



# General Assembly

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## Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Sixty-fourth session

### Summary record of the 670th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 2 October 2013, at 10 a.m.

*Chairperson:* Ms. Arango Olmos ..... (Colombia)

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General debate (*continued*)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.*

**General debate** (*continued*)

1. **Mr. Choi** Seokyoung (Republic of Korea), noting that the principle of non-refoulement was a cornerstone of the UNHCR mandate, said it was regrettable that refugees and asylum seekers from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea continued to be repatriated against their will. The Republic of Korea had decided to make a voluntary contribution of US\$ 8 million to support the sustainable reintegration of Afghan returnees and called for stronger partnerships with development actors to ensure successful durable solutions. The Refugee Act had entered into force in his country in July 2013 established a legal requirement for interpretation services, legal assistance and basic social services to be provided to all asylum seekers present in the territory. The country's institutional capacity had been enhanced, thanks to the establishment of an independent division for refugee affairs within the Ministry of Justice.
2. **Mr. Serra** (Italy) said that Italy had pledged 22 million euros in aid for the Syrian Arab Republic and neighbouring countries in 2013, with a further 6.1 million euros in the pipeline. While the strong focus on the crisis in the Middle East was clearly justified, other crises, such as those in Mali, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Darfur, should not be forgotten.
3. The adoption of new European Union legislation on asylum, in June 2013, marked an important advance in the development of a common European asylum system, and his Government would do everything in its power to ensure the system's success. Italy was grateful for the invaluable support provided by the adjudication of asylum claims and its useful recommendations on refugee protection. It looked forward to participating in the High Commissioner's forthcoming Dialogue on Protection Challenges.
4. **Mr. Houessou** (Benin) said that Benin had been welcoming migrants since the 1970s, including around 180,000 asylum seekers from Togo. The majority had since returned home, while approximately 4,000 Togolese nationals were seeking local integration in Benin. Under a new scheme, those persons could obtain a 10-year residence permit and apply for Beninese nationality. Refugees from other neighbouring countries could also benefit from the scheme. With the success of the country's local integration programme, the last refugee camp Benin had closed in September 2013. Togolese nationals who integrated into local society would cease to be classified as refugees as soon as they received the requisite documents from their country of origin.
5. **Mr. Lungu** (Zambia) said that Zambia had made considerable progress with local integration of former Angolan refugees. The focus had now shifted to the integration of the Rwandan refugees affected by the invocation of the cessation clause in June 2013. His Government applauded host countries that had increased their resettlement quotas. It had recently participated in a UNHCR training event on IDP protection in Kampala and looked forward to seeing stronger and more effective partnerships between UNHCR and other United Nations agencies, particularly in the implementation of the local integration programme in Zambia.
6. **Mr. Omar** (Djibouti) said that Djibouti had a higher concentration of refugees per square metre than any other country because of a prolonged drought, continuing influxes of refugees who remained in the country and the arrival of still greater numbers of migrants in transit. An estimated 26,000 refugees in Djibouti would require assistance in 2013.
7. Djibouti had been a major point of transit for migrants en route to Yemen and other Arab countries since 2009. Those migrants generally lacked financial resources and were malnourished and vulnerable to ill-treatment, abuse and exploitation at the hands of criminal groups. Their pressing humanitarian needs posed considerable challenges both for

the national authorities and for host communities on the migration routes. The Government's strategic response was to provide humanitarian aid for the most vulnerable, while endeavouring to build resilience and to find durable solutions.

