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

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Eighty-ninth meeting

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Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva

Summary record,* Wednesday, 13 March 2024, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Dr. Katharina Stasch(Germany)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Opening of the meeting

1. The **Chairperson** declared open the eighty-ninth meeting of the Standing Committee and said that she took it that the Committee wished to approve the requests of the Dominican Republic, Indonesia and Panama to participate as observers.

2. *It was so agreed.*

Adoption of the agenda (EC/75/SC/CRP.1)

3. *The agenda was adopted.*

Adoption of the Standing Committee Work Programme for 2024

4. *The Standing Committee work programme (EC/75/SC/CRP.2) was adopted.*

Opening remarks by the Deputy High Commissioner (UNHCR)

5. The **Deputy High Commissioner**, extending her wishes for peace at the start of Ramadan, said that peace had been in short supply over the past six months.

6. The humanitarian crisis in Gaza had reached catastrophic proportions with a besieged population that had virtually no access to food or water. Far too little aid was reaching families and children who faced starvation. She joined the Secretary-General's call for a humanitarian ceasefire and for the immediate and unconditional release of all remaining hostages.

7. In the Sudan, violence had displaced over 8 million people both inside and outside the country and families were left to bear the brunt of a conflict to which there was no end in sight. More than 1.6 million people had fled to the Central African Republic, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia and South Sudan, countries that themselves were struggling to cope with instability, the rising cost of basic necessities and the effects of climate change. She thanked the countries that continued to welcome Sudanese refugees into their communities. She had met some of the displaced families recently in Farchana and Adre in eastern Chad, a remote location that now sheltered thousands, where local authorities were overwhelmed and under-resourced. Sudanese children had told her of their longing for normalcy and stability so that they could play and learn. UNHCR contended with the reality of forced displacement every day in eastern Chad and was working with its partners to support the efforts of the Government to respond to the growing needs.

8. A second Global Refugee Forum had been held in December 2023 and a comprehensive report on its outcomes would soon be provided by the Office's new Assistant High Commissioner for Protection. More than 40 multi-stakeholder pledges were announced at the Forum, many of them co-led by Governments. Over 1,700 pledges were made, considerably more than those announced at the first Forum in 2019. These pledges represented significant financial, technical, material and policy commitments across a range of thematic areas and sectors, including economic inclusion, climate and countering gender-based violence. The number of pledges by non-State actors had tripled since the first Forum and the broader representation and engagement of stakeholders and participants had lent strength, conviction and optimism to the event. The most important lesson to be drawn was that the right vision could unite and inspire all stakeholders in the search for solutions. With a shared purpose, international cooperation and partnerships were still possible. Work would now shift to ensuring that the pledges were implemented and UNHCR would work tirelessly to achieve the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees.

9. The recent Multilateral Organisation Performance Network (MOPAN) assessment showed that UNHCR had made immense progress in its agility, responsiveness and efficiency. The assessment recognized the Office's clear leadership in forced displacement situations and highlighted its ability to mobilize stakeholders and surge operations in response to sudden emergencies. One of the key strengths of the Office was its organizational structure and comprehensive reform process; it had undergone a process of decentralization and regionalization in which decision-making authority had been delegated to seven regional bureaux that were closer to the refugees. The structural transformation had been followed by a digital transformation of processes through the Business Transformation Programme (BTP) and by fostering a culture of inclusion, integrity, empowerment and accountability. An independent evaluation of the decentralization process was currently under way with a report expected in the second half of 2024.

The report will identify areas that require further focus and investment and potential course corrections. A lessons-learned exercise and an impact gains assessment would evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the Business Transformation Programme. Lastly, a cultural assessment using the United Nations Leadership Culture Assessment tool is expected to yield insights into team dynamics and internal procedures.

10. In response to concerns about the sustainability of the financing model of the Office, she said that efforts were under way to identify potential options, informed by research and external perspectives that took the organization's mandate into consideration. The history of UNHCR was one of constant evolution and adaptation to a changing geopolitical landscape and the emergence of a multi-polar world. The protection and asylum space was eroding even as the number of forcibly displaced persons continued to grow. The funding environment was also becoming more challenging every year and the increase in humanitarian needs was outpacing the available resources. In 2023, with a needs-based budget of close to \$11 billion, UNHCR had received just over \$4.8 billion, a decrease of 11 per cent since 2022. Contributions were projected to be substantially lower than the \$10.8 billion sought for 2024.

11. The Office was grateful to the countries that supported forcibly displaced and stateless people and to the donors who supported its programmes. The Office had worked hard to earn their trust and fully appreciated the political, social and economic pressures faced by countries, the strains created in host countries and the many competing demands on donors. However, the Office was compelled to draw attention to the implications of the projected funding shortfall and to the potentially drastic consequences of continued financial uncertainty. The Organization's cash position was becoming increasingly tenuous and its ability to meet its near-term financial obligations could soon be ineffective if financial pledges remained unmet in the coming weeks. The Office stood ready to work with Member States to avoid such a worst-case scenario.

12. UNHCR had taken a series of measures to absorb some of the expected financial impact so that more could be spent on refugees. A realignment and rationalization process designed to reduce potential duplication had resulted in the discontinuation of 1,600 positions, a process that would continue into the 2025 planning cycle. For its impacted colleagues, the Office offered career management services, training and reskilling opportunities, complemented by mediation and informal conflict resolution when needed. UNHCR continued to reprioritize its operational activities and to reconsider its operational presence and footprint, but the reality was that the organization could only absorb so much before the impact was felt by its partners, and by the refugees themselves.

13. Food aid was being scaled back in Kenya and in Tunisia and the Office would no longer be able to provide vouchers and one-time cash grants for extremely vulnerable asylum-seekers. There were countless examples across all regions where painful decisions to scale down or suspend activities had been taken and their impact would lead to greater reliance on negative coping strategies such as the need for children to work instead of attending school, a greater likelihood of recruitment into armed groups, and asylum-seekers and refugees who had risked everything having to rely on criminal networks to move to other countries.

14. In the absence of evident solutions, it would not be possible to fall back on outdated and unsustainable response models that relied solely on humanitarian aid or focused exclusively on life-saving interventions. It was critical to work with development partners from the onset of a displacement crisis and to stay the course, especially during challenging times, as the benefits of joined humanitarian and development actions were not always visible.

15. UNHCR was committed to transparency as part of a conscious push towards more openness, greater engagement and a culture of accountability, including on matters of integrity and oversight. For the first time, it had shared with the members of the Standing Committee the annual report on the practice of the High Commissioner in disciplinary matters and cases of criminal behaviour. A side event on the Office's oversight landscape would be held at the present meeting.

Regional activities and global programmes

16. The **Assistant High Commissioner for Operations** (UNHCR), introducing the item, said that since the eighty-sixth meeting of the Standing Committee, there had been a 14 per cent increase in global displacement; as at 31 December 2023, the number of forcibly displaced persons stood at 114 million. In 2023, UNHCR had declared 43 emergencies in 29 countries, a notable increase over the 35 declared in 2022.

17. The war in the Sudan had resulted in one of the worst displacement crises but had unfortunately received limited attention. To date, more than 1.6 million refugees had fled the country and some 200,000 had moved internally to safer areas, a total of 460,000 South Sudanese nationals had returned and over 6 million people had been displaced. Over the past 11 months, refugees and returnees had been arriving in remote areas of the Central African Republic, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Libya and South Sudan. In visits to some of those countries, he had witnessed the immense need and the outstanding generosity of countries and communities that were hosting refugees despite challenges of their own.

18. Efforts to provide life-saving support such as food, shelter, water and health in partnership with sister agencies, including the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Food and Agriculture Organizations (FAO), remained of paramount importance. Yet funding shortfalls, including for the Sudan crisis, continued, with countries such as Bangladesh, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Jordan, Uganda and Yemen particularly affected. In 2023, the Office had reduced its cash programme in Colombia, prioritizing only specific protection cases and reaching only 20 per cent of eligible families.

19. The arrival of refugees in large numbers had a severe impact on the regions receiving them. It was incumbent on the international community to continue to mobilize both humanitarian resources and development assistance so that UNHCR could gradually transform its programmes and activities by making them less aid-dependent and more sustainable. With the right strategy and investments, the presence of refugees could benefit host regions. In 2023, the Office had launched a strategy of engagement that coordinated the role of development actors in the search for solutions for refugees, internally displaced persons, returnees and stateless persons. Bilateral stakeholders were increasingly including forcibly displaced and stateless persons in their development programming and some of them, including the European Union, France, Germany and the Netherlands (Kingdom of the), had established financial instruments, programmes on forced displacement or development funding targets. Others, such as Belgium, Denmark and Japan, had expanded their programmes to include the people with whom UNHCR worked by supporting innovative approaches.

20. Through its International Development Association (IDA), the World Bank had invested \$4.2 billion in refugees and host communities in 17 countries. The Global Concessional Financing Facility (GCFF) had also provided concessional loans to seven middle-income countries, unlocking a total commitment of \$6.5 billion. It had, however, experienced difficulties in financing and the Office appealed for continuous support to sustain the implementation of progressive refugee policies in host countries.

