



General Assembly

Distr.: General
24 November 2021

Original: English

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

Summary record of the 743rd meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 7 October 2021, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Baddoura (Vice-Chair)..... (Lebanon)

Contents

General debate (*continued*)

Consideration of reports on the work of the Standing Committee (*continued*)

(a) International protection (*continued*)

(b) Programme budgets, management, financial control and administrative oversight

Consideration of reports relating to programme and administrative oversight and evaluation

Consideration and adoption of the programme budget for 2022

Review of the consultations with non-governmental organizations

This record is subject to correction. Corrections 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 the present record to the Documents Management Section (DMS-DCM@un.org).

Any corrected records of the public meetings of the Committee at this session will be reissued for technical reasons after the end of the session.



In the absence of Ms. Farani Azevêdo (Brazil), Mr. Baddoura (Lebanon), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

General debate (*continued*)

Statements made in exercise of the right of reply

1. **Ms. Bračina** (Latvia), speaking via video link and referring to the statement made by the representative of Belarus at the Executive Committee's 739th meeting ([A/AC.96/SR.739](#)), said that earlier that year the President of Belarus had threatened to flood neighbouring countries with migrants. Shortly afterwards, the rate of irregular migration from Belarus into Lithuania, Latvia and Poland had increased exponentially, and there was evidence to suggest that the Belarusian authorities had issued tourist visas to citizens of third countries, only to eject them into those three States. That artificial crisis was accompanied by a disinformation campaign to discredit Latvia and the European Union, and her Government considered it an attack designed to increase tensions on the border with country members of the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. While her Government provided humanitarian aid to those at the border, those who had been granted tourist visas and later become stranded fell wholly within the jurisdiction of Belarus. The international community must call on Belarus to cease its use of vulnerable persons for political ends and to fulfil its international and human rights obligations.

2. **Mr. Gobeza** (Ethiopia), referring to the statements made by the representative of the United States of America at the Executive Committee's 742nd meeting ([A/AC.96/SR.742](#)), of Finland at its 740th meeting ([A/AC.96/SR.740](#)), of Switzerland at its 736th meeting ([A/AC.96/SR.736](#)), of Sweden at its 739th meeting ([A/AC.96/SR.739](#)) and of the United Kingdom at its 741st meeting ([A/AC.96/SR.741](#)), said that the expulsion of the United Nations staff members from Ethiopia owed to their serious interference in its internal matters, as had been explained clearly to the relevant partners. His country rejected the politicization of United Nations assistance. Nevertheless, it valued its partnership with the United Nations and its agencies, with which it would continue to work, and called upon the United Nations to uphold the principles of impartiality and neutrality and to replace the expelled staff expeditiously. His Government's cooperation with multilateral agencies must not undermine its sovereignty or pose a threat to its security.

3. **Mr. Damiani Pellegrini** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), referring to the statement made by the representative of the United States of America at the Executive Committee's 742nd meeting ([A/AC.96/SR.742](#)), said that the sanctions imposed on his country by the United States, which violated international law and the Charter of the United Nations, constituted crimes against humanity and aimed to bring about an unconstitutional change of government, suffocated the Venezuelan people and undermined the economy. The United States had ignored calls for their lifting by leading international figures, including the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

4. **Ms. Quezada** (Chile), referring to the statement made by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela at the Executive Committee's 742nd meeting ([A/AC.96/SR.742](#)), said that her Government condemned categorically the violence against a group of migrants in the north of her country. The competent authorities were working to punish the perpetrators, and a transit centre had been established and the capacities of existing shelters increased. Chile was committed to defending and promoting human rights through its new migration legislation and policies.

5. **Ms. Shao Wu** (China), speaking via video link, said that States must increase their support for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). China supported all parties that sought a political solution to the situation in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and strongly opposed external interference in that country's affairs. Migration by Venezuelans was caused by economic difficulties owing to unilateral sanctions and other external interventions, and her Government called on the countries concerned to respect the development path chosen by the Venezuelan people and to lift the sanctions.

China provided support to the Venezuelan Government, with which it would continue to cooperate to reduce migration flows.

Consideration of reports on the work of the Standing Committee (*continued*)

(a) International protection (*continued*) (A/AC.96/1211, A/AC.96/1219, A/AC.96/1210 and A/AC.96/1217)

6. **Mr. Baghaei Hamaneh** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that his Government wished to express its rejection of paragraph 30 of the note on international protection (A/AC.96/1211), which included terms to which his delegation did not agree and that could be understood as creating additional commitments for host countries. As had been highlighted in the statement of the representative of Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the mandate and operations of UNHCR should remain apolitical and based on the universally agreed humanitarian principles of objectivity, neutrality, impartiality and humanity. The introduction of politically sensitive and controversial concepts and language called into question the neutral character of UNHCR.

7. **Ms. Schacher** (Refugees International), speaking via video link, said that the externalization of States' asylum obligations posed a major threat to international protection at a time when new humanitarian crises made respect for the letter and the spirit of international law more critical than ever. While such measures, most commonly used by high-income countries, were often presented as legitimate support for countries of origin and transit, aid must not be contingent on migration control efforts and did not offset asylum and protection obligations. Low-income countries hosted the majority of displaced persons, and major transit and host countries hindered access to protection by adopting closed-door and return policies.

8. According to UNHCR guidance, measures to deter irregular migration must not preclude access to protection or constitute violations of international law with regard to asylum. Some States had engaged in refoulement indirectly by funding migration and border authorities in countries that did not protect the rights of forced migrants. Harsh deterrence measures were ineffective because asylum seekers moved out of necessity, rather than choice. There were also concerns regarding the removal of asylum seekers to unsafe third countries, for example under the 2016 agreement between the European Union and Turkey and other agreements with North and West African countries. Another concern was the offshoring of asylum processing facilities, leading to the long-term detention of asylum seekers in deplorable conditions.

