

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

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**Standing Committee**

**Eighty-third meeting**

**8-10 March 2022**

Held at the International Conference Centre Geneva (CICG), Geneva

**Summary record\*, Tuesday, 8 March 22, at 10 a.m. (hybrid)**

*Chairperson: Mr. Baddoura..... (Lebanon)*

**Contents**

Opening of the meeting and adoption of the agenda and the Standing Committee work programme for 2022

Regional activities and global programmes

- a. Regional updates
- i. Asia and the Pacific
- ii. Middle East and North Africa

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.00 a.m.*

**Opening of the meeting and adoption of the agenda (EC/73/SC/CRP.1) and the Standing Committee work programme for 2022 (EC/73/SC/CRP.2)**

1. **The Chairperson** declared open the eighty-third meeting of the Standing Committee and said that the Central African Republic, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, the Gambia, Liberia, the Niger and Sierra Leone had made official requests to participate in the present meeting as observers. He suggested that those States should be invited to take part in the meeting as observers. It was so agreed. The agenda for the meeting and the 2022 work programme were adopted as presented.

2. **Ms. Clements** (Deputy High Commissioner, UNHCR) said that the recent events in Ukraine were a stark reminder of the collective failure to maintain international peace and security, despite the determination expressed in the Charter of the United Nations to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. Observing that the number of displaced persons in Ukraine was approaching 2 million, she echoed the call by the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the High Commissioner to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, and provide humanitarian access for those delivering aid. The High Commissioner had visited Poland, the Republic of Moldova and Romania to support the response and oversee the activities of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); although the response had been efficient and well-managed thus far, it would need to be adapted as the crisis evolved. Similarly dramatic consequences of conflict were faced by millions more people worldwide, and UNHCR remained committed to responding to displacement everywhere.

3. In order to achieve the exceptional flexibility required to deal with global instability, UNHCR was continuing to make organizational improvements through the business transformation programme, notably by empowering teams on the ground, reducing bureaucracy and ensuring the efficient use of resources. The programme followed the earlier decentralization and regionalization phase and was intended to guarantee coherence between all aspects of management. The associated planning and management approach, COMPASS, had already enabled 24 operations to implement multi-year strategies and was due to be rolled out to a further 55 operations in 2022. By 2024, multi-year strategies would be universal within UNHCR, enabling longer-term planning and improving alignment with development partners; the recently issued UNHCR Strategic Directions 2022–2026 provided guidance in that respect. The new digital human resources platform, Workday, was also due to be launched in 2022, with the aim of facilitating mobile working and improving understanding of the workforce, which in turn would support efforts to achieve greater diversity and inclusion.

4. The business transformation programme would also contribute to ongoing United Nations system-wide efforts to drive business innovation. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had accelerated the shift towards new ways of working, enabling agencies to collaborate on shared services and integrate business processes to deliver more efficient administrative support to operations. To that end, further progress had been made in establishing a common fleet with the World Food Programme to provide a cost-effective vehicle leasing service. The UNHCR travel policy had also been revised to simplify the administrative processes and reduce the Organization's carbon footprint, while its newly issued policies on managing occupational health and safety, and COVID-19 vaccination aimed to comply with its duty of care towards its workforce.

5. Turning to the issue of financial regulations, she highlighted the difficulty of applying the poorly adapted and outdated United Nations Financial Regulations and Rules to a voluntarily funded agency such as UNHCR, which would significantly benefit from having its own regulations. Although system-wide solutions often made sense at the operational level, variations in financial regulations did not impede agencies' capacity to deliver as one system; the Office took a different view to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions in that respect. In addition, UNHCR was the only entity outside the United Nations Secretariat with a budget of over \$100 million that still operated under the United Nations Financial Regulations. It was an ideal time to review the financial regulations as part of the ongoing transformation; she therefore called for support from representatives when the matter was considered by the United Nations General Assembly.

6. UNHCR's change process continued to be accompanied by cultural change, with a shift to a less strict hierarchy, greater empowerment and more trust. There had been a push to reinforce integrity across the Organization, with the goal of maintaining strong formal systems to deal with misconduct; the High Commissioner's annual report on disciplinary matters was key to such efforts, providing both general information and a way for managers to discuss issues with their teams and ensure that systems were suitable. The aim was also to bolster the informal side of the justice system, with further investment in workplaces built on trust, transparency and integrity. Dealing with problems earlier and more effectively would improve dynamics across UNHCR and free up capacity in the formal system. All of those efforts were based on a reinforced partnership between specialized Headquarters entities and managers at all levels of the Organization, and included initiatives to strengthen management skills.

7. Substantial progress had been made in combating racism and racial discrimination as part of the continued development of an inclusive, diverse and respectful Organization. Based on the independent review of workplace race equality and equity commissioned in 2021, UNHCR had established a multi-year action plan with a view to becoming a more inclusive Organization; those efforts would build on existing progress towards achieving gender parity and gender and disability inclusion.

8. On budgetary matters, UNHCR had maintained a consistently high income in 2021, although it had marginally fewer resources available in comparison with 2020, despite growing need and renewed emergencies such as those in Ethiopia and Afghanistan. Implementation remained strong, having benefited from the key role of regional bureaux in identifying needs and optimizing resource allocation, and improvements to make contributions available more rapidly. An unprecedented \$617 million had been raised from the private sector, nearly half of which had been unearmarked; such unearmarked provision was critical to the Organization's capacity to respond to unforeseen crises.

9. A regional refugee response plan for Ukraine had been launched the previous week to complement the humanitarian flash appeal launched by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; \$1.7 billion was required to meet the short-term needs of the 16 million people affected by the military offensive. That appeal brought the 2022 budget to \$9.8 billion, although the figure was likely to rise again before the end of the year. The international community needed to show similar solidarity to people displaced by other crises; she therefore called for contributions at the upcoming pledging conferences for Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Yemen, and to the Ethiopia appeal. Forcibly displaced and stateless populations worldwide were counting on UNHCR, which in turn relied on its donors.

**10. Mr. Mazou** (Assistant High Commissioner for Operations, UNHCR) said that more than 1.9 million people had fled Ukraine in recent days, with many more affected by the conflict but unable to leave the country. Although great solidarity had been shown towards those refugees by neighbouring communities and governments, some non-Ukrainian residents had been held up as they tried to return home. Governments had reaffirmed their commitment to receiving refugees without discrimination, while UNHCR was working closely with the International Organization for Migration and non-governmental organizations to respond to distress calls and provide the necessary assistance.

