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Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Sixty-fifth session

Summary record of the 679th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 1 October 2014, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Mr. Choi Seokyoung(Republic of Korea)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

General debate (*continued*)

1. **Mr. Manicom** (Canada) expressed concern about the huge number of unaccompanied children who had been forcibly displaced by lingering conflicts and protracted crises, such as those in Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria, as their plight could have tragic consequences. Education was, however, an effective tool for reducing their vulnerability, especially when exile was prolonged. Recent emergencies in Syria, Libya and Iraq had shown that vulnerable segments of the population, especially religious communities, had to contend with mounting persecution and violence. Canada therefore remained determined to defend religious minorities' rights during armed conflicts and enforced migration. It encouraged the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to continue to establish partnerships with faith-based organizations in order that it might gain a better understanding of those communities' needs.

2. **Ms. Batistić Kos** (Croatia) was pleased that UNHCR had recommended the application of the status cessation clause of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees to persons who had been displaced during the conflicts in her region. UNHCR had likewise taken the unprecedented step of making recommendations, which would certainly help the four countries in the region to put in place and implement sustainable solutions for those persons. Substantial progress had been achieved on the ground and the execution of the first sub-project under the Regional Housing Programme was advancing well. Serbia would begin to implement its part of that programme in the very near future. Unfortunately some of the areas of return of the refugees covered by the Programme had been hard hit by the historic floods in May 2014, which had once again made it necessary for Croatia to take in refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Her country was concerned by the growing number of persons who were often risking their lives to flee from the conflicts in the Middle East and Africa.

3. **Mr. Ahn** (Republic of Korea) commended UNHCR endeavours to provide its field staff and partners with relevant guidelines on refugee protection based on respect for human rights. Since the principle of non-refoulement was central to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, it was worrying that North Korean refugees and asylum seekers were still being repatriated against their wishes. He urged UNHCR to spare no effort to secure the application of that principle. Education was likewise of importance if lasting solutions were to be found. He reaffirmed his country's commitment to cooperation in that respect with the countries and agencies concerned.

4. **Mr. Staur** (Denmark) noted that in 2014 the Executive Committee would adopt a budget of over 6 billion United States dollars, the largest in its history. He was pleased to say that Denmark was one of the main donors. The exceptional scale of the worldwide refugee problem meant that sustainable solutions to protracted displacement must be found as soon as possible. Denmark welcomed the agreement concluded in April 2014 between UNHCR and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) on mixed situations involving refugees and displaced persons. Since national and international NGOs were implementing an increasing number of UNHCR programmes, he urged UNHCR to ensure that partnership principles were fully understood by actors on the ground. Denmark co-chaired the Solutions Alliance, a network of entities which worked together to end protracted displacement by favouring development-oriented approaches. The progress made by that initiative was promising.

5. **Mr. Fasel** (Switzerland) firmly condemned deliberate attacks against humanitarian personnel and the refusal of access to vulnerable groups. He welcomed the joint UNHCR-OCHA note, which clarified coordination and the responsibilities of the Humanitarian Coordinator and the UNHCR Representative in mixed situations. He encouraged both

organizations to cooperate more closely. Switzerland was satisfied with the numerous advances made in technical areas, the consolidation of which it would continue to support through financing and the seconding of experts. It was pleased to note that the theme of the High Commissioner's seventh Dialogue on Protection Challenges would be protection at sea.

6. **Mr. Trambajolo** (Italy) said that Italy had had to contend with a serious humanitarian emergency in the Mediterranean, in the course of which the Italian navy had saved more than 135,000 people as part of the Mare Nostrum operation, the largest humanitarian operation ever mounted by Italy. Nevertheless the death of 3,000 people during that operation in the current year made a common European approach essential. Italy had therefore made that issue a priority of its Presidency of the European Union and had set itself the goal of securing the adoption of a common European policy on migration and asylum. He was pleased that in 2014 the Dialogue on Protection Challenges would be devoted to protection at sea. Italy had pledged a total of 9 million dollars to UNHCR in 2014. It was on the point of ratifying the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

7. **Mr. Ramadan** (Egypt) welcomed the High Commissioner's visit to Egypt in September 2014, which had made it possible to acquaint UNHCR with the action to assist refugees undertaken by the Egyptian Government notwithstanding its current difficulties. Egypt had learned much from its close cooperation with UNHCR during the Syrian and Libyan crises. In order to end the Syrian emergency, which had generated a large influx of refugees into Egypt, priority had to go to promoting human rights in the region, fighting terrorism by cutting off its sources of finance and guaranteeing the protection of civilians. The 250,000 Syrian refugees in his country lived where they wanted and were not confined to refugee camps. The Government had adopted a resolution guaranteeing Syrians equal treatment in education and the health services. That constituted a heavy financial burden for his country. Egypt was also one of the main countries of transit for migrants in an irregular situation, especially those from east Africa. Neighbouring countries were unable to absorb the huge number of Syrian refugees, who increasingly attempted to cross the Mediterranean by transiting through Egypt. A cooperation mechanism needed to be put in place to deal with what would undoubtedly be long-lasting.