21. UNHCR continued to see progress in its collaboration with multilateral development banks. Those banks had a strong comparative advantage in addressing the development needs of forcibly displaced persons, returnees and host communities, including by investing in infrastructure, agriculture and livelihoods and leveraging private sector engagement. A joint initiative between UNHCR and the International Finance Corporation, established in 2023, supported the design of innovative and scalable private sector solutions-oriented projects in forced displacement situations through teams in Brazil, Ecuador, Moldova, Poland, Romania and Türkiye. A side event at the present meeting on the theme "Making the Business Case for Refugee Hosting Areas: How is the private sector engaging in forced displacement contexts?" would provide tangible examples of the progress made.

22. While most refugees sought asylum in neighbouring countries, others chose for various reasons to move farther away. In the Sahel region, South America and Asia, tens of thousands of people had embarked on dangerous journeys with more than half a million crossing the Darién Gap in 2023 alone and the numbers making the risky sea journey across the Mediterranean at a six-year high. Onward maritime movements of refugees in the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal, mainly from Myanmar and Bangladesh, continued to increase. UNHCR was working constructively with States and other stakeholders to address the scale and complexity of the challenge of mixed movements of refugees and migrants. The response must be collective, humane and in line with international legal obligations and must take a route-based approach at all relevant points along the key mixed movement routes.

23. As evidenced at the Africa Climate Summit 2023 and at the twenty-third session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

(COP28), there was an increasing understanding of the role played by climate change and natural hazards in the context of forced displacement. To better anticipate the effects of climate change, UNHCR was engaging with global experts on predictive analytics and strategic foresight and had recently teamed with the global research group, CGIAR, to inform its policies and programmes. That engagement was contributing to the collective modelling of climate hotspots, including the development of Africa's first Climate Adaptation Strategy for the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGAD) region.

24. The Office's Strategic Plan for Climate Action 2024-2030 set out a comprehensive vision for its engagement in wider efforts to ensure that forcibly displaced populations fleeing from climate fuelled crises or living in climate vulnerable countries were protected from the impact of climate change and living self-sufficient lives. UNHCR was endeavouring to reduce its own environmental footprint through sustainable reductions in the management of its buildings, facilities, fleet and air travel and was seeking additional resources in order to provide better protection to displaced persons. The Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement gave a renewed call for collaboration and strengthened partnerships in assisting internally displaced persons. Through greater collaboration with stakeholders across the United Nations system and with local authorities, the Office was helping to creating the conditions for safe and lasting solutions.

25. All UNHCR partners were to be commended for the exceptional solidarity demonstrated during the Global Refugee Forum 2023, which had embodied the spirit and intentions of the Global Compact on Refugees at a time of unprecedented need. In light of the complex state of current affairs, partnership, responsibility-sharing and solidarity had never been more important and UNHCR looked forward to working with donors to ensure implementation of the significant pledges made. It greatly appreciated the financial support that Member States were providing to the people that it served and commended the efforts and dedication of the thousands of colleagues who served in some of the most difficult situations all over the world.

a. Regional updates

i. East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes

26. The **Director of the Regional Bureau for the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes** (UNHCR) said that while 2023 had been marked by a sense of hope in the region with achievements such as the signing of a peace agreement ending the conflict in northern Ethiopia and progress in the Solutions Initiative for South Sudan and the Sudan, those hopes had been dashed in 2024. The outbreak of conflict in Laascaanood, Somalia had caused more than 100,000 people to flee to Ethiopia; continued conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo had led thousands to flee to Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania; and a brutal war in the Sudan had created a major humanitarian emergency that had caused one of the largest protection crises of recent years with over 8 million people displaced in less than a year. Amid those challenges, neighbouring countries and communities had kept their borders open to receive those forced to flee; humanitarian partners had come together to support hosting countries; and development partners such as the World Bank, the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the European Union had stepped up their efforts from the start of the emergency in an approach that had been discussed for years and was now taking shape.

27. During his recent visits to 10 of the 11 countries covered by his Regional Bureau, he witnessed how UNHCR teams were responding to people's needs but also noted their deep concern when faced with difficult decisions on which essential services to curtail owing to overstretched resources, and their frustration when lack of access impeded their ability to reach people. Those resources were a matter of concern, as were the aid pipeline breaks experienced by WFP. Food insecurity usually led to a major increase in protection issues such as gender-based violence, tensions with host communities and higher risks of regional instability. Great efforts were being made to strengthen investment in livelihoods and to reduce the dependence of people on aid. The opportunity to earn a living was key to rebuilding lives with dignity.

28. At the Global Refugee Forum 2023, transformational pledges had been made by Governments in the region, intergovernmental bodies such as IGAD, the East African Community (EAC) and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR); public- and private-sector partners; and humanitarian and development stakeholders. Those pledges had included, among others, Uganda's commitment to uphold its generous self-reliance policies, Kenya's Shirika

Plan to transform refugee camps into municipalities and Ethiopia's pledge to transform protracted refugee camps into settlements. Matching pledges had been made in the true spirit of the Global Compact on Refugees. Progress was being made, for example, regulations had been issued in Kenya, digital identification documents had been delivered in Ethiopia and the private sector had been engaged to a greater extent in several contexts. More needed to be done, however, including by supporting countries and their partners in the implementation of their pledges.

29. The impact of climate change was an ongoing issue in the region for populations that felt unfairly affected by challenges to which they had not contributed; cycles of drought and storms seemed to be never-ending. A regional climate response strategy had been developed in order to guide the Bureau's work with Governments, regional institutions, United Nations sister agencies, communities and other partners in their efforts to ensure the inclusion of refugees and other displaced persons in mitigation plans and adaptation strategies.

30. UNHCR had supported the African Union in its adoption of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights Relating to the Specific Aspects of the Right to a Nationality and the Eradication of Statelessness in Africa, a major step that required continued support. It had also worked with its partners in responding to the needs of internally displaced persons, most significantly in Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan and the Sudan, with a focus on protection needs, shelter and core relief items. The plan was to continue those efforts in 2024 if access and funding permitted.

31. UNHCR was committed to finding solutions for both refugees and internally displaced persons. What the region needed most was for peace to take hold in areas of conflict, following which consideration could be given to voluntary repatriation. Almost 600,000 people had returned to their countries of origin in the region, the majority to Burundi and South Sudan, and attention was being given to promoting the return of Burundians and seeking support that would make voluntary return sustainable.

32. In South Sudan, over 470,000 people caught in the Sudan conflict had had to return with nothing to places they had not been in decades and where very few services and opportunities were available. Reintegration was necessary so that those returnees could rebuild their lives. Progress had been made in the area of resettlement; a record number of cases had been submitted and departures had doubled since 2022. Greater efforts to encourage complementary pathways had been made and it was hoped that with help from Member States, they could be continued in 2024. He reaffirmed the Office's commitment to strengthening cooperation with local and refugee-led organizations, which always knew best what was needed.

33. The region was also witnessing mixed movements affecting countries such as Djibouti, as well as along the southern route. UNHCR was determined to work with its partners through a "whole-of-route" approach. Country operations in the region focused on proactively identifying and mitigating risks. During the past year, lessons learned on aid diversion risks, particularly in Ethiopia and Somalia, had been shared across the region. In the Sudan's current operational environment, efforts to balance the challenge of minimizing risks with the Office's determination to stay and deliver were being made.

34. In closing, he thanked Member States and the Office's partners for their support, and urged them to continue and even increase their support so that the ubiquitous term "overstretched resources" could be replaced by terms such as "resilience", "economic opportunities" and "solutions".

35. The representative of **Ethiopia**, speaking on behalf of the African Group, said that the East and Horn of Africa, the Great Lakes region, Southern Africa region and the West and Central Africa region hosted a total of over 48.9 million forcibly displaced persons of concern to UNHCR. Across many parts of the continent, conflict, political violence, climate change and food insecurity were converging to forcibly displace increasingly large numbers of people. The region had made remarkable progress in terms of legal and policy measures in an effort to achieve the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees. The African Group was encouraged by progress in the improvement of legal frameworks, skills development and the socioeconomic inclusion of refugees and in fostering greater inclusion in labour markets. A few African countries were hosting the largest number of refugees and internally displaced persons and it was imperative to support them. The Group acknowledged the solidarity shown by those countries and urged them to continue despite underfunding and internal challenges. It was pleased that UNHCR prioritized dialogue with key

stakeholders and ongoing partnerships with development actors to ensure a sustainable response encompassing emergency assistance, resilience and self-reliance.

36. Climate and disaster displacement was a global phenomenon that affected every country in the world, albeit unevenly and with varying consequences. In the Horn of Africa, after a prolonged drought that had already forced millions from their homes in previous years, floods in 2023 had caused some of the highest levels of disaster displacement recorded in the region. In some parts of the continent, people who had already been displaced by conflicts could be displaced again by a flood or a storm. It was the combination of all of those factors that determined the severity of displacement and the risk of it becoming protracted.

