



General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/AC.96/SR.579
8 October 2004

Original: ENGLISH

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Fifty-fifth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 579th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 4 October 2004, at 10 a.m.

Temporary Chairman: Mr. BOULGARIS (Switzerland)

Chairman: Mr. ESCUDERO MARTÍNEZ (Ecuador)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

OPENING OF THE SESSION (item 1 of the provisional agenda)

1. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN declared open the fifty-fifth session of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

STATEMENT BY THE OUTGOING CHAIRMAN

2. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN, speaking in his capacity as Chairman of the fifty-fourth session, extended a special welcome to the delegations of Egypt and Zambia, which were attending their first plenary session as members of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme. The continued growth of the Committee, with its wide geographic representation, was indicative of the international community's awareness that the challenges facing the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) were global and required broad and cohesive responses. He welcomed the fact that Ghana and Romania had applied for membership of the Committee.

3. The devotion and professionalism of UNHCR staff, in Geneva and in the field, was all the more impressive when one recalled their often stressful and difficult working conditions. The recent massacre of 150 refugees in Burundi and the murder of staff member Bettina Goislard in Afghanistan in November 2003 brought that point home. The security of United Nations staff must be guaranteed if humanitarian agencies were to perform their work effectively, and he was pleased to note that UNHCR had been quick to take substantive measures in that regard.

4. During the past 12 months the Standing Committee had focused on various issues such as governance, the budget, cooperation and coordination. In the area of governance, a series of interactive and constructive consultations had laid the groundwork for decisions to be taken at the current session. Appropriate weight had been assigned to input from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), whose range of skills and expertise made them an important partner both for UNHCR and the international community as a whole. Further cooperation between member States and civil society should be allowed to flourish and bear fruit. On the question of funding, the adoption of needs-based budgeting was a promising development, but member States and donors had a responsibility to boost their untied contributions. As at 14 July 2004, slightly less than US\$ 200,000 of the annual budget of US\$ 954.9 million had been untied contributions in the strict sense of the term. If UNHCR was to respond effectively and equitably to the refugee needs it had identified all over the world, it was incumbent upon donors to reverse the ratio of tied to untied contributions.

5. During his field visits to the Islamic Republic of Iran and Sri Lanka, he had been able to observe at first hand the practical cooperation and coordination that had been forged between different United Nations agencies working to meet the needs of refugees and displaced persons. While much remained to be done, he was nonetheless convinced that the implementation of initiatives such as the "4Rs" (repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction) and the closer involvement of NGOs in annual planning at country level would ultimately prove beneficial.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS (item 2 of the provisional agenda)

6. Mr. MARTABIT (Chile) nominated Mr. Escudero Martínez (Ecuador) for the office of Chairman.
7. Ms. WHELAN (Ireland) seconded the nomination.
8. Mr. Escudero Martínez (Ecuador) was elected Chairman by acclamation.
9. Ms. PRINCESA (Philippines) nominated Mr. Oshima (Japan) for the office of Vice-Chairman.
10. Mr. DEWEY (United States of America) seconded the nomination.
11. Mr. Oshima (Japan) was elected Vice-Chairman by acclamation.
12. Mr. SATJIPANON (Thailand) nominated Ms. Blomberg (Sweden) for the office of Rapporteur.
13. Ms. JOYCE (South Africa) seconded the nomination.
14. Ms. Blomberg (Sweden) was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.
15. Mr. Escudero Martínez (Ecuador) took the Chair.

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

16. The CHAIRMAN thanked the members of the Executive Committee for the confidence they had placed in him and paid a tribute to the outgoing Chairman, whose warmth and ability had enabled the Executive Committee to carry out its work so effectively during the previous year.

17. His country, Ecuador, had a long tradition of asylum and international protection, and in recent years had hosted an increasing number of refugees from neighbouring strife-torn Colombia. Accordingly, and notwithstanding its limited resources, Ecuador was keen to share its experience with other countries in the region in the form of technical assistance. In those endeavours UNHCR was a respected and valuable partner. His Government therefore welcomed the Central and Latin American regional initiative to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees and the ongoing regional efforts to strengthen international protection of refugees, solidarity and the development of durable solutions to refugee problems.