8. **Mr. Hajnoczi** (Austria) said that Austria looked forward to the 2013 High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges and to the Global Forum on Statelessness planned for 2014. His Government encouraged UNHCR to continue to raise awareness of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict situations. It was important to involve women, especially refugee women, in decision-making. Austria remained one of the main refugee receiving countries in Europe and had signed a memorandum of understanding with UNHCR to safeguard and enhance standards within its asylum and reception system. A bill was being prepared to provide for the withdrawal of the reservations that Austria had made to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

9. **Mr. Hassan** (Yemen) said that Yemen kept its doors open to refugees from the Horn of Africa, especially Somalia, and was supporting more than 450,000 displaced Yemeni citizens. It was also dealing with an influx of over 50,000 economic migrants from Ethiopia each year. There were estimated to be around 1 million irregular migrants in Yemen. His Government had turned to the United Nations and international immigration agencies for support in managing the new arrivals and alleviating and regularizing their situation. It was drawing up a national plan to address illegal migration. Yemen wished to thank UNHCR, international migration agencies and countries including Mali and Ethiopia, for supporting the return of irregular migrants in Yemen.

10. **Mr. Agalga** (Ghana) said that former Liberian refugees who had opted for local integration in Ghana had been registered and would be issued with residence permits before the end of 2013. His Government had also started issuing biometric Convention travel documents. Refugee status had been granted to the 1,557 Togolose asylum seekers who had been in Ghana since 1993, 49 Ivorian refugees had been voluntarily repatriated, and various measures had been adopted to encourage further returns.

11. Ghana continued to meet its financial and resource-sharing commitments but was deeply concerned that food supplies were guaranteed by the World Food Programme (WFP) only until the end of 2013. The Government was considering ratifying the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa with a view to strengthening legal protection for persons displaced by national and man-made disasters.

12. **Mr. Kongstad** (Norway) called for a Security Council resolution to be adopted on ensuring unimpeded humanitarian access in crisis situations. He said that real-time evaluations of the Syrian refugee response had identified clear weaknesses and should inform a dialogue between United Nations agencies and implementing organizations on enhanced coordination and partnership.

13. Unlocking protracted refugee situations was a priority for Norway. Any durable solution to the protracted Afghan refugee situation would need to be part of the national plan for economic development. In Somalia, Norway was focusing its assistance efforts on improving living conditions in the south, in preparation for the return of IDPs and refugees. There was a need to shift from short-term care and maintenance to self-reliance and increased political engagement. That would require an investment in education, health services and income-generating opportunities.

14. **Mr. Hilale** (Morocco) said that massive population displacements were placing exceptional strain on host countries in Africa and the Middle East. He saluted the High Commissioner's efforts to extend the donor base to include the private sector and said that

Morocco had made a voluntary contribution to UNHCR of US\$ 1 million for the fifth consecutive year.

15. His Government welcomed the successful resettlement and return initiatives that had been undertaken and encouraged UNHCR to build on such programmes. Since refugee registration and access to up-to-date demographical and statistical information were key to the success of such programmes, his Government reiterated its call for reliable censuses to be conducted at the refugee camps in Tindouf in order to verify the status of those living there, guarantee their safety and, ultimately, allow for their voluntary return to Morocco.

16. **Mr. Digna** (Sudan) said that the Sudan had a wealth of experience in helping refugees from neighbouring countries. It had worked with UNHCR to provide assistance and protection in camps within the Sudan, but it had been forced to absorb a large proportion of the recent cuts to refugee programme funding. His Government called on UNHCR and WFP to reconsider the criteria used to make decisions on the distribution of aid.

17. A joint transitional solutions initiative had been launched for the Sudan in 2012 but funding constraints meant that concrete action to date had been limited, which raised concerns about the initiative's long-term feasibility. The Sudan was grateful to the donor States that supported the project and urged other States and organizations, including the World Bank, to contribute to its success.

18. **Ms. Ellis** (New Zealand) said that, despite the many achievements and innovations that it recounted, the 2012 UNHCR Global Report made grim reading. In refugee camps around the world, access to basic services still fell short of minimum standards. Given that budget constraints were at the root of that situation, her Government called on fellow delegations to strive for increased predictability and flexibility in funding and to reduce earmarking in favour of early and unrestricted contributions.

19. New Zealand continued to welcome Bhutanese refugees, and the Government remained committed to its long-standing refugee quota programme, under which a total of 750 refugee and humanitarian places were made available each year. It had recently agreed to allocate 50 resettlement places each year for refugees fleeing from crises, including the Syrian crisis. New Zealand was also closely involved in the search for durable resettlement and protection solutions for Colombian refugees.