9. Externalization of asylum procedures failed to protect lives and promote orderly movement, and she called on States to recommit to responsibility sharing. States must determine whether a third country was safe based on individual asylum claims, an assessment of the security and human rights situation and whether access to asylum processes were available there. UNHCR must facilitate a global discussion of the risks of externalization and continue to denounce the practice.

10. **Ms. Triggs** (Assistant High Commissioner for Protection), noting Member States' strong commitment to the principles of the global compact on refugees and their pledges at the Global Refugee Forum, said that they should report their progress and any gaps that they had identified prior to the forthcoming High-level Officials Meeting. The Asylum Capacity Support Group offered great potential for strengthening asylum systems in low-income countries, and she hoped that the Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies established by Switzerland would be replicated elsewhere. She reiterated the call of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for more resettlement places and for countries that did not offer resettlement to consider doing so. Complementary migration pathways, such as community sponsorship programmes, were proving effective.

11. Disaggregated data in the design of programmes and appeals was important. Work with communities was a vital part of the decentralization efforts of UNHCR, particularly during the pandemic. One of the few positive aspects of the pandemic was the harnessing of technology, including the UNHCR call centres. Their use, and that of other remote facilities, would increase in the coming months to broaden the reach of UNHCR. She welcomed

Member States' ongoing funding of the work of UNHCR to protect internally displaced persons. She thanked the Organization of Islamic Cooperation for its support while reiterating the strictly humanitarian nature of UNHCR, which was guided by the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. All aspects of the note on protection fell within the mandate of UNHCR, including membership of particular groups.

(b) Programme budgets, management, financial control and administrative oversight ([A/AC.96/1219](#), [A/AC.96/1210](#), [A/AC.96/1217](#), [A/AC.96/1218](#) and [A/AC.96/1212](#))

12. **Ms. Clements** (United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the dramatic consequences of the peace divide to which the Secretary-General had referred in his recent address to the General Assembly of the United Nations included the displacement of more than 2 million persons in Ethiopia and an almost fifty-fold increase to forced displacement in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras over the previous decade. Instability was accelerating, and UNHCR must demonstrate agility, flexibility and adaptability in response. It had nurtured those attributes through an aggressive transformation agenda, doubling its budget and workforce and decentralizing structures and decision-making. Through the business transformation programme, processes and tools were being modernized to meet the needs of the growing organization, new ways of working and increasingly complex operating environments, while COMPASS, a new planning, budgeting, monitoring and reporting system, allowed for multi-year planning and longer-term protection and solutions strategies.

13. The global compact on refugees had formalized existing changes to the work of UNHCR in relation to displaced persons, including improved links between humanitarian and development responses and integration of essential services. Integration efforts had also informed the approach of UNHCR towards partnerships. UNHCR had actively promoted elements of the reform agenda, such as the resident coordinator system, resulting in a number of benefits, including improved consideration of individuals' needs in development planning. UNHCR had also improved the way in which it partnered with entities outside the United Nations system and had begun to contribute to its partners' costs, one of the ways in which it demonstrated its commitment to the Grand Bargain on humanitarian financing.

14. Agility, flexibility and adaptability required effective risk management and robust controls. To that end UNHCR had consolidated its oversight functions and launched the Risk Management 2.0 initiative, which had laid the foundations for the Risk Management 2025 Strategy. Efforts to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment were guided by staff members' needs and had been redoubled through a vision, strategy and action plan. The support of the Member States, including the Group of Friends to Eliminate Sexual Harassment, was vital, and work had been done to normalize reporting and constructive dialogue. In its seventieth year, UNHCR remained focused on increasing efficiency and identifying opportunities. That mindset had led to the proposed financial regulations, increased efficiency and the diversification of funding sources. It was also driving efforts to enhance inclusion, diversity and gender equity.

15. The agility, flexibility and adaptability of UNHCR had paid dividends during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, allowing its teams to adapt programmes and systems to meet the additional needs of forcibly displaced and stateless groups. UNHCR teams would continue to capitalize on new working methods to meet the many future challenges outlined in the proposed budget for 2022, which was the first to be developed using COMPASS and the first to use the budget structure adopted in 2020. It was also the first budget for UNHCR as a decentralized organization and had benefited from the oversight of the regional bureaux.

16. **Mr. Smith** (United States of America) said that his delegation wished to recognize the efforts made by UNHCR to reform the way in which it compiled its budget and tracked results. Its new approach would provide greater transparency for donors, host countries and persons of concern and a clearer picture of the impact of its work on people's lives. Looking at the 2020 budget, the United States was pleased to note a slight reduction in the gap between funding and needs compared to 2019. However, the significant shortfall that remained continued to have a negative impact on the lives of people in vulnerable situations. The

international community had to address that gap while ensuring that available funds met the most pressing needs. It was commendable that, despite the programming challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR had maintained a 2020 expenditure of 90 per cent of funds received. It should continue to identify practices that were working well and regularize them, while ensuring strong oversight and consistent application globally. One of the initiatives that UNHCR planned to undertake in 2021 and beyond was to strengthen its engagement in situations of internal displacement. In that regard, the United States would be interested to receive more details on additional funding to support that engagement over the course of 2021.

