



# 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 773rd meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 18 October 2024, at 3 p.m.

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

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*The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.*

**Agenda item 6: Consideration and adoption of the programme budget for 2025**

*(continued)* (A/AC.96/75/5; A/AC.96/75/6)

1. **The Chair** said she recalled that, in the previous meeting (A/AC.96/SR.772), a delegation had requested a vote on the adoption of the draft general decision on administrative, financial and programme matters, approving the programme budget for 2025. In accordance with rules 26 and 27 of the rules of procedure of the Executive Committee, she would invite member States of the Committee to vote, by a show of hands, on the adoption of the draft general decision.

2. *The draft general decision was adopted by 87 votes to none, with 3 abstentions.*

3. **The Chair**, noting that the general decision had been adopted without objection, invited delegations to make any statements in explanation of vote.

4. **Mr. Bladehane** (Algeria) said it was regrettable that the delegation of Morocco had resorted to using fallacious, unfounded arguments not only to block the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) but also to make accusations against Algeria, whose only fault was to support international law and host refugees fleeing death and persecution. The Algerian delegation rejected in no uncertain terms the attempt by Morocco to blackmail UNHCR and other humanitarian entities, including the World Food Programme. None of the accusations that had been made by the delegation of Morocco had related to the programme budget. Such a defiant and obstructionist attitude towards the work of UNHCR imperilled all of the Office's efforts in the service of the world's 123 million refugees and displaced persons, most of whom were in Africa.

5. In reaffirming his delegation's support of and confidence in UNHCR, he wished to recall that all Executive Committee documents were, and would continue to be, drafted in accordance with international law. His delegation had backed the adoption by consensus of the general decision, in line with previous practice, and had voted in favour of the adoption of the programme budget, which was aimed at alleviating the suffering of millions of refugees and displaced persons. His delegation urged all concerned to respect the agreed language used by the United Nations and would reject any amendment based on politicization or aimed at holding UNHCR and its purely humanitarian activities hostage.

6. **Mr. Kadmiri** (Morocco), explaining that his delegation had chosen to abstain during voting, said he would like to make it clear that no attempt had been made to politicize the work of UNHCR. His delegation had sought to defend the basic humanitarian principles of UNHCR and the vital interests of Morocco, which would never be left to hang in the balance. The commitment of the Government of Morocco to asylum policy and refugee protection was globally recognized. His delegation would use all legal avenues to denounce any action that was incompatible with the basic principles, including those of impartiality and neutrality, underpinning the Office's humanitarian mandate. It would use all legitimate means to have its voice heard and its legally justified demands heeded. It called upon UNHCR to assume full responsibility for the situation and to take all remedial measures. His delegation's position was steadfast; it had exhausted every possible means of calling attention to the unprecedented situation in relation to the camps in Tindouf, which was putting lives in danger.

7. **Ms. Namono** (Uganda) said that she wished to commend those member States who had voted in favour of the programme budget, which had been adopted, albeit not through the preferred process. As the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees had said at the outset of the current session, multilateralism was a powerful force: it gave States the chance to discuss, air differing views and, ultimately, speak collectively on the most important issues. Even when States disagreed, it was critical not to lose sight of the humanitarian lens when considering UNHCR activities. Calling for a vote on such an important issue as the programme budget was akin to calling into question the protection of people – including children and pregnant women – who had no voice, whose lives depended on the Office's protection work; that was surely not the message that the Executive Committee wished to send to those people.

8. Her delegation would always give priority to the work of UNHCR; from time to time, it might decry the low levels of funding in certain areas, but it never doubted the critical nature of that work. Her delegation hoped that, through multilateralism, the Committee would once again coalesce behind the programme budget, leave aside issues that were not humanitarian in nature and return to its practice of approving the budget by consensus.

9. **Mr. Nkosi** (South Africa) said that he wished to commend the 87 member States who had voted in favour of adopting the programme budget and demonstrated solidarity with the millions of people who looked to UNHCR for protection. His delegation was extremely concerned about efforts to politicize the Office's budget, which was tantamount to compromising the integrity of an organization upon which millions of people depended for their survival. That was particularly the case in Africa, where UNHCR operations were critical to bringing relief not only to the more than 50 million persons of concern but also to the communities that hosted and integrated them, most of which were in low- and middle-income countries. The Executive Committee had spent the previous four days listening to statements highlighting the vast needs and underfunding of operations in Africa.

