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

Distr.: General
16 April 2024

English only

Standing Committee

Eighty-ninth meeting
13-15 March 2024

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva

Summary record,* Friday, 15 March 2024, at 10:05

Chairperson: Dr. Katharina Stasch (Germany)

Contents

3. Regional activities and global programmes (continued)

- a. Regional updates (continued)
- vii. Middle East and North Africa (continued)
- b. Global programmes (EC/75/SC/CRP.3)
- c. Emergency response, security and supply
 - i. Emergency response and supply (EC/75/SC/CRP.4)
 - ii. Security of workforce and operations in UNHCR (EC/75/SC/CRP.5)

Statements made in exercise of the right of reply

* 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 10.05 a.m.

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

3. Regional activities and global programmes (continued)

a. Regional updates (continued)

vii. Middle East and North Africa (continued)

1. The representative of the **United States of America** expressed gratitude to UNHCR for its tireless work in the Middle East and North Africa. The United States continued to work with UNHCR and other partners to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to those affected by disaster and conflict in the region and called upon donors and other stakeholders to help increase support.

2. The delegate expressed concern over the devastating situation in Gaza; was heartbroken for the victims of the horrific tragedy of 7 October 2023 and for all the innocent people in Gaza who were suffering from what was clearly a humanitarian catastrophe. She called for the immediate release of all hostages. She stated that the sights witnessed every day in Gaza were devastating. Far too many Palestinian civilians had been killed, and every civilian death was a tragedy, including the more than 165 United Nations and other humanitarian workers who had been killed in the conflict. Common humanity compelled action: the United States Department of Defense had carried out air drops of humanitarian assistance and it was working with the United Nations and several partners to immediately activate a maritime route to deliver aid. Those actions, however, were not a substitute for sustainable relief deliveries, at scale, over land. The United States of America called for Israel to open and expand access for humanitarian assistance to reach civilians and ensure humanitarian personnel, sites, and convoys were not targeted. Her Government applauded the incredible efforts of the United Nations and other organizations to meet humanitarian needs.

3. The situation in the Syrian Arab Republic remained one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, with an unprecedented 16.7 million people requiring assistance. The United States of America applauded UNHCR for supporting displaced Syrians and encouraged it to focus on lifesaving programmes and durable solutions. Her Government remained deeply concerned about protection for refugees and continued to emphasize that conditions in the Syrian Arab Republic were not yet conducive to safe, voluntary and dignified refugee returns. She commended the principled stance of UNHCR on returns and encouraged it to continue advocating against forced deportations and refoulement.

4. In Yemen, the United States of America supported humanitarian assistance for more than 18 million people. Her Government welcomed the prioritization of protection work by UNHCR, including its efforts to provide civil documentation for refugee and asylum-seekers. The United States of America remained deeply concerned by Houthi attempts to interfere in humanitarian assistance; their actions worsened an already dire humanitarian crisis. Despite those challenges, UNHCR continued to advance shared goals, for which the United States of America was grateful.

5. The Government of Iraq's commitment to support durable solutions for displaced Iraqis was appreciated. She urged the Government to fulfil its commitment to cash grants, livelihoods, new housing and issuance of documentation for all displaced persons. If those commitments could not be met within the Government's ambitious timeline, she urged it to extend the deadline in order to allow the provision of assistance inside camps and informal settlements until after the July 30 closure deadline. The United States of America continued to call for durable solutions that were safe, dignified and voluntary.

6. In Israel, the United States of America appreciated the advocacy by UNHCR for refugees and migrants, including for the Eritrean and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex populations, but remained concerned by the lack of durable solutions for asylum-seekers.

7. In North Africa, the United States of America reiterated the concerns of UNHCR about reports of arbitrary arrest and detention, refoulement, and violence against refugees, migrants, asylum-seekers, and other vulnerable populations. North African countries had a long history of generosity toward refugees, asylum seekers, and other vulnerable populations and the United States of America urged their governments to continue that work with UNHCR. The United States of America remained concerned about the protection environment for Sudanese refugees and asylum-

seekers in the region and expressed appreciation for the response by UNHCR; it would continue to support efforts to allow registration in border areas. In Mauritania, she welcomed the work of UNHCR to strengthen relief to development coherence, including improving the World Bank's Windows for Host Communities and Refugees. She further highlighted the collaboration of UNHCR with the private sector and international financial institutions to improve social cohesion and access to education, livelihoods and infrastructure. Finally, the United States of America appreciated the critical role of the Gulf Cooperation Council in supporting UNHCR and its contribution of more than \$90 to the region in 2023.

8. The representative of **Türkiye** aligned his delegation with the statement delivered by Pakistan on behalf of the group of countries from the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Geneva. Türkiye was grateful for the expressions of solidarity and for contributions made to the ongoing recovery and reconstruction after the earthquake of February 2023. The situation in the region was alarming and required concerted action on several fronts. He wished to highlight that the Syrian Arab Republic remained one of the biggest displacement crises in the world. As of early 2024, Türkiye continued to host around 3.2 million Syrians and to provide them with access to basic services: close to one million Syrian babies had been born in Türkiye and there had been around 100,000 hospital admissions; almost 1.1 million school-age Syrian children and about 12,000 Syrian volunteer teachers supported efforts in the education field. More than 60,000 Syrian students attended university in Türkiye and more than 24,000 students enrolled in higher education received scholarships. His Government gave sincere thanks for the support provided but underlined that the burden shouldered by host countries in the region was not sustainable. Solutions to be considered included creating conditions for voluntary, safe and dignified returns while reinvigorating the political process envisaged under Security Council resolution 2254 (2015).

9. The developments in the Sudan were of great concern with devastation in the country and the humanitarian consequences deteriorating with each passing day. Türkiye supported all regional and international initiatives aimed at ending the conflict and easing human suffering. The international community should act together to encourage the parties to come to a negotiated solution. Yemen had long suffered from conflict; humanitarian needs in the country were dire and needed to be addressed.

10. The situation in the Middle East and North Africa region had become more complicated and the whole region was at grave risk due to the developments in Gaza. There had been an unprecedented number of deaths and scale of destruction of infrastructure and cultural legacy and the United Nations Security Council had unfortunately failed to end the suffering, the occupation of the Palestinian territory and grave breaches of international law. Türkiye called for an immediate ceasefire and unhindered access to humanitarian aid, the release of captives from all sides and international recognition of the Palestinian State based on United Nations parameters as part of the two-State solution. The embodiment of an independent, sovereign State of Palestine based on 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital was the only way to achieve a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. Further, Türkiye wished to underline that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for the Palestine refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was irreplaceable and the suspension of aid under any pretext was wrong: UNRWA must be supported more than ever.

11. The representative of **Israel** said that on 7 October 2023, Hamas fired hundreds of rockets into southern Israel; as people rushed to bomb shelters, thousands of Hamas terrorists had entered Israel, killing 1,200 innocent people. Some 240 people had been taken hostage, including babies, children, women and the elderly, 134 of whom currently remained in captivity. At the Supernova Sukkot music festival, Hamas had fired at and killed those looking to escape and the festival site was one of the places that Hamas had used rape as a tool of war. Conflict-related sexual violence had been referred to in the mission report of the Official visit of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict to Israel and the occupied West Bank 29 January – 14 February 2024. Since the beginning of the war imposed by Hamas, 15,700 rockets had been fired indiscriminately at Israel and some 250,000 Israelis had been displaced from their homes in southern and northern Israel. She reminded UNHCR that the 60,000 persons who remain displaced in northern Israel were also persons of concern under the mandate of UNHCR. In response to the attacks of 7 October 2023, Israel was at war with Hamas which was a terrorist organization which embedded its assets in and among civilian population and infrastructure. Israel did not target civilian infrastructure: it targeted Hamas and it adhered to international humanitarian law. In failing to recognize Hamas' cynical tactics, statements made at the present

meeting rewarded Hamas' disdain for human life.

12. Israel was at war with Hamas; it was not at war with the Palestinian people. Since the beginning of the war, Israel had facilitated aid to the Palestinian people which was currently entering Gaza by land, air and sea and was set to increase in the coming days. Israel had facilitated over 312,000 tonnes of humanitarian aid and had opened the Kerem Shalom border crossing through which all United Nations aid passed. Israel had also facilitated the air drop of 1,250 packages of humanitarian aid in northern Gaza. The first boat carrying humanitarian food was also on its way. In the previous few days, Israel had also facilitated a World Food Programme (WFP) convoy directly to northern Gaza. The United Nations had mechanisms to distribute aid in Gaza as it did in response to crises all over the world. Currently, the majority of aid entering Gaza was not through UNWRA but through other United Nations agencies whose employees had not carried out the massacre and kidnapping of innocent Israelis. Israel would continue to do what it could to get aid into Gaza away from Hamas. It would also continue to do what it could to get its people home and free them from a terrorist organization. Hamas could bring about a humanitarian pause in the fighting by releasing the women, children and injured it was currently holding and it could end the war immediately by releasing all 134 hostages and laying down its arms.

13. The representative of the **Islamic Republic of Iran** aligned his delegation with the statement delivered by Pakistan on behalf of the group of OIC countries in Geneva. He expressed strong condemnation of the ongoing Israeli assault on Gaza and the forced displacement of thousands of Palestinians, particularly women and children. The catastrophic situation of Gaza and of Palestinians was worsening day by day and people were trying to survive starvation, blockade and targeted attacks on civilian infrastructure. The Islamic Republic of Iran emphasized the right of return by Palestinian people to their homeland as their undeniable right, as echoed by UNHCR.

14. The enforcement of unlawful unilateral coercive measures was the main factor compounding vulnerability in the Syrian Arab Republic and profoundly affecting its economy, stability and humanitarian circumstances. The measures constituted a stark violation of the human rights of the Syrian people. The budget cuts in UNHCR programmes were a matter of serious concern; the lack of increase in financial resources and support hindered the implementation of sustainable solutions and posed challenges to the achievement of long-term stability and security for refugees and displaced persons in the region. He reiterated the importance of equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing which required UNHCR and the international community to enhance assistance to the major host countries.

