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

Fifty-fourth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 577th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 2 October 2003, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. BOULGARIS (Switzerland)

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MEETINGS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE IN 2004

CONSIDERATION OF THE PROVISIONAL AGENDA OF THE FIFTY-FIFTH SESSION
OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

OTHER STATEMENTS (agenda item 11)

1. Ms. RASMUSSEN (Observer for the Norway Refugee Council), Rapporteur of the Pre-ExCom Consultations with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), said that 160 NGOs from 65 countries had attended the 2003 session of the Pre-ExCom Consultations. The fact that a large number of UNHCR staff had participated in the event clearly indicated the strong commitment of UNHCR to strengthening partnership with NGOs. Panel discussions had covered a broad range of topics including partnership, registration, the Convention Plus initiative, human rights, internally displaced persons, better refugee protection in the regions, education, complaint and investigation mechanisms, NGO sustainability, evaluation and follow-up, and regional sessions.
2. There had been a clear recognition that human rights instruments and bodies could be used to protect the rights of refugees. NGOs should bring strong cases before regional human rights bodies and United Nations treaty-monitoring bodies with a view to upholding the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers. For their part, Governments should respond to and implement the recommendations of treaty-monitoring bodies and ensure that their national legislation conformed to international human rights law.
3. NGOs were of the view that the Convention Plus initiative and the High Commissioner's Forum were still very much controlled by States. It was important to ensure that Convention Plus and the Forum provided permanent solutions to the problems of refugees and not just of those States. UNHCR should clarify its policy on internally displaced persons and adopt a collaborative approach in order to ensure greater predictability. Unfortunately, recommendations on evaluating refugee women and children and community services for refugees had not yet been implemented. On the issue of registration, NGOs were concerned about the possible misuse of the information gathered. Questions had been raised about the manner in which registration data could be used for resettlement or security purposes.
4. The commitment to changing attitudes within UNHCR had been welcomed but, in order to ensure that partnership became truly institutionalized, wider discussions needed to be held between UNHCR and NGOs both at headquarters and in the field. Generally speaking, NGOs had welcomed the High Commissioner's recent policy on partnership, but were somewhat sceptical about the funding dimension of the initiative.
5. It was recognized that the recent tragic events in Iraq had irreversibly changed the context in which humanitarian action was undertaken. The discussion at Pre-ExCom had focused on two areas: first, the responsibility of humanitarian agencies themselves to strengthen their capacity in specific operating environments, improve training, develop appropriate standards and raise with donors the possibility of dedicated funding for security. Second, the wisdom of entrusting humanitarian operations to the military had been queried, because over-identification of humanitarian workers with military elements undermined their perceived impartiality and resulted in their becoming targets.

6. The inclusion of more NGO representatives from the South had been suggested as one way in which the work of Pre-ExCom could be improved in 2004.

7. The CHAIRMAN said that the valuable contribution made by NGOs to the work of the Executive Committee had been acknowledged in the draft decision on NGO observer participation in the work of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme and its Standing Committee, which contained a commitment to undertake a review of all aspects of NGO participation and identify areas that needed to be strengthened.

8. Mr. HUSSAIN (Chairperson of the UNHCR Staff Council) said that the terrorist attack on the United Nations premises in Baghdad in August 2003 had moved the question of staff security to the top of the agenda. While there could be no minimizing of the responsibility of the perpetrators of that atrocity, it was intolerable that the United Nations should increasingly find itself in the midst of conflicts where its neutrality and impartiality were called into question by certain parties. Despite the risks, and in clear contravention of the Organization's own security rules, essential security measures had still not been taken to protect the remaining United Nations staff in Iraq.

9. The call for adequate security measures should not be misinterpreted: United Nations staff were fully committed to helping the people of Iraq, but they could do so effectively only if the appropriate conditions existed, which was clearly not the case at present.

10. Constructive relations between staff and management were crucial to maintaining staff morale and the effectiveness of the Organization as a whole. In UNHCR, the High Commissioner's accessible and open approach had won many plaudits. For example, the fact that the staff had been asked to play a significant role in the design and development of the Code of Conduct meant that that document had received a very warm response - over 98 per cent of staff members had signed it. The encouraging attitude shown by the High Commissioner should be reflected at all levels of management.

11. The CHAIRMAN said that UNHCR staff should rest assured that States were sympathetic to the predicament of staff working in the field and were very much concerned for their safety, as had repeatedly been stated during the general debate.

