



## General Assembly

Distr.  
GENERAL

A/AC.96/SR.572  
29 June 2004

ENGLISH  
Original: FRENCH

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

Fifty-fourth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 572nd MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,  
on Tuesday, 30 September 2003, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. BOULGARIS (Switzerland)

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GE.03-02667 (E) 140604 290604

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

PRESENTATION BY THE HIGH COMMISSIONER AND GENERAL DEBATE  
(agenda item 4) (continued)

1. Mr. MUTOMB MUJING (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that his delegation endorsed the general comments made by the representative of Algeria on behalf of the African Group. The Democratic Republic of the Congo was emerging from a horrific war that had led to the deaths of over 3.5 million people, massive population displacements inside and outside the country's borders, the destruction of much of its basic infrastructure, massacres, and crimes against humanity. The unanimous desire of the Congolese people to preserve its unity and their President's strong determination had ensured the success of the inter-Congolese dialogue, and the process of establishing transitional institutions under the Global and All-Inclusive Agreement on the Transition in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was proceeding normally.
2. The Congolese people and Government wished to thank the international community and all countries and peoples that believed in peace and justice for their help, which would continue to be needed for a long time to come. They wished to thank in particular all the neighbouring countries that had opened their borders and taken in refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. They also expressed their gratitude for the dynamic efforts of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in general and its office in Kinshasa in particular.
3. The Democratic Republic of the Congo was itself a country that welcomed refugees and had been home to large numbers of them for many years, notably following the genocide in Rwanda. There were currently 360,000 of them living in perfect harmony with the local population. Out of concern for their living conditions, the Democratic Republic of the Congo had not only become a party to the international instruments relating to refugees but had also adopted its own legislation on their status. Thanks in particular to the establishment of tripartite commissions, work had begun on 20 June 2003 on the voluntary repatriation of about 20,000 Angolan refugees. In addition, 58,000 Rwandan refugees, 700 refugees from the Congo and 3,000 Central African refugees had been repatriated and 69,000 Sudanese refugees would be repatriated if the prospects for a return to peace in their country were realized.
4. For its part, the Democratic Republic of the Congo was ready to welcome back, as soon as the security situation permitted, the millions of Congolese who had taken refuge in neighbouring countries. The sense of solidarity in the country would facilitate their return and reintegration, though there would be a need in that context for greater assistance from the international community in general and UNHCR in particular.
5. Basically, the refugee problem could only be solved by removing the causes that forced people to leave their country, and one of the main causes was armed conflict. While it was true that refugees were generally from developing countries, responsibility for the situation lay primarily with the industrialized countries that manufactured weapons and all the countries that traded in them and supported rebel movements. Given its commitment to living in harmony with all its neighbours, the Democratic Republic of the Congo supported the idea of organizing an international conference on peace and security in the Great Lakes subregion.

6. Finally, he drew attention to the problem of the destruction of the environment and ecosystem as a result of housing refugees on sites that had not been prepared for them in advance. The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo was counting on the international community's help in repairing the environment in the country, as it was a key element in the global ecosystem.
7. Mr. NAZARI (Observer for Afghanistan) drew attention to some of the major successes achieved in Afghanistan with the help of the international community on the road to peace, national unity, reconstruction and democracy. The voluntary repatriation programme had facilitated the return of 2.2 million Afghan refugees and about 600,000 internally displaced Afghans had returned to their region of origin. Reconstruction was proceeding in accordance with the process set in motion by the Bonn Agreement, despite the attempts of the enemies of peace and stability to endanger the population. The draft constitution had been drawn up and the loya jirga would meet in 2003. Preparations were under way for national elections, in which refugees would be able to take part, in 2004. In the area of reintegration, the first steps had been taken to build shelters and provide drinking water and other essentials, though not enough had been done to meet everyone's needs. Measures had been taken to identify the major challenges ahead, but it was clear that the reintegration process would require time and the continued support of the donor community. The Return Commission and its working groups had assessed some of the obstacles to repatriation and measures were due to be taken shortly to overcome them. UNHCR support in that respect was very much appreciated. However, despite all the efforts to rebuild the country and reintegrate refugees and displaced persons, many problems remained to be solved and the help of the international community remained vital.
8. Afghanistan was counting on all those who had so generously taken in Afghan refugees over the past 24 years to be patient a little longer until the refugees could be returned in a gradual, voluntary and controlled manner in accordance with the country's capacity to absorb them. Tripartite agreements had been signed in that respect with a number of asylum countries.
9. He hoped that the international community would continue to help Afghanistan to face up to the threats of terrorists and the enemies of peace who were encouraging conspiracies and fomenting unrest along the country's southern borders, thereby hindering repatriation. He also drew donors' attention to the need to increase the resources allocated to returnees and displaced persons.
10. Finally, he hoped that UNHCR would continue to facilitate the process of repatriation and reintegration and, in cooperation with Governments and international organizations, to help Afghanistan find new and durable solutions for refugees, returnees and displaced persons.
11. Mr. SJÖGREN (Sweden) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union. In the course of the past year, there had been many new refugee crises around the world. In particular, the situation in Liberia and neighbouring countries had worsened dramatically. He was pleased that UNHCR was actively assisting refugees while at the same time he recognized the difficulties it faced as a result of security and protection problems and the precariousness of the funding situation. He commended UNHCR, and, indeed, the entire United Nations system, for their preparations and contingency planning before the war in Iraq. His delegation continued to support the impressive UNHCR repatriation programme in Afghanistan and called on the international organizations with a more

