



General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/AC.96/SR.613
14 April 2009

ENGLISH
Original: FRENCH

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Fifty-eighth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 613th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 3 October 2007, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. MTESA (Zambia)

CONTENTS

GENERAL DEBATE (*continued*)

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Editing Unit, room E.4108, Palais des Nations, Geneva.

Any corrections to the records will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

GE.07-02204 (E) NY.07-62756

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

1. Mr. THIRD (New Zealand) echoed the High Commissioner's concerns regarding recent increases in refugee numbers. The massive influx of Iraqi refugees was placing huge pressures on the infrastructures of the receiving countries. New Zealand had therefore made a contribution of one million New Zealand dollars to support the work of UNHCR to help those countries and was resettling some Iraqi refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic. It urged all countries to find ways to support the work of UNHCR with the Iraqis who were being generously hosted in the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan.
2. New Zealand strongly supported the UNHCR structural reform process and commended the High Commission for the progress made to date. While the budget situation had improved for 2007, it was also true that, according to internationally agreed standards of measurement, the needs of refugees and people of concern were not being met. However, New Zealand was pleased to see the progress being made towards durable solutions in some of the most protracted situations, such as the resettlement of the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal and the willingness of asylum States such as Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan to facilitate local integration. There had been a noticeable improvement in the ability of UNHCR to refer refugees for resettlement and, with resources redirected to field activities, that capacity had been increased to the point where referrals had been made equal to the number of available places for resettlement. New Zealand acknowledged the resettlement efforts of Brazil, Chile and Italy, which were an encouraging sign that resettlement was being considered as a durable solution by more countries.
3. Mr. TIIDO (Estonia), noting that his country was making a statement in the Executive Committee for the first time since becoming a member in April 2007, thanked the Chairman, the High Commissioner and the delegations which had welcomed Estonia. In recent years, the United Nations humanitarian system had undergone important reforms, of which Estonia had been a strong supporter. For example, it had actively supported the strengthening of the Central Emergency Response Fund, which had contributed considerably to UNHCR operations in forgotten emergencies. Poverty, armed conflicts and natural disasters were creating increasing numbers of internally displaced persons, and the High Commissioner was to be commended for the high priority that he had given to those persons. Certain concerns had been expressed about the importance acquired by activities for internally displaced persons compared with the refugee programmes that were the core activity of UNHCR. At the beginning of 2007, UNHCR had committed itself to reviewing its programmes for internally displaced persons. The real-time evaluation conducted by UNHCR in countries where the cluster approach had been introduced had been useful. His delegation noted the conclusion that the cluster approach should for the time being remain a humanitarian mechanism initiated through field-driven decisions.
4. His delegation had noted with interest the UNHCR activities to prevent and reduce statelessness. Estonia was actively seeking solutions to the situation of persons with undetermined citizenship who had remained in its territory after the restoration of the country's independence in 1991. The Government's naturalization policy had produced

positive results. The number of persons who had been naturalized was currently greater than the number of those who had not, and the number of persons with undetermined citizenship had decreased threefold over the past 12 years.

5. Regarding the structural and management reform of UNHCR, his delegation supported the process aimed at channelling more resources into operations, reducing administration and headquarters expenditure and locating services where they were most effective. It also welcomed the ongoing informal consultations that were making the process transparent. It was generally supportive of the new budget proposal but noted that the view had been expressed that more consultations were needed to clarify all the outstanding issues. Estonia continued to contribute financially to UNHCR operations. In 2007, it would increase its core contribution to the UNHCR budget for the third successive year and would continue to respond to the appeals.

6. Mr. ARIAS PALACIO (Venezuela) said that the best way to help refugees was to avert situations that caused human displacements for political reasons. In that connection, on behalf of his Government, he thanked the countries and the various international agencies that had mobilized to support peace in Colombia. Almost 90 per cent of asylum applications in the Americas currently came from Colombia; to promote peace in Colombia was to contribute to the well-being of the region and alleviate the heavy burden placed on host countries and on UNHCR.

7. The Venezuelan State guaranteed asylum seekers and refugees their rights. As a country that promoted and championed human rights, it had developed the protection of refugees by accepting them in all spheres of society without exception. There were no special programmes for refugees in Venezuela, but the programmes implemented by the State to help the disadvantaged, in order to guarantee their basic rights to education, health, employment and food, were offered on an equal footing to Venezuelan nationals and to refugees. Venezuela welcomed the process of decentralization and regionalization of UNHCR, designed to place more means at the disposal of the persons for whom it was responsible. It supported budget reform in order to enhance the efficiency and transparency of UNHCR activities and welcomed the dialogue to be held in December on the challenges of protection, focusing on the migration-asylum nexus.

