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Summary record of the 668th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 1 October 2013, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Arango Olmos (Colombia)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

High-level segment on solidarity and burden-sharing with countries hosting Syrian refugees *(continued)*

1. *A filmed statement by Ms. Indrawati, Chief Operations Officer and Managing Director of the World Bank, was shown. In it, Ms. Indrawati highlighted the alarming situation in Lebanon and Jordan and called for immediate action to be taken to provide combined humanitarian assistance and development aid in order to relieve the suffering of the refugees, alleviate the burden on the host countries and address the medium- and long-term impacts of the crisis.*

2. **Mr. Finol** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that the member States of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America had sent emergency supplies to Syrian refugees in Lebanon and that his country had offered to take in Syrian refugees. The deeper causes of the humanitarian situation must be addressed, however. His Government denounced the imperialist powers for promoting and financing the violence in the Syrian Arab Republic and for their duplicity in disguising imperialist intervention as humanitarian aid. The resources of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) were being handed over to the very terrorist groups that had launched the attacks of 11 September 2001. Syrian sovereignty and territorial integrity must be respected, and his Government welcomed the positions taken by the Governments of the Russian Federation and China to prevent the criminal bombing that had been planned by the Pentagon. The solution must be a political one and negotiated among the Syrians themselves.

3. **Mr. Piperkov** (Bulgaria) said that support must be provided to the neighbouring countries that hosted Syrian refugees so that the refugees could remain close to their homeland, which would expedite the recovery process once hostilities had ended. The number of asylum seekers arriving in Bulgaria from the Syrian Arab Republic had increased tenfold in the previous 12 months. The Government was providing them with security, shelter and food, but, if the trend continued, it would need assistance from its United Nations partners and the European Union. Expanded support should be given to host countries outside the immediately affected region.

4. **Mr. Melchenko** (Observer for Belarus) said that Belarus supported calls for a political solution to be found to the Syrian conflict. Syrian humanitarian organizations and Governments must also work together to increase the amount of assistance provided to Syrian refugees. The number of persons fleeing the conflict who had applied for asylum in Belarus had increased dramatically since the last quarter of 2012; in 2013, they accounted for 30 per cent of all asylum seekers in the country. All those whose applications had been processed had been granted refugee status or complementary protection, and Belarus would continue to consider all applications in strict accordance with national law and its international obligations. Belarus was prepared to discuss ways of expanding its capacity to host refugees and invited UNHCR to play an active role in the process.

5. **Ms. Chaves** (Argentina) said that the White Helmets Commission of Argentina had been working with UNHCR to assist with planning, water management, sanitation and communications at the Dormiz camp in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. Another proposal to provide support to refugee camps in the countries bordering the conflict zone was being evaluated. The National Commission for Refugees of Argentina had authorized a procedure for expediting processing of applications for refugee status or asylum filed by Syrians. Of the 154 refugee status applications that had been received from Syrian citizens to date, 142 had been processed. Several Syrian families had brought family members to Argentina under an expedited family reunification procedure.

