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Summary record of the 658th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Monday, 1 October 2012, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. Knutsson.....(Sweden)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

General debate (*continued*)

1. **Mr. Abdollahi** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that Afghans in his country had access to health care and basic education, among other services. In 2011, only 21,000 Afghan refugees had returned to their country, while 835 Afghans had been resettled since the beginning of 2012. His Government allocated US\$ 345 million annually for 288,000 refugee students from Afghanistan and Iraq.

2. **Ms. Southern** (Australia) said that in 2012 her Government had signed a multimillion dollar partnership framework with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). By June 2013, it would expand its resettlement programme in order to host 20,000 individuals. It had released \$A 10 million for strengthening regional cooperation, inter alia through the establishment of a regional support office in Bangkok on 10 September 2012. In 2012, it had donated \$A 6 million to UNHCR for the Syria Regional Response Plan. Over the next four years, it would increase its core contribution to the agency.

3. **Mr. Sylvester** (Canada) said that his country allowed the resettlement of almost 13,000 refugees a year and provided humanitarian assistance to millions more. It had reviewed its asylum system in order to make it faster and fairer, and to ensure that refugees who needed protection received it swiftly and that failed claimants were removed quickly. Canada would be setting up a new refugee appeal division, giving the majority of failed claimants access to a fact-based appeal at the Immigration and Refugee Board. Since November 2011, almost 14,000 Angolan refugees had left Canada to return to their country. Canada welcomed the three tripartite agreements concluded in 2011 between UNHCR, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Ghana and Togo for the voluntary return of Ivorian refugees.

4. **Mr. Ngokosso** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that, since May 2012, growing insecurity in the eastern part of the country had led to 2,235,954 internally displaced persons and 60,000 new refugees fleeing to neighbouring countries. Of the 79,617 Angolan refugees in his country, for whom the cessation clause had been in effect since 30 June 2012, 17,111 had been repatriated. Nearly 23,000 people who had expressed the intention of returning to Angola were awaiting repatriation, while 48,000 requests for local integration had been registered. His Government considered it would be more realistic to postpone implementation of the cessation clause for Rwandan refugees to 30 June 2013, owing in particular to the insecurity which made locating and contacting the refugees extremely difficult. The return of peace to the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo would enable the country to resume the repatriation of Congolese nationals, of whom there were 111,107 living in Uganda, 57,641 in Rwanda, 62,667 in the United Republic of Tanzania and 28,957 in Burundi. Thanks to the restoration of peace in the province of Equateur, UNHCR support and the full cooperation of his Government, 25,687 out of 115,134 refugees had been repatriated since May 2012.

5. **Ms. Sinjela** (Zambia) said that her Government had adopted new criteria for granting legal status to those refugees, chiefly Angolan, who met the relevant requirements, for example, by granting them Zambian citizenship or issuing them with a permanent residence permit. The Government would put in place a plan of action for the 23,000 Angolans who no longer held refugee status since the cessation clause had been invoked on 30 June 2012. It also continued its awareness-raising activities in host communities as part of its local integration programme. In order to reach a durable solution for the Rwandan refugees who would still require international protection after the cessation clause was invoked on 30 June 2013, the Rwandan Government could make it easier for those who already possessed a residence permit to acquire citizenship of the country of asylum. Lastly, a study on statelessness should be launched by the end of 2012 so that Zambia could make

an informed decision about acceding to the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness of 1961.

6. **Ms. Kos** (Croatia) said that her country was contributing financially to UNHCR humanitarian aid for Syrian refugees and was continuing its efforts to prevent and reduce statelessness, particularly among the Roma. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia and the implementing partners were continuing preparations for the Joint Regional Programme on Durable Solutions for Refugees and Displaced Persons.

7. **Mr. Minami** (Japan) said that his country's contribution to UNHCR in 2012 would be US\$ 180 million, compared with US\$ 226 million in 2011. The side-meeting on Afghan refugees organized by UNHCR during the Tokyo Conference on Consolidation of Peace in Afghanistan had confirmed how crucial humanitarian aid and development assistance were to each other. In 2011, Japan had launched a pilot resettlement programme to host refugees from Myanmar who had been living in the Mae La camp in Thailand. The programme would be extended for two years.

