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Summary record of the 730th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 6 October 2020, at 9 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Baddoura (Vice-Chair).....(Lebanon)

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In the absence of Mr. Pecsteen de Buytsverve (Belgium), Mr. Baddoura (Lebanon), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 9.05 a.m.

General debate (*continued*)

1. **Mr. Imamberdiyev** (Turkmenistan) said that as a permanent member of the Executive Committee of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Turkmenistan made ongoing contributions to international efforts to protect stateless persons and refugees and was committed to ensuring the creation of an environment conducive to safe, orderly and regular migration. The country's determination to honour its commitments was demonstrated by the various conferences that it had organized in Ashgabat since 2012 with support from UNHCR and other international partners. Turkmenistan had also contributed to efforts to make cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation more robust.

2. In 2020, Turkmenistan had been working with the regional representatives of UNHCR, other international partners and civil society to combat statelessness. In recent years, some 23,000 stateless people had become naturalized citizens of Turkmenistan. The year 2021 had been declared the International Year of Peace and Trust by the General Assembly of the United Nations in a resolution sponsored by Turkmenistan.

3. Turkmenistan had taken comprehensive protective measures in response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the related pandemic. It was also involved in providing assistance to Afghanistan. The international community, for its part, should continue to provide support to refugees and stateless persons and to the Governments of countries hosting or sending refugees.

4. **Mr. Ebsa** (Ethiopia), noting that ongoing cooperation with UNHCR enabled his country to improve the lives of refugees and members of the communities that hosted them, said that in recent years, despite social and economic challenges of its own, Ethiopia had maintained its long-standing policy of opening its doors to refugees. It was also making efforts to address the root causes of displacement in the wider region. Meanwhile, in Ethiopia itself, refugees had been granted work permits and were allowed to live outside refugee camps. They had thus been empowered to integrate into their host communities.

5. As in many countries, the COVID-19 pandemic was posing challenges. Pandemic response mechanisms had nonetheless been informed by inclusive approaches ensuring that local measures benefited both refugees and the members of the communities in which they lived. More support was needed for those and other related measures, with priority being given to improving access to sanitary services and increasing testing capacity for refugee and non-refugee communities alike. Pledges made by donor countries at the first Global Refugee Forum in December 2019 should be implemented in full awareness of the ravages of the pandemic. The international community would have to work in coordinated fashion to ensure that the pandemic did not increase the burden on developing host countries such as Ethiopia, which was of the view that public health measures could be taken without reducing support for refugees.

6. Ethiopian refugees returning to the country should also be given proper support and greater efforts should be made to solve the problems faced by the large numbers of people who had been displaced internally by flash floods, landslides and other natural disasters related to climate change. The comprehensive approach adopted as part of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration would help make people less vulnerable to such crises.

7. **Mr. Spasovski** (North Macedonia), speaking via video link, said that a law on international and temporary protection, which was mostly in line with European directives, had entered into force in North Macedonia in 2018. The country, which was a party to all key international instruments concerning refugees and stateless persons, had made a number of commitments within the framework of the global compacts on refugees and migration.

8. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, North Macedonia had begun conducting interviews with asylum seekers online. It had been among the first countries on the Balkan

Peninsula to act on recommendations made by the European Commission and by health authorities, thereby helping both asylum seekers and government officials stay healthy. There had been uninterrupted access to asylum procedures throughout the pandemic, with newly arrived asylum seekers being accommodated in a separate quarantine unit. None of the foreign nationals housed at the reception centre overseen by the Ministry of the Interior had tested positive for COVID-19.

9. Although the pandemic had led to the suspension of joint operations on the country's borders, cooperation with other countries along the Western Balkan migration route had remained robust. The experience of recent years had shown that transnational cooperation and shared responsibility could be a highly effective means of combating transnational threats, managing migration and saving lives, and North Macedonia remained committed to those principles.

10. **The Chair** said that, as the interpretation of the previous speaker's statement had been inaudible, a translation into English would be made available in due course.

11. **Mr. Malangoni** (Observer for the Niger) said that migration was a major concern the world over, including in the Niger, where perilous desert crossings often had fatal outcomes. The huge inflow of refugees from neighbouring countries was compounded by population movements within the Niger itself, making the management of migration all the more complex. In 2020, more than half a million people had been forced to flee towards the Niger, 25 per cent more than in the previous year. Despite their own vulnerability, local communities had welcomed them with open arms. The COVID-19 pandemic had thus struck against a backdrop of already heightened pressure on vital resources including food, water, health care and land. The Niger therefore welcomed the support provided by UNHCR and the country's other international partners for its efforts to combat the spread of COVID-19. Despite the difficulties it faced, the Niger remained determined to honour the commitments it had assumed under the global compact on refugees. For example, it was currently implementing a policy of alternatives to refugee camps, which was supported by improved access to basic social services and job creation strategies in those areas of the country to which refugees had fled. In a related development, the Niger had been one of the few African countries to offer protection and assistance to refugees freed from detention camps in Libya. Over 3,000 refugees formerly detained in Libya had thus found shelter in the Niger before being resettled in third countries.

12. A comprehensive reform of the country's asylum procedures was planned to ensure that effective protection was afforded to those in need. Particular beneficiaries of the reform would include those Nigerians who, from 2013 onwards, had fled widespread insecurity, including the Boko Haram insurgency, in northern Nigeria and had been given temporary protection in the Niger. In addition, legislative steps had been taken to combat statelessness and to provide protection and assistance to internally displaced persons.

13. As the President of the Niger had often highlighted, there was a need for greater engagement on the part of the country's neighbours and the international community in the Lake Chad Basin and the tri-border area where Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger met. He therefore called on the country's partners to do more to help his Government to find durable solutions for the problems faced by all its people.

