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

### Summary record of the 770th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 17 October 2024, at 10 a.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Stasch ..... (Germany)

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Agenda item 3: High-level segment on statelessness and general debate (*continued*)

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

**Agenda item 3: High-level segment on statelessness and general debate (continued)**

1. **Mr. Sylla** (Senegal) said that in keeping with the commitments it had made at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, Senegal, with the support of its partners, was continuing to take initiatives to strengthen protection for refugees and asylum-seekers and respect for their fundamental rights. The Senegalese authorities were committed to equipping the country with an equitable, efficient and sustainable asylum system that complied with international standards. The adoption of the Act on the Status of Refugees and Stateless Persons represented a significant step forward, as it enshrined the right to family reunification and included provisions to combat statelessness.

2. Between 2019 and 2023, 374 refugees had become Senegalese citizens under the naturalization procedure; a further 700 applications were currently being processed. While those figures still fell short of the targets set, they nevertheless reflected the enduring commitment of all actors to support refugees. Against a backdrop of reduced funding for humanitarian activities worldwide, the Senegalese approach also promoted the socioeconomic inclusion and autonomy of refugees and asylum-seekers by ensuring that they had equal access to national programmes.

3. The Senegalese Government planned, with the support of its partners, to continue its naturalization programme for eligible refugees and to step up initiatives to eradicate statelessness and address mixed migration flows. The steps already taken to return internally displaced persons to their places of origin in the south of the country would continue and be further consolidated through appropriate socioeconomic programmes.

4. **Ms. Fisher** (Portugal) said that, against the background of the rapid rise in numbers of forcibly displaced persons across the globe, to over 120 million, more needed to be done to address non-observance and violations of international humanitarian law, which were fuelling additional forced displacement, and to address impunity. The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and the conflicts and ongoing crises in Afghanistan, Myanmar, the Sahel, the Sudan, Syria and Venezuela had forced millions of persons to flee; the return of conflict to the Middle East was forcing people to leave their homes in ever greater numbers. Her delegation was appalled by the catastrophic humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and called for immediate measures to be taken to prevent any further population displacements and to provide shelter to the population. It was also extremely concerned about the loss of civilian life and the forced displacement caused by the escalating violence in Lebanon.

5. The United Nations system could and should work in a more collaborative manner by investing in the triple nexus approach, linking humanitarian action, development and peace. Accordingly, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) should continue to align its work not only with that of entities in the humanitarian sphere but also the work of other United Nations bodies and peacekeeping missions. The humanitarian funding gap was growing wider by the day, meaning that, in 2023, only half of the \$11 billion budgeted by UNHCR could be spent, and expenditure had decreased by 8 per cent. At the same time, solutions continued to fall short. In 2023, only around 160,000 refugees had been resettled and only around 40,000 had been naturalized.

6. Portugal had made eight pledges at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum: to increase its resettlement quota, to strengthen mechanisms for civil society participation, to create new centres devoted to integrating refugees into the labour market, to reform the national programme for learning Portuguese so that it better met the needs of refugees and migrants, to streamline family reunification procedures, to implement inclusion projects, to increase its financial contribution to UNHCR and to contribute to the Global Platform for Higher Education in Emergencies. It would continue to support the some 61,000 persons who had fled the war in Ukraine and sought temporary protection in its territory, as well as the around 1,200 Afghan refugees who had arrived in the country since 2021 and the approximately 300 refugees from Egypt, Jordan and Türkiye that it resettled each year.

7. The Portuguese asylum system was undergoing reform. In 2023, a new agency for integration, migration and asylum had been created with the aim of devising a more

people-focused policy under which border management and asylum applications would be dealt with separately and community integration would be made part of the asylum application process. In June 2024, the new Government had adopted a new migration and asylum plan designed to facilitate the family reunification process and to accelerate resettlement by placing greater emphasis on multisectoral integration. In 2023, parliament had adopted a law that defined stateless persons as a distinct legal category. Portugal remained firmly committed to upholding international refugee law and would continue to advocate for the development of complementary pathways, namely through higher education, and of mental health and psychosocial support.

8. **Ms. Menendez Espinoza** (Observer for El Salvador) said that the recent history of El Salvador had underscored the importance of adopting a comprehensive approach to forced displacement that not only responded to the immediate needs of displaced persons but that also promoted durable solutions. El Salvador had worked closely with UNHCR and the members of the comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework initiative to advance the fulfilment of commitments made, particularly in the context of the Global Compact on Refugees and the 2023 Global Refugee Forum. It had modernized its asylum system: a new reception centre for asylum-seekers had been built and was expected to be operational before the end of 2024. The Commission for the Determination of Refugee Status was continuing to implement a comprehensive care protocol for asylum-seekers. By extending the “My First Job” programme, the Government had succeeded in integrating hundreds of displaced persons, refugees and persons at risk of displacement into the formal labour market. Ensuring access to a livelihood was crucial to achieving true social inclusion. The Government was continuing to work in partnership with the private sector to generate more employment opportunities.

9. The Salvadoran vision of human mobility was not limited to the protection of those already displaced but included the prevention of future displacement. The continuation of the programme establishing urban welfare and opportunities centres, which afforded young people opportunities in art, languages, sports and other fields, was but one example of how the Government of El Salvador was creating alternatives to displacement and migration. At the international level, it was continuing to work with its neighbouring countries in exchanging best practices and strengthening regional capacities to address and prevent forced displacement.

10. Currently, around 123 million people had been forcibly displaced worldwide. That alarming figure should compel the international community to redouble its efforts and foster international solidarity, which was the key to addressing ongoing humanitarian crises. Countries of origin and transit and host countries needed to work together to effectively address the causes of displacement. Her delegation called on the international community to continue to support the efforts of UNHCR and all actors committed to protecting displaced persons.

11. **Mr. Elghitany** (Egypt) said that he echoed the High Commissioner’s call for equitable and sustainable burden- and responsibility-sharing and the upholding of key humanitarian principles and the fundamental tenets of international law. His Government had already made clear its position on the humanitarian catastrophe occurring in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which fell under the exclusive and irreplaceable mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Lebanon. His delegation also offered its condolences to UNHCR on the death of the staff members killed in Lebanon and expressed his country’s strong condemnation and rejection of Israeli aggression, which constituted a blatant violation of international humanitarian law and fundamental norms and principles. Rejecting aggression and violations of international humanitarian law and calling for ceasefires and lasting political solutions did not represent a deviation from the core issues to be discussed by the Executive Committee or from the Office’s mandate. Rather, it highlighted the root causes of the displacement crises, which, if left unaddressed, risked trapping the region in a vicious circle of violence and mass displacement, with potentially far-reaching consequences. Egypt was thus committed to the triple nexus approach, which addressed the root causes of conflict, met urgent humanitarian needs and built the long-term resilience of affected communities in a sustainable manner.

12. As at the end of September 2024, approximately 800,000 refugees and asylum-seekers were officially registered with UNHCR in Egypt, representing a nearly threefold increase in less than two years and the highest number in the country's history. In 2023, Egypt had ranked third globally for new asylum applications, with over 183,000 received. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Egypt was currently hosting over 9 million migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers and individuals in refugee-like situations, including around 5 million Sudanese nationals, of whom over 1 million had refugee status.

