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FIVE 'MEGA-TRENDS' -- INCLUDING POPULATION GROWTH, URBANIZATION, CLIMATE CHANGE --

MAKE CONTEMPORARY DISPLACEMENT INCREASINGLY COMPLEX, THIRD COMMITTEE TOLD

High Commissioner for Refugees Says Trends Causing Crises to Multiply; Means Humanitarian Action Operating in Difficult International Environment

Five "mega-trends" -- population growth, urbanization, climate change, migration and food, water and energy insecurity -- made contemporary forms of displacement increasingly complex, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees told the Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) today.

Addressing the Committee as it took up questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian activities, High Commissioner António Guterres said these mega-trends were causing crises to multiply and deepen. Together with the global financial and economic downturn, this meant humanitarian action was taking place in a difficult international environment.

"Attempting to deal with these mega-trends individually would doom the effort to failure. They are a global reality and need a global response", he said. "This has not always been the strongest feature of an international community whose analytical and policy tools are fragmented and dispersed."

He highlighted efforts over the past three years to reform his Office -- UNHCR -- which will celebrate its sixtieth anniversary next year -- noting that it, nevertheless, faced four main challenges. These included shrinking humanitarian space, with humanitarian actions facing unprecedented insecurity in the field; shrinking asylum space marked by greater restriction and fewer rights; increasing difficulty in achieving durable solutions, resulting in more situations of protracted displacement; and rising numbers of urban refugees.

He stressed that, although the UNHCR was not yet the organization it could be, "it was getting there". If the measure for these reforms was delivering enhanced protection, assistance and solutions for those it cared for, many could already be judged as effective. Not only had significant resources been freed up and used to bridge critical gaps in the field, but UNHCR's new approach to assessing beneficiary needs and its ambitious results-based framework -- the Global Needs Assessment (GNA) -- had been rolled out worldwide earlier this year.

To fill gaps in responses to natural disasters at the field level, he had also requested that the UNHCR be allowed to take the lead role at the organization's Executive Committee meeting a month ago. The UNHCR was well placed to provide support to Governments, which had the main role and responsibility in responding to natural disasters, but might lack the expertise to coordinate protection-related activities.

During the ensuing general discussion, delegates underlined the need to address the root causes of displacement, particularly armed conflict and political instability. As part of that effort, durable solutions to protracted refugee situations should also be sought, many said. The representative of Liechtenstein welcomed UNHCR's approach in that regard, stressing that the first step out of a prolonged period of dependency must be a real choice between a safe and dignified return, local reintegration or resettlement.

The United States representative said that finding durable solutions was one of the best investments that could be made in advancing the security and welfare of refugees. Such work was inextricably linked to humanitarian assistance efforts, but should also move beyond care and maintenance towards increasing the self-reliance of all refugees, and especially those in protracted situations.

Citing the burdens caused by the influx of so many refugees, a number of host countries called for more international support, including financial assistance. Yemen's delegate said that, in addition to the thousands of refugees it had received from the Horn of Africa in past years, 46,000 Somalis had entered Yemen since the beginning of 2009 and assistance was needed to blunt the economic burden posed by the absorption of so many refugees. The representative of Kenya stressed that work was also needed to help local communities stop conflicts and environmental degradation.

Several countries highlighted the situation of Afghan refugees, whose country continued to be the leading country of origin of all global refugees. The delegations of Iran and Pakistan -- where the majority of the Afghan refugees currently resided -- stressed that beyond being voluntary, returns needed to be sustainable. Pakistan's delegate suggested a "pull factor" that included the design of viable individual and family return packages could help. The assistance regime, which had been reduced in 2002, should also be strengthened.

The representative of Afghanistan noted his country's "lost citizens" had at last begun to find their way home, with over a quarter of a million of them returning in the past year. But, repatriation alone did not equal success, and coordinated work to ensure that refugees returned safely, voluntarily, gradually and with dignity was needed. He said his Government was working to increase its absorption capacity in order to manage and assist sustainable reintegration, but Afghanistan would have difficulty implementing its strategy for refugees without sustained financial assistance from the international community.

A portion of the debate centred on the process of local integration. Several countries applauded the decision by the United Republic of Tanzania to offer local integration through naturalization to the 1972 caseload of Burundian refugees. Others, citing the potential difficulties in this process, urged more focus on third-party resettlement.

To this end, Iran's delegate cautioned that local integration could spark a crisis for host countries, especially in "mass influx situations", and the international community should refrain from providing unrealistic and irrational remedies. Moreover, the UNHCR should encourage more participation by the international community, including developed countries, in resettlement efforts.

Also speaking were representatives of the United Republic of Tanzania (also on behalf of the Southern African Development Community), Sweden (on behalf of the European Union), Federated States of Micronesia (on behalf of the Pacific small island developing States), Japan, Switzerland, Georgia, Norway, Egypt, Colombia, Sudan, Algeria, Russian Federation, Zambia, Ethiopia, Canada, Morocco, Ukraine, Thailand, Montenegro, Bangladesh, India, Serbia, Republic of Korea, Malta, Mauritania, South Africa, Nigeria, Kuwait, Jamaica, Liberia and Azerbaijan.

The representatives of Sri Lanka and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea spoke in exercise of the right of reply.

Representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and the International Organization for Migration also participated in the debate.

The Committee will meet again at 3 p.m. Thursday, 5 November, to hear the introduction of several draft resolutions and take action on others.