14. **Mr. Mehboob Sultan** (Pakistan), in a pre-recorded statement, said that Pakistan currently hosted more than 1.4 million Afghan refugees and 850,000 Afghan citizen card holders. Around 85 per cent of refugees throughout the world were still hosted by developing countries with limited resources, and the burden was becoming difficult to bear. The COVID-19 pandemic had presented new challenges, disrupting economies and societies in unprecedented ways, wiping off decades of development gains and heightening the risk of high unemployment, poverty and hunger among local populations and refugees alike. As a result, host countries required greater international support and solidarity, including through enhanced liquidity and debt relief.

15. Despite social and economic pressures, Pakistan had demonstrated unparalleled generosity and hospitality in hosting Afghan refugees for four decades. It had adhered to the highest standards of protection throughout, and those standards had been further reinforced during the pandemic. The Government had provided Afghan refugees and other Afghan

nationals in Pakistan with access to the same health facilities as the Pakistani population. In addition, Afghan refugees were entitled to enrol their children in State-run primary schools, had access to higher and professional education with generous scholarships, and were entitled to open bank accounts. With the support of UNHCR, Pakistan was already providing cash assistance of 12,000 rupees per family to 36,500 extremely vulnerable Afghan refugee families, and, with donor support, it intended to increase that number to 85,000 families. In that connection, his country appreciated the contributions of its partners to the Refugee Affected and Hosting Areas Programme.

16. In cooperation with its regional partners and UNHCR, Pakistan had launched the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees with a view to fostering the necessary conditions for voluntary repatriation, promoting the sustainable reintegration of refugees in Afghanistan and supporting host countries. His Government welcomed the support provided for the Strategy by the core group of States and looked forward to working closely with UNHCR, Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and other international partners in the shared pursuit of durable solutions.

17. Although Pakistan remained committed to the spirit of voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees, it was concerned that the number and pace of voluntary repatriations had declined drastically in recent years. In 2019, only 6,220 Afghan refugees had voluntarily left Pakistan to return to Afghanistan. Reversing that trend would require concrete steps on the part of the international community. Thus, at the international conference held in Islamabad in February 2020 to mark 40 years of hosting Afghan refugees in Pakistan, a call had been made for a time-bound, well-resourced and mutually agreed road map for the repatriation and reintegration of Afghan refugees, including through accelerated opportunities for resettlement and the opening of complementary pathways.

18. Peace and stability in Afghanistan were critical for the sustainable return of Afghan refugees. His Government welcomed the progress made in the peace and reconciliation process, and considered the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity a useful forum for bilateral engagement concerning the return and resettlement of Afghan refugees. It was meeting regularly with the Government of Afghanistan to discuss and enable the repatriation and return of all Afghans by means of a joint plan that included timelines and targets.

19. Lastly, as a co-convenor of the first Global Refugee Forum, Pakistan remained committed to the objectives of the global compact on refugees and urged States to honour their pledges. His Government valued the efforts of UNHCR to reach out to new partner States and institutions. It was vital that such efforts were supported through humanitarian funding. In devising its global operations policy, UNHCR should be sensitive to the regional and local requirements of host countries and should ensure that its policies took due account of local dynamics. Current development financing instruments needed to be redesigned, and to be implemented in ways that would not worsen the already high debt burdens of host countries and would not undermine the true meaning of the principle of equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing.

20. **Mr. Mohammed** (Nigeria), speaking via video link, said that, in spite of his Government's decision to introduce a national lockdown to control the spread of the COVID-19 virus, it had maintained a flexible position at its borders, allowing access for refugees seeking humanitarian assistance. Owing to the combination of security crises and natural disasters besetting the country, which had been aggravated by the pandemic, there were currently close to 3 million persons of concern, including internally displaced persons and refugees, in Nigeria. As the Government worked to improve the national security situation and to implement national reintegration and rehabilitation programmes for those persons of concern, plans were also being made to repatriate Nigerian refugees in Cameroon, Chad and the Niger.

21. In the spirit of international solidarity, cooperation and burden-sharing encapsulated by the global compact on refugees, Nigeria had welcomed over 57,000 refugees from Cameroon in 2017. That figure had since risen. The National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI) was working tirelessly to provide

additional support at entry points in the border states of Cross River, Benue and Taraba by increasing staffing and establishing more offices.

22. Currently, around 57 per cent of the refugee population lived in host communities, and around 43 per cent in settlements. NCFRMI planned to construct additional resettlement communities, each comprising 600 housing units, in the North West, North East and South South geopolitical zones in the coming five years, providing sustainable housing for hundreds of thousands of persons of concern. In addition, as part of an empowerment programme undertaken in collaboration with the Central Bank of Nigeria, NCFRMI offered loans to certified refugees and internally displaced persons to support entrepreneurship and vocational training, thereby boosting self-reliance and reducing the need for ad-hoc Government assistance. The local governments of the states of Benue and Cross River had also donated 400 hectares of land to refugees for agricultural activities.

23. Nigeria pledged to take due account of the situation of refugees, internally displaced persons, returnees and host communities in its national, state-level and local development plans, while strengthening the protection that it offered them by ensuring the integrity of the asylum system, in line with international legal instruments. His Government would continue to strive to ensure the availability of durable solutions for refugees, internal displaced persons and other persons of concern.

24. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), speaking via video link, said that Pakistan was one of the longest-standing host countries in the world, and that he had been honoured to attend the international conference held in Islamabad to mark 40 years of Pakistani hospitality towards Afghan refugees. He wished to congratulate the Government of Pakistan on its decision to allow Afghan refugees to open bank accounts, which was an important step towards self-reliance and sustainability. UNHCR would spare no effort in mobilizing resources to support host countries and exploring opportunities for the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees. The 2020 Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, set to be held in November, would be an opportunity to make progress in that connection.