developmental focus, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank, to cooperate with the Afghan authorities in increasing assistance to returnee areas in order to facilitate reintegration and prevent new outflows.

12. Subject to parliamentary approval, Sweden would be increasing its contribution to the UNHCR programme budget for 2004 from 400 to 430 million Swedish krona. In recent years the UNHCR programme budget had been adjusted to match the expected levels of contributions rather than to reflect the basic humanitarian needs of refugees, but it remained underfunded. That situation seriously affected the organization's ability to meet even the minimum needs of the world's refugees for assistance and protection. The funding of the budget should be the joint responsibility of the members of the Executive Committee. The current system, under which the budget depended on a small group of donors, was neither equitable nor sustainable and must be improved so as to provide predictable and sustainable funding at a level commensurate with global refugee needs. Members of the Executive Committee had considered various ways to achieve that in recent years, but without success. The most recent proposal, concerning a 30 per cent baseline for contributions, had been presented in the High Commissioner's working paper on the UNHCR 2004 process. He noted that there had been a broad convergence of views among the main donors and developing host countries, but regretted that others could not agree even to the modest proposal presented by the High Commissioner. Discussions on that subject should be continued.

13. Sweden remained committed to making an active contribution to the implementation of the Agenda for Protection and welcomed the progress already made, particularly by UNHCR. In Sweden, special efforts were being made to find solutions to the problem of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum and that of sexual or gender-based violence.

14. Sweden supported the idea of holding a forum on the Convention Plus initiative and intended to take an active part in the Convention Plus process, which was an important means of sharing the burden and responsibility of protecting refugees and finding durable solutions to their problems. However, it was important that it should not undermine or contradict the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol or human rights standards. It was also important not to jeopardize the progress made so far in the international protection regime. In that spirit, Sweden had also expressed reservations on the proposals for the use of "processing centres" or "protection zones".

15. Under the 1951 Convention, asylum, or, at least, non-refoulement, was reserved for those in need of international protection. Treating those who did not need protection in the same way as those who did could seriously compromise the credibility and sustainability of the international protection regime. A rational policy on return must therefore be an important element of that regime. He therefore welcomed the Executive Committee's adoption of the conclusion on the return of persons found not to be in need of international protection.

16. He strongly supported UNHCR efforts under the Framework for Durable Solutions to improve strategic planning with development actors, bilateral aid-providers and the Governments of host countries for the benefit of refugees and returnees. He also welcomed its joint efforts with UNDP, the World Bank and other organizations to operationalize the "4Rs" (repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction), Development through Local Integration (DAR) and Development Assistance for Refugees (DLI) concepts. His Government would continue to

support the idea of taking refugees into account in development plans and thus targeting them in development efforts, provided that recipient countries, for their part, were prepared to give corresponding priority to refugees in their own plans.

