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

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Summary record,* Thursday, 14 March 2024, at 15:03

Chairperson: Dr. Katharina Stasch (Germany)

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* Summary records, prepared by external service providers, summarize the discussions and record decisions taken. Though extensive, they do not represent a verbatim record of the proceedings. Corrections to a summary record should concern only errors made regarding, for example, an official title, and a statistic or a statement reflected from the discussion. A correction does not allow for any additions or for changes to be made of a political character. Any proposed substantive corrections will be checked against the sound recording of the meeting before any change can be made. Requests for corrections should be sent to the ExCom Secretariat: excom@unhcr.org, and any corrected records will be reissued with a new date. Feedback on the summary records may also be sent to the ExCom Secretariat for consideration in the preparation of future summaries.

The meeting was called to order at 3.03 p.m.

Dr. Katharina Stasch (Germany), Chairperson, chaired the discussion

3. Regional activities and global programmes (continued)

a. Regional updates (continued)

vi. Europe (continued)

1. The representative of **Malta** said that her country aligned itself with the statement delivered by the European Union and wished to add the following remarks in its national capacity. She thanked UNHCR for its valuable work through its operations in Europe and congratulated them for the successful organization of the Global Refugee Forum 2023 as co-hosts. Her country would continue working on the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees, including the pledges submitted at this forum.

2. As the update document clearly indicated, the ongoing situation in Ukraine continued to be a major priority issue on migration issues in Europe as a whole. As the tragedy of Ukraine further unfolded due to Russia's war of aggression against its sovereign neighbouring state, Malta continued to provide material and political support as well as humanitarian funding, including at the European Union level, and all necessary assistance to Ukrainian refugees, including by also addressing their social and health needs. Her country shared the serious concerns expressed in the update document on the devastating effects Russia's military ventures were having on children, including their right to education. Malta placed high importance on the rights of children, in particular those in conflict situations. The intersecting violation of rights that were currently affecting Ukrainian children would leave a lifelong lasting physical and psychosocial effect. It therefore welcomed that the update document included a reference to mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) to forcibly displaced persons. It also welcomed the continued work to increase capacity development on mental health and psychosocial support in the Mediterranean.

3. Migration in Europe remained a multifaceted traumatic area and Malta wished to recall that not all migratory routes into Europe were related to the situation in Ukraine, but rather to unrest and conflicts further afield. Her country welcomed that the update documents referred to the complex challenges that irregular and mixed population movements had presented at Europe's external borders, including Malta, as a frontline State in the central Mediterranean route, and that the UNHCR would further engage in this with States such as Malta. In closing, she thanked UNHCR for its continued invaluable assistance and cooperation in all areas within its remit, through its offices in her country. Malta remained committed to supporting UNHCR, both from an advocacy point of view, as well as through financial contributions and hoped that this long-standing cooperation could be further strengthened going forward.

4. The representative of **Armenia** congratulated the newly appointed Assistant High Commissioner for Protection and Director of the Regional Bureau for Europe and wished them every success in their new capacity. She also thanked UNHCR for its update on its operations in Europe and all those delegations who had made references in their statements to the refugee situation and the forcibly displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh. Her country highly valued the vigorous engagement of UNHCR in support of the response plan led by the Armenian government following the arrival of the refugees in Armenia. She reiterated her Government's gratitude to all those donors whose generous financial and in-kind contributions had narrowed the gaps in Armenia's refugee plan. Unfortunately, the refugee response plan as well as the medium to long term response in her country still remained underfunded and her country would be grateful for possible new donations from all engaged partners. Finally, Armenia wished to renew its support to the UNHCR for its ongoing activities across the region and for its global programmes.

5. The representative of **Luxembourg** said that his country fully endorsed the statement made by the European Union and wished to add a few considerations of its own. His country reiterated its support for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine, and its unwavering solidarity with the Ukrainian people. After more than two years since the start of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the humanitarian situation in Ukraine remained deeply worrying. In the face of continuing difficulties, his country reiterated the need for unhindered humanitarian access to be able to respond effectively to the humanitarian needs of the Ukrainian people.

6. Luxembourg wished to thank the UNHCR for its tireless work and support in protecting,

assisting and responding to the needs of the Ukrainian population, including in areas that were difficult to access, and to the displaced population in neighbouring countries. His Government had stood side-by-side with Ukraine since day one and to date had provided more than €13.4 million in humanitarian aid through the UNHCR and other UN agencies, NGOs and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. His country had also provided €5 million in support in kind, such as generators, medical equipment, medicines and connectivity services. It was striving to maintain its level of humanitarian funding to Ukraine and its support to the UNHCR in 2024 and to step up its early recovery assistance. In Luxembourg, more than 4,300 Ukrainians, mostly women and children, were currently benefiting from the rights and services associated with temporary protection, which had been in place since March 2022 in European Union Member States. Both now and in the future, Luxembourg could be counted on to continue to provide political and financial support.

7. The representative of **Austria** thanked the Director of the Regional Bureau for Europe and congratulated him on his appointment. He welcomed the comprehensive regional update and thanked the Office's staff in the field and the Director for their unwavering commitment and hard work on the ground. Lastly, he also congratulated UNHCR for co-hosting, co-convening the successful Global Refugee Forum 2023 in Geneva last December.

8. In the second year since the outbreak of Russia's brutal and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, it was distressing to note that, less than three weeks ago, the conflict had caused 6.4 million refugees and 3.7 million internally displaced persons to flee. His country was appalled that this war had brought about an inconceivable number of serious violations of international humanitarian law that were clearly outrageous both in their number and in their intensity. This included deliberate attacks on hospitals, schools and critical civilian infrastructure, as well as the indiscriminate use of explosive weapons in populated areas. His Government continued to firmly call upon both parties in the conflict, in particular the Russian Federation, to fully comply with its obligations under international humanitarian law. Austria remained extremely concerned at the reports of children from Ukraine being forcibly deported to the Russian Federation and Belarus, and called upon Russia to ensure immediate and unimpeded access for UNHCR and other mandated agencies to all Ukrainian refugees, in particular children.

9. Austria also reaffirmed its unwavering support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, and its inherent right to self-defence against Russian aggression. This conflict had not only created a disastrous situation in Ukraine itself but had also gravely exacerbated humanitarian crisis in other regions, where food and energy shortages were causing unimaginable suffering in the poorest areas of the global south. One person had given the order to start this war and that person was the President of the Russian Federation, who had the power to end the war today and Austria wished to directly and exclusively appeal to him to withdraw his troops from the entire territory of Ukraine within internationally recognized borders and to return to the negotiating table. His country fully supported the 10-point peace plan drawn up by Ukrainian President, Volodymyr Zelensky. No state and no one person stood above international law and a world in which international rules were complied with was vital.

10. Austria reaffirmed its unwavering support for Ukraine's independence and were impressed by the courage and resilience of the Ukrainian people to defend themselves. In standing with Ukraine, his country stood with the people that defended their own country, their self-determination, democracy and freedom. Since the outset of the brutal Russian war, Austria had stood in solidarity with and continued to substantially support Ukraine. As a leading donor of humanitarian assistance, to date his Government had mobilized more than €210 million in public financial and humanitarian assistance for Ukraine and its neighbouring states. Further, since the outbreak of the conflict, in excess of 110,000 displaced persons from Ukraine had registered in Austria under the European Union's Temporary Protection Directive and currently his country hosted more than 68,000 displaced Ukrainians, approximately 40,000 of whom are recipients of public welfare services.

11. Austria thanked UNHCR for its vital work in delivering protection, shelter and assistance to populations most in need, including in hard-to-reach areas. It appreciated that protecting women and girls, including from sexual and gender-based violence, and sexual exploitation and abuse would remain a key priority for UNHCR, across its Ukraine situation response. His Government commended UNHCR for prioritizing the access to education for displaced children and young people from Ukraine and warmly welcomed that, in response to the significant mental health and psychosocial support needs among forcibly displaced populations throughout the region, UNHCR

had strengthened its capacity building efforts and training in that field. Austria would be interested in learning more about the organization's activities in addressing the specific protection and assistance needs of persons of concern to UNHCR with disabilities in the region. It welcomed that UNHCR would also accelerate its efforts to address statelessness in Europe, in partnership with governments, civil society, regional organizations and persons with lived experiences of statelessness.

12. The representative of **Finland** said that Finland had some additional remarks in its national capacity. Two years ago, Russia launched its full-scale war of aggression against its peaceful sovereign neighbour, Ukraine. In the face of Russia's brutal aggression, Ukrainians had shown incredible resilience and determination. It was vital that the international community pursued its efforts to hold Russia and its representatives accountable for the widespread and blatant violations of international law. Russia was solely responsible for this war and his country expressed its appreciation to UNHCR for the effective coordination of the Ukraine Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan, engaging more than 300 partners across 11 countries. The role of UNHCR was essential in delivering protection, shelter, cash assistance and winterization activities. His Government stressed the need to take the special needs of persons in vulnerable situations, including persons with disabilities, adequately into account and to involve organizations representing such groups in the planning and implementation of refugee responses. This was not only a moral imperative, but a means to increase the effectiveness of aid.

