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Summary record of the 764th meeting

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Chair: Ms. Stasch (Germany)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 1: Opening of the session, adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters (A/AC.96/75/1)

1. **The Chair** declared open the seventy-fifth session of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
2. She said that, at the end of June 2024, there had been approximately 122.6 million persons around the world who had been displaced as a result of persecution, conflict, generalized violence and human rights violations, an increase of 12.6 million since the end of June 2023. It was also more than double the 59.5 million forcibly displaced persons a decade previously, at the end of 2014.
3. It had been a privilege and an honour to chair the Executive Committee during the previous year. She had had the opportunity to see at first hand the important work that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), together with its committed partners, was doing, particularly during her field visit to Mauritania in May, but also during her visits to Ethiopia, South Africa and Zimbabwe in her capacity as Chair of the Council of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). She had been moved by the plight of the refugees and people on the move she had met during her visit to Mauritania and had been impressed by the Government's inclusive response to displacement-affected communities, in line with the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees.
4. *The agenda was adopted.*

Agenda item 2: Statement by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

5. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that it had been a year of extremes, contradictions, loss and grief caused by conflict, violence and abuses fed by the terrible lie that the path to peace was found through war. However, there had also been at least some moments of hope. Over the summer, the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris had provided an opportunity to applaud the best of the human spirit, as embodied by the refugee athletes. That evening, the Office would honour Sister Rosita Milesi, the Nansen Refugee Award global laureate for 2024, along with the four regional Award winners, Maimouna Ba, Jin Davod, Nada Fadol and Deepti Gurung, five exceptional and inspirational women who served as a powerful reminder that humanity was not lost, even amid the pain.
6. At a time when the future seemed more uncertain than ever, nowhere was uncertainty and anxiety more palpable than in Lebanon. He had just returned from a visit to the country and to the Syrian Arab Republic, during which the overwhelming message from those he had met had been that they wanted a ceasefire, sustained by a meaningful peace process. That was the only way to break the cycle of violence, hatred and misery. It would also allow the return of persons displaced by the conflict and help to avert a major regional war with global implications.
7. There were hundreds of thousands of displaced persons in Lebanon seeking reprieve from Israeli air strikes. Once again, the distinction between civilians and combatants had become almost meaningless. It was said that wars were becoming smarter, which was no doubt true in terms of sparing military assets but not in terms of avoiding indiscriminate civilian casualties and destruction and displacement. Patterns of conflict witnessed also in Ukraine, Gaza, the Sudan and Myanmar, in which adherence to international humanitarian law had been reduced to the faintest of fig leaves, had destroyed clinics, schools and thousands of lives, including those of humanitarian workers from UNHCR and other organizations, not least the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. It was unacceptable for the lives of humanitarians to be dismissed as mere collateral damage, or worse, for humanitarians to be maligned as somehow culpable or complicit. If, in the seventy-fifth anniversary year of the adoption of the Geneva Conventions, countries did not restore their collective commitment to protecting civilians as a legal obligation and uphold their related responsibilities, wars would grow even more murderous and devastating, adding significantly to forced displacement within and across borders.

8. While the humanitarian community mourned, UNHCR continued to provide a response, as it always had. It was working with the authorities and partners in Lebanon to meet the most urgent needs, without distinction, because air strikes spared no one. If they continued, many more ordinary civilians would be displaced, and some would decide to move on to other countries. Many had already entered the Syrian Arab Republic, which had opened its doors to all those fleeing Lebanon. Both Lebanese refugees and Syrian returnees, who accounted for 70 per cent of the 276,000 new arrivals in the country, needed immediate relief assistance. Funding appeals had been launched for Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic and were in urgent need of contributions.

9. The situation required decisive action on two fronts. First, UNHCR would continue to work with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to ensure the safety of all arrivals. He trusted that the Government would uphold its stated commitments to effectiveness, transparency and rights, and that UNHCR would continue to be able to monitor returns both at border crossings and in places of destination. Second, he hoped that donors would support and help to stabilize returns. Security Council resolution 2254 (2015) allowed significant interventions, not only in the humanitarian sphere but also in the early recovery space. Although progress on those two fronts was urgent because of the ongoing emergency-driven return movement, it could also provide useful elements in ongoing discussions on sustainable solutions for Syrian refugees.

10. Against the backdrop of crisis in the Middle East, it would be easy, and perhaps even tempting, to become cynical about multilateralism and to turn inwards, but cynicism and isolation were not luxuries that refugees could afford. The second Global Refugee Forum had demonstrated how the right vision could forge a new spirit of cooperation. Now, 10 months on, it was more important than ever to recall the commitment to inclusion and responsibility-sharing that had resulted in more than 2,000 pledges being made at the Forum. Under the leadership of the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, the Office was following up on the implementation of the pledges, many of which had already had a tangible impact on displaced people and their host communities. Looking ahead to the meeting of high-level officials to be held in December 2025, there was a need to keep that spirit alive and to draw on the lessons of the Forum in responding to the unrelenting pace of humanitarian emergencies.