17. Mr. BIN GHANEM (Yemen) said that the Yemeni authorities, in cooperation with UNHCR, had carried out a census of the refugees living in Yemen, but the figures obtained were neither precise nor definitive, as not all the refugees had registered and more continued to arrive. Not content with simply giving shelter and protection to refugees, Yemen had contacted the parties to the conflict in the Horn of Africa to encourage them to reach a peaceful settlement. He hoped that the discussions being held in Nairobi on the situation in Somalia would be successful, with a view to guaranteeing peace, security, stability and democracy in that country. He called on donors to continue to help Yemen to bear what was an increasingly heavy refugee burden.

18. Mr. MOESBY (Denmark) said that his delegation associated itself fully with the statement made by the representative of Italy on behalf of the European Union. Referring to the cowardly attacks on United Nations personnel in Baghdad, he paid tribute to all those, including UNHCR staff, serving the United Nations in very dangerous and difficult conditions all over the world.

19. Denmark had always strongly supported UNHCR and would continue to make substantial voluntary contributions to enable it to fulfil its mandate. His delegation was in favour of adopting the measures proposed by the High Commissioner in his report to broaden the donor base of UNHCR, diversify its sources of funding, including by turning to the private sector, apply the United Nations scale of assessments to 30 per cent of its annual budget and ensure that decisions corresponded more closely with the size of the UNHCR budget, the work it was expected to do and the resources and funding that were available. The fact that the Executive Committee adopted the budget meant that its members had a collective responsibility for it.

20. He supported the proposal to remove the time limit on the mandate of UNHCR, since there was no reason to believe that the humanitarian needs of refugees would be any less in the future. It was therefore necessary to continue with efforts to make better use of the limited resources available and to improve the organization's effectiveness by funding durable solutions.

21. In the first place, delivery mechanisms needed to be fine-tuned. The 4Rs approach was a particularly welcome initiative as it focused on the need to improve cooperation between United Nations agencies and to establish a link between the emergency phase and development, as well as on the role of the United Nations at the country level. It was important, in particular, to help local institutions and organizations to take over from the United Nations agencies in efforts to find lasting solutions to problems. Denmark supported the 4Rs initiative in Sri Lanka and was prepared to consider ways to further develop the 4Rs approach, including by providing assistance in other post-conflict situations.

22. Secondly, more needed to be done in countries that hosted large numbers of refugees. More than 70 per cent of the world's refugees lived in developing countries, many of which were categorized as "low-income countries under stress". It was essential to cooperate with the Governments of those countries to reduce tension, alleviate poverty among refugees and the

local population and strengthen the capacities of refugees in preparation for their repatriation or integration. Denmark provided assistance to countries that had undertaken activities for that purpose.

23. Thirdly, a culture of protection must be created, as called for by the Secretary-General. That was the aim of the Convention Plus process. Denmark would continue to support that process, which would help create the framework for an international system of burden- and responsibility-sharing. The process should be refined by launching one or more pilot projects on the ground. The experience of best practices gained from them could be used to develop general agreements on, for example, resettlement, secondary movements or development assistance for refugees. The inter-agency cooperation established recently through the Geneva Migration Group was an interesting initiative in that respect.

24. Mr. KJØRVEN (Norway) said that the statements by the High Commissioner and the Emergency Relief Coordinator showed the importance of taking a comprehensive approach to the refugee problem, ranging from prevention and dealing with humanitarian emergencies to the promotion of durable solutions. The High Commissioner's efforts to place UNHCR at the centre of an integrated crisis-response system within the United Nations and to establish a genuine partnership with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on the ground were encouraging. However, it should not be forgotten that UNHCR had a unique mandate which could not be transferred to any of its partners, regardless of how closely the latter might be involved in protection.

25. With regard to security, the international community should spare no effort to put a stop to the practice of deliberately targeting humanitarian workers and to bring the perpetrators of such crimes to justice. In that respect, the role of the International Criminal Court was of paramount importance.

26. With regard to the search for durable solutions, he welcomed the important initiatives taken by the High Commissioner. The progress made in improving coordination between organizations within the United Nations system was encouraging, but the ongoing reforms of the system could only succeed if new procedures and mechanisms were adopted to provide joint funding for a number of organizations, including UNHCR. In that connection, Norway was prepared to provide further financial support for the 4Rs initiative.

