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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS
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Fifty-sixth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 597th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 6 October 2005, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. MARTABIT (Chile)

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

ADDRESS BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (agenda item 2)

1. The CHAIRMAN said he was honoured to welcome the Secretary-General, and invited him to address the fifty-sixth session of the Executive Committee.
2. The SECRETARY-GENERAL said he was pleased to address the Executive Committee of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), where he had spent some of the most formative years of his career. At UNHCR, he always knew he was among friends and with people whose commitment to the United Nations was second to none. He especially welcomed the opportunity to speak to the Executive Committee at such an important moment for the world and for the humanitarian community. It had been five years since he had last addressed the Executive Committee - an eternity when one considered all that had happened since. The Committee itself had continued to grow over that time, and he was glad to welcome Romania and his own country, Ghana, which had joined since the previous session. It was also the first meeting of the Executive Committee since his good friend António Guterres had taken up his duties as High Commissioner for Refugees. He and Mr. Guterres had worked very closely together on the question of East Timor and on other matters during Mr. Guterres' term as Prime Minister of Portugal. Mr. Guterres' appointment to the post of High Commissioner for Refugees had pioneered a new way of handling senior appointments, as part of the efforts to increase transparency throughout the United Nations system.
3. He also wished to express his gratitude to Kamel Morjane for his contributions as Assistant High Commissioner, and wished him every success for his return to Tunisia to serve as Minister of Defence. He paid tribute to UNHCR staff, who had endured many difficulties recently and continued to face many challenges, including threats to their security. But they had carried on with a real sense of teamwork and dedication. UNHCR was in good hands at every level, and worthy of the international community's continued political and financial support.
4. He would focus his remarks on the significance of the outcome of the recent World Summit for the humanitarian community, and for UNHCR in particular. When he had issued his report, "In Larger Freedom", earlier in 2005, he had challenged world leaders to be bold. Although the international community's expectations had not been met in all of the areas where progress had been thought necessary, the Summit had produced some remarkable commitments, including on matters of direct concern to the humanitarian community and the Executive Committee.
5. On a broad level, world leaders had endorsed the role of the United Nations in strengthening the humanitarian response system. With that commitment came hope for swifter and more predictable action to help the victims of war and natural calamities. Leaders had also made a number of important specific commitments. Perhaps the biggest innovation had been the agreement to establish a Peacebuilding Commission, which would fill a gaping institutional hole.

Too many countries lapsed back into violence when efforts to consolidate peace or create stability were weak, or not sustained. The new Commission was meant to counter that trend. It would bring all actors to the table in an effort to improve international coherence, and it would try to ensure that international attention did not diminish once the media spotlight turned its focus to other crises. The return of refugees and internally displaced persons was a major part of any post-conflict scenario, and was far more than just a logistical operation. Indeed, it was often a critical factor in sustaining a peace process and in revitalizing economic activity. He welcomed the High Commissioner's determination to have UNHCR play a proactive role in the future work of the Peacebuilding Support Office, which would be established to support the Commission. Member States had asked that the Commission and Support Office should start work no later than the end of 2005.

6. Another very important step taken by the Summit had been the clear acceptance by all United Nations States Members of the responsibility to protect civilian populations against genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. Most of the mass displacements of people over the past 15 years had been sparked by such crimes. Although a number of countries had been sceptical of that concept, fearing that it would be used as a fig leaf for unwarranted intervention, such resistance was lessening, as shown by the clear language endorsed by the Summit. When he had first raised the issue in a General Assembly speech in 1999, there had been consternation in the room; six years later the responsibility to protect was accepted, and progress was being made.

7. He was aware that the humanitarian community had had concerns of its own - which themselves would be used as a fig leaf, with deliveries of assistance masking Member States' lack of appetite for addressing the real sources of conflict. There was also concern that military action taken in exercise of the responsibility to protect could somehow taint the impartiality of humanitarian assistance. The international community would continue to live with those tensions, but they must not take a back seat to the breakthrough that had been achieved. International inaction had been recognized as unacceptable, especially where national Governments were unwilling or unable to act. Of course, robust action must be a last resort. The focus should really be on earlier, non-violent ways to prevent conflicts or political upheavals from reaching such a point. At the same time, the international community must do its utmost to ensure that when it was tested again, as it surely would be, it honoured the solemn pledge made by Heads of State and Government in New York in September 2005.