13. Finland would continue to support Ukraine, including through humanitarian assistance for the people in need for as long as needed. Ukraine was also Finland's biggest development cooperation partner country and reconstruction efforts had already started in Ukraine. His country had published the first part of the National Reconstruction Plan in December, which focused on the role of the private sector. Engagement of both companies and investors in the reconstruction was essential. His Government looked forward to deepening its partnership with UNHCR in Ukraine and would provide assistance to people who had fled the war in Ukraine and continue to protect them in cooperation with other European Union member States. Special attention would be paid to persons in a vulnerable situation, such as unaccompanied children who had fled the war in Ukraine.

14. Since the beginning of the war, approximately 67,000 Ukrainian citizens had applied for temporary protection from Finland, of whom an estimated 43,000 were still residing in Finland. Ukrainian citizens had the right to work and study in Finland immediately after applying for temporary protection. The Finnish government programme put a high premium on supporting the employment, education and integration of those who have fled the war in Ukraine. In recent months, Finland had witnessed a hybrid operation at its eastern border, where the vulnerability of human beings had been exploited for political motives. Third-country nationals had been admitted in various ways and assisted in travelling to the Finnish border. Such instrumentalized movement of people was not only causing human suffering but was also impacting its security and stability and that was intolerable. In December 2023, an agreement was reached on the European Union's new Pact on Migration and Asylum. Finland welcomed its adoption and recognized the importance of its effective implementation of the new legislation. The Pact would create an effective and unified procedure for processing asylum applications within the entire Union. The mandatory border procedure would allow quicker access to protection and direct potentially unfounded applications to that border procedure while preventing secondary movement.

15. The representative of the **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** said that Russia's assault on Ukraine was an unprovoked, premeditated and barbaric attack against a sovereign democratic state. His Government and its international partners stood as one in condemning the Russian government's reprehensible actions, which were an egregious violation of international law and the United Nations Charter. His country would continue to support the Ukrainian government in the face of that assault on its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Russia's war in Ukraine was now in its third year and the crisis was becoming increasingly protracted. The United Kingdom remained concerned about the continuing humanitarian situation, with almost 15 million people in need of humanitarian assistance. It thanked UNHCR for its efforts to protect Ukrainian refugees who had been forced to flee their homes due to the conflict and noted the challenges highlighted in the Ukraine Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan. The United Kingdom welcomed the work of UNHCR on surveying the future intentions of people taking refuge outside Ukraine and hoped that this work continued to inform thinking and dialogue around future durable solutions.

16. The representative of the **Philippines** said that her country had expressed its concern in various multilateral fora at the scale of forced displacement in Ukraine. Above all, the safety, welfare and human rights of civilians must be prioritized, especially those of women, children and persons with disabilities. International humanitarian law must be respected and safe access for humanitarian and aid workers must be upheld. Her Government had extended its support to international organizations in addressing the humanitarian crisis, including to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Ukraine Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan. It also remained concerned over the continuing expulsions, violent pushbacks and incidents of maltreatment during the entry of asylum-seekers and migrants into the region. This had remained a frequent feature of the UNHCR regional report year after year. Her country stressed that human rights and human lives must be respected and international obligations must be adhered to, including the 1951 Refugee Convention and other international instruments. The Philippines wished to highlight that human rights should be championed universally, regardless of region, nationality, race, ethnicity and religion.

17. The representative of **Uganda** thanked the Director for his succinct report. Her country had a proud background as one of the largest hosting countries but also as the leading one in Africa and was also acclaimed for its progressive refugee policies. Uganda was very grateful, particularly to Europe and the European Union, for frequently recalling her country's role in championing human rights. It was against that background that the Bureau's regional update, in the opening paragraph, mentioned that some 3,840 deaths were recorded along the primary sea routes. This was not, by any measure, an inconsiderable number of people and represented a 27 per cent increase from 2022 to 2023. The representative expressed her regret at such numbers and indicated that her Government was also very concerned that asylum-seekers and migrants were continuing to report expulsions, violent pushbacks and incidents of maltreatment when trying to enter the European Union.

18. As one of the most progressive refugee hosting countries, Uganda wished to call on its bilateral partners in Europe, with which it enjoyed cordial relations and which champion human rights, to implement the best practices that they recommended her country implement. It was the appropriate course of action. Her Government had seen some countries open their borders in Europe and was proud of them for doing so. Germany was among the leading host countries and it was important that best practices shared among Member States were also effectively carried out in their countries. She welcomed that the Standing Committee afforded such States the opportunity for such interactive dialogue.

19. While Uganda continued to keep its borders open, her country was also often reminded to respect international law and standards. Aware of mixed movements into Europe, the representative wished to inquire as to how they distinguished between migrants and asylum-seekers in the absence of any communication and wondered whether it was the case that such persons arrived carrying signs indicating to which category of person they belonged. Her Government had many refugees who came from far beyond its borders. Her country hosted some 18,000 Sudanese nationals and in excess of 20,000 Eritreans, despite not sharing borders with these countries, and was only capable of identifying whether such persons were asylum-seekers or migrants due to its free, transparent and fair asylum system. Pushbacks and deaths, including of pregnant women and children, were no longer acceptable.

20. It was also concerning that Europe continued to be the leading region when ranked by the number of stateless persons, with some 540,000 men and women. It was her country's opinion that the international community could do better and that there were many policies they could learn from African countries. Her Government invited them to carry out benchmarks and was also willing to put in place some training in this regard to ensure that statelessness dropped in Europe. To much acclaim, the European Union's Temporary Protection Directive had been extended and while cognizant that this was a regional initiative of the European Union, the representative wondered whether the Director could explain what was the best way for this and for humanitarian support to also be extended to non-Ukrainians. Applying humanitarian principles also meant extending such principles to those beyond your borders and responding to human needs. Uganda was proud of Europe's response to Ukraine and of its support of Ukrainian refugees but it was also vital to extend the same response to all of humanity.

21. In closing, Uganda had learnt from this regional report that European countries had at least prioritized impact areas and solutions, which had been very well funded but wondered whether Europe could also not do better as regards other regions and whether there were not two different

regions with two levels of funding. By investing internationally in impact areas and solutions to reduce dependence on humanitarian assistance, a commensurate reduction in the refugee burden occurs, resulting in integration and inclusion which in turn leads to no longer requesting donor support. Her country wished to explore with the Committee whether it could learn the manner in which to address such issues from African States.

22. The representative of the **Republic of Korea** thanked the Regional Director for his briefing and said that the Republic of Korea wished to join the many delegations in expressing his deep concern with the humanitarian situation in Ukraine and other parts of the region. His country also supported the approach taken, particularly from European Union Member States and other countries in the region, to tackle the crisis in close cooperation with UNHCR and took note of the real progress made in this regard, including through the European Union's Pact on Migration and Asylum. His country looked forward to the learning more about the progress against the desired outcome in the Organization's annual results report.

23. His Government also recognized that both the documents and the oral briefing mentioned the need to strengthen education for Ukrainian children and extend the necessary support for Ukrainian returnees, among other needs. Bearing in mind these aspects and the Ukraine Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan, the Republic of Korea would fulfil its humanitarian reconstruction and other commitments to Ukraine. This year alone would see his country disperse \$300 million for the people of Ukraine of which \$200 million corresponded to funding in humanitarian assistance. Such funds represented a meaningful increase from previous contributions and his Government would work closely with key humanitarian organizations.

24. In closing, the Republic of Korea wished to make a minor observation on some common, not Europe-specific points and indicated that although there was uniformity in the format of the updates, with regard to part B. Progress and challenges in achieving the 2023 plan and updated plans for 2024 of the Regional Update – Europe report, there were some slight variations in each of the regional update reports. For example, in the regional update for Europe and in those on some regions this information was clearly drafted to highlight the themes of four impact areas: protect, respond, empower and solve, as well as cost cutting. However, some regional updates seemed somewhat flexible and only outlined specific themes or programs, rather than a general description of those impact areas. This made it difficult to capture the broader progress and challenges of certain regions. Therefore, his delegation was of the view that more consistent informed reporting would result in such documents being better understood and would enhance their quality management.

25. The representative of **Türkiye** welcomed the new Regional Director and thanked him for his updates. All of the international community was becoming accustomed to hearing the numbers and statistics concerning the level of immense human suffering all over the world. Rather than repeating them, it was better to clearly explain what these numbers reflected. The international community had failed to keep its promises for a better future, including those made more than 70 years ago to end the suffering of refugees. There were many issues to address and this work required collective and comprehensive action but what was observable was that it still had some distance to go before achieving such needed solidarity.

