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## Third Committee

### Summary record of the 32nd meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 7 November 2012, at 10 a.m.

*Chair:* Mr. Mac-Donald (Chair) ..... (Suriname)

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Agenda item 62: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions

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

**Agenda item 62: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions** (A/67/12, A/67/12/Add.1 and A/67/323)

1. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that a balance had to be found between ensuring a timely and effective emergency response to new crises and investing in solutions for the millions of people living in protracted exile around the world. The fact that media and political attention had shifted elsewhere did not mean that those living in protracted despair should be abandoned. The investment by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in reinforcing emergency preparedness and response capability was now paying dividends. The concept of corporate responsibility for emergencies had been embedded throughout the Organization; internal and external rosters had been strengthened; the emergency response capacity of national partners had been improved; and the supply service had been professionalized.

2. Solutions to protracted displacement ultimately lay in the political arena, outside the scope of the mandate of UNHCR. However, there was much humanitarian actors could do to advance solutions, including adopting conflict-sensitive approaches; lobbying to highlight the humanitarian consequences of conflict escalation; investing promptly in education and self-reliance; and using cash and voucher-based support mechanisms that empowered displaced persons to determine and address their own priorities. Early investment was also needed to help refugees retain and reinforce their social and economic capital and opportunities for voluntary repatriations should be seized. Efforts to put displacement firmly on the development agenda were being pursued, including through the Transitional Solutions Initiative, which was being piloted with the United Nations Development Programme in Colombia and eastern Sudan. UNHCR was also working closely with other stakeholders to implement the Policy Committee's recent decision on durable solutions.

3. The report detailed various strategies that had been developed to resolve some of the world's most protracted refugee situations, including resettlement,

and he thanked the 26 States, led by the United States, Australia and Canada, who continued to accept refugees for resettlement. It would be a tragic mistake to allow the collective commitment to solutions to protracted refugee situations to lose momentum, as early investment in those solutions reduced the human and financial costs in the long run for both the displaced persons and the host communities. As host countries made significant, long-term contributions that were often less visible than other forms of assistance, he was committed to finding ways to recognize them in a tangible manner. Upholding and sustaining the right to asylum required strong, timely and sustained international solidarity and burden-sharing, in the form of financial, technological and political support, and enhanced resettlement programmes.

4. The crises currently unfolding in the Syrian Arab Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan and South Sudan had radically tested the capacity of UNHCR to deliver on its mandate in increasingly difficult environments. In addition to efforts to assist and protect internally displaced persons within those countries, UNHCR was also leading the international refugee response in the 11 countries that surrounded them. Programme budgets were increasingly stretched, owing to the global financial crisis; he therefore thanked all donors for their significant and consistent support. Fortunately, UNHCR had ended 2011 in a very solid financial position and the projected level of voluntary contributions for 2012 in dollar terms was similar to that of 2011. However, the significant increase in refugee emergencies in 2012, as opposed to the humanitarian crises caused by natural disasters of recent years, had put enormous pressure on the human and financial resources of UNHCR. Total expenditure for 2012 was expected to exceed that of 2011, while resources had remained the same. There was therefore deep concern about the capacity of UNHCR to cope with existing operations while responding to new emergencies in 2013, as all financial resources were expected to be exhausted by the end of 2012. While he was aware of the pressures on humanitarian aid budgets, he stressed that curtailing such assistance would be more costly in the long run and appealed to all donors for additional support.

5. Over the course of 2012 a number of measures had been taken at UNHCR Headquarters, resulting in

some \$60 million in additional savings, which had been diverted to new emergencies. Investment in life-saving services and key protection priorities had not been affected and commitments to government and non-governmental partners had been maintained. A robust review had also been carried out of procurement plans and controls placed on stock replenishment. In 2013, the workforce would be reduced slightly and cost-saving measures would continue to be applied. The multi-year investment in reforms to improve the organizational performance, efficiency and delivery of UNHCR had resulted in a more streamlined agency, with a sharper focus on strategic direction, accountability and control and strengthened operational capacity in the field. Measures were now being introduced to improve financial management and programme oversight capability. The value of unearmarked funding had also become increasingly apparent; they allowed compelling protection needs, which might otherwise not have been met, to be prioritized and for a swift response to new emergencies. In 2011, the largest proportion of unearmarked funds had been spent in Africa, with only 13 per cent spent on Headquarters' costs.