17. The United States was glad to see a 36 per cent increase in the funding allocated to tackling statelessness in the 2022 budget compared to 2021. It urged UNHCR to continue supporting States in identifying and assisting stateless persons, with the goal of eradicating statelessness. It was helpful that the proposed budget for 2022 was broken down by population group and by impact, outcome and enabling areas, and that differences between 2021 and 2022 were described in detail. His Government would be grateful to know whether any further changes to the budget were anticipated before 1 January 2022, including about the 2022 needs for Asia and the Pacific.

18. **Mr. Lobato** (Philippines) said that his Government welcomed the results framework established by UNHCR and found merit in reviewing the effectiveness of the framework's benchmarks in the coming years and in transitioning from a biennial to an annual budget cycle. The Philippines supported the efforts of UNHCR to achieve gender parity and, like other States, wished to see greater geographic and racial diversity both on the ground and in senior leadership positions. Statistics in that regard would be useful baselines for measuring progress.

19. It would be interesting to hear the thoughts of the Deputy High Commissioner on how UNHCR could identify and leverage synergies across United Nations entities and other international organizations, minimize redundancies and streamline bureaucracy in order to increase financial efficiency and channel more funds to projects on the ground. The Philippines would be happy to see continued efforts to protect UNHCR staff from harassment and support their mental health.

20. **Ms. Nagahara** (Japan), noting that the number of forcibly displaced people worldwide had reached a record high of 82.4 million at the end of 2020 and was likely to rise further in 2021, said that the international community should, as a matter of urgency, make concerted efforts to reduce humanitarian needs by addressing the root causes of displacement. Japan appreciated the unwavering commitment of UNHCR to assisting persons of concern and would continue to lend its support in that regard to the extent possible. At the same time, it encouraged emerging donors to join efforts to support the activities of UNHCR in a more sustainable manner. Japan had been proactively providing funds to UNHCR on top of its regular contributions in the form of emergency and partnership grants.

21. Japan welcomed the efforts of UNHCR to implement the recommendations of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) and the Board of Auditors and requested it to continue to engage actively with the oversight mechanisms in that respect. The introduction of a new budget structure was an important milestone that would improve the visibility of the use of funds and accountability for results. Japan wished to thank UNHCR for explaining the rationale behind establishing its own financial regulations. It supported the proposal to initiate the process of drafting the regulations and requested UNHCR to ensure transparency in that process by providing enough opportunities for Member States to participate in relevant consultations.

22. **Mr. Mindrin** (Russian Federation) said that it was important for all Member States to support the draft programme plan of UNHCR for 2022. In the plan for 2023, UNHCR should include information on the large number of reforms that it had introduced or had planned, including details of the economic grounds for the reforms and risk-benefit analyses. It would be helpful for UNHCR to develop a road map for the implementation of recommendations made to it by the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee, OIOS, the Board of Auditors, the Inspector General's Office (IGO) and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions.

23. The Russian Federation was grateful for the paper containing the proposed revision of the financial rules of UNHCR concerning the programme budget, which could be a good starting point for the creation of a clearer, more transparent legal basis for the financial activities of UNHCR, whose budget was one of the largest in the United Nations system. In line with a decision of the Standing Committee, the Russian Federation intended to continue consultations on the matter with other Member States and relevant divisions of UNHCR. It supported the efforts of UNHCR to ensure a balanced geographical representation among its staff at headquarters and in the field and would remain a reliable partner in the future.

24. **Mr. Banzet** (Canada) said that, despite the growth in the number and significance of displacement challenges and the difficulties posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR had shown its strength and the positive impact of reforms, which it had introduced while maintaining business continuity. Canada encouraged UNHCR to continue to prioritize efforts to increase diversity and inclusion in its workforce and promote staff welfare, including through the provision of mental health services. Canada recognized the efforts that UNHCR had made to align its work with that of other humanitarian and development agencies and welcomed the measures that it had taken to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. It should continue to collaborate with key partners in the humanitarian system, including the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, to ensure coherence in upcoming plans, appeals and responses. Canada urged partners to follow up on recommendations made by the High-level Panel on Internal Displacement and encouraged UNHCR to continue to improve its partnership arrangements with non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The meaningful participation of local and national responders, including refugee- and women-led organizations, was essential to the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance to crisis-affected populations. Canada therefore called on UNHCR to continue working to ensure such participation and to strengthen the delivery of gender-responsive humanitarian action, including by supporting local women's organizations and implementing its Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity at the field level. It should also champion such action in its coordination with United Nations agencies, NGOs and persons of concern to ensure that the differentiated protection needs of women, men, girls and boys were adequately addressed.

25. Canada supported the adoption of a multi-stakeholder approach to the implementation of the global compact on refugees and the efforts of UNHCR to find new and innovative sources of funding to address significant unmet needs and foster the inclusion of development actors in the refugee context. It appreciated the long-term reform efforts under way within UNHCR, which should ensure that those efforts were aligned with its strategic objectives, helped to improve results and strengthened programme reporting. Canada looked forward to seeing further improvements to enhance strategic planning and promote a results-based culture, which would in turn lead to greater transparency, particularly in the setting of strategic priorities for the UNHCR budget. In conclusion, Canada wished to express its strong and continuing support for UNHCR and was committed to working with the agency to make a difference in the lives of refugees.

26. **Mr. Mayr** (Germany) said that UNHCR had performed admirably in the face of the many and severe challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Germany supported the agency's plans to undertake a lessons learned exercise in order to better prepare for future challenges. It also welcomed the development of a new results-based management system, in particular the stronger focus on transparency, visibility and accountability, and on the outcomes and impact of protection and assistance activities. It was important for UNHCR to take all necessary measures to address shortcomings in the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence in emergency programming in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to continue to ensure the timely delivery of medical goods and access to services for persons of concern. It should also adapt its management of partnerships, given that a high percentage of its budget was being implemented through partner organizations, and ensure that the use of innovative solutions in the field went hand in hand with an appropriate set of data and privacy protection policies.

