United Nations A/AC.96/SR.689*

General Assembly

Distr.: General
12 October 2015

Original: English

Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Sixty-sixth session

Summary record of the 689th meeting
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 7 October 2015, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. Comissário

Contents

* Reissued for technical reasons on 13 November 2015.

GE.15-17378 (E) 131115

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

Statement by the High Commissioner and general debate (*continued*)

1. **Ms. Whyte Gómez** (Costa Rica) said that Costa Rica, since the 1970s, had been a host country for large migration flows and persons seeking protection, but there had been a worrying increase recently in arrivals from the Northern Triangle countries: Honduras, Guatemala and especially El Salvador. The country had made much progress in developing its model for the recognition of refugee status over that period and it was now firmly based on protecting the human rights of all. It had acted as a regional leader in events concerning refugees in recent decades and, with the invaluable assistance of UNHCR, had worked for durable solutions and initiatives, such as those on quality asylum, reducing the risk of statelessness and local integration, that could be repeated in other countries and continents.

2. There was a clear need to find ways of strengthening UNHCR, as both the present and the future demanded an institution with a greater capacity for action. Furthermore, action should not be taken to resolve crises only after they had occurred; the existence of immature democracies, authoritarian regimes and huge economic inequalities between countries and regions of the world as causes of migration could not be ignored.

3. **Mr. Keita** (Guinea) said that migration raised two main challenges: providing millions of refugees with the assistance and protection they needed, and addressing the root causes of their flight from their homelands. Recognizing the tireless efforts of UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies, and the responsibility, hospitality and generosity shown by the countries of the European Union to the hundreds of thousands of refugees arriving on their shores, he said that Guinea too had faced a comparable migration crisis resulting from the conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone, with over 800,000 refugees entering its territory. Two thousand of them had now opted for local integration, but a further 7,000, mainly Ivorians, still remained in the country as refugees. Guinea was seeking assistance in helping them support themselves to reduce the risk of vulnerability to which they had been exposed since food aid had been ended in June 2015.

4. Guinea was close to vanquishing Ebola virus disease and expressed its sincere thanks to the whole international community for its support, which it hoped would continue through contributions to the post-Ebola development programme. Guinea was about to hold presidential elections, an event that would be of great importance in maintaining peace and stability in the region.

5. **Mr. Ocando** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that the imperialist strategy of destroying States that refused to obey, which had been implemented in Libya, was the main cause of the current refugee crisis. Syria had, until 2010, been host to hundreds of thousands of refugees from other countries, but now millions of Syrians in turn were fleeing their own country because of an unjust war.

6. Even after the drastic fall in the price of oil, Venezuela had maintained its broad and inclusive refugee system, offering to millions of individuals from all over the world, notably over 5 million from Colombia, the rights to free health care, education and employment. Eighty thousand Colombians, many of whom had already been granted nationality, were registered with the public pension system and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families was enshrined in the country's law. Unfortunately the border with Colombia was more than 2,000 km long, which made it difficult to prevent illegal elements entering Venezuela. As part of the transnational conspiracy against the Bolivarian revolution, such criminals had murdered Venezuelan civilians

and soldiers and engaged in illegal trade that had undermined the national currency. Venezuela had thus been forced to close some of its borders, but the closure had been the subject of false manipulated reports by media conducting an anti-Venezuelan campaign. He stated categorically that no single refugee had been deported from the country and, if it were to be proved otherwise, he would personally go to the border to take them back in. Human rights were a fundamental part of the Bolivarian revolution.

7. **Mr. Sadigov** (Azerbaijan) said that there was no clear definition of the status of forced migrants in international law and the absence of any binding document meant that they were not afforded sufficient protection. It would be possible to develop such a document on the basis of the rules and standards expressed in the fundamental principles of the United Nations.

8. As a result of the armed aggression by Armenia, Azerbaijan, with more than 1,200,000 refugees and forced migrants, had, proportionately, one of the largest refugee populations in the world. Furthermore, its strong economic growth attracted many migrants from other countries. Armenia had also unfortunately taken advantage of the current problems to continue its policy of ethnic cleansing by settling Syrian refugees of Armenian nationality in occupied Azerbaijani territory. Azerbaijan had devoted $6 billion to improving the situation of the forced migrants over the previous 20 years, the last tent camp having been done away with in 2007. However, there were still 400,000 forced migrants living in difficult conditions and donor support was needed to improve their situation. Their rights could only be fully restored if there were a resolution to the conflict, with the complete liberation of all the occupied territory and the refugees allowed to return and take back possession of their homes and property, in line with the “Great Return” programme developed in cooperation with the international organizations. Azerbaijan was also working with UNHCR to make the necessary amendments to its legislation to establish a legal framework for the protection of refugees and forced migrants.

