

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

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Summary record,* Wednesday, 15 June 2023, at 3:05 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Kadra Ahmed Hassan (Djibouti)

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

International protection *(continued)*

a. Note on international protection *(continued)*

1. The representative of **Burkina Faso**, aligning his remarks with the statements made by the African Group and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, said that his country played host to more than 37,000 stateless persons and had undertaken a number of legal, political and social initiatives in an effort to better understand the status of vulnerable populations and ensure that they had full enjoyment of their rights. Burkina Faso was committed to regularizing the status of asylum-seekers, to reduce the risk of statelessness. To that end, since 2008, the country had adopted a law on the status of refugees, was drawing up a law on civil status and had ratified the principal international conventions relating to the status of refugees and stateless persons. The Government had promoted access by refugees to the same basic social services as Burkina Faso nationals. Nonetheless, the persistence of terrorism had resulted in the internal displacement of more than 2 million people, mostly women and girls in need of urgent assistance. He therefore appealed to the international community, humanitarian partners in particular, to provide the necessary urgent assistance to those vulnerable groups, who were simply the victims of a security, humanitarian and geo-political crisis that had been unjustly imposed upon them. By working together, durable solutions could be found for the benefit of all. He thanked UNHCR for its commitment and its work on the ground, and reiterated his country's commitment to ensuring the protection of humanitarian workers, who were being increasingly targeted by terrorist attacks.

2. The representative of **Ethiopia** said that unfortunately, burden- and responsibility-sharing with regard to hosting, protecting and assisting refugees, as well as the search for solutions, had thus far been inadequate, inequitable and inconsistent, which continued to seriously affect the international protection of refugees. As well as ensuring the protection of the rights of refugees, it was important to strengthen development assistance in major refugee-hosting countries. As noted in the report, building strong legal frameworks was associated with long-term development in major refugee-hosting countries, but it was concerning that assistance levels remained low, with only 22.8 per cent of the funds required to respond to the refugee situation in Ethiopia in 2023 received as at 1 June. Support for host countries should be seen as an investment in a global public good, not as charity. Humanity should be the main driver of assistance, regardless of race, gender, colour or geography. It was time to demonstrate concrete solidarity in addressing the serious and unprecedented humanitarian crises around the world.

3. Ethiopia was continuing to assist those fleeing conflict, even though it was dealing with its own internal problems and serious drought. The country hosted more than 1 million refugees and asylum-seekers, a number that was increasing by the day owing to recent conflicts in neighbouring countries. Host communities had welcomed them, sharing what little they had, but additional stress was being put on already scant budgetary resources. Cognizant of the protracted nature of the situation and the need for refugees to be self-reliant, the Government of Ethiopia had provided increased employment opportunities to refugees, in a joint approach with partners and the private sector. Investment in the long-term resilience of host communities for refugee populations in protracted situations would be of great benefit and help to ease the pressure.

4. As a major refugee-hosting country, Ethiopia was looking forward to working with others for the success of the upcoming Global Refugee Forum. A national stakeholder meeting was being held in June, with participation at all levels, in order to take stock of the implementation of existing pledges, review progress, challenges and good practices, and set new priorities and areas for potential pledge-matching. Accordingly, he called on partners to make mega pledges. The Forum must lead towards a fairer and more sustainable way of sharing responsibility, and would be a good opportunity for Member States to capitalize on the successes that had been achieved and to commit to action-oriented quality pledges.

5. Ethiopia was hosting refugees while also dealing with millions of internally displaced persons, because of conflict and prolonged drought. The Government had put in place legal and policy frameworks to comprehensively address internal displacement issues and implemented projects in the affected areas to bring durable solutions. It was working closely with the Office of the Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Solutions to Internal Displacement, but more support was needed. Going forward, it was critically important to fill the funding gap for humanitarian

assistance and the protection of refugees and to provide enhanced development interventions in large refugee-hosting countries, as well as expanding secondary pathways for asylum, in the spirit of burden- and responsibility-sharing.

6. The representative of **Brazil** welcomed the approach taken in the Note on international protection, which recalled that it was crucial to ensure the right to seek asylum with dignity. Protection was at the core of her country's humanitarian action. She thanked the High Commissioner for recognizing the efforts of Brazil to extend its humanitarian visa policy for Haitians but noted that the policy had also benefited large numbers of refugees and migrants from Afghanistan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Ukraine. On the basis of the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, Brazil had also extended prima facie refugee recognition to new categories of vulnerable groups, including members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community from countries where such minorities were criminalized, and women and girls from countries where female genital mutilation was practised. The Government of Brazil had also recently created an intergovernmental working group to develop a comprehensive national policy on migration, refuge and statelessness, with the intention of going well beyond regularization and emergency assistance. All those pledges would be announced at the upcoming Global Refugee Forum.

7. The representative of **Sudan (the)** said that his country was facing an extremely difficult humanitarian situation as a result of the rebellion of the Rapid Support Forces on 15 April. The Rapid Support Forces had carried out acts of vandalism, sabotage and terrorism; they had attacked Government buildings and ministerial offices; hospitals had been turned into military barracks and universities had been set on fire. Embassies and international organizations had also been targeted, including the UNHCR building in Khartoum. Rebel groups also continued to attack civilians. Statistics showed that around 1.5 million people had been internally displaced, and 450,000 had crossed the border into neighbouring countries. He therefore requested assistance from UNHCR in order to address the situation, while thanking the Office for its Regional Refugee Response Plan, which outlined the significant financial assistance required. He urged the international community to support the effort by providing the necessary financing to implement the Plan.

8. Sudan (the) had been welcoming refugees and migrants for more than 50 years, in spite of its internal struggles. All refugees and asylum-seekers were treated with dignity and provided with employment opportunities in the agricultural, industrial or service sectors. Government statistics showed that there were around 1.5 million registered refugees in Sudan in 2022, and that 70,000 Ethiopian refugees had fled to the country between November 2020 and July 2021, as a result of the conflict in Tigray. Sudan had never shirked its responsibilities. While he thanked the countries that had offered to take in Sudanese refugees, he urged the international community to show greater flexibility and effort, since a number of countries had imposed harsh restrictions on the entry of Sudanese people, including stopping issuing visas to Sudanese nationals altogether, invalidating visas that had already been granted, or even imposing heavy fines on all Sudanese nationals who remained in a third country when their visas expired. Recalling the favourable response that had been granted to Ukrainian refugees and migrants when war had broken out there, he said that Sudan (the) expected equal treatment.

9. The representative of **Sweden**, aligning her remarks with the statement made on behalf of the European Union, welcomed the attention that had been given in the Note on international protection to the link between displacement and the enjoyment of key human rights. Indeed, human rights were universal and should be fully enjoyed by all, regardless of gender, religion, ethnic background, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity. A human-rights-based approach to protection was important and should be at the centre of the search for durable solutions, across the peace, humanitarian and development nexus.

10. In the wake of the illegal Russian aggression against Ukraine, Europe was continuing to experience its worst displacement crisis since the Second World War. Sweden applauded the crucial work of UNHCR in the region and continued to stand in solidarity with Ukraine. At the same time, the number of humanitarian crises around the world continued to grow, and she called for support to those in need of international protection in new, protracted and under-reported displacement situations. The upcoming Global Refugee Forum would be an opportunity to take stock and reaffirm the international commitment to global solidarity and to the central tenets of burden- and responsibility-sharing. Sweden commended UNHCR for its role in championing the centrality of protection and its leadership of the Global Protection Cluster, while recognizing that all agencies

were responsible for placing protection at the centre of humanitarian action. Protection and the reduction of risks were a system-wide collective responsibility.

