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Summary record of the 753rd meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 13 October 2022, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Stasch (Vice-Chair)..... (Germany)

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Consideration of reports on the work of the Standing Committee *(continued)*

(a) International Protection *(continued)* ([A/AC.96/1221](#), [A/AC.96/1222](#), [A/AC.96/1228](#) and [A/AC.96/1229](#))

1. **Mr. Nkosi** (South Africa) said that his country planned to take vigorous action to eradicate the backlog of appeals and strengthen the asylum system in partnership with Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in order to ensure that deserving asylum-seekers and refugees had access to protection. Progress had been made, with UNHCR support, towards eliminating the backlog. Action to achieve that goal had included joint training of newly recruited members by the Judicial Institute for Africa and UNHCR. The members had then begun to adjudicate appeals and their action was expected to intensify in the coming months. The Refugee Appeals Authority had extended an invitation to the South African Judicial Education Institute to provide further training for members.

2. As refugee status should not be permanent, action to achieve durable solutions should address the root causes of forced displacement. In line with the goal of burden- and responsibility-sharing, South Africa underscored the importance of increased cooperation of the international community, since the main burden of responsibility lay with refugee host countries that were required to provide protection with their limited resources. South Africa hoped that the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges in December 2022 would focus on intensifying resettlement and voluntary returns.

3. **Mr. Widmer** (Switzerland) called for resolute action by the international community to prevent further crises. As underscored in the Global Refugee Forum, such action must be based on a multi-stakeholder and humanitarian-peace-development nexus approach, particularly in the context of peacebuilding. When investigating the root causes of displacement, it was essential to highlight the importance of enhanced respect for international humanitarian law, human rights and fundamental freedoms.

4. The High Commissioner's note on international protection ([A/AC.96/1222](#)) illustrated the extent to which gender-based and sexual violence persisted. Switzerland accorded priority to the prevention of such phenomena and also to the strengthening of response procedures. The situation could be exacerbated when persons of concern to UNHCR, particularly women and girls, were exposed to perpetrators of organized crime, primarily smugglers and traffickers. Vulnerable persons frequently lacked access to the police and legal aid and faced stigma and discrimination. Switzerland therefore requested UNHCR to cooperate more closely with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and work with other bodies such as the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance.

5. Switzerland continued to take resolute action to combat human trafficking and supported global endeavours to elucidate the complex links between human trafficking and forced displacement. Swiss border guards attended training courses on due diligence, focusing on respect for human rights and the right of asylum. Countries of origin, transit and destination faced complex challenges in terms of identification of disappeared persons and communication with their family members. Switzerland cooperated with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and other States and partners in developing standards and procedures for effective action in that regard. The 2023 Global Refugee Forum, which would be held in Geneva, would provide a vital opportunity for tackling the issue of international protection for refugees.

6. **Mr. Rose** (Australia) said that he wished to underscore the importance of preventing and addressing the root causes of forced displacement, such as conflicts and the climate emergency, and of promoting voluntary repatriation. Australia appreciated the vital role played by UNHCR in that regard, guided by the core principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. In addition, the immense contribution made by refugee hosting countries was the bedrock of the Global Compact on Refugees.

7. Australia was deeply concerned about the displacement of more than one third of the population of Ukraine following the unlawful invasion by the Russian Federation. The

European response to the mass displacement embodied the principles of international cooperation and of burden- and responsibility-sharing.

8. Since the end of the Second World War, Australia had successfully settled more than 930,000 refugees and others in humanitarian need, and appreciated their contribution to Australian society, culture and prosperity. The Government aspired to progressively increase the country's humanitarian intake in the years ahead. A total of 13,750 places for permanent resettlement were provided under its current annual programme and an additional 16,500 places would be provided for Afghan nationals during the next four years. Australian border protection policies were consistent with the country's international obligations and its rights as a sovereign nation. At a time of unprecedented global displacement, the Government welcomed the development of the third country solutions for refugees. In line with its commitment to the Global Compact on Refugees, Australia was piloting new approaches to pathways for refugees and other displaced people, including through refugee labour mobility and community sponsorship. It was a founding member of the Global Task Force on Refugee Labour Mobility, drawing on its Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement Pilot programme. In addition, the Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot programme would allow more Australians to make a direct contribution to resettling refugees and helping them to adapt to life in Australia.

9. **Mr. Olfato** (Philippines) said that his Government was concerned about the escalation of armed conflicts that had exacerbated forced displacement in many parts of the world, and about denial of entry, pushbacks and expulsions on many land and sea borders that had resulted in loss of life. In addition, the negative and discriminatory political narratives concerning refugees, migrants and other persons of concern had resulted in a public backlash and restrictive government policies.

10. As climate change was a driver of displacement, organizations like UNHCR should collaborate with States in determining how international obligations were applicable to climate refugees. The Strategic Framework for Climate Action would serve as a useful tool in that regard.

11. The Philippines endorsed the partnership between UNHCR and IOM. Standard operating procedures would enhance inter-organizational efficiency in addressing issues such as trafficking in persons.

12. It was essential to promote the right of access to asylum, to uphold the principle of non-refoulement, to eliminate all forms of violence, including sexual exploitation and gender-based violence, and to assist people in vulnerable situations, including women, children and persons with disabilities. Given the need to find durable long-term solutions for refugee hosting countries, UNHCR should consider producing a separate report or introducing a relevant agenda item on that issue in future sessions of the Executive Committee.

13. **Mr. Sender** (Germany) said that the record number of displaced persons and of emergencies declared by UNHCR highlighted the vital need for protection in humanitarian emergencies. The immense displacement from Ukraine had required a swift reaction by the international community. Moldova, neighbouring European Union countries and other partners had displayed enormous solidarity by hosting millions of refugees.

14. The right to seek asylum free from discrimination was a cornerstone of the international legal framework, and should be supplemented by adequate standards of treatment, strict adherence to the principle of non-refoulement and access to basic services. Given the importance of protection for achieving durable solutions, UNHCR should provide the necessary guidance to all stakeholders in displacement settings in order to prepare the pathways to solutions. Protection regimes, including regular pathways in cross-border contexts, were also necessary to tackle to major impact of climate change. Germany welcomed the close collaboration of UNHCR with the Platform on Disaster Displacement in that regard. As the number of cases of sexual and gender-based violence was alarming, UNHCR should promote a rigorous response to any signs of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment of refugees. Germany welcomed the close coordination between UNHCR and IOM, as illustrated by their joint framework of engagement. The action taken by the Special

Adviser on Solutions to Internal Displacement was welcome and timely. UNHCR and its staff should take steps to ensure the success of the Action Agenda on Internal Displacement.

15. **Mr. Tirivavi** (Zimbabwe) said that the continued collaboration between UNHCR and IOM, including in Zimbabwe, helped to bridge funding gaps, which had been identified as a major concern during the general debate. It also enhanced the availability of technical expertise to address issues affecting persons of concern in a holistic manner. Zimbabwe, as a host country, received and processed applications from asylum-seekers through an inter-agency Refugee Status Determination Committee, which operated with the assistance of the UNHCR country office in Zimbabwe. The Committee had no backlog of applications for refugee status. With regard to durable solutions, Zimbabwe supported action to address the root causes of displacement. In addition, it viewed voluntary repatriation as a viable means of returning persons of concern to their countries of origin in a dignified manner. However, in some cases refugees were unwilling to return after the entry into force of a cessation clause. Zimbabwe therefore called on UNHCR to assist Member States in dealing with such situations without compromising the dignity, safety and rights of people of concern.