18. In the coming year the Bureau of the Executive Committee would place special emphasis on development assistance for refugees (DAR), since it was clear that genuine protection should encompass measures to enable host communities to develop. Development assistance was essential in efforts to fortify the protection capacity of refugee host countries. Likewise, the Bureau intended to emphasize and support any initiative that facilitated development and

resettlement as an effective component of international solidarity and burden-sharing. Priority attention should be given to durable solutions, such as those contemplated under the Convention Plus initiative.

19. At the same time ongoing and new refugee emergencies, such as that in the Sudan, should not be overlooked. The current session would also offer an opportunity to review successful solutions to refugee problems stemming from new agreements to end wars and internal conflicts, and from closer cooperation between member States, UNHCR and the growing number of intergovernmental and non-governmental partners. The longstanding efforts of UNHCR to defuse crises through voluntary return, especially in Africa, deserved to be highlighted. Lastly, special attention should be paid to improving security conditions, both for humanitarian workers and beneficiary populations.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS (item 3 of the provisional agenda) (A/AC.96/LV/L.1/Rev.1)

20. The agenda was adopted.

STATEMENT BY THE HIGH COMMISSIONER, GUEST SPEAKER AND
GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4)

21. Mr. LUBBERS (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) expressed his grief and anger at the situation in Darfur. Although he had spoken out in November 2003, it had taken the international community six months to wake up, and during that time a great deal of killing had taken place. Now that the large-scale killing and clearing of villages had ended, humanitarian access had been secured, but the issues of protection, trust and building lives remained. UNHCR would be in Darfur with the African Union monitors, human rights colleagues, NGOs and other United Nations colleagues and would complement wider efforts by the Secretary-General's Special Representative to the Sudan. The authorities in Darfur had asked UNHCR for help, and he in turn had asked them to make the victims their priority. For UNHCR, the plight of the people of Darfur had become a reality of enormous dimensions, and a new Director of Operations had been appointed to oversee the Office's complex response.

22. Elsewhere in Africa, some 10,000 refugees a month were returning to Burundi, where there was a pressing need to consolidate the peace process for the future of the Great Lakes region. The recent massacre and flight of refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo was tragic evidence that a solution must be found to the problems in the eastern part of that country, where the fate of the Banyamulenge was equally important for regional peace. South Africa was to be commended for its determined mediation on those issues, and it was to be hoped that the November conference on the Great Lakes region would yield positive results.

23. As a result of the unprecedented number of repatriation operations in Africa, 270,000 people had returned to Sierra Leone and an operation to repatriate 330,000 Liberians had begun. In Angola, around 250,000 refugees had returned since 2002, although a further 200,000 remained in camps. In Eritrea, 230,000 people had been repatriated in the past four years. A renewed commitment to enhancing voluntary returns and addressing protracted

refugee situations had emerged at the ministerial-level dialogue held in Geneva in March; a similar commitment to post-conflict reconstruction and sustainable reintegration was needed to break the cycle of violence.

24. In Iraq, UNHCR had helped repatriate some 14,000 refugees from the Islamic Republic of Iran, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon, but security conditions would have to improve drastically if the Office was to assist in the country's humanitarian reconstruction. Despite a deterioration in security in Afghanistan, 3.5 million refugees had returned since 2002 and the new camps established along the border with Pakistan in 2001 had just been closed, in agreement with the Government of Pakistan, providing proof that such an operation was possible. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, UNHCR had reduced elements of the care and maintenance programme and increased transport assistance with a view to encouraging repatriation while ensuring that returns were voluntary. Those developments were moving the Office closer to the "Afghanistan Plus" approach.

25. In Western Sahara, it was hoped that the first exchange of visits between family members separated for decades by the conflict would lead to a political solution for that group, currently the oldest caseload.

26. There had been no progress in the Middle East. In an increasingly "global" world, the situation in that region complicated the challenge faced by Islamic States striving for modernity. His Office was addressing current crises and potential population displacement along the "fault lines" where Islam met non-Islamic societies, and he welcomed the resolution of the Organization of the Islamic Conference to organize a ministerial-level meeting on refugee issues in 2005.

