

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

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**Eighty-fourth meeting
28-30 June 2022**

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

Summary record*, Tuesday, 28 June 22, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Mr. Baddoura(Lebanon)

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The meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m.

Opening of the meeting and adoption of the agenda (EC/73/SC/CRP.9)

1. **The Chairperson** declared open the eighty-fourth meeting of the Standing Committee. The agenda (EC/73/SC/CRP.9) was adopted.
2. The Chairperson reported on his recent field mission to Uganda, which had taken place from 15–20 May 2022. The objective of the mission had been to learn about the situation of refugees in Uganda and the impact of their presence there. He had witnessed the emergency response to the ongoing arrival of refugees in Uganda, particularly those arriving from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and had talked with several refugees who were awaiting resettlement or had been admitted through a complementary pathway programme. The mission had been an opportunity to look at solutions and see how comprehensive approaches to refugee response worked in practice.
3. Uganda was the largest host country in Africa, with over 1.5 million refugees. It was a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, as well as to the 1969 Organization of African Unity Refugee Convention. It also had a progressive and inclusive refugee policy. During the Chairperson’s visit, the Prime Minister of Uganda had underlined to him that the country’s open-door policy was based on deep-seated values and beliefs held by the people and the Government. The Prime Minister had reiterated her Government’s commitment to allowing people fleeing violence to find safety in Uganda, but had emphasized that Uganda, as a middle-income country, could not be expected to carry the burden alone. Enhanced support from the international community was needed. The large-scale refugee movement triggered by the war in Ukraine should not overshadow other humanitarian crises.
4. The Chairperson had met a number of refugees in Kampala, including a young man who had been accepted to go to college under the World University Service Canada Student Refugee Program and a young woman who, along with her two younger siblings, was soon to be reunited with an older sibling living in the Netherlands. However, most refugees were not as fortunate as they. UNHCR had recently announced that more than 2 million refugees would be in need of resettlement in 2023, but fewer than 40,000 had had such an opportunity in 2021.
5. He had also travelled to the south-west of the country, namely to the border district of Kisoro. There, he had met immigration officers and local authorities who had been clear that the flow of refugees would continue as long as there was instability in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Some refugees only sought temporary safety, squatting on porches and in schools, and fully expected to return home when it was safe to do so. Others went to UNHCR transit and holding centres, where they received humanitarian assistance. Those wishing to remain in Uganda were later moved to refugee settlements. The influx of refugees was putting a huge strain on border communities, which had prompted a discussion on the need to extend development aid to those areas.
6. In Uganda, refugees did not live in camps, but in open settlements together with local communities. He had visited the Rwamwanja settlement, which was currently home to more than 80,000 refugees, mostly Congolese, and some 40,000 Ugandans. Locals and refugees shared the same water delivery system, sent their children to the same schools, and had equal access to national health services. Development funding had enabled the local authorities to upgrade and expand the local school as well as to consolidate six health centres.
7. *A short video about the mission to Uganda was projected.*
8. The Chairperson commended the efforts of Uganda to implement the Global Compact on Refugees, but highlighted that enormous challenges remained. More people living in a particular district translated into a need for more teachers and health workers. However, no clear plan existed to determine who would pay for their training and salaries. While refugees were allowed to work and sell their produce in Uganda, it took them years to reach an adequate level of self-sufficiency. Because of new arrivals, the plots allocated to each family had become smaller, rendering cultivation unsustainable and prolonging their dependency on humanitarian aid. Many people had also expressed deep concern about the impact that hosting refugees had on the environment.

9. Uganda required and deserved more support. It was vital to step up international burden- and responsibility-sharing. It was not only a question of increasing funds, but also of ensuring that funds arrived faster and were more flexible.

10. **Mr. Tibaleka** (Uganda) thanked the Chairperson for his visit to Uganda. Uganda was currently experiencing an influx of refugees, with some 64,000 refugees received from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan in 2022 alone. Many had settled in refugee settlements such as Rwamwanja and Nakivale, while others were waiting to return home.

11. During his visit, the Chairperson had witnessed the implementation of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework in Uganda, thanks to which refugees were able to live peacefully alongside nationals. Investments in the humanitarian and development sectors had had a positive ripple effect on host communities. He therefore called for more support to enable the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework model to thrive.

12. The Chairperson had also seen first-hand some of the challenges facing Uganda as a refugee-hosting country, including the issue of dwindling land for refugee settlements, as well as underfunding of the UNHCR and World Food Programme refugee response. On average, UNHCR had received only 45 per cent of its required budget over the past three years, while the World Food Programme had decreased food rations because of inadequate funding. The international community must commit to responsibility- and burden-sharing to support host countries.

13. **Ms. Clements** (Deputy High Commissioner, UNHCR), speaking via video link, said that the human consequences of the conflict in Ukraine were staggering, with close to 15 million people being forcibly displaced. The response to the situation had been exemplary, and support had come from across the globe. That said, an even greater scale-up in activities was required to respond to such massive displacement.

14. UNHCR had been at the forefront of the response in Ukraine, providing direct assistance to fleeing families and mobilizing human and financial resources. For example, it had deployed 550 personnel through emergency deployments and expedited the assignment of a further 210 international personnel. It had also set up cash programmes in record time and entered into 25 new partnership agreements to leverage collective strength.

15. However, the response in Ukraine had had an impact, stretching the organization in terms of its human and financial resources. The rapid redeployment of several hundred personnel had led to gaps in personnel elsewhere. Government contributions in 2022 were projected to be similar to those in 2021, even with the \$500 million that had been provided for the situation in Ukraine. Contributions must be significantly increased so that the rest of the world's forcibly displaced and stateless people did not suffer. Greater financial support was all the more important in view of the global economic consequences of the Ukraine crisis, including spikes in inflation and the increased cost of essential commodities, which were driving up the aid needs of displaced populations and the cost of UNHCR operations.

16. The multiplicity of crises was not only a risk, but also an opportunity. It was an opportunity because it forced the organization to experiment and innovate, as had been the case in Ukraine, where a number of new initiatives had been launched, including cash and finance hubs. Finance hubs enabled UNHCR to process an increasing number of financial transactions while maximizing efficiency and quality. Transactions were undertaken by a nimble specialized regional team, avoiding the need to create dedicated local positions. Cash hubs followed the same logic, supporting affected countries in establishing cash programmes quickly and at short notice.