16. **Ms. Kibere** (Uganda) said that host countries, such as Uganda, were required to guarantee the basic rights of refugees and to include them in their national social welfare system. However, Uganda, as a developing State with a population of over 55 million people, found the task of catering for over 1.5 million refugees very stressful, since it led to the virtual collapse of its national welfare system. The Government therefore appreciated the mobilization of funds for the purpose by UNHCR and donors. However, it would continue to call for greater support, particularly as one of the convenors of the 2023 Global Refugee Forum. Host countries could only bear their burden if all stakeholders mobilized resources to assist them in ensuring access to education, health care, mental health and psychosocial support, especially for vulnerable persons such as girls, women and persons with disabilities.

17. Voluntary repatriation was only possible if the root causes of displacement were addressed. As not all persons who applied for asylum were deemed to qualify for protection and were not UNHCR persons of concern, it was difficult to decide what action to take in order to protect their human rights and dignity. As hundreds of failed asylum-seekers remained stranded in Uganda, the Government requested UNHCR, in partnership with IOM and other migration platforms, to provide assistance for their dignified removal. Uganda was keen to participate in the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges in December 2022.

18. **Ms. Ngaiza** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) played an important role in refugee management operations in her country, and local communities had benefited therefrom in a variety of ways. However, only 3 of the 10 partners involved in implementing the Tanzanian refugee operation were local NGOs and the remainder were international NGOs.

19. The United Republic of Tanzania underscored the importance of building the capacity of local actors because most local organizations, when compared with their international counterparts, were unable to demonstrate the requisite expertise in all areas. Capacity-building for local NGOs would help them to play a significant role in the humanitarian response, since they were always the first responders in emergencies. It would also facilitate local ownership of current refugee projects.

20. **Ms. Atteya** (Egypt) said that her country had recently launched the Joint Platform for Migrants and Refugees with the aim of mobilizing international support for services provided to migrants and refugees and their host communities. Egypt welcomed the increased inclusion of refugees in primary and secondary health care in host communities and their inclusion in vaccination schemes. Refugees had access to public hospitals in Egypt, in cooperation with UNHCR and the World Health Organization (WHO). In addition, refugee women had access to complaint mechanisms concerning violence against women and to shelters for women survivors of violence. Given the immense burden that such action imposed on health-care systems in host countries, targeted assistance was required to meet their needs and priorities.

21. Egypt provided access to education for refugees and asylum-seekers on an equal basis with Egyptian students. All Arabic-speaking refugee students were enrolled in public schools

and thousands benefited from fee exemptions at the university level and from scholarship schemes.

22. Egypt renewed its call to the international community to address the phenomena of displacement and climate crises in a collective manner and to focus on investing in resilience and prevention. It also welcomed UNHCR efforts to tackle the nexus of displacement and human trafficking.

23. The influx of refugees, asylum-seekers, irregular migrants and victims of human trafficking into Egypt placed a huge burden on the authorities in light of the current complex and volatile situations in the region and the required process of identification and referral. Egypt had endorsed a robust legal framework that tackled issues of irregular migration and human trafficking, and it was currently establishing a national asylum system that was capable of addressing such complex issues in a comprehensive and integrated manner.

24. Egypt commended UNHCR on its efforts to secure both traditional and innovative sources of funding from a wide range of partners to meet the challenges faced by developing States that hosted large numbers of displaced persons. However, it expressed concern about the increasingly low percentage of resettled refugee populations, which currently stood at just 1 per cent. As large numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers in Egypt came from situations and crises in which the chances of voluntary repatriation and reintegration were very slim, resettlement based on equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing was vital. Only 10 per cent of the more than 30,000 newly registered refugees each year were being resettled in third countries.

25. **Mr. Frenkel** (Israel) welcomed the agreement signed by IOM and UNHCR to operationalize their joint 2020 framework document on developing standard operating procedures in order to facilitate the identification and protection of victims of trafficking. Israel also commended UNHCR on its support for the Global Protection Cluster introductory guide to anti-trafficking action in internal displacement contexts. Israel welcomed the ten new commitments on disability inclusion made by UNHCR at the second Global Disability Summit. It also welcomed UNHCR action to ensure that the voices of children and youth were heard and to ensure that child-friendly procedures were put in place.

26. Israel also welcomed the priority placed on implementation of the UNHCR policy on prevention, risk mitigation and response to gender-based violence. However, noting that services for male survivors of gender-based violence were scarce, it asked whether UNHCR had any ideas on how the situation could be improved. Israel further welcomed the long-standing commitment of UNHCR to the integration of age, gender and diversity into its policies and programmes and the use of disaggregated data to ensure that such policies and programmes were based on facts rather than on prejudices or stereotypes.

27. Israel supported the references in the note on international protection to sexual orientation and gender identity. It disagreed with the claim that UNHCR reports advocated controversial concepts. On the contrary, they exhibited its commitment to the fulfilment of its mandate without discrimination. The United Nations Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity had highlighted States' obligation to address violence and discrimination against women and girls, including lesbian, bisexual and trans women, and against gay, bisexual and trans persons, other gender-diverse persons and intersex persons.

28. **Ms. Fowler** (New Zealand) said that her country recognized that the protection needs and acute vulnerability of refugees, internally displaced persons and marginalized people had been exacerbated by the extraordinary current circumstances, including the adverse impact of climate change, not only in terms of the risk to health, but also in terms of the significant socioeconomic impact. New Zealand supported inclusive humanitarian action rooted in a robust and inclusive protection agenda to ensure that all persons of concern were afforded adequate protection. It welcomed the commitment of UNHCR to such action and, in particular, to gender and disability inclusion.

29. As New Zealand acknowledged that access to rights, protection and solutions ultimately depended on States' commitments and actions, it was committed to promoting international cooperation and effective burden- and responsibility-sharing. In addressing the

global displacement situation, it supported the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees.

30. At the 2019 Global Refugee Forum, New Zealand had pledged to build protection and resettlement capacities in the Asia and the Pacific region. It was pleased in that connection to have been partnered with the Philippines for asylum capacity support. Work was under way to increase such support and New Zealand remained open to providing capacity-building support to other national asylum systems, particularly in the Pacific region. It was pleased to contribute to capacity-building programmes bilaterally and through multilateral initiatives, including through intergovernmental consultations on migration, asylum and refugees.

31. **Mr. Ng'andu** (Zambia) said that displaced persons fleeing from their countries of origin expected to be received in a humane manner and to have their rights and freedoms protected. Zambia had made efforts to modernize refugee settlements with a view to transforming them into ultra-modern communities. The modernization of refugee settlements approach would ensure that the persons concerned were fully self-reliant, since they would participate in the country's economic development. The Government was also taking steps to ensure that their documentation was recorded in the national documentation system. In addition, the Government was seeking to provide a permanent solution for former Angolan refugees whose refugee status had been withdrawn following the invocation of the cessation clause. With a view to enhancing protection services for persons of concern, Zambia was developing a national refugee policy pursuant to which administrative procedures would be aligned with international best practices.

