



# General Assembly

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## Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Seventy-fifth session

### Summary record of the 771st meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 17 October 2024, at 3 p.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Stasch ..... (Germany)

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*The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.*

**Agenda item 4: Consideration of reports of the Standing Committee**

**(a) International protection** ([A/AC.96/75/2](#), [A/AC.96/75/3](#) and [A/AC.96/75/10](#))

1. **Ms. Menikdiwela** (Assistant High Commissioner for Protection) said that more than 122 million people had been forced to flee their homes owing to conflict, violence and persecution. Crises were constantly emerging; over the previous three years, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had declared a new emergency every 10 days.

2. The widening war in the Middle East had caused harrowing destruction in densely populated areas of Beirut, with an estimated 1.2 million people in Lebanon displaced. More than 250,000 individuals had fled to the Syrian Arab Republic, around 70 per cent of them Syrian refugees who had sought international protection in Lebanon years earlier. The population of the Gaza Strip had been repeatedly displaced, and more than 42,000 people had been killed. The leadership required to address the situation on the ground was lacking; an immediate ceasefire and political solution were long overdue. All parties must respect international humanitarian law. The adequate funding and scaling up of humanitarian assistance were essential, as was the protection of aid workers. One of the UNHCR staff members killed in Lebanon had been leading programmes supporting 400,000 Syrian refugees in the Bīqā' Valley.

3. She had recently visited the Sudan, where 25 million people were in need of protection and assistance. Massacres were being committed along ethnic lines, and there was an alarming level of gender-based violence. Recent floods had displaced tens of thousands of people. There had been an increase in the smuggling and trafficking of Sudanese nationals, including children and young people. Many Sudanese citizens had chosen to travel to other regions of the world; a failure to scale up support would likely lead to a rise in the number doing so. Sudanese refugees continued to arrive in Chad in a severely traumatized state. She welcomed the reopening of the Adré border crossing, which had enabled UNHCR and other United Nations agencies to deliver essential relief items to nearly 600,000 people. The Office applauded the host countries that had generously welcomed Sudanese refugees despite facing their own challenges and called on parties in the region and beyond to support them.

4. In the first half of 2024, escalating violence in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo had pushed almost 1 million people to flee. On a recent mission, she had met with individuals from Ituri and North Kivu provinces who had been affected by killings, detention, kidnapping, extortion and the recruitment of their children by armed groups. They continued to face grave violations in the camps to which they had fled, where violence was common. In the same period, there had been a significant rise in reported cases of gender-based violence in North Kivu province, with rape used as a weapon by armed actors. Women and girls were subjected to attacks at gunpoint, trafficking and sexual exploitation and frequently resorted to survival sex. Perpetrators were rarely held accountable. Humanitarian actors had stepped up their work in and around camps but were severely limited by inadequate funding, poor access and security challenges. While all parties to conflict were obliged to guarantee the protection of civilians and respect for the civilian nature of displacement camps, the responsibility to protect lay first and foremost with States. Ending impunity was essential.

5. As more than 60 million forcibly displaced and stateless women and girls faced heightened risks of gender-based violence, UNHCR was rapidly scaling up its services. Funding, however, continued to fall short of needs, particularly in protracted displacement situations. Maintaining donors' focus on such situations was a struggle. Violence perpetrated by non-State actors presented another challenge, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean, where escalating gang and cartel violence, instability and human rights abuses had triggered large-scale displacement. In Haiti, for instance, gang violence had forced more than 390,000 people to flee in 2024 alone. Asylum-seekers and migrants frequently used the same routes, embarking on increasingly dangerous irregular journeys, often using smuggling or trafficking networks. The collective failure to establish effective policy options meant that the management of human mobility had been placed in the hands of such networks.

6. UNHCR wished to thank States and its partners for their constructive engagement in the consultations on the route-based approach, which recognized the multifaceted challenges posed by mixed and onward movements. It was working with them to identify concrete, rights-based measures that would improve the response to such movements, recognizing that a focus on border controls was often ineffective. Countries of origin, asylum, transit and destination must work together to address the root causes of displacement, strengthen protection and assistance for individuals on the move at the earliest stage possible, open up pathways to resettlement and regular migration and expand the opportunities for the socioeconomic inclusion of refugees.

7. Asylum and migration had been key issues in the many elections that had taken place across the world in 2024. Despite some positive developments, refugees and asylum-seekers continued to be the target of xenophobic discourse, misinformation and hate speech. The attempt by some States to instrumentalize the movement of persons for political gain was of particular concern, as was the implementation of restrictive measures, such as border closures, reduced access to asylum procedures and the detention of asylum-seekers. Seeking asylum was not a crime or security threat, but a fundamental right. The international refugee protection regime provided safeguards for those fleeing persecution while also addressing States' legitimate national security concerns. Nonetheless, UNHCR understood the challenges faced by some States in responding to mixed movements and continued to provide support to ensure that they were handled in a more humane manner that was in line with international law. It had published guidance on admission to territory and access to asylum, which outlined the lawful measures open to States to address their security concerns about specific individuals, and had issued an advocacy brief providing concrete recommendations for the advancement of practical alternatives to the detention of asylum-seekers. UNHCR called for an end to juvenile detention and welcomed the efforts of certain States, including Colombia, in that regard.

8. There was an urgent need for durable solutions, of which peace was the most durable and sustainable and the precursor to the voluntary, safe and dignified return of refugees. Third-country solutions remained a key protection tool that must be scaled up. UNHCR welcomed the increase in resettlement in 2024 and wished to acknowledge the United States of America for its acceptance of 159,000 of the almost 200,000 refugee resettlement submissions. It was vital that other States should increase their concrete commitments in that regard. Other avenues offering safe and regulated access to protection and opportunities in third countries included family reunification, labour mobility and education schemes and humanitarian visas. In that connection, she wished to highlight the recently launched Italian labour mobility programme, which offered refugees access to the regular labour migration system, accredited training in their countries of asylum – currently Egypt, Jordan and Uganda – and support in their applications to Italian companies. Building on those good practices was essential to ensure the sharing of responsibility with host countries.

9. More than 500,000 individuals had acquired citizenship since the launch of the I Belong campaign to end statelessness. Since 2010, there had been 77 new accessions to the statelessness conventions. Some countries had adopted new laws and policies to better protect stateless persons and grant women the right to pass their nationality to their children. Those successes were largely thanks to collaboration with, and the advocacy of, partners including women's rights and stateless-led civil society actors. The launch of the Global Alliance to End Statelessness was a vital next step; she encouraged States that had not yet done so to join the Alliance. Much remained to be done, as millions of stateless persons continued to be deprived of their rights, but the progress already observed was evidence that ending statelessness was within reach.

10. **Mr. Traoré** (Burkina Faso), speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, said that the number of individuals in Africa who had been forcibly displaced by conflicts and political crises had increased for the thirteenth year running, to over 50 million. Africa was home to an estimated 1.9 million stateless persons, in many cases because of the inadequate birth registration systems in West Africa. The main protection challenges facing African States were persistent conflict, climate change, humanitarian and security crises and fragile economies. Such challenges were compounded by the lack of resources available to host

countries and the inadequacy of the legal frameworks for combating statelessness and displacement.

