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Chairman: Mr. Al-Hinai (Oman)

Contents

Agenda item 114: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions (*continued*)

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

Agenda item 114: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions (*continued*) (A/56/3, 12 and Add.1, 128, 333 and 335)

1. **Mr. Madej** (Poland), referring to the increasing number of refugees and the deterioration in the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, said that as soon as the military operation was over and the goals of the anti-terrorist coalition had been completed, the international community and, above all, the United Nations should take urgent measures to rebuild the Afghan economy and restore normal living conditions in the country. It was to be hoped that the stabilization of the political situation and the improvement of security conditions would enable the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to operate effectively and extensively to provide assistance for the Afghans that most desperately needed help.

2. Refugees, returnees and displaced persons were and must continue to be of the greatest concern not only to UNHCR but also — and perhaps above all — to the host Governments, which had the primary responsibility for their protection. States should also continue to cooperate fully with UNHCR and provide financial support, if they wished to resolve refugee problems quickly and effectively.

3. With regard to United Nations reform in the interests of more efficient management and a better use of resources, he said that, in planning its activities, every part of the Organization should take into account the limited availability of funds. At the same time, he welcomed the fact that, as the result of the adoption, at the beginning of 2000, of a standardized structure for the budgets of all United Nations bodies, UNHCR had clearly distinguished in its budget between the costs of its global operations and those of its headquarters administration, thus increasing its transparency.

4. His delegation was deeply concerned by the large number of conflicts taking place in the world, which generated new tides of refugees, and by the increasing number of attacks of which the victims were staff members of UNHCR. It strongly condemned such acts, particularly since they were directed at dedicated and impartial personnel.

5. As had been duly mentioned in the High Commissioner's report, migration in Central Europe was on the increase and the Governments of the region were engaged in strengthening their national immigration and asylum legislation and institutions. In Poland, the Repatriation and Foreign Nationals Amendment Act, which regulated the issue of the residence of refugees in the country, had been based on valuable suggestions put forward by UNHCR, coming into force in 2001.

6. The year 2001 marked the tenth anniversary of Poland's accession to the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. The accession had been of great symbolic importance. In accordance with the Convention, of which Polish nationals had been beneficiaries for many years, Poland had opened its borders to asylum-seekers and refugees from other countries, thus showing its devotion to the principles of solidarity and humanitarian assistance.

7. Although his delegation welcomed the leading role of UNHCR in managing the issue of refugees on a global scale and commended the manner in which it carried out its mandate, there was a case for arguing, in view of the limited resources and the new challenges it faced, that UNHCR should concentrate on priorities and, where appropriate, transfer some tasks to other partners in the field.

8. **Mr. Ghassemi** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that his country, which had hosted millions of refugees for over two decades, had endured every kind of problem, while the continuation of political instability and conflict in Afghanistan had turned that country into a source of drug trafficking. When added to endemic poverty and the lack of job opportunities, the situation had given drug traffickers the chance to abuse the protection accorded to genuine refugees and asylum-seekers. Accordingly, UNHCR should, within the framework of international cooperation, establish a mechanism aimed at preventing such practices. At the same time, the host country's ability to receive refugees and the contributions from the international community should be taken into account.

9. Although recognizing the usefulness of the assistance provided by the international community, he regretted that it remained limited, in view of the huge number of refugees in Iran and the extent of their needs. The international community's contribution did not suffice to meet the basic needs of the refugees for

even a week. His Government's annual expenditure on refugees exceeded the total annual budget of UNHCR. The international community had a common responsibility to resolve what was a global crisis, and it was not just or fair to leave host countries to cope with the problem alone.

10. Since voluntary repatriation, by far the most lasting solution, went hand in hand with development, the international community would do well to promote development in the countries of origin. The development of infrastructures for health care, job opportunities, education and housing, particularly in the areas adjacent to the borders of Afghanistan, together with serious demining efforts, could give a considerable boost to hopes for a minimum living standard for asylum-seekers.

11. **Mr. Andrabi** (Pakistan) said that Pakistan had played host to millions of Afghan refugees for over two decades. At the height of the Afghan conflict, there had been 3.2 million registered and another half million unregistered Afghan refugees in the country. Over a decade after the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan, Pakistan still hosted over 3 million Afghan refugees, and the number continued to rise. It was impossible to quantify the precise costs of sheltering the refugees, but, in addition to the direct costs, the adverse impact on Pakistan's demographic and social structure, as well as the economy, employment, ecology and natural resources, had been devastating.