27. All States must take their share of responsibility and share the burden in the area of refugee assistance. Donor countries must honour the pledges made at the International Conference on Financing for Development held in Monterrey. It would be most unfortunate if those countries were to succumb to fatigue and leave host countries to take care of refugees simply because the latter had no choice but to accept them. The outright rejection by some donors of the High Commissioner's very modest proposals for reforming UNHCR finances was far from encouraging in that respect.

28. Mr. ZANDAMELA (Mozambique) said that the situation in Africa showed that the demand for assistance for refugees, returnees and displaced persons had grown considerably. Despite the financial difficulties facing UNHCR, he therefore called for a special effort to address the implementation of the badly underfunded programmes in Africa.

29. As a host country, Mozambique would continue to honour its obligations under the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol, but his delegation believed that the refugee problem should be dealt with on the basis of burden- and responsibility-sharing.
30. Mozambique currently hosted over 9,500 refugees, mostly from the Great Lakes region. The unpredictable situation resulting from secondary movements of asylum-seekers and refugees was a matter of particular concern. His Government had taken bold steps to implement the Development through Local Integration initiative but faced great difficulties because of the limited resources available to it. In that context, it was prepared to enter into partnerships in order to provide better protection and assistance for refugees and to help them become self-sufficient.
31. Mr. KYRÖLÄINEN (Finland) said that as there was clearly no end in sight to the refugee problem, he was in favour of removing the time limit on the mandate of UNHCR.
32. As a major resettlement country itself, Finland would like to see more countries join in efforts to offer resettlement opportunities. He hoped that the central role of resettlement would be adequately reflected in the allocation of resources. While the repatriation and return of refugees were other durable solutions, it was important not to forget that post-conflict situations were often very unstable and characterized by new outbreaks of violence and persecution. That was why returnees needed protection during the transition period, including through monitoring of the human rights situation. His delegation welcomed the High Commissioner's initiatives in that area.
33. His delegation also supported the strengthening of the position of UNHCR within the United Nations system. Indeed, there was a place for UNHCR in all forums where humanitarian affairs, human rights, civilian crisis management and coordination within the United Nations system were discussed.
34. The protection of refugee women and children from sexual violence remained an important issue, and it was to be hoped that UNHCR would make efforts to incorporate gender mainstreaming into its protection activities. As far as refugee children were concerned, more needed to be done in matters of education in order to protect them, for example, from recruitment into the armed forces.
35. His delegation supported the High Commissioner's efforts to raise the profile of refugee issues and was therefore in favour of holding ministerial-level meetings of States parties provided that they dealt with issues of particular relevance to the aims of the Convention. It also supported the High Commissioner's Convention Plus initiative. Finland intended to remain one of the major per capita contributors to UNHCR. His delegation welcomed the approach taken to solving the funding problems faced by UNHCR, including by broadening the donor base, but stressed the importance to UNHCR of prioritizing its activities and of adhering strictly to its mandate.
36. Mr. CHUNG Eui-yong (Republic of Korea) called on all States and international organizations to propose measures to improve the security of humanitarian workers, who put their lives at risk every day, as the international community had seen with the attack in Baghdad.

37. Notwithstanding the importance of the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol, it was clear that those two instruments alone were not sufficient to deal with the current refugee situation. It was increasingly necessary to make the link between conflict management, humanitarian assistance and development policies. In that context, the UNHCR 2004 and Convention Plus initiatives were particularly welcome. His Government supported the efforts made by UNHCR and the international community to find durable solutions that would ensure fairer burden-sharing and that would enhance capacities to protect refugees.

38. Funding was another important matter. Despite the progress made in managing human resources in UNHCR, difficulties remained, and his delegation supported the initiatives to broaden the donor base and increase private funding. The Republic of Korea had contributed US\$ 1.1 million to the UNHCR budget in 2003 and would be increasing its financial contribution in the future.

