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## Executive Committee Of The Programme Of The United Nations High Commissioner For Refugees

### Fifty-ninth session

#### Summary record of the 621<sup>st</sup> meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 7 October 2008, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. THOMPSON..... (Costa Rica)

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General Debate (*continued*)

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*The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.*

**General Debate (Agenda item 4) (continued)**

1. **Mr. O CEALLAIGH** (Ireland) said that Ireland supported the statement made by France on behalf of the European Union and that protecting persons forced to leave as a result of oppression and conflict had to remain a priority for everyone, even when other headlines made newspaper front pages. Ireland remained a strong supporter of UNHCR. At an international level, it had long had a close working relationship with UNHCR and, at domestic level, it was very grateful for the assistance UNHCR had provided in relation to the process of developing Ireland's legislation on migration and asylum and the training of officials working in the asylum determination process. Mr. O Ceallaigh expressed his delegation's concern at the large-scale displacements of populations that were being triggered by current crises in the world, particularly in Chad to which Ireland had sent troops with the EUFOR mission. He deplored the fact that humanitarian workers were being directly targeted by armed groups in Afghanistan.

2. Ireland attached considerable importance to the efficient and coordinated functioning of the United Nations system and commended UNCHR for its engagement with the various consolidated financing mechanisms and pooled funds introduced to improve the timeliness and effectiveness of humanitarian intervention. Ireland hoped that in order to assist those in greatest need of humanitarian assistance in countries where refugees, internally displaced persons and host populations lived alongside each other, UNHCR would do its best to ensure that its activities formed part of a global strategy involving other organizations and humanitarian agencies, particularly in the context of the "Delivering as One" initiative.

3. Ireland welcomed the fact that UNHCR had recently chosen to focus on protracted refugee situations and, even if return was the best solution for most refugees, certain programmes designed to integrate them fully in a host country (Burundian refugees in Tanzania for example) could be a source of inspiration. In that connection, Ireland encouraged countries to participate in the resettlement programme. Finally, Ireland was in favour of the Member States submitting a summary update on progress made in implementing the Agenda for Protection at national level, and was confident the process of structural and management change on which UNHCR had embarked would enable it to fulfil its mandate still more efficiently in the future.

4. **Mr. STROHAL** (Austria) supported the statement made by the representative of France on behalf of the European Union and welcomed the initiative taken by the High Commissioner to assist people in protracted refugee situations and find durable solutions to their problems. In that connection, Austria welcomed December's "Dialogue on Protection Challenges" and the High Commissioner's call, during his opening remarks, for a major and systematic debate on the international community's response to the growing scale and complexity of forced displacement. Austria also welcomed the focus that UNHCR had recently placed on the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, as well as its active participation in the reform which the humanitarian system was undergoing, particularly in the context of the "Delivering as One" initiative, and the implementation of cluster approach. Finally, Austria considered that the structural and management change process, as well as the decentralization and regionalization on which UNHCR had embarked, would make it possible to free up additional resources enabling it to meet its mandate in full.

5. **Mr. GOODERHAM** (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) pointed out that even though 2008 had been a year of complex challenges for the humanitarian community, the humanitarian space continued to shrink. In addition, it was increasingly difficult to access populations in need and, in some countries, the security of humanitarian workers was at risk. This being the case, it was essential to have a

humanitarian system that was fit for purpose. The United Kingdom therefore strongly supported the ongoing reform that was designed to strengthen cooperation between the different actors concerned within a cluster approach, and urged the High Commissioner to continue along that path. He also asked UNHCR to look beyond its initial mandate – the protection of refugees – and assist other vulnerable groups in need.

6. The United Kingdom also intended taking advantage of the chairmanship it was soon to assume of the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement for 2008-2009 to focus on the question of integrating resettled refugees and resolving certain protracted refugee situations, as well as assessing the range of durable solutions that certainly included resettlement but also voluntary return and local integration. To that end, he urged States that had yet to do so to set up resettlement programmes.

7. **Ms. SIKANETA** (Zambia) said that Zambia endorsed the statement made by the representative of Côte d'Ivoire on behalf of the Group of African States. She straightaway stressed that the need for UNHCR to coordinate effectively with the Member States, the UN specialized agencies and humanitarian operators in order to reach the maximum of beneficiaries in the field. Faced with the new challenge of forced migration, it was not possible to continue to ignore the difficult situation of internally displaced persons. In that respect, Zambia welcomed the fact that UNHCR and the African Union were planning to convene, next year, a special summit of Heads of State and Government on African refugees, returnees and displaced persons and welcomed the work under way to draw up a convention on the protection of internally displaced persons in the continent of Africa.

8. While the restoration of relative peace in the region and the continuing efforts of the international community to address the root causes of the refugee problem had enabled thousands of refugees who had been living in Zambia for more than 30 years to return home, there was still a huge presence of refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo, and a residual caseload of Angolan refugees. Zambia was therefore eagerly awaiting UNHCR's "Dialogue on Protection Challenges" in December.

