



General Assembly

Distr.: General
21 November 2023

Original: English
English, French and Spanish only

Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Seventy-fourth session

Summary record of the 760th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 11 October 2023, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Espinosa Cañizares (Vice-Chair) (Ecuador)
later: Ms. Ahmed Hassan (Chair) (Djibouti)
later: Mr. Espinosa Cañizares (Vice-Chair) (Ecuador)

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In the absence of Ms. Ahmed Hassan (Djibouti), Mr. Espinosa Cañizares (Ecuador), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.

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

General debate (*continued*)

1. **Mr. White** (Ireland) said that Ireland unequivocally condemned the attack by Hamas on Israel and was deeply shocked by the terrifying scenes unfolding in Israel and Gaza. It expressed its heartfelt condolences to all victims and their families. Ireland also expressed its sympathy and solidarity with those affected by the earthquake in Afghanistan.

2. In the light of proliferating conflict, the climate emergency and economic insecurity, his Government reiterated its support for host countries and underscored the shared responsibility of States to protect refugees without discrimination. In that connection, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) should continue to provide inclusive services and identify safe options for refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons and stateless persons of all ages, sexual identities, genders and backgrounds. In particular, the needs of victims of gender-based violence should be prioritized in UNHCR responses.

3. Noting that climate change had become a permanent driver of migration, Ireland welcomed the strategic framework for climate action and called on UNHCR to ensure that climate action was central in all planning.

4. Ireland had, over the years, consistently increased the funding that it provided to UNHCR through multi-annual agreements. Ireland had also recently announced a further increase in its budget for overseas development aid. Unearmarked, predictable, multi-annual funding arrangements should be encouraged to enable UNHCR to respond flexibly to situations and to make long-term plans. Ireland also provided funding to support UNHCR action in specific countries, including Ukraine, where the unprovoked and unjustified full-scale invasion by Russia had had a devastating impact.

5. Ireland looked forward to the Global Refugee Forum, which would provide an opportunity to reinforce political commitment to the protection of refugees and amplify the voices of the most affected. Collective, decisive and well-resourced action, guided by humanitarian principles, remained the best means of overcoming global challenges.

6. **Mr. Chen Xu** (China) said that, in response to the growing refugee crisis, States should uphold multilateralism and show strong support for UNHCR and other multilateral agencies in their coordinating role. Given the significant funding gap, the Office should continue to cut costs while exploring new sources of funding. He welcomed its initiative to reduce costs at headquarters in 2024 so that more funds could be used for global projects. Meanwhile, developed countries should – in line with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities – provide further support to refugees and host countries.

7. As refugees had the right to benefit from the progress offered by artificial intelligence, big data and other emerging technologies, States should work together to provide capacity-building and training programmes to help refugees master new technologies and improve work skills so that they could better integrate into the information society. New technologies should also be used to address climate change and reduce the number of climate refugees.

8. Assistance should be provided to those in greatest need. The international community should take action to find political solutions to the crises that had led to the protracted displacement of millions of Palestinians, Syrians and Afghans. It must address the issue of the frozen overseas assets of Afghanistan and help the people ease their plight. As Africa faced the largest refugee crisis, UNHCR should continue to give the continent priority, including by mobilizing more resources for African countries.

9. Action was also required to address the root cause of the refugee problem, namely regional instability and unbalanced development. To that end, States should promote the settlement of disputes through dialogue and consultation, in line with the Charter of the United Nations. In addition, development should be restored as a core item on the

international agenda with a view to improving the position of developing countries in the international division of labour and achieving shared prosperity.

10. China had presented a number of initiatives to support global refugee governance and resolve the root causes of the refugee crisis. It would continue to deepen its cooperation with UNHCR to that end.

11. **Ms. Schweitzer** (Austria) said that he wished to add his delegation's voice in condemning in the strongest possible terms the heinous terrorist attacks by Hamas against Israel. The senseless violence had to cease immediately, hostages must be released and civilians protected in accordance with international law. He also expressed the solidarity of Austria with the victims of the tragic earthquakes in Afghanistan.

12. In the run up to the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – in which the right of every human being to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution had first been enshrined – and given the growing displacement crisis, Austria deplored the human rights violations, political oppression, civil strife and war that was forcing persons from their homes. In particular, it condemned the continued unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression waged by Russia against Ukraine, which had led to the displacement of millions of persons both internally and into the Schengen area. Austria also deplored the military operations under way in Nagorno-Karabakh, which had led to the mass exodus of ethnic Armenians. States in armed conflict had a responsibility to ensure respect for international humanitarian law in all circumstances, including by granting full, safe and unhindered access to aid and guaranteeing the safety of humanitarian corridors and workers.

13. Austria had recently adopted a humanitarian aid strategy, which acknowledged the particular vulnerability and needs of refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless persons and recognized that the main drivers of migration and displacement were armed conflict, human rights violations and the climate crisis. Since 2019, her Government had quintupled its humanitarian budget, to €77.5 million in 2023, with UNCHR remaining its primary partner in that area. In its new strategy, Austria had committed to enhancing its focus on vulnerable groups, in particular women and girls, LGBTIQ+ persons and persons with disabilities. Combating sexual and gender-based violence, providing medical care and fostering the participation of women and girls must stay at the forefront of humanitarian measures, including by ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health and rights. A human rights-based approach, in which recipients were empowered to participate actively in shaping the assistance received, was essential. Furthermore, the international community needed to strengthen protection and reception capacities in and near regions of origin, provide education and create employment opportunities, in addition to ensuring adequate health care for vulnerable groups.

14. For its part, Austria received the second highest number of asylum applications per capita and had one of the highest rates of application approvals in the European Union. In addition, more than 100,000 displaced persons from Ukraine had registered in Austria since the start of the war. Austria looked forward to the Global Refugee Forum as an opportunity to mobilize further support for burden- and responsibility-sharing for refugees.

15. **Ms. French** (United Kingdom) said that the United Kingdom expressed its deepest sympathies to those killed by the earthquakes in Afghanistan and the terrorist attacks in Israel. His delegation expressed its steadfast support to the State of Israel and its unequivocal condemnation of Hamas and its appalling acts of terrorism.

16. In recognition of rising urgent humanitarian needs, the United Kingdom would increase its global humanitarian aid budget to £1 billion in 2024 and 2025. It had also maintained the same level of core unearmarked funding in 2023 and encouraged other States to provide similarly flexible contributions. The United Kingdom applauded the ongoing business transformation efforts made by UNHCR. It also wished to recognize the continued generosity and leadership of host nations and communities in providing sanctuary to forcibly displaced people.