6. Further to the landmark Intergovernmental Event held in December 2011 on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the fiftieth anniversary of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, a number of States, led by Norway and Switzerland, had undertaken to initiate a global debate on how to address protection gaps in relation to cross-border displacement linked to sudden-onset disasters, including those triggered by climate change. In addition to the 92 countries that had made pledges in relation to refugees and asylum-seekers and the 22 on protection of internally displaced persons, 61 had made pledges in relation to statelessness, which had resulted in a number of accessions to the relevant Conventions in 2012. Decisive action was needed if statelessness was to be resolved within the next decade.

7. The report also detailed the different meetings UNHCR had held and attended. The Dialogue on Protection Challenges in December 2012 would focus on Faith and Protection. In 2013, UNHCR would continue to work with States to address critical protection gaps. In that connection, updated guidelines had been issued on the detention of asylum seekers and refugees, and a consultation process on the concept of

temporary protection was planned. In order to reinforce the protection capacity and delivery of UNHCR, the number of staff positions devoted to protection had increased by 70 per cent worldwide since 2005, and protection staff now constituted 26 per cent of the workforce, as opposed to 19 per cent seven years ago. Key protection priorities included the dissemination of an updated strategy on preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence; the new child protection framework; a new five-year education strategy; and implementing the urban refugee policy.

8. In addition to developing strategic partnerships with a broad range of stakeholders, UNHCR was actively engaged in the development of the Transformative Agenda and committed to assuming its responsibilities under the cluster approach in support of internally displaced populations. More unearmarked funding had been mobilized for operations in that regard in 2012, despite the growing number of refugee emergencies. While primary responsibility for internally displaced populations lay with States, UNHCR was exploring opportunities for its partners to play a stronger and more predictable role in planning, coordinating and delivering assistance.

9. UNHCR would also continue to invest in robust measures to allow its staff to work in safety. Two members of staff had been killed in 2012, one in the Syrian Arab Republic and one in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Aid workers were increasingly exposed to violence, in part as a result of the criminal motives behind conflicts and radical, foreign-sponsored ideologies entwined with political aspirations. UNHCR would therefore continue to invest in staff training as well as protective hardware and equipment. The best way to ensure staff safety was to cultivate positive relationships with the local communities and to adhere strictly to the humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence.

10. The current proliferation of crises was partly the result of a series of inter-connected global trends, namely accelerated demographic, climatic, social and economic changes, incomplete democratization processes, failure to address marginalization and inequality, and competition for scarce resources, as well as the international community's limited capacity to prevent and resolve conflicts in a timely manner. The lack of clear international power relations had led new crises to multiply and chronic situations to persist, with increasingly dramatic humanitarian consequences.

Gaps in the collective capacity to generate sustainable political solutions to such crises meant the humanitarian action was needed more than ever. He therefore urged all Member States to renew their commitment to addressing the plight of all displaced persons.

11. **Mr. Tanin** (Afghanistan) said that his Government fully supported the mandate of UNHCR to find a comprehensive solution to protracted refugee situations. His country had one of the world's most complex and protracted refugee situations, as many Afghans had fled the violence of the last decades, taking refuge in neighbouring countries, Europe, Asia and beyond. They deserved the attention and protection of the international community, particularly as many of them had been the victims of racist and xenophobic attacks.

12. Thanks to the assistance of UNHCR and countries in the region, nearly 6 million Afghans had returned home through voluntary repatriation programmes, representing nearly 25 per cent of the country's total population. Such a substantial population increase in such a short time had placed a great deal of pressure on his country's absorption capacity. In addition, the scope of humanitarian assistance had been restricted by the deteriorating security situation over the last four years. However, despite the difficult conditions, his Government, together with UNHCR, had built some 220,000 homes for the most vulnerable returnees. More than 10,000 water points had been constructed and cash grants given to some 4.6 million returnees. Nevertheless, much remained to be done before the 3 million refugees still living in the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan could return to their homeland.

13. Effective and sustainable reintegration required socioeconomic development and employment opportunities, particularly in rural areas. Around 60 per cent of all returnees had encountered reintegration difficulties, including lack of land, shelter, safe drinking water and other basic services, such as health care and education. The scale and complexity of the challenges ahead, coupled with a sense of refugee and asylum fatigue in the host countries, would require long-term engagement from the international community. The International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries, held in May 2012, had resulted in guidelines for long-term support that would

enhance the voluntary return of Afghan refugees, with a focus on community-based development within the country, which had also received support during the recent Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan.

14. **Mr. Zheglov** (Russian Federation) said that his country highly valued its partnership with UNHCR, which had recently marked its twentieth anniversary. An important milestone in that relationship had been the 2011 meeting between the High Commissioner for Refugees and the Russian Federation President, which had positively assessed the high level of cooperation between the two sides. His country would continue to provide financial support to UNHCR totalling \$2 million annually.