9. Believing in the concept that a problem shared is a problem solved, Zambia warned of a looming food crisis, as the World Food Programme had recently given the Zambian Government notice of its decision to stop feeding, as of 31 December 2008, some 5,000 refugees, mainly from Angola, on the ground that the latter were in a protracted refugee situation. Zambia was also concerned by the return to Zambia of a number of repatriated Angolan refugees, which cast doubt on the effectiveness and sustainability of the reintegration programmes in the country of origin. It was therefore calling for UNHCR and the countries of origin to work together and called on the international community to devote more development resources to the areas of return. Finally, Ms. Sikaneta said that Zambia welcomed being one of the eight pilot countries involved in the High Commissioner's Global Needs Assessment initiative, thanked the Danish Government for its support in regard to the Strengthening Protection Capacity Project and reaffirmed its resolve to honour all the obligations incumbent upon it under the conventions to which it was party.

10. **Ms. GOMEZ OLIVIER** (Mexico) said that her delegation supported the statement made by the representative of the Dominican Republic on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States. Mexico had a long tradition of hosting and protecting refugees, recognizing their contribution to the country's economic, political and cultural development. Reaffirming its commitment to the 1951 Convention and the related 1967 Protocol, as well as the 1984 Cartagena Declaration, as the basic legal instruments for the international protection of refugees, Mexico had recently embarked on the transposition of these international instruments into its domestic law. The draft law drawn up for that purpose governed, among other things, the rights of *non-refoulement*, family reunification and the freedom to engage in gainful activity in the national territory.

11. In practical terms, Mexico accorded refugee status to anyone who applied for it and met established criteria, regardless of their country of origin. With the support of the National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination, the Mexican Commission for Aid to Refugees was implementing activities designed to promote the rapid integration of refugees locally. Under the Mexico Action Plan, Mexico was planning to set up a pilot solidarity resettlement programme for refugees. Considering that mixed migration flows were a major challenge for the international community, Mexico was concerned that some States were currently tightening up their policies on migration, even though they had a duty to protect the life and physical integrity of all individuals and to ensure respect for their fundamental rights, whatever their migration status. Mexico firmly believed that the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement of the United Nations General Assembly provided an appropriate framework for protection in that regard.

12. **Mr. YIMER** (Ethiopia) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Côte d'Ivoire on behalf of the Group of African States. The overall number of refugees and internally displaced persons for which UNHCR was responsible worldwide had again risen to reach some 31.7 million in 2008. During the past year, Ethiopia had been able to organize some return operations, but was concerned not just by the renewed conflict and insecurity in some parts of Africa, particularly Somalia, as such situations generally triggered further displacements, but also by the scale of the current food crisis. In that connection, it commended UNHCR for the emergency assistance which it none the less managed to provide to its beneficiaries and for its support for the World Food Programme, particularly in relation to food distribution.

13. In the context of mixed migration flows, it was necessary to identify those persons in genuine need of international protection and to guarantee their access to a proper asylum procedure. Dismayed to note that so many asylum-seekers continued to lose their lives trying to reach foreign shores, the Ethiopian Government had taken part, in May 2008, in a regional conference held in Yemen to develop a regional 10-point plan of action to address mixed migration flows from the Horn of Africa.

14. Ethiopia had a tradition of providing protection and assistance to refugees from various countries. Currently, Ethiopia was hosting 86,000 refugees, mainly from Eritrea, Sudan and Somalia. Launched in 2006, the programme for the return of Sudanese refugees was continuing smoothly, with the result that three refugee camps in western Ethiopia had been able to be closed, following the repatriation of more than 35,000 Sudanese refugees. At the meeting of the Tripartite Commission on the Voluntary Repatriation of Sudanese Refugees from Ethiopia, which had taken place on 18 September in Addis Ababa, participants had projected a repatriation figure of 12,000 for 2009, that is to say almost half the current population of the two remaining camps. Even though Ethiopia was not one of the pilot countries selected for implementation of the "Delivering as One" initiative concerning development and humanitarian assistance, it was trying to rehabilitate the areas damaged by the presence of refugees and to use the existing infrastructure in camps that had been closed to improve living conditions in the former host communities. However, it needed international assistance to complete that undertaking.

15. As a result of the humanitarian crisis in Somalia, Ethiopia was experiencing a new influx of refugees from southern Somalia. A total of 21,000 Somali refugees were currently living in the three camps that had been opened in eastern Ethiopia and some 10,000 asylum-seekers were in a transit centre, awaiting a decision. In addition, Ethiopia was currently hosting more than 30,000 Eritrean refugees, and their numbers were constantly increasing. Since the majority were young boys from urban areas, the Ethiopian Government had taken measures to enable them to live in towns, as long as they could support themselves, to join relatives living in the country or to enrol in State or private higher education institutions, as long as they could pay their own tuition fees. Given the

huge burden it faced, Ethiopia was appealing to donor countries and humanitarian organizations for additional international assistance as a matter of urgency.