17. The challenge of managing multiple crises simultaneously was placing unanticipated demands on staff at a time when the organization was undergoing a complex, multifaced and interdependent change process. The Business Transformation Programme, which aimed to update, upgrade and modernize the organization's internal infrastructure, was a key component of UNHCR transformation and a necessary complement to the decentralization and regionalization of operations. Good progress was being made with the next new system, expected in the last quarter of 2022. The schedule for the Business Transformation Programme was being kept under close and critical review. It was important to ensure that colleagues in key functions, such as supply, were able to contribute to emergency responses and that change management efforts were made to enable colleagues across the organization to transition to new systems and processes. UNHCR remained committed to ensuring that the roll-out of new systems was managed and timed within operational

and business cycles to ensure that they benefited operations and generated the least possible disruption.

18. The task of managing the above risks and opportunities had not been left to the High Commissioner and senior executive team alone. Overall strategic guidance and direction were provided by the Transformation Governance Board and the Senior Management Committee complemented by inputs from independent oversight entities, including the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee.

19. The change process continued to be accompanied by a dimension of cultural change, including significant efforts to reinforce the integrity of the organization. In that respect, UNHCR had piloted a support desk for workplace concerns and was looking to strengthen the informal component of its conflict resolution process. Substantial work had also gone into tackling sexual misconduct and supporting survivors. The organization was committed to ensuring that survivors were heard, through its victim-centred approach and with the support of a victim care officer. She referred delegates to the 2020–2022 Strategy and Action Plan on tackling sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment for further information. Similar actions had been applied in the context of Ukraine, where protection from sexual exploitation and abuse capacities had been deployed as part of a coordinated inter-agency response.

20. She drew attention to the rising needs of refugees across the global and urged governments to show similar levels of solidarity to people displaced by crises beyond Ukraine. UNHCR continued to work diligently to diversify its sources of funding and was actively engaged in addressing systemic issues affecting humanitarian donorship. Despite those efforts, an urgent need for more funds remained. Support for Ukraine had come at the expense of other operations. More funds would enable UNHCR to continue supporting the 100 million forcibly displaced and stateless persons around the world, regardless of where they were from. Failing that, UNHCR would be compelled to make difficult choices which would impact the world's most vulnerable people.

21. **Ms. Papka** (Nigeria) requested a minute of silence for the African migrants and refugees who had lost their lives at the Nador-Melilla crossing the previous week.

22. *At the invitation of the Chair, members of the Committee observed a minute of silence.*

International protection

23. **Ms. Triggs** (Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, UNHCR) said that the number of forcibly displaced persons had reached a record 100 million and global collaboration was urgent. UNHCR had legal and policy tools at its disposal for effective international protection, including the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the Global Compact on Refugees and the UNHCR Strategic Directions 2022–2026. Political will and financial support were now needed for implementation.

24. While many Member States supported the principles of refugee protection, some governments had declared that the international asylum system was unworkable and return of those not in need of international protection nearly impossible to practise, and declared that asylum-seekers should claim asylum in the country where they first found safety. Deterrence had even become a priority for some countries, resulting in efforts to externalize responsibilities for refugees by transporting asylum-seekers to other, less well-resourced countries. Externalization was not the answer. It shifted the burden, rather than sharing the responsibility, and ran contrary to international refugee law in its letter and spirit. Nonetheless, UNHCR took concerns about the efficacy of asylum processes seriously and was working hard with governments, partners and civil society to improve the speed, efficiency and fairness of asylum systems. The Asylum Capacity Support Group was a useful initiative in that respect.

25. Voluntary repatriation was a solution that had become all too rare. It was well documented that most refugees wanted to return home but, while an increase in repatriations in 2021 was encouraging, the number of voluntary returns remained extremely low, largely owing to protracted conflicts, a lack of respect for the rule of law, and other issues in countries of origin. Resettlement was a solution reserved for those most in need. UNHCR was optimistic that the quotas for resettlement agreed for 2022 would be met, despite the backlog of submissions that had accumulated partly owing to the pandemic of coronavirus disease (COVID-19). She noted increased global

support for complementary or regular pathways, including the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative Fund scholarship programme and new or expanded labour mobility programmes in countries where labour needs were rising. However, the number of persons finding a solution through resettlement or complementary pathways remained low, and initiatives must be scaled up.

26. In line with the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness and the #IBelong campaign, ending statelessness was a strategic priority for UNHCR. For stateless persons, enjoyment of the right to nationality was the only sustainable solution, as it provided the pathway to other rights, including equality and non-discrimination. UNHCR was continuing its efforts to combat racism, discrimination and persecution and, in that connection, called on all governments to provide safe, legal access to people seeking asylum, regardless of their nationality, race, ethnicity, political affiliation, sexual orientation or gender identity. Turning to the issue of internal displacement, she called on States and humanitarian and development actors to work together to meet the needs of internally displaced persons. UNHCR offered support through skills-building, grants for new businesses, the reconstruction of infrastructure and direct cash assistance.

27. Bold, creative thinking was required to advance development financing. Noting that many countries hosting large numbers of displaced persons were also those most affected by fragility, conflict and climate change, and that the war in Ukraine had led to high commodity prices and food insecurity in many low- and middle-income host countries, she said that development financing was urgently required by those countries to ensure the provision of social safety nets, education, accommodation and livelihoods for displaced persons. She highlighted the commitment of UNHCR to involving forcibly displaced persons and the communities that supported them in the design of its work and the determination of solutions. In closing, she emphasized the central importance of access to rights and noted that the Global Compact on Refugees provided practical strategies for sustainable solutions to meet the needs of forcibly displaced and stateless persons. While UNHCR endeavoured to scale up solutions to those increasing needs, the principle of responsibility-sharing remained key to its work.

a. Note on international protection (EC/73/SC/CRP.10)

28. **Ms. Tan** (Director of the Division of International Protection, UNHCR) introduced the High Commissioner's Note on International Protection, which recognized the many ways in which States facilitated and ensured access to rights for refugees, asylum-seekers, returnees, stateless persons and internally displaced persons, while also acknowledging that, in many situations, access to rights was impeded.

29. During a challenging 18-month period in which UNHCR had declared 42 new emergencies, UNHCR had observed troubling instances of refoulement, including arbitrary and collective expulsions and denial of entry and violent pushbacks at borders. Some countries maintained far-reaching restrictions on entry, without exceptions for asylum-seekers, purportedly to manage the spread of COVID-19; however, most States had shown that managing infection risks was possible even while maintaining access to asylum. Positive examples of States providing access to protection had been seen in South America, where Colombia and other countries continued to offer temporary stay to Venezuelans, and in Europe, where temporary protection had been extended to millions fleeing the conflict in Ukraine. Such instances demonstrated that it was possible to provide swift access to protection, even in situations of mass influx. They also highlighted the importance of access, without discrimination, to safe territory and international protection for all who needed it.