11. In the third year of the COVID-19 pandemic, its consequences continued to have a disproportionate impact on forcibly displaced persons. Global efforts to include them in the health response of host governments, supported by the Office, had seen mixed results. In 2021, 162 countries had included refugees in their national vaccine plans, while, to date, 8.36 million vaccine doses had been distributed to around 4.79 million refugees and other forcibly displaced persons in 66 countries. An additional 72 countries had confirmed that they had started vaccinating refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR. However, fewer than 5 per cent of adults in low-income countries were vaccinated, compared to around 58 per cent in advanced economies. The Office would therefore continue efforts to ensure access to vaccines, which remained the most effective response to the pandemic.

12. The pandemic had also had a severe socioeconomic impact on internally displaced persons and refugees, particularly those living in urban settings and working in the informal sector. While in some countries citizens had received social assistance to combat the effect of lockdowns on their

ability to earn money, that had rarely been the case for refugees, meaning they could be left behind as economies slowly recovered. It was therefore crucial to ensure that displaced populations had the right to work in the formal sector and were able contribute to national social security systems, as that would promote self-reliance.

13. Over the past two years, UNHCR had significantly strengthened its collaboration with development actors, which was a key component of the Global Compact on Refugees. Specifically, that work included engagement with partners such as the World Bank, the European Commission's Directorate-General for International Partnerships, regional financial institutions and national governments on a bilateral basis. The Office was also involved in joint initiatives with other United Nations entities, such as the Blueprint for Joint Action for Refugee Children with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and work with the World Food Programme to address shortfalls in humanitarian food assistance by investing in food production in refugee contexts. It was especially important to expand opportunities for refugee livelihoods, self-reliance and inclusion, including through private sector partnerships; to that end, a collaboration with the International Finance Corporation would be launched later in the year to develop an integrated approach to private sector solutions for forced displacement.

14. As the number of emergency declarations issued continued to grow, it was essential for UNHCR to maintain a strong emergency response capacity and effective staff safety management systems, which it achieved with the support of non-governmental partners. Given the particularly high risk of gender-based violence in emergency contexts, prevention and risk mitigation were a priority in the UNHCR response.

15. Climate change was a defining issue of the time; frequently linked to conflict, it had a devastating impact on forcibly displaced persons and host communities. Furthermore, humanitarian operations themselves had a negative impact on the environment due to the purchase, delivery, use and disposal of core relief items. UNHCR had therefore launched the Operational Strategy for Climate Resilience and Environmental Sustainability 2022–2025, which was focused on preparedness, response and supply, and remained committed to achieving the Clean Energy Challenge. It would also continue working with partners on initiatives to simultaneously address issues related to climate, the environment and food insecurity.

16. Implementation of the Policy on UNHCR's Engagement in Situations of Internal Displacement was ongoing, and a progress report and independent evaluation of the Policy were due later in the year. As a member of the steering group for the Secretary-General's proposed action agenda on internal displacement, which would follow up on the work of the High-level Panel on Internal Displacement, the Office remained committed to working with affected States to find lasting solutions for internally displaced persons.

## **Regional activities and global programmes**

### **a. Regional updates**

#### **i. Asia and the Pacific**

17. **Mr. Ratwatte** (Director of the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, UNHCR), speaking via video link, said that seven months on from the fall of the former Government in Afghanistan, the economy and social services in the country were on the brink of collapse. In that time, UNHCR had assisted over 1 million people with its partners, including in neighbouring countries; had deployed an additional 264 members of staff in the region; had launched the Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan; and had stepped up its work with development partners to explore how collaboration could be harnessed to support UNHCR's longstanding efforts to build resilient communities. Human rights violations – particularly against women and girls – could drive more Afghans to other countries in search of safety. The generosity of the Governments of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan in hosting Afghan refugees should not be taken for granted; the Afghanistan Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan had therefore been launched to support host countries in the region to meet the needs of refugees and host communities.

18. The recent focus on those efforts should not divert attention from the plight of other refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless persons across the region. The humanitarian situation in

Myanmar had deteriorated, and over 3 million individuals needed life-saving assistance, a number that would rise without a peaceful resolution of the crisis in the country. In 2021, UNHCR had assisted 170,000 individuals across Myanmar, including through joint UNHCR and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) quick impact projects in Rakhine State, where some 133,000 Rohingya remained in camp-like settings. Since the fall of the previous Government, some 500,000 persons had been displaced and a further 40,000 had sought safety in India and Thailand. UNHCR had not been able to access those populations, which underscored the need to establish national asylum systems to enable individuals to seek protection without further risking their lives. Scant progress was being made in Myanmar to address the root causes of the displacement of the Rohingya in Bangladesh or to create conditions to enable their return. Young people in particular had few opportunities to develop and use their skills. Nearly 800 Rohingya had taken precarious sea routes in search of better livelihoods, 29 of whom had died in 2021. UNHCR and partners would thus continue to focus on improving living conditions and investing in education and skills development. Despite those difficulties, communities – including refugees – had played a key role in the restoration of humanitarian services provided in Cox’s Bazar that had been suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic response, and nearly 80 per cent of Rohingya refugees had been vaccinated against COVID-19.

19. Principled leadership and responsibility-sharing were needed to save lives. In particular, the leadership of regional bodies such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in implementing a peaceful political solution to the situation in Myanmar would be pivotal to achieving lasting outcomes. He noted that the creation of a Core Group of States for the Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees was already creating tangible results and called for the engagement of all stakeholders in efforts to support refugees in the region.

20. In 2021, UNHCR had sought to restore resettlement processing to levels reached before the COVID-19 pandemic. Additional resettlement places would be welcomed, as meaningful efforts to further develop complementary pathways. Although the current crises in Afghanistan and Myanmar precluded large-scale voluntary repatriation, UNHCR was committed to supporting families in returning to their countries of origin in safety and dignity and to help them to rebuild their lives. He expressed his gratitude to countries hosting and protecting refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless persons, and conveyed his appreciation to Member States for their financial and political contributions to the efforts of host governments and UNHCR in the region.

21. **Ms. Clifford** (European Union group statement) reiterated her delegation’s commitment to supporting refugees and host countries, making special reference to individuals forced to flee war in Ukraine.