9. **Mr. Begun** (Belarus) said that Belarus had collaborated extensively with UNHCR and in 2014-2015 had improved reception conditions for asylum seekers, notably taking a group of Syrian refugees from Lebanon. Throughout 2015, it had seen a significant increase, to more than 15,000, in the number of forced migrants arriving, particularly from Ukraine, as well as Syria and Afghanistan, and the continued support of the international community was welcome. Recognizing the importance of acting on the causes, rather than simply the results, of humanitarian crises, Belarus was one of the initiators of talks between the sides to the conflict in Ukraine which had brought a halt to active fighting.

10. **Mr. Šofranac** (Montenegro) said that Montenegro was committed to implementing international standards on asylum and migration. It was working on long-term solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons in the country, including local integration with the provision of housing. It put a special emphasis on voluntary return, to which end it was working with representatives of the authorities in Kosovo and the offices of UNHCR and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe in Kosovo. The closure of Konik camp was a priority in making progress towards durable solutions.

11. **Ms. Kuzmanovska** (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that, with great cooperation and support from UNHCR and other organizations, the authorities were doing their utmost to cope with the huge inflows of migrants, mainly from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan. Over 300,000 had entered the country through the southern border with Greece since the beginning of the year, including more than 118,000 between just 19 June and 5 October, with a daily peak of 12,000 and the influx likely to continue. As a result, the Asylum and Temporary Protection Act had been amended to allow migrants to declare their intent to seek asylum and then decide

within 72 hours whether to seek asylum in the country or to continue their journey. Two temporary accommodation centres had been set up and free medical assistance was provided for all. A response plan had been drawn up for the case of a mass influx of migrants. Most positively, the number of cases of human trafficking had been drastically reduced.

12. **Mr. Malangoni** (Observer for Niger) said that, because of its position at the crossroads of migratory flows, Niger was a country of origin, transit and destination for migrants. It was expected that 120,000 would transit the country in 2015, bringing socioeconomic, political and development consequences, besides affecting national and international security. With the constant support of UNHCR, Niger continued to host refugees from several neighbouring countries and endeavoured to enable them to find employment, improve their self-sufficiency and allow them greater independence and dignity. He called on UNHCR and all its partners to increase their support for countries hosting refugees and displaced persons.

13. **Mr. Hall** (Greece) said that, since the beginning of the year, Greece had received more than 350,000 refugees, and over 80,000 in August alone, compared to slightly over 77,000 in the whole of 2014. The smaller islands were particularly affected, with refugee arrivals outnumbering the local population. More than 55,000 persons had also been rescued by the coastguard, but sadly many others had lost their lives during the perilous journey from Turkey.

14. The country's priorities during the unprecedented humanitarian crisis were registering the new arrivals, moving them from the islands to the interior of the country, responding to their basic needs, identifying vulnerable persons and informing them of the availability of international protection in the country. Most of those arriving were Syrian, Afghan or Iraqi nationals and, although the recognition rates for such asylum seekers were very high in Greece and the asylum procedure was now credible, effective and rapid, with decisions issued according to a fast-track procedure within the day, very few actually applied for international protection in the country. Greece was thus faced with a huge influx of potential refugees who wished to continue their journey to other European Union member States to join their compatriots or to benefit from greater opportunities. With UNHCR providing invaluable support, it was working with its partners and the European Asylum Support Office towards a fairer distribution of responsibilities for refugee protection.

15. **Mr. Dassys Beke** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that Côte d'Ivoire had taken effective measures to put an end to statelessness. For example mobile court hearings had been organized and decisions issued authorizing the birth registration of 153,658 persons who had no legal status and were therefore at risk of statelessness. Moreover, around 90,000 persons whose legal status had been questionable owing to the destruction of the state registry during the social and political crisis in Côte d'Ivoire had also been registered. A total of 255,730 beneficiaries had been issued with birth certificates.

16. On 13 September 2013, a law had been adopted, which allowed children born on the national territory at a time when nationality could be acquired by birth or decent to acquire Ivorian nationality simply by making a written declaration. Prior to the entry into force of that law, migrants and their children from the colonial period who had been born on Ivorian territory, had not been considered as Ivorian nationals despite having been integrated into society. Under the new law, 45,000 such persons were in the process of acquiring Ivorian nationality.