11. As humanitarian emergencies worsened in many African countries, funding for the responses continued to be subject to unprecedented restrictions, the situation aggravated by contributions being earmarked. National asylum systems were struggling to cope with the growing number of applications. Some African States had sought to increase their capacity to process the applications and receive asylum-seekers, but there had also been violations of the principle of non-refoulement, with arbitrary expulsions and violent returns of African asylum-seekers from other continents. The Group of African States wished to remind States of their obligation to uphold that principle and prevent the expulsion of individuals to countries where they were likely to suffer serious harm. They must also respect the right to return and be prepared to facilitate the return of persons no longer in need of international protection. Robust asylum systems and mechanisms for identifying international protection needs remained essential for guaranteeing the protection of persons seeking safety in situations of conflict or persecution.

12. Steps needed to be taken to alleviate the burden on the States hosting the largest number of refugees and asylum-seekers. The only way to address the root causes of forced displacement was to ensure the lasting resolution of existing conflicts. In that connection, the international community should make a sustained commitment to tackling the causes of the conflicts in Africa, which could not be done while those conflicts were neglected because attention was on conflicts elsewhere. The Group of African States stressed the urgent need to prioritize durable solutions and complementary pathways, welcoming the conclusion on those matters to be adopted during the current session. It recognized the role of the triple nexus approach, linking humanitarian action, development and peace, called on development actors to support that approach as a step towards durable solutions and echoed the appeal made by humanitarian partners for substantial investment in early warning systems and disaster risk financing. It encouraged UNHCR to take steps to ensure the rigorous monitoring of the implementation of the commitments made at the latest Global Refugee Forum.

13. **Ms. Kalmbach** (United States of America) said that the United States firmly supported the Office's mandate to provide protection to all forcibly displaced and stateless persons. It welcomed the efforts made to eradicate statelessness and looked forward to advancing the participation of stateless persons in global efforts to that end. Her Government shared the Office's concern that individuals might avoid seeking protection out of fear of persecution based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. Accordingly, it applauded the work done to mainstream inclusion and provide targeted interventions to meet the needs of marginalized groups in humanitarian contexts.

14. The scale and complexity of the current humanitarian crises called for long-term, integrated solutions. The United States welcomed the Office's partnerships with development and private sector actors, which enhanced economic opportunities for displaced populations and their host communities, built their resilience and ensured protection outcomes remained at the centre of efforts to seek solutions. The United States Refugee Admissions Program played a crucial role in international protection, bringing refugees from every region of the world to the country. In 2024, the country had welcomed the largest number of refugees in three decades, the majority of whom came from Africa.

15. **Mr. Gionet** (Canada) said that Canada appreciated the leading role of UNHCR in the provision of international protection and humanitarian assistance and was deeply saddened by the loss of two of its staff in Lebanon. His delegation called for respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law and increased protection for civilians and humanitarian workers.

16. Canada reiterated its solidarity with host countries, many of which shouldered a disproportionate share of the burden arising from the global displacement crisis. Its own experience had shown that refugees could be positive agents for change in their new communities. His Government would continue to uphold its commitments under the Global Compact on Refugees, in particular those on resettlement, by transforming the Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot into a permanent programme by late 2025 and supporting countries to develop community sponsorship programmes. Canada encouraged other Member States

to join the multi-partner efforts to expand third-country solutions and ensure their inclusive and equitable implementation.

17. Canada appreciated the work undertaken in the context of the I Belong campaign. His Government had decided to join the Global Alliance to End Statelessness; it would seek to identify how best to share its experiences, practices and legislative expertise with respect to the loss or non-acquisition of citizenship owing to gender discrimination and to benefit from the expertise and experience of others.

18. Canada acknowledged the need for fair and timely asylum decisions and remained committed to building and reinforcing asylum capacity in the Americas through the Regional Asylum Capacity-Building Initiative in Mexico, its ongoing support for the comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework and its recent work to develop targeted information-sharing and training sessions for countries across the region. It was deeply committed to working with UNHCR and other partners to find durable solutions for at-risk LGBTQI+ individuals. UNHCR should strengthen gender-responsive protection measures and ensure that its work was guided by its age, gender and diversity policy.

19. While commending UNHCR on its efforts to simplify the protection architecture, he said it was essential that technical coordination and specialist expertise should be preserved. UNHCR should work with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and other stakeholders to guarantee a coherent approach, while prioritizing the needs of the most vulnerable in its decision-making. It could count on support from Canada in upholding the principles of international protection and advancing the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees.

20. **Mr. Traoré** (Burkina Faso) said that, as a party to the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention), Burkina Faso attached great importance to international protection, as it had demonstrated by taking on new commitments at the Global Refugee Forum in 2023. His Government had amended the legal framework on asylum and adopted a text incorporating the Kampala Convention into national law. It was working to amend the nationality provisions of the Code of the Individual and the Family, establish a body responsible for determining statelessness and implement measures to facilitate the delivery of birth certificates to children from internally displaced groups.

21. In March 2024, the tripartite agreement between UNHCR, Burkina Faso and Mali on the voluntary return of Malian refugees had been amended to take account of developments in the displacement situation. The success of that voluntary return process had been such that Burkina Faso was now sharing its experiences with other neighbouring countries. His Government welcomed the organization by the Togolese authorities and the UNHCR Regional Bureau for West and Central Africa of the third regional dialogue on the responses to the significant influx of refugees in the Gulf of Guinea and hoped that it would lead to improvements to the voluntary return process.

22. **Mr. Amurgail** (Sudan) said that the fundamental rights of Sudanese citizens were being violated by the Rapid Support Forces. Members of that militia had raped women and children, with the aim of forcing them to leave their homes, and children had been recruited as soldiers. People had been forced to move from town to town to escape the violence. Women and young girls who lived in the regions occupied by the militia were in particular need of support. International efforts to facilitate the return to education of former child soldiers would also be welcome.

23. It was crucial that the international community should step up its efforts to assist displaced persons who had been forced to leave their homes owing to climate change. He thanked those countries that had welcomed Sudanese refugees and called for more work to be done to provide them with support and protection, facilitate their access to labour markets and uphold the principle of non-refoulement. The Sudanese Government was grateful for the effective assistance offered by the international community and donors, the continuation of which was essential, given the seriousness of the situation.

24. **Mr. Widmer** (Switzerland) said that Switzerland welcomed the High Commissioner's note on international protection ([A/AC.96/75/3](#)) and all the work done by

UNCHR to ensure the protection of persons of concern. With respect to the protection of children, he wished to draw attention to the importance of the Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies, which provided opportunities for advocacy, the sharing of experiences and the mobilization of additional resources. In addressing gender-based violence, it was important to understand whether the violence involved was domestic or conflict-related. Switzerland would be interested to learn more about community-based activities for the prevention of gender-based violence.

