerous journeys via irregular pathways, on land and at sea, with a view to curbing the growing number of lives lost and the prevalence of human trafficking, among other things. It had further noted the increase in mixed movements of migrants and refugees and the Office's efforts to respond, in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration, as well as the need for a focus on complementarity in the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees.

88. With the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights being celebrated at the end of the year, it was a fitting time to spotlight the right of refugees and displaced persons to seek international protection and to enjoy the exercise of all their inalienable rights, without restriction. Nigeria, however, had strong reservations about the Office's categorization of discriminated-against groups, in particular the reference in the High Commissioner's Note to “sexual orientation or gender identity”. Those were totally alien concepts to many Member States and UNHCR should take good note of the national laws of those States and show the utmost respect for their beliefs, refraining from the use of categories that undermined their pivotal, time-honoured values and exposed them to social engineering and cultural revisionism. The inclusion of a “gender and diversity” component in the indicators for gauging access to services provided for refugees

and displaced persons, as well as support for host communities, for instance, had not been unanimously approved by Member States and served not only to negate the views of those that considered it unacceptable but also to exclude other categories of vulnerable persons with existential needs. More information from UNHCR on its activities to address so-called “harmful social norms and practices” in Nigeria would be appreciated.

89. Nigeria stressed, once again, the need for multi-stakeholder partnerships of development, peace and climate actors, among others, to ensure an appropriate response to humanitarian crises globally. It was important, in the run-up to the second Global Refugee Forum in December, to work towards a collective commitment on the part of Member States to find sustainable solutions to the challenges faced by refugees, including those displaced by climate-induced disasters.

90. The representative of **the United States of America** reiterated that the United States had a shared commitment to respect the rights of refugees, stateless persons, internally displaced persons and others forcibly displaced. Populations on the move were increasingly mixed, with individuals fleeing persecution alongside those fleeing climate change and extreme poverty. The world must continue to adapt to those new realities and challenges, while also safeguarding foundational principles.

91. The United States recognized that addressing mixed population movements required a wholistic approach, which meant strengthening national systems to maintain safe passage for those in need of asylum, while also expanding lawful pathways for others so as not to overburden asylum capacity. It was essential that States should ensure that all civilians fleeing persecution had non-discriminatory access to asylum, irrespective of their nationality, race, ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, sexual orientation, or gender identity, and the United States expressed concern at efforts by some Member States to influence the contents of the High Commissioner’s Note on international protection. It called on UNHCR to reaffirm its understanding that the Note was dutifully shared, without caveat, and reflected the High Commissioner’s expert reflections on protection, UNHCR’s core mandate.

92. With the increase of mixed movement flows globally, the United States was working in the western hemisphere in partnership with governments, multilateral development banks, UNHCR and other international organizations, NGOs and the private sector to try to advance safe, humane, and orderly migration management, increasing access to protection for those fleeing persecution or torture and seeking new opportunities to protect stateless persons and prevent and end statelessness in the region. With its regional partners, the United States was addressing the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement.

93. The sheer magnitude and protracted nature of the global drivers of displacement had placed an enormous strain on the international protection regime, leaving durable solutions out of reach for many people in need. New ways to improve access to protection, including through temporary protection measures, must be identified while work towards long-term solutions was ongoing. It was vital that the critical pathway of refugee resettlement continued to undergo innovation and expansion.

94. The United States urged Member States to leverage the expertise of UNHCR and other international organizations to make progress on commitments made under instruments like the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS) and the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection and devise creative pathways for protection and solutions, including interim temporary protection, while expanding access to asylum and upholding their obligations of non-refoulement.

95. The United States underscored the importance of unhindered access to territory, particularly as so many were fleeing conflict in Sudan (the), and called on UNHCR to prioritize registration and access to documentation, and programming that was accountable and inclusive of the views and preferences of affected persons and to work towards comprehensive solutions supported by a wide variety of partners.

96. To meaningfully engage in their communities and sustain their families, refugees needed access to essential documentation. Many Member States were taking steps in that area to strengthen protection. The United States commended Japan for its granting of nationality to children of stateless Rohingya refugees, and both Kenya and Chad offered promising legal developments that could expand access to livelihoods, which it was hoped would soon be fully implemented.