6. **Mr. Lungu** (Zambia) said that international efforts to tackle the humanitarian crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic, while commendable, should not undermine existing durable solution initiatives. Support must be provided to all the countries hosting Syrian refugees so as to pave the way for regional recovery and reconstruction once the conflict had ended. All stakeholders should identify the best strategies for dealing with the situation and donors and aid agencies should work together to provide an effective and comprehensive humanitarian response.
7. **Ms. Mukantabana** (Rwanda) commended the Governments of the countries concerned for hosting Syrian refugees and urged the neighbouring countries to keep their borders open to refugees and asylum seekers. Rwanda supported the principle of burden-sharing, which must be upheld in order to safeguard the right to asylum and ensure peaceful coexistence between refugees and host communities. Rwanda was committed to helping to find a lasting solution to the Syrian refugee crisis.
8. **Mr. Ayieny Aleu** (Observer for South Sudan) said that the Republic of South Sudan was looking forward to becoming a full member of the Executive Committee. UNHCR had protected the people of South Sudan for over 30 years, and South Sudan would show its appreciation by always welcoming and protecting refugees.
9. South Sudan urged UNHCR and donor countries to continue to help Syrian refugees and the host countries. It viewed education as essential for improved camp management and for developing skills that refugees could use when they returned home. Syrian children now living in refugee camps were the hope for their country's future and needed to be allowed to grow up as good Syrians and good Muslims. The political solution to the Syrian conflict should not be sought in Washington, Moscow, New York or Geneva, but in the Middle East.
10. **Mr. Livieres Ocampos** (Observer for Paraguay) expressed concern at the Security Council's failure to mention the humanitarian crisis in resolution 2118 (2013) and at the fact that the silence of the international community had prompted some politicians in Lebanon to call for border closures. The Security Council should issue a statement on the refugee crisis and make every effort to end the conflict. Paraguay was willing to contribute by, for example, participating in a resettlement programme, granting visas for refugee children to study in Paraguay and joining in fund-raising efforts with UNHCR.
11. **Mr. Agalga** (Ghana) said many Ghanaian families had ties with the Syrian Arab Republic and were directly affected by the catastrophe unfolding in that country. Ghana supported the calls for solidarity to be shown to the refugees and to the host countries and applauded the High Commissioner's initiative in that regard. Concerted action to end the Syrian civil war was needed. Ghana endorsed the proposal to include a call for a comprehensive political solution to the humanitarian crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic in the final statement of the high-level segment.
12. **Ms. Batistić-Kos** (Croatia) said that Croatia was well aware of the burden placed on the refugee hosting countries and of the threat being posed to their socioeconomic development and to regional security. Croatia was providing targeted support in both the Syrian Arab Republic and the neighbouring countries. It had allocated 450,000 euros to various programmes and was supplying additional financial and in-kind assistance. To address the Syrian crisis, resources and capacities must be efficiently pooled and lessons drawn from the experience of regions such as her own.
13. **Mr. Al-Amin Digna** (Sudan) commended all the countries currently hosting Syrian refugees on their generosity and appealed to them to keep their borders open. He called upon the international community to alleviate their burden and said that the Sudan would provide support in areas such as sanitation, health and education. He urged the international community and donors to continue to support UNHCR and the relief efforts. He said that

all parties must focus on finding a political solution to the tragic situation and must eventually facilitate a dignified return for the refugees.

14. **Mr. Morales Suárez** (Ecuador) said that the grave situation in the Syrian Arab Republic was yet another reminder of the plight of refugees and internally displaced persons around the world. Ecuador had the highest concentration of refugees of any country in Latin America and the Caribbean area. Of 170,000 people who had sought asylum since 2000, 56,000 had been granted refugee status. Countries of origin, transit and destination must share responsibility for protecting refugees and international migrants. Sustainable solutions, included voluntary repatriation, local integration and third country resettlement must be pursued.

15. **Ms. Menéndez Pérez** (Spain) said that her country had contributed €8.6 million to relief efforts in and around the Syrian Arab Republic and urged donors to honour their pledges without delay. Spain would contribute a further €1.5 million, and the Spanish Office for Humanitarian Action planned to send a team to Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey in October 2013 to assess how best to use those funds. Virtually all asylum applications from Syrian citizens were treated favourably and the annual quota of 30 resettlement places for Syrian refugees might be increased. Coordination between humanitarian organizations and development agencies was imperative.

16. **Mr. Wintermantel** (Hungary) said that the Security Council must ensure that humanitarian organizations were granted access to the people who needed their help in the Syrian Arabic Republic. Most of the aid that his country provided to the region had been channelled through UNHCR, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Hungary intended to provide a further €100,000 in aid and to offer resettlement places to Syrian refugees.

17. **Ms. Stone** (Australia) said that host countries needed practical support in order to house, clothe and feed refugees. Improved coordination of humanitarian and development activities was needed. Only 43 per cent of the funds needed for the Syria Regional Response Plan had been received. Australia had contributed US\$ 100 million, mainly for shelter, food and clean water in refugee camps. It had made available 500 places for permanent resettlement of especially vulnerable Syrian refugees from 2013 on. However, Syrians or others who attempted to enter the country illegally would not be accepted under the Government's "Operation Sovereign Borders" policy.

18. **Mr. Alattas** (Observer for Saudi Arabia) said that a concerted effort was needed to guarantee that aid got through to assist the millions of refugees in the region. Saudi Arabia had earmarked around US\$ 425 million to support Syrian refugees. US\$ 5 million had been allocated to support refugees in Lebanon and a similar amount to those in Jordan. A further US\$ 3 million had been allocated for WFP to use in its response to the crisis.

19. **Mr. Almabroug** (Observer for Libya) said that the widespread destruction of homes and property in the Syrian Arab Republic had given rise to profound social and economic problems. The international community was duty-bound to contribute sufficient funds to house, feed and care for the refugees properly in host countries. Libya had accepted 20,000 Syrian refugees and, in spite of its own political difficulties, would maintain an "open-door" policy with regard to further arrivals. Libya was working with international organizations in order to the assist the refugees, some of whom had already managed to find work in his country.