8. Mr. AMIRBAYOV (Azerbaijan) said that, although the increase in the number of refugees for the first time since 2000 to nearly 10 million was hardly encouraging, it was gratifying that a large number of refugees and internally displaced persons had been able to return to their homes as a result of large-scale voluntary repatriations organized mainly in Afghanistan and in some regions in Africa. As the country hosting one of the largest populations of internally displaced persons, Azerbaijan continued to watch with interest the processes linked to UNHCR attempts to address the caseload of internally displaced persons. The proposed new budget structure, with a separate pillar covering internal displacement, would not only allow more transparent and efficient management but would clearly demonstrate the commitment of UNHCR to address the challenge of internal displacement. The fact that operations for displaced persons had previously remained outside the Executive Committee's competence had not been really helpful.

9. Azerbaijan had been glad to learn that 1.9 million internally displaced persons had returned to their homes during 2006. Unfortunately, that positive development had not affected the displaced populations in Azerbaijan, who were preparing for their fifteenth winter in displacement. Azerbaijan supported UNHCR in its determination to redouble efforts to find durable solutions to protracted situations and urged all concerned to act expeditiously so as to end those long-standing situations. It looked forward to continuing its cooperation with UNHCR to find solutions to a broad range of other refugee, asylum and migration challenges. The technical and consultative assistance provided by UNHCR for the capacity-building of the Government of Azerbaijan in strengthening the asylum system for example, was crucial.

10. Ms. FORERO UCROS (Colombia) said that her Government was tackling the issue of displacement and refugees with the strongest determination and had in recent years pursued a resolute policy for the prevention of displacements and the care and resettlement of the persons concerned. Since 2002, the policy of democratic security had made it possible to restore the State presence over much of the territory and, between 2002 and 2006, achieve a 63 per cent reduction in acts of terrorism, which were one of the causes of forced displacements. At the same time, a plan of social and economic recovery had reduced the unemployment rate from 20 to 11 per cent and maintained sustained economic growth of about 6 per cent. There were currently fewer internally displaced persons: the number had decreased from an average of 450,000 persons a year in 2002 to 200,000 in 2006. It was also estimated that over 500,000 displaced persons had returned to their homes and, for the third consecutive year, the number of Colombian migrants returning to the country was higher than the number leaving.

11. In recent years, the Colombian Government had made an unprecedented financial effort to help the displaced population, for which allocations amounting annually to US\$ 400 million had been included in the budget for 2007-2010. Prior to 2002, such allocations had amounted to only \$70 million a year. Access by that population to health care and basic education currently exceeded 80 per cent. Certain challenges remained, such as socio-economic stabilization, and the Colombian Government was therefore implementing several programmes, including programmes for the recovery of municipalities, assistance to the victims of violence and help for families. The support of the international community for the efforts of the Colombian Government was crucial if it was to succeed in its task.

12. Ms. NAHAYO (Burundi) said that 2007 had been marked in her country by the mutual commitment of the Government and of the FNL-Palipehutu movement to implement the global cease-fire agreement concluded in September 2006. In addition to continuing talks with a view to the effective implementation of the provisions of the peace agreement, the Government had pursued its dialogue with the other political forces in the country, civil society and the media with a view to consolidating the democratic culture and strengthening governance and the functioning of the institutions resulting from the 2005 elections. As far as the economy was concerned, several regions had experienced severe flooding after suffering a prolonged drought in 2006. Seven provinces had been declared disaster areas and the Government had been obliged to

appeal for national solidarity and humanitarian assistance to help the 2 million persons affected by those disasters.

13. In that context, the movement to repatriate the Burundian refugees living in the United Republic of Tanzania had slowed down considerably and an average of only 1,000 persons had been repatriated each month between January and June 2007. The Government had nevertheless continued to give high priority to repatriation, return and resettlement. Under the tripartite agreement between Burundi, the United Republic of Tanzania and UNHCR, the two Governments and UNHCR had met in Dar es Salaam from 1 to 4 June 2007 to discuss ways of reactivating and intensifying the repatriation of refugees. The principal measures adopted since that tripartite meeting concerned the transfer to Burundi of secondary education services starting with the school year 2007/08, the introduction of an allowance of 50,000 Burundian francs per person repatriated and the extension from four to six months of the food allowance for returnees. Thanks to those measures, there had been some resumption of the repatriation process since July 2007, with an average of 9,000 persons repatriated each month. The Burundian Government thanked the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania for its understanding and cooperation in dealing with the problem and expressed the hope that donor countries and agencies would give it assistance so that the operation of voluntary repatriation of those refugees could be accelerated and concluded, by financing an allowance for all returning refugees, making a consequential transfer of support resources to Burundian schools and health facilities and supporting the Burundian policy for resettlement of repatriated and displaced persons without land in new purpose-built sites and villages.