25. Lastly, the efforts of humanitarian actors to prevent violence and protect the persons affected must be well-coordinated. The Global Protection Cluster had a key role in the implementation of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Action Plan on the Centrality of Protection. Therefore, for there to be truly systemic change, the Emergency Relief Coordinator should have a strong leadership role.

26. **Ms. Adoum** (Cameroon) said that, in Cameroon, refugees and asylum-seekers, who numbered more than half a million, were increasingly living in host communities rather than refugee camps. As the experiences under the memorandum of understanding signed eight years earlier on the transfer of responsibility for refugee status determination from UNHCR to Cameroon had been encouraging, the two parties would, in the following days, hold further discussions on how the country's asylum system could be made sounder. Under the country's refugee law, refugees had the same right to employment as nationals. By way of example, because of that law, a refugee, educated entirely in Cameroon, had been admitted into the professional association for architects. Admission had previously been limited to nationals.

27. Since the signing of tripartite agreements on voluntary repatriation with the Central African Republic and Nigeria in 2019, there had been 13,251 convoys of refugees returning to the Central African Republic. The return of 14,000 Nigerian refugees was expected. The seven countries hosting the largest numbers of refugees from the Central African Republic had adopted the Yaoundé Declaration on solutions in the context of forced displacement related to the Central African Republic crisis in April 2022 and then rolled out a solutions support platform, under Cameroon and the Central African Republic as co-chairs. The protection of, and provision of assistance to, internally displaced persons remained a challenge for Cameroon. A delegation from the African Union would visit the country shortly to help find solutions.

28. **Mr. Damiani Pellegrini** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that one of most worrying issues addressed in the High Commissioner's note on international protection had to do with the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza and Lebanon. The constant, systematic attacks by Israel had led to an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. Civilians had been massacred indiscriminately, and essential infrastructure, including hospitals, schools and homes, had been completely destroyed. Millions of people had been left without food, drinking water and medicine. Local humanitarian systems, put under extreme pressure, had collapsed, and the increasing number of refugees being taken in by neighbouring countries, whose resources were already limited, posed a risk to the stability of the region. It was imperative that the international community should condemn those violations of international law and act decisively to end the catastrophe.

29. In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the National Refugee Commission had taken steps to enhance the country's response capacity, and the Commission's own operational capacity had been bolstered. Significant progress had been made in applying digital technology to the refugee application process, and temporary documents could be issued digitally. With support from UNHCR, monitoring visits were systematically conducted throughout the country to extend protection to persons who had been granted asylum and identify any shortcomings in protection. He wished to reaffirm his country's unshakeable commitment to multilateralism and international cooperation, guided by the fundamental principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international law.

30. **Ms. Fowler** (New Zealand) said that the number of forcibly displaced people in the world, which had surpassed 100 million in 2022, was now 123 million and could potentially reach 137 million by the end of 2025, represented both a displacement crisis, driven by conflicts and other humanitarian challenges, including the worsening adverse impacts of

climate change, and a protection crisis, particularly for women and girls and all their diversity, children, the elderly and persons with disabilities.

31. New Zealand reaffirmed its commitment to collaborate with UNHCR and the global community to find enduring protection solutions for refugees. It was important to have strong international laws and policies, along with quality funding. Humanitarian aid was a temporary solution; political solutions were essential. New Zealand was committed to the resettlement of refugees with priority protection needs through its refugee quota programme and complementary pathways. It recognized the perilous environments in which UNHCR and its staff operated and was aggrieved that 2024 was on track to be the most deadly year on record for humanitarian workers.

32. **Mr. Nkosi** (South Africa) said that South Africa was concerned about the increasing number of displacements but also fervently believed that sustainable long-term solutions could be found by strengthening the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. There should be an enhanced focus on conflict prevention and good governance to avoid forced displacement and ensure that countries could provide sustainable pathways out of poverty. Economic growth and development needed to be promoted in more parts of the world to enable people to enjoy their rights to life, liberty and security under international refugee law and to unlock the benefits of voluntary repatriation and the reintegration of returnees.

33. His delegation wished to address the statement in the note on international protection that “South Africa proposed to withdraw from the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and re-accede with reservations”. His Government had taken note of the concerns raised by UNHCR, was committed to a rules-based multilateral system and had no intention of walking away from its international commitments. The country’s laws on international protection had at times been abused. Its intention was to ensure durable solutions that included regular and complementary pathways and were consistent with the country’s obligations with respect to international protection. It was engaging with a variety of stakeholders to that end.

34. South Africa looked forward to working with partners on its digital transformation, its top priority, and was committed to clearing its asylum appeals backlog. It would continue to make voluntary contributions to support the Office’s work on international protection.

35. **Mr. Arga** (Ethiopia) said that his country’s unwavering solidarity with those fleeing conflict was reflected in the progressive policies that it had adopted. It had included refugees in national protection and assistance systems, nearly 200,000 refugees were enrolled in its primary and secondary schools, and data on the education of refugees had been integrated into the national education information management system. In just one year, more than 10,000 economic opportunities had been created for refugees. Refugee communities had been assisted to engage in agriculture and livestock production and had benefited from market system development and services to promote financial inclusion.

36. International cooperation was essential to enhance refugees’ self-reliance and foster the coexistence of refugees and host communities. Ethiopia would redouble its efforts to implement sustainable programming in collaboration with UNHCR and its partners. Despite the international efforts to address the causes of displacement, the challenges remained enormous, and no tangible improvements had yet been seen. Given the volatile situation in the region in which Ethiopia was located, the prospects of voluntary return were dim. Resettlement was therefore the preferred solution. A significant number of refugees had benefited from resettlement opportunities in Australia, Canada, France and the United States, and he wished to thank those partners for their continued support. Ethiopia called upon UNHCR to expand resettlement opportunities and encouraged countries that offered such opportunities to do so in a timely manner.

37. The international community should recognize the difficulties faced by host countries where, as in Ethiopia, protection and humanitarian needs were rising while the funding gap was widening. Underfunding, earmarking, unpredictability and the untimely release of funds hampered host countries’ capacity to respond to complex emergencies. Ethiopia therefore called upon partners to provide flexible unearmarked funding to UNHCR so that refugees’ needs for protection and assistance could be met.

38. **Mr. Ebbe Monga** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that there were more than 7 million internally displaced persons in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and more than 1 million of its nationals were refugees in other countries. Through ongoing strategic dialogue with UNHCR, an appropriate response could be coordinated.

39. His Government called for the international community to mobilize to tackle the root cause of the forced displacement: the internal conflict and the continued attacks on the eastern part of the country by uninvited foreign forces. An array of measures, including preventive, educational, political and diplomatic ones, should be used to address forced displacement.