20. **Mr. Guterres** (High Commissioner), responding to the points raised, said that he agreed with the representative of South Korea on the imperative need for full compliance with the principle of non-refoulement and welcomed the adoption of that country's new Refugee Act. Improvements in asylum law in Italy and the decision by Austria to withdraw its reservations to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees were welcome.

21. Benin, Zambia and Ghana were to be commended for their approaches to voluntary repatriation and local integration. Zambia, in particular, was applying the cessation clause in exemplary fashion. UNHCR fully understood the difficulties faced by Djibouti, and recognized that Yemen was generously granting asylum seekers from Somalia prima facie refugee status. UNHCR would continue to work with Yemen in dealing with displaced persons in its territory. It welcomed the establishment by Morocco of an asylum system in full compliance with modern standards and noted with satisfaction that the Sudan had granted 35,000 work permits to refugees in Kassala State. Funding for refugee programmes throughout Africa must be increased.

22. UNHCR took the results of real-time evaluations most seriously. The promotion of refugee self-reliance was central to UNHCR strategies. He agreed with the position of New Zealand regarding resettlement and the need to move away from earmarked funding.

23. **Mr. Orjiako** (Nigeria) said that refugee crises and population displacement were triggered, among other things, by terrorism. The Nigerian Government was attempting to curtail the activities of the Boko Haram terrorist group in north-east Nigeria. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons contributed to the problem, making it imperative to bring the illicit arms trade in Africa under control. All Governments should be prevailed upon to end illicit arms transfers.

24. **Mr. Sukayri** (Jordan) said that the influx of refugees into his country was having a deleterious effect on the local environment. The country's capacity to provide health care, food, transport and housing had been stretched to the limit, and the situation highlighted the need to revise burden-sharing mechanisms.

25. **Mr. Delmi** (Algeria) said that not enough was being done at the international level to prevent conflicts that unleashed flows of refugees, to resolve differences between States or to manage post-conflict situations. For almost 40 years, Algeria had hosted refugees in Tindouf. The refugees were still awaiting a solution to the question of Western Sahara. Algeria would welcome a visit by the Executive Committee to Tindouf. Algeria also hosted refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic, Libya and other African countries and provided aid to those States.

26. **Mr. Andanje** (Kenya) said that Kenya had hosted close to 1 million refugees over the previous two decades. Water consumption in camps exceeded aquifer recharge and boreholes were being dug five times deeper than 20 years before. Human resources to manage refugee flows were inadequate. Asylum corridors and refugee camps were being used to smuggle small arms into Kenya, and unemployed youth were falling under the sway of terrorist groups. The recent siege at a Nairobi shopping mall underlined the security threat to Kenya as it dealt with the refugee influx from Somalia and attempted to stabilize the country.

27. **Mr. Thongphakdi** (Thailand) said that his country supported the process of change in Myanmar and that the time had come to envisage the return of the Myanmar refugees, of whom 140,000 were in Thailand. While development efforts were important, refugees' humanitarian needs should not be lost from view. The need to curtail the movement of irregular migrants by sea was growing in urgency. In the previous year, Thailand had provided temporary shelter to 2,000 people fleeing from Rakhine State. More must be done to head off such situations.

28. **Mr. Speldewinde** (Australia) said that Australia was committed to implementing status determination procedures for asylum seekers and to combating human trafficking. It had allocated an initial US\$ 10 million to strengthen regional cooperation through capacity-building, including through the Bali process. While it welcomed the political and economic progress made in Myanmar, it considered that more must be done to guarantee the rights of all in that country. UNHCR and the Government of Myanmar should, in particular, focus on improving the situation in Rakhine State.