14. Since the beginning of 2007, because of the situation in the Kivu region, in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Burundi had been receiving Congolese asylum seekers who were admitted as refugees under the Convention of the African Union. They joined tens of thousands of other refugees living in the urban areas of Burundi or in camps. Since the capacity of the three existing camps had already been exceeded, with over 20,000 refugees, the Government had decided to open another camp in the east of the country, which would be able to accommodate 30,000 refugees. It was to be hoped that the situation would soon be stabilized in DRC and that it would be possible rapidly to create an arrangement for tripartite management of the problem, not only for the Congolese living in Burundi but also for the repatriation of the Burundian refugees living in DRC. For all those reasons, the Government urged UNHCR to play a central role in 2008 in the process of mobilizing the necessary resources to meet the urgent needs of the populations affected. In particular, the populations wanted specific solutions to the problems of resettlement land. The development of new sites and villages for repatriated and displaced persons without land was one of the Government's priorities.

15. Mr. RAJ PAUDYAL (Nepal), referring to the protracted situation of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal lasting for over 15 years, said that the Government's efforts to resolve that humanitarian crisis through bilateral negotiations had unfortunately been stymied by the procrastination of the Bhutanese authorities. As host to over 106,000 Bhutanese refugees, Nepal was making every effort to guarantee peace and security in the camps

and to protect the rights of the refugees, particularly those of children, women and other vulnerable groups. However, that problem had imposed an enormous burden on the country's economy. UNHCR had recently completed the task of re-registration of the Bhutanese refugees in the camps in Nepal. The key to resolving the problem lay in the repatriation of those refugees in safety and dignity. For Nepal, voluntary repatriation of the refugees to Bhutan remained the preferred option for the refugees. However, it would not stand in the way of the choice of refugees who wished to opt for third country resettlement.

16. Mr. HOLGUIN FLORES (Ecuador) endorsed the statement made by the delegation of Peru on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean countries (GRULAC). He noted that 97 per cent of the applications for asylum in Ecuador were submitted by Colombians and that Ecuador was the Latin American country that received the most applications. In 2007, the acceptance rate had been 36 per cent, which showed the country's openness to refugees. Acceptance of all those refugees posed a number of social and economic problems, exacerbated by the lack of necessary infrastructures and the fact that Colombia was not giving any economic assistance to its own nationals in Ecuador. In addition, the inadequate policing of the frontier between Colombia and Ecuador had allowed irregular armed groups from Colombia to settle in that area. Their clashes were forcing Colombian nationals to seek refuge in Ecuador and provoking internal displacements of Ecuadorians.

17. Ecuador urged recognition of the responsibility of all States, and not only of that of Ecuador, since it was making huge efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to over 250,000 persons in need of international protection. In view of the principles of shared responsibility and solidarity, it appealed to the international community to give it more support.

18. Ms. KALMETA (Bosnia and Herzegovina) endorsed the statement made by the Portuguese delegation on behalf of the European Union. She noted that her country had achieved significant results as regards the return of refugees and displaced persons. All activities in that area had been undertaken in close cooperation with the UNHCR office in Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly those undertaken to reduce the level of displacement in the country. Despite the results achieved, much still remained to be done. Almost 400,000 persons were temporarily residing abroad and were recorded as refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina. About 80 per cent of them had been integrated into host countries, but 80,000 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina still needed durable solutions, initially through return to their country. There were currently 135,500 internally displaced persons. Although returnees often faced difficult living conditions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it was encouraging that interest in return was still very high. Good results had also been achieved as regards the creation of conditions for sustainable return, repossession of property and reconstruction of housing and infrastructure. However, that process was not yet completed and additional resources were needed. At the regional level, Bosnia and Herzegovina was fully committed to implementing the Sarajevo Declaration on refugee return.

19. Mr. BAKONTON (Togo) recalled that the disturbances during the 2005 presidential election in Togo had caused the displacement of about 20,000 persons internally and of over 40,000 persons in Benin and Ghana. Since that crisis, the efforts made by the international community had resulted in the signature in 2006 of a comprehensive political agreement allowing the creation of a government of national union. Other measures had been adopted, such as the establishment of an office of High Commissioner for Returnees and Humanitarian Action to protect and assist returnees in Togo, the creation of reception committees in the areas most affected by the events and the opening of an office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The voluntary repatriation convoys organized since the signature of the tripartite agreements had permitted the return of 894 persons living in Benin, representing over 80 per cent of the refugees who had left Togo in 2005. The Togolese Government could assure the international community that all the necessary security measures were in place for the legislative elections scheduled for October 2007 in order to avoid a new round of departures from the country.