32. **Mr. Smith** (United States of America) said that the United States greatly appreciated the protection and assistance which UNHCR and its partners provided for the 100 million persons who had been forcibly displaced. Access to asylum and the principle of non-refoulement remained the bedrock of the international refugee protection system. His Government was committed to improving its own asylum system and helping other nations to expand asylum possibilities for populations of concern. In 2022 it had assumed the Chair of the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS) Support Platform, which coordinated funding and technical assistance to address forced displacement in Central America and Mexico. It was also proud to be Chair of the Friends of the I Belong Campaign to End Statelessness. A commitment to protection was central to the Los Angeles Declaration on Protection and Migration, which had been adopted at the Summit of the Americas in June 2022.

33. The growing number of reports of the refoulement of Syrian refugees were alarming given that UNHCR had described Syria as unsafe. States must therefore maintain protection and desist from any current plans for large-scale returns to that country. As Haiti faced a deadly resurgence of cholera, United States medical staff were assisting Haitian health-care workers and NGOs to respond to the outbreak. The supply of additional humanitarian relief to that country would be increased.

34. In Ukraine, his Government continued to work with its allies and partners to protect those facing the ongoing horrific attacks by Russia, including on civilians and civilian infrastructure, which were part of its illegal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. The adoption of General Assembly resolution ES-11/4 of 12 October 2022, entitled "Territorial integrity of Ukraine: defending the principles of the Charter of the United Nations", was both unmistakable testimony to the international community's resolute condemnation of the illegal attempt by Russia to annex Ukrainian territory by force and evidence of firm support for the right of the Ukrainian people to choose their own future and to live peacefully within the internationally recognized borders of Ukraine. Reports that Russian authorities and their proxies had detained, interrogated and abused hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian citizens were worrying. His Government condemned the alleged forced relocation of Ukrainians to so-called filtration facilities in Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine and in Russia itself. The unlawful transfer or deportation of protected persons during armed conflict was a grave breach of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and a war crime. The "Uniting for Ukraine" process had been launched in April 2022 to enable Ukrainian citizens who had been forced to flee their homes as a result of the war to travel to the United States, where they could be considered for temporary residence for a period of up to two years and then apply for a work permit. More than 62,000 Ukrainian

citizens had already entered the country under that programme. The efforts of the European Union, Colombia and Ecuador to extend temporary protection to Ukrainians were also praiseworthy.

35. The needs of persons with disabilities were often overlooked. UNHCR should therefore strengthen its inclusive approach to the protection of such persons. As his Government was also steadfastly committed to combating gender-based violence as part of its humanitarian action, it had renewed its support for the “Safe from the Start” project with a view to taking effective action to counter that form of violence and promoting increased representation of and by women and girls. As over half of forcibly displaced persons were children, it was of paramount importance to prioritize protection services and access to education for boys and girls. Efforts to empower children and build their resilience through the creation of safe and protective environments were welcome. Since racial, ethnic and gender discrimination remained major causes of statelessness, it would be advisable for UNHCR to allocate more core resources to counter those insidious forms of marginalization and exclusion. Strategic efforts should be made to accelerate progress towards the goal of the I Belong campaign to end statelessness around the world. UNHCR must remain equally devoted to the four areas of its work on statelessness, namely identification, prevention, solutions and protection. The report entitled “UNHCR Engagement in Situations of Internal Displacement 2019–2021” was much appreciated. Member States and UNHCR should fund that work. Moreover, it would be wise for Member States to draw on UNHCR expertise to help them develop and implement national laws and policies on internal displacement. Member States and UNHCR were facing enormous protection challenges that demanded leadership, humanity, a whole-of-society approach and accountability. The United States was prepared to engage in joint efforts to meet those challenges.

36. **Ms. Banks** (Observer for Action for Humanity) said that the international response to the situation in Ukraine demonstrated that the refugee protection regime could serve its purpose in times of crisis. Most countries had kept their borders open and had shown generosity to and solidarity with persons fleeing the conflict. The activation by the European Union of Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between Member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof was a significant step towards a more humane regime and a fairer sharing of responsibility. However, that response was unprecedented and not how Europe had always behaved in other conflicts, such as those in Afghanistan or Syria. Attempts to close major migrant routes to Europe and plans by the United Kingdom and Denmark to externalize their responsibility to Rwanda would breach the non-refoulement principle and undermine international protection. Politicians in low- or middle-income countries also took advantage of such trends to legitimize their own anti-refugee policies. Although non-refoulement constituted a non-derogable principle, there were abundant reports of violent pushbacks and detention of migrants, along with the criminalization of persons who documented such practices. When faced by an increasing number of conflicts, disasters and climate emergencies, States should abide by their commitments and share, rather than shift, the responsibility to save lives and guarantee the rights of displaced persons. Legal frameworks and institutional practices should be reinforced to that effect. Non-governmental organizations called for the same level of solidarity, non-discrimination, protection and political support as that shown to Ukrainians to be displayed to all persons escaping conflict, violence, persecution and human rights violations. To that end, UNHCR should act as a strong and persuasive advocate for the rights of all displaced and stateless persons. Humanitarian aid must be distributed equitably across all regions. The move by UNHCR to tap into its emergency response fund was welcome, but it did not go far enough and was not sustainable.

37. While NGOs lauded neighbouring countries’ tremendous efforts to host Syrian refugees, they were dismayed by reports of unlawful detention, abuse and lack of care that disproportionately affected women and girl refugees. In spite of its long-standing generosity, some of Lebanon’s asylum policies and practices were pushing refugees into taking desperate measures. In the current economic crisis, refugees were too often scapegoated for the country’s difficulties. Non-governmental organizations therefore urged all governments in the region to uphold the principle of non-refoulement in view of the many risks faced by

returning refugees. Pushbacks and roundups of refugees ostensibly to address security threats or other concerns should be forcefully condemned. Overwhelming evidence showed that Syrians did not wish to return owing to safety concerns and the lack of any prospect of earning a livelihood or obtaining housing or basic services. UNHCR and States should use a combination of political dialogue, humanitarian diplomacy, technical assistance and financing to encourage Lebanon and other host countries to create a more enabling environment for refugees and find durable solutions.

38. One year after the Taliban's takeover in Afghanistan, the situation remained fragile throughout the country. With the economy on the brink of collapse, the freezing of development aid and economic sanctions, humanitarian indicators were on a downward spiral. The protection of women and girls, minority ethnic groups, former government employees and western embassy staff was also a matter of concern. The ongoing humanitarian and protection crisis meant that displacement in Afghanistan could only worsen. Increased numbers of Afghans were expected to seek refuge in neighbouring countries. Many faced the risk of deportation, despite the issuing of a UNHCR non-return advisory. Host States should preserve asylum and protection arrangements for Afghan refugees and should abide by the aforementioned advisory for as long as necessary. Any further discussion of a solution strategy for Afghan refugees and its support platform should focus on assisting host countries and on resettlement opportunities.

39. In 2020 extreme weather events had triggered the displacement of 30 million persons. Climate change was likely to increase the frequency and intensity of such events. In East Africa, the drought affecting some countries, including those hosting refugees, and floods in others, were exacerbating food insecurity and heightening competition for available resources between refugees and host communities. NGOs called on UNHCR to use the Strategic Framework for Climate Action and its expertise to help stakeholders to devise policies that would enhance the protection of persons who might be displaced in the wake of climate change. They welcomed the launching of flash appeals and called for the inclusion of a systemic approach to protection needs linked to climate change in humanitarian response plans.

40. While NGOs welcomed the response to the crisis in Ukraine, they reiterated that resources must not be diverted from the humanitarian needs of millions of other persons worldwide. It was worth looking ahead, as the solidarity shown to Ukrainians could help to reshape efforts to achieve greater burden-sharing.

