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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS
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Fifty-seventh session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 602nd MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva
on Tuesday, 3 October, 2006, at 3.00 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. FUJISAKI (Japan)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.00 p.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4) (continued)

1. Ms. BLOCH (Jesuit Refugee Service), reporting on consultations held by NGOs during the week prior to the Executive Committee's session, said that the main themes addressed had been the same as the key themes addressed in the general debate. Regarding internal displacements, most NGOs had found the modular approach too unwieldy and bureaucratic. Far from making NGOs full partners, as it should, that approach complicated their participation. Accordingly, some NGOs, based on work done with regard to protection of children, had proposed joint assessments modelled on the initiative for age, gender and diversity mainstreaming (AGDM). Another major problem in the case of displaced persons was education. Although there was a lead agency for education, lack of cooperation had forestalled significant progress. Many NGOs therefore wished to see a specific model for education that would enable actions being pursued to be both strengthened and better coordinated.
2. With regard to mixed migration flows, NGOs had expressed deep concern regarding reliance on border management and control measures, which had the effect of hampering access to asylum procedures, aggravating trafficking in and illegal entry of persons, engendering increased human rights violations against the people comprising those flows, and distorting the 1951 Convention by making it a tool for regulating migrations. It was vital rapidly to establish formal channels of migration in order to ease the pressure on the institution of asylum. It was likewise vital to protect the rights of migrants as well as those of asylum seekers and refugees. For that reason, NGOs recommended to all host countries that they ratify the Convention on Migrants' Rights and adopt a rights-based approach.
3. With regard to seeking lasting solutions to protracted situations, NGOs favoured implementing strategies relying on voluntary repatriation, resettlement and local integration, depending on circumstances. Having often observed a disparity between the criteria applied for voluntary repatriation and the reality on the ground, NGOs had reached the conclusion that greater stress should be laid on peacebuilding, early recovery, restoration of infrastructure, and helping people concerned to find means of subsistence in order to encourage viable repatriation or return. Finally, NGOs welcomed the conclusions on statelessness and on vulnerable women and girls. It was henceforth up to Governments, NGOs and the Office of the High Commissioner to use the practical contents or the conclusions with a view to improving work on the ground. On that score as well, making use of AGDM could prove effective.
4. Ms. CROMPTON (New Zealand) said that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) needed the support of Member States with regard to protection in order to carry through the reform it had undertaken. New Zealand firmly supported that broad-ranging endeavour and looked forward with interest to seeing what progress could be made both at headquarters and in the field. That change should be accompanied by a regular dialogue with the staff in order to manage the pressures inherent in such development.

5. Although the overall number of refugees had declined, there were still many protracted situations in which refugees had remained in camps for at least ten years, especially in Asia and in the Pacific. Some encouraging results had recently been achieved in the region. Her delegation also noted with satisfaction the agreement between the Government of Nepal and the UNHCR regarding registration of refugees from Bhutan living in camps in Nepal as of 8 October 2006. While welcoming the fact that the Nepalese authorities had agreed to the departure of a number of vulnerable refugees with a view to their resettlement, she encouraged Bhutan to continue working with Nepal to find lasting solutions. The substantial registration campaign conducted by the Thai Government over the previous year also deserved recognition. Such strides in the region inspired hope that a solution could be found for the Rohingas in Bangladesh.

6. The Government of New Zealand supported UNHCR's entry into to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee on internally displaced persons. Prompt intervention by UNHCR in Timor-Leste and Lebanon had clearly revealed the improvement of UNHCR's capacity to respond to sudden emergencies. However, the new role of UNHCR as cluster leader in the module devoted to internal displacements added a considerable workload, calling for careful strategic planning. In that regard, the Government of New Zealand would wish to see a more penetrating and detailed assessment of the effects of that new role and looked forward with interest to the outcome of discussions on its budgetary implications.

7. M. KABWEGERE (Uganda), recalling that his country was receiving numerous refugees from Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and Sudan, expressed the hope that the situation in those countries would improve and that flows of refugees in the Great Lakes region could thus come to an end. Uganda had long been a country of origin of refugees. Three presidents of Uganda had themselves been refugees. The Ugandan Government had since taken steps to eliminate the causes of those population flows and had established an exemplary body of refugee law. In Uganda, refugees had access to land and could engage in productive activities. In one of the refugee settlement areas, average household income of refugees was even higher than that of local households.