11. During its presidency of the Council of the European Union, Sweden was pursuing work on the European Union asylum package. On 8 June, the Council had taken a decisive step towards reforming the Common European Asylum System by agreeing a negotiating position on the asylum procedure and management regulations, which would form the basis of negotiations with the European Parliament going forward. Sweden was a long-standing resettlement country and planned to continue receiving a quota of 900 refugees. Resettlement remained a sustainable, safe and organized way to offer international protection to refugees in the most vulnerable situations, as well as an important act of solidarity with host countries, so she urged more countries to offer it.

12. The Note on international protection was not a negotiated document and did not require approval by Member States, so there was no need for additional caveats to be included that might restrict the independence of the High Commissioner in the exercise of his duties.

13. The representative of **Mexico** noted that, more than 70 years after its establishment, the international refugee system remained a fundamental normative framework for promoting and protecting the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers. However, there were still challenges relating to insufficient responsibility-sharing and regional cooperation, as well as obstacles to effective access to protection and durable solutions. Such challenges required decisive rights-based responses as well as more holistic efforts to address the root causes that led people to need international protection. With regard to the management of mixed migratory flows, particularly in the Americas, it was important for policies and practices to conform to international protection standards, with an emphasis on respect for human rights and the dignity of all, regardless of migration status. That issue required greater synergies between the commitments of the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which complemented and reinforced one another. There was also a need for strengthened cooperation between UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and other humanitarian agencies and actors on the ground.

14. Greater effort was needed to prevent the concerning vulnerable situations faced by migrants on the main migration routes, including by diversifying pathways for regular migration, which would give the most vulnerable migrants more options, while also helping to optimize the limited resources of national refugee systems. It was also important to promote the economic, social and cultural rights of refugees and asylum-seekers. Mexico had implemented programmes promoting the inclusion of refugees in society, guaranteeing access to education, employment and health services. In terms of durable solutions, Mexico had adopted a package that included both voluntary, safe and dignified repatriation, local integration, and relocation to third countries. The Government was seeking alliances with other States, with UNHCR and other actors, to ensure that refugees found durable solutions that enabled them to live in peace and dignity.

15. Regional coordination was key to addressing the challenges of international protection. Mexico actively participated in regional initiatives and mechanisms, including the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS) and the Quito Process, which encouraged dialogue between States and the exchange of best practices, as well as promoting a more coordinated rights-based regional response. Looking towards the upcoming Global Refugee Forum, Mexico reiterated its commitment to the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees and hoped to continue working with UNHCR and other States to strengthen its efforts to provide effective assistance to those seeking international protection in the country.

16. The representative of **South Africa** said that full and effective implementation of the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights would go a long way towards reducing and preventing forced displacement. The root causes of forced displacement needed to be tackled from the perspective of the nexus between peace and stability, development and human rights. The international community should support countries of origin to encourage dialogue between communities in conflict, to allow for a return to peace and stability and create the conditions for voluntary, safe and sustainable return. That focus formed the basis of her country's solidarity with countries experiencing protracted humanitarian crises, including the Sahrawi and Palestinian people.

17. With regard to the challenges of mixed movement, South Africa agreed that capacity-building for development, strengthened border management and asylum systems was needed, and

was consolidating its immigration legislation in that regard. However, it was important to reflect on the responsibility of countries of origin to facilitate the return of nationals no longer in need of international protection. It was also in the best interests of UNHCR to guard against the misuse of international refugee law by economic migrants.

18. South Africa was a lower-middle-income country with a fragile economy, with declining living conditions in host communities and local municipalities struggling to provide services. However, it remained committed to improving the livelihoods of those living in the country. While people would always move between countries, the exercise of the right to freedom of movement should not encourage States to abdicate their responsibilities towards their nationals. Discussions relating to partnerships, including those with development banks, should take into account the conditions in the low- and middle-income countries that continued to carry the burden of hosting refugees. Solutions to enhancing international protection could not take a “one size fits all” approach.

19. The representative of **Switzerland** said that, over the past year, a number of fundamental principles of international protection had been broken or implemented unequally, in particular the principle of non-refoulement, which had been introduced in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, and which was closely linked to the right to asylum. He commended the efforts of UNHCR to support countries’ asylum systems; and stated that work should continue to strengthen the normative frameworks in partner countries. The decision to develop a five-year strategy on asylum capacity development was welcome in that regard. The upcoming Global Refugee Forum would also provide a good opportunity to strengthen international engagement on the matter, in particular through the adoption of a number of joint and global initiatives.

20. Owing to the growing duration of displacements, the question of inclusion in host country systems was increasingly relevant. Access to basic services, education and employment for refugees depended on better burden- and responsibility-sharing at the international level. The international community was requested to therefore make greater efforts to firm up that commitment. It was also crucial for the most vulnerable people to have adequate protection that was adapted to their needs. Switzerland also commended UNHCR for its efforts to strengthen the protection framework for the most vulnerable people. In that regard, Switzerland welcomed the Office’s work with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, to which it intended to contribute.

21. The representative of **Venezuela (the Bolivarian Republic of)** welcomed the information about the Chairperson’s recent visit to Colombia. It was good that a meeting of Ambassadors had been held in the region, but unfortunate that nobody from her country had been included. It was only through transparent and inclusive dialogue with the participation of all parties that durable solutions would be found. In that regard, she also welcomed the important advances made by the Government of Colombia in the peace talks led by President Petro. Turning to the Note on international protection, she said that her country had received almost six million refugees from many countries, who had been admitted to health, food, education and housing programmes without discrimination, in spite of the unilateral measures imposed on the country. UNHCR did not appear to show similar concern for that significant population.

22. Her delegation had repeatedly noted the tendency to confuse the definitions of refugees, asylum-seekers and immigrants, which was a challenge for the application of the different legal frameworks and could have serious implications on the methods of providing protection to both groups, in accordance with international law. It was important to process asylum requests properly, and the rigorous methodology in collecting data enabled refugee status to be determined and allowed people to receive the necessary international protection and enjoy the rights afforded to them, including the right to non-refoulement. Working together with States that had robust systems to determine refugee status would enable governments to develop legal protection measures with inclusive public policies for health, education and housing, among other things. In that regard, it was important to develop effective measures for seeking durable solutions. An effective international protection system depended on the international community’s ability and commitment to find durable solutions to refugee situations, such as voluntary repatriation. It was important to address international protection from the perspective of human rights through dialogue that included all actors, in the context of cooperation between nations, without politicizing the issue.

23. The representative of **Germany**, aligning his remarks with the statement made on behalf of the European Union, stressed the need for a rights-based response to displacement and its commitment to displaced persons worldwide. Human rights, and refugee rights in particular, guided its engagement and should be at the centre of every effort to respond to forced displacements. It was therefore a matter of deep concern that so many displaced persons could not fully enjoy their human rights, especially as global displacement continued to rise. In 2022, the war of aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine had caused global displacements to rise to more than 100 million persons, a trend which had continued in 2023 with the fighting in Sudan (the) and the devastating earthquake in Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic. Countries that hosted large numbers of refugees needed international support. Germany remained committed to burden- and responsibility-sharing. As a country with one of the largest numbers of refugees, it understood the difficulties that host countries faced.