8. **Mr. Mohar Betancourt** (Mexico) said that in recent years his country had significantly modified its legislation by incorporating the right to asylum in its Constitution and adopting a special law on refugees and subsidiary protection, which included gender as an additional ground for granting refugee status and provided for subsidiary protection for persons without refugee status whose lives might be threatened were they to return to their country of origin. Mexico had also adopted measures to enable refugees to work and access free health care.

9. **Mr. van Schreven** (Netherlands) urged all countries to contribute to resettlement programmes and continue to back UNHCR activities in support of host countries.

10. **Mr. Getahun** (Ethiopia) said that the number of refugees in his country had increased sharply, from 265,000 in September 2011 to 375,000 in September 2012. Ethiopia was therefore very alarmed by the more than 30 per cent reduction in the budget allocated to the refugee programme, especially given that three camps for new refugees were scheduled to open within the next two months. Since 2009, the policy of settling refugees outside camps had enabled many of them to meet their own needs and pursue their studies, thanks in part to the university grants awarded to more than 950 Eritrean refugees. The 2012 visit to Ethiopia by the High Commissioner for Refugees had provided an opportunity to broach the question of intensifying cross-border humanitarian activities between Ethiopia and Somalia, with a view to reducing the influx of refugees into Ethiopia.

11. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) welcomed the efforts made by the various countries and their support for UNHCR activities. The agency was deeply concerned about the difficulties encountered in raising the necessary funds for the refugee repatriation operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

12. **Ms. Arango Olmos** (Colombia) said that an individual redress mechanism, including psychosocial assistance, had been set up in the context of the implementation of the legislation relating to victims and land restitution. The objective for 2012 was for 72,380 victims to benefit from the mechanism. Colombia and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) were active partners in the development and implementation of the social integration programmes for the displaced populations in urban areas. In 2012, Colombia had made a voluntary contribution to UNHCR in support of the refugee populations along the northern border of Ecuador.

13. **Ms. Mirachian** (Italy) said that her country was one of the main European countries of transit for irregular migrants, of whom more than 62,000 had reached Italian shores in 2011. Italy was requesting the European Union to take new measures in that connection, to strengthen coordination between countries of origin and countries of transit, and to establish

a common area of protection and solidarity, especially since the Syrian crisis heightened the risk of a new emergency situation.

14. **Mr. Choi** Seokyoung (Republic of Korea) said it was regrettable that cases of refoulement to certain countries had risen in 2011; a number of refugees and asylum seekers from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea had been sent back against their will. The protection of North Korean refugees and asylum seekers must remain a priority. The Refugee Act, which would take effect in July 2013, aimed to more effectively protect and promote the human rights of refugees and asylum seekers. His Government was endeavouring to improve its hosting capabilities by increasing the number of interpreters and making preparations for the opening of a refugee reception centre in June 2013.

15. **Mr. Delmi** (Algeria) recalled that his country was currently facing new influxes of refugees, mainly from Mali and the Syrian Arab Republic. With a view to returning those refugees to their countries of origin, Algeria had taken measures to foster conditions for peace in the region. In addition, domestic legislation had been revised in order to align the provisions relating to the treatment of refugees, asylum seekers and stateless persons with the principles of international refugee law.

16. **Mr. Niemtchinow** (France) said that guaranteeing humanitarian actors swift, free and unobstructed access to vulnerable populations was essential; close coordination among all humanitarian actors on the ground was indispensable; and emergency assistance must not be reduced to the short term, but rather should be part and parcel of a broader reconstruction and development strategy.

17. **Ms. Bassim** (Egypt) said that her country, which had received more than 100,000 Syrian refugees, was concerned about the escalation of the Syrian conflict and the ensuing population displacement. She cited the tragic situation of Palestinian refugees, who were forced to leave the countries that had hosted them for many years because of the crises in those countries.

18. **Ms. Pierce** (United Kingdom) drew attention to the following points: leadership in humanitarian emergencies, coordination, accountability and donor monitoring of agencies' progress. Resettling refugees in third countries was a way of ensuring their protection; that solution should sit alongside voluntary return and local integration.