Background

The Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) met this morning to take up the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and to consider questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions.

The report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (document A/64/12) provides an account of the work carried out by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) between January 2008 and mid-2009, in response to the needs of over 34 million people of concern. It looks at major developments and challenges with respect to protection, assistance and finding durable solutions for refugees, internally displaced persons, stateless persons and others of concern; progress made three years into the reform process; renewed efforts to tackle protracted refugee situations; and an overview of UNHCR's global priorities. Partnerships and coordination of action with other concerned entities, both within and outside of the United Nations system, are also reviewed.

The report states that, of the 34.4 million people of concern to the UNHCR, some 10.5 million

were refugees at the end of 2008. The number of identified stateless people stood at almost 6.6 million; however, the actual number of stateless people worldwide is estimated to be closer to 12 million. The number of people displaced in their own country as a result of conflict remained high, at an estimated 26 million, with 14.4 million of them benefiting from UNHCR protection and assistance activities. The report notes that the latter constituted an increase of more than 600,000 compared to the 13.7 million of the previous year, and was the highest figure ever recorded by the UNHCR.

According to the report, developing countries were hosting 8.4 million refugees, or 80 per cent of the global refugee population, by the end of 2008. Despite the repatriation of a quarter of a million people to Afghanistan, Pakistan again topped the list, hosting nearly 1.8 million, mostly Afghan refugees. Afghanistan continued to be the leading country of origin of refugees, followed by Iraq. Together, Afghan and Iraqi refugees accounted for almost half of the refugee population under UNHCR's responsibility.

Returning home became a reality for more than 1.3 million internally displaced persons during 2008, including some 700,000 going back to their places of origin within Uganda and 350,000 going back to their areas of origin inside Kenya. More than 600,000 refugees were also able to return to their homes. At least 839,000 individual applications for asylum or refugee status were submitted to Governments or UNHCR offices in 154 countries in 2008. This constitutes a 28 per cent increase compared to the previous year (635,800) and the second consecutive annual rise.

The report states that the UNHCR reform process, which started in 2006, had made the Office a leaner and more efficient organization. Staff costs had been reduced to just under 34 per cent of total expenditure. A number of human resources management reform initiatives have been undertaken to address career management, assignments and promotion and staff well-being and relations. Other reforms included a transition to a results-based framework, the launch of a global needs assessment, a revised budget structure and the development of a global management accountability framework. To empower and capacitate the field, the UNHCR began to pursue a more robust model of decentralization and regionalization in Europe and the Americas.

The report further notes that the current working environment for humanitarian staff dealing with forcibly displaced people was highly complex, requiring a decisive, coherent and dedicated response, in partnership with all relevant parties, notably States. The structural and management reform process launched in 2006 had now reached the consolidation phase, with an organization-wide commitment to results-oriented performance. Going forward, the Office would continue to review its working methods and adjust them as necessary to maximize delivery for its beneficiaries.

The report of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (document A/64/12/Add.1) summarizes that body's sixtieth plenary session, which was held in Geneva, from 28 September to 2 October 2009. It includes decisions of the Executive Committee, but notes that consensus on the text of a draft conclusion on protracted refugee situations could not be reached in time for its adoption and inclusion. However, negotiations on that text were being pursued with the objective of reaching consensus on an agreed text by the end of the current year, for their adoption at the Executive Committee at an extraordinary meeting to be convened in December 2009. The report also includes a Chairman's summary of the general debate as Annex II.

The Committee also had before it the Secretary-General's report on assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa (document A/64/330), which covers the period from 1 January 2008 to 15 June 2009 and updates the information contained in the report submitted by the Secretary-General to the sixty-third session of the Assembly (document A/63/321).

The report recommends that, in line with international and regional instruments, States should respect the principle of the non-refoulement of refugees and ensure the proper reception and timely registration of refugees. Given that two out of three refugees depend on international aid, host countries must be encouraged, and supported in their efforts, to create environments that enable refugees to become self-reliant. This may include the withdrawal of reservations on refugee rights set out in the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol.

According to the report, African States have led the world in developing a binding regional convention for the protection of internally displaced people, and United Nations organizations must continue to support these efforts. Moreover, the lack of recovery programmes when humanitarian assistance is being phased out puts the sustainability of durable solutions at risk. Humanitarian and development organizations and institutions need to better synchronize their activities to avoid a transition gap. Likewise, donor States should consider investing more in early recovery efforts.

The report says that African States that have not yet done so should consider acceding to the

Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and to the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. They should also be encouraged to work with the UNHCR and other organizations, as appropriate, to identify stateless populations on their territory and to review domestic legislation, with a view to eliminating gaps that can give rise to or perpetuate statelessness.

State and non-State parties to conflict, as well as international and regional mediators, should work towards addressing the root causes of all forms of displacement in Africa in a resolute manner, with greater attention to the links between the prevention of displacement, durable solutions and sustainable peace processes. Refugees and internally displaced persons should be integrated in post-conflict transition schemes, development plans and poverty reduction strategies.

State and non-State parties to conflict should facilitate access by humanitarian organizations to affected civilian populations and ensure the security of humanitarian workers, so that protection and assistance can be provided safely, even during ongoing hostilities. Humanitarian organizations should tailor their security arrangements to address the different patterns of violence affecting staff, facilities and assets. African States are also encouraged to ratify and enforce the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel.