40. **Ms. Bhatt** (Australia) said that Australia thanked UNHCR for delivering crucial protection and humanitarian assistance across the globe. Australia remained concerned about the impact of conflict on the safety of civilians and humanitarian workers. Protection must be afforded to all civilians. It was essential that the root causes of displacement should be addressed, but durable solutions must also be found for those displaced by conflict through the creation of more legal pathways. In its role as Chair of the Global Task Force on Refugee Labour Mobility, Australia was a global advocate for the expansion of refugee labour mobility pathways.

41. Australia had made 25 pledges at the Global Refugee Forum, seeking to help provide a consistent response to key issues leading to displacement and persecution and address how displacement could exacerbate gender-based violence, discrimination against the LGBTIQ+ community, women, children and others. To deliver effectively on its pledges, Australia would continue to collaborate with those with lived experience through a refugee advisory panel and strongly encouraged others to do the same.

42. Australia was deeply concerned about the escalating conflict and worsening humanitarian situation in Myanmar. It commended countries in the region, especially Bangladesh, for hosting refugees fleeing Myanmar. Enhanced support for Rohingya in Bangladesh that gave them access to livelihoods, education and skills training could increase their self-reliance and open opportunities for complementary pathways. Australia urged all member States to continue working together in solidarity on the global challenge of displacement and to share responsibility for the protection of those who needed it in a non-discriminatory manner.

43. **Mr. Patrick** (United Kingdom) said that the United Kingdom welcomed the note on international protection. However, the reference to the United Kingdom in paragraph 10 was no longer correct. His Government would be ending its Migration and Economic Development Partnership with the Government of Rwanda, which was not an effective means of tackling the challenge of irregular migration.

44. **Mr. Dey** (Bangladesh) said that a whole-of-society approach must be applied to counter the rise in anti-refugee and anti-migrant narratives, hate speech, racism, xenophobia and religious hatred around the world, particularly in developed and refugee-hosting countries. Development partners and donors must extend their support to both host countries and countries of origin. Persons forced to leave their homes because of disasters and the impacts of climate change were in dire need of international protection. The adverse effects of climate change could exacerbate social, inter-ethnic and other tensions.

45. For seven years, Bangladesh had been hosting over 1.2 million Rohingyas and providing them with humanitarian assistance and protection. Unfortunately, not a single Rohingya had returned to Myanmar in that time. Over the previous two months, 30,000 Rohingyas had crossed into Bangladesh, fleeing escalating violence and persecution in neighbouring Rakhine State. Bangladesh was grateful to UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration and other humanitarian partners for supporting its efforts to shelter them. Rohingya children were being given an education in the Myanmar language in around 6,000 learning centres. To ease congestion at the camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh had, using its own resources, developed another camp at Bhasan Char, which had all amenities and ample options for economic activities and could accommodate 100,000 persons. Around 35,000 Rohingyas had thus far voluntarily relocated to that camp. However, only 49 per cent of the joint response plan for the Rohingya humanitarian crisis was funded. Bangladesh urged donors to close that chronic funding gap.



46. As a densely populated developing country, Bangladesh was left with one durable solution to the protracted humanitarian crisis: voluntary repatriation. The international community must intensify its efforts to facilitate the safe, voluntary and dignified return of the Rohingya to Myanmar, which would be possible only if their protection upon return to Rakhine State could be assured.

47. **Ms. Al-Hashami** (Observer for Iraq) said that she applauded the Office's humanitarian work to protect refugees and displaced persons. Iraqi regulations were being amended to ensure the non-discriminatory protection of refugees and acceptance of asylum-seekers. The country's migration law protected the rights of persons whose situations gave rise to humanitarian considerations. Over 100,000 refugees had benefited from programmes put in place, with cooperation from UNHCR, for the integration of Syrian refugees and the reintegration of Iraqi displaced persons. Thousands of persons who had been at risk of statelessness had received identity documents confirming their Iraqi nationality. To ensure the protection of the refugees, solidarity and unity were needed at the international level.

48. **Ms. Kibere** (Uganda) said that the core mandate of UNHCR was protection, a precondition for durable solutions which could only be provided after asylum had been granted. It was also intertwined with and could not be separated from budget and funding.

49. **Mr. Waweru** (Observer for the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)) said that IPU had been working to engage the global parliamentary community in the effort to provide comprehensive and sustainable solutions to the plight of refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless persons, focusing, under its partnership with UNHCR, on awareness-raising, information-sharing, skills-building and the creation of national and regional partnerships. Sustainable solutions could not be achieved without international cooperation and an inclusive approach, which in turn required political commitment and the involvement of a multitude of actors, including parliaments and parliamentarians. Parliamentary action and involvement, whether in terms of adopting laws, approving budgets, overseeing the work of the executive or raising public awareness, were essential for the implementation of international norms on the protection of refugees and internally displaced persons and the elimination of statelessness. At the second Global Refugee Forum in 2023, the Union had renewed its pledges to support efforts towards enhancing parliamentary engagement in protecting refugees and supporting host communities and in ending statelessness.

50. **Mr. Mauro Tabet Cruz** (Plan International), speaking on behalf of a wide range of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), said that the global rise of anti-migration, nationalist discourse, hate speech and misinformation was fuelling a rise in xenophobia. There had also been a worrying rise in policies to externalize responsibility for the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers. The NGOs urged Governments to counter the rising xenophobia targeting displaced populations and to fulfil their responsibilities with respect to international protection and global solidarity. The NGOs welcomed the review by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee of its response to internal displacement and the work of the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on Solutions to Internal Displacement.

51. Important progress had been made under the I Belong campaign, but many challenges remained. The NGOs urged States to place stateless persons, as the true experts, at the centre of their responses to statelessness and to address the issue with urgency. The launch of the Global Alliance to End Statelessness would provide an important platform going forward.

52. NGOs continued to operate in challenging environments, with stretched resources and decreased capacity. They saw their work being criminalized and were faced with a shrinking civic space and hostile political discourse. Those factors made the provision of essential services challenging, especially for local NGOs working on the front line. They called upon States to protect civil society space so to allow them to contribute effectively to the protection of displaced populations.

53. Effective protection could not be achieved unless inequalities in accessing services were addressed. Humanitarian actors and States should continue to push for the participation of forcibly displaced and stateless persons in all their diversity, including by recognizing

refugee-led organizations as equal partners in refugee response efforts and providing them with the necessary support.

54. **Ms. Menikdiwela** (Assistant High Commissioner for Protection) said that delegations had rightly recognized the importance of solutions such as increased resettlement quotas and complementary pathways and the need to create the conditions for voluntary repatriation. She was grateful to all delegations that had mentioned the importance of preventing and addressing statelessness, especially Burkina Faso and Iraq, which had given examples of their activities. The announcement that Canada intended to join the Global Alliance to End Statelessness was welcome. She thanked the delegation of Burkina Faso, which had spoken on behalf of the African Group, for underlining the cardinal principle of non-refoulement – a cornerstone of the international refugee protection regime and part of international customary law.