REPORTS ON THE WORK OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE (agenda item 6) (continued)

(b) PROGRAMME, ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL MATTERS (continued) (A/AC.96/974, 977, 978 and Add.1, 983, 984 and 985)

12. Mr. CALLAN (Australia) said that his Government had already expressed its grave concern about the findings of the United Nations auditors, who had painted a sobering picture of mismanagement of financial and human resources by UNHCR over a number of years. Those weaknesses reduced UNHCR's efficiency, its impact on the ground and its ability to mobilize funds to meet core needs. It was precisely because UNHCR's work was so important and relevant and because the Office lacked sufficient resources to meet its objectives fully that it must make the best use of the resources at its disposal and properly account for their use.

13. Australia welcomed the measures that UNHCR was taking to implement the auditors' recommendations through management systems renewal, improved human resources policies and practices and stronger selection and supervision of implementing partners. At the same time, UNHCR should reflect on the adequacy of those steps, both individually and in the aggregate, to overcome the shortcomings identified by the auditors.
14. One aspect of particular concern was the high proportion of UNHCR staff with indefinite contracts, a situation which was inappropriate not only because the organization relied heavily on voluntary funding, but also because the nature of UNHCR's work obliged it to be able to expand and contract.
15. Mr. MATSUI (Japan) said that his Government continued to support UNHCR in its endeavours to make its operations more accountable. Staffing issues, especially the assignment and recruitment of staff, were always of major concern to donors, not only because the principle of equitable geographical representation must be observed, but also because staff changes could have an impact on partnership between UNHCR and donors. Japan fully understood UNHCR's need for flexible funding arrangements and welcomed the various initiatives launched by the Office, but was less enthusiastic about the creation of supplementary budgets and programmes on an emergency basis. His delegation would find it helpful if UNHCR paid greater attention to highlighting the real needs and priorities for the coming year.
16. Mr. SCHUYT (New Zealand) said that his Government was very concerned by the findings of staff mismanagement in the auditors' report. Appointing the right people to the right positions was only half the story; it was then important to ensure that they did the right things. The details that had been provided about staff training and the Code of Conduct were useful and informative. However, an equally important element was the establishment of an effective system to define the priorities and responsibilities of staff and to monitor and assess their performance. More information about such developments should be made available in due course. The internal mechanisms of UNHCR should be subjected to the same degree of scrutiny as the international protection regime. New Zealand wished to align itself with those countries that had welcomed the positive developments in management, budgeting and coordination systems at UNHCR in recent years.
17. Ms. WYRSCH (Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees) said that UNHCR had noted the stipulation that use of the Operational Reserve should be closely monitored to ensure that any action funded therefrom was consistent with UNHCR core activities, and that the Standing Committee and the Executive Committee should be regularly updated on its use. Efforts would continue to be made to develop standards and indicators, mainstream a gender perspective in the work of UNHCR activities and report on staff management and performance issues.
18. Mr. TAKIZAWA (Controller and Director of the Division of Financial and Supply Management), responding to questions that had been raised about surpluses carried over from one year to another, said that US\$ 33 million had been carried over from 2002 to 2003, US\$ 43 million had been carried over from 2001 to 2002, and US\$ 53 million from 2000 to 2001. There were three principal reasons why money might be carried over from one year to the next, namely strict earmarking of contributions, late receipt of contributions and the specific

demands and time frames of individual project cycles. As to the findings in the auditors' report, shortcomings had to be exposed before they could be remedied. UNHCR managers had acknowledged the auditors' criticisms and were committed to acting on them.

CONSIDERATION AND ADOPTION OF REVISED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR 2003 AND PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR 2004 (agenda item 7) (A/AC.96/979 and Add.1 and A/AC.96/985)

19. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to the UNHCR Annual Programme Budget for 2004 and revised programmes and budgets for 2003. Of particular relevance was table I.3 of document A/AC.96/979, which set out expenditure in 2003 as well as the proposed Annual Programme Budget for 2004.

20. Ms. WYRSCH (Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees) said that UNHCR would review in depth the comments made by delegations in the Standing Committee regarding the budget and would factor them into its work on the preparation of future budget documents. Among the issues raised had been the undertakings reflected in the proposed draft decisions, including the suggestion that further discussions should be held to explore ways of making the budget review process more meaningful. An undertaking had also been made, on a trial basis in 2004, to review the use of the Operational Reserve as a mechanism to provide obligational authority for additional contributions for new, unprogrammed activities. In implementing its programmes, UNHCR fully intended to bear in mind the relevant observations of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) and the Board of Auditors.