11. In Ukraine, civilians needed help to prepare for a winter that was likely to be even more difficult than the two previous ones, with so much of the country's energy infrastructure having been destroyed by Russian strikes. In Myanmar, the number of displaced people had increased by over 2 million over the previous year as a result of multiple ruthless conflicts across the country. In the Sudan, where the crisis received little media attention and inadequate financial support, the dramatic consequences of collective inaction were being felt, and the situation could still get worse.

12. He had visited the Sudan twice in 2024. The situation in the country defied description. Famine, disease, floods and horrific human rights violations had displaced more than 11 million people, that figure having almost doubled over the previous year. Some 2 million Sudanese citizens had become refugees, most of them hosted by Egypt, Chad, Ethiopia, the Central African Republic and South Sudan, themselves fragile countries that were battling their own crises and the effects of climate change. The previous week, 25,000 Sudanese refugees had arrived in Chad, adding to the 1.2 million refugees already in the country, which was one of the poorest in the world. At a time when too many countries elsewhere chose to close their borders or to use refugees as political pawns, host countries' generosity could not be taken for granted. The regional refugee response plan for the Sudan was only 27 per cent funded. A drastic increase in support was required.

13. Despite continued efforts in the Sudan and the region, there was a sense of powerlessness. He had participated in several General Assembly discussions on the Sudan crisis and, in a dismal reflection of the current state of leadership in the world, had heard nothing that would give hope that the armed men devastating their own country would come to the negotiating table. He had also heard that humanitarian assistance, so desperately needed to at least mitigate the consequences of mediocre leadership, was in short supply. No peace and few resources made for a lethal equation that, if something did not give, would cause displacement to grow further, both in numbers and in geographical spread. Without a

sense of safety and stability, refugees would move on. Already, Sudanese refugees had travelled in greater numbers to Libya and Uganda, while others had crossed the Mediterranean and even the English Channel.

14. Given the number of emergencies, the peace deficit and the fact that achieving long-term solutions remained a distant prospect, the protracted nature of most displacement should come as no surprise. Far more needed to be done to support long-term hosts. In July, he had visited Pakistan to raise awareness of the situation there and to mobilize resources in support of government efforts to maintain the country's traditional hospitality in spite of security and other concerns. During his visit, he had welcomed the suspension of the Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan. In that regard, UNHCR continued to appeal to all States hosting Afghan nationals not to push anyone back against their will. UNHCR would continue working with Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, which had both generously hosted Afghan refugees for decades, to preserve the available protection space and find ways to mobilize additional support for refugees and their hosts.

15. The constant escalation of crises meant that UNHCR had to work in difficult places and find ways to reach the most vulnerable. That was true of Afghanistan but also of many other countries, where operating in highly politicized and often insecure environments presented particularly complex challenges. One such challenge was dealing with a wide range of formal and informal actors, including de facto authorities and Governments under sanctions or other international pressures. A second challenge was access, such as in the Sudan or Myanmar, where cross-line and cross-border operations were particularly delicate on account of fast-moving and unpredictable conditions on the ground. A third issue related to the increasingly stringent oversight requirements of some donor Governments. He was well aware of the geopolitical realities that UNHCR had to navigate and accepted the scrutiny that came with operating in difficult environments. Moreover, UNHCR was grateful for the support it received and was completely committed to transparency in all its activities. However, its presence in those environments was not only necessary but also in need of strengthening. It was precisely because of the non-political nature of the Office's work that it was able to be effective. It had to retain the flexibility to adapt to changing realities on the ground in order to deliver on its mandate to protect and to solve.

16. The number of displacement emergencies had increased exponentially in recent times, averaging 40 per year over the previous three years. In addition, displacement flows had become more complex. Conflict, violence and persecution remained the main drivers, while the effects of climate change had become displacement multipliers. The reasons compelling people to move, often from the same areas or countries, became difficult to disentangle, especially when there was a concurrent lack of economic opportunities. Such contexts gave rise to mixed flows, with refugees and migrants moving side by side along the same routes. Those routes did not all lead to Europe or the southern border of the United States of America; some led to Southern Africa, the Persian Gulf and South-East Asia.

17. Mixed flows created challenges for countries along the routes and for refugees and migrants themselves, who faced significant protection risks while on the move. Governments could help by not focusing only on their borders and by resisting political pressure to make reactive decisions, such as adopting ineffective schemes to outsource, externalize or even suspend asylum procedures, in breach of their international legal obligations. Instead, they should look upstream at the root causes of displacement and at opportunities in countries of transit to provide protection, including through regularization programmes and other legal pathways, which they should vastly expand with the support of development partners. Safe Mobility Offices in the Americas were examples of multipurpose hubs where UNHCR and IOM worked together to strengthen such pathways, which complemented the extraordinary inclusion and regularization efforts of many countries in the region, such as Brazil, Ecuador, Colombia, Costa Rica and Mexico. When refugees and migrants did reach borders, UNHCR supported countries in developing lawful responses that met the challenges of mixed movements, including fair and fast asylum procedures that identified those in need of international protection but also provided for the safe and dignified return of people found not to be in need of protection.

18. The shared responsibility towards refugees and migrants could also be effectively discharged through regional cooperation mechanisms, provided that they fully respected the

right to seek territorial asylum. Regional disembarkation schemes could be explored as a means of creating efficiencies by pooling resources in search and rescue operations, asylum processes and, critically, the hosting or return of individuals after their claims had been fairly assessed. UNHCR stood ready to provide expert advice and play a monitoring role to ensure that such arrangements were lawful and feasible.