24. Efficient asylum systems were central to the right to seek international protection. Germany commended States that had advanced their systems and welcomed all follow-up leading to a more performance-driven approach in the work of UNHCR. In that connection, he stressed the importance of allowing UNHCR full access to refugees, asylum-seekers and others crossing borders. It was essential to facilitate access to asylum in a non-discriminatory manner. International protection and access to asylum were fundamental principles and needed to be upheld in the context of mixed movements. Germany commended UNHCR and IOM for their efforts to ensure efficient coordination and collaboration in their joint responses.

25. Germany reiterated the importance of respecting the independence of the High Commissioner and his right to present his personal views to the General Assembly and its subsidiary organs, as enshrined in the UNHCR Statute. It was concerned about the repeated attempts to undermine his independence.

26. Germany had recently published new strategies focusing on women's rights. Protection from sexual and gender-based violence remained a priority for his Government. That was reflected in its commitment as the current lead State of the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies, which it would use to address such violence in displacement contexts at the Global Refugee Forum. Germany supported the participation of women and girls through its action network on forced displacement, and it urged UNHCR to continue its efforts to encourage a meaningful involvement of displaced persons, women and refugee-led organizations at all levels, including at the Global Refugee Forum.

27. His Government stressed the importance of inclusion. Access to education could have protection benefits, especially for girls. Germany hoped to make further progress in promoting access to education for displaced populations in the run-up to the Forum. His delegation commended UNHCR for its work on protection from sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment and encouraged it to continue extending its feedback mechanisms and accountability to affected populations.

28. UNHCR needed flexible and reliable funding to enable it to respond rapidly and predictably to both new and protracted crises and to provide swift protection when it was most needed. Germany was the Office's largest government provider of flexible funding. It commended donors that provided unearmarked, flexible funding and called on all donors to increase their share.

29. The representative of **Ecuador** said that, in order to protect persons fleeing violence and persecution, it was necessary to strengthen refugee systems, to apply a human rights-based focus and to ensure that there was no discrimination under any circumstances. Ecuador was continuing its efforts to improve and facilitate access to application procedures for foreign nationals in need of international protection. Between January and May 2023, it had received 3,555 refugee applications, primarily from Colombian and Venezuelan citizens. In January, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility had issued instructions concerning the procedure for determining the status of refugees and stateless persons which contained guarantees for international protection and standardized the application procedure.

30. Ecuador had adopted practical measures for the protection and regularization of Venezuelan and other nationals. A new decree granted amnesty for Venezuelan citizens and members of their families who had not registered their entry into Ecuador at official migration control points; such

persons were issued exceptional temporary residence visas. It was one of the countries in the region with the highest number of persons with recognized refugee status, more than 70,000 since 1989. The next Global Refugee Forum presented a fitting opportunity for donors and other stakeholders to step up their support for countries which, like Ecuador, hosted a large number of persons in need of international protection.

31. The representative of **Malta** said that her country aligned itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union. The situation in Afghanistan, Sudan (the) and the Syrian Arab Republic and the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine posed enormous challenges for receiving States. Malta remained committed to a just migration policy based on the dual notion that persons in need of protection were granted the rights and benefits to which they were entitled by law, while those who were not in need of protection were promptly returned to their country of origin.

32. Her delegation commended UNHCR's work in advancing community-based approaches to protection through its office in Malta. As noted in paragraph 37 of the Note on international protection, over the past year UNHCR had supported community mobilization programmes to combat female genital mutilation in Malta, where some cases had occurred in certain migrant groups. The Maltese authorities remained steadfast in their commitment to eradicate that practice and to meet the Sustainable Development Goal Target 5.3 deadline of zero female genital mutilation by 2030 and the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020–2024. The criminal code had been amended to combat that harmful practice. Malta welcomed the assistance of UNHCR in that regard and its employment of a community-based and whole-of-society approach.

33. Malta reiterated its support for the commitment of UNHCR to the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees. It looked forward to the second Global Refugee Forum later in 2023 and the opportunity to present new pledges to support implementation. It thanked UNHCR for its continued invaluable assistance and cooperation in all areas within its remit and hoped that it could be further strengthened going forward. It expressed appreciation to UNHCR personnel in field operations for their work in often challenging circumstances.

34. The representative of the **Russian Federation** said that his country supported UNHCR's efforts to improve the effectiveness of the international system for the protection of refugees, internally displaced persons, persons on the move within countries and stateless persons, in accordance with the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, which the Russian Federation strictly observed. The Russian Federation welcomed UNHCR's efforts to conclude an international agreement on refugees and to prepare the second Global Refugee Forum, a new milestone for strengthening the international protection system. It called on UNHCR to continue to work on the basis of the universal principles of neutrality, independence, impartiality and humanity, in full compliance with its mandate.

35. His delegation stressed the right of refugees to freely return to their country, which was often the best and most durable solution. It urged UNHCR to continue to contribute to the implementation of the Russian Federation's initiative regarding the voluntary repatriation of Syrian refugees and to actively work towards their reintegration in their country. His country had traditionally supported UNHCR's work aimed at eliminating statelessness and was particularly concerned about the widespread nature of statelessness in a number of European countries, which should be a priority on UNHCR's agenda. The elimination of statelessness was a key priority for the Russian Federation; some 800,000 stateless persons had been granted citizenship since 1992.

36. His delegation welcomed the work of the High Commissioner aimed at meeting the needs of internally displaced persons. That activity had a positive impact on the lives of many persons and often played a key role in promoting stability in various countries and regions. His country was also interacting with UNHCR as part of its international obligation to ensure the protection of refugees. National legislation guaranteed reliable protection on its territory for foreign citizens and stateless persons, regardless of their country of origin, beliefs, nationality or race. The Russian Federation had received more than 54,000 refugees from 64 countries. Legislation on migration would soon be passed introducing new approaches to the granting of asylum as part of a comprehensive reform of regulations governing entry into and residence in the country.

37. In 2022, large numbers of forcibly displaced persons had entered the Russian Federation on an emergency basis from the Donetsk and Luhansk Peoples' Republics, Zaporozhe, Kherson and Ukraine. The Russian Federation had made considerable efforts to ensure the protection of those persons and provide them with adequate living conditions. UNHCR staff could see for themselves the effectiveness of the efforts made by the Russian authorities to take in and offer temporary accommodation for such persons.

38. The representative of **Japan** said that his Government was deeply concerned that more than 110 million people had been forcibly displaced owing to conflict, violence, human rights abuses and persecution. Climate change and infectious diseases were prominent among the many factors that significantly impacted the phenomenon of displacement, giving rise to rapid increases in the number of refugees and internally displaced persons and resulting in prolonged displacement. Japan paid tribute to the staff of UNHCR for their dedicated work under difficult conditions, and it was grateful to UNHCR's senior management team for its strong leadership.

39. In response to the many crises facing the international community, his Government had recently revised its Development Cooperation Charter. The Charter aimed to achieve quality growth and poverty eradication, promote peaceful, secure and stable societies, strengthen a free and open international order based on the rule of law, and lead international efforts to address increasingly complex and serious global issues. Japan would continue to provide assistance for refugees and internally displaced persons, in cooperation with UNHCR and the international community, with a view to implementing its Development Cooperation Charter and the Global Compact on Refugees.

40. The representative of **Israel** welcomed the focus placed in the Note on international protection on the human rights of persons of concern, as well as the information on child protection and protection from gender-based violence and the emphasis placed on education. However, it would have appreciated receiving information concerning actions taken to prevent and combat sexual exploitation and abuse. As a co-Chair of the Geneva Group of Friends to Eliminate Sexual Harassment, Exploitation and Abuse, Israel stood ready to support UNHCR in that effort, and stated that every opportunity must be taken to update all members.