41. **Ms. Triggs** (Assistant High Commissioner for Protection) said that it was encouraging to note speakers' support for the fundamental principles of the right of access to asylum, solidarity and the sharing of responsibility.

42. The emphasis placed by many speakers on the importance of preventing displacement and on the peace and development nexus perhaps pointed to a new two-pronged approach to protection. Resettlement and complementary pathways for admission were a good example of that approach. She was grateful to the representative of Brazil for drawing attention to the Quito Process on the Human Mobility of Venezuelan Nationals in the Region, which was a very valuable regional mechanism for exchanging good practices in that respect. However, more resettlement possibilities were needed as they and labour mobility would provide genuine, durable solutions for the future. She therefore particularly thanked the United States of America for the additional resettlement places it was providing, as well as the six other States that had stressed their commitment to offering resettlement and complementary pathways to admission. The paper entitled "Third Country Solutions for Refugees: Roadmap 2030" illustrated the importance of resettlement admissions and complementary pathways in terms of the volume of submissions. She thanked the representatives of Pakistan, Egypt and the Islamic Republic of Iran for their frank views and for the generous support those countries gave to the large refugee populations which they were hosting. Their work underpinned the fundamental principles of refugee law. Given that asylum systems needed to be strengthened and the principle of non-discrimination underscored, UNHCR looked forward to a continued dialogue on that question. UNHCR was committed to the equal enjoyment of everyone's rights in accordance with its non-political, humanitarian and social mandate. Her Office was prepared to continue discussions of the complex issues raised by Organization of Islamic Cooperation. The High Commissioner's note on international protection and UNHCR

documents were not negotiated with Governments but were issued under the authority of the High Commissioner. The way in which United Nations documents were produced followed rules established by the Secretariat. The note on protection had been drawn up in accordance with the Secretariat's administrative instructions. UNHCR was committed to an inclusive approach in all its activities. It therefore looked forward to finding language that expressed a consensus on the issue of discrimination.

43. The durable solution for the overwhelming majority of forcibly displaced persons was inclusion in host countries' social systems. It was therefore encouraging that so many States gave refugees and forcibly displaced persons from other countries access to their education and health systems. She welcomed the statements from the Governments of Canada, Switzerland, the United States of America, Israel, Egypt and Zimbabwe with regard to the need to protect women and girls on the move from various forms of gender-based violence and trafficking.

44. The Global Compact on Refugees recognized the need to address the complex interaction of environmental phenomena with the traditional drivers of refugee movements. UNHCR was therefore striving to make headway in that area through its Strategic Framework for Climate Action.

45. She thanked the Islamic Republic of Iran for its legislative amendments to reduce statelessness by making it easier for women to pass on their nationality to their children. In that context, she was grateful to States that had supported the I Belong campaign. As lack of documentation exposed migrants to the same disadvantages as stateless persons, their ability to register births and to obtain key documents was essential.

46. UNHCR acknowledged the impact of hosting large numbers of refugees for long periods on host countries' economy and would continue its work to ensure that principle of solidarity encompassed support for those countries. She welcomed the deepening interest in development cooperation displayed by Switzerland and Ecuador. A thorough understanding of the role of development might make it possible to tackle the root causes of migration. She was grateful to Israel and the United States for highlighting the dire impact of displacement on persons with disabilities and older persons. It was encouraging that so many States recognized that those persons' inclusion was an important part of the protection obligation. She assured the group of NGOs that UNHCR was committed to working with NGO groups at local and community level. It was heartening to learn of progress in the matching process of the Asylum Capacity Support Group and of the work being done by the Philippines and New Zealand to promote the boosting of asylum capacity in the Pacific region. She commended Zambia on its efforts to update its asylum system to build asylum-seekers resilience.

(b) Programme budgets, management, financial control and administrative oversight (A/AC.96/1223, A/AC.96/1223/Add.1 and A/AC.96/1225)

47. **Ms. Clements** (United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees) said that she wished to thank all the delegates for their support for the efforts of UNHCR to assist the more than 100 million forcibly displaced persons throughout the world. The humanitarian landscape was dynamic, complex and interconnected. Forced displacement was accelerated by climate change and compounded by political and economic uncertainty and food insecurity. The financial outlook for 2023 was sobering. It was, however, precisely for such difficult times that UNHCR existed and had been mandated to protect refugees and other persons who had been forced from their homes.

48. It was thanks to States' support that UNHCR had been able to increase its human and financial response in record time in Ukraine, classrooms welcomed refugee children in the Republic of Moldova, rents were paid in Lebanon and health clinics opened their doors to host communities and refugees alike in Uganda. With States' financial assistance, UNHCR supplied life-saving aid to displaced populations wherever they were. Decentralization and regionalization had enabled the Office to deliver that aid effectively, even during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

49. UNHCR was constantly striving to become leaner and greener with a lighter carbon footprint. It was strengthening its oversight functions and tightening its financial discipline.

The business transformation programme was the main vector of the digital transformation of UNHCR. The Workday cloud-based platform would strengthen evidence-based decision-making by offering greater insight into the workforce's skills, identifying gaps in talent management and bringing global best practices to UNHCR. The Office had reviewed its policies, eliminated red tape and reduced complexity wherever possible, because simplification would make for better delivery and greater efficiency. As a result of the introduction of the results-based planning, budgeting, monitoring and reporting system, COMPASS, twice as many operations had developed multi-year plans for 2023 than for 2022. Better planning led to stronger linkages between the work of UNHCR and its partners at the country level and closer alignment with national and United Nations planning frameworks. The planning process for subsequent years would be simplified and be much less time-consuming. Furthermore, the Office was transforming its supply chain and procurement process and was moving to leaner delivery mechanisms. It had improved the efficiency of its travel management by using an innovative fleet management service. It took every opportunity to test its new processes and ground them in the realities of its operations. One successful outcome of its efficiency drive had been the finance hub which it had managed to set up within weeks of the onset of the Ukraine emergency and which had processed large volumes of financial transactions quickly without compromising quality.

50. The transformation of UNHCR was not only measured in simpler processes or in efficiency gains. Success was also measured in the engagement, diversity and commitment of the workforce, since it was an organization that was bound together by its values and its dedication to the persons whom it served. The Office believed in nurturing the workforce's skills and capacity in order to provide the best care for persons who had been forced to flee. UNHCR prided itself on being able to operate in complex and unstable environments. Risk was inherent to its work and was informed by its five-year risk management strategy (2021–2025). UNHCR colleagues had the tools to identify problems before they occurred and to mitigate their impact when they happened.

51. Accountability and integrity were the cornerstones on which the success of UNHCR rested. Without the framework for ethical decision-taking and the knowledge that misconduct could be safely reported, the freedom to act could easily turn into the freedom to abuse, harass and defraud. Whenever UNHCR staff members witnessed or were the victims of misconduct, it was crucial that they knew that they could confidentially report it without fear of retaliation. Throughout the transformation process, UNHCR had continued to learn through independent and thorough evaluation focused on regions, specific countries or global strategic priorities. Moreover, the High Commissioner had just issued a revised policy designed to strengthen the Office's evaluation capacity and overall governance.