27. Germany was grateful for the continued work of the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee throughout the pandemic and the strengthening of the field presence of IGO. Regarding sexual and gender-based violence and protection from sexual exploitation, abuse

and sexual harassment, it was crucial to address the backlog of cases that had been growing since the beginning of the pandemic. Germany looked forward to collaborating with UNHCR in the delivery of the latter's mandate.

28. **Ms. Clements** (United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees) said that she was grateful to Member States for their positive feedback and their advice on responding to challenges. UNHCR would continue to liaise closely with them on key issues, including its stepped-up approach to internal displacement. The budget for operations to assist internally displaced people had been increased in every region barring Europe – where efforts were undiminished but had been redirected from hands-on support to coordination – and the Middle East and North Africa. Precise figures in that regard could be provided in due course. Regarding statelessness, UNHCR was trying to better understand how to translate priorities established at the corporate level into actions on the ground. In terms of the budget, it was difficult to specify what further changes would be made before 1 January 2022, but additional funding would be needed to respond to the situation in Afghanistan, where opportunities were opening up to help internally displaced people.

29. UNHCR was firmly committed to geographical diversity and wished to engage in a discussion with Member States on what exactly the term meant. With regard to leveraging synergies, there were many examples of close collaboration with sister agencies, including in the context of the Business Innovations Strategic Results Group. An important point had been made about the mismatch between funding and needs. UNHCR echoed calls for unearmarked funds, which it would put to good use in a transparent manner. She appreciated the support expressed by Member States for the establishment of new financial regulations and their acknowledgement of the efforts made by UNHCR to implement fully the recommendations of oversight mechanisms, which remained a priority. The agency mainstreamed gender in all its work and had developed a comprehensive action plan to promote gender equality. In that regard, there was a strong link between underfunding and the incidence of gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse. It was therefore vital for Member States to contribute to ensuring that the agency's budget was adequate to meet the needs of all persons of concern.

Consideration of reports relating to programme and administrative oversight and evaluation

Report on activities of the Inspector General's Office (A/AC.96/1215)

30. **Mr. Garnett** (Inspector General), noting that the report contained numerical data on sexual misconduct complaints, said that he and his team were keenly aware that each number represented a life or lives that had been severely and negatively affected. There was no place at UNHCR for sexual misconduct. His Office continued to investigate concerns in that regard without fear or favour and remained committed to taking all complaints seriously, undertaking a professional intake assessment and investigation, and applying a victim-centred approach. The threshold for investigation was very low, there were no restrictions on the method of receipt of complaints, and the Office had the right to initiate an investigation in the absence of a complaint. UNHCR staff had a duty to report misconduct. However, 85 per cent of complaints of sexual exploitation and abuse involved personnel from partner organizations. Accordingly, his Office had helped to develop e-training on investigations for such organizations. He wished to thank the senior management of UNHCR for its strong support for a zero-tolerance approach. Leadership was fundamental to providing a safe environment for victims to report offences. While the complex global operations of UNHCR would continue to generate cases, the volume of complaints reflected efforts to build confidence in relevant mechanisms and systems. Despite those efforts, underreporting remained a concern. His Office would continue to make changes in policy and in practice to address the issue.

31. The IGO strategy for 2021–2026 had been finalized. Its overall intended outcome was to ensure that UNHCR had an effective independent oversight system, giving confidence to relevant stakeholders over its efficiency, economy and effectiveness. That goal would be achieved through oversight delivery and coordination, and investigations. His Office sought to ensure that independent oversight work was coordinated and understood, and, most

importantly, that it resulted in organizational learning. Coordination among oversight providers, in particular his Office, the Evaluation Service and the OIOS Internal Audit Service, had improved thanks to regular and meaningful meetings and exchanges, a consolidated online oversight plan and enhanced reporting to management on oversight matters. In addition, his Office had set out a clear operational model of how it intended to interact with each oversight provider and UNHCR management. The Internal Audit Service had an opportunity, under its new leadership, to further modernize its work and seize the opportunities presented by the improving risk maturity of UNHCR. An analysis that his Office had carried out of the output of oversight providers in 2020 had found no significant change compared to 2019 and that pandemic-related risks to delivery had generally been well managed. Many of the issues and risks that persisted would be addressed through the transformation and change process. His Office had supported the UNHCR management team's improved closure of recommendations from oversight providers and was exploring ways to integrate follow-up across all providers.

32. His Office continued to receive an increasing number of complaints, with a total of 1,500 predicted in 2021. The type of complaints and the geographic location of complainants showed little to no change compared to previous years. The Office's substantiation rate for complaints had increased slightly to 58 per cent. Its strategy for investigations was to refine the scope of its work, enhance delivery and ensure organizational learning and prevention. It was working with management colleagues on a new triage mechanism to address workplace challenges earlier, more appropriately and through a management-led response, which should enable it to focus its resources on tackling misconduct. With regard to protection from retaliation, the transfer of prima facie cases from the Ethics Office to his own Office was being finalized. Work was also under way to refine links with management colleagues on financial and resettlement fraud and misconduct by implementing partners. His Office continued to improve its investigations, including through enhanced open-source searching, upgrades to its case management system and digital forensics capacity-building. It was also working on witness protection policy issues and the SpeakUp! helpline. In the first half of 2021, the Office's Investigation Service had issued 11 management implication reports, which were short notes to help UNHCR management colleagues to draw lessons from complaints and investigations. UNHCR had embarked on a range of organizational development activities to make itself fit to respond to global challenges and demands. While he considered the programme of changes to be appropriate, it was significant in terms of scale and pace of change. He and his colleagues would continue to review the changes closely in order to ensure their delivery.