22. Since the fall of the previous Government of Afghanistan, the European Union and its Member States had addressed humanitarian needs in the country as a priority. The de facto authorities of Afghanistan must facilitate the delivery of principled humanitarian action, including ensuring the participation of women and re-establishing girls’ education. Against a backdrop of growing poverty, drought and food insecurity, increased support would be required in order to improve livelihoods, resilience, community-level cohesion and inclusion. The delivery of basic services beyond humanitarian purposes should be conditional and independent of governmental structures to avoid legitimizing the de facto regime. The European Union and its Member States would reaffirm its solidarity and partnership with the people of Afghanistan at the upcoming pledging conference. She called on all actors to fully respect international humanitarian law, including by ensuring immediate, full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access, and commended the Governments of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan for their longstanding generosity in hosting Afghan refugees. The European Union would continue to support the response by chairing the Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees and offering legal, safe and organized pathways to Afghan refugees forced to flee to neighbouring countries.

23. The worsening situation in Myanmar was deeply concerning, with 14 million people now requiring humanitarian assistance. In the light of escalating violence and the evolution of the situation to a protracted conflict with regional implications, she echoed the call for an immediate end to all hostilities, the disproportionate use of force and the state of emergency. The military authorities of Myanmar must respect international humanitarian law and ensure rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access across the country. Any further deterioration of the crisis in Rakhine State would delay the discovery of sustainable solutions for Rohingya refugees. UNHCR should

continue to support the creation of conditions for the safe, voluntary, informed and sustainable return of refugees and internally displaced persons. She commended the governments of neighbouring countries, particularly the Government of Bangladesh, for generously hosting Rohingya refugees. She urged UNHCR and its partners to strengthen their gender-based response to prevent, mitigate and respond to sexual and gender-based violence, including in access to sexual and reproductive health care services, and to combat trafficking in persons, child labour, forced marriage and other risks faced by Rohingya refugees. Lastly, she supported UNHCR's call for increased search and rescue efforts for refugees in distress at sea and for refugees to be allowed to disembark in places of safety.

24. **Ms. Baghli** (the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation as observer), speaking via video link, commended UNHCR for its invaluable efforts to provide life-saving humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan. Her organization had recently established a humanitarian trust fund to provide assistance to the people of Afghanistan and had recently held talks with the de facto authorities of Afghanistan to discuss how the organization could best provide humanitarian aid to the country. Durable peace and development would require the active participation of all sectors of Afghan society, including women and minorities. The General Secretariat of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, together with the Islamic Development Bank and the humanitarian trust fund, had been tasked with engaging with United Nations organizations to unlock the financial and banking channels required to resume the flow of financial and humanitarian assistance to the country. Her organization remained willing to cooperate with organizations in the United Nations system to provide support and assistance to the Afghan population.

25. Despite their socioeconomic challenges, countries belonging to her organization were hosting the majority of refugees. In particular, Bangladesh was hosting over 1 million Rohingya refugees. She reaffirmed her organization's solidarity with the Government of Bangladesh and called on the international community to assist that Government in the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the Rohingya in the spirit of solidarity and responsibility-sharing.

26. **Mr. Virabutr** (Thailand), speaking via video link, expressed grave concern at armed conflicts across the world, including in Ukraine, and emphasized the critical need for peaceful dialogue and the avoidance of actions that could lead to humanitarian crises. His Government appreciated UNHCR's continued support in the protection of persons in vulnerable situations, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic; in particular, the adoption of innovative approaches such as remote registration demonstrated UNHCR's ability to adapt its operations to different circumstances.

27. His Government had taken a number of steps to provide assistance and sustainable solutions to individuals in need of protection, including by providing COVID-19 vaccines and treatments to all residents regardless of immigration status; developing a national screening mechanism to enable vulnerable individuals to legally remain in Thailand and access basic services; providing protection to persons displaced from Myanmar; creating "humanitarian areas" to aid the provision of assistance to refugees from Myanmar at national frontiers; contributing financial support to the World Food Programme's work in Afghanistan; and providing financial contributions to support humanitarian assistance efforts in Myanmar.

28. The Government of Thailand would continue to play a constructive role in regional efforts to tackle irregular migration alongside international partners. He highlighted the need to strengthen cooperation to counter trafficking in persons, promote cooperation for prosecution and address the root causes of irregular migration. He expressed appreciation for UNHCR's assistance to the Government of Bangladesh in its efforts to support displaced persons in Cox's Bazar and for the implementation of quick impact projects in Myanmar, and called for the immediate cessation of violence in Myanmar, the identification of peaceful solutions and the fulfilment of humanitarian needs.

29. **Ms. Haque** (Bangladesh) highlighted her Government's continued efforts to ensure that the 1 million Rohingya refugees in her country remained safe and secure despite her country's limited resources. Nearly 90 per cent of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh had been immunized against COVID-19 through her Government's mass vaccination programme, and public officials and security forces had been deployed to operate refugee camps. However, the prolonged stay of the large refugee population was having a serious impact on the surrounding environment, and public

services and infrastructure in Cox's Bazar were struggling to cope with demand, resulting in disruption for the host community. Her Government had therefore set targets for the voluntary relocation of refugees to the island of Bhasan Char and had signed a memorandum of understanding with UNHCR to support Rohingya refugees there. To date, some 23,100 Rohingya had been relocated to Bhasan Char.

30. Under the tripartite memorandum of understanding signed between UNHCR, UNDP and the Government of Myanmar, 20,000 individuals had benefited from projects implemented in Rakhine State. However, more concrete measures were needed to build trust and confidence among Rohingya in Rakhine State; she therefore urged UNHCR to meaningfully engage with the Government of Myanmar to create a conducive environment for repatriation from camps in Bangladesh. It was concerning that funding for the Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis to address the needs of Rohingya refugees and host communities in Bangladesh had fallen short of its target each year. Furthermore, while the target population of that plan was increasing, assessed funding requirements continued to decline, resulting in an additional burden on her country. While its support for the Rohingya and host communities was appreciated, the international community must assume greater responsibility for the crisis under the principle of equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing.

31. **Ms. Shin** (Republic of Korea) expressed appreciation for the tireless efforts of UNHCR and partners to address challenges over the previous year, especially in Afghanistan and Myanmar, and noted the innovative approaches the Organization had adopted to sustain its work in the face of recent challenges. She urged relevant governments and authorities to adhere to the principle of non-refoulement; to guarantee full, unimpeded and sustainable humanitarian access to people in need; and to actively address gender-based violence, trafficking in persons and other serious violations against vulnerable groups. It was encouraging to see that most host countries had incorporated refugees and other vulnerable populations into their national COVID-19 vaccination campaigns. Her Government would work with the international community to identify durable solutions aimed at self-reliance and resilience.

