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Summary record of the 673rd meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 3 October 2013, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Arango Olmos

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

Consideration of reports relating to programme and administrative oversight and evaluation (*continued*)

- (i) *Report on activities of the Inspector General's Office* (*continued*)
(A/AC.96/1127)
- (ii) *Report on Policy Development and Evaluation* (A/AC.96/1128)

1. **Mr. Salomons** (Officer-in-Charge of the Policy Development and Evaluation Service) presented an outline of the report on policy development and evaluation and added that the Service had undertaken a project to evaluate States' responsibilities in determining refugee status. Since its creation, the Service had participated actively in meeting the objectives set by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as part of its evaluation policy, particularly in relation to transparency. Ensuring the establishment of effective mechanisms for the systematic follow up of recommendations was also a priority for the Service.

2. **Ms. Pollack** (United States of America) said that she hoped that the Executive Committee members would be regularly updated on the work of the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee and the measures taken by UNHCR to follow up its recommendations. Although many of the recommendations made by the Board of Auditors in 2011 had been followed up, around 40 of them, particularly regarding risk management, remained outstanding. She continued to be concerned at the ineffective control over implementing partners reported by the Board of Auditors and the Office of Internal Oversight Services, and commended the responsiveness to the proposal made by the Member States to establish an Internal Compliance and Accountability Committee.

3. She thanked the Inspector General's Office for its report and commended UNHCR for making its partners aware of the importance of reinforcing investigation capacities. She added that UNHCR should continue to place more emphasis on result-based programme planning and make objectives and indicators more measurable and less subjective. After commending the work carried out by the Service, she recalled that the confidence of donors, host governments, partners and refugees depended on the strength of the oversight mechanisms.

4. **Ms. Conijn** (Netherlands) asked the UNHCR to consider separating the Service's duties of developing policies and evaluating them, in order to guarantee the independence of the evaluation activities, and allocating extra funding to such activities.

5. **Ms. Stone** (Australia) asked for information regarding the measures taken to make up the backlog in the consideration of complaints submitted to the Inspector General's Office, particularly those concerning cases of sexual exploitation, as well as planned measures to avoid further backlogs. She commended the work of the Service, requested information on the follow-up to documents that it prepared and suggested that the evaluation of the intervention in the Syrian crisis should serve as a basis improving future interventions, particularly in the areas of partnership and coordination.

6. **Mr. Kebede** (Inspector General of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that he appreciated the encouragement of the members and reiterated that independence and transparency were at the heart of the work of the Inspector General's Office. Risk management and mitigation could not be carried out without the coordinated work of the oversight mechanisms. Owing to limited resources, it had been decided that inquiries into cases of sexual exploitation would be a priority. The overlaps that existed between inspection missions and audit assignments raised the question of whether they should be merged.

7. **Mr. Salomons** (Officer-in-Charge of the Policy Development and Evaluation Service) said that cooperation with the World Food Programme (WFP) on protracted refugee situations had been a rich learning experience for UNHCR, which had become familiar with its Management Response Matrix, used by Mr. Crisp, former Director of the Service, in the report on Dollo Ado. In future, all evaluations of interventions would be based on a matrix containing the relevant information on the intervention to make it easier to verify its actual application. A change to the name of the unit responsible for evaluation within the Service might be considered, because its work was more analytical in nature.

Consideration and adoption of the biennial programme budget 2014–2015

(A/AC.96/1125, A/AC.96/1125/Corr.1 and A/AC.96/1125/Add.1)

8. **The Chairperson** drew the participants' attention to the document outlining the follow-up given by UNHCR to the observations of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) (A/AC.96/LXIV/CRP.1, circulated in the meeting room).

9. **Mr. Aleinikoff** (Deputy High Commissioner) presented the draft biennial programme budget 2014–2015, considered on 17 September 2013 by ACABQ and the Standing Committee. The budget, which was again drawn up based on a global needs assessment, took account of the implementation capacities of UNHCR. The total budget proposed for 2014 amounted to US\$ 5.3 billion, an increase of 35 per cent on the initial budget for 2013, but an increase of less than 1 per cent on the current budget for 2013. There were currently more than 43 million people displaced by conflict and persecution in the world, of whom 38.8 million were of direct concern to UNHCR. An increase of around 3.3 per cent in the total number of such people was predicted for 2014.

10. The budget for 2014 was distributed among the four pillars as follows: 81 per cent for the refugee programme (pillar 1), mainly in Jordan, Lebanon, Kenya, Ethiopia and Chad; 1 per cent for the stateless persons programme (pillar 2); 5 per cent for reintegration projects (pillar 3); and 13 per cent for projects for internally displaced persons (pillar 4), mainly in the Syrian Arab Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Myanmar and Iraq. The programme activities principally concerned Africa (39 per cent), unaccompanied minors (31 per cent) and Asia and the Pacific (12 per cent).