21. Mr. HILALE (Morocco) said that while the secretariat was to be congratulated on the easy-to-use format and clear presentation of the proposed Programme Budget for 2004, the forecasts for the Tindouf camps in the North African region were flawed, owing to the lack of a reliable system for distributing and monitoring the assistance provided. His Government's often repeated claim, namely that the international humanitarian assistance intended for the Moroccan detainees in the Tindouf camps was being systematically misappropriated by the so-called Frente POLISARIO, had finally been borne out by reports in the international media, and consequently a number of European NGOs had scaled down or stopped providing assistance for development projects in the camps. At the same time the duplicity and hypocrisy of the Frente POLISARIO had been exposed to all the world: for years that organization had quietly misappropriated international humanitarian aid while painting a picture of famine and malnutrition in the camps.

22. Three key factors facilitated the misappropriation of humanitarian aid: a lack of transparent population figures, the absence of any supervisory structure to monitor the distribution of the humanitarian aid approved annually by the Executive Committee, and the fact that camp inmates did not enjoy basic rights such as the right to freedom of movement and the right of return to their country.

23. Morocco called on UNHCR to conduct its own inquiry and take the necessary measures to stop the misappropriation of aid. It should also invite Algeria, as host country, to conduct a joint investigation with donors and NGOs to bring the guilty parties to justice. The credibility of UNHCR was at stake.

24. Mr. STUDER (Switzerland) said that his delegation considered the Annual Programme Budget a key tool for planning, implementing and evaluating UNHCR activities and thereby enhancing their effectiveness. It encouraged UNHCR to continue with its efforts to establish results-based budgeting and management methods. It also agreed with ACABQ that improvements in the presentation of progress indicators should significantly improve programme quality.
25. Switzerland was aware of the continuing challenge of balancing indicated needs with expected income from voluntary contributions. His delegation therefore encouraged UNHCR to continue its efforts to broaden the donor base, although that should not be achieved only through the application of a scale of assessment. Switzerland also considered that, in the medium term, the United Nations regular budget should contribute more to the budget of UNHCR, as well as to the budgets of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
26. His delegation encouraged UNHCR to give further consideration to the savings potential in its operational programming and administrative costs, including staffing costs.
27. Before any final decision was taken on the additional US\$ 50 million component of the Operational Reserve, introduced on a trial basis for the current year, Switzerland would welcome a substantive discussion of the matter.
28. Lastly, he announced that subject to parliamentary approval, Switzerland's total contribution in 2004 would amount to a minimum of Sw F 24 million, of which half would be unearmarked.
29. Ms. PROVÓ-KLUIT (Netherlands) said that her delegation welcomed the emphasis placed on reinforcing field operations, especially protection activities, and on the search for durable solutions, particularly in Africa.
30. She welcomed the new approach adopted in the 2005 Country Operations Plan and the final project planning for 2004. It was essential for UNHCR to move from a resource-based budget towards a needs-based budget and to uphold minimum standards in all country operations.
31. Her delegation strongly supported the High Commissioner's efforts to broaden the donor base with the aim of fully funding the budget. Efforts should also be made to reduce earmarking to a minimum. The Netherlands' own voluntary unearmarked contribution could be used for any new policy developments falling within the UNHCR mandate or for the Inspector General's function. As an essential function, however, the latter should as a matter of principle be financed under the regular programme.
32. The fact that only 16 per cent of staff was based at headquarters reflected a balanced approach, enabling policy to be initiated and operations controlled centrally while at the same time ensuring that there were sufficient well-qualified staff in the field implementing UNHCR's mandate. The number of staff waiting between assignments was, however, a matter requiring attention.

33. Her delegation strongly supported UNHCR's approach and actions with regard to staff security, which it considered a priority. She was concerned to note that UNHCR had rarely been able to gain access to the common system resource of the Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator (UNSECOORD) for its own specific needs.

34. Ms. CAMPBELL (United States of America) said that the inclusion in the budget document of a trend analysis on staffing was a good step towards increased transparency. Her delegation remained concerned, however, that staffing needs were not assessed within the global context of requirements, and if encouraged UNHCR to rationalize staffing in the near future.

35. Her delegation appreciated the innovative proposal to create a mechanism within the Operational Reserve to allow additionality. It also looked forward to seeing the first steps towards genuine needs assessment in 2004, particularly through increased participation of relevant actors in strategic planning exercises. She trusted that the High Commissioner and senior management would be faithful to that effort by presenting donors with an assessment of real needs, even if that meant presenting a spending plan at a lower level.

36. Her delegation hoped that more funding would be forthcoming for the remainder of 2003 and that there would be no need for fourth-quarter programme cuts. The United States had contributed over US\$ 300 million during the current calendar year and appealed to others to make sure that the gap was filled.

