



# General Assembly

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## Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Sixty-third session

### Summary record of the 665th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 5 October 2012, at 10 a.m.

*Chairperson:* Mr. Knutsson (Sweden)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.*

#### **Election of officers**

1. **Ms. Farani Azevêdo** (Brazil) nominated Ms. Arango Olmos (Colombia) for the office of Chairperson.
2. **Mr. Mulrean** (United States of America) and **Mr. Gallegos Chiriboga** (Ecuador) seconded the nomination.
3. *Ms. Arango Olmos (Colombia) was elected Chairperson by acclamation.*
4. **The Chairperson** said that discussions were ongoing among the Asia-Pacific States, whose turn it was to nominate the Vice-Chairperson. Accordingly, he proposed that the election of the Vice-Chairperson should be deferred for two weeks and the matter referred back to the Asia-Pacific States.
5. *It was so decided.*
6. **Ms. Ighil** (Algeria) nominated Mr. Boukili (Morocco) for the office of Rapporteur.
7. **Ms. Hanlumyuang** (Thailand) seconded the nomination.
8. **Mr. Boukili** (Morocco) was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.

**Adoption of the report of the sixty-third session of the Executive Committee** (document without a symbol, distributed in the meeting room)

9. **Ms. Hanlumyuang** (Rapporteur), introducing the draft report on the sixty-third session, said that sections I and II provided an overview of the session. Section III contained the draft decisions, as negotiated and approved by the Executive Committee members, namely, decisions on: the revised 2012–2013 budget; NGO participation in the work of the Executive Committee; the programme of work of the Standing Committee in 2013; observer participation; and the provisional agenda for the sixty-fourth session. The draft report also contained annexes listing decisions taken by the Standing Committee in 2012 and the Chairperson's summary of the general debate. Once adopted, the report would be transmitted to the Third Committee of the General Assembly as an addendum to the High Commissioner's annual report.
10. *The report of the sixty-third session of the Executive Committee was adopted.*

#### **Closing of the session**

11. **Mr. Guterres** (High Commissioner) said that UNHCR faced several apparent or real dilemmas, many of which had been mentioned by members of the Executive Committee at the sixty-third session. Contrary to popular belief, UNHCR did not have to choose between strengthening its emergency response and investing in solutions for protracted situations. It did, however, have to strike the right balance between the two, bearing in mind that solutions could be postponed in protracted situations, but not in emergencies. To achieve that balance, development partners as well as humanitarians needed to be involved in the solutions. Hence, the need for the Transitional Solutions Initiative, in which member States also had a critical role to play by helping humanitarian and development actors to work together in the early stages of refugee crises and by guaranteeing support for host communities and solutions for refugees. UNHCR both had to act in those early stages and to remain alert to solutions which required education and vocational training to be provided as early as possible in order to avoid creating dependency.

12. In emergency situations, another apparent dilemma was making the choice between lifesaving and core protection activities. Again, the only solution was to do both. Stopping young people from being recruited by armed groups, guaranteeing the civilian and humanitarian character of asylum, or preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence were as important as providing water and medicine. Where resources were scarce, they had to be created; choosing between saving lives and protecting people was inconceivable.

13. Many delegations had mentioned the dilemma of whether to give priority to refugees, IDPs or returnees. UNHCR had a clear mandate to assist refugees when a State was unable to respond fully to a refugee situation. Where possible, UNHCR cooperated with States to coordinate refugee responses, but, if all else failed, it provided the last resort response.

14. States had primary responsibility for dealing with internal displacement, while UNHCR played its role within the cluster approach. However, the paramount criterion when deciding how to allocate resources and deliver to people of concern to UNHCR was that refugees, returnees and IDPs were all human beings with the same dignity.

15. UNHCR sometimes faced complex dilemmas when trying both to provide protection and assistance in highly insecure environments and to ensure the security of staff. While staff security always took priority, it was impossible to guarantee against risks. To help create the conditions in which staff could remain in conflict situations, UNHCR adhered to the principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence and reached out to the parties to explain that its role had nothing to do with the causes of the conflict. That said, situations in which humanitarian workers were viewed as legitimate targets were extremely difficult to manage and dramatic choices were sometimes unavoidable.

16. Preserving the autonomy of humanitarian space posed a dilemma in some integrated missions and in other forms of civilian-military cooperation. In peacekeeping operations where there was no peace to keep and the peacekeepers became parties to the conflict, the United Nations should not adopt the formula of an integrated mission. However, if that formula was chosen, it should be applied only at the level of strategic discussions and consultations. UNHCR had faced that dilemma in a number of crises around the world; when in doubt, the preservation of humanitarian space should remain the paramount consideration.

17. A further dilemma for UNHCR was that of maintaining a lean central structure with strong decentralized field operations and clear strategic direction and oversight. Organizations were effective only if they had sufficient capacity in the field and if they provided support as close as possible to the point of delivery. UNHCR had thus decentralized a number of functions and strengthened capacity at headquarters in oversight, programme control, financial management, protection and a number of technical areas. Those steps were a prerequisite for choosing the right partners, monitoring their activities and creating the best possible synergies. Establishing a lean central structure could free up money for UNHCR protection activities.

18. Maintaining the integrity of the UNHCR mandate while integrating with inter-agency coordination mechanisms was another dilemma that UNHCR sometimes faced. The UNHCR mandate was extremely clear, but it could not be accomplished by the organization alone. Partnerships within United Nations system and the humanitarian community were needed and were successful if mechanisms were in place for coordination, information sharing and the strategic involvement of all concerned.

19. Those dilemmas should be addressed based on several guiding principles. The first was that the needs, rights and dignity of persons of concern must be at the heart of all decisions. The second was the importance of partnerships. Third, all decisions should be

taken within a framework of accountability to the people UNHCR cared for, its partners and member States. However, staff would still find themselves in situations that were so complex that no one model could provide an optimal solution. They would need to draw on their own resources and a thorough knowledge of the situation to be able to find solutions.

20. *After the customary exchange of courtesies, **the Chairperson** declared the sixty-third session of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees closed.*

*The meeting rose at 11 a.m.*