8. Aware of the funding difficulties faced by UNHCR, the Ugandan Government had taken steps to incorporate refugee issues into its programmes and its budget. At the same time, it had received invaluable assistance from UNHCR and partners such as the Danish Government to implement a programme of development assistance geared to refugees and host communities. It did not suffice currently to observe that the absolute number of refugees in the world had declined. All powers and all leaders of countries, from the richest to the poorest, should rally to strategies aimed at bringing an end to refugee flows altogether. The problem of internal displacements required a solution of a different order. The Ugandan Government, for its part, was endeavouring, in cooperation with UNHCR, to improve the situation in camps for displaced persons in northern Uganda. In that regard, the peace talks taking place in Juba with rebels of the Lord's Resistance Army were a major factor. If those talks bore fruit, the Government would need support from its partners to help people return to normal life.

9. Ms. IVANCHIKOVA (Observer for Belarus) said that the Government of Belarus had just begun implementation of its third migrations plan (2006-2010), aimed at applying measures to enhance the efficiency of management of migratory flows in Belarus. It had also created an agency entrusted with protecting asylum-seekers and had taken measures to facilitate social integration of refugees. With help from UNHCR, it had launched a project of international

technical assistance to strengthen the national refugee system in Belarus, including training for professionals working with migrants. Activities were also being organized to strengthen technical competencies of States dealing with refugees and asylum seekers. Software had been developed for registering and accounting for those persons, and a reception centre had been created for their temporary settlement.

10. Mr. SOHOU (Observer for Benin) said that his delegation supported the statement made by Algeria on behalf of the African Group. In 2005 Benin had received over 20,000 Togolese refugees, many of whom had already been able to return to their country thanks to a dialogue between the Government of Benin and the Togolese authorities. Those voluntary returns were continuing and the Government of Benin hoped that UNHCR would be able to help candidates for return and contribute to facilitating their social integration.

11. Concerned with improving refugees' living conditions and respect for their fundamental rights, the Government of Benin, with assistance from the UNHCR representative in Cotonou, had been strengthening the capacities and competencies of refugee management personnel. Regional courses on human rights addressed to staff and State officials as well as other actors involved in refugee protection were of particular importance for the Government of Benin, which hoped that the training course conducted by UNESCO-Benin Chair in July 2006, with participation by 54 representatives from 14 African countries, would be followed by other quality courses resulting from enhanced cooperation between UNHCR, the University of Cotonou and the Government.

12. In view of UNHCR's reduced resources, the Government of Benin had itself begun to assume tasks such as the recording of asylum applications, interviews and other assessments of dossiers for the determination of refugee status. That effort, begun in 2005, had been proceeding through eligibility committees and appeal committees, which had permitted substantial time savings in the review of applications, through the creation of national legal aid centres and through strengthening of partnerships with civil society. Nevertheless, there was a risk that the activity could not be sustained over the long term without active and prompt support from UNHCR and its partners. Accordingly, the Government of Benin addressed an appeal to the international community to provide UNHCR with needed support in order effectively to carry out its protection activities and improve their quality. The delegation of Benin stressed that Benin had been recognized as one of the countries where persons in distress enjoyed their fundamental rights without restriction. His delegation reiterated Benin's desire to become a full member of the Executive Committee.

13. Mr. RODRIGUEZ CUADROS (Observer for Peru), speaking on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, said that situations of political crisis and internal violence causing flows of refugees and internally displaced persons had been multiplying recently. In 2006, the number of persons under UNHCR protection had increased by 13%. Despite that, UNHCR had managed to bring the number of refugees to its lowest level in a quarter of a century, primarily through voluntary return policies. States and UNHCR played a central role but could not assume responsibilities alone with regard to protection of refugees, asylum seekers and persons displaced in their country. Civil society and private actors also had an essential role to play, notably by supporting action aimed at finding lasting solutions based on efforts for peace, peaceful coexistence and reconciliation.

14. Responsibilities and strategic priorities for the Latin American and Caribbean region had been defined in the Mexico Plan of Action, whose aims were: strengthening the national and regional legal framework by enacting new legislation concerning refugees, strengthening national institutional capacities dealing with current refugee and IDP situations, duly applying resettlement policies and contributing to a culture of tolerance, understanding and respect for human rights. Those strategic orientations were applied concretely in the framework of programmes set up with UNHCR assistance. The programme called "Ciudades Solidarias" ("Cities of Solidarity") aimed at fostering self-sufficiency and economic integration among refugees settling in urban centres by creating job opportunities, facilitating and speeding up the processing of applications, and involving civil society and UNHCR in implementation and follow-up of integration projects in keeping with each State's legislation. The programme called "Fronteras Solidarias" ("Border Solidarity") aimed at strengthening institutional machinery for the protection of border areas and acting with the local population to prevent all forms of rejection and discrimination against refugees, and to bring them the assistance and protection they needed. A programme referred to as "solidarity for resettlement" was aimed at providing support to countries of the region which were hosting a substantial number of refugees.

