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## Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Sixty-first session

### Summary record of the 643rd meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 6 October 2010, at 10 a.m.

*Chairperson:* Mr. Woolcott.....(Australia)

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General debate (*continued*)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.*

**General debate** (*continued*)

1. **Mr. Samba** (Central African Republic) said that the Central African Republic hosted over 30,000 refugees from the Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It had ratified the Convention on the Status of Refugees and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, and had adopted the corresponding domestic legislation. In August 2010, the Government, with the help of UNHCR, had organized a national conference on the protection of refugees' rights, which had made it possible critically to assess the situation, to revitalize refugee protection and to draw up a coherent government policy.
2. The demobilization effort under way for former rebels was aimed at ensuring a lasting peace and facilitating the return of Central African refugees currently living in southern Chad. The Government also planned to ratify the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa, to decentralize refugee protection bodies in the country, to develop a naturalization mechanism for refugee applicants and to issue biometric identity cards to refugees. Such efforts required the support of the international community, as the State was short of funding. Donors and partners working with UNHCR in the Central African Republic were therefore requested to strengthen their financial and material support to the Office.
3. **Mr. Nandago** (Namibia) said that in the light of the remarkable progress made in ensuring peace and stability in Angola and Rwanda, in the past year Namibia had prepared for the voluntary repatriation of refugees from those countries. The first group of Angolan refugees was due to be processed by the end of October 2010 with the help of a UNHCR voluntary repatriation exercise. UNHCR should consider invoking the cessation clause within a reasonable period for refugees from those two countries.
4. Small numbers of refugees were currently arriving in Namibia from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi and Somalia. While Namibia placed priority on local integration and had moved ahead in formulating a relevant policy, local integration could not be fully realized without ensuring that some Namibians would benefit as well, for example through improvements in infrastructure.
5. Namibia had taken part in the drafting of the Kampala Declaration on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons in Africa, which had been signed in 2009, and would participate in a workshop to review its implementation and future steps. He expressed thanks to UNHCR for training Namibia's refugee administration staff, including the members of the Namibian refugee status determination committee, and said he hoped that, notwithstanding the global financial crisis, such cooperation would continue in the future.
6. **Ms. Farani Azevêdo** (Brazil), noting that Brazil's voluntary contributions to UNHCR had recently reached the highest point ever at \$3.3 million, said that the Brazilian Government had signed a memorandum of understanding with UNHCR, and that it was prepared to share with the Office its successful experiences that could help to empower refugees and assist in the development of host communities. For example, the Brazilian school feeding programme, which benefited some 47 million children, helped to increase attendance, reduced malnutrition and, when linked with local food production, promoted local development. Working with the World Food Programme (WFP), Brazil had assisted countries in Africa and Latin America to replicate the feeding programme. Her Government considered that UNHCR could make good use of such an approach in refugee camps and local communities. UNHCR, like other agencies, should integrate South-South cooperation into its operational philosophy.

7. The promotion of peace, stability and human rights required a broad strategy addressing the root causes of conflict, with shared responsibility and solidarity, and concerted action by all. When trade negotiations or climate change talks failed, the ultimate effect was to worsen poverty. The lack of solutions to conflicts, to which the High Commissioner had referred in his opening statement, was attributable to the fact that root causes of conflict were not being addressed. Lasting solutions should deliver the real dividends of peace: stability, development and strong national institutions.

8. In Brazil, the granting of asylum was a State policy, and was understood to reflect the country's democratic values. Brazil operated a "protection-sensitive" entry system, respectful of the freedom of movement of all migrants and allowing for the immediate protection of asylum-seekers. Refugees were able to apply for permanent visas after six years of residency. Brazil was deeply concerned about threats to the observance of non-refoulement principles posed by inadequate asylum claims procedures and xenophobic policies. Criminalization of illegal migration was counterproductive and posed new challenges to international protection.

9. **Mr. Amidu** (Ghana) said that Ghana practised an open-door policy for refugees and asylum-seekers and had built good relations with neighbouring States with a view to ensuring peace and security in the subregion.

10. He expressed surprise that the 2010 update on UNHCR operations in Africa mentioned 6,000 Ghanaian refugees who had allegedly crossed into Togo following communal violence in northern Ghana in March 2010. Some intra-ethnic conflict had occurred between two Bimoba clans and had indeed led to the displacement of a few Ghanaians to Togo. However, such movements between the two States often occurred in times of conflict and were a temporary phenomenon.