41. Israel welcomed the information referring to persons with disabilities, such as the cooperation with the International Disability Alliance, the launch of the disability inclusion facilitator's guide and the examples provided regarding cooperation between UNHCR and States. It was, however, disappointed that the explanation of activities conducted concerning the protection of persons with disabilities and their participation was limited to only one paragraph of the Note on international protection. In 2022, with the adoption of the omnibus resolution, for the first time a call had been included for an update on the progress on implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy. Israel commended the strong commitment of the leadership of UNHCR and the personal commitment of many staff members. However, it would like to see a stronger commitment at all levels of management and staff to make it clear that inclusion of persons with disabilities and their rights was a cross-cutting issue that needed to be addressed in every programme, policy and activity, as called for by the Strategy, bearing in mind that at least 15 per cent of the world population were persons with disabilities.

42. Israel welcomed the focus of UNHCR on addressing the needs of persons of concern without any discrimination and promoting a strong age, gender and diversity approach. It renewed its support for the programmes, plans and policies that referred to women, children, persons with disabilities and the LGBTI+ population.

43. His delegation joined others in stressing that the Note on international protection was not a document negotiated by Member States but had been prepared by the Organization. Caveats, footnotes and the like were not needed, especially since the inclusive and realistic approach of UNHCR was exemplary within the United Nations system. To make the idea of "leaving no one behind" a reality, it was necessary to act together. Israel stood ready to play its part.

44. The representative of the **Kingdom of the Netherlands** said that his country aligned itself with the statement made by the European Union and its Member States. With regard to paragraph 16 of the Note on international protection, his delegation stressed that the Note was not a negotiated document, but reflected the High Commissioner's views, which his Government shared and

supported. All persons of concern entitled to protection under the Convention should have access to that protection and should be treated equally and enjoy the same basic rights.

45. His country recognized its own responsibility to offer protection to persons seeking safety. The growing number of asylum applications and requests for family reunification and temporary protection, the aftermath of the pandemic of coronavirus disease (COVID-19), the response to the situation in Afghanistan and the illegal Russian war in Ukraine had strained the country's asylum reception and housing capacity as well as educational and other public services, and his country therefore appreciated the efforts made by host countries of lesser means or those which faced droughts, floods and earthquakes that adversely affected the lives and livelihoods of their own populations. It commended in particular those countries that had taken steps for refugee inclusion, including in the wake of the conflict in Sudan (the). His country supported those efforts through contributions to UNHCR and in partnerships aimed at creating jobs for refugees, providing for their livelihoods and assisting the host communities in many countries. It had joined the mega pledge on economic inclusion and social protection and was planning to increase its support through the Partnership for Improving Prospects for host communities and forcibly displaced persons over the coming four years. It called on other donors to follow suit.

46. His delegation asked what steps UNHCR was taking to help organize the safe and dignified return of refugees. His country urged UNHCR to further strengthen its capacity to fulfil its important mandate and stood ready to support it in identifying ways of moving forward in promoting its implementation.

47. The representative of **Egypt** said that her country aligned itself with the statements delivered by the groups of which it was a member. Egypt supported UNHCR's vision of the convergence between the rights entailed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the international protection of refugees and persons of concern. Along with Bangladesh, Colombia, Nigeria and the Philippines, it had highlighted that important relationship during a side event held during the fifty-second session of the Human Rights Council, at which UNHCR, the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights and a number of civil society organizations working in the field of asylum had participated.

48. As a signatory of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the Organization of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, Egypt upheld the right of asylum of those in need of international protection. According to an IOM report, in 2021 Egypt had hosted more than 290,000 refugees and asylum-seekers registered with the UNHCR, in addition to 9 million migrants and refugees, including migrants in refugee-like situations. With the ongoing crisis in Sudan (the), those numbers continued to grow. From the outset, Egypt had opened its borders to more than 210,000 Sudanese persons fleeing the conflict and had provided them with medical and humanitarian assistance. That increased the burdens shouldered by her Government and the hosting communities, whose commitment to receiving refugees and asylum-seekers and providing them with basic services, in line with international and regional obligations, was unwavering. It also placed a greater strain on the services provided by the Government to ensure the inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers in national systems and their social cohesion in their hosting communities, and it made it more likely that such persons would embark on dangerous journeys in search of better living conditions elsewhere.

49. Egypt emphasized the challenges associated with the growing trend of mixed movements. It welcomed the joint UNHCR-IOM Framework of Engagement in that regard and underscored the need for a more comprehensive approach in dealing with people on the move, including categories which were not accounted for, such as migrants in refugee-like situations and unregistered populations in need of international protection.

50. The challenge of large-scale displacement and unregistered populations had been highlighted during the current crisis in Sudan (the), where out of the more than 210,000 Sudanese persons who had entered Egypt, only 13,000 had approached UNHCR for international protection. That compounded the burdens borne by Egypt, given the lack of international assistance and development support for those unregistered groups, and it showed the importance of more context-specific approaches in responding to such challenges.

51. The current ongoing crisis in Sudan (the) also highlighted the need to address the root causes of displacement and to invest in building the resilience of local and hosting communities. Conditions for return to the countries of origin must be ensured by channelling assistance across the peace, humanitarian and development nexus.

52. As a host country, Egypt had long provided refugees and asylum-seekers with protection and basic services on an equal footing with Egyptian citizens, including in the areas of health and at all levels of education. It had launched a Joint Platform for Migrants and Refugees with the aim of mobilizing international support for services provided for people in need of international protection and their host communities.

53. However, with persistent underfunding and lack of substantial international support, and the continuing influx of refugees and asylum-seekers, the sustainability and quality of such services, and consequently the livelihoods of both refugees and persons in the host communities, were increasingly at risk. Egypt stressed the need to ensure equitable and sustainable burden- and responsibility-sharing and to propose solutions and opportunities for refugees and asylum-seekers in a more balanced manner that did not focus solely on inclusion in host communities without an equal emphasis on enhancing durable solutions, such as encouraging voluntary return, addressing the root causes of forced displacement and promoting opportunities for resettlement in third countries and complementary pathways.

54. The representative of **Spain** said that her delegation aligned itself with the statement by the European Union. Persons fled their countries for a variety of reasons, and it had become increasingly difficult to draw a line between asylum-seekers and migrants. Without the generosity of host countries and communities, their situation would be even worse.

55. The principle of burden- and responsibility-sharing was more important than ever, and everyone was called upon to play a more active role in taking concrete measures that produced tangible results. Together with the growing need at national level to review protection and inclusion mechanisms so as to better reflect the current international situation, such mechanisms must ensure safe and orderly migration and provide more resources for host countries.

56. The number of displaced persons in Spain had skyrocketed, from 2,600 persons requesting asylum in 2013 to 120,000 in 2023. To address the problem, her Government had overhauled and upgraded its Asylum and Refugee Office, with UNHCR's assistance, to provide greater financial means, personnel, technological resources and transparency; that had led to a fourfold increase in the number of international protection cases settled. In 2022, 91,000 applications had been processed, and more than 14,000 persons from Afghanistan, Colombia, Mali, the Syrian Arab Republic, Ukraine, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and elsewhere had been granted refugee status, subsidiary protection or protection for humanitarian reasons. Between 2019 and 2022, 57.2 per cent of requests for the status of statelessness had been granted, reducing by a factor of four the number of cases pending. As in many European countries, Spain had put in place a temporary protection mechanism for Ukrainians who had fled the Russian invasion. Spain currently hosted more than 161,000 Ukrainian nationals.