8. The Summit had also marked a step forward on the question of internally displaced persons. Its recognition of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement should help to improve the protection provided to some of the world's most vulnerable people. However, the provision of a more predictable and effective response remained an outstanding humanitarian challenge. He had seen for himself in Darfur earlier in the year the difficulties that existed in meeting their needs.

9. With the support of his Emergency Relief Coordinator, and the Humanitarian Coordinator system on the ground, he was committed to ensuring that the United Nations family fulfilled its responsibilities. If necessary, there would be a new distribution of tasks, new partnerships would be created and institutional arrangements would be adjusted. The internally

displaced must not be seen as an optional extra. He applauded the commitment made by UNHCR to strengthening its efforts to protect internally displaced persons, and to taking a lead role in assuring emergency shelter and coordination in the camps. That commitment was a landmark in the Organization's efforts to meet the General Assembly's regular demands to improve the predictability of its response in an area where it has been lacking. Moreover, UNHCR would make that contribution without any distraction from its responsibilities for cross-border refugees. He urged the Executive Committee to recognize UNHCR's efforts to reform the humanitarian response system, and to support the agency as it explored the financial and capacity implications of those efforts.

10. The Central Emergency Revolving Fund for humanitarian emergencies was one avenue for providing such support. He was pleased that the Summit had agreed to strengthen the Fund; there had already been pledges in excess of US\$ 150 million, and it was hoped there would be still more. That step, however, was not just about funding levels; it was about developing the ability to respond quickly and effectively, on a scale large enough to meet the needs. A strengthened Fund, with its associated mechanisms, would help ensure that United Nations agencies had guaranteed funds within three or four days of an emergency, without having to wait for donor responses to flash appeals, which could fall well short of needs. The 2004 tsunami in South-East Asia and the recent hurricanes on the Gulf coast of the United States were only the most recent examples of how important it was to move quickly when crisis struck. Although UNHCR had an emergency fund of its own, it would appeal to the Central Revolving Fund for additional needs and activities that went beyond typical refugee emergencies.

11. Note should also be taken of the Summit's decision to create a new, standing Human Rights Council and strengthen the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). If States Members gave the new Council the right structure and terms of reference, it could ensure more effective protection, capacity-building and technical assistance than were afforded by the present Commission on Human Rights, which would help prevent the crises that displaced people in large numbers. He would continue to urge Member States to conclude negotiations, and come to a decision on details, before the March 2006 session of the Commission on Human Rights. If States Members also truly gave OHCHR the financial support it deserved, the Office would have far more capacity than it did at present. The two High Commissioners, for Refugees and Human Rights, would coordinate not only on matters of policy but also operationally, reinforcing each other's work.

12. The development gains triggered by the Summit - more aid, debt relief, and support for quick-impact projects - should also be seen as a contribution to conflict prevention, promoting stability in places where humanitarian agencies were active. An intellectual breakthrough had been made at the Summit, since States Members had accepted or acknowledged for the first time the indivisible links between security and the development of human rights. It had been clear that security could not be enjoyed without development, nor development without security, and that neither could be enjoyed without respect for human rights.

13. The Summit had sought to improve coherence and coordination throughout the United Nations system, and would also have an impact on humanitarian personnel, from their operational activities in the field to the policymaking bodies that gave them guidance. It had also paid close attention to United Nations management. The extensive blueprint of reforms included

steps to increase accountability and efficiency, improve protection for whistleblowers, and ensure all staff understood and adhered to a single code of ethics, all of which would have a clear effect on UNHCR, as would additional steps to strengthen supervision and make it more independent.

14. International migration had received some attention during the Summit, and would certainly consume far more of the Organization's energy in the years ahead. Migration was one of the big issues facing the world. Governments and international organizations needed to do a better job of realizing its many benefits, while addressing the difficulties it could cause. The Global Commission on International Migration had recently issued its report, which offered important recommendations for better managing migration for the benefit of all, States and migrants alike. He would study it carefully, and he urged all States to do so as well, particularly in the light of the scheduled high-level dialogue on migration during the 2006 General Assembly.

15. The High Commissioner had spoken, earlier in the current session, about the difficulty of maintaining the asylum regime when States viewed all new arrivals primarily as would-be immigrants. But UNHCR also had considerable expertise in ways to improve the management of migration, for instance by empowering migrants so that they could integrate smoothly into host communities. He hoped that UNHCR would actively engage in that debate under the leadership of Mr. Guterres. With the commitment to strengthening the humanitarian system came the hope that the world would guarantee a swifter and more predictable response to the victims of war and natural calamities. It should be acknowledged, however, that humanitarian agencies alone, vital as their work was, would not resolve crises unless States upheld their responsibilities, addressed root causes of displacement, and did the political work necessary.