10. His delegation regretted the breaking of consensus and the call for a vote on such an important issue as the budget, jeopardizing the financial support needed by UNHCR. The vote had purportedly been requested on the basis that the Office had endeavoured to secure additional funding for unexpected situations, when it was actually for empowering communities and achieving gender equality – a traditional line item – among the Saharawi and amounted to a very small proportion of the Office's \$10 billion budget. Women and girls faced major multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and were disproportionately affected by major displacement. In such contexts, advancing on women's empowerment and gender equality was a priority, not an option. States should support UNHCR, not endeavour to obstruct its work or show indifference to human suffering. The votes in support of the budget had been votes in solidarity with persons of concern to UNHCR.

11. **The Chair** said she hoped that the adoption by vote of the programme budget would be an exception to the Executive Committee's usual procedure of adoption by consensus.

**Agenda item 13: Adoption of the report of the seventy-fifth session of the Executive Committee (A/79/12/Add.1)**

12. **The Chair** said that members would now consider the draft report of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on its seventy-fifth session (A/79/12/Add.1), which reflected the decisions adopted during the plenary meetings and had been made available to delegations.

13. **Ms. Namono** (Rapporteur) said that chapters I and II of the draft report provided an overview of the session. Chapter III contained the conclusion on durable solutions and complementary pathways. She wished to thank member States for their efforts to allow the conclusion to be adopted by consensus. States had demonstrated a commitment to multilateralism and a common desire to do what was best for refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR, as well as host countries and their communities, notwithstanding a diversity of views and national priorities. During the session, decisions had been adopted on the programme budget for 2025; the programme of work of the Standing Committee for 2025; observer participation; the provisional agenda for the seventy-sixth plenary session of the Executive Committee; the participation of intergovernmental organizations in private meetings of the Executive Committee; and the simultaneous distribution of documents of the Executive Committee. Once adopted, the report would be submitted to the Third Committee of the General Assembly for consideration, as an addendum to the High Commissioner's annual report (A/79/12).

14. **The Chair** said that she wished to suggest including in the text wording to the effect that the general decision on the programme budget had been approved without objection after a vote. She took it that the Executive Committee wished to proceed to adopt the draft report.

15. *The draft report of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on its seventy-fifth session was adopted.*

16. **Ms. Csizmadia** (Hungary) said, with regard to the conclusion on durable solutions and complementary pathways, that her delegation had not engaged in the negotiations on the conclusion owing to a number of red lines for Hungary in the zero draft. It had taken that decision in a spirit of constructive cooperation and a desire to support the Office's important work. The Government of Hungary acknowledged and appreciated the contribution of host States in receiving and providing international protection to refugees, including those in protracted situations, with limited resources. It played its part in easing that burden, in accordance with its national capacities, and in hosting and supporting refugees, most notably those fleeing the war in Ukraine. The conclusion, however, contained too many calls for States to act, without taking account of their national priorities, capacities and competencies or their right to decide how to support host countries, be it through addressing root causes or offering voluntary resettlement and complementary pathways for admission of refugees. Furthermore, the Government of Hungary had not adopted the Global Compact on Refugees, did not participate in its implementation and thus could not support references to it in official documents, including the conclusion. Her delegation had joined the consensus on adopting the conclusion, but dissociated itself from the paragraph in which the Compact was referenced. It would be grateful to have its comments reflected in the official record of the session.

#### **Agenda item 14: Closing of the session**

17. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the state of the world was too grim to allow political disagreements to create division on issues on which there had formerly been consensus. UNHCR was prepared to continue engaging constructively with the delegation of Morocco and any other delegation to resolve substantive disagreements.

18. The Global Alliance to End Statelessness, which all States and other relevant stakeholders were encouraged to join, had added 12 new members over the course of the week. Collective efforts to eradicate statelessness were yet another testament to the power of multilateralism and to what was possible when work was done together. Statelessness not only deprived people of their fundamental rights but was also a significant social and economic problem and, like the individual States, UNHCR would continue supporting efforts to eradicate it. The effectiveness of action coordinated at the regional level by organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States had also been highlighted during the session.

19. An effective response to mixed flows of refugees and migrants could be mounted only by looking at displacement routes as a whole. Looking at such flows through the prism of border controls alone was bound to be ineffective. UNHCR was ready to support States' efforts to manage the difficult balancing act of securing their borders while also implementing asylum policies and building the relevant capacity.