15. The representative of **Canada** said that 2023 had been a harrowing year for people in the Middle East and North Africa. Natural disasters and new and on-going conflicts had worsened the conditions for refugees and internally displaced persons, spurring new displacement, including the mass movements driven by protracted conflicts in Yemen and the Syrian Arab Republic and the escalating war in the Sudan as well as natural disasters in the Syrian Arab Republic, Türkiye and Libya. Canada expressed its solidarity and support for those affected and was proud to be a key humanitarian donor in the region to which it had provided over \$340 million in 2023. UNHCR, with its mandate to protect and assist refugees and the forcibly displaced, was indispensable and Canada deeply appreciated its unwavering commitment and the dedication of its staff across the region. Canada also recognized the generosity of host communities in countries supporting large refugee populations despite their own socioeconomic constraints and natural disasters.

16. The Red Sea conflict was having an impact on humanitarian operations in Yemen and causing rising hunger in northern Yemen in particular. The country was experiencing one of the highest levels of food insecurity globally. Canada was also preoccupied by the situation of Syrian refugees and encouraged efforts by UNHCR and host countries to combat anti-refugee sentiment and to encourage recognition of their positive social and economic impact and the meaningful participation of women and girls. Canada emphasized that returns should only take place where they could be done in a safe, dignified, voluntary and sustainable manner: continued economic and security challenges in the Syrian Arab Republic, compounded by the serious human rights abuses experienced by returning refugees, clearly demonstrated that those conditions had yet to be met. Syrian refugees still required international support and protection. Canada welcomed the plans by UNHCR to address root causes and foster resilience by harnessing the humanitarian-development-peace nexus to tackle the multi-faceted challenges arising from the combination of protracted displacement, socioeconomic difficulties and insecurity. Canada was pleased that UNHCR planned to increase coordination with United Nations partners and other actors and would welcome further

details on the enhanced cooperation and what would be done to improve the quality of response.

17. Canada was deeply concerned by the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza; it was working to overcome the challenges to humanitarian access and the delivery of lifesaving relief so that more assistance could reach those in need. Affirming the vital role of UNWRA and appreciating the critical role played by the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, Canada was also encouraged by the engagement of UNHCR in supporting, within the limits of its mandate, the urgent needs of Palestinian civilians in Gaza. Canada was closely monitoring the escalation of the Israel-Hamas and Israel-Hezbollah conflicts and their impacts on the region and commended the efforts of UNHCR and the United Nations system as a whole in rapidly developing contingency plans and supporting displaced populations from southern Lebanon. Canada continued to call on all parties to respect international humanitarian law obligations: the protection of civilians was paramount in the humanitarian response.

18. The representative of **Mexico** expressed concern that deteriorating conditions in the region had led to an increase in displaced persons. Mexico regretted the humanitarian and human rights situation in several countries in the region, including in Gaza where there had been more than 30,000 deaths and thousands of wounded, as well as a high number of displaced people. Mexico reiterated its call for an immediate and sustained cessation of hostilities throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory and for the immediate release of all hostages. It was urgent to halt indiscriminate attacks on the civilian population and on key infrastructure including hospitals, schools and United Nations facilities and to avoid any escalation in military action in Rafah. It would be vital to restore basic services and to remove restrictions on the movement of people and goods. Similarly, there must be permanent access for incoming humanitarian aid. Mexico reiterated its firm support to United Nations agencies present on the ground, including UNWRA: in recent days, her Government had contributed \$1 million to that agency in support of its activities. Mexico was also concerned by the repercussions in the wider region and appealed to all regional actors to exercise restraint and to avoid an escalation in hostilities. Against that background, Mexico and Chile had raised the case of Palestine with the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, requesting an investigation of the probable commission of crimes within its jurisdiction. Furthermore, Mexico deemed it necessary to implement the decision on provisional measures issued by the International Court of Justice relating to the application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (*South Africa v. Israel*). Mexico reiterated its support for a peaceful two-State solution which was the only lasting political solution to the conflict that took into account the legitimate security concerns of Israel and would allow the consolidation of the State of Palestine in a politically and economically viable way.

19. The representative of **Morocco** said that the unprecedented crisis and humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza demanded immediate attention. Morocco's position was aligned with that of the global community in calling for an immediate and sustainable ceasefire, the protection of civilians and the unhindered flow of humanitarian aid; obligations that were consistent with international humanitarian law. Humanitarian organizations played a role in protecting human dignity; on the previous day, Morocco had deployed a humanitarian aid operation delivering 40 tonnes of humanitarian aid to Gaza and the holy city of Jerusalem with the aim of alleviating the suffering of the Palestinian people. Morocco called for a political horizon to be put in place for the Palestinian cause so as to relaunch the two-State solution.

20. The Global Refugee Forum 2023 had paved a clear path for Member States, setting objectives and targets. Morocco particularly welcomed the enthusiasm for the mega pledge on the inclusion of refugees in national health care systems. Morocco would co-lead the post Global Refugee Forum monitoring arrangements facilitated by UNHCR, and it had pledged to strengthen its human border management, something on which Morocco and UNHCR would continue to demonstrate leadership. The theme was also a priority for Morocco in its role as co-chair of the Global Compact for Migration's Champion Countries Initiative and complemented its human-centred approach based on the promotion of a positive narrative.

21. Morocco noted that UNHCR had continued to conduct refugee status determination in 17 out of the 18 countries in the region and it was a source of regret that only one State in the region refused to comply with its obligations arising out of the 1951 Refugee Convention. Protecting refugees became impossible in situations of acute and ongoing insecurity. Protection entailed safeguarding not only the physical integrity but also the human dignity of every individual under the UNHCR mandate.

22. In Tindouf, the presence of armed elements in refugee flows and camps posed a fundamental threat to the civilian and humanitarian nature of asylum, creating serious security problems for refugees and humanitarian workers. Morocco questioned the unacceptable expenditure on the militarization of the camps where armed separatist groups exercised control in contradiction of the 1951 Refugee Convention and its protocols. Urgent questions must be asked of the host State on that issue. Morocco firmly condemned the Sahrawi Refugee Response Plan (SRRP) 2024-2025 and emphasized that it had no official or formal status and could not be considered as a reference document for fundamental reasons related to the registration of populations in the Tindouf camps and in view of the responsibilities of the host State. Morocco commended the position of UNHCR in that regard which adhered to the 2018 statement and called on the Regional Bureau for the Middle East and North Africa to safeguard the organization's responsibility as the sole United Nations agency mandated to register refugee populations.

23. The representative of the **Republic of Korea** expressed concern at the deteriorating situation in the region. The root cause of displacement was the lack of peace and stability and the acute conflicts and renewed efforts to find durable political solutions were therefore increasingly important. The Republic of Korea had engaged with the region, providing humanitarian assistance and development cooperation to various countries. His Government planned to carry out more programmes and multiyear contributions through UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). More positive impacts were expected from the social inclusion of displaced people, their access to livelihoods and their economic participation in host communities.

24. Concerning the information provided by the Regional Director on strengthening the resilience of communities in the Syrian Arab Republic through an area-based approach, he wished to learn more about the operations, the expected number of displaced persons to be included in the approach and the challenges envisaged. Concerning the decision of the Government of Iraq to close 23 camps by the end of July 2024, he wished to know how internally displaced persons had reacted to the policy and how many of them would be expected to return to their place of origin or be locally integrated. He also wished to learn more about the internal reflections within the United Nations on the effectiveness of their operations in Yemen and how UNHCR believed that it could increase its humanitarian impact in the country.

25. In closing, he joined previous speakers in expressing deep concern about the situation in Gaza and in calling for immediate humanitarian access and the immediate release of hostages. An immediate humanitarian ceasefire was essential to allow humanitarian operations in the field. His Government was also deeply concerned about the possibility of military operations in Rafah where some 1.4 million Palestinian people had been displaced: further humanitarian catastrophe must be avoided.

26. The representative of **Denmark**, aligning her delegation with the statement by the European Union, said that the humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, which had been worsened by the devastating earthquake of February 2023, was of great concern. The crisis continued to affect the wider region, especially the neighbouring countries that had been hosting large numbers of Syrian refugees for over a decade. She commended the efforts of UNHCR to provide protection and relief to the millions of refugees and internally displaced persons and their host communities which Denmark was proud to support, recognizing the importance of resilience building and early recovery inside the Syrian Arab Republic. She further emphasized the need for cross border access to be upheld as it was crucial for the delivery of much-needed relief to the population in the north-west of the country. During the Global Refugee Forum 2023, Denmark had pledged support for a new phase to the Regional Development and Protection Programme which was led by Denmark, with additional funding from European Union delegations in Jordan and Lebanon. The Programme focused on supporting livelihood and protection programmes for refugees and host communities and worked entirely through local partnerships. It was part of wider, multiyear efforts in support of resilience and protection in all countries affected by the Syrian crisis. UNHCR was a valuable partner in those efforts along with the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and local civil society organizations.

27. Denmark was deeply worried by the situation in Gaza and reiterated Israel's obligations to ensure the protection of civilians and to allow unhindered humanitarian aid. Denmark was concerned that the ground offensive in Rafah could worsen the already catastrophic humanitarian situation. Her Government echoed the call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire to allow aid to reach civilians and for the unconditional and immediate release of all hostages. Denmark took note of the binding

measures imposed by the International Court of Justice and reiterated the importance of ensuring the protection of civilians at all times, in line with international humanitarian law. She underlined the need for expanded humanitarian access to reach the people in Gaza. She commended UNHCR for its support to authorities and local partners, in complementarity with UNWRA, under their respective mandates in that critical moment. She commended the support provided by UNHCR to forcibly displaced persons in the region and emphasized the importance of having an age, gender and diversity approach in the response to make sure that it was truly inclusive, non-discriminatory and reached those most in need. Denmark was proud to support UNHCR through both its targeted and unearmarked funding.

28. The representative of the **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** said that, 13 years ago, the peaceful demands of Syrians for freedom, political reform and respect for the rule of law had been met with a brutal assault that continued to the present day and had resulted in millions of Syrians becoming refugees or internally displaced. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland encouraged UNHCR to continue to draw attention to the Syrian crisis as the largest in the world in terms of population movement. The United Kingdom continued to support the United Nations-convened political process under Security Council resolution 2254 (2015) as the only path to a resolution of the refugee and displacement crisis and to alleviating the pressures on the generous neighbouring countries that hosted close to six million Syrians.