55. On the age, gender, diversity and LGBTQI+ issues that had been raised, she stressed that UNHCR provided assistance and solutions for all the people it served in a non-discriminatory and inclusive manner, in keeping with its long-standing organizational commitment. She was pleased to note that some delegations had underlined the importance of access to education for refugee children. In addition to its obvious benefits, education served as a protection tool by preventing the exploitation of refugee children and their recruitment by armed groups.

56. UNHCR was grateful to the United Kingdom for rescinding the agreement with Rwanda that would have externalized its asylum obligations. The Office recognized that many States were concerned about the ability of their asylum systems to keep up with the number of applications. In that regard, it maintained its long-standing offer to support States, including in terms of training and capacity-building.

57. The issue of shrinking civic space, which had been mentioned by Plan International, was of extreme concern. In certain countries, people had been incarcerated purely for working with UNHCR. She therefore appealed to the States members of the Executive Committee to advocate on behalf of NGOs that faced hardship in the countries where they operated, so that they were able to function independently in support of UNHCR humanitarian operations.

**(b) Programme budgets, management, financial control and administrative oversight** (A/AC.96/75/4, A/AC.96/75/4/Add.1 and A/AC.96/75/7)

58. **Ms. Clements** (United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees) said that she had been inspired during the launch of the Global Alliance to End Statelessness by the words of two formerly stateless individuals, Noor Azizah and Nosizi Dube. They had reminded the Executive Committee of the ever-present need to find solutions for displaced and stateless persons. In challenging times, UNHCR was responding in 588 locations across the globe with over 1,200 partners, most of them local actors. Local and national responders, who currently received 57 per cent of the Office's partnership funding, were crucial to its efforts to protect and aid those who were forced to flee. As well as scaling up its presence in response to new emergencies, UNHCR was working to achieve the vision of the Global Compact on Refugees and to adapt its programming and delivery, in pursuit of a world where displacement was history and everyone had a nationality.

59. To meet present and future challenges, UNHCR had stepped up collaboration under broader United Nations reforms, including United Nations 2.0 and the efficiency agenda. It had launched a new publication, *Beyond Borders*. It had modernized the way in which it worked, in line with the Global Compact, making strides in efficiency, agility and inclusivity, decentralizing decision-making and embedding innovation, data and technology in its processes. As a result, it was better equipped to tackle unprecedented global displacement. Yet there was no room for complacency, and UNHCR was developing a comprehensive road map to deliver better for those who relied on it.

60. Two weeks previously, she had joined senior officials from other United Nations agencies and entities to develop new ideas for the modernization of the United Nations system. The result had been an ambitious agenda for change that sought to address the daunting challenges facing the Organization. Further developments were expected in areas

such as generative artificial intelligence (AI), predictive analytics, behavioural science, innovative finance and making the United Nations nimbler and more efficient.

61. UNHCR continued to innovate and was on track to generate \$5 million in savings through the rightsizing of its vehicle fleet. It was investing in greening its operations and transitioning its offices to renewable energy, particularly in climate-vulnerable regions. Ten offices would be solar-powered by the end of 2024, reducing carbon dioxide emissions by up to 2,500 metric tons per year. UNHCR had also set an example in its use of financial technology to improve the management of treasury functions. It was working closely with the private sector to learn from its experience in achieving efficiencies.

62. The Office had improved its implementation of recommendations made by external and internal oversight entities, which were extremely useful in the Office's efforts to refine systems, improve impact and optimize efficiencies. In 2024, it had been assessed by the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network, which in its findings had highlighted the Office's leadership in forced displacement situations and its strong risk management practices.

63. The Office's budget for 2024 stood at almost \$10.8 billion, including supplementary budgets for the Sudan situation and the UNHCR response in Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, where resources were urgently required. It currently faced three mega-emergencies, including that in Ukraine, with massive humanitarian impact and grave consequences for international peace and security. Although the conflict in Gaza did not fall within the Office's mandate, its severe repercussions were placing a strain on resources. The proposed annual programme budget for 2025, in the amount of \$10.2 billion, reflected immense humanitarian needs. Increasingly, the budgets would focus on strengthening self-reliance and moving towards more sustainable response models in support of the objectives of the Global Compact. It was necessary to redouble efforts to build national capacities, recognizing the crucial role that host countries played. UNHCR was grateful to those Member States who had increased their contributions in recent months; nevertheless, its work remained only 45 per cent funded, which was forcing it to make difficult choices. The Sudan refugee response plan was only 27 per cent funded, with most of the funding coming from a handful of Member States. As that situation was unsustainable, UNHCR urgently called for more countries to step up and become donors. There was an urgent need for unearmarked funding, which allowed UNHCR to deploy immediately in emergencies and deliver protection in overlooked crises. UNHCR continued to engage with the private sector and to expand its donor base, with 3 million individual supporters. It was building on its achievements in innovative financing and Islamic philanthropy, and was exploring climate financing and debt-for-nature swaps with a view to supporting climate-affected host and refugee communities.

64. The strength of UNHCR lay in its diverse and dedicated workforce. In April 2024, the High Commissioner had launched the Office's first diversity, equity and inclusion strategic framework. In August, a milestone had been reached with the achievement of gender parity at all levels of the international workforce. UNHCR continued to promote equal opportunities for women in leadership, strengthening gender-sensitive policies and promoting an inclusive workplace culture in line with broader United Nations strategies. UNHCR had also taken serious steps to invest in the mental health and psychosocial well-being of its workforce. It was no secret that global events had taken a significant personal toll on some colleagues. They worked in a field of endless and growing needs and faced worsening conflict situations and deteriorating security. The introduction of new systems and the discontinuation of 6 per cent of all positions had also had an impact and continued to affect individuals, teams and managers.

65. During times of transition, it was essential to uphold a strong culture of accountability, trust and transparency, along with robust systems for reporting possible misconduct and abuse. In recent years, UNHCR had invested in strengthening its formal and informal integrity systems. A rise in the number of complaints indicated a growing awareness of and trust in those systems.

66. UNHCR worked for some extraordinary people, who, given the opportunity, could fulfil their potential and contribute to the societies in which they lived. One example was

South Sudanese refugee Monicah Malith, who had spoken at the recent Summit of the Future, calling on all Member States to take collective responsibility to support forcibly displaced persons and demonstrating what could be achieved by including them in communities and services. The transformation and modernization of UNHCR was not just about championing innovation and changing systems, but about changing lives. UNHCR was grateful to all stakeholders who participated in that effort, and for the support they provided to almost 123 million forcibly displaced persons.

67. **Ms. Biar** (Australia) said that her delegation was grateful to UNHCR for its transparency in sharing audit findings. It welcomed the thematic audit on gender-based violence but was concerned about the finding that gaps in maintaining suitably qualified staff in core areas contributed to programme ineffectiveness. It wished to know what steps UNHCR was taking to address the identified gaps and ensure that operations had optimal staff capacity to effectively mitigate, prevent and respond to gender-based violence.

68. **Ms. Clements** (United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights) said that the issue was one that the senior executive team was looking at closely and would continue to address as a top priority, insofar as resources permitted.