20. The emphasis on sustainability in the Office's work had prompted considerable discussion. Sustainable support was provided to refugees, displaced persons and host countries and communities until durable solutions were found. He welcomed the questions that had been asked about that issue, as they encouraged UNHCR to define more clearly what it meant by sustainability.

21. The broad support for measures to help refugees and displaced persons become more self-reliant was encouraging. In many places, refugees and displaced persons had been given access to the labour market in recognition of their ability to contribute to the communities in which they had sought safe haven. The delegations of Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and Zambia, had made compelling statements outlining their commitment to inclusion, as had the delegations of a number of States in Latin America. Without sustained support, however, those States might crack under the strain of the ongoing wave of displacement, and the sustainable aid model that UNHCR sought to achieve would not work.

22. Humanitarian aid must be provided without creating dependence and other obstacles to development. Development organizations must follow the example of humanitarian actors and learn how to mobilize resources faster, especially in times of crisis. Partnerships between host countries and humanitarian and development actors would also have to be made more

robust. UNHCR would continue to act as a catalyst for development funding, including from international financial organizations such as the World Bank. It would also continue advising on matters such as the roll-out of policies designed to help win the support of development and private sector actors. As to the financial aspects of sustainable refugee aid, it should be remembered that UNHCR was first and foremost a humanitarian organization focused on protection and solutions.

23. Even as the session had proceeded, air strikes had continued to prompt the flight of thousands of people from their homes in Lebanon. The people camping in the streets of Beirut or taking shelter with impoverished families in Damascus would need help. In that regard, he looked forward to the conference being organized by the Government of France with a view to mobilizing resources for that humanitarian crisis. Above all, he called for ceasefires in Lebanon and Gaza.

24. War must never be considered normal: not in Myanmar, which was as unstable as it had been in decades, in the Sahel, which was experiencing an increasingly acute displacement crisis that was threatening the coastal States, or in the Sudan, where horrifying war-related abuses continued to drive displacement. Becoming accustomed or resigned to such crises, in particular when they were protracted and multifaceted, as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, had to be avoided. Complex crises had been overshadowed by newer, bigger crises elsewhere, but those affected would not be abandoned; they could count on the support of UNHCR.

25. UNHCR would also work with the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Solutions to Internal Displacement and play a role in efforts to ensure that the United Nations provided support for resolving internal displacement crises. Activities to prevent displacement were also a component of field operations. In Honduras, for example, work had been done to increase the resilience of communities and enable community members to stay put.

26. Efforts to prevent displacement were not unlike efforts to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change, which the Executive Committee had heard about in strong statements from the representative of Bangladesh and other speakers. Those messages would be passed along at the 2024 Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to be held in the coming month.

27. The importance of resettlement and other complementary pathways, touched on in many statements, should be underscored. Durable solutions were also important. The momentum generated at the latest Global Refugee Forum should be sustained, and, as the representative of Uganda had noted, the Forum's success would be measured by the number of the many pledges made at the Forum that were honoured.

28. He was grateful to the donors for their trust. Although UNHCR now had a budget for 2025, more funds were needed, particularly flexible funds, which made it possible to respond to the needs of all forcibly displaced and stateless persons, without distinction. It had, as the representative of the Global Staff Council had noted, been painful to have to reduce staffing levels. He was grateful for the support shown by the States members of the Executive Committee and, like many others who had spoken, hoped that they would in the future return to the tradition of taking decisions by consensus.

29. **The Chair**, thanking all those whose work had made the session possible, said that, in her time as Chair, she had learned that the less formal purpose of the Executive Committee had been to build community; that had been achieved. The members of the community might have diverging points of view, but there was a unity of purpose: to protect and support refugees and host communities.

30. As Chair, she had endeavoured to ensure that UNHCR cooperated more closely with the International Organization for Migration and other United Nations and humanitarian organizations. She had also highlighted the needs and potential of displaced women and girls. Another issue that should continue to be raised was climate change and its implications for displaced persons and refugees. For the future, the first challenge was to provide what the High Commissioner had termed sustainable refugee aid. Other future challenges included

ensuring that responses to mixed migration movements involved effective cooperation and making the transformative changes that had been announced at the Global Refugee Forum.

31. After an exchange of courtesies, she declared closed the seventy-fifth session of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

*The meeting rose at 4.30 p.m.*