26. The 1951 Refugee Convention was under stress and its core principles regarding the refugee regime were undermined in many ways, including by instrumentalization, externalization or pushbacks. His country wished to highlight the need to safeguard the integrity of the 1951 Refugee Convention, under serious threats from State parties, and UNHCR should act swiftly and commit to its protection. The current displacement landscape was complex, but in such an environment, there were increasing references to the concept of mixed movements. His Government closely followed discussions around that concept and wished to highlight two points: first and foremost, UNHCR should never desist from pursuing its mandate to protect the rights of asylum-seekers and refugees,; and second, the mixed movement concept should not be used as a tool to pursue zero sum refugee asylum-seeker migration policies. A person should not be categorized as an economic migrant in developed countries, while also categorized as an asylum-seeker or refugee in transit countries. All the data showed there was an immense burden on host countries. In the past, host countries repeatedly underlined that this was unsustainable and today, his country believed that it was starting to witness the emergence of some social flare-ups due to this long-overdue imbalance. There were two quick means of relieving such pressure: the first was by providing stronger support for those countries. Türkiye was aware of the difficulties around funding, but if such support were to stop now, it would put at risk the progress that had been made over many years on protecting persons of

concern, as host countries would still play a critical role in any potential improvement to the current situation. Second, and in line with the objectives of the Global Refugee Compact, the international community should prioritize solutions. The mindset surrounding the provision of support to countries of origin should change and work on returns and considering current circumstances should be a priority.

27. For almost a decade, Türkiye had been one of the largest refugee hosting countries. In cooperation with UNHCR, it had developed many best practices in this field. However, this could not and should not last forever. The principle of burden and responsibility sharing should be further implemented and the Global Refugee Forum 2023 was the platform to put the Global Refugee Compact into action. His Government had been one of the co-conveners of the first Forum and continued to support the second one. Türkiye had made a list of pledges, ranging from returns as a solution to Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic and for the Rohingyas, or on the rights of the child, higher education, and sports. This struck a balance between solutions and other aspects of refugee protection and reflected his country's global approach to different displacement situations. As it had done in the past, such as in the case of the war in Ukraine, the Syrian crisis or during the considerable irregular multi-directional flows of refugees, including those from Afghanistan, Türkiye would remain committed to the 1951 Refugee Convention, to the protection of vulnerable persons, in line with their long humanitarian tradition, to the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Refugee Forum 2023 and it would continue to support UNHCR in its endeavours.

28. The representative of the **United States of America** thanked UNHCR for its briefing and for the continued bravery and compassion it and all humanitarians operating in Ukraine had shown over the past two years since Russia's full-scale invasion. It welcomed the organization's outreach efforts to raise awareness of the key role humanitarians played in bolstering the resilience of Ukrainian people. The magnitude of humanitarian needs in the region continued to be extensive.

29. Russia's war of aggression had exacerbated food insecurity for millions and caused incalculable damage to Ukraine's infrastructure and the environment, killed and injured tens of thousands, displaced millions, destroyed at least 1.4 million family homes and wrought immense human suffering. The Russian President's actions had forced nearly 10 million people to live away from their homes. Russian officials had deported to Russia or forcibly transferred within Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine, hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian civilians, including children, in contravention of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Russia also refused to allow humanitarian organizations access to these protected persons, again, in contravention with the Fourth Geneva Convention. Her Government renewed calls for Russia to immediately withdraw their forces from Ukraine's internationally recognized borders, and to comply with international humanitarian and human rights law.

30. The United States of America had provided nearly \$2.9 billion in Ukraine-related humanitarian assistance since Russia's full-scale invasion, with this funding benefitting displaced and stateless people and host communities both inside Ukraine and across the region. Her country called on the international community to continue protecting the most vulnerable until conditions allowed safe, dignified and voluntary returns. In particular, it applauded the generosity of its European allies and partners who continued to open their borders and communities to those fleeing Russian aggression.

31. Her Government wished to take the opportunity to recall for this Committee that more than a year had passed since the devastating earthquakes in Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic and that it had provided more than \$315 million for emergency food, health, shelter, water, sanitation and other life-saving assistance in Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic. It applauded Türkiye and UNHCR for their ongoing recovery efforts and advocated for the continued inclusion of refugees and other displaced persons in such initiatives. Türkiye had been a generous host to refugees for decades, particularly since the start of the Syrian crisis, with over 3.5 million refugees today residing in Turkish host communities. Her country recognized the strong collaboration between Türkiye and UNHCR to register and assist vulnerable refugees, ensuring their integration into national systems. However, there was concern at ongoing calls for refugees to return to the Syrian Arab Republic, despite the assessment by UNHCR that the Syrian Arab Republic was not yet safe for large-scale returns. The United States of America encouraged hosting States to maintain close collaboration with UNHCR, adhere to their international obligations, including non-refoulement, and seek durable solutions while safeguarding refugee protection.

32. The representative of **Japan** thanked the UNHCR for its presentation. The Ukrainian humanitarian crisis continued due to Russia's aggression. Japan stood by all Ukrainians, who continued to live in the midst of an ongoing war and would continue to support the development and the reconstruction of Ukraine. To date, his country had announced a total of \$7.6 billion in humanitarian, financial, rehabilitation and reconstruction assistance to Ukraine and its neighbouring countries. In December last year, it had decided to provide an additional \$1 billion in assistance to Ukraine and its neighbours, including for humanitarian projects, such as the construction of temporary shelters, to be implemented by UNHCR.

33. Last month, the Japanese government had hosted the Japan-Ukraine Economic Recovery Promotion Conference in Tokyo and had continued to work on addressing the crises with various stakeholders, including the private sector and international organizations, while utilizing the humanitarian, development and peace nexus approach. His Government had funded humanitarian assistance to Azerbaijan and Armenia in the amount of \$2 million last October, including \$1 million to UNHCR to support displaced persons. On the subject of the UNHCR update document on Europe, it reported an increase in sea movements from Africa to Europe, as other delegations had mentioned. In light of the structural reforms within UNHCR and the fact that the Africa and Middle East and North Africa Bureaux were no longer based in Geneva, leaving only the Regional Bureau for Europe in that city, the representative wondered what the scope of the impact of this structural reform was and what the current status of cooperation was between these bureaux on the route-based approaches.

34. The representative of **Germany** said that his country aligned itself the statement delivered by the European Union. Unfortunately, more than two years after Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine had started, and after 10 years of war in the eastern parts of the country, there was still no end in sight. Russia's war had forced 6.3 million Ukrainians to flee, almost 4 million people of which were internally displaced. The refugee response plan for 2024 was clear and the needs would remain significant, and that was only for those who could be reached. Millions of Ukrainians were living in illegally occupied areas under Russian oppression. They were not forgotten.

35. Russia should be held accountable for the human suffering east and west of the Dnieper River. Therefore, it was for Russia to ensure humanitarian access to UNHCR and other humanitarian actors, and to respect international humanitarian law. The humanitarian crisis in Ukraine remained a protection crisis and the international community must ensure humanitarian access and put the protection of civilians at the heart of the response. Consequently, the focus should remain on gender-based violence, mental health and psychological and psychosocial support, and was a vital part the humanitarian response. His country encouraged other humanitarian actors to also engage in these areas and appreciated the work of UNHCR on the protection cluster. An effective response required close coordination and synergies between donors, international and local humanitarian organizations, and Ukraine's local and regional national authorities. Therefore, Germany was honoured to co-host together with Ukraine the Ukraine Recovery Conference in Berlin in 2024. It was looking forward to strengthening their collaboration and tightening their commitments, together with many of those present.

36. Russia's war had not only brought immense suffering upon the people of Ukraine, but continued to exacerbate existing fragilities in the global economy and endangered vulnerable populations worldwide. His Government would continue to support vulnerable populations and their host States worldwide in the spirit of global burden sharing and responsibility sharing and commended the Committee and UNHCR for its determined engagement to support Ukrainians both inside and outside Ukraine. It supported efforts which would facilitate further needs analysis, taking into account all factors of vulnerability. In particular, the representative wished to highlight the joint efforts by UNHCR and Germany in providing shelter and support to internally displaced persons within Ukraine. This allowed many citizens to stay in the country and remain close to their loved ones. For those who had to flee Russia's war of aggression, Germany was determined to continue its support and protection as a host to 1.1 million Ukrainians. At the same time, his country reiterated its gratitude to Ukraine's neighbours and other European States that gave shelter to Ukrainian refugees. In closing, he said that Germany stood firm for as long as it would take on its substantial humanitarian support to all Ukrainians in their homeland and to those who had found refuge in Germany.

37. The representative of **Ukraine** (observer) said that as the war in Ukraine became protracted, so did the displacement and humanitarian crisis it provoked. More than 10 million Ukrainians remained displaced, including about 3.7 million within Ukraine and a further 6.5 million abroad.

The sustainable reintegration of people still appeared a distant prospect due to residential damage and destruction, disruption of essential services, and persistent safety and security risks. Russian attacks on densely populated areas and critical civilian infrastructure continued to take a heavy toll on civilians across Ukraine, while also impacting access to essential services. She thanked UNHCR for supporting Ukraine with the needs of the affected population and hoped that the recent High Commissioner's visit to the country would help sustain momentum in effective response.