20. **Mr. Huseynov** (Azerbaijan) said that his country was acquainted with the plight of refugees, having itself faced difficulties with refugees and IDPs since gaining independence in 1991. The neighbours of the Syrian Arab Republic had come under immense strain and some Governments in the area were beginning to tighten their border controls and to impede the entry of further refugees. Host countries needed robust humanitarian and

development assistance from the international community. Although Azerbaijan itself played host to more than 1 million refugees and IDPs, it had become a donor country and was mobilizing aid for Syrian refugees.

21. **Mr. Seilenthal** (Estonia) said that Estonia had contributed around €1 million to relief efforts for Syrian refugees. In Jordan, Estonian disaster relief teams had helped to build the Azraq refugee camp and Estonian NGOs had provided educational assistance for young Syrians in Zaatari refugee camp. Estonia would contribute €50,000 for the destruction of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic.

22. **Mr. Păduraru** (Republic of Moldova) said that in the early 1990s, 60,000 nationals of his country had been forced to abandon their homes because of war. His Government upheld the principle of non-refoulement with regard to Syrian citizens. In all, 196 Syrians had been accorded or were waiting to be accorded refugee status there. A further 500 had now regularized their situation. It was unknown how many Syrians had taken refuge in the Transnistria region. If international funds were made available, the country would permanently resettle up to 50 refugees considered to be especially vulnerable. The authorities were working with UNHCR and NGOs to provide refugees and asylum seekers with appropriate assistance.

23. **Mr. Onek** (Uganda) said that the number of refugees and asylum seekers present in Uganda had risen to around 235,000. He called on UNHCR to work towards a sustainable and long-lasting solution to the conflicts that had triggered inflows of refugees into his country. A political solution must be found to the Syrian conflict in order to resolve the refugee crisis in the region.

24. **Ms. Stepanyan** (Observer for Armenia) said that around 10,000 Syrian refugees, most of them of Armenian origin from the Aleppo area, had found shelter in Armenia. Several hundred more made their way into the country every week. The Government had kept open its embassy in Damascus and its consulate in Aleppo and was issuing entry and residence permits free of charge. Asylum and naturalization procedures for Syrians had been simplified, and the authorities were providing temporary shelter, free health care and education, assistance with finding work, and credit at discounted interest rates for microenterprises. Syrian refugees could import their vehicles and other goods without paying customs duty. Around US\$ 20 million had so far been disbursed in support of Syrians in Armenia and the Syrian Arab Republic. As more refugees continued to arrive, Armenia would be unable to bear the cost without assistance. It needed help to house the refugees.

25. **Ms. Pictet-Althann** (Observer for the Sovereign Military Order of Malta) said that Malteser International had distributed emergency health kits in the areas around Damascus and Aleppo, and around 20 hospitals and other medical centres in the north of the country would shortly receive drugs and medical consumables. Malteser International had an office and temporary field hospital in Kilis, 3 kilometres inside the Turkish border. It was also supporting education facilities for 1,500 Syrian students there and would provide basic health care in a transition camp in the area. The Order was also active in Lebanon and northern Iraq. The field hospital in Turkey would be moved into the Syrian Arab Republic as soon as conditions permitted. Mobile health units would also be sent. Capacity-building was key, and refugees were themselves involved in many of the Order's relief projects. So far, the Order had provided €7 million in assistance. It was committed to maintaining a long-term presence in the area.

26. **Mr. Chikh** (Organization of Islamic Cooperation) said that a spirit of solidarity was a strong feature of Islamic culture and had been demonstrated in the Syrian refugee context. Neighbouring countries had consistently observed the principle of non-refoulement but the

burdens on them was growing heavier. A political solution was urgently required, as were means to lighten the burden on host countries.

27. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) had launched numerous appeals for assistance for the refugees. In January 2013, the Government of Kuwait had held an international donor conference and secured commitments of contributions amounting to US\$ 1.5 billion. OIC and local partners had established a psychosocial trauma centre for refugees in Kilis and had organized a conference in 2012 which had led to the establishment of an NGO coalition to work in border areas in Jordan and Turkey. Substantial contributions had also been provided for work in the Syrian Arab Republic.

28. OIC was committed to helping to meet the challenges imposed by the Syrian crisis through innovative solutions. Alternatives such as third country resettlement and facilitated processing of asylum requests in other countries should be increasingly considered. OIC remained confident that the tragic ordeal of the Syrian people would serve as a catalyst for efforts to bring peace and stability to the region.