29. In Yemen, the flow of refugees was complex and created challenges for mandate overlaps: he welcomed the efforts of UNHCR in working cohesively with IOM and key implementing partners to ensure that the humanitarian response was needs-based and not status-based. The development of a protection strategy for the response in Yemen was welcomed. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland was concerned by the decision to downgrade the roles of the camp coordination, camp management and shelter cluster coordinators. Following the terror attack perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October 2023, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland remained resolutely committed to getting humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza who desperately needed it, by all possible means. A significant increase in the flow of aid into Gaza was required, including the opening of more routes and the sustaining of water, fuel and electricity supplies. The overarching priority must be an immediate pause to allow aid into Gaza and hostages out, followed by progress toward a sustainable, permanent ceasefire.

30. The representative of **Iraq** (observer) aligned her delegation with the statement delivered by Pakistan on behalf of the group of OIC countries in Geneva. She thanked UNHCR for its efforts to provide support to refugees and displaced persons and to find solutions to the multiple crises in the region. Iraq was concerned by the humanitarian situation in Gaza and condemned the policy of vengeance and the displacement of victims. Iraq called for a ceasefire and for respect for the decision of the International Court of Justice relating to the application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (*South Africa v. Israel*) and for its application in the Gaza Strip in its entirety. UNWRA required support in its task of providing humanitarian aid and there should not be undue barriers to providing medical aid to Gazans through UNWRA.

31. The Government of Iraq wished to continue to reduce and bring to an end the number of internally-displaced people in its own country, focusing on the root causes and striving to reintegrate people living in camps. Cash assistance and work opportunities had been given to families, social benefits had been introduced and identity documents had been issued to support the dignified return of displaced persons. Iraq was also host to 270,000 Syrian refugees and it was working with UNHCR to ensure they had access to health care and protection pending their return to their country of origin.

32. The representative of the **Danish Refugee Council, speaking on behalf of non-governmental organizations** (NGOs) (group statement) said that the military operation in Gaza had impacted the entire region, with over 30,000 dead, including 13,000 children, while two million people had been displaced. The funding cuts to UNWRA had impacted responses in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic and across the region. Non-governmental organizations reiterated their call for an immediate ceasefire.

33. In Lebanon, violence in the south had led to displacement, including of Syrian refugees. The increase in forced returns into the Syrian Arab Republic was concerning: some of the deported were refugees registered with UNHCR, underscoring that registration provided insufficient protection from those practices. NGOs asked UNHCR and diplomatic missions to engage with the Government

of Lebanon to lift those measures and to address anti-refugee discourse. She urged donor governments to invest in social cohesion programmes and to include Syrian refugees in development programmes.

34. In Jordan, NGOs welcomed the role the Government had played in providing opportunities for refugees to access services and livelihoods. However, potential changes to social security might reduce access to the labour market. She called for UNHCR and development donors to work with the Government to ensure that refugees had continued admission as part of the development agenda. She encouraged engagement with the private sector to create job opportunities for refugees and host communities and support the integration of refugees into Jordanian society.

35. In Türkiye, following the earthquake, Syrian refugees had faced restrictions in accessing aid services and compensation schemes. There were reports of restrictions, reduced protection space and anti-refugee rhetoric. NGOs requested UNHCR and diplomatic missions to continue advocating for refugees to have access to services, including psychosocial support and mental health, and called on donor Governments to engage with the Government of Türkiye to uphold the principle of non-refoulement. NGOs further requested stakeholders to ensure that internally displaced persons and refugees returning to displacement camps in the Syrian Arab Republic that were outside of government control were able to receive assistance: authorities should not impede the delivery of aid across borders. She called for early recovery programmes and the restoring of community access to essential services and the upholding of the centrality of protection in all programming. NGOs asked all stakeholders to deliver on the Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement, ensuring effective protection and assistance to internally displaced persons. In Iraq, the transition out of the humanitarian architecture had resulted in new ways of responding to internally displaced persons: she welcomed the work of the Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Solutions to Internal Displacement to engage the Government on a roadmap, although there had been limited opportunities for non-governmental organizations to inform the document. NGOs urged stakeholders to ensure that the protection platform in Iraq was adequately resourced and to engage with the Government of Iraq to ensure that there were extended deadlines for the camps.

36. In Yemen, NGOs requested stakeholders to engage in conflict de-escalation and in an inclusive peace process. She requested donors to consult with aid agencies on the impact of terrorist designations on the humanitarian situation, suggested the development of a Yemen-wide framework for tracking the returns of internally displaced persons and requested increased access to migrant communities across Yemen. In Libya, the European response to irregular onward migration risked trapping many in the hands of traffickers: she urged the authorities in Libya to allow UNHCR to fully exercise its mandate and ensure that all protection agencies had unhindered access to populations. NGOs advocated for access to services and livelihoods to be facilitated for stateless persons and for discrimination in nationality laws to be addressed.

37. The **Director of the Regional Bureau for the Middle East and North Africa**, responding to the various comments and questions, said that he would group his answers by theme. He thanked governments for staying the course with UNHCR in protracted situations, particularly the Syrian crisis 13 years on; they had provided a significant level of funding in the past 10 years to assist refugees and ultimately support States such as Jordan and Lebanon to stay and deliver.

38. Little information on the issue of Gaza had been included in his updates, since the Office's position was the same as that of the United Nations Secretary-General, which had been clearly articulated since late 2023, including on the need for unimpeded access to Gaza. While the mandate of UNHCR was similar to that of UNRWA, there was a clear division of labour between the two entities. UNHCR stood behind all statements made by the Secretary-General regarding the defunding of UNRWA. The Agency worked not only in Gaza, but also in Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, Jordan and the West Bank. Defunding of UNRWA meant that responsibility for the seven decades old system that helped support Palestinian refugees would fall to the States hosting those refugees, which was just not possible. Such defunding would run counter to efforts by UNHCR to express solidarity and support for Jordan and Lebanon; funding was necessary to respond to all refugee situations in the region, in Gaza and beyond.

39. Regarding the role of civil society and local NGOs, funding for the Middle East and North Africa channelled through those entities was 61 per cent, with 30 per cent channelled through international NGOs; the balance was essentially direct implementation by UNHCR in the form of registration and cash assistance.

40. Turning to the issue of internally displaced persons, the three pilot countries and the role of, and cooperation by UNHCR with, the Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Solutions to Internal Displacement, he welcomed the strengthening of national institutions in Iraq and Libya. UNHCR was working with those countries on the issue of documentation of movements of internally displaced persons, which had to be voluntary and to the destination of choice – not necessarily the original place of residence, which in some cases was completely uninhabited or destroyed. UNHCR worked as part of the UN country team, providing advice and ensuring that any internal displacement occurred in humane and voluntary conditions.

41. He thanked the representative of Iraq for the comments regarding the plan to close camps in the Kurdistan Region, which was a complex matter; UNHCR would continue to work on the relevant details with the Government in conjunction with the United Nations country team and humanitarian team.

42. Similarly, he thanked the representative of Egypt for the statement made on behalf of the Arab Group. UNHCR programmes on issues including human rights, protection of children and addressing displacement throughout the Arab world had unfortunately had to take a back seat, given the various crises in the region, particularly the large-scale crisis in the Sudan. He looked forward to a time when UNHCR would be able to resume its programme of work.

43. He highly valued the longstanding tradition in Tunisia of supporting human rights. All countries in the Arab world were under significant budget pressure, and Tunisia was no exception in that regard. UNHCR would work closely with the Government of Tunisia to find ways to deal with the problem raised. It was to be hoped that the exceptional assistance the Office was providing to asylum-seekers in Tunisia would suffice.

44. Humanitarian operations in Yemen had been considerably complicated by the recent designation of the Houthis as a terrorist organization, and consequent sanctions, in response to the Red Sea crisis. Discussions were ongoing regarding the extent to which UNHCR, and the United Nations system as a whole, together with NGOs, could continue their assistance programmes in northern Yemen. If the current financial situation continued, UNHCR might have to reconsider its engagement with the situation of internally displaced persons, which was the collective responsibility of the United Nations system, not a direct-mandate responsibility. He hoped the Office would not have to scale back on everything it had achieved to date.

45. The situation in the Syrian Arab Republic regarding internal displacement and returns was complex. There was clear frustration in the region about how the conflict in the country had ended – or rather, not ended. It was impossible to predict, with the current impasse, what the next phase in the Syrian Arab Republic would be; it was certainly not possible to continue for another 13 years with the status quo. Global humanitarian budgets were being squeezed, and countries that were under enormous pressure, such as Jordan and Lebanon, were being told that budgets would be reduced even further. The situation was unfair, particularly given the smaller economies of those two countries and the disproportionate number of refugees they hosted.

46. Funding had in fact been declining for three years, and efforts to “prioritize” – which a number of delegations had called for – had been going on for just as long. UNHCR had now reached the point where more prioritization was impossible: it had to decide between reducing staff or offices and the number of families it could afford to keep on the cash list. While support was still maintained in the health and education sector, direct financial support was seriously under threat.

47. The conditions were not yet in place for any large-scale organized returns to the Syrian Arab Republic. UNHCR provided support to individuals wishing to return, however, and in 2023 some 36,000 Syrians had returned home. The fundamental obstacles to return remained security and conscription, as well as far more fundamental issues that no humanitarian agency, including UNHCR – at least not alone – was able to address. A number of discussions and initiatives aimed at improving the conditions for return were under way, however, and UNHCR remained constructively engaged. He remained at the disposal of any delegates wishing to have a bilateral meeting.

b. Global programmes (EC/75/SC/CRP.3)

48. **The Director of the Division of Resilience and Solutions**, introducing the item, said that the Office's global programmes remained focused on delivering much needed humanitarian assistance, while also working towards resilience and durable solutions. Promising developments in economic inclusion and self-reliance had been seen. Refugees' access to formal employment stood

at 45 per cent in 2023, marking a 27 per cent increase since 2019. However, while more refugees had the right to work and open bank accounts, practical and legal barriers continued to be obstacles in many places. In that regard, the multi-stakeholder pledge on economic inclusion and social protection made at the Global Refugee Forum 2023 was crucial in that it galvanized 200 stakeholders towards enhancing legal frameworks and expanding programmes to boost employability, entrepreneurship, data and evidence. UNHCR intended to build on that in 2024 by supporting pledge implementation in 10 countries.

49. Building the self-reliance of refugees through economic inclusion needed to be accompanied by access to quality education. Given that only 7 per cent of young refugees reached higher education, the enrolment of 420,000 children across 14 countries, together with the Education Above All Foundation's "educate a child" programme, were vital achievements. UNHCR had also developed the global "15by30 Roadmap" to elevate refugee youth enrolment in higher education. To reach that goal, it was imperative to bolster complementary pathways to education, connected digital education, vocational and educational training and national enrolment, as well as initiatives such as the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI) scholarship programmes.

