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Chair: Mr. Grünwald (Vice-Chair) (Slovakia)
later: Mr. Marschik (Austria)

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In the absence of Mr. Marschik (Austria), Mr. Grünwald (Slovakia), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.

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

Agenda item 60: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions (A/78/12 (Part I), A/78/12 (Part II), A/78/12/Add.1, and A/78/183)

1. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), introducing his report (A/78/12), said that he echoed the calls of the Secretary-General for an immediate ceasefire, unhindered humanitarian access, the release of hostages, and an end to the deadly cycle of violence in Gaza. He also paid tribute to the humanitarian staff on the ground from the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, numerous non-governmental organizations, and in particular the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) staff, which had recently lost 67 staff members due to the violence. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) did not have a mandate to operate in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, but as a humanitarian organization, lamented the loss of Israeli and Palestinian civilian lives, and the extraordinary human suffering inflicted on the people of Gaza – half of which were children – by the Israeli military operation. Civilians and civilian infrastructure must be protected in line with international humanitarian law and adequate humanitarian assistance must reach civilians. The conflict threatened to destabilize other countries, including in the Middle East.

2. Despite media coverage predominantly focusing on the events in Israel and Gaza, UNHCR continually responded to multiple crises: deplorably, conflict, violence and persecution continued to kill, maim and displace civilians, often with an utter disregard for humanity and the basic laws of war. As of 2022, more than 114 million people had been forced from their homes as a result, compared to 110 million previously; nearly 90 per cent of those lived in low- and middle-income countries. It was unsurprising that with 114 million displaced persons, the world was unable to make meaningful progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and leaving no one behind. Conversely, genuine progress on the Goals would rapidly and dramatically reduce the number of displaced persons.

3. With the eruption of the 2023 Sudan conflict, more than 6 million people had been displaced, including well

over 1 million refugees, many fleeing into neighbouring countries that were already dangerously fragile. Chad, for instance, was a landlocked country on the front lines of the climate crisis and had seen its refugee population almost double to 1 million in just a few months. He urged the military leaders involved in the Sudan conflict to end the violence.

4. In many places, the growing number of forcibly displaced persons was a symptom of growing or unresolved conflict. For instance, violence continued unabated in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo, where nearly 1.5 million people had been uprooted in 2023 alone. Fighting and violations of international humanitarian law were widespread in parts of the Central Sahel, forcing people from their homes, including to coastal states in West Africa. Over 100,000 refugees had crossed to Armenia in just a few days in September 2023. Combined with conflict, the climate emergency had forced nearly 900,000 people from their homes in Somalia in 2023. Myanmar had seen over 400,000 people displaced by violence the same year, and the total number of internally displaced in the country had reached nearly 2 million, in addition of course to those who had sought refuge abroad, including the 1 million Rohingya people in Bangladesh. Behind every statistic, there was a heart-breaking story.

5. UNHCR was tasked with helping States to protect and assist each of those 114 million displaced individuals, working alongside partners from United Nations agencies, international and national non-governmental organizations, and an increasing number of refugee-led organizations. While the number of crises was growing, however, funding was not. Many suggested that prioritization was necessary, but he assured them that prioritization and streamlining were happening every day, given that projects rarely received more than 50 per cent of their approved budgets. New systems, tools and processes had been introduced; staffing structures had been realigned across Headquarters, regional bureaux and operations; posts were streamlined to maintain focus on delivery; and UNHCR was working closely with other agencies to rationalize expenditures wherever possible, such as with the integrated, unbranded fleet management service it co-led with the World Food Programme. In fact, more worrying than the financial situation of UNHCR was that of the entire humanitarian system, which was collectively at its breaking point. Humanitarian operations were sorely underfunded; the inability of States to prevent and end conflict ravaged the humanitarian agenda. While UNHCR faced a shortfall of \$600 million before the end of 2023, the outlook for 2024 was even more dire.

6. Although the efforts of UNCHR with the private sector had led to \$1.2 billion in revenue from individuals, companies and foundations in the last year, that was insufficient. He appealed to all, including donors in the Gulf Region and those whose multilateral contributions had declined or had never been substantial, to fund rather than cut humanitarian agencies at such a critical time. Meanwhile, however, cooperation with development partners in contexts of forced displacement had been strengthened. The World Bank, for example, increasingly supported host governments, which enabled the latter to include refugees in national programmes until they could return home voluntarily, safely and with dignity. Data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development showed that in 2020–2021, more than \$11 billion in development assistance from bilateral and multilateral banks had gone to refugee assistance, in addition to funding United Nations agencies and others through coordinated humanitarian appeals. Host countries should participate in such programmes, as they provided much-needed complements to purely humanitarian responses. He expressed gratitude to countries playing an important role in resettlement efforts, and to those working on complementary pathways like labour mobility programmes and scholarships and urged the international community to do more in that regard.

7. For many countries, inclusion remained a key priority. Progress had also been made in the reduction of statelessness, as in Kenya for example, where President Ruto had issued documentation conferring Kenyan nationality to members of the Pemba community who had long lived in the country. Kenya had also launched a groundbreaking plan that would shift from encampment to integrated settlements, bringing benefit to refugees and host communities alike. He called for strong international support for that critical plan, including as direct support to the Government of Kenya from bilateral and multilateral development actors.

8. Working in countries of origin likewise remained a priority. The Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees was an important platform: nearly 200,000 displaced Afghans and around 20,000 refugees had returned in the past 18 months, including to priority areas for return and reintegration. While the United Nations continued to argue for the reversal of national edicts, it provided more support to Afghans in need, especially women and girls. It was hoped that better resourced and more flexible funding for humanitarian operations would be found in Afghanistan, as well as in the countries hosting the largest number of Afghan refugees, especially the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan.

9. Solving displacement required rebuilding trust as well as ensuring safe conditions and the necessary resources. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the Government was urged to continue addressing protection considerations and supporting early recovery activities, enabling those who opted to return voluntarily to live dignified lives.

10. Work continued towards solutions in Myanmar, including for the Rohingya. Elsewhere, such as in Burundi, significant numbers of refugees could not find solutions owing to a lack of resources: more than 24,000 Burundian refugees had stated that they wished to return to Burundi, but the repatriation programme faced a shortfall of more than \$13 million.

11. Mixed flows were complicated, but solutions could be found beyond the simple slogans that worked well on social media but made no difference in reality. He encouraged focusing on a “whole of route” approach, in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM). As High Commissioner, he would continue to uphold his mandate and ensured that territorial access to seek asylum was maintained, as it was fundamental to international refugee law and reflected the principle of nonrefoulement, as enshrined in customary international law. It was unacceptable to externalize or outsource asylum obligations.

12. Tensions that had been brewing for many years had come to the fore following the COVID-19 pandemic and had been further inflamed by wars in Ukraine and Gaza. All parties were urged to put aside painful and sometimes justified grievances, and instead focus on protecting, helping and finding solutions for the 114 million people worldwide who had been forced to flee their homes. At the upcoming Global Refugee Forum, the international community was urged to show unity and work together to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.

13. **Mr. Poveda Brito** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), speaking on behalf of the Group of Friends in Defense of the Charter of the United Nations), said that the distinction used by UNHCR between refugees, migrants and asylum seekers was not reflected for Venezuela, where a single category of “Venezuelans displaced abroad” was used.

14. His delegation denounced the politicization and selectiveness applied to the situation in Venezuela. He asked the High Commissioner why the categories were not applied the same way as elsewhere, and what constituted displaced persons if international law was not applied. He also asked him to address the impact of unilateral coercive measures on refugees.

15. **Mr. Breen** (United States of America) said that the United States recognized the need to provide protection and deliver critical services to refugees. Education for minors was essential to breaking the cycle of poverty and displacement, as access to educational resources gave refugees the knowledge and skills to rebuild their lives. To that end, the United States had announced its “Welcome Corps on Campus” initiative, which allowed qualified refugee students to continue higher education in the United States while being sponsored by members of their new campus community. Refugee students participating in the innovative program would be processed through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, thus creating a pathway to permanent residency and citizenship in the United States. The program also allowed colleges and universities in the country to play a leading role in resettling refugee students and empowering them to achieve long-term success. He asked what partnerships UNHCR was pursuing to make educational services more widely available to refugees.