16. **Mr. GARGOUM** (Observer for Cameroon) said that his delegation fully subscribed to the views expressed by the representative of Côte d'Ivoire on behalf of the Group of African States. True to its tradition of hospitality and solidarity, Cameroon accepted into its territory men and women in search of peace and security. In addition to the influx of nomadic M'bororo cattle herders from the Central African Republic since 2005, huge numbers of Chadian citizens had arrived fleeing the events in Chad of February 2008. At 30 September 2008, Cameroon was hosting 78,586 refugees, 62,315 from the Central African Republic, 10,600 from Chad, 2,871 from Nigeria, 1,377 from Rwanda and 675 from the Democratic Republic of Congo. In early 2008, the international community had still been providing the Government of Cameroon with support to cope with the influx of Chadians into Cameroon's northern provinces. Many of those displaced persons had now returned to Chad. Negotiations were planned for the signing of a tripartite agreement between Cameroon, Chad and UNHCR for the voluntary repatriation of the 4,236 Chadian refugees in Langui camp in northern Cameroon. The recent visit to Cameroon by the head of UNHCR's Africa Bureau had been particularly valuable. Cameroon welcomed the decision by UNHCR to boost the quality and scale of its presence in Cameroonian territory and undertook to provide it with all necessary assistance.

17. **Mr. UZÜMCÜ** (Turkey) said that the recent increase in the number of refugees and other populations encompassed by UNHCR's mandate was giving rise to bigger challenges, and that no single international organization or country could cope with problems of that magnitude. Taking the leading role in this area, UNHCR had become more effective than before. Turkey welcomed completion of the outposting process and believed that decentralization, regionalization and the new budget structure would further improve UNHCR's effectiveness and capacity for swift action. It also attached great importance to UNHCR's training activities for national experts.

18. While it was heartening to see that many of the commitments entered into in 2007 had been met, improving the plight of the displaced still required the adoption of new collective measures. Such measures included finding durable solutions, making structural changes and strengthening dialogue. Some speakers had stressed the need for transit countries to play a greater role in the fight against human trafficking. As a transit country, Turkey believed that no country could resolve that problem alone and called for full international cooperation.

19. **Ms. METSANDI** (Estonia) supported the statement made by France on behalf of the European Union and stressed that given the recent increase in the number of refugees and displaced persons in the world, united action and constructive dialogue were needed more than ever. In regard to the reform of UNHCR, the Estonian delegation attached particular importance to cost-effectiveness, transparency and avoiding duplication, and welcomed the process of decentralization and regionalization carried out for that purpose. Highlighting the importance of training, the Estonian delegation thanked UNHCR for its cooperation and assistance in training Estonian border guards and preparing training materials for them. Since Estonia was situated at the external border of the European Union, it was very important to be able to differentiate between refugees in need of international protection and persons trying to enter the Union illegally.

20. Estonia's support for UNHCR's operations had consistently increased, in terms both of its contribution to UNHCR's core budget and its response to appeals. The review of the progress States had made in implementing the Agenda for Protection was a welcome and useful initiative furnishing an overall picture of the results obtained, identifying difficulties and helping States to improve their plans of action further. Finally, the Estonian delegation supported UNHCR's efforts to find durable solutions and, in that context, was looking

forward to the High Commissioner's December "Dialogue" on protracted refugee situations.

21. **Mr. VERROS** (Greece) entirely subscribed to the statement made by the representative of France on behalf of the European Union. He thanked UNHCR for its rapid and timely response to the recent crisis in Georgia, an initiative which Greece was supporting by way of a voluntary contribution. As the presidency of the European Union had stated, the desperate situations witnessed in the Mediterranean were a serious problem which required the transit countries to increase their cooperation with UNHCR and reaffirm their determination to combat human trafficking. Greece commended the High Commissioner's commitment to structural and management reform as a way of channelling UNHCR's resources increasingly to the field. It strongly supported UNHCR's participation in the "Delivering as One" initiative and in strategic partnerships with other humanitarian agencies.

22. Given the problems Europe was facing in relation to asylum, Greece fully supported the French presidency's initiative for a Common European Asylum System and had offered to host the European Asylum Support Office, once established. Its extensive maritime border meant that Greece had been under tremendous pressure for the past five years, recording 112,000 illegal immigrants in 2007. Applications for asylum, often made for economic reasons, had increased by 461% between 2004 and 2007. This problem affected many other countries. Despite the situation, Greece continued fully and unconditionally to guarantee the protection of persons in need under the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Additional Protocol. A systematic effort was being made to upgrade asylum procedures and hosting conditions. Greece was working closely with UNHCR to resolve all outstanding issues.