12. In the wake of the latest developments in Afghanistan, more and more Afghans were moving in the direction of Pakistan. According to UNHCR figures, an additional 135,000 Afghans had fled to Pakistan since 11 September 2001 in search of safety and assistance. Afghans currently constituted the largest population of displaced persons in the world, and Pakistan was host to the largest number of refugees.

13. The only lasting solution to the current flow of Afghan refugees would be to help the displaced Afghans inside their own country. It would therefore be appropriate for the United Nations to set up camps inside Afghanistan, close to the border with Pakistan, and arrange relief for the displaced persons, estimated by UNHCR to be around 7.5 million, to prevent a greater influx of refugees to Pakistan. For its part, Pakistan was willing to accommodate the most

vulnerable groups, i.e., the wounded, the disabled, extremely sick persons and orphans.

14. Restoration of complete peace in Afghanistan was vital. That in turn required the formation of a broad-based, multi-ethnic and representative government. The international community would have to play an active part in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of that war-torn country, so that the repatriation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan and Iran could begin. Pakistan fully supported the efforts of the United Nations to achieve a peaceful settlement of the Afghan crisis.

15. While appreciating the assistance provided by UNHCR to Afghan refugees in Pakistan, his delegation regretted that despite the almost constant increase in the numbers of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, UNHCR assistance had dwindled. It now represented only 2 per cent of the overall budget of UNHCR, whereas Pakistan was receiving over 16 per cent of the world's refugee population.

16. The report of the High Commissioner for 2002 (A/56/12) showed that the gap between the challenges facing UNHCR and the resources available to it had continued to increase. The international community, while responding to fresh displacements of people, should continue to support settled refugees wherever they were, until a permanent solution was found for the problem which had forced them to flee.

17. Pakistan welcomed the High Commissioner's initiative for global consultations on international protection and the steps taken to introduce innovative methods of evaluation, but again called upon UNHCR to adopt a new budget format to meet the needs of developing countries with large and permanent refugee populations. To support them, a special support budget should be allocated to the host countries, in close consultation with those countries and the donor community. It was strange that the host countries were excluded from the process of determining the resources required to look after their refugee populations.

18. Countries which hosted a large number of refugees should not be perpetual hostages to a given situation. It was unrealistic to expect them to shoulder international responsibilities indefinitely without support from the international community. Systematic burden-sharing also depended on adequate and timely funding of the humanitarian activities of UNHCR. The High Commissioner's report mentioned the unpredictable and irregular timing of contributions.

Donor countries should provide support in a more predictable and flexible manner. UNHCR should act as a catalyst to develop programmes, with the assistance of other international agencies, to deal with the adverse economic, social and political impact of large-scale refugee influxes on developing countries. In that context, it was also essential to strengthen the host countries' capacity to provide effective protection for the refugees.

19. Countries hosting large numbers of refugees had the responsibility and the sovereign right to screen out those who did not fulfil the criteria for refugee status. Those who did not need humanitarian assistance and were economic migrants should be repatriated. Those suspected of being a security threat, such as armed elements or infiltrators, should also be sent back to their countries of origin. The measures taken by the host countries to implement those decisions did not constitute refoulement.

20. **Ms. Korneliuk** (Belarus) said the protection of refugees called for solidarity and increased cooperation from the international community. For some years, Belarus had had to deal with the refugee problem on a daily basis, and had found that uncontrolled migrant flows outside the national framework, with regional and international dimensions, had an impact on stability and security. The situation was further complicated by the arrival in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) of clandestine immigrants from other parts of the world. In 1996, almost 5,000 such immigrants had been arrested on the borders of Belarus. That phenomenon had led to an increase in crime (almost two per cent of crimes committed in the past 10 months had been perpetrated by foreign nationals and stateless persons) and drug trafficking, and had added to the problem of illegal workers.

21. In the light of the current international situation, there was also a real risk that the refugees and migrants flooding into Belarus would join terrorist or nationalist groups. To prevent that happening, States with common borders must first and foremost show solidarity. A seminar on the problems of migrants and refugees had been organized by UNHCR on 15-17 November 2001, bringing together representatives of the immigration services of Belarus, Latvia, Poland and Ukraine. The host countries needed financial assistance to enable them to identify clandestine immigrants quickly and put an end to trafficking. Belarus was spending nearly

two million dollars a year to stem the flow of clandestine immigrants.