29. Australia supported resettlement as a tool for tackling refugee emergencies and urged other countries to provide resettlement places. Australia had resettled around 12,000 refugees in 2012. However, no one who entered the country illegally would have access to its humanitarian programme. Since resettlement programmes could not absorb the global refugee population, temporary admission was another valuable approach. Australia was developing measures to prevent sexual and gender-based violence in refugee and IDP camps. Civil registration was a key to verifying the identity of stateless persons and expediting the issuance of protection visas.

30. **Mr. Chevallier** (France) said that less publicized refugee emergencies deserved greater attention. Violence in the Central African Republic, for example, had led to the displacement of nearly 300,000 people in less than a year. Each situation required a tailored

response. For instance, only 40 per cent of Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries had been housed in camps. Those who had not, however, were just as entitled to assistance. France supported the UNHCR policy on urban refugees. Immediate and unfettered humanitarian access to those in need should be guaranteed. The safety of humanitarian workers must also be ensured. France welcomed the cooperation between UNHCR and UNDP in Afghanistan. Efforts by UNHCR to build capacity and resilience among population groups affected by refugee situations in Africa were to be applauded.

31. **Ms. Bassim** (Egypt) said that, even as it had undergone one of the most critical phases in its modern history, Egypt had welcomed hundreds of thousands of Syrians, along with Palestinian, Sudanese and other African refugees. It needed more international assistance in order to continue to serve the 300,000 Syrians who had arrived in the country. Developed countries should offer more resettlement places, and countries emerging from conflict should be helped to rebuild their institutions.

32. **Ms. Ciobanu** (Romania) said that the gap between refugees' needs and the amount of available aid was widening at an alarming rate. She would be interested to know what lessons had been learned from the Syrian and Malian crises in the context of the Transformative Agenda. Romanian contributions to UNHCR were predominantly unearmarked. The Government had approved a second national resettlement programme for 2012–2013, with a quota of 40 places. The Timisoara Emergency Transit Centre had hosted more than 1,230 refugees since 2008. In 2013, 68 per cent of asylum requests received had been from Syrian citizens.

33. **Ms. Conijn** (Netherlands) said that self-reliance should be an objective of aid efforts from the outset of a crisis. The Netherlands had contributed 34 million euros to the UNHCR core budget in 2013 and a further 27 million euros for specific situations worldwide. It offered 500 resettlement places annually. It welcomed the implementation of the Transformative Agenda, the Transitional Solutions Initiative and the promotion of solutions for persons of concern through the "Delivering as One" approach.

34. It was to be hoped that recent efforts to improve conditions in the Mugunga III IDP camp in the Democratic Republic of the Congo would enhance the safety of the women and girls housed there. UNHCR was in a good position to play an active role in the debate on protecting civilians from violence. The opening of a third safe house in Port au Prince, Haiti, was welcome, as were the efforts of UNHCR to promote birth registration. UNHCR needed robust internal auditing and centralized oversight, as well as a solid enterprise risk management policy and an anti-fraud strategy.

35. **Mr. Staur** (Denmark) said that contributions to address crises such as those in Somalia and Mali could diminish on account of donor fatigue. New approaches to protracted displacement situations were needed. Denmark strongly supported the Transitional Solutions Initiative and had recently signed an agreement with UNHCR to improve the predictability of funding and the Programme's operational flexibility. Denmark provided significant funding for durable solutions and for protracted field operations. It supported the implementation of the Transformative Agenda and the creation of incentives for senior staff to take up humanitarian coordinator positions. It called for more dialogue between UNHCR and key actors, in particular OCHA and WFP.

36. **Ms. O'Brien** (Ireland) commended UNHCR on ensuring that its response to new emergencies did not detract from the promotion of durable solutions to protracted refugee crises and the protection of the most vulnerable. She welcomed the UNHCR multi-country review of safe shelter arrangements for victims of sexual and gender-based violence and the UNHCR/WFP initiative to study gender and protection aspects of cash transfer programmes. Ireland supported a strong and effective OCHA field presence and welcomed efforts to strengthen cooperation between UNHCR, OCHA and other key actors. UNHCR

had a good record for nominating high-calibre candidates to humanitarian coordinator posts. Noting the laudable work of the Government of Zambia and Zambian communities on integration of former Angolan and Rwandan refugees, she called for socioeconomic development projects to be pursued in new settlement areas.