17. The Ebola outbreak had hampered the progress achieved with regard to voluntary repatriation of Ivorian refugees, as preventive measures had had to be taken in order to limit the spread of the disease. However, the repatriation of Ivorian refugees from Togo and Ghana had resumed and the repatriation of refugees from

Liberia and Guinea would resume in the near future. In conclusion, he reiterated his Government's solidarity with countries hosting Central African, Syrian, Afghan, Burundian and Sudanese refugees and called for a constructive dialogue in order to put an end to the suffering of those innocent populations.

18. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), responding to the various points raised, said that Costa Rica was a reference point for protection regionally and globally. He stressed the importance of initiatives to ensure quality asylum, reduce the risk of statelessness and facilitate local integration, and he welcomed the statement made by the representative of Costa Rica in Brazil with regard to refugees fleeing from organized criminal groups in the Northern Triangle. Guinea was an exemplary and extremely generous host country and a pivotal point for refugee protection in the region. He expressed UNHCR's solidarity with the Government of Guinea in dealing with the Ebola epidemic. He welcomed the efficient cooperation between the Governments of Venezuela and Colombia in resolving their border problems and welcomed assurances made by the representative of the former that not a single refugee would be deported as a result of those problems. He thanked the representative of Azerbaijan for his statement and said that Azerbaijan had always provided quality assistance to and ensured the implementation of the rights of internally displaced persons residing on its territory. Pointing out that Belarus had developed an effective asylum system, he expressed appreciation for its open-door policy in relation to the large number of Ukrainians who had been fleeing from their country in the recent past. Montenegro had also developed an efficient asylum system and played a leading role in regional cooperation. He thanked the Government of Montenegro for its constant efforts, inter alia, to ensure the implementation of the regional housing programme and assist displaced persons from Kosovo. He expressed his appreciation to the Government of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia for managing the dramatic influx of refugees, whose number ranged between 5,000 and 12,000 per day. He assured the Government of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia that UNHCR would provide its assistance in that regard. He praised the Government of Niger for the continued protection it offered to refugees from Libya, Mali, Nigeria and other countries despite the dramatic impact of the presence of Nigerian refugees in the south-eastern part of the country on its economy, society and security. Greece had developed an efficient asylum system and had overcome many difficulties but it could not be expected to deal alone with the sudden huge increase in the influx of refugees. UNHCR would support Greece in persuading the international community to acknowledge that the challenge it faced was European, not Greek. He stressed the importance of reinforcing Greece's reception capacity, guaranteeing subsequent resettlement of refugees to other countries and developing a policy of return for persons not in need of protection. Lastly, he stressed the vital role of Côte d'Ivoire and the leadership of President Ouattara in eliminating statelessness in the country and in the region, and said that remarkable developments were taking place in Côte d'Ivoire. He expressed the hope that Ivorian refugees would be repatriated in the very near future.

19. **Ms. Tchokpon** (Benin) said that Benin, which hosted hundreds of refugees from various countries, had developed a refugee management and integration strategy and had reformed several laws and institutions, with the active involvement of universities, civil society and the media. For example, a draft law on asylum and refugee protection as well as a draft decree on the work of the national committee on assistance to refugees were being finalized with a view to optimizing asylum procedures. She reiterated her request for UNHCR expertise in resolving situations in which people were at risk of statelessness in the border regions of Benin and on disputed territories, as well as with the reform of civil status and laws governing nationality. In conclusion, she expressed her country's support for the Global Plan of Action and the Abidjan

Declaration approved at the forty-seventh ordinary session of the Authority of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Heads of States and Government.

20. **Mr. Ahsan** (Bangladesh) stressed the importance of addressing the root causes of migration and striking a balance between refugee protection and a durable solution to the refugee crisis. Voluntary repatriation was always the best solution in that regard. Developing countries hosted the largest number of refugees and tried to keep their borders open despite the tremendous burden on their societies and economies. Yet, their enormous sacrifices often went unnoticed. He stressed the importance of translating the burden-sharing principle into concrete financial measures and measures to facilitate repatriation. As a host country, Bangladesh had fulfilled its responsibilities when faced with the influx of thousands of Myanmar refugees onto its territory. More than 32,000 Myanmar Muslim refugees still lived in two camps in Bangladesh, awaiting voluntary repatriation to their homes in the Rakhine State of Myanmar. His Government continued to work with UNHCR on improving education and health-care facilities for refugees and measures were being taken to ensure birth registration of children of all registered refugees. He expressed concern about a reduction in UNHCR funding for Bangladesh as well as a proposal to limit certain key activities. His Government looked forward to continued bilateral dialogue with Myanmar in order to resume the repatriation process. He urged the international community to help the authorities of Myanmar create conditions that would allow refugees to return to the Rakhine State. Continued investment in dialogue between communities was also needed in order to promote peaceful coexistence and a sense of inclusion. With regard to the recent migrant flows along the Andaman Sea routes, he said that regional countries were working together to stop further migration by sea, dismantle trafficking networks and address the root causes of the crisis. Bangladeshi nationals rescued in the neighbouring countries had been brought back home.