23. Greece was committed to combating human trafficking on the basis of both prosecution and prevention. A national action plan to protect and assist the victims of human trafficking had been drawn up, and an interministerial committee tasked with implementing it. Preventive action was carried out in a number of neighbouring countries employing programmes to assist and inform potential victims of trafficking, particularly women, one of the most vulnerable groups. A memorandum of cooperation had been signed with UNHCR concerning women and girls, refugees and asylum-seekers. Finally, the Greek delegation informed the Executive Committee that between January and August 2008, the Greek coast guard had saved the lives of 4,137 people in 217 search and rescue operations.

24. **Mr. GUTERRES** (High Commissioner for Refugees) replied to the contributions. He thanked the representative of Ireland, a country whose increasingly substantial contribution was extremely useful, and thanked him for his comments on the devotion shown by UNHCR staff. He thanked Austria's representative for his comments on protection in an operational context and for pointing out that particular attention should be paid to sexual violence, one of the most shocking aspects of the incidents that could occur in refugee camps. Mr. Guterres thanked the representative of the United Kingdom and said he had high hopes of the United Kingdom's chairmanship of UNHCR's Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement, particularly when it came to mobilizing new resettlement countries and so be able to offer refugees more alternatives. He expressed his deep thanks to Zambia's representative for her country's substantial efforts to help refugees over many years and underlined UNHCR's commitment to the dialogue with the Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola concerning the repatriation of refugees from those two countries; turning to the problem of food security in relation to some groups of Angolan refugees, he said that consultations were under way with the World Food Programme (WFP) and donors in an effort to find appropriate solutions.

25. Mr. Guterres congratulated Mexico on its new asylum legislation which continued that country's long tradition of hosting refugees. He agreed with Mexico's representative that, in the context of mixed migration flows, the fundamental rights of all persons had to be respected, whatever their status. Failure to respect the rights of migrants made it more difficult to respect the principle of protecting refugees. In relation to Ethiopia's refugees problems, of which its representative had given a comprehensive account, Mr. Guterres stressed that UNHCR was entirely aware of the increasing burden constituted by the presence of Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia and had increased its level of commitment in that regard, even though still more needed to be done. UNHCR was currently working with the United Nations Country Team in Ethiopia to ensure that effective rehabilitation programmes were put forward. Finally, Mr. Guterres appealed to Ethiopia to open up humanitarian spaces in regions in which access remained limited.

26. In response to the statement by the Observer for Cameroon, Mr. Guterres stressed UNHCR's commitment to boosting its presence and capacity for action in Cameroon which was hosting large numbers of refugees. The Central African Republic was not just one of the forgotten crises, it was a crisis that had never been recognized, and that made Cameroon's efforts to demonstrate solidarity towards the Central African refugees all the more outstanding. UNHCR undertook to carry out a more effective campaign for recognition of this problem. Responding to Turkey's representative, Mr. Guterres said that he was fully aware of the complex environment of countries like Turkey, which were at one and the same time countries of origin, asylum and transit; he wished to work more closely with the Turkish Government on methods of guaranteeing protection in that kind of environment. He took the opportunity of expressing the hope that Greece's reservations to the 1951 Convention could soon be withdrawn. Turning to Estonia's representative, he stressed that the border guard training programme she had mentioned was a good example of how it was possible for countries to adopt the immigration policy of their choice, while managing their borders with a view to protection, by ensuring that individuals in need of protection were in fact recognized and admitted to the territory and had the opportunity of obtaining asylum. Finally, Mr. Guterres told the representative of Greece that UNHCR was well aware of the pressures Greece faced as a result of its geographical situation and the current context – particularly the conflicts in the Middle East – and wanted still better cooperation with it. He agreed that it was necessary for the international community to mobilize to combat one of the most detestable crimes in the world today, namely trafficking in human beings.

27. **Ms. MAHAWAR** (India) said that protection had to remain at the core of UNHCR's work. In India's view, voluntary repatriation was the best and most durable solution. The "Four Rs" approach (repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction) had produced positive results in some countries and should be expanded. It was important that rehabilitation and reconstruction should be rapidly undertaken to secure the sustainable reintegration of persons who had been repatriated. In this context, assistance to developing countries, particularly to create economic opportunities, was particularly important. Focusing on internally displaced persons should not lead to the neglect of refugees who remained the priority in terms of UNHCR's mandate and limited resources. The Member States had prime responsibility for internally displaced persons. UNHCR should have a part to play in situations involving internally displaced persons where the States concerned specifically requested this. Mixed migration flows were a global challenge and subject of debate, and it was vital to develop competencies and capacities to differentiate refugees from economic migrants to make it possible better to address refugees' protection needs. Attention had to be paid to the links between poverty and refugee movements. The global development agenda, particularly in the context of Millennium Development Goals, had to underpin international efforts to address humanitarian needs and the reintegration of refugees.