22. Belarus was also continuing to deal with the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, which had contaminated almost a quarter of its territory and one fifth of its population, forcing 135,000 people to leave their homes as a result.

23. Belarus was anxious to find a solution for the problems of the immigrants, while respecting the rights and fundamental freedoms of the citizens of the Republic. Its immigration policy aimed to set up a system for regulating migratory flows through the adoption of legislation dealing with the control of migrants, immigration, freedom of movement and choice of residence, giving grants in aid to Belarusians to facilitate their repatriation from the former Soviet Union, protecting the rights of Belarusian migrant workers and reintegrating persons who had been internally displaced for environmental reasons. She announced that her country had acceded to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol.

24. Her delegation supported the initiative for holding a ministerial meeting in Geneva, in December 2001, of States parties to the 1951 Convention, and hoped the meeting would provide genuine opportunities to establish mechanisms for solving the worldwide problem of clandestine immigration and refugees, taking account of the new challenges of the times. Belarus was prepared to participate actively in all measures adopted for that purpose.

25. **Mr. Knyazhinskiy** (Russian Federation) said the refugee question, which was unfortunately a very topical issue, called for coordinated efforts, especially in the political, socio-economic, humanitarian and judicial fields. It was also important to ensure effective implementation of the provisions of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, and to adopt new approaches and develop new instruments to resolve the problem.

26. The Russian Federation supported the initiative for setting up a process of global consultations on international protection. It would play an active part in them, with a view to finding a lasting solution to the refugee problem, and it was committed to the principles of international protection laid down in the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol. All measures adopted to put into effect the recommendations for the

establishment of a consultation process must be based on those instruments, and must take account of international law and the principles of the territorial integrity of States, their sovereignty and non-interference in their internal affairs.

27. His delegation endorsed the initiative for holding a ministerial meeting on 12 and 13 December 2001 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the 1951 Convention, and hoped the meeting would be an opportunity for States parties to the Convention to restate their commitment to the principles relating to the international protection of refugees.

28. His Government, which attached great importance to improving the situation of migrants in its territory and in other members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), supported the implementation of the Programme of Action of the 1996 Geneva Conference on the Problems of Refugees, Displaced Persons, Migration and Asylum Issues and hoped that measures in that context could be carried out in the framework of close cooperation. In that regard, he commended the active role played by UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in finding a solution to the problem of refugees and displaced persons in the Russian Federation and the CIS countries.

29. While welcoming the fact that the Conference follow-up process had been extended to 2005, his delegation nonetheless deplored the fact that the goals set by the Conference in 1996 were far from being achieved. In view of the importance of multilateral cooperation among the countries of the region, the donor countries, UNHCR, IOM and other international institutions, he emphasized that the CIS countries needed more political support in that regard.

30. Multilateral cooperation should be strengthened in order to support the central role played by the United Nations in coordinating efforts to combat new threats that might provoke massive migration flows. The struggle against one of those threats — terrorism — should not jeopardize the work of a body whose task was international protection.

31. He commended the efforts of UNHCR to adopt measures to help people forced into involuntary displacement. It was appropriate that UNHCR should assume the leading role in the crisis situations that had led to the rise in refugee numbers, since it applied the correct approach and operational capacity and

possessed the necessary qualified staff. His delegation took note of the efforts by UNHCR to improve the effectiveness of its programmes and operations by adhering to the principles of neutrality, impartiality and non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign States.

32. Lastly, his delegation reaffirmed its support for UNHCR, noting the important role that it played in providing assistance and protection to refugees and displaced persons and its capacity to respond to new humanitarian challenges.

33. **Mr. Lordkipanidze** (Georgia) said that a humanitarian tragedy continued to unfold in Georgia, which was host to more than 300,000 displaced persons, while conflicts in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region of South Ossetia remained unresolved. Renewed violence against the Georgian population, organized crime and a discriminatory policy pursued by Abkhaz separatists in schools in the predominantly Georgian-speaking Gali district had the aim of preventing the repatriation of displaced persons. Recent bombings in the Kodori Valley had, moreover, considerably added to the outflow of the Georgian population from Abkhazia, though in that case the territory in question was under the control of the Georgian Government.