15. The Mexico Plan of Action also covered specific resettlement programmes in Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay, which were essential for the region and which required substantial funding. Paraguay had decided to participate in those programmes, evidencing the interest countries of the region were taking in the problem of refugees. The countries of Latin America were determined to find lasting solutions, focusing in particular on integration or on economic, social and citizen reintegration. In that regard, they welcomed the measures taken by the High Commissioner to encourage micro-credit and micro-finance as effective means to reduce vulnerability among refugees and internally displaced persons and to enhance their autonomy and their chances of successful reintegration. They also favoured action by UNHCR in the sphere of protection of internally displaced persons. The expected visit by the High Commissioner to Colombia and Ecuador in February 2007 would be an opportunity to strengthen regional strategies for refugees and internally displaced persons and further to strengthen the already close cooperation that existed between governments of the region and UNHCR.

16. Mr. MUSHELENGA (Namibia) said that his country, which was the product of international solidarity and many of whose people had spent long years in exile, was doing everything possible to ensure respect for the right of asylum and make room for people fleeing war and persecution. Currently, Namibia was hosting 6,500 refugees, 75% of whom were Angolans who had been in the country for over ten years. During the preceding year, intensive discussions had taken place with UNHCR to find lasting solutions, and a number of short-term and long-term measures had been agreed upon. The first dealt with registration of all refugees and asylum seekers, a necessary condition for preparing identity documents for all adults, which would give them greater freedom of movement. The second measure aimed at eliminating by year's end the backlog in applications for refugee status. The third measure was preparation of a pilot project on local integration, articulated with the "Vision 2030" development plan. Application of those measures required many-faceted assistance from UNHCR. The Namibian Government was therefore also concerned by the negative consequences which UNHCR staffing cuts and restructuring in southern Africa would have on the implementation of those measures.

17. Namibia, which had participated recently in the initiative for age, gender and diversity mainstreaming, reiterated its commitment to fostering autonomy among women and groups of

young refugees, which should be at the core of the search for lasting solutions. Namibia had taken part in the High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development recently held in New York. That issue was of particular interest to Namibia, since southern Africa had become a destination region for refugees and wished to incorporate the phenomenon of migrations into its equitable development policy.

18. Mr. HUGENEY (Brazil) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Peru on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States. Brazilian legislation on asylum was implemented by the Government and civil society, which were represented equally on the National Council on Refugees (CONARE). There were no quotas in Brazil and the country reviewed asylum applications on a case-by-case basis. Refugee status was granted to all applicants who met the requirements.

19. About 80 % of refugees in the world were received by developing countries, making it still more urgent to strengthen their capacities. To that end, Brazil proposed the creation on its territory of a regional training centre for resettlement countries. Such a centre would permit exchanges of best practices and continuing education of personnel working in reception and integration of resettled refugees. Capacity-building activities required assistance from traditional countries of resettlement, which could supply financial and technical help. Finally, Brazil realized that the problem of refugees was taking on a new dimension in the context of migration and supported the High Commissioner's efforts to clarify the links between migration and asylum and to grant adequate protection to those who needed it.

20. Mr. DAPPAH (Ghana) said that his country was currently hosting refugees from a dozen countries of the African continent, most of whom came from Liberia. Fortunately, Liberia was beginning to find peace. Ghana, with other partners of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union, had worked tirelessly for the advent of peace in Liberia and other conflict zones of Africa and would continue to do so, convinced that the only way to attain the goals of development was to reduce the number of refugees on the continent. He hoped that UNHCR and the international community would help the Government and people of Liberia to establish a basic infrastructure enabling Liberians to return home. Thus far, very few Liberians had opted for voluntary repatriation, which meant that at year's end the number of refugees remaining would be wholly disproportionate to Ghana's budgetary estimates.

21. He recalled that a similar situation had occurred in 2000, when UNHCR had halted all assistance to Liberian refugees in Ghana without ensuring that adequate measures had been taken for those remaining in the country to be able to meet their needs. The Government of Ghana had had to step in and provide basic services to refugees in camps in order to avert the outbreak of epidemics. The sudden cessation of UNHCR activities had also triggered tensions between refugees and local communities. Ghana hoped that situation would not recur. Ghana would continue to meet its obligations to refugees despite its economic difficulties, but it felt that UNHCR had the responsibility of continuing to provide protection and assistance to people falling under its competence and of helping host countries to bear the burden. Ghana also urged that incentives to repatriation be sufficiently attractive to encourage voluntary return to Liberia. Ghana would continue to support all peace initiatives in the sub-region and the continent and would continue its cooperation with UNHCR to find lasting solutions for people falling under the purview of the High Commissioner.

