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

Fifty-eighth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 610th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 1 October 2007, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. MTESA (Zambia)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.30 p.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4) (continued)

1. Mr. MATTEI (France) commended the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for its work in areas of acute crisis such as Darfur and the Kivu region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In that connection, the security arrangements envisaged in Security Council resolution 1778 (2007), providing for a multidimensional presence to help create the security conditions conducive to the return of refugees and displaced persons, would make a crucial difference to the work of the Office and to reconstruction and development efforts. UNHCR also continued to do exemplary work in areas where the refugee crisis was easing, such as Mauritania. He expressed concern at the humanitarian situation in Iraq and commended the unstinting efforts of Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic, which now required international assistance.
2. An increasing number of people required UNHCR protection. He therefore welcomed the enhanced role of the Office in the protection of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) under the United Nations cluster approach, which must be applied pragmatically and flexibly. He affirmed the importance of the Dialogue on Protection Challenges and thanked the High Commissioner for Refugees for the regular updates on the reforms under way, particularly the important process of decentralization and regionalization and the adoption of a new budget structure, which would result in greater transparency.
3. He deplored the increasing reliance on voluntary contributions, of which only 20 per cent were not earmarked. His Government wished that figure to stand at 70 per cent in regard to its own contribution, in order to allow greater flexibility. He welcomed the forthcoming signature of a framework agreement which would enhance institutional and operational cooperation between France and UNHCR. Given the importance of the French language, and multilingualism at UNHCR headquarters and in the field operations, UNHCR vacancy notices should not make English the only required language; a great number of refugees were to be found in French-speaking countries.
4. Ms. MAPISA-NQAKULA (South Africa) thanked the High Commissioner for his recent visit to her region, which had provided useful guidance and support to poor regions under pressure to meet their relevant international commitments. She endorsed the priority assigned to United Nations and UNHCR reform - which should not, however, benefit a few powerful countries alone - and particularly welcomed the efforts of UNHCR to achieve greater flexibility in fulfilling the demands of its core mandate. The increase in displacement owing to political and environmental instability made reform vital. In that connection, she welcomed the increased transparency and predictability in the proposed new budget structure, but echoed the concerns expressed by the African Group regarding the “firewall” between budget allocations for refugees and allocations for other programmes and projects.
5. Many of the challenges and emergency situations facing UNHCR were in Africa, and she therefore renewed her appeal for an increased focus on the needs of that region. Sustainable development was critical in addressing poverty and in preventing conflicts that led to displacement. South Africa experienced mixed migration and was receiving an increasing number of asylum-seekers. In order to improve the overall management of migration, it had

introduced various measures such as the Refugee Backlog Project, amendments to the Refugees Act, and the strengthening of systems in general. Her country was committed to its international obligations concerning refugees and asylum-seekers and was taking steps to combat xenophobia and other forms of discrimination against them. She expressed her strong support for the draft conclusion on children at risk; the protection needs of the most vulnerable should be attended to in an effective and sustainable manner.

6. Mr. GUTERRES (High Commissioner) commended the South African Government for its commitment and humanity in providing assistance to asylum-seekers and refugees while faced with the demands of internal security. He had been impressed by the open and generous attitude that he had witnessed during his recent visit to South Africa, where the influx of migrants was larger than in Europe. South Africa could count on the support and commitment of UNHCR. He thanked the representative of Australia for his comments on the need for improved presentation of UNHCR statistics, an area to which close consideration was being given, and welcomed his focus on “solutions”. The work of UNHCR was not only about protection and assistance but indeed about enabling solutions, such as voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement. The Office would continue to cooperate with Australia, particularly with its important resettlement programme. He concurred with the representative of France on the importance of the framework agreement, which would enhance strategic cooperation between UNHCR and that country. He furthermore welcomed the comments on the progress made in the area of voluntary returns, particularly regarding the Mauritanian refugees in Senegal and Mali, where a long-standing problem was being resolved. He requested international assistance in that regard.

7. Ms. THORS (Finland) said that UNHCR and its partners were facing new and increasingly complex challenges regarding improved international protection of refugees and respect for their fundamental human rights. In dealing with mixed migratory movements, it was important to identify those in need of international protection and guarantee them access to the proper asylum procedure. The 10-Point Plan of Action constituted an important tool in that respect in the context of the European Union. She welcomed the response of UNHCR to the European Commission’s recent Green Paper on the future Common European Asylum System, in which the protection of refugees was central and to which Finland would be making an active contribution.

8. The issue of addressing gender-based violence against refugee women was a high priority, and she expressed her appreciation and support for UNHCR efforts further to develop instruments to combat related human rights violations and mainstream gender issues into all its programmes. She expressed support for the draft conclusion on children at risk and stressed that the expanded role of UNHCR in protection of IDPs should not detract from the Office’s core mandate.