50. On the health front, UNHCR was enhancing collaboration with governments and stakeholders to also address the impact of non-communicable diseases in the refugee community. A recent achievement was the global high-level technical meeting on non-communicable diseases in humanitarian settings, organized by UNHCR and the World Health Organization (WHO). The event recognized the need to include refugees in, and strengthen, health systems. At the Global Refugee Forum 2023, the "Group of friends of health for refugees and host communities", created with WHO, generated 150 health-related commitments. In response to the worsening global food security crisis, UNHCR had partnered with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and WFP and was active in the Global Network Against Food Crises. UNHCR was also engaging with development actors such as the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Bank and the African Development Bank (AfDB) to tackle those issues more effectively.

51. In parallel, UNHCR was committed to implementing more environmentally sustainable solutions in its settlements and shelters and across its water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and energy projects. Kenya's Shirika Plan was a standout example of the integration of refugees into socioeconomic frameworks alongside host communities. Similarly, the transformation of refugee camps in Ethiopia – and opportunities in Malawi and Zambia – represented a significant step towards settlements.

52. The Office's strategic partnerships with development actors continued to play a crucial role in amplifying the reach and impact of its global programmes in countries of origin and in displacement situations. As highlighted by the Assistant High Commissioner for Operations in his opening statement, to implement the Strategy on Engaging with Development Actors introduced in 2023, UNHCR was working with development partners to ensure they included forcibly displaced and stateless people in their research, censuses and funding programmes, and that country of origin and host governments had the support they needed to include them in programmes covering areas such as livelihood, employment, education and health care.

53. Notable achievements had been seen in countries where national policies and development finance had played key roles. For instance, in Mauritania and Uganda, transitions from humanitarian to development-led initiatives in the health, water and education sectors showcased successful socioeconomic inclusion under government leadership. The partnership between UNHCR and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was progressing well with a clear focus on data-driven policies and analytics, which was reinforced by UNHCR staff having been seconded to IMF headquarters.

54. The representative of **Bangladesh** noted the positive developments made in enhancing refugees' livelihood opportunities and economic inclusion in their respective host countries since the Global Refugee Forum 2019 and commended the high number of transformative multi-stakeholder pledges made in the area of economic inclusion and social protection at the Global Refugee Forum 2023. Given that education was a crucial component of an enlightened future for refugee children and young adults, the programmes implemented by many Member States and NGOs to facilitate refugees' access to primary, secondary and tertiary education were much appreciated.

55. Bangladesh had hosted 1.2 million Rohingya refugees at the Cox's Bazar camp for six years, which presented considerable challenges, not least of which the provision of nutrition to the 30,000

children born there every year. In around 2020 the island of Bhasan Char had been developed to alleviate the risks and congestion associated with the overcrowded Cox's Bazar camp; the island was equipped with modern amenities including schools and hospitals and had ample opportunities for economic activities. The international community was supporting the learning activities of Rohingya children based on the Myanmar curriculum along with various skills-development programmes. To date, some 35,000 Rohingya had relocated to Bhasan Char voluntarily and 100,000 more were expected to freely move there by the end of 2024. His Government urged donors and development partners to invest in Bhasan Char to foster the economic inclusion of Rohingya through their engagement in various income-generating and resilience-boosting activities.

56. Repatriation was the only sustainable solution to the protracted humanitarian crisis, however. The international community, including the United Nations and regional bodies, must intensify their efforts for a permanent solution based on the sustainable return of Rohingya to Myanmar and their reintegration. Unfortunately, there had been no significant programmes related to livelihood opportunities, economic inclusion, public health or education implemented in Rakhine State in Myanmar. His Government urged UNHCR to step up efforts to develop and implement in Rakhine livelihood, education, health, water and sanitation programmes, as well as critical infrastructure, which would encourage Rohingya to return to their homeland and realize their human rights.

57. The representative of **Ethiopia** said that promoting the self-reliance of refugees was a way to ensure their socioeconomic rights and help them lead a dignified life. It also decreased their dependency and enhanced the sustainability of durable solutions. The benefits of self-reliance therefore went beyond protection. The important role education played in refugees' futures should also be emphasized, from the perspective of the right to education. In Ethiopia, while over 187,000 refugee students had been enrolled at various levels of education for the 2023-2024 academic year, severe underfunding was having adverse repercussions. Similarly, the provision of essential services was being undermined by serious underfunding, which severely impacted the protection, health and well-being of women and girls. His Government welcomed the improvement in the realization of refugees' economic and social rights despite global challenges and encouraged UNHCR to strengthen its partnership with the private sector, in order to advance employment, self-employment and employment creation opportunities for refugees. Ethiopia enjoyed a very good partnership with the Ikea Foundation, for example, in helping host communities and refugees to engage around irrigated agriculture. On the basis of that experience, Ethiopia had made a commitment at the Global Refugee Forum 2023 to provide 10,000 hectares of irrigable land and encouraged partners to join in the realization of the pledge.

58. Regarding energy and the environment, refugees and host communities in Ethiopia had sustained severe repercussions of climate change, such as prolonged drought and floods. To address that challenge his Government was working with UNHCR and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) on projects to increase the provision of alternative energy sources. Funding for global programmes should be less earmarked; experience had shown that there was a mismatch between the priorities of people of concern and programmes with earmarked funding. Hence, maintaining a degree of flexibility and applying a bottom-up approach in the allocation of funds was vital. He expressed his appreciation to UNHCR and partners for their continued support in helping refugees live in a dignified manner through the global programmes and reiterated Ethiopia's unwavering commitment to provide basic services to refugees.

59. The representative of the **Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that the significant efforts made by developing countries such as hers that hosted refugees, particularly in the important areas of education, health and food security, were crucial for adapting policies, infrastructure and capacities to the emerging needs of refugees. She welcomed the improvements in the realization of refugees' economic and social rights, noting in particular the increased unrestricted access to formal work from 18 per cent in 2019 to 45 per cent in 2023. Over 50 per cent of refugees now had the legal right to open bank accounts, which was a key step towards financial inclusion.

60. However, her Government deplored the ongoing challenges arising from legal and practical barriers to accessing services as well as the limited capacity of local governments, which impeded access to the employment of women and adolescents. Her Government looked forward to the strategic review of key areas to be considered when looking at successes and challenges in education, with a view to preparing for the next five years. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela was deeply concerned to hear that various forms of malnutrition had persisted in 2023, and appreciated the measures taken by States as part of UNHCR operations to address that issue.

61. Policies using cash-based interventions presented important challenges for humanitarian work, including assessment of their impact regarding basic needs, financial results, gender, human development and social cohesion. Her Government had significant concerns about the security and appropriateness of cash-based interventions, their impact on local markets and the economy, the possibility of excluding individuals, and ensuring that cash reached those who needed it. The effectiveness of such interventions compared to in-kind assistance was debatable in certain circumstances.

62. Unearmarked, sustainable and multi-annual funding was important for developing countries and provided vital flexibility to adapt to dynamic and complex crises. It allowed countries and organizations to implement sustainable long-term strategies, while earmarked funding often limited their ability to respond quickly to changing or emerging needs. What was more, her Government believed that earmarked funding could compromise the independence of humanitarian operations by linking funding to donors' political interests or specific strategies. That in turn could influence the selection of geographical areas, target populations or kinds of interventions, basing them on political priorities rather than objective humanitarian objectives. Dependence on earmarked funding could indeed affect the capacity of organizations to operate in an impartial manner, which was essential for the effectiveness of humanitarian work.

63. The representative of **Switzerland** said that while the improved access to employment for refugees from 18 per cent in 2019 to 45 per cent in 2023 constituted considerable progress, much remained to be done to create the appropriate conditions for improving their autonomy. UNHCR should continue its efforts under its 2024-2028 Strategy, particularly in countries that still had restrictions, and assess the results obtained. Given the crucial role of the private sector in engaging states, he wished to know how UNHCR worked with that sector to attain its objectives. The Office's participation in the Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies should have been included in the education initiatives mentioned in the report, particularly in light of the renewed pledge at the Global Forum for Refugees 2023.

64. He welcomed the increased use of cash-based interventions, with seven million people having benefitted from them in 2023. The limited amounts distributed per person, however, only covered 50 per cent of actual needs; the efficiency of those interventions was therefore questionable, given the fixed costs per transaction. Blockchain technology could help reduce those costs, and Switzerland was promoting its use by all United Nations agencies.

65. Switzerland welcomed the inclusion of refugees in national health-care systems, the continued cooperation between UNHCR and WHO and their joint efforts to improve care for refugees with non-communicable diseases. He asked what action UNHCR was taking to improve the resilience of food security in the face of climate change, welcoming the Office's cooperation with the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and WFP, which should be intensified. While the establishment of a joint analytical framework was an excellent starting point, he wished to know what results had been achieved by the Joint Programme Excellence and Targeting Hub, what challenges it faced and what the next steps of cooperation would be with the WFP, WHO and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). It was to be hoped that the Office's membership of the Global Network Against Food Crises would enable greater coordination in that regard. His Government called for UNHCR to join with FAO, IFAD, WFP and international financial institutions to increase investment in that area, in equitable and long-term partnership with local structures and communities, in order to improve both the quality and quantity food.

66. His Government would have liked the Geneva Technical Hub to have been referred to in the report, given that UNHCR had been its main beneficiary over the past three years. Similarly, there was no mention in the report of any specific initiatives to provide any installations to protect displaced persons against the effects of climate change. It was important to mention such examples, particularly since UNHCR co-chaired the Global Shelter Cluster.

67. The representative of the **Kingdom of the Netherlands** welcomed the strengthening and establishment of partnerships between UNHCR and development actors in the private sector to promote the inclusion of refugees. His Government supported the Office's efforts to address the persistent challenges, including legal and practical barriers to access services, limited local government capacity and financial constraints, outlined in the UNHCR Global Survey on Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion, as part of the multi-stakeholder pledge on economic inclusion and social protection made at the Global Refugee Forum 2023.

68. He acknowledged the importance of cash-based interventions for refugees and welcomed the Office's aim to scale up cash as the primary response modality, including in emergencies. In that context his Government was concerned that exceptional cash assistance was being phased out in Tunisia owing to budget constraints and had taken note of the regional director's response to that issue. He wished to know how cash-based interventions would feature in upcoming financial prioritization efforts compared to other forms of assistance.