37. Displacement was not inevitable and addressing it should be an integral part not only of sustainable development and climate action, but also of humanitarian response and peacebuilding. Responding to the long-term needs of displaced persons could help to reduce the scale of the problem, and ultimately the risk of future displacement. African countries needed support for their efforts to enhance their resilience and their capacity to tackle disastrous climate impacts. The Group therefore called on its partners to support the Office of the Special Adviser on Solutions to Internal Displacement in its efforts to bring about durable solutions.

38. At the Global Refugee Forum 2023, African host Governments and other organizations had pledged to achieve greater protection and inclusion through a number of solutions to be implemented over the next four years. In some cases, however, pledges made by partners were not consistent with pledges made by host countries or the needs on the ground. The African Group encouraged partners to make more specific commitments that would enable host countries to fulfil their own pledges and enhance the self-reliance of refugees and host communities over the next four years.

39. Most of the refugee operations in the region were facing daunting challenges, particularly funding gaps and ration cuts that were leading to malnutrition and unrest in some areas. The African countries most impacted by severe underfunding hosted the highest number of refugees and internally displaced persons and their protection efforts were being adversely affected. As at 31 January 2024, only 11 per cent of the operational needs in the region were funded. He called on the partners to allocate more unearmarked funding to UNHCR and urged the Office to prioritize the most underfunded operations in order to correct imbalances. Recent experience showed that solidarity and creative solutions were possible.

40. The representative of the **European Union** said that, like those of the previous speaker, his comments would cover the three African subregions. The European Union's partnership with African countries remained a top priority as demonstrated by the Final Declaration of the sixth European Union – African Union Summit: A Joint Vision for 2030, and the work of the European Union-African Union-United Nations Tripartite Task Force on the Situation of Migrants and Refugees in Libya. The European Union and its member States were determined to fulfil the commitments to refugees and their host communities in Africa made at the Global Refugee Forum 2023. He welcomed the efforts by the African Union to end statelessness and commended the UNHCR support platforms, including the recently launched Central African Republic Solutions Support Platform (CAR-SSP).

41. He called on the Office to continue to make protection the cornerstone of its work in West and Central Africa. While he welcomed efforts to improve coordination and develop solid protection analyses, the deteriorating situation in the central Sahel and its impact on humanitarian access should be further documented. The European Union would provide additional support for efforts to strengthen the asylum system in Mauritania, in line with the recently signed migration partnership, and was closely monitoring the situation of coastal countries, especially Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo, with a view to providing new financial support. He called on the rights of forcibly displaced persons to be respected, the risk of expulsion to be prevented, the provision of assistance to out-of-camp refugees strengthened and climate considerations integrated to a greater extent. The European Union counted on the Office's efforts to help Nigeria to mitigate the impact of camp closure policies and called for additional financial resources and political commitment to address the forgotten crisis in Cameroon.

42. The Sudan had become one of the world's largest displacement crises, accompanied by the looming threat of famine. Acknowledging the extremely volatile environment in which UNHCR operated, he called on all parties to ensure respect for international humanitarian law and guarantee safe, rapid and unhindered humanitarian access. The Office's regional response to the Sudan crisis,

including in eastern Chad, was appreciated. The need for the international community to step up its efforts to fund the desperate humanitarian needs in the region would be discussed at the International Humanitarian Conference for the Sudan and its Neighbours, organized by France, Germany and the European Union, to be held in Paris on 15 April 2024. UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and other stakeholders should strengthen their coordination frameworks in line with their comparative advantages. In view of the alarming reports of sexual and gender-based violence, he stressed the importance of prioritizing gender-responsive protection.

43. Acknowledging the key protection role played by UNHCR in South Sudan, especially in light of the eruption of war in the Sudan, he welcomed the coordination between UNHCR and IOM, the transportation of asylum-seekers and refugees to existing refugee camps in order to avoid congestion at the border, and the efforts with a view to the interoperability of data systems. He noted the Office's objectives in the area of durable solutions through its Pockets of Hope initiative and emphasized the importance of its core protection mandate. The European Union looked forward to receiving more information on the Office's conflict analyses and contingency plans and called for greater attention to protection analysis in the Central African Republic.

44. He paid tribute to the Office's work with internally displaced persons and refugees in Ethiopia, with new arrivals benefiting from prima facie recognition, and its progressive policies for refugee rights and advocacy. While welcoming the resumption of food distribution to refugees, he recalled the importance of strict measures to prevent and respond to the risk of aid diversion and fraud. The Office's capacity-building efforts should accompany the registration of all asylum-seekers and provide a comprehensive analysis of protection gaps. He expressed support for the swift implementation of the Ethiopian humanitarian country team's protection strategy and acknowledged the Office's work on the reintegration of returnees in Somalia.

45. The European Union continued to support the generous policies of Uganda towards refugees, underpinned by a strong humanitarian-peace-development nexus approach. However, new asylum-seekers continued to arrive and the response was still underfunded. He commended Kenya's commitment to the camp-to-settlement approach, urged UNHCR to facilitate the rollout of that country's Refugees Act 2021 and acknowledged the Office's work in reducing the Somali refugee registration backlog.

46. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the ongoing escalation of violence and worsening of the humanitarian situation was exposing millions of people to human rights abuses, including displacement, deprivation of rights and gender-based violence. With the withdrawal of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), the protection of civilians and further civil-military coordination efforts should remain a priority. The European Union reiterated its commitment to addressing sexual and gender-based violence and encouraged UNHCR to enhance its coordination and advocacy role, including with regard to displacement sites. Forcibly displaced persons should be provided with legal documents and land on which to settle. In the Great Lakes region, the European Union was supporting regional efforts to provide durable solutions for refugees through voluntary repatriation or local integration into host communities.

47. Expressing concern at the humanitarian situation in Mozambique as a result of the instability caused by violent non-state armed groups in Cabo Delgado province and by Cyclones Idai and Kenneth, he stressed that relocation and return should be voluntary, dignified and limited to situations where security and safety conditions were met and services were available. Internally displaced persons, returnees and host communities required protection, mental health services and psychosocial support until they were able to fully rebuild their lives and livelihoods.

48. The representative of the **Sudan** expressed support for the Office's frontline work in response to the humanitarian crises in the region and for the support provided to the most vulnerable people of concern, particularly in his country. In the East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes region, unprecedented numbers of people had been forcibly displaced by disasters or conflicts and the civil war in the Sudan, involving a specific rebel group, had led to one of the worst crises of displacement. Over 9 million people, most of them women and children, had been forced to leave their homes. He thanked the countries in the region that were hosting Sudanese refugees.

49. He welcomed the Office's references to the crisis in the Sudan in its reports as a brutal rebellion against the people and the State; and stated that solving problems starts with proper definitions. Despite previous appeals for the international community to address that unprecedented

humanitarian crisis, children were still dying at a rate of one per hour, particularly in the Zamzam refugee camp. A rapid response to the crisis would create possible solutions; otherwise, the Sudan would continue to host 2 million refugees from neighbouring countries. He reaffirmed his Government's commitment to facilitating access for humanitarian aid, including across the borders with Chad, Egypt and South Sudan, and called on donors to deliver on the commitments made in the various UNHCR forums on the Sudan and neighbouring countries. Those commitments should include the provision of immediate, intermediate and long-term assistance to communities hosting refugees, who required all kinds of basic services, within a framework of responsibility- and burden-sharing.

50. The representative of **Italy** commended UNHCR and its staff for their crucial work on the ground in extremely challenging circumstances. Partnership with African countries was a key priority for his Government, which was strongly committed to supporting responses to forced displacement. That commitment had recently been translated into a number of initiatives, including the International Conference on Development and Migration, held in Rome in July 2023; the Italy-Africa Summit, held in Rome in January 2024 with the participation of UNHCR; and the launch of the Mattei Plan for Africa, which sought to build a new form of partnership with African countries. One of the Plan's objectives was to combat human trafficking and ensure the orderly management of migration flows, paying special attention to people in vulnerable situations. Italy had confirmed its commitment to the Office's work in the region at the Global Refugee Forum 2023 by endorsing initiatives aimed at addressing the root causes of forced displacement.

51. The situation unfolding in the Sudan and neighbouring countries, which had caused one of the world's largest displacement and protection crises, was of the utmost concern with over 8.1 million people fleeing from their homes. Particularly alarming were the repeated indiscriminate attacks on densely populated areas, which increased the risk of harm to civilians, and the unprecedented level of conflict-related sexual violence against women and girls as a weapon of war. He welcomed the Regional Refugee Response Plan recently launched by UNHCR, which aimed to provide life-saving assistance and protection to refugees and internally displaced persons – including in the Sudan – and the solidarity demonstrated by host communities in the Central African Republic, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia and South Sudan. He called on all parties to the conflict to enable rapid, safe and unfettered humanitarian access to all people in need and to implement speedy administrative and visa procedures for the safe passage of humanitarian aid.

52. Expressing concern at the escalating humanitarian crisis in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, exacerbated by the impact of flooding and the withdrawal of MONUSCO, he encouraged UNHCR to continue its efforts to provide shelter, protection and camp coordination in close collaboration with other United Nations agencies and partners and with a particular focus on the needs of vulnerable groups such as women, children, older persons and people with specific needs.