16. **Mr. Hauri** (Switzerland) said that respect for international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law formed the bedrock of the UNHCR mandate to protect displaced persons worldwide. While awaiting long-term solutions such as the safe and voluntary return of refugees to their countries of origin, host States must be supported to facilitate the socioeconomic inclusion of refugees within their national systems. Financing, investments and support should be further diversified in cooperation with the private sector to include in-kind contributions, professional training and employment. Given the growing impact of climate change, the international community must invest in mitigation, adaption and resilience-building measures. The upcoming Global Refugee Forum, co-hosted by Switzerland, would be an invaluable opportunity to mobilize efforts for an effective and coordinated response. His delegation asked what would be necessary to achieve such a response, despite increases in displaced persons and dwindling economic means.

17. **Mr. Faiq** (Afghanistan) said that the situation of Afghan refugees and migrants in neighbouring countries – especially the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan – required urgent attention. Afghan refugees had endured over four decades of forced displacement due to conflicts, violence, and both natural and manmade disasters in their homeland. Their plight was worsened by a lack of legal status, thus depriving them basic services and education (especially for children), and lawful employment for adults. The vulnerable situation of Afghan refugees also exposed them to arrests, detention, and persecution.

18. It was deeply concerning that Pakistan had chosen to deport unregistered Afghan refugees starting in November 2023. Pakistan was urged to reconsider, given continued persecution and insecurity in Afghanistan. He asked whether any actions had been taken with regard to the deportation of 1.4 million Afghan refugees from Pakistan and if there was truth to the reports of some Afghan refugees paying different or increased registration fees to work with UNHCR, noting that all refugee returns must be conducted in accordance with the universally agreed principle of voluntary, safe and dignified return.

19. **Mr. Pilipenko** (Belarus) said that in 2022, applications for protection in Belarus had grown fivefold. Belarus would continue to cooperate with the local UNHCR office in Minsk to create the appropriate conditions to host asylum-seekers and hoped that the joint initiative to create a new hosting centre would be successfully implemented. UNHCR had supported Belarus in adopting national legislation to accept Ukrainian refugees in recent years.

20. He would like to know what measures would be taken to ensure that the Global Refugee Forum was not politicized and that its broad focus was not replaced with narrow interests. His delegation noted that unilateral coercive measures had not been addressed in the current report and asked whether such measures would be added to the list of factors affecting refugees in the future.

21. **Mr. Rae** (Canada) said that the international community should not mistake the polite tone of the High Commissioner for a lack of gravity: the compounding effects of climate change and growing conflicts meant that the refugee crisis was devastating, especially for the poorest and most vulnerable members of society. He wondered whether it was necessary to think of new ways of raising money from the public, from governments, from elements in the United Nations system and from the private sector.

22. **Ms. Asaju** (Nigeria) said that refugees and internally displaced persons were among the most vulnerable populations, and their numbers were growing. The international community must collectively address the roots of the crisis through effective multilateralism, with a view to ensuring safety and dignity for the millions affected by war, climate change, conflict, poverty, inequality and natural disasters.

23. Conflict, violence and climate change had swelled the ranks of displaced persons in Africa to over 40 million. Alongside addressing the needs of refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless and internally displaced persons, the international community must also take

action with regard to the adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, inflation, climate change, food insecurity and rising energy and food costs. Given that more than 80 per cent of refugees were currently hosted by developing and least developed countries with limited resources and capacities, it was hoped that the Global Refugee Forum would strengthen the international commitment to responsibility-sharing.

24. **Ms. Almeida Marinho** (Portugal) said that the last decade had seen the number of people forced to flee their homes more than doubling worldwide, increasing from 51 million in 2013 to around 108 million in 2023. Population movements had also become more complex, with people travelling the same routes for different reasons, such as escaping conflict, lack of economic opportunity, food insecurity or climate change. Member States must promote the universal ratification of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951 Convention) and its 1967 Protocol, as well as implement the Global Compact on Refugees. The upcoming Global Forum on Refugees should be leveraged to make ambitious and transformative pledges in support of the UNHCR mandate and with a view to supporting not just immediate actions, but also services such as education, social protection and mental health support. Least developed countries, which accounted for less than 2 per cent of global domestic product, hosted more than 20 per cent of all refugees. It was therefore crucial to invest in complementary pathways for admission and resettlement policies to share the burden.

25. Noting that the report mentioned a new Global Alliance to End Statelessness, which would include the participation of stateless persons, she asked the High Commissioner to elaborate on the dynamics of that alliance to be launched in 2024.

26. **Ms. Skoczek** (Poland) said that as a member of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) board, her delegation appreciated the joint efforts undertaken with UNICEF to provide displaced children with psychosocial support. Similarly, her delegation welcomed the important role played by UNHCR in delivering complementary assistance to refugees in Ukraine and neighbouring countries; Poland remained a steadfast supporter of the agency's operations in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Syria as well.

27. In 2023, Poland had responded to UNHCR calls for assistance in the Sudan and Armenia; it thus appreciated the development of the Ukraine Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan (January–December 2023) by UNHCR. However, her delegation wondered how the regional refugee response plan would be funded in 2024. Prevention and anticipatory actions should be

prioritized in humanitarian efforts; in that light, she wished to hear examples of the successful implementation of the UNHCR Policy on Emergency Preparedness and Response.

28. **Ms. Arab Bafrani** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that it was deeply concerning that new waves of displaced persons and refugees were being prompted by war, with the situation of the Palestinian people gravely exacerbated by the actions of the occupying regime.

29. At the national level, Iranian authorities had worked to provide adequate services to Afghan refugees despite economic and financial constraints, extending the country's inclusive health and education policies to millions. Iran had already addressed statelessness through the reform of its national laws, which allowed the children of non-Iranian fathers and Iranian mothers to obtain citizenship.

30. In some cases, Iran had contributed more than its fair share to the hosting and supporting of refugees. Given the plight of refugees worldwide, the burden and responsibilities must be shared; the infrastructures of host communities were heavily overburdened. In addition, the situation had been exacerbated in Iran due to insufficient international assistance and the application of unilateral coercive measures. She asked the High Commissioner to evaluate the amount of humanitarian assistance provided to Iran, a country which hosted millions of Afghans and had repeatedly proven its willingness to help despite the obstacles posed by unilateral coercive measures.

31. **Mr. Feruță** (Romania) said that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was a rare example of coordination within the United Nations system. Romania had been working closely with UNHCR to provide support to millions of Ukrainian refugees. Member States were encouraged to provide more predictable funding: UNHCR had the means, tools, and skilled professionals in the field, but needed funding.

32. **Ms. Mudrenko** (Ukraine) said that 2022 had seen the largest yearly increase in displaced persons, mainly due to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation. Almost 20 months after the invasion, 5 million people had been displaced inside the country and another 6.2 million had sought safety abroad. Approximately 4.7 million Ukrainians had returned to their homes, 20 per cent of them from abroad. As the war continued, 70.6 million (or 40 per cent of the population) remained in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, while the Russian Federation fuelled the humanitarian crisis by repeatedly targeting civilian populations, critical infrastructures and humanitarian

workers and facilities. However, millions of Ukrainians had been reached with lifesaving assistance and protection services provided by UNHCR.

33. Her delegation asked UNHCR to continue engaging in humanitarian development action, supporting Ukraine's strategy and action plan for internal displacement, and to focus on programmes to support resilience, recovery and reintegration. It expressed deep concern about the hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians, including children, that had been unlawfully deported to the Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine.

34. **Mr. Mohamed** (Egypt) said that his delegation joined the call for an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, as well as immediate and unhindered humanitarian access to the area. It also shared the international community's concerns regarding the increase in the number of people forcibly displaced due to armed conflict, natural disasters, underdevelopment, poverty and lack of economic opportunities. Egypt continued to host over 350,000 refugees, in addition to more than 9 million migrants and other people in refugee-like conditions, while ensuring the access of all to basic services such as education and health care as part of its one-refugee policy approach.