13. Under its "one refugee" approach, the Government of Egypt ensured that refugees and asylum-seekers received protection and access to essential services on an equal footing with Egyptian citizens, regardless of their nationality. At the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, Egypt had pledged to enhance the social inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers. That endeavour would build on the work done through the Joint Platform for Migrants and Refugees, which, to date, had included a joint programme that had benefited from €12.2 million in funding from the European Union. Egypt was also collaborating with UNHCR and UNDP to finalize its refugee response and resilience plan for 2025.

14. However, the inclusion of refugees in Egyptian society continued to place significant pressure on the country's resources and infrastructure, to the detriment of all concerned. Against a backdrop of ongoing global economic challenges and regional instability, there was an urgent need to scale up the global humanitarian response to displacement crises and to fulfil funding commitments in line with the principle of equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing.

15. The disparities between the numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers registered with UNHCR, migrants in refugee-like situations and individuals in need of international protection were a cause for concern. The Office's registration capacities needed to be strengthened, particularly in protracted refugee situations.

16. His delegation commended the Office's efforts to facilitate the safe and voluntary return of refugees and asylum-seekers to their countries of origin and to strengthen preparedness for returns. It was important to take a balanced approach to durable solutions, prioritizing resettlement, complementary pathways and addressing the root causes of displacement to ensure safe and voluntary returns.

17. **Ms. Lemus Álvarez** (Guatemala) said that Guatemala greatly appreciated the increased presence of UNHCR in the country. Human mobility must be addressed by means of a comprehensive approach, which should include international cooperation strategies designed to respond to the challenges associated with that phenomenon while promoting solidarity and responsibility-sharing, as required by the Global Compact on Refugees.

18. Her Government remained committed to upholding the principles of international refugee law and to strengthening reception and assistance mechanisms for persons in the context of human mobility. As a testament to that commitment, a meeting had taken place between the President of the Republic of Guatemala and the High Commissioner with the aim of strengthening the ties between Guatemala and UNHCR and addressing important human mobility-related issues. Moreover, the country had taken part in the Summit of the Americas, held in Los Angeles in June 2022, which had culminated in the adoption of the Declaration on Migration and Protection. Guatemala was also an active participant in the comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework initiative, established pursuant to the Global Compact on Refugees, in the Cartagena+40 process and in the Quito Process on the Human Mobility of Venezuelan Nationals in the Region. Likewise, local authorities had participated in the second national conference organized under the Cities of Solidarity initiative to share experiences in hosting persons needing international protection.

19. **Mr. Alkhubaizi** (Observer for Kuwait) said that the international community needed to reconsider its moral responsibilities in the face of challenges that threatened safety, security and stability at the regional and international levels. It could not turn a blind eye to the violations of basic human rights, international humanitarian law and international human rights law caused by successive humanitarian crises and protracted conflicts, which had killed thousands of civilians and forced an unprecedented number of people to seek refuge elsewhere. Alarming, the total number of displaced persons worldwide had reached over 120 million. Trust in the United Nations had been eroded and alternative solutions that

threatened international peace and security were being sought. A reform of the Security Council was needed to enable it to address current conflicts and challenges effectively. Tactics such as starvation and hindering the delivery of humanitarian aid had become commonplace, in blatant violation of those persons' human rights. The international community must take urgent action to ensure the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid without discrimination.

20. Kuwait had participated in the 2023 Global Refugee Forum because it believed in the importance of supporting and safeguarding the dignity of refugees and displaced persons worldwide. The country shared responsibility for refugee response at the regional and international levels by supporting communities hosting refugees and displaced persons without distinction. Over the previous decade, it had provided almost \$500 million in funding to UNHCR.

21. **Ms. Michael** (Observer for Eritrea) said that the international community was living in an era characterized by the shifting of geostrategic tectonic plates and global power centres. The associated transitions and potential changes to the prevailing power equilibrium were marked by uncertainty, unrest, chaos, conflict and a profound sense of disruption and loss and, more ominously, a tendency to pursue destabilizing policies based on zero-sum geopolitical calculus.

22. Eritrea was hosting many Sudanese nationals who had been forced to flee the conflict in their home country. Those persons were not referred to as "refugees"; rather, Eritrea was their second home, and they were treated accordingly. At the same time, the Government of Eritrea was actively working to help bring peace to the Sudan. While it stood in solidarity with those seeking refuge in Eritrea, the Government also strived to challenge those who sought to manipulate the narrative to serve their own agenda. The generosity of least developed countries in hosting displaced persons contrasted sharply with the approach of wealthier nations, which often sought to outsource their responsibilities. The global forced migration crisis was a reminder that narrow geopolitical interests often overshadowed essential humanitarian actions. Eritrea had taken steps to ensure that there were no stateless persons within its borders. Every individual on Eritrean soil was either recognized as a citizen or as having a nationality and thus enjoyed the legal protection and rights flowing from that status.

23. Eritrea knew all too well the pain inflicted by the Office's biased and unlawful eligibility guidelines, which had been influenced not by humanitarian principles but by the political agenda of strategic depopulation pursued by certain hostile powers to disenfranchise its young people from the exigencies of nation-building at a critical juncture in its history. The result was that the country was unfairly portrayed and that the realities on the ground were often misrepresented. Nevertheless, Eritrea remained committed to cooperating with international initiatives aimed at promoting and facilitating the safe, regular and dignified movement of migrants, regardless of their legal status. However, UNHCR must ensure full respect for the core principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and operational independence, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 46/182 on the strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations.

24. **Mr. Kunnumpurath Sulaiman** (India) said that throughout history, India had welcomed refugees from all over the world despite facing its own development- and security-related challenges. Indeed, some of the refugee communities in India would have lost their heritage, culture and even language had it not been for the protection offered by the Indian refugee response framework. As a key international development partner, India continued not only to host refugees using its own resources, but also to contribute to efforts to find long-term, durable solutions to protracted refugee situations through, inter alia, building the capacities of States. The humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations undertaken by India demonstrated its capability and willingness to share responsibility.

25. The Constitution of India guaranteed the fundamental rights of all persons residing in the national territory, whether they were citizens or not. While the Government remained committed to protecting and to providing humanitarian assistance to refugees, it believed that the safe, speedy and sustainable return of displaced persons and refugees to their homes was the best long-term solution to address influxes. The humanitarian responsibility of hosting

refugees and displaced persons should not be underestimated. The international community should do more to support States that were hosting and caring for displaced persons in their territories and civil society organizations that were involved in providing humanitarian assistance to refugees.