15. His country ascribed great importance to the sixtieth anniversary celebrations in 2011 of the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the fiftieth anniversary of the Convention of the Reduction of Statelessness, in which it had actively participated, and welcomed the consensus reached at the ministerial level in the relevant communiqué. It was important that the document reflected the support of the international community for the work of UNHCR, and that it called for enhancing cooperation with respect to the protection of refugees and stateless persons. It likewise welcomed the reforms undertaken by UNHCR aimed at improving budgetary efficiency and providing assistance to greater numbers of people.

16. It was imperative that the humanitarian and non-politicized character of the work of UNHCR should be preserved, in accordance with its Charter, and that cooperation with interested countries should be enhanced in order to strengthen their national systems and initiatives for protecting refugees. Such cooperation should be constructive and should eschew any interference by UNHCR in the internal affairs of sovereign Governments.

17. **Ms. Nemroff** (United States of America) said that her delegation commended the work of UNHCR, which took place in increasingly complex and dangerous environments, and extended its condolences to the families of UNHCR staff who had died in service. She took note of the critical work performed by UNHCR and Member States in Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Mali, while carrying out operations in many other protracted situations. Humanitarian crises were often of such a magnitude that no one Government or agency could successfully meet the aid and protection

challenges alone; the efforts of UNHCR to enhance its cooperation with a wide range of partners were therefore to be commended.

18. She welcomed the fact that the report raised the issue of sexual and gender-based violence, which was a major concern, and the dissemination of an updated strategy on the matter. The international community must find a comprehensive solution that included greater awareness and education, stricter law enforcement, the promotion of gender equality and women's rights, and an enhanced protection presence. UNHCR should constantly evaluate its capabilities and performance, including strengthening its human resources policy, in order to fulfil its mandate. In that connection, she asked for details of efforts by UNHCR to enhance leadership, coordination and accountability as part of the Transformative Agenda, and what steps UNHCR might take to ensure that its sufficient resources to meet the growing and ever more costly humanitarian needs.

19. **Ms. Andersen** (Norway) said that the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic continued to be a matter of grave concern. While she welcomed the efforts of UNHCR, the host countries and the wider humanitarian community to provide support and assistance to those displaced by the conflict, more donations would be needed to ensure that those people had the necessary shelter, supplies and psychological support, particularly with winter on the way. Humanitarian efforts should be coordinated and delivered as one; partnerships were the only way to ensure that all needs were met comprehensively. In that connection, she asked what the international community could do to support host countries and to help to uphold key humanitarian principles in protracted emergency situations.

20. **Ms. Alsaleh** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that at a 5 November 2012 meeting in Damascus, both the regional Humanitarian Affairs Coordinator and the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Syria had confirmed that the Syrian Government was providing all necessary facilities to humanitarian workers and allowing them to travel freely around the country. The humanitarian organizations that took part in that meeting had agreed that the main obstacle to implementation of the response plan was insufficient funding.

21. She wished to hear what the High Commissioner thought of the economic sanctions being imposed on Syria by the United States of America, the European Union, and certain other parties. The sanctions were having a clear negative impact on conditions among refugees in Syria, whose plight was purportedly a matter of concern to those parties. Meanwhile Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries were being exploited for political purposes, and some refugee camps had been turned into terrorist training bases. She asked what measures the High Commissioner had taken to protect Syrian refugees against abuses, and urged him to hold accountable those States that provided shelter and weapons to the armed groups that were undermining stability in Syria and creating an artificial humanitarian crisis.

22. **Mr. Maina** (Kenya) said that his Government was gravely concerned about the situation of the 650,000 refugees in the Dadaab refugee camp. As Somalia now had a stable government and life in that country was returning to normal, Somali refugees had an historic opportunity to contribute to rebuilding their country. He called on UNHCR and the international community to find a lasting solution to the situation of those refugees, as the protracted situation had placed a great deal of strain upon the host communities and his Government had invested heavily in efforts to help to stabilize Somalia. He asked what action UNHCR had taken towards encouraging the voluntary repatriation of Somali refugees.

23. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that he was hopeful that the efforts of the Afghan Government, together with the Governments of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan, would allow more Afghan refugees to return to their homeland, by ensuring that the 48 sites selected for returnees had better capacity to welcome them and offer them a sustainable future. UNHCR remained committed to working with the Afghan authorities and other partners to ensure the success of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees. UNHCR would also continue to work with the Governments of the host countries to ensure that Afghan refugees were afforded the necessary protection and assistance, while at the same time encouraging voluntary repatriations. Afghans had become a global refugee population, and unfortunately, some of them had fallen into the hands of criminal gangs of human traffickers. UNHCR was actively engaged in dialogue with governments around

the world to ensure that refugees were effectively protected from such gangs and that asylum claims were given due consideration. He applauded the remarkable resilience of the Afghan people who were rebuilding their lives and their country.