32. The devastating humanitarian situation arising from the takeover of power in Afghanistan required heightened attention, close coordination among partners and tailored humanitarian assistance at all levels and in all sectors. She thanked the delegation of the European Union for its key role in the Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, and the Governments of Pakistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and other hosting countries for their inclusive approaches to refugees. Given the increased vulnerability of women and girls, the specific needs of that group should be identified and addressed.

33. She echoed concerns regarding the worsening situation in Myanmar in the light of continuous reports of human rights violations in Rakhine State and elsewhere. Minorities must not experience discrimination or have their basic needs and rights disregarded. She urged the authorities of Myanmar to create conducive conditions for the safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return of the Rohingya people, and expressed appreciation to the Government of Bangladesh for its support, including the provision of COVID-19 vaccines to Rohingya refugees. Her Government would continue to finance life-saving activities in Afghanistan and Myanmar.

34. She asked for details on the educational environment in Bhasan Char; information on the current status of the tripartite memorandum of understanding signed between UNHCR, UNDP and the Government of Myanmar; and regular updates on the progress of efforts to improve data-tracking on burden- and responsibility-sharing in line with the United Nations Global Compact on Refugees.

35. **Mr. Smith** (United States of America) commended UNHCR for rapidly expanding its operations in Afghanistan in response to dramatically increasing needs. His Government remained committed to supporting partners in providing life-saving assistance to those newly displaced by the conflict, while continuing to promote the return and reintegration of refugees. He echoed the call to allow Afghans in need of international protection to access assistance and seek asylum in neighbouring countries and urged countries to respect the principle of non-refoulement. He also commended the work of the Core Group of States for the Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, thanked the Government of Pakistan and UNHCR for continuing to protect Afghan refugees and urged donors to contribute resources to the implementation of the Afghanistan Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan.

36. He condemned the violence perpetrated by the Myanmar military forces against the people of Myanmar and called on the authorities to end the violence, ensure unhindered humanitarian access and restore Myanmar's path to democracy. Applauding UNHCR's work to provide refuge and durable solutions for displaced persons in and from Myanmar, he urged all countries to protect refugees and asylum seekers from that country, allow UNHCR access to those populations and to responsibly rescue individuals in distress at sea and allow disembarkation. He encouraged new and existing donors to support the response to the Rohingya crisis.

37. UNHCR should redouble its advocacy on behalf of Tibetans, continue to engage the Government of Nepal on the integration and documentation of Bhutanese refugees and work with the Government of Bhutan on voluntary returns. The Government of Nepal should resume the registration of Tibetan refugees and issue documents allowing them access to formal employment and public education. Her Government was also committed to working with the international community to ensure that asylum seekers from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and ethnic and religious minorities from China could access assistance, protection and other durable solutions. He encouraged UNHCR to work with China and other governments to ensure non-refoulement.

38. He commended UNHCR's approach to reducing statelessness in Asia and encouraged governments to eliminate discrimination in nationality laws and procedures. UNHCR should work with the Government of Thailand to ensure the effective implementation of its national screening mechanism and to seek alternatives to immigration detention for mothers and children. He urged the Government of Malaysia to grant UNHCR access to immigration detention facilities and encouraged the Organization to work with the Government of Indonesia to increase access to better livelihoods and education among refugees. Lastly, he encouraged UNHCR to work with the Government of India to strengthen the protection of asylum seekers, refugees and populations at risk of statelessness.

39. **Mr. Ishida** (Japan) expressed appreciation for UNHCR's unwavering commitment despite the challenging environment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and welcomed the increase in the number of priority areas of return and reintegration for Afghanistan. His Government had provided financial support to UNHCR for humanitarian assistance interventions to respond to the situation in Afghanistan and would continue to provide financial assistance to the governments of neighbouring countries that had generously accepted Afghan refugees, in particular Pakistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Tajikistan. His Government would also continue to engage in the Core Group of States for the Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees and appreciated the progress made in that forum. He urged the Taliban to ensure access for humanitarian assistance; respect the rights of all Afghan people, including women; build an inclusive political system; and prevent Afghanistan from becoming a hotbed for terrorism.

40. He urged the military forces of Myanmar to immediately end the violence in the country, release detainees and restore democracy. His Government would continue to work with the international community, including ASEAN, to improve the situation in Myanmar by providing additional humanitarian assistance to address the COVID-19 pandemic, support UNHCR projects and tackle the increase in poverty resulting from the economic stagnation following the military takeover.

41. **Mr. Winder** (United Kingdom) expressed concern at the active conflict in Ukraine and said that his Government stood with those European countries that were supporting people able to leave Ukraine. The need for humanitarian assistance was increasing around the world as a result of growing crises, which were leaving millions forcibly displaced, and a heightened disregard for international norms. Change management and cultural shifts should be central to efforts to address the challenging new situations ahead. His Government would work with multilateral partners to improve the impact of the humanitarian system, strengthen its safeguarding and oversight and support its work on norms, standards and partnership principles. He also recognized the specific issues faced by women and girls and the need for the international community to support the victims and tackle the causes of gender-based and sexual violence.

42. His Government continued to support the pursuit of a long-term solution to the Rohingya refugee crisis in Myanmar that envisaged their voluntary return when possible and accountability for the atrocities experienced. He commended UNHCR's efforts to support the Rohingya in Bangladesh and praised the Government of Bangladesh for its continued efforts to ensure that the



Rohingya could lead safe, meaningful lives, while recognizing the security, environmental and economic challenges posed by the protracted situation. The deteriorating conditions in Cox's Bazar were concerning. Improving education and livelihoods would help to combat worsening security and the mistreatment of women in camps and would help Rohingya refugees to remain hopeful and prepare for their eventual return. He expressed support for the memorandum of understanding signed between UNHCR and the Government of Bangladesh; however, UNHCR must be able to independently confirm that all relocations to Bhasan Char were indeed voluntary. The practice of allowing the Rohingya to travel between Cox's Bazar and Bhasan Char should continue and be expanded. He hoped that the Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis to address the needs of Rohingya refugees and host communities in Bangladesh would be launched soon.

43. The situation in Afghanistan was a priority for his Government, which would continue to do its best to ensure safe passage for all those who wished to leave, including through its new Afghan refugee resettlement scheme. His Government would use every diplomatic and economic lever at its disposal to restore stability to the country, which would require a concerted and coordinated effort from the international community. He commended all countries in the region that had hosted Afghan refugees. His Government had allocated significant financial and logistical resources to its response to the crisis and would soon co-host an international pledging conference to galvanize international support for the humanitarian response.