26. **Ms. Paumier López** (Observer for Cuba) said that her delegation wished to offer its sincere condolences to UNHCR on the death of two of its staff in Lebanon. Cuba expressed solidarity with the nations attacked by Israel and called for peace and the start of negotiations for an immediate ceasefire to avoid further escalation of a conflict that had already cost the lives of tens of thousands of people and had aggravated the humanitarian and refugee crisis in the region. Peace in the Middle East would only be made possible through a comprehensive, lasting and fair solution, including the creation of a sovereign and independent Palestinian State based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

27. The new Constitution of Cuba, adopted in 2019, empowered the President to grant Cuban citizenship, which allowed for the reduction of the few cases of statelessness that existed in the country. The high-level segment had highlighted how global challenges, especially conflict and humanitarian crises, had led to an unprecedented increase in the number of people requiring international protection. Each agency in the United Nations system must do more, within the limits of its respective mandate, to tackle the root causes of the movement of refugees, as that was the most effective way of achieving durable solutions. The imposition of unilateral coercive measures in violation of international law generated an economic and social impact that undoubtedly contributed to increased human mobility.

28. Regrettably, the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris had been the scene of the shameful politicization of the concept of a refugee. Her delegation had already denounced the matter at the ninetieth and ninety-first meetings of the Standing Committee, where it had asserted that UNHCR was complicit in the manipulation of the concept of a refugee, the theft of sporting talent, the distortion of Olympian principles and the corruption of the spirit in which the Refugee Olympic Team had been created. One of the athletes included in the Team had made disrespectful and fallacious political statements against his country, his people and the sporting movement that had allowed him to become an Olympic champion at the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo. That act had confirmed concerns about the true political motivation behind the inclusion of athletes of Cuban origin in the Team. Her delegation again urged UNHCR to discharge its mandate and to review the procedures for awarding scholarships and selecting the members of the Team that it organized in conjunction with the International Olympic Committee. There was also a need for greater transparency regarding the work of the Olympic Refugee Foundation, of which the High Commissioner served as vice-president. The statements made during the presentation of the Refugee Olympic Team to the effect that its members were fleeing war and conflict or were being persecuted did not apply to several athletes, including those who were Cuban nationals. Resources earmarked for the provision of international protection should benefit only those who really needed assistance; any kind of exclusion, favouritism or politicization of that process should be avoided.

29. **Mr. Gunnarsson** (Iceland) said that Iceland joined in honouring the memory of the UNHCR colleagues in Lebanon who had recently lost their lives. Humanitarian work was becoming ever more dangerous and respect for international humanitarian law was being tested. The collective commitment to protecting civilians, in accordance with the Geneva Conventions, must be restored. Iceland called on all parties to armed conflicts to respect their legal obligations. Humanitarian access must be assured. Those who violated international law must be held accountable.

30. Iceland joined the calls for enhanced efforts to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence and highlighted the need for an intersectional approach in addressing the protection needs of persons in vulnerable situations. It also supported the goal of ending statelessness, having acceded to the two conventions on statelessness three years previously.

31. Iceland was very concerned that only 14 per cent of total funding to UNHCR in the current year was completely flexible: a lack of flexibility could make the difference between life and death. Iceland strove to be a predictable and flexible partner that prioritized quality

funding in its financial contributions to the humanitarian system. It was now committed to providing multi-year core funding to UNHCR for the next five years. He urged other partners to do the same.

32. **Mr. Habib** (Observer for Indonesia) said that, since 7 October 2023, the world had witnessed flagrant violations of international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions, by a single country. Indonesia unequivocally condemned the indiscriminate attacks by Israel in Gaza, on the West Bank and in Lebanon, action that had resulted in the deaths of medical and humanitarian workers, including staff members of UNHCR and UNRWA. An attack in southern Lebanon had injured 15 members of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, including two Indonesian soldiers. Indonesia called on all parties to end the violence forthwith.

33. The Indonesian Government upheld the principle of non-refoulement, in particular in respect of Rohingya refugees arriving in Aceh province and, working with UNHCR and IOM, had supported thousands of refugees and asylum-seekers in transit. He wished to highlight the role of host communities such as the people of Aceh province in providing such support.

34. It intended to take firm action against those involved in the transnational crimes of trafficking in persons and people smuggling and, with Australia, its co-chair in the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime, would be strengthening collective efforts to address those issues.

35. The plight of long-term refugees, particularly Afghans, who made up half the refugee community in Indonesia, was of particular concern, given that, in 2023, only 13 per cent of UNHCR operations in the country had been funded. That had hampered efforts to improve their harsh living conditions. He hoped that the projected increase in the budget for 2025 would bring tangible improvements.

36. Indonesia reaffirmed its commitment to burden-sharing. It contributed to UNHCR in unearmarked funds, and he called for a more predictable system of humanitarian funding. As a member of the Friends of the I Belong Campaign to End Statelessness, Indonesia welcomed the launch of the Global Alliance to End Statelessness.

37. **Mr. Espinosa Olivera** (Mexico) said that the international community must step up efforts to address the root causes of forced displacement. His delegation deeply regretted the death of the UNHCR colleagues in Lebanon and appealed for the safety and integrity of humanitarian staff to be duly protected in line with the Geneva Conventions.

38. As a country where all stages of the migration cycle converged, and having in recent years witnessed the rise in mixed migration flows, Mexico supported a whole-of-route approach in designing effective responses. In 10 years, the number of refugee applications in Mexico had increased a hundredfold, standing at nearly 141,000 in 2023; more than 90,000 persons had been recognized as refugees or granted complementary protection since 2021. Refugees were entitled to schooling, work, travel documents and permanent residence, among other benefits, and an integration programme to match refugees to employment opportunities, run in close cooperation with UNHCR, had benefited more than 35,000 people. Such services were based on a comprehensive gender-based approach that also took account of age and diversity.

39. In line with its commitments made at the second Global Refugee Forum, the Government intended to establish spaces for meaningful participation by refugees and asylum-seekers in decision-making, thereby promoting their empowerment and the full exercise of their rights. It hoped that the current negotiations under the Cartagena+40 process would yield a new action plan to comprehensively address the new realities and challenges in the region, in line with the Global Compact on Refugees.

40. In its efforts to address statelessness, Mexico had amended the criteria in its Constitution governing acquisition of nationality to eliminate the distinction between children of Mexicans who had been born in Mexico or had been naturalized and children of Mexicans who had not been born on Mexican territory.

41. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that he commended El Salvador on its important work in reducing and tackling the challenge of internally displaced persons. He particularly admired the “My First Job” and “Cubos” programmes. He was grateful to El Salvador for participating in the comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework, an important initiative that tied in with the Global Compact on Refugees.

42. He warmly welcomed Guatemala as a new member of the Executive Committee. His discussions with President Arévalo, in Guatemala and in Geneva, had been very constructive and inspiring. His Office supported Guatemala in its work on all issues related to human mobility and also in its work with El Salvador in the context of the comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework and of the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection.

43. Noting that Mexico was a very important partner in the region and across the globe, he said he recognized the increasing migration pressure it was under, in which international protection was a significant factor, and the year-on-year rise in asylum applications. His Office would continue to support Mexico in that regard and also in the many other important initiatives being developed there, notably the efforts to generate employment, including in conjunction with IOM.