37. Mr. KINNEN (Germany) said that his delegation appreciated the presentation of strategic goals, global objectives and progress indicators for 2004 and encouraged UNHCR efforts to further improve the budget document.

38. Every effort must be made, through management, administrative and financial structures, to satisfy donors' legitimate concern that their contributions were allocated efficiently. The documents under consideration indicated that that might not always have been the case, and his delegation therefore welcomed paragraph (e) of the draft general decision on administrative, programme and financial matters. Improvements in financial management would help to maintain the German public's support for UNHCR.

39. His delegation was particularly satisfied with ongoing efforts to improve the physical protection of refugees as well as the prevention of sexual abuse and exploitation. It supported the environment-related programmes and hoped to see improved implementation in the field.

40. Mr. CUTILLO (Italy) said that earlier in 2003 UNHCR had appealed for funding to prepare for massive outflows of refugees from Iraq. In the light of subsequent events, the Office had revised its operations and appealed for funds to assist in repatriating Iraqis. The prevailing security situation had, however, prevented repatriation from being started. Moreover, UNHCR staff levels had been cut following the tragic events in Baghdad.

41. The 2004 budget clearly took note of that context, requesting only US\$ 3.3 million in funding for Iraq. Yet, from the documents available, it appeared that an additional US\$ 15.8 million would still be required over and above the US\$ 35.1 million already received or expected for the Iraq repatriation and reintegration operation. His delegation therefore wished to know how much money had actually been obligated and spent for that operation; how

UNHCR expected to spend at least US\$ 15.8 million by the end of 2003 with such a reduced presence in the country; and whether it would not be appropriate to review and reduce the budget and redirect any available funds to other operations in need of funding.

42. Mr. SOUALEM (Algeria), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that, at the end of the previous session of the Executive Committee, the two institutions referred to by the representative of Morocco, UNHCR and WFP, had issued a joint communiqué refuting the allegations of misappropriation but acknowledging that assistance to Saharan refugees was clearly insufficient. Both those organizations had offices in the Algerian capital and in the camps, which supervised the dispatch and distribution of food aid. His delegation was astonished that a country that had seen a major scandal involving aid to school canteens could level such accusations at two international humanitarian institutions.

43. Ms. WYRSCH (Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees) thanked the members of the Executive Committee for their indications of contribution levels for 2004 and for their expressions of continued support for UNHCR.

44. Referring to a point raised by the representative of the Netherlands, she confirmed that UNHCR was attempting to reduce the number of staff-in-between-assignments to the lowest possible level.

45. Mr. TAKIZAWA (Controller and Director of the Division of Financial and Supply Management), replying to queries concerning general financial management, including the shortfall for 2003, said that his office had a number of simple but effective mechanisms for managing resources in the situation of unpredictable funding and unpredictable expenditure. In contrast to the two previous years, amounts for the field had been higher than expected. Some shortfall had been anticipated, which was why members had been requested to give more. An additional US\$ 1 million from each donor would fill the gap.

46. Results-based budgeting was being implemented throughout the United Nations, and members should be warned that, although many offices had invested millions of dollars, the exercise had not always met with success. However, UNHCR's task in that regard was somewhat easier than that of other agencies, and he hoped that the results would be visible in 2004.

47. Mr. MEIER (Chief of the Budget Section, Division of Financial and Supply Management), replying to the point raised by the representative of Italy concerning funding for projects in Iraq, said that the amounts shown in table 1.4 of document A/AC.96/979 corresponded to the appeal from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. As of 1 July 2003, that supplementary budget was being implemented under phase II, and the provision for 2004 was US\$ 3 million. The CASWANAME Bureau would report on implementation.

48. In reply to the representative of the Netherlands, he said that UNHCR did indeed not benefit fully from the UNSECOORD network, owing to the remoteness of UNHCR locations in the field. However, the Office contributed 7.4 per cent of the budget of UNSECOORD to cover

part of its staff costs and was endeavouring to avoid duplication of effort and to ensure better resource management. He believed that the situation would improve in the coming months as a result of the coordination currently undertaken by both bodies.

49. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to the revised draft general decision on administrative, financial and programme matters, which related to approval of the total budget requirements for 2004, amounting to US\$ 954,890,100, and to approval of the total revised budget requirements for 2003, amounting to US\$ 1,149,661,500. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Executive Committee wished to adopt the draft decision.

50. It was so decided.

OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES (agenda item 8) (A/AC.96/976)

51. Ms. WYRSCH (Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the Office had made substantial progress in the past year in the areas of management, strengthening performance and improving the quality of its work while exercising austerity in the use of resources. The Oversight Committee in particular had been striving for a coordinated approach in order to achieve a cohesive and effective oversight mechanism for UNHCR.