17. In the face of continued widespread violence and displacement, the Sudan, Chad, Egypt and South Sudan had led the way in providing protection to those fleeing the violence, despite having to confront their own humanitarian and economic challenges. In addition to

contributing £21.7 million for humanitarian assistance inside the Sudan, the United Kingdom had committed £5 million to help meet the urgent needs of refugees and returnees in South Sudan and Chad. The invasion of Ukraine by Russia had also caused widespread displacement and humanitarian need. In response, the United Kingdom had provided £347 million in humanitarian assistance since start of the invasion and had received more than 186,000 Ukrainian refugees. The United Kingdom remained committed to using all diplomatic and humanitarian resources available to support forcibly displaced persons and foster peacebuilding. It would renew that commitment in an international development white paper, to be published later in 2023.

18. The Global Compact on Refugees remained the best strategy for burden- and responsibility-sharing and was central to ensuring that the international protection regime supported the inclusion and protection of the most vulnerable groups, namely women, girls, the LGBT+ community and persons with disabilities. The Global Refugee Forum presented an opportunity for the international community to recommit to the Compact.

19. With regard to statelessness, the United Kingdom had provided £365 million to support the response in Bangladesh over the preceding six years, in addition to nearly £30 million to support the Rohingya – the single largest stateless population in the world – and other Muslim minorities in Rakhine State. The United Kingdom remained committed to efforts to secure the safe, voluntary and dignified return of the Rohingya to Rakhine State once conditions allowed, which was the only possible long-term solution to the crisis. In that connection, the Minister for Asia of the United Kingdom would co-convene the high-level meeting on Rohingya refugees, to be held in Bangkok later in October 2023.

20. As statelessness was a gender equality issue, the United Kingdom called on the 24 countries that did not allow women to pass on their citizenship on an equal basis to men – a root cause of childhood and multigenerational statelessness – to reform their laws on nationality. In that connection, it looked forward to joining the new Global Alliance to End Statelessness upon its launch in 2024.

21. **Mr. Habib** (Observer for Indonesia) said that, in the light of continued growth in the number of refugees and persons forcibly displaced because of war, conflict, persecution, human rights violations and environmental degradation – including the more than 160,000 civilians from Palestine alone who, to date, had been displaced as a result of the recent conflict and total siege – Indonesia called on all parties to that conflict to obey international humanitarian law and ensure the protection of civilians and humanitarian workers. The occupation of the Palestinian territories – the root cause of the humanitarian situation there – needed to be resolved, in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions and provisions of international law.

22. Indonesia was one of the many low- and middle-income countries with limited capacities and resources that, together, were hosting two thirds the world's refugee population. Having witnessed a constant flow of refugees over recent years, including more than 900 Rohingya refugees in the preceding year, Indonesia called on all countries, especially States parties to the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its Protocol, to meet their obligations with regard to burden- and responsibility-sharing and to galvanize support for international organizations, such as UNHCR, and their work in transit countries.

23. The international community must also work together to stop human trafficking and people smuggling. Traffickers and smuggling syndicates appeared to be heavily involved in the irregular migration of refugees to South-East Asia, which gave rise to inhuman treatment and exploitation. To combat such crimes, Indonesia was working through regional mechanisms, such as the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime, which it co-chaired with Australia.

24. A long-term, holistic solution to the current global refugee crisis was required. Indonesia supported the efforts of UNHCR to broaden its donor base and explore innovative sources of financing to address the humanitarian funding gap. Moreover, it encouraged the international community to support the efforts of countries of origin to resolve the root causes of the crisis. Efforts were also needed to address non-traditional causes of displacement, such as climate change, the food and water crisis and environmental degradation.

25. **Mr. Dockendorf** (Luxembourg) said that Luxembourg strongly condemned the recent terrorist attacks by Hamas in Israel and lamented the many victims, including civilian victims in Gaza. It called on the parties to the conflict to fully respect their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Luxembourg also lamented the many victims of the earthquake in Afghanistan.

26. In the face of multiple and prolonged crises driven by armed conflict, climate change and food insecurity, it was more urgent than ever to uphold the fundamental protection principles that underpinned the mandate of UNHCR and to seek durable solutions. To that end, international cooperation, responsibility-sharing and coordination with development actors were essential.

27. Noting the draft budget for 2024 and the continued, worrying increase in the number of forcibly displaced persons, Luxembourg reiterated that, despite the pressures on its accommodation system and network, it would continue to uphold its responsibilities as a host country. In addition, under its strategic partnership with UNHCR for the period 2022–2025, Luxembourg was providing predictable multi-year funding from a budget of €33.4 million.

28. Through its satellite communication programme, Luxembourg was helping to re-establish connectivity on the ground and to provide basic services to affected populations. As digital inclusivity could make a tangible difference to the lives of refugees and internally displaced persons, Luxembourg was also engaging heavily with the Innovation Service and had co-founded the Connectivity for Refugees initiative with UNHCR.

29. Given the importance of inclusivity, Luxembourg commended the Office for the attention given to protecting diversity in all its forms and combatting all types of discrimination during its protection activities.

30. **Mr. Mowafy** (Egypt) said that, in the face of increasing crises, rising displacement and emerging challenges, such as climate change, Egypt greatly appreciated the role played by UNHCR in supporting refugees and other groups that required its protection. For its part, Egypt hosted some 9 million registered refugees and asylum-seekers, a figure that had increased threefold over the preceding decade. Despite challenging economic conditions, Egypt maintained its policy of equal treatment for refugees and Egyptian nationals in access to health and education services. It also promoted their social integration and their participation in development initiatives, in line with its sustainable development strategy, Vision 2030.

31. Egypt did not receive sufficient assistance from the international community, however. Humanitarian agencies in Egypt had received just over 10 per cent of the funding allocated to Egypt for the response to the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic and only a third of the funding allocated to Egypt for the response to the crisis in the Sudan, despite Egypt hosting some 317,000 refugees from the Sudan. The increased pressure on resources and services was leading to greater competition for work among refugees and host communities, which threatened social cohesion and encouraged illegal migration.

32. Burden- and responsibility-sharing were key to ensuring a sustainable response to the refugee crisis. Funding gaps must be closed, further efforts to promote peace and prevent crises were required, and a balance between short-term humanitarian responses and medium- and long-term development projects needed to be created. The international community must shoulder its responsibilities in that regard. It must not wait until the next disaster struck before it took action.

33. **Ms. Kolsöe** (Iceland) said that the new forced displacement record underscored the dire need for increased burden- and responsibility-sharing and for durable, political solutions to armed conflicts. As a strong and well-resourced UNHCR – possible only through collective action – was more essential than ever, Iceland called on all donors to ensure that the Office was able to fulfil that mandate.