11. In response to a report carried by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in May 2010 stating that about 3,500 Ghanaian refugees had arrived in Togo following ethnic conflict in northern Ghana, the Ghanaian Government had sent an assessment mission comprising representatives of numerous United Nations agencies and Ghanaian officials to ascertain whether any displacement had taken place. The mission had concluded that there were no refugees from Ghana in Togo, although some people on either side of the border occasionally crossed over to benefit from the distribution of relief items.

12. UNHCR should take more care to ensure that its official documentation reflected the actual situation. The population of the entire area affected by the conflict in question was approximately 3,000. The Ghanaian Ambassador in Togo had never been notified of the arrival of any Ghanaian refugees.

13. Ghana continued to host a large number of refugees, mainly from the West African subregion. Most were still unwilling to return, even though the situation in their country of origin had improved. Ghana would pursue efforts with UNHCR to find solutions for those who remained and looked to the Office to provide support for them until durable solutions could be found.

14. **Mr. Damey** (Guinea) said that notwithstanding the fact that instability had marked Guinea in recent years and had seriously undermined the functioning of State institutions, and despite the fact that the Government had had to deal with the effects of the world financial crisis, Guinea had continued to extend hospitality to refugees and displaced people. It now hosted some 30,000 such persons near urban areas, and an additional 17,000 in the Kouankan and Laine refugee camps, as well as many asylum-seekers.

15. Given its own aspirations for development and the needs of its people, Guinea needed tangible support from the international community to remedy the many profound economic, social and environmental problems arising from the presence for over two

decades of refugees from Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire and the internal displacement of Guineans. Since 2008, Guinea and UNHCR had worked together on a local integration programme, first for refugees from Sierra Leone and later for those from Liberia. It was regrettable that out of the 11,000 people eligible for the programme, only about a hundred had taken part, apparently owing to a lack of interest among the refugees, who preferred resettlement, and the inadequacy of the programme's assistance kit. The Guinean Government was concerned about the lack of sufficient funding to assist refugees in local integration and to help host populations. With more resources, it could implement microprojects and other revenue-generating activities for both groups.

16. **Mr. Nyak** (Sudan) said that the Sudan had for four decades hosted a large number of refugees from Eritrea, Ethiopia and Chad and thus had a good knowledge of how to handle refugee issues. Persons in protracted refugee situations in eastern Sudan were now beginning to migrate to towns, resulting in large numbers of unregistered urban refugees. Counting the number of such refugees for the purposes of verification was the joint responsibility of UNHCR and the Government. In May 2010, the Government had begun a verification exercise for refugees based in urban areas and settlements. However, it still faced technical difficulties; for example, its refugee status determination centre in Shagarab required special support, including capacity-building.

17. For the first time, cases of trafficking of new refugees had been detected in eastern Sudan. Dealing with that phenomenon would require resources and facilities, together with a comprehensive strategy that combined legal, social and economic aspects in a unified framework.

18. The Government, working with UNHCR, was updating and amending its asylum legislation with a view to the possible integration of refugees in communities. The Government and people of the Sudan were committed to implementing the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in a spirit of dialogue and conducting the referendum for which it provided on time. The Government had launched a new strategy to find a durable solution to the conflict in Darfur. The help provided by the international community was crucial for a peaceful and stable Sudan.

19. **Mr. Feyder** (Luxembourg) said that he shared the concerns expressed by the High Commissioner about the relatively low number of voluntary repatriations and the growing complexity of conflicts. Given the difficulties, the Office deserved all the more praise for the flexibility and adaptability which it had shown in recent conflicts and natural disasters. It was important for UNHCR to have the resources it required to respond rapidly and adequately in conflict situations. Luxembourg had concluded a multi-annual framework agreement with UNHCR to provide the Office with predictable, steady and stable funding. Contributions should be flexible, above all in a context where UNHCR had adopted a biennial budget cycle. Luxembourg had recently exceeded the goal of devoting 1 per cent of its gross national income to public development aid, notwithstanding the difficulties posed by the economic crisis.

20. The growing violence to which humanitarian workers from international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were subjected was of serious concern, as was the increasing number of persons displaced within their own countries. He welcomed the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa, which had been adopted at a special African Union summit and financed in part by Luxembourg.

21. Luxembourg firmly supported the courageous reforms undertaken by the Office, and applauded the transition to needs-based budgeting, which reflected a desire on the part of UNHCR to adapt in order to meet the real needs of those in distress. Luxembourg

supported the adoption of a common European asylum system and had recently received a number of Iraqi, Somali and Eritrean refugees for resettlement.

22. **Mr. Oyarce** (Chile) echoed the comments of the High Commissioner regarding the integrity of asylum systems and the need to exclude those not in need of protection, along with those who had committed criminal offences or who belonged to terrorist organizations. Collaboration between agencies such as the Office and Interpol was central to providing States with the necessary information to ensure proper use of the system.