30. Turning to mixed movements, she said that UNHCR had worked with partners to promote respect for the basic rights of all those on the move, while recognizing the specific legal position of refugees. Fair and efficient refugee status determination procedures, operating without discrimination and reflecting key safeguards, were essential to protect the rights of refugees. UNHCR and States had implemented innovative practices in 2021–2022, using technology to support asylum systems, manage registration and process document renewals online. The Asylum Capacity Support Group, a key support mechanism under the Global Compact on Refugees, documented those good practices and had the potential to deliver more, with the support of Member States and other stakeholders, to advance solidarity and responsibility-sharing.

31. UNHCR remained committed to combating racism, intolerance and discrimination against displaced and stateless populations. In addition, UNHCR was working with many of its partners to ensure greater access to scholarships and other forms of support for displaced and stateless children

and youth, for whom access to education had posed a significant challenge over the previous year. In addition, through the Safe from the Start initiative under the UNHCR deployment scheme, specialists were supporting emergency operations worldwide to address gender-based violence. UNHCR continued to work closely with States on internal displacement law and policy, which had resulted in strengthened legal policy frameworks in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mexico, Mozambique and Nigeria, and the ratification by the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ethiopia of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa. While important advances had been made on affording stateless persons access to citizenship, the limitations of reliable data continued to hamper progress on identifying and reducing statelessness.

32. UNHCR remained fully committed to finding and implementing durable solutions, such as expanding voluntary repatriation, and welcomed positive progress on return in West and East Africa. Third-country solutions, including resettlement and complementary pathways, remained key priorities. She welcomed the efforts of many States and other stakeholders to work with UNHCR over the previous year to overcome persisting and new challenges. However, more commitments to protection and solutions would be needed for the year to come. Preparations for the 2023 Global Refugee Forum offered a vital opportunity to translate pledges into action to ensure access to rights for all those fleeing persecution and enhance burden- and responsibility-sharing in meaningful ways.

33. **Ms. Mbirimba** (African Group statement) said that, although many States respected the right to access asylum and the principle of non-refoulement, many regions had seen the use of measures to deter the arrival of persons seeking international protection, such as refoulement, border closures, arbitrary and collective expulsions and unfair restrictions in connection with COVID-19 to block access to territory. The pursuit of such measures called into question the foundations of international refugee law and undermined the concepts of solidarity and responsibility-sharing set out in the Global Compact on Refugees. Considering the crucial role played by robust procedural systems in guaranteeing effective asylum access, the African Group welcomed the considerable support provided by UNHCR to States in adapting their asylum systems to process asylum applications equitably and effectively so that persons in need of international protection could be recognized and protected in line with international law.

34. The African Group also welcomed progress made towards enhanced international cooperation and multi-stakeholder engagement to find solutions to forced displacement, such as the increase in public development aid for developing countries and the establishment of partnerships aimed at implementing policies to alleviate poverty and find durable solutions. The group encouraged members of the global community to further increase their participation in burden- and responsibility-sharing in line with commitments made during the 2021 Global Refugee Forum. As developing countries affected by conflict and climate change often hosted high numbers of displaced persons, such countries required increased financing and development support to bolster their response capacity. The principles of cooperation set out in the 1951 Refugee Convention and the Global Compact on Refugees were crucial in that regard.

35. The growing number of internally displaced persons was extremely concerning, as was the fact that 80 per cent of global internal displacements in 2021 had occurred in sub-Saharan Africa. The African Group welcomed the collaboration of UNHCR with various regional entities on the ratification, domestication and implementation of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa. The group also welcomed efforts to promote the inclusion of refugees in national health plans and policies, even if those efforts had met with challenges in certain low-income countries. While the increase in the number of repatriations in 2021 was laudable, it nonetheless represented just 4 per cent of the repatriations needed.

36. Turning to statelessness, she said that the African Group welcomed the significant advances on the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness, including the accession of States to United Nations conventions on statelessness, the implementation of specific procedures to identify and protect stateless persons, and the introduction of guarantees on citizenship in legislation to prevent statelessness. However, progress had been uneven and further reforms were required in certain countries with high numbers of stateless persons. The African Group encouraged States to adopt further legislative and procedural measures to address gender- and ethnicity-based discrimination, which was a major cause of statelessness. Finally, the African Group encouraged the international community to offer support for solutions to the humanitarian crisis in Africa and called for the increased involvement of development actors through reliable and complementary partnerships.

37. **Mr. Wagner** (European Union group statement), speaking on behalf of the European Union and its Member States, with the candidate countries the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, as well as the stabilization and association process and potential candidate country Bosnia and Herzegovina having aligned themselves with the statement, drew attention to the fact that the number of forcibly displaced persons in the world had risen to over 100 million within the space of a year, setting a regrettable new record. Many millions of them were Ukrainian. The unprovoked and unjustified invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, had triggered a displacement crisis on a scale not seen in Europe since the Second World War; more than 7 million – mostly women and children – had entered the European Union from Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova seeking safety in neighbouring countries or within the region since 24 February 2022; and while many were returning, the situation remained volatile. European countries and communities had responded with an outpouring of solidarity and support, and the European Union had taken the unprecedented step of activating its Temporary Protection Directive (Directive 2001/55/EC) to ensure the protection and prevent the trafficking of vulnerable refugees; more than 3 million had been granted temporary access to suitable accommodation, social welfare assistance, medical care and education, as well as to labour markets. At the same time, European Union Member States had continued to meet their international obligations in providing protection to other refugees, with more than 200,000 per year having been provided with safe and legal pathways; more than 500,000 asylum-seekers had applied for international protection in 2021 and more than 97,000 had secured a safe haven; and the European Commission was launching a pledging exercise to ensure continued support for voluntary resettlement.

38. In addition to the challenges of forced displacement in Europe, the European Union remained steadfast in its solidarity and commitment to supporting efforts to address those associated with other displacement crises at the global level. It had organized the sixth Brussels Conference on “Supporting the future of Syria and the region” the previous month, for example, at which it had undertaken to provide 4.8 billion euros of the total 6.4 billion euros pledged by the international community, which would take the overall amount mobilized to assist those displaced by the protracted crisis in the region since 2011 to 27.4 billion euros.