44. Thanking the Government of Cuba for the measures it had adopted to reduce statelessness, he said he encouraged it to join the Global Alliance to End Statelessness. Cuban leadership and active participation strengthened global and regional frameworks for the protection of refugees. He underscored the apolitical and neutral role of the Olympic Games, which were a source of inspiration to all, and in particular to refugees around the world. He was grateful to Cuba for its work with UNHCR to benefit hundreds of refugees in Cuba and hoped to be able to continue that constructive collaboration.

45. He thanked Kuwait for its positive statement, reflecting that country’s long tradition of humanitarian support, especially evident during the early days of the Syrian refugee crisis. He trusted that it would continue to extend support to UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations as the region was once again witnessing a fairly catastrophic humanitarian crisis.

46. He wished to reassure the Egyptian Government that UNHCR scrupulously observed the division of labour between itself and UNRWA and would fully respect the complementarity and difference between the two mandates. He was grateful to Egypt for its leadership in the multi-stakeholder pledge on peacebuilding and conflict prevention, on which he also commended Norway, Colombia and Egypt for their initiative. He trusted that the generosity and inclusiveness that Egypt had shown in hosting refugees from many countries, most recently Sudanese refugees, could be maintained and strengthened. UNHCR would be there to help, as in the past.

47. The kind words of support from India for both UNHCR and the Global Refugee Forum, and its commitment to the assistance and protection of refugees were particularly important in the region, given the numbers fleeing Myanmar due to the growing conflict in that country. He fully agreed that the focus should always be on creating conditions for people to eventually return to their country, even in more difficult situations, such as that of refugees from Myanmar.

48. Indonesia, too, played an important role in the Myanmar situation, allowing hundreds of Rohingya refugees fleeing in boats to disembark. UNHCR echoed to all States the appeal for resources to help Indonesia face those situations. He also repeated his appeal for more strategic use to be made of the Bali Process in the region. Following the recent visit to Indonesia by the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, he believed that the Process offered many possibilities that could be leveraged and developed, in cooperation with Australia and Indonesia, and with IOM.

49. He congratulated Senegal on the very positive work being done to reinforce the country’s asylum system to make it equitable, effective and sustainable in respect not only of refugee reception and status determination, but also of inclusion and integration. He hoped that all the activities described could serve as an example for the region and beyond.



50. He was grateful to Eritrea for hosting refugees from the Sudan. It was one of the many countries in the subregion to have been hit by a wave of refugees from that country. He could assure its delegation that his Office was fully committed to maintaining an approach based on humanity and neutrality.

51. He wished to thank Portugal for its pledge to increase resettlement, along with the many other important pledges that Portugal had made at the Global Refugee Forum. The focus on family reunification had been an important theme in its engagement. Family reunification was at times seen as somewhat complex or even controversial, but it was not only important for human rights, it was a powerful tool for successful integration, since families integrated better than individuals.

52. He thanked Iceland for being such a good donor and for its very concrete support for certain aspects of the Office's protection work, especially its protection of diversity and of gender equality, and in combating gender-based violence. Its flexibility as a donor and its tendency to do even more than it had promised to might serve as an example for other States to follow.

53. **Ms. Milewska** (Observer for the Council of Europe) said that the 46 member States of the Council of Europe were committed to governing with respect for human rights, the rule of law and democracy, with the aim of preventing a repetition of the European history of the first half of the twentieth century. All those living under the jurisdiction of one of those member States must be able to enjoy the rights and freedoms recognized by the European Convention on Human Rights, backed by the case law of the European Court of Human Rights. Migrants and refugees, many of whom were particularly vulnerable because they had been torn from their roots, deserved attention and the effective protection of their rights. A number of specialized bodies under the Council of Europe monitored respect for the human rights of individuals, including migrants and refugees, in its member States in the areas of detention, human trafficking, domestic violence, discrimination and statelessness.

54. The Council of Europe was working on a compendium of good practice in legal aid, representation, access to information and justice for children in proceedings to determine nationality and statelessness, and on a non-binding instrument on access to nationality for stateless children, with guidelines on child-friendly procedures. The great importance of the Council's close collaboration with the High Commissioner and their mutual reliance on each other's standards and work could not be overemphasized.

55. **Mr. Cassayre** (Observer for the International Development Law Organization (IDLO)) said that IDLO was of the view that stronger investment in the rule of law was needed at the national and global levels to address both the root causes and the consequences of displacement and statelessness. Clear laws and policies grounded in the principles of fairness and non-discrimination provided the foundation for protecting vulnerable populations. IDLO had partnered with Kenya, Mali, the Philippines and Sierra Leone to identify discriminatory laws in areas such as gender and nationality, and barriers preventing displaced persons from obtaining documents and services. Where formal legal institutions were inaccessible or weak, IDLO worked to link them with informal systems and provided capacity-building and other forms of support. Research carried out by IDLO into survivor-centred justice for gender-based violence had shown that women could be more than twice as vulnerable to violence in complex contexts such as conflict and the climate crisis. A survivor-centred approach ensured that they did not withdraw their cases and that they received effective protection and redress.

56. The rule of law could help countries navigate the challenges posed by the climate crisis, ensuring that mitigation and adaptation efforts were inclusive and fair, and that stronger justice systems included fair dispute-resolution procedures. Climate action at the local level, such as that IDLO had carried out in Kenya, could help communities resolve land disputes, thereby reducing conflicts that could lead to displacement. IDLO had also conducted gender assessments of climate and environmental legal frameworks in Burkina Faso and the Philippines.

57. **Mr. Mugaruka** (Observer for the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR)) said that the Great Lakes Region continued to face significant political and security challenges, and conflicts in several member States had created a complex refugee

situation and increased the risk of statelessness for displaced persons. Many of the 5 million refugees in the region had been living in exile for extended periods; children born in exile faced particular difficulties in acquiring nationality in the countries of asylum. With limited financial and technical resources, gaps in national legislation and lack of awareness of the causes and consequences of statelessness, it was difficult to implement civil registration systems and nationality verification processes, while stigmatization and a lack of inter-State cooperation made it harder for stateless persons to claim their rights and access basic services.

58. The consequences of the conflict in the Sudan were particularly acute, with 10 million internally displaced Sudanese citizens in various parts of the country and 2 million refugees in neighbouring host countries. He appealed to UNHCR and the international community for help and support.

59. ICGLR had made significant strides in addressing refugee issues, combating the illicit mineral trade and mitigating security threats in collaboration with regional and international partners; its efforts to combat statelessness had been robust and wide ranging. It recognized the launch of the Global Alliance to End Statelessness as a critical step towards a world where everyone had the right to nationality. ICGLR stood ready to reinforce its cooperation with all partners to consolidate peace, security and stability in the region and to address the intertwined problems of refugees and statelessness.

60. **Ms. Sarr** (Observer for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)) said that her organization called on all stakeholders to commit to ensuring the peace and security of her region by helping to address the factors that had a negative impact on the humanitarian situation there, including political challenges, food insecurity and climate change. ECOWAS had adopted the Banjul Plan of Action on the Eradication of Statelessness 2017–2024, had joined the Global Alliance to End Statelessness and had developed a regional model law on the determination of statelessness and the protection of stateless persons. In terms of concrete action for refugees, it had pledged to provide Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria with financial support to address the needs of the displaced populations on their territories, which had grown significantly in 2024.

