



General Assembly

Distr.: General
13 January 2016
English
Original: French

Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Sixty-sixth session

Summary record of the 690th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 8 October 2015, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. McCarney (Vice-Chair)..... (Canada)

Contents

General debate (*continued*)


This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent *within one week of the date of the present document* to the English Translation Section, room E.6040, Palais des Nations, Geneva (trad_sec_eng@unog.ch).

Any corrections to the records of the public meetings of the Executive Committee at this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

GE.15-17890 (E) 120116 130116



Please recycle 



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

General debate (continued)

1. **Ms. Maurás** (Chile) said that her delegation was concerned at the lack of political will to prevent and resolve the conflicts responsible for the current humanitarian crises and to combat drug trafficking networks. The International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent and the World Humanitarian Summit were forums at which global commitments could be undertaken and synergies and consensus generated with a view to resolving those conflicts. Chile for its part had relaunched its reception programme for Syrian refugees and participated in peace negotiations between the Colombian Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). It welcomed the adoption, in 2014, of the Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action, which offered a framework for regional cooperation and solidarity in strengthening the international protection afforded to refugees, displaced persons and stateless persons in Latin America and the Caribbean.
2. **Mr. Dunbar** (Observer for Haiti) said that Haiti had been confronted with a massive movement of persons from the Dominican Republic ever since the Dominican Constitutional Court had handed down Judgement No. TC 168-13, whose effect was to strip hundreds of thousands of Dominicans of Haitian descent of their nationality.
3. **Mr. Estrada Roman** (Nicaragua) said that, in a world in which self-interest, pride, interventionism and greed prevailed and opened the door to multiple conflicts, it was urgent to consider overhauling the multilateral system that governed the United Nations.
4. **Mr. Bártolo** (Portugal) said that, since the beginning of 2015, Portugal had helped, at both the national level and in the context of the European Union, to carry out initiatives and actions aimed at assisting the vast number of refugees and migrants flooding into Europe. That having been said, there were no purely humanitarian solutions to the acute political crises, regional conflicts and bloody civil wars that were all too often fuelled, financed and directed by external actors. In a different context, Portugal remained actively engaged in efforts to prevent and eliminate statelessness.
5. **Mr. Cisse** (Senegal) said that Senegal supported the statement made by Rwanda on behalf of the African Group. The tripartite agreement concluded between Mauritania, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Senegal had allowed the voluntary and organized repatriation of more than 24,000 Mauritanian refugees. Moreover, in accordance with the memorandum of understanding concluded with UNHCR in 2011, thousands of secure refugee identity cards had been distributed.
6. **Mr. Okio** (Congo) said that his country endorsed the statement made by Rwanda on behalf of the African Group and maintained an open-door policy. Since March 2013, some 30,000 refugees had arrived in the Congo from the Central African Republic. On 17 August 2015, a process involving the biometric verification and registration of all asylum seekers and refugees had been launched in order to facilitate the implementation of measures offering such persons legal protection and suitable assistance. Furthermore, voluntary repatriation drives carried out in October 2014 and September 2015 had resulted in the return of 147 and 248 Angolan refugees, respectively. The situation of Rwandan refugees, who had been subject to the cessation clause since June 2013, and that of refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who had been received in the Congo in June 2009, should be discussed urgently in tripartite meetings. In addition, biometric travel documents that met the

standards of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) would soon be issued, and a law on asylum would be adopted in the coming days.

7. **Ms. Riachi Assaker** (Lebanon) said that her country wished to thank the international community for its assistance, while at the same time noting that it was far from being adequate to cope with a crisis of the magnitude and duration of the current one. Allocated resources had been assigned primarily to humanitarian assistance, whereas they were equally needed for development assistance and burden-sharing, given that half the country's population was made up of refugees.