9. Asylum applications from Iraqis had risen 45 per cent in the first half of 2007. Finland had begun to resettle refugees in Iraq’s neighbouring countries and intended to resettle more currently in Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic in 2008. Finland was also committed to receiving Burmese refugees under the annual refugee quota. In that connection, she expressed deep concern at the reports from Burma concerning the detention of large numbers of political

prisoners. The use of force against unarmed and peaceful demonstrators was unacceptable. More States must be encouraged to start, and expand participation in, resettlement programmes, and Finland was willing to act as partner to any countries interested in setting up such programmes.

10. Mr. PATRICIO (Mozambique) thanked the High Commissioner for his ideas on reform, which would be sure to improve the treatment of asylum-seekers, refugees and IDPs, and for his recent visit to Mozambique. His country was committed to implementing the three durable solutions for refugees - repatriation, resettlement and integration. A decree regulating legislation on refugee status had recently been passed and a policy on local integration and self-reliance for refugees was being adopted. Mozambique was currently assisting and hosting 6,700 refugees and asylum-seekers, the majority of whom lived in the Maratane refugee camp. There were no restrictions on their movements, and some refugees outside the camp were developing self-reliance activities. Since repatriation was the most appropriate long-term solution, he welcomed the voluntary repatriation, in 2007, of over 200 refugees to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and hoped that more would follow. He expressed concern at the new inflows of refugees or asylum-seekers passing through Mozambique bound for other countries in the region; a regional solution was necessary, together with assistance from international partners such as UNHCR.

11. Greater international solidarity was required to address the plight of refugees and asylum-seekers, especially in Africa and the Middle East, and in that connection he welcomed the ongoing United Nations and UNHCR reforms, which should strengthen efforts to find durable solutions. He expressed his appreciation for the efforts of the international community to find a lasting solution to the Darfur and Great Lakes crises. Durable peace, security, respect for human rights and sustainable development were vital to eliminating the root causes of displacement.

12. Mr. MOESBY (Denmark) expressed strong support for the High Commissioner's efforts to improve the flexibility and efficiency of his Office. It was important for the Office to maintain momentum in the structural and management reform process. He therefore welcomed the progress on outpostting, decentralization and regionalization and looked forward to receiving information on the outcome of the Comprehensive Field Review. UNHCR was becoming better equipped to respond to emergencies, and he hoped that it would meet its standing response capacity target by the end of 2007. He also commended the Office on taking humanitarian reforms forward, and expressed support for its role in the cluster system and its commitment to the needs of IDPs, since important synergies existed between work for refugees and work for IDPs.

13. Denmark attached priority to reintegration of refugees in their countries of origin, to support for communities hosting asylum-seekers and to the reintegration of IDPs. He therefore welcomed the UNHCR initiative on a new policy framework and implementation strategy for return and reintegration, especially given the large scale of returns in recent years. Support from development partners was required to provide basic needs, health and education, and post-conflict recovery efforts needed to be stepped up. Concrete results were expected from the "4-Rs" approach (Repatriation, Reintegration, Rehabilitation, Reconstruction), from development assistance for refugees, and from self-reliance strategies.

14. There was a window of opportunity for engaging development partners in early recovery, and he welcomed the focus of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee on that area and the search for a financing mechanism, in which he hoped the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) would participate. He urged UNHCR to use United Nations reform and the “Delivering as One” initiative to enhance joint implementation of reintegration activities at the country level. Dialogue and cooperation with States were key to including IDPs in national development plans and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. He welcomed the strengthened partnerships between UNHCR and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on the implementation of humanitarian and early recovery programmes. The lead role of the Office in the protection cluster was crucial and in that connection he welcomed the High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protection Challenges initiative.

15. Mr. KUSSUMUA (Observer for Angola) thanked the High Commissioner for visiting Angola recently to attend the ceremony marking the end of the voluntary repatriation programme for Angolan refugees, after a protracted armed conflict. Of the 600,000 Angolan exiles and refugees in neighbouring countries, over 400,000 had returned home and were rebuilding their lives. Efforts were under way with host countries to assist the return of many other Angolans still living as refugees. He requested UNHCR assistance in the local integration of Angolan refugees in host or neighbouring countries, including Zambia, Botswana, Namibia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Funds from potential donors should be obtained to that end. He welcomed the proposal to raise the reserve appropriation level for “new or additional activities - mandate-related” from \$50 million to \$75 million as from 2007.

16. Efforts were being made to find lasting solutions to a number of conflicts in Africa that risked creating millions of refugees and IDPs. At the same time, recent years had seen unprecedented levels of repatriation, as peace and stability returned to countries such as Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone and Liberia. History had shown that forced displacement could be avoided, or limited, with the commitment of the international community.

17. The rising incidence of irregular migration and human trafficking was affecting all countries, particularly in Africa, and had its roots in the social and economic problems of developing countries. Since irregular migration often involved the forced displacement of people in search of security, it was no easy matter to apply all procedures established in the international legal instruments on asylum correctly and fairly. In response to growing intolerance resulting from security concerns and public confusion over the distinction between migrants and refugees, UNHCR should focus its efforts on restoring confidence and protecting the principle of asylum.