35. As noted in the report, 76 per cent of global refugees were hosted by developing countries, which grappled with increased debt distress. Enhanced international support must be provided to developing countries to increase and sustain their hosting capacities to share the burden equitably. His delegation asked what methods could be used to identify innovative sources of financing for developing countries, especially within the context of the upcoming Global Refugee Forum. Any initiatives adopted must not, however, add further debt burdens to developing countries or further restrict their access to financing.

36. **Mr. Retalis** (Greece) said that individuals in need of international protection had reached record high numbers; his delegation asked how the High Commissioner planned to encourage Member States to do more for people in need of protection.

37. Greece was on the front lines of the refugee crisis, receiving large numbers of mixed arrivals. Relative to the size of its population, the country hosted a large number of refugees and asylum-seekers. With the support of the European Union and human rights defenders, the country had improved its hosting capacity and national asylum service. However, his delegation deplored the involvement of criminal smuggling networks that exploited human suffering along migratory routes, as well as the heinous

instrumentalization of migrants, in total disregard of international law.

38. **Mr. Hakobyan** (Armenia) said that behind each of the 114 million individuals affected by displacement worldwide, there was a unique story. Locally, 100,000 individuals had been displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh and found refuge in Armenia. His country stood ready to assist in the voluntary, safe and dignified return of Armenian refugees, and asked what mechanisms could be deployed to facilitate their return, since individuals would not return to their places of origin without meaningful international guarantees, given the circumstances.

39. **Ms. Monica** (Bangladesh) said that her delegation was alarmed by the global rise in displacement due to conflict, violence, humanitarian crises, climate change, natural disasters and human rights violations, as well as the rise in statelessness and the shrinking space available to for asylum-seekers. It commended the lead UNHCR had taken in humanitarian operations around the world, including the Rohingya camps in Bangladesh. It urged UNHCR to intensify efforts to engage with Myanmar and scale up its activities in Rakhine State, with a view to creating conditions that were conducive to the voluntary repatriation of the Rohingya minorities to their homeland.

40. Her delegation took note of the high security risk faced by humanitarian workers, particularly in active conflict situations, and of the horrific and indiscriminate attacks on humanitarian actors in Gaza. In light of the growing politicization of humanitarian access in conflict zones, she wondered about the future of humanitarian operations amid increasing conflict.

41. Although Bangladesh appreciated the generous support of donors reflected in the programme budget of UNHCR, it lamented that the unquantifiable contribution made by host countries remained unrecognized. Host countries bore immense burdens economically, environmentally, socially, politically, diplomatically and in terms of security risks. Such opportunity costs must be duly recognized in the spirit of responsibility-sharing. Her delegation felt that UNHCR could help to highlight the contributions of host countries by developing a comprehensive model that incorporated the unquantifiable costs borne by host countries, as well as by donor countries in some instances.

42. **Mr. Hachem** (Lebanon) said that although UNHCR did not promote or facilitate refugee returns to the Syrian Arab Republic, it assisted local communities receiving returnees; his delegation encouraged that

approach and asked for more information on how UNHCR assisted local communities.

43. **Ms. Samai** (Algeria) said that her delegation was deeply concerned about increasing numbers of African refugees, especially as a result of conflict. Addressing the root causes of conflict was essential to ensure the safe and voluntary return of refugees to their countries of origin. Mobilizing the necessary resources was nonetheless a significant challenge for the international community, especially given the shifting priorities of certain donors. An innovative approach to resource mobilization that involved the private sector would be needed to mitigate the deteriorating refugee situation in Africa – a situation that could have devastating consequences for the stability and security of the continent.

44. The Global Refugee Forum would be an occasion for the international community to renew its collective commitment to refugees and elaborate policies to comprehensively address all aspects of displacement through a development-centred approach. Her delegation inquired about the methodology that UNHCR would employ to measure the impact of hosting refugees. It also wondered how a non-earmarked contribution funding model could impact the work of the agency on the ground.

45. **Ms. Zhang** Sisi (China) said that the global refugee situation remained dire, and international humanitarian relief was under considerable strain. For that reason, the international community must act urgently and responsibly to uphold multilateralism, adhere to the principle of responsibility-sharing and support UNHCR in coordinating its efforts aimed at alleviating pressures on host countries, assisting countries of origin in restoring peace and developing their economies and enhancing refugee self-reliance.

46. The international community, particularly developed countries, should fulfil its commitments by providing financial and technical assistance to host countries. UNHCR should continue to increase its support for and ease the suffering of refugees and forcibly displaced persons in regions including Palestine, Syria, Afghanistan and large parts of Africa. Her Government had consistently attached importance to the issue of refugees by supporting UNHCR in playing a coordinating role to provide protection to refugees and strengthen humanitarian assistance.

47. **Ms. Ahangari** (Azerbaijan) said that refugees and internally displaced persons were among the most vulnerable, and the international community had a shared responsibility to ensure the safety and dignity of those affected by natural disasters, violent conflict and

lack of development, as well as to find a durable solution that included the right to return.

48. Her delegation lamented that the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees had neglected to address the rights of 200,000 Armenian refugees prevented from returning home, as well as the rights of 700,000 internally displaced Azerbaijanis, most of whom likewise could not return home as their homes had been razed to the ground during the occupation and littered with landmines. Enabling the right of return of ethnic Azerbaijanis to their homes should be at the centre of international efforts to restore justice and peace and ensure reconciliation.

49. **Mr. Elhamriti** (Morocco) said that Africa was not responsible for the increasing numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons but bore its disproportionate impact, with the continent hosting one third of the global forced displacement population. His delegation was alarmed that the UNHCR was facing a funding gap of 42 per cent of its budget.

50. Precise data regarding the registration of refugees and returned persons was necessary to develop appropriate policies; to that end, his delegation urged cooperation between UNHCR and the Office of Statistics so they could expand beyond the data that was voluntarily provided by Member States. He asked the High Commissioner to describe how it might be possible to conduct a census of refugees living in camps controlled by armed non-State actors, especially in conflict areas. His delegation also noted with concern the diversion of public funds in certain situations.

51. **Ms. Idres** (Sudan) said that her delegation wondered about the most effective method to address humanitarian needs in the context of the large-scale displacement in the Sudan. With regard to the protection of children and their access to education, the Sudan had expanded opportunities for learning and increased technical assistance to strengthen the resilience and life skills of children. Measures had also been taken to improve health services for women and children with locally sustainable solutions. Her delegation asked about the main obstacles facing the implementation of the commitments made at the 2023 UNHCR Pledging Conference and what steps should be taken next.

52. **Ms. Qureshi** (Pakistan) said that protecting and supporting refugees was the collective responsibility of the international community and must not conveniently be relegated to neighbouring countries alone. Even though it was not a signatory to the 1951 Convention, Pakistan had done more than its share by hosting 4 million refugees over the last four decades. It would

also continue to facilitate the repatriation of Afghan citizens to third countries.

53. However, regulating inward and outward movement was the sovereign right of each State. The national plan approved to repatriate all illegal foreigners was an instrument to that end, adopting a holistic and realistic approach to the phased and time-bound repatriation of all illegal foreigners in Pakistan, without discriminating against any specific nationalities. The plan did not apply to individuals registered in Pakistan, such as Afghan refugees with proof of registration or citizen cardholders. The repatriation of illegal aliens was a purely administrative matter of national law and should not be interpreted otherwise.

54. **Mr. Khairunsyah** (Indonesia) said that the number of people fleeing persecution was growing every year: his delegation called on all countries to live up to their international obligations under the 1951 Convention.

55. Indonesia continued to provide humanitarian assistance to refugees transiting through its territory, with 2016 regulations guiding concrete measures to provide assistance. While energy and resources might be allocated to care for refugees, prolonged conflicts continued to increase forced displacements. In Palestine, hundreds of thousands of refugees had been displaced, most of them women and children. His delegation urged the international community to end the cycle of violence.

56. **Mr. Altarsha** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the issue of Syrian refugees was a painful and complicated one affecting many countries. While a specific set of factors had originally driven people out of the country, it was necessary to rebuild the environment for their dignified return. No families would return to destroyed houses and schools or to a landscape with zero services. However, collective efforts were needed to rebuild: the Syrian Arab Republic was therefore cooperating with UNHCR to find solutions.