61. **Mr. Mahlab** (Observer for the African Union) said that the current session of the Executive Committee was being held at a critical time for Africa. The continent faced a dire humanitarian situation and the total population of displaced persons had reached approximately 44 million. The African Union had therefore taken significant steps in recent years to strengthen its humanitarian architecture, including by adopting a decision to establish the African Humanitarian Agency in Uganda. Works on the institution's headquarters were at an advanced stage, and it would soon become operational. The African Union also made tireless efforts in cooperation with its member States to find sustainable solutions to humanitarian crises, including by developing and promoting legal and policy frameworks to address issues affecting refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless persons.

62. As a member of the Global Alliance to End Statelessness, the African Union looked forward to contributing to global efforts aimed at addressing statelessness. It was also committed to promoting the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Specific Aspects of the Right to a Nationality and the Eradication of Statelessness in Africa, which it had adopted under as part of measures taken to fulfil the pledges made at the high-level segment on statelessness in October 2019.

63. **Mr. Kinouani** (Observer for the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)) said that his region had become the epicentre of the humanitarian crisis in Africa. According to figures published by UNHCR two months previously, it hosted over 11 million displaced persons, including nearly 6.5 million internally displaced persons in the Democratic Republic of the Congo alone. Many of those people had been displaced as a result of conflict – notably the crisis in the Sudan – and the consequences of climate and environmental emergencies. They were confronted with countless problems and obstacles. To address the situation, the member States of ECCAS had decided to strengthen the organization's work in the humanitarian field and had introduced a mechanism for special contributions with a view to establishing a solidarity fund.

64. As part of the actions taken to implement the Medium-Term Indicative Strategic Plan 2021–2025, the ECCAS Commission had begun examining the problems arising from

protecting persons in situations of forced displacement and finding lasting solutions for them. ECCAS had signed a memorandum of understanding with UNHCR in August 2022 and, earlier in 2024, cooperation between the Commission and the regional office of UNHCR had been formalized with the presentation of letters of accreditation. The two organizations had adopted an action plan for the period 2022–2025, which provided for the establishment of a common regional asylum policy. As a result, ECCAS was conducting research into the current asylum situation in Central Africa with a view to developing a new regional policy covering the principle of non-refoulement, new refugee protection systems, the management of external borders and the upholding of the civil and humanitarian rights of asylum-seekers.

65. ECCAS was committed to combating statelessness, which affected millions of people in Central Africa. It had joined the I Belong campaign, and five of its member States had acceded to the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. At the Global Refugee Forum in December 2023, ECCAS had pledged to adopt a regional treaty on the protection of stateless persons and solutions to statelessness. It had also participated in the fifth francophone training course on the law of statelessness and nationality and would soon organize, in collaboration with UNHCR and the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, a high-level regional forum on the humanitarian situation in Central Africa in order to develop an appropriate infrastructure.

66. **Ms. Pictet-Althann** (Observer for the Sovereign Order of Malta) said that the Sovereign Order of Malta remained committed to providing assistance to refugees and displaced persons in all regions of the world. Through those efforts, it endeavoured to alleviate human suffering, to support host communities and to foster peaceful relations by implementing people-centred solutions that were sustainable over time.

67. Some of the most significant emergency operations currently carried out by the Sovereign Order of Malta were those undertaken in areas of conflict, where it provided support to displaced persons and their host communities. It was currently developing medical units to provide healthcare services in Gaza, and around 5,000 people there had already benefited from relief consignments delivered by Malteser International, the Order's humanitarian relief agency, in close coordination with the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Her organization had successfully evacuated around a thousand patients from villages on the southern border of Lebanon and had stepped up its assistance to the growing number of displaced civilians in the country, including through the provision of shelter, healthcare and medicine and the distribution of hot meals and other essential supplies.

68. The Sovereign Order also continued to provide food and non-food items to internally displaced persons affected by the war in Ukraine and to refugees living in neighbouring countries. It offered mental health support to persons at risk, including through the use of telemedicine and mobile units, and provided persons with disabilities with equipment and rehabilitation services. It had established shelters in Lviv and was currently overseeing the reconstruction of a centre for social support for children and families near Kyiv. In South Sudan, Malteser International had repaired more than a dozen wells to provide refugees and internally displaced persons with drinking water in Western Bahr el-Ghazal. The Sovereign Order had also provided training on the development of income-generating activities, including agriculture, with the aim of fostering the social and economic integration of displaced persons into their host communities and promoting gender equality and peaceful coexistence.

69. It was firmly committed to the protection of communities that had been displaced or otherwise affected by natural disasters. In Nigeria, it had strengthened the provision of water, sanitation and hygiene services at the Bakassi camp and had provided additional support to communities affected by the recent floods. It also supported refugee families affected by heavy rainfall, landslides and flash floods in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh. Investing in preparedness and risk reduction remained essential in a global context where climate change was increasingly a driver of human displacement.

70. **Ms. Haddad** (Observer for the International Olympic Committee (IOC)) said that the High Commissioner had been awarded the Olympic Laurel at the opening ceremony of the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris in recognition of the sacrifice and commitment of all UNHCR staff. The strength of the partnership between IOC and UNHCR had been demonstrated by

the success in Paris of the Refugee Olympic Team, which stood as a powerful symbol of resilience, hope and the transformative power of sport.

71. The needs of displaced persons around the world were great, and sport alone could not address their challenges. However, IOC was committed to strengthening the role played by sport in contributing to positive outcomes, as illustrated by its work in the field of mental health. It was estimated that one in five displaced persons experienced a mental health issue such as depression, anxiety or post-traumatic stress disorder and many more were likely to experience some level of psychosocial distress. The success of the Game Connect programme of the Olympic Refugee Foundation in Uganda had shown that participation in sport could significantly reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression among displaced persons and their peers in host communities. In Europe, IOC was working to expand its Sport Coach+ training programme on trauma-informed coaching and psychosocial support, which had been designed to foster safe and supportive sport environments conducive to promoting the mental health and well-being of young people affected by displacement.

72. IOC was committed to working bilaterally and within multi-stakeholder partnerships to strengthen and develop the way sport was used to benefit displaced persons and their communities. It had been one of the convenors of the pledge on the use of sport for inclusion and protection which had been launched at the Global Refugee Forum in December 2023. Over 140 sports organizations, refugee-led organizations, humanitarian actors, Member States and private sector actors had already committed to fulfilling that pledge, and she encouraged all key stakeholders to continue exploring the different ways in which they could use sport to strengthen the mental health, well-being, protection and inclusion of displaced persons worldwide.

73. **Ms. Pontillo** (World Food Programme (WFP)) said that her organization and UNHCR both faced significant funding constraints that impacted their capacity to address the growing needs of the communities they served. However, WFP remained fully committed to ensuring adequate food assistance for refugees and currently provided support to refugees, migrants and internally displaced persons in some 50 countries. The strategic partnership between WFP and UNHCR must be strengthened if they were to ensure that the needs of persons of concern continued to be met. Over the previous four years, thanks to the generous support of the Government of the United States of America, the UNHCR-WFP Joint Programme of Excellence and Targeting Hub had played a key role in strengthening assistance for refugees and other forcibly displaced persons. Under that initiative, the two organizations carried out joint actions in the areas of needs assessment, programming and data sharing in 19 countries. To strengthen that cooperation further, they had also recently launched a joint protocol on information-sharing, which would ensure that changes in assistance were communicated to those affected in a timely and accountable manner.