53. Concerning the Sahel region, he appreciated the Office's "stay and deliver" policy on protection-centred actions, including prevention of gender-based violence, risk mitigation and response, and civil documentation. His Government was closely following the situation in Niger, which, until recently, had provided an element of stability for the region and remained of crucial importance in the management of mixed movements. He requested more information on the Office's vision for protection and enhancement of the resilience of forcibly displaced persons in the Sahel region in light of, among other things, recent discussions on the Focus Area Strategic Plan for Climate Action 2024–2030. While considering the outcomes of the MOPAN assessment, he welcomed further reflection on the Office's plan to hand over roles and responsibilities to development actors in protracted refugee situations in Africa.

54. The representative of the **United Republic of Tanzania** congratulated the High Commissioner and his staff on their outstanding work in providing international protection to refugees and asylum-seekers at a time of unprecedented numbers of forcibly displaced persons and a continual decline in the resources required to tackle the problem. The scarcity of financing for humanitarian responses in Africa required collaborative efforts. His country was hosting 251,720 refugees and asylum-seekers, most of them Burundians, and the acute shortage of funds had led to reduced humanitarian assistance for refugees, including the closure of health facilities.

55. While it was clear that the current stable political and security situation in Burundi would allow those refugees to return home, some were reluctant to do so even after receiving security

assurances from Burundi. He stated that it was not fair that his Government and the international community, through UNHCR, should continue to provide protection and humanitarian assistance in those cases, nor was it fair for Burundi to be deprived of potential human resources. He called for an immediate solution to be found. While his country continued to respect the fundamental principles of the voluntary repatriation exercise and was conducting it in accordance with tripartite arrangement decisions, the situation required a unique approach. He urged UNHCR to speed up termination of the refugee status of Burundians in order to protect the asylum space from abuse and avoid protracted refugee situations.

56. One of the refugee camps, Nduta, which accommodated Burundian refugees in the United Republic of Tanzania, would be closing in December 2024. He therefore requested the international community to prioritize support for the Burundian Government's efforts to create a welcoming environment for returnees in line with the fourth key objective of the Global Compact on Refugees. Despite the many challenges that his country had faced for many years while fulfilling its refugee protection obligations under international law, it would continue to open its doors to genuine asylum-seekers from neighbouring and other countries.

57. The representative of **Ethiopia** said that his country had maintained its unwavering solidarity with those fleeing conflicts by adopting an open-door policy towards refugees despite internal challenges such as the impact of climate change. Ethiopia had made major strides in refugee protection, the incorporation of refugees into national systems, access to education, health care and socioeconomic inclusion. With regard to the protracted refugee situation in the country, a focus on a development approach and the long-term resilience of host communities would reap benefits by easing pressure on those communities and enhancing self-reliance of refugees.

58. At the Global Refugee Forum 2023, on the understanding that support would be received from its partners, Ethiopia had made bold pledges in areas such as the inclusion of refugees in the existing national system, climate action and the transformation of refugee camps into urban settlements, provision of irrigable land, progress towards renewable energy, and development of digital connectivity in order to enhance refugee protection and financial inclusion. While making pledges was a first step, it was not an end in itself and must be accompanied by meaningful action. He therefore called on the partners to join Member States in fulfilling all of their commitments in a spirit of fairer burden- and responsibility-sharing and encouraged UNHCR to coordinate pledges, including those made within the United Nations system.

59. Since the outbreak of the conflict in the Sudan in April 2023, over 100,000 people, including over 50,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, had crossed into Ethiopia from the Sudan in addition to the 50,000 Sudanese refugees already in the country. By waiving penalties, his country had extended visas for Sudanese citizens living in Addis Ababa. In 2023, Ethiopia had also received over 100,000 refugees from Laascaanood in Somalia. The host communities had welcomed them and shared what little they had, but protection and humanitarian needs were on the rise and funds were dwindling. Against that backdrop, the regions that had experienced a continued influx of refugees were heavily affected by the effects of El Niño and recent floods. As at the end of 2023, the Office's programmes in Ethiopia were significantly underfunded. In such situations, the international community should recognize the enduring difficulties that host countries faced in providing protection and solutions for refugees.

60. He drew attention to the fact that even as his country was opening its doors to refugees, it had millions of internally displaced citizens as a result of conflict and prolonged drought. Legal and policy frameworks were being put in place in order to address their situation comprehensively and various projects were being implemented in affected areas with a view to durable solutions. To date, Ethiopia had returned nearly 2.5 million internally displaced persons with no other assistance from its partners than transport fees. As a member of the Group of Friends of the Platform on Internal Displacement, Ethiopia worked closely with the Office of the Special Adviser on Solutions to Internal Displacement.

61. The multifaceted difficulties that internally displaced persons faced required a comprehensive solution at all levels. A concerted effort at the state and international levels was needed and the lack of funding was a critical challenge. He therefore encouraged his country's partners to join the Internal Displacement Solutions Fund, which promoted national leadership strategies that were fully inclusive in addressing the needs of internally displaced persons.

62. The representative of **Uganda** said she hoped that 2024 would be the year in which the burden, responsibility and pressure on refugee host countries, such as her own country, would ease. Her Government had made pledges on policies in key areas such as self-reliance, climate change and localized durable solutions and was committed to their timely implementation, but support from its partners was needed. She thanked the donors that had announced their financial and technical support for Uganda and invited other countries to do the same.

63. At the time of the previous meeting of the Standing Committee, Uganda had hosted 1.56 million refugees; it now hosted 1.61 million. Since January 2024, some 30,000 refugees, almost 9,500 of them from the Sudan – with which Uganda did not share a border – had entered the country. Nearly 6,500 of those people were from South Sudan, adding to the 900,000 already in Uganda. While numbers told only part of the story, they did not lie. Unfortunately, however, her country was no longer in the news and the daily influx of refugees did not make the headlines.

64. Uganda had been one of the first countries to pilot the comprehensive refugee response framework, to great acclaim. The inclusion of refugees had long been ingrained in its society, but the funding gap continued to widen and she wondered whether the humanitarian response was being linked to Uganda's national political processes without its knowledge. While traditional donors must deal with donor fatigue and competing humanitarian interests, her country faced worse challenges. Was it to close its borders or ship refugees out of the country and, if so, where? Would it be legal to do so? What was it to do with the over 800,000 children who could not go to school and the 900,000 girls and boys with no access to reproductive health services?

65. She stated that the milestones jointly achieved by hosts and donors must not be reversed; the burden and responsibility for hosting refugees must be shared. If a developing State such as Uganda could commit to shouldering the burden for over eight years, its partners – which were in a better economic position – could and should not cut support because of the challenges that they faced.

66. The representative of **France** said that in 2023, her country had been the sixth-highest contributor to UNHCR with over €120 million. Africa had been the main recipient of her Government's humanitarian funding allocated to the Office. France was implementing operational cooperation projects in the region, including a partnership with the Government of Chad on strengthening capacities of that country's asylum system.

67. She recalled that the International Humanitarian Conference for the Sudan and its Neighbours, organized by France, Germany and the European Union, would be held in Paris on 15 April 2024. Its goals were to mobilize funding for humanitarian aid and call on the parties to the conflict to ensure free, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access to the whole of Sudan. She hoped that the High Commissioner would participate in the Conference in order to draw attention to the situation and to the needs of Sudanese displaced persons and refugees, as well as those of host States and communities.

68. Her Government was horrified by the sexual and gender-based violence reported by hundreds of thousands of survivors in the Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Sudan and elsewhere on the continent. She welcomed the Office's efforts to support those women and girls and encouraged it to adopt a gender-sensitive approach in its programmes. Her Government was determined to eliminate all forms of conflict-related sexual violence, particularly the use of rape as a weapon of war, and to combat impunity. Her Government was involved in the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda and had awarded the Simone Veil Prize for gender equality to the Movement of Survivors of Sexual Violence in the Central African Republic (MOSUCA), which aimed to provide support and rehabilitation to victims and ensure that future generations would not suffer the same fate. Her Government had placed the *Avec Elles* ("With Them") initiative at the heart of its co-sponsorship of the Global Refugee Forum 2023, at which it had made specific, measurable commitments on the inclusion, education, protection and reintegration of refugee women and had mobilized many State and private-sector partners to make similar commitments.

69. The representative of the **Netherlands (Kingdom of the)** expressed concern at the large numbers of refugees and deteriorating social and economic situation in East Africa and their implications for reaching the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees. He wondered whether UNHCR was exploring opportunities to work with other specialized United Nations entities to address the needs in sectors such as education, water, sanitation, hygiene, health, nutrition and livelihoods while taking resource constraints into account.

70. He commended the Office's response to the large-scale displacement crisis caused by the war in the Sudan, which affected two neighbouring countries. His Government was concerned at the impact on host communities and the heavy dependence on agencies such as UNHCR at a time when funding was dwindling. Recognizing the enormous efforts of countries in the region to host such large numbers of refugees, he called on them to continue their efforts to incorporate refugees into their national systems to the extent possible. His Government was supporting that process through its Prospects programme and had increased its contribution from €500 to 800 million in its pledge at the Global Refugee Forum 2023.

