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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS  
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Fifty-third session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 564th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,  
on Tuesday, 1 October 2002, at 3 p.m.

<u>Chairman:</u>	Mr. BOULGARIS (Vice-Chairman)	(Switzerland)
later:	Mr. YIMER (Chairman)	(Ethiopia)
later:	Mr. BOULGARIS (Vice-Chairman)	(Switzerland)

CONTENTS

GENERAL DEBATE (continued)

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In the absence of Mr. Yimer (Ethiopia), Mr. Boulgaris (Switzerland),  
Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4) (continued)

1. Mr. DUQUE ESTRADA MEYER (Brazil) said that, in line with its firm commitment to sustainable solutions, Brazil had worked closely with UNHCR and the representatives of civil society in order to implement its new resettlement programme. The first families had already arrived and the programme would be extended in due course, in accordance with Brazil's capacities.
2. He welcomed the outcome of the Global Consultations process and particularly the reaffirmation of States' commitment to the principles of the Convention. The Agenda for Protection was a most welcome document and an important step towards the fulfilment of the High Commissioner's mandate. The six goals defined therein represented a synthesis of the challenges the international community now faced. All States parties to the Convention should be committed to its full implementation.
3. Mr. KUSSUMUA (Observer for Angola) said that the Memorandum of Understanding signed in April 2002 between his Government and UNITA (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola) had opened up new prospects of peace and stability, which would make it possible to embark on a normalization process aimed at the social reintegration of vulnerable groups directly affected by the armed conflict, including UNITA ex-combatants and their dependants, and the repair of the social and physical infrastructure. Economic and social recovery would depend in large part on the success of the Government's programme for the return and resettlement of nearly 400,000 Angolan refugees, to be carried out with the help of humanitarian agencies, in particular UNHCR. A donor round table would be held in the near future in order to mobilize resources from the international community to support that programme.
4. Ms. NGENDAHAYO (Observer for Burundi) said that, after nearly 10 years of war, around 20 per cent of Burundi's population were refugees, IDPs or uprooted persons. Some 45,000 refugees from the east and south of Burundi had been repatriated under the tripartite agreement between the Governments of Burundi and Tanzania and UNHCR, but UNHCR had unexpectedly suspended aid to returnees from those areas, following a road accident in June 2002 in which 35 people had lost their lives. Although another 7,500 refugees had nevertheless been repatriated and others were returning on foot, UNHCR's decision had been a blow to the search for sustainable solutions and had exposed many refugees to the risk of torture and sometimes deadly assault, in violation of the principle of dignified return and humanitarian protection. She therefore called on UNHCR to review its position: it was not unknown for such repatriation operations to be conducted while shooting and ambushes continued.
5. Her Government had appealed to the rebels to enter negotiations and she urged the international community to help convince them to do so. Senseless violence continued to take its

toll of innocent civilians, including returnees attempting to reach their places of origin. She called on donors to make good their pledges in order to facilitate social and economic reform and the repatriation and reintegration of Burundian refugees, which would help consolidate peace and move the country and the subregion towards economic growth and political stability.

6. Ms. GABR (Observer for Egypt) welcomed the Agenda for Protection and said that it was important to develop an appropriate framework for its implementation, taking into account all political aspects and, in particular, the suffering of women and girl refugees. With regard to Goal 5, she said that it was essential to confront the problem of xenophobia and racism and end restrictive government policies on hosting and, in line with Goal 6, it was important to lift resource constraints in order to provide an appropriate level of protection for refugee women and refugee children. Her delegation wished to emphasize the importance of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol and believed any new institutions and mechanisms proposed should be established in line with those instruments.

7. She hoped that the developed countries would maintain their tremendous efforts to protect refugees, for, in a tightly interdependent world, their failure to do so would entail consequences that would not be confined to developing countries. She also called on the international community to redouble its efforts to protect Palestinian refugees from the practices of the Israeli Government, which flouted international humanitarian law.

8. Mr. U MAUNG AUNG (Observer for Myanmar) said that, despite the complexity of the refugee problem, the international community must continue its search for humane, sustainable solutions. UNHCR had a unique role to play in that regard and his delegation paid tribute to its significant achievements. Myanmar, for its part, relied chiefly on bilateral consultations to resolve refugee problems, but welcomed the support of UNHCR and other international bodies where appropriate.