22. Mr. DUMONT (Argentina) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the observer for Peru on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States. It was very important to examine the links between migration and asylum from a global perspective which enabled the respective roles of the International Organization for Migration and the UNHCR to be clearly distinguished. The coordination taking place within the Global Migration Group was very useful in that regard. The UNHCR's initiative to assume the role of cluster leader in activities aimed at protection of internally displaced persons was very interesting. With regard to administrative and budgetary questions, the Argentine delegation welcomed the study being conducted by UNHCR with a view to reducing headquarters expenses in favour of operations in the field. It also approved of making savings at the beginning of the exercise. Outsourcing certain tasks was also a measure worth considering, but maintaining quality of protection services was a goal to be kept in mind. The question of security of personnel and of refugees was of major importance for Argentina; in that regard, the measures taken for personnel training were in that area were very positive. It was to be hoped that questions of parity between men and women would be taken into account in the field.

23. The situation of refugees in Latin America had become a source of concern for UNHCR in recent years, due to the increase in the number of displaced persons triggered by the conflict in Colombia. At the end of 2004, 20 Latin American countries had adopted the Mexico Plan of Action, which aimed at helping refugees and displaced persons pursuant to the principle of regional solidarity, which called for resettlement as a lasting solution. Under that plan, the Argentine Government had signed a memorandum of understanding with the regional representative of UNHCR in Buenos Aires and was implementing a resettlement plan. For some refugees, resettlement was the only viable solution; accordingly, thanks to UNHCR assistance, Argentina had been able to receive families of Colombian origin who were able to rebuild their lives in an environment culturally closer to their own. With regard to strengthening the legislative and institutional framework, a draft law on refugees was under review by the Chamber of Deputies and should be adopted before the end of the legislative term.

24. Mr. LOULICHKI (Morocco) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Algeria on behalf of the African Group. Morocco supported the new budgetary policy of UNHCR based on adapting expenditures to needs, primarily in the field. The role that fell to external offices of UNHCR in developing the budget seemed the solution best suited to that strategy. The Moroccan delegation welcomed human resources management reform but felt that it should encourage a balanced strategy with regard to recruitment, bearing in mind the needs of UNHCR but also equitable geographical representation at headquarters and in the field, with only professional considerations and competencies in mind.

25. With regard to the UNHCR's mission in light of the growing number of asylum seekers and internally displaced persons, he recalled that on 10 and 11 July 2006 Morocco had hosted a Euro-African Ministerial Conference on Migration and Development, bringing together representatives of nearly 60 African and European countries and some ten regional and international organizations, including UNHCR. The aim of the conference had been to provide concrete, appropriate and lasting solutions to the challenge of managing migratory flows. It had provided a springboard for renewed cooperation between Europe and Africa and for a convergence of views between countries of origin, transit and destination of migrations, based on a comprehensive vision encompassing development and security. UNHCR's contribution to the conference had been much appreciated. The High Commissioner had introduced the ten-point

Plan of Action to respond to mixed and irregular migratory flows in countries of origin, transit and destination. Regarding internally displaced persons, Morocco believed that UNHCR's commitment to a "modular responsibility approach" was a praiseworthy initiative which could respond to the needs of persons lacking protection, including in their own country. However, that extension of the mandate of UNHCR should not be pursued to the detriment of its core mandate, which was still protecting refugees and promoting lasting solutions.

26. Morocco recalled its concern regarding the populations in the camps at Tindouf, who for 30 years had been deprived of their most elementary rights, including freedom of movement and the right of return. That highly anachronistic situation had to end and those populations should benefit from adequate assistance and should be able to choose return.

27. Ms. UDON (Nigeria) said that her delegation subscribed to the statement made by the representative of Algeria on behalf of the African Group. While welcoming the management reforms undertaken by UNHCR, she regretted the precarious financial situation of the Office of the High Commissioner, which would have an impact on programmes supporting refugees and on their protection, especially in Africa. UNHCR should strengthen its partnership with United Nations agencies and other concerned institutions in order to maximize synergies and competencies, thus helping to strengthen UNHCR's financial position, contributing to lasting returns and to improving the lot of refugees. Nigeria was in principle favourable to extending the role of UNHCR to protection of internally displaced persons but felt that those efforts should not diminish the resources or attention earmarked for protection of refugees, especially in long-term situations.

28. Nigeria noted with regret that many countries were continuing to turn away refugees and asylum seekers, violating their obligations under international law. Nigeria likewise condemned attempts at "containing" refugees and asylum seekers within their countries or regions of origin. It welcomed UNHCR's efforts to protect people in the context of mixed and irregular flows, but felt that such protection should not extend to persons or activities that did not fall within the High Commissioner's mandate. Attacks against refugees were on the rise, and protection of women and girls, as well as stateless persons, needed to be strengthened. Countries' capacity to take steps to follow up the Executive Committee's conclusions should be enhanced.