18. Mr. LEE Sung-joo (Republic of Korea) said that, as was clear from the Global Appeal 2007, the UNHCR operational environment showed no sign of improvement, with the number of refugees, IDPs and mixed migrants on the increase. The current refugee situation called for a more strategic approach than in the past. He therefore welcomed the reform measures undertaken, including regionalization and decentralization, the outposting of administrative functions, the proposed new budgetary structure and the cluster approach. However, while the Office’s efforts were commendable, UNHCR could not resolve all the problems alone. Increasingly tight border controls and restrictive screening measures by some countries were a cause of concern. At a time of broader and mixed migration, the refugee problem risked becoming a contentious political and social issue in countries of transit and destination. Refugee problems should be addressed from a humanitarian perspective;

human safety should not be sacrificed to the national security imperative; the principle of non-refoulement should be upheld; and people seeking protection should not be returned against their will.

19. More than 10,000 North Korean refugees had settled in the Republic of Korea. He expressed appreciation to UNHCR and other agencies and States for their efforts to help other North Korean refugees settle in the countries of their choice. He expressed concern about the situation of stateless persons from the Central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union and called upon the countries concerned to restore citizenship to those persons. He recalled that the Government of the Republic of Korea was revising its immigration legislation and regulations in order to improve the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers. With a view to greater participation in international protection efforts, his Government would also continue to increase its voluntary contributions to UNHCR, despite the huge costs of resettling the North Korean refugees.

20. Mr. SHOUKRY (Egypt) commended the High Commissioner for his important personal contribution to the work of UNHCR over the past year and praised UNHCR for its successful field activities, particularly in Africa, in spite of the security risks and financial and other constraints with which it had to contend. The return of peace to certain African countries had enabled the Office to undertake voluntary repatriation of several thousand IDPs and refugees. It was now the duty of the international community to assist with their resettlement and reintegration.

21. He commended the High Commissioner for his initiative of holding an international conference in April 2007 to draw attention to the humanitarian crisis in Iraq and the need for efforts to address its root causes in order to prevent further population displacement. He also recalled the importance of assisting receiving countries, including through burden-sharing and capacity-building. He expressed support for the greater focus on IDP activities over the past year, through the cluster approach, and welcomed the launch of such activities in Africa. However, those activities should not detract from the Office's core protection mandate or divert resources required for refugees.

22. His Government favoured the structural and administrative reforms under way and requested further clarifications and consultations on the proposed budget structure. It also welcomed the Executive Committee's draft conclusion on children at risk. He viewed positively all initiatives for the protection of refugees that were in keeping with international humanitarian law, while stressing that the problem of refugees in Egypt must be seen in the broader African context. His Government was willing to consider any arrangements proposed by UNHCR to improve the situation of refugees in Egypt based on the principles of national capacity-building, effective international participation and burden-sharing.

23. Mr. CARACCILO DI VIETRI (Italy) commended the High Commissioner on his efforts over the past year and fully endorsed the views expressed in the High Commissioner's introductory statement. He also congratulated Ms. Katrine Camilleri on winning the 2007 Nansen Refugee Award for her work on behalf of refugees and displaced persons in the Mediterranean region. In connection with the statement made on behalf of the European Union, he said that the emerging consensus on migration policies should not encourage member States to become complacent, but rather should make them more committed to resolving migration issues.

24. He expressed support for the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges initiative and 10-Point Plan of Action, which were appropriate tools for addressing the protection needs of refugees in situations of mixed migration. Their wider implementation should result in better cooperation arrangements for vulnerable people worldwide and avert the threat of smuggling and trafficking. He hoped that the recent agreement between UNHCR and his Government on the resettlement of 37 Eritrean refugees would further strengthen cooperation between Italy and UNHCR.

25. Despite progress made, the rise in the number of refugees worldwide, largely as a result of the crisis in Iraq, was a matter of concern. The international community should acknowledge the generosity shown by the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan in hosting Iraqi refugees and should invite them to refrain from imposing excessive restrictions on entry. For its part, UNHCR should continue to seek international support for the Syrian and Jordanian authorities; Italy had contributed approximately \$5 million to UNHCR for that purpose.

26. The rise in the number of IDPs as a result of conflicts made the Office's role as leader of the IDP cluster even more challenging, notably in parts of Africa like Darfur, where downscaling of some operations could have serious humanitarian consequences. While the cluster approach enabled humanitarian organizations to coordinate their assistance better, there was still room for improvement. Partnerships should be strengthened with a view to filling gaps and making the most efficient use of resources available. In that connection, the structural and administrative reforms undertaken by UNHCR had thus far proved successful and should therefore be continued. The streamlining of headquarters operations and outpostting of administrative functions to Budapest reflected a new strategic approach that should improve efficiency in the field and enhance the capacity of UNHCR to operate in a changing institutional environment.