97. The United States welcomed UNHCR's new and expanded efforts to increase accountability to affected persons, including the five-year plan on working in partnership with communities. Robust programming to support survivors of gender-based violence, to prevent family separation and to provide accessibility for persons with disabilities and services responsive to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI+) needs were critical. Donors should provide adequate resources for seeking out and learning from the voices of the most vulnerable to improve protection programming. For the Global Refugee Forum to succeed, shared efforts were needed to focus on building diverse institutional partnerships and advancing solutions.

98. The representative of **France** stated that France aligned itself with the statement from the European Union and commended UNHCR on its work to protect refugees and others under its mandate in a complex international situation marked by a multiplicity of conflicts, climate change and the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis. Between 2020 and 2022, France had more than doubled its funding to the UNHCR. It also saluted UNHCR for its commitment to the intensification of operations in Ukraine and in neighbouring countries and for its assistance to those forced to flee, as well for its work in other crisis zones in Africa, Asia and the Americas.

99. He recalled his country's continued support for the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees and its role as co-convenor of the upcoming Global Refugee Forum in December 2023, where commitments to protection-related issues would be announced. The President of France would co-sponsor the event, enabling initiatives that would bring measurable progress by bringing together all actors: States, international organizations, private companies and civil society. He applauded the commitment of the host country, Switzerland, and the co-convening countries Colombia, Japan, Jordan, Niger (the) and Uganda. On the Note on international protection, France wished to reiterate how vitally important it was to respect the independence of the High Commissioner and his right to present his professional views to the General Assembly and subsidiary bodies.

100. The representative of **Uganda** said that her country aligned itself with the African Group and OIC statements. She thanked the High Commissioner and his team for the very informative Note on international protection that shared a global picture of the status quo on persons of concern to the Office. With reference to the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, she highlighted the universality of human rights - rights that accrue to every human being by virtue of being human. Uganda agreed with the sentiments expressed in the Note, which emphasized the right for all persons to seek asylum and enjoy the rights of a transparent, fair, and impartial asylum system.

101. The asylum system in Uganda was very transparent in that it afforded a right of appeal to the High Court to those in disagreement with the decision of the Refugee Eligibility Committee, which determined application cases for asylum. She called upon other States that spoke highly of certain human rights to accord Africans - Ugandans inclusive fairness and equality in their respective asylum systems.

102. However, Uganda was not immune to the challenges of the asylum process and was struggling with a backlog of over 39,000 cases. It needed help to return persons who, upon scrutiny of their cases, did not merit asylum; while Uganda was aware that such persons did not qualify as persons of concern to UNHCR, it remained confident that UNHCR's close collaboration with IOM and the Ugandan Government would help to find a solution.

103. On climate action, refugees and host communities in rural communities largely depended on wood to meet their basic needs for biomass energy for cooking, shelter and income generation from forests. That protracted situation had negatively impacted the environment, and Uganda urgently called for climate action intervention, which was one of its thematic areas open to pledges at the upcoming Global Refugee Forum.

104. Turning to the inclusion of refugees in national systems, in paragraph 32 of the Note on international protection, the High Commissioner had correctly articulated the Ugandan position on socioeconomic inclusion: refugee settlements in Uganda were indistinguishable from local communities and enjoyed every right accorded to Ugandan citizens, except the right to participate in elective politics. Nevertheless, Uganda continued to grapple with the real-time challenges of ensuring humanitarian and development needs for refugees and host communities, especially in the light of the ongoing budget cuts.

105. Uganda was ashamed that, in the 75th anniversary year of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the international community still failed to ensure basic human rights such as the

right to food, clean water, health, and basic education. However, as one of the co-convenors of the second Global Refugee Forum, her country would continue to do its part, and called on the donor community to match Uganda's pledges with meaningful, quantifiable, and tangible commitments to address climate needs, find durable solutions and empower refugees to achieve self-reliance and ease the burden Uganda continued to face. The international community could turn refugees into agents of their own development by empowering them to become persons of value to a home, a village and, by extension, to a country that had welcomed and hosted them in their greatest time of need.