39. Regarding the situation in Afghanistan, the President of the Commission, at the G20 Extraordinary Leaders’ Meeting on Afghanistan in October 2021, had announced a package of 1 billion euros in support for displaced Afghans and host communities in the region, within the framework of its leadership role in ensuring political and financial support, including as Chair of the Core Group of the Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees. In Africa, which remained a major priority, it had mobilized nearly 1.1 billion euros to support the more than 4.7 million displaced persons in the Sahel region. Lastly, it had recently released an additional 22 million euros to support Rohingya refugees and host communities in Bangladesh, as well as conflict-affected people in Myanmar.

40. On the issue of displacement due to climate change, environmental degradation and disasters, the European Union was about to assume the presidency of the Platform on Disaster Displacement and would continue to promote coordinated actions and support to meet the needs of partner countries in terms of resilience-building and enhanced prevention, preparedness and mitigation. UNHCR’s increased engagement in efforts to address the many challenges in that regard, in keeping with its Strategic Framework for Climate Action, would be welcomed, keeping in mind the importance, while working in coordination with other international, national and local actors, of respecting existing roles and mandates; a division of labour that drew on the core strengths of those involved was key to delivering an efficient and effective response.

41. The European Union was committed to greater international burden- and responsibility-sharing, as well as to tackling the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement, and remained a leading donor of humanitarian and development assistance in response to major crises – it had devoted most of its humanitarian aid budget of 2.2 billion euros for 2021 to the needs of refugees, internally displaced persons and host communities, and had allotted 10 per cent of its external assistance budget – nearly 8 billion euros – to forced displacement and migration issues.

42. His delegation endorsed the practice at sessions of the Executive Committee of adopting conclusions on international protection and solutions for future guidance, and welcomed the current focus on the theme of mental health and psychological support, which was a major challenge in the context of displacement situations, including the war in Ukraine.

43. **Mr. Gul** (Pakistan, speaking on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)), recalled that the OIC group of countries, in a letter to the High Commissioner dated 11 January 2020, had requested that UNHCR refrain from referring directly or indirectly to politically controversial concepts that did not command universal recognition, such as those related to sexual orientation and gender identity, and that an effort be made to distinguish between the documents with which Member States were, and were not, asked to associate themselves. Acknowledging that UNHCR had made an effort to respond, the OIC group further requested that a footnote be included in the Note on International Protection to indicate that its content did not represent the views of all Member States. In the spirit of its long-standing partnership with UNHCR, the OIC group urged the Organization to address its concerns about the use of divisive language and specific interpretations in documents and to make certain that the wording was more general, all-encompassing and conducive to achieving consensus and, hence, the goal of providing protection for all refugees, without discrimination. Existing international human rights law, he said, provided sufficient clarity to combat violence and discrimination against any person or group, cooperation rather than controversy was key to humanitarianism and UNHCR, for its part, should seek to keep its mandate and operations apolitical and rooted in universally agreed humanitarian principles.

44. **Mr. Petrossian** (Armenia) said that Armenia, as a country directly affected by the phenomenon of forced displacement, appreciated and stood ready to further its cooperation with UNHCR in advancing fundamental principles of humanitarianism, such as humanity, neutrality and impartiality, and would continue to contribute to efforts to alleviate the plight of people fleeing conflicts, violence and persecution. It was crucial to address the phenomenon comprehensively, from the root causes to the human rights of the refugees, the internally displaced and stateless and all other persons of concern. In the meantime, however, the global forced displacement crisis showed no signs of abating. On the contrary, the total number of displaced persons in the world continued to rise and had recently passed the 100 million mark, which was a stark and sobering wake-up call for action to resolve and prevent conflicts and to bring an end to persecution. The victims of forced displacement must have the chance to benefit from international humanitarian assistance, protection and the hope of a durable solution. UNHCR was accustomed to working in uncertain conditions, such as during the COVID 19 pandemic when, in cooperation with partners, it had managed to continue to support States in providing protection and assistance to persons of concern. To deliver that support, UNHCR, together with other United Nations entities and other humanitarian actors with a universal mandate, had to have unfettered, unconditional, humanitarian access to the people and places in need. Any politicization of such access was unacceptable: Armenia was seriously concerned that entire areas that UNHCR had been mandated to cover, as well as their forcibly displaced populations, had been marginalized and rendered inaccessible as a result. In that regard, it was important to recall the report of the United Nations Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Internal Displacement, entitled *Shining a Light on Internal Displacement*, which had concluded, under recommendation 9 (Strengthen the quality of protection and assistance to internally displaced persons and host communities), that the United Nations and donor States should strongly advocate for humanitarian access in the places where it was unduly restricted or denied, including on behalf of non-governmental organizations, and that the States hindering that access should be held accountable through the various mechanisms and tools of the United Nations human rights machinery; humanitarian assistance must not be extended to affected persons in a manner that undermined their human rights, safety and dignity or that discriminated against them because of their origins, language, religion or opinions.

45. **Ms. Namono** (Uganda), aligning her delegation with the African Group statement, stressed that nobody on earth, no matter how poor, would willingly give up their livelihood and home to become a refugee and that it was incumbent on the international community to offer protection to fellow human beings forced to flee for their lives. Every country, including those such as hers with an open-door policy for refugees, should question whether it was doing as much as it could to protect the rights of displaced populations, from the point of displacement to that of their final settlement. Efforts to address the issues called for the cooperation not only of the countries hosting the refugees but also of those responsible for their flight, and all countries needed to hold each other accountable for their actions.

46. In the meantime, rates of acceptance among resettlement States had been low, well short of the annual targets, and hosting communities, particularly in developing countries with meagre resources, such as hers, were struggling to cope with the increased strain of catering to stranded populations of displaced persons. Compounded by the impacts of a COVID 19 pandemic that had

ravaged the economy, caused the closure of existing pathways, Ugandan infrastructure, particularly schools and hospitals, and the environment were depleted and crying out ever more loudly for development aid, local communities were growing weary and the political establishment was at risk of being pressured, against its will, into reconsidering its open-door policy. The situation was dire. With its refugee response programmes in need of greater support, Uganda, which remained committed to implementing the Global Compact for Refugees, notwithstanding the associated drain on its infrastructure, called on all States and partners to abide by the principle of responsibility and burden-sharing. Underfunding was the main challenge and impediment to progress in the protection of refugees and other persons of concern, especially now that the world's attention had shifted to the current crisis in Ukraine. Her Government, which appreciated the assistance that the country had received from partners, fellow Member States and private donors, therefore urged others to follow suit to enable it to continue to address the needs and find lasting solutions for the protection of all refugees, irrespective of their race, nationality, gender and age, keeping in mind that every refugee was a human being fleeing from danger in the hope of finding refuge.