8. **Ms. Iivula-Ithana** (Namibia) said that Namibia had started to take in refugees in the early 1990s but that their number had fallen from 25,000 in those days to their current level of a few hundred. Osire refugee camp was very well run and boasted a school and a hospital. Prior to the adoption of the cessation clause, Namibia had been playing host to 6,000 Angolan refugees. The two governments concerned and UNHCR had introduced a package of incentives to enable Angolan refugees to embark upon a new life in their home country. The Namibian Government had adopted a policy aimed at the local integration of the remaining 2,400 Angolan refugees, with the financial assistance of UNHCR. Namibia was preparing to ratify the Kampala Convention and was contemplating the signature of the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

9. **Mr. Knutsson** (Sweden) said that the conflict in Syria was still claiming many lives and was spilling over into Iraq. He was gravely concerned by the violence and human rights violations arising from that conflict and by the recent massive flow of refugees into Turkey. Sweden was one of the European Union countries which took in the largest number of asylum seekers and it intended to continue to offer refuge to persons in need of protection. The current Swedish chair of the Core Group on Syrian Resettlement confirmed the country's long-term commitment in that area. Sweden welcomed the focus placed by UNHCR on new partnerships and efforts to achieve sustainable solutions to refugee situations, inter alia through the Solutions Alliance. It strongly supported assistance with self-sufficiency and long-term planning in partnership with all those concerned.

10. **Mr. Kongstad** (Norway) said that Norway participated in the new Solutions Alliance, the Global Initiative on Somali Refugees and the Afghan Solutions Strategy. It endorsed the Secretary-General's decision on durable solutions for displaced persons. It commended the greater efforts being made by UNHCR to ensure the protection and education of children and it hoped to be able to step up its cooperation with UNHCR in that field. It was, however, concerned by inadequate action to combat sexual violence during conflicts. Care must be taken to ensure that such action was given its rightful place in humanitarian assistance.

11. **Mr. Rücker** (Germany) said that Germany's contribution to the UNHCR budget had grown considerably in recent years, but funding still fell short of what were enormous needs. For that reason the emerging countries should acknowledge their "emerging responsibility" and make a corresponding contribution to the budget. Germany would host a ministerial conference on the situation of Syrian refugees in Berlin in October 2014, which would be co-chaired by Mr. Guterres, the High Commissioner. Its purpose would be to agree on a coordinated, effective response to the refugee crisis in that region and jointly to define medium-term priorities for regional stabilization. Since that crisis was likely to last for several years, it demanded coordinated, predictable action, including that of donors. Education, which was vital in order to avoid the loss of a generation in Syria, would form another important pillar of the Berlin conference. Germany also attached great importance to countering the humanitarian consequences of climate change. It welcomed the valuable participation in and input of UNHCR to the forum that it had organized on that subject in Berlin in June 2014.

12. **Mr. Bošković** (Montenegro) said that Montenegro had vigorously sought a permanent solution to the status of refugees and internally displaced persons in its area. The Regional Housing Programme, which it was implementing with international partners, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia, would house 6,063 vulnerable persons in Pljevlja, Nikšić, Berane and Herceg Novi. Thanks to bilateral cooperation with the authorities of Kosovo, 13 families, or 67 persons, had recently been able to return to Klina (Kosovo). On 20 February 2014 the authorities of Montenegro had inaugurated a centre with the capacity to accommodate 65 asylum seekers that complied with international standards.

13. **Mr. Hassan Trad** (Observer for Saudi Arabia) said that Saudi Arabia allocated more than 0.7 per cent of its gross domestic product to official development assistance and pledged the payment of 1 million dollars to UNHCR in support of its various activities to assist refugees.