9. Mr. MAPUSHI (Observer for Zambia) said that his delegation welcomed the Agenda for Protection, which addressed many of the problems encountered by his Government, and believed that it was important to establish a forum within the framework of the Executive Committee in order to ensure effective implementation.

10. The peace and reconciliation process in Angola provided an opening for a sustainable solution, through voluntary repatriation, for the more than 200,000 Angolan refugees currently in Zambia. For such an undertaking to succeed, however, UNHCR programmes would need more consistent and adequate funding and he called on the international community to be more forthcoming with regard to UNHCR's budget in 2003 and 2004.

11. For the millions of refugees in Africa for whom there were no sustainable solutions, the promotion of self-reliance in the context of local integration was the next most viable option. The "Zambia initiative" was an example of a community-development approach that bridged the gap between relief and development by empowering both refugees and members of the host communities. Those refugees who opted not to be repatriated would not be a burden on the host country. He thanked the Africa Development Bank and the Governments involved for their assistance in promoting that initiative, in a practical demonstration of burden sharing.

12. Mr. Eui-Young CHUNG (Republic of Korea) said that, as the High Commissioner had emphasized, the main challenge ahead was to translate the recommendations of the Agenda for Protection into concrete action. Priority setting should be done with as broad a participation as possible. International cooperation and burden sharing would also be essential to implementing the “Convention Plus”: it was to be hoped that that concept could be further developed in order to help protect the lives and human rights of people not formally recognized as refugees, but living in refugee-like situations and likely to face persecution if they returned home.

13. Without adequate funding, UNHCR could not fulfil its mandate and his Government appreciated the High Commissioner’s efforts to alleviate the organization’s financial shortfalls and underfunding. His Government had contributed US\$ 12 million to various international programmes in support of Afghan refugees in 2001, including US\$ 3 million through UNHCR.

14. His delegation hoped the recent downward trend in the number of people of concern to UNHCR would continue; it would maintain its support for UNHCR’s efforts to strengthen international cooperation.

15. Mr. BOGUNOVIČ (Observer for Slovenia) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by Denmark on behalf of the European Union.

16. Slovenia had on several occasions expressed concern about the issues of secondary movements and the abuse of asylum procedures, problems that gave rise to negative attitudes within society. His delegation had therefore listened attentively to the High Commissioner’s proposals on the “Convention Plus” and the UNHCR 2004 process. It agreed that new ways of overcoming those challenges had to be found, but also believed that a fair system of international burden sharing needed to be established.

17. Slovenia strongly supported the idea of bridging the relief-development gap through the “Four Rs” - repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction, an approach it had itself implemented in the early 1990s through the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. It was also vital to recognize the value of local integration in the asylum country and the asset refugees represented to the host community.

18. Mr. DJINNIT (African Union) said that recent changes in Africa, particularly the establishment of the African Union, provided a golden opportunity to develop new approaches to the humanitarian challenges facing the continent, including the plight of refugees. He was confident that the scheduled plenary panel meeting on durable solutions for refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons in the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) would lead to more robust partnerships better able to meet the needs of refugees in Africa. Moreover, in order to prevent humanitarian work with refugees from being hampered by the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other States, the Constitutive Act of the African Union had incorporated a far-reaching “principle of non-indifference”, which gave the Union the right to intervene in member States in respect of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity.

19. Progress towards ending some of the conflicts in Africa had resulted in the repatriation of some refugees and had opened a window of opportunity for UNHCR and the international community to accelerate the repatriation and reintegration of those refugees still in exile. However, additional resources were needed to assist refugees and displaced persons, whose plight had been worsening despite the generous contribution of host countries whose own economic situation had been deteriorating. One example of the worsening conditions in which refugees had to live was the incidence of sexual violence directed against them in West Africa. The speed and firmness with which UNHCR had moved to stamp out that phenomenon was reassuring. The African Union would continue to cooperate fully with UNHCR and all the humanitarian agencies, not only to alleviate the suffering of refugees and displaced persons, but also to address the root causes of the problem.