57. **Ms. Banakan Elel** (Cameroon) said that strengthening education could provide valuable opportunities for refugees and host children alike; her delegation asked what strategies UNHCR had implemented to ensure access to education for both internally displaced and refugee children, including the use of information and communication technologies, and what the upcoming Global Refugee Forum could offer in that regard.

58. Complementary pathways were necessary to find legal avenues for those in need of international protection to go to a third country; she asked how the

agency could further assist countries in lifting barriers to family reunification. She would also like to know how existing partnerships with development agencies and international financial institutions to facilitate the passage from a humanitarian agenda to a development-centred one could be strengthened.

59. **Ms. Lassen** (Denmark), speaking also on behalf of the Nordic countries, said that the agency's increasing funding gap was greatly concerning. Denmark was proud to provide unearmarked, flexible and multi-year funding that allowed UNHCR to respond quickly and where the need was greatest. Denmark had also had the privilege of facilitating the drafting of the annual UNHCR omnibus resolution, which would facilitate the agency's fulfilment of its humanitarian and non-political mandate; it thanked all Member States for the consensual outcome and encouraged them to show unity and solidarity.

60. With regard to the upcoming Global Refugee Forum, her delegation asked what the desired outcomes might be, and how to sustain momentum afterwards.

61. **Ms. Blackett** (Observer for the Sovereign Order of Malta) said that the Sovereign Order of Malta was committed to alleviating the plight of refugees, providing resources and assistance in Bangladesh, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, Nigeria, Türkiye, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Ukraine. Working in collaboration with local partners, its humanitarian relief agency Malteser International provided psychosocial support, medical care and vocational training. Its comprehensive approach helped to empower refugee women and prioritized engagement with local entities to alleviate daily struggles. Given that low- and middle-income countries hosted 83 per cent of the world's refugee population, she asked how UNHCR could encourage greater capacity and responsibility-sharing without exacerbating the financial burdens of hosting nations.

62. *Mr. Marschik (Austria) took the Chair.*

63. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), responding to the representative of Bangladesh, said that the situation in Gaza had once again highlighted the risk to which humanitarian workers were exposed, leading to the death of 67 UNRWA staff members. It was important to reiterate that international humanitarian law prohibited targeting civilians and humanitarian workers. Donors should also provide more investment in staff security.

64. He agreed with the representative of Canada that the existing model faced incredible challenges and that new models were needed, using as an example recent

UNHCR cooperation with the World Bank and other international financial institutions. When host countries were cooperative and accessed development funding, extraordinary progress was possible, allowing for the spread of benefits between refugees and host countries. He agreed with the representative of Egypt, however, that there was a cost to some development funding provided through loans; the World Bank was working to strike an equitable balance between concessional loans and grants. He also cited the more systematic use of Islamic funding as another possible avenue.

65. Responding to the representative from Algeria, he agreed that unearmarked funding was vital and sorely lacking: in 2022, unearmarked funding had only accounted for 12 per cent of the total money given to UNHCR and the agency faced a dramatic shortfall of \$600 million before the end of the year. He therefore urged Member States to provide unearmarked funding, including at the upcoming pledging conference so that the actions of UNHCR were not unduly constrained.

66. At the Global Refugee Forum, lessons learned would be shared, alongside new ideas and models, between Member States as well as international organizations, academia, the private sector and refugee-led organizations. In preparation for the Forum, his Office had issued the Indicator Report 2023, which contained answers to some of the questions asked regarding the impact of refugees in host countries, how to better measure host country contributions, and progress made towards responsibility-sharing.

67. With regard to the point about avoiding the politicization of the Forum made by the representative of Belarus, he reminded Member States that they were the ones who must avoid politicizing the refugee issue: UNHCR did not politicize its work.

68. He thanked the United States of America for its extraordinary financial contribution, which remained by far the largest of all Member States, even despite a small reduction compared to 2022 due to funding challenges. He also appreciated the country's improvements to its resettlement programme, a model that involved greater participation from local communities and which had inspired Canada and other countries.

69. Refugee education was a priority of UNHCR, as the percentage of refugees enrolled in primary, secondary and tertiary education remained much lower than those for non-refugee children. Although progress had been made in that regard, the COVID-19 pandemic had created setbacks and investment was needed from development organizations. The 15 by 30 Roadmap was a special UNHCR campaign to achieve 15 per cent

enrolment of refugees in higher education, up from only 2 per cent just a few years earlier.

70. Responding to the representative from Portugal on the issue of statelessness, he noted that UNHCR was at the end of the #IBelong campaign to end statelessness, launched in 2014. The road to eliminating statelessness was long and arduous, but the gains of the campaign should be leveraged to launch a voluntary alliance and keep making progress.

71. Thanking the representative of Switzerland for addressing the enormous impact of climate change on global displacement trends, he expressed hope that the connection between conflict and climate would be a key point on the agenda of the twenty-eighth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and would translate into concrete mitigation strategies.

72. He reiterated the proposal to open a working table with UNHCR, IOM and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to discuss differences of opinion regarding definitions and statistics.

73. Agreeing with the representative from the Islamic Republic of Iran, he noted that the international community must continue to support the country in hosting millions of Afghan refugees, the numbers of which had only increased following the Taliban takeover of Kabul.

74. Taking note of the security concerns expressed by the representative of Pakistan, he nevertheless called for the issue of unregistered Afghans to be dealt with humanely, bearing in mind that most unregistered refugees would still face dangerous conditions when repatriated. UNHCR would continue to discuss the issue constructively with Pakistan.

75. The return of refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh could only occur under safe and voluntary conditions as part of a broader political agreement, which fell outside the mandate of UNHCR; however, the agency remained available to assist with the right of return as it had since the beginning of the conflict 30 years prior. Although the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh ceasefire agreement had tasked UNHCR with helping returnees, the agency had never been able to implement its mandate due to continuing hostilities.

76. Regarding the situation in the Sudan, the most important issue was accessing populations in need. UNHCR needed more support from the Government of the Sudan to overcome bureaucratic impediments and ensure security in conflict zones. Children were the most impacted by the fighting: although the international community appeared to have moved on, the abuse being

perpetrated on women and children in Darfur was just as dire as it had been 20 years earlier.

77. He agreed with the representative of Morocco that it was important to have accurate and precise statistics regarding the people being helped and reiterated the availability of UNHCR to help in that regard.

78. There were two elements needed for a refugee population to return: its country of origin must regain that population's trust, including by ensuring security, resolving property issues and providing sufficient resources; in parallel, the international community must assist with early recovery. UNHCR would continue to work with the Syrian Arab Republic to ensure both of those elements. With regard to Ukrainian refugees, the agency's strategy was to focus on the acute problem of internal displacement within the country. However, it would also continue to operate in host countries such as Moldova and would pivot to wherever the need was greatest.

79. He gave special thanks to the Nordic countries and Denmark specifically for their consistent and strong support, including financing, and their work as facilitators steering the omnibus resolution. He hoped that the draft resolution would again be adopted by consensus as it had been previously in 2021.

80. **Mr. Skoog** (Observer for the European Union) said that the European Union and its member States shared concerns about the growing challenges faced by refugees, internally displaced and stateless persons, asylum seekers and host communities and condemned the rising number of violations of international humanitarian law. Collective effort was needed to support and ensure the dignity of forcibly displaced persons. Humanitarian access and spaces must be safeguarded, and the safety of aid and medical workers must be ensured by parties to conflict, whether State or non-State actors.

81. In 2022, total humanitarian aid contributions by the European Union and its member States reached 12.2 billion euros, which represented 30 per cent of global humanitarian funding. Most was allocated to projects addressing the needs of forcibly displaced persons and host communities. Earlier in 2023, they had adopted commitments to mobilize more resources, improve performance, reduce needs and reach out to emerging and potential humanitarian donors, and they had reaffirmed their commitment to provide at least 0.7 per cent of collective gross national income as official development assistance by 2030.