27. Europe had just witnessed the remarkable achievement of 1 million returnees to Bosnia and Herzegovina. While returns would continue for all those who wished, the artificial and counterproductive ambition of returning all remaining uprooted people needed to be abandoned, and Europe must reflect on how best to promote sustainability and stability in its south-eastern corner. Consideration should next be given to the prospect of eventual accession of all parts of the former Yugoslavia to the European Union.

28. In the 15 years since the end of the cold war increased UNHCR presence in the Russian Federation and the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) had led to significant progress in capacity-building in the area of asylum, and UNHCR would pursue recommendations emanating from the 2004 CIS Conference follow-up. The Northern Caucasus continued to be plagued by insecurity and conflict, and UNHCR had been appalled by the recent atrocity in Beslan, North Ossetia. It would continue to work with the Russian Federation in supporting voluntary returns to Chechnya as well as other solutions for those not ready to return. The pressing question of Chechen asylum-seekers also required a coherent response from the European Union that would promote stability and protect refugee rights.

29. With regard to the situation of refugees in Asia, he welcomed recent developments in Myanmar which would provide a basis for the eventual return of 120,000 refugees in Thailand. UNHCR had been granted access to areas of refugee origin in eastern Myanmar and had been

asked by the Government to assist the reintegration within the country of internally displaced persons returning from border areas. The Secretary-General had endorsed his intention to include those groups in UNHCR programmes.

30. Less encouraging was the situation of Bhutanese people in camps in Nepal, where recent events had made it more urgent to find solutions. All possible alternatives must be examined, including voluntary repatriation as a first option, resettlement and gradual broadening of assistance to encompass refugee-hosting areas. In Sri Lanka, the suspension of peace talks in 2003 had led some donors to delay contributions to the programme. UNHCR was following the peace process closely and remained committed to ensuring a smooth transition through a 4Rs programme. With regard to the plight of North Korean asylum-seekers in China, he said he would welcome the chance to discuss the issue as well as opportunities for China to assist in the region with the Chinese authorities.

31. He introduced the new Director of the Bureau for Asia and the Pacific.

32. There had been two positive developments in the Americas. November 2004 would see the commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, which would produce a plan of action for furthering refugee protection in the region. He hoped that the spirit of Cartagena would produce a regional humanitarian response to the increased number of displaced persons in Colombia. He had also received assurance from the Government of the United States of America that that country was committed to increasing the number of resettlement places for refugees. He thanked the United States for that pledge and for its ongoing support of UNHCR. The Bureau for the Americas would also have a new Director, who would assume his functions on 1 December.

33. Turning to global operational challenges, he said that one of the Office's priorities was embodied in the five commitments to refugee women. Participation of women refugees in food distribution was one example of the effort to translate those commitments into action. A study conducted jointly by UNHCR and the World Food Programme (WFP) had reaffirmed the need for refugee women, as better guarantors of household assets, to take part in distribution efforts and to have individual identity documents.

34. Progress had been made in cultivating a shared sense of responsibility for gender and age issues among staff and reinforcing the accountability of senior managers. The multifunctional team approach to mainstreaming had been piloted in 10 countries in 2004 and would be applied globally in 2005. He had accepted the offer by the Government of Norway to create a post of Special Adviser on Gender Issues.

35. The Secretary-General's call for a review of United Nations global security management practices had resulted in a more integrated approach to security. The report of an internal working group had made 80 recommendations that complemented the anticipated changes and would strengthen the capacity of UNHCR to operate safely. UNHCR had charted a course to enable staff to reach people in need while minimizing risk and casualties in a high-risk environment. Training projects had been designed to help colleagues make informed decision about operating safely and effectively in areas of insecurity. To supplement those projects,

the eCentre project, an initiative by the Government of Japan that brought humanitarian staff from several agencies together with elements of the army, would be expanded and would be conducted in the Middle East and Africa following the pilot experience in Asia.