20. Ms. NYIRAMILIMO (Observer for Rwanda) expressed her appreciation to UNHCR and the international community for their contribution to the welfare of the refugees in Rwanda, who were mostly from Burundi or the Kivu region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. During the High Commissioner's visit to Rwanda earlier in the year, many of the Congolese refugees had expressed a desire to return home and, in August 2002, they had been encouraged to do so by the Congolese authorities, as the security situation in the Kivu region had greatly improved. About a third of them had already returned and the rest would be repatriated gradually. There was no truth in claims that they were being repatriated by force; on the contrary, those who did not want to return would continue to be granted asylum in Rwanda. Rwanda was a party to the main international and regional instruments guaranteeing the international protection of refugees and was fully committed to the fundamental principles governing the voluntary repatriation of refugees, as shown by the joint declaration she had signed, as Minister of State for Social Affairs, with the UNHCR country representative in September 2002. It was also her Government's policy to encourage Rwandan refugees in other countries to return home; so far, over 3 million of them had been repatriated voluntarily. She called on UNHCR and the countries of asylum to encourage the voluntary repatriation of the remaining Rwandan refugees and appealed for international support for reintegration programmes for returnees.

21. Ms. ZEMICHAEL (Observer for Eritrea) said that voluntary repatriation was the preferred and most durable solution to the refugee problem, but the most difficult part of the process was the full reintegration of refugees. The 3 million refugees and internally displaced persons in Africa lived in the most abject conditions, even though the poor host countries did their best to stretch their meagre resources. NEPAD was a welcome step in the right direction, as the refugee problem could not be separated from the pressing challenges of poverty eradication and other development goals, but it should not be allowed to overshadow the need to pay sufficient attention to refugees' immediate humanitarian needs.

22. Her country appreciated the assistance of UNHCR and the collaboration of the Government of the Sudan in repatriating Eritrean refugees in safety and dignity, but more assistance was still needed. The voluntary repatriation of Eritrean refugees from the Sudan had resumed in May 2001 and was still on track, even though it was taking place in the aftermath of conflict and drought. In cooperation with UNHCR and other agencies, her Government was preparing a comprehensive programme to deal with the rehabilitation of refugees, internally

displaced persons, expellees and demobilized soldiers within the framework of longer-term development strategies. With the recent declaration by UNHCR of the application of the “ceased circumstances” provisions of the cessation clause, the registration of urban refugees had begun and more diversified reintegration schemes that were compatible with their needs would be required.

23. She conveyed her Government’s gratitude to all its partners for their response to the complex humanitarian emergency in her country, but stressed that there was still an urgent need for international assistance to avert disaster and rebuild the lives of the returning refugees and other displaced persons.

24. Mr. MONZOULE (Observer for the Central African Republic) said that his country had experienced many problems in recent years as a result of economic and social instability and mass influxes of refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan. Moreover, a climate of hostility towards some refugees, particularly those from Rwanda, had developed as a result of their alleged involvement in the attempted coup in May 2001. Continued UNHCR support was therefore very important to his country, which would continue to take in refugees in strict compliance with the applicable humanitarian rules. Unlike certain other Governments in the region, the Central African Government would never allow its territory to be used as a basis for attacks on friendly neighbouring countries. Nor had it ever attempted to return refugees seeking asylum in its territory. Rather, it was constantly seeking to live in peaceful cooperation with its neighbours and therefore welcomed efforts by the African Union and the Central African Economic and Monetary Community to settle its dispute with Chad.

25. His country’s security problems stemmed from the fact that it bordered on three countries in a state of armed rebellion. He called on UNHCR to support the disarmament programme set up after the events of May 2001 in order to make refugee camps more secure and to transfer the remaining officers of the former Forces Armées Zaïroises to another country and resettle the Rwandan refugees in other countries. He commended UNHCR efforts to combat environmental degradation in refugee camps and called for financial support to rehabilitate the sites of former camps. He was confident that UNHCR would continue to give its fullest support to the Central African Republic in the task of taking care of the 50,000 refugees still in its territory.

26. Mr. LOMONGIN (Observer for Kenya) said that it was 10 years since his country had opened its border to an avalanche of refugees from neighbouring Somalia and smaller influxes from the Sudan. His Government continued to promote dialogue and reconciliation within the framework of the Intergovernmental Authority for Development and had appointed a special envoy to try to bring together the warring factions in Somalia. He called on the international community to become more involved in the search for peace in the region and to ensure that all refugees in Kenya were able to return home or were resettled in a third country. The “Actions 1, 2 and 3” exercise proposed by UNHCR, combined with the pressure of budget cuts, would merely transfer the burden of refugees from the international community to the host countries, with little regard for a country’s ability to cope, and would be unworkable in Kenya because of the country’s unique geographical and socio-economic circumstances.