52. Mr. CRISP (Head of the Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit), introducing the evaluation and policy analysis section of the report on oversight activities (A/AC.96/976), said that the current core staffing level would be maintained in 2004, albeit at the expense of a substantial reduction in the evaluation consultancy budget.

53. Various UNHCR entities had initiated and managed evaluation projects with the Unit's funding and support, in accordance with the objective of devolving the evaluation function and creating a culture of evaluation within the Office. Some 90 staff members had received formal training in evaluation objectives and methods.

54. In keeping with UNHCR's commitment to promote joint and inter-agency evaluation activities, relationships with the evaluation units of various organizations had been established or maintained. Two evaluations had been undertaken with an NGO partner and one with a member of the Executive Committee.

55. It had been thought that placing all evaluation findings in the public domain, conducting evaluations in a consultative manner and introducing a management response mechanism would automatically reinforce the impact of evaluation. Expectations in that regard had not been fully met, however, and additional mechanisms were being considered.

56. Despite the progress made in implementing the evaluation policy since its introduction in January 2003, certain modifications to the policy statement would be required in the near future. Any new implementation and enforcement mechanisms would, for example, need to be effectively incorporated into the statement which would also have to be updated to reflect the Unit's role as secretariat of the Policy Committee, where it was intended that recommendations on operational policy would be formulated and the findings of evaluation projects would be considered. Despite the announcement made in 2002, no evaluation advisory committee had

been established, partly because no appropriate process for selecting Executive Committee members had been identified and partly because an intensive round of bilateral discussions on evaluation between the Unit and certain Executive Committee members was being held.

57. A number of evaluation reports were to be published shortly concerning UNHCR policy on refugees in urban areas, UNHCR's management learning programmes and its monitoring capacity and systems, and the reproductive health services provided to refugees. Other reports would have a specific geographic focus. Evaluation projects in progress or under consideration included a review of the role of UNHCR in promoting refugee livelihoods and self-reliance, and a review of the Office's protective staffing capacity. UNHCR activities in several countries would also be evaluated in the near future.

58. With regard to the coordination of oversight activities, he said that there had been a more regular and effective exchange of information and ideas between the members of the Oversight Committee, and in particular between the Unit and the Inspector General's Office.

59. Mr. KALTENBACH (Chief of the Internal Audit Service), introducing the internal audit section of the report, said that the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) worked closely with UNHCR's other oversight functions and coordinated its audit work both within the formal framework of the UNHCR Oversight Committee and on a day-to-day basis. Auditors also took part in investigations and special reviews and cooperated in joint training programmes.

60. The internal auditors also worked closely with UNHCR's external auditors, the United Nations Board of Auditors. The fact that the Board now had a permanent presence in Geneva greatly facilitated coordination and cooperation. The internal auditors provided reliable information to the external auditors, thereby avoiding repetition and duplication of work, and also followed up on problems highlighted by the Board of Auditors, which could on occasion result in major policy changes.

61. OIOS had introduced a five-point audit rating system to facilitate benchmarking between operations, thereby making it possible to compare the effectiveness of the application of key internal controls in audited operations and enabling management to take corrective action where required. It was important to note that such ratings in no way implied an assessment of individual managers' performance, since deficiencies might result from a difficult operational environment, internal staffing constraints, less-than-qualified implementing partners or other external factors. The majority of the audited operations had been found to be "average", which meant that some correction was needed. Understandably, UNHCR managers in the field were not always happy to have their operations directly compared with others, but senior management had been appreciative and supportive, viewing such ratings as a further step towards enhanced accountability and transparency.

62. The main focus during the reporting period had been the UNHCR Afghan emergency operation and related operations in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The resident audit team had visited virtually every UNHCR office in the region at least once and had suggested improvements to UNHCR's controls, systems and procedures, as well as to those of its partners, at a very early stage. A second round of visits was currently under way in Afghanistan to follow up on the first. Auditors had observed and reviewed the repatriation programme for

Afghanistan, a high-risk area in view of the amounts of cash assistance paid and the undocumented status of most refugees. Procedures had gradually been tightened and technological tools introduced to mitigate the risk of abuse.

63. Mr. McNAMARA (UNHCR Inspector General) said that the Investigation Unit had received over 100 complaints thus far in 2003, a tenfold increase over previous years. Not all complaints were well founded or led to an investigation. The Unit was currently investigating 60 allegations, but they all needed careful review.

64. The increase in the level of complaints reflected greater confidence in UNHCR oversight mechanisms. Most of the complaints had come from UNHCR sources and related to alleged corruption and sexual exploitation. The volume of complaints was comparable to that in other United Nations agencies and was expected to level off or decrease in the future.