28. India applied the principle of *non-refoulement* and also applied to refugees a policy of non-discrimination, religious freedom, free access to the courts and so on. Over the years, it had ensured protection for many large refugee populations and successfully managed the repatriation to countries of origin, through bilateral arrangements. It was enhancing its cooperation with UNHCR, and had this year held its first high-level bilateral consultations with the latter, which had produced fruitful discussions.

29. **Mr. KUSSUMUA** (Observer for Angola) said that the global economic recession and the unprecedented rise in the cost of foodstuffs and energy could jeopardize the activity of the humanitarian agencies, as the available resources dwindled. That situation required the creation of a more solid partnership between the countries concerned within the framework of North-South cooperation. Since 2002, the Angolan Government had successfully conducted a process of national reconciliation which had recently resulted in parliamentary elections which the international community had considered to be exemplary. The new Government would continue to implement the programme of reconstructing the country which relied on four major strategic objectives: good governance; the implementation of a durable and coherent macro-economic policy; infrastructure renewal; social welfare and the defence of citizens' fundamental rights.

30. Angola's current stability was encouraging many Angolan citizens, who were refugees in neighbouring countries, to return to their country of origin. The Angolan Government was currently implementing projects to assist the repatriation of these refugees in conditions of dignity, and reiterated to the governments of neighbouring States its commitment to establishing a joint plan to find durable solutions to the situation. In that connection, UNHCR's support would continue to be indispensable, as the asylum countries did not have adequate resources to guarantee the voluntary repatriation of the refugees. Angola was counting on UNHCR's assistance in developing a policy on asylum, repatriation and reintegration that would make it possible to ensure that measures to combat illegal immigration did not harm refugees entitled to benefit from international protection.

31. **Mr. AMIRBAYOV** (Observer for Azerbaijan) said that the number of refugees and internally displaced persons was still increasing and affecting new regions, largely because of armed conflicts and extreme poverty. Every year, thousands of people tried to reach Europe and the developed countries. Azerbaijan therefore believed that the international community should pay greater attention to the Mediterranean countries, which absorbed the first wave of these refugee flows, as well as Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Pakistan, which hosted millions of Iraqi and Afghan refugees. The global food crisis was seriously affecting the most vulnerable groups and hunger refugees were the latest development. Large numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons had long been in this situation, including in Azerbaijan. However, there had also been positive results, since 700,000 refugees and two million displaced persons had been able to return to their native lands, and new countries had agreed to take part in the refugee resettlement programme.

32. Azerbaijan supported the process of reform launched by UNHCR in 2006, as it would make the organization stronger and its assistance more effective. The financial assistance received also played an important role, and Azerbaijan took the opportunity to thank donor countries and organizations, especially the United States, the European Union and Japan. The decentralization and regionalization of structures would have positive impact on the cost-effectiveness of UNHCR's administrative services, and the Budapest Global service Centre was a good example of this.

33. UNHCR was currently working in 28 countries that were hosting internally displaced persons, including Azerbaijan, and was providing assistance to 14 million people. The Government of Azerbaijan was in favour of continuing that assistance, although it was aware that it had the prime responsibility for resolving the problems linked to displaced persons in its territory. In that regard, the action of the Government of Azerbaijan had been



exemplary. For instance, displaced persons living in tents had been resettled in new infrastructure much closer to their region of origin, and the tented camps have been closed down. The Government was also continuing to support the development of gainful activity for internally displaced persons. He thanked UNHCR for its assistance with the programme to assist the return of forcibly displaced persons and undertook to continue to cooperate closely with it. Acknowledging the very positive role UNHCR had played in Azerbaijan during the nineties to alleviate the consequences of the humanitarian catastrophe caused by the armed conflict with Armenia, Mr. Amirbayov hoped that Azerbaijan would soon be able to make a financial contribution to UNHCR as a donor country.

34. **Mr. VHATTACHARYA** (Bangladesh) commended the High Commissioner's recent visit to Bangladesh which had enabled him to see at first hand the plight of the Myanmar refugees, who had been living in camps for several decades, and discuss with the national authorities a strategy for achieving a durable solution to the problem. The involvement of the country of origin was a must if voluntary return, which was the preferred solution for refugees, was to be sustainable. Bangladesh believed that UNHCR should continue to work with the Myanmar authorities and build on the existing activities in Myanmar's Northern Rakhine State. Indeed, since most of the refugees in Bangladesh had already returned safely to Myanmar, there was reason to believe that conditions in Northern Rakhine State were suitable for the voluntary return of the remaining refugees. Bangladesh encouraged the High Commissioner to consider this to be the preferred solution.