29. **Ms. Elis** (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) said that the 220,000 Palestine refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic were in a dire situation. All Palestine refugee camps in that country were caught up in the conflict, half were inaccessible, and the inhabitants of Yarmuk were reportedly surviving on sugar and water. Only a negotiated cessation of hostilities would save them from destruction.

30. The Palestine refugees had severely limited flight options. The Jordanian borders were closed to them, camps in Lebanon were overflowing and access to Egypt was difficult. All receiving countries were urged to welcome them and to uphold the principle of equal treatment and of non-refoulement. Their situation was a stark reminder of the urgent need to find a just solution to the Palestine refugee issue in the context of a negotiated peace settlement.

31. UNRWA activities in the Syrian Arab Republic focused on resilience-building, delivery of basic services and support for communities. UNRWA called for greater attention to be paid to the particular vulnerabilities of Palestine refugees and for an increased protection response on the part of States and other humanitarian actors.

32. **Ms. Tanguy** (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) said that she was concerned by the fact that Syrian refugees and host communities in neighbouring countries were not receiving sufficient support and that some communities were approaching breaking point. Unsustainable pressure was being placed on local livelihoods, resources and infrastructure and would increase in the winter months. International support must be scaled up urgently to provide life-saving services to refugee populations and to strengthen and sustain local capacities.

33. Red Cross teams were serving half a million people in camps and host communities in various countries. However, IFRC appeals were underfunded. Coverage was below 30 per cent in Iraq and Lebanon, where tensions were rising, and in Jordan alone it would be necessary to scale up cash assistance by 500 per cent in 2014. Prompt donor support was needed to address that situation.

34. IFRC was conducting activities to mitigate the growing risk of interpersonal violence, including gender-based violence, in host communities. However, the situation was approaching breaking point. Lebanon faced the greatest risk of intercommunal tension and violence. Community-based organizations could help to defuse tensions, while livelihood programmes could be used to supply the immediate needs of the most vulnerable. Durable solutions were furthermore needed to address increasing vulnerabilities and aid should be channelled towards local absorption capacity-building. Acknowledging the selfless contributions of humanitarian volunteers, in particular of those 22 who had lost

their lives in the line of duty, she appealed to all parties to protect humanitarian actors in the region and to facilitate access to the most vulnerable.

35. **Mr. Duplat** (International Rescue Committee), speaking also on behalf of a wide range of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), said that the international community should must share the burden with host countries by helping to strengthen infrastructure and public services, build local capacity and defuse tensions between refugees and their hosts. The international community should also support underfunded appeals for assistance for Syrian refugees.

36. He was alarmed at the discriminatory treatment meted out in several countries to Syrian Palestine refugees and called on all countries to protect refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic, to fully respect their rights and to refrain from placing them in illegal detention. Most of the refugees would probably opt for voluntary repatriation when conditions allowed, but opportunities for third country resettlement for particularly vulnerable Syrians would also be welcome. Resettlement countries should share the burden, expand resettlement opportunities and expedite processing.

37. He said that the Regional Refugee Coordinator and the Syria Humanitarian Coordinator should work closely with the Humanitarian Coordinator to develop regional planning and response strategies. NGOs should be involved in needs assessment before the sixth Regional Response Plan was released. A more coherent plan must be to address the needs of refugees outside camps and of host communities, and more effective ways must be found to identify and reach out to vulnerable persons in urban settings. A holistic response was needed that linked relief recovery and development approaches. Programming should focus on local investments, and UNHCR should integrate the refugee response into the United Nations Development Assistance Framework and poverty reduction strategy papers. Lastly, a negotiated political solution to the Syrian conflict must be found without delay.

38. **Mr. Osotimehin** (United Nations Population Fund) said that the Syrian crisis was affecting 2.3 million Syrian women and girls of reproductive age. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) had worked with partners on the ground to provide critical reproductive health services, including emergency obstetric care, to some 27,600 women in the Syrian Arab Republic where, there had been a dramatic increase in scheduled caesarian sections. UNFPA and partners had distributed more than 35,000 vouchers giving pregnant women access to maternal health and obstetric services free of charge.

39. Services to address gender-based violence were urgently required. Emergencies made affected populations more vulnerable as families were separated and critical services became scarce. Syrian refugees commonly cited fear of sexual violence as a reason for fleeing. UNFPA supported four safe spaces in Damascus and rural Damascus and planned to establish a further five. Psychological support was provided in those spaces, as well as recreational activities for women and children. Survivors of gender-based violence who required medical care were referred to specialized medical facilities.