71. He echoed the representative of the African Group's call for more unearmarked funding and urged donors to join the multi-stakeholder pledge on unearmarked and flexible funding launched at the Global Refugee Forum 2023. Recognizing that displaced persons were not likely to return in the short term, he stressed the need for increased efforts to achieve durable solutions such as those highlighted by UNHCR, particularly in Chad and South Sudan, and asked what kind of support from the international community was needed for that purpose.

72. The representative of **Switzerland** said that in light of the disastrous humanitarian repercussions of the conflict in the Sudan described in the conference room paper, his Government called on the parties to the conflict in the Sudan to make every effort to reduce its impact by maintaining existing humanitarian access, particularly between Chad and Darfur, and restoring it in regions where it had been interrupted. In 2024, Switzerland would continue to focus on that crisis through targeted financial support, humanitarian advocacy and technical contributions.

73. His Government, which was particularly concerned by the prevalence of gender-based violence, welcomed the Office's efforts in that area and its close collaboration with local women-led organizations in the Sudan. Switzerland would provide its expertise on that issue at the subregional level and would promote cooperation with such organizations in Chad. If those initiatives were successful, he invited the Office to apply them to other campaigns.

74. The integration of refugees and internally displaced persons into national plans had been a central theme of the Global Refugee Forum 2023 since 66 per cent of refugees in the region had limited or no access to the labour market. He agreed that investing in solutions would be an effective way to reduce protection funding needs and wondered which countries and sectors had made the most progress and which best practices should be applied in other contexts.

75. The representative of **Norway** commended the Office's efforts to enhance protection, response and the provision of assistance to the growing number of people on the move in an increasingly volatile region. The war in the Sudan had led to one of the world's largest displacement crises and could not be ignored, even if it was no longer headline news.

76. His Government was concerned by warnings that in the absence of a ceasefire or humanitarian assistance, an estimated 18 million people in West Darfur and Khartoum would slip into the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification category of Phase 5: a state of catastrophic hunger, increased displacement and humanitarian suffering. Moreover, a new stream of refugees into existing vulnerable situations in neighbouring countries could further destabilize the region. There was an urgent need for unfettered humanitarian access through a greater number of safe border crossings and internal access between areas controlled by the parties to the conflict.

77. The reports of continued conflict-related sexual violence in the Sudan and elsewhere in the region were another source of concern. Further efforts to prevent sexual and gender-based violence and offer protection and support to the victims were needed. He emphasized the importance of close cooperation among humanitarian organizations in prioritizing such protection issues.

78. With regard to the overall situation in the region, he commended the Office's leadership in the search for sustainable solutions to protracted refugee crises. Close cooperation with governments and subregional organizations such as IGAD and the East African Community was important in promoting freedom of movement and enabling the economic inclusion of refugees.

79. The representative of **Finland** expressed concern at the shocking crisis in the Sudan, including violence and the looming threat of famine. He appealed to all parties to the conflict to cease hostilities immediately, ensure respect for international humanitarian law and guarantee unrestricted, timely and safe humanitarian access to and across the Sudan. Specific protection measures were needed for those in particularly vulnerable situations, including people with disabilities, who were often left behind. His Government was grateful for the Office's timely

response in the region and to the neighbouring countries that had shown their solidarity with refugees fleeing the Sudan despite their own challenging situations.

80. His Government was also paying close attention to the humanitarian situation in South Sudan, which had received large numbers of returnees since the start of the conflict in the Sudan in one of Africa's largest displacement situations. In view of that conflict's intersection with the impacts of climate change and food insecurity, the protection needs – including those related to sexual and gender-based violence – were significant. He noted the Office's important role in facilitating durable solutions, including through the promising Pockets of Hope initiative.

81. The Horn of Africa was a priority region for Finland's provision of humanitarian assistance, development cooperation, civilian crisis management and peacebuilding and was highly affected by forced displacement, food insecurity and a multitude of protection risks. While the level of hostilities had decreased after the Ethiopian Government's 2022 peace agreement with the Tigray People's Liberation Front, his Government remained concerned about security, particularly in the Amhara, Oromia and Tigray regions. He thanked UNHCR for its work with an increasing number of internally displaced persons and refugees and noted the progress in respect for refugee rights. He welcomed the Office's increased attention to risk and oversight measures in response to the reports of aid diversion in Ethiopia in 2023 and encouraged further sharing of lessons learned.

82. During the multi-stakeholder pledge on peacebuilding and conflict prevention at the Global Refugee Forum 2023, Finland had been pleased to match a pledge with the Government of Somalia, a long-standing partner affected by continual displacement drivers relating to conflict, climate and health. His Government had pledged to support the people of Somalia by engaging young people – including young internally displaced persons – in national reconciliation and peacebuilding processes with a view to find sustainable solutions to forced displacement. In 2023, Finland had contributed €13.4 million to the Office's response in the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region, of which €10.4 million were allocated to the situation in the Sudan, and would continue to prioritize the world's largest displacement crises in its humanitarian assistance.

83. The representative of the **Philippines** commended donor countries' generosity in the East and Horn of Africa and recalled that, as acknowledged during the last meeting of the Standing Committee, host countries were among the largest humanitarian donors. Noting the difficult regional situation, particularly in the Sudan, he supported the Office's response to the humanitarian needs of the displaced Sudanese people, who had been the greatest casualties, and stressed the need to protect people in situations of vulnerability, including displaced women and children, migrants, older persons and people with disabilities. Solutions to the ongoing conflict, displacement and insecurity ultimately lay in the hands of the parties to that conflict. In the meantime, the situation in the Sudan remained among the most underfunded and he called for more attention and financial support. His Government would continue to contribute to the Office's regional refugee response and to its humanitarian response plans for the Sudan.

84. The representative of **Australia**, recognizing the generosity of the countries and communities that were hosting refugees and displaced populations in the region, said that her Government remained concerned by the region's multiple and intersecting humanitarian crises. Since March 2023, it had contributed 35.45 million Australian dollars in aid to the region, of which 3 million had supported the Office's work in the Horn of Africa and 12 million had supported its work under the Sudan Regional Refugee Response Plan. Her Government was alarmed by the deteriorating humanitarian situation and destruction in the Sudan; and called for respect for international humanitarian and human rights law by all parties to the conflict. The 8 million people newly displaced by that conflict, both internally and throughout the region, compounded with existing displacement, had made the Sudan one of the largest internal displacement crises and the largest child displacement crisis in the world.

85. At the Global Refugee Forum 2023, her Government had supported the multi-stakeholder pledge, Beyond Borders, Beyond Barriers, with a view to comprehensive solutions in the IGAD region and had announced an additional 7 million Australian dollars in funding for UNHCR under the Sudan Regional Refugee Response Plan. It was essential for humanitarian agencies to be given safe and unimpeded access in order to deliver life-saving assistance to those most impacted by the conflict. She welcomed further information on the humanitarian access issues that the Office faced in the Sudan, their impact on its work, and ways in which Member States could assist that work through diplomatic channels.

86. The representative of the **United States of America** reaffirmed her Government's commitment to assisting refugees and forcibly displaced persons in the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region in light of the growing needs resulting from the conflict in the Sudan, the resurgence of fighting in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia, and the climate-related disasters affecting populations already uprooted by conflict. She applauded the many countries in the region that had continued to host large influxes of refugees in 2023 and the host governments that had made 100 new pledges during the Global Refugee Forum 2023. Those commitments were the foundation of the collective pledge to pursue new approaches in order to better assist refugees and host communities.

87. The increasing number of forcibly displaced persons in the region made it essential for all parties to increase their efforts to find solutions, including support for returnees and social and economic inclusion. With 578,000 people returning to their countries of origin in South Sudan and Burundi in 2023, the members of the international community must cooperate in creating durable conditions for reintegration. The Governments of Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda were hosting over 3 million refugees and working to improve their resilience and economic inclusion through more integrated settlements and expanded economic opportunity, but additional action was needed so that refugees could take full advantage of those opportunities.

88. Even in the midst of a new emergency that required a focus on life-saving efforts, solutions must be planned. Her Government recognized the increasing impact of climate shocks on humanitarian operations, including secondary displacement and damage to critical infrastructure, and urged donors and Governments to prioritize funding for climate mitigation activities and consider how climate resilience in humanitarian response could be improved. Building on the inaugural 2023 Africa Climate Summit in Kenya, her Government remained committed to confronting the climate crisis ambitiously in Africa and around the world.

89. With regard to the Sudan, where bureaucratic and other severe impediments to humanitarian access remained a source of concern, she stated that UNHCR should maintain its provision of assistance to internally displaced persons and refugees while stakeholders should strengthen the protection of civilians and the security of aid workers and their facilities with respect for international humanitarian law. In South Sudan, she welcomed the Office's efforts to respond to nearly 600,000 new arrivals, including a complex mix of returnees and Sudanese and other refugees fleeing the Sudan.