57. To improve the country's international protection system, regulations for foreign nationals had been revised to promote integration and make it easier for migrants to find employment. Spain had begun issuing multiannual work permits for foreign nationals from Colombia, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala and Honduras. A similar arrangement had already existed for more than 10 years with Morocco, and a pilot project had been put in place with Senegal. Regulations for family reunification had been updated.

58. Spain was firmly committed to increasing its assistance for development and humanitarian action. Legislation on international cooperation passed earlier in the year provided that such assistance would attain 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product by 2030.

59. The representative of **Australia** welcomed UNHCR's ongoing efforts to promote normative and operational collaboration across the peace, humanitarian and development nexus in order to support affected populations and their host communities. In that connection, he commended the World Bank's recent World Development Report, which demonstrated the positive development outcomes that could be realized if the economic potential of refugees was harnessed. His delegation

commended UNHCR's strong commitment to integrating age, gender and diversity considerations into its policies, programmes and advocacy work. Australia supported UNHCR's work to better prevent, respond to and mitigate the risks of gender-based violence and encouraged the Office to elaborate further on its progress in implementing the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy.

60. Australia welcomed UNHCR's efforts to promote the meaningful participation of refugees. Refugee voices needed to be central to the consideration of international protection at both the global and the community level. To that end, Australia would once again include a refugee as part of its delegation to the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement at the end of the month, and it would for the first time include a refugee in its delegation to the Global Refugee Forum.

61. Australia remained committed to collaborating to find solutions to refugee crises in its region. It was supportive of UNHCR's efforts, including with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, to promote a comprehensive regional response to the situation in Myanmar, expand solutions for Rohingya refugees and maintain support for host countries. It remained one of the largest and most consistent donors to the Rohingya refugee response. Myanmar nationals were one of the largest caseloads in the Australian resettlement programme and, as co-Chair of the Bali Process, Australia had recently activated the consultation mechanism to address irregular maritime movements in the Andaman Sea.

62. Australia maintained a long-term commitment to providing one of the world's largest resettlement programmes on both an absolute and per capita basis. It continued to focus on persons in greatest need of resettlement, including women and girls, ethnic minorities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer persons and other identified minority groups. Australia also encouraged the expansion of complementary pathways. His country recognized the generosity of host countries and communities and remained committed to global responsibility-sharing. It would continue to work with UNHCR and other partners, including in the run-up to the Global Refugee Forum.

63. The representative of **Cameroon** said that her country aligned itself with the statement by the African Group. She referred to a comment in paragraph 41 of the Note on international protection, according to which in Cameroon life skills programmes for adolescent boys and girls had been scaled back, and the number of children with disabilities who received support had declined. Her delegation wondered what assessment methods had been used to make such an assertion, and she pointed out that the right to education was at the core of her country's priorities, as underscored in legislation passed in 1998. At international level, Cameroon had acceded to the Convention Against Discrimination in Education of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in 1960 and had acceded to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Her country's determination to promote education had been reaffirmed in a number of projects and programmes, including the 2020–2030 national development strategy. The refugees and displaced persons, and adolescents in particular, whom Cameroon hosted lived together with the nationals of the country under identical socioeconomic conditions. Of course, there was always room to improve the protection of such persons and encourage their personal development, and her Government would continue to work to that end, in which endeavour it asked for UNHCR support. Cameroon thanked UNHCR for its support of the programmes under way in the country to promote decent conditions for persons fleeing persecution and oppression.

64. The representative of the **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** said that the growing global protection needs arising from new and existing displacement crises had stretched the capacity of humanitarian response, but it was the international community's shared responsibility to maintain a focus on humanitarian crises everywhere. In that connection, the United Kingdom expressed gratitude to the host communities for providing vital support and assistance to refugees.

65. Her delegation strongly condemned the outbreak of hostilities in Sudan (the) and called on the parties concerned to put an end to the conflict. It commended the work of UNHCR, which was key to supporting refugees fleeing the violence in Sudan (the) and in neighbouring countries, and it welcomed plans by UNHCR to co-host the pledging conference for Sudan on the following Monday. It was more important than ever to prioritize response plans to target life-saving assistance to those most in need. She expressed her delegation's concern at the attempts of some members to influence the independence of the High Commissioner's Note on international protection.

66. Her delegation welcomed the call for increased partnership and looked forward to hearing the results of the Framework of Engagement on mixed movements developed by UNHCR and IOM. Moreover, she welcomed the establishment of the Advisory Board to the UNHCR Task Team on Engagement and Partnership with Organizations led by Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons and asked what progress had been made and whether any challenges had arisen.

67. The United Kingdom would continue to offer protection to those in need by setting up safe and legal routes, as it had done in the case of Afghanistan, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of China, the Syrian Arab Republic and Ukraine. Likewise, it would strengthen education systems and continue to provide children displaced by conflict and crisis with safe, quality education in order to reduce their vulnerability to exploitation, gender-based violence and abuse. The United Kingdom would take a leading role in developing an education mega pledge.

68. Her delegation commended UNHCR on its work to support the implementation of the Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement and encouraged UNHCR to continue efforts in that regard. Her delegation also welcomed the establishment of the Global Alliance to End Statelessness and looked forward to continued collaboration. She expressed appreciation to UNHCR for the progress it had made in creating the conditions for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of displaced persons, particularly the 207,000 Burundian refugees mentioned in the report.

69. The representative of **Armenia** said that more attention should be paid to preventing displacement and addressing the root causes of large-scale refugee movements and protracted refugee situations, particularly in the context of grave and systemic human rights violations or threats of mass atrocities such as ethnic cleansing. Doing so would vastly contribute to international efforts to address forced displacement and reduce the associated financial burden.

70. Armenia took note of the adoption of the multi-year workplan designed to address various priorities related to displacement, including in the context of armed conflict. She acknowledged the special role of UNHCR in contributing to the prevention of displacement by being present on the ground, particularly in the early stages of impending mass displacement. Her delegation was keen to engage in further discussions with UNHCR and all Member States interested in strengthening the focus on prevention and the root causes of displacement.

71. The representative of **Pakistan**, aligning his delegation with the statement by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and noting the comments by several Member States that the Note on international protection was not up for negotiation, recalled that its purpose had been to help the High Commissioner perform his role in a better, but nonetheless impartial, manner; restraint was therefore required, particularly when dealing with political and religious convictions.

72. Globally, three-quarters of refugees were hosted by low to middle-income countries. Forty per cent of refugees were hosted by three countries, one of which was Pakistan; together those countries represented just 1.6 per cent of global GDP. Despite facing an economic downturn as a result of health-care emergencies, protracted and new conflicts and unrelenting climate emergencies, those countries were shouldering a disproportionate burden in terms of international responsibility to protect refugees. That situation was compounded by perennial shortfalls in humanitarian funding, a lack of political will and mobilization of resources and an unequal distribution of resources.

73. Pakistan hosted millions of Afghan refugees and had continued to welcome new arrivals, particularly after August 2021. Despite the impact of floods in 2022, which had affected 33 million people, including 800,000 refugees, and led to acute food insecurity, Pakistan maintained an inclusive, generous and compassionate approach to refugees and continued to provide for their basic health care, education and livelihood needs. Proof of registration cards had been issued to registered Afghan refugees to improve their access to essential services, and work was ongoing to expand higher education opportunities for Afghan youth, including girls, in the fields of medicine, engineering, agriculture and management. Pakistan was also using all available communication channels with the de facto authorities in Afghanistan to advocate for the return of girls and women to education. Moreover, in collaboration with UNHCR, one-time cash assistance had been provided to 247,000 refugee families following the recent floods.