25. Turning to Africa, he wished to reassure the Government of Nigeria that UNHCR understood the complexity of the challenges that Nigeria faced in the areas of security, development and displacement. He urged it to continue to address humanitarian issues in parallel with its security concerns, especially the issues surrounding the repatriation of Nigerian refugees to their regions of origin. He wished to thank the Government of the Niger for taking on the additional burden of hosting the emergency transit mechanism. The forthcoming High-Level Humanitarian Event on the Central Sahel, organized by the Government of Denmark, would be an important opportunity to mobilize resources for States in the Sahel that were affected by the increasing instability in the region. He also wished to encourage the Government of Ethiopia to continue to serve as a model in terms of its approach to refugees, and to congratulate it on its initiatives to open borders and grant refugees access to essential services and work permits. UNHCR was aware of the challenges associated with the return of Ethiopian refugees, and would continue to mobilize bilateral resources to help the Government to meet those challenges.

26. **Ms. Grama** (Republic of Moldova), speaking via video link, said that all refugees, asylum seekers and stateless persons in the Republic of Moldova who had tested positive for the coronavirus disease had received treatment without discrimination. In the context of the pandemic, she wished to express her Government's gratitude to UNHCR for the assistance that it had provided to asylum seekers and refugees on the territory of the Republic of Moldova. She also wished to reiterate her Government's support for the global compact on refugees and to reaffirm its commitment to ensuring that asylum seekers had access to health care on the same terms as Moldovan citizens, to meeting the basic needs of persons accommodated in the temporary accommodation centre, and to extending the period of validity of identity documents issued to asylum seekers, thus giving them continued access to medical, social and economic services. Measures were currently being taken to modify the legal framework to make it possible to fulfil all those commitments.

27. The Republic of Moldova recognized the contributions that refugees could make to sustainable socioeconomic development and thus paid special attention to facilitating their

integration into Moldovan society. The Government continued to foster the necessary conditions for growth, employment and education in order to reduce refugees' economic dependence. Amendments to the national legislation on the integration of foreign nationals had recently been adopted and would enter into force on 1 January 2021. The amended legal framework emphasized the importance of cooperation between central and local authorities and the non-governmental sector to facilitating the integration process.

28. **Ms. Baković** (Montenegro), in a pre-recorded statement, said that Montenegro had done its utmost to support migrants, refugees, displaced persons and stateless persons during the pandemic, for it was aware that they constituted a category at risk. As a result of its efforts, not a single person in that category had been infected with the virus in Montenegro. Measures taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among persons belonging to those groups included the disinfection of facilities where persons seeking international protection were staying, the distribution of flyers and posters about hygiene measures in six languages and the hiring of two additional doctors to work at one of the country's migrant reception centres.

29. The Government had provided various forms of assistance, such as monetary compensation and utility subsidies, to all persons living in Montenegro who met certain requirements, including all foreign nationals who had been granted international protection, whether or not their entitlement to integration assistance had expired. It had also improved sanitary infrastructure and disseminated information on measures to prevent infection in order to ensure that all relevant services were equipped to deal with the pandemic. Furthermore, in response to the crisis, Montenegro had made additional efforts to fulfil the commitments made during the Global Refugee Forum, for example, by increasing the availability of accommodation for foreign nationals seeking international protection and supporting regional efforts to strengthen the asylum system.

30. **Ms. Kazakova** (Russian Federation), in a pre-recorded statement, said that the Russian Federation shared the concerns that had been expressed about the pandemic and was supporting the efforts of UNHCR to prevent the spread of the virus. However, while it was necessary to provide assistance to displaced persons and host States, it was unacceptable to use such assistance for political or other aims. International humanitarian activities must be based on the principles of neutrality, independence and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States. It was crucial to refrain from trade wars, sanctions and other restrictive measures that would undermine efforts to combat the pandemic.

31. Settling conflicts through political and diplomatic means and assisting with recovery was essential to enable refugees to return to their countries of origin and prevent further waves of forced migration. She therefore called on UNHCR to continue implementing her country's initiative for the repatriation of Syrian refugees, in order to ease the burden on host countries. The reduction of statelessness, particularly in the Baltic States, should also remain on the UNHCR agenda.

32. The Russian Federation provided assistance to all foreign nationals and stateless persons, regardless of their faith, race or ethnic origin. It was currently home to 28,000 foreign nationals, from 53 different States, who had been granted refugee status or temporary asylum. The Government had taken various steps to reduce the risk of COVID-19 infection among that population group, including, for example, suspending the execution of all decisions to rescind refugee status. There were also plans to amend national legislation in order to improve the assistance provided to asylum seekers.

33. **Ms. Delgado Peralta** (Mexico), in a pre-recorded statement, said that there had been a significant increase in the number of persons applying for refugee status in Mexico in recent years. That increase had presented challenges that the country sought to address with the support of UNHCR. In the context of the pandemic, Mexico had spoken out against discriminatory border restrictions that violated the principle of non-refoulement; while some countries had decided to close their borders to refugees, Mexico had taken steps to ensure that its refugee system could continue to operate during the pandemic and to make its refugee status application procedures more accessible. In order to reduce the risk of infection in migrant holding centres, asylum seekers had been allowed to move to alternative accommodation run by civil society. Her country's inclusive response to the crisis was based

on the recommendations of a range of international bodies, including the Human Rights Council and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

34. The pandemic did not change the fact that all persons in Mexico, including refugees, had the right to health, employment, education and basic services. With that in mind, steps had been taken to increase refugees' access to various services, including public health services. In addition, a programme had been set up to enable persons seeking international protection who were trained health professionals to contribute to the fight against COVID-19. The economic impact of the pandemic had led to a worrying rise in discrimination and xenophobia; in response, the Government had stepped up its campaigns to raise awareness of those issues.