8. **Ms. Majali** (Jordan) said that her country hosted a large number of refugees. She stressed the need for innovative ideas to eliminate the humanitarian aid funding deficit, adding that the Jordan Response Plan 2016-2018 could not be implemented fully without the assistance of the international community.

9. **Mr. Elsaed** (Egypt) said that, in recent years the Egyptian Government had carried out numerous measures to address the irregular status of asylum seekers.

10. **Mr. Hernández Sánchez** (Observer for the Dominican Republic) said that the persons who had asked to be listed in the Aliens Register, in accordance with Special Act No. 169-14, could begin the naturalization process within two years, while those who had opted to participate in the regularization plan could expect to have their status regularized. The Dominican Republic did not and would not carry out collective expulsions and had no cases of statelessness.

11. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) welcomed the efforts made by member States and their support for the activities of UNHCR.

12. **Mr. Kim Young-moo** (Republic of Korea) said that his country had joined the campaign "No lost generation" in favour of Syrian refugees.

13. **Mr. Bertoni** (Italy) said that Italy supported the statement made by Sweden on behalf of the European Union. More effective measures must be taken to combat human trafficking. Furthermore, the international community must equip itself with better tools for reducing funding gaps and spending less time planning responses to potential crises and preparing for their implementation.

14. **Mr. Cima** (Argentina) said that, in October 2014, Argentina had implemented a programme to facilitate the social integration of Syrian refugees, and that hundreds of humanitarian visas had already been granted for that purpose. Applications for refugee status by Syrians were reviewed without delay by the National Commission for Refugees following a simplified procedure. Since 2012, 370 requests for asylum and family reunification had been processed. In 2015, the Commission had received 830 asylum applications; a total of 849 decisions had been issued, 44 granting refugee status and 45 family reunification. Argentina was committed to continuing its cooperation with UNHCR in order to help refugees and asylum seekers, who had been designated a priority of its national policy.

15. **Mr. Bauriski** (Poland) said that Poland wished to align itself with the statement made by the European Union. Poland supported the collective action being carried out by the European Union in favour of refugees and the search for durable solutions. It took the view that the international community should not merely resettle refugees from the Middle East and North Africa but should rather take measures to prevent such persons from undertaking dangerous journeys to Europe. To date, Poland had allocated €4.4 million in aid to Syrian refugees. It had also increased its financial contribution to the activities of UNHCR and the World Food Programme. Poland considered that migration was not a regional problem but rather a global one that merited in-depth consideration by the United Nations. Failure to do so would undermine the operational capacity of the United Nations system.

16. **Ms. Ibrahim** (Nigeria) said that Nigeria aligned itself with the statement made by Rwanda on behalf of the African Group. Nigeria hosted asylum seekers from Cameroon, Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Libya, Mali, South Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic. In January 2015, it had repatriated 452 refugees from Cameroon, some of whom had lived in Nigeria for more than six years. In its war against the terrorist group Boko Haram, Nigeria had donated \$60 million for the deployment of the Multinational Joint Task Force, which had managed gradually to restore peace in the affected parts of the country, thereby allowing many displaced persons and refugees to return to their homes. As Nigeria did not encourage the placement of asylum seekers in camps, they were offered Government transit accommodation instead and were registered with its national health insurance scheme.

17. **Mr. Ghariani** (Tunisia) said that Tunisia aligned itself with the statement made by Rwanda on behalf of the African Group. The world was currently faced with a set of unprecedented and very complex conflicts that humanitarian actors, including UNHCR, were incapable of resolving on their own, owing to a lack of resources. That situation had both a qualitative and quantitative impact on the services offered to people affected by those conflicts. The proliferation of conflicts, which in many cases were artificial and fostered by political interests, undermined the efforts of UNHCR and prevented it from focusing on the search for durable solutions. Moreover, despite the laudable efforts of the countries that hosted refugees, the generous contributions of donors and the hospitality of host country populations, persons fleeing conflict were being subjected to intolerance, xenophobia and racism. It was thus more than ever necessary for Governments and civil society to carry out an awareness-raising campaign in order to address the root causes of those problems. Owing to the erosion of its resources and the neutrality of its mandate, UNHCR had reached the limits of its action and should adopt an innovative approach to cooperating with other United Nations bodies concerned with achieving peace and security in the world. It should, for example, seize the opportunity of the World Humanitarian Summit, which would be held in Istanbul in 2016, to promote an approach that was based on conflict prevention and sustainable development.