19. It was encouraging to note a conceptual shift towards “route-based” approaches in various regional instruments, from the Declaration on Migration and Protection to the new pact on migration and asylum. The true barometer of the effectiveness of such approaches would be how they were implemented. Irrespective of the model used to operationalize route-based responses, significant support and investment would be required to build the capacity of host and transit countries and ensure compliance with international legal obligations. There was a clear need for innovative solutions that were both principled and pragmatic.

20. While strengthening its responses to refugee crises, the international community could not afford to lose sight of the situations in countries of origin. It had to address the root causes of displacement and work towards solutions, including for internally displaced people, whose number had doubled in the space of a decade, and many of whom would become refugees if they were not supported within their country. Over the previous few years, there had been renewed attention on the issue of internal displacement, including through the Action Agenda on Internal Displacement. The Office would continue to work with the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on Solutions to Internal Displacement and his team to develop a coherent United Nations system-wide response and would strongly support the approaches and mechanisms to be put in place by the Secretary-General in the coming weeks to pursue the Agenda’s objectives once the Special Adviser’s role came to an end.

21. Solutions remained equally crucial and difficult in refugee contexts. Close to 70 per cent of all refugees were hosted by a country neighbouring their own. Most refugees wanted to return to their country, voluntarily and in dignity, when conditions allowed. The key element in determining returns was refugees’ own assessment of those conditions. UNHCR would always inform them and share its views, but the decision was theirs. That did not mean that the situation in countries of origin would always be suitable for large-scale returns, but it did point to the need for flexibility and support when refugees returned voluntarily or, unfortunately, under duress, in imperfect conditions, as illustrated by the situations in Burundi, South Sudan and even the Syrian Arab Republic. Communities where people were returning should be supported in order for returnees to regrow their roots and for the cycle of displacement to be broken.

22. Lastly, resettlement and other complementary pathways formed another important piece of the solutions puzzle. UNHCR was aiming to submit close to 200,000 refugees for resettlement in 2024, which would be a record. He wished to thank resettlement countries, in particular the United States of America, for their solidarity and for helping UNHCR to fulfil the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees.

23. UNHCR needed to be afforded flexibility when it came to funding. Its financial outlook, especially earlier in 2024, had been bleak and had contributed to a range of precautionary measures. Expenditure had been frozen across its activities, and although part of a wider realignment review, 1,000 positions, accounting for 6 per cent of the total, had been discontinued. Those measures had come on top of the Office’s usual prioritization efforts. It was now consolidating the various strands of the reform it had started several years previously, namely decentralization, systems modernization and partnerships with development and other actors, which would make it even more efficient and enable it to deliver on the vision of the Global Compact. He wished to acknowledge the role of Deputy High Commissioner in steering the Office through the process of modernization and the collaborative manner in which she had done so.

24. The Office’s funding situation for 2024, while still well below what was needed, had improved. Once again, that was largely thanks to the support of the United States of America, which continued to provide the lion’s share of the Office’s budget. The other top donors were Germany, the European Union, Sweden and Denmark, while the Republic of Korea had substantially increased its contribution. Nevertheless, the Office’s \$10.8 billion budget was

still only 45 per cent funded, and the same funding uncertainty hung over the budget for 2025 and likely beyond. That volatility was compounded by earmarking. To date, despite the efforts of Sweden, Norway, Denmark, the Kingdom of the Netherlands and many private donors, only 14 per cent of the Office's funding for 2024 was completely flexible, which made it difficult to respond with the required agility, especially as UNHCR was so dependent on a handful of donors, with no guarantee that funding levels would be maintained.

25. The current approach was not sustainable in the context of protracted crises, increasingly frequent emergencies and inflexible, unpredictable humanitarian funding that had not kept pace with needs. Such a situation created problems for all stakeholders. Displaced people and host communities lived in constant uncertainty. Host countries could not plan and respond appropriately because funding was so unpredictable. The resources of UNHCR and its partners had become stretched and, as a result, they must make difficult decisions, often at the last minute, over whether to maintain or suspend activities and whether or not to renew partnership agreements. The pressure on donors had also increased, with different humanitarian crises competing for their funds alongside domestic and international budgetary priorities.

26. Sustainability was not a new concept. It had been at the heart of the Grand Bargain, the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and the Global Compact on Refugees, which had been affirmed by the General Assembly in 2018 and by the pledges made at the two Global Refugee Forums. In order to fulfil those commitments, States must by no means move away from humanitarian aid but rather address their over-reliance on it, as it was designed for short-term responses, it was quickly exhausted, and it was not meant to prop up long-term or recurrent activities. It not only created dependency but had a negligible, even detrimental, effect on the development of national capacities.

27. Developing services exclusively for displaced people funded by humanitarian aid, such as vocational training that excluded local community members, was unsustainable and created tensions within communities by pitting displaced people and their hosts against each other. The same thing happened when displaced people were denied access to local services and opportunities. It was a recipe for instability, especially at a time when more than half of all refugees were under the age of 25. Muhammad Yunus, the Chief Adviser of the Government of Bangladesh, had spoken eloquently about the plight of hundreds of thousands of young Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, who were disconnected from opportunities but connected to the world, where many negative forces were lurking, ready to exploit their despair.