35. Mexico remained committed to implementing the comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework and would continue to promote efforts to address the root causes of displacement. It was also interested in strengthening the framework's support platform in order to mobilize additional technical and financial support. It would submit its annual report under the framework in November 2020.

36. **Mr. Sinka** (Burkina Faso) said that Burkina Faso was currently hosting almost 20,000 refugees, the vast majority of whom were Malian, and around 10,000 asylum seekers. It was working tirelessly to improve refugee protection and to find appropriate solutions within the framework of its national development and emergency plans. Over the course of 2020, repeated terrorist attacks and other security incidents had created an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, as the number of internally displaced persons had risen to over 1 million. Burkina Faso welcomed the support that it had received from the international community in managing that crisis; however, it continued to face enormous challenges and therefore called on the international community to show continuing solidarity, in line with the principles enshrined in the global compact on refugees.

37. The Government had recently taken a number of measures to increase security and protect the human rights of all persons living in Burkina Faso. Those measures included gathering all Malian refugees living in the Sahel Region in a single location to ensure their protection and facilitate their voluntary repatriation, in accordance with the tripartite agreement concluded between Burkina Faso, Mali and UNHCR. In addition, a document on standard procedures for the identification and referral of asylum seekers had been agreed upon by Burkina Faso, UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration and a bill on the status of stateless persons had been drafted.

38. Lastly, noting that the Bamako action plan agreed upon by the Group of Five for the Sahel during the seventieth session of the Executive Committee could not be implemented while the security threat in the Sahel remained a concern, he said that his Government reaffirmed its plea for the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel to be placed under Chapter 7 of the Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice in order to allow for its operational capacities to be strengthened.

39. **Mr. Zau** (Observer for Angola), speaking via video link, said that the COVID-19 pandemic required solidarity and cooperation. The crisis was an opportunity to analyse the situation of refugees and stateless persons, to strengthen the capacities of State institutions and to create the conditions for durable solutions to be found. Angola had taken a number of measures to support refugees during the health crisis, such as distributing medical supplies to reception centres and building field hospitals. It was currently home to over 50,000 foreign nationals, of whom around 30,000 were asylum seekers and around 16,000 were refugees. The number of persons benefiting from international protection in Angola had fallen over the previous year, as over 2,000 persons from the Democratic Republic of the Congo had chosen to return to their country of origin.

40. Various measures had been taken to address migration-related challenges. For example, biometric data had been collected for all refugees and asylum seekers in order to facilitate the issuance and renewal of identity documents and mechanisms for the protection of stateless persons had been strengthened, in accordance with the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, which Angola had ratified on 7 October 2019.

41. **Mr. Akhlaqi** (Afghanistan), in a pre-recorded statement, said that an influx of returnees from neighbouring countries was likely as negotiations between the Government and the Taliban continued; Afghan refugees had long demonstrated a long-held desire to return home whenever conditions were conducive, with 5.3 million having returned since 2002. The Government intended to fulfil its responsibilities to all returnees, providing robust support for sustainable reintegration in line with the global compact on refugees. The Afghan vision was clear: a prosperous, peaceful and secure Afghanistan would bring new opportunities for all and put a definitive end to the protracted displacement of Afghans.

42. Despite the formidable challenges facing Afghanistan, there were also significant opportunities, such as the upcoming pledging conference. In addition, sustained efforts had been made to firmly embed the need for solutions for returnees and internally displaced persons in national development strategies and plans, including the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework 2021–2025. The inaugural meeting of the core group of States supporting the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees had been scheduled for 7 October 2020, and he hoped that Afghanistan could count on the international community's support for the group, and for peace and stability in the country more generally. The Government had identified 20 priority areas in which joint investments in humanitarian issues, development and peace could improve the country's absorption capacity and bolster reintegration projects.

43. It was worth noting that President Ghani had allocated €600,000 in humanitarian aid for the victims of the fire at Moria camp on the Greek island of Lesbos, in keeping with the spirit of responsibility and burden-sharing. In that same spirit, he wished to thank all partners who generously hosted and supported Afghan refugees and migrants.

44. **Ms. Kauppi** (Finland) said that Finland remained committed to the Three-Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways and had explored alternative ways of working in order to be able to welcome 850 refugees in line with its pledge at the Global Refugee Forum. It was in fact further scaling up its resettlement programme, and would welcome 1,050 refugees in 2021. In addition, to support Greece and other Mediterranean countries, it had pledged to relocate 175 unaccompanied minors and single-parent families, and to date had welcomed 72 unaccompanied minors from Greece and 30 from Cyprus. Cooperation with Malta and Italy also continued. The country's multi-stakeholder approach, in which civil society and community volunteers had an active role, was central, and could be considered a best practice.

45. Finland appreciated UNHCR efforts to update its results-based management system and would welcome further steps to highlight the benefits of unearmarked core contributions. Her Government also wished to thank the senior UNHCR leadership for its commitment to disability inclusion, which was a high priority for Finland.

46. **Mr. Bhattarai** (Observer for Nepal) said that his Government had implemented a COVID-19 preparedness and response plan that covered refugee protection and assistance needs, in line with the country's commitment to leave no one behind. Over the past 30 years Nepal had done its best to shelter and protect thousands of Bhutanese refugees, despite facing considerable challenges of its own, but persistent rigidity and a failure to implement agreed decisions on the part of Bhutan had continued to confound its sincere efforts to find a durable solution. The Government had repeatedly called for the stalled process to resume with a view to securing the safe, secure and dignified repatriation of all remaining refugees. In the meantime, it wished to express its appreciation for the generous support of the core group of countries in facilitating the third-country resettlement of Bhutanese refugees, as well as the contribution of UNHCR, the World Food Programme and donors to their protection and care. While creating the conditions for voluntary repatriation was the primary responsibility of countries of origin, Nepal called on the international community to take timely and comprehensive action to safeguard the right of return and ensure effective rehabilitation.