21. **Mr. Kumar** (India) said that the failure of some countries to honour their obligations under the Convention and Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees was further aggravating the crisis. On the other hand, those countries which had decided to regularize their refugees and allow them access to employment, education and health services were to be commended. Finding durable solutions should be the ultimate goal of national and international humanitarian efforts. Bilateral and regional dialogues among the countries concerned and close coordination between humanitarian and development actions were of vital importance. He called upon the international community to acknowledge the crucial role of developing countries in addressing the refugee issue. Those countries received little recognition for their contribution despite the fact that they hosted 80 per cent of all refugees. The Executive Committee should develop ways of recognizing their enormous contribution in that regard. For its part, India was committed to hosting and integrating refugees in full respect for the principle of non-refoulement.

22. **Mr. Hoscheit** (Luxembourg) said that the unprecedented humanitarian crisis called for solidarity and reinforced cooperation at all levels in order to support Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon, Ethiopia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan and other host countries. Links between humanitarian response and development cooperation instruments had to be reinforced, with humanitarian and development interventions being undertaken simultaneously at the outset of a crisis. He stressed that the current humanitarian system required an in-depth reform and welcomed UNHCR efforts to find durable solutions, ensure greater transparency and adapt its budget to the needs of the populations concerned. The partnership agreement of Luxembourg with UNHCR would be extended by one year in anticipation of a further extension for a longer period. Luxembourg contributed €6 million per year to UNHCR, 20 per cent of which was non-earmarked funding. His Government was ready to work with UNHCR on the

ground, in particular through “Emergency.lu”, a satellite system that ensured communication in situations of crisis and helped coordinate emergency responses. Luxembourg, which currently held the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, was determined to seek a European response to the migration crisis and considered the protection of the most vulnerable persons in armed conflicts as one of its top priorities. In conclusion, he endorsed the request made by the European Union to participate as an observer in informal preparatory consultations of UNHCR.

23. **Ms. Horvath** (Hungary) said that the migration crisis was a global phenomenon that required a global response. Referring to the opening statement of the High Commissioner, she pointed out that it was misleading to draw parallels between the events of 1956, when 200,000 Hungarians had fled to Austria and Yugoslavia and had been resettled in 34 different countries, and the current crisis. At that time, Hungarians had requested asylum in neighbouring countries, had complied with all regulations and had waited for months or years to be resettled. With all due respect for the High Commissioner, the present phenomenon of irregular mass migration was a completely different phenomenon.

24. She regretted that the migration crisis was neither being dealt with properly nor its root causes addressed efficiently. Hungary had had to take immediate action in order to conform to European Union regulations and prevent irregular border crossings. However, the temporary border security fence along the Hungarian and Serbian border was not a wall and did not mean that Hungary closed its borders. Regular border crossing points would remain open. Hungary fully respected the principles of non-refoulement and non-discrimination of asylum seekers. Furthermore, Hungary did not tolerate any anti-Muslim policies or sentiments and respected the Muslim faith. Her Government acknowledged the need to provide international protection to Syrian refugees and show solidarity to countries neighbouring Syria. Initiatives to increase the funding of UNHCR activities in the region would be welcome. Since the beginning of the conflict in Syria, Hungary had contributed more than €600,000 to the most critical sectors. An in-kind contribution of 1 million euros to support the activities of the World Food Programme (WFP) in the region was under consideration. In conclusion, she said that Hungary was ready to approve the Nansen Initiative protection agenda.

25. **Mr. Valencia** (Colombia) said that after a 50-year conflict, the Government had recognized the existence of 7,620,000 victims, 6,415,000 of whom were internally displaced persons, which was equivalent to 13 per cent of the country’s population. In 2011, a special law had been adopted, which sought to ensure that victims would be located, identified and registered in a unified registry in order to enable the Government to respond to their needs. A four-year plan had also been developed, which focused, inter alia, on protection, solutions, compensation and the participation of victims and displaced persons in all matters of concern to them.