36. Security cost money, and he trusted that donors would respond favourably to additional requests for funding. He thanked the Swiss Government for its support in strengthening the security of the Office's headquarters building. A renewed determination to minimize risks to the staff was the legacy of the sadness felt as a result of the senseless killing of Protection Officer Bettina Goislard in Ghazni, Afghanistan, in 2003.

37. The UNHCR 2004 process had culminated in the adoption of a General Assembly resolution affirming the steps that had been taken to strengthen the capacity of the Office to carry out its mandate. Earlier in the year, the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) had presented three proposals to UNHCR and its Executive Committee. First, unaware of the Secretary-General's approval in principle of an organizational structure with two Assistant High Commissioners, it had suggested a structure comprising two Deputy High Commissioners rather than two Assistant High Commissioners and one Deputy. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) was also in favour of the former arrangement, but advised waiting for the results of the Headquarters review, a view he himself endorsed. Secondly, JIU and ACABQ had advised UNHCR to move towards a biannual budget. Thirdly, JIU had made recommendations regarding the post of Inspector-General, which had just been filled, and the latter's office. He also wished to draw attention to the recruitment of a Chief Information Officer and the creation of a Division for Information Technology.

38. UNHCR had made progress as a measurable performer using standards and indicators. It was integrating the eighth Millennium Goal and making strides in the areas of universal primary education, health for refugees and mobilizing partnerships for durable solutions. It had improved its programme-support ratio and was incorporating results-based management.

39. On the issue of protection and durable solutions, he said that in the past few years the politicization of immigration, confusion between refugees and economic migrants and fear of criminal and terrorist networks had combined to erode asylum legislation in many States, paradoxically against a backdrop of declining numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers. Despite progress in the two years since the Executive Committee had endorsed the Agenda for Protection, the current environment was less friendly to refugees.

40. One of the main objectives of the Convention Plus initiative was to explore more equitable ways of sharing the asylum "burden". The Agenda for Protection and Convention Plus constituted the nexus for burden-sharing and permanent solutions. Solutions were being found for more and more people, and the linkage between development assistance and refugees, self-reliance and 4R programmes were gradually gaining acceptance. UNHCR was particularly grateful to Canada for its assistance in completing the Multilateral Framework of Understandings on Resettlement in June 2004. The next task was to put the Framework into practice.

41. A better understanding of irregular secondary movements of refugees and asylum-seekers was needed. The survey of secondary movements of Somali refugees and asylum-seekers could help in that regard and also provide inputs for the proposed Comprehensive Plan of Action for Somali Refugees. Moreover, political developments in

Somalia offered hope for a durable peace. The elements set out in UNHCR's Basic Propositions on Irregular Secondary Movements could be developed into a wider agreement on key issues, such as the responsibilities of States for refugees and asylum-seekers moving through several countries, early registration, and timely access to durable solutions.

42. At a meeting hosted by the Government of Denmark on the targeting of development assistance broad support had been expressed for the inclusion of displacement in aid policies. The Economic and Social Council had specifically encouraged States to support and fund the implementation of the 4Rs and other tools in order to facilitate the transition from relief to development. Targeting development assistance should be linked to the concept of human security, and durable solutions should be based on the principles of individual empowerment and self-reliance.

43. Generous funding was needed to improve protection and solutions. The results of the work done by the Convention Plus Unit in 2005 would be mainstreamed from the beginning of 2006. The Unit had already done effective work in the area of burden-sharing and solutions and had helped generate other projects, such as registration.

44. The Afghanistan Comprehensive Solutions initiative sought to define arrangements for the return and reintegration of Afghans; elaborate the rights of Afghans with protection needs and other legitimate reasons not to return; and explore provisions for temporary labour migration. Initial discussions had been promising, and aspects of the initiative could be extended to other countries hosting Afghan refugees.

45. The European Union had issued a number of directives laying the foundation for a common asylum system. Pending their implementation, it should proceed with the creation of a genuine European asylum space in order to meet the need for balanced management of asylum-seeker flows, based on responsibility and burden-sharing. UNHCR was looking at ways that a common asylum system could be created throughout the Union that would be in the interest of refugees and member States alike.