65. Everything would depend on how promptly and effectively UNHCR responded to complaints and on whether subsequent disciplinary action served as a deterrent. While disciplinary action was a matter for the Division of Human Resources Management, NGO partners also had an important role to play in monitoring behaviour and acting on their own investigations. His Office was currently developing investigation guidelines with help from its partners.

66. The Investigation Unit worked closely with OIOS in Geneva and New York and they intended to undertake joint investigations later in the year. The Unit also needed to work with local authorities, particularly in cases that could lead to criminal prosecution.

67. UNHCR was accountable not only to donors and Executive Committee members, but also to refugee beneficiaries, partners and its own staff. The UNHCR Code of Conduct had been signed by 98 per cent of UNHCR staff and was being incorporated into agreements with agency partners. It was a valuable tool that should be promoted and applied.

68. The Investigation Unit needed more resources in order to respond to the dramatic increase in its investigation caseload, to provide training to other investigators, to develop more elaborate guidelines for investigation activities, to improve public information campaigns in the field and to employ specialists as required. UNHCR intended to approach a number of States for additional funds.

69. The problems that UNHCR had encountered in West Africa had helped to raise awareness of the vulnerability of refugee women and children and of persons in remote and dependent situations. Revised guidelines had been drawn up on preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence, while the Committee had produced some Conclusions on the same subject. However, those tools needed to be implemented simultaneously in the spheres of monitoring, deterrence and prevention.

70. While proper investigations were important, so, too, was an effective inspection capacity. His Office had developed a more flexible and targeted approach to inspections and intended to publish inspection summaries on the UNHCR web site. It also planned to undertake more

strategic reviews with a view to looking at operations in a broader context. Some reviews would be accompanied by regular inspections and ad hoc inspections aimed at addressing specific issues and problems.

71. The key to both investigations and inspections was implementation and follow-up. While his Office could not take disciplinary action, it did work closely with the UNHCR Division of Human Resources Management to improve effectiveness in that area.

72. The fact that almost 50 per cent of recommendations from 13 recent inspections had not been implemented suggested the need for a shift in institutional management culture and more effective follow-up mechanisms. A strengthened Oversight Committee could be a new forum for pursuing that objective.

73. His Office enjoyed close and fruitful cooperation with the Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit and the Internal Audit Service. With their support and the support of OIOS, the main elements for an effective UNHCR oversight function had been put in place and were working well. However, more was needed. Audit, inspection and evaluation findings should be systematically reflected in management performance appraisal reports and recurring problems should be more actively addressed. Basic OIOS recommendations on fraud prevention and abuse should be implemented. His Office would do its utmost in the coming year to ensure that that happened.

74. Ms. LYNCH (United States of America) suggested that it might be useful to consider making oversight reporting a more formal requirement of Committee proceedings.

75. She commended the Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit for the excellent work it had done and hoped that it would continue to play an oversight role in all evaluations in spite of its plans to devolve certain of its responsibilities. Her delegation was a staunch advocate of real-time evaluations and looked forward to more of them. It particularly welcomed efforts towards joint and inter-agency evaluations, including with NGOs.

76. The major issue was how to make effective use of evaluations. The lack of progress in that area was disappointing, particularly in respect of the implementation of the recommendations arising from the evaluations on refugee women, refugee children and community services. The document prepared on that subject had been unclear about the steps actually being taken in the field. Was consideration being given to follow-up responsibilities for the steering committees involved in major evaluations?

77. Her delegation welcomed the idea of creating an evaluation advisory committee and strongly supported the proposal for a global review of UNHCR's capacity to monitor the protection, rights and well-being of refugees, matters of particular importance to the United States.

78. The United States was concerned at the shortcomings in UNHCR's financial and human resources management. UNHCR should move forward in addressing those areas of concern; it was to be hoped that things would improve sooner than within the two-year time frame that had recently been mentioned. Her delegation welcomed the news that the situation of auditing certification seemed likely to improve.

79. UNHCR's efforts to modernize its financial and tracking systems were encouraging, and she hoped that the Management Systems Renewal Project would address some of the concerns that the auditors had raised. The High Commissioner's commitment to a new human resources policy was also encouraging, and her delegation hoped to see the plans in writing as soon as possible.

80. With regard to investigations, she wondered, given the relatively low number of complaints from refugees, whether standardized mechanisms for registering complaints had been established in refugee camps. Her delegation had noted the increase in complaints of sexual exploitation and strongly urged UNHCR to continue its efforts to prevent sexual abuse and investigate cases quickly and thoroughly. The lack of feedback on disciplinary action was worrying. What action, for example, had been taken against those responsible for abuses in Nepal?