38. She called upon UNHCR to continue its active engagement in humanitarian-development action in Ukraine, particularly through supporting the Strategy of State Policy on Internal Displacement for the period until 2025 and focusing on programming, supporting recovery and reintegration efforts. She welcomed the launch of the Regional Refugee Response Plan in January 2024 and noted the position of UNHCR in relation to temporary travel by Ukrainian refugees to Ukraine. She thanked all countries that had provided temporary protection to Ukrainians and commended the European Union decision to extend temporary protection until March 2025.

39. Ukraine was seriously concerned by civilian Ukrainians being deported by the Russian Federation to its territory, including at least 19,546 children. Only a small number of children had been returned and she called on the humanitarian community to demand full and unimpeded access to those people, particularly children, to facilitate their safe return to Ukraine in accordance with the Fourth Geneva Convention.

40. The protection crisis in the temporarily occupied territories had been further exacerbated by Russia through forced massive naturalization known as "passportization", which she condemned. Ukrainian citizens had been forced to obtain Russian passports under extreme pressure and refusal could lead to being denied access to basic services, as well as unlawful deportation and detention. Ukraine called for continued international support for Ukrainian citizens facing Russian aggression and for UNHCR's work in Ukraine and neighbouring countries.

41. The representative of the **Jesuit Refugee Service Europe, speaking on behalf of non-governmental organizations (NGOs)** said that the European Union's New Pact on Migration and Asylum focused on deterrence, detention and deportation. The decision to include mandatory border procedures implied de facto detention at the European Union's external borders, children and vulnerable people included. This could extend to applications of unaccompanied children.

42. The Pact relied on the legal fiction of non-entry and expanded on the use of safe third country concepts, outsourcing the European Union's asylum responsibilities and raising the risk of refoulement, whilst lowering procedural guarantees including legal aid.

43. The focus on border procedures increased administrative burdens for European Union countries at external borders, leading to bottlenecks, delayed asylum and overcrowded camps. The solidarity mechanism would not effectively alleviate this.

44. NGOs were alarmed by proposed derogations for crisis, force majeure and instrumentalization situations, as these allowed for deviation from common asylum standards, expanded the use of border procedures and lowered key safeguards. Fast track asylum procedures heightened the risk of violations and the denial of fair individual assessment. She called for the Pact's implementation with full respect for the fundamental rights of refugees and stateless persons, in close consultation with NGOs and civil society.

45. Detention upon arrival was likely to increase with the screening regulation and the amended asylum procedural regulation, undermining the last resort principle. She strongly urged European countries to use detention only as a last resort. Safe country concepts also undermined the rights of asylum-seekers, subjecting them to additional human rights abuses and deportation. These agreements, coupled with systematic pushbacks and some pullbacks, fostered a Fortress Europe.

46. The 1951 Refugee Convention obligated European States to assume their responsibilities and properly resource their asylum systems. She urged European States to significantly increase their resettlement quotas and to open up more opportunities for complementary pathways.

47. On statelessness, European States' inadequate policy response heightened the risk of statelessness, particularly for children. NGOs urged all European States to implement their international obligations, ensuring stateless children born on their territory acquired a nationality.

48. The Ukraine response offered a model for a common European response to all refugees. Ukrainian refugees currently had temporary or other forms of protection and a coordinated,

sustainable solution would be crucial beyond March 2025. It was important to give long-term perspective to refugees fleeing Ukraine, allowing them to settle and integrate into host countries. Many would qualify for subsidiary protection as the war continued, whereby if all refugees fleeing Ukraine sought individual protection statuses simultaneously, national asylum systems could be overwhelmed. NGOs called for the exploration of a united European Union approach for transitioning to long-term regularized status with permanent legal stay, prioritizing children's enrolment in schools. Access to mental health and psychosocial support services, as well as employment opportunities, were also priorities.

49. The **Director of the Regional Bureau for Europe**, responding to Members' comments on the need to apply the 1951 Refugee Convention and others, said that situations that brought about the existence of the Convention involved war and human rights violations and these circumstances unfortunately continued to exist, making it necessary to apply the Convention and protection of persons as refugees. Refugees seeking to migrate and mixed flows were issues that the route-based approach could resolve.

50. On the situation in Ukraine, he acknowledged the support received by UNHCR in areas close to the frontlines. The need to support early recovery efforts and UNHCR humanitarian programming involved working with nexus partners, seeking solutions initially by promoting sustainability, local ownership, and self-reliance for the displaced and returnees. UNHCR and UNDP had developed a strong partnership and collaborative framework to further operationalize the humanitarian development nexus around five priority areas: protection and public safety, housing needs, access to services, livelihood opportunities and community inclusion, and participation and social cohesion. UNHCR would seek to engage all partners on recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine. He acknowledged the need for demining and asked for access for humanitarian actors to be able to respond to these needs. The needs of children in Ukraine were different and education was a challenge in many countries where children were not registered. UNHCR welcomed efforts by Member States to ensure that Ukrainian refugee children were registered at schools and could benefit from education. UNHCR would work alongside other actors to ensure that children could be reunited with their families, reminding all States that adoption and naturalization should not occur, and that refugee children's interests should be at the heart of actions. He commended the social inclusion that enabled many Ukrainian refugees to have access to employment and contribute to the support of the countries receiving them. He noted that mental health support was extremely needed, but was still weak in many places, and UNHCR urged all states to focus on giving access to national services to the most vulnerable.

51. Responding to members' questions, he said that 94 per cent of the key national partners of UNHCR were refugee-led organizations. At the field level, UNHCR did its utmost to put localization, at the centre of its programming, as well as giving a voice to refugees and the internally displaced. He reiterated UNHCR's commitment to protection from sexual exploitation as a critical part of the Ukrainian response. He welcomed the strong engagement of the United Nations, NGO and government partners in networks in Hungary, the Republic of Moldova, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, gathering more than 170 members active in the response and spearheading collective efforts.

52. On the Karabakh situation, UNHCR was at the end of its six-month appeal and was supporting the Armenian government in ensuring the inclusion of refugees in education and employment whilst considering their possible return to Azerbaijan. He was encouraged by the statement of Armenia and Azerbaijan looking at peace in the near future; this would enable UNHCR to support refugees and move towards solutions.

53. He acknowledged that many migrants and asylum-seekers were crossing the Mediterranean Sea towards Europe and the dramatic increase in the number of deaths. This emphasized the need for countries to engage in the route-based approach with humanitarian actors.

54. UNHCR was encouraged by the recent European Union decision to engage in cooperation with Mauritania and recognized the extraordinary policies hosting of Malian refugees in Mauritania. He welcomed increased action in this field to reduce the number of people resorting to smugglers or traffickers and risking their lives by attempting to join family members.

55. UNHCR would welcome the adoption of the European Union's New Pact on Migration and Asylum. It was important to build on this consensus and ask for a protection-sensitive

implementation of it while being aware of the risks of detention and deportation procedures, including for children. UNHCR would pay close attention to the Pact's implementation should it be adopted.

56. On gender-based violence, taking robust measures and ensuring that victims had access to protection services was a priority for UNHCR. Effective and long-lasting access for refugees to national mechanisms for responding to gender-based violence was required.

57. On statelessness, much work had been done to prevent and reduce statelessness. The #IBelong campaign had not resulted in the total eradication of statelessness, but UNHCR looked forward to the efforts and pledges made. New pledges made by European countries to reduce statelessness in Europe and ensure that no child was born as stateless were welcomed.

vii. Middle East and North Africa

58. The **Director of the Bureau of Middle East and North Africa**, presenting an update on the UNHCR operations in his region, said that he was deeply concerned with the ongoing situation in Gaza and the impact on civilians. UNHCR in Egypt continued to closely monitor the situation in and around Gaza and the risk of regional spillover. Contingency plans were being aligned in anticipation of a different scenario in which the role of UNHCR would vary. Egypt was supporting the cross-border operation in Gaza through the Egyptian Red Crescent (ERC) and was fully engaged with the broader United Nations interagency coordination structures.

59. In Lebanon, there had been a major impact. Actual or anticipated exchanges of fire across the southern border had resulted in more than 91,000 displaced persons from the South, including 8,700 Syrian refugees. Learning from Gaza and new emergencies, UNHCR had quickly dispatched regional stocks to support the ERC. UNHCR could cope with addressing multiple situations simultaneously, but capacity was challenged by reduced funding.

60. On the Syrian crisis, this continued to be the largest in the region in terms of population movement, with over 12 million people forcibly displaced. In 2023, the Arab normalization and other initiatives suggested the possibility of Syrians being able to return home voluntarily in safety and dignity, but the implementation of these changes was still to be seen. Neighbouring countries continued to host almost six million Syrians while the socioeconomic conditions and vulnerabilities of refugees and host communities continued to deteriorate due to extreme poverty and debt. Inside the Syrian Arab Republic, 16.7 million people needed humanitarian assistance and nearly 13 million people were food insecure. UNHCR would continue to support solutions within the Syrian Arab Republic through early recovery, with a focus on strengthening the resilience of communities through an area-based approach. Maintaining and expanding funding was crucial, in addition to access to services and livelihood in host countries.