27. Mr. VAN MEEUWEN (Belgium) said that the situation in the Great Lakes region would continue to require attention and resources for some time to come. He welcomed the tripartite approach to the recent voluntary repatriation programmes there and viewed the Pooled Fund for the Democratic Republic of the Congo as a useful tool for addressing any new emergencies. The situation of Iraqi IDPs and refugees was a matter of concern, and he expressed support for UNHCR activities relating to Iraq and his solidarity with the neighbouring countries hosting Iraqi refugees. Recognizing the vital role of host countries in situations of protracted crisis, he said that UNHCR should provide greater assistance to refugees who returned voluntarily, including by advocating for their return and reintegration to be factored into national development plans.

28. His Government welcomed the establishment of the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission as a vehicle for dealing with post-conflict situations and creating durable solutions for displaced persons. It also attached importance to education for refugees, especially vocational education for young refugees, as a means of improving their prospects. With regard to violence against women in zones of conflict, efforts to combat impunity were essential and should be based on greater access to justice and legal assistance.

29. Partnership was an essential component of humanitarian reform. Further discussion on how to enhance the role of NGOs working with UNHCR was therefore to be encouraged. In that connection, the cooperation agreement signed with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was welcome. His Government was also in favour of the inter-agency cluster approach

and the increased focus of UNHCR on IDPs, within the framework of its mandate and existing budgetary resources. It also supported the structural and administrative reforms under way at UNHCR. A results-based budget and separate funding for refugee programmes and IDP projects would ensure greater transparency and efficiency. Also welcome were the efforts to present a realistic budget and to broaden the donor base. He favoured any measure that would improve operational efficiency and bring support services closer to the field.

30. Mr. LEKO (Hungary) said that Hungary supported UNHCR involvement in the protection of IDPs, through the cluster approach, and encouraged the Office to continue building partnerships with relevant actors in order to find durable solutions for refugees. Given the growing numbers of refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR, it was vital that the Office should further strengthen its protection activities. In that regard, he supported the High Commissioner's continued efforts to increase the Office's flexibility and effectiveness and welcomed the results achieved thus far.

31. His Government was pleased that through the UNHCR Global Service Centre in Budapest it was able to help generate more resources for populations of concern, and it stood ready to provide all the necessary support for the swift establishment of the Centre's operations. He welcomed the decentralization and regionalization process and was confident that the new budget structure would ensure greater transparency and provide a satisfactory solution for IDP operations without diverting resources from programmes for refugees and stateless persons.

32. Hungary had greatly benefited from UNHCR cooperation in establishing and improving legislation relating to asylum and refugees. The aims of its new Asylum and Refugee Act, which would enter into force in January 2008, were to address gaps in existing legislation and bring it into line with European Union directives and the 1951 Convention. The Act would strengthen the rights of persons seeking recognition of refugee status, with particular emphasis on those requiring special treatment. It would also provide a legal framework for the resettlement of up to 100 refugees per year. In addition, the Aliens Act of July 2007 established a new procedure to guarantee the rights of stateless persons under international law. In that connection, he looked forward to the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges in December 2007.

33. Mr. LEIKVOLL (Norway) said that UNHCR seemed to be moving in the right direction with the improvement in its funding situation over the past year, indicating greater donor confidence. The Office should turn its attention to the issue of environmental degradation as a consequence of climate change, which was now at the top of the international agenda. Environmental issues continued to be one of the causes of conflict, particularly in Darfur, as borne out by a recent study by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). UNHCR must therefore prepare itself for more climate-related conflicts and an increasing incidence of displacement in the near future, including in regions not previously affected by humanitarian crises. The Government of Norway was willing to assist UNHCR with a survey on how best to prepare for such situations.

34. With the increase in the number of Iraqi refugees, the global refugee population was once again close to 10 million. His Government was concerned about the high numbers of refugees in protracted refugee situations. Although progress had been made in finding durable solutions, those solutions should not compromise the right of refugees, including the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal, to return home when they so decided. The value of the Office's efforts were measured in

the field. The most serious challenges remained Darfur, Iraq and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He acknowledged the invaluable contribution of the many developing countries which had borne the immediate impact of refugee situations, and expressed strong support for the Office's protection mandate for dealing with such crises.

35. The High Commissioner and UNHCR staff were to be commended on their efforts to introduce reform. His Government attached particular importance to the decentralization and regionalization process, but underlined the need for clear delineation of responsibilities in regard to accountability, reporting and decision-making between the different levels in UNHCR. The reform process should be used to promote gender equality and a progress report should be submitted to the Standing Committee at its next meeting.

36. UNHCR had benefited from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), which was effective in providing more rapid funding for crises. Norway encouraged other donors to support the Fund. The cluster approach had helped improve the humanitarian response. He was pleased to note that recent evaluations of the approach had found that IDP operations had not adversely affected refugee programmes. There was a need to improve the human resource capacity, as a matter of priority, and, more generally, to step up implementation of the cluster approach in the field.