74. Hosting large numbers of refugees had a long-term impact on the socioeconomic indicators of host communities. His delegation therefore shared the view that protection and development were

mutually interdependent and reinforcing; however, it was necessary to comprehensively review donor priorities, international political will and the financing models of development actors in order to successfully adopt such an intersectoral approach, meaningfully implement the principle of burden- and responsibility-sharing and foster international solidarity. Without adequate funding and strong political will, the growing numbers of refugees and the absence of durable solutions would continue to negatively impact the international protection regime.

75. The representative of **Morocco** said that it was crucial to preserve the integrity of the international protection system in order to effectively provide durable solutions for refugees and address the underlying causes of forced displacement.

76. Access to services was a vital aspect of the right to asylum. In that connection, his country was currently hosting the Third Global Consultation on the Health of Refugees and Migrants, marking the first time that a specific focus had been placed on refugee health and highlighting the importance of pledges made outside the Global Refugee Forum.

77. Morocco welcomed efforts by UNHCR in over 50 countries to improve the quality and efficiency of refugee status determination as a means of facilitating socioeconomic inclusion, since without registration refugees were unable to access basic services, faced movement restrictions and confinement to camps, and suffered from increased gender-based violence, vulnerability, exploitation, discrimination and exclusion.

78. The representative of **Denmark**, aligning her delegation's remarks with the European Union statement, said that the increase in the number of forcibly displaced persons, driven, in particular, by the illegal Russian war aggression against Ukraine, was deeply troubling.

79. She commended UNHCR for having strongly stressed the universality of human rights and the need to place them at the centre of all efforts to prevent and respond to forced displacement. She also welcomed the Office's continued commitment to preventing, mitigating and responding to sexual and gender-based violence and promoting gender equality, and she encouraged further work in that area.

80. Most refugees were hosted in the countries neighbouring their country of origin and she commended the generosity of those host countries and communities. Nevertheless, with humanitarian needs growing globally among both refugee and host communities, it was vital to implement integrated, sustainable approaches with a long-term development perspective that would benefit both the displaced and the host communities. She therefore welcomed the continued strong focus of UNHCR on working with development partners, such as the World Bank, and hoped that those partnerships would continue to be strengthened in 2023. She also welcomed the strengthened partnership with IOM on mixed movement.

81. She was concerned about the number of people who continued to put their lives in the hands of people smugglers, often with disastrous consequences. Her country wished to create a more humane and fair asylum system in Europe, with a focus on addressing the root causes of irregular migration. Denmark was looking at all viable solutions in that regard and welcomed the European Union agreement of 8 June 2023 on key asylum and migration laws.

82. She reiterated her country's strong support for UNHCR and its conviction that the High Commissioner's ability to independently express his professional views was central to the functioning of the Office and provided the best basis for the response to the plight of forcibly displaced persons.

83. The representative of **Austria**, aligning his delegation's remarks with the European Union statement, said that war and armed conflict, such as the brutal Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and current conflicts in Afghanistan, Myanmar, Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, represented the most extreme accumulation of human rights violations. Human rights were the foundation of free societies and thriving communities; their universal application was both non-negotiable and a prerequisite for the achievement of lasting peace, security and development.

84. His country commended UNHCR on its implementation of the Policy on the Prevention of, Risk Mitigation, and Response to Gender-based Violence and its work to ensure access to sexual and reproductive health and rights. Moreover, it commended UNHCR on the successful enrolment of 1.4 million refugee children in primary education since 2012 and its ongoing work to expand higher education opportunities. Likewise, it highly valued the Office's actions to provide inclusive protection and support for persons of concern with disabilities.

85. Austria welcomed the Office's global work to address statelessness, including its new strategic plan on responding to statelessness until 2026 and its endeavours to establish a global alliance to end statelessness. Likewise, his country welcomed the commitments made by many States to end gender discrimination in their nationality laws, provide universal birth registration and safeguard against child statelessness.

86. Austria expressed appreciation to UNHCR for its comprehensive guidance in matters of international protection, which was not only relevant in relation to multilateral cooperation but also in the granting of protection by the country's domestic asylum authorities. In that connection, in 2023, Austrian asylum authorities had granted international protection in over 6,000 cases and subsidiary protection in over 3,000 cases.

87. Austria fully supported the Office's commitment to protecting the rights of forcibly displaced and stateless LGBTIQ+ persons. It was unacceptable that, in the twenty-first century, people were forced to flee their countries because of their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression or sexual characteristics. His country condemned any laws or practices prohibiting same sex relationships, especially those prescribing the death penalty, and remained deeply concerned by the refusal or inability of some States to offer protection to LGBTIQ+ persons suffering or at risk of violence or abuse. In that connection, he also wished to stress that the High Commissioner could independently report and speak on the realities and challenges on the ground within his mandate.

88. Austria supported the practice of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme in issuing conclusions on international protection. It welcomed the agreement reached on the draft decision of the next multi-year workplan for Executive Committee conclusions and considered the three topics identified for 2024–2026 to be both important and timely.

89. The representative of **Zambia**, aligning his delegation's remarks with the statement by the African Group, said that his country had a long-standing history of providing refuge, protection and access to basic services to those fleeing persecution, conflict and natural disasters.

90. Hosting refugees placed strain on local infrastructure, resources and services such as health care, education, water, sanitation and housing. It was therefore necessary to mobilize additional resources and improve coordination with stakeholders in order to ensure access to quality services for both refugee and host communities. In that connection, his country was working to ensure that the issue of documentation for all refugees, especially children born in the country, was definitively resolved in 2023. Refugees were now being included in agricultural cooperatives.

91. In terms of coordination, robust partnerships had been established between government entities, UNHCR, other agencies and non-governmental organizations. Following extensive consultation, a new modernizing approach had been developed to better address the needs of refugees and host communities and ensure efficient use of resources. Moreover, ongoing monitoring was being carried out to assess the effectiveness of interventions, address emerging needs and identify gaps in service provision.

92. Zambia requested that countries consider accepting other nationalities for resettlement as a durable solution. He wished to know why refugees from Rwanda, who were also vulnerable, were being excluded and discriminated against. Such action also had an impact on security within host countries, since some of those claiming to be Congolese refugees were not, in fact, Congolese, but could see that refugees of that nationality were being prioritized. Extending resettlement to Rwandan refugees would ensure that genuine refugees received support.

93. The representative of **Türkiye**, aligning his delegation's remarks with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation statement, said that he was deeply concerned by the global rise in forced displacement and the deepening inequality in burden- and responsibility-sharing. If such trends

continued, the systematic breakdown of the international protection system was likely. Hosting countries, of which Türkiye had been the largest for almost a decade, had shown tremendous generosity; however, such situations were unsustainable. The Global Refugee Forum was only effective if accompanied by a joint willingness to act. His country trusted that the Forum would work to expand solutions, especially those involving return.

94. His country appreciated the emphasis UNHCR had placed on development and peace in tackling the root causes of displacement. Türkiye, however, remained concerned about the state of the international protection regime, particularly in the light of developments such as externalization, pushback practices and expulsions; it trusted that UNHCR would act swiftly, implementing a system-wide coordinated approach to address such protection issues.