61. In North Africa, the eruption of civil war in the Sudan had forced more than 450,000 refugees to flee to Egypt, a country facing its own economic challenges. UNHCR had also noted an increase in Sudanese irregular entry and stay across Egypt, particularly in the South. UNHCR was continuing collaboration and advocacy with the Egyptian government to ensure access to asylum and assistance for those fleeing the Sudan.

62. He said movements by sea from North Africa to Europe continued, with more than 97,000 people arriving in Italy from Tunisia, while 52,000 arrived from Libya. Crossings to Spain via the Mediterranean Sea increased by 19 per cent. UNHCR continued to work with the concerned authorities and partners to strengthen access to protection and solutions at the first point of encounter. Its strategy included short-term measures to address immediate needs and long-term interventions to strengthen access to national protection and asylum.

63. A new influx of Malian refugees to Mauritania had resulted in an out-of-camp population that required immediate attention. UNHCR had recently announced a level-1 emergency for Mauritania and needed to strengthen capacity to respond to life-saving needs alongside partners whilst linking up with mid- to long-term resilience and development efforts.

64. On the funding situation, he said that this was crucial for UNHCR and host countries to be able to deliver their mandate. Large hosting countries such as Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan were the first responders for multiple crises and required predictable multi-year support. Funding cuts had resulted in reduced protection space, increased poverty and risk of onward movement to Europe. In 2023, UNHCR was forced to cut back critical aid, including all winter assistance in Egypt, Iraq,

Jordan and Lebanon. This year the Agency's cash assistance programmes were at risk.

65. The representative of **Pakistan**, (group statement on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) group of countries in Geneva), called for an end to the aggression and oppression by the occupying power in Gaza against Palestinian people. He condemned the non-compliance by the occupying power with the provisional measures ruled by the International Court of Justice and demanded a complete and comprehensive cessation of war crimes and all brutal acts of genocide, including killing, displacement, and destruction of Palestinian people by the occupation forces. The OIC Group appreciated UNHCR echoing the right of Palestinian people to return to their homeland. It also appreciated the work done to support those affected by the situation. The Group rejected any prejudice to the role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Refugees (UNRWA), including cancelling its mandate, denouncing all pressures to which the agency was exposed through resource constraints and incitement campaigns with the desire to liquidate its existence. He commended States which had resumed funding of UNRWA and urged all States to assume their responsibilities in providing unimpeded and adequate humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people.

66. On budget cuts in UNHCR programmes in OIC countries, the group was concerned by this since most refugees and other displaced persons were hosted by low and middle income OIC countries, which were disproportionately shouldering a large portion of the global burden to host, assist and protect refugees. The Group was especially concerned by the situation in the Sudan, recalling the principle of equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing, which required UNHCR and the international community to provide enhanced assistance to OIC countries hosting large numbers of refugees and displaced persons, as well as countries of origin to cater for returnees through humanitarian and development assistance.

67. The representative of **Egypt**, (group statement on behalf of the Arab Group), expressed concern regarding the increasing number of persons of concern in 2023 due to protracted conflicts and eruption of new humanitarian crises. She reiterated the importance of peaceful settlement of all conflicts and dealing with the root causes of displacement and the refugee problem. The humanitarian crisis in Gaza was unprecedented, where internally displaced persons represented 85 per cent of the population due to Israeli crimes, especially as the Israeli occupation was determined to launch a military operation in Rafah which hosted more than 1.4 million Palestinians. This was a very clear attempt by Israeli leaders to displace the Palestinian people and liquidate the Palestinian cause. The Arab Group concurred with the report and reiterated that UNRWA had the sole mandate to support Palestinians, as well as the importance of the continued funding of UNRWA.

68. On the Sudan situation, she warned against the humanitarian catastrophe arising from the deteriorating security, economic, and humanitarian situations. More than five million Sudanese had become internally displaced persons and over half a million had fled to neighbouring countries. She asked donor countries and institutions to implement the Humanitarian Response Plan, to fulfil their pledges to support the Sudan, fill the 75 per cent funding gaps compared to needs, facilitate humanitarian assistance, and increase the resilience and stability of host communities. She supported response efforts.

69. Following the earthquake in the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye as well as storm Daniel in Libya, it was important to provide protection to all refugees, internally displaced persons, and persons of concern in addition to providing all basic services. International efforts should be based on burden- and responsibility-sharing on a humanitarian basis, away from politicization and seeking sustainable solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons.

70. She appreciated efforts by UNHCR and its partners on preparedness and planning for return. It was important to find sustainable solutions for refugees in a more balanced way and to focus on integrating refugees in hosting countries, while not ignoring other sustainable solutions such as voluntary return or resettlement. The international community needed to shoulder its responsibility based on equal burdens and responsibilities. It was also important to find solutions to the root causes of displacement. She commended the partnership of UNHCR with the League of Arab States mentioned in the report. She called upon the regional bureau to highlight the efforts of countries in the region in dealing with asylum-seekers and refugees in its upcoming report, despite the economic situation. Reduced funding of UNHCR in the region was concerning, covering only 10 per cent of financial needs concerning Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, the Sudan and Yemen, where operations were the least funded at international level. She called on the international community to fulfil its responsibilities vis-à-vis refugees, internally displaced persons, and host communities and expand

unearmarked funding in order to alleviate the burden on host countries, based on the principle of shared and equal responsibilities.

71. The representative of the **European Union** (group statement of the European Union and its Member States) said that, after thirteen years of conflict, the Syrian crisis was still far from being resolved. He commended the countries neighbouring the Syrian Arab Republic and reaffirmed the European Union's commitment to continue supporting the Syrian people and those countries hosting Syrian refugees, both bilaterally and through the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan. To ensure that humanitarian assistance reached those most in need and to address the growing needs of internally displaced persons in the north of the country, it was vital to continue to use all modalities for aid delivery, including cross-border mechanisms. He therefore called on all stakeholders to respect and expand aid delivery in the country.

72. The European Union and its Member States reiterated the importance of ensuring that refugee returns were voluntary, safe and dignified, which was not the case at that time, and called for the implementation of the commitments made in that regard at the previous meeting of the UNHCR Executive Committee. The safeguarding of refugee rights, notably the right to registration, documentation, decent living conditions, improved self-reliance and adequate access to basic services, was of vital importance.

73. In Türkiye, the European Union had pledged €400 million for reconstruction efforts after the earthquake and it was supporting Jordan and Lebanon to provide refugees and host communities in vulnerable situations with access to basic services. It called for the establishment of a nexus dialogue uniting all relevant humanitarian and development actors.

74. The escalating violence in the Middle East was having a dramatic effect on Palestinian refugees, who continued to rely on humanitarian support provided by UNRWA, both within the Occupied Palestinian Territory and in Lebanon, Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic. The European Union and its Member States appreciated the efforts of UNHCR efforts to address the tremendous humanitarian needs of the region, and they welcomed the decision by the United Nations Secretary-General to appoint an independent review group to assess the internal mechanisms and procedures of UNRWA.

75. The European Union and its Member States called for the respect of human rights and international humanitarian law and accountability for any violations thereof. It was paramount to ensure the protection of all civilians at all times, as well as the protection of civilian infrastructure. The European Union and its Member States reiterated their condemnation of the terrorist attacks perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October 2023 and called for the unconditional and immediate release of all hostages. They took note of the binding provisional order issued by the International Court of Justice and urged all sides to respect international law. Expressing his deep concern at the imminent threat of famine among displaced Palestinians, especially those in northern Gaza, he called for the facilitation of the work of United Nations agencies, including through continued, rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access, in order to deliver aid to those in need through all necessary means. He welcomed the opening of a maritime corridor to deliver humanitarian assistance to Gaza from Cyprus. Noting the High Commissioner's call for an immediate ceasefire on humanitarian grounds, he expressed his deep concern about the humanitarian consequences of a possible ground operation in Rafah.

76. In Yemen, the operating environment remained challenging, especially under Houthi-controlled areas, and refugees, migrants and asylum-seekers faced increasing protection risks. It was vital to maintain clear and transparent communication of the issues at hand to enable operations to reach the most vulnerable, including women and girls. As the sole provider of protection services to forcibly displaced persons, UNHCR played a central role in addressing their overwhelming protection needs. It was also a key partner in facilitating the coordination of the humanitarian response. The European Union and its Member States welcomed the engagement of UNHCR in the country and reiterated their commitment to supporting joint efforts, including on the promotion of the centrality of protection and the implementation of the joint mixed-movement strategy by UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Donors and humanitarian actors must maintain a united voice in order to ensure smooth coordination.

77. The representative of **Algeria**, aligning his delegation with the statements made by the groups to which it belonged, reiterated his country's support of UNHCR's noble mission. The Middle East and North Africa was one of the regions most affected by instability in the context of an increasingly

complex humanitarian situation. In that connection, he wished to take the opportunity to condemn the systematic genocide being committed in Palestine and to urge the international community to pressure the occupying power to respect the principles of international humanitarian law.