81. She appealed to the Inspector General to consider reporting on the broad management objectives and recommendations gleaned from inspections. Together with examples of good practices, such information would provide an invaluable insight into UNHCR's operational strengths and weaknesses.

82. Her Government remained committed to providing assistance and support for UNHCR inspections and investigations staff, including through further training.

83. Ms. PROVÓ-KLUIT (Netherlands) underlined the importance of the Oversight Committee and of good cooperation between the internal auditing, evaluation and investigation and inspection functions. She welcomed the introduction of a management response requirement into UNHCR's evaluation policy, together with the other measures adopted to guarantee proper follow-up and ensure that UNHCR offices used evaluation findings and recommendations effectively. She also welcomed the establishment of control mechanisms within the Internal Audit Service to ensure that recommendations were implemented.

84. UNHCR's commitment to strong protection management oversight through the Inspector General's Office remained contingent on the deployment of adequate numbers of well-qualified staff, clearer management accountability and the implementation of preventive measures. Her delegation wished to draw the Inspector General's attention to the need for regular reviews of the way that headquarters communicated policy directives to field offices. It remained convinced that the Inspector General's budget should be financed out of the regular budget.

85. Ms. MARCHAND (Canada) said that her delegation welcomed the development of a close relationship between the Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit and the Division of Operational Support as well as the establishment of the new Operational Policy Committee. Canada was encouraged by efforts to mainstream evaluation throughout the organization and to provide UNHCR staff with training in evaluation methods. UNHCR should maintain the momentum and should not reduce its human and financial investments just as it was beginning to see returns.

86. Canada supported the proposed establishment of an evaluation advisory committee and recommended that membership should rotate between interested member States.

87. Her delegation was deeply concerned by the problems with human resources management and the qualifications of implementing partners identified in the auditors' report. It urged UNHCR to take note of the recommendations made and to find prompt solutions to the problems identified.

88. Canada welcomed the strategic inspection review conducted by the Inspector General's Office, and particularly its emphasis on problem resolution and greater flexibility. However, it believed that the regional and subregional reviews fell within the competence of the Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit.

89. UNHCR should continue its efforts to implement inspection recommendations, as the figures on implementation contained in the reports were somewhat disappointing. Moreover, the fact that the reported figures were no longer accurate underscored the need for UNHCR to provide the Executive Committee with more updated reports.

90. The increase in the number of complaints received by the Investigation Unit and of disciplinary measures taken by UNHCR was indicative of an increased awareness among staff of their obligations and a commitment on the part of UNHCR to enhance transparency and efficiency.

91. Mr. SCHUYT (New Zealand) asked to what extent the oversight functions were involved in the development of improved management systems, since they seemed ideally placed to comment on management problems.

92. Ms. VERZUU (United Nations Volunteers (UNV)) said that UNV had had a very positive experience while working with UNHCR on the follow-up to the OIOS audit team's recommendations. The humanitarian crises which had unfolded throughout the 1990s had led to an increase in cooperation between UNHCR and UNV and the number of United Nations Volunteers involved in UNHCR activities. The audit had thus been timely, encouraging discussion of issues relating to the use of United Nations Volunteers and to management, supervisory, financial and budgetary control systems. Regular consultations had been undertaken with UNHCR and UNV colleagues in New York; as a result, policy guidelines had been drawn up and submitted to the High Commissioner for his endorsement. A draft global memorandum of understanding on the use of United Nations Volunteers was due to be finalized by the end of the year. Field guidelines were also planned.

93. Thanks to fruitful cooperation with the OIOS audit team, UNV and UNHCR had not only produced tangible results, but had enhanced and deepened relations between the two organizations.

94. Ms. PITTAWAY (Observer for the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)) praised the Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit for its responsiveness, transparency and inclusiveness and for the easy access that it provided to its documentation. ICVA hoped that UNHCR was committed to using and implementing the results of the Unit's evaluations.

95. Follow-up to the refugee self-reliance and livelihoods evaluation should take account of burden sharing and ensure that self-reliance was not used as a pretext for shifting responsibilities for refugee protection.

96. The global review of UNHCR's monitoring capacity was an ideal opportunity to examine the Office's performance in cases of interception, particularly when intercepted persons were sent to countries that had not signed the 1951 Convention. The review should also look at the monitoring of forced and coerced repatriation and of refoulement, as well as the apparent lack of follow-up on violations of the human rights of returnees.