20. The refugee population in Togo was estimated at 12,864 persons. They enjoyed adequate protection and an assistance programme, and the specific needs of refugee women and children and of other vulnerable categories were taken into account by the Government. However, despite its willingness, Togo did not have the material and financial means to look after the refugees and asylum seekers. The Togolese Government there appealed to UNHCR to redouble its efforts to improve the situation of those persons in Togo.

21. Mr. GUTERRES (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that UNHCR had improved its financial situation by reducing operating costs without jeopardizing its field activities. However, some of its operations were below minimum standards – for example in DRC and in eastern Sudan. UNHCR needed to have more resources and to make better use of them. Estonia, a new member of the Executive Committee, was to be congratulated on its commitment to grant Estonian nationality to all persons residing there as soon as possible. The President of Venezuela was also to be commended on having taken the initiative of arranging a humanitarian exchange of prisoners and thus promoting peace in the region. He noted that there was very good cooperation between Azerbaijan and UNHCR for the provision of assistance to internally displaced persons in that country. He welcomed Azerbaijan's remarkable commitment to improving the living conditions of internally displaced persons without questioning their right to return. It was indeed possible to provide better conditions of assistance to displaced persons, while promoting their right to return.

22. Colombia was currently an example as regards the management of internal displacements. It was the only country where a constitutional court determined the status of internally displaced persons. That had enabled the Government to formulate a plan of action for ending unconstitutional situations, supported by a much larger budget and a civil society that was active in the protection of the rights of displaced persons. The sustainable reintegration of returnees and displaced persons in Burundi was the goal shared by that country and UNHCR. The main prerequisites for success were the consolidation of peace and democracy, as well as the strengthening of international

cooperation so that more effective reintegration measures could be adopted. The quality and improvement of the asylum system in Burundi were also noteworthy.

23. He congratulated Nepal on its programme to reduce the number of stateless persons, under which nationality had been granted speedily to 2.6 million persons. He also thanked the Nepalese Government for accepting the principle of the resettlement of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal and called for enhanced cooperation so that the security forces could guarantee the freedom of choice of refugees in camps. He noted that Ecuador had a very generous and very effective asylum policy. He also stressed the importance of the programme for the regularization of the situation of aliens, particularly Colombians, whether or not they were refugees, who were living in Ecuador.

24. It was encouraging that the delegation of Bosnia and Herzegovina had given a detailed description of the ongoing process of the return of displaced persons or refugees. A number of problems remained in that regard, but the Government was obviously quite determined to find a solution to those difficulties, with the cooperation of UNHCR. Lastly, he offered his best wishes for the success of the consolidation of the democratic process in Togo, which was an essential element for the possible voluntary return of the Togolese in dignity and safety. UNHCR was determined to work with the Togolese, Beninese and Ghanaian Governments to guarantee the return of the refugees and the success of their reintegration, and took note of the comments concerning the need to strengthen the UNHCR programme, particularly in the area of reintegration.

25. Mr. AGHBASH (Sudan) associated his delegation with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of African States and recalled that, with its four decades of experience in hosting refugees, the Sudan was currently required to shoulder the greater share of related responsibilities as a result of the application of the cessation clause. The Sudanese Government therefore requested UNHCR to assist it in hosting the numerous Eritrean refugees who had arrived in the Sudan after the application of that clause and who were living in camps where the food was inadequate. He called on donors to guarantee the regular provision of food to those refugees. Despite the fact that \$1.2 million had been made available immediately after the High Commissioner's visit to those camps, the influx of new refugees from Eritrea and Somalia was preventing any improvement in the situation. In addition, the Sudan wished to stress that the programme of Sustainable Options for Livelihood Security in Eastern Sudan (SOLSES), developed by UNHCR to restore the environment in the regions occupied by refugees, was not functioning properly. The Sudanese Government therefore requested financial assistance for the implementation of that programme.

26. The Sudan had always been mindful of the fate of its nationals who had been forced by the war in southern Sudan and in Darfur to seek refuge in neighbouring countries. Many of them had returned to southern Sudan following the conclusion of the Naivasha Peace Agreement in 2005 and the creation of the Government of National Unity. It therefore requested financial and material assistance from UNHCR and from donor countries for the voluntary return of Sudanese refugees and the rehabilitation of receiving areas. Expressing its condolences on the loss of African Union troops stationed in Darfur, his delegation expressed the hope that the international community would put

pressure on the rebel factions to enable the refugees and displaced persons of Darfur to return to normal life.