16. Though the number of refugees worldwide had declined, the number of people of concern to UNHCR had increased. The Summit, too, had left a great deal of work to be done, both by States Members and by the Secretariat. He was determined to keep pushing ahead - to implement everything within his power, and to continue pressing Governments to find agreement on those issues that had proved intractable during the negotiations. He looked forward to working with all States in that effort. He thanked the Executive Committee for their attention, and invited members' questions and comments.

17. Mr. FAIDUTTI ESTRADA (Ecuador) said that in view of the complex humanitarian situations that existed in Latin America, he wished to know what place the region held on the United Nations humanitarian agenda. The millions of persons of interest to UNHCR in Latin America had demonstrated that solidarity was a characteristic feature of the region in the search for durable solutions. Nevertheless, the region still required increased support from the international community. His delegation would like to know the Secretary-General's view of Latin America in that context. What position did the region hold in the plan of United Nations reforms, and what impact would those reforms have on the grave humanitarian situations in the area, and on their solutions.

18. Mr. SINGH PURI (India) said that India would be a willing participant in the work of reorienting the United Nations to meet present challenges. His delegation welcomed the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission, and would actively cooperate to implement the decisions that had been taken at the recent United Nations Summit. India also welcomed the

decision to establish a Human Rights Council. The outcome document of the Summit had reiterated the international community's commitment to refugee protection and assistance, which was particularly timely given the growing signs of asylum fatigue and new threats to the principle of non-refoulement. Careful consideration should be given to the recommendations of the Global Commission on International Migration.

19. UNHCR could increase its effectiveness through ensuring impartiality in its work. Efforts must be made to broaden the donor base, and give due recognition to contributions in kind by host countries in the developing world. Proposals to increase UNHCR involvement with internally displaced persons (IDPs) required careful thought and planning, since refugees should remain the Office's priority. The institution of asylum that underpinned international protection must be preserved.

20. Mr. KHOSHROO (Islamic Republic of Iran) said his delegation understood that the United Nations was in the process of reviewing humanitarian responses, and was confident that the outcome of those reviews would be timely and useful for improving responses to humanitarian needs. The creation and maintenance of a constant and properly coordinated relationship between relief and development was particularly important in addressing refugee problems. Such a linkage could facilitate repatriation and reintegration, through contributions to reconstruction and development in countries of origin. It was also important that development assistance should be considered additional to existing humanitarian efforts, and not be provided at the expense of humanitarian assistance and relief.

21. His delegation also supported the collaborative response to internal displacement, and the commitment of UNHCR in that regard. Care must be taken, however, to ensure that UNHCR attention and resources were not diverted away from refugee issues. He expressed his appreciation of the Secretary-General's commitment to peace and security-building activities, which had a direct impact on refugee situations. The Islamic Republic of Iran was the world's largest country of asylum, and had hosted millions of refugees for over 20 years. The Government had always tried to assist Afghan and Iraqi refugees, and had carried out a range of activities to promote peace and security in Afghanistan and Iraq. Such activities were closely linked to finding durable solutions for refugees and asylum-seekers.

22. Mr. AYALOGU (Nigeria), speaking on behalf of the African Group, commended the Secretary-General for his tireless efforts, vision and leadership, which had enhanced United Nations efforts to maintain international peace and security and, in particular, in the management of global refugee situations.

23. The Peacebuilding Commission could provide a forum for all stakeholders to create comprehensive solutions to protracted refugee situations. He wondered how the United Nations intended to utilize that mechanism to address unremitting and future conflicts; how the necessary funding would be secured; and in what way that Commission would contribute to the African Union's ongoing efforts to promote peace and security in the region. Given the adverse effect of donor fatigue on food rations and protection in many refugee camps, he asked whether the Office could assist UNHCR to remedy the situation even on an ad hoc basis. Every moment counted for a refugee left without assistance or protection.

24. Ms. NELLTHORP (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that the European Union appreciated the Secretary-General's support for UNHCR staff, which often worked under dangerous circumstances, and looked forward to early implementation of the humanitarian reforms agreed to at the 2005 World Summit. The best way to improve humanitarian response was to enhance cooperation and coordination, under the leadership of United Nations humanitarian coordinators, in particular with respect to IDPs. There must be certainty as to which agency should act when a crisis arose.