23. He expressed support for the reforms under way at UNHCR to improve the management and impact of resources and set priorities effectively, in the face of rising demand and increasingly complex situations. Many countries in his region had made significant progress in modifying their legislation to expand the scope of protection for refugees. Chile had recently promulgated an act setting out comprehensive regulations, guidelines and procedures for protection, in line with the requirements of the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Additional Protocol. Chile supported the Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action to Strengthen the International Protection of Refugees in Latin America, one of the most innovative elements of which was the solidarity resettlement programme. Chile had hosted thousands of refugees from around the world and some 2,000 from more than 30 countries remained in the country.

24. **Mr. Sia Bi** (Côte d'Ivoire) drew attention to the significant progress made by Côte d'Ivoire in recovering from its crisis since the signing of the Ouagadougou political agreement of 4 March 2007. The Agreement had facilitated the identification of populations, restoration of State authority throughout the country and demobilization of former combatants. Publication of the candidate list for the presidential elections due to be held on 31 October 2010 marked the last step on the road to recovery, in which the support of the international community and the Office had been indispensable.

25. Despite its domestic crisis, Côte d'Ivoire continued to honour its international commitments to protect the vulnerable. It was currently hosting over 24,000 Liberian refugees and had taken measures to integrate them into Ivoirian society, particularly by enrolling children in school and halving the costs of naturalization for those wishing to acquire Ivoirian citizenship. Nevertheless, their situation remained precarious because of lack of funding for the Government's integration programme, which had been developed with UNHCR assistance. With the application of the cessation clause for Liberian refugees due to take effect from 31 December 2011, more support would be needed, for example in finding economically productive activities for refugees.

26. Repatriation of the remaining 12,000 Ivoirian refugees in the region had been delayed by arrangements for the forthcoming elections, but would continue after the presidential election had taken place. Agreements had been signed with the principal host countries to plan the operation. Although the immediate humanitarian crisis had passed, the situation in Côte d'Ivoire continued to present serious challenges, and he called on the international community to continue supporting the vulnerable and promoting peace and human dignity.

27. **Ms. Assaker** (Lebanon), welcoming the reforms undertaken to improve the effectiveness of the Office and the High Commissioner's visit to Lebanon, which had provided an opportunity for dialogue on refugee policy, said that Lebanon's particular history and circumstances prevented it from serving as the kind of haven that others would like to see. In general, the international community should do more to offer humanitarian assistance to those in need and seek fair and durable solutions to the situations of conflict and occupation that led to displacement. The underlying causes of conflict must be addressed in order to ensure peace and end the suffering of refugees. She expressed support

for the Office's work to protect refugees and to provide assistance, at the request of States, to populations internally displaced by conflict, violence or, increasingly, natural disasters.

28. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), responding to the various points raised, paid tribute to the Central African Republic for its generous attitude towards hosting refugees, notwithstanding significant security and development challenges. That country deserved greater international support. He reaffirmed the Office's commitment to helping to provide protection for refugees and for internally displaced populations in the northern part of the Central African Republic. He welcomed Namibia's approach to applying the cessation clause with respect to Angolan and Rwandan refugees, particularly its generosity in accepting local reintegration, and pledged the Office's continued support for its activities.

29. In addition to meeting the requirements of the Mexico Plan of Action, the implementation of the resettlement programme of Brazil had been crucial to resolving the situation of a group of refugees from the Middle East. He welcomed the emergence of Brazil as a donor country, and praised the quality of Brazilian asylum legislation and the commitment of the Government and society to integrating refugees. He also welcomed Brazil's stance on South-South cooperation, which provided the framework in which 80 per cent of refugee protection was provided. Brazil's exemplary programmes to reduce inequality and fight poverty, influenced by the assistance given to refugees, were a source of inspiration. Emphasizing the generosity and openness of Ghana in providing refugee protection and seeking durable solutions, he cautioned against downplaying the displacement of ethnic groups across the international borders that divided their communities. The essential issue was to provide assistance and protection to the vulnerable in a way that eschewed politicization.

30. Guinea had shown itself to be a strong partner for the Office, hosting refugees from all neighbouring countries without reserve, despite development challenges and the impact on its society, economy and, in particular, its environment. The Office had not yet had the opportunity to assist sufficiently with the challenges that the country now faced, and he called for greater solidarity from the international community.

31. He drew attention to the fact that the Sudan had been hosting refugees for several decades, including around 150,000 from Eritrea. The new strategy being developed between the Sudan and the Office would need international support if it was to succeed. He wished the Sudan well in holding and abiding by the results of its forthcoming referendum. The success of the Sudan's complex transition would bring benefits at the national, regional and global level.