37. **Mr. Guterres** (High Commissioner), responding to the points raised, said that UNHCR was fully committed to supporting Nigerian refugees and he hoped they would soon be able to return home. He was committed to ensuring that the international community supported Jordan and was grateful to Algeria for playing its role as a host country. He recognized the need for more effective handling of the huge migratory flows in the region.

38. Kenya had shown great generosity towards hundreds of thousands of refugees and he planned to work with the Kenyan and Somali Governments to find solutions for Somali refugees. UNHCR would also work with the Government of Thailand to find durable solutions for the refugees from Myanmar. He urged the Government to assist the persons fleeing from Rakhine State.

39. Australia supported UNHCR activities worldwide and its resettlement programme contributed significantly to the international protection regime. He was open to a dialogue with the Australian Government on what it called “the irregular movements of people” in the Asia-Pacific region.

40. France was a pillar of the European asylum system, having taken in more refugees in 2012 than any other European country. He wished to reassure the representative of France that the protracted and other “forgotten” crises were a key concern for UNHCR as well. In relation to the points made by Egypt, he recognized the need for effective cooperation to combat human trafficking and welcomed the consultations that he had held with the Egyptian authorities on phasing out the temporary restrictive measures applied to Syrian refugees.

41. The Timisoara Emergency Transit Centre played an essential role in UNHCR programmes and UNHCR particularly appreciated the decision of the Romanian Government to establish a resettlement quota. He had taken note of the proposals by the representative of the Netherlands on improving various aspects of UNHCR protection measures and of the comments by the representative of Denmark on the transition from relief to development. He welcomed the framework agreement signed with Denmark, not least because of the increased predictability of support from that country. He noted that the representative of Ireland had omitted from her statement a reference to her country’s “One World, One Future” development policy. He hoped that UNHCR would be able to play a role in its implementation.

42. **Ms. Menéndez Pérez** (Spain) said that Spain attached great importance to the improvement of refugee registration systems, the fight against sexual and gender-based violence and the protection of especially vulnerable persons and urban refugees. The full implementation of the Transformative Agenda was essential for optimizing coordination and field activities and fostering synergies with other agencies. Humanitarian organizations and development agencies needed to work together to promote refugee self-sufficiency from the onset of a crisis and to support host communities and find durable solutions. The funding gap facing UNHCR was a source of concern, and Spain welcomed efforts to improve the transparency of the Programme’s prioritization and funds allocation procedures.

43. **Mr. Museka** (Observer for Zimbabwe) said that Zimbabwe, which had become party to a number of key treaties, was currently hosting 7,450 refugees from the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa. Mixed migration flows added to the burden, since economic migrants sometimes took advantage of the asylum system. The comprehensive

solutions strategy for Rwandan refugees was progressing well, however, with most interviews for voluntary repatriation having been completed. The Government of Zimbabwe was grateful to UNHCR for helping it to fulfil its responsibilities towards refugees.

44. **Mr. Niemi** (Finland) said that UNHCR was the main recipient of the support that Finland gave to humanitarian programmes. His Government was, however, concerned that, if spending levels remained on trend, they would be unsustainable. UNHCR should continue to improve coordination and find synergies with OCHA and other agencies. The implementation of the Transformative Agenda was to be encouraged in that regard.

45. UNHCR should find more innovative ways to increase self-reliance, especially among refugee women, and to mainstream age, gender and diversity into protection assessments. Refugees must play an active role in policies that affected them, and all refugees must be afforded the protection that they needed.

46. **Mr. Nuno Bártolo** (Portugal) said that 30 Syrian refugees had been resettled in Portugal each year since 2008, and Portugal had recently made a voluntary contribution of 50,000 euros to the UNHCR humanitarian assistance fund for the Syrian Arab Republic. At the same time, Portugal had been organizing highly successful seminars under the UNHCR confidence-building measures programme for Western Sahara.