Statement by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

ANTÓNIO GUTERRES, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, said humanitarian action was taking place in a difficult international environment, especially against the backdrop of the global financial and economic crisis. He identified five “mega-trends” which were interlinked with the issue of displacement: population growth; urbanization; climate change; food, water and energy insecurity; and migration. The world population was expected to surpass 9 billion by 2050, and almost all the population growth would be in the developing world. The current population is 6.7 billion. A majority live in cities, and that proportion is expected to reach 70 per cent in 2050. Already, services and jobs were failing to keep pace.

He said global warming threatened to contribute to massive displacement. Compared to two decades ago, the increase in extreme weather events today was making natural disasters about twice as likely. Energy demand was expected to increase by 50 per cent in the next 20 years, most of it in the form of fossil fuels, which would contribute to global warming. Approximately 1.4 billion people lacked safe water and water shortages threatened millions, while many poor countries were still undergoing a food crisis. Competition over those and other resources would necessarily intensify.

He added the world had more than 200 million migrants. The demographics, economics and environmental degradation that drove migration were unlikely to relent.

“Attempting to deal with these mega-trends individually would doom the effort to failure. They are a global reality and need a global response”, he said. “This has not always been the strongest feature of an international community whose analytical and policy tools are fragmented and dispersed.”

Those mega-trends were causing crises to multiply and deepen, he said. Two thirds were found in a “band of crisis” stretching from south-west Asia through the Middle East to the Horn and Great Lakes of Africa. It included Palestinian refugees. Of the nearly 14.5 million internally displaced people that benefited from attention by the UNHCR, around three quarters lived in those areas, and almost all the significant new internal displacement had been there.

He said one out of two people displaced by conflict lived in Africa, and he lauded the African Union for approving a convention for responding to forced displacement. He said African leadership had been extremely important in that regard, and expressed hoped their example would be copied in other parts of the world.

He said the UNHCR faced four challenges, the first of which was shrinking humanitarian space. Many actors in today’s conflicts had no respect for humanitarian principles or the safety of humanitarian staff. The firmer line taken on national sovereignty by a few Governments for political reasons had resulted in humanitarian agencies being thrown out. The blurring of the lines that used to separate civilian and military actors had created confusion, which was cynically and brutally exploited by some to undermine operations.

He said that the UNHCR had lost three staff members in Pakistan in a period of six months, while a fourth had been abducted and held for 63 days. The office of the World Food Programme (WFP) in Islamabad was attacked in October, killing five staff. For its part, the UNHCR had created a security steering committee to examine the security situation of key operations, and was enhancing its “security software” -- information-gathering capacity, staff training and rules of engagement, and paying special attention to national and implementing partner staff. In doing so, it was communicating with others, such

as the United Nations Department of Safety and Security.

He said shrinking asylum space was the second big challenge. Despite developments in asylum law and practice in a few jurisdictions, including alternatives to the detention of asylum-seekers -- especially children -- the trend was broadly towards greater restriction and fewer rights. Pushing asylum-seekers back to where protection was not available, or further burdening developing countries, which already hosted four fifths of the world's refugees, was neither normal nor acceptable. Some systems had a "zero recognition rate" for asylum-seekers, even from war-torn countries.

The third challenge was the increasing difficulty in achieving durable solutions, he said, directly linked to the increasing complexity and intractability of contemporary forms of conflict. While more than 600,000 refugees were voluntarily repatriated with UNHCR's support in 2008, that was 17 per cent fewer than the year before, and among the lowest in the last 15 years. Repatriation was decelerating in Afghanistan, southern Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. But in the United Republic of Tanzania, about 170,000 Burundian refugees from 1972 were naturalized. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) had clarified that, in West Africa, refugees from member States were entitled to work, residency and other rights.

In response to current crisis, he said Chad, Iran, Jordan, Kenya, Pakistan, Syria, United Republic of Tanzania and Venezuela all hosted more than 200,000 refugees or persons in refugee-like situations. The UNHCR had submitted more than 121,000 refugees for resettlement consideration in 2008, twice as many as in 2006. Unfortunately, that added up to more refugees than available resettlement places, implying that additional places must be found.

He stressed that, with fewer solutions there would be more refugees in protracted situations. The UNHCR had developed a Global Plan of Action on these situations that emphasized enhanced support for voluntary repatriation, a revised education strategy, multi-year strategies of self-reliance, more support for refugee-affected and hosting areas, prioritized use of resettlement, and an increased emphasis on partnerships.

A similarly comprehensive approach was animating the Office's efforts on statelessness, he said. Recent years had seen some major breakthroughs. Urdu-speaking Biharis in Bangladesh were enfranchised in time for national elections in December 2008. The Russian Federation was granting nationality to an increasing number of those left stateless by the Soviet Union's dissolution. The UNHCR was also working with the Governments of Kyrgyzstan and Viet Nam, as well as civil society, to register stateless populations. Information on nationality and documentation was being made available in Côte d'Ivoire. Legal counselling was being provided in the western Balkans, Iraq and Nepal.

He said the fourth main challenge -- urban refugees -- included refugees, asylum-seekers, returnees, the internally displaced and the stateless living in urban settings. Providing protection in these settings would be the subject of this year's Dialogue on Protection Challenges on 9 and 10 December. Together with the Cities Alliance, the UNHCR was conducting a scoping study on urban displacement that recognized the strong links between displacement, urban planning and poverty reduction. A thorough review of UNHCR operations for Iraqis in Amman, Beirut and Damascus was also being undertaken.