82. The right to seek and enjoy asylum and the principle of non-refoulement remained at the heart of

European law, policy and action. The European Union and its member States had contributed to a sizeable part of global resettlement efforts, and they were grateful to governments and host communities that had generously taken in forcibly displaced persons worldwide. The upcoming second Global Refugee Forum in 2023 would be an important stepping stone for all actors to mobilize renewed and enhanced commitment and cooperation to jointly solve the plight of refugees. The Forum should bring transformational pledges and new policy commitments that would result in sustainable, positive change. Progress should be tangible and monitored, and pledges, particularly multistakeholder pledges, were key. There should be sufficient space for the exchange of ideas, lessons learned and experiences, including from refugees themselves.

83. The European Union and its member States appreciated that UNHCR had continued its business transformation programme, improved its oversight system and provided data on the global implications of underfunding. They invited UNHCR to further broaden the donor base and enhance synergies, especially through joined-up approaches with various other United Nations organizations.

84. **Mr. Poveda Brito** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), speaking on behalf of the Group of Friends in Defence of the Charter of the United Nations, said that the Group attached particular importance to the mandate of UNHCR given that the global political, economic, social and environmental dynamics of recent decades had triggered major emergencies requiring international protection for thousands of people forced to flee their places of origin for reasons beyond their control. In that context, and in the light of the gravity of the situation on the ground, the Group called for the urgent adoption of measures to provide international protection for the heroic Palestinian people, who had endured years of brutal aggression, at least until the prevailing cycle of impunity was broken and those responsible for heinous crimes were brought to international justice.

85. The best guarantee for ensuring sustained progress towards a more peaceful and secure world, in which development and human rights were a reality, was full adherence to the spirit in which the United Nations had been established, as clearly enshrined in the purposes and principles of its founding Charter, including the promotion of friendly and cooperative relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights, self-determination and the resolution of disputes through dialogue. Those political foundations, however, were being increasingly threatened by the advent of unilateralist tendencies that progressively sought to

undermine the effectiveness of multilateralism as the best way of addressing major global challenges and threats, which, in many cases, were common to all. To ensure the success of its mandate, UNHCR should fully adhere to the guiding principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and operational independence, as defined in General Assembly resolution 46/182. It was only through full coordination and national ownership, in a context of maximum transparency, that UNHCR activities would have the necessary legitimacy to avoid any risk of being politically exploited by external actors, which would ultimately only undermine trust and call into question the credibility of the United Nations specialized agencies, programmes and funds.

86. The Group considered unilateralism, extremism, exceptionalism and foreign interventionism to be one of the main sources of the global crises that led to massive human displacement around the world, with political instability in some regions of the world being the primary cause. In many cases, moreover, such displacement was motivated by economic interests. At no point was consideration given to the negative impact of such approaches on the human rights of the population subjected to such violations, including on the most vulnerable. The political, economic and social impact of the systematic campaign of unilateral coercive measures against entire peoples, in contravention of all norms of international law, represented the most sophisticated cause of global human displacement emergencies, depriving more than one third of humanity of the full enjoyment and realization of their human rights, undermining the economies of the countries subject to those criminal measures and even hampering national efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The motivation of unilateral coercive measures was purely political, and they entailed consequences that would otherwise be avoidable. The High Commissioner for Refugees should speak out unequivocally against those policies and practices that constituted a blatant affront to the spirit of the Charter.

87. Human action based on a model of unequal economic accumulation and exploitation of resources had exacerbated the current climate catastrophe and triggered natural phenomena of atypical proportions, including floods, heat and cold waves, hurricanes and other unprecedented disasters. Unfortunately, those circumstances also gave rise to mobility crises that must be addressed through solidarity and cooperation, on the basis of a global, coherent and concerted response and within the framework of effective and inclusive multilateralism, for which the Group reaffirmed its full

support and in which the United Nations was called upon to play a central role.

88. The Group emphasized that the assistance provided by the United Nations in the context of humanitarian emergencies constituted one of the Organization's most critical tasks, both because of the great demand for financial resources and because of the technical expertise and high-risk operational capacity it required on the ground, which also made it particularly politically and socially sensitive. The Group therefore urged all parties involved to fulfil their functions and operate in strict compliance with the relevant national and international legislation and prevent their work from being misused for economic or commercial advantage by some sectors interested not only in profiting from human tragedies but also in prolonging them indefinitely; an immoral practice that the Group strongly condemned.

89. Lastly, he reaffirmed the Group's willingness to collaborate at the regional, national and international levels. It was important to address issues inherent to the mandate of UNHCR from a human rights perspective, avoiding at all times the politicization of the sacred concept of refuge.

90. **Ms. Rasmussen** (Denmark), speaking on behalf of the Nordic Countries, said that 2023 had marked a sad milestone, with long-standing conflicts, instability and climate change and natural hazards driving record high numbers of forcibly displaced persons around the world. The Nordic countries were thankful for the generosity shown by host countries and for the work of the High Commissioner and UNHCR staff who had carried out their work under difficult circumstances.

91. In that context, those delegations underlined that international humanitarian law must be respected by all parties to conflict, and humanitarian access to and protection of civilians must be ensured. In the previous decade, the international community had taken important steps by adopting both the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Global Compact on Refugees, which guided its work towards sustainable development and solving the plight of refugees.

92. The Nordic countries remained fully committed to the principle of solidarity and international burden- and responsibility-sharing. They welcomed continued efforts by UNHCR to strengthen and advocate for the protection of refugees, as well as its continued focus on preventing, mitigating and responding to sexual and gender-based violence. They wished to underline the importance of UNHCR applying its age, gender and diversity approach across its operations; that was key to

ensuring that responses were free of discrimination and truly inclusive to all persons in vulnerable situations.

93. Increasingly complex drivers of displacement and more protracted crises made humanitarian-development-peace nexus approaches critical. Those delegations welcomed and encouraged the continued strategic focus by UNHCR on expanding partnerships with development actors, including the World Bank, the International Finance Corporation and other international financial institutions. They commended the increased focus on climate action, called on UNHCR to further step up its efforts in that regard and welcomed its increased focus on addressing mixed movement.

94. Over half of all people under the mandate of UNHCR were internally displaced persons. The Nordic countries acknowledged the work of UNHCR to protect and provide assistance to those people and were pleased by its commitment to the implementation of the action agenda and the work of the Special Advisor on solutions to internal displacement. The second Global Refugee Forum in 2023 marked an opportunity to step up collective efforts at a policy and operational level in order to strengthen the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees. Those delegations were committed to doing their part to make the Forum a success.

95. **Ms. Al Jaradi** (Oman), speaking on behalf of the Gulf Cooperation Council, said that their delegations remained committed to providing aid and relief to refugees, in line with the principles set forth in the true Islamic faith, whose integral tenets included fraternity, charity and tolerance. They were concerned that the number of refugees under the mandate of UNHCR worldwide had risen by 35 per cent from 2021 to the end of 2022.

96. The Gulf Cooperation Council condemned the activities carried out in the territory of Palestine, occupied illegally by Israel, called upon the international community to take all necessary measures to prevent the deportation of the people of Gaza and completely rejected any plans or directives on the part of Israel to deport the people of Palestine. It called for the full protection of displaced persons in Gaza, who were suffering from indiscriminate shelling, and emphasized the importance of reaching an immediate ceasefire.

97. The international community should unite to protect and support refugees and forcibly displaced persons around the world and alleviate their suffering. The Gulf Cooperation Council applauded all efforts made by Member States to support and provide relief to refugees, and they emphasized the importance of

making all efforts to ensure medical and food support for refugees and forcibly displaced persons through continued collaboration with UNHCR.

98. **Ms. Banaken Elel** (Cameroon), speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, said that the Group was gravely concerned about the rising number of refugees and displaced persons in various parts of the African continent. It emphasized the need to develop a holistic approach to addressing large population movements that took into account the underlying causes of displacement. The African continent was home to more than one third of the world's forcibly displaced persons, including more than 6 million asylum-seekers and refugees and almost 15 million internally displaced persons. In that context, the Group appreciated the work that UNHCR and other agencies had undertaken across Africa to ensure that displaced persons had access to protection and asylum, provide life-saving assistance and reduce and prevent statelessness.