34. The gravity of the humanitarian situation in Georgia posed a whole range of challenges to his Government and to UNHCR, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other United Nations programmes and specialized agencies involved in conflict settlement in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, particularly in efforts to provide refugees and displaced persons with both protection and assistance.

35. It was clear that international guarantees were indispensable in ensuring the protection and security of displaced persons and refugees returning to Abkhazia. UNHCR had an important role to play in that regard, as it continued to provide material assistance and monitor the process of return to the Gali district. Together with UNHCR, the United Nations Human Rights Office in Abkhazia, Georgia, could contribute to the safe and dignified return of displaced persons by monitoring the human rights situation and taking adequate measures in cases of the violation of such rights.

36. With regard to assistance to displaced persons, his Government supported a two-track approach

combining immediate humanitarian aid with long-term development assistance. Since the settlement of the conflicts and the problems relating to Georgia's economic development was likely to be protracted, however, humanitarian assistance was still vital for the survival of the displaced persons, and his Government was therefore greatly concerned by the intention of UNHCR to phase out its presence in Georgia and its assistance to displaced persons from Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region. As for long-term development assistance, his Government was committed to ensuring the implementation of the "New Approach" programme targeted at facilitating the integration of displaced persons and strengthening their capacity for self-reliance. In that regard, he paid tribute to the efforts of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), UNHCR, UNDP and the World Bank. The Government would extend its cooperation with those bodies in order to attain the objectives of the programme. It also attached great importance to the effective functioning of the Georgia Self-Reliance Fund established by the World Bank.

37. Any coherent policy of assistance for displaced persons entailed administrative and legislative measures aimed at improving their protection and addressing the whole range of their needs. His Government would therefore continue its dialogue with international organizations and programmes and with Georgian non-governmental organizations to review administrative practices and legislation relating to displaced persons and refugees.

38. His Government had already started exploring ways to incorporate the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement into Georgian law. The recommendations of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, drawn up during his visit to Georgia, were also being taken into consideration in the elaboration of nationwide strategies and programmes relating to displaced persons.

39. Georgia honoured its obligations under the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol. It was also party to a number of international human rights instruments relating to the rights of refugees. The instruments in question provided the legal framework for dealing with the interests and needs of refugees. Moreover, in the aftermath of the events of 11 September 2001, the Government was endeavouring to introduce special security safeguards in order to meet its obligations under Security Council resolution 1373 (2001) and to

prevent terrorists from gaining access to Georgian territory under the guise of asylum-seekers. It intended to cooperate with UNHCR in efforts to avoid making unwarranted linkages between refugees and terrorism.

40. **Mr. Kpotsra** (Togo), after endorsing the statement by the representative of Guinea on behalf of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), emphasized that the continent of Africa, the scene of numerous serious crises and disasters, currently played host to 3.6 million refugees, according to the most recent data, or 30 per cent of all the world's refugees, not to mention an even larger number of displaced persons.

41. Such tragic displacements had disastrous social, economic and political consequences, both for the people concerned and for the host countries. For that reason, tribute should be paid to those African countries which, at the cost of enormous sacrifices and at the risk of crippling their own societies, continued to receive and assist such persons.

42. The international community should provide continuous and, indeed, more generous assistance to such countries, as well as to the refugees and displaced persons in their territories. In that context, he drew attention to the decision at the seventy-second ordinary session of the Council of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which had called on the international community to provide appropriate assistance to refugees in Africa comparable to that provided in other parts of the world.

43. His delegation also urged the rapid implementation of the decision by the heads of State and Government at the Millennium Summit to strengthen international cooperation and facilitate the reintegration of refugees and displaced persons into their countries of origin.

44. He welcomed the efforts of UNHCR and the other United Nations agencies and humanitarian organizations, which were working hard, often in very hazardous conditions, to help the millions of refugees and displaced persons in Africa. He also welcomed the cooperation which had been established between those institutions.

45. He drew attention to the even more poignant and difficult situation of refugee children separated from their families or unaccompanied refugee minors, and in that connection he referred to General Assembly

resolution 54/145. While welcoming the steps that had been taken by the United Nations and other organizations to provide protection and assistance to that vulnerable group (see A/56/333), his delegation, like the Secretary-General, was deeply concerned at the immensity of the task which had still to be accomplished and the modest extent of resources available.