44. **Ms. Fry** (Canada), commending the efforts of the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific in meeting the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, expressed concerns regarding the increasing number of refugees and internally displaced persons resulting from the situation in Afghanistan. She asked what impact the liquidity crisis was having on the ability of humanitarian partners to bring donor funding into Afghanistan, and what solutions were being proposed by UNHCR and its partners. Her Government would continue to advocate for a humanitarian response that ensured the equitable access to assistance for all vulnerable populations. She asked how UNHCR was engaging with the de facto Government in Afghanistan in order to ensure that there was no interference in the delivery of humanitarian assistance to all. She further urged UNHCR to ensure that actions under the Afghanistan Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan and the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees were complementary and coordinated.

45. She expressed concern regarding the increasingly protracted situation of Rohingya refugees in the region. The movement of refugees, including to and from Bhasan Char, must be carried out in accordance with the principles set out in the memorandum of understanding signed with the Government of Bangladesh, ensuring that human rights were respected. She encouraged UNHCR to establish a monitoring mechanism and ensure that the principles of freedom of movement and the voluntary nature of relocations were respected. She asked whether any more assessments were required in order to finalize the operational approach to Bhasan Char, and asked how the Canadian Government and other donors could support UNHCR in delivering its mandate in Bhasan Char, and across Bangladesh.

46. **Ms. Lehoux** (Switzerland) commended the Afghanistan Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan and recognized the importance of providing support to countries neighbouring Afghanistan, especially to bolster preparedness. Her Government remained committed to supporting UNHCR's work in and around Afghanistan, and highlighted the importance of burden- and responsibility-sharing, in line with the Global Compact on Refugees. Her Government had already pledged over 80 million Swiss francs in the period 2021–2022, and would announce its pledge for 2022–2023 at the pledging conference planned for March 2022. Highlighting the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, she commended the generosity of host countries. She recognized the importance of humanitarian assistance, but said that such assistance would not prevent the collapse of essential public services, strengthen the resilience of the population or save the economy. Humanitarian assistance was one of many tools that should be used to respond to the complex challenges in Afghanistan. She called on the international community and the de facto Government of Afghanistan to respect and protect fundamental human rights, including those of women and girls.

47. **Mr. Sender** (Germany) commended UNHCR for staying in Afghanistan to deliver urgent assistance and applauded the generosity of host countries and communities in welcoming Afghan refugees. As one of the governments that was convening the pledging conference in March 2022, he highlighted the need to strengthen humanitarian support and galvanize the support of the international community. He expressed concern about the de facto Government's attempts to

interfere in the delivery of humanitarian assistance, in breach of humanitarian principles. In that regard, it was concerning that the President of the Afghan Red Crescent Society was a signatory of a plan to monitor and control the movement of refugees.

48. Turning to the situation in Myanmar, he said that the increase in humanitarian need and the number of persons of concern was worrying; he noted the restrictions on humanitarian access across the country and expressed concern regarding the safety of humanitarian workers on the ground. A regional approach to the situation, assuring support for refugees in Myanmar and neighbouring countries, would be welcome.

49. **Ms. Jahren** (Norway) said that the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Afghanistan was of serious concern. She asked whether there was a need to amend the objectives of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees in light of the changing situation in that country, with particular regard to achieving sustainable solutions for Afghan refugees and asylum seekers. She noted that progress towards finding sustainable solutions to the situation of internally displaced persons had stalled, and said that local integration should be prioritized as a viable and realistic choice. The international community must work as one to find solutions to the liquidity crisis in Afghanistan, and to prevent the collapse of the banking system. Difficult economic circumstances gave rise to critical protection concerns for women and children. She commended UNHCR's efforts to monitor and support survivors of gender-based violence and women at risk.

50. **Ms. Rasmussen** (Denmark), echoing concerns expressed regarding the war in Ukraine and the resulting devastating humanitarian crisis, said that her Government was providing humanitarian assistance and welcoming all refugees from Ukraine. She recognized the tremendous humanitarian need around the world, and said that the historic appeal for support in Afghanistan was a testimony to the dire situation in that country. She commended UNHCR for its commitment to stay and deliver humanitarian assistance during the recent escalation. She said that her Government had provided approximately \$80 million in 2021. That support would continue. The situation in Afghanistan was not just a humanitarian crisis; human rights were also at risk of violation, particularly those of women and girls. Everyone, regardless of gender, ethnicity or religion, should have access to humanitarian assistance, including health and education and all humanitarian workers should be able to operate. She called on UNHCR and its partners to continue to push for the protection of human rights, and to continue to collaborate with actors within and beyond the United Nations system to ensure coherent efforts. Humanitarian assistance alone was not enough; it must be linked to efforts to sustain basic services. In that regard, the Danish Government had reactivated previously frozen development assistance, which would be allocated to life-saving activities and the protection of human rights.

51. **Ms. Simichen Sopta** (Croatia) expressed regret that the number of refugees and internally displaced persons had continued to increase in Asia and the Pacific, despite progress made over the previous two decades. The deteriorating humanitarian and security situation in Afghanistan had led to political and social gains being lost, and the living conditions of the Afghan people had worsened considerably, increasing the need for humanitarian assistance. She commended the Afghanistan Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan and the information provided on improving the humanitarian-development nexus and welcomed UNHCR's efforts to scale up its operation in that region. Furthermore, human rights must be guaranteed, especially for the most vulnerable groups: women, children, minorities, human rights defenders and journalists. Her Government had contributed to efforts to build peace, improve governance and enhance the well-being of Afghans through humanitarian projects in the areas of education, health and small enterprises, which focused on the rights of women and girls. It was regrettable that women and girls were once again disproportionately affected, and she expressed the hope that girls would be able to return to school in March 2022. She recognized the generosity and solidarity of the Governments of Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran in their long-term hosting of refugees. She commended UNHCR and other international organizations for staying in Afghanistan and delivering humanitarian assistance during the recent period of turmoil, and she noted that the current drought had exacerbated humanitarian concerns. Independent humanitarian operations and safe, unhindered access to the entire territory must be guaranteed for all humanitarian staff, irrespective of gender. The Government of Croatia would continue to provide financial support for humanitarian activities and material support for Afghan refugees. Moreover, she called on the international community, international and non-governmental organizations and the United Nations to work together to implement an overarching response to support the Afghan people.