99. In February 2023, the African Union adopted the statutes of the African Humanitarian Agency, thereby facilitating the eventual operationalization of that Agency. In central Africa, efforts were ongoing to finalize a joint multi-year plan to implement the solution-focused partnership between UNHCR and the Economic Community of West African States. The Group was concerned that several national humanitarian programmes remained substantially underfunded. It was crucial that the global burden- and responsibility-sharing mechanism be enhanced to fund durable solutions that took into account the impact of ongoing global food, energy, economic and financial crises, as well as the adverse effects of climate change. In that regard, the Group called for increased international solidarity and renewed political commitment to address the challenges of financing and creating an enabling environment for sustainable development and economic growth, particularly in developing countries, which hosted the greatest share of refugees. The increased number of refugees and displaced persons on the African continent had raised concerns about pressure on the health, education, infrastructure and social services resources of African countries.

100. The Group reaffirmed the importance of the Global Compact on Refugees and recognized the centrality of the principles of national solidarity and burden- and responsibility-sharing in its implementation. It looked forward to the second Global Refugee Forum, which would allow participating States to take stock of pledges and initiatives made since 2019 and would provide an opportunity to share best practices for burden- and responsibility-sharing to facilitate comprehensive responses.

101. **Mr. Mohamed** (Egypt) said that global crises had led to a growing number of refugees worldwide. Those refugees faced myriad challenges during their displacement and their search for international protection under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. They were waiting for an end to the crisis of funding, for greater sustainable development in their countries of origin and for conditions that would allow their voluntary return to their countries of origin or their acceptance in host countries, which would allow them to work, study or reunite with their families.

102. Egypt continued to host more than 350,000 refugees and 1 million migrants. As part of his country's unified refugee policy, refugees and asylum-seekers received protection and access to public services, including health care and education, on an equal footing with Egyptian citizens. They were also guaranteed freedom of movement and were not confined to refugee camps. In cooperation with the United Nations Resident Coordinator to Egypt and United Nations agencies and development partners, his Government had launched the Joint Platform for Migrants and Refugees in 2021 to mobilize resources in order to enhance social inclusion.

103. Coordinated international efforts were needed to find lasting solutions and account for the humanitarian aspects of the refugee crisis. More equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing was needed to allocate resources and meet the needs of refugees and their host countries. The principles of the Global Compact on Refugees should be implemented in order to ensure the reintegration of refugees and the resolution of issues in host countries that would facilitate their voluntary return. Political instability led to influxes of refugees and undermined sustainable development in the countries of origin.

104. The alarming decline in funding for UNHCR imperilled the sustainability of its operations, requiring the international community to increase its financial support for UNHCR. Efforts should not be limited to the short term; worsening humanitarian challenges and rising influxes of refugees compelled the international community to provide funding in the medium and long term. His delegation looked forward to the second Global Refugee Forum in 2023, which would provide opportunities to implement commitments and assume new duties related to resolving the refugee crisis.

105. **Mr. Hachem** (Lebanon) said that the Syrian conflict and the ensuing displacement crisis had taken a heavy toll on his country, which continued to host more than 2 million Syrian refugees. Despite his country's efforts in regional and international forums to warn of the existential threat that such a burden constituted to

Lebanon and the region, no progress had been made in addressing the issue effectively and sustainably.

106. In 2023, Syria had returned to the League of Arab States, and negotiations between Syria and Türkiye had begun. However, that had not benefitted the Syrian people. Over 42 per cent of the population in Lebanon was displaced Syrians, and an estimated 1,500 additional people entered Lebanon illegally each day. In certain governorates, there were more displaced persons than Lebanese citizens, and there were three Syrian live births for every one birth to Lebanese citizens. The Syrian displacement issue presented a major threat and concern to his Government. The UNHCR strategy of providing assistance to displaced persons living in Lebanese territories and withholding it if they returned to Syria was destroying the people and the economy of Lebanon. His country could no longer shoulder the \$5 billion annual burden of hosting displaced Syrians.

107. Most Syrian refugees in Lebanon were not politically oppressed, and, following the end of hostilities, it was time for them to return home. The international community should cooperate with the Governments of Lebanon and Syria in that process. UNHCR and the international community should reconsider their plans for displaced Syrians in Lebanon and provide them with incentives to return to Syria. The situation was a ticking time bomb; the Lebanese Government and the United Nations needed to find solutions that would provide relief to Lebanon.

108. **Ms. Zhang** Sisi (China) said that the global refugee situation had continued to deteriorate, and there was a severe funding gap for humanitarian relief. Rising xenophobia directed toward refugees, coupled with most refugees being concentrated in developing countries, placed a significant burden on the economies, social development and security of those countries. A comprehensive approach should be taken in ensuring refugee protection and enhancing refugee self-reliance while also providing solutions, focusing on addressing the peace and development issues in the countries of origin, promoting peace talks, increasing development assistance and creating conditions for the refugees to return home.

109. Low- and middle-income countries were bearing the burden of hosting 76 per cent of refugees; other countries must shoulder responsibility and increase their contributions. Developed countries should fulfil their aid commitments, and those countries that were primarily responsible for the refugee issue should provide greater assistance. Humanitarian issues should not be politicized, and the protection of civilians should be a top priority for all involved parties. Ideological and

geopolitical considerations should be abandoned, and the parties involved should make every effort to avoid humanitarian disasters.

110. Her delegation expressed deep sympathy for the people of Gaza and called for an end to all hostilities and the realization of a humanitarian ceasefire. Israel, as the occupying power, should fulfil its obligations under humanitarian law by lifting the comprehensive blockade on Gaza, immediately rescinding evacuation orders, restoring the supply of essential goods and preventing an even larger human-made disaster.

111. **Mr. Vichankaiyakij** (Thailand) said that it was alarming that over 108 million people were displaced worldwide, representing an increase of 19 million people since 2022. The spirit of burden- and responsibility-sharing much be upheld and reenergized. The upcoming second Global Refugee Forum, to be held in December 2023, would be an important opportunity to demonstrate global solidarity for displaced persons and their host communities. His delegation hoped that preparatory meetings such as the High-Level Meeting on Rohingya Refugees would enhance the synergy and complementarity of the international community's efforts. In the case of the Rohingyas, Bangladesh and other regional transit countries should not be left to carry the responsibilities on their own.

112. Conflict-induced displacement required humanitarian assistance, and its underlying causes must be addressed. In line with its humanitarian tradition, Thailand had continued to provide assistance and shelter to those fleeing conflicts from the neighbouring region. It was committed to upholding the principle of non-refoulement as enshrined in the Act on the Prevention and Suppression of Torture and Enforced Disappearance. His delegation encouraged the international community to do more with regard to conflict prevention and resolution, peacebuilding and development and the prevention and resolution of protracted conflict situations.

113. Thailand had recently launched a national screening mechanism for persons fleeing persecution; those recognized as protected persons under the mechanism would be granted access to health care and, in the case of children, to education. In that pilot phase, his Government was counting on the expertise and support of UNHCR, especially with regard to capacity building and the strengthening of the mechanism's infrastructure. It also welcomed cooperation with other countries and partners in those areas and in facilitating resettlement. His Government remained committed to ensuring that children born in Thailand could be registered and receive birth certificates and hoped that

the international community would join it in guaranteeing access to legal identity documents and essential public services.

114. **Ms. Mendoza Elguea** (Mexico) said that her country had a long tradition of welcoming refugees, including South Americans escaping dictatorships in the 1970s and Central Americans fleeing war in the 1980s and early 1990s. Violence, political crises and the impacts of natural disasters had led to an influx of refugees in Mexico, which had gradually become a final destination for refugees because of some of the policies in countries that had historically been destination countries. Unfortunately, some of those refugees had become victims of organized crime in her country due to their vulnerability.

115. Mexico had adapted to constant migration changes by receiving the fourth highest number of asylum applications of any country, making efforts to establish two additional offices of the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance on the southern border, seeking to enhance bilateral agreements with the United States of America to establish safe routes for asylum-seekers and managing humanitarian permits.

116. Underlying structural causes must be addressed to effectively manage flows of refugees, and international cooperation must be an integral part of any strategy. To that end, her country had offered to cooperate with Member States through the establishment of social programmes, projects relating to energy and natural resources and a medicines agency for Latin America and the Caribbean. Mexico was eager to cooperate closely with UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration and its neighbours to the north and south.