33. **Mr. Frenkel** (Israel) said that IGO was to be commended for finalizing its internal standard operating procedures on a victim-centred approach. He would be glad to hear details of how the procedures were being implemented. He agreed that the rise in misconduct complaints was attributable in part to awareness-raising, the involvement of management and an increased presence in the field. Israel hoped that the trend would continue and that no misconduct would remain unreported. It welcomed the speedy assessment and prioritization of cases of sexual exploitation and abuse and encouraged UNHCR to continue its efforts with regard to data collection. As a member of the Geneva Group of Friends to Eliminate Sexual Harassment, Israel thanked IGO for the information provided on collaboration with other United Nations system entities, which it fully supported. Lastly, it welcomed the emphasis placed on training and the development of e-learning tools.

34. **Mr. Driessen** (Netherlands) said that the Netherlands was grateful to have been kept informed on the work of IGO, which was crucial and should thus be funded sufficiently and in a manner that reflected the caseload and the need for extra attention in high-risk situations. In that regard, it would be useful to know which recommendations stemming from the United Nations Development Programme peer review of the IGO Investigation Service remained open, what level of priority had been accorded to them and what type of proactive investigations had not been possible owing to budgetary constraints. An indication of whether implementing partners were included in training sessions for investigators and support staff, and of whether the Service planned to share training materials with other actors, would also be appreciated.

35. IGO had a role to play in expanding collaboration with inter-agency partners. He would welcome details of the work undertaken so far in that regard and the Inspector General's thoughts on the possibility of establishing joint investigation teams. His Government appreciated the efforts of IGO to implement a victim-centred approach and would be interested to hear more about the trends, risks and other issues that had been identified with regard to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. IGO should assess the level of staff satisfaction with its services, particularly those related to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. As mentioned at the eighty-second meeting of the Standing Committee, there was also a need for UNHCR to make further improvements to its risk management, including in terms of the establishment of risk appetite.

36. **Mr. Smith** (United States of America) said that the United States recognized the importance of the work of oversight providers in strengthening accountability and learning and in making the activities of UNHCR more efficient and effective. It commended the continued prioritization of oversight and evaluation activities and the progress made by UNHCR in that regard over the previous year, despite COVID-19-related restrictions. It was interested to see how the internal standard operating procedures on a victim-centred approach and the procedural guidance for the efficient and effective receipt and processing of complaints by the Intake Unit would be implemented and what their impact would be. It commended UNHCR for the progress made in linking the work of its Evaluation Service with that of oversight partners and with strategic planning, monitoring, data and analytics, and results-based management. It encouraged UNHCR to remain transparent through the roll-out of new systems, to be open to feedback from donors, partners in the field and recipients of its services, to measure the progress of its decentralization and regionalization efforts against specific targets and adjust its model accordingly and to address, in a timely manner, the gaps identified in the evaluation of UNHCR-led initiatives to end statelessness.

37. The United States commended the efforts being undertaken by the Evaluation Service and IGO to better coordinate audit and evaluation activities and hoped that the oversight system envisaged in the IGO strategy for 2021–2026, combined with the results-based management system, would produce concrete gains in efficiency and accountability. It also welcomed the focus of IGO on ensuring organizational learning from its investigative work. While the investigations in themselves were important for accountability, the effective analysis of cases of misconduct would allow UNHCR management to address their upstream causes and take preventive action.

38. **Mr. Lacroix** (France) said that his delegation wished to commend UNHCR and IGO for their work and reiterate the calls that it had made to UNHCR with regard to risk and supply chain management and results-based approaches in the context of the decentralization and regionalization process, and to IGO with regard to accountability and good practices, particularly in terms of financial management and the monitoring of the proper use of budgetary resources. It wished to emphasize the need to apply strict and transparent frameworks in the selection of implementing partners, which should be able to demonstrate an ability to develop a precise and effective methodology for using and tracking funds. Lastly, it welcomed the increase in the number and improvement in the quality of the evaluations conducted by UNHCR since 2016, which were of particular relevance when they concerned emerging and priority areas.

39. **Mr. Garnett** (Inspector General) said that the aims of the victim-centred approach adopted by his Office were to avoid retraumatization, focus on victims' safety and rights, meet their expressed needs and provide them with as much timely support as possible. Recruiting a diverse workforce was a challenge within the investigation community. Nevertheless, his Office was making good progress: it employed more women than men and had a diverse team in terms of age, ethnicity and geography.

40. Training materials for NGOs on how to handle cases of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment had been finalized and would be made available in the near future. His Office had been organizing online training sessions during the pandemic and hoped to return to the field during the last quarter of 2021. Regarding inter-agency cooperation, he was working closely with his counterparts at the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme. His Office, together with UNHCR management, was following up on the findings of an internal analysis of sexual exploitation and abuse trends.

Some of the data collected were highly sensitive and were thus being held securely. New standard operating procedures were in place for the Intake Unit, which was having to contend with an increased workload while attempting to make its processes for the intake and referral of complaints more robust. The Investigation Service took care to balance the rights of alleged victims with those of the accused. In general, the Service appeared to be well respected.