24. He thanked the Russian Federal Migration Service, for its cooperation, particularly with regard to the improvements made to the asylum system and managing broader migration flows. UNHCR was firmly committed to abiding by the principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence. Similarly, the support of the United States was essential, given that it operated the largest resettlement programme and its increased financial support for UNHCR in 2012 had helped the Office to meet all requests for assistance. Efforts to combat gender-based violence were both a personal and a corporate priority. Despite the financial constraints, it was important that such commitments were maintained. In that regard, UNHCR had increased its capacity to respond to emergency situations, including an improved human resources policy and inter-agency coordination and information sharing, and was very actively engaged in the Transformative Agenda in the context of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. Donors would be more likely to contribute resources if UNHCR could show results and demonstrate that it provided value for money. In the light of the global economic crisis, UNHCR would continue to invest in a results-based approach in an effort to secure funding.

25. In line with the Transformative Agenda, 52 agencies, coordinated by UNHCR, had worked together to launch two appeals for Syrian refugees and displaced persons. A review of contingency planning and a revised request for assistance would be presented to the international community in a few weeks' time. All the agencies involved were working together to provide basic support and assistance to all Syrian refugees during the winter months. He also acknowledged the long-standing cooperation between UNHCR and the Syrian Government, which had provided refuge for some 500,000 Palestinian refugees and 1 million Iraqis. Although many Iraqis had now returned to their homeland, UNHCR continued to work with the Syrian authorities to support others, even in the current, extremely difficult circumstances. The mandate of UNHCR expressly prohibited the agency from entering into the political dimensions of crises; its role was to support internally or externally displaced

persons. However, UNHCR was strongly committed to upholding the civilian and humanitarian nature of asylum and did not work with or solicit the support of armed groups.

26. Lastly, he paid tribute to the Kenyan Government that had welcomed refugees from many countries, not just Somalia. During his recent trip to Kenya he had been working with the authorities to fine-tune a voluntary repatriation programme for Somali refugees. Steps were being taken to identify areas where Somali returnees could be housed and, once all the conditions for the feasible and sustainable repatriation of refugees had been met, the programme would be launched.

27. **Mr. Jiddou** (Mauritania) noted that the report referred to some 14,000 Mauritanian refugees who had chosen to remain in Senegal. He recalled that the refugee camps on the Mauritanian-Senegalese border had been closed in March 2012, in the presence of the High Commissioner and the President of Mauritania. The situation was therefore considered resolved. Mauritanian refugees had now been reintegrated in his country and victims of the violence of 1990 had been provided with land and compensation.

28. **Ms. Mballa Eyenga** (Cameroon) said that her delegation supported the mandate of UNHCR and thanked the field staff, without whom that mandate could not be implemented. Ultimately, however, responsibility for assisting refugees should be shared between the international community and the host country. She asked whether there was still room for improvement in the internal procedures of UNHCR after six years of reforms and what its priorities would be in the future. She noted that over 1,000 complaints had been received by the Inspector General's Office within UNHCR in the past year and asked what reasons lay behind that high number and what steps had been taken to remedy underlying issues.

29. **Mr. Al Bayati** (Iraq) said that no UNHCR report since 2003 had placed the number of Iraqi refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic at 1 million. As the security situation had continued to improve in his country, increasing numbers of Iraqi refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic and the Islamic Republic of Iran were returning home. The number of Iraqi refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic was now around 200,000.

30. **Mr. Kebret** (Ethiopia) said that his Government appreciated the support and cooperation of UNHCR to assist the refugees in the region. His country was now

host to many refugees from neighbouring States. His Government stood ready to continue to work with UNHCR in the future.

31. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that while a voluntary repatriation programme for Mauritanian refugees had been completed, some people had chosen to remain in Senegal and would be integrated into the local population. The situation of Iraqi refugees had also improved, with far fewer people now relying on assistance from UNHCR. Indeed, Iraq was now a host country for Syrian refugees. The discrepancy in the numbers arose from the difference between the official statistics of the host country and those given in UNHCR reports, which focused on those refugees who were supported by UNHCR programmes. He thanked the representative of Cameroon for her words of support, but the positive actions taken by her Government to help many refugees and support the work of UNHCR spoke much louder than words. He also highlighted the exemplary cooperation and generosity of the Ethiopian people, civil society and Government, which through its open border policy, pro-active assistance programmes and dynamic civil society had helped many refugees from neighbouring countries.