47. **Mr. Zniber** (Morocco) said that Morocco wished once again to endorse the Secretary-General's call for a worldwide cessation of hostilities in order to prioritize the fight against the pandemic. King Mohammed VI had launched a pragmatic, action-oriented initiative to support efforts to contain the pandemic in Africa, delivering medical aid and humanitarian assistance to various countries throughout the continent. Morocco had also dispatched 17

cargo planes carrying more than 400 tons of medicine and food to Lebanon following the tragic explosion in Beirut and had deployed a military field hospital to provide medical care for the victims. Given the importance of registration for the provision of protection, Morocco urged UNHCR to expand and improve its registration and identity management programme.

48. At the national level, exchanges between the UNHCR office in Rabat and the relevant Moroccan authorities had yielded positive results, including unrestricted access to health and education for refugees and asylum seekers and a wide range of vocational training, self-employment and labour opportunities. Deploying the multi-stakeholder and partnership approach advocated in the global compact on refugees, the Government had also implemented two joint initiatives with UNHCR as part of its COVID-19 response, namely, a comprehensive assessment of the socioeconomic impact of the virus on refugees, and a partnership agreement with the National Council of the Order of Physicians to facilitate access to specialized health care for asylum seekers and refugees.

49. Morocco remained gravely concerned about the situation in the Tindouf camps, the host country's persistent opposition to the international consensus on the need to separate humanitarian issues from political considerations, its devolution of authority over the camps to a non-State, separatist actor and the militarization of the camps, in contravention of the State's responsibilities. Certainty regarding the number of people in the camps could only be achieved through a survey based on UNHCR criteria and standards.

50. **Mr. Izquierdo Miño** (Ecuador) said that, although Ecuador was the largest recipient of refugees in the region, having granted refugees status to 70,000 persons, with support from UNHCR his Government had been able to respond effectively to the pandemic without paralyzing the national refugee system, ensuring that anyone in need of international protection had access to a flexible, simple procedure. To date, over 11,000 applications had been initiated online and processed digitally. Venezuelan refugees and migrants accounted for 70 per cent of all asylum applications, more than 400,000 of the 5 million Venezuelan citizens who had fled their country having decided to remain in Ecuador. From October 2019 to August 2020, uninterrupted by the pandemic Ecuador had undertaken the largest regularization process in its history, normalizing the status of 67,000 persons and bringing the total number of Venezuelan citizens in a regular situation in Ecuador to 195,000. Ecuador encouraged UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration to continue supporting the region's efforts within the framework of the Quito Process on the Human Mobility of Venezuelan Nationals in the Region.

51. Ecuadorian law guaranteed the right to public education for all children, regardless of their nationality or immigration status, and around 69,000 Venezuelan children were enrolled in its schools for the current academic year. Ecuador was also one of 11 countries implementing the joint UNHCR and United Nations Children's Fund "Blueprint for Joint Action" initiative to promote and protect the rights of refugee children. Thus, despite increased displacement and the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19, Ecuador remained firmly committed to fulfilling the global compact on refugees.

52. **Ms. Baikoua** (Observer for the Central African Republic) said that, since 1983, the Central African Republic had continuously received large numbers of persons seeking international protection and that the various ongoing crises that had substantially depleted the country's resources had not weakened its resolve to continue welcoming them, as was its tradition. In May 2020, for example, the country had welcomed 3,078 refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who had been granted prima facie refugee status on the basis of a humanitarian assessment and biometric registration. Furthermore, the establishment, in 2017, of an inter-ministerial committee responsible for finding durable solutions had led, inter alia, to the naturalization of 42 Rwandan refugee households whose status had expired.

53. Since his accession in February 2016, the President had made recovery and the consolidation of peace a sine qua non condition for stability and development and the return of Central African refugees. With the support of the UNHCR office in Bangui, more than 17,000 Central African refugees had since returned under an ongoing repatriation programme that also encompassed support for reintegration, the construction of basic social infrastructures and the issuance of identification documents to returnees in an effort to

prevent statelessness. The signature of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic in February 2019 had prompted a new wave of mass returns, which was expected to continue as, with the support of the international community, the Government strove to ensure the security of people and property throughout the country in time for the elections on 27 December 2020.

54. Having demonstrated its commitment to addressing the refugee issue, the Central African Republic wished to seek the High Commissioner's support for its request to become a member of the Executive Committee.

55. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that progress in the Afghan peace process opened up opportunities to identify the root causes of displacement and resolve the issue in a sustainable manner. Those opportunities must be seized, and it was imperative that the upcoming pledging conference focused on finding solutions to displacement. He was very grateful to the countries and entities, such as the Asian Development Bank, that were supporting the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees. He likewise welcomed the announcement of Afghanistan's substantial contribution to UNHCR operations in Greece, where many Afghan refugees were located.

56. Turning to Africa, he noted the reduction in the number of refugees registered in Angola as many returned voluntarily to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in a process that UNHCR was observing and supporting. UNHCR would also support the voluntary return of Central African refugees provided that the security situation held. The upcoming elections would be key in that regard. He regretted, however, that the participation of refugees in the elections had not been made possible, as he had personally discussed with the President. Nonetheless, he took note of the country's efforts to support refugees despite all its national problems and, while the country's inclusion in the Executive Committee was a matter for the Members States to decide, the request certainly had UNHCR support. Humanitarian assistance, linked with development efforts, was essential in Burkina Faso, given the dramatic rise in the number of internally displaced persons in the country, and the upcoming donor conference for the Sahel region, at which the Assistant High Commissioner for Operations would launch the roll-out of the Bamako ministerial declaration on forced displacement in the Sahel, would, once again, be crucial. He commended Burkina Faso for hosting Malian refugees and welcomed its accession to the Executive Committee. He also welcomed the close collaboration between UNHCR and Morocco, which was home to a complex mix of refugees and migrants and was doing an excellent job of managing the situation while respecting international instruments on refugee rights. UNHCR had monitored the situation in the Tindouf camps from the outset, and he hoped that sufficient progress would be made on the political front to finally resolve one of the world's most protracted refugee situations.