Report on evaluation (A/AC.96/1216)

41. **Ms. Bell** (Head of the Evaluation Service) said that the experiences of the previous year had highlighted the importance of finding creative ways to critically and independently assess organizational results. The pandemic had influenced the nature of the work of her Service, forcing it to do more remotely. Although it had completed 13 evaluations and initiated a further 27 during the reporting period, rigorous assessments of performance required boots on the ground. Thankfully, in 2021, face-to-face missions had been possible in Costa Rica, the Niger, South Africa, the Sudan and Zambia. The Service had contributed to a United Nations system-wide evaluation of the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19 and was leading a second global evaluation of the protection of refugee rights during the pandemic. Evaluations had shown that the pandemic had presented challenges but also opportunities. In some operations, UNHCR had been forced to deprioritize more developmentally focused activities in order to respond to acute COVID-19 needs. At the same time, in several countries, existing partnerships between UNHCR and development actors had contributed to greater inclusion of refugees in national COVID-19 responses. The Service intended to publish its COVID-19-related findings in a new series of quarterly updates.

42. Evaluations undertaken in recent years had been contributing to change within UNHCR in three main ways. First, they had provided assurances regarding the agency's direction and strategies, including in Jordan, where its efforts to obtain work permits for refugees had boosted not only household income and food security but also protection, and Ethiopia, where its cooperation with development actors had enhanced access to legal services in Gambela, benefiting both refugees and host communities.

43. Secondly, they had generated knowledge and pointed the agency in new directions. The agency's response to Cyclone Idai had revealed critical gaps between policy and implementation and a need to strengthen engagement in emergency preparedness, in addition to highlighting the important role that UNHCR had to play in asserting the centrality of protection in situations of natural disaster. The Service's evaluation of the agency's regional response to the crisis in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela had showcased a number of good practices in the use of remote approaches to reach refugees.

44. Thirdly, they provided evidence in favour of transformation. For example, an evaluation of the agency's approach to workforce learning and development had suggested the need for a more decentralized, flexible and demand-driven approach. The evaluation of UNHCR-led initiatives to end statelessness, meanwhile, had shown that current approaches were unlikely to lead to the success of the global campaign to end statelessness within a decade. UNHCR management had accepted almost all the recommendations made in the evaluation and had agreed on an action plan.

45. The Service had itself been evaluated in 2021 by a peer review panel, which, while finding that the Service's evaluation policy and strategy were a good fit for UNHCR, had made several useful recommendations regarding independence and resourcing, and technical areas related to evaluation planning and implementation. It had also advocated a carefully sequenced expansion of evaluations at the regional and country levels that complemented and supported the roll-out of the results-based management system and ongoing reforms related to decentralization and multi-year planning. Agreed follow-up actions from the peer review would be embedded in a new evaluation policy, which she would be pleased to share in due course. The Service had taken steps to harmonize its work with that of other UNHCR entities that played an important oversight role in order to avoid duplication and maximize coverage, learning and the advice given to management. Efforts were under way to set up a single system for follow-up to management responses.

46. The outlook for the year ahead was promising. A spotlight session at the High-level Officials Meeting would be devoted to examining the situation of refugees during the pandemic. Furthermore, the Service would expand its support for decentralized evaluations through the planned deployment of senior regional evaluation officers in several regions. Measures would also be taken to develop evaluation capacity on the demand and supply sides. Upcoming evaluations of the recently adopted UNHCR policies on internally displaced people and gender-based violence would play an important role in identifying areas of excellence and prompting early course correction where needed. Major emergency evaluations were also planned for UNHCR operations in Afghanistan and Ethiopia, and an evaluation of the impact of the agency's decentralization and regionalization efforts had been scheduled for 2023. She wished to take the opportunity to thank those Member States that had engaged constructively with her Service over the previous year and would welcome expressions of interest to participate in any upcoming evaluations.

47. **Mr. Driessen** (Netherlands) said that his delegation would appreciate a briefing on the peer review and the Service's response to it, an indication of whether the Service intended to conduct evaluations of the planning and budgeting approaches of UNHCR and its engagement in United Nations development system reforms, and an explanation of whether the Service was actively revisiting and following up on the recommendations that it received, including with regard to policy coherence in the UNHCR response to disasters.

48. **Ms. Bell** (Head of the Evaluation Service) said that a report on the peer review would be published by the end of the month and uploaded to her Service's website and the website of the United Nations Evaluation Group. A management response had already been drafted and was being discussed internally. A United Nations system-wide evaluation policy was expected to enter into effect in 2022. In the meantime, the Service was carrying out a range of joint evaluations with other United Nations entities, including of the results achieved by UNICEF and UNHCR in promoting health, education, water and sanitation for refugee children. The Service did not currently intend to evaluate planning and budgeting, which could be an area for collaboration with other oversight providers. The peer review panel had recommended the establishment of a system for follow-up to recommendations from evaluations, and the new evaluation policy would include a requirement to produce public follow-up reports.

Consideration and adoption of the programme budget for 2022 (A/AC.96/1213/Rev.1 and A/AC.96/1213/Add.1)

49. **The Chair** recalled that the programme budget for 2022, contained in document [A/AC.96/1213/Rev.1](#), had already been reviewed at an informal consultative meeting on 17 August 2021 and at the eighty-second meeting of the Standing Committee.

50. **Mr. Dávalos Dávalos** (Ecuador) said it was alarming that the number of persons of concern had increased to almost 92 million owing to new and protracted conflicts. At the same time, the COVID-19 crisis had caused significant changes to the plans and budget of UNHCR. Displacement and statelessness would require greater attention over the coming years, as the number of refugees was expected to rise, mostly in the Americas. While the budget allocation for the region had grown by 9 per cent in 2021 – the second largest increase – the programme budget remained inconsistent across the region in terms of the number of persons of concern hosted.