26. International commitment was needed in order to put an end to armed conflict. The agreement on the establishment of Special Jurisdiction for Peace, which had been concluded in Havana on 23 September 2015, was of great importance in that regard. He called on the Executive Committee to avoid the politicization of its debates and to put refugees and displaced persons at the heart of its action.

27. **Mr. Reaich** (New Zealand) said that humanitarian responses must be rooted in a robust protection agenda in order to ensure that all persons of concern were afforded adequate protection. He encouraged UNHCR to ensure that the agency continued to prioritize the needs of displaced women, girls and children. New Zealand believed that humanitarian and other agencies had to work together to maximize the impact of humanitarian action, especially in the context of protracted crises. Effective coordination between actors with overlapping mandates was essential. His

Government was pleased to continue offering protection and durable solutions to the wold's most vulnerable refugees through its Refugee Quota Programme. The Government had also significantly increased the number of Syrian refugees to be resettled in New Zealand over the following two years and had boosted its humanitarian assistance to the region.

28. **Mr. Abbas Malloum** (Chad) said that his country hosted a large number of refugees, most of whom had been in Chad for more than 10 years and had been granted access to arable lands and basic services. A resurgence of instability in the Central African Republic and northern Nigeria was producing new waves of asylum seekers in Chad, necessitating additional support from the international community and increased budget allocations from UNHCR. Support was also needed for the multinational force that had been set up by the countries of the Lake Chad Basin Commission in order to halt the exactions of the Boko Haram insurgency.

29. **Mr. Heredia Acosta** (Mexico) said that his country had supported refugee children's living conditions and health by financing a UNHCR project to promote stabilization and social cohesion in Lebanon and had developed similar projects in Turkey and Jordan. With a view to strengthening refugee protection in Latin America, Mexico had adopted the Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action. Mexico would continue to give effect to the highest international standards of protection, including by carrying out actions to benefit specific groups, such as unaccompanied minors.

30. **Mr. Zhang** Lei (China) said that contemporary refugee situations were rooted in social inequality and regional instability, making it urgent to resolve poverty and eliminate the sources of conflict in countries of origin. The coincidence of the grave refugee crisis in Europe with the seventieth anniversary of the United Nations pointed to the need to reaffirm the basic principles of the Charter of the United Nations, including State sovereignty, territorial integrity and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. It was crucial for States to be guided by a spirit of international solidarity and to provide assistance to host countries, 80 per cent of which were developing countries. Moreover, countries of origin, transit and destination must strengthen their cooperation and coordination. China was an active partner in providing refugee protection throughout the world and would continue to strive towards the achievement of that aim.

31. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), responding to various statements, commended Benin for its robust asylum and local integration systems. He thanked the representative of Bangladesh for his appeal for support on behalf of the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and his call for the problem of statelessness to be solved by countries of origin. Referring to the statement of the representative of India, he expressed admiration for the Indian tradition of hospitality and open borders, and took note of suggestions for improving the work of his Office. He commended the generosity that Luxembourg had shown despite its small size, both in terms of refugee reception and humanitarian assistance. He took note of the two relevant points raised by the representative of Hungary in her statement, namely the importance of not discriminating against refugees on the basis of their religion and the acknowledgement that the Muslim religion was not responsible for the present mass migratory movement.

32. He welcomed the progress made in the peace process in Colombia and highlighted the fact that it had the most advanced institutional framework for the protection and support of IDPs in the world. He thanked New Zealand for the high quality of its resettlement programme and welcomed its chairmanship of the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement in 2016. He expressed his Office's gratitude to Chad for its exceptional cooperation with UNHCR in the areas of security, self-reliance and the protection of refugees. Referring to the statement made by the

representative of Mexico, he confirmed the importance of the Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action and conveyed his Office's interest in cooperating with Mexico on protecting unaccompanied minors who arrived in Mexico as part of migratory flows from Central America. He thanked the representative of China for his statement and welcomed the excellent cooperation that UNHCR received from China in various crisis areas.