39. As the High Commissioner had stressed in his opening statement, some of those who were not formally recognized as refugees were nevertheless living in extremely vulnerable conditions similar to those of refugees and were susceptible to a wide range of human rights violations. Protecting their lives and rights was no less important than protecting those of officially recognized refugees. His Government hoped that the Convention Plus concept would be designed in such a way as to take those persons' needs into account.

40. Mr. HILALE (Morocco) welcomed the High Commissioner's proposal for holding a ministerial-level meeting of States parties every five years. He believed that the Convention Plus concept would enable UNHCR and States parties to discharge their responsibilities towards refugees more effectively, including by making as much use as possible of durable solutions.

41. With regard to the funding problems experienced by UNHCR, his delegation supported the High Commissioner's call for a substantial increase in the UNHCR regular budget and was in favour of broadening and diversifying the private donor base. However, it was still concerned about tied contributions, which might be motivated by political or media considerations and which might distort the refugee problem at the global level. Consequently, all contributions should be paid into a special fund to be used and allocated at the sole discretion of UNHCR.

42. Finally, his delegation supported the initiatives designed to strengthen the partnership between UNHCR and the United Nations specialized agencies, and between UNHCR and NGOs. Such institutional cooperation would make it possible to avoid the inconsistencies observed in the 1980s and 1990s, when some agencies had funded operations that violated the basic rights of refugees.

43. Mr. KURTTEKIN (Turkey) welcomed the ongoing evaluation by UNHCR of its activities in the light of the new challenges facing it. Such an evaluation was a vital and delicate exercise. His Government hoped that the initiatives taken in that respect, such as the High Commissioner's Forum and UNHCR 2004, would build on the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol and would fill the gaps in those two instruments.



44. The principles that governed international protection were being undermined by the priority given to security requirements. Since the attacks of 11 September 2001, the shortcomings of the exclusion mechanisms provided for in the Convention and its Protocol had become clearer. His delegation would be following the work on that issue with keen interest.
45. States and UNHCR must do their utmost to retain the exclusively civilian and humanitarian nature of refugee camps and settlements. They should also focus on international cooperation and on burden- and responsibility-sharing, and the views of developing countries that hosted large numbers of refugees should be taken into account in any new approach to the refugee problem.
46. Mr. ALI (Uganda) said that there were currently 207,400 refugees in his country, almost half of whom were living in settlements in rural areas. However, it was becoming increasingly difficult to sustain that approach because of pressure on the land and the shortage of funding for a delivery of basic services. Because of a lack of resources, his Government had not been able to fully implement its policy of promoting self-reliance among refugees and taking refugee issues into account in national development plans. It was therefore appealing to the international community for support to implement that policy.
47. Many host countries, especially in Africa, could be forced to apply restrictions if they did not receive additional resources to help them bear the cost of accommodating refugees. Host communities could not be expected to shoulder the burden of caring for refugees alone. The only solution was to appeal for international solidarity and apply the principle of more equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing. His Government fully associated itself with the views expressed on that subject on behalf of the African Group at the first session of the High Commissioner's Forum.
48. Mr. FORERO UCROS (Colombia) said that his delegation had listened with great interest to the High Commissioner's statement, noting in particular the measures taken or envisaged by UNHCR to guarantee respect for refugees' fundamental rights, prevent forcible repatriation and allow refugees to return to their countries in acceptably safe and dignified conditions. In the light of the new challenges posed by internal conflicts, terrorism and rising violence, it was essential to take concerted action and to strengthen bilateral and inter-agency cooperation, particularly in the humanitarian field. The ultimate aim of international protection should be to find durable solutions based on voluntary repatriation and resettlement.
49. A number of steps had been taken in Colombia with the support of UNHCR to facilitate the repatriation of refugees and to deal with the difficult problem of internal displacement. Thanks to the memorandum of intent signed by UNHCR and the Colombian Government with regard to cooperation in efforts to combat forcible displacements, it had been possible to contain the problem within the country's borders. Tripartite agreements such as those signed by Colombia, Ecuador and UNHCR had also proved very useful. At the domestic level, the national strategy implemented by the Government relied strongly on the Social Solidarity Network, a State agency set up to meet the immediate needs of the most vulnerable groups.
50. Mr. BOUAH-KAMON (Côte d'Ivoire) associated his delegation with the statement made by the representative of Algeria on behalf of the African Group. For more than a year, Côte d'Ivoire had been in the grip of a serious military and political crisis originating in an