46. The fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951 should be taken as an opportunity to promote its implementation, as well as that of the Protocol of 1967 relating thereto. Those instruments and the OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa constituted the foundation of the regime for the international protection of refugees which the process of global consultations launched by UNHCR, and favourably welcomed by African heads of State and Government, was aimed at re-energizing.

47. Enhancing the protection of and assistance to refugees should, however, go hand in hand with searching for lasting solutions. The main cause of refugee flows in Africa was conflict, and it was possible to deal with that phenomenon effectively only by attacking the underlying causes of existing conflict and examining the sources of potential conflicts.

48. It was in that context that his delegation welcomed the progress made in the work of the Open-ended Ad Hoc Working Group set up by the General Assembly to monitor implementation of the recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa (A/52/871-S/1998/318) and supported the proposals contained in the Group's report (A/56/45) recommending to the General Assembly to call upon the international community to strengthen its support for the efforts of African countries in the fields of education, training and the promotion of regional peace and the resolution of conflicts.

49. **Ms. Trajkovska** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) recalled that several months previously her country had been the stage for acts of terrorism and violence that had forced thousands of people to be internally displaced or to find refuge in other countries. Faced with that situation, leaders of the four largest parliamentary parties had, in the presence of international facilitators, signed a framework

agreement on 13 August 2001 aimed at bringing calm, respect for human rights and democracy back to the country. One could only deplore the fact that the general situation had not been really clarified or improved since then, with terrorists continuing to commit sporadic acts of violence and the country undergoing a grave economic crisis.

50. In 1999, her country had played host to more than 360,000 Kosovar refugees. It had proved to be a very difficult task. Most of the refugees had managed to return to Kosovo, and, according to the official data of the Ministry of the Interior, only some 3,000 registered persons from Kosovo and Serbia with the status of temporary residents for humanitarian reasons, the majority of them Roma, currently remained on Macedonian territory.

51. It was important for the Macedonian authorities, the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and the International Security Force in Kosovo (KFOR) to cooperate more closely to prevent the situation in Kosovo from having a negative influence on security conditions in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In that respect, one of the primary tasks of the Macedonian Government was the elimination of the fundamentally anti-democratic concept of the ethnically clean State. It was to be hoped that the democratic and fair elections held recently in Kosovo would contribute to stabilizing the region.

52. The international community having undertaken to promote and protect human rights, and respect for those rights being unfortunately still a long way from reality in many countries, the States Members of the United Nations had a duty to support UNHCR in carrying out its humanitarian mission.

53. **Mr. Ghimire** (Nepal) said that according to the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees there were more than 21 million refugees, asylum-seekers and displaced persons in the world at the end of 2000, fewer than the year before (22.3 million) but nevertheless a figure which spoke volumes about the virulence of the conflicts that were affecting so many countries.

54. He was pleased to note that more than 50 years after its establishment, UNHCR, with the cooperation of a large number of governmental and non-governmental organizations, was continuing to fulfil its mission with undiminished determination, and he

encouraged it further to strengthen its strategy, targeting particularly those regions where the situation remained uncertain, without, however, losing sight of the fact that a durable solution to the problem of refugee flows was possible only when their root causes were addressed in time. He was also pleased to note that UNHCR was giving attention to the special needs of refugee women and children and to the environmental problems of the asylum countries resulting from the presence of refugees; he expressed his deep concern, however, at the grave financial crisis of the Office. He urged all donor countries, particularly the developed countries, to increase their financial support and to provide in full and on time the contributions they had pledged, so that the Office of the High Commissioner could fulfil its mandate and continue to save lives.

55. There were currently more than 100,000 refugees on Nepali soil, the majority of whom had come from Bhutan and had been living in eastern Nepal for more than a decade. UNHCR, the donor countries and non-governmental organizations were providing them with continued assistance in various forms (food, shelter, water, sanitation, health care, education and training, community services, etc.), but his Government considered that their repatriation would be the best solution to their problems, and therefore the previous year, along with the Government of Bhutan, it had begun the process of verifying their identities.

56. The extended presence of large numbers of refugees in the least developed countries of asylum aggravated their economic, social and environmental situations, and they should be provided with financial and other help so that they did not sink deeper into poverty and chaos.