33. **Mr. Šuc** (Slovenia) said that the 4,000 migrants who had recently entered Slovenia had been provided with appropriate reception facilities, and the Ministry of Interior had a contingency plan ready in the event of a new migratory wave. Slovenia remained committed to sharing the burden of responsibility for fighting human smuggling and trafficking and preventing further loss of lives at sea. It had pledged to participate in the Mediterranean Operation Sophia of the European Union Naval Force by providing a patrol boat and crew. In recent years, Slovenia had supported humanitarian appeals from UNHCR, primarily those for IDPs and refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic and South Sudan, and would continue to support UNHCR programmes in the future.

34. **Mr. Delmi** (Algeria) said that his delegation took the view that the best solution to the current refugee crisis was voluntary repatriation in dignity and security. He recalled that the Sahrawi refugees in the Tindouf refugee camps would be registered at the appropriate time in the context of cooperation between UNHCR and Algeria, in its capacity as a host country. Registration was a technical procedure that was merely one aspect of a broader plan, whose execution depended on implementation of the Western Sahara peace plan of the United Nations. That plan called for Sahrawi self-determination but it had been stalled by Morocco.

35. **Ms. O'Brien** (Ireland) said that her country was fully committed to playing its part in addressing the current migration crisis in Europe. In addition to the Irish naval vessels that were deployed to the Mediterranean Sea in order to carry out vital rescue missions, Ireland would accept 4,000 persons under European Union resettlement and relocation programmes. In doing so, Ireland pledged to ensure that the new arrivals were provided with all appropriate support, and it would continue to work with UNHCR to that end.

36. **Ms. Laurin** (France) said that the unprecedented global migration crisis that had resulted in uprooting some 60 million persons from their homes imposed an obligation on every country to take urgent action. France was doing its part and had agreed to receive 30,000 persons, as well as to increase its contribution to the United Nations programmes and specialized agencies by €100 million, focusing on those providing assistance to Syrian refugees. Among the actions required in order to address the crisis, she highlighted the importance of cooperation between countries of origin, transit and destination in combating human traffickers and smugglers. First and foremost among the tools available for such cooperation was the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols Thereto, and she called on all States that had not already done so to ratify those instruments. The World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 would offer an opportunity to find ways to improve assistance to persons affected by conflict and enhance the effectiveness and financing of humanitarian action. France stood ready to engage fully in those endeavours.

37. **Mr. Van Schreven** (Netherlands) said that his country advocated a shared responsibility on the part of European Union member States for asylum seekers in Europe. Since the beginning of the refugee crisis, the Netherlands had contributed €336 million in humanitarian aid to the Syrian Arab Republic and its neighbours and had pledged an additional €110 million for 2015. Emergency assistance alone was insufficient; rather, it was necessary to develop mechanisms that would assist refugees in establishing a sustainable, dignified existence. Doing so required close partnerships

between the countries in the region that received large flows of refugees, as well as the more active involvement of development actors, such as the World Bank, in emergency situations.

38. In 2015, his country's contributions to UNHCR totalled more than €51 million, of which €33 million had not been earmarked. The Netherlands attached great importance to the provision of non-earmarked funds to UNHCR and encouraged other countries to do the same. Each year the Netherlands contributed to the resettlement of 500 persons worldwide and was the current Chair of the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement. The World Humanitarian Summit would provide an opportunity to address fundamental shortcomings in the way humanitarian aid was delivered, and the Netherlands would give priority to the Summit during its Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2016.

39. **Ms. Rebong** (Philippines) said that the Philippines did its share to extend protection through an emergency transit mechanism, contributions to UNHCR and the International Organization of Migration (IOM) and participation in the Nansen Initiative. Together with the United States of America, the Philippines co-chaired the IOM-sponsored Migrants in Countries in Crisis initiative.

40. **Mr. González Arenas** (Uruguay) said that, in 2006, Uruguay had adopted the Refugee Act and had established a refugee commission for the purpose of fulfilling its international obligations relating to refugee protection. Since 2009, Uruguay had been implementing a number of resettlement programmes, including one for women in situations of violence and another for the rural resettlement of Colombians. Both had yielded excellent results in terms of the educational, social, labour market and cultural integration of resettled families. In 2014, Uruguay had adopted the Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action and had begun implementing a programme of work in conjunction with UNHCR, which was aimed at strengthening procedures for the determination of refugee status.