27. Kenya had had its share of problems arising from the presence of refugees and the volatile situation in the region, including the proliferation of small arms, tension between refugees and local communities, and negative environmental effects. Preventive and rehabilitative measures were urgently needed if disaster was to be averted. While the situation of refugees in Kenya was not classed as an emergency, the country continued to experience sporadic influxes which demanded the rapid mobilization of resources beyond those budgeted for by the Government and UNHCR. Cuts had already had to be made in life-saving supplies and the outlook for durable solutions to the refugee problem was bleak indeed. He appealed for corrections in regional imbalances in providing for refugees and urged all those concerned with refugees' welfare to continue supporting UNHCR so that it could provide the same basic necessities for refugees in Kenya as in other parts of the world. The current processing of Somali Bantus for resettlement in the United States offered some hope for those refugees who were not able to return home even after peace had been restored.

28. Lastly, he called for a concerted effort by the international community to seek durable solutions that would ultimately lead to voluntary repatriations in peace and dignity and expressed his support for the High Commissioner's focus on the "four Rs".

29. Mr. Yimer (Ethiopia) took the Chair.

30. Mr. PETÖCZ (Observer for Slovakia), associating his delegation with the statement by the representative of Denmark on behalf of the European Union, said that Slovakia had witnessed a significant increase in the number of asylum-seekers in recent years, but remained a country of transit rather than of destination. However, the number of asylum-seekers and migrants was expected to increase once Slovakia had joined the European Union and its new asylum laws, designed to bring its legislation up to date, had entered into force. He shared the High Commissioner's concerns about funding for UNHCR programmes and commended his efforts to broaden the donor base. In 2001, Slovakia had for the first time ranked among the more significant UNHCR donors and would be looking for ways to become a regular contributor in the future. His delegation subscribed fully to the High Commissioner's initiatives to focus on sustainable solutions to refugee problems, strengthening partnerships, burden-sharing and addressing the root causes of those problems. It also welcomed the "Convention Plus" initiative and looked forward to the adoption of the Agenda for Protection.

31. Mr. AKAPELWA (Commission on Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons, African Union) welcomed the High Commissioner's stated intention to follow closely the plight of refugees and internally displaced persons in Africa and assured him of the full cooperation of the Commission on Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons. Africa accounted for the largest number of refugees and internally displaced persons in the world: many of them lived in appalling conditions and were exposed to serious human rights violations. Nevertheless, African countries of asylum and countries of origin were making commendable efforts to promote the voluntary repatriation of refugees in conditions of security and dignity. At its meeting in July 2002, the Executive Council of the African Union had appealed to the international community to share the burden of refugees by providing increased and equitable humanitarian assistance to refugees, internally displaced persons and countries of asylum. In the interests of

such burden sharing, he urged all countries to provide the necessary financial and material assistance to countries overburdened with large numbers of refugees. He supported the High Commissioner's focus on the "four Rs" as a way to help resettle returnees and enable them to rebuild their lives. Some encouraging developments in the peace processes initiated by the African Union in conjunction with various regional and international agencies offered hope that it would soon be possible, with the valuable and dependable support of UNHCR, to repatriate more refugees. The Commission on Refugees wholeheartedly supported the work of UNHCR and would continue to work side by side with it and with development partners, stakeholders and asylum countries to seek ways of alleviating the suffering of refugees and internally displaced persons and to resettle returnees in their countries of origin.

32. Mr. CAMBIASO (Italy), associating his delegation with the statement by the representative of Denmark on behalf of the European Union, said that his delegation welcomed the High Commissioner's innovative approach to the problems of refugees, although, with his "Convention Plus" and "UNHCR 2004", he was perhaps a step ahead of the Executive Committee, which was still occupied with "Actions 1, 2 and 3". He agreed with the overall thrust of the High Commissioner's suggestions - to deal with the areas not covered by the 1951 Convention and to reform UNHCR - and supported the proposal to set up an advisory forum to monitor the implementation of the Agenda for Protection, although he believed that the forum should come within the purview of the Executive Committee. In that connection, the third track of the Global Consultations on International Protection appeared to be more promising than the second track.

33. In Afghanistan, the dedicated staff of UNHCR had already achieved results that were beyond expectations, but, with winter rapidly drawing on, it was crucial to ensure that repatriation was sustainable. However, UNHCR could not do everything; others had to initiate the development processes that were vital to the reintegration of repatriated Afghans.