57. **Mr. Prasad** (India) said that the international fight against terrorism, while certainly necessary, must not be aimed against a particular people or religion and must not restrict the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers. At the same time, it was important to prevent certain States from taking advantage of the right to asylum to provide shelter to terrorists.

58. The sad plight of the Afghan refugees, by drawing attention to the general problem of refugees, had also highlighted its root causes. There were evident links between poverty, conflict and forced displacement, but also between the refugee problem and development. In order effectively to tackle abject

poverty, which was the underlying cause of massive refugee flows, and thereby to prevent humanitarian crises, the international community had to invest in the long-term development of developing countries.

59. His delegation hoped that more States would open their borders to refugees, who were frequently viewed by the developing countries, crippled as they were by a lack of resources and unstable economies and often plagued by ethnical social tensions, as merely an additional burden and not the vital force which they in fact were. Those countries which were receiving the bulk of the world's refugees must be able to count on more concrete support than mere promises of cooperation and precarious financing.

60. While recognizing the right of States to prevent any abuse of the right of asylum, his delegation deplored the fact that the hospitality offered by many countries had deteriorated to the point where asylum-seekers had sometimes been hounded out and expelled, and recalled that the basic rights of asylum-seekers must never be violated.

61. His delegation was concerned at the fact that the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951 and the 1967 Protocol relating thereto were still being implemented unevenly in many regions of the world because of a lack of resources and particularly a lack of genuine political will, and hoped that the more prosperous signatories would set an example by strengthening their commitment to respecting the provision of those instruments.

62. His delegation was convinced that voluntary repatriation was still the best solution to the refugee problem, and considered that assistance should be given to the developing countries to create favourable economic conditions for the return of their nationals or the resettlement of refugees.

63. **Ms. Samah** (Algeria) hoped the fiftieth anniversary of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees would make the Convention more widely known and encourage additional ratifications.

64. She noted that in spite of a slight fall in the numbers of refugees and other persons covered by the mandate of UNHCR, the situation was still worrying and the task of the High Commissioner was still burdensome. Her delegation urged the international community to provide more consistent financial support to UNHCR, so that its programmes of

assistance and protection could be extended equitably to all refugees, including the long-term refugees in Africa. To avoid new refugee flows, it was also necessary to contribute actively to the process of voluntary repatriation and to support the reconstruction and development efforts of the countries of origin.

65. During the seminar on the promotion of refugee law, organized by UNHCR for World Refugee Day, it was pointed out that since the beginning of the decolonization movements in Africa, Algeria had received refugees of over 42 nationalities. It was also committed to providing asylum and assistance to Saharan refugees until the conflict in Western Sahara was finally settled, and hoped that the first ministerial meeting of States parties to the 1951 Convention would bring concrete results.

66. **Mr. Baduri** (Eritrea) said the consolidated inter-agency appeals for complex emergencies, from which Eritrea had benefited early in the year, provided immediate relief and protection while also focusing on post-conflict needs and the root causes of humanitarian crises.

67. Since 1992 Eritrea had been engaged in repatriating and reintegrating those of its nationals who had taken refuge in the Sudan, and in resettling internally displaced persons. It had been gravely hindered in the human, economic and material aspects of its efforts by the recent war with Ethiopia. However, with the cooperation of United Nations agencies and both local and international non-governmental organizations, the country had been able to respond quickly to the humanitarian crisis and limit the displacement of civilian populations. The deployment of United Nations peacekeeping forces to the theatre of conflict following the signing of the peace agreement had reassured many displaced persons and encouraged them to return to their homes. However, about 55,000 civilians still remained in camps or with host communities.

68. The international community should take appropriate measures to guarantee the safety, dignity and well-being of displaced persons, many of whom had been unable to return to their villages for the planting season because of the presence of mines and unexploded ordnance, or insecurity caused by the close proximity of their villages to the southern boundary of the Temporary Security Zone, or because the villages were under Ethiopian administration.

69. Apart from the programme for the repatriation and reintegration of Eritrean villages from the Sudan, launched in 1993 in cooperation with UNHCR and various non-governmental organizations and Eritrean and Sudanese government institutions, the country was now dealing with the enormous task of demobilizing combatants. He welcomed the Security Council resolutions calling for assistance to those activities, and was thankful that the Secretary-General was preparing to launch another consolidated inter-agency appeal to support them.