32. Lastly, turning to the question of reform, the number of staff working at UNHCR Headquarters had been reduced to 700 in one single building, thereby reducing structural costs to a minimum. Those savings had been used to provide additional funding to work in the field and to establish a logistics centre in Amman, Jordan. The main concern now was to improve accountability, programme and financial controls and inter-agency cooperation and information exchange.

33. **Ms. Malenga** (Democratic Republic of the Congo), speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), said that SADC was concerned that the prevailing insecurity and renewed conflicts in Africa had not only uprooted millions of people, but had also prevented displaced populations from returning and from receiving sufficient protection and assistance. In addition to the United Nations treaties concerning refugees, the Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa of the Organization of African Unity and other regional instruments provided protection for those vulnerable populations. In the light of the burden borne by African States that hosted

refugees and the impact of refugee camps and settlements on local populations, she urged the international community to continue to fund programmes to assist refugees and internally displaced persons.

34. Speaking in her national capacity, she said that although the civil war in her country had formally ended, continued fighting in the east had produced new refugee flows. The deteriorating security situation had led 2.4 million people to flee the region, some 335,000 of whom had already been displaced. Internal displacement, together with rapid urbanization, presented a major challenge, with social protection implications.

35. Her country also hosted some 208,500 refugees and asylum seekers, 50 per cent of whom were from Angola. Of the 20,000 Angolan refugees who had indicated that they would be willing to return to their country, 7,000 had been repatriated as part of the UNHCR programme. For those that remained, the Refugee Act of 2002 and the 2006 Constitution granted refugees and asylum seekers the same rights, with the exception of political rights, as those accorded to nationals of the host country.

36. **Mr. Vrailas** (Observer for the European Union), speaking also on behalf of the acceding country Croatia; the candidate countries Iceland, Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; the stabilization and association process and candidate country Bosnia and Herzegovina; and, in addition, Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, said that the European Union and its member States would continue to advocate for greater respect for international humanitarian law, the security of humanitarian workers and their unimpeded access to refugees, stateless persons and the internally displaced, whose numbers remained alarmingly high. New simultaneous emergencies were testing UNHCR to the limit and solutions had not been achieved for millions of refugees and internally displaced persons in protracted situations. In too many instances, the principle of non-refoulement was not respected and many displaced and stateless persons lived in extreme poverty without access to basic rights and services and under the threat of violence. More must be done to resolve those problems.

37. The European Union firmly supported the ambitious internal reform within UNHCR, including

the Transformative Agenda, and welcomed its new child protection framework, the updated strategy on sexual and gender-based violence and the new education strategy. Promoting access to education and ending sexual and gender-based violence were constant priorities for the European Union and should be the centrepiece of all humanitarian operations, which should focus on displaced women and children in particular, since they accounted for 80 per cent of the global displaced population.

38. The European Union was committed to developing a common asylum policy and would show continued solidarity with third countries by investing in their capacity to deal with protracted refugee situations. Resettlement was an important tool in providing durable solutions for refugees worldwide, together with voluntary return and local integration, and the European Union's resettlement programme was designed to strengthen cooperation for the resettlement of refugees in Europe. The European Union was doing its utmost to provide UNHCR with the necessary resources to meet the needs of refugees. However, it encouraged UNHCR to continue its efforts to make more efficient use of resources, enhance accountability and oversight, and establish an organization-wide risk management framework. It also urged UNHCR to broaden its donor base and increase private-sector fundraising.

39. **Mr. Sparber** (Liechtenstein) said that the work of UNHCR was indispensable in assisting refugees, returnees and displaced persons, and the international community must urgently tackle the humanitarian, legal and political dimensions of displacement. Comprehensive strategies were needed to address the root causes of climate-induced displacement and to provide a more systematic response in the form of early warning mechanisms, strengthened resilience and capacity building in emergency response. The inclusion of displaced persons in decision-making mechanisms was essential to ensure sustainable, long-term solutions.

40. With regard to conflict-induced displacement, his country was deeply concerned at the prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence and other human rights abuses affecting displaced women and girls in particular, and encouraged the High Commissioner to continue focusing on that issue. Ending all forms of violence against women remained a priority for Liechtenstein, since those violations of the

fundamental rights and freedoms of women and girls had a severe long-term impact on their physical and mental health and constituted a major challenge for development. Targeted projects were needed to stamp out violations and ensure that women had access to legal advice and representation, and appropriate redress.

41. Liechtenstein was concerned that an estimated 12 million people were stateless and no significant progress had been made in identifying such persons since 2010. Given that stateless persons were particularly vulnerable to violations of fundamental rights and freedoms, Liechtenstein called on Member States to ratify the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, and to actively assist in developing more comprehensive statistics on statelessness as a first step to a more systematic response to that human rights and humanitarian situation.

