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Summary record of the 681st meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 2 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. Tchariè** (Togo) said that Togo currently hosted 21,000 refugees of 14 different nationalities, including 600 persons from the Central African Republic. Following a tripartite meeting between Ghana, Togo and UNHCR held in Lomé on 20 December 2013, the local integration of Ghanaian refugees from 1982 and 1994 in Togo and the return of the remaining Togolese refugees in Ghana had begun. On 19 December 2013, two memorandums of understanding had been concluded between UNHCR and Togo with a view to providing refugees with travel documents in compliance with the standards of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and secured identity cards. On behalf of the Togolese Government, he thanked the Beninese Government for providing durable solutions to the situation of Togolese refugees on its territory, which had resulted in the closure of the last Togolese refugee camp on 26 September 2013.
2. **Mr. Muzenda** (Observer for Zimbabwe) said that Zimbabwe hosted many asylum seekers, the majority of whom came from the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa. Despite its economic difficulties, Zimbabwe hosted 8,742 refugees and asylum seekers, of whom 88 per cent lived in the Tongogara refugee camp. Following the Ebola epidemic outbreak, the Southern African Development Community had adopted a regional policy for preparedness and response on 5 September 2014.
3. **Mr. Rizzo Alvarado** (Observer for Honduras) said that the Presidents of Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador had submitted the Plan of the Alliance for Prosperity in the Northern Triangle to the United Nations Secretary-General at the sixty-ninth session of the United Nations General Assembly, with a view to preventing the mass exodus of adults and children to North America through the establishment of the requisite development conditions in the countries of origin.
4. **Mr. Bártolo** (Portugal) said that Portugal was committed to assisting in the resettlement of Syrian refugees as part of its national refugee resettlement programme, and supported the aim of eliminating statelessness by 2024. Within the framework of the Confidence-Building Measures Programme for Western Sahara, Portugal had organized various cultural seminars since 2011, with the support of all stakeholders, aimed at increasing trust and understanding.
5. **Mr. Prielcel** (Slovakia) said that his country, as a new member of the Executive Committee, welcomed the cooperation with the UNHCR office in Slovakia on the proposed emergency transit centre, which had been established under an agreement between UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Slovakia in order to strengthen protection and resettlement activities.
6. **Mr. Aala** (Observer for the Syrian Arab Republic) said that the Syrian Arab Republic had always welcomed persons in need of protection, regardless of their nationality. There was an urgent need for humanitarian assistance in the country owing to the actions of armed groups, supported from abroad, which had committed horrific attacks against State infrastructure and institutions. Through cooperation with the United Nations and specialized agencies, efforts had been made to ensure that humanitarian assistance reached all persons, without discrimination. In order to resolve the humanitarian crisis resulting from the exile, support for terrorism must be brought to an end and efforts must be made to reconcile all parties so as to bring peace and restore basic State services. The Syrian Government worked to ensure that those who wished to return could do so. He stressed that the aspirations of the Syrian people could only be expressed by Syrians themselves and not the barbaric hordes brought into the country by, inter alia, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

7. **Mr. Samba** (Observer for the Central African Republic) said that the Central African Republic sought to facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance, protect at-risk communities, namely persons of Muslim denomination or similar, from violations, and find durable solutions to their difficulties. Despite the crisis, the National Refugee Commission and UNHCR had voluntarily repatriated 6,283 refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo since January 2013. The authorities were working to reintroduce the refugee status determination process, which had been suspended in 2010, through capacity-building exercises with members of the Appeals Commission and the Eligibility Subcommission. With UNHCR support, they had also been trying to establish a simplified procedure for issuing refugee biometric travel documents in compliance with ICAO standards. Nevertheless, much remained to be done. He therefore requested the international community's assistance in conducting operations on behalf of asylum seekers and refugees in the Central African Republic.

8. **Ms. Jayasuriya Arachchige** (Observer for Sri Lanka) thanked UNHCR for the support extended to Sri Lanka under the post-conflict resettlement programme. As recently noted by the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, the Sri Lankan Government had made great progress in facilitating the return or resettlement of nearly 760,000 internally displaced persons. Despite not being a signatory to the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, Sri Lanka hosted refugees and asylum seekers (1,606 and 321 persons respectively in 2014) and supported UNHCR efforts to issue them with certificates in accordance with the 2006 agreement.