70. **Mr. Malik-Aslanov** (Azerbaijan) said conflicts and acts of aggression and terrorism were leading to an increase in the number of refugees and displaced persons, perennial suffering for millions of people and enormous economic cost. It was therefore necessary to break the vicious circle of conflict and refugee outflows, and find durable solutions.

71. His Government reaffirmed its commitment to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, a key component in the system for international protection of refugees. It supported the initiative of the Swiss Government and UNHCR in convening a ministerial meeting of States parties to the 1951 Convention, and hoped ways could be found to update the Convention.

72. Of utmost concern for his Government was the plight of almost a million refugees and displaced persons on its territory, 20 per cent of which was occupied by neighbouring Armenia. The President had recently signed several decrees for the settlement of Azerbaijanis who had had to leave Armenia as a result of its policy of ethnic cleansing in the Agdam and Fyzuli regions occupied by Armenian military forces. Azerbaijan stood ready to resolve the conflict, provided the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity were respected, and to grant self-government to the people of Nagorny Karabakh. The problem of the refugees and displaced persons could be solved if Armenia withdrew its forces from the areas it was occupying, and if the populations concerned could return home. He drew attention to the fact that Armenia had recently set up a programme for the permanent resettlement in Nagorny Karabakh of Armenian families from Armenia or from CIS countries, and that the Government of Azerbaijan was categorically rejecting it.

73. Having had a million refugees and displaced persons, sometimes from other countries in the region, on its soil for the past eight years, Azerbaijan faced an acute humanitarian problem, and therefore took the view that the UNHCR office in Baku should remain open. The Government was grateful to all those whose assistance had enabled it to help the refugees and displaced persons. It now hoped to count on their generosity to implement agricultural projects and facilitate the development of small businesses and well-equipped medical centres for the refugees.

74. **Mr. Dorji** (Bhutan) said he agreed with the High Commissioner that “long-term durable solutions” must be found to refugee problems, and that protection alone was not sufficient. However, one must be aware that refugee movements stemmed from very different causes, and that no general prescription for solving them was possible. Moreover, it was necessary to distinguish genuine refugees from economic migrants and those who took up residence in a foreign country for political reasons. Another point worthy of consideration was the fact that when faced with vast movements of population, countries did not always have the means to keep out unwanted migrants, especially those who entered by virtue of porous borders and blended easily with their own populations. Such movements could pose a grave threat to them over time, and especially to small nations.

75. As the High Commissioner noted in his report (A/56/12, para. 62), the Governments of Bhutan and Nepal had concluded an agreement in December 2000 on the modalities for verifying the identities of people in the refugee camps in eastern Nepal, who belonged to four different categories and included non-Bhutanese, and in March had begun to put it into practice. In August 2001 the eleventh Ministerial Joint Committee which they had established had reviewed the progress of the agreement and noted that it was proceeding smoothly. It had decided to accelerate the process of verification by simplifying the procedures used and strengthening the joint verification teams. More recently, the foreign affairs ministers of the two countries, meeting in Katmandu from 5 to 8 November, had worked on harmonizing their positions on the categories of persons in the camps. The previous week, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bhutan and the Minister of Finance of Nepal had met in New York to discuss the issue. As the two countries were acting in a spirit of cooperation, he was hopeful that the problem would soon be resolved. His Government was grateful to the international community for its continued

assistance to the refugees in the camps in eastern Nepal.

76. **Ms. Fotso** (Cameroon) said that the High Commissioner’s report (A/56/12) painted a full picture of the activities which had been carried out and opened up new prospects. The international community had to contend with an ever-increasing number of refugees. Africa was the continent worst affected by the phenomenon and it was a deplorable fact that discrimination against refugees was continuing. Human and financial resources would have to be boosted if any real results were to be obtained.

77. Respect for human dignity made it imperative to pay closer attention to the issue of refugees, which had legal and political implications in that it influenced the stability and security of States. The steps taken by the Office of the High Commissioner to improve the status of refugees were commendable, especially the introduction of flexible operations management mechanisms, the adoption of a unified Annual Programme Budget, the strengthening of the policy on family reunification and international cooperation, the promotion of refugees’ participation in development and the holding of a first ministerial meeting of States parties to the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees in December 2001 in Geneva.