90. Concerning Ethiopia, her Government commended the Office's emergency response support for the over 50,000 new refugees fleeing the conflict in the Sudan and nearly 100,000 new arrivals fleeing violence in Somalia during the past year; she welcomed all efforts to advance refugee inclusion policies.

91. The ongoing tripartite discussions between the United Republic of Tanzania, Burundi and UNHCR had the potential to lay a strong foundation for the voluntary, safe and dignified repatriation of Burundian refugees. Her Government was proud to support those efforts and called on others to facilitate voluntary return.

92. She congratulated the Government of Kenya on its progress in combating statelessness and looked forward to seeing a draft of the Shirika Plan. She commended the efforts to engage development actors and the private sector in refugee-hosting areas to promote economic inclusion and hoped to carry that positive momentum forward. She thanked the Kenyan Government and UNHCR for supporting her Government's refugee resettlement programme, which provided a durable solution for the most vulnerable refugees hosted by Kenya, and hoped to see greater efforts to address the root causes of forced displacement in the region in 2024.

93. The representative of the **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** thanked UNHCR, its partners and host governments and communities worldwide for their dedication to meeting the needs of refugees and displaced persons. His Government greatly appreciated the Office's and the co-conveners' leadership and the progress towards durable solutions, including local integration, resettlement and voluntary, safe and dignified return, at the Global Refugee Forum 2023. He emphasized that the focus should be on delivering those solutions; every moment spent considering their relative merits was another moment in which refugees and displaced persons were left in need.

94. Refugees must be meaningfully involved in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the Office's programmes and must be recognized as their own agents of change. Coordination with development actors, including the World Bank and other multilateral development banks, was essential in reversing the widening gap between humanitarian needs and available resources and achieving durable solutions. Member States and the Office should encourage the greater engagement of donors rather than continually digging deeper into finite humanitarian budgets, which should be a last resort.

95. He commended UNHCR for its life-saving work on the frontlines in fragile States and for its investment in response capacity. His Government remained steadfast in its support for those efforts and called on the Office to direct funding to the most challenging situations. As noted in the conference room paper, Member States had expressed concern regarding the sustainability of the UNHCR funding model and he welcomed the Office's efforts to review it and clear messaging on the severity of the immediate challenges faced.

96. His Government was encouraged by the continued focus on real human costs and on the people in whose name the present meeting was being held. The international community must ensure that refugees in Ethiopia were not given siloed treatment but were viewed as part of wider humanitarian efforts and provided with the same level of assistance as other refugees.

97. He recognized the significant pressure on neighbouring countries as a result of the shocking, continued displacement crisis caused by the conflict in the Sudan, thanked them for their commitment to supporting their region and stressed the need for additional funding from the international community in order to prevent further suffering and destabilization. The Sudanese armed forces' withdrawal of permission for vital cross-border deliveries of humanitarian aid from Adré in Chad was indefensible and must be reversed immediately.

98. The representative of **Japan** said that, given the troubling situation in the Sudan, the political unrest in West Africa and the need for international solidarity with African countries in the face of that humanitarian crisis, his Government would soon provide UNHCR with \$17 million for the provision of urgent humanitarian assistance to refugees, displaced persons and host communities in Africa with an emphasis on the women, peace and security. At the Global Refugee Forum 2023, his Government had pledged support for refugees and host communities in Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan, Uganda and Zambia. Many African countries had also participated in the multi-stakeholder pledge. Support from all stakeholders, including donors, international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector, must be scaled up in a way that was inclusive of host communities, internally displaced persons and refugees.

99. The representative of **Kenya** said that there had been a surge in the number of people from the region seeking refuge from climate shocks in his country, which was also seriously affected by drought and devastating floods. While displaced persons remained on the frontlines of the climate emergency, adverse climate conditions and disasters were pushing others to move, including across national borders, and causing secondary displacement that increased the risk of disease, epidemics and food insecurity. Host communities, which were facing the same devastating problems, must not be forgotten and she urged UNHCR to make a greater effort to take those additional challenges on board. Her Government, which chaired the Platform on Disaster Displacement, looked forward to collaborating under the Platform's mandate to protect people displaced by disasters and climate change and reduce disaster displacement risks in countries of origin.

100. Continued fragility within the region as a result of conflicts and adverse climate events remained a concern for the displacement of persons, but also for the disruption of ongoing humanitarian operations and the return of refugees to their countries of origin. Noting the impact of insecurity in countries of origin on the Office's work, including safe return and reintegration, she urged UNHCR to amplify its calls for peace in order to prevent displacement and ensure that those who had already been displaced could return and reintegrate. She would welcome an update on efforts to address the deeply concerning risks to refugee children in the region, including through prevention, prosecution and accountability, and further clarification of any collaboration on family tracing between UNHCR and other partners such as the International Conference of the Red Cross (ICRC) and its Central Tracing Agency.

101. While the disturbing problem of insufficient access to education for displaced and refugee children brought protection risks, it also had development impacts, exacerbating underdevelopment in both hosting countries and countries of origin. Support for return and reintegration – one of the

four objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees – must be linked to education in order to ensure that returnees had the necessary skills to reintegrate into and support their countries of origin. That downward trend in education also meant that several of the Sustainable Development Goals were far from being achieved. She requested information on the causes of inequality in access to education and on the steps taken to urgently address that trend.

102. It was crucial to follow up on the commitments made at the Global Refugee Forum 2023, including by host countries, through commensurate financial, material and technical support. On risk management, she welcomed the focus on emergencies and climate change. While noting the role of operational risk registers as a mitigation measure, her Government requested further clarification of those registers, the involvement of national stakeholders in their development and implementation, and the risk-based oversight tool for the region. While host countries were struggling to support new arrivals amid declining funding; there were increasing inflows of displaced persons into Kenya as a result of both climate disasters and conflicts. Repeated calls for the inclusion of displaced persons must be matched by resources.

103. Noting the various situations that the comprehensive needs budget for the region would address, she urged UNHCR to ensure that long-standing host countries such as her own, which were also making significant hosting and protection commitments, were not left to shoulder the burden alone. She requested information on the Office's efforts to address the 88 per cent funding gap for operational needs in the region as at 31 January 2023 and looked forward to receiving feedback on the outcome of the inter-agency needs assessment exercise scheduled for the first quarter of 2024.

104. The representative of **Canada** expressed his Government's appreciation for the vital work of UNHCR; thanked its staff and partners for their sustained efforts to alleviate the sufferings of the most vulnerable persons, often at the risk of their own safety; and congratulated UNHCR for its unfailing commitment to discharge its mandate despite financial difficulties. His Government continued to call for transparency in the extremely difficult prioritization of resources with a focus on the most vulnerable. He stated that humanitarian interventions that took age, gender and diversity into account had the greatest operational impact. He welcomed the significant progress in promoting strategic partnerships with development actors and urged UNHCR to maintain its comparative advantage by drawing on their expertise while preparing exit strategies, where applicable, to facilitate the transition to resilience and durable solutions. Congratulating the Office on the successful Global Forum on Refugees held in 2023, he acknowledged the pressing need to find innovative solutions to both emerging crises and protracted situations and the value of real, meaningful participation by refugees at all decision-making levels. He therefore called for renewed support for the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

105. His Government was committed to a needs-based approach to humanitarian assistance in which support for one crisis did not come at the expense of others. It remained deeply concerned by the ongoing conflict in the Sudan and escalating violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Sahel region and South Sudan and joined UNHCR in calling for the protection of civilians and the rapid and unimpeded access of life-saving humanitarian aid to civilians in need in accordance with international humanitarian law. He commended the complexity and scale of the Office's response in the region but urged it to strengthen data collection and monitoring and evaluation frameworks in order to assess performance and incorporate an age, gender and diversity approach while targeting the most vulnerable. In conjunction with its provision of life-saving assistance and humanitarian funding for the Sudan and regional displacement hotspots, his Government had introduced facilitative immigration measures to support the people of the Sudan, who were striving for peace and an end to violence in their country.

106. He welcomed the Office's engagement with IGAD and AfDB and requested more information on the substance of those partnerships and their effectiveness in delivering durable solutions and resilience-building at country level. He noted the Office's prioritization of child protection and gender-based violence response within its country-level operations. His Government requested additional information on the Office's coordination with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and other partners in its response to new Sudanese arrivals in Chad and South Sudan.

107. The recent escalation of violence in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, including the rapid advance of the March-23 Movement towards Goma, the new presence of other forces and the projected withdrawal of MONUSCO by the end of 2024, were of great concern. His Government

requested regular updates on the Office's contingency plans and response measures in order to address concerns regarding humanitarian access and population movements in the region. As instability spread to the border regions of coastal West African States, his Government wondered how UNHCR was adapting its presence and role in the region, especially by mitigating humanitarian access concerns.