#### **Agenda item 5: Consideration of reports relating to programme and administrative oversight and evaluation** ([A/AC.96/75/8](#) and [A/AC.96/75/9](#))

##### *Report on activities of the Inspector General's Office*

69. **Mr. Garnett** (Inspector General) said that his report ([A/AC.96/75/8](#)) provided an account of the work of his Office for the year to June 2024. The Inspector General's Office had continued to carry out activities within the framework of its five-year strategy for 2021–2026, with the core aim of ensuring that UNHCR had an effective independent oversight system. During the year, both the assurance and the integrity oversight systems had stepped up to the challenge, with various independent entities and actors working together.

70. As Inspector General, he took seriously the independence of his Office and his freedom to take action or comment on important issues. In recent years, the independence of the other third line entities had improved. The High Commissioner had continued to recognize the importance of the Office's independence and had been supportive of its work and that of the oversight system in general.

71. Independent oversight was not exempt from the current challenges: while his Office continued to seek and deliver efficiencies through technology and process, there had been difficult choices to make. Although the oversight system had not been significantly scaled back, continued commitment and vigilance were necessary to ensure that it remained stable and fully effective.

72. His Office remained committed to the full transparency of its work, especially in relation to investigations, and to protecting the integrity of the process to ensure accountability for misconduct. Regarding requests for more detailed reporting, it should be noted that his Office had a large workload. He would therefore appreciate continued support for the multilateral approach, based on verifiable trust in UNHCR systems, with a focus on improving systems and overall outcomes.

73. Regarding the assurance system, he had created a strategic oversight team to focus on resolving problems; it was an assurance provider in its own right. In addition to its coordination and policy work, it brought a range of risk-based, strategic and advisory work to the attention of UNHCR senior management.

74. The Inspector General's Office was uniquely positioned to identify cross-cutting and thematic risks. It worked with oversight providers across the system to identify key themes arising from their work. Those themes included continued positive progress on risk management; completing the "golden thread" of the UNHCR business transformation, decentralization and headquarters realignment; enhancing overall approaches to data and management information; and enhancing accountability mechanisms.

75. The ongoing work of building and maintaining frameworks of control – being clear about responsibilities and accountability – was of critical importance. UNHCR was making

sensible choices and taking actions to improve its control environment. However, there was a need to consolidate gains over the next 18 months, and his Office was working with different assurance providers to ensure a coherent plan of work in 2025. As the oversight system could appear complex, his Office had developed a short video, available online, to explain how it worked and how its constituent parts fitted together.

76. With regard to the integrity system, overall complaint numbers had increased by a modest 8 per cent during the reporting period, softening from the 30 per cent increase that had been recorded the previous year. The number of complaints that fell within his Office's mandate was expected to reach a plateau of 2,100 per year by the end of 2024. A further 700 to 800 complaints, mostly protection-related, had been referred to UNHCR operations around the world. Given its workload, the Inspector General's Office increasingly relied on others to address complaints that were lower priority or better handled through other processes, including through referral to funding partners, United Nations system counterparts, the Ethics Office and UNHCR management. Steps had been taken to build partners' capacity to handle such referrals, such as the provision of training on fraud and misconduct investigations.

77. The data on investigations had revealed "cold spots" in terms of the filing of complaints. In the first half of 2024, 51 per cent of complaints had come from just 10 operations and the remainder from the other 107 operations. Work to enhance awareness was having some effect, although further efforts were needed. Priority was given to complaints of sexual misconduct, in which a victim-centred approach was adopted. The numbers of such complaints, mostly involving UNHCR staff, remained steady. Although data from the UNHCR NotOnlyMe system were confidential, the system had given at least one victim the confidence to come forward. His Office continued to work well with the Principal Adviser on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment. To ensure organizational learning from misconduct events, his Office had issued 41 management implication reports, which were short memorandums addressed to executive management with a view to making improvements to controls and systems identified as ineffective.

78. As part of its efficiency agenda, his Office was integrating AI solutions into its work on investigations. Solutions included the use of generative AI in the case management system and the development of a machine-learning AI model, which would provide a chatbot for complainants to report concerns and would assess the data provided. His Office was proceeding with due consideration of the risks, especially for victims of sexual misconduct, and human oversight of decision-making would be retained. The SpeakUp! helpline – the anonymous misconduct reporting platform for staff – had been replaced with a new provider at lower cost and a system that automated data transfer to his Office.

79. Additional work was ongoing with the Ethics Office, the Division of Strategic Planning and Results and the Division of International Protection on various issues. His Office had enhanced proactive measures to address financial fraud committed by displaced persons, specifically through its "double dipping" project, in which data were shared with partners to identify duplicate claims. Although the project had had some success, it was being hampered by slow or incomplete cooperation from counterpart agencies.

80. In conclusion, the oversight system, although under pressure, remained effective and continued to rise to the challenge of assuring UNHCR stakeholders and addressing integrity lapses. Member States were encouraged to maintain their constructive engagement and dialogue with the oversight community.

81. **Mr. Tarutin** (Russian Federation) said that his delegation was grateful to the Inspector General for his detailed report. Noting that his Office was using AI in its daily work, he called on the Inspector General to ensure proper oversight of the technology and to guarantee data protection and security.

82. His delegation was also grateful to the Inspector General for conducting a briefing on the topic of internal audit of UNHCR on the margins of the eighty-ninth meeting of the Standing Committee. Such mechanisms of cooperation with Member States should be implemented on a regular basis. He wondered, for example, whether the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee might organize intersessional briefings.

83. Fraudulent claims remained a widespread problem and should be addressed as a matter of priority. Furthermore, UNHCR should follow the example of a number of United Nations agencies and launch a public online platform for tracking the implementation status of recommendations by oversight structures. Doing so would improve the transparency and accountability of UNHCR and would be useful for Member States. Finally, he wished to know the extent to which decentralization had affected the work of the Inspector General's Office.

84. **Mr. Garnett** (Inspector General) said that his Office was proceeding carefully in its use of AI and accorded high priority to data security. The machine-learning solution was being developed internally within a secure environment known as a sandbox. Regarding the case management system, his Office was working with the software provider to ensure careful control. Notwithstanding the efficiencies to be gained from the use of AI, humans would continue to be involved in processes.

85. His team continued to prioritize fraud cases and had stepped up efforts to combat financial fraud. The "double dipping" project addressed the problem in a proactive way. Work had also been done to enhance reactive capacity and the transfer of information between UNHCR and funded partners.

86. UNHCR had an internal management tool for the follow-up of recommendations from oversight bodies. The public reports of, for example, the Board of Auditors and the Office of Internal Oversight Services also contained information on the implementation of recommendations. Member States therefore should have a clear view of the progress achieved in 2024 and the efforts that had been made to address long-standing issues.

87. In respect of decentralization, all oversight providers had a coherent plan for the next three years, under which they would consider different aspects of the business transformation. The interest expressed in intersessional briefings by the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee would be brought to the attention of the secretariat. It was for the Committee to decide whether to hold such briefings.