78. Despite the increasing numbers of persons of concern to UNHCR in the region, the provision of resources to meet their needs had long been insufficient. He reiterated the need to address all crises that led to forced displacement, especially the protracted conflicts and situations of colonization suffered by many countries. As a member of the Security Council, Algeria was determined to provide protection to refugees and displaced persons. Indeed, at the Global Refugee Forum 2023, his country had made three important pledges demonstrating its commitment in that regard. He congratulated all countries and actors involved on the success of the Forum.

79. Algeria hosted thousands of refugees and dedicated significant resources to combatting human trafficking and drug smuggling networks on its borders. It had also launched development projects to support the populations on its borders who were suffering the consequences of poverty and climate change. Ensuring economic progress in the Sahel would contribute to the security of the whole region and curb irregular migration.

80. As regards the situation of refugees in Western Sahara, he called on donors to contribute to implementing the plan that had been announced the previous year to address malnutrition among Sahrawi refugees. He extended thanks to traditional donors for their continued support and commended the initiative of Brazil to expand support to Sahrawi refugees in the area of hygiene and water sanitation.

81. The representative of **Jordan**, aligning his delegation with the statements made by the groups to which it belonged, said that the destructive war in Gaza was a stark reminder of the ineffectiveness of temporary solutions: the international community must strive to find peaceful solutions to the conflict. He warned that any Israeli attack on Rafah would lead to humanitarian disaster, and he reaffirmed his country's position that the displacement of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank must not be tolerated. As the only United Nations agency with a mandate to provide humanitarian assistance in Gaza, UNRWA should continue to receive resources and support to fulfil its vital role. Left unresolved, the crisis would have far-reaching consequences.

82. Jordan was concerned that only a small percentage of the 2024 funding requirements for the Middle East and North Africa region had been met thus far, and the budget allocated to the region had decreased compared to 2023. International funding in support of the Jordan Response Plan for the Syria Crisis had been steadily declining, forcing Jordan to use its own general budget to fill the gap. That had exacerbated financial challenges within the country, compromised the implementation of national plans in the areas of education, health and labour, and put additional pressure on its already depleted resources.

83. Jordan was committed to providing a safe haven for refugees and displaced persons, yet it was being increasingly abandoned by the international community in that endeavour and forced to shoulder a disproportionate share of the burden. He therefore urged donors to continue to support the programmes of United Nations agencies and the Jordan Response Plan, based on the principle of equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing. It was vital to follow up on the pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum 2023, focusing on sustainability and accountability, ahead of the high-level meeting in January 2025.

84. The representative of **Lebanon**, aligning her delegation with the statements made by Pakistan on behalf of the OIC countries in Geneva and the Arab Group, and reflecting on the success of the Global Refugee Forum 2023, said that her country hoped that the pledges made would consider all durable solutions, beyond socioeconomic inclusion into host countries. It was imperative to capitalize on the period between one forum and the next in order to identify topics of common interest and build partnerships, and Lebanon remained confident that UNHCR would make all possible efforts to fulfil that task. Her country commended UNHCR on its efforts to support countries in the region, especially those that had faced devastating natural disasters.

85. Unresolved conflicts and wars – notably the ongoing war in the Syrian Arab Republic and the Israeli war against Gaza – continued to wreak havoc and bring about humanitarian tragedies. Regarding the latter, its spread to neighbouring countries would be devastating for the peoples of the region, particularly in Lebanon.

86. Her country, like others in the region, could not continue to bear the brunt of the Syrian

refugee crisis. That protracted crisis, which was compounded by donor fatigue and the dwindling interest of the international community, exceeded its capacities and was further exacerbating domestic difficulties on all levels. In that vein, while Lebanon appreciated the efforts of UNHCR in the field and encouraged it to maintain close coordination with the Lebanese authorities, it was nevertheless deeply concerned about the decline in funding for the Syrian refugee crisis.

87. She reiterated that her country's preferred durable solution to the Syrian crisis was the gradual, safe and dignified return of displaced Syrians to the secured regions of their country, supported by international organizations and the international community. Noting that the number of refugees opting for voluntary repatriation had declined compared to the previous year, she expressed her deep concern that the programmes adopted by UNHCR might lead to the de facto socioeconomic integration of refugees into their host communities, thus impeding their return to the Syrian Arab Republic. Forcing States to integrate displaced persons in that way did not serve the interests of the host communities or the displaced populations themselves, many of whom were resorting to irregular migration routes through the Mediterranean. Her country therefore urged UNHCR to intensify its efforts to remove obstacles preventing displaced Syrians from returning to their country; to continue to support returnees in safe areas of the country and ensure the sustainability of their return; and to make every effort to gradually alleviate the burden on host countries, in line with the principle of equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing.

88. The representative of **Egypt**, aligning her delegation with the statements made by the groups to which it belonged, said that Egypt was deeply concerned by the increasing number of people forcibly displaced in the region as a result of multiple emergencies and new and ongoing conflicts. The war in Gaza would have dire consequences for the whole region and would further increase the already unprecedented number of displaced persons. UNRWA was the only agency with a mandate to provide support to Palestinians and its funding should be resumed and increased. Egypt called for the substantial increase of and unhindered access to humanitarian aid, 80 per cent of which it supplied.

89. Commending UNHCR on its efforts to respond to the growing needs of refugees and forcibly displaced persons in the region, Egypt expressed its concern at the persistently low levels of funding and the large amount of earmarked contributions targeting specific refugee populations. In line with its "one refugee" approach, Egypt had long provided protection and basic services to refugees and asylum-seekers, on an equal footing with Egyptian citizens. There remained, however, a pressing need to intensify the global humanitarian response to ensure that funding commitments were fulfilled and the burden of hosting refugees was equally shared.

90. Despite the gravity of the situation in the Sudan, only a low percentage of the pledges made at the high-level pledging event to support the humanitarian response in the Sudan and the region had been fulfilled. It was critical to promote a humanitarian-development-peace nexus in order to address the underlying causes of conflict, while responding to the emergency needs of civilians and investing in the long-term development of local communities.

91. She commended UNHCR on its efforts in the area of repatriation and urged it to further promote and strengthen preparedness for returns. Welcoming the progress that had been reported in 2023, she stressed the need for a balanced approach that put equal emphasis on resettlement and complementary pathways and addressed the root causes of displacement so as to enable safe and voluntary return.

92. The representative of **Spain** said that the various emergencies in the Middle East and North Africa region were a cause of deep concern for her country and demonstrated the need for a paradigm shift. Systematic violations of human rights and international humanitarian law were one of the main drivers of instability, whose impact was compounded by natural disasters.

93. Deploping the drastic deterioration of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, she reiterated her country's call for an immediate ceasefire, for strict compliance with international humanitarian law and for the effective implementation of the measures ordered by the International Court of Justice. Spain strongly condemned the attacks against civilians, hospitals, schools, United Nations facilities and humanitarian personnel and expressed its deep concern at the spread of famine in the Gaza strip. Humanitarian access must be unconditional, especially in Rafah, and hostages must be released. Spain vigorously rejected the possibility of a military operation in Rafah, which would have serious humanitarian consequences and lead to further forced displacement.

94. She expressed appreciation to UNHCR for its efforts to respond to the needs of the crisis, for its defence of the fundamental and irreplaceable role of UNRWA and for its collaboration with the latter. UNRWA and the Palestinian National Authority were the only institutions capable of operating in Gaza. Spain reiterated its call for an International Peace Conference to be held as soon as possible. Recognition of the State of Palestine and implementation of the two-state solution were critical to achieving peace.

95. The Syrian crisis was a priority for Spain and it had been supporting both the population in the Syrian Arab Republic and Syrians in the main host countries, whose commendable generosity it hoped would continue. Spain had assisted those countries in strengthening their hosting capacities and improving their financial management and public services through bilateral projects. Her country had also resettled Syrian refugees from Lebanon and Türkiye, prioritizing women and children, and, as a European Union Member State, it had made significant contributions to the European Union Facility for Refugees in Türkiye.

96. In the Sudan, Spain strongly condemned the human rights violations, sexual violence against women and girls and attacks on the general civilian population and humanitarian personnel. It urged the parties to resume negotiations and end the conflict.

97. Spain welcomed the comprehensive, humanitarian response implemented in the north of Africa, which united the efforts of UNHCR and IOM and focused on displacement routes, and called for greater collaboration from other countries. She concluded by recalling that compliance with international humanitarian law was not optional and all countries were responsible for upholding it.

98. The representative of **Slovenia**, aligning her delegation with the European Union statement, said that the conflict in Gaza had caused unprecedented human suffering in just a few months, which would only be alleviated by a sustainable ceasefire. It was imperative to set politics aside and focus action on Palestinian civilians. Reaffirming its strong support for UNRWA, which played an indispensable role in coordinating the humanitarian response in Gaza, Slovenia noted its deep concern at the mounting public attacks on the credibility of the United Nations.