52. **Mr. Olfato** (Philippines) noted UNHCR's successes in Asia and the Pacific, as well as the difficult challenges, which included the protracted nature of the displacement of persons from Afghanistan and Myanmar. Committed to the principle of burden-sharing, his Government had welcomed Afghan refugees and was piloting a complementary pathways programme for Rohingya people. It was essential that national, regional and international responses were coordinated and mutually reinforcing, and he highlighted the activities implemented by his Government, which complemented the work of the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management, and UNHCR's efforts to prevent and address internal displacement attributable to climate change. UNHCR should focus on technical cooperation and capacity building, which would enhance national responses to humanitarian needs should they arise. Such activities could be facilitated through bilateral partnerships, such as his Government's partnership with the Government of New Zealand under the Asylum Capacity Support Group. Capacity building would also enable governments to establish resilient humanitarian institutions and governance mechanisms, such as his Government's multi-stakeholder service to protect refugees, stateless persons and asylum seekers and coordinate humanitarian response. Finally, he noted that his Government had completed the domestic process to accede to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, and he expressed the hope that his Government's actions in that regard could serve as an example to others.

53. **Ms. Chandra** (Australia) commended UNHCR's tireless efforts to address protection in protracted refugee crises and to enhance preparedness and capacities to host displaced people, and said that her Government would continue to provide support to countries in the region in line with the Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan and the Afghanistan Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan. Expressing serious concern regarding the deteriorating situation in Myanmar, she commended the work of UNHCR and its partners to deliver core relief items and equipment related to the COVID-19 response. She called for the granting of immediate and unimpeded access to deliver humanitarian assistance, and highlighted her Government's commitment to resettling nationals from Afghanistan and Myanmar, among other countries. She commended the inclusive COVID-19 response implemented by the Government of Bangladesh and UNHCR, and highlighted the ongoing efforts to address protection issues and meet critical needs in challenging circumstances, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters and fires in refugee camps. She encouraged UNHCR to continue to provide strong leadership in Bhasan Char, including through monitoring conditions and refugee movements to and from the island, and sharing findings to ensure that risk assessments were effective. She expressed appreciation for UNHCR's innovative approaches to gathering registration data, which could be used to improve the inclusion of refugees. Particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, remote approaches would help to ensure that critical protection services continued. Data should be disaggregated by sex, age and ability to ensure that protection was accessible to all; and UNHCR should ensure data security.

54. **Mr. Doğan** (Turkey) highlighted the fact that the current humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan was being exacerbated by a lack of food security and malnutrition. Health, education and social services were on the brink of collapse and terrorism remained a constant threat. He welcomed the measures implemented by the international community, to which his Government had contributed in the form of emergency aid, medicine, food and clothing sent to Afghanistan by rail. Turkish humanitarian workers had stayed in Afghanistan to deliver assistance despite the worsening conditions, paying specific attention to the needs of women and children. Recognizing the importance of education, the Maarif Foundation had sought to keep its schools open in Afghanistan, including 14 schools for girls. Humanitarian aid alone would not stabilize that country; steps must also be taken to stabilize the financial system. He commended neighbouring countries that were hosting Afghan refugees, and called on the international community to support those governments in the spirit of burden- and responsibility-sharing. Everyone had a role to play in ensuring that the situation did not become any worse and to prevent the potential irregular migration crisis.

55. **Mr. Arrafiq** (Yemen) said that people in his country had been suffering for eight years, and highlighted the unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Yemen. Approximately 24 million people did not have access to water or medication, there were five million internally displaced persons and one million Yemeni citizens had sought refuge in neighbouring countries. The actions of the Houthis militia had targeted civilian populations and caused them to become displaced. However, the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol remained in force, and he called on the international community, particularly Western and Arab governments, to provide aid to displaced Yemeni populations and refugees, many of whom were unable to access funds in their host countries. All

refugees deserved equal treatment. The cycle must be broken, and he urged the international community to share the burden carried by the Yemeni people.

56. **Mr. Hashmi** (Pakistan) expressed appreciation for the work of UNHCR and its field staff in the face of growing challenges, and recognized the critical support provided to refugees by international partners and host governments and communities. The COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated existing humanitarian challenges and hindered UNHCR's responses, and developing countries had borne the social and economic brunt of that impact. Vaccine equity remained a moral and humanitarian imperative, and he commended UNHCR for its advocacy in that regard. It should enhance its outreach to secure affordable and timely access to vaccines for refugees and citizens of host countries. Despite facing domestic economic and public health challenges, his Government had continued to ensure the equitable access of refugees to vaccinations, education, health and livelihoods.

57. While it was true that the humanitarian situation was deteriorating, there was still time to avert another humanitarian tragedy. Enhanced international engagement with the Government of Afghanistan would be essential in promoting the political, economic and social stabilization of that country. He welcomed the efforts undertaken by UNHCR, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other organizations within and beyond the United Nations system to galvanize much-needed humanitarian assistance for the people of Afghanistan, and further welcomed the decision to convene a pledging conference in March 2022. Failure to ensure well-resourced humanitarian and economic assistance would generate another vicious cycle of human suffering and displacement. Despite financial constraints, the Government of Pakistan had provided humanitarian assistance to the value of \$35 million, had helped to establish a humanitarian supplies hub, and had facilitated transit trade and cross-border movement of Afghans in need. His Government had also hosted an extraordinary ministerial meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation in December 2021 in order to mobilize humanitarian assistance. In collaboration with UNHCR, his Government had completed a project to issue smart cards to 1.4 million Afghan refugees and update their data, to improve access to health, education and banking services. It also remained actively engaged with the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees and its support platform.

58. He shared the legitimate concerns expressed regarding the human rights situation, the nature of power-sharing, and terrorism in Afghanistan, which must be addressed in a meaningful manner. He called for financial assets to be unfrozen and sanctions to be reviewed to enable the banking system to channel humanitarian assistance and provide basic services as one part of a sustainable solution for the people of Afghanistan. Enhanced political and diplomatic engagement would provide opportunities to pursue peace, security, development and human rights, in tandem with humanitarian and economic assistance. Lessons should be learned from past experiences; humanitarian assistance alone was not sufficient. A strategic approach to developing sustainable solutions was required. The preferred solution for many was the voluntary repatriation of refugees in a safe, dignified and well-resourced manner. However, conditions must be favourable in order to encourage such voluntary repatriation, which included an environment free from violence and assured of political, social and economic stability. Finally, he emphasized the importance of consistently applying the principle of equitable burden and responsibility-sharing.