9. **Mr. Dzundev** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia had offered protection to more than 400,000 refugees between 1991 and 2014. It currently hosted some 1,000 persons in need of international protection, most of whom belonged to the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. The majority of refugees in the country's centre for asylum seekers came from the Syrian Arab Republic, Pakistan and Afghanistan, via Greece. In 2014, the authorities had adopted an asylum seeker integration programme and an action plan aimed at resolving the difficulties of persons who had not been registered at birth.

10. **Mr. Ababneh** (Jordan) stressed the importance of the actions of NGOs and civil society organizations on the ground, in cooperation with UNHCR and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. Assisted voluntary repatriation was one of the most important aspects of assistance as a whole.

11. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) welcomed the efforts made by different countries and the support shown for UNHCR activities. He referred with some emotion to the situation of Syrian refugees, as he had been deeply moved by the generosity of the Syrian people towards refugees during each one of his visits. He stressed that UNHCR would continue to operate with the highest regard for the principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence.

12. **Mr. Vos** (Netherlands) endorsed the statement made on behalf of the European Union. Recalling that three quarters of the world's refugees had left their countries more than five years previously, he stressed that it was more important than ever to devise durable solutions which would enable refugees to live in dignity. In that respect, the Netherlands welcomed the role played by UNHCR alongside the Danish Government in the Solutions Alliance. It supported the implementation of the joint note between UNHCR and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on coordination in mixed situations at both headquarters and field level. Following the international conference in The Hague, the Netherlands intended to establish a national mechanism for the determination of statelessness.

13. **Mr. Adhikari** (Observer for Nepal) said that Nepal had welcomed thousands of Bhutanese refugees over the last 20 years and had taken all possible steps to guarantee their protection and security. It had made great efforts to find durable solutions to the situation through bilateral negotiation, but had been thwarted by the failure of Bhutan to implement decisions agreed following 17 rounds of ministerial-level negotiations. No Bhutanese refugees had been able to return to their homes, not even those who had been officially recognized by the Nepal-Bhutan Joint Verification Team in 2003. Nepal wished to resume the verification process, repatriate Bhutanese refugees and close the refugee camps as soon as possible. The primary responsibility for establishing conditions conducive to the safe and dignified voluntary return of refugees lay with the country of origin.

14. **Mr. Ren** (China) said that the international community should take all necessary steps to safeguard peace. Regional and international differences should be resolved by peaceful means and emphasis should be placed on prevention so that conflicts did not reoccur. Responsibilities and burdens must be shared and developed countries should honour their commitments to host countries for refugees in terms of technical assistance. The legitimate demands of host countries must be taken into account and refugees should be encouraged to resettle or return to their countries of origin. The Chinese Government was discharging its duty to protect refugees and had increased its contribution to UNHCR: 230 million yuan had been earmarked for Syrian refugees, 80 million yuan had been allocated for South Sudan and a further 230 million yuan had been used to combat the Ebola epidemic. China also contributed to the activities of the African Union and the World Health Organization.

15. **Mr. Finol** (Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)) said that his country hosted persons in need of international protection, in the belief that inclusion was the best form of protection. That philosophy had been reflected in public policies which provided refugees with access to free education and health care. Refugees could fully exercise their economic rights, particularly their right to work. They received the same national social benefits and advantages as Venezuelan citizens. The Venezuelan Government denounced the systemic causes that drove millions of people to flee their homes and stressed that only a firm commitment to peace and a reduction of inequalities could put an end to that scourge.

16. **Mr. Yeganyan** (Observer for Armenia) said that his country had applied to become a full member of the UNHCR Executive Committee and would be able, for the first time following independence, to make a financial contribution to UNHCR. Armenians, who had often had to flee from their homes in the course of their history, had welcomed 15,000 refugees from the Syrian conflict. The Armenian Government had established an accelerated asylum procedure and had granted them residence permits. Ethnic Armenians, in turn, enjoyed an accelerated naturalization process. Armenia had also become a host country for a steadily increasing number of Ukrainian asylum seekers. Armenia, which had benefited from the skills and entrepreneurial knowledge of Syrians, called on UNHCR and its international partners to maintain their level of assistance in 2015 and 2016 so that emergency response measures could be transformed into longer-term assistance and durable solutions could be found. Such measures would be all the more important given the country's intention to reform its asylum legislation. Armenia had also taken steps to reduce statelessness by granting Armenian citizenship to 85,000 stateless persons, and had drafted a bill on the subject. He recalled that 952 Armenian families forcibly displaced from Azerbaijan had been living in precarious conditions for over 25 years and called on donor countries' assistance in providing them with adequate housing.