18. **Ms. Masana García** (Peru) said that the Refugee Act adopted by Peru embodied international legal principles and offered due process guarantees. The authorities were currently reviewing the Act's implementing regulations with a view to better assisting unaccompanied minors and issuing identity papers, that enabled asylum seekers to work while their application was being processed. It was also taking steps to expedite the processing of asylum applications and to improve the daily living conditions of asylum seekers and refugees already present in its territory. According to forecasts, the number of asylum applications submitted to the Peruvian authorities in 2015 would increase by 80 per cent in relation to the number submitted in 2014. With regard to the problem of statelessness, it should be noted that the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness had entered into force for Peru in 2014. Moreover, the Aliens Act, which had recently entered into force, recognized the status of humanitarian migrants, thereby providing a means for regularizing the status of stateless persons living in the territory of Peru.

19. **Mr. Brizuela Pérez** (Observer for Paraguay), speaking on behalf of MERCOSUR, said that MERCOSUR member States had strengthened their normative and institutional frameworks on asylum by establishing national refugee commissions. They had recently adopted a declaration of principles relating to the international protection of refugees whereby the determination of refugee status for the purposes of non-refoulement had extraterritorial effect. Five Latin American countries were implementing programmes for the resettlement of Colombian refugees, and various countries in the region had extended those programmes to other refugees as well.

Furthermore, as part of the “Borders of Solidarity” programme, the MERCOSUR countries were giving priority to training border officials. They were also seeking ways to enable refugees to benefit from the workforce mobility programme while preserving their status as refugees.

20. **Ms. Rodríguez Ramírez** (Observer for Panama) said that, in order to bring its national legislation into conformity with international standards of protection, Panama, in conjunction with civil society and UNHCR, was currently carrying out a series of reforms. In particular, the National Office of Refugee Affairs was working to improve the processing of asylum applications. Panama had also acceded to the two conventions on stateless persons and was preparing a law on the establishment of a mechanism to assist such persons. It was still working on ensuring refugees full access to employment, education and housing.

21. **Mr. Tomasi** (Holy See) said that responsibility for assisting refugees should not rest solely on the countries that shared a border with the refugees’ country of origin. The issuance of humanitarian visas and the lifting of sanctions against carriers of asylum seekers could enable refugees to arrive in Europe without risking their lives. The countries of the European Union had taken laudable measures to cope with the massive influx of refugees, but they were also planning to reinforce border controls in order to prevent migrants from entering their territory.

22. **Mr. Moraru** (Republic of Moldova) said that his country aligned itself with the statement delivered by the European Union. The Republic of Moldova currently offered international protection to 613 persons, nearly 81 per cent of whom were from the Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan and Ukraine. It also provided various forms of assistance to 24,000 migrants in an irregular situation, including the issuance of work permits and study visas and the grant of family reunification arrangements. The Republic of Moldova paid particular attention to ensuring respect for the rights of refugees and to facilitating their social integration. It also took special measures to ensure their access to the education system and the labour market. The costs of integration were fully covered by the State budget, which attested to Moldovan society’s solidarity with persons in need of assistance and protection.

23. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) welcomed the efforts made by the Republic of Korea, Italy, Argentina, Poland, Nigeria, Tunisia, Peru, Paraguay, Panama, the Holy See and the Republic of Moldova, as well as their support for the activities of his Office.