47. **Ms. Kołodyńska** (Poland), aligning her delegation's statement with that delivered by the European Union on behalf of its Member States, expressed appreciation to UNHCR for its unwavering support in the face of major emergencies and protracted crises in various hotspots around the world. In particular, her Government was grateful for the assistance provided not only to Poland but also to Hungary, the Republic of Moldova, Romania and Slovakia to help them deal with the consequences of the forced displacement of millions of people from neighbouring Ukraine, caused by the unprovoked and unjustified invasion of the country by the Russian Federation; it looked forward to consulting and cooperating with UNHCR to ensure further enhanced, coherent, support.

48. Poland was deeply concerned about the obstruction of humanitarian access that was hampering the delivery of aid to those in need in eastern Ukraine. In view of the significant challenges preventing the Ukrainian relief services from reaching those areas, international organizations clearly needed to step up their assistance so as to ensure that the citizens there enjoyed their rights to protection which, as stated in the High Commissioner's Note on International Protection, ultimately depended on the action and commitments of States. Poland, for its part, was doing its utmost to provide shelter, care and protection for the 4.3 million forcibly displaced persons who had entered the country from Ukraine since 24 February 2022; around half had settled in Poland for the foreseeable future. It had simplified the procedures for border crossings, established additional transport connections, with some 150 new information points for foreigners at railway and bus stations, and introduced a complex reception and shelter scheme involving the participation of both Polish citizens and the Government that facilitated the local integration of the forcibly displaced, allowing them to live in an open environment as opposed to confining them to a refugee camp or restricted refugee centre. Regarding their access to basic rights and services, special legislation had been introduced that granted full and free access to the labour market, medical care and education as well as to other forms of material support; refugees were therefore benefiting from the same public services as any other citizen of Poland, thereby paving the way for their meaningful participation in society – some 1.2 million displaced Ukrainians had already been registered as having a Polish identity number and, hence, access to social benefits.

49. Meanwhile, her country's Government Plenipotentiary for War Refugees from Ukraine had been assigned to strengthen humanitarian coordination mechanisms at the national and local levels, with the participation of non-governmental organizations, and a dedicated aid fund had been created to finance the delivery of support to displaced persons by central and local Government departments; some 786 million euros in budgetary resources had been allocated to the fund to date.

50. Poland would continue to support Ukraine and its people with access to protection, rights and solutions and was ready to work constructively and in close partnership with UNHCR and other international organizations to ensure that protection.

51. **Ms. Munro** (Canada) agreed that the international protection system relied on the good faith of States in meeting their commitments and assuming responsibility for non-discriminatory access to safe territory, to rights and to effective protection and solutions. Equally, the Global Compact on Refugees, which, with its emphasis on international cooperation, multi-stakeholder approaches and solidarity with both refugees and affected host communities, put the right to asylum and the principle of non-refoulement at the heart of international protection, did indeed provide an effective way forward to satisfactory solutions. Having chaired the Global Compact's comprehensive regional

protection and solutions framework support platform since July 2021, Canada had seen the Compact in action in Central America and Mexico and the engagement and dedication of the platform's member countries, as well as the invaluable contribution of civil society and private sector partners in delivering concerted and sustained actions to address forced displacement in the region. As the inaugural Chair of the Global Task Force on Refugee Labour Mobility, Canada would continue to advocate efforts to achieve objective 3 of the Compact (expand access to third-country solutions) based on a multi-stakeholder approach that helped refugees to "realize their human right to decent work".

52. On the critical issue of tackling sexual and gender-based violence, Canada was a member and former lead of the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies and advocated increased funding for programming in humanitarian settings. UNHCR's expanded mobile and remote service provision for survivors was to be welcomed, as were its efforts in mainstreaming gender-based violence risk mitigation and advocacy of support for male survivors and others facing violence due to sexual orientation or gender identity. However, response capacity was seriously underfunded, and services had been restricted because of the COVID 19 pandemic; UNHCR was encouraged to prioritize efforts to address the gaps and expand the services. Also, given that the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse remained a major concern, UNHCR was encouraged to further strengthen and implement safeguarding policies, improve hiring practices and whistle-blower protections and seek to introduce new system-level mechanisms where possible.

53. Regarding UNHCR's pivotal role in the overall humanitarian architecture, in particular as Global Cluster Lead Agency for Protection, its improvements in terms of coordination capacity and evidence-based analysis were much appreciated and there had been welcome progress in integrating age, gender and diversity into UNHCR policies, programmes and advocacy; the use of disaggregated data to identify persons with disabilities was commendable. Canada looked forward to working with UNHCR to operationalize the recommendations of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's protection policy review. While much had been done to support and deliver international protection, there was much more to do before the next Global Refugee Forum, and Canada would continue to play its part.

54. **Mr. Ferzli** (Lebanon) drew attention to two worrying trends that his delegation had identified in the Note on International Protection: the steady rise in the number of new emergencies and forcibly displaced persons in the world, which, if it continued, would inexorably lead to further meltdown in the humanitarian system and augment the pressure on host States and communities; and the poor results in terms of durable solutions, which indicated that the international community had failed to achieve consensus and deliver on its commitment to strengthen multilateralism. The currently complicated geopolitical situation worldwide should serve not as a pretext for inaction but as a reason to redouble efforts to strengthen peace processes and promote durable solutions. A failure properly to address the colossal challenges facing host countries could aggravate the main drivers of displacement which, in some vulnerable host countries, could cause grave political, economic, social and/or security-related problems. Member States must in good faith renew their commitment to the Global Compact on Refugees as a whole and show the political will to translate the critical principles of burden- and responsibility-sharing into concrete actions.

55. Regarding the situation in Middle East and North Africa region host countries such as his, the intractable challenges posed by the region's protracted and highly complex refugee crises had been exacerbated recently by the threat of food insecurity caused by the disruption of supply chains due to the war in Ukraine. While one third of the its population made up of displaced persons from neighbouring countries, Lebanon, with the support of UNHCR and various international and national non-governmental organizations, remained committed to providing aid, protection and relief for displaced Syrians on its territory. The mounting pressure on its infrastructure and vital sectors, however, had grown intolerable and its resilience was stretched to the limit; business as usual was no longer an option. Lebanon therefore urged the international community to redouble its efforts to ensure the safe repatriation of displaced Syrians to their homeland and finally heed the call for more equitable and predictable burden- and responsibility-sharing. Countries such as his should not be left to their plight, hosting increasingly vulnerable populations of displaced persons in steadily deteriorating conditions; the more the situation deteriorated the more vulnerable the system in place would become to abuse at all levels. Voluntary repatriation figures, according to the United Nations Development Group Note on Durable Solutions for Displaced Persons, were worryingly low, and the call for durable solutions all the more urgent; as local integration in the Lebanese context was

out of the question, the preferred solution from the development point of view would be the safe and dignified return of displaced Syrians to their home country.