106. The representative of **Portugal** said that Portugal aligned itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union and its Member States. She thanked UNHCR for the very comprehensive Note on international protection and commended its staff and partners for their important work across the world.

107. The celebration, in December, of the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was a reminder of the importance of maintaining a human-rights-based approach to international protection. It was vital to ensure that access to international protection and to basic rights was granted irrespective of nationality, race, ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, sexual orientation or gender identity. Portugal remained committed to the protection, assistance, reception and integration of refugees and migrants and stated that the principles of responsibility and solidarity, the respect for the dignity of the humans, and combating human trafficking and illegal immigration were at the core of its policies and of the newly established Portuguese Agency for Minorities, Migration and Asylum.

108. People seeking international protection moved across borders alongside those moving for economic and other reasons; all were facing similar risks and challenges and following similar routes. The complementarity between the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact on Safe, Regular and Orderly Migration was therefore clear and required a comprehensive and collaborative approach. Portugal commended the framework of engagement agreed between UNHCR and IOM to strengthen joint responses to mixed movements of refugees and migrants and to durable solutions for internally displaced persons, as well as data.

109. Since 2015, Portugal had taken part in resettlement programmes, working closely with UNHCR and contributing to the collective effort to create legal and complementary pathways for persons in need of international protection. Resettlement and integration had been conducted in a whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach and Portugal had also supported the Sustainable Resettlement and Complementary Pathways Initiative.

110. Portugal would continue to take its share of responsibility in the resettlement and relocation programmes, including the commitment to relocation of unaccompanied minors from the Greek islands, and to be part of the rescue operations in the Mediterranean. In the same vein, it had welcomed a large group of Afghan citizens looking for international protection following the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan.

111. The unprovoked war in Ukraine had imposed new challenges on the international community. In solidarity, Portugal had granted temporary protection to over 50,000 people of all nationalities, including stateless persons, who had fled the war. From the beginning of the crisis, Portugal had approved a large package of special measures for persons leaving Ukraine, granting them access to health, education, housing and employment. To date, the humanitarian assistance provided by Portugal amounted to 53 million euros, of which 30 million had been provided to the Polish Strategic Reserves Agency for humanitarian assistance for Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees.

112. Portugal had a long tradition of promoting economic, social and cultural rights and paid particular attention to the right to education. It was particularly committed to creating opportunities for forcibly displaced persons to access higher education. Therefore, it had been an active partner of the Global Task Force on Third Country Education Pathways and had supported the Global Platform for Higher Education in Emergencies, which was an emergency scholarship programme enabling students from countries in conflict to continue their training and preparation for the future.

113. In the current context of multiple and complex humanitarian crisis, the second Global Refugee Forum would be a timely opportunity to enhance the principles of the Global Compact for Refugees. Portugal thanked UNHCR for all the preparatory work under way and looked forward to a successful event in support of the cause of international protection.

114. The representative of the **Philippines** thanked UNHCR for the updates and the Note on international protection and noted the continuing situations of displacement that placed strain on

governments and the humanitarian community, compelling constant reprioritization of limited resources, including human resources, and institutional capacity. UNHCR had been an important actor in that space, as the Organization faced response and protection challenges in the light of successive crises. At the same time, it should remain aware of the criticality of comprehensive, solutions-centred approaches, also a core part of its mandate.

115. Reaching that delicate balance in determining global priorities was underpinned by the most basic of humanitarian principles: global burden and responsibility-sharing. That should mean that the demand for communities to host more, and for humanitarian organizations to do more, should enjoy the corresponding financial support and mutual political understanding.

116. It was crucial that the rights which protected the welfare of refugees and other persons of concern should be upheld, including through creating safe pathways that could prevent unnecessary loss of life at both land and sea borders. Responses to movements of people, both refugees and migrants, should not come at the expense of human lives and dignity, the right to seek asylum and the obligation of non-refoulement.

117. Further support was needed in order to enable host communities to enhance the inclusion of persons of concern, including their access to basic services, integration and meaningful participation in local communities, and consideration of any specific needs and requirements. Special attention should be given to groups in vulnerable situations, including women and children, indigenous peoples, older persons and persons with disabilities. The Philippines looked forward to continued updates in that regard, including a report on the implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, as mandated by the 2022 UNHCR omnibus resolution.