attempted coup d'état that had turned into an armed uprising. The uprising had been followed by the most serious humanitarian crisis in the country's history and by large movements of displaced persons and refugees. The Government of national reconciliation set up at the instigation of the French Government was currently attempting to disarm, demobilize and reintegrate former combatants, but the humanitarian situation remained precarious. With the exception of UNHCR and the World Food Programme (WFP), few donors had responded to the consolidated appeals launched by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for Côte d'Ivoire and humanitarian workers on the ground were unable to meet the needs of the population. His Government's hopes therefore rested entirely on the ability of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to persuade sponsors to fund the consolidated appeal under the consolidated appeals process for 2004.

51. Between May and August 2003, Côte d'Ivoire had taken in about 50,000 new Liberian refugees, bringing the total number of refugees in the country to about 100,000. Despite the crisis, the Government had done its best to fulfil its international commitments, particularly with regard to the protection of refugees. It had taken steps to facilitate resettlement, maintain the civilian nature of reception points, raise awareness of the refugee problem, finalize the law on asylum and submit it to Parliament, systematically register refugees and guarantee their protection, promote the implementation of a programme to integrate refugee children in the Ivorian education system and a programme to renovate the reception area for refugees, and facilitate the process of resettling over 6,000 refugees in the United States of America and 100 in Sweden.

52. In its attempts to find durable solutions, his Government had taken steps to encourage refugees to be self-sufficient. Over 90 per cent of them were, like the majority of internally displaced persons, living with families, not in camps, and therefore received no direct material assistance from humanitarian organizations; instead, they received social and economic support from the host communities, which were themselves deeply impoverished by the crisis. In order to avoid any tensions that might arise as a result of that situation, his Government hoped to receive financial support from UNHCR and the donor community to assist it in taking care of the persons concerned. He called on UNHCR to become more involved in the repatriation of Ivorian refugees, mostly from Guinea and Liberia.

53. Mr. STEINER (Germany) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Italy on behalf of the European Union. His Government, which had taken an active part in the consultations held as part of the UNHCR 2004 initiative, endorsed the High Commissioner's proposals and was looking forward to the follow-up to them. Despite serious budget constraints, it had substantially increased its contributions to the work of UNHCR.

54. There was reason to be proud of the outcome of the voluntary repatriation programme in Afghanistan, which had been one of the largest ever undertaken. Between September 2001 and December 2003, Germany had paid out some €250 million to fund reconstruction projects and humanitarian activities in Afghanistan. His Government had also provided one of the largest troop contingents for the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and was helping to set up and train the Afghan police force, rebuild the national education system, strengthen civil society and improve the country's infrastructure. Those measures were intended to help solve the problems that led people to become refugees. The operation was a long-term one that the

international community must see through to completion, since otherwise the problems would merely resurface in more serious forms. Although much had been achieved, progress had been largely confined to Kabul and its surroundings. The international community should extend its activities to all regions so as to facilitate, in particular, the holding of free and fair elections throughout the country.

55. His Government would support all proposals designed to strengthen the role of the United Nations in Iraq and to re-establish Iraqi sovereignty. It had earmarked €50 million for humanitarian aid to that country and intended to participate in the civilian reconstruction process provided that transparency and international control were assured. It had also responded to the special appeal for Africa launched by the High Commissioner by providing funds for emergency aid. Lastly, with the aim of helping to find durable solutions, it had identified a number of countries in which it would be undertaking specific projects in cooperation with UNHCR.

56. Mr. WEERAKOON (Sri Lanka) said that the provisions of the peace agreement signed in February 2002 by the Sri Lankan Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam were gradually being implemented. One of the features of the agreement was the priority it gave to the humanitarian situation in the regions affected by the conflict, where projects relating to the resettlement of displaced persons, mine clearance and the reconstruction of schools, health centres and roads were under way. His Government had also launched a long-term economic development programme to encourage refugees and displaced persons to return home: owing to the support of UNHCR, almost half of the 800,000 persons displaced as a result of the conflict had done so. More efforts along the same lines were needed, and his Government was determined to do everything possible to ensure the return of refugees in safety and dignity.