He noted that everything the Office needed to do for all persons of concern was being done in a highly challenging economic environment, and it had embarked on comprehensive structural reform even before the crisis hit. In 2006, total expenditure was \$1.1 billion and, this year, it was expected to be \$1.7 billion. Activities had increased by more than 50 per cent, even as the number of staff worldwide had been maintained and personnel in Geneva reduced by 30 per cent. The proportion of total expenditures dedicated to Headquarters, including the Global Service Centre in Budapest, had been reduced from nearly 14 per cent in 2006 to approximately 10 per cent in 2008. Further, staff costs had been reduced from 41 per cent of total expenditure to 34 per cent.

He went on to say that savings through reform had allowed significant additional resources to be freed up for the people the UNHCR cared for. The benefits had initially aimed at critical gaps in the areas of malaria, malnutrition, reproductive health and sexual and gender-based violence, and to initiate new programmes for anaemia, water and sanitation. Those investments had now been mainstreamed and had significantly enhanced the Office's emergency response, as was seen recently in Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Perhaps most important among the reforms was UNHCR's new approach to assessing beneficiary needs and its ambitious results-based framework, he said. The Global Needs Assessment had been rolled out worldwide in 2009. It would allow the Office -- for the first time -- to project the full scale of its beneficiaries' needs. Further, the Global Strategic Priorities were finalized in August and the Global Accountability Framework was now being tested.

He said the process of decentralization and regionalization was ongoing, and the authority for decisions had been moved as close as possible to the point of delivery. The first phase of human resources reform had also been completed, with the establishment of an ethics office, a whistle-blowers policy, a Staff-Management Consultative Council, and a Career Management Services Section.

Procedures for fast-track deployment had been improved, a new policy on short-term assignment enacted, and a new performance appraisal system introduced. The second and final phase of the human resources reform was also ongoing and included a more streamlined and professional assignments and promotions process. These were difficult reforms in the United Nations context, but they were essential to make the UNHCR more agile.

He emphasized that the change process was moving into a consolidation phase, noting that the focus would now be on oversight and continuous improvement. A new Division for Programme Support and Management had been created to integrate programme management, analysis and support functions that had previously been scattered. The capacity of the Division of International Protection Service was also being enhanced. Other recommendations, such as those made by the European Union's anti-fraud office to augment the independence and integrity of the Office of the Inspector General and the Fritz Institute, were being implemented or were in an advanced phase of being implemented.

While the UNHCR was not yet the organization it could be, he said "it was getting there". Reform was not an objective, in itself, but a means to delivering protection, assistance and solutions for those it cared for. By that measure, many reforms were already effective. The Office had already embraced its wider responsibility for conflict-generated internally displaced persons, including in protection, shelter and camp coordination and management clusters, which made more resources available to refugees and the stateless. Moreover, the pledge that responsibility for internally displaced persons would not take away from resources to refugees had been fully respected.

He noted that, in terms of responding to natural disasters, there was a gap at the field level. He had requested that the UNHCR take on this role during its Executive Committee meeting a month ago.

With its emergency roster of able individuals, the UNHCR was well placed, through the United Nations Country Teams, to provide support to Governments, who had the main role and responsibility in responding to natural disaster, but might lack the expertise to coordinate protection-related activities.

In closing, he noted that the UNHCR would celebrate its sixtieth anniversary next year. The following year would see the sixtieth anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the fiftieth anniversary of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. A committee had been created to identify how best to commemorate those instruments and whether, given the changing nature of displacement, new ones were necessary.

Question Time

The representative of Ethiopia raised questions about "unsubstantiated facts" in the Commissioner's report in relation to internally displaced persons in her country. According to the report, data could not be obtained because access to certain areas had been restricted. The report had also expressed concern about laws governing civil society in her country, which were deemed restrictive to humanitarian action. She said the number of internally displaced persons in Ethiopia, as cited in the report, was exaggerated. The Government had been taken by surprise by such unfounded stories. She said such meddling was unacceptable. Natural and man-made disasters created crisis and displacement, and her Government viewed its work with United Nations agencies as a top priority. For its part, the Government was working to deliver assistance to people in remote areas. She added that Under-Secretary-General John Holmes had led a field mission to the Somali region in 2008, where the situation had been grave at that time. She asked him to name his sources of information. Also, did he believe that humanitarian agencies were the right organizations to study the issue of human rights, and to uncover the root causes of conflict displacement?

The representative of the Sudan said his country was one of the States that received refugees from neighbouring countries and had done so for decades. Even if it brought considerable burden to the Government, it nevertheless welcomed refugees, because it believed in providing assistance to those that required it. But, the Commissioner's report did not correctly reflect situation in the Sudan, and did not reflect recent developments. Those humanitarian organizations that had gone beyond their mandate, and which had been removed from the country, had been replaced by others that were working effectively. The assessment team that was working with the United Nations and the Government to study that issue had borne that situation out, and he had not expected the report to discuss the issue further. He added that, in Darfur, refugees were being returned and there had been a decrease in acts of violence. The representative of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) had delivered a report on that subject to the

Security Council, in which he talked of such improvements. On the political side, the Government is making every effort to resume negotiations, with the assistance of the Government of Qatar. He then turned to the issue of human resource reform within the UNCHR, asking about the Ethics Office. What was its mandate and what activities had it conducted?