74. **Ms. Karadenizli** (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)) said that the experiences and needs of displaced and crisis-affected women and girls must be a central consideration in all collective responses to displacement, conflict and humanitarian crisis. Firstly, it was essential that the specific needs of women and girls were taken into account in refugee response plans and that they participated in decision-making at all levels. Women must be empowered to shape the policies and programmes that affected their lives, and UN-Women was committed to working with partners to integrate gender equality into the heart of refugee response plans. Secondly, women's economic empowerment was critical to fostering recovery, building resilience and developing sustainable solutions. UN-Women continued to work with local women's organizations and national and local governments to develop programmes that built the economic resilience of displaced women. Thirdly, it was necessary to explore innovative financing and partnerships with the private sector to increase the impact of actions in support of displaced persons. At the same time as humanitarian needs were growing, traditional resources were becoming increasingly overstretched.

75. The stateless status of many women and girls was directly linked to discriminatory nationality laws that denied them the right to live as fully recognized citizens. UN-Women continued to advocate against gender discrimination in nationality laws and to promote the rights and protection of all refugee women and girls. At the Global Refugee Forum, it had

pledged to address statelessness alongside its partners in the new Global Alliance to End Statelessness.

76. **Mr. Javed** (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that, as a member of the Global Alliance to End Statelessness, his organization had undertaken to lead a thematic working group on ending childhood statelessness by securing every child's right to a nationality at birth and preventing statelessness later in life, regardless of a child's or his or her parents' gender, legal status or lack of legal identity. UNICEF and UNHCR worked together in 92 countries to implement joint actions under their strategic collaboration framework, which had been signed in 2023.

77. UNICEF was committed to pursuing joint advocacy at national, regional and global levels to end childhood statelessness, including by: ensuring the right of every child to a nationality immediately after birth, both in law and in practice; removing gender discrimination in nationality laws and civil registration laws; and promoting universal child birth registration. It encouraged States to accede to international conventions on statelessness and advocated for stateless children to be given access to basic services. UNICEF was also committed to strengthening collaboration with other stakeholders, including UNHCR, in at least 10 target countries to accelerate their progress towards ending childhood statelessness, including by supporting them to amend their nationality laws to prevent statelessness at birth, to achieve universal birth registration and to strengthen the collection of data on statelessness.

78. **Mr. Devictor** (World Bank Group) said that, in view of the increasing numbers of persons who were forcibly displaced because of ongoing conflicts and insecurity, it had become more critical than ever to deliver on the commitments set forth in the Global Compact on Refugees and the pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum. The World Bank Group was committed to supporting host countries under the Global Concessional Financing Facility and through the International Development Association. Furthermore, its private sector arm, the International Finance Corporation, and UNHCR had established a joint initiative to mobilize private capital and to support the development of local economies and markets in the context of forced displacement.

79. Refugee situations were not only emergencies; they had a tendency to last. It was therefore important for host countries and their partners to develop responses that were both financially and socially sustainable. The World Bank Group welcomed the importance that UNHCR attached to sustainable programming and its focus on policies of temporary inclusion, medium-term perspectives and the need for more equitable responsibility-sharing. Furthermore, certain approaches to hosting refugees were more cost-effective than others, and the World Bank Group stood ready to contribute to the formulation of policies that benefited both refugees and host countries. However, humanitarian assistance could not simply be replaced with development support; the former remained critical in many situations, especially in the early stages of a crisis. His organization therefore called for the continued support of donors to address the growing number of global emergencies.

80. **Mr. Ishimwe** (Refugees Seeking Equal Access at the Table (R-SEAT)), speaking on behalf of a wide range of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), said that his statement was the first to be made by a refugee-led organization at a meeting of the Executive Committee. It was a proud moment that reflected the importance of engaging refugees not only as individuals but also through their representative organizations.

81. The pleas of refugees were becoming harder to hear amid a rising clamour of fear, division and indifference. The concept of humanity was under siege. In addition to the alarming scale of displacement, there was a deepening chasm between those people whose suffering was acknowledged and those who were forgotten. Some refugees were deemed more worthy of compassion and protection than others. Humanitarian workers had once believed that every life was equal, but now, in a world where refugee camps had become battlefields and children collateral, doubt had crept in. NGOs now wondered how they could continue their work as they watched their dream of a peaceful world with equal protection and dignity for all fade away.

82. In order to promote a shared humanity, priority must be put on saving lives and ensuring access to protection and essential services. Pushbacks, detention and torture must be avoided. Second, all stakeholders must proactively address the backlash against forcibly

displaced and stateless persons in both public discourse and political rhetoric. The latter had become increasingly negative and divisive. States must prioritize integration and inclusion, protect humanitarian workers and refrain from criminalizing aid operations. Third, the importance of the meaningful participation of refugees in refugee responses must be recognized. Affected persons must be permitted to influence discussions, policies and decision-making processes relevant to them; that could be achieved through the establishment of refugee advisory boards. Refugee-led organizations remained severely underfunded, and there were few opportunities for them to meaningfully engage in substantive matters. States should embrace them as true and equal partners. The shared duty to save lives and ensure protection was a moral imperative. The response of today would shape tomorrow.

83. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that he fully supported the three recommendations set out in the powerful statement by the representative of R-SEAT. All stakeholders needed to step up and allocate appropriate resources for refugee-led organizations.

84. He appreciated the long-standing commitment of the African Union, which was an active member of the Global Alliance to End Statelessness. The figure of 44 million forcibly displaced persons across Africa represented 36 per cent of the world's refugee population, which underscored the importance of regional organizations. He also valued the role of ECOWAS in fostering regional cooperation and analysing and addressing the root causes of displacement in West Africa. The growing pressure on coastal States was an important theme that had emerged from the general debate. He welcomed the participation of ECCAS in an Executive Committee session for the first time and wished to commend it on its solidarity fund, which highlighted the need for cooperation between stakeholders to avoid both overlap and lacunae in humanitarian efforts. He wished to thank IGCLR for its contribution and noted the importance of States in that region using their influence to solve conflicts and overcome humanitarian fatigue.

85. He was very grateful to IOC for its extraordinary support, not only in terms of the Olympic Laurel it had awarded him at the 2024 Olympic Games, but also through the Refugee Olympic Team and the Olympic Refugee Foundation, which promoted sport as a tool for coexistence in conflict-affected communities. The Committee's role in leading the Sport for Refugees Coalition was also very important. The Council of Europe was engaged in valuable work on human rights, including by supporting its States members in ensuring that their responses to asylum applications and refugee influxes were in line with international law. He welcomed the call by IDLO for clearer, more equitable laws. The Organization was doing important work on the policy and legal aspects of climate action in relation to displacement, which warranted greater attention. The humanitarian engagement of the Sovereign Order of Malta was very welcome, particularly in connection with displacement caused by natural disasters. Responses must be organized around the link with climate change.