28. Exclusion was therefore a risk, and a more sustainable option was to include refugees and displaced people in their host community. Inclusion did not have to mean permanent integration, nor did it alter a State's commitment to finding durable solutions, to work towards the safe and dignified return of displaced people or towards resettlement and other pathways, as was clearly spelled out in the Global Compact on Refugees.

29. Uganda, Colombia, Mauritania, Brazil, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mexico and Kenya, which was preparing to launch its Shirika Plan, were among the countries to have already concluded that it was more efficient and more sustainable for refugees to be self-reliant and to be included in national structures and systems than to make them wholly dependent on humanitarian aid. Meanwhile, UNHCR was working with development actors to ensure that host countries received international support for their inclusion efforts. After all, inclusion was not about shifting the burden to host countries; it was about strengthening the capacities and resilience of host countries and communities so they could successfully include displaced people in their national response systems for the duration of their displacement.

30. A sustainable model based on inclusion had several clear advantages. Host communities benefited from the human capital provided by displaced people, who in turn felt more of a commitment to their host communities because they became participants. Implementation of the model allowed host countries to obtain additional development financing, including for remote areas where refugees were located. At the same time, it allowed UNHCR to focus on protection and solutions and it relieved some of the pressure on humanitarian funding.

31. Currently, Sudanese health professionals worked in Juba clinics and hospitals. In European countries, Ukrainian refugees had access to the job market. The inclusion of refugees contributed to economic growth and social stability. Inclusion was not only an approach for the current time but an investment in the future, as refugees would be better prepared for their eventual return to their countries of origin.

32. UNHCR stood ready to work with interested States to develop sustainable inclusion models that were adapted to their particular situations. In that regard, it was committed to strengthening its cooperation with host Governments, development organizations, financial institutions and multilateral banks. It would also redouble its efforts to attract the attention and mobilize resources of the private sector in order to unlock the potential of displaced people and host communities in terms of investments, market value and human capital.

33. UNHCR was aware from regional consultations and bilateral meetings that many concerns remained, especially over implementation, including about how such a new approach would fit in with existing national frameworks. There were also questions about financing, such as how the shift to a sustainable aid model would work differently in middle- and lower-income countries. There was a need to reflect more deeply on how programming and budgeting was done, such as whether to move to multi-year budgets to support strategic planning, which was essential to promote self-reliance, as was already the practice in many UNHCR operations. Any decisions on such matters would involve consultations with States, in full respect of the Office's governance structure and mechanisms. Furthermore, host countries should take the lead in those consultations so that their concerns and needs remained at the forefront moving forward.

34. He wished to express how pleased he was that that statelessness was being given a special focus at the current session of the Executive Committee. UNHCR had launched the I Belong campaign in 2014 with the objective of ending statelessness within a decade. That objective was ambitious yet deliberate, as the progress made in the preceding decade had shown that the campaign was on the right track, even though statelessness had not been eliminated. More than half a million people had acquired nationality since its launch. They had become visible members of society, who had gained the right to do things many took for granted, such as open a bank account or enrol in school. It was important to take a moment and celebrate those achievements given that solutions were so elusive. He wished to commend Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan in particular for becoming the first countries to have resolved all known cases of statelessness.

35. In 2025, UNHCR would be celebrating its seventy-fifth anniversary, and he urged everyone to continue to seize every opportunity available to find solutions for refugees, to build on the promise of the Summit of the Future and to uphold the non-political character of humanitarian work. In doing so, it was to be hoped that peace might yet be achieved, even in countries where it still seemed such a distant goal. As Pope Francis had stated the day before, war was a defeat for everyone, especially those who believed themselves to be invincible. It should be borne in mind that wars, too, would end.

Agenda item 3: High-level segment on statelessness and general debate

A film on the I Belong campaign to end statelessness was projected.

Dialogue with former stateless persons

36. **Ms. Rani** (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Goodwill Ambassador) said that, as a journalist and storyteller, she had had the privilege of sharing the stories of many people from around the world and was especially passionate about amplifying the voices of those who often went unheard, such as stateless persons. Statelessness was a profoundly isolating experience, one that deprived millions of people around the world of their basic rights. It was a solvable problem, however. She wished to introduce Ms. Dube and Ms. Azizah, who had experienced both the challenges of statelessness and the transformative power of obtaining a nationality.

37. **Ms. Dube** said that she had been born in Kenya in 2000. She and her parents had been stateless because they belonged to the Shona people, an ethnic group that, at that time, had not been considered an Indigenous community of Kenya. As a result, following her birth, she

had not been issued with a birth certificate and had not received the bacille Calmette-Guérin vaccine.

38. She had found her opportunities in education to be limited because of her statelessness. In 2013, other Shona pupils at her primary school had been unable to take their final exams because only children with a birth certificate had been able to register for them. However, she had managed to take advantage of a special dispensation allowing children to register for their exams by providing a credit card proving their identity. A member of Parliament had visited the school and had offered her a scholarship to attend high school, where she had had to lie to conceal the real reason why she was unable to present her birth certificate. She had later been forced to pass up the opportunity to participate in an exchange programme to the United States of America and, in 2017, she had resorted to obtaining an illegal birth certificate to register for her high school exams.