The representative of Finland said the Commissioner's report had been helpful. He asked about global needs assessment process, which he welcomed. How would the process enhance the humanitarian response capacity across the United Nations system, and in cooperation with other actors? Would the methodology and applicability of the process be assessed and revised, if needed? How would the process be applied to the consolidated appeals process framework? Regarding the search for a durable solution to the situation of refugees, he noted that that meant facilitating a transition from emergency relief to development. That, in turn, would require tools, resources and expertise in the humanitarian and development fields. What challenges did the UNHCR face in that regard, and how could those efforts be enhanced and supported? He noted, as well, that the 55 donors and 101 per cent funding were signs of people's trust in the UNHCR and in the importance of its work.

The representative of Yemen thanked the Commissioner for his report, and expressed appreciation for the UNHCR's efforts. He welcomed his country's partnership with the UNHCR in providing assistance to refugees and affirmed his country's commitment to cooperate. He congratulated the UNHCR on its reform, which began in 2006. The report had held Yemen up as an example of a country that was carrying out its work, despite its economic difficulties. He asked if there was any intention to increase cooperation between the UNHCR and countries with urgent needs.

The representative of Côte d'Ivoire expressed condolences to the UNHCR for having lost personnel in the field. He also called on the Commissioner to observe the fair distribution of posts within the UNHCR.

The representative of Cameroon expressed thanks to the UNHCR for its commitment and welcomed the good cooperation between her Government and the Office. She congratulated him on the reforms, in which there were still many challenges. Her Government was particularly concerned by violent attacks on personnel and called on States to step up their protection of humanitarian actors. Her country would try to ensure the security of refugee camps, in cooperation with other countries and civil society. To guarantee the rights of refugees, her Government was offering grants to vulnerable students, financing micro-projects and funding hydraulic projects, among other things. It was strengthening its public health services and, working with the WFP and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), was carrying out vaccination programmes. The Government would welcome financial support from donors, and urged them to continue their assistance to host countries. On the transport of food products, how could the international community better contribute to ensuring the security of convoys? Did the Commissioner have specific needs, in that regard?

The representative of Australia said her delegation was concerned about acts of violence that diminished the ability of the UNHCR to respond to those in need. Australia welcomed the reforms undertaken by that Office, as well as efforts to address protracted situations. Through its permanent representative in Geneva, Australia was delighted to be chairing the Executive Committee.

Zimbabwe's delegate said that, in response to the Secretary-General's report, her country was concerned with the Secretariat's assessment of the situation in her country. Specifically, in paragraph 32, the first sentence talked about challenges faced by a large number of persons there. As far as her Government was concerned, it had yet to assess if there was even a large population of displaced persons. How could the Secretariat then describe such a situation, if no such assessment had taken place? Moreover, there was also a lack of clarity in paragraphs 32 and 33, which used terms such as "many Zimbabweans". Why was the Secretariat describing a political environment of uncertainty, when progress had been made? She called on the Secretariat to be more precise.

She noted that last year her delegation had described why Zimbabweans were migratory. They had been going to South Africa from time immemorial and there was nothing new about it. Also, why were the attacks of May 2008 included in this report, when they had been talked about last year? As far as Zimbabwe was concerned, this situation had been overtaken by events. Her Government was working in cooperation with the humanitarian aid organizations, including the UNHCR, and was grateful for the help it was receiving. It hoped there was no sinister motive in including these outdated events in the current report.

The representative of Serbia said the High Commissioner had mentioned the burden borne by countries hosting large populations of refugees and internally displaced persons. Serbia was one such country. It had 341,000 internally displaced persons or refugees in a protracted displacement situation. The High Commissioner was well aware of that situation, since he had visited Serbia. Could he share his views on how this protracted

situation could be resolved?

The representative of China said 2008 had witnessed the first decline since 2006 in the number of refugees. China highly appreciated the efforts of the UNHCR, which had maintained good cooperation with Governments, intergovernmental and regional organizations, and non-governmental organizations around the world. The root causes of the refugee problem had yet to be eradicated, however, and the economic crisis, as well as the impacts of climate change, had further worsened the situation for refugees. China hoped the UNHCR would continue to take as its core responsibility the protection of refugees. It should also help developing countries strengthen their capacity-building in order to fashion long-lasting solutions. It should also continue its pragmatic cooperation with Governments. For its part, China was fulfilling its relevant obligations in capacity-building and the procurement of emergency goods, among other things, and it was ready to further that cooperation.

Kenya's representative said his Government very much appreciated the work of the UNHCR in his country. He clarified that the number of refugees in Kenya was 300,000 in one camp and over 100,000 in another, bringing the total to over 400,000. Of course, that applied only to the number of registered, camp-dwelling refugees. He emphasized that the cause for those refugees lay in conflict-ridden neighbouring countries and the burden for his country was high. He thanked Kenya's partners in that regard, but underlined the need for a long-term solution. Aid agencies were working to try to stem the flow of refugees. Kenya supported repatriation and settlement work, but more work was needed to help the local communities stop conflicts and stop environmental degradation. What UNHCR plans existed to assuage the feelings of the communities around the refugee camps? What long-term solutions could come out of Member States to deal with the continued flow of refugees from countries like Somalia?