59. **Ms. Wu** (China) commended efforts to scale up UNHCR's humanitarian assistance in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Government of China would continue to support that work and to provide humanitarian assistance in many countries, as well as contributing to efforts to improve global refugee governance. Through the framework of South-South cooperation, her Government had provided \$2 million to support the COVID-19 response for refugees and host communities in Kenya, the United Republic of Tanzania and South Sudan; and \$2 million to support refugees, internally displaced persons and other vulnerable groups in Afghanistan for the purchase of essential items. Her Government had also provided over 2.1 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine and had collaborated with the World Food Programme to establish a humanitarian emergency hub in China.

60. Her Government firmly objected to the remarks made by the representative of the United States of America concerning the status of the so-called Tibetan refugees. Those people were not refugees who had escaped to Nepal, but Chinese citizens who had left the country illegally. Many had been coerced or deceived by human traffickers, and some had been trained by terrorist groups and carried out terrorist actions to disrupt border crossings and threaten regional security.

Furthermore, people entering China from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea were also not refugees, but had crossed into China for economic reasons. The Chinese Government cooperated with all relevant governments to ensure security and the rule of law, and to combat illegal migration and human trafficking, in accordance with the law. In line with international practice, her Government was working to safeguard the security and stability of the region.

61. The Chinese Government strongly objected to any effort to politicize illegal immigration, and expressed its disapproval of any government or organization exercising double standards on that issue. The representative of the United States had condemned others, while ignoring the behaviour of her own Government. The United States Government had interfered in the internal affairs of other nations causing war and unrest, which had led to significant loss of life and waves of refugees; more than 20 million refugees had left Afghanistan, Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic alone. It had built a wall along the border with Mexico, and had misused its power to expel refugees, detain refugee children and violate human rights at that same border. The Chinese Government urged the Government of the United States to stop interfering in the domestic affairs of other nations.

62. **Mr. Matin Razm** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that his country had been hosting significant numbers of refugees and undocumented foreign nationals, including Afghans, and had mobilized humanitarian aid for internal dissemination within Afghanistan. Great efforts had been made to ensure that refugees had adequate access to health-care services, and all foreign nationals had been included in the national COVID-19 vaccination plan, irrespective of legal status. National legislation had been updated to make it easier to obtain Iranian nationality. Regarding Afghan refugees, the number of voluntary returnees was low and the provision of assistance to host countries was insufficient. Given the improved security situation in Afghanistan and the reduction of COVID-19 restrictions, UNHCR was expected to redouble its efforts to scale up the resettlement and repatriation of Afghan nationals. The continued influx of Afghan refugees into the Islamic Republic of Iran was placing a strain on the country's economy, services and resources, which were already under pressure due to the imposition of unilateral coercive measures and the pandemic. The need for the effective contribution of the international community, including international humanitarian organizations and donors, was therefore greater than ever before.

63. **Mr. Jones** (Asia Displacement Solutions Platform, Group statement), speaking on behalf of multiple non-governmental organizations, said that the protection environment for displaced populations across the region remained broadly inadequate. Durable solutions for displaced Afghans were more important than ever, should build on safe, dignified and voluntary movements, and should comply with the principle of non-refoulement. Despite pledges by States to facilitate evacuation of their former Afghan staff, it remained unclear whether or when such evacuations would take place. States should expedite processing and evacuations of vulnerable groups, including civil society members, journalists and women's activists. Concerning the transfer of Rohingya refugees to Bhasan Char, all relocation must be voluntary, and refugees must be provided with complete, relevant and accurate information in a language and formats they understood. UNHCR, donors and the Government of Bangladesh must work towards a unified and multi-year refugee response, taking into account the holistic needs of refugees, regardless of their location, in order for non-governmental organizations to deliver support in line with humanitarian and protection principles.

64. Regarding humanitarian access, it was vital to ensure that humanitarian actors could move and work in a safe, unhindered and principled manner, including in Afghanistan, where restrictions on female staff had increased. In Myanmar, the international community must act to protect civilians and mobilize resources to help address emerging needs. Given the economic sanctions and funding reductions applied with respect to Afghanistan, the provision of humanitarian aid to the country did not and would not suffice. UNHCR and States must immediately expand development funding and invest in resilience and livelihoods, and stimulate socioeconomic recovery. Based on United Nations Security Council resolution 2615 (2021), an international banking solution must be found to enable money to enter Afghanistan, scale up aid and revive the country's economy. While humanitarian carve-outs to sanctions were welcome, clear reassurances must be given to financial institutions that they would enjoy immunity for all transactions related to humanitarian assistance. The asylum space across the region remained constrained, with pushbacks preventing refugees from accessing territory to claim asylum, thus violating international law and causing refugee deaths or disappearances at sea. He commended the recent decision by Indonesia to let 105 Rohingya refugees disembark in the country, and encouraged all States working towards a regional rights-based search, rescue and disembarkation framework to heed its example.

65. Immigration detention remained of serious concern in Asia, despite growing calls to pursue alternatives. All States should implement non-custodial measures and community-based care arrangements, especially for families and children. In light of the pandemic, early or temporary release must be extended to refugees, whose right to the highest attainable standard of health must be respected, including through vaccination coverage. States and UNHCR must pay increased attention to the human rights and specific needs of women and girls, who faced increased challenges due to the pandemic. Donors must meet their commitments to the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies Road Map 2021–2025, through sufficient, timely and flexible multi-year funding. Uyghurs should be protected from refoulement and be acknowledged as a group of concern by UNHCR. Arbitrarily detained Uyghur refugees should be released, allowed to settle and protected from harmful forced return. Concerning States hosting protracted refugee populations in which there were limited prospects for repatriation or local integration, alternative solutions, including resettlement, must be explored. He acknowledged the role played by States hosting Rohingya refugees and encouraged other States to increase responsibility-sharing, including through funding, resettlement and support in host and transit countries.

66. **Mr. Ratwatte** (Director of the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, UNHCR) reiterated that UNHCR staff, resources, supplies and assets in Afghanistan had been scaled up exponentially in recent months, and new offices had been opened in areas where access had improved. Following negotiations with the de facto authorities, all UNHCR female staff had been enabled to work in UNHCR offices and in the field. Challenges remained regarding the new accompaniment policy for women in the country, but work was being carried out area by area to address the issue. In general, UNHCR staff were able to fully access populations in the country to carry out their assessments and deliver humanitarian assistance without hindrance. UNHCR would continue its work with partners in the country. A share of the resources under the Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan was allocated for UNHCR, as there was a link with the refugee response plan for neighbouring countries in the region. He acknowledged that coping mechanisms for refugees and local populations in host countries had been weakened by the pandemic and the economic situation. It was therefore essential to continue to provide support to host countries in order to ensure stabilization, as well as to secure resources to increase the resilience of Afghans in Afghanistan.