78. Cameroon, whose policy of openness and tradition of hospitality were well known, was a party to that convention and had always supported UNHCR. It was therefore bound to be concerned by the rumours that the High Commissioner’s office in Yaoundé was to be closed. The country was sheltering some 50,000 refugees, was situated in an unstable region and, since it offered a calm diplomatic environment, it would have difficulty in explaining the hasty closure to the general public and non-governmental organizations.

Rights of reply

79. **Mr. Akopian** (Armenia), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said to the representative of Azerbaijan that, the previous year, his delegation had wondered why a country which was as rich in oil and the recipient of as much foreign investment as Azerbaijan was unable to sort out the problem of refugees and displaced persons, or at least to make their lot easier. It no longer posed the question, as it had become plain that oil revenue was mainly being used to prop up an authoritarian regime.

80. The Azerbaijani Government did not seem to be interested in finding a solution because the whole issue

enabled it to put pressure on the international bodies trying to settle the ongoing conflict and could be used as propaganda against Armenia, which it accused of being the source of all its troubles, real or otherwise.

81. As for the number of 1 million refugees which had been quoted, the High Commissioner had said in his report (A/56/12) that 627,790 persons, and not 1 million, came under the mandate of his office in Azerbaijan. Admittedly that figure was much less impressive, but it was impossible to go on deceiving the international community.

82. The Armenian population who were resettling in Nagorny Karabakh were simply refugees who were taking advantage of the ceasefire to return home. That certainly did not constitute a violation of international law.

83. Armenia had been the first Eastern European country to be faced with the issue of refugees in the wake of the ethnic cleansing that had forced 1.5 million Armenians to flee from their homes between 1988 and 1990. Despite its modest resources, it had always done its best to further the integration of refugees and displaced persons in society. It could only hope that Azerbaijan would cease its propaganda and try to improve the situation of the refugees until a lasting solution could be found to the problem.

84. **Mr. Malik-Aslanov** (Azerbaijan) thanked the representative of Armenia for reminding the international community that his country had rich oil reserves. He took issue with the assertion that Azerbaijan was not doing anything for the refugees. He had already clearly indicated in his statement that Azerbaijan had taken steps to help them.

85. He drew attention to the fact that General Assembly resolution 48/114 had noted that the number of refugees exceeded 1 million.

86. His Government naturally objected to the illegal resettlement of Armenian families in Nagorny Karabakh before any political solution had been found. Armenia was championing that programme, and it would appear that not only Armenians but also nationals of CIS countries were resettling in the region concerned.

87. **Mr. Akopian** (Armenia) said that he had nothing to add to the protest of the representative of Azerbaijan about the resettlement of refugees in the conflict area, but thought that the figures given in A/56/12 for the number of refugees should be trusted, because they were the most recent. He congratulated Azerbaijan on

striving to help the refugees, but commented that his statement had focused on the fact that the issue of the refugees chiefly served the Azerbaijani Government as a propaganda tool and that human wretchedness could not be used for that purpose.

88. **Mr. Malik-Aslanov** (Azerbaijan) stated that, once again, Armenia was trying to divert attention and quoted Security Council resolutions 822 (1993), 853 (1993), 874 (1993) and 884 (1993), which called for the unconditional withdrawal of Armenian military forces from the occupied territories in Azerbaijan.

89. **Mr. Bwakira** (Director, New York Liaison Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the tragic events of 11 September had highlighted the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. The Office of the High Commissioner welcomed the material and financial support it had been given so as to be able to cope with that crisis, but it was not oblivious to the existence of refugees and displaced persons all over the world. The lack of the resources needed for refugee programmes in Africa was very worrying.

90. Many delegations had agreed with the High Commissioner that protection without solutions was not protection. Solutions therefore had to be found by enhancing prevention, addressing root causes and facilitating voluntary repatriation, local resettlement and sustainable reintegration. The inclusion of refugees' needs in development strategies and the participation of those refugees, especially women, in development programmes would be an excellent means of achieving those ends.

91. That process obviously necessitated local, national, regional and international cooperation, and many delegations had reported that they did cooperate with the UNHCR and other bodies.

92. He was pleased to note that the Member States supported the principles of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, global consultations and the holding of the ministerial meeting of States parties to the Convention in December 2001, but emphasized that adequate funding was essential. He hoped for a show of generosity at the pledging conference on 3 December in Geneva.

The meeting rose at 5.05 p.m.