The representative of Egypt, referring to the challenges facing the UNHCR, said the root cause of the refugee problem must be addressed. What was the UNHCR doing in that respect? Also, in relation to the protection of those working in the humanitarian field and in the UNHCR, what was being done to protect staff? In terms of the report, he asked for more explanation on the definitions given by the UNHCR to the categories of "IDP-like" and "refugee-like" situations.

The representative of Pakistan expressed regret for the loss of UNHCR staff and condemned the acts targeting them. Everyone must work together to identify threats and eliminate them. What could be done for host countries that were extending protection and shelter to refugees in protracted situations? That was particularly important in light of the financial and food crises, he added.

Morocco's delegate said that the High Commissioner had been "faultless" in his work. The work of the UNHCR was needed more than ever before. It had paid a high price in human lives. The five trends the High Commissioner had highlighted required a global response, but there was always a gap between the goals and the financial means of meeting them. His delegation had noted the reforms undertaken by the Office, particularly those in terms of recruitment. Morocco hoped that those reforms would not take away from the main responsibility of the UNHCR. Did the Office intend to further pursue decentralization? In terms of natural disasters, he had said the primary responsibility lay with national Governments. Did the UNHCR intend to draft some kind of guide or basic rules, so countries could respond in a coordinated fashion when such disasters struck?

Responding first to the representative of Ethiopia, Mr. GUTERRES underscored the long-standing partnership between the UNHCR and the Government of Ethiopia. The framework of cooperation enjoyed by the two parties was extensive and important. He then noted that his report covered a period that ended in June, and it was true that the Government had taken action since then with regard to people affected by drought. He said the idea of establishing a sub-office had been floated to make it easier to deploy assistance in response to displacement caused by the violence in the south-east. However, the Government had answered in the negative. He stressed that a negative response on that issue did not undermine other aspects of cooperation between the UNHCR and the Government with respect to refugees.

He told the representative of the Sudan that the UNHCR enjoyed good cooperation with that Government, which was hosting 150,000 refugees in the east. The UNHCR's implementing partner was the Sudanese Government's Commission on Refugees. He stressed again that, because of the time frame covered by the report, it was true that access for non-governmental organizations had improved in southern Sudan. But, he noted that the Government had yet to accept UNHCR's role as cluster leader on protection and camp management.

To the representative of Finland, he said the global needs assessment was an ambitious project covering both emergency and regular activities of the UNHCR. Agreeing that the process, and the

associated “tools”, needed continuous evaluation, the UNHCR had created a new division of programme support. It was working with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on how to harmonize that process with the United Nations’ process for assessing needs in emergency situations. They were seeking to simplify the tools at their disposal to make the consolidated appeals process better. Such tools were excellent for enhancing cooperation with other actors. He underlined the importance of donor support and the support provided by host countries.

Responding to the representative of Yemen, he said resources had been successfully diverted to certain operations that faced huge difficulties in addressing refugee protection, given a difficult economic environment. The programme in Yemen had increased threefold. The UNHCR was deeply committed to increasing cooperation with countries such as those.

To the representative of Côte d’Ivoire, he stressed the importance of an equitable geographical balance, and said that there was a good balance among UNHCR directors, in that regard. The UNHCR was also concerned about maintaining a gender balance, and had set aside 50 per cent of all promotions at all levels for women. But, he said it was challenging to ensure gender and geographic balance amid other issues of concern, such as merit and the need to comply with the United Nations’ internal justice system.

In answer to the representative of Cameroon, whose country was generous in welcoming refugees from neighbouring countries despite the problems it created, he said cooperation with other agencies and the Government of Cameroon was exemplary. He intended to visit the country in 2010. The logistical problems raised by the delegate was mostly felt by the WFP and not so much the UNHCR, because the volume of food provided by the UNHCR was much less. He said the WFP was facing increased difficulty because of piracy.

He added that Ambassador Miller was a dynamic chair of the Executive Committee, and they were working together to ensure that important decisions would be acted on next year.

To the representative of Zimbabwe, he admitted that some things had improved since the time of the report. The paragraph cited by the questioner contained not just negative elements, but positive ones too; namely, the formation of an inclusive government that had given rise to cautious optimism, the launch of pilot projects by humanitarian agencies, and so on.

Responding to the representative of Serbia, he said UNHCR’s efforts to deal with protracted situations included the situation of refugees hosted by Serbia, which was also hosting internally displaced persons. A conference would be held in Serbia soon on the situation of refugees in that complex environment. The UNHCR had defined measures with the Government and that of its neighbours to make return more attractive and sustainable. That process would involve discussion on complex issues, such as tenancy rights.

To the representative of China, he said he was planning a visit to that country and was in the process of discussing dates. The UNHCR was fully supportive of China’s efforts to develop refugee legislation.

In answer to Kenya, he said the UNHCR had prepared a plan to support host communities according to the “delivering as one” philosophy, and involving nine United Nations agencies. He said he was committed to bringing people together around that issue and in raising the necessary resources. Environmental degradation was at the centre of that process. The UNHCR was seeking to carry forward that philosophy in as many countries as possible, and was developing community development programmes in Pakistan, although recent events had made things slightly difficult. In the past, encouraging community involvement tended to fall by the wayside, because of emergency concerns and lack of resources. But, he was totally in agreement on its importance, both as a matter of justice and protection.