35. Bangladesh had been hosting Myanmar refugees for decades, although its resources were limited and it was also one of the most densely populated countries in the world. Consequently, local integration of the refugees was no longer possible. In recent months, measures had been taken to improve living conditions in the camps, education, health and nutrition. It was, however, discouraging to note that UNHCR's budget and work plan envisaged that the number of persons of concern to UNHCR in Bangladesh would remain essentially the same in 2009. UNHCR would have fewer resources available to it to address the protection and assistance needs of these refugees in 2009. In addition, UNHCR was planning to assist only 5,000 of the 30,000 refugees projected to remain in Bangladesh by the end of 2009. The Government of Bangladesh asked the High Commissioner to provide some explanation for this and to intervene to protect these refugees. It also called on the international community to contribute to the efforts to assist these refugees.

36. Bangladesh welcomed the Global Needs Assessment initiative which would enable UNHCR to get a better picture of the needs of refugee populations and to prioritize. It recommended that UNHCR should give priority to meeting basic needs and essential services for protracted refugees. It also urged UNHCR to launch programmes to support local communities in the refugee impacted areas of Bangladesh. Given the widespread deforestation caused by years of exploitation of forest resources by refugees, it called on UNHCR to resume its forestry- and environment-related activities, which had been discontinued since 2007.

37. **Mr. MALLOUN** (Observer for Chad) said that the humanitarian crisis in Chad had been provoked by the deteriorating security situation in Darfur, the insecurity in the north of the Central African Republic and the instability in eastern Chad, which was linked to incursions by armed group and inter-community tensions. Since 2003, Chad had been hosting, in its territory, more than 300,000 Sudanese and Central African refugees, and the widespread lack of security had resulted in the internal displacement of more than 180,000 people. Despite this almost permanent state of insecurity, activities to assist more than 180,000 people were continuing and enabling human lives to be saved. Aware of the situation, the United Nations Security Council had authorized the deployment of a peace-keeping force in eastern Chad and the north-east of the Central African Republic. The aim of this deployment in the host regions was to provide increased security to refugees and

humanitarian workers and facilitate the smooth operation of the humanitarian mission. The Republic of Chad wished to reiterate its profound gratitude to the United Nations system, the European Union, the United States of America and France for their contributions to the deployment of this international peace-keeping force.

38. The presence in Chad of the Sudanese and Central African refugees continued to have a dramatic impact, and the Government of Chad did not believe that the conditions for the return of the refugees to their countries of origin were yet in place. Consequently, the Government of Chad urged UNHCR to favour the programme for resettling the refugees in a third country. Since the humanitarian and security situation in Darfur and the northern part of the Central African Republic remained fragile, the Government of Chad reaffirmed its determination to work towards a lasting peace throughout the sub-region. It was still in favour of the existence of a humanitarian space, but reminded the international community of the blunders resulting from the activities of some NGOs, such as *L'Arche de Zoé*.

39. **Ms. SEBUDANDI** (Observer for Rwanda) said that the Rwandan delegation aligned itself with the statement made by Côte d'Ivoire on behalf of the African Group of States. Rwanda had always worked in close cooperation with UNHCR, particularly when it had had to deal with the very many Rwandan refugees outside the country following the 1994 genocide. After the wars that ravaged the Great Lakes region, one of Rwanda's top priorities had been to repatriate more than 3.3 million refugees. Today, 99% of those refugees had been repatriated and successfully reintegrated into society, but it was necessary to step up efforts to facilitate the return of the 77,000 refugees who remained outside the country.

40. The Government had made rapid progress in terms of recovery and development, thereby creating a stable environment conducive to economic development. Good governance, democratization, universal free education, a public health system and poverty reduction strategies were some examples of these positive achievements, and Rwanda was on track to meet some of the Millennium Development Goals. In view of these positive developments, the Government of Rwanda had asked UNHCR to invoke the cessation clause for Rwandan refugees, a decision that could encourage repatriation, if accompanied by an effective awareness-raising campaign.

41. Rwanda was also hosting some 55,000 refugees, mainly from the Great Lakes region. Unfortunately, Rwanda's budget allocation from UNHCR and other partners to cater for the welfare of these refugees had been declining. This situation was a matter of concern, as Rwanda had often had to use its meagre resources to meet the refugees' basic needs. Rwanda supported all the initiatives under way to deal with the problems of refugees and internally displaced persons in the Great Lakes region, and called upon the international community to monitor very closely the renewed fighting in eastern Congo to prevent new refugee flows and a return to insecurity in Rwanda. This appeared all the more necessary, as some reports suggested that Interahamwe genocidal forces were involved in the fighting.