39. Prompted by discussions with UNHCR and the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, the Government of Kenya had started to give serious consideration to the possibility of awarding the Shona people Kenyan nationality in 2019. The authorities had decided to start by issuing identity documents to Shona schoolchildren so that they could register for their exams and she had received a birth certificate for the first time. Finally, on 12 December 2020, the Shona people had been granted nationality by the Government. Obtaining her Kenyan citizenship had been a life-changing moment when she had finally broken free from the chains of statelessness.

40. **Ms. Azizah** said that she belonged to the Rohingya people and had been born in the Rakhine State in Myanmar in the 1990s. Rohingya persons born in Myanmar had been stateless since 1982, when the ruling military junta had passed a citizenship law removing their right to citizenship. However, prior to 1982, exclusionary practices and laws had already been established in Rakhine State with the aim of ensuring that Rohingya people were considered as migrants in a land that they had called home for many generations. Today, the Rohingya people constituted the largest stateless community in the world.

41. As a baby, she had fled to Malaysia with her family following an outbreak of violence against the Rohingya in Myanmar. As refugees in Malaysia, they had lived in constant fear of being discovered by the authorities and had relied on the generosity of host communities. Her mother had ensured that each member of the family had been assigned an individual place to hide when the police had carried out searches for illegal immigrants. In 2003, the Government of Australia had finally granted asylum to her and her family. She felt grateful for her Australian passport but angry that her people were still classed as non-citizens in their homeland.

42. **Ms. Dube** said that she was grateful to the Government of Kenya for making the changes that enabled her to obtain a passport. She now lived free from restrictions and had the power to fulfil her potential. Stateless persons lived in the shadows and were unable to participate actively in society. Thanks to her passport, she was visible at last.

43. **Ms. Azizah** said that, on the day when she had obtained Australian citizenship and her passport, she had felt like a human being with dignity for the first time. However, only 1 per cent of Rohingya people held a passport and over half of the 2.8 million Rohingya people lived outside Myanmar. She had therefore founded the Rohingya Maïyafuïnor Collaborative Network, an organization led by Rohingya refugee women that fought to combat cultural erasure and to amplify the voices of Rohingya people who did not enjoy the same legal protection as she did.

Panel discussion : “Marking 10 years of progress through the I Belong campaign”

44. **Ms. Rani** (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Goodwill Ambassador), moderator, said that, since the launch of the I Belong campaign, the adoption of new laws, policies and commitments in countries around the world had helped hundreds of thousands of people to finally gain the nationality they deserved. The panel would reflect on the successes and lessons learned from the previous 10 years and consider what further steps were needed to truly end statelessness.

45. **Mr. Hajiye** (Turkmenistan), panellist, said that the main factors permitting the elimination of statelessness had been an unwavering commitment to international standards concerning human rights and statelessness, and firm adherence to the Sustainable Development Goals. In particular, the principle of leaving no one behind had been central to efforts to create a just and equitable society for all, regardless of migration status. His Government's commitments under the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness has been reflected in the alignment of national legislation with international standards to ensure the protection of fundamental rights for everyone, including stateless persons.

46. One key step had been the integration of citizenship principles into broader national development strategies in line with long-term sustainable development plans. An important element in preventing new cases of statelessness, and in ensuring equal rights for women and men with regard to their acquisition, change or retention of citizenship, irrespective of marital status or the citizenship of a spouse, had been legislation that guaranteed citizenship to any child born in Turkmenistan who would otherwise be stateless.

47. Successful implementation of the National Action Plan to End Statelessness 2019–2024 had been facilitated by close cooperation with international organizations, especially UNHCR. That cooperation had culminated in the streamlining of procedures for determining the status of stateless persons and creating a fair and transparent process for granting citizenship to those who had been deprived of it.

48. As a result, more than 32,000 people, including refugees and stateless persons, had acquired Turkmen citizenship in recent years. Biometric identification and the digitalization of civil registration systems had played an important role in that process. Important legislative reforms had been introduced in 2020, including a new Civil Status Act, which guaranteed the registration of all births regardless of the legal status of their parents. Any subsequent risk of statelessness had been precluded, because the Act ensured that every child born in Turkmenistan had the right to a name, identity and citizenship. The successful elimination of statelessness had been achieved through a combination of a strong political will, legislative reforms, international cooperation and the modernization of identification and registration systems.

49. **Mr. Uema** (Brazil), panellist, said that, under the Constitution, nationality was granted to children born in Brazil, regardless of their parent's nationality, to descendants of Brazilians born abroad and to persons who intended to reside in Brazil permanently, because the right to nationality was deemed to be a fundamental right inherent to every human being and an essential condition for the exercise of human rights. It was held to be a prerogative which must be guaranteed to all persons within States' territories. He therefore urged all States to provide for a broad right to nationality in their constitutions, laws or executive decisions. The Migration Act, adopted in 2017, contained a whole section on the protection of stateless persons and the reduction of statelessness. The main new development had been the introduction of a statelessness determination procedure, under which people could apply online for recognition of their statelessness status and receive a residence permit while their applications were being processed. Persons who had been recognized as stateless qualified for naturalization through a simplified procedure after only two years of residence.