51. Ecuador understood that UNHCR budgeting and planning methods were based on a comprehensive evaluation of the humanitarian assistance and protection needs of persons of concern. However, the significant increase of such persons in the Americas had not been reflected accordingly or in a manner proportionate to the funds assigned for 2022 given that the number of persons of concern was expected to rise by 41 per cent compared to 2021, making it the region with the highest figure in the world. The UNHCR budget for the Americas was insufficient and most of the persons of concern were being cared for by countries that faced major economic and social challenges.

52. He would like the Committee to take the matter into account considering that the aim of the budget was to make the organization more efficient in terms of delivering results for persons of concern. The Americas needed a larger operational presence to respond to the

immediate needs of an increasing number of such persons, especially at borders and in urban areas. He urged donors to increase their allocation of unearmarked funds to allow UNHCR to respond to situations with greater agility.

53. **Mr. Mayr** (Germany) said that, in the second year of the pandemic, the health crisis was contributing to the ever-widening gap between growing humanitarian needs and available funds. In spite of increased financial support from some donors, humanitarian assistance remained severely underfunded. Broadening and diversifying the humanitarian donor base must therefore continue to be a priority. Germany called on all Member States and development partners to honour their pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum and other conferences, and welcomed the priority given by UNHCR to assistance to the most vulnerable and its dedication to improving effectiveness and efficiency. Predictable funding and ensuring a robust cash flow were crucial to enable UNHCR to respond to the needs of unprecedented numbers of forcibly displaced persons effectively. His Government's funding for UNHCR remained as flexible as possible to enable the Office to adapt its operations to current situations and needs. In order to make the best use of allocated funding, Germany encouraged UNHCR to take concrete measures to reduce the number of staff in-between assignments, in line with the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions ([A/AC.96/1213/Add.1](#)), and hoped to see improvements in terms of the gender balance among high-ranking officials.

54. **Mr. Mindrin** (Russian Federation) said that his Government supported the recommendations contained in the report of the Advisory Committee and proposed the introduction of the practice of approving the Advisory Committee's recommendations and reflecting them in the wording of draft decisions on the budget. The Russian Federation agreed that the presentation of the annual programme budget should include the evolution of expenditures, both actual and projected by item of expenditure, with justifications, as well as detailed staffing plans and tables. That information should be included in all future budget submissions for consideration by the Executive Committee and the Standing Committee. He trusted that the new planning, budgeting, monitoring and reporting system, COMPASS, would facilitate a more predictable, effective and timely preparation of the budget.

55. The Russian Federation wished to repeat the request it had made in 2020 for the submission of information on any operation or financial support provided by UNHCR to the resident coordinator system and on areas of potential improvements in such cooperation. There was a need for more specific information on the financial and administrative performance appraisals and the next steps in the reform process, including decentralization and regionalization, data and digitalization, improved working arrangements and other initiatives. It would also be helpful to have more specific details of the mechanisms for innovative financing. The Russian Federation supported the adoption of the draft programme budget.

56. **Mr. Driessen** (Netherlands) said that he hoped documentation for the next budget would be circulated sufficiently in advance to allow enough time to reflect on the recommendations of the Advisory Committee and all the substantive discussions on recommendations during the Standing Committee meetings. UNHCR should be commended for the progressive steps taken, including the alignment of entitlements for United Nations Office for Project Services and UNHCR contractors. Welcoming the progress made by UNHCR in cooperation with the Business Innovations Strategic Results Group, he would be keen to see quantifiable savings and efficiency gains and to have more information on the engagement of UNHCR with the resident coordinator system.

57. **Ms. Clements** (United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees) said that she understood the frustration expressed by the delegation of Ecuador at the fact that the needs of the increasing numbers of persons of concern entering the country had not been sufficiently addressed in the budget. However, a balance had to be struck between meeting needs and the Office's budget capacity. UNHCR was undergoing a transition from a top-down to a bottom-up approach in terms of its planning on how to respond to the needs of displaced persons and host communities.

58. UNHCR had to respond to constantly changing needs and there was a danger that, if the budget was prepared too far in advance, it would not match the reality of the programming

year. The organization also had to align itself with the Advisory Committee calendar. Discussions were being held in an attempt to have the Advisory Committee's report issued in time for consideration by member States during the Standing Committee meetings before adoption. Numerous steps had been taken in terms of innovative financing, including the green financing facility, in order to address increasing needs.

59. UNHCR had contributed \$2.4 million to the resident coordinator system. Much remained to be done by the resident coordinators in terms of bringing the reinvigorated system together, including preparing the frameworks for planning and cooperation. Gender parity and clean energy remained high priorities and UNHCR would contribute to the efficiency agenda.

60. **Mr. Schotten** (Rapporteur) said that he wished to draw delegations' attention to the draft general decision on administrative, financial and programme matters contained in annex V of the report by the High Commissioner on the annual programme budget 2022 of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (A/AC.96/1213), paragraph (a) of which contained a proposal to approve the revised programmes and budgets for regional programmes, global programmes and headquarters for 2021 for the amount of \$9,131,348,441. Paragraph (c) of the draft decision contained a proposal to approve the programmes and budgets for regional programmes, global programmes and headquarters for 2022 for the amount of \$8,993,707,996. The draft decision authorized the High Commissioner to create supplementary budgets and issue special appeals in case of emergency needs that could not be met fully from the operational reserve. At the informal preparatory consultations held on 22 September 2021, member States had agreed to add a new paragraph (c), which contained a proposal to take note that the programme budget for 2022 had been prepared in accordance with the Executive Committee decision on a revision of the financial rules for voluntary funds administered by the High Commissioner for Refugees. Paragraph (c) would then become paragraph (d). It was the amended decision that was now proposed for adoption.