25. Ms. THOMAS (International Council of Voluntary Agencies), thanking the Secretary-General for his commitment to including NGOs in the work of the United Nations, asked how the recent reforms in the United Nations humanitarian system would enhance the United Nations capacity to address protracted refugee situations and provide assistance to refugees, asylum-seekers and IDPs. Was there a way to ensure that the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) benefited those vulnerable groups?

26. The SECRETARY-GENERAL said that he was deeply concerned over the situation in Latin America, in particular the Andean Region, and had discussed with the High Commissioner for Refugees the need for increased support to Governments in the region. He was considering the possibility of designating an officer to monitor and report on the developments so as to ensure prompt action should a crisis arise. If Latin America's relative stability had previously diverted attention from the region, the United Nations was closely following the social and political developments and, in response to rising tensions and increased humanitarian needs, UNHCR would intensify its cooperation with Latin American Governments.

27. He welcomed India's support for the creation of a Peacebuilding Commission and a Human Rights Council, as well as its call for all Governments to pay heed to the work and the report of the Global Commission on International Migration. In the decision to extend UNHCR activities to cover situations of internal displacement, the concern that those additional responsibilities might undermine its refugee mandate had been taken fully into account. However, the needs of IDPs could not be ignored. The past strategy of waiting until a crisis had developed before a lead agency was appointed had failed to produce satisfactory results. A more systematic approach was required, with UNHCR playing a leading role, on the understanding that it would be given all necessary support. He encouraged Governments to support UNHCR in its new role both in political and in financial terms. The instability caused by internal displacement must not be underestimated; in some cases, it might even lead to additional outflows of refugees. Once refugees had crossed international borders, addressing displacement was infinitely more challenging. Nevertheless, ensuring that the additional responsibilities did not exceed UNHCR capacities was a priority and, should that be the case, the new approach would be duly reconsidered.

28. The most effective way to address protracted refugee situations was through political agreements that resolved the underlying issues. In Sudan, for example, the signing of a comprehensive peace agreement between the Government and rebel groups, with the formation of a new Government in Khartoum, had facilitated the return of refugees, some of whom had lived in camps for 20 years. However, comprehensive peace in Sudan could be achieved only if the crisis in Darfur was resolved. The lack of progress in the Abuja peace process therefore caused concern, and the United Nations would do its utmost to exert pressure on both parties to the conflict to reach an agreement without undue delay.

29. Asylum-seekers were another important issue. The establishment and the work of the Global Commission on International Migration had made a very useful contribution, and he would use its excellent report as a basis for his own report to the General Assembly during the high-level dialogue on the subject to be held in 2006.

30. Women, child and elderly refugees, IDPs or asylum-seekers often suffered disproportionately and the implementation of the MDGs would no doubt have a positive impact. At the same time, their protection was, and would remain, a priority in all United Nations plans and programmes.

31. The Peacebuilding Commission was intended as a forum for dialogue between all stakeholders and major donors with a view to devising long-term plans to stabilize countries in distress. Implementation of the agreed programme would be undertaken with the participation of the Commission, concerned agencies and Governments. Elections were often only the beginning of the recovery process; nation-building and peace-building required donor resources. Cooperation between the donor community, the World Bank and Governments of countries lately in conflict was thus vital to working out a long-term approach that could prevent the resurgence of strife.

32. In the presence of donor fatigue, broadening the donor base was crucial to securing funding for humanitarian action. To date, the contribution of certain wealthy countries had been negligible and efforts would be stepped up to bring them on board. The Office would also explore new and innovative sources of funding. A group of countries had proposed the establishment of a solidarity fund for voluntary contributions by travellers that would go towards combating HIV/AIDS. Further creative ideas were welcome.

33. Mr. GUTERRES (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) thanked the Secretary-General for his commitment to the work of UNHCR and commended him for his diplomatic and political skill, his principles and his truthfulness. Recognizing that his appointment by the Secretary-General represented a heavy responsibility, he said that he trusted that the commitment of UNHCR staff and Member States would help him rise to the challenges ahead.

The meeting was suspended at 4 p.m. and resumed at 4.10 p.m.