41. **Mr. Dhital** (Observer for Nepal) said that his country had been providing shelter to thousands of Bhutanese refugees for more than two decades, and against all odds, had taken great pains to ensure their protection and safety. It had adopted a pragmatic approach to finding a durable solution to the problem, which remained one of the most protracted refugee situations in the world. The efforts of Nepal to resolve its refugee problem through bilateral negotiations had remained stalled owing to the non-implementation of the agreed decisions by Bhutan. Nepal was in favour of resuming the stalled process, repatriating the refugees and closing the refugee camps at the earliest opportunity. Although Nepal appreciated the support of the core group of countries in the third-country resettlement of the refugees, it viewed resettlement as merely a temporary solution, it believed the refugees possessed an inalienable right to return to their homes in dignity and honour and called for renewed efforts by all partners to that end.

42. **Mr. Vierita** (Romania) said that the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic continued unabated. After a year and a half of war in Ukraine, the humanitarian situation was far from being resolved. As winter was fast approaching, he was concerned about a possible disruption of humanitarian operations in the eastern part of the country and called on all relevant actors to allow the impeded delivery of assistance. The Government supported a coordinated European Union response and was open to participating in the relocation and resettlement mechanism. Romania was working with UNHCR to implement its third national resettlement programme. It was also operating an emergency transit centre in Timisoara, which had offered safe haven to more than 1,700 refugees. At the same time, it remained committed to its partnership with UNHCR, as demonstrated by its annual unearmarked contributions.

43. **Mr. Piperkov** (Bulgaria) said that his Government was deeply concerned by the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. The migration problem would not be resolved without stabilizing the situation of countries of origin. Enhancing dialogue between countries of origin and transit was crucial. The Western Balkans region was fragile and the continuous migration pressure seriously threatened its stability. While Bulgaria had not been affected as much as other countries by refugee flows, it faced serious challenges. The number of persons seeking asylum in the country amounted to nearly 11,000 people in the first eight months of 2015. The Government was taking steps to deal with human trafficking and provide shelter, food and other benefits to the people who applied for international protection.

44. **Ms. Kos** (Croatia) said that the international community was witnessing a large influx of refugees and migrants travelling along the Western Balkans route. The route had recently changed direction, towards Croatia, with more than 115,000 people who had entered the country to date and approximately 5,000 new people arriving per day. The Government was making every effort to manage the situation in an orderly manner and to treat every individual with dignity. All such persons received free medical care, food and accommodation. In addition to centres for refugees and asylum seekers, a temporary shelter had been set up which could accommodate 5,000 people. The Government had also provided transport for refugees, taking special care not to separate families. The current refugee and migrant situation was a multidimensional problem that required multilateral solutions. Managing movements of people was a common responsibility and an opportunity for humanity as a whole.

45. **Mr. Karklins** (Latvia) said that Latvia was doing as much as its resources allowed to assist the large number of displaced persons, refugees and asylum seekers, including through its unearmarked contributions to UNHCR. In 2015, €50,000 had already been allocated to the Office and the Government had made a commitment to receive approximately 800 asylum seekers as part of the relocation programme of the European Union. As the funding available to UNHCR barely met half of its assessed needs, the Office should focus its activities on alleviating the suffering of those most in need, in the areas of current conflicts, whether they were in Africa, Central Asia, the Middle East or Ukraine. Coming from a small country with a small mission to the United Nations Office in Geneva, his delegation had had to learn how to set priorities and focus on essentials. In the current troubled times, UNHCR should follow suit and ask donors to provide unearmarked contributions that could be channelled where they were most needed.

46. **Mr. Eyjólfsson** (Observer for Iceland) said he wished to pay special tribute to the neighbouring countries, which had quietly and resolutely given shelter to the great majority of refuges. Unfortunately, however, as the High Commissioner had put it earlier, there were no humanitarian solutions to humanitarian crises: the solutions must be political. All countries that had an influence on those engaged in fighting should be brought to the same table. Furthermore, the Security Council bore prime responsibility for resolving the conflicts. His Government, for its part, had allocated $16 million to counter the crisis. Its response was further bolstered by a grass-roots movement in support of the brave souls who risked their lives to reach the shores of Europe. Iceland had been participating in resettlement programmes since 1996, which involved close cooperation between municipalities and the Icelandic Red Cross. Furthermore, there was a long tradition according to which each refugee family who resettled in Iceland was brought into contact with local families who provided support. That gave such families the chance to familiarize themselves with the country and participate in society. Inclusion was the watchword there.

47. **Mr. Pung** (Estonia) said that his Government was concerned about the ongoing violations of international humanitarian law, impunity and diminishing humanitarian

access. Europe continued to face crises in Ukraine. In 2015, Estonia had greatly increased its assistance to Ukraine and had been working with UNHCR to mitigate the suffering of displaced persons and those who had decided to stay despite the destruction. The Government strongly condemned the recent decision of the illegitimate authorities in Luhansk to impede the work of United Nations agencies in the region.