67. Concerning liquidity and cash, multiple processes were ongoing, and decisions and discussions had taken place at the United Nations level, including on how to meaningfully unblock the resource allocation under resolution 2615. It was vital for other development resources to be freed and sent to partners on the ground, whether they were humanitarian, development or other actors. Methods had also been adopted through pre-existing mechanisms by working with money service providers to bring cash into the country and to put in place adequate monitoring and reporting systems. The willingness to expand the devolution of such resources remained critical. Rights advocacy was an important part of UNHCR's work with the de facto authorities in Afghanistan. Inclusive approaches looked at ensuring the participation of different ethnicities and groups in processes, with a focus on the return to work of female staff and access to education for girls. Although some incremental changes were taking place, much work remained to be done.

68. On the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR), he appealed to the members of the Core Group to use the upcoming pledging conference to shore up support for other responses inside Afghanistan and the host countries. The priority in Afghanistan would be to work towards ensuring resilient communities in the identified main areas of return, cooperating on the ground with partners, and increasing access to basic health care, education and livelihoods. It was expected that more internally displaced persons in Afghanistan would return to their areas of origin at the end of the winter, and additional support needed to be increased to facilitate such returns. A community-focused and area-based approach was being taken together with partners to that end.

69. Regarding data, he thanked the Governments of Bangladesh and Pakistan for their work to provide smart cards for refugees. A significant amount of data had been collected in order to provide assistance and enable solutions that took into account the human capital of refugees and investment in educational skills. Moving on to Myanmar, he said that the approach taken in northern Rakhine was similar to the community-focused area-based approach in Afghanistan. The quick impact projects implemented together with the United Nations in northern Rakhine remained extremely important. UNHCR's requests to Member States in the region had been either to support such initiatives in northern Rakhine through UNHCR or UNDP or to have organizations that were able to deliver community-based grassroots interventions to enhance access to health, primary education

and livelihoods in northern Rakhine, in order to build the conditions for the eventual voluntary repatriation of the Rohingya to the area. However, unless such actions were carried out at scale and unless some of the rights-based issues were meaningfully addressed, the goal of voluntary repatriation would remain elusive.

70. With regard to Bangladesh, the Joint Response Plan was under consideration by the Government, and would hopefully be approved soon. However, adequate resources were still not being received for the Joint Response Plan, despite the fact that populations were increasing. The Plan should be considered as a platform that articulated all of the needs for the refugee response in Bangladesh and should be adequately financed. Ensuring access to services, livelihoods and education for refugees in and outside the camps and outside, in collaboration with the Government, UNICEF and partners, remained a priority. Regarding Bhasan Char, it was important to recognize the efforts made by the Government to address the challenges observed and the positive changes that had taken place. A large number of partners were working together on the island to support the refugees, and a market assessment had been carried out with a view to enhancing livelihood opportunities, increasing market access with other chars, and supporting government initiatives there. Further efforts were needed to support the Government's work in Bhasan Char and ensure that the Rohingya who went there were well-informed and did so on a voluntary basis.

71. As regards vaccine equity, the implementation of refugee-inclusive policies of the countries in the region, despite the challenges created by the pandemic, was commendable. The protection issues raised were addressed as part of UNHCR's daily work and dialogue on each of them was ongoing.

## ii. Middle East and North Africa

72. **Mr. Ghairabeh** (Director of the Bureau of Middle East and North Africa, UNHCR) said that, while refugee countries in the region had shown resolve and solidarity in the face of the COVID-19 crisis, they continued to experience challenges that pre-dated the pandemic. The crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic remained the largest displacement situation in the world. UNHCR and partners had stepped up their work to support national response plans, host governments, host communities and persons of concern. However, the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan remained underfunded at 46 per cent of the \$5.6 billion total appeal for 2021. He called on donors not to waver in their commitment. The number of refugees who had returned to the Syrian Arab Republic in 2021 was extremely low. His Bureau remained committed to pursuing durable solutions for Syrian refugees, including voluntary, safe and dignified return. It was crucial for the international community to continue to support refugees, host communities and host governments in the region with predictable multi-year funding. More resettlement countries needed to step forward and increase the number of places they offered. UNHCR continued to deliver and coordinate multisectoral assistance in response to the Syrian crisis and, together with other agencies, was exploring ways to strengthen the impact of its work, including through innovative area-based programmes.

73. In Lebanon, both refugees and Lebanese nationals were deeply affected by the crises affecting the country, with over 90 per cent of refugees living in extreme poverty. Sea departures from Lebanon towards Cyprus and other Mediterranean destinations in 2021 had almost doubled since the previous year. It was vital to ensure new funding and support for programmes and appeals that focused on the increasing needs of the Lebanese people, as a complement to the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan.

74. The situation in Yemen remained one of the worst humanitarian crises globally, and the recent escalations in the country and growing regional dimension of the conflict were of concern. In 2022, UNHCR would expand its presence and provision of assistance in response to both new and protracted displacement. Cash assistance remained a key protection tool. He looked forward to the upcoming high-level pledging event on the humanitarian crisis in Yemen to reinvigorate support for the situation.

75. In Iraq, the Bureau continued to promote the systematic inclusion of persons of concern in social protection schemes and safety nets, by strengthening access to national services and employment opportunities, identifying comprehensive protection and solutions strategies, and promoting the sustainability of return through small-scale infrastructure projects. Millions of

returnees and internally displaced persons lacked civil documentation, had limited access to basic services, lived with damaged property and critical infrastructure, and had few livelihood opportunities in areas of return.

76. In North Africa, significant numbers of refugees and asylum seekers had been registered by UNHCR in 2021, with the largest groups being from Mali, Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic. The number of refugees and migrants bound for Europe who had disembarked in Libya following rescue at sea in 2021 had been almost double that in the previous year. The Bureau would continue to work with governments, civil society and refugee communities to advise on travel risks, enhance responses on travel risks, enhance responses to search, rescue and disembarkation arrangements in the region, and assist those in need of international protection.

77. In Libya, the situation remained uncertain following the postponement of the presidential elections originally scheduled for December 2021. Despite the considerable operational difficulties experienced in 2021, the Bureau was working with Libya to resolve outstanding challenges and to deliver on its mandate.

*The meeting rose at 1 p.m.*