32. He expressed appreciation to Luxembourg, as the Office's largest per capita donor, for its involvement in creating a common European asylum system. Its efforts, particularly as a small country, to promote resettlement solutions were laudable. Commending Chile for its legislation and policies on refugee protection and its contribution to implementing the Mexico Plan of Action, he noted that Chile had assisted in resettling refugees not only from its region, but also from further afield, helping the Office to ease complex and politically sensitive situations.

33. He said that he wished Côte d'Ivoire success in its electoral process and that the Office was committed to helping Côte d'Ivoire in providing protection for internally displaced persons and repatriating Ivoirian refugees and others. He commended it for its generous hosting of refugees, which merited international support.

34. His visit to Lebanon had yielded positive results in the area of protection. Lebanon was faced with a number of complex issues, including the presence of a large number of Palestinian refugees. The issue fell outside the Office's mandate but presented the country with significant challenges.

35. **Mr. Ismail** (Somalia) expressed appreciation to UNHCR, host countries and donor countries for their contribution to protecting Somali refugees. The work of UNHCR to benefit refugees and internally displaced persons, despite the increasing insecurity and the shrinking humanitarian space in Somalia, was particularly welcomed. He strongly echoed the statement made earlier in the session by the representative of Yemen concerning the need to tackle the root causes of the problem. The efforts of the Office would be unsustainable without support from functioning national and provincial institutions and better coordination among the various United Nations entities operating in Somalia. While Yemen, with its historical, cultural and ethnic ties to Somalia, was an important stakeholder in the country's stabilization, the positive role that it could play had so far been ignored by the international community.

36. The situation in Somalia must be examined from the point of view both of taking immediate practical action and of tackling the root causes of the political and socio-economic crisis. The only viable alternative in the short term was to utilize a viable road map including targets focusing on the provision of humanitarian and social services. The main issues fuelling political instability were access to social services and resources and how best to strengthen government capacity at national and provincial level. In the longer term, a sustainable State-building process for peace would be required. It should be borne in mind that the most important challenge for any Somali Government would be to reconcile traditional values with the requirements of modern statehood, including harmonizing Somali customary law, genuine Islamic sharia law and modern law.

37. The regime collapse in 1991 meant that ordinary Somalis had had to fall back on their clan identity and religious identity. Although some individuals had misused those resources, the overwhelming majority of Somalis were ready to overcome the imposed and superficial divisions involved. He therefore requested the Executive Committee to provide the Office with the necessary support to fulfil its objectives for Somalia's internally displaced persons, refugees and asylum-seekers. The Office should follow the example which it had set in Liberia and take a firm stand, rather than watching helplessly or continuing with "cosmetic remedies". In addition to meeting its humanitarian responsibilities, the Office could assist in State-building for peace by helping individuals to learn tolerance and coexist peacefully. He urged host countries not to judge all Somali asylum-seekers by the unlawful activities of the few, and to refrain from forced repatriation or refoulement.

38. It was essential to end the political and socio-economic crisis and restore Somalis to full ownership of their country. The increasing numbers of refugees, internally displaced persons and sea pirates, together with deregulation and attempts to modify deep-rooted cultural values, were clear symptoms of a man-made crisis. In stable conditions, Somalia could support its people and contribute to economic growth at home and abroad. Concerted political efforts were vital to ensuring full enjoyment of human rights by the Somali people, creating stability and eliminating the negative effects of the crisis on neighbouring countries.

39. He expressed gratitude to peacekeeping forces from Uganda, Burundi and Ethiopia for their role in his country. The international community should support the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) in opening new humanitarian corridors and spaces, and he looked forward to reporting positive developments and to Somalia's return to a proactive role in the international arena.

40. **Mr. Karnwea** (Observer for Liberia) expressed gratitude to UNHCR for its assistance in providing protection to Liberian refugees and to the Governments and peoples of the United States of America, Canada and Australia and the members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for providing shelter and homes to Liberian citizens.

41. By the end of 2009, some 169,000 Liberian refugees had returned home. Liberia still needed the support of UNHCR in establishing new reintegration programmes for returnee populations. Despite the efforts of UNHCR, his Government and other partners, some 60,000 Liberian refugees remained in various countries of asylum, including Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. The Government of Liberia was ready to provide passports for approximately 27,600 Liberians who had opted to integrate locally in asylum countries in the subregion. The Government required assistance in planning and supporting the work of inter-agency passport teams in the countries of asylum.