52. She thanked the delegations for their constructive engagement with regard to the recent proposal for the UNHCR budgetary process. The good offices of the Rapporteur who had secured consensus on the budget were particularly commendable. The budget for 2023 was \$10.2 billion, because humanitarian needs were so great, but it was smaller than the budget for 2022, which stood at \$10.7 billion, another sign that it was always seeking to improve efficiency. However, a wide gap remained between needs and resources. Only 50 per cent of budgeted needs for 2022 had been met. That shortfall, combined with donor earmarking, had a dramatic impact on persons of concern, particularly in places like Lebanon, Jordan, Yemen or Ethiopia. If it could not be bridged, the Office would be forced to choose between life-saving priorities and make impossible choices.

53. She recognized the extraordinary commitment of the UNHCR team and partners to making a positive impact on the lives of forcibly displaced, returnee and stateless persons and paid tribute to their dedicated work often undertaken at great personal risk.

54. **Ms. Pabalan** (Canada) said that her country strongly supported the operationalization by UNHCR of the principle of more equitable responsibility-sharing in advance of the 2023 Global Refugee Forum. Canada also recognized the improvements in the Office's internal business operations aimed at strengthening strategic planning and ensuring alignment with the goals of the Global Compact on Refugees.

55. As a donor that provided predictable and flexible humanitarian funding to UNHCR, Canada encouraged the Office to continue promoting increased transparency and to

strategically prioritize its limited resources. It should also continue prioritizing efforts to increase diversity and inclusion in its workforce and to support staff welfare, including their mental health and well-being.

56. Canada welcomed the steps taken by UNHCR to prevent, combat and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, as well as its efforts to promote joint action in that regard with other organizations. Canada encouraged UNHCR to promote gender-responsive humanitarian action and to ensure that the special needs of all persons were taken into account, regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity. It was also essential to implement the UNHCR age, gender and diversity policy in all field operations.

57. In line with member States' joint commitments under the Grand Bargain, Canada strongly encouraged UNHCR to reinforce accountability with respect to affected populations, especially in its field operations. It also encouraged UNHCR to continue building partnerships with local organizations, particularly organizations run by refugees and women, to include them in the planning process and to provide them with flexible funding.

58. **Ms. Méndez Escoba** (Mexico) said that the budget deficit in recent years had undermined the provision of basic services required by highly vulnerable people. It was therefore important to obtain new sources of funding and to promote flexible financing.

59. Mexico noted that UNHCR had managed to secure \$1 billion from private sources in 2022. It encouraged the Office to continue seeking such funds and to ensure that, when allocating the resources, an appropriate balance was achieved between all operations. The private sector should also be informed of the challenges and needs pertaining to each operation. Mexico supported the budget proposal for 2023 and noted that the budget allocated to the Americas, and to Mexico in particular, had been increased in order to address the growing need for protection.

60. With regard to the revised financial rules, it would be useful if UNHCR could share the document containing the recommendations made by the two oversight bodies. The impact of the new rules should also be assessed in due course. Mexico welcomed the commitment by UNHCR to internal governance and accountability through the transformation programme, the results-based budget reform process as well as decentralization and regionalization. Mexico supported the recommendations of the Board of Auditors and encouraged UNHCR to promote their implementation and those pending implementation from previous years. However, given that the problems encountered in the audits were concentrated in areas that represented only 19 per cent of the budget, it would be useful to have a broader perspective of the situation in the majority of programmes.

61. Mexico appreciated the action taken to prevent and respond to cases of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, and encouraged UNHCR to continue promoting robust measures to ensure inclusion, diversity and gender equality in the Office.

62. **Mr. Tarutin** (Russian Federation) urged UNHCR to implement all recommendations made by the Board of Auditors and the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) as soon as possible and to report to Member States on their implementation. The Russian Federation believed that the recommendations would improve the management system, enhance UNHCR efficiency and ensure an adequate level of transparency, which was of particular relevance in the context of the continuous reforms.

63. As the OIOS report ([A/AC.96/1225](#)) stated that an assessment of the level of UNHCR risk maturity would be completed by September 2022, it would be useful to know whether any preliminary conclusions had been drawn by OIOS. Paragraph 33 of the report alleged that South Sudan had incorrectly prioritized the use of monetary resources to achieve its goals. The Russian Federation wished to know whether OIOS had a specific methodology for assessing the effectiveness of allocations. For instance, should a specific percentage of funds be allocated directly to persons of concern in UNHCR field offices? A baseline for assessments would be extremely helpful for Member States. In addition, according to paragraph 39 of the report, OIOS had concluded from initial studies that the use of cash as a service modality for persons of concern was a more efficient methodology. The Russian Federation would appreciate more detailed data on how the study had been conducted.

64. **Ms. Valls Noyes** (United States of America) said that her country had provided UNHCR with nearly \$2.2 billion in United States fiscal year 2022, and it strongly urged other Member States to provide UNHCR with the funds it required for 2023. Progress toward reducing the historic levels of global displacement and statelessness called for the prioritization of local integration, voluntary repatriation, refugee resettlement, meaningful refugee inclusion and access to citizenship for the stateless.

65. The figures for refugee resettlement in the United States had doubled between fiscal year 2021 and fiscal year 2022, and President Biden had ordered the admission of up to 125,000 refugees in fiscal year 2023. All Member States should demonstrate their robust support for populations of concern not only through funding of UNHCR but also through support for durable solutions and refugee inclusion.

66. The United States appreciated the provision by UNCHR of critical resources for populations of concern around the world who suffered from the impact of climate change. Initiatives such as those planned in the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa in 2023 were imperative to contend with climate-related disasters.

67. The United States was pleased to note that full use had been made of the resources dedicated to reducing statelessness in 2021. It also commended the planned increase in birth registration of children at risk of statelessness in the Americas in 2023. However, the under-resourcing of statelessness, particularly in country operations, continued to be a matter of concern. The United States therefore urged all Member States and donors to dedicate adequate resources to the global reduction of statelessness.

68. In addition, the United States called for an increase in resources for the protection of women, children and youth, stateless persons, internally displaced persons, persons with disabilities, and LGBTIQ+ persons.

69. The United States would appreciate information on the impact of the UNHCR business transformation process on budgeting and monitoring procedures as well as examples of how the process had saved funds that could be used to assist affected populations.

70. **Mr. Olfato** (Philippines) noted that the Board of Auditors had concluded that the UNHCR finances remained sound. The Philippines welcomed the full operationalization of the new results-based management system and the improved workforce planning management. The goal of organizational efficiency and the ongoing transformation and modernization process required the support of Member States for reforms, including the revision of financial rules. The Philippines commended UNHCR on its action to promote such revisions. Moreover, the process had been undertaken with a consultative spirit and with rigour, both in Geneva and in New York. The shared goal was action to ensure an agile and flexible UNHCR that that could better serve its mandate and extend rapid humanitarian assistance on the ground.

71. **Mr. Sender** (Germany) said that the record budget announced by UNHCR reflected the continuation of a worrisome trend of increased displacement. Even though some countries, including Germany, had raised the level of financial support that they provided, the gap between funding and humanitarian needs was growing. Accordingly, the broadening and diversification of the humanitarian donor base should be a top collective priority, as had repeatedly been stressed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Germany would continue to provide substantial funds. With a view to enhancing their effectiveness, it had set up flexible funding mechanisms such as programme-based funding in East Africa, which would enable UNHCR to adapt to changing operating conditions. Germany encouraged other States to follow its example by providing flexible funding. It welcomed the planned development of a comprehensive accountability framework aligned with ongoing reforms and was keen to have clarity on the division of responsibilities and to see improved control systems. While it applauded the progress made on enterprise risk management, it noted that audits had identified gaps in the management and use of risk registers. It encouraged UNHCR to implement cost-effective measures that concurrently addressed several risks, for example complaint mechanisms and basic infrastructure that promoted child protection as well as protection from gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse.