95. Türkiye welcomed the strong emphasis the Assistant High Commissioner and colleagues had placed on human rights. In that connection, his country wished to express its appreciation for the work of other international platforms, such as the Human Rights Council; it trusted that the selection of the new Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants would not jeopardize the credibility of the mandate or the protection of migrants, including persons of concern to UNHCR.

96. The representative of **Ukraine** (observer), said that the global humanitarian outlook had been shaped by the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, which had resulted in the displacement of over 19.5 million people. Over 5.1 million Ukrainians continued to benefit from temporary protection, and Ukraine was deeply grateful to all host countries.

97. The continued attacks on civilians and critical civilian infrastructure including the destruction of the Kakhovka dam on 6 June 2023 by the Russian Federation amounted to war crimes; such actions were fuelling a protracted displacement crisis of outstanding proportions and would have far-reaching global consequences. Ukraine therefore urged international humanitarian organizations, including UNHCR, to redouble their efforts to obtain complete, safe, rapid and unimpeded access to Russian-occupied parts of the country in order to provide emergency relief.

98. Ukraine was particularly concerned about the violation of the right to nationality of persons living in the territories temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation, who were being forced to acquire Russian citizenship under the threat of losing their homes, jobs and access to various services. It resolutely condemned any legislation introduced by the Russian Federation for that purpose, which it considered to be null and void.

99. The forced transfer of over two million Ukrainians from the temporarily occupied territory by the Russian Federation was also deeply concerning, as was the forced transfer of over 19,000 Ukrainian children to the Russian Federation or Russian-occupied territories within Ukraine. His country called on UNHCR to secure full and unhindered access to temporary shelters and “filtration” camps and to forcibly displaced Ukrainian children and to facilitate the safe return of the latter to Ukraine.

100. The representative of **Iraq** (observer), aligning her delegation’s remarks with the statements of the Arab Group and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, wished to express her concern about the growing number of refugees and internally displaced persons worldwide and the current humanitarian challenges brought about by armed conflicts, climate change and water shortages. Tackling such challenges, which particularly affected host countries, required international solidarity and innovative approaches.

101. Iraq was a country of origin, transit and destination for a large number of refugees. It had hosted tens of thousands of refugees from neighbouring countries and ensured the provision of medical care, education and access to asylum in accordance with international standards.

102. Her delegation called on the international community to show solidarity and implement equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing with regard to refugees in host countries. Systems must be developed to address the root causes of crises, and international support for the most vulnerable groups must be maintained while upholding social and other values.

103. The representative of **Panama** (observer) wished to express her country’s gratitude to the Deputy High Commissioner for her visit to Panama and also to commend the Office on its valuable

work to support her Government in addressing the mixed movement of migrants and refugees, which had increased in recent years.

104. As President Pro Tempore of MIRPS, Panama had presented the Regional Action Plan 2023, with the support of UNHCR, in May 2023, and it advocated for cooperation with neighbouring countries to share best practices and ensure safe, orderly and regular migration. In that connection, the “Binational Controlled Flow Operation” had been established to protect migrants travelling north from transnational organized crime, particularly human trafficking.

105. On a national level, her country was implementing its national plan for the refugee and migrant population, which focused on protection, education, health, employment and social protection. There were also temporary migrant reception stations at border crossing points to provide humanitarian aid, food and medical care for migrants and refugees. Moreover, her Government had launched a public campaign with the message that the Darién National Park was not a migration route, but a world heritage site. Mass migration through the park was causing water pollution, affecting both migrants and the Indigenous Peoples who lived there.

106. The **representative of the NGOs** emphasized the importance of including older people who had been forcibly displaced alongside other potentially at-risk groups in any Executive Committee conclusion. The Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine had demonstrated that older people continued to be overlooked. The UNHCR document Working with Older Persons in Forced Displacement provided valuable insights into the challenges faced by older people in displacement situations, although the application of the guidance had not been adequate thus far. All protection strategies must acknowledge the intersecting identities of older people as part of a comprehensive approach consistent with the UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity.

107. The health and care needs and social or economic status of older people could make them even more vulnerable during crisis situations, leaving them isolated, neglected and without a support network. That was particularly the case for older women and older persons with disabilities, who experienced a heightened risk of violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect and often encountered multiple and intersecting barriers to accessing essential services. Those issues were compounded by ageism and ableism on the part of humanitarian responders. The guidance in the UNHCR Approach to Persons With Disabilities in Displacement should be implemented in all settings.

108. She encouraged UNHCR and its partners to promote and support involving older people and at-risk groups in all aspects of shaping, implementing and monitoring programmes, policies and pledges. The exclusion of older people from data collection, needs assessments and registration processes led to a lack of understanding of the specific barriers they faced. UNHCR should require the collection, analysis, use and reporting of age-, gender- and disability-disaggregated data in all programmes; however, any sharing of such data should be consistent with the recently updated Inter-Agency Standing Committee guidelines on data sharing.

109. She urged UNHCR to ensure that the rights and well-being of older refugees and asylum-seekers were considered and upheld as part of a safe and dignified voluntary return process. Those who had been granted settled status should enjoy equal access to services in national health care, housing and social assistance programmes in order to facilitate their socioeconomic integration. Resettlement and complementary pathways were another key solution for displaced older people; UNHCR should work with resettlement countries on admitting older people as a priority and ensuring that their particular needs were taken into account when providing access to health care and housing services.

110. The **Assistant High Commissioner for Protection (UNHCR)**, responding to the points raised, expressed her appreciation for representatives’ support for the work of UNHCR and their understanding of the challenges of achieving its desired outcomes. She welcomed the understanding by many delegates of the entirely non-political, humanitarian and social character of UNHCR’s protection work.

111. The dangers faced by people seeking protection had been made tragically clear by the shipwreck, that very morning, of a refugee ship off the town of Pylos in Greece, with major loss of life. In response to representatives’ comments on additional responses to provide protection within mixed and onward movements, as well as for whole-journey approaches, she acknowledged that

many felt that a “comprehensive” response was critical and pointed to the collaborative framework with IOM as an example of future joint working approaches to provide protection for those kinds of movements. In respect of concerns about the asylum backlogs and the resulting increased vulnerabilities experienced by refugees, she stressed that the Office was striving to promote streamlined asylum processes as part of its commitment to supporting States in implementing fair and fast asylum systems.

112. She welcomed the consensus around solidarity and responsibility-sharing. She thanked the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan, which were protecting a total of 8.2 million displaced people, but noted the importance of redistributing that heavy and disproportionate burden. The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Refugee Forum in December 2023 were intended to provide opportunities to share that responsibility more equitably.

113. She acknowledged the need, emphasized in representatives’ statements, to pursue protection and solutions in tandem. UNHCR and its partners were working to improve and increase the number of resettlement options provided across the world. She further took note of the calls for greater consideration of disability and the particular needs of women and older people in protection approaches. The performance of UNHCR against the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy would be assessed in greater detail at the forthcoming Executive Committee meeting in October 2023. Providing a voice for persons who had experienced statelessness or displacement was an essential commitment in UNHCR’s work; more collaborative work was being done to enable refugees and refugee-led groups to participate meaningfully.

114. She acknowledged that funding was an ongoing problem and praised government responses to recent humanitarian crises. Despite many governments significantly stepping up their support, there were still substantial financing shortfalls for the Office’s humanitarian operations.