34. Given the importance of predictable and flexible funding, Iceland had worked continuously to increase its core contributions to UNHCR beyond a multi-year agreement. Having more than doubled its contributions of predictable and flexible funding in 2022, Iceland had also doubled its core contributions at the start of 2023 and had provided a top-up in June to allow UNHCR to respond to evolving needs, including the large-scale

displacement crisis in the Sudan. Iceland would also continue to provide predictable funding for UNCHR operations to address protracted – and often underfunded – crises, such as those in Afghanistan, central Sahel, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. Moreover, the commitment of Iceland to Ukraine had not faltered, nor had it come at the expense of other crises of refugees and internally displaced persons. As UNHCR could not do such work alone, Iceland had increased its predictable and flexible contributions to the World Food Programme (WFP) and other key humanitarian and development partners.

35. Commending host countries for their generosity, Iceland recognized that alleviating the strain on those countries was at the heart of the commitments contained in the Global Compact on Refugees. The Global Refugee Forum would provide an opportunity to address the issue. Participants should be guided by the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which had served as the basis for the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and for the development of international refugee and human rights law more broadly.

36. While war, violence and conflict were key drivers of forced displacement, certain groups faced persecution even in times of peace owing to various factors, including their sexual orientation and gender identity. Given the importance of respect for international law, Iceland strongly supported the commitment of UNHCR to its protection mandate and its efforts to integrate age, gender and diversity, including disability inclusion, into all aspects of its work. Furthermore, as different groups were affected by forced displacement and statelessness in different ways, an intersectional approach was vital to identify and respond to protection risks.

37. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that UNHCR welcomed the various suggestions that had been made by the representative of China. His Office was already taking action in those areas that were within its control. For example, as he had noted in his opening statement at the Executive Committee's 755th meeting ([A/AC.96/SR.755](#)), cost-cutting measures had been implemented, and his Office would continue to try to be as cost-effective as possible. UNHCR was embracing the use of modern technology, including artificial intelligence. Additional help from countries more advanced in that area would be very welcome. It was worth noting that Palestinian refugees fell under the Office's mandate only in areas that were outside the operational remit of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

38. Indonesia had been a good partner in respect of addressing the complex problems that arose along dangerous routes in South-East Asia in which there were mixed movements. Dealing with them country by country, border by border, would be too complicated, which was why a whole-of-route approach was needed. On that front, existing frameworks in South-East Asia, such as the Bali Process, could facilitate international cooperation, the search for solutions and burden-sharing.

39. Egypt had been on the front line of the refugee emergency in the Sudan. The arrival of Sudanese refugees had only added to the existing population Egypt was hosting in an inclusive and welcoming manner, despite a shortage of resources and amid acute security concerns. The President of Egypt had assured him that, while those security concerns were being taken into account, Egypt would continue to adopt a humane approach to receiving people fleeing from war and persecution. UNHCR stood ready to assist with short-, medium- and long-term support and to work in partnership with Egypt and development organizations to mobilize additional forms of support.

40. Luxembourg was a valued partner and had indeed demonstrated its solidarity with UNHCR and people of concern to it in a tangible way, including generous financial contributions in the form of multi-year funding. It was also a strong supporter of the UNHCR Innovation Service, which supported the digital dimension of his Office's activities.

41. He noted that a number of delegations had singled out UNHCR staff for praise. Alongside colleagues from other organizations, UNHCR staff often risked their own lives or worked in very difficult conditions. The moral and financial support of Ireland was much appreciated. Its increased financial contributions had established Ireland as one of his Office's major donors. It had also been a strong advocate of multilateralism in various forums, including the Security Council and the European Union.

42. Austria, too, had been one of the few member States to have increased its contributions in recent years and had been part of his Office's major donor group for some time. The Assistant High Commissioner for Protection had recently returned from a visit to Austria and highlighted the quality of its asylum system.

43. He welcomed the substantive commitments of the United Kingdom to humanitarian assistance and expressed the hope that they would help to restore the United Kingdom as a substantive donor to UNHCR humanitarian operations. The conference on the situation of the Rohingya, being co-convened by the United Kingdom, might present an opportunity to demonstrate that generosity. Efforts to ensure that the international protection regime was fit for the twenty-first century were appreciated, providing that the fundamental principles of asylum were upheld.

44. Iceland was another good example of a strong funding and resettlement partner. It was true that UNHCR could not address refugee and internal displacement crises alone.

45. **Ms. Bollini** (Observer for the Council of Europe) said that the Council of Europe, with its pan-European membership and human rights-centred approach, was well-placed to contribute to international efforts to support the increasing number of displaced persons. It had a number of standards and tools, developed under its Action Plan on Protecting Vulnerable Persons in the Context of Migration and Asylum in Europe for the period 2021–2025, that could contribute to international efforts, including with regard to the refugee situation following the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. Those standards and tools included: a guidance note on addressing the risks of trafficking in human beings related to the war in Ukraine and the ensuing humanitarian crisis; a checklist on the protection of children affected by the refugee crisis; and a recommendation of the Committee of Ministers on protecting the rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls.

46. The Council of Europe Development Bank continued to provide significant support to countries facing a large influx of refugees, and the Council of Europe offered capacity-building and training, including for legal professionals, on the protection of refugee and migrant children and on alternatives to immigration detention. A new course on protecting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons in asylum procedures had recently been published. Awareness-raising and capacity-building activities complemented other efforts on the ground and were carried out in cooperation with international partners, UNHCR in particular.

47. The Special Representative of the Council of Europe Secretary-General on Migration and Refugees had conducted fact-finding missions to seven Council member States since the start of the aggression against Ukraine. Follow-up activities – ranging from linguistic integration through education, access to health care and integration through sport – were ongoing with UNHCR partners in those countries and would benefit every refugee, regardless of their country of origin. At the most recent Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe, member States had reaffirmed their commitment to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (European Convention on Human Rights).

48. **Ms. Sarr** (Observer for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)) said that the African region had recently faced a surge in violent conflicts, primarily in the Sahel and in northern Nigeria, leading to further displacement, exacerbating the humanitarian situation and leaving millions of persons in urgent need of aid. Growing instability was, however, making humanitarian operations more difficult. According to the latest data on displacement, more than 6.7 million persons were displaced in the region, the overwhelming majority of whom were internally displaced. The ECOWAS Commission was currently in contact with its member States, UNHCR and other United Nations entities with regard to the exemption of humanitarian goods and services from sanctions imposed on the Niger.

