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Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Sixtieth session

Summary record of the 636th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 2 October 2009, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Mr. Dumont (Argentina)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Election of officers (agenda item 12)

1. **Mr. Phuangketkeow** (Thailand) nominated Ms. Millar (Australia) for the office of Chairperson.
2. **Mr. Gooderham** (United Kingdom) seconded the nomination.
3. *Ms. Millar (Australia) was elected Chairperson by acclamation.*
4. **Mr. Mwape** (Zambia), speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, nominated Mr. Badr (Egypt) for the office of Vice-Chairperson.
5. **Mr. Akram** (Pakistan) seconded the nomination.
6. *Mr. Badr (Egypt) was elected Vice-Chairperson by acclamation.*
7. **Ms. Gutierrez** (Costa Rica) nominated Ms. Pitotti (United States) for the office of Rapporteur.
8. **Ms. Birladianu** (Romania) seconded the nomination.
9. *Ms. Pitotti (United States) was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.*
10. **Ms. Millar** (Australia) said that she knew from experience about the consequences of displacement for the lives of the persons concerned and about the tragedies that some of the world's most vulnerable groups suffered as a result of exploitation. She added that, as a host and resettlement country, Australia had been a partner and supporter of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for many years.

Any other business (agenda item 13)

11. **The Chairperson** noted that none of the delegations had asked to speak on the agenda item.

Adoption of the report of the sixtieth session of the Executive Committee (document without symbol, distributed at the meeting) (agenda item 14)

12. **Ms. Birladianu** (Romania) gave a brief outline of the draft report of the sixtieth session. Sections I and II provided an overview of the work performed during the session. Section III contained the draft decisions approved by the Executive Committee. Lastly, annexes I and II contained, respectively, the list of decisions taken by the Standing Committee and the summing up of the general debate provided by the Chairperson earlier that week. The final version of the report would be sent for consideration by the Third Committee of the General Assembly as an addendum to the High Commissioner's annual report.
13. *The draft report of the Executive Committee on the work of its sixtieth session was adopted.*

Closing of the session (agenda item 15)

Remarks by the High Commissioner and by the Chairman of the Executive Committee

14. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that UNHCR appreciated the support it had received in the global needs assessment process. It also acknowledged the concerns expressed about the risks inherent in the needs assessment approach. In order to improve the management of that situation, it was first of all essential

to set initial budget targets that reduced the risk of delay, frustration and injudicious prioritization. The budget targets set for 2010 were more or less in line with global expenditure levels in 2008 and 2009, which would help ensure continuity. Furthermore, UNHCR would be monitoring any changes in needs very closely, so that the initial budget targets could be raised in line with the availability of earmarked funding and a pragmatic approach to priority setting. The prioritization process required an in-depth knowledge of which activities were carried out and which were not, as well as of the consequences of any shortfalls in funding for a given activity. A number of measures had been adopted to that end. Firstly, a new programme support and management division had been created to coordinate the needs-assessment process and the application of UNHCR strategic priorities to the different global projects and programmes, and to provide support to the two Assistant High Commissioners, without losing sight of those strategic priorities and at all times demonstrating sound common sense. Secondly, all operations would be reviewed at fortnightly meetings between the Deputy High Commissioner, the High Commissioner and officers of the UNHCR budget service and finance section, to ensure that transactions were carried out on good terms and that the necessary funds were available. Thirdly, fortnightly meetings between the High Commissioner and each Bureau Director would provide an opportunity to consider each operation and monitor the situation in the field. As an operational model, there was no substitute for knowledge of the situation on the spot and adjustment of activities to match it. Lastly, regular and transparent communication between members of the Executive Committee, host countries, donors, non-governmental organizations and all other partners would be established.

15. He assured member States that UNHCR would begin the consolidation phase of the internal reform process within the next two months, once the last remaining human resource management decisions had been taken. The main aim of that phase would be to enhance UNHCR response capacity and fine-tune the various elements of its structural reorganization in order to adjust it as closely as possible to the reality in the field. The consolidation phase would necessarily imply, at the headquarters level, the implementation of a zero growth policy and an increase in productivity and flexibility, and, at the field level, a drive to find means of strengthening protection capacity, without recourse to outsourcing, that enabled UNHCR to mitigate existing shortcomings and address any new challenges that might arise, in particular the new policy for urban refugees. The support of all partners, including Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, NGOs and host country Governments, remained pivotal in the provision of assistance and services (health care, accommodation, etc.) to beneficiaries.

16. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was committed to furthering the United Nations humanitarian reform process, specifically through the adoption of the cluster approach, as a means to bridge gaps in the humanitarian response to internal displacement situations. To that end, UNHCR had assumed leadership of the coordination, protection, emergency shelter and camp management clusters in situations of conflict-induced internal displacement, while the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Organization for Migration led the emergency shelter and camp management clusters for persons displaced by natural disasters. The division of responsibilities in the case of the protection cluster for persons displaced by natural disasters was less clear-cut. Currently UNHCR, UNICEF and OHCHR took the lead on a case-by-case basis, with relative efficacy, but the modalities of intervention needed to be better defined.

17. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was also fully committed to improving needs assessment and prioritization methodologies, in cooperation with the subsidiary bodies of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee established for that purpose, as well as to strengthening the effectiveness of international action within the framework of the "Delivering as One" initiative, as a means to ensure, in conjunction with

United Nations system partners and all development actors, the sustainability of returns, the resolution of problems encountered by countries hosting large refugee communities, and the restoration of the environmental habitat in former refugee areas. In that regard, it should be emphasized that, while it supported the United Nations integrated missions concept (intervention at the political, security and humanitarian levels), UNHCR nonetheless placed great importance on preserving the autonomy of humanitarian space and the integrity of humanitarian principles.

18. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees would be hosting a dialogue on urban refugees in December that year, at which it hoped to engage all its partners, including individual States, as the bodies primarily responsible for guaranteeing respect for fundamental human rights in the new urban reality, in an in-depth debate. In view of the enormous contribution that individual States, and in particular African nations, had made to supporting voluntary repatriation and developing resettlement and local integration opportunities for remaining refugee groups, and sometimes entire communities, following the dialogue on protracted refugee situations in 2008, he urged member States of the Executive Committee to arrive as soon as possible at a meaningful conclusion that reflected the needs and concerns of all persons in protracted refugee situations.

19. As had been suggested by a number of the delegations, in the course of the year ahead UNHCR would be working, as a matter of priority, to draft a roadmap for application of the cessation clause to Rwandan, Burundi, Angolan and Liberian refugees. The roadmap would not only answer the concerns of countries of origin and reception but also serve as a means to monitor compliance with the protection requirements imposed under the cessation clause.

20. In view of the celebrations to mark the sixtieth anniversary of its creation and the anniversaries of the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, in the very near future UNHCR planned to set up, under the aegis of the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, a committee to lead informal consultations with member States regarding a fitting manner in which to commemorate those milestone events. He was also looking forward to a further meeting with several of the delegations in Kampala, on the occasion of the African Union summit on forced displacement in Africa at which the African Convention on the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa was due to be adopted.

21. In conclusion, he announced that the Nansen Refugee Award for 2009 would go to the late Senator Edward Kennedy for his achievements, over more than 45 years, as an advocate of people who found themselves with no voice and no rights and in recognition of his exceptional contribution to the development of US legislation on refugees and asylum. Effectively utilizing his influence in Congress, he had been the chief sponsor of more than 70 refugee related measures and had been instrumental in codifying international refugee obligations into domestic law. Although deeply saddened by his passing, UNHCR was grateful that it had been able to inform Senator Kennedy of the Nansen Committee's decision in June. The award ceremony would be held on 28 October 2009 in Washington D.C. and would be attended by members of the Senator's family and representatives of UNHCR and the Norwegian Refugee Council.

22. **The Chairperson** paid tribute to UNHCR field staff, many of whom had lost their lives over the course of the year, and praised their courage, their team spirit, their efficiency and their commitment to the protection of refugees. He thanked the member States, representatives of civil society and observers for their contributions to the debate and urged them to work in a spirit of consensus and conciliation in order to bring all major tasks outstanding to a successful conclusion as quickly as possible, including finalization of the draft conclusion on protracted refugee situations.

23. After the customary exchange of courtesies, the Chairperson declared the sixtieth session of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees closed.

The meeting rose at 11.25 a.m.