50. At the regional level, the plan of action adopted in 2014 as part of the year-long process to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, known as Cartagena+30, contained a chapter dedicated to reducing statelessness, with goals related to the accession to the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, the establishment of statelessness determination procedures and the facilitation of naturalization process. Significant progress had been witnessed since then. For example, persons who were recognized as being stateless had access to family identification procedures even before becoming a Brazilian citizen.

51. In 2023, the Government had announced its decision to adopt a new national policy on migration, asylum and statelessness. Six working groups, consisting of representatives of the federal government, states, cities, civil society, refugee organizations and the UNHCR and IOM offices in Brazil, had been set up to discuss the proposed policy in an effort to build

on the significant progress achieved so far. The launching of the Global Alliance to End Statelessness was an opportunity to redouble national endeavours to complete the work.

52. **Mr. Nash** (Director of the European Network on Statelessness), panellist, said that the I Belong campaign had helped to draw attention to several of the Network's regional advocacy campaigns. The ongoing work of UNHCR and other partners and stakeholders had certainly resulted in real progress in Europe since 2014. First, nine European countries had introduced or improved safeguards in their nationality laws to prevent childhood statelessness. Second, there had been real momentum towards reducing cases of statelessness among Roma and other minority groups in the western Balkans, where North Macedonia had led the way with a series of legal reforms that had almost resolved all known cases of statelessness. Lastly, several European countries had introduced statelessness determination procedures. The new pact on migration and asylum had introduced provisions on the identification of persons and the recording of statelessness that were binding on all European Union member States. While it was right to celebrate progress, it was necessary to recognize that much still needed to be done to end statelessness, both in Europe and globally. It was therefore vital to redouble efforts and to use the current meeting as a platform to unlock much needed resources and action to address statelessness. In particular, UNHCR must continue to show leadership, increase its resources for and attach high priority to the issue. All stakeholders must engage with the new Global Alliance to End Statelessness and embrace the rich and exciting potential for progress that it offered. Above all, it was essential to maintain momentum to enable stateless people to claim power as leaders of change.

53. As statelessness was both a cause and a consequence of forced migration, the Global Refugee Forum and other forums should ensure that it was always in the foreground of their discussions. It was also to be hoped that the Global Alliance could help to improve funding for civil society organizations led by stateless persons.

54. **Mr. Uema** (Brazil) said that it was extremely important to create a mechanism for the recognition of stateless persons. Rapid naturalization was also essential to facilitating the integration process.

55. **Mr. Hajiye** (Turkmenistan) said that the international community needed to make more strenuous efforts to end statelessness and Governments should cooperate more closely with civil society to that end.

56. **Ms. Dube** said that organizations representing stateless persons and Governments needed to join together and make a collective effort to solve the problem of statelessness.

57. **Ms. Azizah** said that issuing stateless persons with documentation was the key to enabling them to access work and education and thus break the cycle of poverty affecting so many of them.

Personal reflections on the I Belong campaign

58. **Ms. Hendricks** (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Goodwill Ambassador) said that the daily reality for millions of stateless persons was that of having no legal identity document, no legal residence, not being able to register their children at birth, having no access to education or healthcare and constantly fearing arrest as they had no proof of identity. When the Universal Declaration of Human Rights had been adopted 76 years earlier, she had been only 20 days old. Her parents had never heard about the Declaration, but they knew all too well the Jim Crow laws of apartheid that segregated the races in the South. To all intents and purposes, she, too, had been born stateless in her own country. She did not have the same protection under the law and was unable to exercise the same rights afforded to every white girl who had come into the world on the same day in the same town in Arkansas, where she had been born. It was not until the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 had become law, after 300 years of slavery and 100 years of apartheid, that she had become a full citizen, as described in the United States Constitution. Belonging to a nation meant not only having all the rights of a citizen, but more importantly, having the duties and responsibilities of citizenship that shored up democracy and ensured freedom for all. At age 15, she had officially belonged.

59. When UNHCR had invited her to become a Goodwill Ambassador in 1986, she had seen it as an opportunity to put into action on a wider scale her sincere belief that her inner peace and peace in the world must be founded on the principles of human rights. Over the past 40 years, she had drawn much inspiration from her dedicated UNHCR colleagues in the field, some of whom had even lost their lives doing invaluable work for the refugee cause. She had been humbled and had drawn encouragement from so many refugees and stateless persons whom she had met, especially the women. When she felt discouraged, she needed only to think of them. They faced with incredible dignity and courage the nearly insurmountable difficulties and dangers of refugee life for women and girls.

60. In 2014, when the campaign to end statelessness had been launched, she had become aware of the millions of stateless persons who did not belong, who lived as invisible non-citizens. During the previous 10 years, many mothers of stateless children had spoken to her passionately of their hopes and dreams for the future. One mother in Côte d'Ivoire could not contain her joy after the ceremony where her two children had finally received their birth certificates. That mother's dreams were no different from the dreams that everyone had for their families, for their children to grow up and prosper, for their families to be able to live in peace and to be able to contribute in a positive way to a community that recognized them as fellow human beings. As a result of the I Belong campaign, entire population groups had been granted nationality and important legislation had been adopted to prevent statelessness. There was much more to be done for those who were still waiting, feeling forgotten and fearful, suffering silently in the shadows, or voiceless.