118. The topic of displacement resulting from climate change and natural hazards was an important cross-cutting issue in the multilateral agenda. The understanding of, and work on, climate-induced displacement could be made clearer through continued briefings on UNHCR initiatives in that regard, including the status of implementation of the Strategic Framework for Climate Action.

119. Finally, the Philippines acknowledged its collaboration with UNHCR at national and regional levels, as a consistent partner in many initiatives where a middle country, such as the Philippines, could become more involved, including through programmes on statelessness and documentation, refugee inclusion, improving asylum systems and third-country solutions. That collaboration had motivated its commitment to be a modest donor to the UNHCR and several of its refugee response plans, and it encouraged other stakeholders to do the same to the best of their respective abilities.

120. The representative of **Norway** thanked the UNHCR for the Note on international protection and the briefing. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation had created the largest refugee crisis in Europe since the Second World War. The recent conflict in Sudan (the) was leading to new displacement of thousands of people. It was obvious that the main solution to stop people from being forcibly displaced was to restore peace, even if that was beyond the scope of humanitarian work per se.

121. Working on the nexus between peace, humanitarian and development actors was more important than ever and must be prioritized. Norway commended UNHCR for its collaboration with the World Bank and development agencies; in order to improve the situation for refugees, internally displaced persons and the local population in hosting States, it was necessary to have development agencies on board.

122. Protection must remain the overarching priority and main goal of UNHCR's work. Operational protection measures at the country level must be prioritized and UNHCR's role as cluster lead was vital. Norway commended UNHCR for its collaboration with non-governmental Organizations in the Global Protection Cluster.

123. The funding gap gave cause for concern, as the consequences of lack of funding could be dramatic. More donors needed to step up, preferably by contributing with flexible and unearmarked funding so that UNHCR could direct the funding to where it was most needed.

124. The suffering of children in armed conflict was one of the most pressing political and humanitarian concerns today. Yet it remained one of the most neglected. Norway had just hosted a conference on protecting children in armed conflict with a number of partners and 400 participants from States, NGOs and United Nations agencies. A total of 30 States and 40 organizations had signed a commitment to make every effort to ensure the protection of children

in armed conflict to safeguard a common future. Norway reported that it had made a commitment of one billion Norwegian kroner over three years to that end.

125. Persons from the LGBTIQ+ and the sexual orientation and gender identity-community must have their basic human rights protected; that applied to any individual, inside or outside their own country. Several resettlement countries, including Norway, were giving priority to refugees from that group because of their often extremely vulnerable situation.

126. There was a continuous need to prioritize the prevention of, and response to, sexual and gender-based violence, including protection measures. Its victims were mostly women and girls, but men and boys could also be victims. In line with this, it was important to ensure access to health care, including reproductive health care.

127. Norway had established a special initiative to work on the links between support for refugees, migrants and host communities. It appreciated the close cooperation with UNHCR regarding resettlement, and encouraged more States to contribute with resettlement opportunities and complementary pathways. The right to apply for asylum was vital; well-functioning asylum systems required well-functioning systems for returns in case an applicant was deemed not to have protection needs.

128. Lastly, Norway would support the UNHCR Strategic Directions 2022–2026, with particular emphasis on the planned enhanced efforts to ensure protection, gender equality, prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, efforts relating to internally displaced persons and contributing to mitigating the consequences of climate change. Norway was preparing for the Global Refugee Forum in December, and looked forward to cooperating with UNHCR, States and other stakeholders.

129. The representative of **Chad** said that Chad aligned itself with the statement made on behalf of the African Group, thanked UNHCR for its efforts in support of those it protected and welcomed the presentation of the Note on international protection, which highlighted the progress achieved in safeguarding the rights of those under its mandate, as well as the main obstacles encountered. Chad welcomed the increased efforts deployed by UNHCR to strengthen its response to mixed movements of refugees and migrants as a contribution to the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migrations.