115. The **Director of the Division of International Protection** welcomed the unequivocal commitment of delegates to the international refugee protection system and praised the positive steps taken by some countries to address asylum backlogs, reinforce safeguards and recognize status on a prima facie basis. Acknowledging calls from a number of representatives for increased efforts to address the challenges related to returning people not in need of international protection, she pointed to UNHCR’s work with its partners in the UN Network on Migration to facilitate the dignified and safe return of the persons concerned to their countries of origin. In response to calls to strengthen protection for refugees moving alongside migrants in mixed movements, she welcomed the comments on the value of regional cooperation and regional platforms, and welcomed representatives’ recognition of the Executive Committee and Standing Committee as valuable forums for a frank and fruitful dialogue. She acknowledged the many concerns expressed about statelessness and about climate change as a driver of displacement.

116. A number of delegates had raised concerns about racism, xenophobia and hate speech and had stressed the importance of access to basic rights without any kind of discrimination. Many representatives had emphasized the importance of inclusion and had given examples of ways in which they made services and facilities available to refugees, in particular by enrolling significant numbers of girls in their education systems. They had also stressed the importance of involving refugees as actors for development.

117. The reference in the Note to the scaling-back of life-skills programmes for adolescents and support for children with disabilities in Cameroon applied to services previously provided by UNHCR, which had been reduced due to dwindling resources. That was one example of the potential adverse effects if the funding shortfall were to continue.

118. She thanked the many delegations who had noted the prevalence of gender-based violence within their societies and emphasized the importance of both prevention and responses in order to address it. The reference to Nigeria in paragraph 50 of the Note was in the context of a positive initiative in several countries, entitled “engaging men in accountable practices”. The reference in the same paragraph to “engaging communities in addressing harmful social norms and practices” denoted an overall priority of the Office and was not intended to apply to any specific country.

b. b. Statelessness (including an update on the #IBelong campaign)

119. The **Director of the Division of International Protection**, introducing document EC/74/SC/CRP.12, noted that 55 of the 289 high-level pledges on statelessness adopted in 2019 had been achieved, with a further 103 in progress. The upcoming Global Refugee Forum presented a crucial opportunity to implement the outstanding pledges more quickly and renew further commitments around ending statelessness.

120. Since the update presented to the Standing Committee in 2021, Kazakhstan, Kenya and Uzbekistan had taken major steps to tackle statelessness, through a national identification and documentation campaign in Kazakhstan, recognition of the Pemba people as citizens in Kenya and progressive changes to nationality laws in Uzbekistan. Prevention was highlighted as a key tool for addressing statelessness. Liberia and the Philippines had implemented statutory provisions to prevent statelessness from arising. Those reforms were welcomed, but further work was required to ensure equal rights for all. Other countries, including Albania, Benin, Colombia, the Kingdom of the Netherlands and Turkmenistan, had adopted legislation to establish statelessness determination procedures, which were also playing a vital role in identifying and providing legal recognition and protection for stateless migrants. The Philippines and Togo had acceded to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, and Togo had also acceded to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons.

121. The Office had enhanced its qualitative and quantitative data sets on stateless populations, which meant that more stateless individuals were being reported – a total of 4.3 million stateless people in 95 countries as at June 2022. The endorsement of the International Recommendations on Statelessness Statistics by the United Nations Statistical Commission in 2023 was a key milestone for work in that area.

122. Statelessness had been identified as a strategic UNHCR focus area from 2022 to 2026, and accordingly a strategic plan was being developed to address statelessness collaboratively with partners and to enhance efforts across the Office. In 2023 and 2024, the #IBelong campaign would focus on statelessness and development to deepen engagement with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and leverage partnerships with development actors. Upon the conclusion of the #IBelong campaign in 2024, UNHCR would establish a global multi-stakeholder alliance to significantly expand engagement with key global, regional and national stakeholders.

123. The representative of the **United States of America** expressed her appreciation for UNHCR's leadership of the #IBelong campaign and noted the immense progress achieved. Her delegation viewed statelessness as a legal or administrative problem created by States, which was solvable if they chose to act. Therefore, she urged all countries to take action and advocate for domestic and international reforms to eradicate the phenomenon.

124. She outlined her country's financial support for UN bodies and agencies working in the area of statelessness, including more than \$1.4 million in direct support for relevant NGOs and the highest contribution of any Member State to UNHCR. The United States advocated in UN forums for nationality rights and other legal reforms in countries where national laws discriminated against women. It had pledged to adopt a definition of statelessness for its own domestic immigration system and to build a process for making statelessness determinations.

125. Despite the increased involvement of affected-community-led organizations and civil society in efforts to reduce and prevent statelessness, more needed to be done, particularly in creating reliable global-statelessness data sets. The International Recommendations on Statelessness Statistics were a potential solution to address the data gap.

126. The representative of the **Philippines** expressed his gratitude to UNHCR and international and civil society organizations. The spirited political ambition of the #IBelong campaign and the High-Level Segment on Statelessness in 2019 had encouraged his country to refine its own national policies on naturalization and child statelessness. The Philippines commended the determined efforts to mainstream the #IBelong campaign and reiterated its continued commitment to supporting that advocacy work as UNHCR set up its multi-stakeholder global alliance. Upon the conclusion of the #IBelong campaign, the Office's work must focus on data improvements and efforts to reach remote areas and fill any policy gaps. He asked whether there would be a special session at the end of the #IBelong campaign to review the progress made.

127. The representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland praised UNHCR's coordination and leadership of the #IBelong campaign and re-emphasized her country's support for greater development cooperation and the strategic focus adopted for the remainder of the campaign. She looked forward to the global alliance that would succeed the campaign.

128. Despite the progress made by Kazakhstan, Kenya and Uzbekistan in eradicating statelessness, there was still much to do, particularly in respect of intergenerational statelessness, since one in three stateless individuals was a child. Those children were deprived of other rights and unfairly impacted in other areas of their lives. Therefore, she commended States which had facilitated access to nationality rights for children by granting access to birth registration and enabling women to confer nationality on their children. Reforms that enshrined gender parity in national law were helping women and girls to achieve their potential; UNHCR should consider the role of regional women-led organizations in guiding the changes needed. She thanked UNHCR for its work in improving qualitative and quantitative data on stateless populations and looked forward to the Global Refugee Forum.

129. The representative of **Costa Rica** said that her country had developed a series of regulatory reforms and initiatives, ranging from projects to eradicate the risk of homelessness to inter-agency coordination to integrate stateless individuals into society. In addition, through reforms to the Options and Naturalizations Act in 2017, Costa Rica had become the first country in Latin America to grant Costa Rican nationality to stateless individuals. During the previous Global Refugee Forum, Costa Rica had announced five commitments to tackle statelessness, which had been very difficult to implement during the COVID-19 restrictions. Face-to-face engagement was suspended until November 2022, but workshops and skills training for public bodies and civil society had continued remotely. Regulatory reforms and the "You Are Not Invisible" awareness-raising campaign had also supported the delivery of those commitments, with stateless persons receiving identification and travel documents, and the handling time for stateless-person applications reduced to six months.

130. The representative of **Colombia** said that, in January 2023, the country had ratified the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and had undertaken joint regional efforts to combat statelessness. Under the country's Childhood First policy, as of May 2023, Colombian citizenship by birth had been granted to 100 minors who had been born in Colombia but who had not met residency requirements. The Government was considering the extension of the Childhood First measures to the migration situations discussed earlier in the current session. She commended UNHCR for organizing the Global Summit on Gender Equality in Nationality Laws, where States had discussed the challenges faced by many countries in ensuring that women could obtain citizenship rights and pass them on to their children.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.