47. **Mr. Tomasi** (Holy See) said that the number of unaccompanied children among asylum seekers was rising, and mixed migration groups were taking to the sea, creating complex challenges for providers of humanitarian assistance. Legal instruments designed to protect such persons were often inadequately enforced, and humanitarian solutions could not be effective unless the underlying political issues were resolved. Faith-based communities played a valuable role in providing relief, support and even hope to refugees.

48. Solidarity and burden-sharing should not diminish because of compassion fatigue. The long years of giving should be considered in relation to the protracted situations of some 7.5 million refugees in the world. A new political effort was required to prevent future refugee crises and promote the dignity of every person. Pope Francis had recently pointed out that migrants and refugees were not pawns on the chessboard of humanity.

49. **Mr. Morales Suárez** (Ecuador) said that Ecuador received on average 1,000 asylum applications each month. It had granted refugee status to 56,000 persons, 98 per cent of whom were Colombians. Those persons enjoyed freedom of movement, just like Ecuadorian citizens. They did not live in camps and had access to education, health and fuel subsidies, among other benefits. Over 27,000 foreign children attended Ecuadorian schools.

50. Ecuador recognized the significant efforts made by Colombia to resolve the internal conflict behind the refugee influx. In his Government's view, durable solutions could be achieved through: the implementation of a voluntary return programme; greater integration of refugees wishing to remain in Ecuador; and the expansion of the voluntary resettlement programme. He called upon the international community to increase its financial and political support for refugee projects under way in Ecuador.

51. **Mr. Hoscheit** (Luxembourg) said that Luxembourg and Australia proposed that a statement on the humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic should be issued by the President on behalf of the Security Council. Luxembourg was concerned that alarming situations in other countries, such as the Central African Republic, might be overlooked. It favoured solutions such as refugee repatriation and reintegration of IDPs and had provided financial support for the repatriation of Malian refugees.

52. Luxembourg had signed an agreement with UNHCR for 2012–2015 whereby it would contribute 24 million euros to the Programme and a voluntary contribution of 6



million euros over four years. It had also signed an agreement on the implementation of the “emergency.lu” solution to improve communications and coordination on the ground.

53. **Mr. Djundev** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that more pressure needed to be put on the parties in the Syrian civil war to reach a political solution. New partnerships, innovative strategies and early warning mechanisms were needed to prevent further refugee crises. The international community must also not lose sight of the plight of IDPs. His Government was currently involved in a joint UNHCR-European Union project to construct social housing for refugees. Other projects to provide education and access to employment were also under way. A bilateral agreement on the voluntary repatriation of Kosovo refugees in his country was expected to be adopted soon. As a transit country for migrants, his country faced challenges, such as dealing with an increasing number of unaccompanied minors among asylum seekers and with rising mixed migration flows. Continued UNHCR support was much appreciated.

54. **Mr. Guterres** (High Commissioner), responding to the points raised, commended Spain on the generosity of its people. Spain was the country from which UNHCR received the largest donation directly from the people. Zimbabwe was to be similarly commended for always keeping its borders open and would have the full cooperation of UNHCR. The representative of Finland had rightly pointed out the growing tension between needs and resources, which required a political solution. The confidence-building seminars hosted by Portugal had been very constructive. The role of faith-based organizations in providing humanitarian assistance should not be underestimated and he recalled the strong statements made by His Holiness Pope Francis on the obligation to protect refugees and respect the rights of migrants. Interfaith dialogue might indeed be a way to achieve progress in crises such as the one in the Syrian Arab Republic.

55. UNHCR was extremely grateful to Ecuador for its generosity as a host country. The dialogue between Ecuador and Colombia was exemplary. He noted that Luxembourg made huge financial contributions to UNHCR and that its “emergency.lu” telecommunications initiative was a major contribution to refugee protection. UNHCR valued its cooperation with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and supported the development of that country’s asylum system.

*The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.*