14. **Mr. Chávez Basagoitia** (Peru) said that Peru, which was a new member of the Executive Committee, had adopted a Refugee Act which governed the procedure for granting refugee status and which incorporated the principles of international law and the right to due process. The purpose of several of the act's provisions was to improve the care of unaccompanied minors, to issue identity documents to asylum seekers and to ensure that refugees had access to health and education services. The authorities were trying to cut the five months which were currently needed on average to process applications for refugee status, the number of which had been steadily rising, from 420 in 2013 to probably around 500 by 2014. The 1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons had recently entered into force in Peru and the process of adopting the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness had almost been completed.

15. **Mr. Guterres** (High Commissioner for Refugees) welcomed the efforts made by the various countries and the backing they provided for UNHCR activities. He particularly commended Denmark's role in founding the Solutions Alliance.

Statement by the Secretary-General of the United Nations

16. **The Chairperson** suspended the general debate in order to give the floor to the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

17. **Mr. Ban** (Secretary-General of the United Nations) commended the action of UNHCR and paid tribute to humanitarian workers around the world, who daily risked their lives to assist people in need. He welcomed the commitment of the High Commissioner for Refugees and the passion with which he performed his duties. In view of the increasing number of crises, refugees, displaced persons and asylum seekers throughout the world, he advocated preventing forced displacement, addressing its root causes and seeking solutions, all of which necessarily entailed more resources, political leadership and closer cooperation within the international community, as exemplified by the Transformative Agenda of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee.

18. The Human Rights Up Front Initiative, which had been launched in 2013, was designed to make human rights central to thinking and protection efforts in the field, irrespective of the crisis. While that new approach had already made it possible to protect almost 100,000 people in United Nations bases in South Sudan, it must be accompanied by a genuine quest for sustainable solutions, especially within the framework of the Solutions Alliance, which were a means of promoting peace, stability and the development of all the countries concerned.

19. He welcomed UNHCR plans for a global campaign to end statelessness. In the lead-up to the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 it was vital to reaffirm the universal nature of humanitarian principles, to reject their erosion and to ensure that the humanitarian system was suited to its purpose.

20. He said that, when he had been a child, the action of the United Nations during the Korean War had restored his hope after he had been forced to flee from his village. When the international community took united action, refugees and displaced persons could once again hope for a better future and a better world.

21. **The Chairperson** thanked the Secretary-General of the United Nations for his statement and his commitment to UNHCR activities.

22. **Mr. Baloch** (Pakistan) asked how the United Nations could ensure that development partners' pledges of financial contributions to refugee strategies were kept and what measures might be contemplated to improve synergy between development activities and the provision of humanitarian assistance, so that refugees might be able to return safely to their countries of origin.

23. **Mr. Onek** (Uganda) asked how the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the United Nations could help to address the underlying causes of displacement.

24. **Ms. Richard** (United States of America) wished to know what measures could be taken to ensure that enough funds were channelled to humanitarian assistance in order to meet the needs arising from an ever-increasing number of emergencies.

25. **Mr. Serra** (Italy) asked how the United Nations could promote respect for humanitarian principles in countries of transit as well as compliance with the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

26. **Mr. Ban** (Secretary-General of the United Nations) said that a comprehensive solution to refugees' problems would be unthinkable without the firm support of the international community. Preventive diplomacy, to which he had given priority since he had taken office, was effective only if world leaders listened to their people's aspirations and, at the same time, secured the rule of law and applied the principle of good governance. At the financial level, working out an annual estimate of humanitarian assistance was one

way of helping donors to plan and honour their commitments better. At all events, human rights must take precedence in humanitarian activities.

27. **Mr. Guterres** (High Commissioner for Refugees) expressed the gratitude of the members and observers of the Executive Committee to the Secretary-General of the United Nations for his attendance, solidarity and commitment. The humanitarian community, which was faced with a proliferation of crises, had almost reached breaking point, which was why it was so important to prevent and resolve conflicts. He thanked the Secretary-General of the United Nations for his tireless efforts and unswerving support and hoped that, through his work, he would secure the success of the common values of the United Nations.

Resumption of the general debate

28. **Mr. Guterres** (High Commissioner for Refugees) thanked donor countries for their generous support. It was vital that UNHCR had at its disposal non-earmarked funds in order to be able to respond to emergencies as they occurred; it was to be hoped that that type of aid would be made available systematically. Sweden's policy with regard to the intake of Syrian refugees should serve as a model for all European countries. He congratulated Germany on becoming the country which had accepted the largest number of asylum seekers the previous year.