37. Mr. GUTERRES (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) thanked the Finnish Government for its partnership with UNHCR in all areas, including funding, but above all for the reform of its asylum policy. The Office was committed to cooperating with the European Union in the establishment of a common European asylum policy, as evidenced by its response to the European Commission's Green Paper on the Future Common European Asylum System. He welcomed the willingness of Finland to establish partnerships with other countries interested in resettlement programmes. He agreed with a suggestion that national experts and NGOs should be more actively involved in the preparation of the Executive Committee's conclusions.

38. As he had seen on a recent visit, Mozambique had one of the most open and generous policies towards refugees, combining self-reliance and local integration. He concurred with the representative of Mozambique that a regional approach was required in southern Africa to cope with mass displacement and limited resources. Turning to the statement by the representative of Denmark, he said that Denmark had played a particularly important role in implementing reintegration policies and providing development assistance to refugees. There was indeed a window of opportunity to engage development partners in such activities, thus helping to ensure sustainable returns and to support refugee-impacted areas. He called on the members of the Executive Committee to show leadership in promoting such policies in the decision-making bodies of development agencies and international financial institutions.

39. The Government of Angola had shown a clear commitment to supporting refugees wishing to return to their country. In that connection, he appealed for donor support for the Zambian Initiative, which was of great importance to the development of communities in western Zambia that had long been hosting Angolan and other refugees. UNHCR was committed to supporting refugees from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea who were in distress, and was addressing the problems of stateless people of Korean origin. While he recognized that States

needed to implement effective security policies to protect their citizens and to responsibly manage their borders, he considered that they must also ensure that their refugee policies allowed for identification of persons requiring protection, having due regard to the principle of non-refoulement. Experience had shown that the two imperatives were not incompatible.

40. In response to the statement by the representative of Egypt, he said that UNHCR was strongly committed to multilingualism and that having staff capable of speaking the same languages as refugees was key to its success. In that connection, UNHCR was doing its best to engage more Arabic speakers. Egypt had done a great deal for Sudanese refugees, notably by granting them the four freedoms. UNHCR had made it very clear that its work for IDPs should in no way be at the expense of its activities for refugees. The proposed budget structure not only included a firewall, but also enhanced oversight by the Executive Committee, marking a departure from the current practice, whereby all IDP programmes were funded through supplementary budgets that were not subject to such scrutiny.

41. UNHCR had enjoyed exemplary cooperation with the Italian Government in developing a refugee policy, with the involvement of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and ICRC. He expressed the hope that such experiences could be replicated elsewhere.

42. With regard to the statement by the representative of Belgium, he said that it was precisely because of the remarkable progress made in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in Burundi that some very serious problems linked to the humanitarian situation and to political stabilization risked being neglected. He thanked the Belgian Government for organizing the first Global Forum on Migration and Development, and said that he looked forward to the next session of the forum, which was due to be held in the Philippines. He furthermore expressed his gratitude to the Governments of Hungary and Romania for their cooperation in the outposting of UNHCR staff in Budapest, and welcomed the development by the Hungarian Government of a comprehensive and modern asylum system.

43. The representative of Norway had quite rightly drawn attention to the link between climate change and conflict, thus underscoring the need to ascertain how to deal with many new forms of displacement. It was ultimately for the member States to show political leadership in that regard. He agreed that accountability was imperative in the management of UNHCR, including with respect to gender equity.

44. Mr. PHUANGKETKEOW (Thailand), expressing support for the High Commissioner's vision and strategic directions and for the reforms that had been undertaken, said that the Government of Thailand, which was committed to meeting the needs of displaced persons and asylum-seekers, had recently established three legal assistance centres at camps for displaced persons from Myanmar. The first of their kind in the world, the centres would provide better access to justice for the camp residents. Thailand had also issued identity cards to all 140,000 displaced persons from Myanmar, granting them effective access to medical care and other services. It had also taken steps to create more income-generating activities for them, while supporting durable solutions, including voluntary repatriation. Such an approach was made possible thanks to cooperation with UNHCR and with numerous NGOs, to which he expressed his gratitude.

45. Addressing the situation of Laotian Hmong asylum-seekers in Thailand, he said that although the region was now free from the conflict that had initially triggered outflows, many Hmongs were being lured into Thailand for economic reasons. The Thai Government was working with the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic to encourage safe and voluntary repatriation, and had established a transparent screening mechanism for Laotian Hmongs who required protection. Its policy could become a showcase for cooperation in dealing with the problem of illegal migration.

46. Mr. HESSOU (Observer for Benin) said that for 40 years Benin had demonstrated its hospitality by generously welcoming, protecting and assisting displaced persons. As a result of ongoing dialogue with the authorities in the subregion, his Government had concluded a tripartite agreement with Togo and UNHCR, which had brought about a sharp reduction in the number of persons seeking asylum in Benin in the past two years. The Eligibility Committee established by the Government of Benin to determine refugee status had drawn up a compendium of its decisions - the first of its kind in French-speaking Africa - to solicit feedback from legal experts, to make refugee policy better known and to bring its practices into line with international standards.