69. He welcomed the work of UNHCR in conjunction with UNICEF and WHO on the introduction of the new "minimum service package for mental health and psychosocial support", which was crucial in organizations' interventions and helped responders to provide basic psychosocial support. His Government urged UNHCR to continue its work in that area in order to fully embed mental health and psychosocial support in its operations with refugees and host communities, and to promote it more broadly amongst other partners.

70. The representative of **Uganda** expressed support for the hopeful tone in the update on global programmes. It was important to retain hope despite realities on the ground, particularly in regions such as her own.

71. Welcoming the reported increase in refugee access to formal employment, she would appreciate further disaggregated data on that topic to better inform Member States as partners on where refugees were seeing those admittedly welcome greater benefits, since in her country – and perhaps in Africa as a whole – there were real challenges in employment. For that reason, her Government was calling for private sector investment to allow access to those jobs. Only through further information would a true picture of the situation of refugees and displaced persons as a whole emerge.

72. She reiterated that social inclusion and livelihoods were a proud tradition in Uganda dating back to the 1940s. As other partners began to focus on inclusion, there were real positives but also real challenges. Long-term inclusion of refugees led to the risk of being left to shoulder the burden by partners suggesting that the situation should, by that point, have been addressed by the Government, without necessarily managing that transition and equipping systems to sustain inclusion. The update should reflect at least a little of that challenge for sustainability in social inclusion, especially for the developing world.

73. She echoed descriptions of education as the backbone of any child or young person. The Ugandan Government faced the challenge that 65 per cent of its refugee population were children, who therefore required education and had disaggregated needs – education was very closely linked to health and nutrition. Systems must be put in place within global programmes that promoted complete education. It was one thing to enrol a child, but it was important to know what the level of retention was for girls or refugee children beyond primary level. Such topics required reflection.

74. On food security, her Government had struggled. While it was positive that UNHCR intended to partner with WFP and FAO, in reality, WFP was poorly funded. Food rations had decreased. The Ugandan Government had taken inclusive actions such as providing land for farming, but even with a good climate and good soil, food security was a real challenge, especially for new arrivals, who were reduced to one meal per day at most – even pregnant woman and menstruating girls. The situation around food security had been attested with data and must be more widely discussed because it was not sustainable. The food ratios given were for rurally hosted refugees rather than those in urban environments.

75. While the update was supposed to focus on all the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees, it was clear that it had mainly emphasized social inclusion in response and protection. There appeared to be little to no coverage of durable solutions, which were greatly needed in the current environment of underfunding and consistent budgetary cuts. The update might usefully include a section on existing partnerships to that end.

76. The representative of **Kenya** said that at both the 2019 and 2023 Global Refugee Forums, her Government had pledged to implement its education and training strategy for refugees and host communities for 2023 to 2027 to promote equitable access, enhance high-quality education and training, and strengthen inclusion of refugees in its education system. She requested further details on the technical assistance outlined in the update to be provided in a number of pilot countries to help operationalize the Global Compact on Refugees for equitable, high-quality education.

77. She welcomed the Vodafone Foundation-funded Instant Network Schools programme's

efforts to expand access to education in refugee communities in six countries, including Kenya. She also took note that the global shelter cluster was developing its strategy for 2024 to 2029. She requested further details on the linkage between the strategy and the multi-stakeholder pledge on climate-resilient, sustainable human settlements for refugees and their hosting communities, which her Government had joined.

78. On data, she noted the reference to UNHCR's partnership with CartONG and that organization's mission to put data in the service of humanitarian, development and social action projects. In that respect, she requested clarification on the sourcing of the data and on any synergies between CartONG and the UNHCR and World Bank Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement.

79. At the national level, her Government had made several achievements that were essential to developing the Shirika Plan, including the conferment of charters and gazettments to enhance inclusion and access to services by refugees, and multi-stakeholder consultations at the national and county levels to define the six pillars of the Shirika Plan. Those pillars included systems building; integrated services delivery on health education, adequate housing, water and sanitation, energy, and social protection; human capital and skills development; sustainable natural resource management, including climate change and disaster risk reduction; sustainable economic development; and durable solutions and complementary pathways.

80. The representative of the **Philippines** said that his Government, which supported inclusion programmes and was encouraged by the increase in unrestricted access to formal employment, would like more information on the advocacy work of UNHCR with governments in that regard with a view to balancing the benefits with host communities. It would appreciate hearing the assessment by UNHCR on the challenges and opportunities of the cash-based interventions programme, while awaiting another post-distribution monitoring report. It would be interested to learn, regarding mental health and psychosocial support, how Executive Committee Conclusion no. 93 - 2002 on reception of asylum-seekers in the context of individual asylum systems figured in UNHCR programmes, particularly on integrating specific initiatives such as participation of persons of concern and multi-sectoral partnerships. It would appreciate the elaboration by UNHCR on programmes for the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

81. The representative of the **United States of America** said that the Global Refugee Forum 2023 had been a milestone reaffirming UNHCR's role in providing life-saving assistance to refugees and stateless persons – a function that would not be possible without its global programmes. In working towards the next Forum, collaboration and strategic prioritization of scarce resources and key programmes would be essential to achieving the pledges made. Host governments' inclusion of refugees was the most sustainable and dignified option to support refugees' self-reliance, social cohesion and protection in the face of mounting global displacement.

82. She commended the efforts of UNHCR to advance inclusion with a wide range of stakeholders, including the private sector and development actors, which her Government had supported at the Forum through co-leading the multi-stakeholder pledge on economic inclusion and social protection. In line with that commitment, it would continue to advocate for inclusive policies and approaches that promoted more development, private sector solutions and refugees' self-reliance.

83. Education was naturally a key enabler of inclusion and for that reason, her Government proudly collaborated with UNHCR and the World Bank to expand access to education through enhanced data collection and analysis with the Higher Education Learning Network and the Building Evidence in Education donor working group.

84. She applauded the successful partnership of UNHCR with the Educate A Child programme in 2023. Separately, her Government supported other global initiatives such as the UNHCR-WFP Joint Targeting Hub, which amplified organizational strengths and enabled closer collaboration by leveraging each organization's comparative strengths.

85. Regarding cash-based assistance, she eagerly anticipated the continued rollout of innovative distribution methods such as CashAssist to leverage technology for real-time traceability and accountability. She agreed that agile global programmes and continued flexible funding were critical for UNHCR's core humanitarian activities.

86. The representative of the **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** recognized the vital support that the global programmes provided to field operations, commending

the work of UNHCR with partners and host governments to ensure that refugees received the services they needed and were entitled to.

87. Multi-stakeholder pledges launched at the Global Refugee Forum 2023 were vital platforms for sustained action towards implementing the Global Compact on Refugees. He therefore encouraged government pledge leaders and UNHCR to harness the potential of those structures to deliver effective coordination and accountability for commitments ensuring pledge implementation looking ahead to the 2025 High-Level Officials Meeting and even the 2027 Forum.

88. He welcomed the UNHCR strategic review of its education activities, asking the Director for a timeline for the completion of that work and confirmation of what resources would be allocated to deliver the Forum's education multi-stakeholder pledge.

89. He commended UNHCR for the development of greener core relief item specifications and appreciated the commitment of the Chief of the Shelter and Settlement Section to support the reestablishment of the donor group.

90. The minimum standards for camp management had recently been updated and he called on the Secretariat to join others in integrating those standards into its toolkits to ensure important benchmarks for accountability to affected populations and safety and quality of life for displaced people, whether in camps or communities.

91. He noted the important work of UNHCR on livelihoods and ensuring that refugees were connected to economic systems that reduced their dependence on aid. Half of refugees, however, still lacked even a bank account. He called on UNHCR to work still more closely with host governments and the World Bank to integrate refugees into existing government systems wherever possible, reducing their dependence on aid and international organizations. Over time, those steps should reduce demand on finite humanitarian resources.

92. The **Director of the Division of Resilience and Solutions** thanked Member States for their support over 2023, assuring them that his Division would approach Member States bilaterally on some of the issues raised.

93. On disaggregated data, his Division would provide a fuller answer to the request from the Philippines for more information on that area at a later date, which would then be shared more broadly.

94. On recommendations for items that could have been included in the update, he acknowledged that the Geneva Technical Hub was among the most important technical initiatives of UNHCR, with technical expertise supporting operations globally, and one for which the Secretariat was seeking other United Nations partners and was grateful to the Government of Switzerland for its support. While the Hub had not been mentioned in the current update, his Division would ensure it was present in the next edition, along with a number of other initiatives.

95. On cash-based initiatives, while more innovative approaches would be pursued, current progress was satisfactory. The approach to the situation in Ukraine using blockchain technology had won an award, and CashAssist was progressing well. While there was more to be done – his Division was keen to pursue opportunities and initiatives that might offer improvements in that area – the data from 2023 collated so far emphatically showed that current initiatives were indeed making a great impact on recipients' well-being. In 100 countries, \$750 million had been provided in cash to 7 million people, and the post-distribution monitoring report was due to appear and would be made available to Member States.

96. On education, good progress was being made but support was required. The Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI) scholarship programme, supported by the German Government for over 30 years, had been a backbone of tertiary education but was now facing funding challenges and needed more partners: without tertiary education – whether formal, vocational or in other systems – young people would not graduate into employment schemes. At present, tertiary education stood at 7 per cent, compared to primary education at 68 per cent and secondary education at around 38 per cent.

97. Good progress was being made on private sector engagement. The Joint Initiative with the International Finance Corporation had completed its first year and was producing results. Additionally, private sector engagement such as with the Vodafone Foundation was contributing to employment, education, vocational training and digital connectivity. Many more initiatives were

taking shape. More were needed, but the support received was good.

98. Food security was a major challenge. As had been mentioned, partners such as WFP were facing their own budgetary challenges. High-level and regional-level discussions with those partners were taking place on how to address those issues. Greater focus on and investment in agriculture in countries such as Uganda was planned; UNHCR was partnering with the World Bank on insect farming, a project that was rapidly expanding in several African countries, and there were a number of initiatives seeking to complement those undertaken with the World Bank and FAO in that area.