REPORTS ON THE WORK OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE (agenda item 5) (continued)

- (b) PROGRAMME BUDGETS, MANAGEMENT, FINANCIAL CONTROL AND ADMINISTRATIVE OVERSIGHT (continued) (A/AC.96/1006, 7, 10, 12 and Add.1, and 17 to 19)

34. Ms. CHAMBERLIN (Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees) said that measures would be taken to ensure that UNHCR's new responsibilities for IDPs did not work to the detriment of funding for refugees. Additional financial mechanisms, such as the Central Emergency Response Fund, would be utilized. She thanked Canada for its good humanitarian donorship, for its continuing support for the UNHCR evaluation unit, and for encouraging States members to help UNHCR bridge the 2005 funding gap. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) had commended UNHCR for its

results-based management efforts and had approved the incorporation of results-based management into the presentation of the budget. Following an ACABQ request, UNHCR would simplify its budget presentation. It would also take on board Canada's proposal to develop a multi-year evaluation plan and its request to make the safety of UNHCR field staff a budget priority.

REVIEW OF THE ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS WITH NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS (agenda item 8)

35. Ms. MAHMOOD, Rapporteur of the Annual Consultations with Non-Governmental Organizations, said that 183 organizations from 76 countries had participated in the 2005 UNHCR Annual Consultations with NGOs. The meeting had been well balanced in terms of both gender representation and participation of national and international NGOs.

36. With regard to participatory assessment and planning, remaining difficulties in partnership between UNHCR and NGOs had been largely attributed to a lack of shared visions and objectives. Participatory assessment could enhance NGO and UNHCR partnerships with all stakeholders. Collaboration between UNHCR and the Thai Burma Border Consortium, the Mexico Plan of Action, and joint collaboration between Spanish NGOs and UNHCR were models of best practices to be shared and emulated. In particular, developing country NGOs depended on UNHCR funding, which resulted in unequal partnerships, and they should be given a platform to voice their concerns. NGOs' experience made them valuable UNHCR partners. Key performance indicators and standards and methods to ensure effective inclusion of all stakeholders should be developed.

37. The decision to include IDP protection in UNHCR's mandate had been unanimously welcomed, but would increase the workload considerably and there had been concern that UNHCR might lack the resources to implement the new approach. A mechanism to manage the increased workload must be identified as a matter of urgency. IDP needs assessments should be undertaken with the participation of all stakeholders. Education for IDPs also needed addressing.

38. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee had identified measures to remedy the current shortcomings in addressing IDP situations, and they would be implemented gradually over the next two years. It was important for the lead agency identified for each of the nine clusters to consult with NGO partners; otherwise, since international NGOs might be better placed to establish strategic partnerships with cluster lead agencies, the new approach might alienate national and local NGOs and further limit their participation. Lead agencies must recognize the importance of national and local NGOs and involve them in planning and implementation.

39. Access and security remained primarily the responsibility of host governments and UNHCR should encourage governments to facilitate humanitarian access. States should be invited to participate in the Annual Consultations with NGOs with a view to fostering dialogue and understanding. NGOs might also have a role to play in holding UNHCR accountable.

40. Sexual and gender-based violence were increasingly being recognized as a problem and close collaboration between NGOs and UNHCR was important. While guidelines on the subject were useful, the local context might not allow for the adoption of conventional ones, so an innovative approach was required. Best practices such as the sexual assault referral centre run by the International Red Cross in Sierra Leone should be documented.

41. With regard to guaranteeing the right to seek asylum, the new refugee status determination procedures were welcomed by NGOs in the interest of transparency. However, a lack of conformity with standards and long delays in procedures prevailed. There was a shortage of UNHCR staff specialized in refugee status determination, which gave rise to problems of interpreting the procedures correctly; training was therefore essential. The importance of legal counsel and access to case-files must be recognized and easier ways of distributing information on procedures must be found. UNHCR should allow for NGO comments on such procedures with a view to their improvement.

42. Concerns had been expressed about States justifying detention as a deterrent to absconders. Alternatives to detention were seen as being other forms of detention. The question of whether the holding of migrants by agencies such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) was tantamount to detention had been raised. The situation of Iraqi refugees detained in Lebanon had been highlighted as requiring prompt action. UNHCR should provide more information on detention in its annual reports, in particular relating to the observance of standards, with statistics, and best practices on alternatives to detention. It should also initiate dialogue with IOM and civil society on such alternatives. The role of advocacy in ending detention was recommended.

43. The problems facing returnees who had remained for a long time in host countries had been recognized - there was a fear of secondary movements. It was necessary to build bridges between the host and receiving countries. Counselling should be provided for individuals and receiving countries should receive support. UNHCR should involve NGOs in its discussions with States so as to ensure that readmission agreements and return programmes were carried out with respect for human rights.