57. Moving on to Europe, he was pleased to note the efforts of the Republic of Moldova and of Montenegro to factor refugees into their COVID-19 responses. The statement by Montenegro had been particularly interesting as it showed how innovative approaches could facilitate asylum procedures even in times of emergency and distress. He appreciated the work that the Russian Federation was engaged in with UNHCR to create the conditions necessary for voluntary return to Syria, and fully agreed that its work must remain non-political and that conflicts must be settled through peaceful means. He welcomed the announcement that Finland intended to increase its resettlement commitment and was grateful for the country's readiness to welcome migrants from within Europe, for its constant focus on vulnerability, particularly disabilities, and for its large unearmarked contribution.

58. Turning to Latin America, he wished to express his gratitude to Mexico for its long tradition of welcoming migrants, as evidenced by its implementation of the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, and its decision not to close borders despite the pandemic. Mexico was facing a new, very complex situation, with people arriving from all over the world. UNHCR was very supportive of integration opportunities, and it would be important to further develop the potential of the comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework. Ecuador had handled the COVID-19 pandemic prudently yet humanely in terms of its impact on refugees and migrants, and he appreciated its continued programme of regularization. He reiterated the call for greater donor funding in connection with the Quito Process.

59. With regard to Asia, he appreciated the support provided by Nepal in finding solutions for the Bhutanese refugees whom it had hosted for many years. Following resettlement efforts, only a few thousand Bhutanese refugees remained in Nepal. He invited Nepal and Bhutan, supported by other countries, to continue the dialogue to find solutions for those refugees, including the return, as a minimum, of older refugees with links in Bhutan.

60. **Ms. Mendoza Agudelo** (Colombia) said that, despite the new challenges generated by the COVID-19 pandemic, Colombia reiterated its commitment to the Venezuelan people and the 1.8 million Venezuelan citizens residing in Colombia. Although the border between the two countries had been closed to curb the spread of COVID-19, humanitarian corridors had remained open to allow Venezuelans who wished to return to their country of origin to do so. However, restrictions placed on their return by the Venezuelan regime had led to large masses of people being blocked on the Colombian side of the border. The Colombian authorities had responded by setting up temporary facilities to provide accommodation, food, hygiene kits, health screenings and other services. While around 100,000 Venezuelan migrants had thus far returned home, the relaxation of COVID-19-related isolation requirements and the recent reopening of certain Colombian economic sectors had brought new flows of Venezuelans back to Colombia.

61. In responding to the pandemic, the Government had guaranteed Venezuelan migrants with COVID-19 the same care as Colombian citizens, had extended the validity of all documents regularizing migrants' status, and had continued refugee determination procedures digitally in order to issue decisions on the 17,000 refugee applications in progress.

62. Colombia continued to honour its commitments under the global compact on refugees. For example, as part of efforts to prevent statelessness, Colombian citizenship had been granted to 47,000 children born in Colombia to Venezuelan parents since 2015. Her Government wished to thank UNHCR and the international community for their support, but also to recall that, given the scope of the migration and the new challenges created by the pandemic, an increase in support was urgent and critically needed.

63. **Mr. Macieira** (Portugal) said that, in response to the pandemic, on 28 March 2020 his Government had decided to grant temporary residency rights to all immigrants and asylum seekers who had applied for residency prior to 18 March, thereby giving them access to social, health and other benefits. Portugal welcomed the new Pact on Migration and Asylum proposed by the European Commission and was committed to engaging in discussions. Stronger cooperation with countries of origin and transit was needed in order to have an effective, lasting migration strategy. Portugal had consistently participated in the ad hoc relocation from Italy and Malta of persons rescued on the central Mediterranean route and had also agreed to relocate up to 1,000 asylum seekers and refugees from Greece and to host 500 unaccompanied minors from the refugee camps on the Greek islands.

64. As higher education was crucial for both the early recovery and long-lasting reconstruction of countries affected by conflict, the Government was supporting the Global Platform for Syrian Students, had co-organized a virtual briefing on higher education opportunities as complementary pathways for admission to third countries and had contributed financially to the Sustainable Resettlement and Complementary Pathways Initiative. Portugal fully supported the High Commissioner's internal reform initiative and was grateful to UNHCR staff and partners for delivering under very challenging conditions.

65. **Ms. Saarsalu-Layachi** (Estonia) said that the pandemic had highlighted the need for new, innovative approaches, including the increasingly urgent need for digitalization. The forthcoming discussions on protection should therefore focus on the importance of accurate, well-protected data. There was also a need for more coordinated action to protect the most vulnerable, as a lack of interoperability between humanitarian organizations led to duplication in data handling. Harmonized, secure data handling and longer-term projections would contribute to a more efficient and resilient humanitarian system, as would increased cooperation with development actors and other stakeholders. Estonia therefore welcomed the establishment of the Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement, a venture of UNHCR and the World Bank.

66. Uninterrupted access to education was another fundamental concern that could be met, even during a pandemic, by providing connectivity and affordable Internet access along with

e-learning solutions. Estonia had supported digital education in emergencies, for example by providing information technology training to children in refugee camps in Jordan. In addition, at the Global Refugee Forum, Estonia had pledged to contribute to UNHCR work on identity management and inclusion by sharing its expertise in that area. Estonia also wished to express its support for UNHCR efforts to further regionalize and decentralize its important, life-saving services.