108. The representative of the **Republic of Korea** said that the humanitarian approach was clearly not sufficient to address the crises in Africa, the Middle East and North Africa. Despite the important role of development and its nexus, donors could not operate directly in areas severely affected by conflict and insecurity and, in many cases, must rely on international organizations with local expertise and infrastructure. In 2024, his Government would provide new multi-year funding to eight key agencies. UNHCR and IOM were each expected to receive around \$40 million over the next three years for programmes in countries experiencing conflict and fragility, primarily in the aforementioned regions, so that the Office could help to build safe and secure communities in four countries and IOM could empower livelihoods and economic vitality in the fragile and conflict zones of six countries. Through those multi-year programmes, his Government hoped to enhance both the protection and self-reliance of displaced persons and the stability of host communities. In that context, it was increasingly important for international agencies to improve their effectiveness, coordination and division of labour while avoiding duplication and other inefficiencies.

109. The Republic of Korea was currently implementing various development projects targeting displacement, one of which promoted the voluntary return and peaceful reintegration of Burundian refugees from 2022 to 2025, with \$10 million in funding from his Government and the Office in nearly equally portions. To date, his Government and UNHCR had helped some 26,000 refugees to return safely and various post-return support measures were being considered. He looked forward to the implementation of additional safe and dignified return programmes and hoped that the Korea-Africa Summit in June 2024 would bring more attention to refugee issues in the region. Peace and security were key to addressing displacement and humanitarian access was a core value that must be guaranteed under all circumstances. He hoped for the safety and security of humanitarian actors in the field, including UNHCR, in the current extremely difficult situation.

110. The representative of **Denmark** said that the numerous forced displacement situations across Africa remained a matter of great concern. The conflict in the Sudan was aggravating an already-troubling humanitarian crisis and affecting the wider region; a deteriorating humanitarian and protection crisis was putting millions of lives at risk in the Sahel region; and the impact of climate change, whether drought or flooding, was both a risk multiplier and a driver of displacement.

111. The second Global Refugee Forum had been an opportunity to mobilize and renew commitments to promoting durable solutions to the plight of refugees and he commended the African countries that had made progressive policy pledges that were proof of their will to protect and foster refugees' potential while such solutions were being sought. Denmark took pride in its commitments in support of host countries' pledges pertaining to, among other things, socioeconomic inclusion and self-reliance, climate resilience, protection and better data collection, including in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda. He stressed the role of the Office's regional bureaux and country offices in follow-up to and implementation of the pledges made at the Forum.

112. Climate action and resilience were top priorities for his country, which had played a lead role in mobilizing support for a new pledge on climate action at the Forum. The inclusion of displaced populations in host countries' national climate plans would help to ensure that the action taken benefited the people most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, which was a driver of displacement across the continent. A major focus of his Government's work with UNHCR and partner countries was strengthened cooperation with development and climate actors to ensure that humanitarian response incorporated a long-term sustainable development perspective from the outset. He welcomed the Office's continued commitment to that work and requested more information on its concrete plans for 2024.

113. His Government also prioritized efforts to prevent, mitigate and respond to sexual and gender-based violence. He was pleased that the Office remained focused on the issue and was committed to strengthening cooperation with women-led organizations and route-based approaches to mixed movements. More information on the Office's cooperation with IOM to that end would be appreciated. Lastly, concerned about the funding challenges to UNHCR and its capacity to mitigate

forced displacement situations in Africa, Denmark encouraged new and existing donors to join it and other countries in providing flexible, unearmarked funding.

114. The representative of **Germany** said that the challenges facing the Office's regional bureaux across Africa showed that humanitarian emergencies did not stop at borders, that host communities had a vital role in helping to share the burden and that the flexible regional funding approach that Germany had been piloting since 2021 had been a success, meaning that it could help UNHCR to ensure a rapid tailored response.

115. Germany remained deeply concerned about the situation in the Sudan and had increased its 200 million euro pledge to support the relief efforts, made at the ministerial-level pledging event held in Geneva in June 2023, by a further €50 million. In cooperation with France and the European Union, her Government was also organizing the International Conference for Sudan and its Neighbours, to be held in Paris on 15 April 2024. Commending UNHCR for its role in delivering assistance to displaced populations under the most difficult circumstances, she urged it to include coordination with local partners on the ground. While Germany welcomed the priority given to the crisis in Chad, most of the refugees arriving there from the Sudan did not intend to return for the foreseeable future. It was therefore important to ensure the continuity of operations while seeking sustainable solutions that took into account the limited capacity and significant needs of vulnerable host communities and prioritizing the prevention of gender-based violence and the protection of children.

116. Concerned about the food security situation in the region, particularly in northern Ethiopia, her Government encouraged the Office to continue its efforts to identify durable solutions for internally displaced persons, reform the humanitarian architecture and ensure that functioning risk mitigation mechanisms were in place in order to prevent and respond to the risk of aid diversion. On a recent visit to the Gorom refugee camp in South Sudan, Germany's Minister for Foreign Affairs had stressed the immense challenges posed by the huge influx of refugees and returnees from the Sudan and had welcomed the coordinated efforts of UNHCR and IOM to address them. Her Government was extremely concerned about the serious widespread protection risks in South Sudan, particularly for women and girls. It welcomed the measures taken and called on the Office to strive, in its capacity as the lead agency in the protection sector, to strengthen efforts to prevent and combat systematic abuses.

117. The increasingly difficult situation of refugees and internally displaced persons was having a severe impact on the Lake Chad Basin and Sahel regions and beyond. Safe, voluntary and dignified return, wherever possible, remained a priority and coordination between development, humanitarian and peace actors must be strengthened with a view to durable, region-wide solutions. She commended the Office on its vital work in that regard and encouraged it to enhance coordination with local entities such as the Lake Chad Basin Commission. The withdrawal of MONUSCO would make the situation all the more challenging for civilians and humanitarian workers alike and Germany requested UNHCR to strengthen its coordination with OCHA, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), IOM and non-governmental partners to protect and assist the newly displaced. She stated that the crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo must not be forgotten.

118. Lastly, her Government was concerned about the latest increase in internal displacement and deteriorating security situation in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique and called on UNHCR to further coordinate with all relevant stakeholders to improve humanitarian access and meet the protection needs of internally displaced persons.

119. The representative of **Togo** stressed that the humanitarian crisis in West Africa and the Sahel region had been compounded by constraints on aid delivery and subregional coordination owing to border closures and a lack of solidarity. His Government remained committed to a coordinated approach to the humanitarian consequences of mass forced displacement caused by terrorism or climate change, regardless of the sociopolitical backgrounds of the displaced. Togo would continue to advocate for and promote stability in the subregion and collective efforts to foster peace and solidarity and to address the vulnerabilities of the displaced persons who were at the heart of its cooperation with UNHCR.

120. His country's culture of peace and hospitality had always made it a welcoming destination for refugees and asylum-seekers. It was currently hosting more than 33,000 people from 27 countries in Africa and beyond, and his Government was constantly adapting its approaches in response to

inflows resulting from the security situation in the Sahel region by granting residence permits, issuing birth certificates and ensuring that refugees had the same access to basic and higher education as its own citizens. With support from UNHCR and organizations such as the Savannah Women's Club, it was also addressing the issue of gender equality by providing specific vocational training and financial support with a view to the socioeconomic empowerment of refugee women.

121. Togo's continued commitment to its long-standing partnership with UNHCR, which was in their mutual interest and that of the refugees and asylum-seekers under the Office's protection, was reflected in his Government's pledges at the Global Refugee Forum held in 2023. Those pledges focused on education, gender empowerment, non-tax-based social protection projects and programmes and the eradication of statelessness. He welcomed the Office's advocacy among donors for improved local solutions and a speedier administrative process for refugees and host communities and looked forward to the upcoming visit of the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, which would further strengthen his country's partnership with UNHCR.

122. The representative of **Cameroon** said that the chief purpose of his Government's participation in the Office's work was to significantly improve the living conditions of the more than 400,000 refugees from multiple countries that it was hosting. In light of the satisfactory progress to date in implementing commitments, made with the support of the UNHCR Multi-Country Office in Yaoundé, to ensuring access to health care, education, socioeconomic inclusion and the issuance of appropriate documents, his Government had opted for continuity with an added focus on environmental aspects. Collaboration with other public- and private-sector stakeholders, including multisectoral donors, was key to achieving those goals and Cameroon was striving to foster the necessary synergies. He thanked UNHCR and its donor partners and stakeholders for their support on the ground and called for the strengthening of the Office in Yaoundé.

123. The representative of **Action for the Needy**, speaking on behalf of a group of NGOs, said that the attention given to Africa at the Global Refugee Forum 2023 had been encouraging and it was important to sustain that momentum through collective efforts to protect the vulnerable and find durable solutions. He drew attention to the increase in forced displacement in Africa in 2023 and to the deteriorating protection environment in the Sudan. The NGOs that he represented called for the protection of civilians, a permanent ceasefire and the facilitation of humanitarian access; an inclusive political process to build sustainable peace, taking into account the views of all stakeholders, and especially women and young people, in cooperation with refugee-led organizations; support for the integration of Sudanese refugees into neighbouring countries with a strong focus on mental health and psychosocial support and alternative learning opportunities for children; and incorporation of an equitable approach into the Sudan's national adaptation plan with the participation of refugee-led organizations.