46. A new edition of the State of the World's Refugees would be published in 2005, focusing on the results of the Agenda for Protection, the Framework for Durable Solutions and Convention Plus.

47. The year 2004 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons. While statelessness was a source of insecurity for millions of people, only 57 States had acceded to the Convention thus far. Statelessness would be the subject of a panel discussion at the current session, with emphasis placed on practical solutions to protracted situations.

48. The creation of a post of Assistant High Commissioner for Protection could make a real and quantitative contribution to the implementation of the UNHCR protection mandate. The Office needed to reinforce its protection strategy and policy-making in order to ensure that protection considerations were properly identified and advocated in its operations; it also needed to ensure that refugee protection considerations were reflected in the policy deliberations and processes of the United Nations system. He hoped that the Executive Committee would approve that proposal.

49. UNHCR needed to make better use of partnerships as an integral part of its operating, funding, programming, and implementing processes. Along with the Agenda for Protection and Convention Plus, partnerships represented the way forward for UNHCR. The Office's recent co-sponsorship of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), for example, enabled it to advocate more effectively for the integration of refugees into host countries' HIV programmes.

50. UNHCR was evaluating the revised Memorandum of Understanding with WFP and would use the results of the review to chart the way forward. The Office had also seconded a senior staff member to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to improve implementation of the collaborative approach to internally displaced persons (IDPs). The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) had endorsed a set of revised policies on internally displaced persons, which would be important for humanitarian coordinators and country teams. UNHCR had introduced procedures to make participation in IDP situations more predictable and remained fully committed to supporting the Emergency Relief Coordinator and Country Teams in that area.

51. UNHCR had taken measures to expand the role of NGOs in its activities. A five-month Protection Learning Programme for UNHCR partners was in its final stages, and all Representatives would establish regular dialogue and cooperation with NGOs on protection matters. There would be increased consultation with operational partners on optimizing resource allocation and donors would be more involved in the operational review process in order to reduce gaps in humanitarian response. By opening its books to partners and inviting them to do likewise, UNHCR would be better prepared to meet the needs of refugees.

52. A core team was working with a respected consulting firm to examine UNHCR's workforce management policies, budget and resource allocation processes, senior management decision-making, and reporting requirements. The review would look at headquarters with a "field eye" and would explicitly include the proposed post of Assistant High Commissioner for Protection.

53. For the first time in recent memory, UNHCR was not in a funding crisis. It had achieved a certain degree of financial health and stability thanks to the Executive Committee's generous support and improved financial management. In addition, the Office had significantly improved financial planning and expenditure controls, although it had launched several supplementary appeals in 2004, which remained underfunded. Donors should support the UNHCR supplementary budget without diverting contributions from the Annual Programme. Over the past three years, donors had responded well to the Office's commitment to improving performance. For their part, States should act on the principles of "good donorship", making predictable and consistent contributions early in the budget cycle.

54. The organization's health ultimately depended on human resources management. While good progress had been made, UNHCR could improve its performance through policies that motivated and provided greater certainty to staff. The current assignment process was to be reviewed with a view to improving vacancy management. In addition, UNHCR planned to ensure that all staff were clear about their next posting and provide more security training. It needed committed staff who understood that the proportion of hardship and non-family duty

stations had increased to over 50 per cent in recent years. With the introduction of fixed-term appointments for new recruits, the Office would be able to adjust the workforce as required. It would recruit talented individuals, ensuring greater gender parity and geographical diversity, hold staff and managers accountable for their performance and conduct and apply vigorous sanctions for misconduct. Merit would be used as the primary basis for advancement. The goal of individual empowerment went hand in hand with the goal of encouraging performance.

55. Mr. MORRIS (Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP)) said that the High Commissioner for Refugees was someone to whom everyone in the humanitarian community listened, and WFP attached the utmost importance to its partnership with UNHCR. The two organizations shared a similar commitment to humanitarian principles, a deep concern for people most at risk, and a commitment to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. Food and nutrition were central to the achievement of the Goals, to human survival and to the ability of refugees, returnees and IDPs to have a decent life and hope for their future. The partnership was a model one within the United Nations family and was often cited for the concrete way in which it addressed serious problems of people at risk on the ground.