67. **Mr. Tressler Zamorano** (Chile) said that the Latin American subcontinent had faced an increasing number of humanitarian challenges in recent years and was currently home to more than 16 million persons of concern to UNHCR. During the pandemic, Chile had held the pro tempore presidency of the Quito Process, the mechanism coordinating the regional response to the unprecedented humanitarian crisis in which over 5 million Venezuelans had left their country, and in that role it had achieved some important results. For example, workshops had been held on issues including voluntary return, family reunification, and trafficking in human beings in contexts of displacement. Upon the conclusion of the Santiago Chapter, held on 23 and 24 September, a declaration had been issued to highlight the progress made and formalize the establishment of the Group of Friends of the Quito Process. Chile had also made progress towards fulfilling the pledges on statelessness, family reunification and access to the job market that it had made at the Global Refugee Forum. His Government welcomed the steps that UNHCR had taken towards increased regionalization and wished to thank it for its contribution to the Quito Process.

68. **Ms. Jardfelt** (Sweden) said that Sweden valued the UNHCR global response to the pandemic and was encouraged to see that, in the midst of the health crisis, UNHCR had also made headway on important reforms. The pandemic had demonstrated the unpredictability of crises and the importance of flexible funding in crisis response. Sweden was proud to be the largest donor of unearmarked funding for UNHCR, and its Strategic Partnership Agreement was a sign of its commitment to multi-year, predictable and flexible funding. It strongly encouraged other donors to increase their core funding and to enter into multi-year agreements.

69. Sweden had made a long-term commitment to resettling 5,000 refugees each year, and to date had issued 183,000 permanent residence permits to persons fleeing the conflict in Syria. The country had also sent supplies to Greece following the fire at the Moria refugee camp on the island of Lesbos. It fully supported the United Nations Yemen humanitarian response plan and was determined to fulfil the pledges it had made at the Global Refugee Forum.

70. **Mr. Obeidat** (Jordan) said that, although a small country, Jordan continued to provide a model of refuge and protection. It had hosted over 1.3 million Syrians for almost 10 years, and over 85 per cent of those refugees were living not in camps but in host communities. Though facing high unemployment and other economic challenges that had been compounded by the pandemic, Jordan continued to run schools on double shifts in order to accommodate Syrian students, to issue work permits to Syrian refugees and to provide other services despite the pressure those efforts placed on its health, water, education and electricity sectors.

71. The country's national debt had risen as a result, and there was a 71 per cent deficit in the Jordan Response Plan for 2020, with only US\$ 637.7 million of the \$2.2 billion originally planned having been funded. An additional concern was the 51 per cent funding gap in the dedicated UNHCR budget for Jordan. The commitment of the country's friends and partners in the international community therefore remained invaluable. Willing host countries like Jordan needed to be perceived as true partners, and his country wished to echo the High Commissioner's words regarding the importance of solidarity, support and burden- and responsibility-sharing. Jordan was concerned about the to date modest resettlement figures. It believed that more should be done to create conditions conducive to voluntary return, and wished to recall that creating such conditions was a responsibility shared by the entire international community.

72. **Ms. van Daalen** (Netherlands) said that her Government commended UNHCR for its efforts to integrate mental health and psychosocial support into its work, including in its COVID-19 response. It welcomed the efforts that the Global Refugee Forum team was

making to ensure that pledges were fulfilled and urged all those who had made pledges but had not reported on follow-up to give account of their progress. In the light of the recent health crisis, her Government looked forward to hearing how health would be embedded and mainstreamed within the Global Refugee Forum framework.

73. Regrettably, the majority of contributions to UNHCR came from only a limited number of donors. UNHCR should therefore continue broadening its donor base, notably to include non-traditional donors. The Netherlands would maintain its multi-year, unearmarked contribution of €33 million until 2021, and encouraged other donors also to provide unearmarked funds. It would also be contributing a total of €7 million over three years to support UNHCR work in Libya and Tunisia.

74. UNHCR should continue working to ensure that refugee communities and local and refugee-led organizations participated not only in the implementation of programmes but also in their design. The Netherlands fully supported the reforms under way and looked forward to seeing a cost-benefit analysis of the process in the coming years. UNHCR also needed to make progress on ensuring compliance with, and reporting on, funding compact commitments. The recent allegations of sexual abuse in the Democratic Republic of the Congo had her Government's highest attention. It encouraged UNHCR to investigate and report allegations as quickly as possible, including through the appropriate United Nations mechanisms.

75. **Mr. Grima** (Malta) said that, although the number of migrants that had arrived in Europe in the first half of 2020 was lower than the corresponding figure for 2019, there had been a 160 per cent increase in the number of migrants taking the central Mediterranean route into Europe between January and September 2020 compared to the same period in the previous year. Malta had processed more than 1,500 first time applications for asylum, making it the country with the third highest number of applications per capita in the second quarter of the year. The number of arrivals had stretched the country's resources to the limit, particularly as the Government had been required to impose emergency measures to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus, including in migrant reception centres. However, the challenges posed by the pandemic had given rise to a number of innovations, including the online processing of asylum applications and online and telephone-based case management and counselling for persons with specific needs.

76. At the level of the European Union, the Government of Malta looked forward to discussing the New Pact on Asylum and Migration with its European partners. Malta had been a firm supporter of the global compact on refugees since its inception, and, although the pandemic had hindered the Government's ability to implement the pledges that it had made at the Global Refugee Forum, it was striving to fulfil its commitments by promoting the integration of migrants and refugees and taking targeted actions to increase the participation of refugees in the labour market.

77. **Mr. Podhorský** (Slovakia) said that the COVID-19 pandemic had disrupted the implementation of programmes for the resettlement and assisted voluntary return and reintegration of refugees and was likely to have a long-term impact on refugee populations. UNHCR was to be commended for the way that it had scaled up its support for refugees and their host communities in response to the pandemic. The Global Refugee Forum had given rise to a series of wide-ranging and substantial commitments to improve the lives of almost 26 million refugees and to support the communities that hosted them. Given that 14.6 million new cases of internally displaced persons had been registered around the world in the first six months of 2020, it was hoped that the High-level Panel on Internal Displacement would deliver tangible and ambitious recommendations for durable solutions to the problem of internal displacement.