49. ECOWAS had an awareness-raising and advocacy strategy to foster the implementation of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (the Kampala Convention) and provide a legal framework for the protection and assistance of displaced persons. The strategy was currently

aimed primarily at East African member States affected by violent conflict, such as Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Ghana and Togo, but would ultimately be extended to all member States so as to ensure a regional approach to displacement. In addition, ECOWAS and UNHCR had jointly developed a regional policy on refugees and a regional framework on the protection of stateless persons.

50. In 2023, ECOWAS had allocated more than \$8 million in aid to help member States respond to the deepening humanitarian crisis; provided \$4 million to countries affected by conflict, such as Nigeria, Burkina Faso, the Niger and Mali; and made a further \$2.5 million available to Burkina Faso.

51. ECOWAS wished to express its gratitude to UNHCR for its efforts to maintain the provision of protection for forcibly displaced persons and its engagement in seeking solutions, especially with regard to mixed movements. UNHCR was encouraged to continue its efforts in the region to address the humanitarian situation.

52. **Ms. Latimer** (Observer for the International Olympic Committee) said that sport could play an important role in a whole-of-society response to the challenges of forced displacement. For those affected by conflict or persecution, sport was more than just a leisure activity: it offered an opportunity to be included and protected, a chance to heal, develop and grow.

53. Sport and physical activity could help to reduce stress and have a positive impact on physical and mental health and well-being. The social support, structure and routine of organized sport could help in building resilience and supporting recovery, including of persons who had been exposed to traumatic events. However, communities affected by displacement often missed out on sport's positive benefits, since it was not routinely incorporated into refugee responses. It was therefore commendable that UNHCR and its partners had included sport in a regional response framework for Ukraine and launched a sport strategy.

54. Partners across the Olympic Movement were being galvanized to support displaced people and their host communities through sport, in accordance with the Olympic Charter. Since 2019, the Sport for Refugees Coalition had collectively contributed in excess of \$14 million and reached almost 200,000 displaced people. Ahead of the second Global Refugee Forum, a multi-stakeholder sport pledge on inclusion and protection was being prepared. A number of commitments to join the pledge had already been made and others would be welcome in order to help refugees to thrive through sport.

55. Sport was not a stand-alone tool; it worked in synergy with other fields, such as health, education, child protection, gender equality, disability inclusion and social cohesion. It was hoped that there would be a further shift towards recognizing and utilizing sport in activities in situations of forced displacement. Closer collaboration between the sport sector, the humanitarian sector and member States was needed to embed inclusive access to sport into national policies and refugee response frameworks.

56. At the 2024 Olympic Games, in Paris, the third Refugee Olympic Team would compete, demonstrating that peace and inclusion was possible. In that spirit, member States were urged to fully harness sport as a means of supporting the extraordinary efforts of UNHCR and other actors.

57. **Ms. Dalibey** (Observer for the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)) said that, with staggering numbers of people fleeing their homes owing to conflict, persecution, discrimination, violence and the effects of climate change, forced displacement was a priority issue on the OIC humanitarian agenda, since many of its member States were countries of origin or destination. There was an urgent need for the full implementation of the principle of responsibility-sharing to ease the burden on host countries, especially developing countries and those dealing with protracted situations. For its part, OIC had scaled up its efforts to provide assistance to refugee populations in its member States. It had strengthened the capacities of a number of regional offices to implement humanitarian-peace-development nexus projects and disbursed funding for humanitarian assistance, including through the Islamic Solidarity Fund. The establishment of the Global Islamic Fund for Refugees, in

partnership with UNHCR and the Islamic Development Bank, would provide for innovative and sustainable funding to help alleviate the plight of millions in need.

58. Global food insecurity was also a cause for concern. The Islamic Organization for Food Security had devised food security programmes for OIC countries, such as Afghanistan. Work was under way to develop a strategic plan on food security, with the aim of building capacities for sustainable agricultural and rural development and enhancing food security in OIC member States.

59. The root causes of forced displacement must be addressed. The causes of the ongoing situation in the Middle East were rooted in the Israeli colonial occupation and the total disregard for the rights of Palestinians and international law. OIC called for a credible solution to end the Israeli occupation and achieve a just two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of an independent State of Palestine.

60. OIC stood in full solidarity with Afghanistan in the aftermath of the recent devastating earthquake. Among other support efforts, it was engaged with the de facto authorities to advance the rights to education and employment of women and girls. The OIC Afghanistan Humanitarian Trust Fund had recently signed several implementation agreements, including with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and WFP, to provide food assistance, nutrition for children and health care.

61. A joint UNHCR-OIC visit to Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, had been conducted in August 2023. OIC reiterated its commitment to the International Court of Justice framework to bring an end to the persecution of the Rohingya and ensure accountability. There was a need to create a safe environment for the return of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar and relieve the burden on Bangladesh.

62. **Mr. Mamba** (Observer for the African Union) said that the African continent continued to face humanitarian emergencies characterized by an increase in forced displacement as a result of armed conflict, violent extremism, natural disasters and climate change. The recent earthquake in Morocco and devastating floods in Libya had led to widespread devastation and loss of lives; the conflict in Sudan and the situation in the Horn of Africa, the Sahel and the Lake Chad basin had resulted in large-scale displacements. In the face of increasing humanitarian challenges and mixed movements, the African Union reiterated its continued commitment to work with partners to address those challenges, thanked African Union member States for their continued hospitality, despite limited resources and the high cost of hosting refugees, and welcomed the support of UNHCR and humanitarian partners. The international community was urged to provide much-needed assistance.

63. In spite of the efforts deployed, several protracted situations of refugees and internally displaced persons remained unresolved in Africa. Renewed collective efforts were needed to deal with the root causes and to find durable solutions. To that end, the African Union continued to strengthen its peace and security measures, and an African humanitarian agency was being established to coordinate and streamline humanitarian responses in Africa. Following a humanitarian and pledging summit held in Malabo in 2022, a 10-year implementation road map was being developed, with a view to addressing humanitarian crises and pursuing development. Multilateral and bilateral partners were therefore called upon to honour their pledges.

64. **Mr. Cassayre** (Observer for the International Development Law Organization (IDLO)) said that greater investment in the rule of law could contribute to efforts to address the drivers of displacement, such as conflict, climate change and instability, in a number of ways.

65. First, addressing inequality, exclusion, impunity and breakdowns in the rule of law through formal or informal justice systems could help in resolving disputes before they became full-blown crises. IDLO had published, in collaboration with stakeholders, a report on diverse pathways to people-centred justice; another, on women's participation and leadership in customary and informal justice systems, was in the pipeline; and a webinar on collaborating with informal justice systems to meet justice needs in humanitarian settings was being developed.

66. Second, empowering people and communities to claim their land rights and participate in climate decision-making could unlock transformative changes, including alleviating poverty, ending hunger and promoting gender equality and sustainability. In an issue brief entitled “Rule of law responses to climate insecurity”, IDLO had concluded that people-centred justice systems and inclusive governance arrangements could serve as a robust framework for enhancing climate action and mitigating climate insecurity risks.