17. **Ms. Salsa** (Estonia) endorsed the statement made on behalf of the European Union. She welcomed the agreement of April 2014 between the High Commissioner and the Emergency Relief Coordinator on coordination between UNHCR and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in mixed refugee and displacement

situations, and called on the two organizations to ensure the implementation of the agreement. She expressed concern over the increasingly complex situation at European borders and said that more should be done to address the root causes of instability and crisis.

18. **Mr. Dunbar** (Observer for Haiti) said that Haiti was participating for the first time as an observer in the intersessional meetings of the UNHCR Executive Committee. He supported the two statements made by Paraguay on behalf of the Group of Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean (GRULAC). He expressed concern at the numerous ongoing armed conflicts in Africa, which ran the risk of increasing the number and vulnerability of refugees and stateless persons, and called for more coordinated international solidarity, burden sharing and more effective and better planned actions on the ground in order to prevent crises in the making, resolve conflicts and establish more favourable conditions for world peace. He expressed his gratitude to UNHCR, on behalf of the Haitian people, for its support in finalizing a bill on nationality aimed at combating statelessness.

19. **Ms. Csizmadia** (Hungary) said that Hungary was party to all relevant international and regional conventions on statelessness. It had taken steps to improve its legislation in that area and had adopted an independent procedure for determining statelessness in July 2007. Hungary was committed to conducting an awareness campaign on the issue and had actively contributed to the first Global Forum on Statelessness held in The Hague in September 2014. Gravely concerned by the evolution of the Syrian crisis, Hungary had made a financial contribution to the work of the United Nations agencies in the Syrian Arab Republic and neighbouring countries, and was hosting Syrian refugees.

20. **Mr. Streeter** (Chile) said that the presence of the United Nations Secretary-General at the current session of the Executive Committee reflected the strong political and institutional support for the work of UNHCR and indicated the value placed on humanitarian work as part of efforts to develop more inclusive global governance. Chile had adopted a law on the protection of refugees in 2010. It had participated in the UNHCR resettlement programme since 1999 and had welcomed hundreds of refugees from more than 30 countries under that programme. It was convinced that the Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action, due to be adopted by the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean in December 2014, would make an important contribution to international protection of refugees in the region.

21. **Mr. Ulloa Alvarenga** (Observer for El Salvador) endorsed the statement made by Paraguay on behalf of GRULAC. He expressed concern at the latest forms of forced displacement which denied international protection to the most vulnerable groups. El Salvador was also very concerned about the irregular migration under dangerous circumstances of accompanied and unaccompanied minors from countries in the northern triangle of Central America, namely El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala. He stressed the need to promote the concept of shared responsibility between States of origin, transit and destination and to provide international protection to persons in transit. Steps should also be taken to promote family unity, which was the cornerstone of child protection.

22. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the implementation by the Netherlands of a mechanism to determine the status of statelessness was a very important step that should serve as a model for other countries. He commended Armenia for its first financial contribution to UNHCR, which was of great symbolic value. He considered the new Haitian nationality law to be an invaluable protection instrument for Haitians and their descendants, who risked becoming one of the largest stateless groups. He thanked Hungary for the effectiveness of the UNHCR Global Learning Centre and Service Centre in Budapest, which had contributed to cost reductions and the Agency's increased efficiency.

23. **Mr. Soe** (Observer for Myanmar) said that the refugees arriving on the shores of various countries in the region did not come from Rakhine State. They were citizens from countries in the region which had fallen victim to local and international criminal groups involved in human trafficking to destinations in Southeast Asia and beyond. Perpetrators of such abuses should be arrested and prosecuted in accordance with the law. As for Myanmar refugees in Thailand, Myanmar would be pleased to receive them and hoped that they would return home soon.

24. **Mr. Mercado** (Argentina) endorsed the statement made by Paraguay on behalf of GRULAC. Refugee protection was a priority issue for Argentina. It had been addressed in the Constitution, the law on migration and the law on the recognition and protection of refugees. The efforts made by Argentina had increased the protection of refugees at national level and within the framework of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR). Argentina was party to the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, and the National Congress had approved a bill in August 2014 regarding the country's accession to the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. People seeking refugee status in Argentina received free legal assistance at all stages of the procedure for determining such status. Argentina paid particular attention to the situation of unaccompanied minors. It had therefore filed a request, together with other MERCOSUR member States, seeking an advisory opinion from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights on the situation of migrant children, with a view to obtaining an exact understanding of States' obligations in that regard and the measures required in respect of children's or their parents' immigration status. It had been an unprecedented step, which had resulted in the advisory opinion of 19 August 2014 on the rights and guarantees of children in the context of migration and/or in need of international protection.