72. **Ms. Ochwo Rwego** (Office of Internal Oversight Services), responding to a question from the representative of the Russian Federation regarding enterprise risk management, said that OIOS had concluded that UNHCR had achieved tremendous progress since the inception of enterprise risk management and that it remained on track to achieve the goals of the five-year risk management strategy (2021–2025). OIOS had not concluded that the priorities set by South Sudan were wrong. However, when funds were limited and needs were increasing, the choices made by States were sometimes not properly aligned to strategic priorities. OIOS then flagged the problem to ensure more effective alignment. With regard to cash-based interventions, OIOS had compared the effectiveness of the delivery of core items and services in kind to persons of concern with the effectiveness of using cash assistance. The study had concluded that the delivery of services through cash-based interventions was both more efficient and more effective.

73. **Ms. Clements** (United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees) said that partnerships played a major role in the UNHCR localization agenda, in the promotion of reforms and in the responsible allocation of resources. Action to prevent and respond to sexual misconduct was an important example of the localization agenda. A small-scale fund had been launched three years previously by the High Commissioner to prevent sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment by providing resources to community-based organizations and local organizations led by women and refugees. UNHCR had received over 1,000 proposals and succeeded jointly with the International Council of Volunteer Agencies (ICVA), which was currently managing the fund, in supporting 49 of the proposals. The audit findings and recommendations in the OIOS report had given rise to in-depth discussions. UNHCR was firmly committed to the abolition of recommendations that were no longer relevant because of the reforms introduced in recent years.

Statement made in exercise of the right of reply

74. **Mr. Atroshkin** (Russian Federation), referring to comments made by the representative of the United States, said that the Russian Federation was a major host country for refugees and persons forcibly displaced from Ukraine and Donbas. Over 4.5 million people, including more than 160,000 children, had been evacuated voluntarily to the Russian Federation with a view to saving their lives and those of their families. His country firmly rejected the politicized and absurd allegations about violent treatment of refugees and the establishment of filtration camps. Such allegations were slanderous and constituted an attempt to use the UNHCR platform to politicize the situation and to undermine the standing of the Russian Federation in the context of Ukraine.

Consideration of reports relating to programme and administrative oversight and evaluation

Report on activities of the Inspector General's Office (A/AC.96/1226)

75. **Mr. Garnett** (Inspector General) said that the strategy of the Inspector General's Office (IGO) for 2021–2026 was designed to promote meaningful and sustainable changes in the UNHCR oversight systems. Significant progress had been made, with the support of his Office, towards achieving genuine solidarity and an ongoing dialogue within the oversight and integrity actors. They had worked collectively with management colleagues, since real change occurred only when there was organization-wide learning initiated by executive management. He thanked the High Commissioner and the Deputy High Commissioner for their unwavering support in that regard.

76. His Office continued to facilitate quarterly meetings of oversight providers to share work plans, risk assessments, qualitative and quantitative data, and intelligence regarding risks. Action to address the most prominent risks required careful planning to ensure effective sequencing and use of oversight tools. His Office had supported the development of a single oversight approach to the business transformation programme and to the response to the emergency in Ukraine. Live conversations concerning assurances had been conducted in the early phases of the emergency between UNHCR management, IGO and the Internal Audit Service. They had been followed by a proactive and preventive fraud risk review of cash

programming by IGO. In addition, an internal audit would be conducted in 2022 and an evaluation in 2023.

77. His Office continued to support the Joint Inspection Unit's engagement with UNHCR and was working with colleagues to explore ways of reducing the transaction costs of their work, while ensuring maximum learning and insight results. It had recommended an update of the memorandum of understanding under which internal audits of UNHCR were conducted. Such arrangements should reflect, and take advantage of, the opportunities provided by a more risk-based and agile UNHCR client. IGO had been working on the project with OIOS colleagues and across the United Nations system.

78. The IGO strategic oversight team had undertaken independent reviews of complex strategic risks and issues. Reviews of management oversight in the context of decentralization and regionalization and of the business transformation programme had been selected because of their strategic impact on UNHCR. They had been delivered in an agile and risk-based manner to provide the UNHCR management team with advice and support. Scheduled internal audits would follow. As Inspector General, he kept a close eye on the balance and capacity of the oversight system. He had supported the renewal of the Evaluation Service's evaluation policy and the objective of increasing the judicious use of evaluation across UNHCR. His Office had been working with management and other independent counterparts to enhance the integrity response of UNHCR. Changes to the delivery of complaints to the Ethics Office concerning protection from retaliation had been regularized. A support desk had been established to ensure speedy and effective referral of workplace concerns to the best-placed entity to address the complaint, including line management. The Speak Up helpline and the support desk sought to ensure the protection and confidentiality, if required, of complainants.

79. His Office had received resources to improve UNHCR interaction with management colleagues on resettlement misconduct, to enhance interaction with UNHCR partners on misconduct complaints, and to improve action to address financial fraud committed against UNHCR. It also had an ongoing project to review witness protection issues.

80. The IGO report contained statistics on integrity matters handled during the reporting period. The number of complaints continued to increase and was expected to total more than 1,600 in 2022. The increase reflected, in his view, greater willingness and the requisite confidence to report. His Office had taken steps to streamline its intake and referral processes in order to handle the increased workload.

81. The annual number of complaints of sexual misconduct remained broadly unchanged. As a majority of the complaints related to UNHCR implementing partners, IGO continued to provide online and in-person training and support for partners to build their capacity. It had also organized regional workshops at the headquarters and in West Africa and additional workshops were planned in southern Africa, the Americas and Europe (in support of the Ukraine response), before the end of 2022.

82. Reports setting out risks and learning points were issued to management colleagues. The reports were more strategic and system-focused in order to ensure substantive organizational learning results. His Office had embarked on a range of efficiency and effectiveness measures within its oversight and integrity work. For instance, it used data analytics software for qualitative data analysis, invested in investigation case management and remote data extraction and analysis software, provided training courses on victim-centred sexual misconduct investigations, and enhanced the visibility of IGO work for UNHCR colleagues.

83. **Mr. Frenkel** (Israel) said that he welcomed the reduction in the backlog of complaints, the upgrading of the case management system, and the presentation of figures concerning past and current complaints and investigations. He agreed that the increase in misconduct complaints was attributable to awareness-raising, management emphasis on integrity, an increased presence in the field and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Israel hoped that the trend would continue and that no misconduct would remain unreported. It also welcomed the increase in the number of cases opened concerning sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. UNHCR was promoting a clear policy of zero tolerance for inaction. As data collection was of key importance for the formulation of proper policies on how to address

such phenomena, Israel encouraged UNHCR to continue its efforts in that regard. The imposition of disciplinary measures and sanctions sent a strong signal that increased trust in the system. As a member of the Group of Friends to Eliminate Sexual Harassment, Israel thanked the Inspector General's Office for the information provided regarding collaboration with system-wide entities, which it fully supported. It also welcomed the emphasis placed on training and the development of e-learning tools, which played a key role in eradicating sexual misconduct.