47. The Government of Benin, together with all its partners working with refugees in Benin, had called for donor support to maintain the quality of refugee assistance. In recent days, two agreements had been signed, one for \$17,000 with the United States Diplomatic Mission in Benin and Caritas-Benin, and the other for \$75,000, with the Embassy of the Netherlands and UNHCR. For the second straight year Benin had been named by the United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants among the countries with the best record for compliance with international standards on the protection of refugees. He reiterated the wish of his country to become a full member of the Executive Committee, which would help it to build on such achievements.

48. Mr. LOULICHKI (Morocco) said that Morocco supported the lead role of UNHCR in the cluster concerned with assistance for IDPs, especially in view of the increasing numbers of vulnerable people and the need to avoid duplication. He endorsed the new results-based budgeting policy and applauded UNHCR for the progress in improving its human resources management. His delegation had actively participated in the consultations on the draft conclusion on children at risk, while his Government had developed a specific legal system for child protection and had established a system for the protection and assistance of children in vulnerable situations.

49. The Government of Morocco had recently concluded a cooperation agreement with UNHCR that would further strengthen their partnership. It remained concerned, however, about the situation of Moroccan citizens held in the Tindouf camps, who for 30 years had been deprived of their fundamental rights, including freedom of movement and the right of return. Although, since 1975, it had been calling for a credible and reliable census of the camp populations, the Government of Algeria had thus far refused to undertake, or to permit UNHCR to undertake, one, notwithstanding its obligations under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. A census was essential to determining the volume of humanitarian assistance required in the camps and to avoiding any misappropriation of aid. The only possible explanation for the Algerian Government's refusal to allow a census was a desire on its part to exploit the

suffering of the camp populations in order to forestall a political solution. He requested UNHCR to draw up a detailed report that clearly identified the party blocking such a census. He thanked the donor States that were assisting those living in the Tindouf camps and endorsed the views expressed by the High Commissioner in his opening statement concerning the need to redouble political efforts in order to offer real hope to the inhabitants of the camps.

50. Morocco had submitted an autonomy plan to the Security Council which had been warmly received. It had taken part in the negotiations held in Manhasset in April 2007, and would do everything in its power to resolve the conflict. In the meantime, it stood ready to implement confidence-building measures such as family visits, burials, in their home villages, of Saharans who died in the camps, the organization of pilgrimages to Mecca, with funding from the Moroccan Government, and the celebration of weddings between people in the Saharan provinces and those in the camps.

51. Mr. SCHWEPPE (Germany) said that the principles of human rights, humanitarian and international law were often ignored to the detriment of both local populations and humanitarian workers. Climate change created greater vulnerability, pandemics and migratory movements, while increasing competition over natural resources and energy, poor governance and poverty exacerbated such problems. The crises inter alia in Iraq, the Sudan, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia had resulted in a situation where the number of IDPs had reached a tragic high and would probably continue to rise. In addition, for the first time in 10 years the number of refugees was also rising. Germany recognized the burdens placed on host countries, in particular the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan.

52. The German Government strongly supported the structural and management reforms undertaken by UNHCR, which were designed not to cut costs but to improve services and deliver more resources to the increasing number of persons of concern to UNHCR. The biennial programme budget for 2008-/009 was realistic and the new budget structures were a pragmatic way of ensuring that UNHCR could both fulfil its obligations vis-à-vis refugees and support the inter-agency response to situations resulting from internal displacement. The new structure would also enhance transparency and oversight.

53. By leading the clusters on camp coordination and management, protection and emergency shelter for refugees and IDPs in armed conflicts, UNHCR would contribute its expertise and leadership in vital areas. The challenges of internal displacement lay beyond the capacity of any single organization and could only be met effectively by inter-agency approaches and partnerships, supported by national Governments. While he supported the lead taken by the United Nations in reform, he considered that strengthened partnerships between United Nations agencies, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs should lie at the heart of the reform. He therefore fully supported initiatives such as the Global Humanitarian Platform. On the subject of partnership, France and Germany were continuing to cooperate in the joint financing of UNHCR relief projects for Iraqi refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan and for Sudanese refugees and IDPs in Chad.

54. Mr. MARTABIT (Chile) expressed full support for the work and objectives pursued by the High Commissioner to improve international protection and find durable solutions for refugees. The increase in the number of refugees and IDPs as a result inter alia of conflicts, climate change and epidemics presaged many future difficulties, which would have to be faced with firm resolve.

55. The Mexico Plan of Action had become a successful tool in helping to strengthen protection for refugees and IDPs in Latin America. The Solidarity Resettlement programme was one of the most innovative and emblematic components of the Plan, since it made it possible for any country in Latin America to offer to take in refugees from another country in the region. Since the signing of a solidarity resettlement agreement between UNHCR and Chile in 1999, small numbers of refugees had settled in Chile. The initiative had subsequently been extended to other countries in the region, demonstrating the importance that they attached to resettlement policies based on eligibility and the principle of non-discrimination.