42. **Ms. Niang** (Senegal) said that in view of the numerous crises unfolding around the world and the record numbers of refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless individuals, it was more important than ever that the provisions of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its Protocol were respected and violations of the principle of non-refoulement were stamped out. Senegal was concerned that some countries had accepted the "safe third country" concept as a basis for removal without necessary protection safeguards and called for a strengthening of the resources of UNHCR and its international partners to tackle recurrent sexual violence against displaced women and girls and to protect refugees at sea.

43. Senegal welcomed the steps taken by Governments to grant nationality to stateless persons living on their soil, but urged the international community to do more to prevent new cases of statelessness from arising as a result of State successions. Efforts should focus on warding off threats to international peace and security and promoting a rights-based approach.

44. Senegal welcomed the inclusion of the adoption of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa in the Report of the Secretary-General on assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa (A/67/323) given that the African continent hosted a



quarter of the global refugee population. As the only legally binding regional instrument, the Convention was designed to tackle the root causes of displacement, including human rights violations, natural or man-made disasters and development projects. Lastly, given the magnitude of the problem of refugees, statelessness and displacement, Member States should improve their legal and institutional mechanisms to provide protection for those people, and provide assistance to countries in transition to ensure sustainable solutions.

45. **Mr. Nofukuka** (South Africa) said that his Government had adopted a rights-based approach to protecting and promoting the fundamental freedoms of refugees. In his country, refugees and asylum seekers enjoyed freedom of movement and were allowed to work, study and access basic services while their applications were being processed. As part of its firm commitment to protecting refugees, South Africa would become a party to the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness as soon as its internal consultative processes had been completed.

46. Given the magnitude and number of emergencies in Africa, donors and Member States should contribute greater resources to minimize the root causes of protracted refugee situations in that part of the world. At the regional level, South Africa was actively involved in efforts to harmonize the legislative frameworks of the SADC countries and to enhance their refugee protection systems and capacities to improve management of irregular migration.

47. In developing countries competition between refugees and locals for access to basic services sometimes created tension, which made voluntary repatriation to the country of origin the preferred option. However, local integration was also possible with the support of the international community and international financial institutions. South Africa was particularly concerned about the vulnerability of displaced women and girls to sexual and gender-based violence and welcomed the measures implemented by UNHCR to help those groups. Lastly, South Africa condemned the attacks on humanitarian actors and expressed its condolences to the families of the dedicated officials who had lost the lives while on official duty.

48. **Ms. Heptullah** (India) said that the international community should focus on creating the necessary

conditions for the voluntary return of refugees and pay particular attention to the problems of developing countries, since they were the main countries of origin and countries of asylum. Given the limited resources of developing countries, greater international solidarity and burden sharing were paramount.

49. India commended UNCHR for its work in dealing with emergency situations, but urged it to ensure that its core mandate of providing international protection and assistance for refugees was not compromised. It also called on UNHCR to adhere to the principle that its involvement in emergency situations required the full cooperation of the States concerned, and to ensure that its engagement included an exit strategy to enable the State mechanisms to resume their core functions and responsibilities towards the people.

50. Protracted refugee situations and the rise in the number of people seeking refuge and protection remained a source of concern to India, and it urged the international community to ensure that non-State actors did not prevent humanitarian assistance from reaching the victims of conflict. With regard to mixed migration flows, a clear distinction should be drawn between refugees and economic migrants in order to better address the protection needs of refugees, and international migration should be promoted since migrants added value to both the destination and sending States.

51. National authorities were primarily responsible for protecting internally displaced persons, and UNHCR should provide complementary assistance only with the agreement of those authorities. In the absence of national authority protection, UNHCR should take action in accordance with its mandate and after due consideration of all the implications. In view of the limited scope of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, host States should provide on-the-ground protection and hospitality for refugees. India had been a major refugee-hosting country for thousands of years and would continue to provide protection for refugees under its laws.

52. **Mr. Zhang** Guixuan (China) said that the international community must address the root causes of the refugee problem, uphold the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and reduce the number of refugees and internally displaced persons by resolving disputes through peaceful negotiations. Concrete steps should be taken to help developing

countries achieve the Millennium Development Goals, and Member States should work together to find sustainable solutions to the refugee problem in accordance with the principle of international solidarity and burden sharing, and should scale up assistance to the Asian and African developing countries, which hosted large numbers of refugees.

53. China urged UNHCR to deepen its internal reforms, ensure rational distribution and use of its resources and strengthen its emergency response capacities. It also called for increased assistance for developing countries in building their capacities for protecting refugees, as well as greater efforts to prevent the politicization and abuse of refugee protection mechanisms. Practical measures were also needed to improve the geographical representation of UNCHR staff and strengthen their protection.