25. **Ms. Rebong** (Philippines) said that the protection of refugees, which was a long-standing tradition in the Philippines, had been strengthened through the Emergency Transit Mechanism. The Philippines had made a contribution of US\$ 3.1 million to UNHCR and IOM in the past five years. Cooperation under the mechanism continued, despite the challenges facing the country, in particular because of the need to support the millions of persons displaced by Typhoon Haiyan. In October 2015, the Philippines would host the regional governmental consultations with countries in Southeast Asia as part of the Nansen Initiative.

26. **Mr. Klymenko** (Observer for Ukraine) said that Ukraine was having to contend with an influx of persons displaced by the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea by the Russian Federation and the subversive activities by the Russian Federation in southeast Ukraine. The Ukrainian Government was taking all possible steps to address the problems of displaced persons and find durable solutions, including on the basis of the recommendations of United Nations agencies. Ukraine called for assistance for the populations in the southeast of the country, in strict compliance with relevant international rules and standards, and in close cooperation with and under the supervision of the International Committee of the Red Cross. The peace plan prepared by the President of Ukraine provided for a revitalization of destabilized regions so as to ensure the swift return of displaced persons. Ukraine respected the agreements made by the Contact Group on 5 September 2014, but illegal armed groups supported by the Russian Federation continued to terrorize the population and force them to flee. The Russian Federation must withdraw its military units from Ukrainian territory and cease supporting terrorist groups by providing them with weapons and mercenaries if it genuinely wanted to address the needs of displaced Ukrainians.

27. **Mr. Mendoza Gantes** (Observer for Panama) said that his Government supported the regional UNHCR office in Panama. Thanks to the regional office's assistance, Panama had been able to accede to the Conventions on statelessness in 2011. It had adopted a law

on provisional humanitarian assistance status so that hundreds of Colombians could obtain a residence permit in the country. The Panamanian Government had been participating in the Quality Assistance Initiative concerning protection, which had been launched in the region. Panama was concerned at the displacements caused by the violence in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, and had been seeking a joint solution to the issue, which was putting children and adolescents at risk. In addition, it called for the strengthening of national, subregional and regional mechanisms to combat illegal smuggling and human trafficking networks. It also supported the Cartagena +30 process.

28. **Ms. Pictet-Althann** (Observer for the Sovereign Order of Malta) said that the Order of Malta's global relief agency, Malteser International, provided health-care assistance for internally displaced Syrians on the Turkish-Syrian border and had set up a surgical hospital in Bab al-Salam. Since August 2014, the Order of Malta's mission in Iraq had provided medical care to 25,000 displaced persons in Erbil and those efforts had gradually been extended to other parts of the country. In Lebanon, the Order had distributed food and medicine to Syrian refugees. It also provided assistance to civilians in the Central African Republic and to South Sudan refugees in northern Uganda, and distributed food aid in South Sudan. Malteser International had carried out assistance programmes for refugees and displaced persons in Myanmar and Thailand for many years, and in the Philippines following Typhoon Haiyan in 2013. Migratory flows across the Mediterranean remained of particular concern and the Order of Malta's Italian Relief Corps continued to assist with the Mare Nostrum project.

29. **Mr. Chikh** (Organization of Islamic Cooperation) said that member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) had always offered asylum and protection to refugee populations and currently hosted the largest number of refugees in the world. The worrying situation of Syrian and Iraqi refugees, including the ethnic and religious minorities among them, had been closely monitored by his Organization, which continued to launch appeals to member countries for increased mobilization. In Africa, the Organization had provided humanitarian assistance to Somali and Central African refugees. It had launched several urgent appeals to its member States in a bid to obtain further assistance for refugees within its scope, and, as a result, had been able to mobilize Islamic solidarity in order to assist Somali refugees in the Dadaab camps and persons returning to their countries. Between January and May 2014, it had conducted humanitarian missions in the Central African Republic, Chad and Cameroon. In September 2014 in New York, the meeting of OIC Foreign Ministers had approved a decision to gradually transform its humanitarian assistance into longer-term development assistance.