29. Nigeria was gratified at the relations it maintained with UNHCR and at the signature in 2006 of two memoranda of understanding transferring certain UNHCR operations to the National Commission for Refugees. UNHCR should contribute to the training of Commission personnel, to enable it to discharge its increased responsibilities. Nigeria requested UNHCR to continue the dialogue with its partners in order to find lasting solutions to refugee problems and to enable refugees to return home with complete security and dignity. In that regard, Nigeria welcomed cooperation between UNHCR and the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission, and wished to have additional information regarding activities planned by UNHCR in that context. Nigeria reiterated its commitment to peace in Africa in order to enable refugees to return.

30. The PRESIDENT invited the High Commissioner to respond to statements.

31. Mr. GUTERRES (High Commissioner for Refugees) thanked the representative of New Zealand for drawing attention to the protection of refugees in Nepal, where registration had already begun; there was progress towards cooperation with Nepal and Bhutan, as well as with countries of settlement, in order to forge lasting solutions. He fully supported the concept developed by New Zealand of "strategies that induced no refugees". As he had observed during his visit to Uganda, settlement and living conditions for refugees there were the same as for the local population. That was an example of hospitality and generosity that deserved to be imitated in many regions of the world. That situation created a moral obligation to help Uganda to resolve the problem of displacements due to attacks by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in northern Uganda. The problem was currently being addressed in the context of close cooperation with various agencies and NGOs, under the auspices of Uganda, and repatriations that occurred would be yet another success to be imitated.

32. He recalled the important role played by refugee protection and assistance in Benin and hoped that country would continue to have a positive influence upon others in the continent. He called for closer cooperation between his office and representatives of Latin American and Caribbean countries. The Mexico Plan of Action and its various aspects held a very important place in refugee protection, not only because of what was being done in Latin America but also as an example. Brazil and Argentina were also to be commended for their exemplary asylum policies, under which, for example, resettlement processes based on solidarity were currently being established. He congratulated Namibia for its local integration projects and strategies affording new opportunities to refugees. He commended Ghana for its important proposals regarding Liberian refugees and hoped to see cooperation between UNHCR and Ghana bolstered in order better to face difficulties ahead.

33. He felt that the Rabat Conference in which he had participated had generated a high-calibre debate on cooperation among countries of origin, transit and destination of highly complex population flows; such flows had had an adverse effect on Morocco's development. The UNHCR valued its bilateral cooperation with Morocco highly and intended to pursue the joint efforts under way with a view to signing a headquarters agreement. He sincerely hoped that a political solution would be found to end the problem of the Saharaoui refugees, one of the oldest situations dealt with by UNHCR. He assured Nigeria that UNHCR would fully respect its mandate concerning refugees and its cooperation with the Peacebuilding Commission would aim solely at lasting repatriations. He felt that, thus far, the international community had not been able to provide effective support to transition processes, particularly post-conflict, thus making repatriations less likely to become lasting; currently, that failing could be remedied with the help of the Peacebuilding Commission.

34. Mr. CASSIDY (United States of America) endorsed the statement of the High Commissioner in reply to the Observer from Uzbekistan. He recalled that States had an obligation to protect the international asylum system, not to force those with good reason to fear torture or persecution to return to their countries, and not to induce other countries to do so. He therefore requested the Government of Uzbekistan to reconsider its decision to close the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Tashkent, to cease encouraging other States to send back Uzbek asylum seekers, and to permit United Nations officials to meet those who had been forcibly sent back to Uzbekistan. Finally, he asked the country's authorities to re-commit themselves to working with the Office of the High Commissioner.

35. Mr. NIRK (Observer for Estonia) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union. Estonia welcomed the Executive Committee's adoption of conclusions on women and children at risk, who constituted the overwhelming majority of refugees and displaced persons and who required increased protection. Estonia had followed with interest the description of the approach followed by UNHCR to address the problem of stateless persons around the world. Estonia had itself found solutions for many persons whose nationality was uncertain and who had remained on its territory once Soviet occupation had ended. For over 10 years, it had made extensive use of naturalization, so that currently there were three times fewer people with uncertain nationality than during the 1990s. Moreover, those persons enjoyed more rights than the ones provided for in the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, as UNHCR had repeatedly noted.