67. Third, adopting a gender-sensitive and gender-responsive approach to the rule of law could help in securing women’s land rights. IDLO had promoted the active participation of women in the drafting of land laws and fostered their involvement as justice seekers in land dispute resolution mechanisms. It was also working to assist countries in eliminating discriminatory laws to ensure inclusivity, equality before the law and the participation of all in society.

68. Fourth, investing in the rule of law could help to address food insecurity. In a forthcoming policy brief, the importance of empowering the most food insecure people to claim their rights was highlighted, as was the need to strengthen food systems governance through legal and regulatory frameworks and safeguard equitable access to land, water and natural resources. Lastly, by upholding the rule of law, States could unlock lasting solutions to the challenge of statelessness, while dramatically improving the lives and futures of stateless people and enhancing the prospects for sustainable development.

69. In short, by investing in the rule of law alongside humanitarian and development assistance, a more inclusive, just and sustainable future could be created and key drivers of displacement and insecurity addressed.

70. **Mr. Kammer** (Observer for the Sovereign Order of Malta) said that growing disrespect for international humanitarian law had affected increasing numbers of innocent people, including refugees and victims of human trafficking. In Ukraine, thousands of volunteers and aid workers from the Order of Malta bodies had been at the borders neighbouring Ukraine since the hostilities had begun, offering humanitarian aid and comfort to Ukrainian refugees and internally displaced persons.

71. In Africa, Malteser International, the relief agency of the Order of Malta, continued to assist internally displaced persons and refugees from South Sudan, while the worsening situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo had led to further internal displacement, resulting in the closure of health centres and delays in cash distributions to refugees and internally displaced persons. Two large new projects on nutrition and health system strengthening were being implemented in three provinces. Refugees arriving in Uganda from the Democratic Republic of the Congo were being supported.

72. Elsewhere, other projects included improving access to primary health care and psychological support for survivors of sexual violence and displacement in marginalized, rural and semi-rural communities in Colombia, particularly in the outlying agricultural regions, where access to basic medical services was extremely poor. In Syria, the goal was to provide medical care and improve living conditions for internally displaced people, including by enhancing access to primary and secondary health care and improving access to water, hygiene and sanitation facilities in camps. Four mobile medical units were now being operated in Lebanon to ensure basic health care in several provinces, thereby providing Syrian refugees and Lebanese persons in need with access to free medical care. In Myanmar, while the escalating armed conflict had led to increased displacement, limits on access had hindered the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Nevertheless, Malteser International was currently implementing some 15 programmes, including in the areas of health, disaster risk reduction and food security and nutrition, in the country.

73. Ahead of the second Global Refugee Forum, the Order of Malta would welcome efforts towards increased burden- and responsibility-sharing among civil society stakeholders, including faith-based actors.

74. **Ms. Bounford** (World Food Programme) said that, in 79 of the countries in which WFP operated, some 345 million persons were facing acute food insecurity – an increase of almost 200 million since early 2020. In 2022, more than 15 million refugees and asylum-seekers had been hosted in 52 countries experiencing food crises. While WFP had

provided \$1.5 billion in assistance to more than 10 million refugees, the situation had been further worsened by a funding crisis that was forcing WFP to scale back its life-saving assistance. At the current time, WFP faced a 72 per cent shortfall in the \$1.58 billion it needed for refugee operations. While its operations in Lebanon, Uganda, Jordan and the Sudan were facing the most acute shortfalls, ration cuts were affecting most of its refugee operations. The said reduced assistance was expected to lead to increased food and nutrition insecurity and serious protection risks.

75. WFP and UNHCR were working together to address the constraints she had outlined, including through needs-based targeting and prioritization, improved information-sharing and joint advocacy on diversified funding and durable solutions. The UNHCR-WFP Joint Programme of Excellence and Targeting Hub was also supporting efforts to improve response efficiency and effectiveness.

76. At the upcoming Global Refugee Forum, WFP, UNHCR and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) would co-lead a multi-stakeholder pledge on agriculture, agricultural livelihoods, food systems and food security. The pledge acknowledged the critical role of agriculture and agricultural livelihoods, strengthened food systems and food assistance in addressing and preventing acute food insecurity and reducing long-term dependency. It laid the foundations for refugees and other forcibly displaced persons to integrate into and thrive in their host communities and to successfully reintegrate into their communities when they decided to return home.

77. **Mr. Burgeon** (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) said that, at a time of unprecedented humanitarian needs, reductions in humanitarian funding, high food prices and a lack of flexible development funding had increased the severity of needs for the newly displaced, while solutions for those living in protracted displacement situations had been pushed further out of reach. FAO supported the High Commissioner's call for the deployment of development funds at the beginning of an emergency response, when emergency and development actors were working side by side to meet the immediate needs of displaced persons, while also laying the groundwork for durable solutions and working to break the cycle of long-term dependency. It called upon resource partners, financial institutions and development and humanitarian partners to increase their support for that approach, which was badly needed.

78. Those who had been displaced from or to rural and remote areas must not be forgotten. As displacement became increasingly urbanized, displaced persons living in rural and remote areas, outside of camps, were often overlooked. Impossible decisions on prioritization were being made owing to significant funding shortfalls; however, such decisions had serious consequences for those living in already underserved rural and remote areas. Moreover, investment in agricultural livelihoods could lay the foundation for refugees to be able to better integrate into and eventually thrive in their host communities. It could also create conditions conducive to their successful reintegration if and when they decided it was safe for them to return home.

79. FAO therefore encouraged member States to join the FAO, WFP and UNHCR multi-stakeholder pledge, which sought to leverage the critical role that agriculture, strengthened food systems and food assistance could play in boosting refugee livelihoods and local economies, reducing acute food insecurity and building stronger food systems for refugees and their host communities.

80. **Ms. Dimitriadou** (World Bank Group), noting the complex and difficult context in which UNHCR and its partners were working, said that the World Bank was committed to continue to support the efforts and generosity of host countries at a time when their own populations were struggling. Much-needed support for middle- and low- income countries had been provided, including through the Global Concessional Financing Facility and the International Development Association window for host communities and refugees, with a view to expanding services and opportunities for refugees and host communities. Enhanced support was being provided to countries facing fragility and conflict risks to help them to maintain core service delivery, which, in turn, could reduce the need for people to flee their own country and pave the way for people to return.

81. The Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement had continued to strengthen the quality and quantity of data used to shape policies and programmes for forcibly displaced persons and host communities. The *World Development Report 2023: Migrants, Refugees and Societies* contained information on what had worked best to support refugees and host countries and how to shift the current paradigm so as to take a medium-term perspective from the outset.