34. With regard to the situation in West Africa, he was relieved to see that the investigation by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) appeared to have cleared UNHCR staff of sexual abuse, but there were still reports that child refugees were regularly exploited and abused, sometimes by humanitarian workers and not only in West Africa. He expected UNHCR to fulfil its obligation to protect those children as energetically as it had done in the past. Lastly, he expressed the wish that the High Commissioner's imaginative and dynamic approach would make the international community more sensitive to the unacceptable plight of millions of refugees and internally displaced persons; refugee camps should be a response to emergencies, not a salve for guilty consciences.

35. Mr. NAJAFOV (Observer for Azerbaijan) said that Azerbaijan had one of the largest populations of displaced persons in the world, a fact that had surprisingly been overlooked by the High Commissioner in his opening remarks. The international community had tended to lose sight of Azerbaijan's problems owing to their protracted nature. His Government had nevertheless taken various steps to improve the situation of refugees and displaced persons and was cooperating with international and humanitarian organizations, including UNHCR, which should explore the possibility of setting up a country office in Azerbaijan. At the same time,



Azerbaijan noted with concern that there had been a decline in the amount of humanitarian assistance provided by international agencies. His Government was also anxious that its efforts to find solutions to refugee problems should not be hampered by the political ambitions and territorial pretensions of States that were attempting to delay the achievement of peace. While welcoming the Agenda for Protection, Azerbaijan did not consider that it adequately addressed the problems of people who had been forced to flee their homes as a result of enemy occupation. A special structure should therefore be established within UNHCR to deal with issues relating to internally displaced persons (IDPs).

36. Prince SOBANDLA (Observer for Swaziland) said that the Swazi Government and people remained committed to the institution of asylum despite recent disturbances caused by refugees in Swaziland. The vast majority of the refugee population worked hard to improve their lot, and it was the policy of his Government to harness their positive energy into a self-reliance strategy. To that end, refugees in Swaziland had been provided with land and technical assistance. UNHCR had provided invaluable help and encouragement for his Government's efforts to integrate refugees locally.

37. Mr. WAÏS (Observer for Djibouti) said that Djibouti had had to deal with refugee problems more or less continuously since independence in 1977. It was still home to large numbers of Ethiopian and Somali refugees. However, many refugees had been repatriated with the assistance of UNHCR and the cooperation of the authorities in the refugees' countries of origin. The repatriation process was long and slow and was often held up by inadequate infrastructure in the refugees' homeland. Delays in food supplies to refugee camps was another vexing problem. In order to alleviate those and other problems, donor countries should be more generous and active in their programmes.

38. Ms. AL-HAJJAJI (Observer for the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that the reported sexual abuse of refugee women and children by humanitarian workers in West Africa had shocked her Government. It was very likely that similar abuses had taken place in other parts of the world, yet the facts had been covered up. Humanitarian actors should be compelled to adhere strictly to guidelines for the protection of women and children. The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya was also concerned about the racist measures and laws that some countries had adopted in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in the United States of America on 11 September 2001. The net effect of those measures had been to further stigmatize and marginalize refugees and asylum-seekers; in some cases, recourse had been had to unlawful detentions and forced returns. On a more positive note, her Government and various Libyan NGOs had recently initiated fruitful cooperation with UNHCR.

39. Mr. Boulgaris (Switzerland), Vice-Chairman, resumed the Chair.

40. Ms. FILIP (Observer for Romania), associating herself with the statement made by the representative of Denmark on behalf of the European Union, said that her Government had endeavoured to enhance its domestic mechanism for refugee protection through closer cooperation with UNHCR and a comprehensive training programme for the officials concerned. Various internal administrative reforms had also helped Romania to improve its capacity to

manage refugee flows. In the past decade, Romania had started to become an asylum country for refugees from the Middle East, Africa and Asia, a novel situation that had necessitated various adjustments in administrative culture and public perceptions.