36. Estonia was gratified to note that the budget proposed for 2007 was an austerity budget which could nevertheless cover the estimated financial needs of the organization. Efforts should continue to keep administrative expenditures under control and to favour operational expenditures. Estonia had contributed to the UNHCR budget since 1998, and in 2006 it would more than triple its contribution, hoping to do still more in future. In order to enhance its cooperation with UNHCR, it had taken steps towards becoming a member of the Executive Committee the following May.

37. Mr. ACHARYA (Observer for Nepal) said that he was gratified to note, as noted in the introductory statement of the High Commissioner, that UNHCR continued to direct its action towards seeking lasting solutions to refugee problems and working for their voluntary repatriation under secure and dignified conditions. He noted with satisfaction the intention of UNHCR to deepen its partnerships and its cooperation with non-governmental organizations at the international and local levels. The decision also to focus its action on protection was also very positive, as was the creation of the office of Assistant High Commissioner for Protection. Moreover, the reform undertaken by UNHCR, which covered both its structure and finances and its major spheres of activity, afforded a strategic vision for actions planned for 2006.

38. With regard to refugees from Bhutan in Nepal, the situation was not yet settled. Over the previous 15 years, Nepal, faithful to its humanitarian commitments, had hosted hundreds of thousands of refugees in camps in the eastern part of the country, despite the enormous burden that implied for its fragile economy. Despite constant efforts to resolve the problem, there had been no response from Bhutan. Nepal had long emphasized the need rapidly to initiate a programme of voluntary repatriation of refugees from Bhutan, under secure and dignified conditions. It had always agreed that UNHCR should conduct re-registration and a new determination of the profile of refugees from Bhutan in the camps, in keeping with applicable international standards. Nepal hoped to be able to count on continued assistance from UNHCR, the World Food Programme (WFP) and other donors until the problem was resolved.

39. Mr. SAMANIEGRO (Ecuador) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the observer for Peru on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States. He believed that the UNHCR should be able to continue its delicate humanitarian work within a well-defined framework, far removed from political debates and academic discussions which did not lead to any consensus. It was necessary to ensure that international protection was not confined to concepts such as "the responsibility to protect;" to be mindful of the growing mixed

migratory flows; not to speak of forced migrations when dealing in fact with asylum seekers; to make sure not to forget to protect people whose life was in danger on the pretext that the phenomenon of migration was on the rise; and not to encourage the restrictive policies of certain countries or regions. From that perspective, Ecuador would consider with interest the plan of action on mixed migratory movements to which the High Commissioner had referred.

40. Ecuador was pleased to be considered by UNHCR not as a victim of the humanitarian crisis in the region but as part of the solution to that crisis. It continued to be the leading host country for Colombian refugees and UNHCR was the partner which helped it most to discharge its responsibilities in that regard. Intent on seeking lasting solutions, Ecuador was striving to apply the Mexico Plan of Action and the provisions of the international Agenda for Protection. It also supported efforts in the region to develop resettlement based on solidarity. However, those efforts, emanating from developing countries, could truly bear fruit only if the principle of burden-sharing were applied.

41. Mr. SIB (Observer for Burkina Faso) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by Algeria on behalf of the African Group. Despite progress made, there remained tensions around the world giving rise to massive population movements that required protective action and assistance. In that context, the Ministerial Conference on Refugees, Returnees, and Internally Displaced Persons in Africa had been held on 1 and 2 June 2006 in Ouagadougou, focusing on the theme of protection of and assistance to victims of forced displacement in Africa. That meeting had been an opportunity to identify gaps hampering the management of refugees and victims of forced displacement and had demonstrated the resolve of leaders of the continent responsibly to address the issue of refugees, the largest numbers of whom were unfortunately to be found on the African continent.

42. Africa was currently experiencing the phenomenon of clandestine migration, which took the form of unspeakable and unacceptable human tragedies caused by distortions in development policies, war and economic insecurity. A continuing dialogue was needed to find solutions to those cross-border problems, which served as a reminder of the need for solidarity among nations. That dialogue, keenly aspired to by countries with fragile economies affected by inequitable international trade and the unbearable burden of debt, should serve as the key to a true partnership, a symbol of peace and stability in those countries. Financing for development should take into account all initiatives and should be seen as a central question for the stability of the region. UNHCR would succeed in its mission only through frank cooperation with governmental and non-governmental actors of all countries. While supporting Governments' efforts to improve national systems for protection of refugees and displaced persons, it should continue its restructuring in order to be in step with the challenges of our time and to attract more donor contributions. Mobilizing States and international donors to bring relief and assistance to victims of forced displacements required comprehensive and efficient strategies which should envisage upstream prevention of conflicts and other kinds of crises which were at the root of population movements and should include policies of return for refugees and displaced persons.