84. **Mr. Driessen** (Netherlands) welcomed the substantive work undertaken by the Inspector General's Office during the reporting period, its focus on qualitative components of the system and its action to address the backlog of complaints. The Netherlands welcomed the establishment of the support desk to handle staff workplace concerns and encouraged UNHCR to continue promoting the efficiency and effectiveness of the desk. Prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment remained a key priority for the Netherlands. It commended the UNHCR senior management on the steps taken to achieve system-wide change. Such an approach was urgently needed, as illustrated by the recent revelations regarding the humanitarian situation in South Sudan. The Netherlands underscored the need to ensure adequate funding for IGO and the wider infrastructure involved in the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, and the need to improve reporting mechanisms on the ground. Given the high-risk environment in which UNHCR operated, priority should be accorded to a clear risk management policy.

85. **Mr. Tarutin** (Russian Federation) said that, notwithstanding the valid reasons cited in paragraph 31 of the report, his delegation was concerned about the growing number of complaints received by IGO, which should dedicate the necessary efforts and resources to preventing violations. Although, during the reporting period, fraud with financial implications had been the subject of the same percentage of complaints as sexual exploitation and abuse, the former, unlike the latter, did not appear to have been identified as a priority in prevention efforts. He wished to know whether UNHCR had a strategy to combat fraud, which was a particularly insidious offence in the context of the ongoing business transformation process. His delegation supported investigators' return to the field, mentioned in paragraph 45 of the report. Field missions were the most effective way to ensure the reliability and objectivity of investigations.

86. **Mr. Sender** (Germany) said that his delegation wished to underline the importance of properly managing misconduct allegations and of having adequate oversight of partner performance and programme delivery. When necessary, training and capacity-building should be provided in risk management and the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, harassment and fraud. His delegation greatly appreciated the training provided to partners by IGO and would welcome details of any similar initiatives that were planned.

87. **Mr. Smith** (United States of America) said that his delegation recognized the value of all the divisions of UNHCR that contributed to organizational oversight in strengthening accountability and ensuring that the Office's work was efficient and effective. It was pleased to note the progress described in paragraph 4 of the report and looked forward to seeing the results of the implementation of the IGO strategy for 2021–2026. It would be interested to hear information on the Office's plans to promote good practices and address issues uncovered through its oversight activities, along with details of the methodology followed in conducting such activities.

88. The efforts made by IGO to improve staff training and access to online resources were steps in the right direction. It was essential for UNHCR staff, partners and affected persons to know how to file complaints. His delegation took great interest in the groundbreaking oversight work conducted in response to the business transformation programme, particularly in the context of decentralization and regionalization, and encouraged UNHCR management to prioritize transparency with its staff and donors in relation to its systemic responses to the issues raised by IGO.

89. **Mr. Olfato** (Philippines) said that his delegation acknowledged the commitment of UNHCR to continuing to improve its complaint mechanisms, reduce backlogs of complaints and prevent and respond to cases of misconduct. Nevertheless, it was worrying that most of the investigations opened during the reporting period had related to sexual exploitation and

abuse, and sexual harassment. His delegation was also concerned at the numerous reported cases of fraud and corruption, which contributed to depriving persons of concern of valuable resources. Many of the cases of misconduct had involved implementing partners. It was therefore important for UNHCR to perform due diligence and rigorous assessments when outsourcing to or partnering with other organizations. Details of any progress made in that regard would be appreciated.

90. **Mr. Widmer** (Switzerland) said that integrity was a key concern for an organization the size of UNHCR and that the implementation of the five-year risk management strategy was an important step in the right direction. In the report, while figures I and II presented useful information, the inclusion of data for the past four or five years would have made it easier to identify trends. It would also be helpful to have statistics on information and training sessions, in particular the number of participants, and on the sanctions imposed in respect of each category of misconduct. Such information would be valuable in determining specific actions to be taken with respect to awareness-raising, training and even the introduction of new processes and guidelines.

91. **Mr. Garnett** (Inspector General) said that the data collected on misconduct revealed only the tip of the iceberg and should be interpreted with caution. He had identified the sharing of data as a priority in efforts to develop his Office's communications strategy. His Office took seriously its responsibility to investigate both fraud and sexual exploitation and abuse. Regarding complaints of the latter, the bar for launching an investigation was low, and special attention was paid to protecting victims and witnesses. As was noted in the report, his Office was aware that it could do more to combat financial misconduct in general and fraud in particular. UNHCR had a policy to counter fraud that was implemented under the authority of the Division of Financial and Administrative Management. However, there was a need for better coordination among all relevant stakeholders, including legal colleagues who were particularly involved in the tail end of fraud cases. While it was expected that all cases would be dealt with appropriately, priority would be given to tackling serious fraud.

92. Measures had been taken to more effectively and efficiently triage the complaints that his Office received. It was important to ensure that the right tool was used to address each complaint. For example, investigations were not an effective tool to deal with interpersonal disputes, which should instead be handled by line managers, perhaps with the support of the Ethics Office or the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services. While there was a natural overlap between evaluation and audit, they were two different tools that served different purposes. The Heads of the Evaluation Service and the Internal Audit Service coordinated to ensure that the right tool was used at the right time.

93. The reviews that his Office conducted were intended to be internal and agile, with the objective of supporting management, rather than slow and formal. A principles-based methodology would continue to be followed in that regard. As strategic oversight was established as a tool within UNHCR in 2023, his Office could perhaps share some of the findings of its reviews at briefings or in a more formal setting.

94. His Office would continue to support management colleagues in working with implementing partners and enjoyed close cooperation with the Division of Strategic Planning and Results and its Implementation Management and Assurance Service in ensuring that the lessons learned from investigations and oversight work were shared within UNHCR and at the country level. Some lessons concerned specific partners and geographical conditions, while others related to more systemic, structural issues.

95. He would be happy to share longitudinal data on complaints. Although the number of complaints received by his Office had risen during the reporting period, the data set was relatively small. Every quarter, he produced an "oversight of oversight" report for management colleagues that addressed qualitative and quantitative issues, which were brought to donors' attention when necessary.

Report on evaluation (A/AC.96/1227)

96. **Ms. Bell** (Head of the Evaluation Service) said that evaluation could play a critical organizational role in four ways: (1) by making a real-time contribution when needed; (2) by maintaining a focus on long-term results; (3) by documenting good practices and distilling

lessons; and (4) by supporting governance. The ability of UNHCR to adapt swiftly during a crisis was critical, with millions of lives depending on it. There was a perception in some quarters that evaluators arrived after the battle and bandaged the dead. The Evaluation Service was endeavouring to change that perception by offering evidence-based insights at an earlier stage and being more forward-looking. In 2022, it had rapidly produced summaries of evidence on several themes, including accountability to affected populations. The Service's approach to evaluating emergency responses had evolved to include the provision of support for management-led real-time reviews conducted within three months of the onset of crises. The Service was also undertaking evaluations sooner in order to support course correction and demonstrate results. Over the previous year, it had responded to many requests for strategic evaluations of country programmes to inform prioritization.

97. Her Service was committed to maintaining a focus on sustainable long-term solutions for the people it served. Findings from the seminal evaluation of UNHCR engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation and from other evaluations had clearly contributed to the Office's new action plan for working with development actors, which was part of the strategic architecture that would guide the Office over the coming five years. Meanwhile, the evaluation of UNHCR repatriation programmes and activities had pointed to the need for the Office to further acknowledge and respond to refugee-led organizations in repatriation processes and scale up efforts to promote reintegration in countries of origin, including through area-based approaches.