30. **Mr. Lonnback** (International Organization for Migration (IOM)) noted that the increasing number of migrants who died at sea or in other perilous situations was one of the most tragic aspects of forced migration. IOM estimated that 4,077 migrants had died in 2014, and at least 40,000 since 2000. IOM and UNHCR had agreed to share their experiences on mixed migration flows and harmonize best practices on the matter. The two organizations also worked closely together on issues of migration and climate change within the High-level Committee on Programmes following the Framework Convention on Climate Change process, and the Nansen Initiative on disaster-induced cross-border displacement. A series of important multilateral events dedicated to development and humanitarian issues would be held over the next two years, including the first World Humanitarian Summit in 2016.

31. **Mr. Eklu** (Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)) said that the ECOWAS region was still reeling from the consequences of the recent crisis in Mali, and that hundreds of thousands of persons had been displaced in Nigeria as a result of the activities of Boko Haram. The region had also witnessed the worst Ebola epidemic outbreak in history. The ECOWAS Commission had taken action in collaboration with the

World Health Organization and other regional bodies in an attempt to reduce the number of deaths and infections, and had called on all its partners for urgent assistance. With the support of ECOWAS and other partners, the Malian Government had begun to make progress towards a political solution and had started to organize the voluntary return of Malian refugees. ECOWAS and UNHCR continued to work in partnership to promote the ratification and implementation of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa.

32. **Mr. Hernandez** (Community and Family Services International), speaking on behalf of the NGO community, said that protecting refugees and displaced persons was the most pressing issue. States and UNHCR should encourage the leadership and participation of women and girls in situations of forced displacement. The self-reliance and basic human rights of refugees in protracted situations must be promoted. States must guarantee the principle of non-refoulement and ensure the protection of refugees. Refugees in urban areas or other non-camp settings should also be protected. States should establish a legal framework for the rights of internally displaced persons and provide support to host communities.

33. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) welcomed the efforts made by countries and the support shown for UNHCR activities. He stressed that UNHCR would lend its firm support to the voluntary repatriation of refugees from Myanmar and urged the Myanmar authorities to work towards finding a solution to the persisting problem of statelessness in the country. Regarding the situation in Ukraine, he remained committed to working with the country's authorities in order to assist internally displaced persons and he gave assurances that UNHCR would operate in strict compliance with humanitarian principles, in accordance with its mandate. He said that UNHCR was currently working with some 900 NGO partners around the world and he stressed that such partnerships, which had become of major strategic importance for the organization, had been indispensable to the success of its work.

34. **The Chairperson** noted that delegations had reiterated the need to strengthen international protection and consolidate the principles of non-refoulement and unhindered access to victims of conflict. They had also underlined the importance of the non-political nature of UNHCR activities. He welcomed the fact that a considerable number of Member States had supported efforts to eliminate statelessness. Delegations had expressed their support for efforts to empower women and combat gender-based violence in situations of displacement. They had recommended strengthening partnerships, developing activities related to education, particularly for children, broadening the donor base and improving coordination. They had also encouraged UNHCR to strengthen cooperation with Governments and regional and subregional organizations. Taking note of the enormous burden that crisis situations placed on host countries and local communities, delegations had urged all stakeholders to provide systematic support and show greater solidarity by increasing their contributions to UNHCR activities. They had also emphasized the importance of prevention and the establishment of durable solutions for situations of displacement and the conflicts which often caused them.

Right of reply

35. *The representatives of Algeria, Morocco and the Russian Federation made statements in exercise of the right of reply.*

36. **Mr. Delmi** (Algeria), exercising his right of reply, said that the Moroccan representative during his statement in the general debate had conflated issues and had spoken untruths about Algeria as the host country of Sahrawi refugees in Western Sahara, and the course of the political process aimed at resolving the dispute between the two countries.

37. **Mr. Boukili** (Morocco), exercising his right of reply, said that the Algerian representative's remarks were incorrect and reiterated his claims regarding the situation of refugees in the Tindouf camps in Algeria and the political disputes between the two countries.

38. **Mr. Smorodin** (Russian Federation), exercising his right of reply, said that the Ukrainian representative during his statement in the general debate had made false allegations and remarks regarding the role and actions of the Russian Federation in southeast Ukraine, and the assistance it extended to refugees and displaced persons in the region. He provided further information in that regard.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.