11. The total number of posts needed would decrease slightly from 9,087 at the start of 2013 to, in all likelihood, 9,034 in 2014. Thanks to the efforts of UNHCR to entrust implementation to its partners, the ratio between expenditure on staff and total expenditure had fallen from 41.4 per cent to 26 per cent. During the following biennium, UNHCR would continue to address critical needs in field operations, commence the upgrade of its resource management system, continue to strengthen capacity programme management and the technical sector and lead the other major initiatives presented in part 3 of the budget document.

12. He pointed out that paragraph 18 of the ACABQ report contained no objection to the draft programme budget.

13. **Mr. Beck** (Germany), speaking on behalf of France and his own country, said that he was concerned at the 46 per cent funding shortfall, despite record contributions in 2012. While a budget based on needs assessment might be most able to help UNHCR to fulfil its mandate, it should help it to set its priorities on the basis of the global strategic priorities in a fully transparent way. He noted with satisfaction that the presentation of the budget was clearer and that the internal reform process was bearing fruit, particularly concerning the reduction of the headquarters budget.

14. **Ms. Menéndez Pérez** (Spain), commending the fact that UNHCR had drawn up its financial statements in accordance with International Public Sector Accounting Standards

(IPSAS), said that her country would closely follow the implementation of the recommendations of the Board of Auditors and the process of bringing the internal audit function “in-house”. She noted the document containing the follow-up given to the ACABQ observations. She commended the commitment of UNHCR to the dialogue with Governments on budgetary issues, which had led to informal consultations in line with the ACABQ recommendations. She asked UNHCR to present clearly and transparently to the Executive Committee members the measures taken to strengthen the efficiency of its actions. Such measures, however, should not lead to cuts.

15. **Mr. Heo Jong-Yul** (Republic of Korea) said that he commended the effort made by UNHCR to include in its draft programme budget estimates of the number of persons of concern, as well as information on those estimates, but recalled that, as shown in the previous ACABQ report, the correlation between the number of persons of concern to UNHCR and the figures in the budget was not yet sufficiently clear. Additionally, more favourable conditions for efficient resource planning seemed to be forming following the publication of the IPSAS-compliant financial statement. Lastly, the feasibility of introducing an integrated approach should be examined, as recommended by ACABQ.

16. **Ms. Stone** (Australia) said she commended the reforms prioritizing the resources assigned to field operations and recalled that headquarters should, nevertheless, have sufficient resources to provide critical support to the field in emergency situations and in key protection areas. She commended the breakdown of the operational global strategic priorities into rights groups with allocated funding. She was pleased that results-based management was a priority and welcomed the efforts made to establish links between the budget, appeal and reporting documents.

17. **Ms. Sato** (Japan) said that, in addition to its regular contribution, her country made contributions to the supplementary budget and emergency grants. In March 2013, Japan had allocated some US\$ 24 million in assistance for Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries, around US\$ 120 million in humanitarian aid for disaster response in Africa, US\$ 34 million in humanitarian aid for the Middle East and North Africa and US\$ 6.8 million to activities in Myanmar, a total of US\$ 362 million. In June 2013, the regular contribution of Japan had risen to US\$ 63 million, with an increase in the percentage of non-earmarked funds (from 34.5 per cent to 43.1 per cent). To respond to the instability in the Syrian Arab Republic, since April 2012 Japan had made emergency grants totalling US\$ 9 million.

18. **Mr. Aleinikoff** (Deputy High Commissioner) said that the difference between the initial budget for 2013 and the budget proposed for 2014, of slightly more than US\$ 1 billion, resulted mostly from the consequences of the Syrian crisis. When preparing the budget for 2013, UNHCR could not have anticipated the situation it would be facing two years later. That being so, it would endeavour to reduce its costs as far as possible, while avoiding making arbitrary decisions. He noted with satisfaction that the latest contributions to the budget from Japan and the United States of America had reached the record figures of more than US\$ 250 million and more than US\$ 1 billion respectively, and invited all the delegations to break their own records.

Draft general decision on administrative, financial and programme matters
(A/AC.96/1125)

19. **Mr. Boukili** (Rapporteur) drew the delegations’ attention to paragraph (c) of the draft general decision on administrative, financial and programme matters (A/AC.96/1125, annex VII), where adoption of the programmes and budgets for regional programmes, global programmes and headquarters for 2014–2015 was proposed, amounting to US\$ 5,307,842,800 for 2014 and US\$ 5,179,463,700 for 2015.

20. **The Chairperson** thanked the UNHCR Controller for her dialogue with the Executive Committee, the attention she had given to the issues raised and her work on the budget. She added that the additional information provided on the global needs assessment had been appreciated. Moreover, by adopting the budget proposed by the High Commissioner for 2014–2015, the Executive Committee was acknowledging and supporting the continued application of the global needs assessment methodology. She took it that the Committee wished to adopt the draft budget for 2014–2015 as presented in the draft general decision.