86. He wished to stress the importance of his Office's partnership with the World Bank Group, including through the Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement, and urged all countries to support the Bank's replenishment drive for the International Development Association Window for Host Communities and Refugees, which was a global concessional financing facility aimed at middle-income countries. Although food security was crucial in refugee responses, his Office, in partnership with the World Food Programme, had struggled to highlight its importance. He appealed to all donors to fund food operations linked to refugee situations. Greater development efforts were also needed to ensure sustainable food security. UNHCR was proud to have signed a memorandum of understanding with UN-Women, which was an advocate on gender-related issues both externally and with the United Nations system. There was a strong gender dimension to statelessness, and the practical role of UN-Women was crucial in that area. In that regard, the work of UNICEF, including on the legal and operational aspects of birth registration, was also vital.

*Statements made in exercise of the right of reply*

87. **Ms. Katvalyan** (Armenia) said that she was obliged to repudiate the groundless accusations made in the statement by the representative of Azerbaijan at the Executive

Committee's 766th meeting (A/AC.96/SR.766). In 2023, Azerbaijan had committed ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh. During the related military offensive, as had been stated unequivocally by the International Court of Justice, more than 100,000 Armenians had been compelled to flee. Azerbaijan had then begun to falsify history and invent fabricated geographical references to towns and villages in the Republic of Armenia to which it claimed that Azerbaijanis should return. Such behaviour clearly amounted to territorial claims.

88. Parts of the sovereign territory of the Republic of Armenia remained under occupation by Azerbaijan. Around 500,000 Armenians had lived in Soviet Azerbaijan; today, virtually none remained, the majority having been massacred or forcibly displaced. Azerbaijan should remember the rights of those people when fabricating new narratives. While Armenia continued to address the urgent needs of the refugees, Azerbaijan attempted to perpetuate its ethnic cleansing by looting and destroying the property and religious and cultural heritage of forcibly displaced persons. Moreover, Azerbaijan had engaged in ethnodemographic engineering by settling Azerbaijanis en masse in territories that had been inhabited by Armenians for many centuries.

89. Aggressive statements by Azerbaijan called into question its readiness to normalize relations with Armenia. Despite that country's destructive approach and continuous attempts to jeopardize peace talks, Armenia remained committed to the normalization of relations and to the conclusion of a peace treaty ahead of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Baku in November 2024.

90. **Ms. Georgantzoglou** (Greece), referring to a statement made by the representative of North Macedonia at the Executive Committee's 766th meeting (A/AC.96/SR.766), said that Greece wished to recall that, pursuant to article 1 of the Prespa Agreement of 12 February 2018, the constitutional name of that country was the Republic of North Macedonia, with the short form of North Macedonia to be used *erga omnes*. The Republic of North Macedonia had imparted that information to the United Nations and all Member States on 14 February 2018 by means of two notes verbales. Greece wished to reaffirm the importance of adherence to international law and of the full implementation, in good faith, of the Prespa Agreement.

91. **Mr. Safarov** (Azerbaijan), referring to a statement made by the representative of Armenia at the Executive Committee's 766th meeting (A/AC.96/SR.766), said that, in speaking about a refugee-like population numbering more than 100,000 individuals, the delegation of Armenia had used a geographical name that was not found in the database of maps maintained by the United Nations.

92. Having begun three decades earlier, Armenia continued to violate the rights of 300,000 Azerbaijanis forcibly expelled from western Zangezur and other regions, also known as Western Azerbaijan. Due to the prolonged Armenian aggression, Azerbaijan had, on humanitarian grounds, gradually integrated refugees from Armenia into society, afforded them their rights and granted them citizenship. The Government of Armenia had never recognized a single right of Azerbaijanis expelled from Armenia.

93. With regard to the refugee-like population in Armenia, the Government of Azerbaijan had stated that it recognized the rights of Armenians from the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan and had created an Internet portal to facilitate their return. The Armenian Government had responded by blocking access to the portal.

94. Azerbaijan reiterated its call for Armenia to end its discriminatory treatment of Azerbaijanis forcibly expelled from Armenia and to uphold their rights as a matter of urgency.

95. **Mr. Baddoura** (Lebanon) said that, in a statement made at the Executive Committee's 768th meeting (A/AC.96/SR.768), the representative of Israel, the occupying Power, had pretended that Israel was not waging war against the Lebanese people. However, millions had been displaced, 2,400 people had been killed and 10,000 injured, and farmland and cultural heritage in the southern regions had been razed. While Israel claimed that its military operations were targeted and limited, there had been 20,000 attacks in all parts of Lebanon, punctuated by attempted ground invasions, bellicose rhetoric and threats to transform the country into another Gaza. The Israeli representative had claimed that his Government respected international humanitarian law, despite the fact that the whole world,

including friends of Israel, was appalled at the contempt it was showing for that law, both in Gaza and in Lebanon.

96. The Israeli representative had labelled Hizbullah a terrorist group, a designation that Lebanon categorically rejected as part of the usual Israeli propaganda that equated legitimate resistance with terrorism. When speaking of terrorism, the horrific pager attacks and the deliberate targeting of the City Hall in Nabatiyah the previous day, which had caused the deaths of 16 civilians, including the mayor, during a meeting to coordinate aid deliveries, should be borne in mind. The most preposterous and shocking of the claims made by the Israeli representative was that Israel was on the side of the free world. Perhaps by “freedom”, he had meant the freedom to massacre, invade, rampage and dehumanize with total impunity.

97. **Mr. Savchuk** (Ukraine), referring to a statement made by the representative of the Russian Federation at the Executive Committee’s 767th meeting ([A/AC.96/SR.767](#)), said that Ukraine regretted the recycling of false narratives by the Russian delegation to cover up its Government’s unlawful actions in Ukraine. Its reference to 5 million Ukrainians who had allegedly “come to” the Russian Federation had been particularly egregious, given that those persons were simply the population of the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. That assertion had been nothing but a blatant attempt to manipulate the Executive Committee. Ukraine urged all delegations not to fall for such subterfuge.

98. He wished to reiterate that Ukrainian civilians who found themselves in the hands of the Russian Federation as a result of its armed aggression against Ukraine were protected persons under international humanitarian law. They were not refugees. The Autonomous Republic of Crimea, the city of Sevastopol and parts of the Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation were integral parts of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. Ukrainian sovereignty over those territories had been upheld by numerous General Assembly resolutions and resolutions adopted since the Russian aggression had begun in 2014. No territorial acquisition resulting from the threat or use of force should be recognized as legal under international law. Ukraine demanded that Russia immediately cease its armed aggression, unconditionally withdraw all its forces and military equipment from Ukraine and fully respect the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine.

99. **Mr. Uszyński** (Poland), referring to a statement made by the representative of Belarus at the Executive Committee’s 769th meeting ([A/AC.96/SR.769](#)), said that, from a humanitarian point of view, the region was affected not only by the illegal neocolonial war being waged by Russia against Ukraine but also by hybrid attacks by Belarus that were aimed at undermining the security of Poland and nearby countries. Instrumentalizing the movement of migrants and asylum-seekers, violating their rights and exploiting their hopes and plans with the aim of inflicting political damage on its neighbours was one of the most despicable practices imaginable.