44. The campaign on refugee warehousing had raised important issues on refugee rights but participation still had a very Northern bias. National, local and Southern NGOs must be included in future discussions. It was vital that all NGOs working with refugees should have a clear understanding of human rights frameworks and the relevance to their work. Active education campaigns for all stakeholders were necessary. Anti-warehousing campaigns should be linked to poverty reduction strategies and the MDGs. In the CASWANAME (Central Asia, South-West Asia, North Africa and Middle East) region partnerships between advocates, NGOs, refugees and UNHCR should be consolidated so as to resolve protracted refugee situations. Innovative measures were required to ensure that community needs were met and rights respected. Refugee communities must be empowered to have some autonomy in camps. Self-reliance should be encouraged as early as possible and the failure to do so by States should be addressed. States should be encouraged to view local integration favourably, and NGOs were encouraged by the Executive Committee's conclusion on the topic. The Somalian, Tanzanian and South African experiences highlighted local integration as a durable solution.

45. Resettlement was one response to protracted refugee situations. Strategic resettlement should be part of a comprehensive plan encompassing other durable solutions. Concern had been expressed about two negative trends: resettlement as a temporary solution and integration within a host country. Refugees must have clear information on resettlement initiatives and attention should be focused on the more vulnerable. Lessons learned by resettlement States should be shared with emerging resettlement countries.

46. Food security considerations should focus on the need for more accurate information so as to reduce gaps in the provision of aid. Coordination between United Nations agencies and with NGOs must be improved. It was imperative to reduce the vulnerability of communities to different forms of exploitation by ensuring food security. More accurate assessments of the vulnerable population should be carried out before food cards were issued. The absence of sustainable food planning resulted in food crises: donors must be educated on funding for emergency preparedness. Sensitivity to local culture and the need for non-food items in food preparation was essential. Food items must cater for special needs, in particular specific nutritional deficiencies.

47. The overall conclusions of the consultations were that there was overwhelming support for cooperation and partnership between UNHCR and NGOs from the planning stage through to implementation. UNHCR should continue to compile a catalogue of good practices to which NGOs could contribute. It was important to establish benchmarks to measure the impact of good practices and pilot groups should be identified to promote their implementation. Protracted refugee situations required innovative strategies to address community needs. While the Office's role with regard to IDPs was welcome, there was concern that it might reduce its protection capacity. Active involvement with host and receiving Governments, vulnerable populations and donors was necessary to achieve comprehensive and durable solutions. UNHCR and the NGO community must have a common vision, namely the welfare and protection of refugees and IDPs so that conclusions could be put into practice. In closing, she cited part of the keynote address on protracted refugee situations that had opened the annual consultations: "Refugees also matter because they are a litmus test of how tolerant and just we are as a society, as a nation and as an international community."

48. The CHAIRMAN said that he had attended the consultations and had been greatly impressed by the high level of commitment of the NGOs. He encouraged the many NGOs whose contribution was essential to UNHCR in its work to continue to cooperate closely with the Office.

REPORTS RELATING TO EVALUATION AND INSPECTION (agenda item 6) (A/AC.96/1013 and 1014)

49. Mr. ASOMANI (Inspector General), introducing the report on activities of the Inspector General's Office (A/AC.96/1013), said that one important development over the past year had been the informal consultations on enhancing the independence of the Inspector General's Office (IGO), requested by the fifty-fifth session of the Executive Committee and held on 22 February and 21 July 2005. The consultations had proved to be a collaborative exercise in identifying appropriate ways of enhancing not only IGO operational independence, but also the transparency, quality and impact of its work. Their outcome was a draft decision submitted to the current session for consideration.

50. Upon taking office, the High Commissioner had called for a comprehensive review of the administrative instruction setting out the role, functions and modus operandi of IGO. Taking into account the outcome of the consultations, the review set forth a number of measures aimed at enhancing the independence and quality of IGO: strengthened safeguards in the procedures for appointing and removing the Inspector General and for non-interference in IGO's mandated activities; provisions for making available the full text of inspection reports to the members of the Executive Committee and UNHCR staff; and fuller reporting to the Executive Committee on the complete range of IGO activities, while ensuring the confidentiality of investigations and inquiries.

51. In tandem, steps had been taken to double IGO operational capacity, thereby allowing for an expanded programme of inspections as of 2006 and more systematic follow-up of inspection recommendations. The post of senior investigation officer for dealing with allegations of misconduct relating to staff entitlements had been transferred from the Division of Human Resource Management to the IGO Investigation Unit with a view to rationalizing the investigation function and improving consistency in investigation practices.