54. China was actively cooperating with UNHCR to protect refugees and was working to promote its domestic refugee legislation. It stood ready to join forces with other countries to eliminate the root causes of the refugee problem and build lasting peace and prosperity worldwide.

55. **Mr. Sinhaseni** (Thailand) said that his country was fully committed to working with UNHCR and other humanitarian partners to assist those in need both in Thailand and elsewhere. To that end, it had issued over 5,000 birth certificates for children born of displaced persons in temporary shelters to reduce their vulnerability to statelessness, and was working closely with UNHCR and resettlement countries to accelerate resettlement from Thailand.

56. His Government had no time frame for the voluntary return of the 140,000 displaced persons living in the nine temporary shelters on Thai soil, and was aware that the necessary conditions needed to be created on both sides of the border to ensure the sustainability of their eventual return. The safety and willingness of the displaced persons were paramount and Thailand supported UNHCR in coordinating consultations with all stakeholders. In the meantime, the Government was striving to improve the provision of education and vocational training programmes in the temporary shelters, and provide health-care services and enhanced protection for women and children.

57. Thailand supported the constructive involvement of UNHCR in global and regional consultative processes and was coordinating regional efforts to stem

the flow of smuggled and trafficked migrants and dismantle criminal syndicates through the Regional Support Office of the Bali Process in Bangkok. The root causes of irregular migration must be tackled through a comprehensive approach focusing on such issues as poverty alleviation, job creation, national reconciliation and peacebuilding.

58. **Mr. Zheglov** (Russian Federation) said that his country considered the work of UNHCR to be an important component of international efforts to maintain peace, security and stability, and it stressed the importance of further coordinating the activities of humanitarian organizations and agencies in crisis situations.

59. In that context, it assessed positively the work of international organizations in providing humanitarian assistance in Syria. Humanitarian organizations and entities should be granted full access to Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries in order to properly evaluate the situation and to provide needed relief. It was inadmissible to violate the unarmed character of refugee camps.

60. His country was actively cooperating with Syria in providing humanitarian assistance, both bilaterally and through international organizations, and many millions of dollars had been contributed to humanitarian programmes, including direct humanitarian assistance. It had voluntarily assumed additional responsibilities to protect refugees and reduce statelessness, in keeping with the relevant initiative of UNHCR in December 2011. First and foremost, the realization of those responsibilities had involved the adoption in June 2012 of a new Government strategy with respect to migration policies, which included the implementation of legislative reforms to improve procedures for granting refugee status, cooperating on the voluntary return of refugees, facilitating their social and cultural integration, and elaborating assistance programmes.

61. In addition, a number of temporary relocation centres had been opened to accommodate those seeking refugee status, and the system used to document them had been modernized, including through the provision of electronic travel documents valid for five years. At the same time, refugee status no longer had an expiration date.

62. There had been a sustained upward trend over the past several years in the number of people seeking

refugee status in his country, with some 13,000 people from 89 countries petitioning between 2007 and 2012. Of those, 6500 had been granted asylum, with 1000 receiving refugee status and 5500 gaining temporary asylum. Measures to integrate refugees into society were ongoing, and those receiving refugee status were eligible to apply for citizenship within a year.

63. His country welcomed the work of UNHCR on eliminating statelessness. Regrettably, the problem had not diminished in intensity, especially in countries where hundreds of thousands had been deprived of citizenship for over a decade. That was especially true in certain European countries where so-called stateless persons had been denied their civil, political, social and economic rights, and his Government therefore called on the High Commissioner to renew efforts to implement a concrete solution to the problem.

64. **Mr. Hisajima** (Japan) said that his country appreciated the efforts to reform UNHCR and the cost reductions already achieved. Promoting human security was a major pillar of his country's foreign policy and it therefore welcomed the adoption of General Assembly resolution 66/290 on human security. Japan was committed to resolving the Afghan refugee issue and recognized that humanitarian assistance and development assistance were linked, as demonstrated at the Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan held in 2012. To assist refugees from Myanmar, Japan had renewed its pilot resettlement programme launched in 2010 in cooperation with UNHCR to host Myanmar refugees from the Mae La camp in Thailand, and had increased the number of refugee camps from one to three.

65. Through the Tokyo International Conference on African Development, Japan was leading international discussions on African development and working to consolidate peace and stability in Africa as a basis for sustainable development, which would be the focus of the fifth Conference in 2013. Although armed conflict and political turmoil had been overcome in many cases, Japan was concerned at the high number of refugees and internally displaced persons in Africa, and would continue its cooperation with UNHCR to provide seamless assistance to countries in the aftermath of conflict.