He said humanitarian activities provided a bandaid system of support. To truly solve problems required political action. That was true, for example, in the situation of Somalia, where a political settlement was needed to stem the tide of 5,000 to 7,000 Somalis arriving in Kenya every month.

To the representative of Egypt, he explained that a footnote in his report provided the definition of “IDP-like” or “refugee-like”. In short, there were times where refugees were not recognized as such, but had the same protection needs. Similarly, there were internally displaced persons who were displaced within their own country and were supported by the UNHCR, but were not counted in the statistics as displaced persons. Thus, such people faced the same situation as refugees or internally displaced persons, but were not officially recognized as such. In most cases, it was only a matter of time before they were classified as normal, standard-internally displaced persons or refugees.

He said Pakistan was the largest host country in the world, with 1.8 million Afghans. He praised its generous attitude, even amid its many problems. In his visit to the country, he and the Government had reached agreement on a community-based programme he had spoken about earlier. After initial hesitation, a certain number of countries had now come forward with announcements of support.

To the representative of Morocco, he said the UNHCR was able to expand its activities without increasing costs. That was partly due to the good quality of its human resources. Also, the UNHCR had decentralized a bulk of services to Budapest. The next stage would be to decentralize its information and computer support services, which were currently located in Geneva, but would be brought to hubs closer to Budapest. Already, the UNHCR had reduced its presence in Geneva from 1,400 to 720, which had brought enormous savings. The costs at its new sites were quite low.

As for its treatment of internally displaced persons, he said the UNHCR was part of the cluster approach, for which general guidelines already existed. Sometimes, agencies faced difficulties in implementing those guidelines, particularly in countries with weaker administrations. To bolster its efforts, the UNHCR would typically send two or three experts to work closely with the Government.

Statements

JUDITH MTAWALI (United Republic of Tanzania), speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), acknowledged the importance of the decreases in the number of refugees worldwide for the past eight consecutive years. Those figures were truly encouraging. However, it was undeniable that there were alarming numbers of displaced persons in the world and the root causes of displacement must be addressed, bearing in mind the relation between prevention, durable solutions and sustainable peace processes.

She said that, with Africa still registering the largest number of internally displaced persons, it was imperative to set up concerted efforts in that area at the national, regional and international levels, in parallel with strengthening international law. The SADC welcomed the adoption of the new African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa, which was the first legal instrument dealing with internally displaced persons and emphasized the responsibility States and armed groups had in protecting and assisting their own uprooted citizens. The SADC encouraged all African countries to ratify that instrument.

She noted that SADC member States were home to over 2 million persons of concern, further pointing out that tangible progress had been made in the region towards the local integration of refugees in the last year. A series of tripartite meetings were continuing to prepare for the return of refugees to their countries and to find durable solutions for protracted refugee situations. The SADC particularly welcomed the readiness of Angola, Zambia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to participate in those meetings. While it recognized that a long-term solution was not without challenges, the SADC believed a comprehensive approach that involved a mix of solutions would offer the best chance for success. In this, legal migration opportunities may be fundamental in tackling the already precarious refugee situation. The SADC applauded the Tanzanian Government's decision to offer local integration through naturalization to the 1972 caseload of Burundian refugees. It encouraged more African Government to engage in negotiations to create more local integration opportunities for long-staying refugees.

She said migratory movements in the region were growing for a number of reasons, including exponential economic growth in Angola and the developed country status of South Africa, which were attracting an increasing number of asylum-seekers and illegal migrants. That migration put pressures on resources that were already strained by the world financial, economic and food crises. The countries of the SADC faced tremendous challenges in providing assistance to the mixed population movements, as well as the strain caused by urban refugees. It was crucial to elaborate a normative framework and enact socio-economic measures to promptly achieve sustainable solutions. With the phenomenon of internally displaced persons migratory movements becoming an increasingly global challenge, mixed migration flows required more engagement from the States and stakeholders that were seeking to address their causes and consequences.

She stressed that the shrinking of asylum space among developed countries was disrupting the burden-sharing responsibility. The strict migratory measures implemented by several countries to frustrate or hinder successful asylum requests chastised those who left everything behind looking for a better life. That desire should not be considered a crime, and the SADC stressed the need for a comprehensive approach that included international protection responsibilities. Migration policies should take into consideration not only the international protection obligations, but also the humanitarian perspective.

PER ORNEUS (Sweden), speaking on behalf of the European Union and associated States, said the international community must responsibly face the challenges brought on by climate change,

environmental degradation, population growth, urbanization, food insecurity, the economic crisis and shrinking humanitarian and asylum space. The promotion of international humanitarian law was more important than ever, against the backdrop of blatant violations that occurred in various conflict settings. That was particularly true given the shrinking humanitarian space and direct attacks on humanitarian actors.

He said the Union was concerned by the conditions of internally displaced persons in camps in Sri Lanka, and called for freedom of movement. It also called for an overall plan for a return process and unimpeded access for humanitarian organizations there. Unhindered humanitarian access was crucial in many countries, not least the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Yemen and Somalia. While deeply appreciative of Kenya's generosity in hosting refugees, the Union urged the Government of Kenya to provide additional land in the Dadaab area.

He said violations of the principle of non-refoulement needed addressing, for example, in the context of migratory flows. The European Union believed that the UNHCR's 10-point plan to deal with mixed flows was a valuable instrument, and it welcomed the Commissioner's participation in the Global Migration Group. Asylum would be an important part of the Union's next five-year plan, and the Union aimed to adopt the Common European Asylum System in December.