52. Three main issues had been prioritized for action in the near future. Firstly, IGO's relationship with the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) must be defined by establishing a clear framework for cooperation, possibly in the form of a memorandum of understanding. Secondly, action would be taken on the proposal made during the informal consultations to create a core of expert posts among IGO staff so as to ensure continuity and expertise in inspections and investigations. Thirdly, IGO would play an active role in UNHCR efforts to enhance protection for whistle-blowers.

53. Updating the information on operational activities contained in the annual report (A/AC.96/1013), he said he had recently headed the first inspection of activities in Colombia, which had focused specifically on the complex and fluid IDP situation. At the same time, the Deputy Inspector General had led a standard inspection of all aspects of UNHCR operational activities in Tanzania. The observations on Colombia and Tanzania would be subject to review and comment by the inspected offices before they were issued. The full results would be made available to members of the Executive Committee, in accordance with the new policy announced by the High Commissioner. Before the end of the year inspections would also be carried out in Serbia and Montenegro, Thailand, Cambodia, Eritrea and Morocco.

54. The inspections carried out over the last year showed a number of recurring problems, including chronic shortages and delays in the staffing of field operations. Key posts were often left vacant for prolonged periods of time or staffed by young and inexperienced recruits, with an increasingly heavy reliance on United Nations Volunteers, including their utilization as heads of field offices. Security management standards and procedures were not applied consistently. In some offices, even those with high levels of risk, basic security measures were lacking. There was too little connection between protection and programme in field operations: interaction between the responsible functional units took place on an ad hoc basis so that protection teams and programmers were not well informed of each other's activities. The gap between Headquarters and the field seemed to be widening and recurring deficiencies in the monitoring of

field operations by the regional bureaux had been observed. There should be more visits and interaction between Headquarters and the field. The quality of UNHCR establishments in the field, including staff accommodation, had far-reaching effects on the efficiency of operations and the health and morale of staff.

55. Another function of IGO was to conduct inquiries into major incidents affecting the integrity, credibility or assets of UNHCR. In the last year two inquiries had been conducted: the first related to possible vulnerabilities in the food distribution system for refugees in Algeria; the second dealt with allegations of possible links to criminal networks of an NGO that worked with UNHCR in two regions. The findings would be submitted to the High Commissioner and senior managers concerned for appropriate action.

56. In the area of investigations, the most notable development was the significant decrease (46 per cent) in the number of allegations of misconduct. That gave reason to believe that UNHCR efforts to promote a culture of accountability and integrity were working. However, the statistics in question were limited, and it remained to be seen whether they indicated a real downward trend. Each allegation must be effectively addressed. A responsive and trusted investigation function, combined with effective follow-up on findings, including any appropriate disciplinary action, were essential features of UNHCR's modernized management. Also important were efforts undertaken by the management to raise awareness of ethical standards and to reinforce positive guidance to staff. They included refresher sessions on the Code of Conduct, the publication of information on disciplinary action taken, and dissemination of relevant United Nations circulars. In addition there was the IGO Investigation Learning Programme. It aimed at developing a roster of staff trained in investigation standards, methods and procedures who could assist IGO in its investigations in a timely and cost-effective manner. More than 100 national and international staff had already undergone training at workshops in various locations. The Investigation Learning Programme not only built up UNHCR technical investigative capacity but also served to stimulate dialogue among a broader network of staff about the practical meaning of the Code of Conduct, the standards enshrined in the United Nations Staff Regulations and Rules, and the role of investigations in upholding them.

57. Given the large number of investigations the Inspector General's Office had been required to undertake in recent years, a roster of trained staff must be available to assist in them. Despite the decline in the number of allegations of misconduct, the workload remained formidable.

58. Of the 115 investigations completed in the 2004-2005 reporting period, 36 had resulted in findings that had been forwarded to the Division of Human Resources Management for possible disciplinary action. The majority of cases had involved embezzlement, corruption or fraud; together with misuse of assets and theft, those cases had accounted for half of the investigations undertaken. While the incidence of allegations of resettlement fraud had declined, eliminating that problem remained a priority. His Office would work in close collaboration on that issue with the Department of International Protection. The three criminal cases involving UNHCR staff in the current year had concerned drug trafficking, sexual misconduct and embezzlement of large sums of money. In each case, the national authorities had been informed, immunity had been waived, and his Office was monitoring the progress of the cases through the national criminal justice systems.