100. Belarus was responsible for the crisis on the eastern Polish border, having created artificial migration routes from various African and Middle Eastern countries. Furthermore, Poland, unlike Belarus, provided medical assistance for persons remaining at the border. Contrary to the claim made by Belarus, Poland was ready for dialogue on managing the flow of persons across the border between the two countries, on the sole condition that Belarus must lift the migratory pressure it had artificially created.

101. **Mr. Atroshenko** (Russian Federation) said that he wished to exercise the right to reply in respect of the baseless attacks launched in statements made by a number of delegations. Politicized statements did not contribute to constructive discussion on the humanitarian situation. Russia could not remain indifferent to the fate of the people of Donbas, and aimed to save the people of the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics and Kherson and Zaporizhzhia Provinces. The actions of Russia were the result of the actions of Kyiv against Donbas, including its unwillingness to uphold human rights, cease discrimination against Russian-speaking citizens and implement the Minsk agreements.

102. Russia was not targeting civilian facilities that were not used for military purposes. The actions of Ukrainian law enforcement officials were the true cause of forced displacement in the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics and Kherson and Zaporizhzhia Provinces. Russian regions had become the largest recipients of Ukrainian citizens. His



Government rejected the politicized accusations regarding the allegedly forced movement of Ukrainian citizens, including children, which were aimed at stoking anti-Russian rhetoric in the context of the Ukrainian crisis. The people of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics and Kherson and Zaporizhzhia Provinces had exercised their right to self-determination in line with international law. The fact that those regions had become part of Russia demonstrated that their inhabitants had voluntarily become Russian citizens. The accusations against Russia concerning the instrumentalization of migration were groundless.

103. Referring to a statement made by the representative of Georgia at the Executive Committee's 767th meeting (A/AC.96/SR.767), he said that South Ossetia and Abkhazia were independent States. Through its reckless actions, the Georgian Government had rejected the peoples of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which had then declared their independence. The forced migration in the region had resulted from the aggressive policy pursued by Georgia and its unwillingness to conclude agreements with South Ossetia and Abkhazia that could serve to improve the situation and resolve the humanitarian issues. The Geneva International Discussions had been negatively affected by the resolution submitted by Georgia to the General Assembly.

104. **Ms. Gelnere** (Latvia), referring to a statement made by the representative of Belarus at the Executive Committee's 769th meeting (A/AC.96/SR.769), said that the ongoing hybrid attacks and the instrumentalization of migration by Belarus, through the creation of artificial migration routes and the pushing of people across borders, were yet another attempt by the Belarusian regime to threaten the stability, sovereignty and national security of Latvia and other States members of the European Union. Since June 2021, the rate of irregular migration from Belarus had increased exponentially. In 2024, border guards had encountered more than 4,800 attempts to cross the border illegally. Belarusian State institutions had engaged in coordinated actions, bringing in citizens of third countries on false premises, issuing them with tourist visas and then transporting them to the border with Latvia and forcing them to cross it.

105. The Latvian authorities continued to respond to the hybrid attacks in full respect of their international commitments, while also taking reasonable steps to prevent further escalation of the manufactured migration crisis. Latvia condemned in the strongest possible terms the continued instrumentalization of migrants, whose lives and well-being were jeopardized by Belarus for political purposes.

106. **Mr. Jievaltas** (Lithuania), referring to a statement made by the representative of Belarus at the Executive Committee's 769th meeting (A/AC.96/SR.769), said that Lithuania took its international obligations very seriously and was committed to protecting refugees, especially those escaping conflict and persecution. There was, however, a clear distinction between regular, irregular and instrumentalized migration. For more than three years, Lithuania had continuously been confronted with the illegal practice of instrumentalized migration of the Belarusian authorities. By encouraging migrants to travel to Belarus and facilitating illegal crossing into neighbouring countries, Belarus had exposed migrants to a heightened risk of grave abuse and increased their vulnerability to organized crime groups. The unprecedented movement of migrants had led thousands of them, including many children, to become trapped for long periods in border zones in dire conditions. The Belarusian security services not only encouraged illegal border crossings but also deliberately prevented migrants from turning back, including through the use of physical force. As a result, huge numbers of migrants found themselves in life-threatening situations where their fundamental rights were violated. Those actions violated a number of international obligations. Lithuania called on the international community to firmly demand that Belarus comply with its international obligations in the field of migration and human rights.

107. **Ms. Csizmadia** (Hungary), speaking on behalf of the European Union and the States members thereof, said that she wished to respond to a number of statements concerning the so-called unilateral coercive measures imposed by the Union. Restrictive measures imposed by the European Union were fully compliant with international law. Such sanctions were applied in response to serious violations of international law, including the prohibition on the use of force, or other international norms. Sanctions were targeted at the persons responsible for committing serious human rights violations and abuses and undermining peace and security and the rule of law. They were never aimed at the civilian population and were

designed to avoid any unintended consequences for persons not responsible for such actions. Food, medicine and other emergency supplies did not fall under such sanctions.

108. Referring to the statement made by the representative of the Russian Federation, she said that the European Union regretted that the Russian Federation had once again used a humanitarian platform to present its politicized agenda. Together with its member States, it wished to reiterate its resolute condemnation of the war of aggression being waged by Russia against Ukraine, which constituted a manifest violation of the Charter of the United Nations. It expressed its full support for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.

109. **Ms. Loewer** (United States of America), referring to a statement made by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela at the Executive Committee's 769th meeting (A/AC.96/SR.769), said that her country was not alone in taking the view that economic sanctions could be a lawful, legitimate, appropriate and effective tool for responding to malign activity and addressing serious threats to peace and security. Some of the States who were among the most vocal opponents of unilateral coercive measures themselves used sanctions inappropriately, including to crack down on civil society and political opposition.

110. When the United States applied sanctions, it did so in strict accordance with international law and with specific objectives in mind, including to promote a return to democracy and the rule of law, encourage respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and respond to threats to international security. Contrary to claims that its sanctions exacerbated suffering or undermined development, it was the targets of those sanctions who engaged in such behaviour.

111. **Ms. Bejanishvili** (Georgia), referring to a statement made by the representative of the Russian Federation at the Executive Committee's 767th meeting (A/AC.96/SR.767), said that the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions were indivisible parts of Georgia that had been occupied by Russia by means of full-scale military aggression 16 years earlier, in violation of the fundamental principles and norms of international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the Helsinki Final Act. Attempts by Russia to mislead the international community through disinformation and false narratives were in vain. Numerous international courts had issued rulings attesting to the occupation by Russia and its exertion of effective control over the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions of Georgia and confirming Russian responsibility for grave violations of human rights and of international conventions.

112. Georgia again called on Russia to adhere to those rulings, respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia, implement the 12 August agreement mediated by the European Union and withdraw its forces from the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions of Georgia.

*The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.*