21. *It was so decided.*

Review of the annual consultations with non-governmental organizations

22. **Ms. Sarmiento** (Rapporteur for annual consultations with non-governmental organizations (NGOs)) said that the primary theme of the annual consultations with NGOs, held in June 2013 with a record number of participants, was advocating protection. Other significant themes were maintaining the attention being paid to all emergencies and protracted situations in the world and the protection of refugees and internally displaced persons living outside camps. In total, 5 regional sessions and 10 thematic sessions were held. During the consultations, the issues raised included the humanitarian crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic; the absence of legal and institutional protection frameworks in the Asia-Pacific region; the need for collective planning and participation in Africa; the specific protection needs of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, unaccompanied minors, indigenous peoples and people of African descent in the Americas; and inadequate asylum procedures in Europe. A number of other issues were also raised, including durable solutions to internal displacement, the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence from the beginning of emergency responses, the concerns linked to the growing number of unaccompanied minors among refugees and their return to their countries of origin, the need to systematically and coherently identify refugees who wished to be resettled, and the urgent need to promote alternative measures to detention, which was used excessively.

23. **Ms. Pollack** (United States of America) said that UNHCR and all its humanitarian partners should take preventive action against gender-based violence at all levels, in order to protect those vulnerable to it. She welcomed the fact that the protection of refugees in urban zones had been addressed during the different consultation sessions and that UNHCR had made progress in the area, and hoped that the measures that had been agreed upon would be well communicated and implemented in the field. With regard to resettlement, the United States of America was proud to have almost achieved its objective of resettling 70,000 refugees in its territory in the previous year.

24. **Ms. Schamell** (Germany) said that the principles of partnership between UNHCR and NGOs should also be applied in the field, where cooperation was more challenging. Local NGOs provided indispensable aid, especially as they were sometimes the only ones to have access to certain areas. Moreover, they were best placed to explain to local populations and leaders the nature and objectives of the humanitarian aid being provided. Germany was in favour of a humanitarian system based on the diversity of humanitarian actors. That diversity was an asset because crises and humanitarian needs were diverse and needed diverse approaches.

25. **Ms. Kilkenny** (Ireland) said that she encouraged UNHCR and NGOs to ensure that vulnerable refugee groups could participate in needs assessment and decision-making processes. She particularly commended the recommendation strengthening the links with organizations representing women. Additionally, she welcomed the recommendations concerning the inclusion of children, and all the risks to which they were exposed, in all

services and programmes, and added that, besides their educational role, schools also allowed essential services to be provided, particularly in the areas of nutrition and health.

26. **Ms. Rosenvinge** (Norway) said that her country was in favour of closer relationships between NGOs and UNHCR. She observed and commended the fact that a genuine partnership was in the process of being set up. Additionally, Norway thought that the approach of UNHCR in the area of partnership should be broadened and improved.

27. **Mr. Guterres** (High Commissioner for Refugees) expressed his deep thanks and gratitude to all partner NGOs, in particular those that could access places that UNHCR could not for various reasons. Partnership with NGOs should evolve towards joint assessment, planning and action, respecting the role of States. Communication between UNHCR and civil society, via the NGOs, should be permanent and should influence the choices made by UNHCR. All those who collaborated with the UNHCR were encouraged to assimilate that principle and ensure that they applied it in their relations with NGOs. A relationship of equals should be established between UNHCR and its non-governmental partners.

Other statements

28. **Mr. Pellet** (First Vice-President of the UNHCR Staff Council) said that he was concerned about the abolition of guard posts and the subcontracting of staff security to private companies, as was the case in Afghanistan. Depending on the budget available, renewable two-year contracts should be offered to local staff and continuing contracts introduced. With reference to appointments, he regretted that certain posts were given to individuals recruited externally, while colleagues had been doing the work concerned successfully for several years. The new policy relating to the conversion of posts for general service staff should be revised to give priority to existing staff members. Nevertheless, the Staff Council welcomed the creation of the post of living conditions improvement manager, although it had only a very small allocated budget.

Working methods of the Executive Committee and meetings of the Standing Committee in 2014

Consideration of the provisional agenda of the sixty-fifth session of the Executive Committee

Draft decision on the working methods of the Executive Committee and its Standing Committee (decision 1)

Draft decision on the programme of work of the Standing Committee in 2014 (decision 2)

Draft decision on observer participation in meetings of the Standing Committee in 2013–2014 (decision 3)

Draft decision on the provisional agenda of the sixty-fifth session of the Executive Committee (decision 4)

29. **Mr. Boukili** (Rapporteur) briefly presented the draft decisions submitted to the Executive Committee for adoption.

30. **The Chairperson** said that she had received the formal request for the participation of observers in the relevant meetings of the Standing Committee in 2013–2014. The countries concerned were Bosnia and Herzegovina, El Salvador, Honduras, Latvia, Lithuania, Malaysia, Nepal, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Uruguay. If the Executive

Committee did not object, she proposed that the names of those countries be added to the corresponding draft decision and that all the draft decisions be adopted.

31. *It was so decided.*

The meeting rose at 4.55 p.m.