#### *Report on evaluation*

88. **Ms. Bell** (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), introducing the report on evaluation ([A/AC.96/75/9](#)), said that the role of evaluation – to help management decide what, if anything, to do differently – had never been more critical. The Evaluation Office had recently started presenting findings from each global thematic evaluation as they became available. In 2024, for example, there had been briefings on the evaluation of UNHCR engagement in respect of internal displacement and of its decentralization and regionalization reform. Key findings from recent evaluations of major humanitarian responses would be shared later in the year.

89. As the increasing demand for evaluations, country strategy evaluations in particular, could not be fully met, however, evaluation coverage and quality had suffered. Between July 2023 and June 2024, UNHCR had completed 17 evaluations, including evaluations of the scaling up of humanitarian operations in Ukraine and the Sudan and five country strategy evaluations. However, three decentralized evaluations had not met quality standards.

90. The Evaluation Office had had a budget of \$6.7 million in both 2023 and 2024 and an operating limit of \$6.5 million for 2025, 84 per cent of its projected needs. That shortfall had had an adverse impact on evaluation efforts. Additional funds had nonetheless been raised to complete emergency evaluations.

91. The increased earmarking of donor resources had been accompanied by additional project evaluation and reporting requirements, but evaluation capacity at the country level was still limited, and project evaluations rarely added strategic value. Instead of requesting such evaluations, donors could approach the Evaluation Office for the information they needed.

92. Despite the challenges it faced, the Evaluation Office was committed to its role as a driver of accountability, learning and improvement. The insight it had provided had informed the formulation of a number of strategies and helped ensure that the work done by UNHCR had a positive impact on displaced and stateless people. The practice of evaluation was

contributing to the development of an increasingly robust evidence-based and learning culture at UNHCR. A requirement to make explicit references to relevant evaluations had, for example, been included in the guidance for the preparation of the Global Report 2023.

93. Work in areas including gender-based violence, urban refugee livelihoods, climate action and cash programming would be evaluated in the coming year. A number of country strategy evaluations were also envisaged in the recently updated 2024/25 workplan of the Evaluation Office. In addition, as all responses to level 3 emergencies were to be evaluated within 15 months, there would be evaluations of the responses to the emergencies in Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. Representatives of States members of the Executive Committee who wished to participate in any of the upcoming evaluations were encouraged to approach the Evaluation Office.

94. Efforts would continue to be made to build capacity for decentralized evaluations and for the management and use of evaluations at all levels. UNHCR would need to continue developing approaches to monitoring, evaluating and reporting on its efforts related to policy advice, coordination leveraging and advocacy. The Evaluation Office, for its part, would need to raise additional funds to test innovative approaches, including the use of AI. Her Office, which was determined to help ensure that every step UNHCR took was informed by robust evidence, was, as always, willing to provide briefings on any evaluations of interest to Member States.

95. **Mr. Tarutin** (Russian Federation), expressing the hope that stakeholders would continue to be engaged in the planning, design, conduct and follow-up of evaluations, said that, of the evaluations produced in 2024, that on decentralization and regionalization reform was particularly noteworthy. UNHCR should take the conclusions of the evaluation into account and improve its internal procedures. It would be helpful to learn how the Evaluation Office might use AI in its work and how such technologies might help ensure that the evaluations it was responsible for met the quality standards set out in the Norms and Standards for Evaluation of the United Nations Evaluation Group. An evaluation of the approach referred to as sustainable programming might also be of use. In addition, a results framework could be developed for the Evaluation Office.

96. **Ms. Bell** (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that AI was being used to synthesize the lessons of the 100 evaluations that UNHCR had produced over the previous seven years. Like any tool, it had to be used by someone with the appropriate skills.

97. The Evaluation Office rarely took a systematic look at sustainability – the sustainability programming approach, for example – as it tended to focus on evaluating the relevance and effectiveness of urgent humanitarian action. Her Office was nonetheless starting to consider how it could better look at issues linked to the sustainable programming agenda that UNHCR was moving forward on. The framework for the assessment of her Office's performance included indicators such as external ratings of evaluation quality and data on the number and scope of the evaluations it produced. A performance monitoring table could be included in the following year's report.

#### **Agenda item 6: Consideration and adoption of the programme budget for 2025** ([A/AC.96/75/5](#) and [A/AC.96/75/6](#))

98. **The Chair**, drawing attention to the programme budget for 2025, which was contained in report of the High Commissioner ([A/AC.96/75/5](#)), and to the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions ([A/AC.96/75/6](#)), said that the programme budget had been reviewed first at an informal meeting on 30 August 2024 and then in September, at the ninety-first meeting of the Standing Committee.

99. **Mr. Onek** (Uganda), speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, said that, although they were not defined as donors, countries in Africa, which were home to more than 50 million persons of concern to UNHCR, were the starting point for the protection of the rights of displaced persons. The donors that remained committed to donating in a timely, predictable and sustainable manner were appreciated. Unfortunately, however, donations were not keeping up with growing humanitarian needs. The year was nearly over, and funds accounting for only 30 per cent of the budget had been raised. Nowhere was more



underfunded than Africa, which, in addition to grappling with other challenges, was home to 10 of the 14 most severely underfunded refugee programmes. The increasing tendency of donors to earmark funds made it impossible to respond in timely fashion to those in need of humanitarian aid. Unearmarked funds were thus especially welcome.

100. There was an urgent need to fund durable solutions. The funding gap for durable solutions was wider than that for any of the Office's three other impact areas. He welcomed the recent regional group briefing on sustainable programming and called for transparency and the inclusion of all relevant stakeholders in the ongoing consultations. Countries in Africa were already doing a huge amount; a tangible commitment to sustainable support for their generous policies was eagerly awaited.

101. The requisite international support for a resolution of the ongoing crisis in the Sudan, which was displacing increasing numbers of people, had not been forthcoming. As a result of that crisis, as well as the adverse effects of climate change, Africa was in urgent need of additional support. Lastly, the Group, which supported the adoption of the programme budget by consensus, reiterated its call for equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing in meeting the needs of persons of concern to UNHCR. Donors should strive to match the generosity of the States members of the Group, not least by making contributions not earmarked for any particular people or place.

102. **Ms. Dinha** (Zimbabwe), noting that the widening gap between humanitarian needs and available funding was of serious concern, said that the time was ripe for finding ways of strengthening the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. As others had noted, partners should provide unearmarked funds to give UNHCR the flexibility it needed to respond to emergencies. UNHCR should continue to promote sustainable programming, including to mitigate the impact of natural disasters on refugee communities.

103. The recent drought in Southern Africa, the worst in more than 40 years, had left the region parched and put millions of people at risk of acute hunger. Governments of the countries in the region were facing food and nutrition security challenges as the budget for Southern Africa continued to shrink. Her Government nonetheless remained committed to providing 4,400 metric tons of maize to refugee communities under an arrangement with the World Food Programme.