99. Durable solutions – naturally an area on which the Secretariat was focused – depended on root causes: as reported, unless the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic improved, it would be impossible for the smaller-scaler repatriation taking place to be expanded. The same applied for other countries of origin, as the issue was one of political decisions and root causes rather than operational practice. The platforms – most recently the Central African Republic Solution Support Platform – were playing their part and the Secretariat was investigating other initiatives, but until those issues were addressed, progress would be slow.

c. Emergency response, security and supply

i. Emergency response and supply (EC/75/SC/CRP.4);

ii. Security of workforce and operations in UNHCR (EC/75/SC/CRP.5)

100. The **Director of the Division for Emergency Security and Supply** said that the policy on emergency preparedness and response and the new guidance on emergency preparedness had been issued in 2023, with her Division continuing rollout across the whole organization. In 2024, committed to empowering the right people in the right place at the right time, her Division had introduced a French-specific cohort to be trained in the French-speaking workshop on emergency management the following week. She thanked the Governments of Germany and Norway for hosting such workshops for over 20 years. Those efforts were strongly complemented by 21 global emergency standby partners of UNHCR who continued to provide in-kind expert service package support. Her Division was sincerely grateful for their commitment, collaboration and partnership.

101. The Secretariat continued engagement with private sector entities to strengthen emergency capacity. In 2024, it had welcomed Cisco Crisis Response as a new emergency response standby partner of UNHCR – a second private sector emergency partner ensuring capacity to deploy information and communication technology services. The recently relaunched Emergency Handbook was now fully online with improved features, open to partners and available in six languages. Furthermore, based on successful experience in Asia, her Division was establishing a new virtual training centre entitled eCentre for Africa to enhance the capacities of local actors and NGOs in Africa in emergency preparedness and response. She thanked the Government of Japan for its support of the eCentre as announced at the Global Refugee Forum 2023 and for its timely support for the Emergency Handbook.

102. The fragility of the international supply context in recent years had placed tremendous pressure on UNHCR's supply chain, as seen in the current security challenges in the Red Sea. In that regard, UNHCR had benefited in 2023 from strong partner support, such as the European Union Humanitarian Air Bridge, the Dubai International Humanitarian City, and a number of private sector partners such as Kuehne+Nagel, Maersk, the Mediterranean Shipping Company and the United Parcel Service. Their commendable donations of airlifts and sea shipments had significantly enhanced UNHCR's ability to provide effective emergency response solutions.

103. To meet the ever-growing needs of forcibly displaced people faster and better, her Division had comprehensively reviewed its supply chain capabilities and was preparing the launch of UNHCR's new multi-year strategy between 2024 and 2030 to make its supply chain activities simpler, swifter and more sustainable. As part of that strategy, her Division was stepping up its climate action to minimize the environmental impact of its humanitarian assistance. It had already developed greener specifications for seven core relief items, complemented with better packaging, palletization and labelling. In the framework of inter-agency cooperation, three additional vital items would be reviewed in 2024: tents, mattresses and plastic tarpaulins. Her Division, which was well on the way to surpassing its initial target of 20 per cent reduction in carbon emissions from core relief items by 2025, would, in line with the new strategy, aim for a 30 per cent reduction in CO2 emissions by 2030.

104. Turning to strengthening the culture of security, she affirmed that the UNHCR remained committed to ensuring the safety and security of its personnel and engaged actively with host governments and other stakeholders, while undertaking reviews of lessons learned to adapt and strengthen security management practices. In that regard, developing the knowledge and skills of UNHCR personnel in security management remained crucial. In 2023 alone, more than 2,000 staff members and managers at high-risk duty stations had received training, bolstering the capability of personnel to operate in complex environments and fulfil UNHCR's duty of care.

105. In particular, the Women's Security Awareness Training played an important role in managing gender-related security incidents, assisting women in understanding available organizational support and referral pathways. There had been an increase in support requests from individuals affected by gender-based security incidents, and her Division continued to provide confidential and victim-centred security support.

106. She reiterated her Division's strong commitment to strengthening the United Nations Security Management System through proactive engagement and coordination. To that end, her Division had been represented in over 22 inter-agency working groups in 2023, contributing to the successful development of security policy and guidance documents.

107. The representative of the **European Union** (group statement on behalf of the European Union and its Member States) commended UNHCR for its tireless efforts in 2023 to respond to new and growing needs around the world. Its robust system and response, as recently confirmed by the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN), had continued to be strengthened. One year after the entry into force of UNHCR's new policy on emergency preparedness and response, the European Union would be interested to receive more details regarding efficiency gains and progress on inter-agency coordination. Regarding the willingness of UNHCR to expand its emergency partnerships and capacity development activities with other actors, she would also like to better understand what synergies had been achieved with other United Nations organizations such as IOM, UNICEF, WFP and WHO.

108. Among others, the regional crisis in the Sudan had tested the ability of UNHCR to react quickly. The European Union appreciated the swift and large-scale emergency deployments by UNHCR and implementing partners to the Sudan and its neighbours, but also to Armenia and Ukraine, as well as the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye in response to earthquakes.

109. She welcomed concrete linkages with the European Union's civil protection assets in the field. In 2023, it had launched several key operations under its Civil Protection Mechanism, and contributed essential logistical support via the European Humanitarian Response Capacity in a number of countries, including humanitarian flights, air bridge operations, expert deployments and release of emergency stockpiles. Those deployments had been complementary to and supportive of the role of UNHCR, especially in Chad and the Sudan. In addition, the European Union Humanitarian Air Bridge had transported over 126 tons of goods on behalf of UNHCR in three different countries. The European Union continued to develop new capacities to fill operational gaps, where such gaps existed, which would be made available to UNHCR and the whole humanitarian community in close coordination with the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service.

110. She commended UNHCR's reforms in logistics and supply, notably a new supply operating model and climate action targets. Two years after the publication of the European Union humanitarian aid logistics policy, it stood ready to support UNHCR and partners in maintaining a strategic approach to the organization of supply chains and logistics and would appreciate an update on how UNHCR was reducing the environmental impact of its projects and programmes.

111. Regarding the security of its workforce and operations, she acknowledged the relevance of UNHCR's integrated security risk management strategy, inviting UNHCR to continue reinforcing the monitoring and reporting of security incidents, as well as ensuring that every staff member in high-risk areas was properly security trained as part of a comprehensive security risk management strategy, with a specific focus on national staff and including access to mental health services. In the light of the deteriorating security context, the European Union strongly supported cooperation with the Department of Safety and Security as well as security-monitoring NGOs to foster security coordination, monitoring and preparedness among the programming pillars in high-risk areas. She would welcome more information on UNHCR's exchanges with other United Nations agencies to share experience, best practice and lessons learned that promoted a strong security risk management culture within the United Nations Security Management System.

112. The representative of **Japan**, offering condolences for the UNHCR staff who had lost their lives, commended UNHCR for strengthening its crisis response, preparedness and readiness – it was particularly useful that the Emergency Handbook had been made more user-friendly. His Government supported UNHCR’s establishment of the eCentre for Africa as had been mentioned, hoping to hear about concrete progress at the 2025 sessions of the Standing Committee.

113. The representative of the **United States of America** paid tribute to humanitarian personnel operating in increasingly volatile and complex environments. It was crucial that all entities engaged in conflict observed their obligations to ensure the safety of humanitarians as they fulfilled their vital role in alleviating human suffering. Given the increase in emergencies over 2023 and the proliferation of complex conflicts, UNHCR’s emergency surge deployments must include robust staff training and mental health support. Duty of care issues were more important than ever, and she applauded UNHCR for its focused attention and robust field support for security personnel.

114. She welcomed that the number of security incidents affecting UNHCR staff had increased by less than 5 per cent in 2023, a notable improvement from the 30 per cent increase reported in 2022. She would appreciate more details about humanitarian staff affected by security incidents, especially data disaggregated by gender and employment category, as well as an overview of the broader security trends identified. She would especially welcome information on the implications of the large percentage of security incidents related to civil unrest. Noting the efforts of UNHCR to recruit more diverse security staff, she requested a higher percentage of UNHCR’s security staff recruited from more diverse geographical locations and information on how that percentage changed over time.

115. On the new supply chain model of UNHCR providing more real-time data on the status of its global supplies and delegating the authority to use those supplies to the regional and country level, she joined requests for additional information on how UNHCR coordinated with WFP and other humanitarian organizations to avoid duplication of logistical efforts.

116. The representative of the **United Republic of Tanzania** said that in 2023 his Government had received more than 14,000 new asylum-seekers from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. However, that noble gesture had been challenged by the lack of additional funding from UNHCR and the international community as a whole, with its budget reduced by 30 per cent for all implementing partners midway through the implementation calendar year. That had substantially impacted crucial services to refugees such as health, food, education and other non-food items, putting their lives at risk.

117. The current dire financial straits in which UNHCR found itself perhaps called for a different approach. For example, his Government currently hosted 112,755 refugees in camps even though the reason for their flight no longer existed. In 2022, his Government had conducted a joint intention survey together with UNHCR and other partners to learn more about the observed decline in voluntary repatriation of Burundian refugees. According to the results, 95 per cent had not wanted to return due to lack of access to land and livelihood activities, and inadequate social services in Burundi.

118. It was unfair for the UNHCR donor community, the international community or his Government to continue to protect persons who did not deserve it. The Burundian refugee situation should be ended by invoking the cessation clause to prevent asylum space from being abused. He understood the UNHCR mandate and processes in that instance, but the circumstances necessitated a unique response. As a host country, his Government was extremely disappointed by those refugees’ public statements that they recognized only resettlement and naturalization as a durable solution.

119. Regarding the security of UNHCR workforce and operations, his Government was committed to ensuring the safety of all humanitarian actors in the country. For localized humanitarian interventions, UNHCR should do more at the human resources level to ensure that Member States were equally represented in employment. His Government had observed that some countries might have a large number of international staff from a neighbouring country, which could be perceived as that country dictating the host country’s refugee and asylum policies. In that area, UNHCR should carry out evaluations directly, as apart from the humanitarian aspects, refugee hosting was a serious security concern for some host countries.

120. The representative of **France** welcomed the efforts of UNHCR to adopt a prevention culture, which would allow the greatest use of UNHCR resources to save lives. His Government was

working to improve its own prevention tools as part of its humanitarian strategy for 2023 to 2027 and participating in funding preventive work by humanitarian actors such as WFP and the Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Office.