82. The World Bank was evolving to address global challenges. The World Bank was working as one through the purposeful collaboration, coordination and deployment of its collective knowledge and financial instruments. A new joint initiative of the International Finance Corporation and UNHCR was designed to create jobs and support private sector investments to the benefit of refugees and host communities. Partnerships were a catalyst for change, driving innovation and strengthening accountability and efficiency. The World Bank was working with UNHCR, bilateral and multilateral partners, civil society, refugee-led organizations and other key stakeholders in that endeavour.

83. **Ms. Farjon Israel** (Israel) said that, on 7 October, Hamas terrorists had massacred 1,200 Israelis, killing them for who they were, not for anything they had done. Those 1,200 Israelis had been butchered, their bodies mutilated and defiled. As Israelis were dying, the Hamas leadership had celebrated. They had celebrated not in Gaza or Ramallah; they had celebrated in Qatar. Qatar, Iraq, OIC and others had chosen not to condemn Hamas. They had chosen not to condemn the beheadings, rapes, shootings, stabbings and murders of 1,200 Israelis, some of whom had been burned alive. How could people, fellow human beings, see such images, hear such testimonies, and say nothing? How could such a lack of humanity be grasped?

84. The operation in Gaza was an operation against a terrorist organization, the same terrorist organization that was currently telling Palestinians to stay and die in their homes and ignore the messages of the Israel Defense Forces to move to safety. While the Executive Committee was discussing how to protect civilians, Hamas was using Palestinians as a human shield. Israel was at war with a genocidal terrorist group. If the security forces had not responded, how many more Israelis would have died? How many more babies would have been too many for Hamas? How many more innocent men, women and children from countries around the world would have been held in captivity in the Gaza Strip?

85. It had been a pogrom: a pogrom carried out on Facebook Live, in high definition and in colour for the world to see. Many had been too blinded by their hatred of Israel to see that fact. Israel would win the war. Israel would remember those who had stood beside it in its hour of need. The world would remember those who had stood with Hamas while it had slaughtered the Israeli people.

86. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), conveying his condolences for the appalling loss of life to which the representative of Israel had referred, said that he joined the Secretary-General in expressing the hope that the conflict would quickly end and that all civilian lives would be spared.

87. The Council of Europe had been an important partner in upholding human rights in Europe and advocating for the human rights of refugees and migrants. Similarly, ECOWAS had been a vital partner in a turbulent region where forced displacement and political instability were increasing. UNHCR counted on ECOWAS to help it and its humanitarian partners to overcome challenges, such as ensuring access to at-risk populations, protecting refugees, finding solutions and addressing the deep-rooted causes of population exodus.

88. The International Olympic Committee and UNHCR had a special partnership through the Olympic Refugee Foundation and the Committee's work with refugees, displaced persons and host communities, as well as through the Refugee Olympic Team – an extraordinary symbol of what sport could do for those who had been uprooted. He welcomed the sports pledge being prepared for the Global Refugee Forum.

89. Many of the OIC member States were important stakeholders in his Office's activities. The Global Islamic Fund for Refugees was an innovative initiative that deserved more support from the region and beyond.

90. The African continent remained a top priority to UNHCR for all the reasons cited by the representative of the African Union. Of particular concern was the conflict in the Sudan and the attendant refugee crisis; the unrest, terrorism, instability and displacement in the Sahel; and the ever-growing crisis in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Given its conflict resolution mandate, the African Union was a powerful partner in seeking solutions. Increased engagement with IOM and other partners to deal with continental challenges, such as dangerous mixed-movement routes, was a UNHCR objective.

91. IDLO had reminded participants of the importance of the rule of law. In many situations, the failure, absence or weakness of the rule of law caused displacement and prevented return. Strengthening the rule of law was therefore an indispensable complement to his Office's work. The work of IDLO on the protection cluster and on the climate were much appreciated. Similarly, he wished to thank the Sovereign Order of Malta for its invaluable humanitarian work globally, including through Malteser International.

92. In addition to conflict and climate change, food insecurity was an increasing cause of forced mobility, especially in Africa. Unfortunately, food insecurity often accompanied displaced persons in exile. For that reason, it was vital that WFP refugee operations were well funded. Its most underfunded operations – Lebanon, Uganda, the Sudan and Jordan – were also major UNHCR refugee operations. The work of WFP complemented that of FAO, for the key issue for FAO was food security, including in countries of origin and situations of protracted displacement. There were critical linkages between humanitarian work and development, early investments in crises, food security and climate-related situations that often-generated chronic crises, including displacement. He therefore welcomed the multi-stakeholder pledge on agriculture and food security for the Global Refugee Forum.

93. The World Bank had become a crucial partner through its International Development Association financial instruments and its Global Concessional Financing Facility, which had mobilized extraordinary resources in refugee contexts. The importance of those resources should be better recognized, including by host countries. While it was right to lament the decline in humanitarian funding – and the fight in that respect should continue – the powerful instruments that were available from the World Bank and other development institutions to help in mobilizing more resources should not be forgotten.

Ms. Ahmed Hassan (Djibouti) took the Chair.

94. **The Chair** said that, during the general debate, many speakers had echoed the High Commissioner's concern over the rapid increase in conflicts and natural disasters, which had led to multiple new emergencies and complex humanitarian crises and unprecedented levels of displacement worldwide. Refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons and stateless persons had been left in dire circumstances, and host communities, many of them in low- and middle-income countries, were shouldering a heavy burden.

95. Concerns had been expressed about UNHCR underfunding and its impact on the Office's ability to fulfil its mandate, respond to ever-growing needs and provide adequate protection to forcibly displaced persons in protracted situations and new emergencies. Equal attention should be paid to crises in all regions to ensure that no refugee situation or host community went ignored or underfunded. According to one delegation, given that 2023 marked the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the halfway point for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, it was high time for the international community to make a real difference, uphold the rights and dignity of the forcibly displaced and make sure that no one was left behind.

96. There had been calls for the principles of the Global Compact on Refugees to be fully operationalized. The critical importance of providing durable solutions for refugees had been highlighted, while resettlement and complementary pathways had been identified as tangible demonstrations of burden- and responsibility-sharing. Many speakers had outlined innovative approaches that were being implemented in their countries to ensure the inclusion of refugees in national systems. Looking ahead to the upcoming Global Refugee Forum, the need for renewed commitment and cooperation to address the plight of refugees had been emphasized.

97. The importance of identifying effective ways to eliminate the root causes and triggers of forced displacement, including through political, security and development cooperation, had been reiterated. One delegation had recalled that long-term solutions to end conflicts and address climate change required political will and cooperation as a community of nations with a common vision of peace, security and inclusion.