42. The Government had created a strategic plan outlining its current priorities and needs in four key areas: the invocation of a cessation clause and the reintegration of Liberian refugees; local integration and repatriation of refugees in Liberia; contingency planning; and refugee status determination. In order to achieve its goals, Liberia would need the full commitment and assistance of UNHCR. His Government also called on the High Commissioner and member States to assist Liberia in preparing its response to the developing situation in the Mano River subregion.

43. **Mr. Tcharie** (Observer for Togo) expressed gratitude to the High Commissioner for the assistance rendered to Togo. He requested support from across the entire United Nations system for Togo at a delicate stage in its history, as the truth, justice and reconciliation commission established in May 2009 had just begun taking statements from those caught up in the violence that had occurred between 1958 and 2005.

44. He recalled that, since the signing of the tripartite agreements with UNHCR, Benin and Ghana in April 2007, 10,055 Togolese refugees had been repatriated in cooperation with UNHCR. A further 20,000 persons had either returned to their homes of their own accord or had been repatriated as a result of pacification measures taken by his Government. There remained 5,000 Togolese refugees in Benin and 2,000 in Ghana. Those refugees had justified their continued presence in those countries on the grounds of the risk of violence during the presidential election in Togo. The presidential election had passed off peacefully on 4 March 2010. Nevertheless, in 2010 only 13 refugees were registered as returning from Benin, whereas 1,000 had been expected to return as part of an organized repatriation programme. Given the new climate of security and peace in Togo, it was clear that some Togolese refugees wished to stay longer in neighbouring countries for reasons other than security and political concerns. Consequently, he called on the High Commissioner to invoke the cessation clause for Togolese refugees who appeared to wish to make Ghana and Benin their second home.

45. True to its tradition of hospitality, Togo continued to take in thousands of refugees of all nationalities, including 3,665 refugees who had arrived from Ghana in April 2010. His Government was making every effort to offer those refugees Togo's legendary hospitality, hoping that they would be able to return home in the coming weeks. Togo had been one of the first countries to sign the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa and had begun the ratification process.

46. **Mr. Obidov** (Observer for Uzbekistan) said that, following the tragic events in the Kyrgyz Republic in June 2010, more than 100,000 refugees had been accepted in Uzbekistan and had been provided with all the necessary support by the Government and international organizations. They had been assured by the local Uzbek authorities that they would be able to return to Kyrgyzstan in safety and, in fact, they had all subsequently returned home. Consequently, the Government of Uzbekistan suggested that surplus humanitarian aid should be forwarded to Kyrgyzstan.

47. The stability of the Central Asian region as a whole had been threatened because third-party powers had sought to exploit the power vacuum created by the overthrow of the Kyrgyz Government by creating a crisis between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. The recent



events had placed great pressure on Uzbekistan as it sought to cope with the presence of over 100,000 refugees and to ensure peace in the border regions.

48. His Government called on the international community to launch an investigation into the violence that had occurred between 11 and 14 June 2010 in Kyrgyzstan in order to bring the perpetrators of violence to justice. Only an independent international investigation could prevent a repetition of such events.

49. **Mr. Gevorgyan** (Observer for Armenia) expressed his Government's willingness to work closely with UNHCR in commemorating the 150th anniversary of the birth of Fridtjof Nansen, the first High Commissioner for Refugees, who was held in great esteem in Armenia for his efforts to protect Armenian refugees.

50. He said that since its independence, the Republic of Armenia had been addressing the issue of refugees and internally displaced persons under the very difficult circumstances of devastating natural disasters and military conflicts in the region. Armenia had received a large influx of refugees from Azerbaijan and had to contend with internal displacement of persons from border settlements under attack by the Azerbaijani army and from Armenian territories occupied by Azerbaijan.

51. From the outset, Armenia had adopted a policy of integrating refugees by providing them with permanent accommodation and favourable conditions. Much remained to be done, however; some 4,000 refugee families still needed permanent housing. Further international assistance and support was required, and Armenia would hold a donor conference and seek further guidance and assistance from UNHCR.

52. He expressed appreciation for the High Commissioner's independent and impartial approach to providing protection to refugees. Although the outreach activities of UNHCR were expanding, universal coverage had yet to be achieved. The uncertain legal status of territories should not preclude the delivery of international protection, particularly from UNHCR, for affected populations.

53. Armenia had long advocated the close involvement of United Nations human rights and humanitarian machinery in tackling refugee and internal displacement issues in the Nagorno Karabakh Republic and it was pleased to note that there was growing understanding among various international organizations and actors in that regard. He hoped that the visit of the representative of UNHCR to Nagorno Karabakh within the assessment group of the co-chairmen of the Minsk Group Fact-Finding Mission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) would promote equal treatment of all refugees and internally displaced persons affected by the conflict.