66. His country strongly supported the Transformative Agenda and urged UNHCR to continue its efforts to strengthen its leadership, promote effective coordination and enhance accountability. UNHCR should also build

on its partnerships with other United Nations agencies to find durable solutions to protracted crises.

67. **Mr. Selim** (Egypt) said that despite the ongoing international economic and financial crisis and the energy crisis, Egypt was confident that Member States would provide UNHCR with adequate resources to carry out its mandate and pay particular attention to protracted refugee situations in developing countries. The international community had the necessary tools — including mediation, the theme of the sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly — to mitigate the refugee phenomenon, and Egypt called on the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Peacebuilding Commission to consolidate their efforts to that end. Member States had an obligation under international law to ensure that global efforts to protect and assist refugees were successful, and Egypt urged all its neighbouring countries to respect the principle of non-refoulement when dealing with illegal migrants and refugees. The international community should share the burden and responsibility for protecting and supporting refugees, accepting them for resettlement and facilitating voluntary repatriation, and should help the Governments of countries emerging from conflict to rebuild their institutional capacities and their ability to provide basic services.

68. Egypt had spared neither effort nor expense to care for the refugees and displaced persons on its soil, and was currently hosting thousands of Syrian, Sudanese and Palestinian individuals. But more must be done, and the international community should help provide for the refugees' needs and strengthen national efforts in Egypt to resolve the crisis in Syria through peaceful means.

69. **Mr. Maina** (Kenya) said that humanitarian emergencies were too often the result of a collective failure to end conflict and deal with the consequences of natural disasters, and political leaders and the international community must step up their efforts to resolve long-running conflicts and address the short and long-term needs of internally displaced persons and refugees.

70. Kenya was a major refugee-hosting country and its Dadaab camp was the world's largest refugee camp and the third most populous human settlement in the country. Somalis were now the dominant group in the Kakuma refugee camp and the Kenyan Government hoped that those refugees would soon be able to return

to their country safely under its voluntary repatriation programme. To that end, it urged the international community to support the new Somali Government in consolidating its gains, building stronger institutions and providing protection for all Somalis, so that safe havens could be found within Somalia.

71. Kenya was now stretched to capacity and the services and facilities in its refugee camps were so overwhelmed that the country was facing environmental degradation combined with instability and the threat of violence as a result of competition for scarce resources. Deteriorating security was a concern both inside and outside its refugee camps and the disproportionate burden borne by Kenya as a host country could not be allowed to continue. The international community and the United Nations must urgently explore new options to build a more equitable international burden-sharing regime. Kenya was committed to fulfilling its international obligations and responsibilities to protect refugees but its resources were not limitless, and the plight of host communities outnumbered by the refugee population must also be taken into account. The work of UNHCR was commendable but the international community must do more.

72. **Ms. Al-Dhubaib** (Kuwait) said that in 2012, her country had contributed \$3.5 million to refugee relief in Iraq and Syria. While Syria had been the object of much focus recently, it was also important not to forget the ongoing suffering of Palestinian refugees at the hands of Israeli occupation. Kuwait had also contributed \$2 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). It would continue to provide its annual contributions to United Nations agencies, as well as non-governmental assistance such as the provision by Kuwaiti charitable organizations of hundreds of housing units to refugees in Turkey and Jordan.

73. **Ms. Alsaleh** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that economic and social change, natural disasters, terrorism and foreign occupation were all factors in creating refugees. As the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees had pointed out in his report, her country was the world's third largest refugee-hosting country. During the recent crisis that had been precipitated by extremists, it had cooperated fully with humanitarian organizations operating in Syria. However, although an agreement on the revised Syria Regional Response Plan had been signed

between the Government of Syria and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, contributions had not yet reached even one third of estimated funding requirements. While she was grateful to the countries that had pledged support, she called on those countries to follow through on those pledges.

74. She expressed deep concern over the exploitation of refugees by neighbouring countries for political purposes. Some refugee camps had been turned into terrorist training bases, and certain Arab States where Wahhabi and takfiri ideologies held sway were even permitting trafficking in the honour of Syrian refugee girls in the name of so-called "sexual jihad". Meanwhile, the United States of America, the European Union and others were using the pretexts of "humanitarian intervention", "no-fly zones" and "humanitarian corridors" as excuses to intervene in Syria's domestic affairs and further exacerbate instability and displacement. She called on host countries to allow the return of all Syrian refugees who, having seen what life in the refugee camps was like, wished to return to Syria. The Government of Syria would welcome back its citizens without holding them to account.

*The meeting rose at 1 p.m.*