27. Mr. LA Yifan (China) emphasized that, despite the considerable increase in the number of refugees and displaced persons since 2000, the percentage of cases covered by UNHCR had decreased by 3 per cent. The reasons for that decrease should be analyzed and solutions found. It was also noteworthy that, according to UNHCR evaluations, the increased protection of displaced persons had not affected its core function of protecting refugees. Praising the redoubled efforts by UNHCR to ensure the international protection of refugees in the context of mixed migratory movements, the Chinese delegation expressed the view that greater efficiency could be achieved in that area by preventing abuses committed by irregular movers or criminals. In addition, noting that the developing countries hosted three quarters of the world's refugees and were experiencing social and economic difficulties as a result, it emphasized that UNHCR, the international community and the developed countries in particular had a duty to help those countries in a spirit of solidarity and burden-sharing. That was what China was doing, and it was prepared to contribute \$250,000 to UNHCR to promote the international protection of refugees in the world.

28. Mr. MONONGA (Malawi) associated his delegation with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of African States and expressed the hope that the ten-point plan developed by UNHCR would be implemented in Malawi, which was hosting over 10,200 refugees and asylum seekers, mostly from the Great Lakes region. In the past year, Malawi had experienced an influx of irregular movers whom it was difficult to distinguish from real asylum seekers. That phenomenon had been aggravated by the lack of a well articulated refugee policy and limitations in the current refugee law. His delegation was therefore pleased that the UNHCR country office in Malawi was willing to assist the country in its efforts to formulate a national refugee policy and to amend the refugee law. However, it believed that the problem of irregular movers warranted regional attention and a regional solution and urged UNHCR to continue its efforts to strengthen its financial donor base in order to carry out its mandated activities, including voluntary repatriation, which was one of the most appropriate solutions to the refugee problem. The refugees in Malawi should be encouraged to return home in order to assist in the development of their own countries, especially when the reasons for their flight no longer obtained. To that end, Malawi remained committed to working with the Governments of countries of origin and UNHCR, within the framework of the Tripartite Commission for Voluntary Repatriation. Lastly, he expressed particular thanks to Australia, Canada and Norway, among other States that had demonstrated their attachment to the principle of burden-sharing by agreeing to resettle some of the refugees who were residing in Malawi.

29. Mr. KOGDA (Burkina Faso) fully endorsed the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of African States. His delegation, which favoured greater rationalization and improved coordination of field operations, supported the reforms of UNHCR. Burkina Faso, which hosted over one thousand refugees and asylum seekers, was reviewing its legislation and regulations to improve and strengthen its protection system. After a two-year interval, the Eligibility Committee had resumed

work, but Burkina Faso was counting on UNHCR support to accelerate the consideration of 500 pending applications for asylum. In addition, work had started on the census of refugees and asylum seekers, in order to create a statistical database on the subject. An ongoing awareness campaign was encouraging people to volunteer for repatriation, which in the current year had been chosen by about 50 Liberian asylum seekers; similarly, a movement was under way for the return of the Burundian and Rwandese refugees. Burkina Faso, which was one of the few African countries chosen for the resettlement of African refugees, had unfortunately been obliged in 2003 to abandon dozens of refugees to their fate; as a result, their reinsertion, supported by substantial assistance and microcredit projects, had been jeopardized. His delegation hoped that UNHCR would resume that resettlement programme and thus give hope to refugees in search of a better life. With regard to integration, an awareness campaign was being conducted to help refugees married to nationals of Burkina Faso to acquire their nationality. Lastly, his delegation appealed to multilateral and bilateral partners to help refugees living in urban areas in the least developed countries.

30. Ms. MAZEIKS (Latvia) fully endorsed the statement made by the representative of Portugal on behalf of the European Union and welcomed the reforms undertaken by UNHCR to shift funds to operations. Referring to the statement by the representative of the Russian Federation to the effect that UNHCR was neglecting its duties with respect to Latvia, where hundreds of thousands of stateless persons were allegedly being humiliated and restricted in their rights, he emphasized the need to draw a clear distinction between stateless persons and non-citizens. The 1995 law on the status of former citizens of the Soviet Union who were not citizens of Latvia or of any other State had granted a transitional legal status to permanently residing non-citizens entitling them to a set of rights and obligations exceeding the rights prescribed by the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons. The exclusion clause in article 1.2.2. (ii) of that Convention was therefore applicable to non-citizens of Latvia, who enjoyed almost the same rights as citizens, with the exception of certain limited civil and political rights, had internationally recognized documents and could at any time apply for Latvian citizenship through a simple, easy and transparent naturalization procedure, as indeed thousands of them did every year. Latvia, where there were less than 200 stateless persons, appreciated the constructive dialogue that it was conducting with UNHCR on that subject. He also noted that the UNHCR report entitled “2006 Global Trends” reflected that distinction. He further stated that the positive experiences of integration of non-citizens in Latvia could be a useful point of reference for the development of models of refugee integration in other regions of the world.