97. ICVA recommended that the Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit should turn its attention to UNHCR's implementation of the collaborative approach with respect to internally displaced persons. It welcomed the call for NGO involvement in evaluations and looked forward to taking part in them. NGOs also stood ready to support and contribute to the development of implementation strategies for the many excellent refugee protection guidelines that UNHCR had produced.

98. Stronger links between protection and assistance were critical to protecting refugee children and women from abuse and exploitation. NGOs had long advocated a community-based approach which involved all beneficiaries, including children. Since such an approach depended on adequate levels of appropriately trained staff, ICVA welcomed the decision to respond jointly to the three evaluations on refugee children, refugee women and community services.

99. The development of the common situation analysis tool should build on the tool used in the Action for the Rights of Children and should cover both protection and assistance in all UNHCR field programmes. Her organization would also welcome more information about the plans for implementing the community development approach in five pilot countries.

100. ICVA supported the recommendations concerning guidelines for United Nations Volunteers and consultants and for greater transparency in consultant selection and recruitment. It applauded the work done by the Inspector General's Office to follow up allegations of abuse and exploitation and looked forward to participating in the development of an NGO investigations handbook. The Inspector General's Office should oversee the implementation of recommendations from evaluations, since they, too, often remained a dead letter and should follow up the excellent recommendations contained in the recent IOM/FOM on better management of refugee needs.

101. Ms. WYRSCH (Deputy High Commissioner for refugees) said that a paper on the human resources changes that UNHCR was planning was available to members for their perusal. She would contact the Division of Operational Support to address the lack of clarity of UNHCR's paper in response to the evaluations on women refugees, child refugees and community services. However, UNHCR's essential strategy was for the Division of Operational Support to prepare a joint response to the many common elements contained in the three reports.

102. Mr. CRISP (Head of the Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit) said that some of the information he had provided in his statement was not contained in his report because of the time lag between the submission of reports and the holding of the session. However, the Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit did publish quarterly evaluation updates on its web site.

103. He had taken note of the interest in real-time evaluations and his Unit was discussing the possibility of conducting such an exercise in Liberia. While the Unit intended to devolve some of its evaluation functions, it would continue to play its role as the custodian of evaluation policies and principles in all evaluation activities.

104. Carrying out the three evaluations had been a difficult learning experience because they had been conducted sequentially rather than simultaneously, and considerable time had elapsed between the inception of the first evaluation and the conclusion of the last. The exercise had also been somewhat complex, owing to the sheer number of recommendations contained in the reports. However, he had been extremely impressed by the way that the Division of Operational Support had risen to the challenge of implementing the recommendations. He would in due course provide an update on progress achieved.

105. He intended to extend an invitation to all Executive Committee members to join the proposed evaluation advisory committee in order to gauge the level of interest and determine whether the rotation mechanism proposed by Canada was needed.

106. While his Unit was not systematically involved in the development of improved management systems, its current evaluation of UNHCR's monitoring capacity did include a large component on management systems.

107. He had taken note of the suggestion by ICVA concerning the evaluation of UNHCR's work with internally displaced persons and would refer it to the Assistant High Commissioner.

108. Mr. KALTENBACH (Chief of the Internal Audit Service) said that his Service was conducting an audit involving the Management Systems Renewal Project and would report on progress in the near future.

109. Mr. TAKIZAWA (Controller and Director of the Division of Financial and Supply Management) said he would make sure that input from oversight functions was included in the development of information systems.

110. Mr. McNAMARA (UNHCR Inspector General) thanked the United States delegation for the training and other support that it had provided throughout the year and assured it of his willingness to make available to the Committee more comprehensive information in whatever manner it deemed appropriate, including with respect to findings on management practices.

111. While there was no standardized complaints system in camps, UNHCR was working to devise one in conjunction with mass information campaigns aimed at refugees.

MEETINGS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE IN 2004 (agenda item 9)

CONSIDERATION OF THE PROVISIONAL AGENDA OF THE FIFTY-FIFTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (agenda item 10)

112. The CHAIRMAN drew the attention of the Executive Committee to the draft decision on the programme of work of the Standing Committee in 2004, the draft decision on observer participation, the draft decision on the provisional agenda of the fifty-fifth session, the draft decision on NGO participation in the work of the Executive Committee of the

High Commissioner's Programme and its Standing Committee, and the draft decision on observer participation in meetings of the Standing Committee in 2003-2004, which would be included in the report of the current session.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS (agenda item 12)

113. The CHAIRMAN informed the Committee that he would continue his consultations on the status of the European Commission within the Executive Committee. Since no delegation had requested the floor in order to raise any other business, the Executive Committee had thus concluded its consideration of agenda item 12.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.