24. **Ms. Abdullahi** (Observer for the African Union) said that the African Union aligned itself with the statement made by Rwanda on behalf of the African Group. The African Union wished to express its solidarity with persons from the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq and Afghanistan who were fleeing violence in those countries and called on the international community to receive and assist them. In 2015, the humanitarian situation in Africa, which had been exacerbated by conflict, political instability and the effects of climate change, continued to be a subject of concern. In that connection, the African Union called for adherence to the principles enshrined in the relevant universal and regional agreements. It also requested the international community without delay to find durable solutions to the protracted refugee situations in Kenya, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Algeria. She further called on States that had not already done so to sign and ratify the Kampala Convention. The African Union continued to work closely with UNHCR and other relevant stakeholders in order to meet the needs of refugees and asylum seekers in the area of protection.

25. **Mr. Lonnback** (Observer for the International Organization for Migration — IOM) said that cooperation between IOM and UNHCR was more relevant than ever.

IOM had considerably expanded the scope of its humanitarian interventions in the past few years, particularly with respect to refugees. It continued to support the efforts of UNHCR and concerned Governments, notably in the area of resettlement, particularly in the context of the Syrian crisis. In response to the external displacement generated by the crisis in Yemen, IOM and UNHCR had supported the formulation and launch of a regional response plan that, for the first time, focused on the situation of migrants in addition to that of refugees.

26. **Ms. Pictet-Althann** (Observer for the Sovereign Military Order of Malta) recalled that the Order of Malta was present in 120 countries and offered medical care, accommodation and basic necessities to thousands of refugees, displaced persons and migrants. It had increased its activities threefold in Hungary in order to assist refugees transiting through that country. In Germany, it ran 30 centres that provided medical and legal assistance to asylum seekers. The Order of Malta was also present in Italy, in the north of Iraq and in Lebanon. It was actively engaged in preparations for the World Humanitarian Summit and had organized a symposium in that context.

27. **Ms. Silva** (United Nations Development Programme — UNDP) said that refugees should be considered an asset to the society in which they settled, and efforts should be made to promote their integration and autonomy. To that end, income-generating activities needed to be created for refugees and host communities, and UNDP, in conjunction with UNHCR, was endeavouring to do just that in the context of the regional action plan for Syrian refugees. Those and other initiatives offered the chance to draw lessons that could help to better address situations of protracted displacement. UNDP also carried out programmes that addressed the causes of displacement, but a concerted effort on the part of all development partners was necessary in order to find durable solutions. UNDP stood ready to participate in finding innovative solutions in that regard.

28. **Ms. Jerger** (World Food Programme — WFP) said it was regrettable that resource constraints currently inhibited her organization's capacity to deliver food assistance in many situations. WFP and UNHCR worked closely together in promoting the self-reliance of millions of refugees in protracted crises. WFP wished to continue its participation in implementing UNHCR cash-based interventions and coordination arrangements, which were very useful initiatives.

29. **Mr. Thona** (International Council of Voluntary Agencies), speaking on behalf of NGOs, said that the current refugee crisis was the result of successive failures in spite of repeated warnings. The international community had not met its basic international obligations to protect the most vulnerable persons. States, which had primary responsibility to protect refugees, should give priority to saving lives, determining refugees' specific needs, observing migratory movements, combating racism and tackling the root causes of conflict. The next Valetta Summit on Migration to be held by the European Union and the African Union could help to achieve that objective.

30. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) highlighted the exemplary cooperation that existed between UNHCR and the African Union and the remarkable efforts of the latter in numerous areas, such as addressing the causes of displacement, promoting human rights and good governance, preventing and resolving conflicts and carrying out peacekeeping. He recalled that efforts aimed at the development of the African continent had borne fruit and had made it possible for certain countries to reach the highest growth rates in the world in the past few years.