19. **Mr. Demiralp** (Turkey) recalled that, in October 2011, his Government had announced the establishment of a temporary protection regime for Syrian refugees. Since then, it had maintained the regime and had, in particular, respected the principle of non-refoulement. Turkey was host to more than 80,000 Syrians, in addition to those not living in camps. In August and September 2012, the number of Syrians seeking refuge in Turkey had almost quadrupled. In that situation, it was regrettable that the "Syria regional response plan" was still desperately underfunded.

20. **Ms. Westman-Clement** (Sweden) commended UNHCR for prioritizing the promotion of durable solutions and urged it to continue strengthening its partnerships within the United Nations system and its ties with implementing partners in the field. Her country was one of the members of the European Union that received the most asylum seekers as a proportion of its population. In 2013, it planned to increase its financial contribution to UNHCR from SKr 613 million to SKr 633 million in the form of unearmarked funding.

21. **Mr. Schumacher** (Germany) said that his country endorsed the new UNHCR education strategy for 2012–2016 and had celebrated the twentieth anniversary of its own scholarship programme which, since 1992, had enabled over 6,000 refugees to pursue their studies. Germany supported the UNHCR initiative to seek transitional solutions and also the "Solutions strategy for Afghan refugees". In December 2011, it had launched a

resettlement programme which provided for 300 places a year. In terms of funding, Germany had been able to maintain its contribution at the same level in 2011 and even increase it in 2012.

22. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), responding to the comments by Italy, said that it was important to strengthen pan-European cooperation, effectively improve the common European asylum system and raise public awareness as a means of combating xenophobia and racial discrimination. He thanked the Republic of Korea for its assistance to the citizens of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea who became de facto refugees when they were forced to return to their country.

23. **Mr. Bessler** (Switzerland) said that his country had released financial and human resources to support the protection efforts under way in crisis regions; it had recently accepted an initial group of Syrian refugees. His Government regretted the somewhat sluggish implementation of the "Global focus programme".

24. **Mr. Dengo** (Costa Rica) said that his country had established an effective model for protecting the fundamental rights of foreign nationals and had defined uniform criteria for granting refugee status. It was also bolstering its efforts to combat trafficking in persons and collaborating with other countries in the region in efforts to tackle increasingly complex challenges.

25. **Mr. Strohal** (Austria) welcomed the swift appointment of a UNHCR Regional Refugee Coordinator for Syrian Refugees. Given the worrying increase in the number of internally displaced persons due to conflicts or natural disasters, gradually strengthening the legal protection framework for that category of persons should be paramount. Austria had signed a memorandum of understanding with UNHCR with the aim of intensifying coordination and cooperation in improvements to the asylum system and the integration of refugees in Austrian society.

26. **Ms. Farani Azevêdo** (Brazil) said that 2012 had marked the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of her country's Refugee Act, which was deemed a model in asylum legislation. The partnership established between her Government, UNHCR and civil society had made it easier to integrate refugees in Brazilian society. Brazil had also lent its support to resettling refugees as part of a regional approach. Lastly, it shared UNHCR's concern about the growing practice of detaining asylum seekers in a number of countries.

27. **Mr. Hilale** (Morocco) said that for the fourth year in a row his country had made a contribution of US\$ 1 million in unearmarked funding to UNHCR. Morocco viewed the humanitarian crisis in the Sahel region primarily as a development crisis that required coordinated intervention, considerable financial resources, and policies for short- and medium-term recovery. Morocco had been the first country to respond to the crisis in Mali by sending, within days, considerable food and medical aid to Malian refugees in Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger. The food, humanitarian and security situation in the Sahel was so serious that it should be placed among the strategic priorities of UNHCR, its partners and the international community. As to the Syrian Arab Republic, Morocco had been among the first countries to dispatch humanitarian and logistical assistance for the Syrian refugees in Jordan. It had also given UNHCR US\$ 250,000 for assistance to Syrian refugees.

28. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) thanked Morocco for setting up field hospitals in Tunisia and Jordan.

The meeting rose at 6.20 p.m.