98. Lastly, the High Commissioner had called for the international community to come together to ensure protection, humanitarian aid, development and inclusion and take action for better burden- and responsibility-sharing, as refugees had experienced unimaginable, devastating division and had been divided from their homes, their family and their friends.

Mr. Espinosa Cañizares (Ecuador), Vice-Chair, resumed the Chair.

Statements made in exercise of the right of reply

99. **Ms. Katvalyan** (Armenia) said that Armenia refuted all the allegations that had been made by Azerbaijan at the 757th meeting (A/AC.96/SR.757). On 19 September, Azerbaijan had unleashed an unjustified aggression against Nagorno-Karabakh. More than 100,000 refugees had been forcibly displaced in what the European Parliament had defined in a recent resolution as a situation amounting to ethnic cleansing. Armenia strongly condemned the acts of violence committed by Azerbaijani troops against the Nagorno-Karabakh population.

100. Prior to the military offensive, Azerbaijan had imposed an inhuman 10-month blockade on Nagorno-Karabakh, denying entry to international humanitarian organizations, including UNHCR, in violation of the November 2020 ceasefire statement. Its defiance of numerous international calls and an International Court of Justice order to open the Lachin corridor – the lifeline linking Nagorno-Karabakh with the outside world – was a clear indication of the intention of Azerbaijan to perpetrate mass atrocities. Since the 2020 war, Armenians had been subjected by Azerbaijan to extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, abduction, torture and other gross violations of international law. Such violations had been recorded by UNHCR, the treaty bodies and the special procedures. Every person in Nagorno-Karabakh had faced an existential threat and had been compelled to flee for their lives. It was regrettable that the visit to Nagorno-Karabakh by a delegation led by the Resident Coordinator in Azerbaijan had failed to register those realities. The delegation had not included a human rights adviser and thus lacked an assessment of the human rights situation. That situation should be rectified.

101. **Ms. Kalmbach** (United States of America) said that the United States unequivocally condemned the appalling attacks by Hamas terrorists against Israel, including on civilians and civilian communities. The United States supported the right of Israel to defend itself; it stood in solidarity with the Government and the people of Israel and extended its condolences for the lives lost.

102. In the words of President Biden, there was no justification for terrorism. Hamas did not stand for the Palestinian people's right to dignity and self-determination; its stated purpose was the annihilation of the State of Israel and the murder of the Jewish people. It used Palestinian civilians as human shields. Terrorists purposefully targeted and killed civilians. The brutality and bloodthirstiness of Hamas brought to mind the worst rampages of ISIS. Hamas offered nothing but terror and bloodshed, with no regard to those who paid the price.

103. **Mr. Atroshenko** (Russian Federation) said that a number of delegations had made politicized statements containing unfounded attacks on Russia. Such statements were not conducive to constructive discussion of humanitarian issues at an Executive Committee session.

104. Russia could not remain indifferent to the fate of the inhabitants of the Donbass. The country's objective had been to save the population of the Donetsk People's Republic, Lugansk People's Republic and Kherson and Zaporozhye Provinces from de facto annihilation. Russian actions had been prompted by the aggression of the Kyiv authorities against Donbass, the reluctance of Kyiv to ensure respect for human rights and stop discrimination against its Russian-speaking citizens and its unwillingness to fulfil the Minsk arrangements.

105. Russia had become the largest receiving country of internally displaced persons from the Donetsk People's Republic, the Lugansk People's Republic, Kherson and Zaporozhye Provinces, and Ukraine, with over 5 million people having arrived from those territories as a matter of urgency since 18 February 2022. All of those persons had left for safe Russian regions voluntarily, to save their lives and the lives of their loved ones.

106. His delegation firmly rejected the politicized and absurd allegations regarding the forced displacement of Ukrainian citizens and Ukrainian children. Such slander was intended to fuel anti-Russian rhetoric in the context of the Ukrainian crisis.

107. The attempts to hold Russia responsible for the food security situation were part of an intensive disinformation campaign. The negative trends in the food market had been observed for at least the previous few years and had nothing to do with the actions of Russia. They were caused by distortions in the global economy, systemic errors and miscalculations by major Western countries in their macroeconomic, energy and food policies and had been worsened by climate disasters, the pandemic and massive sanctions against Russia.

108. With respect to the statement made by the representative of Georgia at the Executive Committee's 757th meeting, his delegation wished to point out that South Ossetia and Abkhazia were independent States. Allegations regarding the occupation of Georgian territory and ethnic cleansing were baseless. Tbilisi had, through its reckless actions, alienated the people of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, who had proclaimed their independence. The aggressive policy of Georgia was the real root cause of forced migration in the region. Tbilisi had also refused to sign legally binding agreements with South Ossetia and Abkhazia on the non-use of force, which could have opened the way to normalizing the situation and resolving humanitarian problems.

109. **Mr. Safarov** (Azerbaijan), referring to the statement just made by the representative of Armenia and the statement made by the representative of France at the Executive Committee's 758th meeting ([A/AC.96/SR.758](#)), said that it seemed to have become a tradition for Armenian delegations to bring a list of allegations but no evidence to United Nations meetings. Azerbaijan called on Armenia to make use of the chance for peace in the region, something that it had failed to do for three decades.

110. His delegation rejected the groundless allegations made by France. France had no role to play in the processes related to Nagorno-Karabakh after having failed for three decades to act as an impartial mediator between Armenia and Azerbaijan. France had also failed to act as a mediator in the process of return of some 1 million Azerbaijani internally displaced persons and refugees – including the 300,000 Azerbaijanis who had been violently expelled from Armenia in the late 1980s and early 1990s – to their homes of origin. The fact-finding missions periodically conducted by the United Nations in the region had thus far revealed no damage to civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, schools and housing, or to cultural or religious structures in Nagorno-Karabakh. The United Nations team had received no reports from the local population of acts of violence committed against civilians following the latest ceasefire and had observed no destroyed agricultural infrastructure or dead animals from the road. Findings of the UNHCR office in Armenia and the International Committee of the Red Cross had confirmed those observations.

111. **Ms. Díaz-Rato Revuelta** (Spain), speaking on behalf of the European Union and its member States, said that the terrorist acts committed by Hamas in Israel had no justification or legitimacy and must be universally condemned.