31. Ms. SILVESTRU (Moldova) said that, although it favoured the cluster approach adopted with regard to protection and the reforms introduced by UNHCR, her delegation believed that the countries of eastern and western Europe should not be placed on an equal footing. It agreed with the representative of Poland on the need to proceed with caution in the reform concerning regionalization. Moldova was part of the Black Sea basin, which was the scene of a number of ethnic conflicts creating flows of refugees and irregular movers and giving rise to international crime. The Refugee Department was taking measures to establish national reception arrangements complying with European Union standards: in that connection, new legislation was being drafted in the framework

of the programme of action concluded between Moldova and the European Union. A national action programme designed to consolidate national reception arrangements for immigrants and refugees and accompanied by specific measures to improve the registration system and the assistance to be provided in order to facilitate the integration of refugees and asylum seekers into society had been adopted at the end of 2006 on the initiative of the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees and in collaboration with the Romanian National Refugee Office. In the context of the PHARE programme, Moldova had developed a project to support the creation of a system for dealing with the issue of the refugees in its territory and, with the help of Romanian and German experts, was drafting new legislation. At the regional level, its priorities were transborder cooperation, improvement of border controls to combat clandestine immigration and creation of ties with UNHCR for the execution of projects designed to solve the refugee problem, with emphasis on their integration. At the national level, the priority was to improve reception arrangements for refugees.

32. Mr. NGANTCHA (Cameroon) fully endorsed the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of African States. His delegation was of the view that voluntary or forced human displacements would continue as long as there were development gaps between nations and human rights were flouted. The international community had responded to Cameroon's appeal the previous year concerning the humanitarian and health emergency created by the massive influx of refugees from the Central African Republic into Cameroon, by organizing a large-scale humanitarian, health and nutrition operation which had been launched in August in Adamaoua and Eastern Province. His delegation expressed its gratitude but believed that the UNHCR office in Cameroon should be given more resources in view of the increase in the number of refugees in that country.

33. Mr. NDOUGOU (Central African Republic) endorsed the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of African States. Being aware of the conflicts provoked by political tensions or poverty, the Central African Republic had created the National Commission for Refugees and the Government had proposed legislation to the National Assembly on the status of refugees. His delegation thanked UNHCR, the United Nations agencies and the NGOs which had enabled his Government to arrange the return of some 15,000 of its nationals who had fled to other countries, to repatriate some 17,000 refugees from the Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to register 3,000 refugees from Darfur. The Central African Republic was facing problems created by the presence of about 50 fighters from Darfur who were seeking asylum – for obvious reasons – and by the need to care for persons displaced internally because of rebel activities. However, it was aware that none of those achievements would have been possible without the help of UNHCR, which would be able, by setting up a multidisciplinary thematic group, to support the Government's priorities for dealing with the refugee question.

34. Major challenges still remained, however, including the need to combat poverty, illiteracy and political and religious intolerance, which were often the cause of conflicts that produced refugees in the world in general and in Africa in particular. The Central African Republic therefore sent an SOS to UNHCR, the United Nations agencies and

human rights NGOs to all share the burden and enable it to obtain more material and intellectual help from them in order to ensure the success of sustainable socio-economic development projects. It also invited the humanitarian non-governmental organizations to impress on the rebels the need for peace and dialogue. In that connection, the Head of State had already made important concessions by agreeing to sign peace agreements with the rebels and promoting the dialogue which should enable the political players in the country to reach an understanding on a common path leading to peace, unity, mutual understanding and reconciliation. In conclusion, he expressed the hope that the international partners and NGOs would participate in efforts to combat poverty, HIV/AIDS and related problems in the Central African Republic.

35. Mr. GUTERRES (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), responding to delegations' statements, welcomed the recent decision by the Sudanese Government to accept a number of Palestinian refugees stuck at the borders of Iraq, which should resolve one of the most serious refugee crises existing. He also welcomed the reform of the Sudanese Commission on Refugees (COR), which would permit broader cooperation with UNHCR and better work, particularly as regards operations in the eastern part of the country, where much remained to be done to help the Eritrean refugees. He also strongly encouraged the Sudan to continue the programme of voluntary repatriation to southern Sudan, which had indeed been quite successful but which was currently affected by major flooding. He therefore appealed to the international community for greater cooperation in creating the conditions for effective integration of persons returning to southern Sudan and in developing the region. Lastly, he hoped for the same level of cooperation with the Sudanese Commission for Humanitarian Action as had existed for the protection of the Chadian refugees in Darfur, so that adequate assistance could be provided to internally displaced persons.