61. Often, during her concerts, there came a moment when she had the impression that she and the audience were experiencing the music as one, vibrating as one string. She believed that the place within in each person where that vibration took place was the same place from which the Universal Declaration of Human Rights had sprung. In a brief instant, each person was reminded of the truth of who they were, that they were all connected and were all members of the family of humanity. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights showed that each and every person was a valued member of the family of humanity. The Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees encouraged people to care for one another. The I Belong campaign had been an inspiring prelude to the Global Alliance to End Statelessness and she would continue to raise her voice until that goal was reached.

62. *Ms. Hendricks ended her statement by singing the spiritual "Sometimes I feel like a motherless child".*

Panel discussion: "Stepping up multi-stakeholder action through the Global Alliance to End Statelessness"

63. **Ms. Rani** (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Goodwill Ambassador), moderator, said that the Global Alliance to End Statelessness was a new multi-stakeholder initiative that brought together Governments, civil society, international organizations and stateless communities in a collective push to finally eradicate statelessness.

A film on the theme of the Global Alliance to End Statelessness was projected.

64. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), thanking those who had taken part in the first panel discussion, said that it was one thing to talk about statelessness and quite another to hear from those who had experienced it personally: statelessness had an impact on people's everyday lives, making it impossible to do certain things that those who were not stateless took for granted. He wished to draw particular attention to the extremely painful situation of the Rohingya, hundreds of thousands of whom were either stateless in Myanmar or not only stateless but refugees in other countries. It was to address such situations that the Global Alliance to End Statelessness was to be launched. It had evolved from the I Belong campaign launched by the previous High Commissioner 10 years earlier. That campaign had been led by UNHCR, whereas the Global Alliance was a coalition of Governments, civil society, international organizations and academia. It also involved persons affected by statelessness, in order to keep people with lived experience at the centre of a such efforts.

65. Membership of the Alliance would represent a commitment that would send a strong signal to the rest of the world. It would be a forum for exchanging best practices, identifying solutions and advocating collectively for the cause. Some 100 States and other entities had already joined or pledged to join and he encouraged other participants at the meeting to follow suit. UNHCR was fully committed to eradicating statelessness, a cause that was part and parcel of its mandate. However, if the challenge was to be met, all States needed to end statelessness in order to ensure that no one was deprived of the basic right to nationality and identity.

66. **Mr. Chan** (Philippines), panellist, said that the Philippines had long been committed to addressing statelessness at the national and regional levels. As a State that had joined the Global Alliance solution seeker programme, it would build on its achievements and reaffirm its dedication to finding suitable sustainable solutions for stateless persons. At the national level the Philippines would, over the next 10 years, pursue the remaining action points of its National Action Plan to End Statelessness, resolving outstanding cases, ensuring that no child was born stateless, strengthening birth registration and improving its data on stateless and at-risk populations. At-risk populations included certain groups in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and unregistered children in situations of forced displacement and armed conflict. The overall aim was to provide legal identity to all by 2030, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 16.9.

67. The Philippines was committed, under its whole-of-government approach, to further strengthening the initiatives of relevant government agencies with a view to fulfilling the Action Plan. Capacity-building sessions would be stepped up in order to equip local agencies with knowledge of existing statelessness frameworks around the country. Advocacy would also continue for the adoption of domestic legislation implementing the provisions of the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

68. The plan was to shift from a whole-of-government approach to a whole-of-society approach in order to ensure multisectoral inclusion in policy formulation and implementation. To that end, the Government would engage with civil society and international organizations, educational institutions, UNHCR and NGOs in order to raise awareness and advocate for stateless persons and to seek innovative ways to end statelessness.

69. **Ms. Crocker** (United States of America), panellist, said that the I Belong campaign, which the United States had supported, had served as a reminder that statelessness was not just a humanitarian issue but also a development and a human rights issue. Lack of citizenship affected nearly every facet of a person's life, from gaining access to the most basic public services to obtaining legal employment, often implying marginalization, discrimination and family separation. Yet the solutions could be straightforward: legal reforms required political will that ultimately brought benefits to both stateless populations and their host communities.

70. Two examples in that regard were North Macedonia, which, in partnership with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, had recently resolved hundreds of cases and made significant progress on those still outstanding, and Kenya, which had granted citizenship to 7,000 members of the Pemba community and was working on amendments to its legislation in order to provide a legal pathway to citizenship.

71. Since the 2019 high-level segment on statelessness, at which her Government had pledged to advocate for the prevention and reduction of statelessness, the United States had remained the largest single donor to UNHCR, providing more than \$11.6 billion to the Office's global operations.

72. Laws that discriminated on the basis of gender, for example preventing women from passing on their citizenship to their children, were key drivers of statelessness. Since 2019, the United States had championed legal reforms in countries with such discriminatory nationality laws and advocated for equal nationality rights for women in numerous forums, such as the Human Rights Council and the Commission on the Status of Women.