54. **Mr. Haque** (Observer for the International Organization for Migration (IOM)) said that population movements were complex and dealing with them required partnerships among Governments, civil society, NGOs and intergovernmental organizations.

55. The relationship between UNHCR and IOM was of particular importance in a number of areas. The resettlement context had changed significantly over the years, with greater diversity in the resettlement caseload and a larger number of States offering resettlement places, underscoring the need for IOM and UNHCR to work even more closely together in assisting the most vulnerable.

56. The nexus between migration, climate change and the environment was, and would continue to be, an important issue for IOM and the whole humanitarian community. Migration was one option that people could adopt as a survival strategy in the light of climate change. Addressing the needs of internally displaced persons was another key area of cooperation with UNHCR. A collaborative response based on needs and protection was vital to supporting all persons affected by displacement. Mixed migration flows remained a complex challenge for both IOM and UNHCR, and IOM continued to promote a

comprehensive approach to meeting the needs of different groups of migrants and providing support to Governments.

57. **Mr. Eklu** (Observer for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)) said that protracted refugee situations were an enormous burden for host countries, particularly in the context of the recent financial and economic crisis. Greater international solidarity was needed in order to resettle refugees and support host communities.

58. Natural disasters and climate change were increasingly the cause of population displacement, as the floods in recent years in West Africa had shown. While UNHCR was mainly tasked with responding to the plight of refugees and other persons in similar situations, its cooperation and that of other stakeholders was needed in order to deal with the displacement in the ECOWAS region caused by natural disasters and climate change.

59. The 2009 *Global Trends* report indicated that the number of internally displaced persons worldwide had risen to 27.1 million. In the interests of effectiveness and efficiency, the scope of action of UNHCR should be extended to include such persons and further develop synergies with other United Nations agencies and competent institutions in that regard.

60. ECOWAS was undertaking activities to raise awareness among its members of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa. As it was imperative that the Convention should be ratified, ECOWAS was planning to hold a conference on internally displaced persons. It counted on the support of UNHCR for the preparations.

61. The number of refugees seeking voluntary repatriation was now at its lowest level for 20 years. In West Africa, many refugees were asking to be resettled in third countries. ECOWAS members wished to encourage local integration as a durable solution and, accordingly, ECOWAS, with UNHCR and the financial support of the African Development Bank, had implemented a pilot project for the social reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons in four countries: Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

62. **Ms. Olsen** (Danish Refugee Council), speaking on behalf of the NGO community, said that protecting people who had been uprooted by armed conflict and disasters from further violence and refoulement was becoming increasingly difficult. Many countries refused entry to refugees and had restrictive asylum systems, and anti-foreigner sentiment was rising.

63. Since only Governments had the capacity to respond to major disasters such as the recent floods in Pakistan, she asked why members had failed to use all the means at their disposal in that crisis. They should ensure that the deployment of civil and military defence for humanitarian purposes was more predictable and driven solely by humanitarian considerations.

64. Pakistan was a prime example of the limited impact on the ground of humanitarian reform, especially the cluster approach. The reform process must ensure that responses were more coordinated and effective. Protection leadership responsibilities during natural disasters often remained unclear; since UNHCR was possibly the only agency with the necessary expertise, members must provide it with the resources to fulfil that role without prejudice to its core mandate.

65. In the light of growing hostility towards NGOs, regular denial of humanitarian access and increasing insecurity for NGO staff, Governments and other relevant actors should reaffirm their respect for international humanitarian law and the independence of NGO work. The drive towards the integration of the various parts of the United Nations

system would inevitably result in impartial humanitarian action becoming associated with political motivations, which was likely to create further security risks for NGO staff on the ground. Humanitarian coordination and response should remain separate from other United Nations activities, especially in Somalia.

66. In August 2010, United Nations peacekeepers had failed in their protection mandate by not responding to reports of mass rape in North and South Kivu. The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo should share information with humanitarian agencies and act on those agencies' protection concerns. In addition, Governments with internally displaced populations should ensure that legislation and other normative frameworks existed to protect those people, and UNHCR should monitor States' compliance with such laws. UNHCR should confirm its commitment to stand-alone gender-based violence programmes, while continuing to mainstream the issue. It should furthermore pursue its efforts to reduce the risk of such violence through effective livelihoods programming which made women less dependent on men. All actors must integrate gender-sensitive programming into their responses in Pakistan.