121. Regarding security, he paid tribute to UNHCR personnel and local partners working in ever more difficult environments. He reaffirmed the French Government's long-standing commitment to protecting humanitarian personnel, including as part of the Call for Humanitarian Action that it had presented together with the Government of Germany since 2019. It was unacceptable that the world was becoming increasingly dangerous for humanitarian workers. In Afghanistan, Gaza, the Sudan or Ukraine, humanitarian workers must never be targeted. His Government was troubled by the violations of international humanitarian law committed in a growing number of crises. International humanitarian law was not optional: it applied to everyone. He called on Member States to reaffirm that message during the upcoming 34th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

122. The representative of **Bulgaria** commended UNHCR for its determined efforts to find workable solutions for effective emergency preparedness and response to the continuing surge in humanitarian and refugee situations. She welcomed UNHCR's new policy on emergency preparedness and response and efforts to ensure its effective implementation, along with its new guidance on emergency preparedness and provision of practical information for country operations, especially for risk analysis and developing contingency plans in refugee and internal displacement situations and for mixed movements.

123. One of the recent MOPAN recommendations concerned rethinking refugee responses from a long-term perspective, so that as far as possible, refugee emergencies were approached from the start in a manner reducing the risk of UNHCR becoming entrenched as the long-term principal service provider in protracted refugee situations. She would be interested to hear whether and how UNHCR was considering addressing that recommendation by integrating it into its preparedness and early action policy. She supported UNHCR commitment to the continued importance of proactive preparedness and early action, expanding its emergency partnerships and capacity development activities, and advocating for simplified procedures across a range of operational areas.

124. The workforce of an organization was its health and its human face. In the humanitarian field, the workforce went beyond the traditional employee administrative structure – they risked their lives so that others felt safe, protected and respected with dignity. In that regard, she commended UNHCR's reaffirmed commitment to fulfil and build on its duty of care for its workforce, welcoming plans for continued investment in security risk management and its effectiveness, mental health and psychological support for its workforce, and further action to prevent sexual harassment and abuse.

125. The representative of **Switzerland** expressed gratitude that UNHCR had been able to respond to a growing number of emergency and supply situations while working to build its capacities in material purchase and use, and while reducing the environmental impact of its actions. As one of its emergency personnel deployment partners, his Government congratulated UNHCR on its work and looked forward to further collaboration. In that regard, he asked how recent and future budgetary cuts risked restricting the ability of UNHCR to respond to emergency situations; how the Secretariat planned to compensate for personnel reductions through emergency deployments; and whether the Secretariat intended to promote collaboration with local partners' rapid response capacities in the field.

126. He welcomed efforts to manage supply in an expansive, regional and decentralized way. Those measures were important for promoting localization in that area. As it was, however, important to ensure that that process supported local partners rather than undermining them, he asked what measures UNHCR had taken to avoid that situation. His Government had not understood how UNHCR accounted for gender parity in that area, and so wished to know whether there was a good gender balance among personnel, including for emergency deployment, and how a gender-sensitive approach was ensured for the distribution of supplies or other measures to support those in emergency situations.

127. Turning to the security of workforce and operations, he thanked UNHCR for its information on the implementation of UNHCR's integrated security risk management strategy. Given the plethora of crises, the very minor increase in incidents was a positive result. Close collaboration with the United Nations Security Management System was a key factor that his Government encouraged UNHCR to pursue. In that respect, it was essential not to neglect the area of localization. Security

conditions and management by national and local systems that were unsuitable would have an immediate impact on the United Nations system and UNHCR's operations and consequently on the partner security arrangements for which UNHCR was jointly responsible.

128. It was therefore also important to identify how security risk analyses carried out by UNHCR and the United Nations were shared with national and local authorities. Where possible, it could help them identify facets of existing mechanisms that required strengthening in order to improve their security and prevention and response capacities. Moreover, where the relevant United Nations agency programmes allowed, it could prove important to ensure alternative support for implementing the recommendations made. He asked whether UNHCR was also engaged in that area, in particular with regard to security at refugee camps or in rural or urban spaces where refugees formed a majority.

129. The representative of the **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** welcomed the new UNHCR policy on emergency preparedness and response, expressed appreciation for updating the Emergency Handbook, applauded the increase in the number of trained staff ready for deployment to crisis situations. Her delegation urged the Office to continue to invest in its emergency leadership capabilities and capacity to operate in front-line areas close to the refugees and displaced persons, and to consider its approach in the light of the Flagship Initiative of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The views of the Director of the Division of Emergency, Security and Supply as to whether basic services, in a resource-constrained environment, might not be more efficiently delivered through national clusters and partners was requested. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland also urged UNHCR to continue to invest in the humanitarian cluster system, partner coordination and its work with governments and development actors, ensuring that partners benefitted from its multi-year funding from donors and investment in training and had the flexibility for a people-centred approach. The record value of the service donation from standby partners in 2023, alongside sustained investment in UNHCR staff and capabilities, attested to the United Nations' system-wide emergency response capacity; UNHCR should draw on that resource where necessary. Expressing appreciation for efforts to identify risks and develop contingency plans, her delegation called on UNHCR to mainstream such efforts into its work with other United Nations entities, governments and development actors.

130. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, which was proud to work alongside UNHCR in humanitarian crises, encouraged the Office to continue to prioritize the most urgent and severe situations, in places inaccessible to others, and to draw, as appropriate, on the civilian and military resources that it had available for rapid deployment to provide emergency relief.

131. The representative of the **Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** expressed appreciation for the update on emergency response and supply activities, as presented in document EC/75/SC/CRP.4, noting in particular the information on the surge in capacity development activities that had led to an increased number of trained staff ready to respond to emergencies; the global monitoring of situations at high risk of developing into an emergency; and the worrying number of country operations that had identified such situations and been receiving support in risk analysis and contingency planning. More information would be welcome on the systems and criteria used by UNHCR to identify the risk of a new or escalated emergency, and on how the Office was managing and mitigating the environmental impact of its operations.

132. Turning to the information on the security of the workforce and operations, contained in document EC/75/SC/CRP.5, her delegation was keen to know more about the assistance and long-term follow-up support that UNHCR was providing to staff affected by the increasing number of security incidents reported; how it measured the impact and effectiveness of staff mental health and well-being programmes, in particular for the 25 per cent of the UNHCR workforce based at substantial or high-risk duty stations; and what specific steps it was taking to address the lack of gender diversity in the security workforce. The conclusion to the document underscored the importance of having enough flexible funding available to be able to respond effectively to changing and emerging security situations. Unearmarked contributions were therefore crucial to the Office's ability to channel resources rapidly and efficiently to high priority areas without the constraints often faced with earmarked funds; such contributions were critical in particular in volatile security situations, where the capacity to adapt and redirect resources could be crucial to the protection of staff, operations and the persons served by UNHCR.

133. The **Director of the Division of Emergency, Security and Supply**, expressing appreciation

to Committee members for the strength of their engagement with – and continued support for – the Office’s work in the areas covered under the present agenda item, said that the new policy on emergency preparedness and response, together with the guidance on emergency preparedness, provided greater clarity as to the basic principles to observe and procedures to follow when a crisis occurred, including in terms of anticipatory action. The procedures had been simplified, which would help to increase the rapidity and adaptability of operations; the roll-out of the guidance had highlighted the importance of partnership in contingency planning to ensure a joined-up, collective response; and the soon-to-be rolled out refugee coordination model guidance, also developed in close collaboration with other United Nations agencies and in cooperation with NGOs and local actors, would hopefully bring greater predictability to – and partnership in – future refugee responses.

134. Regarding inter-agency cooperation, UNHCR was an active partner in the Standby Partnerships Programme, through which it had been able to identify further efficiencies and avoid duplication, and in the Inter-agency Standing Committee Emergency Directors Group, in its continuing work to strengthen joint responses globally, including through advocacy. Meanwhile, UNHCR attached great importance to its partnerships with government entities, such as the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, whose significant support in 2023, in particular the service packages deployed to Kyiv, Chad and Ethiopia, had been greatly appreciated. She also noted the UNHCR collaboration with the European Union’s Civil Protection Mechanism and the United Kingdom, with whom it looked forward to discussing the availability of deployable resources.

135. On the question about the impact of budget cuts on the Office’s emergency response capacity, she said that its internal response mechanism remained robust and that it could continue to rely on the emergency response roster, which consisted of some 200 staff that had volunteered to join, with the central emergency stockpile of up to \$1 million worth of core relief items held at seven different emergency warehouse locations. The system still provided strong support for responding to new emergencies, although that would clearly require inputs of fresh funding, and her Division was working with colleagues at the Division of External Relations to ensure – through the issuance of flash appeals, for instance – that responses could continue uninterrupted. Regarding the age, gender and diversity issue, the emergency response roster now consisted of a more or less equal share of female and male colleagues and a constant effort was made to ensure geographical and language diversity.

136. On the question of longer-term planning in an emergency situation, the new policy called for a focus, from the very start of an operation, on the operational transition beyond the emergency declaration period, including in regard to staffing. Towards the end of the declaration period for the Somalia crisis, for instance, representatives of the Bureau for the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region and the relevant divisions of UNHCR had met with the operation managers in Ethiopia to assess the extent of the scale-up, identify gaps and discuss the transition to the next phase; that example of good practice could be replicated in other situations. To ensure a sustainable transition, it was important, as highlighted by other directors and the Assistant High Commissioner for Operations, to consider early engagement with development actors in the planning, even when a crisis was ongoing.

137. Regarding supply, collaboration at the global and country levels with other United Nations entities, such as WFP, was once again key. UNHCR was an active member of the WFP Logistics Cluster, with which it worked closely and aligned information on all aspects of logistics, transportation and customs clearance, benefitting also from WFP’s support at the United Nations Humanitarian Response Depot in Dubai, where it no longer had to file relief items; similar support had been extended by the UNICEF warehouse in Copenhagen. Importance was also attached to sustainable procurement and supply, which called for a more integrated supply chain: relief item specifications had been revised, with UNHCR now procuring only 100 per cent recycled blankets and sleeping mats, for example; the Office was seeking to procure material from sources closer to its operations so as to minimize transportation; it was reassessing the packaging and palletization at warehouses; and efforts and measures to “green” the humanitarian supply chain would hopefully enable UNHCR to meet – or exceed – its target of a 30 per cent reduction in the chain’s carbon emissions by 2030.

138. Before moving on to the security of staff and operations, which was an absolute priority for UNHCR, she drew attention to the issue of diversity in the security workforce, saying that with women currently making up just 7 per cent of that workforce, there was a significant gap to bridge

for the Office to come close to achieving its gender parity target, to which end attention would have to be paid not only to the recruitment but also the retention of female security personnel. As to its geographical diversity, 35 per cent of the current security workforce came from African countries, 28 per cent were from Europe, 19 per cent from the Middle East and North Africa, 12 per cent from Asia and 6 per cent from the Americas, and steps would be taken to render it more diverse, including in terms of languages and nationalities.