43. Mr. QUIROS (Observer for Costa Rica) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the observer for Peru on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States. He recalled that Costa Rica had a tradition of receiving and protecting refugees, since the 1970s and 1980s, whereby it had granted refugee status to 50,000 people entering the country following the armed conflicts that had devastated the region. Thanks to

international cooperation and solidarity, but also through the Government's political will to apply the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its Optional Protocol of 1967, Costa Rica had met the challenge and coped with the new wave of refugees that had flowed into the country in the second half of 2000. Currently, in relation to its population, the country was hosting the largest number of registered refugees in Latin America (14,500, of whom 8,500 were recent arrivals from Colombia). In absolute terms, Costa Rica ranked second after Ecuador in the region. Moreover, its rate of recognition of refugee status was among the highest in the world. It was thus beyond doubt that Costa Rica was essentially a host country for South-South migration, and that it was by vocation a land of asylum, despite its limited means.

44. Clandestine migration being a major concern, Costa Rica had carried out a programme of regularization of nationals of Central American countries in 1998-1999; 152,000 people had benefited from the programme, 97% of them Nicaraguans, representing over 3.5% of the population of the country. Given the size of the migrant population hosted by Costa Rica, it was important that the principles of international solidarity and burden sharing be respected, and that international cooperation do its part. The State of Costa Rica spared no effort to ensure for all living in the country, migrants included, respect for their fundamental rights, including the right to education and health. Costa Rica hoped to become a member of the Executive Committee the following year.

45. Ms. KALMETA (Observer for Bosnia-Herzegovina) said that her country cooperated closely with the UNHCR Office in Sarajevo to reduce internal displacements and provide concrete assistance to refugees and to persons temporarily admitted into the territory in the context of reception centres. To facilitate the return and integration of displaced persons, Bosnia-Herzegovina had spared no effort to implement the measures and conclusions provided for in the Sarajevo Declaration. The re-registration process for displaced persons in the country had been completed in Republika Srpska, in the district of Brčko and in 90% of the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Current estimates placed the number of displaced persons at 125,000.

46. Displaced persons and refugees had been invited to submit applications for rehousing to the competent authorities. Thus far, some 42,000 families of refugees and displaced persons, i.e. 142,000 people, had submitted applications. Everything possible was done to enable refugees to return to the housing they had abandoned due to the conflict. A joint housing reconstruction project under way involved some thirty municipalities. The delegation of the European Commission in Bosnia-Herzegovina had financed part of the voluntary return programme. The European Commission was also funding a project for reconstruction of housing for refugees, the SUTRA project, implemented by UNDP. With financing from the Council of Europe Development Bank, Bosnia-Herzegovina had undertaken another housing project for persons in reception centres. To date, 1,100 persons had benefited from it.

47. The Government of Bosnia-Herzegovina was following closely the implementation of the programme of voluntary repatriation of Croatian refugees in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Croatia was one of the most important bilateral donors in the country. Bosnia-Herzegovina had begun to implement a project to strengthen the capacities of local authorities in more than 100 municipalities. That project was funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency,

48. Mr. MFULA (Zambia) welcomed the celerity with which UNHCR had facilitated the implementation of the Angolan repatriation programme of 2003, which had enabled thousands of refugees to return. He also thanked the Angolan Government for agreeing to a one-year extension of the programme, which was to end in 2006. It was evident that, after the completion of the Angolan repatriation programme and the entry into force of the clause on cessation of refugee status, some Angolans would refuse to return to their country for a variety of reasons. The Government and the international community should address that question. Zambia thanked the Danish Government for its proposal to extend the programme of capacity-building in the area of protection.

49. Return to peace had permitted voluntary repatriation programmes to be carried out in some countries but not in others. Thus, despite political changes intervening in Rwanda, Rwandan refugees living in Zambia had shown little interest in the voluntary repatriation programme. The High Commissioner should consider the reasons why some voluntary repatriation programmes do not yield the expected results, and the need to continue providing international protection to those who refuse repatriation.

50. Zambia had implemented a poverty reduction programme entitled the "Zambian Initiative" aimed at responding to the needs of refugees and local communities. While the programme yielded excellent results in the first region where it was implemented, it unfortunately received little support in other regions. The Zambian Initiative would, however, continue to be applied in regions that received refugees and would be included in the fifth national development plan. The UNHCR and the international community were invited to support the initiative by providing funds to ensure its long-term viability.

51. While the Zambian Government welcomed the decision of UNHCR to give greater attention to displaced persons, it hoped that the organization would first and foremost discharge its basic mandate, namely providing effective protection to refugees. Zambia reaffirmed its determination to honour all of the obligations incumbent upon it by virtue of the conventions to which it was a party.