73. Equally aware of the challenges it faced at home, it had also committed to enhancing protection for stateless people living in the United States. It had issued new guidance for

adjudicators in determining statelessness, making it possible to provide immigration benefits to those concerned. It intended to expand the availability and use of statelessness data and include stateless persons in statistics as a means of providing evidence of the scale and impact of statelessness, which in turn would facilitate improved programme design, effective legislative changes and better use of resources.

74. As a member of the Advisory Committee of the Global Alliance, the United States was committed to providing leadership and guidance and fostering dialogue, focusing particularly on the expertise of those with lived experience of statelessness. She encouraged all participants to join the Alliance and thereby ensure that the I Belong campaign became a lived reality for stateless people around the world.

75. **Ms. Cessouma** (Observer for the African Union), panellist, said that the recent adoption by the African Union of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Specific Aspects of the Right to a Nationality and the Eradication of Statelessness in Africa had marked an important stage in efforts to combat statelessness across the continent. The Protocol proposed solutions to problems relating to the recognition of the right to nationality and the exercise of that right. Fifteen ratifications of the instrument were needed and a road map to raise awareness of its content had been devised to assist the States members of the African Union in the ratification process and enable them to transpose the provisions of the Protocol into their domestic legislation as expeditiously as possible. Other partners in the Global Alliance were encouraged to support the African Union in its advocacy in order to obtain the necessary ratifications.

76. Following the adoption of the Protocol, consideration had been given to the mechanisms that would be needed to further reduce, and ultimately eradicate, statelessness. For example, a model law on citizenship and on the prevention of statelessness was to be developed in order to help member States to bring their legislation into line with the content of the Protocol. The issue of statelessness was systematically addressed in regional forums, such as the African Union annual humanitarian symposium on advancing effective and inclusive humanitarian action in Africa, and in training programmes on humanitarian law.

77. States members of the African Union believed that it was important that stateless persons should have access to economic and social services and to economic opportunities. The African Union Commission worked to involve stateless persons in all its activities.

78. **Mr. Best** (Observer for the Council of Europe), panellist, said that it was only possible to honour pledges to end statelessness if specific action was taken. Only States could confer citizenship and, because statelessness was an international problem, Governments needed to work together to agree on principles and set common standards. At the Council of Europe, the 46 member States had embarked on a work plan to facilitate progress towards eliminating statelessness. Specifically, the experts on the European Committee on Legal Co-operation had been given two tasks: first, to compile a set of good practices based on what worked in the member States in areas such as legal aid and representation, access to information and justice for children in nationality and statelessness proceedings; and, second, to negotiate an instrument on access to nationality for stateless children, including guidance on child-friendly procedures, by the end of 2026. Thus the focus was on promoting access to nationality, particularly for children, who were at the greatest risk of exclusion from rights that should apply to all human beings.

79. There were currently 21 States parties to the European Convention on Nationality, an instrument specifically designed to avoid statelessness. It was not one of the Council's most successful conventions but he wished to emphasize that it was open to any State to join, not only members of the Council of Europe.

80. On the judicial front, he recalled that the European Court of Human Rights, whose jurisprudence was binding on States members of the Council, had deemed nationality to be relevant to a person's social identity and thus to the enjoyment of the right to private and family life under article 8 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (European Convention on Human Rights). With regard to the nationality of children specifically, the Committee of Ministers, a body in which each of the member States was represented and which took its decisions by consensus, had adopted a

recommendation focusing on the vulnerability of children, especially migrant and refugee children, who were at considerable risk of exploitation and abuse.

81. The Council of Europe was proud to join the Global Alliance to End Statelessness and looked forward to working with all partners.

82. **Mr. Ashurov** (Coordinator of the Central Asian Network on Statelessness and Nansen Refugee Award laureate), panellist, said that the Central Asian Network on Statelessness had successfully strengthened advocacy efforts by uniting civil society and academia in the region and becoming a trusted partner of UNHCR. Its top priority was to amplify the voices of stateless communities and ensure that those with lived experience were central to decision-making processes.

83. Following the historic achievement of Kyrgyzstan in conducting an identification campaign that had culminated in the resolution of all known cases of statelessness within its borders, the Network had made significant progress elsewhere in the region. Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan had conducted their own mass campaigns to resolve statelessness, while the Amnesty Act in Tajikistan and a new progressive Citizenship Act in Uzbekistan had positively affected tens of thousands of lives. Statelessness in Central Asia had been reduced from 200,000 to 38,000 persons over the preceding decade, progress that had been made possible through the political will of Governments and coordinated multi-stakeholder action at the grass-roots level. New challenges were emerging, however, that had the potential to create additional cases of statelessness, and much needed to be done to establish strong safeguards and improve national prevention systems.

84. The Central Asian Network on Statelessness saw the Global Alliance as a crucial platform for cooperation, learning and advocacy for legal reforms to end statelessness. It was committed to supporting Central Asian States in ratifying the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, developing statelessness determination procedures and bringing national legislation into line with international standards. Its goal was to build sustainable partnerships and harness the momentum of the I Belong campaign for collective action to accelerate transformative change and eradicate statelessness once and for all.

Official launch of the Global Alliance to End Statelessness

85. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the moment had come to turn commitment into action in order to bring closer the time when everyone could enjoy the right to nationality without discrimination.

86. Accordingly, he had the great honour to officially launch the Global Alliance to End Statelessness.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.