57. Mr. VICENTE CHIARADIA (Argentina) said that he shared the concerns expressed by the High Commissioner with regard to the difficulty of reconciling humanitarian interventions with the need to guarantee the security of staff on the ground. He welcomed the launching of the UNHCR 2004 process, particularly the elements relating to the promotion of concerted action by humanitarian organizations in emergencies and the holding of five-yearly ministerial meetings to enhance the multilateral nature of refugee assistance. He also welcomed the recent publication of the revised guidelines on the prevention and punishment of sexual and gender-based violence against refugees and the adoption of administrative measures to reduce the number of officials awaiting assignment. With regard to the situation in Latin America, he said that the number of refugees and displaced persons had increased in recent years and that, in the light of that situation, his Government, and NGOs, had decided to build on the principles of the 1951 Convention by giving priority to local integration as the main durable solution. Lastly, he said that he was sure that cooperation between UNHCR and Argentina would be enhanced now that the regional representative of UNHCR in Latin America had taken up her post in Buenos Aires.

58. Mr. BOGUNOVIČ (Observer for Slovenia) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Italy on behalf of the European Union. He paid tribute to the continued commitment shown by humanitarian workers in the most difficult circumstances, particularly in West Africa, Afghanistan and Iraq. The international community should establish the political and financial conditions needed to ensure the effectiveness of humanitarian interventions. As he believed that the goals of the Agenda for Protection could only be met if a multilateral approach was taken, he welcomed the measures proposed under the

UNHCR 2004 process. Enhanced cooperation with countries of origin, transit or destination was just as important as the establishment of strategic partnerships with international organizations and NGOs. As a future member of the European Union, Slovenia was following the discussion on migration and asylum issues closely and welcomed the detailed proposal made by the High Commissioner in which the global dimension of refugee protection was taken into account.

59. Mr. MAUNG AUNG (Observer for Myanmar) said that his Government had decided to address the various problems related to refugees and migrants in Myanmar by cooperating with neighbouring countries and by implementing sustainable development programmes in the most affected areas. Thus, in the State of Rakhine, where UNHCR was active, the Government had launched many projects to improve the population's standard of living. The projects included building primary and secondary schools, further educational establishments, hospitals and road transport infrastructure. As far as the repatriation of illegal Myanmar residents in Bangladesh was concerned, under the bilateral agreement between the Governments of those two countries and with the help of UNHCR, 46,790 families, or 235,659 persons, had been repatriated, and US\$ 5,663,058 in aid had been distributed for the return process. His Government hoped that, with the help of the international community, the repatriation programme would soon be completed.

60. Mr. da ROCHA PARANHOS (Brazil) said that the recent attacks on United Nations personnel in Baghdad demonstrated the urgent need to find a way to reconcile humanitarian aid and security requirements on the ground. He welcomed the recent publication of new guidelines designed to provide better protection for refugee women and girls against violence, and requested UNHCR to report regularly to the Executive Committee on progress in implementing them. Among the various initiatives developed by UNHCR in recent years, he was particularly interested in those that allowed refugees and members of host communities to prepare microprojects and submit them for funding. He was also interested in the initiative to enhance cooperation and coordination between humanitarian agencies and between them and intergovernmental or non-governmental organizations. Such cooperation made it possible to make optimal use of material and human resources and, above all, to enhance the effectiveness of action on the ground.

61. Ms. VEGH (Hungary) said that her country, as part of its preparations for accession to the European Union, had reformed not only its political and economic institutions but also its asylum institutions and laws. The reforms were particularly important as the States of central and eastern Europe were no longer transit countries but destination countries for many migrants from Asia, the Middle East and East Africa. In the light of that development, her Government had decided to speed up bilateral and multilateral talks aimed at finding practical solutions within the region and promoting joint action that focused on the voluntary repatriation of refugees. With the help of UNHCR, Hungary had opened the first and only reception centre for unaccompanied minors in central and eastern Europe. The centre was run by an NGO and was subsidized and supervised by the Immigration and Naturalization Office. Given the important role of UNHCR in peacekeeping operations around the world, her Government was studying the possibility of increasing its financial contribution to that organization.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.