98. Her Service's independent study on UNHCR support for strengthening national asylum systems had found that excellent progress had been made since the previous review in 2014 and had highlighted areas for further improvement. Evaluations were helping UNHCR to capitalize on innovation and new opportunities, but also to navigate through difficult times. One of the biggest challenges faced over the previous year had continued to be the COVID-19 pandemic, in relation to which a range of evaluations had provided valuable lessons. A joint evaluation of the protection of refugee rights during the pandemic had concluded that governments should make exceptions for asylum-seekers in future large-scale emergencies and leave their borders open.

99. A synthesis of evidence from 26 evaluations conducted over the previous three years had found that UNHCR had delivered on its mandate, often in the most difficult of circumstances. The synthesis had inspired a lively discussion about good practices in remote service delivery. A major challenge during the pandemic had been the prevention of, and response to, gender-based violence. While UNHCR had fared better than many agencies, evidence suggested that gender-based violence services had to be delivered face to face. UNHCR had used hotlines, WhatsApp chats and other social media approaches to maintain contact and services in several countries during the height of the pandemic. Other good practices had included community-based protection monitoring, women's protection committees and mobile health clinics in remote and insecure areas.

100. Evaluation was increasingly contributing to evidence-based decision-making and good governance. A key achievement had been the development of the evaluation policy for 2022–2027, which was aligned with other organizational priorities and policies, notably with respect to decentralization and regionalization, oversight coordination and the new results-based management system. The policy outlined the norms for evaluation coverage at all levels of UNHCR and delineated and reinforced second- and third-line roles. It also required more systematic follow-up and reporting by management on the use made of evaluation recommendations.

101. Over the previous year, her Service had strengthened its engagement processes to give management and member States better oversight of specific areas of the Office's work. It had organized more than a dozen presentations and discussions to that end and had involved member States directly in numerous important evaluations. In 2023, its main strategic focus would be on strengthening the decentralized evaluation function, for which there was growing demand. Its global evaluation workplan for 2023 had been published and included important topics such as gender-based violence, internal displacement, regionalization and decentralization, and the emergency response to the Ukraine crisis. It would be happy to arrange specific briefings on evaluations of interest to member States.

102. **Mr. Tarutin** (Russian Federation) said that it would be helpful to know how closely the Service cooperated with the external facility referred to in paragraph 18 of the report to avoid the duplication of functions. He would also be grateful for information on how the new evaluation policy differed from the previous one, whether it would be possible to evaluate COMPASS, the UNHCR results-based management system for planning and budgeting, to determine the extent to which it helped UNHCR to implement its mandate, whether a tentative schedule of evaluation activities had been drawn up for 2023 and whether there were any plans to revert exclusively to carrying out field evaluations.

103. **Mr. Smith** (United States of America) said that his delegation was pleased to note the Service's engagement with various stakeholders during the reporting period and wished to hear more about the management responses to the evaluation findings published in the report. Details of how monitoring of those responses would be integrated into COMPASS reporting in the coming years would also be welcome. While laudable progress had been made in the areas addressed by the selected evaluations outlined in section II of the report, it would be useful for host and donor States to have data on the tangible impact of that progress. His delegation would be grateful for details of where the "course corrections" mentioned in paragraphs 26 and 29 of the report were being implemented and how the Service's evaluation metrics demonstrated concrete gains in effectiveness, efficiency and accountability.

104. **Mr. Widmer** (Switzerland) said that the report contained several important lessons learned with regard to core aspects of the Office's strategic guidelines that should be shared with partners in all countries. He would be interested in hearing a description of the strategy used to disseminate evaluation outcomes and of its impact. Future reports could helpfully include a paragraph on the communication of those outcomes.

105. On accountability, it was important for UNHCR to provide adequate follow-up to the evaluations, for example by compensating the victims of negligence or misconduct through appropriate processes. The launch of the new consolidated recommendation tracker was a positive development. His delegation looked forward to reading in the next report about how evaluations had contributed to improving the Office's work practices. As the lead donor for the 2023 review of UNHCR by the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN), Switzerland wished to thank the Evaluation Service for its valuable contribution to the exercise.

106. **Mr. Rose** (Australia) said that the report attested to the growing strength and use of the evaluation function in UNHCR. His delegation welcomed the Office's new results-based management platform, COMPASS, and its evaluation policy for 2022–2027. He would be interested to hear what UNHCR foresaw as being its greatest challenge in the implementation of the policy. Performance and quality data were fundamental to providing efficient, coordinated and person-centred humanitarian assistance and to guiding needs-based budget decisions. His delegation supported further developing data analysis and reporting functionalities in COMPASS and wished to see improvements in the collection of disaggregated data through the platform, particularly to reflect the needs of women, children and persons with disabilities.

107. **Mr. Driessen** (Netherlands) said that his delegation supported the evaluation recommendations for UNHCR to make its protection role more explicit in humanitarian-development cooperation, strengthen refugee participation in its asylum capacity development work and step up its efforts to combat gender-based violence and provide related mental health and psychosocial support services. The inter-agency humanitarian evaluation of the Yemen crisis showed that protection was not sufficiently mainstreamed everywhere and often remained underfunded. His delegation encouraged UNHCR to play a stronger role, together with the Yemeni authorities, in operationally analysing protection and putting it at the forefront of the response. Evaluations of the UNHCR responses to emergencies in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger highlighted the importance of strengthening partnerships with local actors, who should be assisted in taking a leading role in robust, well-capacitated responses that were grounded in the local context. A continued push for the localization agenda was needed not only in the context of the Sahel but also elsewhere.

108. UNHCR was to be commended for its new evaluation policy aimed at organization-wide learning at all levels, which his delegation strongly supported. However, some matters

remained unresolved. For example, evaluation coverage should include the evaluation, within a specified time frame, of all 16 outcome areas that were used to track UNHCR plans and actions. Moreover, the full integration of evaluation into results-based management meant that budget and global reports should clearly be informed by evaluations in the Standing Committee. Lastly, his delegation would like to be kept abreast of open recommendations and management reporting on oversight.

109. **Ms. Bell** (Head of the Evaluation Service) said that the cooperation between the Evaluation Service and the external facility referred to in paragraph 18 of the report was very fluid and had involved discussions on her Service's workplan and on the rationale for carrying out evaluations. Her Service had developed an approach paper on oversight in relation to the Ukraine crisis that included not only audit and evaluation but also other IGO activities.

110. Changes had been introduced in the new evaluation policy to reinforce the evaluation function at decentralized levels, to which much decision-making had been devolved. In addition, senior evaluation officers in the UNHCR regional bureaux had been tasked with supporting country-led evaluations.

111. The time frame for evaluating the Office's major policies and all 16 outcome areas had been set at 10 years. The results-based management system was on the longlist for evaluation in 2024–25. Her Service continued to discuss the possibility in collaboration with management and other colleagues.

112. The monitoring of management responses would begin in 2022 through the consolidated recommendation tracker and would be reflected in the 2023 report on evaluation. She was confident that the upcoming review of UNHCR by MOPAN would demonstrate clearly the progress made with regard to the evaluation function.

113. She noted the suggestion to include a paragraph on the communication of evaluation outcomes in future reports. Over the previous two years, her Service had made great strides to improve communications. It recognized that UNHCR decision-makers were busy and that there was therefore a need for creative solutions to ensure that key messages were conveyed effectively.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.