139. Addressing the request for more information on the humanitarian staff affected by security incidents and on the implications of the fact that a large percentage of them had related to civil unrest, she pointed out the main source of threats to staff over the previous five years had been criminal activities; that women, as a rule, were more negatively affected by the incidents than men; and that larger numbers of national colleagues appeared to have been affected simply because they constituted 70 per cent of the workforce. The number of incidents due to civil unrest, however, had indeed continued to grow and the Office anticipated an increase in demonstrations and protests in refugee camps or at UNHCR premises owing to frustration at the lack of – or reduction in – humanitarian assistance, food or basic services. The Office continued to work to address the issue, including through the training of security staff and the wider UNHCR workforce as a whole.

140. The **Assistant High Commissioner for Operations** expressed appreciation for the rich exchanges on regional activities and global programmes at the current meeting, and noting the appreciation that many had, in turn, expressed for the manner in which UNHCR colleagues carried out their protection and assistance mandate. He said that what the Office had valued most, apart from financial support, had been the partnerships forged to ensure the human rights of all forcibly displaced persons and find solutions.

141. The need to respond to emergencies as effectively as possible had remained a priority objective for UNHCR in addressing the displacement crises faced over the previous year in Azerbaijan, the Sudan and Ukraine, among others, adding that the availability of humanitarian resources was crucial and the downward trend in that regard was of great concern. It was now clearly understood that, given the protracted nature of many crises, a humanitarian response alone would no longer suffice. UNHCR must therefore ensure the involvement of development and private-sector actors from the start of its operations. That was what the Global Compact on Refugees – described at the current meeting as the Office’s “protection and solutions compass” – was calling for, as highlighted at the Global Refugee Forum 2023. That event had been an opportunity to take advantage of the presence of a diverse range of partners willing to play a role in managing and finding solutions to forced displacement situations. While many of the pledges made at the Forum related to socioeconomic inclusion, access to services and upholding human rights, they all involved a collective effort to better protect and support forcibly displaced persons and it was crucial now to work hand-in-hand to ensure that the pledges translated into concrete opportunities for the refugees and host communities.

142. As highlighted in the various regional updates presented at the current meeting, UNHCR was shifting, where appropriate, to “sustainable programming” aimed at maximizing levels of self-reliance and inclusion and reducing dependency on humanitarian assistance. The countries receiving Ukrainian refugees, for instance, had established generous legal frameworks to promote self-reliance through financial inclusion, livelihood opportunities and access to social services, among other things. That required a political will and the availability of financial resources. While significant funding had been made available thanks to the awareness on the part of bilateral and multilateral development actors, including the development banks, of the key role that they could play in the search for solutions, more work was needed on the part of all the stakeholders to ensure that the resources really did serve to foster refugee inclusion and self-reliance.

143. Noting that many speakers had acknowledged the increased focus on the impacts of climate change in responses to forced displacement, he said that it was essential to understand those impacts, to incorporate prevention measures into the responses and to include the forcibly displaced in national adaptation plans.

144. The work of the Special Adviser on Solutions to Internal Displacement and his team had been a game changer in the shift from a strictly humanitarian narrative to the search for solutions and sustainable responses, and UNHCR was determined to play its part alongside other stakeholders, including other United Nations entities; his counterparts at IOM, UNDP and he, for example, were travelling to Ethiopia with the Special Adviser the following May to discuss how better to support

the Government in its response to the country's internal displacement situation.

145. Responding to the many comments on the usefulness of solutions platforms, such as the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries and the comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework, he said that the Office was grateful for the support that they had received, as they played a pivotal role in ensuring comprehensive and cohesive approaches. The recently created platform for the Central African Republic, for example, was expected to be instrumental in the return of over 1.2 million refugees and internally displaced persons. Further to the response of the Director of the Division of Emergency, Security and Supply to the many references to the risks to which humanitarian workers were exposed, he confirmed that half of the 466 security incidents reported by UNHCR in 2023 had been attributed to criminal activities and had disproportionately affected locally recruited staff, adding that it was essential to ensure that Member States made every effort to prevent them from occurring.

Statements made in exercise of the right of reply

146. The representative of **China**, referring to a statement by the United States of America the previous day, said that his country firmly rejected – and expressed its great dissatisfaction at – the erroneous remarks that that delegation had once again made about so-called Tibetan “refugees” and his Government's policies on ethnic minorities. The persons concerned were Chinese citizens who had illegally crossed the border and were not refugees in the true sense of the word. They had long been planning and organizing, with the support of foreign forces, that illegal departure from China and some so-called Tibetan exiles had been trained outside China to engage in separatist activities and then infiltrated back into the country. His Government, which adhered to the principles of ethnic equality and unity, guaranteed the lawful rights and interests of all ethnic minorities as a means of fostering relations that were rooted in those principles and that of mutual assistance among ethnic groups. China sincerely welcomed visitors from around the world. The United States of America, while indiscriminately levelling criticism against others, had not addressed its own problems; it would do well to stop interfering in the internal affairs of other countries and face up to and resolve those problems.

147. The representative of the **Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela**, responding to the allegedly well-intended pledges of a number of delegations to support and provide humanitarian assistance to Venezuelans that had left the country, drew attention to the contradiction that some of those talking about the plight of displaced Venezuelans in the region from a humanitarian point of view were the very countries that had, at the same time, imposed on her country the very unilateral coercive measures that had caused the surge in migratory flows in the first place – a fact recognized by the Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights. It was not possible to talk about the situation of Venezuelan citizens in other countries without referring to those impacts. In the meantime, those citizens were exposed to rising levels of stigmatization, discrimination and xenophobia, often exacerbated by political rhetoric and misinformation, with a lack of livelihood opportunities and access to health care further entrenching their marginalization. For her region to prosper, it needed a world without unilateral coercive measures.

148. The representative of the **United States of America**, dismayed by the references to genocide in Gaza, said that such allegations should only be made after a full exploration of the facts. Hamas, on 7 October 2023, had committed barbaric acts of terror and it now bore the responsibility for all the senseless suffering on all sides; and it had been compounding and perpetuating the suffering for the Palestinian people throughout the crisis. The United States of America supported Israel's right to defend itself against terrorism and to ensure that no such terrorist attacks ever happened again. At the same time, it had made clear that Israel must comply with – and investigate credible allegations of violations of – international humanitarian law in its operations against Hamas, and take every feasible step to prevent any harm to civilians. The United States of America continued to condemn the dehumanizing rhetoric on all sides and to advocate at the most senior levels for an agreement to effect an immediate six-week ceasefire in Gaza and for the release of all the hostages, while working to lift the barriers to the provision of humanitarian assistance at scale, all of which, if Hamas were to agree, would create the conditions for a sustainable cessation of hostilities.

149. The representative of the **Russian Federation**, responding to what he described as unfounded allegations against his country levelled by a number of delegations, said that the Russian Federation

had taken action in the Donbass region because it could not remain indifferent to the plight of its inhabitants in the face of Ukraine's aggression and refusal to ensure respect for their human rights, to cease its discrimination against Russian citizens and to comply with its commitments under the Minsk agreements. Russian regions had welcomed some 5 million displaced persons since February 2022, all of whom had arrived in search of refuge and security, and UNHCR should see for itself the results of its efforts to provide them with adequate shelter. His delegation dismissed the politically motivated allegations of the forced deportation of Ukrainian adults and children as part of an anti-Russian smear campaign. Crimea was a legitimate part of the Russian Federation in the eyes of international law; the referendums aligning the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics and the Kherson and Zaporozhye regions with the Russian Federation had been organized in keeping with international law; and their inhabitants were exercising their legitimate right to self-determination. They were not occupied territories and their inclusion in the Russian Federation allowed their inhabitants to claim and obtain Russian citizenship, with all the rights that went with it under the law.

150. The representative of **Algeria**, responding to the comments of the representative of Morocco, said that the allegations once again levelled against his country regarding its handling of the refugee situation in Tindouf were false; that those concerning the militarization of the camps and misappropriation of humanitarian aid, in particular, had already been dismissed by outside observers; and that continuing to level them in the Executive Committee without the least piece of evidence showed a lack of consideration for the work of the humanitarian agencies on the ground, where the delivery of aid was in fact subject to very strict criteria established by the UNHCR operations present in the camps. As to the comment that Algeria was refusing to comply with obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention in Tindouf, he said that the United Nations Humanitarian Controller had in fact commended his country for its role in assisting the Sahrawi refugees while Morocco, the aggression of whose armed forces had led to the forced displacement situation and created the need for the camps in the first place, had rejected the Sahrawi refugee response plan developed by the United Nations entities and NGOs present on the ground. Contrasting its claim to be a champion country for the Global Compact for Migration with its mistreatment of sub-Saharan immigrants, particularly children, to bring pressure to bear on its neighbours, his delegation called on Morocco to respect the dignity of the refugees, abide by international law and end its colonization of a territory that did not belong to it.

151. The representative of **Belgium** (in its capacity as the President of the Council of the European Union) said, in response to what she described as the incorrect and misleading narrative delivered by the Russian Federation at the current meeting, that the European Union remained a staunch supporter of principled humanitarian action carried out by partners whose access to those in need relied on their neutrality and independence. By wilfully undermining the rules-based international order and blatantly violating Ukraine's fundamental right to independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and international law, the Russian Federation was putting global security at risk.

152. The representative of **Morocco**, refuting what he described as the baseless comments of the delegation of Algeria, said that he would not take advice from a country that facilitated the cruel treatment of refugees abducted from its refugee camps and listed a number of questions in need of answers, such as how Algeria intended to demilitarize the camps, now that it had officially withdrawn from its management role and left them in the hands of a separatist group; why the population held in the camps continued to live in deplorable conditions, exposed, as reported by UNHCR, to multiple incidences of sexual violence and child labour; how international aid was being diverted to Algeria, as reported by WFP, and ended up in the hands of the separatist leaders that it was sheltering, with core relief items found for sale on local markets, resulting in shortages of basic necessities for newborns; and why Algeria continued to refuse to register the refugees and to submit erroneous reporting to UNHCR.

The meeting rose at 1.13 p.m.