56. In 2003 the partners had fed 2.9 million people in a total of 38 countries. WFP highly commended UNHCR for undertaking the very difficult task of procuring non-food items and for its commitment to protecting the physical well-being and legal rights of refugees and others at risk.

57. WFP was currently feeding some 175,000 refugees in Chad and expected that figure to rise to over 200,000 in the near future. The refugees had lost everything, and the problems of hunger and malnutrition, especially among women and child refugees, were extraordinary. The experiences of WFP in Angola and Liberia deserved particular mention. The Programme had learned there that it was much easier to mobilize resources during a conflict than after one.

58. WFP was profoundly grateful to the European Union, France, Germany, Japan and the United States of America for helping it in the world's most difficult places. It was equally grateful to the Netherlands, Sweden and others for the support they gave to WFP, allowing it the flexibility to respond quickly. WFP encouraged Governments to develop flexible asylum policies that would, for example, allow refugees access to land for cultivation and other income-generating activities.

59. Children represented the largest percentage of the world's refugees. However, when resources were tight, education was often the first to suffer. To deny children an education was to sacrifice an entire generation. There were 300 million hungry children in the world, half of whom did not go to school. WFP could feed a child for \$35 a year; thus a very modest investment in feeding and educating 300 million children was the most important investment that the world could make in its future.

60. In some camps, particularly in the Sudan and Chad, the numbers of refugee children was increasing. While the refugees and IDPs there wanted to go home, a recent WFP study showed that, in 2005, the issue of food security in those two countries would be far more serious than at present. A political decision was desperately needed to resolve that situation.

61. WFP had learned much from UNHCR about the registration of IDPs, strengthening of resourcing and monitoring, stronger advocacy and information sharing. The two organizations were running an important pilot programme in five countries on the delivery of food and nutrition to the neediest persons.
62. WFP was committed to doing more, doing it better and doing it with UNHCR. It was currently focusing its efforts on educating and feeding children, reducing the burden on women, using food and nutrition in the fight against HIV/AIDS, supporting and protecting people and increasing their self-reliance, helping them to return home and offering them assistance upon their return. In all those undertakings it attached the highest possible value to its partnership with UNHCR.
63. Mr. MOODY AWARI (Kenya) said that his country complied with all international and regional instruments on the protection of refugees and was among the few developing nations to host large numbers of refugees from neighbouring war-torn countries. Some 230,000 refugees currently lived in camps in Kenya, while a large number of refugees and asylum-seekers living in urban areas depended on the local populace for their livelihood.
64. Although Kenya's capacity to handle large refugee inflows was often challenged, the Government was determined to regulate the management of refugee affairs in a predictable and transparent manner. A comprehensive refugee bill had been introduced in Parliament to establish a legal basis for refugee protection in accordance with the principles enshrined in international and regional instruments. The bill included all the standard elements of international protection, focusing in particular on women, children and other vulnerable groups. The Government intended to create a mechanism for managing refugee affairs that would include systems and procedures for registering and determining the status of refugees, compiling records, developing a database on refugees and issuing refugee documents.
65. UNHCR, WFP and other humanitarian agencies were to be commended for their efforts to help refugees in Kenya. Nations also needed to create partnerships and encourage and foster inter-agency cooperation in order to address the challenges posed by refugees.
66. The issue of resources was a matter of great concern, since dwindling financial and other resources hampered protection efforts. The budget allocation for UNHCR activities in Nairobi was far from adequate and should be increased. UNHCR should adopt a needs-based budget in order to guarantee refugees basic amenities and acceptable food rations. It was to be hoped that the forthcoming panel discussion on food security would produce a long-term strategy on food security, so that the issue of inadequate rations would become a thing of the past. Moreover, the issues of housing, health-care and educational facilities in camps also needed to be addressed. The facilities and infrastructure in most camps were in a deplorable state.
67. While some people argued that the policy of encampment denied refugees the right to move freely and engage in productive work, in certain countries encampment was unavoidable, owing to the sheer numbers of refugees, the existence of long and porous borders, ethnic considerations and security concerns. It was only through encampment that refugee problems could be managed effectively and the most vulnerable refugees protected.