48. **Mr. Aryasinha** (Observer for Sri Lanka) said that many Sri Lankans had left their country in the past 30 years because of internal armed conflict and other reasons. His Government had been working with UNHCR to seek sustainable solutions for the internally displaced persons and facilitating the return of Sri Lankans to the country since the restoration of peace. As of 30 June 2015, nearly 800,000 internally displaced persons had been resettled by the Government in the Northern and Eastern Provinces of the country following the demining of those provinces. Protecting and improving the lives of millions of people, including refugees, internally displaced persons, returnees, stateless people and other persons of concern required a predictable flow of regular funds for the programmes carried out by UNHCR and burden-sharing by the entire international community. Sri Lanka had thus made a modest voluntary contribution of $10,000 towards the UNHCR Global Appeal.

49. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said he appreciated the dialogue between UNHCR and the Slovenian Government over movements along the Western Balkan route. For decades, members of the democratic opposition from former Portuguese colonies in Africa had found asylum in Algeria. He welcomed the Government's openness towards providing protection to refugees, including the many refugees in Tindouf. The representative of Ireland had highlighted the role played by the Irish Navy. He paid tribute to all the navies and coastguards in the Mediterranean, the Gulf of Aden, the Caribbean and elsewhere and to commercial vessels that made outstanding efforts to save lives in many parts of the world. While the representative of France had referred to many international initiatives, out of modesty she had not mentioned the considerable assistance provided by the French Government to the Syrian Arab Republic and neighbouring countries. He also welcomed its efforts to combat extremist ideologies. He agreed with the representative of the Netherlands about the importance of unearmarked contributions. The Netherlands had been exemplary in that regard. Such contributions were an essential tool for the work of UNHCR. He thanked the Philippines for the emergency transit mechanism and its "Migrants in Countries in Crisis" initiative. He highlighted the innovative resettlement programme in Uruguay, including its assistance to Syrian refugees. He was grateful for the excellent cooperation with the Government of Nepal and was pleased with the successful resettlement of about 100,000 Bhutanese refugees. He commended the work of the Romanian emergency transit centre in Timisoara. He agreed with the representative of Bulgaria on the importance of cooperation between countries of transit, origin and destination. He appreciated the pragmatism and humanism with which Croatia had managed the large flow of refugees and migrants that had crossed the country in recent months. He fully agreed that UNHCR should follow the example of Latvia and focus on essentials. He thanked the representative of Iceland, who had given participants a very important lesson in solidarity and generosity. The representative of Estonia had rightly emphasized the importance of avoiding violations of international humanitarian law, which stood in the way of the delivery of humanitarian assistance to populations in distress. Lastly, he wished to convey how much UNHCR hoped for a future Sri Lanka without displacement.

50. **Mr. El Mkhantar** (Morocco), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said he took issue with the statement by the representative of Algeria about the so-called visit of the Chairperson to the sequestration camps (*camps de sequestrés*) of Tindouf.

UNHCR and the Committee secretariat had assured his Government that the visit was not part of the Chairperson's official activities and that neither UNHCR nor the secretariat was involved in preparations for the visit. Therefore, he was acting in his capacity as a permanent representative in Geneva and not as Chairperson. The visit was not handled by UNHCR or the secretariat, unless it was funded by Algeria. The Algerian Government was attempting to politicize the Chairperson's mandate, as it had done with the tragic humanitarian situation of the sequestered persons in Tindouf.

51. **Mr. Delmi** (Algeria), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the persons referred to by the representative of Morocco as "sequestered" (*les sequestrés*) of Tindouf were in fact refugees duly recognized by the international community. UNHCR, WFP and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) were present on the ground and attested every day to the fact that those refugees were like other refugees. The grave accusations made by the representative of Morocco, which sought to tarnish the reputation of the Chairperson and Algeria, were irresponsible. Chris Coleman had revealed in WikiLeaks that the most corrupt international official was in fact the Permanent Representative of Morocco to the United Nations. The Government of Algeria had not funded the visit and the Chairperson had visited the refugee camps as a representative of the Committee, as he was entitled to do. He trusted that the insulting allegations against the Chairperson would not be repeated. They did not merit any attention.

52. **The Chairperson** said he had been moved in his mandate by purely humanitarian motives, which had prompted him to make visits to the refugees.

The meeting rose at 6.20 p.m.