78. Better support for refugees, internally displaced persons, stateless persons and host communities depended on the availability of complete and reliable data as only evidence-based analysis could lead to informed decisions and effective policies. For that reason, it was important to ensure the successful implementation of the UNHCR data transformation strategy 2020–2025. The Government of Slovakia fully supported the institutional reform of UNHCR as a means of strengthening the organization and its ability to deliver on its mandate.

79. **Mr. Gaumakwe** (Observer for Botswana) said that the number of refugees in Botswana had fallen from 2,188 in 2019 to 1,097 in 2020. Of the refugees currently in the country, 315 came from Zimbabwe, 308 from Somalia and 158 from the Democratic Republic of the Congo while the remainder were from Burundi, Eritrea, Uganda and Rwanda. The fall in the number of refugees was explained by the return of 839 Namibian nationals and 343 Zimbabwean nationals to their home countries in September 2019 and February 2020, respectively. Botswana continued to facilitate the voluntary return of refugees to their countries of origin when it was feasible to do so.

80. In the light of the repeated calls for Botswana to review its legislation and policies on refugees, the Government was pleased to announce that the review of the Refugee (Recognition and Control) Act had been finalized and that the bill for its amendment would be presented to the Parliament during the next legislative session. The main intention of the new Act was to align the country's practices with international standards, to focus on managing rather than controlling refugees and to ensure that the protection afforded to recognized refugees in Botswana was extended to their family members for as long as they were permitted to remain in the country. The new Act provided for decisions on asylum to be appealed and for the withdrawal of some of the reservations that Botswana had made to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

81. Where the COVID-19 pandemic was concerned, every effort was being made to prevent the virus from infecting the population of the Dukwi refugee camp and, to date, none of the camp's residents had tested positive. The Government of Botswana believed that it was necessary to step up efforts to find durable solutions for refugees, including resettlement to third countries.

82. **Mr. Chen** (China), noting that refugees were a vulnerable group that deserved special attention during the pandemic, said that all countries should implement the relevant General Assembly resolutions, speed up their response to health emergencies and improve their public health systems, ensuring that refugees were included in national health systems and pandemic control plans. UNHCR and other agencies should strengthen their cooperation with the World Health Organization and should prepare contingency and emergency response plans in the light of the evolution of the pandemic, which would be defeated only through solidarity and cooperation.

83. It was important to ensure the full implementation of the global compact on refugees and the pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum. In order to address the root causes of migration and displacement, all countries should heed the Secretary General's call for a global ceasefire, observe the Charter of the United Nations and promote the peaceful resolution of disputes and the reconstruction of post-conflict countries by tackling poverty and facilitating the safe and voluntary return of refugees.

84. Objectivity, impartiality and political neutrality were the cornerstones of national response efforts to refugee crises. UNHCR and all States must safeguard the credibility of the international refugee protection system by ensuring that refugee status was never granted to criminals or terrorists. It was also necessary to ensure that the refugee protection regime was never used as a pretext for intervening in a country's internal affairs.

85. The Government of China hoped that UNHCR would improve the representation of persons from developing countries, especially Asian Pacific countries, among its staff and achieve a greater geographical balance as soon as possible. Developed countries should deliver on their assistance commitments, increase their humanitarian support for refugees and mitigate the pressure on developing countries. China attached great importance to international cooperation on refugee issues. During the pandemic, the Government had provided timely information to the UNHCR office in China and discussed ways of supporting the efforts made by African countries to control the pandemic within the framework of the South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund. In the future, China would continue to engage with UNHCR and support its efforts to improve the global management of refugee issues.

86. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), speaking via video link, said that he hoped that the cooperation and support that China provided to UNHCR operations in Africa and elsewhere, including during the COVID-19 pandemic, would become even more effective in the future. He wished to acknowledge China's key role in

addressing the root causes of displacement in countries such as Myanmar. With regard to the geographical balance of UNHCR staff, a review of the extent to which its structures and culture adhered to racial equality standards was under way that would be based on accurate data and would include an analysis of the geographical composition of its workforce

87. Colombia should be commended for ensuring that humanitarian corridors were kept open to enable Venezuelan refugees to return to their country safely if they chose to do so. In view of the very large numbers of Venezuelan refugees and displaced Colombian nationals in Colombia, it was essential that international programmes established to support them should include provisions for health care. Chile had played an effective leadership role in the Plan of Action of the Quito Process on the Human Mobility of Venezuelan Nationals in the Region. It was necessary to mobilize the support of donor countries for the Quito Process, which was an effective framework for organizing the response to the humanitarian crisis facing Venezuelan refugees.

88. Jordan had been hosting refugees of many different nationalities for more than 70 years. Against the backdrop of the pandemic, it should continue its pioneering role in establishing new models of partnership with the World Bank and other organizations. Gratitude was due to Botswana for the efforts that it was making to bring its legislation on refugees into line with international standards.

89. The Governments of Estonia, Portugal, Malta, the Netherlands, Slovakia and Sweden were urged to invest the maximum amount of goodwill and positive political energy in the discussions that would take place on the New Pact on Asylum and Migration proposed by the European Commission. Thanks were due to Portugal for its good work in support of refugees during the pandemic, and to Estonia for its willingness to contribute to data collection and management operations. He wished to thank Slovakia for its support for the New Pact on Asylum and Migration and Sweden and the Netherlands for the high level of financial support that they gave to UNHCR, particularly the very generous levels of unearmarked funding that they made available. Lastly, he wished to congratulate Malta on having become a member of the Executive Committee.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.