40. UNFPA and UNHCR had recently trained staff that dealt with gender-based violence in the Syrian Arab Republic and other affected countries in the region. They were now formulating a regional strategy to address the reproductive health and protection needs of urban refugees. UNFPA was also providing livelihood services in Zaatari camp and conducting literacy classes for women and girls in communities in Iraq and Jordan. UNFPA supported calls for the alignment of humanitarian responses with development interventions, as that made it possible for humanitarian initiatives to resonate beyond the end of a crisis.

41. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations Office at Geneva, the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Egypt, the*

Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq, the Permanent Representative of Jordan and the Ambassador of Turkey took places at the podium.

42. **The Chairperson** read out the Final Statement of the High-Level Segment of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme on Solidarity and Burden-Sharing with Countries Hosting Syrian Refugees, which read as follows:

"We, Member States of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, gathered in Geneva, Switzerland, on 30 September and 1 October 2013 on the occasion of a High-Level Segment on Solidarity and Burden-Sharing with Countries hosting Syrian Refugees, deliberated upon the following, in a solely humanitarian and non-political spirit:

"We are deeply grateful for the detailed briefing by the Ministers of Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey — neighbouring States hosting Syrian refugees — on the impact on their countries and communities of more than 2 million refugees. We commend the exemplary generosity and hospitality of refugee-hosting countries and communities, and their significant investments in hosting Syrian refugees, as a temporary measure until the refugees voluntarily return to their country in safety and dignity. We recognize the profound impact on host communities, economies, societies, services, infrastructure, environment and security. At the same time we remain mindful of the needs of a huge number of persons that had to leave their homes inside the Syrian Arab Republic.

"We are alarmed at the gravity and complexity of the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic and recognize the urgent need for a settlement. We believe that without a comprehensive political solution the humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic and the whole Middle East region will continue to deteriorate and we commend efforts to convene the Geneva-2 International Conference.

"We reaffirm, therefore, our commitment to the principles of international solidarity and burden-sharing, in supporting host countries and in responding to the assistance needs of refugees and the communities hosting them. We are grateful for the commitments expressed by Member States and the affirmations of support to the host countries and communities, UNHCR, other UN and relevant humanitarian actors working on behalf of Syrian refugees. We call upon all actors to closely coordinate with hosting governments and UNHCR so as to avoid duplication of efforts.

"We call upon the international community to:

- Provide direct aid to governments;
- Provide financial and in-kind assistance to support refugee populations and the communities hosting them, in coordination with the State concerned, to relieve pressure on host communities;
- Take into consideration the assessment by host countries, together with United Nations agencies and international financial institutions, of the impact of refugees on country economies, societies, services, infrastructure, environment and security, in order to provide the assistance required;
- Offer enhanced resettlement, humanitarian admission and family reunification opportunities in third countries; and
- Urge development actors to consider initiatives and projects directed to host communities to ease the economic and social costs of hosting Syrian refugees.

“We express our gratitude to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for supporting the organization of the High-Level Segment on Solidarity and Burden-Sharing with Countries hosting Syrian Refugees.”

43. **Mr. Guterres** (High Commissioner) said that all the participants in the high-level segment had provided an impressive demonstration of solidarity. He expressed the hope that international solidarity would help to achieve the common goal of finding a political solution to the conflict and building peace in the Syrian Arab Republic, a task which, until recently, had been something of a puzzle, with invisible pieces.

44. At the high-level segment the international community had approved a unified statement of support for host countries and recognized the principle of burden-sharing as a fundamental tool of the international protection regime. Other pieces of the puzzle were slowly appearing. The Security Council had approved a resolution on chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic and was currently discussing humanitarian access in the region. Participants in the high-level segment had recognized that the protracted humanitarian emergency had become a structural problem for host countries as well as a threat to regional and global peace and stability. Henceforth, humanitarian and development agencies must work together and coordinate effectively with host country Governments in implementing programmes and projects for refugees and create conditions to enable host countries to provide a sustained, coherent and long-term response.

45. Coordination mechanisms had been established in Jordan, while, in Lebanon, the comprehensive needs assessment conducted by the World Bank would facilitate coordination of humanitarian and development efforts. In Iraq, mechanisms were being put in place and the authorities were working with humanitarian and development agencies to secure support from the international community. Turkey and Egypt were also developing a number of initiatives that could be directly supported by the international community.

46. Countries could help by keeping their borders open to refugees from the Syrian conflict. The fact that 17 out of 18 resettlement countries had announced at the meeting that they would introduce special quotas for Syrian refugees demonstrated a shared sense of responsibility across the entire international community. It was high time that the international community stood side by side with the host countries and shared their burden. The Syrian refugee crisis should not challenge but rather should strengthen the international protection regime.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.