56. **Mr. Ngoya** (Kenya) said that, since his country's accession to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, it had shown its commitment to international refugee law and the right of refugees to legal protection by hosting a large number of refugees from the region. Despite the increasing numbers of regional refugees, Kenya strongly believed in exploring durable solutions at regional level. The COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated movement restrictions and recovery efforts in the face of protracted and emerging crises and remained formidable and, in that regard, UNHCR staff were to be commended for delivering on their mandate and saving lives. Regarding recent national-level developments, following the official publication of the Refugee Act in November 2021 and its entry into force in February 2022, a comprehensive refugee response framework had been developed and adopted to better coordinate refugee issues, including the needs of the host community. The Act was progressive, encouraging of socioeconomic inclusion for refugees by providing access to employment, education and health services and indicative of the Kenyan commitment to the Global Compact on Refugees, which continued to be implemented through close collaboration between national and county governments.

57. The Kenyan Government recognized the many initiatives on international protection, including the strengthening of national child protection and opposition to gender-based violence, and was pleased by the progress made on the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness 2014–2024. In its view, voluntary repatriation to countries of origin remained the preferred durable solution; he called for further efforts in implementing the Global Compact on Refugees. Resettlement in third countries not only balanced burden- and responsibility-sharing, but also alleviated pressure on host countries, and Kenya called on the international community to maintain its efforts to achieve durable solutions.

58. **Mr Dávalos** (Ecuador) noted that, as reflected in the Note on International Protection, there was an incompatibility between some of the measures adopted to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic and international law. However, although the pandemic had presented added challenges to host countries and communities, his country had adopted measures that provided appropriate protection for those seeking asylum. They included implementing virtual assistance by means of a web page that provided information on international protection, the process of asylum requests virtually and access to electronic documents, as well as to other services in connection with international protection. Those measures maintained such services in place for those seeking protection, even in the absence of face-to-face services, and provided remote access to protection units. The refugee community and those seeking protection had access to the free COVID-19 vaccination programme at all times, as a principle of equality under the law, and Ecuador recognized UNHCR support in that area.

59. As regards the existence of mixed movements of migrants and those seeking international protection, Ecuador had initiatives in place to legalize Venezuelan residents. As for strengthening the asylum and refugee screening systems, Ecuador was strongly in favour of a robust system which ensured international protection. Host countries required support to deal with refugees under the principle of burden-sharing in the process of further developing refugee systems. Equally, Ecuador considered that including those seeking international protection when providing access to claims and services was indispensable to the effective exercise of their rights. Full integration of those displaced and measures which ensured their self-sufficiency not only promoted dignity for refugees and their economic, social and legal well-being, but also played a role in the well-being and development of the host community under a whole-of-society approach. Durable solutions for refugees were not possible without international cooperation; that was key to the aim of caring for refugees in a timely, efficient and holistic manner under international law.

60. **Ms. Lehoux** (Switzerland) commended UNHCR for its work and particularly its stay-and-deliver approach in the face of unprecedented crises with record numbers of emergencies of those forcibly displaced. The Global Compact on Refugees was fundamental to continuing to show solidarity and developing collective action based on the principle of burden- and responsibility-sharing. Switzerland was pleased that there had been measurable progress, recorded in the recent UNHCR report, and that collective action had been taken in preparation for the next Global Refugee Forum. As regards the current situation, access to protection free of discrimination was essential. Although there was a sense that preferential treatment was available to those fleeing Ukraine, it was important to recall that all persons were entitled to cross borders during conflicts,

regardless of their original identity or nationality. The principles of non-discrimination and non-refoulement were fundamental to international law, and Switzerland had a duty to promote them diligently. Switzerland had offered protection and security to a large number of fleeing Ukrainians by means of temporary protection status which granted them residence permits and provided them with access to basic services and the labour market.

61. Conflicts, violence, catastrophes and worsening climate change increasingly threatened the education of children, particularly those exposed to conflict or displaced. All children had a right to education yet much work remained to be done. The COVID-19 pandemic had only exacerbated that situation by prolonging school closures and causing the loss of their financing. Young girls were particularly vulnerable to non-attendance due to emergencies, even after the emergency had ended.

62. Also on education in times of emergencies, the Geneva Global Hub on Education in Emergencies had been launched in January 2021 and now had 36 members. The Hub had created multi-stakeholder and multisectoral approaches to meet the education needs of displaced persons, and had recently published a report on the aid required for that sector. Switzerland was pleased to host Giga, a UNICEF-ITU global initiative to connect every school to the Internet and every child to information in an effort to prevent any child from being left behind. Current efforts in that area, particularly in the call to bridge the information gap or technological divide, remained ongoing. Switzerland was pleased with the standard of the work being done on gender equality. Minimum standards were essential, and stakeholder capacity in the field required much improvement. Switzerland was also pleased to see UNHCR extending mobile and remote services, including emergency helplines, to improve management of survivors. It also encouraged UNHCR to continue to fight against gender-based violence and to include local actors, such as women's organizations. She commended UNHCR for its work with the regional development banks and the World Bank to support the implementation of measures that ensured that refugees had access to economic and social development. Only an approach based on human development and peace could allow the world to continue to protect displaced persons from the challenges they faced.

63. **Ms. Rosenvinge** (Norway) said that it was alarming that over the course of the previous year, 42 new emergencies had been declared in 30 countries; however, countries like Côte d'Ivoire, where the situation had been resolved, offered hope. The invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation had created the biggest refugee crisis in Europe since the Second World War and, for the first time since the 1990s, Norway had activated the regulation on temporary collective protection for Ukrainians and was concerned about the risk of trafficking of vulnerable women and children. However, despite that crisis, Norway would continue to meet its commitments on protection in other crises and prioritize the protection of civilians in its work at the United Nations Security Council. Protection should remain the absolute priority and main goal of UNHCR, with operational protection at country level and UNHCR's role as cluster lead for protection placed uppermost on the agenda. In that regard, UNHCR's collaboration with non-governmental organizations in the Global Protection Cluster was to be commended.