67. The sixtieth anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention was an opportunity to examine how the Convention could be more effectively implemented. Members who had not already done so should sign and ratify the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness to mark the Convention's fiftieth anniversary. Reducing statelessness should be a top priority for UNHCR in 2011.

68. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), responding to the points that had been raised, reaffirmed the Office's commitment to the people of Somalia who continued to suffer at home and abroad. People must not be sent back to central and southern Somalia against their will and efforts should be made to ensure that Somalis were not double victims of terrorism. The only solution to the plight of Somali refugees was successful State-building for peace, which would require the international community's assistance.

69. He welcomed Liberia's strategic plan in preparation for the invocation of the cessation clause for Liberian refugees. The voluntary repatriation programme had involved huge numbers of internally displaced persons and refugees, relative to the size of the country, and had been remarkably successful. The Government deserved praise for its support of local integration initiatives in neighbouring countries. UNHCR would work to ensure that those projects received sufficient backing from the international community.

70. He commended the truth, justice and reconciliation commission in Togo for its work. UNHCR would continue to support the voluntary repatriation of Togolese refugees and local integration initiatives, where they were feasible. It would pursue its discussions with the Government on the cessation clause, while taking utmost care to ensure that all the stability requirements were in place before its invocation. He welcomed the Government's willingness to receive refugees from the region.

71. The Government of Uzbekistan had also opened its borders to the large influx of refugees resulting from the recent crisis in Kyrgyzstan. He commended the Uzbek authorities for their cooperation with the UNHCR emergency team and the Government for its constructive approach to establish truth, justice and reconciliation in Kyrgyzstan. That would contribute to the stability of that country and the entire region.

72. He expressed his appreciation for the Armenian Government's efforts to integrate refugees, which was proving challenging owing to the situation in Armenia. UNHCR would continue to cooperate with the authorities on that process and would participate in the OSCE Minsk Group Fact-Finding Mission to Nagorno-Karabakh. He appealed to the Governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan and the international community to create the conditions for a successful political outcome that would facilitate the return of all displaced

persons. UNHCR welcomed Armenia's new asylum legislation and the strengthening of its migration service.

73. UNHCR enjoyed exemplary cooperation with IOM, bilaterally and within the Global Migration Group, both at headquarters and in the field. The work of the two agencies was complementary because migration, if properly managed, would increase the opportunities for effective protection and inevitably strengthen the asylum framework.

74. The Office also had an excellent partnership with ECOWAS. The framework which the Community had established for the free movement of people had significantly facilitated refugee protection and durable solutions for refugees in the region. It should serve as an example of best practice to other regions. He paid tribute to the work of ECOWAS on conflict prevention and resolution. UNHCR supported the New Partnership for Africa's Development, the ECOWAS emergency intervention mechanisms and its forthcoming conference on internally displaced persons.

75. He thanked the Danish Refugee Council for its excellent work worldwide. Cooperation with NGOs was a key aspect of the life of UNHCR. It was fundamental for implementation and as a strategic partnership, and constantly influenced decision-making on UNHCR policy and strategy. UNHCR shared the NGO community's concerns, particularly on the shrinking of asylum space and the autonomy of humanitarian space, protection from gender-based violence and the gaps in protection and assistance in relation to internal displacement.

*Statements in exercise of the right of reply*

76. **Mr. Mikayilli** (Observer for Azerbaijan), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, expressed regret that the delegation of Armenia had made several remarks of a purely political nature which were inappropriate in the UNHCR context. No State, not even Armenia, had recognized the so-called "Nagorno-Karabakh republic". There was no conflict between that region and Azerbaijan; the dispute was between Armenia and Azerbaijan, over several instances of Armenian aggression which had resulted in the occupation of Azerbaijani territories and the internal displacement of some 700,000 people. No Armenian territories were under occupation; the territories under occupation were in Azerbaijan, as recognized in several United Nations Security Council resolutions.

77. **Mr. Amidu** (Ghana), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the High Commissioner appeared not to have understood the seriousness of his earlier comments on the erroneous reference to 6,000 Ghanaian refugees in the update on UNHCR operations in Africa. He recalled that the Government of Togo had not formally notified the Government of Ghana of the presence of any Ghanaian refugees in Togo.

78. **Mr. Gevorgyan** (Observer for Armenia), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that while he did not wish to open a debate about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, he was obliged to counter the allegation that Armenia was an occupying force. The conflict was principally between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan, and it was his Government's sovereign right to recognize the right of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh to self-determination. Azerbaijan's occupation of a town in the Gegharkunik region of Armenia in 1992 had led to the internal displacement of the town's population, an issue which the Representative of the Secretary-General on the human rights of internally displaced persons had examined during his visit in September 2010.