104. She echoed the call for additional support for a resolution of the crisis in the Sudan. She also echoed the call for States to refrain from the politicization of humanitarian assistance and for the immediate lifting of unilateral coercive measures, which continued to stifle development and humanitarian initiatives. Lastly, her delegation supported the adoption of the draft general decision on administrative, financial and programme matters, contained in annex V of the High Commissioner's report on the programme budget for 2025.

105. **Mr. Onek** (Uganda) said he, too, wished to underscore the urgent need to increase the unearmarked funding that UNHCR could draw on to meet humanitarian needs, unforeseen humanitarian needs in particular, such as the sudden influx of refugees from the Sudan into his country, where UNHCR operations were only about 40 per cent funded. His Government's refugee settlement policy was sustained by the generosity of the host communities; as a result of a lack of resources, however, the national budget was under strain, and increasing competition for resources could cause the relationship between host communities and refugees to sour.

106. His delegation had expected a closer focus on durable solutions in the programme budget for 2025. Funds should be set aside to enable refugees to return to their countries of origin. His Government had always called for sustainable approaches to addressing the needs of displaced persons and of countries hosting refugees. Resources were needed for vocational training, job creation and livelihood support. Significant changes to the response to protracted refugee crises such as that in his country could be made only when refugees became self-reliant.

107. His delegation looked forward to further consultations with UNHCR on sustainability programming and its impact on the budgets for country operations. His country, which was home to more refugees than any other country in Africa, strongly supported the adoption by consensus of the programme budget.



108. **Mr. Tarutin** (Russian Federation), welcoming the development of a set of core indicators to track progress linked to enabling areas, said that the Office might consider the possibility of introducing other quantitative indicators that would make it possible to assess its work and the reasonableness of its stated funding needs. In drawing up the budget, it should also take into account the risks that might affect the achievement of programme objectives. In addition, his delegation would welcome the preparation of a document in which the activity referred to as sustainable programming was explained. An outline of the financial implications of such programming could be included in the next budget proposal.

109. The promotion of sustainability in procurement was, as his delegation had noted on other occasions, misplaced. Nowhere in the financial rules and regulations of either the United Nations or UNHCR was sustainability made a procurement requirement. Procurement should be informed by the traditional imperatives – namely, value for money and effective competition. Otherwise, the Office might find it difficult to continue to pursue the efforts that the Advisory Committee trusted it would, to expand its procurement from developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

110. His delegation, which expected to hear the Office's opinion of the conclusions contained in the report of the Advisory Committee shortly, urged the Office to follow up without delay on the proposals made in the report. In 2025, the Office should provide comprehensive information on its transition to a one-year budget and prepare for a possible discussion on whether to return to a two-year budget. The Office had made commendable efforts to incorporate the findings of the Advisory Committee not only into statements made at sessions of the governing bodies but also into the documents that were adopted. His delegation's appreciation of those efforts could be reflected in the draft general decision. Lastly, the Office should ensure that documents from the first 40 sessions of the Executive Committee were digitized and made available on the Office's website.

111. **Mr. Arga** (Ethiopia) said that, although his country was doing its best to meet the needs of the refugees on its territory, the impact of the decrease in funding, in particular for thematic areas of intervention, was visible. The proposed budget for securing solutions, for example, would not make it possible to honour commitments.

112. Investing in long-term projects was paramount. The engagement of the World Bank and other development partners in initiatives to increase the self-reliance of refugees and host communities was thus welcome. Also welcome was the Office's sustainable programming approach, which was sure to be accompanied by additional funding.

113. The priorities of persons of concern were not always addressed by the programmes for which funding was earmarked. Maintaining the utmost flexibility and embracing a bottom-up approach to setting funds aside was thus vital. The programme budget should be adopted by consensus.

114. **Mr. Damiani Pellegrini** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that developing countries, which had received millions of refugees, were facing complex internal challenges that were exacerbated by new forms of colonialism such as unilateral coercive measures. Despite these blatant violations of the international order and human rights, safe haven and assistance were still being provided.

115. The troublingly large funding gap in 2024 had not only posed a threat to the lives and dignity of refugees but had also worsened the fragile situation in the developing countries in which they had sought refuge. It had put humanitarian systems the world over under additional strain. Rich countries were the Office's principal donors, but their contributions tended to come with strings attached. Securing funds that could be used where they were most needed was vital. Earmarking funds was an obstacle to efficient operations and encouraged politicization. Urgent and generous measures, not unduly circumscribed, had to be taken to ensure that the Office and other such organizations had the resources they needed to protect and assist the people of concern to them.

116. **Ms. Hussein** (Sudan), noting that her country continued to grapple with unprecedented levels of displacement, said that, despite the increase in the supplementary budget for the Sudan, the funds made available had not come close to keeping pace with growing needs. A significant resource gap threatened the ability of UNHCR and other

humanitarian organizations to provide life-saving assistance, protection and sustainable solutions for those affected by the crisis. The Sudan bore the burden of supporting nearly a million refugees even as its own citizens faced severe hardship.

117. The High Commissioner's report on the programme budget for 2025 had a commendable focus on protection, inclusion and durable solutions. The shift towards sustainable programming was especially welcome. There was, however, an urgent need to close the funding gaps in countries of origin. Only greater financial commitment and effective burden-sharing would make it possible to ensure that the objectives set out in the Global Compact on Refugees were reached. Member States, donors and other partners were called on to enhance their financial contributions by providing more unearmarked funding to address the growing needs in the Sudan and the region. The people of her country and those to whom it had given refuge deserved nothing less.

118. **Mr. Ishida** (Japan), commending UNHCR for its efforts to enhance its efficiency, said that, in 2023, his country had contributed more than \$150 million, including unearmarked funds, to the global initiatives led by the Office. The Japanese private sector, with which the Office had made laudable efforts to engage, had provided nearly \$90 million more.

119. Addressing crises, however, required more than financial support alone. A "whole-of-society" approach involving enhanced operational collaboration had to be followed. At the second Global Refugee Forum, his country had initiated a multi-stakeholder pledge to bolster the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. By inviting a diverse range of stakeholders to work to their strengths on a collaborative endeavour, it sought to address the root causes of displacement, create conditions conducive to a return, help displaced individuals become self-reliant, provide development assistance that benefited both host communities and refugees and enhance resilience and preparedness in relation to disasters and climate change. Lastly, he welcomed the efforts made by the Office, which should elaborate on them in its budget proposals in the years to come, to strengthen collaboration with development and peace actors.

120. **Ms. Chandra** (Australia), welcoming the presentation of the proposed programme budget, said that her delegation supported the shift towards sustainable programming. The focus on diversifying and strengthening partnerships in the programme budget for 2025 was also welcome. Her delegation was ready to support the ongoing efforts made by UNHCR, which was encouraged to continue allocating its budget so as to effectively address protection needs, including in respect of the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, to deliver on its mandate.

*The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.*