64. There were some issues of particular concern to Norway. First came the prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence in refugee and internal displacement situations, which mostly affected women and girls, but also impacted men and boys. Preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence, including the introduction of protection measures, should be a priority; Norway was pleased that UNHCR would step up its efforts in that regard, as laid out in its Strategic Directions 2022–2026, as its role, particularly as cluster lead on protection, was essential. However, greater efforts required greater funding. Sexual and gender-based violence was the least well funded area in the field of protection, and that funding gap needed to be addressed. Norway would continue to provide funds in unearmarked or softly earmarked form. Second, Norway was celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the decriminalization of homosexuality yet, as shown by a recent violent attack on a venue frequented by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTQI+) persons, that community remained vulnerable. In many countries, LGBTQI+ persons faced persecution, violence and discrimination and protecting LGBTQI+ refugees and internally displaced persons was vitally important. Third, access to health care, including reproductive health care, for refugees and internally displaced persons was an important protection tool, particularly in the context of sexual and gender-based violence, including rape used as a weapon of war and conflict. Fourth, as a protection measure, education in emergencies was a vital part of the humanitarian response; many refugee children had not attended school during the pandemic, with the concern that many, particularly girls, would not return at all. In that regard, UNHCR, along with other

organizations, was to be commended for its efforts to ensure that refugee and internally displaced children retained their access to education. A lack of funding for such efforts due to other ongoing emergency situations was concerning. Fifth, Norway shared UNHCR's concern for the situation of internally displaced persons, and recognized its leadership on related issues. Finally, Norway highlighted the importance of adopting green humanitarian responses and clean energy measures, and viewed such an approach also as a tool for protecting refugees and local communities. People had a fundamental right to seek international protection, and Norway had a robust asylum system. International cooperation remained vital to the issue of protection.

65. **Ms. Galea** (Malta) said that her country aligned itself with the statement by the European Union and commended UNHCR on its Note on International Protection. As a Mediterranean front-line State, providing international protection continued to create both challenges and opportunities for Malta. To date in 2022, there had been a 29 per cent increase in irregular crossings compared with the same period in the previous year; the two-year upward trend was indicative of the pressure that such flows of migrants and asylum-seekers could impose on State structures.

66. There also remained COVID-19 challenges, despite the overall shift to a post-pandemic phase, and concern remained on the longer-term impact of the disease in exacerbating migrant and refugee vulnerabilities, as well as the potential for them to fall into the hands of smugglers or traffickers. Malta had always been a firm advocate of establishing a predictable relocation mechanism that could help address the challenges faced by front-line States; as the longer-term impact of COVID-19 materialized, that aim had become ever more crucial.

67. The invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation had created its own difficulties. Faced with the new challenge of millions of people fleeing, the European Union had activated the Temporary Protection Directive and shown its willingness to take action. Although not a front-line State, Malta had received over 1,000 applications for temporary protection since 24 February 2022 and had reiterated its readiness to support those fleeing violence with a view to seeking both short-term and long-term solutions together.

68. Malta also affirmed its continued support for the Global Compact on Refugees and its desire to continue to follow up on its implementation at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum. She thanked UNHCR for its invaluable assistance and cooperation.

69. **Mr. Hage Chahine Assumpção** (Brazil) congratulated UNHCR and its staff and partners for their stay-and-deliver approach over the previous two years. Multidimensional crises were spreading around the world, leading to a major uptick in violence, economic hardship and political unrest which, when combined with the effects of COVID-19, had also led to greater instability. Faced with 100 million forcibly displaced persons worldwide, he indicated that protection policies and solidarity towards emerging and protracted crises needed strengthening. He was grateful for UNHCR's efforts to maintain awareness of the situation in South America and wished to stress the importance for the international community of continuing to support the region, particularly when it was faced with 6 million displaced Venezuelans.

70. Brazil had implemented a simplified procedure that had given prima facie recognition of refugee status to over 50,000 Venezuelans. Along with national migration law, that measure had helped to ensure that migrants and refugees had access to all public services in Brazil, free from any kind of discrimination. Currently, Brazil hosted over 345,000 Venezuelans, along with other migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers. With a view to establishing quality protection policies, and through Brazil's presidency of the Quito Process, discussions on the protection of vulnerable groups, such as migrant and refugee youth, as well as on ensuring support and visibility to host communities, remained a priority.

71. As shown by its humanitarian visa policy, Brazil had always had an international outlook and had granted protection to those affected by conflicts in Afghanistan and Ukraine under a long-standing policy that had previously benefited those fleeing from Haiti and the Syrian Arab Republic. Brazil remained fully committed to protection and urged the world to show solidarity towards those forced to flee, without discrimination and irrespective of their origin.

72. **Mr. Driessen** (Netherlands) said that the Netherlands aligned itself with the statement by the European Union and its Member States. He welcomed Ms. Tan to her post and thanked her and her team for the Note on International Protection.

73. The Netherlands was gravely concerned by the record number of 100 million forcibly displaced people around the world and by the funding difficulties facing UNHCR. The Netherlands wished to commend those host countries which had provided refugees with access to health care, education and, in some cases, even social protection. Uganda was a good example of such a generous country, as noted in the Chair's opening briefing. The Netherlands also deeply appreciated the continued hosting of Syrian refugees by neighbouring countries, which were facing many crises and vulnerabilities among their own citizens and, at the same time, was concerned about the mounting pressure and hardships facing Syrian refugees in several neighbouring countries, owing to the worsening socioeconomic situation also seen elsewhere. His country wished to make it clear that such concerns were taken very seriously and that it recommitted to making available predictable and multi-annual funding to that region, particularly as the conditions for safe and voluntary return by refugees to the Syrian Arab Republic had not been met.

74. A stable and predictable international protection environment remained critical to the successful implementation of development approaches to forced displacement, to which the Netherlands remained firmly committed. Nexus financing would continue to play a pivotal role in implementing the Global Compact on Refugees, as seen in the feedback on the UNHCR visit to Uganda. He restated his country's support for UNHCR's core protection mandate in the region in the Syrian Arab Republic, including the observance of the principle of non-refoulement. The Netherlands would continue to stand by UNHCR, refugees and host communities in the Syrian Arab Republic and elsewhere in the world. Lastly, the Netherlands joined the call from the African Group and other delegations for more burden- and responsibility-sharing and support for host countries and communities worldwide.