79. **Mr. Mikayilli** (Observer for Azerbaijan), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the issue in question was not one of self-determination, but of the occupation of 20 per cent of Azerbaijani territories by neighbouring Armenia. All United Nations Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, including General Assembly resolution 62/243,

of 14 March 2008, demanded the withdrawal of all Armenian forces from occupied Azerbaijani territories.

80. **Mr. Gevorgyan** (Observer for Armenia), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that Security Council resolution did not describe Armenia as an occupying power and made no mention of the occupation of Azerbaijani territories.

81. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), responding to the representative of Ghana, said that UNHCR always stood ready to correct any statistical errors in its documentation. The Office usually cited the numbers of refugees provided by host countries. He urged the Governments of Ghana and Togo to work with UNHCR to ensure that Ghana's positive political and economic development fulfilled the conditions for the successful repatriation of the refugees.

82. **The Chairperson**, summing up the general debate, said that many delegations had commended UNHCR staff, who often worked in dangerous and difficult situations, for their dedication. Delegations had paid particular tribute to those who had lost their lives in the course of their duties.

83. The anniversaries of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and the sixtieth anniversary of UNHCR would provide an opportunity to raise awareness of refugee issues and UNHCR achievements. More importantly, they would allow States to renew their commitment to the UNHCR and consider how to address the new challenges confronting it. There had been many calls for countries to ratify the conventions, for a strengthening of the Office's protection mandate and a renewed focus on statelessness. Delegations had also underlined the need for all parties to respect international humanitarian law and refugee law and the principles underlying UNHCR humanitarian operations, including non-refoulement.

84. There had been agreement on the many new challenges being faced and how those challenges led to additional forced displacement and exacerbated existing problems such as protracted refugee situations, shrinking humanitarian space, security issues for staff in the field, addressing the needs of women and children and dealing with mixed migration, human trafficking and smuggling.

85. There had been much support expressed for the introduction of results-based management and budgeting and the Global Needs Assessment and calls for transparent dialogue with members on those issues. UNHCR had been encouraged to review its funding approaches in order to seek additional resources, including from the private sector. Several States were fortunately making substantial increases to their annual contributions.

86. Several delegations had welcomed the establishment of an independent advisory committee. Others had pointed out the need for international solidarity and burden-sharing and noted the considerable contributions made and burdens borne by countries hosting large numbers of refugees.

87. While recognizing the significant leadership role of UNHCR in the cluster approach and humanitarian reform, delegations had called for increased cooperation and partnership with a variety of actors, including the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, the International Organization for Migration, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement and NGOs. The particular value of different aspects of partnership between UNHCR and members, including capacity-building, had been underlined.

88. Many delegations had welcomed the willingness of UNHCR to undertake responsibility for persons displaced as a result of natural disasters under certain specified conditions. UNHCR should do that in consultation with member States, and not at the

expense of its mandated responsibilities. That implied careful consideration of the Office's response capacity in terms of financial and human resources.

89. The importance of durable solutions, especially for those in protracted situations, had been highlighted. Delegations had advocated local integration and resettlement when voluntary repatriation, the preferred solution, was not feasible. There had been calls for countries to consider offering more resettlement places. In that regard, the success of the United Republic of Tanzania in ensuring local integration of Burundian refugees was a noteworthy achievement. UNHCR had welcomed the increase in the number of States indicating that they would participate in resettlement opportunities. A few delegations had expressed the hope that some repatriation efforts might proceed in a more expeditious manner.

90. A number of States had pledged to amend their national legislation to help resolve problems of statelessness, and there had been much support for UNHCR initiatives, including programmes to assist urban refugees, the Mexico Plan of Action and efforts to improve the security situation for staff. Several delegations had indicated that they were looking forward to the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection on "Protection gaps and responses" at the end of 2010.

91. UNHCR had been encouraged to pursue efforts to enhance self-reliance, education and livelihood opportunities in the field, carry out birth registration, address the special needs of women and children, including the problems of sexual and gender-based violence, and address the needs of the disabled. The Executive Committee Conclusion on "refugees with disabilities and other persons with disabilities protected and assisted by UNHCR" had met with approbation.

92. Concerns had been raised about States that were severely affected by natural disasters, such as Haiti and Pakistan, or where continuing conflict had contributed to large numbers of displaced persons such as in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and the Sudan. Many delegations had described the efforts they were undertaking to assist displaced persons in their own countries through programmes, projects, national legislation, or regional conferences. Of particular note had been the recent meeting of the African Union in Kampala, Uganda, which had resulted in the Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa.

*The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.*