52. Mr. MARTINEZ MARTINEZ (Mexico) said that in view of the decline in the number of refugees and the increase in internal displacements, the Office of the High Commissioner should reconsider its institutional structure and its budget in order better to respond to new challenges. Nonetheless, protection of refugees should remain at the heart of the organization's mandate. Mexico was therefore deeply concerned about the proposal of some countries to endow UNHCR with a single budget to deal with refugees and displaced persons, and felt it necessary to keep two distinct budgets, since, by virtue of its very mandate, UNHCR could not give the same treatment to those two categories of persons.

53. In view of the reduction in the administrative budget for the Latin American and Caribbean region, and the evident budgetary shortfalls which affected the region's capacity to take care of refugees, Mexico requested the Office of the High Commissioner to include in its next draft programme budget a breakdown of all activities which, without funding, could not be carried out. Mexico recalled the commitments it had subscribed to with 19 other countries of the region in the Mexico Plan of Action and reaffirmed the importance of international cooperation to implement that plan. Mexico reaffirmed its dedication to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol as basic legal instruments of the international regime for protection of refugees,

instruments embodying the principle of non-refoulement and the fundamental rights of refugees and asylum seekers.

54. Mexico shared the view of the High Commissioner that three major questions called for priority attention, namely: (a) growing intolerance and xenophobia towards refugees; (b) the complex problems which mixed migratory flows presented for recognition of refugee status; and (c) the international community's inability to close the gap between needs for help and development. Mexico reaffirmed that the problem of refugees and displaced persons was different from the problem of economic migrants. Accordingly, UNHCR should not exceed its mandate but continue to find the best means to protect refugees and asylum seekers. Mexico was surprised to have learned only through the UNHCR web site of the existence of a ten-point plan of action to deal with mixed migratory flows, although the Mexican delegation had several times expressed the desire for discussion on that subject. Pending the adoption of a position on the contents of the plan of action, Mexico again appealed for the question of mixed migratory flows to become the subject of negotiations among all countries.

55. Ms. SILVESTRU (Observer for the Republic of Moldova) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by Finland on behalf of the European Union. The Republic of Moldova, which had thus far been a country of origin, was gradually becoming a host country. It was reviewing its policy towards immigrants and refugees in order to comply fully with European standards. It had also begun to build several temporary reception centres and to develop a data base on the countries of origin of migrants and refugees, and to implement a policy of tolerance towards immigrants and refugees. Like other countries of the Black Sea Basin, the Republic of Moldova experienced substantial population displacements, especially in the western part of its territory, and had difficulty in ensuring security for persons in conflict zones. Despite that situation, and contrary to other European countries that applied stricter legislation towards asylum seekers and refugees, the Republic of Moldova sought to facilitate and accelerate asylum procedures. In conclusion, the Republic of Moldova invited the High Commissioner for Refugees to visit the country in order to evaluate *de visu* the situation of refugees and displaced persons.

56. Mr. ASHUROV (Observer for Tajikistan) unreservedly supported the implementation of the High Commissioner's reform strategy and had no doubt that it would enable to organization to take more effective action. Until 2000, owing to the civil war, Tajikistan had been primarily a country of origin, but thanks to the help of UNHCR, many Tajik refugees had returned home. In 2000, Tajikistan had become a host country, since for the first time in that year it had received 3,500 Afghan refugees. Although 2,500 of them had been resettled in the United States and Canada, 1,000 others did not wish to take advantage of the resettlement programme. Tajikistan spared no effort to attempt to integrate them into society through various support programmes.

57. The PRESIDENT invited the High Commissioner to respond to statements.

58. Mr. GUTERRES (High Commissioner for Refugees) noted with interest the comments made by the representative of Estonia concerning citizenship. He commended Nepal on its policy towards refugees from Bhutan. To the Government of Ecuador, he expressed deep gratitude for the generosity and hospitality it had shown by receiving numerous Colombian refugees and striving to incorporate them into Ecuadorian society. He congratulated Costa Rica as a democratic country with a very long tradition of asylum.

59. In reply to the statement of the representative of Burkina Faso, he said that the Ouagadougou ministerial meeting on displaced persons had been extremely important and that UNHCR would follow its outcome with great interest. He welcomed the efforts of Bosnia-Herzegovina to facilitate the return of refugees and displaced persons.

60. He noted with interest the observations of the representative of Zambia concerning the failure of voluntary repatriation programmes in some countries and stressed that the Zambian Initiative had been one of the most successful programmes for refugees. He assured the representative of Mexico that the Office of the High Commissioner would address each of the concerns and requests he had made. He welcomed the success of Tajikistan's voluntary repatriation programme for Tajik refugees and assured the Republic of Moldova that he was fully aware of the new problems it faced as a country of asylum.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.