117. Humanitarian aid to address the needs of refugees and host and transit countries was essential, but it was not enough to address underlying structural issues. The search for solutions must be comprehensive and begin with a commitment to respecting international law, protecting civilians and ending conflicts. Institutional capacity needed to be strengthened in order to extend international protection, expand international dialogue and collaboration and encourage greater involvement of development actors in achieving durable solutions. Mexico would ensure that the forthcoming second Global Refugee Forum would provide an opportunity for the international community to effectively implement the Global Compact on Refugees and strengthen the shared responsibilities of the international community.

118. **Mr. Rae** (Canada) said that the international community needed to reaffirm its commitment to the foundations of human rights. Collective efforts were

needed to address humanitarian needs through investment, address good governance and respect for human rights, mitigate the effects of climate change, reduce conflict and ensure a broader respect for humanitarian law. Those efforts were particularly important in a context where growing shortages in humanitarian funding forced partners such as UNHCR to make impossible decisions when it came to prioritizing their work.

119. Despite the economic and institutional challenges they faced, low- and middle-income countries had displayed enormous generosity in hosting almost 76 per cent of the world's displaced population. In that context, leveraging all opportunities with humanitarian development and peace actors to foster community resiliency was key to promoting durable solutions. No solution was sustainable without the meaningful participation of refugees, whose voices and expertise should be centred in all aspects of policy planning, decision making and implementation. Engaging refugee-led organizations through localized humanitarian responses and advocacy, protection and service provisions had transformative potential in terms of optimizing response reach, legitimacy and efficacy. Its recently introduced economic mobility programme had allowed Canada to benefit from refugee expertise in shaping its own policies and programmes to discharge its commitments under the Global Compact on Refugees.

120. His delegation called for strength, international cooperation and equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing. The rights of refugees, internally displaced persons, stateless people and the generous countries that hosted them should be respected as a shared commitment to justice, compassion and dignity for all.

121. **Mr. Jadoon** (Pakistan) said that the triple crisis of the coronavirus disease, climate change and conflict had continued to exacerbate the problem of record levels of refugees and displaced persons, which demanded more robust and collective efforts to meet the growing needs for protection and to forge durable solutions through the implementation of all international commitments, including the Global Compact on Refugees.

122. Pakistan had generously hosted Afghan refugees for more than four decades. In 2023, more than 1.4 million registered Afghan refugees and approximately 900,000 Afghan Citizen Card holders lived in his country. The refugee population received protection and access to public services, including health care, education and employment opportunities, on an equal footing with citizens of Pakistan, and no Afghan refugees were under any threat of being involuntarily

repatriated. His Government remained committed to the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees, welcomed pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum in 2019 and urged the honouring of those pledges. Pakistan looked forward to actively participating in the second Forum, and hoped that tangible commitments would be made.

123. To support refugees in developing countries like Pakistan and their host communities, it was critical to reach out to new partner States and institutions for enhanced humanitarian funding. While devising its global operations policies, UNHCR should be sensitive to local and regional requirements of host countries regarding the implementation of those policies. Developing countries were shouldering a disproportionate amount of the responsibility for refugees. Development financing instruments needed to be redesigned and implemented in a manner that did not worsen the already existing high debt burdens of host countries and erode the principle of equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing. Countries, particularly in the global North, should establish multi-year resettlement schemes, and developed countries should open legal and regular migration pathways for citizens of countries that were facing humanitarian emergencies.

124. It was beyond the capacities of UNHCR and other international organizations to manage the ever-increasing number of displaced people across the globe. Voluntary repatriation to and reintegration in countries of origin was the only durable solution to protracted refugee situations. To increase voluntary return and reintegration, the international community should introduce fully funded policies and programmes for repatriation; increase official development assistance for countries of origin and enable them to receive returnees; invest in developing infrastructure and introducing programmes for creating livelihood opportunities; and lift sanctions for providing unhindered humanitarian assistance.

125. **Mr. Pilipenko** (Belarus) said that the UNHCR mandate was becoming more and more relevant due to the increase in the number of refugees and internally displaced persons, both regionally and globally. The reasons for those increases included armed conflict, inequality between developed and developing countries and a food security crisis that had been triggered, inter alia, by the sanctions policy of a well-known group of States. Belarus was working to create mechanisms to effectively discharge its international commitments under the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. His delegation was grateful to UNHCR and its office in Minsk for their assistance with the functioning of the institution of asylum in Belarus. UNHCR had helped

Belarus to adapt its national legislation and practices to take in refugees from Ukraine in 2014, 2022 and 2023. Effectively resolving the refugee issue was impossible without systemic and constructive cooperation among countries of origin, transit and destination. It was counterproductive to block cooperation in that area for political purposes.

126. His delegation was concerned about the dangerous trend of legitimizing measures taken in certain countries, in contravention of international standards, to discriminate against refugees on the basis of race and ethnicity and restrict their right to apply for asylum and international protection. UNHCR should decisively condemn discrimination and the violation of refugees' human rights, as well as work actively to support constructive dialogue and cooperation among all affected States. Belarus supported the approaches in the Global Compact on Refugees and was convinced that only constructive cooperation among Member States to implement the provisions of the Compact could create the necessary frameworks to adequately prevent and respond to problems.

127. In future reports, UNHCR should assess the impact of unilateral coercive measures on its ability to effectively support refugees.

128. **Ms. Moruke** (South Africa) said that her country's history of institutionalized, racially-based discrimination, which had been exacerbated by multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination including age, gender and diversity, had shaped her Government's understanding of international refugee law. It was understood from a foundational perspective to mean that everyone had the right to life, liberty and security, as articulated in Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

129. Her delegation remained concerned that of the 110 million persons of concern in the UNHCR report (A/78/183), 41 million were hosted in Africa, which was grossly affected by the ongoing global food, energy, economic and financial crises, as well as the adverse effects of climate change. Initiatives by the African Union to address the root causes, prevention and resolution of conflicts on the continent would be in vain without the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, which aligned with the principles of African Union initiatives on post-conflict reconstruction and development.

130. Member States and regional groups should adopt comprehensive and collaborative approaches to handle mixed movements of refugees and migrants. It was in the interests of the international community to safeguard the credibility of international humanitarian law. To that

end, South Africa had recently launched a border management authority as part of a broader vision of strengthening border management to combat issues including trafficking in persons, while ensuring that those who needed international protection would receive it.

131. **Mr. Zumilla** (Malaysia) said that conflicts and unrest around the world had resulted in an influx of asylum-seekers and refugees into neighbouring countries. His delegation was shocked with the escalation of conflict in Gaza by Israel, especially its efforts to forcibly displace the population in the northern part of the Gaza Strip. Those latest acts of aggression by Israel, combined with its intensifying acts of apartheid in the occupied Palestinian territory, had resulted in the mass displacement of Palestinian people, especially women and children. Malaysia condemned those heinous acts by apartheid Israel in the strongest terms.

132. There had been a substantial increase in the number of asylum-seekers and refugees arriving in Malaysia over the years, with some 200,000 registered in the country. Most came from Myanmar, particularly the Rohingya community, whose exodus had been intensified by the military coup d'état in 2021. Although Malaysia was not a signatory to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, his Government continued to provide humanitarian assistance to asylum-seekers and refugees. Asylum-seekers and refugees holding a UNHCR card, for instance, continued to have access to government-run health-care facilities at a discounted rate as compared to expatriates.

133. Alternative learning centres and community learning centres had been established across Malaysia to advocate for the right to education for refugee children, and those centres had garnered funding and support from individuals, community groups, faith-based organizations, foundations and non-governmental organizations, all working in tandem with several government agencies. Education for refugee children was essential to increasing their chances of resettlement and integration in third countries, thereby enabling them to contribute to the host country and rebuild their home country upon their return.

134. The continued influx of asylum-seekers and refugees, coupled with the slow resettlement process and the absence of employment prospects for them due to lack of skills or education, placed a strain on the national resources of host countries. For that reason, the signatory countries of the 1951 Convention should uphold and honour their international legal obligation to resettle or relocate more refugees. Equitable burden-

and responsibility-sharing was fundamental to preserving and upholding the rights of refugees. That said, while regional and international cooperation played a key role in mitigating refugee and migration challenges, the only sustainable way of tackling the issue was to address the root causes of the global and regional refugee crisis and foster the necessary conditions for safe, voluntary and dignified return.