36. He agreed with the representative of China that it was crucial, for the sake of credibility, to preserve the integrity of the asylum system and to punish any abuses. Because of its economic growth, China would be attracting all sorts of people (refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, etc.) seeking a better future and would inevitably be called on to play an ever greater role in receiving and protecting refugees. UNHCR intended to continue to work actively with the Chinese Government to help it to acquire refugee legislation and to establish a system of effective cooperation allowing a distinction to be made between those different categories of persons and protection to be given to those who really needed it. He emphasized that the situation of Malawi as a transit country was particularly interesting, since it was a perfect illustration of the necessity and the difficulty of distinguishing between the various categories of migrants so as to protect only those in need. Southern Africa was the scene of large population movements, for numerous reasons. UNHCR, which appreciated the generosity always displayed by Malawi in accepting refugees from various African countries, was fully prepared to cooperate with the Malawian Government in the formulation of refugee policies and the improvement of the existing legislation. Lastly, he emphasized the success of the voluntary repatriation programme, which had enabled hundreds of thousands of Mozambican refugees who had fled to Malawi to return to their country when the war had ended.

37. He informed the representative of Burkina Faso that UNHCR greatly appreciated how seriously that country was taking its responsibilities as a host and asylum country. The figures were not very telling, but Burkina Faso had the merit of acquiring a framework in which effective protection could be guaranteed to all those seeking asylum. He noted the concern expressed about the possible resumption of the African refugee resettlement programme in Burkina Faso and promised that the problem would be the subject of concerted study in the very near future. He thanked the Latvian representative for raising an issue deserving of study: the right to a nationality and the requirements for granting it, particularly when naturalization criteria were not met. It was true that the persons whom Latvia considered as “non-citizens” nevertheless enjoyed many more rights than were specified in the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons or than were granted to stateless persons in the world in general. An objective debate on the issue was thus needed, focusing exclusively on the interests of the persons concerned. UNHCR very much wanted to continue to cooperate with the Latvian Government but had no intention of becoming involved in political discussions on that subject.

38. He commended the efforts made by Moldova, which was situated in a transit region where many complex population flows intersected, to set up an asylum system, improve its institutions and develop international cooperation. He expressed admiration for the spirit of openness always shown by Cameroon towards refugees arriving from neighbouring countries. At the same time, he regretted that the humanitarian crisis affecting the Central African Republic was not receiving more attention from the international community. He took note of the SOS from the representative of the Central African Republic and assured him that UNHCR would continue to participate in refugee repatriation programmes to southern Sudan and other neighbouring countries, that it would make additional efforts to ensure the protection of internally displaced persons and that, in cooperation with the Governments of Cameroon and Chad, it would ensure that better protection was guaranteed to refugees from the Central African Republic who had fled their country. In view of the difficulties facing the country, he thanked the Central African Republic for continuing to accept refugees and hoped that the peace agreements would be concluded as soon as possible. Without them, it would indeed always be difficult to meet the needs of the population.

39. Mr. PAIVA (International Organization for Migration) said that in its daily work IOM was trying to meet the global challenge of managing migration while ensuring international protection for refugees, but that the traditional responses to the tension created by demographic movements were currently being questioned. The world was changing, and so was the interaction between UNHCR and IOM. Most of the collaborative projects between the two institutions currently concerned third country resettlement and voluntary repatriation, not forgetting assistance to internally displaced persons, aid to the victims of trafficking who feared for their lives, developing government capacity to deal with mixed population flows and care of persons displaced as a result of natural disasters. Those were areas that had not been foreseen in 1951, when the two institutions had been created.

40. In order to meet their common challenges, IOM and UNHCR met regularly, particularly in the framework of their annual consultation. For example, IOM had been heavily involved in the elaboration of the cluster approach. At the request of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, IOM had for example assumed the role of cluster lead for the coordination and management of camps for persons displaced by natural disasters. UNHCR had the corresponding lead role in situations of conflict-induced displacement. In order to avoid overlap, a joint virtual secretariat had been established. Recognizing the complexity of modern migratory flows, IOM was seeking new ways of best performing the tasks entrusted to it by the international community and of responding to its expectations. In that connection, it intended to apply the UNHCR ten-point plan and looked forward to participating in the discussion on the question of asylum and migration – a particularly sensitive subject in which all governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental institutions had a role to play.

41. Mr. BELGASMI (World Food Programme) said that it was generally known that WFP and UNHCR formed an exceptional and long-standing partnership and that their cooperation had constantly grown stronger, both as regards questions of operational coordination (cluster approach), resource mobilization, information sharing and campaigns in favour of refugees and in the field. In 2007, WFP had assisted 1.7 million refugees, 5 million displaced persons and 1.3 million “returnees” (repatriated refugees and internally displaced persons returning to their place of origin). In view of the situation existing in the world, many current joint WFP/UNHCR operations would be continued in 2008, particularly in Algeria, Chad, the Sudan, Kenya, Nepal, Ethiopia, the United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. WFP also supported, through food aid operations, UNHCR programmes assisting vulnerable Iraqi refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic and internally displaced persons in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sri Lanka.