124. With respect to the increase in human rights abuses and continued violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, he called for stronger, more targeted protection for specific groups such as women and girls. In light of the violations of freedom of movement and restrictions on access to humanitarian aid and services by displaced and host communities in the Sahel region, he urged the African Union, the European Union and other international organizations to support the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) through a platform for mediating and resolving the existing challenges. Concerning the fragile situation in Nigeria, he called for all stakeholders to be involved in a coordinated response plan.

125. On the subject of partnerships, which were a first step in addressing humanitarian and development challenges, UNHCR and Member States were urged to seize the potential of multi-stakeholder models. Host Governments should ease restrictions on private sector partners' access to displaced populations in settlements and camps so as to increase livelihood opportunities and self-reliance. With funding on the decline, he urged the Office to sustain its advocacy by emphasizing the urgent need for resources and to ensure transparency in their use and allocation, especially in protracted situations. In light of the discussions on prioritization, UNHCR should ensure that programmes which responded to the needs of children, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups did not run out of vital support.

126. Solutions were limited, but more could be done to prevent conflicts and build peace so that refugees could return home in safety and dignity. He acknowledged the efforts to improve entry procedures and facilitate the protection and integration of refugees, whose contribution to host communities must be recognized, and called on States to develop progressive refugee laws and

policies that ensured displaced persons' enjoyment of their rights and promoted local integration, a key durable solution, to the long-term benefit of host communities. He hoped that States and all relevant stakeholders would increase the number of third country solutions.

127. He applauded the implementation of “green legacy” projects in East Africa, where environmental protection measures were being taken with the involvement of host and displaced communities. Those efforts should be strengthened by allocating specific funding for climate action and giving local NGOs access to loss and damage compensation funds. Specific funding should be earmarked for mitigation of the impacts of rainfall variability, land degradation, desertification and other climate shocks that led to displacement and destroyed livelihoods in the Sahel region. He urged the Governments of Southern Africa to include forcibly displaced persons as key stakeholders in the development of national adaptation plans, in keeping with the principles of accountability to affected populations, and encouraged African Governments to build on their commendable progress in eradicating statelessness, including by upholding the right of citizens to confer their nationality on their children without discrimination.

128. The **Director of the Regional Bureau for the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Region** (UNHCR) said that while there were clear signs of progress in implementing the Global Compact on Refugees, which speakers had described as a “protection and solutions compass” for the next four years, more must be done before the next meeting of high-level officials in December 2025. The subregion was already benefitting from some of the key takeaways from the Global Refugee Forum 2023, at which 100 pledges had been made by Member States and over 120 by partners, and the best way forward was for UNHCR to continue to leverage both the technical and financial support pledged and its own extensive expertise in the interests of the refugees and host communities that it served.

129. The situation in the Sudan, where a protection crisis was still unfolding, was of concern and solutions must be found. He had visited the country twice; the Deputy High Commissioner had toured neighbouring countries, most recently Chad; the Assistant High Commissioner had attended meetings on the Sudan in a number of countries; and the High Commissioner had visited the Sudan. The Secretary-General had issued a call for peace, particularly during the holy month of Ramadan, but it was important to continue efforts to alleviate suffering and save lives. To that end, UNHCR was requesting \$1.4 billion in support for some 2.7 million people from 83 partners within the framework of the recently launched Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) and France, Germany and the European Union were organizing the upcoming International Conference for Sudan and its Neighbours. He stressed the importance of that Conference and hoped that it would secure the financial and diplomatic support required for a ceasefire and end to the conflict.

130. While UNHCR had heard and genuinely shared the serious concerns about sexual and gender-based violence, its capacity to deliver comprehensive life-saving responses, particularly in protracted situations, was seriously hampered by underfunding as highlighted in the Regional Response Plan. Communities on the frontline were responding and the nature and scale of the issue had been discussed the previous day at a meeting with organizations operating in and around the Sudan, many of them led by Sudanese women. However, more must be done to address that problem; the information was available and it was now a matter of collective responsibility.

131. With regard to solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons, he drew attention to the Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement, the support provided for the work of the Special Adviser on Internal Displacement, and the Assistant High Commissioner's upcoming visit to Egypt with a view to cooperation with IOM and UNDP in a collective search for solutions. Meanwhile, the work under way in Somalia would continue under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator and the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator and the return of refugees from the Sudan was creating a pocket of hope in South Sudan, where the Government had adopted a national durable solutions strategy that, if implemented, would help all of the humanitarian and development actors to make real progress in promoting return and reintegration.

132. Within the framework of the Tripartite Commission for the Voluntary Repatriation of Burundian Refugees, UNHCR had supported the voluntary return of some 22,000 refugees to Burundi in 2023, most of them from the United Republic of Tanzania. Those returnees were now in need of reintegration support and the Office would be working to sustain collective efforts to create the conditions for further voluntary returns and provision of the necessary support.

133. With respect to the Office's partnership with development actors, the East and Horn of Africa subregion had benefited from the support that they provided, primarily to host communities but also to refugees. They had been instrumental in supporting policy change and creating suitable conditions for host populations and refugees, including health care, water supply and access to education. That work must continue through other partnerships with, for example, the AfDB.

134. On the issue of risk mitigation, given the importance to the Office and those that it served of ensuring the integrity of its processes and the delivery of assistance to those who were genuinely in need, UNHCR would continue to keep Member States informed of any risks that came to its attention. Regarding the requests for information on education, services and their delivery in partnership with other stakeholders, his team could respond to the delegations concerned in the near future.

ii. Southern Africa

135. The **Director of the Regional Bureau for Southern Africa** (UNHCR) thanked Governments in the region for continuing to receive and protect forcibly displaced and stateless people in the face of socioeconomic challenges, prolonged conflict and the impacts of climate change despite the limited resources available.

136. The conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remained a major source of concern and in the absence of political and diplomatic solutions, women and children were paying the price. Over 144,000 civilians had fled from their homes near the town of Sake to the city of Goma in the past few weeks and new displacements in the east of the country were compounding a preexisting pressing humanitarian situation. There were more than 7 million internally displaced persons nationwide, including half a million refugees, with inadequate basic services and limited income-generating opportunities and UNHCR had recorded some 114,000 human rights violations, including 9,600 cases of gender-based violence, in 2023. As noted in the 2024 humanitarian response plan, \$2.6 billion would be required to meet the humanitarian needs of 8.7 million people and under the inter-agency regional refugee response plan for 2024-2025 and \$668.3 million would be required in order to provide protection, assistance and solutions for the 950,000 Congolese refugees hosted in seven neighbouring countries in 2024.

137. The humanitarian situation in Cabo Delgado province remained complex and dynamic owing to continuous attacks by armed groups and had resulted in the forced displacement of 709,000 people, including 45,957 who had been recently displaced from the Chiure district to Erati in Nampula province. Despite resource constraints, the Government of Mozambique had been relentless in its efforts to assist the displaced persons in Cabo Delgado and was currently seeking longer-term solutions. Several United Nations agencies and non-governmental partners had established a presence in the area.

138. Regarding mixed movements in the region, UNHCR and IOM were working with Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe in their efforts to address the issue through a route-based approach in coordination with the Office's Regional Bureau for the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region. The Office was strengthening its presence in the border areas in order to help national officials to identify and manage refugees and migrants and a concept note to guide that approach was currently under development.

139. In Zambia, the Government had adopted a progressive refugee policy that, once implemented through the 2017 Refugees Act, would safeguard the socioeconomic rights of refugees in the country. Momentum in the search for long-term solutions for refugees and returnees had been provided by the Government's political will and engagement with development actors, and the country was in the process of gaining access to the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA) Window for Host Communities and Refugees financing mechanism. In South Africa, steps had been taken to harmonize three key pieces of legislation – on citizenship, immigration and refugee protection – and UNHCR was working with the Government to identify and address any potential conflicts between them.

140. On the issue of statelessness, the Office applauded the Republic of the Congo for ratifying the two Conventions on statelessness in 2023. Elsewhere in the region, Malawi and Namibia were implementing policy and legal reforms that would remove barriers to addressing issues such as gender discrimination in nationality laws. The Republic of the Congo and Zambia were committed

to including refugees in their national systems through access to national social protection schemes and the issuance of identity documents, thus paving the way for their inclusion in national development plans. The Government of Angola had launched a refugee registration process to address an applications backlog of 28,000 asylum-seekers and the Government of Malawi was conducting a review of the country's refugee laws, which, once amended, would be instrumental in promoting a progressive approach to refugee protection and management.

141. At the regional level, UNHCR and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) were continuing to implement the 2019 Regional Policy Framework on the Management of Refugees and Asylum-Seekers, which also covered stateless people, and a regional work plan had been developed in cooperation with SADC to support Member States' efforts to clear asylum applications backlogs, remove barriers to asylum, promote inclusion and reduce the risk of statelessness.

142. Recalling the 202 pledges made by stakeholders from the Southern Africa region at the Global Refugee Forum 2023 and their increased participation, together with nine United Nations country teams and a host of NGOs, refugee-led organizations and private sector organizations, she thanked donors and partners for their invaluable support. UNHCR would continue to join forces with them to provide longer-term life-saving solutions for the forcibly displaced and stateless in the region.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.