31. **The Chairperson**, summing up the general debate, recalled that many delegations had referred to the current large-scale crises, while at the same time emphasizing that protracted refugee situations, especially those of Afghan and Somalian refugees, should not be forgotten. The participants considered the financial

situation of the humanitarian system deplorable, and drew attention to the reduced funding available for Africa. They had appealed to new countries, as well as to the private sector, to contribute as well to the work of UNHCR. The delegations supported the High Commissioner's request to strengthen the link between humanitarian interventions and development programmes.

32. The question of collective responsibility and burden-sharing had also been a major topic of discussion, and calls had been made for compassion and solidarity. The need to provide better protection to refugees and migrants had also been stressed, particularly with regard to combating human trafficking and sexual and gender-based violence against women. Efforts had also been made to address statelessness.

33. Speakers had shared the High Commissioner's concerns regarding the difficulty of finding durable solutions. In view of that difficulty, initiatives had been taken to strengthen the resilience of refugees and their host communities, notably by means of education, self-sufficiency and cash-based interventions. The need to tackle the root causes of the humanitarian crises had been underscored, and it had been recalled that displacement was not always caused by violence but also by a lack of employment and educational opportunities. Delegations had agreed with the High Commissioner that the issue of displacement should be included in the debate and on agendas relating to sustainable development and climate change.

Statements made in exercise of the right of reply

34. **Mr. Margaryan** (Armenia), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the Armenian refugees' current situation was the result of an ethnic cleansing campaign and a war aimed at suppressing the legitimate quest for self-determination of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh. In his view, the refugees' return would not be possible unless a commitment was made to resolving the conflict.

35. **Mr. Kolesnikov** (Russian Federation), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the Georgian delegation had launched unfounded accusations against his country, implicating it in the occupation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. That region constituted an independent State, and the Russian Federation had never controlled its territory. The Georgian Government had politicized the matter without concern for those who had been subjected to the intervention of its armed forces in 2008. Legally binding agreements on the non-use of force would allow for a return to normalcy in the region, especially from the social standpoint.

36. **Mr. Penjo** (Bhutan), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, referred to the statement made by the delegation of Nepal concerning persons living in camps in Nepal. The latter were not refugees, but rather economic migrants. The Governments of Nepal and Bhutan had recognized that the camps accommodated a variety of people, but the screening procedure had been interrupted in 2003 by an attack against the members of the joint verification team. Bhutan was in contact with the Government of Nepal on that issue, and a third-country resettlement process was making a significant contribution to the resolution of the humanitarian problem.

37. **Mr. Ashrafzade** (Azerbaijan), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, referred to the human rights violations perpetrated against the 230,000 Azerbaijanis who had been driven from their homes in Armenia towards the end of the 1980s. Armenia occupied 20 per cent of the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh and more than 1 million Azerbaijanis had become refugees or displaced persons. In June 2015, the European Court of Human Rights had ruled in favour of six Azerbaijanis who had been subjected to forced displacement by Armenia.

38. **Mr. Margaryan** (Armenia), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that, on that same date, the Court of Justice of the European Union had handed down a

decision in favour of an Armenian complainant who had been displaced and had confirmed that Azerbaijan had carried out attacks against the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh and neighbouring regions.

39. **Mr. Pipia** (Georgia), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the Russian Federation continued to violate the territorial integrity of Georgia, to contravene the principles of international law following its military attack of 2008 and to occupy 20 per cent of the territory of Georgia. It had practised ethnic cleansing in 2008, which had been recognized by the international fact-finding commission. In exchange for the restoration of its territorial integrity, Georgia had undertaken not to use force. The Russian Federation must respect its international obligations, as well as the terms of the 2008 ceasefire agreement.

40. **Mr. Ashrafzade** (Azerbaijan), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, recalled the terms of the decision of the European Court of Human Rights and General Assembly resolution 62/243, which demanded the withdrawal of all Armenian forces from the territory of Azerbaijan.

41. **Mr. Kolesnikov** (Russian Federation), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the statement by Georgia was factually inaccurate and in no way contributed to resolving the refugee problem.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.