56. Under the Mexico Plan of Action, Chile had received 104 refugees from Colombia since 2005 and had agreed to welcome around 100 refugees in 2007, primarily from Ecuador and Costa Rica. It had also decided to host around 100 Palestinian refugees from Iraq. In that regard, he reiterated Chile's commitment to pursuing its cooperation with UNHCR and the Executive Committee.

57. Mr. DAHLGREN (Sweden) said that his Government strongly supported the UNHCR reform process as a necessary step that would enable the organization to meet the needs of an increasing number of persons of concern effectively and flexibly. He expressed satisfaction with the decision on outpostting and with the openness demonstrated by the High Commissioner throughout the reform process, since it was crucial for the success of such comprehensive reforms to keep all stakeholders involved, engaged and committed. He also underlined the importance of remaining focused on the Office's core mandate. He urged the non-parties to the 1951 Convention to ratify the Convention and urged the States parties to implement it fully. He welcomed the Dialogue on Protection Challenges initiative and the efforts to reform the process for elaborating the Executive Committee's protection conclusions.

58. The European Union intended to establish a common asylum system by 2010 aimed primarily at guaranteeing international protection to persons in need throughout the European Union. UNHCR partnership was extremely important in that endeavour and he therefore welcomed the Office's comments and proposals on the European Commission's Green Paper on the Future Common European Asylum System.

59. Sweden shared the concern over the humanitarian situation caused by massive displacement in Iraq, and greatly appreciated the efforts of UNHCR to alleviate the situation. He recognized the generosity and solidarity of the Governments in the region, in particular the Governments of the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan, which were hosting very large numbers of persons. Since the massive inflows put serious strain on social services, the economy and the infrastructure of host countries, more needed to be done to share the burden and to enable host countries to continue taking in refugees.

60. On the subject of reform, the improved UNHCR budget situation was very welcome, and he expressed the hope that the reform process would increase predictability and flexibility, keeping shortfalls in income to a minimum. Unmet needs remained, and he therefore encouraged donors to provide predictable, timely and flexible funding, while UNHCR should continue its efforts to raise private funding. Ongoing humanitarian reforms were a good way of improving the overall response to humanitarian needs. He therefore encouraged UNHCR to continue its important work as cluster lead.

61. He urged UNHCR and members of the Executive Committee to increase joint efforts to find durable solutions, in particular to protracted refugee situations. Return was generally the preferred solution, but, in the absence of return options, local integration and resettlement must remain valid options.

62. Mr. PETRITSCH (Austria) commended the High Commissioner for his active role in bringing the humanitarian crisis in Iraq and its consequences to the attention of the international community. The increase in the numbers of refugees and of mixed migratory flows worldwide made the identification of persons in need of protection an ever more challenging task. In that regard, the Dialogue on Protection Challenges was a timely initiative. The High Commissioner's increased attention to displacement due to climate change and environmental degradation was also welcome. Examination of the root causes was of high importance. However, such issues should not divert attention from the protection of refugees.

63. Austria was in the process of ratifying the Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and hoped to deposit the instrument of ratification by the end of 2007. His Government was also closely following the structural and management reforms at UNHCR in the hope that they would improve efficiency and release additional resources for the fulfilment of the Office's mandate. Regarding the decentralization and regionalization process, the adoption of four models for regional structures was an innovative and relevant approach to dealing with situational differences. He supported the proposed budget structure and commended UNHCR for significantly improving its financial situation since 2006.

64. He expressed appreciation for the strong gender mainstreaming approach taken by UNHCR, and welcomed the specific references to the needs of girls in the Executive Committee's conclusions on children at risk. He also welcomed the ongoing United Nations reforms and the active participation of UNHCR therein and requested an initial assessment by UNHCR of their impact on its work, in particular the establishment of the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission. He commended UNHCR for its achievements in the area of refugee assistance and protection over the previous year, in particular the staff who worked relentlessly in the field under extremely difficult circumstances.

65. Ms. MINT ABDELLAH (Observer for Mauritania) said that Mauritania had developed a new vision which marked a break with the past and reflected a firm and real desire to find just and equitable solutions to the human rights violations committed in the past.

66. The Government of Mauritania was working to find a definitive solution to the issue of the Mauritanian refugees who had fled to Senegal and Mali following the events of 1989. An inter-ministerial committee had been set up to oversee the repatriation of the refugees and had consulted widely with all the stakeholders and visited the sites where the Mauritanian refugees

were living. National consultations were planned for the purpose of adopting a joint plan of action for the repatriation of the refugees and implementing a national strategy for their full reintegration. In that context, she thanked UNHCR for its willingness to work together with the Government of Mauritania and called upon the international community to mobilize funding in order to settle the problem of the refugees.