112. **Ms. Bejanishvili** (Georgia), referring to the statement made by the representative of the Russian Federation in exercise of the right of reply, said that the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions were indivisible parts of Georgia that had been occupied by the Russian Federation as a result of its full-scale military aggression against Georgia. The occupation of regions that were an integral part of Georgia was in violation of the fundamental principles and rules of international law, the Charter and the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. The attempts by Russia to mislead the international community through disinformation and false narratives must also be considered. International courts had ruled on the occupation and effective control of the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions of Georgia and confirmed that Russia was responsible for grave violations of human rights and numerous international conventions. Her delegation once again called on Russia to comply

with those decisions, respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia, allow the European Union to implement its mandate, to abide by the August 2008 ceasefire agreement and withdraw its forces from the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions of Georgia.

Consideration of reports of the Standing Committee

(a) International protection (A/AC.96/74/2, A/AC.96/74/3 and A/AC.96/74/10)

113. **Ms. Triggs** (Assistant High Commissioner for Protection) said that, as pointed out in the note of the High Commissioner on international protection, although some encouraging progress had been made in terms of protection, with many countries offering asylum-seekers livelihood opportunities and extending eligibility for national education and health services to refugees, some States had refused to allow asylum-seekers to enter their territory, shifting responsibility to other, usually lower-income, countries. The growing funding shortfall impeded effective protection.

114. Traditional long-term solutions were hard to find for refugees. Although most wanted to return home, continued insecurity and insufficient funds often made it impossible for them to do so. UNHCR would be requesting over 117,000 resettlement places for the most vulnerable refugees in 2023. While complementary pathways for admission to third countries were expanding, they were currently available to only a very few. Millions remained without hope.

115. At least 75 per cent of the burden of hosting lay with low- to middle-income countries, especially those neighbouring areas of conflict. Many of those countries were also among the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. The primary challenge for the international community was to address that unequal burden.

116. Perceptions that the asylum system was broken had risen alongside the increase in the scale of forced displacement. The response of UNHCR was clear: the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees continued to save millions of lives and was more vital than ever. There were, however, understandable concerns. For example, refugee status determination procedures were often slow and burdensome, and refugees had to rely on humanitarian aid and social assistance for years while waiting for authorization to work.

117. Some Governments had responded to those concerns by adopting extreme deterrent measures, including denying disembarkation to persons rescued at sea. Some had passed laws imposing mandatory detention on irregular entry and carried out forced returns to third countries with no safeguards in place. The international refugee protection regime was under serious threat, as some States failed to implement the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and adapt their asylum systems to new realities. UNHCR stood ready to help States modernize their asylum systems and called on all States to share their expertise and pledge, at the upcoming Global Refugee Forum, to help other States through the Asylum Capacity Support Group. Flight caused by the impacts of climate change presented a new challenge, and the response in terms of international protection was evolving. UNHCR encouraged the inclusion of refugees in climate action plans and the scaling up of financing for host countries.

118. The overarching strategy for achieving practical and sustainable solutions lay in the Global Compact on Refugees, which called for the involvement of Governments, local communities, faith groups, non-governmental and refugee-led organizations, the private sector, development banks and other stakeholders in achieving the goal of equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing. In recent years, UNHCR had entered into effective non-transactional partnerships with development banks and international financial institutions. Bilateral donors and multilateral banks had provided over \$11 billion of development assistance from 2020 to 2021, making it possible for refugees to be included in national social systems. Through the Window for Host Communities and Refugees of the International Development Association, under the World Bank Group, \$3.2 billion had been invested in 16 low-income refugee-hosting countries, with UNHCR assessments of the laws and policies relating to refugees and human rights facilitating the release of funds. Investments by development actors had also helped provide economic opportunities for refugees in Ethiopia, under the Economic Opportunities Program, and in Kenya, under the Shirika Plan.

119. Other efforts made under the Compact had centred on a whole-of-journey, or whole-of-route, approach to mixed and onward movements. State responses to such movements had focused on unilateral deterrent measures and some bilateral agreements, but such responses were limited. There was a need for a comprehensive strategy covering the routes in their entirety: from countries of origin, through transit countries, to countries of destination. Whether those risking dangerous journeys were refugees escaping conflict or migrants in search of opportunities to build their lives, they often had similar protection needs, and the protection of their rights was an imperative. UNHCR was working closely with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to develop a strategy to meet protection needs at critical points along mixed movement routes using a whole-of-society approach, with the involvement of local communities, mayors and cities, faith groups, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and other United Nations agencies.

120. A whole-of-journey approach to protection would support the fair and fast assessment of international protection needs, facilitate access along routes to asylum or resettlement and ensure that local communities received support by combining humanitarian aid with development aid and investment. The value of the approach could be seen in, for example, the recent creation, in line with the Declaration on Migration and Protection, of Safe Mobility Offices in Colombia, Guatemala and Costa Rica, through which IOM and UNHCR referred people to the United States Refugee Admissions Program and provided information on complementary pathways. Spain and Canada had also joined that initiative. The strengthening of national asylum systems was a vital element of the “whole-of-journey” approach, which offered a practical alternative to deterrent tactics that were harmful to refugees and largely unsuccessful. The approach was founded upon the right to seek asylum at territorial borders.

121. The key global mechanism for the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees was the Global Refugee Forum. The 1,400 pledges made at the Forum in 2019 had been a crucial demonstration of good faith and goodwill, but they must be implemented. Although the will to do so was there, the funding was often not. A key element of the Compact related to the use of data to measure concrete outcomes. While the next indicator report on the Compact, to be released in November 2023, would show sustained progress in responsibility-sharing in some key areas, much more needed to be done to achieve truly equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing and lasting solutions.

122. Chad provided a model of good practices. It was one of the least developed countries in the world, with around half of its population living below the poverty line, but it hosted more than one million forcibly displaced persons, including recent arrivals fleeing conflict in the Sudan, and it had implemented its pledge regarding the inclusion of refugees. Chad had granted refugees freedom of movement and access to the national health, education, and justice systems, and more than 200,000 refugees had received arable land for farming.

123. Progress under the Compact had been promoted by support platforms through which key actors could coordinate protection and solutions. Efforts undertaken through the support platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees had led to the building of community centres, schools, clinics and houses. Work was being done through the support platform of the comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework (MIRPS) to increase technical capacity at the local level and advocate for funding, and through the Intergovernmental Authority on Development support platform to obtain pledges on climate adaptation and durable solutions.

124. The Compact recognized that international protection was most effective when refugees were involved in the policies, decisions and programmes that affected their lives. UNHCR had redoubled its efforts to ensure refugee participation at the Global Refugee Forum and expected 300 refugees to attend.

125. Significant progress had been made in addressing statelessness since the launch of the I Belong campaign. UNHCR welcomed the commitments made by Sao Tome and Principe and the Congo to ratify the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. A new solution seeker programme would be launched at the Forum to widen partnerships to end statelessness.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.