42. **Mr. MINAH** (Observer for Sierra Leone) said that his Government fully supported UNHCR's activities in Sierra Leone, particularly the vital assistance provided to refugees in the country, as well as in other areas of tension in the world. Sierra Leone had recently made a marked improvement in resolving refugee-related problems, and was continuing to do all it could to consolidate peace and stability in the country. On the issue of reparations, the Government was mindful of its obligations to compensate the victims of the internal conflict and had therefore implemented a programme of reparations. It hoped to have the support of the United Nations system and the international community in order to ensure the programme's success. As regards the resettlement of refugees in neighbouring countries, Sierra Leone was doing all it could, with the help of UNHCR, to resettle persons who wished to take advantage of the resettlement policies those countries were

implementing. Finally, as regards the cessation clause, Sierra Leone welcomed the useful dialogue and clarification provided by UNHCR in response to the concerns recently expressed by Sierra Leone.

43. **Mr. MATUS** (Observer for Belarus) said that Belarus had achieved significant results in establishing a national system for the granting of asylum, and had adopted specific measures to enable it to participate in the international system for the protection of refugees. Belarus had introduced solid legal foundations for working with refugees and had set up State agencies responsible for managing issues linked to forced migration. In June last, it had adopted a new law on according refugee status to foreign nationals and stateless persons, accompanied by provisional protective measures. The legislation of several European Union States and UNHCR's recommendations had been taken into account in the process of drafting the law.

44. Since 1997, of the more than 3,000 asylum-seekers in Belarus, 802 individuals from 13 States had been accorded refugee status. In addition a *non-refoulement* decision had been taken in relation to 79 foreigners, enabling them to be accorded a temporary residence permit for a maximum of one year. Belarus had created the conditions necessary for the social integration of refugees, including through naturalization. So far, 64 refugees, or 8% of the total, had acquired Belarusian citizenship.

45. Constructive cooperation between the UNHCR representation in Belarus and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, in the context of the "Migration and Asylum" programme in 2008, had made it possible to develop two international technical assistance projects whose implementation would help to resolve the problems of migration in Belarus in an effective manner. The projects were currently being studied by the European Commission, and the Government of Belarus hoped that their final adoption would guarantee future cooperation between Belarus, the European Union and UNHCR. Belarus was rigorous in complying with its humanitarian obligations and was open to constructive international cooperation in this area.

46. **Mr. GUTH** (European Commission) said that UNHCR was a source of inspiration to the European Commission, which had embarked a major revision of its common asylum policy and hoped very soon to adopt a European pact on immigration and asylum. Between now and June 2009, a number of legislative proposals would be put forward for the revision of all the European Union's asylum policy instruments and the establishment of procedures that met the highest standards. In early 2009, the European Commission would propose the creation a European Asylum Support Office, and this would significantly contribute to raising the quality of asylum procedures across the European Union. The European Commission also intended to reinforce solidarity in relation to third countries hosting large numbers of refugees, including by establishing a resettlement programme.

47. Financial assistance had to be based on humanitarian needs, and the European Commission therefore supported the new Global Needs Assessment initiative. Given its mandate and field presence, UNHCR was well placed to gather detailed information on the needs of refugees and internally displaced persons. The Commission wished to encourage UNHCR to pursue the initiative in a spirit of cooperation with host countries, the other agencies, NGOs and humanitarian coordinators. In that context, it welcomed the further efforts by UNHCR and the wider humanitarian system to clarify how the overall coordination objectives of the humanitarian reform could be reconciled with UNHCR's unique mandate for refugee protection. Finally, the European Commission paid tribute to the staff of UNHCR who risked their lives on a daily basis to protect the rights and lives of the most vulnerable.

48. **Ms. DIOP** (Economic Community of West African States/ECOWAS) supported the statement made by the representative of Côte d'Ivoire on behalf of the Group of African

States and said that, in 2001, ECOWAS and UNHCR had adopted a framework for multi-sectoral cooperation principally geared to developing the capacity to deliver humanitarian responses in emergency and crisis situations in West African countries. ECOWAS had created an emergency response team whose members had been trained by UNHCR since 2006. In addition the ECOWAS Commission was working to establish a sub-regional policy on emergency response for West Africa.

49. In recent years, West Africa had experienced incessant rainfall resulting in flooding and thousands of deaths, not to mention the displacement of millions of people, the destruction of infrastructure and farmland and the advent of epidemics. Against that backdrop, its Member States had great expectations of ECOWAS assistance, and ECOWAS, in turn, was counting on increased collaboration with UNHCR to enable it to establish a permanent emergency response structure for the sub-region. The ECOWAS Commission had learnt a great deal from the joint workshop it had organized with UNHCR with a view to integrating humanitarian indicators into its early warning system, ECOWARN; this was an essential tool that allowed ECOWAS to discharge its conflict prevention and management mandate and provide an early response in emergency conflict and humanitarian situations. Within the framework of the Common Approach to Migration, adopted by the ECOWAS Authority in January 2008, the ECOWAS Commission had been tasked to use its regional integration mechanisms to help regularize the status of refugees post-conflict. ECOWAS also intended to ensure that the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons was used to protect the rights not only of refugees but also of migrants and asylum-seekers.