99. It was essential to ensure the safe and unimpeded delivery of sufficient humanitarian aid by opening more crossing points into Gaza and establishing additional supply routes. While it was true that maritime corridors offered further potential for aid delivery, she wished to reiterate the importance of supplying aid by land. She extended her appreciation to Egypt and Jordan for their commendable efforts in the provision of aid to Gaza.

100. The representative of **Chad**, aligning his delegation with the statement by the African Group, said he wished to extend his thanks to UNHCR for its activities in 2023 against the backdrop of the global financial crisis. Chad was hosting over one million forcibly displaced persons and it had seen a significant increase in asylum applications since the start of 2023, which could be attributed to the influx of refugees from the Sudan, as well as to the rising numbers of returnees from neighbouring countries. That situation presented a number of protection challenges and placed constraints on the country's resources.

101. While Chad's borders would always remain open, it was flagging under the weight of the conflicts in the countries surrounding it. The situation in the east of Chad was particularly desperate, compounded by rising food prices, disproportionately large refugee populations and additional pressures surrounding access to food and land. Chad called upon all humanitarian, technical and development partners to support the programme aimed at refugees and local communities in eastern Chad.

102. Thanking UNHCR for its support of 1.2 million Sudanese refugees since April 2023, he noted his concern at the risk of conflict from that country spilling over into Chad. He welcomed the humanitarian conference on the Sudan that would be held in April and reiterated his country's position that peace was the only way to end the humanitarian catastrophe.

103. Deploring the rising death toll in Gaza, he concluded by urging the international community to intensify its efforts to restore peace to the region.

104. The representative of **France**, aligning her delegation with the European Union statement, said that her country commended the crucial work carried out by UNHCR in the North Africa and Middle East region to support the needs of persons displaced as a result of the effects of climate change, natural disasters and conflict. She also extended appreciation to the countries in the region

that were hosting refugees, notably those hosting many millions of Syrian refugees, and she reaffirmed her country's commitment to supporting them, exemplified by its long-running resettlement programme. Lamenting that the conditions for the voluntary, safe and dignified return of Syrians to their country were not yet met, she stressed the need for the Syrian regime to make progress in that direction, in line with the commitments made to the Executive Committee.

105. Regarding the ongoing conflict in Gaza, she called for an immediate ceasefire, respect for international humanitarian law and the opening of all crossing points for aid delivery. France would continue to demand the immediate and unconditional release of hostages. Welcoming the support of UNHCR for UNRWA, whose work was vital to the stability of the region, she asserted that its mandate should remain in force until a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was found. France reiterated its condemnation of the terrorist attacks committed by Hamas on 7 October and expressed its concern at the allegations that UNRWA staff had participated in them. Those allegations must be fully investigated. It welcomed the decisions taken by the Secretary-General in that regard, as well as the audits of the Agency currently being carried out, and called for Israel's full cooperation with the investigations.

106. The representative of the **Kingdom of the Netherlands**, aligning his delegation with the European Union statement, expressed his grave concern at the situation in Gaza. Deploring the loss of life of both Palestinian civilians and humanitarian workers, he was deeply troubled by the prospect of a large-scale ground offensive in Rafah and urged Israel to refrain from taking such action, which would have dire consequences and would be entirely irresponsible given the number of civilians living there. It was, nevertheless, important to plan for a rapid scaling-up of humanitarian aid in preparation for such a scenario.

107. Recalling States' obligation, under international humanitarian law, to grant access for the provision of humanitarian aid, he called for expanded and improved access for humanitarian aid in Gaza, preferably by land. The gravity of the situation compelled the international community to devise alternative solutions for aid delivery, such as air drops and maritime corridors. The Netherlands (Kingdom of the) would continue to support such initiatives; however, it wished to underline that maritime corridors could never be a substitute for access by land.

108. He urged all Member States to support the call for an immediate, temporary ceasefire with a view to a permanent cessation of conflict, which was paramount in order to enable the unconditional release of the remaining Israeli hostages.

109. His country welcomed tireless efforts of UNHCR in the Middle East and North Africa region, notably its commitment to strengthening the empowerment and participation of persons of concern in decisions affecting their lives, and it would continue to support such activities through its core contribution to the PROSPECTS partnership. Through it, the Netherlands (Kingdom of the) was intensifying its support to the countries in the region that were hosting Syrian refugees. Moreover, it continued to work closely with a number of international organizations to strengthen the resilience and self-reliance of those vulnerable populations in order to improve their access to education, employment and protection.

110. In Iraq, he called on all parties involved in the planned closure of 24 camps for internally displaced persons to devise a feasible, comprehensive plan to ensure durable solutions for the displaced persons in question, thereby avoiding the risk of informal settlements, in line with the Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. He urged all United Nations agencies and the relevant authorities to safeguard the wellbeing and rights of the internally displaced persons in concerned.

111. The representative of **Italy** commended the humanitarian workers providing assistance to the 15.6 million forcibly displaced or stateless people in the Middle East and North Africa region and expressed concerns about the increasingly precarious situation there. The 13 million people in protracted displacement across the region as a result of the Syrian conflict remained highly vulnerable, particularly in northern Syria. With this in mind, he called on UNHCR to scale up its protection services and urged all actors to respect their obligations under international human rights laws and to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

112. He noted the spillover effects of the hostilities in Gaza into neighbouring areas and countries, and thanked UNHCR for its efforts to protect and support refugees there. Italy deplored the civilian deaths in the conflict and stressed that civilian infrastructure must not be targeted, calling for a

durable ceasefire and rapid and unhindered access to humanitarian assistance. In view of the dramatic level of food insecurity in Gaza, Italy was spearheading the “Food for Gaza” initiative in partnership with other agencies to open up access to food aid.

113. Italy was also continuing its support to UNHCR in supporting people in Türkiye requiring international protection following the earthquake and was providing evacuation and humanitarian corridors for people in need of international protection in Libya, a show of solidarity with host countries and support for refugees.

114. The representative of **Switzerland** was alarmed at the protracted crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic, with no political solution in the pipeline, as well as the continued violations of human rights. With the humanitarian situation having reached its nadir since the start of the war, he called on all states to respect the principle of non-refoulement and ensure that Syrian refugees only return voluntarily and safely. He also appealed for greater international sharing of responsibilities in hosting displaced persons, and reiterated Switzerland’s commitment to providing basic services for refugees and host communities.

115. With the risk of the Gaza conflict spilling over into the wider region, there was a pressing need for UNHCR and its partners to develop a contingency plan should it escalate further. Likewise, Switzerland strongly urged UNHCR to deepen its partnership with local bodies in order to find lasting solutions on the ground. At the same time, it was eager to find out how much of UNHCR’s budget was allocated to supporting local partners, whether the support was delivered through long-term structured partnerships and which actions UNHCR had taken under the United Nations Secretary-General’s Action Agenda on Internal Displacement.

116. The representative of **Japan** stressed that the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza must improve urgently. Japan had provided further assistance of \$32 million in February 2024 and contributed around \$15 million towards the response by UNHCR in the Middle East in March 2024.

117. Japan was also working to ease the burden on communities hosting refugees in Jordan and reiterated its commitment to international responsibility sharing. It would also continue to support refugee-hosting countries through cooperation with international development finance institutions.

118. The representative of **Sweden** voiced his worries about the growing humanitarian needs of forcibly displaced persons in the Middle East and North Africa region and welcomed the discussions about prioritising financial allocations as part of a needs-based assistance approach, particularly with humanitarian funds dwindling. Sweden was extremely apprehensive about the humanitarian situation in Gaza and a potential ground offensive in Rafah, and echoed calls for an immediate ceasefire and the immediate release of hostages.

119. Concerns were also raised about the humanitarian situation in Yemen, with the dire conditions exacerbated further by recent Houthi attacks. Parties in Yemen were urged to work with United Nations agencies to ensure that needs-based humanitarian assistance was delivered, with Sweden contributing to these assistance efforts by hosting the humanitarian Senior Officials Meeting for Yemen in May 2024. The work of UNHCR to help build a joint stance for a principled humanitarian response in Yemen was praised, but questions were raised on how donors could support this effort.

120. The representative of **Tunisia** underscored the funding challenge faced by countries in the region, with a reduction in earmarked funding against the backdrop of escalating humanitarian crises and increasing needs. He therefore called on the international community to share this burden and, consequently, reduce the suffering of internally displaced persons and refugees, achieved through clear mechanisms to alleviate pressures on countries of transit and destination in the Middle East and North Africa region.

121. He demanded greater efforts to facilitate the return of refugees to their countries of origin, accelerate resettlement programmes in countries that meet the needs of forcibly displaced persons and tackle the refugee crisis by finding solutions to its root causes. Tunisia also reiterated its commitment to international law and to providing dignified hosting conditions for refugees.