41. A new law on refugees had tightened up the refugee status determination procedure, and refugees were entitled to a money grant and access to various educational, health and employment opportunities. The ultimate goal was to support recognized refugees, encourage their self-reliance and facilitate their integration into Romanian society. Romania had also sought to enhance its role and commitment at the international level, particularly within the context of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

42. Mixed flows of refugees and economic migrants had made the identification of genuine asylum-seekers more difficult than ever. Accordingly, her Government welcomed the strategic cooperation between UNHCR and other international organizations, which would not only consolidate the humanitarian aspect of UNHCR's mandate, but also address the questions of post-conflict stabilization and development. In welcoming the Agenda for Protection, Romania believed that the core agenda items of the proposed forum on international protection should be: the definition of priorities, the application of the principles of burden-sharing and the identification of durable solutions.

43. Mr. HUSSAIN (Pakistan), speaking on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, said that member States of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) were in the forefront of international humanitarian action. More than 7 million refugees in the world were either Muslims or had found shelter in Islamic countries. OIC was concerned that donor countries often channelled resources to those countries where they had strong political or strategic interests. An objective criterion needed to be developed for the sustained allocation of funds to refugee operations around the world. The High Commissioner should ensure that funds were distributed evenly. The protection of refugees was an international responsibility and developing Islamic countries should not be left to shoulder the burden alone. Islamic countries had made significant financial contributions towards various refugee operations through bilateral channels which were frequently ignored. Some Islamic countries, by hosting large refugee populations, had already made an important contribution that should be properly quantified and equated with the cash donors' contributions.

44. The voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees had taken place with unexpected speed, but that had created some logistical problems for UNHCR and the World Food Programme (WFP). It was vital that earlier pledges of financial support for the reconstruction of Afghanistan should be realized in full and as quickly as possible, because the Government of Afghanistan was faced with the enormous challenge of integrating millions of returnees.

45. Mr. MACEDO (Mexico) said that UNHCR was to be congratulated on the role it had played in the return of hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees and on its efforts to find lasting solutions to refugee problems throughout the world. Although there had been a slight reduction in the number of persons under its protection in 2001, the challenges it faced were still enormous, but limited human and financial resources were available to it. Policies of voluntary

repatriation, integration in the host country and resettlement had given excellent results in some countries, including Mexico, and should be pursued as a matter of priority by UNHCR and host countries.

46. In that context, the principle of “non-refoulement” was very important, though it was not mentioned in the draft programme of action of the Agenda for Protection. He believed a specific commitment by States to respect that principle scrupulously should be included in the introduction to Goal 5, entitled “Redoubling the search for durable solutions”. Despite that shortcoming, he supported the adoption of the Agenda for Protection because it would boost the international legal system for refugee protection and help create systems that would ensure that responsibilities towards refugees and internally displaced persons were shared more equitably. He trusted that the implementation of the Agenda would also help ensure respect for the dignity and human rights of refugees.

47. He looked forward to studying closely the proposed “Convention Plus” and welcomed the growing cooperation between UNHCR and IOM. While efforts must be made to prevent abuses of the asylum system without harming the human rights of migrants seeking refuge in countries with a higher standard of living than their own, migration policies should not be used to undermine the legitimate protection to which refugees were entitled.

48. UNHCR’s task would be never-ending if the pressing problems which threatened international peace and security and which were at the origin of most mass movements of people were not resolved. Those problems should be tackled on the basis of respect for human rights and steps to eliminate inequalities in the international economic system. His Government had tackled the problem of refugees in Mexico by providing naturalization and migration papers for almost 25,000 Guatemalan refugees, many of whom had acquired, or were eligible for, Mexican nationality. It had also taken steps, together with UNHCR, to help the refugees in the State of Chiapas. He thanked UNHCR for its valuable contribution to improving Mexico’s system for dealing with refugees and asylum applications; the Government had set up a committee to assess eligibility for refugee status and was currently training local migration authorities and amending domestic legislation on refugees.

49. Mr. SCHATZER (International Organization for Migration) said that many human rights questions connected with the protection of migrants were not covered by the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol; the International Organization for Migration (IOM) looked forward to a fruitful exchange of views on those crucial issues with the High Commissioner for Refugees.

50. Mixed migrant flows raised peculiar problems for national asylum systems. They reflected the fact that migration was a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Refugee protection was important, but it was not the sole priority and imperative. Consequently, it was vital to enhance cooperation between international organizations, NGOs and Governments. In that connection, IOM and UNHCR had sought to fortify their operational relationship by improving institutional arrangements, clarifying responsibilities and ensuring coherent and cost-effective delivery of needed services. In addition, the two organizations had endeavoured to invigorate and expand their consultation mechanisms to enhance mutual understanding.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.