50. ECOWAS announced that it would be organizing, with UNHCR, a Regional Conference on Refugee Protection and International Migration to take place in Dakar on 13 and 14 November 2008. Finally, in collaboration with the African Union, it intended to present a common policy on internally displaced persons at the conference the two bodies would be organizing on that topic in 2009.

51. **Mr. GUTERRES** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said, in response to the latter contributions from the delegations, that he shared the view of India's representative that it was primarily a matter for the Member States to implement programmes for internally displaced persons. UNHCR had constantly increased its cooperation with India which, although it had not ratified the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, had always done a great deal to help refugees and had applied the principle of *non-refoulement*. Responding to the statement by Azerbaijan's representative, Mr. Guterres commended the commitment on the part of the Government of Azerbaijan to build solid structures rather than simple tented camps. That commitment should serve as an example to many countries, as it demonstrated that it was possible to work towards the return of refugees and displaced persons while offering them decent and dignified living conditions *sur place*. In response to the representative of Bangladesh, he reaffirmed that UNHCR was still prepared to help Bangladesh continue its programme of the voluntary repatriation to Myanmar of Rohingya refugees from Northern Rakhine State. The High Commissioner was in close contact with the Myanmar authorities on this matter and was soon to visit the country to evaluate needs. He congratulated Bangladesh on having managed significantly to improve the living conditions of the refugees in the camps, and assured it that UNHCR had no intention of decreasing its assistance and commitment to the Rohingya refugees in 2009, unless their numbers decreased significantly.

52. Mr. Guterres wished to thank Chad for the generosity it had shown in hosting large numbers of refugees from Darfur and the Central African Republic. UNHCR would continue to provide Chad with all the assistance and support it needed, including to help Chadian populations affected by conflicts in the region. Furthermore, the High Commissioner strongly condemned the activities of L'Arche *de Zoé* in Chad. Mr. Guterres

shared the concerns expressed by the observer from Rwanda in relation to Rwandan refugees enlisted in armed groups outside the country, and assured her that he was sparing no effort to find solutions to the problem. He welcomed the improvement in the economic situation and the return to greater stability in Rwanda, which should contribute to creating conditions more conducive to the return of refugees and displaced persons. UNHCR greatly appreciated the efforts Sierra Leone had made to get its economy back on track and took note of the Government's intention of developing its reparations' programme.

53. Mr. Guterres said that UNHCR wished to work closely with Belarus in order to establish an asylum system and better management of migratory flows in the region. The High Commissioner stressed that the European Union was a privileged partner of UNHCR, as contributions from the Member States of the European Union accounted for almost 45% of the organization's budget. He welcomed the development of a common asylum policy and awaited with great interest the creation of the European Asylum Support Office. Mr. Guterres reaffirmed that UNHCR was prepared to work with all its partners in the context of the Global Needs Assessment initiative, as all stakeholders had the same goal, namely to respond on the basis of the real needs on the ground. UNHCR greatly appreciated its cooperation with ECOWAS, whose Protocol on Free Movement of Persons was a key instrument for the local integration of national of other countries of the Community. UNHCR would continue to work with ECOWAS on the establishment of its emergency response structure. In conclusion, Mr. Guterres stressed that ECOWAS had played a vital role in promoting peace and security in the region.

54. **Ms. TSHERING** (Observer for Bhutan), exercising her right of reply following the statement by the observer for Nepal, said that the question of the refugees in Nepalese camps was a complex matter, against a background of illegal immigration, in a region marked out by vast population movements and extremely porous borders. Contrary to the claims of the Nepalese authorities, the camps did not accommodate persons of Bhutanese origin exclusively, and the lack of effective methods of identification meant that it was not possible to determine the true identity of those who arrived at the camp gates claiming Bhutanese nationality. Again, contrary to what Nepal was suggesting, the Bhutanese Government was deeply concerned about the plight of the refugees in the camps in eastern Nepal. It hoped that the negotiations between the two countries, which had foundered in 2003 after Bhutanese refugees had been the victims of violent attacks in the camps, could be resumed as soon as possible in an effort to find a durable solution to the problem.

55. **Mr. BHATTARAI** (Observer for Nepal) said, in response to the observer for Bhutan, that the reason why there were Bhutanese refugees in Nepal was because of Bhutan's policy of discrimination against its own citizens. The individuals concerned had been expelled from Bhutan, which was merely seeking to escape its responsibilities in relation to its own citizens. Nepal did not wish to expel these persons for humanitarian reasons, even though all of Nepal's political parties wished to see them able to return to their own country in dignity. Contrary to Bhutan's claims, the Bhutanese authorities did not wish to work with Nepal to implement agreements and begin fresh bilateral negotiations.

*The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.*