122. With this in mind, he strongly rejected the covered resettlement of asylum seekers and condemned all exploitation of their suffering. The decision to stop exceptional humanitarian assistance in Tunisia with no notice or coordination was putting greater pressure on everyone involved in support efforts there. Furthermore, he also denounced the brutal attacks on the Gaza

Strip and called for joint efforts to save the lives of its 2 million residents and the lifting of the blockade on the Occupied Palestinian Territory in order to deliver suitable protection and assistance to Palestinian internally displaced persons.

123. The representative of **Yemen** expressed solidarity with Palestinian residents and underscored the dire conditions experienced by Yemenis due to the actions of the Houthi militias in the country, triggering rising numbers of internally displaced persons. With the country's citizens experiencing protracted displacement and increasing needs, sustainable support interventions were required, most notably to address the lack of basic facilities in parts of the country where refugees were returning. More broadly, he called on international partners and donors to provide support in order to remove obstacles that were preventing these displaced persons from coming back to Yemen, such as destroyed homes and prevalent landmines.

124. Despite its challenges, Yemen remained committed to international refugee treaties and providing refugee protection and services to individuals displaced from Somalia and the Horn of Africa, in the spirit of responsibility sharing. While it appreciated the international support already in place, there were calls for other states to take on a greater share of the hosting burden from host communities, by seeking sustainable solutions and allocating greater financial and humanitarian resources.

125. The representative of **Finland** noted his country's great appreciation of all of the countries showing solidarity to Syrian refugees as the conflict there entered its 14th year and remained the largest displacement crisis worldwide. He acknowledged the resulting hosting challenges for other countries and praised the inclusive integration policies adopted. In view of the acute humanitarian needs, assistance must be able to reach all parts of the Syrian Arab Republic. Finland also supported the peace-building work by various United Nations agencies within the Syrian Arab Republic and beyond, in the hope of establishing a long-lasting political solution.

126. He also deplored the humanitarian suffering of displaced persons in Gaza, echoing the calls for an immediate ceasefire to enable humanitarian aid to reach those who need it, as well as the release of hostages. Finland was also worried about potential military action in Rafah and emphasised that both sides must respect international humanitarian law.

127. Despite major budgetary challenges faced by UNHCR, it was stressed that no individual in a severe state of vulnerability should be left behind, most notably persons with disabilities. As the Protection Cluster lead agency, UNHCR was viewed as well-placed to ensure inclusive delivery of aid programmes.

128. The representative of the **Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** deplored the enormous humanitarian crisis in Gaza triggered by Israeli military operations and described Israel's behaviour as a "deliberate violation of [...] fundamental principles of civilian protection in armed conflicts". In light of the extreme conditions faced by humanitarian workers, he called for increased protection for these individuals and condemned Israel's attacks against them, accusing it of trying to bring about the collapse of aid operations.

129. With 30,000 Gazans already dead, Venezuela called for immediate action to bring an end to Israel's military operations in Gaza, particularly with the potential for further civilian massacres in Rafah. As a result, the need for a decisive response to guarantee civilian safety and the supply of aid on the ground was urgent, as was the implementation of a humanitarian assistance mechanism to assist all at-risk populations. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela supported any initiatives to achieve a sustainable ceasefire, recognize Palestine as a sovereign nation and bring justice against Israel for their war crimes.

130. The representative of **Germany** confirmed that Palestine, Yemen and the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as neighbouring countries, would remain the focus of its humanitarian assistance in the Middle East and North Africa region. With humanitarian funding dwindling, he called on the United Nations to spend it as efficiently as possible and adapt humanitarian assistance accordingly in the Syrian Arab Republic in order to overcome the potential barriers of local access restrictions. The non-renewal of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2585 was criticized, as it would hinder cross-border aid efforts, due to limited planning capacity. Against the backdrop of the deteriorating displacement situation, Germany's commitment to supporting Syrian refugees and vulnerable host countries was reaffirmed, as was its advocacy for ensuring that refugees only return to the Syrian Arab Republic safely and in dignity.

131. Germany had tripled its 2023 humanitarian funding to Palestine due to the emergency there and intended to match it in 2024. It commended assistance provided by UNHCR to local partners in assisting displaced persons. At the same time, ongoing access restrictions were hamstringing international assistance to Yemen, meaning that more work needed to be done to get aid out to vulnerable populations.

132. The representative of **Portugal** acknowledged the 63 per cent increase in registrations of persons of concern to UNHCR in the Middle East and North Africa region, driven by a wide range of factors. She echoed the concerns raised about the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza, where huge numbers of Palestinians had been forcibly displaced.

133. With this in mind, the vital role of UNRWA in delivering humanitarian aid on the ground was underscored. Despite the allegations of UNRWA staff involvement in the 7th October attacks, Portugal planned to continue to provide funding to the agency. Voicing worries about the humanitarian implications of any military strikes in Rafah, she called on Israel to adhere to international law and for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire.

134. The representative of **Austria** voiced his apprehension about the continuing multi-faceted and mutually exacerbating crises in the Middle East and North Africa region and the acute humanitarian emergencies caused by the resulting multiple refugee flows. The effects of the escalation of the Israel/Gaza conflict were threatening to destabilize the region further.

135. Thirteen years on from the start of the war in the Syrian Arab Republic, the number of Syrians requiring humanitarian assistance was continuing to rise and 12.8 million Syrians were either displaced within the country or registered as refugees in neighbouring countries. He condemned the dangers of sexual and gender-based violence experienced by the most vulnerable internally displaced persons within this dramatically deteriorating humanitarian situation, and noted the strain created for neighbouring countries in hosting these refugees.

136. Against this challenging backdrop, Austria appreciated the generosity of neighbouring countries in providing shelter to Syrian refugees and noted that it had pledged to support eight projects within Middle East and North Africa countries during the Global Refugee Forum 2023. It was also grateful to the UNHCR for providing emergency relief for the most urgent humanitarian needs on the ground and for its efforts to empower females and combat gender-based violence. Its projects to open access to education for persons of concern, protect persons with disabilities and prevent statelessness were equally seen as very worthwhile.

137. The representative of **Brazil** regretted to hear that the war in the Syrian Arab Republic remained the largest forced human displacement in the region, despite UNHCR's tireless efforts and Brazil's unwavering work to provide safe pathways for Syrians. With this in mind, she was worried about the reduction in funding for Syrians hosted in neighbouring countries and cash allowances for Syrians in refugee camps.

138. Brazil was alarmed by the humanitarian implications of the war in Gaza. While condemning the 7th October attack, Brazil believed that Israel's response violated human rights and urged it to allow humanitarian assistance into Gaza. She called for an immediate ceasefire and for the international community to keep supporting UNRWA to enable it to continue its vital work of assisting displaced Palestinians.

139. The **Chairperson** noted that the session was at its scheduled end time and announced that the interpreters had granted ten additional minutes. Therefore, she suggested allowing two more speakers before closing the session. There were no objections to this.

140. The representative of **Australia** remained deeply concerned at the deteriorating conditions in the Syrian Arab Republic and its neighbours, particularly the rate of poverty among Syrian refugees, and commended the continuing generosity of host countries in the Middle East and North Africa region. Australia had provided AUD 570 million in humanitarian assistance to the Syrian response since 2011, which was helping to deliver a range of critical services and basic assistance.

141. Australia was severely concerned about the humanitarian emergency in Gaza and the numbers of civilian deaths. Accordingly, there were calls for an immediate ceasefire and the unimpeded provision of humanitarian relief. Questions were also raised about the impact of the crisis on the broader work of UNHCR in the region.

142. The representative of **Belgium** expressed her support for UNHCR in its mandate to assist

refugees, particularly against the backdrop of rising needs and falling financial resources. The catastrophic suffering of civilians in Gaza was of particular concern, with thousands displaced and huge numbers injured or killed. This situation could be exacerbated further as a result of a potential military assault on Gaza by Israel.

143. She reiterated Belgium’s steadfast belief that both sides must respect international law and international humanitarian law, with civilians and civilian infrastructure protected. At the same time, humanitarian aid must be accessible to vulnerable Gazans immediately and unimpeded. Despite the allegations of UNRWA staff involvement in the 7th October attacks, which Belgium condemned, the country decided to increase its funding to the agency in 2024. In order to create the conditions for peacebuilding and an eventual two-state solution, Belgium demanded an immediate ceasefire and supported any efforts to achieve this.

144. She acknowledged the horrendous humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic and the resulting pressure placed on neighbouring states, which were hosting refugees. Accordingly, she asked how Belgium could assist UNHCR in supporting refugees and their hosts, and noted that a significant amount of its earmarked funding would go to the Syrian crisis in 2024. She praised UNHCR for its commitment to allocate more than 25 per cent of its funds to local partners and encouraged it to work with local civil society organizations. Support was also expressed for expanding partnerships with refugee-led organizations.

145. The **Secretary** reminded delegates of the “Overview of the oversight landscape” side event taking place the following day before the plenary session between 8.45 a.m. and 9.45 a.m.

146. The **Chairperson** thanked all speakers for their contributions.

The meeting rose at 6.07 p.m.