67. Mr. ÜZÜMCÜ (Turkey) said that the recent increase in the overall number of refugees and other populations of interest to UNHCR, particularly in Iraq, presented a great many challenges. As a neighbour of Iraq and a contributor to the UNHCR Iraq Operation, Turkey commended the work done by the Office since the early stages of the crisis and welcomed the efforts of the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan to cope with the influx of Iraqi refugees.

68. He expressed support for the ongoing reforms at UNHCR, and requested timely information on future steps envisaged. In the context of the training strategy review, he emphasized the importance of UNHCR training for national experts, which should be intensified, for example, through the establishment of a training centre.

69. In parallel to its own reorganization, UNHCR was taking part in the broader United Nations reform. Under the cluster approach, it was helping to strengthen the effectiveness of the humanitarian response, and its participation in the “Delivering as One” process was an appropriate way of ensuring that it continued to discharge its international protection duties in a flexible manner.

70. The new Dialogue on Protection Challenges was a welcome initiative, as UNHCR needed new instruments to address current protection challenges. In that context, its 10-Point Plan of Action offered guidance on situations of mixed migration, while best practices could be used to develop additional guidelines for addressing the asylum-migration nexus. Although UNHCR expertise was needed in situations of mixed migration, UNHCR rightly resisted becoming a migration agency. If further success in preventing exploitation of asylum procedures were achieved, the international community and UNHCR would be able to focus on genuine refugee problems.

71. Enhanced inter-agency cooperation was of great importance in meeting new challenges, avoiding duplication and utilizing limited resources as effectively as possible. Reliability and continuity of donor contributions was another important element in multilateral efforts to address refugee problems. The biennial budget and the new budget structure would contribute to the predictability of UNHCR needs and facilitate funding planning.

72. Ms. ROCHA MACINI (Brazil) said the Mexico Plan of Action had helped to enhance protection and find durable solutions for those in need within her region. Latin American and Caribbean countries had a solid humanitarian tradition and their initiatives on refugees were a positive exception in a period characterized by increasingly rigid refugee legislation and growing intolerance, which posed a major challenge to the international humanitarian community in its efforts to protect refugees and asylum-seekers.

73. The principle that asylum was an important component of democratic societies was reflected in Brazil’s legislation and its efforts to integrate refugees from more than 60 different countries and the most diverse political, religious and ethnic groups. The promotion of local

integration and self-reliance represented a particular challenge for developing countries, which needed international assistance in order to ensure sustainable resettlement and sound refugee policies. The Government of Brazil had recently agreed to host a group of 117 Palestinian refugees from Jordan, thus expanding the frontiers of the Solidarity Resettlement programme. Brazil also continued to receive other refugees. Since no quotas had been established for refugees or resettlement, Brazil's National Commission for Refugees examined asylum applications on a case-by-case basis, granting refugees status to those who met the legal criteria. She was grateful to UNHCR for its positive response to a proposal to establish a regional training centre in Brazil to meet capacity-building and training requirements for resettlement in developing countries.

74. Recognition that stateless people existed was a vital first step towards finding a solution to their predicament. In that regard, Brazil had recently taken an important step to prevent statelessness by amending its Constitution to grant Brazilian nationality automatically to children born to a Brazilian father or a Brazilian mother and registered at a consulate.

75. Mr. GUTERRES (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that, in Thailand, he had seen the great efforts made to host refugees from different countries in the region. While there were about 50,000 refugees from Myanmar in camps in Thailand, there were probably closer to 2 million migrants from Myanmar in that country, most of them irregular migrants. The key issue in dealing with displacement and mixed migration was devising a methodology for identifying persons in genuine need. UNHCR was at the disposal of the Government of Thailand to develop such a methodology so that it was transparent and met international requirements.

76. The Global Humanitarian Platform was indeed a key forum for cooperation between ICRC, the Red Crescent societies, NGOs and the United Nations. Some NGOs had a larger budget than UNHCR and efforts should be made to ensure that recruitment by United Nations agencies and NGOs did not create local shortages of expertise; the Global Humanitarian Forum was an important step in that regard.

77. He expressed appreciation to Benin for hosting refugees and for the quality of its asylum system, and called on the international community to support Benin in those efforts. He commended Morocco for its commitment to refugees under difficult conditions and agreed to compile the report which the representative of Morocco had requested. He congratulated Germany on its active work on climate change related to forced displacement and thanked Chile and Brazil for their support for the Mexico Plan of Action and their resettlement work. He agreed with the representative of Sweden that UNHCR must remain a protection agency and applauded Sweden for its record as a humanitarian donor. Sweden provided UNHCR with increasing, early and timely support, and was extremely active on all asylum-related issues. He congratulated Austria for acceding to the 1954 Convention on statelessness and for making meaningful progress on asylum issues. He also praised the approach of Mauritania to repatriation of refugees and congratulated the country on the quality of its reintegration policy. He thanked the representative of Turkey for his valuable comments on the situation of Iraqi refugees.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.