135. **Ms. Sánchez García** (Colombia) said that her Government called for the urgent resumption of dialogue between Israel and Palestine with a view to initiating a peace process that would lead to the peaceful coexistence of the two nations. Colombia wished to express its solidarity with the victims and their families and joined the majority of Member States in calling for an end to the hostilities, for humanitarian access to the Gaza Strip and other territories affected by the conflict, and for respect for international humanitarian law and the right to life.

136. Her Government was grateful to UNHCR and its Colombia office for supporting her country's efforts to assist migrant, refugee and internally displaced populations. Coordination between countries receiving migratory flows, host communities and multilateral agencies was essential, together with international cooperation. Colombia hoped that the second Global Refugee Forum would provide an opportunity to share best practices and lessons learned in the institutional response to migratory flows and the needs of the displaced population. It also hoped that the proposals and commitments made at the Forum would address the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and thus enable progress to be made in peacebuilding in various parts of the world.

137. **Ms. Arab Bafrani** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that her country had hosted millions of foreign refugees, as well as persons who had been forcibly displaced due to various crises and foreign illegal military interventions in the region. Regardless of their status, Iran provided them with health care, education and other social services. Foreign nationals with incurable diseases received free medical services and vaccinations, refugee athletes participated in domestic and international competitions and children of Iranian mothers and non-Iranian fathers were granted citizenship. Those actions demonstrated her country's respect for human dignity. She noted the efforts of international organizations working actively to provide similar services, particularly UNHCR, despite existing challenges.

138. In that context, the principle of equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing should be fully respected,

particularly when developing countries faced significant obstacles such as unilateral coercive measures. The United States had implemented illegal, unlawful, illegitimate and inhumane sanctions that deliberately targeted vulnerable populations and had adversely affected refugees living in Iran. Only a limited amount of relevant assistance had been provided by the international community, despite its emphasis on the importance of humanitarian exemptions from unilateral coercive measures.

139. Local host communities in Iran, especially in the border provinces, had been severely affected by the large influx of Afghan refugees. As a result, health care, education, employment, energy and water infrastructure faced double burdens. It was estimated that international resources covered less than 1 per cent of \$6.5 billion spent on hosting refugees. Relevant policies regarding the hosting of refugees would have to be revisited if international assistance was not adequately expanded. A gap also existed between the annual budget proposed by the Commissioner and the budget allocated to Iran. In 2023, only around one twelfth of the required budget had been realized. Iran had always emphasized voluntary return as the prevailing sustainable solution for Afghan refugees in Iran. Support for mixed migrations of refugees and migrants could not be sustained unless a serious plan with a defined timeline aimed at a durable solution to that issue was incorporated into the agenda of international cooperation.

140. **Mr. Ganou** (Burkina Faso) said that there were more than 36,000 asylum-seekers and refugees in his country as at June 2023. Burkina Faso had faced a security crisis since 2015, leading to mass forcible displacement. It had undertaken actions to attend to the needs of the displaced, in line with its international commitments and with support from partners, including UNHCR. His Government had issued civil status documents and identification documents to forcibly displaced persons, and it was bolstering legal provisions by revising the Code of the Person and the Family, as well as through a draft law on civil status, which would contribute to efforts to combat statelessness.

141. To solve the problem of those who had been internally displaced due to terrorism, Burkina Faso had established a project on forced displacement in Western Africa in May 2023 and had implemented a humanitarian response plan each year to respond to the pressing needs of internally displaced persons, host communities and other vulnerable populations, including refugees. It had also created an action plan which would support activities to ensure security and provide assistance to internally displaced persons. The

time had come to address the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, which would require a subregional and regional approach, rather than solely a national one.

142. **Mr. Surkov** (Russian Federation) said that his delegation appreciated the effective work carried out by UNHCR as the leading international body for addressing forced migration issues. They considered the Global Compact on Refugees an important instrument for consolidating efforts to defend the rights of forcibly displaced persons and would work productively at the second Global Refugee Forum in December 2023.

143. Climate change was outside the mandate of UNHCR. His delegation did not question the effect of natural disasters on displacement, but that issue could be considered in other forums, particularly the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Efforts by UNHCR to deal with the issue of Ukrainian refugees and displaced persons also fell outside its mandate. His delegation was satisfied that the Ukraine issue had not been politicized in the report (A/78/12 (Part I)) and that the issue of Ukrainian refugees had been reflected in the decennial report (A/78/12 (Part II)).

144. After the 2014 coup d'état in Ukraine, hundreds of thousands of Russian-speaking individuals from south-eastern Ukraine had fled to Russia to escape persecution carried out by the Kyiv regime. Since February 2022, more than 5 million people had arrived in Russia from the Donetsk People's Republic, the Luhansk People's Republic, Kherson Province and Zaporizhzhia Province and from Ukraine. Employees of the UNHCR office in Moscow, who regularly visited temporary housing centres for internally displaced persons in various Russian regions, had noted the effectiveness of the efforts being made to ensure decent living conditions for those people. Unfortunately, Western countries had not shown the same political will. In the Mediterranean region, for example, refugees and displaced persons continued to die because of a lack of effort on the part of border control forces in Southern European countries.

145. According to UNHCR, more than 50,000 Syrians had returned to Syria in 2022, which was 15,000 more than had returned in 2021. While that number might seem insignificant in the context of the overall number of Syrian refugees, it was important that the number of returnees was increasing each year, even though UNHCR had neither promoted nor facilitated their return. The international community should take a non-politicized approach to those efforts and avoid creating artificial impediments to refugees' efforts to return to their home countries.

146. The recent politicization of humanitarian activity had become more prevalent, particularly at UNHCR. However, despite the illegal limitations implemented against the Russian Federation and the freezing of its active assets, his Government had told UNHCR it would continue to make a \$2 million annual contribution. A payment had been made in 2022, but Western banks had blocked the transaction.

147. **Ms. Al-halique** (Jordan) said that for many years, her country had been a destination for refugees fleeing conflict in search of a safe and dignified life. Jordan had the second highest ratio of refugees to citizens in the world, with 3 million refugees currently in the country, most of them Palestinian and Syrian. All refugees in Jordan received basic services, including health care and education, making it a model country in terms of handling refugee crises.

148. UNHCR was instrumental in ensuring that refugee issues continued to be made a priority internationally. However, the question of Palestine refugees in Jordan was under the remit of UNRWA, not UNHCR, hence the need to address the Agency's recurring funding shortfall, which undermined its ability to fulfil its mandate of providing vital services, including financial and psychological support, to Palestine refugees.

149. Redoubled regional and international efforts were needed to resolve the Syrian refugee crisis and alleviate its repercussions on host societies. The only way to do so was to reach a lasting political solution to the suffering of the Syrian people and, by restoring security and stability in Syria, create the conditions for safe, voluntary return.

150. **Mr. Shaman** (Saudi Arabia) said that the international community must give due importance to urgent humanitarian issues and make efforts to alleviate the problems caused by crises including armed conflict and natural disasters. His delegation welcomed cooperation efforts between UNHCR and UNICEF and hoped there would be even greater cooperation between the two bodies so as to mitigate the suffering of children and ensure the full realization of their rights.

151. Saudi Arabia was a key partner of UNHCR and had contributed approximately \$10 million to the Office over the preceding decade. In addition to supporting its efforts in Yemen, Somalia, Lebanon, Jordan and Bangladesh, his Government had also assisted with coordination, monitoring, capacity-building and information and experience exchange. Domestically, his country was hosting approximately 110,000 refugees. They had been provided with identification, could access health care and education services and were integrated into all sectors of society.

152. His Government categorically rejected the appeal to displace helpless civilians living in the Gaza Strip. The international community must act urgently to end military escalation, protect civilians, avoid a humanitarian catastrophe and provide humanitarian medical assistance. International cooperation, particularly between donors and international organizations, must be strengthened to mitigate the suffering of refugees and displaced persons throughout the world.

The meeting rose at 6:10 p.m.