42. Unfortunately, the lack or late arrival of funds had on several occasions and for several of those joint operations disrupted the delivery of supplies, causing either an interruption of food distribution or a reduction of the ration distributed. In both cases, the repercussions on the well-being of the refugees and the safety of the humanitarian workers were quickly felt. WFP enthusiastically welcomed the High Commissioner’s decision to make nutrition, particularly child nutrition, one of his priorities. The initial results were promising, but efforts would have to continue over the long term if definite and sustainable results were to be achieved. Concerned about the refugees’ nutritional status and determined to eradicate hunger among the children, WFP and UNHCR agreed on the need to improve the distribution of micronutrients, particularly in the form of “sprinkles”. To that end, a joint mission had been organized in camps in northern Kenya in July and a similar mission was planned in Nepal, for Bhutanese refugee children under five years of age.

43. Ms. ZEIDAN (International Committee of the Red Cross) recalled that ICRC and UNHCR had a long history of cooperation, based on their common aspiration to help millions of people in need of protection and assistance. The two institutions were also working for the promotion, respect and development of international law relating to human rights, refugee law and international humanitarian law, which expressly prohibited

the arbitrary displacement of civilians by parties to an armed conflict. As the custodian of international humanitarian law, ICRC believed that the best way to promote the safety of humanitarian action was to increase compliance with the rules on the subject.

44. It was in that framework that ICRC intended to pursue its independent and neutral humanitarian action in order to have continued access, without distinction, to the victims of armed conflicts all over the world. Internally displaced persons were often torn from their homes for the same reasons as refugees. However, since they remained inside the borders of their own countries and under the jurisdiction of their Governments, they were excluded from the international protection and assistance extended to refugees. Similarly, many victims – children, the elderly, disabled persons or the wounded – were unable even to leave the conflict zones. They should, however, not be forgotten.

45. Mr. GUTERRES (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), responding to the most recent statements, stressed the complementary nature of UNHCR and IOM action and the strengthening of their collaboration. The two institutions, which worked hand in hand in many areas (Working Group on International Migration, resettlement and repatriation operations and protection of internally displaced persons) were increasingly aware of their respective roles and knew how much their synergy benefited the cause of refugees and their own capacity for action. The partnership between UNHCR and WFP was far the most important and the most gratifying. As evidence of that exceptional collaboration, the flags of those two sister institutions were regularly flown side by side even in the most remote areas. He thanked WFP for always giving priority to the needs of refugees and displaced persons, even when resources were scarce. He highly appreciated the collaboration between UNHCR and ICRC, which he sometimes envied for being able to act where UNHCR could not. The concerted action of the three pillars – UNHCR, ICRC and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights – was crucial for the defence of human rights.

46. Ms. TSHERING (Bhutan), speaking in exercise of the right of reply to the statement by the representative of Nepal, said that her Government was deeply concerned about the humanitarian crisis in the camps in eastern Nepal resulting from illegal immigration. She recalled that those camps had been opened by the Nepalese Government, with UNHCR assistance, in 1991, when there had been only 304 refugees claiming to be Bhutanese. Screening procedures had not been put in place until 1993, by which time the camp population had already reached its current proportions. Despite the written agreement between the Bhutanese and Nepalese authorities, acknowledging that there were different categories of people in the camps, all the occupants continued to be indiscriminately labelled as originating from Bhutan. Contrary to rumour, the Bhutanese Government was making continuous efforts to resolve the crisis. It had embarked on a bilateral negotiating process with the Nepalese Government, which had been very close to succeeding when violent attacks had been committed on the Bhutanese in December 2003. The situation had then deteriorated in Nepal, where successive changes of government had only delayed the process. Despite that, Bhutan remained firmly committed to finding a favourable outcome to the crisis and applying the agreements concluded with the Nepalese Government through long and arduous negotiations.

47. Mr. RAJ PAUDYAL (Nepal), replying to the representative of Bhutan, said that the presence of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal was caused by Bhutan's discriminatory policies towards its own citizens. The people concerned had been expelled from Bhutan. The remarks made were therefore totally unfounded and demonstrated Bhutan's desire to distort the facts. Bhutan was trying to evade its responsibilities towards its own nationals. The problem of the Bhutanese refugees was a problem between the refugees and the Bhutanese Government. Nepal had accepted those refugees on humanitarian grounds; they should be allowed to return to their country with dignity and honour. The deadlock in the crisis was basically due to the procrastination of the Bhutanese Government in applying the agreements or entering into negotiations to try to find another acceptable solution. The fact that games were being played with the refugees was merely proof of Bhutan's failure to cooperate and its lack of sincerity.

48. Ms. TSHERING (Bhutan) said that she rejected the inflammatory rhetoric of the representative of Nepal.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.