68. Durable solutions were vital to the voluntary repatriation or resettlement of refugees in third countries. The international community should work together to restore peace in countries experiencing internal conflicts and help them with national reconstruction.

69. The peace processes in Somalia and southern Sudan sponsored by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) were beginning to bear fruit. The prospects for peace and stability in Somalia looked promising, and the way had been cleared for the establishment of a Government of national unity. The international community should provide resources for Somalia's reconstruction to facilitate the voluntary return of its refugees. Governments should also provide the Somali people with incentives, such as a sound and sustainable macroeconomic environment, which could accelerate the pace of reconstruction, economic growth and development. The international community should do more to establish peace and stability and, as repatriation continued, development programmes should be set up under the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Somalia.

70. While the situation in Darfur was extremely worrying, it was important not to lose sight of the peace process taking place in southern Sudan. His Government fully supported international efforts to support the people of Darfur, but also wished to see the peace process in southern Sudan through to its conclusion, since it could provide a blueprint for solutions to similar situations. Broad support was needed for the IGAD peace processes in southern Sudan and Somalia and for the efforts of the African Union and the Government of the Sudan to address the situation in Darfur. With unity and resolve, durable solutions to all African conflicts could be found.

71. Mr. DEWEY (United States of America) said that over the past year multilateral cooperation had led to a 17-per cent decrease in the refugee population. Although refugee warehousing was still a serious problem, progress had been made over the past two years, and generous financing from donor States had enabled the repatriation of nearly 4 million refugees to Liberia, Angola, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan and Iraq. A sustained international effort to provide sustenance and jobs for returnees was necessary until Governments themselves had the capacity to make such provisions. Governments must be encouraged to include refugees in their national development strategies and provide them with long-term transitional and employment assistance.

72. The United States was committed to supporting resettlement programmes, and had increased its admission of refugees to 50,000 during the past fiscal year. The Government had undertaken several initiatives in response to the changing refugee environment, including the provision of substantial funding to UNHCR to increase its capacity to identify and refer refugees to resettlement countries. It supported the proposal to appoint an Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, and welcomed the appointment of a Special Advisor on Gender Issues.

73. UNHCR should continue to strengthen its operational performance. His delegation would be interested to know the impact of the implementation of the new policy for improving staff management. Further efforts were required to carry out needs assessments for refugees, improve UNHCR operational coordination with other international organizations and NGOs, and ensure predictable, rapid and effective emergency response mechanisms. The international community must ensure that UNHCR had sufficient resources to support and expand its staff so that experienced professionals could be deployed quickly to wherever they were needed. Faster

action must be taken in the allocation of activities to operational partners and the necessary financial resources and monitoring must follow as quickly as possible. The United States remained committed to providing financial assistance to UNHCR.

74. States must be encouraged to continue to provide refuge to people fleeing conflict and violence. The recent murder of 160 Congolese refugees in Burundi showed that measures to protect refugees from violence in resettlement countries must be strengthened. It was also important to ensure the protection of humanitarian workers in the field.

75. Mr. de JONG (Netherlands), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the associated countries (Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and Croatia), the stabilization and association process countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) and, in addition, Iceland, welcomed the dialogue between the Executive Committee and WFP. Greater attention must be paid to securing food pipelines for refugees. The European Union welcomed UNHCR initiatives to increase activities aimed at reducing the number of stateless persons, and noted with satisfaction the significant number of refugees that had been repatriated during 2004 as a result of the Office's efforts.

76. Despite the progress that had been made, there were still many protracted refugee situations, and new situations had developed, such as the crisis in Darfur. The European Union appreciated the fact that UNHCR had acknowledged its own shortcomings in responding to that emergency. Measures must be taken to improve early warning systems to alert the international community of potential humanitarian crises. The European Union condemned the violations of human rights in Darfur, and commended the Government of Chad for having provided protection and assistance to Sudanese refugees. Efforts must be made to ensure that the situation in Darfur did not become protracted.