59. Ms. NELLTHORP (United Kingdom) welcomed the decision to enhance the independence of the Inspector General's Office, as it would provide States members with increased transparency and accountability. Her Government looked forward to further discussion with the Inspector General on the functioning of his Office. While it was recognized that UNHCR staff worked under budgetary and time restraints, it was imperative that managers at all levels should prioritize security and should implement field security advisers' recommendations. Turning to law enforcement, she requested clarification as to who was responsible for follow-up of any convictions and sentencing that might follow investigations. She endorsed the decision that the High Commissioner should ensure that the Inspector General's recommendations were implemented promptly, and requested a follow-up report from the Secretariat on the problems that had been highlighted in the Inspector General's report. The Inspector General's Office might consider ways of making more effective use of governance meetings to discuss oversight reports and the Secretariat's responses to them.

60. Ms. van AARDENNE (Netherlands) commended the increased independence given to the Inspector General's Office and the importance the High Commissioner had attributed to strengthening that Office, as field operations would be strengthened in consequence. UNHCR should ensure that field operations were regularly supervised and monitored by the regional bureaux and headquarters, as well as by staff from the departments of human resources, operational support and protection. Her delegation welcomed the special expertise that had been developed to prevent resettlement fraud and the sexual exploitation of asylum-seekers and refugees, but remained concerned that insufficient resources had caused problems in the Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit.

61. Mr. THOMPSON (United States of America) welcomed the High Commissioner's decisions to enhance the independence of the Inspector General's Office and to make inspection reports available to Executive Committee members. Continued implementation of those changes, together with the adoption of a management system based on measured results, would result in better protection of refugees and other persons of concern and would increase partner confidence in UNHCR.

62. The addition of three new inspection officers was welcome, as it should enable UNHCR to double the number of inspections undertaken each year and increase capacity to follow up the implementation of inspection recommendations. It was to be hoped, however, that protection staff and other experts would continue to be included on inspection teams, as they greatly helped their work. The inspections and investigations units would benefit from a similar staffing policy to the one to be adopted by the Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit, with some regular rotating staff and others with inspection and investigation expertise serving on a more permanent basis.

63. Many of his delegation's concerns about human resources had been highlighted by the United Nations Board of Auditors and the Inspector General's Office. They included the shortage of protection staff in the field, the infrequent field visits conducted by protection staff, and the need to establish mechanisms for the prompt deployment of staff at the outset of emergencies. Particular attention should also be paid to the auditors' concerns about management and control of procurement and assets, and the Inspector General's findings on such issues as embezzlement, corruption and fraud.

64. Ms. DUSSEY-CAVASSINI (Switzerland) commended the inclusion of protection and human resources staff from other departments. Given that protection was the highest priority of the organization, it was unfortunate that training for protection and programme management staff had not yet reached an acceptable standard. She requested further details of the training provided to UNHCR staff. It would be useful to provide standardized training programmes that could be delivered inside and outside UNHCR. Her delegation welcomed the decision to increase the independence of the Inspector General's Office.

65. Mr. ASOMANI (Inspector General) thanked the delegations that had supported the measures taken by the Inspector General's Office to enhance its independence. He agreed that importance should be accorded to good governance and security.

66. The Division of Human Resources Management was responsible for follow-up of investigations leading to disciplinary action, and field offices also provided systematic follow-up of convictions in individual countries.

67. Measures would be taken to address the lack of communication between headquarters and the field offices.

68. Increased resources would assist in ensuring that field offices complied with inspection recommendations. Efforts would be made to ensure that the inspection process itself laid the foundations for implementation of recommendations.

69. On the issue of staffing, it was necessary to maintain a balance between staff who had rotated to the field, and were familiar with conditions there, and the need to retain a certain level of expertise within the Inspector General's Office itself.

70. He emphasized that inspection teams included staff from several departments, particularly experts in protection and human resources.

71. The issue of the quality of staff, including training and capacity-building at the field level, was an important one that would be addressed at the management level.

72. Mr. LAMBO (Acting Assistant High Commissioner for Refugees) said that since the report entitled "Evaluation and Policy Analysis: UNHCR's Plan and Activities" (A/AC.96/1014) had been issued, the High Commissioner had decided to strengthen the policy analysis functions and move them into the Executive Office with effect from 1 January 2006. While the details of that move had not yet been finalized, it was being considered within the context of wider restructuring plans. The broad objective was to provide UNHCR management with more detailed analysis that could be used to develop medium- and long-term strategic directions and more effective planning.

The meeting rose at 5.25 p.m.