75. **Mr. Atroshenko** (Russian Federation) said that his country supported the efforts of UNHCR to improve the effectiveness of the international protection regime for refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless persons based on the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. It took note with approval of UNHCR's efforts to implement the Global Compact on Refugees, as well as the work of the Global Refugee Forum, and strongly believed that resolving conflicts by diplomatic and political means in the States of origin and providing assistance to their socioeconomic recovery were key to solving the migration crisis, ensuring the return of refugees to their own places of residence and preventing new waves of forced migration. The Russian Federation shared the view of UNHCR that the voluntary return of refugees to their countries was often the best and most suitable solution for them, and called on UNHCR to continue to contribute to the implementation of the Russian initiative for the voluntary repatriation of Syrian refugees, as well as working actively on their reintegration into their homeland. Russia traditionally supported the work of UNHCR to reduce the number of stateless persons, and was particularly concerned about the many stateless persons in the Baltic States. That issue should continue to be a priority for UNHCR. The Russian Federation welcomed the work of the Office of the High Commissioner on internally displaced persons, as that affected the lives of many people and was often vital to maintaining stability in various countries and regions. The Russian Federation called on UNHCR to act on the basis of the international humanitarian principles of neutrality, independence, impartiality and humanity pursuant to its mandate.

76. After carefully reading the Note on International Protection, the Russian Federation noted with regret that its efforts to welcome refugees had not been fully reflected in the document. The Russian Federation, pursuant to its international obligations and national legislation, provided forced migrants with reliable protection in the form of refugee status or temporary asylum. As part of the measures to facilitate the adaptation and integration into Russian society of asylum-seekers and beneficiaries, as well as to achieve the goals of the Global Compact on Refugees, legislative improvements to the asylum situation would continue.

77. One of the most important principles of citizenship of the Russian Federation was the reduction of statelessness. Currently, over 52,000 people from 60 States had received asylum in the Russian Federation. From 1992 to the present, some 800,000 stateless persons had been granted Russian citizenship. From February 18 to June 16, 2022, over 1 million persons had arrived from the territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk Peoples' Republics and Ukraine, and the Russian Federation was making considerable efforts to provide protection and an adequate standard of living for them, including free health care. Measures were also being taken to provide refugees with financial, psychological and legal assistance, including education, mobile telephony services and temporary accommodation centres for over 32,000 people. To be able to regulate the legal status of

those arriving in an emergency situation from Ukraine and the Donetsk and Luhansk Peoples' Republics, a number of regulatory legal acts had been issued, including a document resolving their legal status and an explanation of the procedures to apply for State support measures. Administrative barriers to migration registration had been eliminated, and the process for seeking temporary asylum had been greatly simplified; it now took only three working days. Citizens from that region could apply for temporary residence permits regardless of official immigration quotas, and the grounds, conditions and procedures for acquiring Russian citizenship had been simplified.

78. **Ms. Petrova** (Bulgaria) said that Bulgaria aligned itself with the statement by the European Union and its Member States and wished to thank UNHCR for the briefing on international protection challenges and achievements. She noted with regret that, in 2022, forced displacement had continued to reach new record levels, with millions of people fleeing from war, persecution and human rights violations. The Russian Federation's war on Ukraine had caused massive displacement, as well as human and humanitarian crises in Europe. Bulgaria remained in solidarity with its neighbouring countries, which had welcomed those fleeing war with generosity. Bulgaria also welcomed UNHCR's efforts to provide assistance to its neighbouring countries and praised the courage of its staff in Ukraine to stay and deliver.

79. Between the beginning of the war and 3 June 2022, over 350,000 Ukrainians had entered Bulgaria, mostly women and children. Of those, approximately 117,000 people were registered under the European Union Temporary Protection Directive and in excess of 82,000 remained in Bulgaria, including 500 unaccompanied minors in the care of the competent child protection authorities. To meet such challenges, the Bulgarian Government had taken a series of operational measures, including establishing an operational coordination group with six subgroups that had assumed responsibility for all refugee-crisis-related issues. A dedicated web portal had been developed to provide information in Bulgarian, Ukrainian and English. Ukrainian citizens with temporary protection had access to the labour market and were able to work in Bulgaria without a work permit. They also enjoyed guaranteed access to health care under the same conditions as Bulgarian citizens, as well as housing, education and social welfare assistance. Many displaced persons had found employment in Bulgaria, and many others had enrolled in education. A new humanitarian housing programme had been launched to accommodate persons with temporary protection, and preventive anti-human trafficking measures were being implemented.

80. Concomitantly, Bulgaria continued to monitor the international situation in other parts of the world, and provided asylum without discrimination for those who met the international protection requirements. Bulgaria shared the grave common concern over the ongoing security and humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, and continued to support UNHCR's role in implementing the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework in Afghanistan. She commended UNHCR's efforts to combat mixed movements and the fight against human trafficking. Bulgaria shared the concerns about the challenges of ensuring access to education for forcibly displaced persons and stateless children, and welcomed UNHCR's priority implementation of its policy on prevention, risk mitigation and response to gender-based violence.

81. **Mr. Olfato** (Philippines) said that the reality of new and protracted crises, tightening borders, limited resources and social fatigue required the international community and humanitarian institutions to show solidarity and develop a coordinated response. Above all, and pursuant to the 1951 Refugee Convention and the Global Compact on Refugees, it was vital to ensure access to asylum and respect for the principle of non-refoulement.

82. The Philippines found it concerning and regrettable that many refugees and other vulnerable persons remained deprived of their access to rights and were often subject to collective expulsion and pushback at land and sea borders. Such restrictions contravened both the spirit and letter of the relevant international conventions, resulting in necessary protection being denied and at times also in an unnecessary and preventable loss of life. It was worrying that deep-seated xenophobia and discrimination exacerbated an already tense political situation for the vulnerable.

83. The Philippines supported initiatives on fighting human trafficking, in partnership with the International Organization for Migration, as vulnerable groups, including women, children and indigenous groups continued to fall prey to organized trafficking, abuse, exploitation and sexual violence. More attention should be paid to climate change and natural disasters, which were drivers of cross-border and internal displacement. The devastating effects of extreme weather conditions

and unseasonal events such as typhoons had taken their toll on climate-vulnerable countries such as the Philippines and Pacific island States; UNHCR should integrate climate change into its mandate.

84. The Philippines continued to play its part in burden- and responsibility-sharing, a principle that underpinned international humanitarian work. As part of its commitment to ending statelessness by 2024, it had acceded to the 1961 Statelessness Convention, had adopted the Foundling Recognition and Protection Act to ensure that abandoned children would never be stateless, and had continued its programmes in the south of the Philippines to provide documentation for stateless indigenous groups. The Philippines had entered into a matching project with New Zealand under the aegis of the Asylum Capacity Support Group, and continued its institutionalization of protection mechanisms by establishing a dedicated inter-agency committee with greater powers. The Philippines had also opened its doors to Afghan, Rohingya and Ukrainian refugees, in line with its established national processes, and highly valued its close coordination with the UNHCR office in the Philippines – a partnership which had stood the test of time and met many other challenges.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.