77. He commended the work of UNHCR in assisting IDPs and encouraged the Office to continue to strengthen its collaboration with the Inter-Agency Internal Displacement Division. Despite a downward trend in the number of asylum-seekers in its territory, the European Union continued to participate in discussions launched in the context of the Convention Plus initiative and in other aspects of the implementation of the Agenda for Protection.

78. A communication entitled "Improving access to durable solutions", which had been prepared at the request of the European Council, would receive considerable political attention during the Netherlands Presidency of the European Union. The communication focused on improving cooperation within the Union in the area of resettlement and on strengthening protection capacities in regions of origin. Those initiatives would contribute to an enhanced international protection regime and a more equitable sharing of burdens and responsibilities. European Union Regional Protection Programmes would also be developed to address protracted refugee situations, with a focus on the Convention Plus initiative, and would form a basis for the special agreements previously outlined by the High Commissioner.

79. Measures must be taken to encourage closer cooperation between northern and southern countries in establishing effective ways of protecting and assisting refugees by providing access to durable solutions and ensuring that root causes of displacement were given prominence on political agendas. National development agendas must be formulated and implemented to

advance the interests of returnees, refugees and host communities. Efforts must be made to ensure that funding for international protection was used as effectively and efficiently as possible.

80. The European Union had established a basis for a common asylum policy, which placed importance on the full and inclusive application of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Minimum standards had been set for reception conditions, and the conditions for qualifying persons as refugees or beneficiaries of subsidiary protection in the European Union had been defined. An agreement had also been adopted on how to decide which Union member would be responsible for processing an asylum application. As with all such measures, efforts must be made to ensure that a clear distinction was maintained between the notions of asylum and migration.

81. The agreed Constitutional Treaty for Europe contained provisions for a common asylum system, and a programme would be developed to ensure their implementation. Further attention would be paid to refugee issues outside the European Union, partnerships with countries of first asylum would be strengthened, and European external policies would be amended to give increased attention to refugee issues.

82. UNHCR must endeavour to establish new partnerships and strengthen old ones, on the basis of the framework for durable solutions. Cooperation among partners would enable a successful transition from relief to sustainable development. The European Union welcomed the fact that UNHCR had joined the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) and had been granted partnership status with UNAIDS.

83. The European Union welcomed the piloting of gender and age mainstreaming projects. Efforts should be made to ensure systematic monitoring and reporting on all aspects of gender and age mainstreaming, and to implement the guidelines for the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence. It encouraged UNHCR to strengthen and broaden its donor base, and to work towards needs-based planning. Measures to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the Office must be taken, including the establishment of a system of results-based management. Although steps had been taken to introduce such a system, it was unclear how long it would take for it to be used in all UNHCR operations. He hoped that a consensus would soon be reached on the issue of granting the European Union enhanced observer status in the Executive Committee.

84. Mr. ENDO (Japan) commended UNHCR for its efforts to protect, repatriate and find other durable solutions for refugees and IDPs. Japan would continue to provide financial support for increasing such efforts; it had decided to contribute a further US\$ 21 million to UNHCR and other organizations for use in Darfur and eastern Chad, where the humanitarian situation was of serious concern.

85. Despite the international community's efforts, durable solutions had not been found for many regions. Japan believed that protracted refugee situations could be solved with the implementation of protection and empowerment frameworks on the ground. Such frameworks would strengthen collaboration between States, UNHCR and its partners, other international organizations and development agencies. Some countries were overburdened by mass influxes of refugees, while others in post-conflict situations did not have fully functioning Governments

and could not provide protection for or empower their own people. Japan intended to assist UNHCR in implementing the Convention Plus initiative and facilitating discussions on the regional targeting of development assistance for refugees. Efforts must be made to increase the number of humanitarian staff on the ground in regions with protracted refugee situations.

86. Protection and empowerment frameworks had proven successful in Afghanistan and Zambia, and Japan was committed to ensuring further successes in other crisis areas. UNHCR must work with refugees to encourage them to empower others, thus making refugees themselves an agent for development.

87. He urged UNHCR to accelerate its headquarters review process and to submit a progress report on the review to the next Standing Committee. UNHCR should also respond to the recommendations made by JIU in its report.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.