130. States close to countries in crisis continued to shoulder the greatest responsibility for assisting refugees. Since the start of the crisis in Sudan (the), Chad had taken in thousands of people seeking asylum and shared with them its meagre resources. The number who had reached the east of Chad from Sudan (the) was estimated at 125,000, in a region which already played host to over 400,000 Sudanese refugees.

131. The Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa estimated that Chad required approximately \$130 million to care for 100,000 Sudanese refugees over the course of the next six months, while the UNHCR office in Chad estimated that up to 200,000 more people could be forced to flee to Chad in the next three months. The new arrivals represented a further challenge to the country's already stretched public services and resources.

132. While calling on local communities in the area to continue to welcome refugees and show solidarity and hospitality in the face of their urgent needs, Chad urged the international community to provide greater and urgent support for Chad, its partners, humanitarian actors and national and international NGOs to enable them to deal with the multiple humanitarian challenges and maintain the country's resilience and avoid a humanitarian catastrophe. Chad called for solid and strengthened partnerships with States, United Nations partners, civil society, representatives of the affected communities, development partners, international financial institutions and the private sector in line with the Global Compact on Refugees.

133. The representative of the **Republic of Korea** commended UNHCR for its efforts and actions in the past year. It recognized the various advances in protection by fellow Member States, as stated in the reports. Non-refoulement and the right to seek asylum were two fundamental principles, and his country urged all Member States to continue to abide by them. Moreover, the safety of the displaced populations had be ensured under all circumstances.

134. He wished to raise two points in respect of durable solutions. As indicated by the Assistant High Commissioner, one was the integrated approach by United Nations agencies, donors and other stakeholders. With regard to the UNHCR's new strategy and engagement with development

actors, success lay in the close alignment of UNHCR's regional and country plans with the needs of displaced persons. Life-saving humanitarian assistance was not the only thing that refugees needed, especially in the protective context. UNHCR was advised to transform its operational strategies and adopt more comprehensive and extended packages where the lives and livelihoods of refugees could be more prioritized, thereby strengthening the nexus with development actors. His second point was that solutions could not be obtained and sustained unless there was peace and stability; a strong will for solutions and self-help by the partner countries was crucial in supporting efforts and making real progress.

135. In October 2022, the Republic of Korea had signed up to projects with UNHCR to support Burundian refugees. In the previous eight months, 10,000 refugees had benefited from the project through return and reintegration. His country would continue to actively support all the projects contributing to durable solutions. He fully supported UNHCR's general direction and the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees. His country had operated a refugee resettlement programme since 2015 and had launched a new window-of-education pathway in 2022. It would continue to join in global efforts to address displacement challenges.

136. The representative of **Canada** said that Canada appreciated the Note on international protection and UNHCR's efforts to address increasingly complex protection challenges. Canada encouraged UNHCR to work with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) to champion and implement the recommendations of the Independent Review of the IASC Protection Policy. In particular, greater efforts should be made to provide durable solutions for the most vulnerable people, especially women and girls, persons with disabilities, and others who faced discrimination based on their sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or sex characteristics. In this spirit, Canada planned to resettle approximately 144,000 refugees between 2023 and 2025, and had recently announced a partnership with Rainbow Railroad to resettle LGBTQI+ refugees in Canada. Her country also remained actively engaged in the MIRPS Support Platform to strengthen responsibility-sharing in Central America and Mexico. In addition to its humanitarian commitments, Canada continued to champion and develop complementary pathways, including as Chair of the Global Task Force on Refugee Labour Mobility. Canada had recently announced two new refugee labour mobility streams and had invited collaboration on a collective pledge ahead of the Global Refugee Forum.

137. Canada continued to be concerned by the increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence during humanitarian crises. In that vein, Canada welcomed the Organization's efforts to empower local and women-led organizations in sexual and gender-based violence mitigation, prevention and response. Canada likewise applauded the commitment of UNHCR and other partners in the campaign "Coming Together for Refugee Education".

138. Canada believed that the Global Refugee Forum was an important occasion to maintain the impetus in the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees. Canada welcomed UNHCR's efforts to focus on the factors related to age, gender and diversity in response to protection needs. Such factors would be at the heart of its approach at the Forum.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.