61. **The Chair** said he took it that the Executive Committee wished to adopt the programme budget for 2022 as set out in the draft decision, as amended.

62. *It was so decided.*

Review of the consultations with non-governmental organizations

63. **Mr. Ishimwe** (Youth Voices Community), speaking via video link, said that the consultations between UNHCR and NGOs had been a success. They had facilitated a dialogue and an exchange of information on best practices with NGOs in the development of UNHCR policies and strategies. The sessions had followed a bottom-up approach, involving working groups and surveys to gather inputs from NGOs and organizations led by persons of concern. The regional consultations had provided space for region-specific discussions and had resulted in the development of concrete recommendations and points for follow-up.

64. In 2021, UNHCR and International Council of Voluntary Agencies had organized eight interactive monthly exchanges on operational, policy and advocacy priorities, such as climate action, funded partnership reforms, countering xenophobia, racism and discrimination, child protection, protection of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons and follow-up on the Global Refugee Forum. The meetings included exchanges with the High Commissioner and other senior members of UNHCR and the NGO community. Ad hoc meetings had been held on emerging issues, such as the situation in Afghanistan.

65. At the regional level, following the UNHCR regionalization and decentralization process, consultations had been conducted with all seven regional bureaux for the first time. A record number of around 3,000 participants had discussed challenges, solutions and responses in the context of the pandemic. The main theme, the localization of humanitarian action and engagement with communities in the COVID-19 context, had been particularly timely as the pandemic had highlighted the critical role of local responders. Some of the key aims of the regional consultations were to bring in more local actors, recognize their leadership and make concerted efforts to increase their participation in coordination mechanisms and decision-making. The participation of organizations led by refugees and other persons of concern had been of particular importance. Communities, especially those

led by refugees and internally displaced and stateless persons, had helped to maintain a vital link to populations of concern and they should be better recognized for their work in coordinating relief efforts and be included in policymaking, coordination and funding structures.

66. The NGOs had strongly recommended improving communication between UNHCR and local organizations by sharing partnership opportunities, supporting existing capacities and strengthening mutual learning between local and international actors. It was also important to invest in local networks for knowledge-sharing, mapping and participation in joint advocacy. UNHCR should focus more on dismantling barriers to participation and seeking involvement at all stages to inform policies and programmes. It should ensure that local NGOs, community organizations and refugees felt empowered to act and take a leading role and make funding more accessible, predictable and flexible with regards to refugee-led organizations, with simplified reporting requirements and financial management support. Member States should regard refugees, internally displaced people and stateless persons as partners rather than beneficiaries and the visibility and participation of local actors in responding to various humanitarian situations should be increased. They should recognize that local organizations have broad networks and know the community, facilitate the registration of organizations led by persons of concern. Member States should also ensure that forcibly displaced and stateless persons were given greater freedom of movement and the right to work.

67. The consultations had highlighted the need for increased advocacy for climate action, with investment in research and flexible funding for NGOs. Partners should be supported with knowledge-sharing and capacity-building on climate action for populations of concern and Member States should facilitate the creation of funding mechanisms that would encourage climate action.

68. The NGOs had recommended strengthening partnerships and making the engagement of UNHCR with partners more transparent, predictable and consistent. It was important to build capacity and mutual trust with partners. Short- and long-term objectives for programming and funding opportunities should be merged to strengthen the humanitarian and development approach, and support to low- and middle-income countries hosting large numbers of forcibly displaced persons should be expanded. Access to documentation, education and social protection schemes should be improved and assistance and services that met the needs of persons of concern should be provided. Member States should uphold their commitments by encouraging greater collaboration on key policy issues and working in collaboration with UNHCR and NGOs to realize the pledges made.

69. **Mr. Smith** (United States of America) said that the work of non-governmental organizations was essential to the ability of UNHCR to deliver on its mandate, since they accounted for some 80 per cent of its field programming. NGOs not only expanded the Office's capacity to provide protection to refugees and other persons of concern, but the diversity of perspectives brought to responses by NGO partners also fostered innovation, which was essential to achieving interim and durable solutions in complex humanitarian situations.

70. The United States encouraged UNHCR to increase the use of multi-year partnership agreements, where possible, and to continue efforts to institutionalize partnership reforms through continuous and open dialogue with civil society partners in order to improve the situation of all populations of concern. The Office's closer collaboration with multilateral development banks would help improve the socioeconomic situations of displaced populations and affected host communities. The continued development of, and investment in, a diverse array of partner organizations, the modernization of the Office's partnership practices and greater collaboration with multilateral development banks were key to identifying and implementing innovative approaches to finding durable solutions. The United States encouraged UNHCR to continue to prioritize women and girls by providing resources and expertise to strengthen access to justice, expanding measures to promote women's economic empowerment and ensuring inclusive social protection and education.

71. Regionalization had provided new opportunities for collaboration and strategic partnership between NGOs and the UNHCR regional bureaux and country operations. As

UNHCR moved forward in its business transformation process, it should clearly communicate information on reforms to ensure it implemented policy and practice consistently across its operations.

72. **Mr. Elie** (International Council of Voluntary Agencies) said that the International Council worked with other regional organizations in its consultations with UNHCR and had processes in place to follow up on its recommendations. A global consultation would be held in 2022 at which the implementation of the recommendations would be assessed.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.