29. **Mr. Béké Dassys** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that 240,000 Ivorian refugees had been able to return home thanks to the assistance of UNHCR and the international community and the Government's policy on promoting national reconciliation and social cohesion. The measures which had been adopted to facilitate the resettlement of those persons within the social fabric placed a heavy burden on a country which was deeply engaged in reconstruction. That was why Côte d'Ivoire was asking for the international community's assistance in completing that programme. In 2013 Côte d'Ivoire had ratified the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. An act had been adopted in 2013 to allow the registration of all children born during the post-electoral emergency, while another act passed in 2013 made it possible for all children born in Ivorian territory to opt for Ivorian nationality, a measure which had saved 600,000 children from becoming stateless.

30. **Mr. Smorodin** (Russian Federation) said that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner must conduct its activities only with the agreement of the countries concerned and in compliance with the principles of neutrality, humanity and impartiality. The Russian Federation was greatly concerned by events in the south-east of Ukraine, which had triggered massive population displacements. Since the beginning of 2014, 860,683 Ukrainians had fled to Russia, of whom 381,294 had asked the Russian authorities to clarify their legal status, 5,549 had applied for refugee status, 193,639 had requested temporary refugee status, 42,483 had asked for temporary residence, 94,932 had applied for citizenship and 23,949 had requested a residence visa. Steps had been taken to meet the needs of those persons, whose influx had not been interrupted by the ceasefire. In order to house them, 979 temporary accommodation centres had been opened and, a working group on integration and reception had been set up, while simplified naturalization procedures would be introduced. The Russian Federation thanked UNHCR for its assistance and asked it to continue to circulate objective information on the Ukrainian crisis to the international community.

31. **Ms. O'Brien** (Ireland) endorsed the statement made on behalf of the European Union. She congratulated UNHCR and OCHA on their joint Note on Mixed Situations: Coordination in Practice and urged UNHCR to implement its provisions in order to avoid any overlapping. She also asked it to continue to strengthen its coordination capacities in the Global Protection Cluster and in protection clusters at field level.

32. **Ms. Kairamo** (Finland) said that 40 per cent of Finland's contribution to UNHCR was based on a multi-year contract and was not earmarked. The rest was allocated with great flexibility. Finland called on other countries to do likewise in accordance with the Principles and Good Practice of Good Humanitarian Donorship. Finland was concerned about the diminishing protection space in some countries. Respect for international humanitarian law was more necessary than ever. Access to education, which was vital for all children, including displaced children, required the frontloading of development assistance. Finland commended UNHCR on its work with host communities and countries to help refugees become self-reliant and considered that it should conclude partnerships, inter alia with the private sector, to that end. Finland hoped that special attention would be paid to vulnerable persons, such as persons living with disability and members of minorities.

33. **Mr. Delmi** (Algeria) said that Algeria was continuing to receive nationals of sub-Saharan countries and Syrians and it was pursuing its efforts through diplomatic channels to achieve the political stabilization of the countries in the region. The Saharans in the camps near Tindouf aspired to voluntary repatriation through the implementation of the United Nations peace plan. In the meantime, the aid given to them did not cover their basic needs and must be supplemented. For that reason, the Algerian Government invited the Chairperson of the Executive Committee to pay a working visit to the Saharan refugee camps in order to obtain a precise picture of their needs and aspirations.

34. **Mr. Bunnag** (Thailand) said that for 30 years Thailand had been taking in a great many refugees from Myanmar. Recent developments in that country had offered them some hope of returning home in the near future. Thailand stood ready to cooperate with all sides in order to build on current progress and prepare for the sustainable return of those refugees when the time came. Care would have to be taken to ensure that conditions on both sides of the border were such that the process would be sustainable, and the experience of UNHCR in that respect would be crucial. Thailand, which in recent years, had taken in refugees from Rakhine State in Myanmar, requested closer regional cooperation in monitoring irregular movements of persons by sea in order to address that issue.

35. **Mr. Ahsan** (Bangladesh) said that for more than 35 years his country had been playing host to long-term refugees. More than 32,000 Muslims from Rakhine State in Myanmar were living in two camps in Bangladesh pending their voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity. Bangladesh had embarked upon a dialogue with representatives of Myanmar to that end and, in the meantime, it was providing those refugees with protection and assistance, with the backing of UNHCR and the World Food Programme. Children received education and adults were given training in preparation for their sustainable return. Bangladesh called on the international community to continue working with the authorities of Myanmar in order to create conditions which would guarantee refugees' right to life and liberty, the restoration of their national identity and their livelihood.

36. **Mr. Guterres** (High Commissioner for Refugees) thanked Côte d'Ivoire for the exemplary practical measures which it had adopted to reduce cases of statelessness. The protection of refugees living with disability was a major concern of UNHCR, which had drawn up a plan of action for that purpose.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.