He welcomed the UNHCR's efforts to contribute to finding durable solutions to the situation of refugees in protracted situations, and urged all countries to contribute, as well. They could do so by addressing the root causes of, and in resolving existing, protracted situations, by carrying out voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement. Within the European Union, work was going on to establish a common resettlement programme to increase the number of places available for settling refugees with protection needs. It was important to fill the gaps that occurred between emergency relief and development assistance. UNHCR's involvement in the United Nations' "delivering as one" initiative was important, in that context.

He welcomed the UNHCR's policy on refugee protection in urban areas, and looked forward to the dialogue on that topic in December. The Union also welcomed the decision by the UNHCR to expand protection to internally displaced populations and the African Union Convention on Protection and Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons in Africa. Moreover, it appreciated UNHCR's lead role for three of the clusters in the "cluster system", and noted the importance of mainstreaming cluster activities in budgets and programming. It urged the UNHCR to continue being a constructive partner in the humanitarian reform effort, and to support the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator and the humanitarian coordinators at the country level. It welcomed the establishment of the needs assessment task force, encouraging the UNHCR to continue being an active partner.

As for internal reform, he stressed the importance of establishing gender parity in staffing.

JEEM LIPPWE (Federated States of Micronesia), on behalf of the Pacific Small Island Developing States, said that those States were among the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. The possibility that those impacts would lead to forced displacement across international borders in the Pacific was one of the gravest security threats they faced. The prospect for the future was particularly alarming for some of the low-lying islands. Factors contributing to climate-induced displacement in the Pacific region included: loss of freshwater security, through reduced precipitation and saltwater intrusion into freshwater supplies; and the loss of food security, through increased inundation, erosion and saltwater intrusion affecting agriculture, ocean acidification and coral bleaching. Other factors were: rising sea levels that exacerbated inundation, erosion and other coastal hazards and threatened vital infrastructure, settlements and facilities; and sudden climate-related disasters or hazard events, such as storms and flooding.

Internal relocation within the islands due to climate change had already occurred, he went on. The settlement of Lateau in the northern province of Torba in Vanuatu had to be relocated because of rising sea levels. Further relocations related to climate change had happened in Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, Tuvalu and the Solomon Islands. Internal relocations, both within and between islands, placed enormous strains on food, housing, education, health and water, as recipient communities struggled to accommodate the displaced people. In some of the small island States, internal relocation was not feasible because of geographical constraints. Displacement to a neighbouring or third country might, therefore, be the only option, if climate change continued at the current rate without significant urgent mitigation by the international community.

For some countries in the Pacific, the climate crisis risked the total submergence of islands, he stated. The Pacific islands included a number of low lying atoll islands rising no more than two to three metres above sea level, so that, as the sea level continued to rise, a point could be reached where whole islands would be eliminated. In the most tragic cases, the very existence of sovereign nations could be at risk. He warned that under no circumstances should the effort to protect climate-displaced people be

used as an excuse for inaction on mitigation and adaptation. "Further, any discussion on climate change induced displacement and consideration of options to protect the most vulnerable must be driven by the people affected", he said.

GEORG SPARBER (Liechtenstein) welcomed the focus on the often forgotten protracted refugee situations. Living in provisional circumstances over a prolonged period of time added particular psychological burdens on the people affected, especially if it was compounded by the absence of prospects for a durable solution. He welcomed UNHCR's approach to promote different kinds of durable solutions for refugees and displaced person on an equal footing. The first step out of a prolonged period of dependency must be a real choice between a safe and dignified return, local reintegration or resettlement.

He said Liechtenstein was concerned about the 26 million persons currently displaced within their country due to armed conflict, and urged all parties to conflicts to facilitate the work of relevant organizations in that field and provide the humanitarian space necessary for their operations. Unconditional and immediate access to refugees must be allowed under all circumstances. The rights of people in provisional camps or settlements must be respected, including their freedom of movement. Further, the civilian and humanitarian nature of those camps must be guaranteed. Parities to a conflict were responsible for the internal and external safety and security of camps, including protecting those refugees and camps from any kind of rearmament, remilitarization or recruitment. Camp inhabitants must also be protected from violence, particularly sexual and gender-based violence that was often rampant in displacement situations. The impunity for such crimes must end.

He stressed that the sixtieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions should be a reminder that their provisions were routinely disrespected in many conflict situation. Indeed, the continuous violation of those rules was a concern and, in that regard, his delegation expressed its deepest condolences to the families of the UNHCR workers who died while carrying out their duties. It also condemned last week's deadly attacks in Kabul, killing five United Nations workers and leaving many seriously injured. Liechtenstein was also concerned by the fast growing number of persons displaced due to climate change and natural disasters. More attention should be paid to future humanitarian and displacement challenges related to climate change. That should include consideration of the legal status of person obliged to leave their residence due to long-term climate change or sudden natural disasters.

TETSUJI MIYAMOTO (Japan) said the need for humanitarian assistance had increased in recent years due to a greater incidence and severity of natural disasters resulting from climate change and other factors. As a major donor country, Japan would continue to strengthen its partnership with the UNHCR and continue to support it as much as possible. For its part, the UNHCR should make every effort to continue to update its organizational structures to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of its assistance and to allocate more of its resources to the field. Commending the streamlining of headquarters and efforts to introduce results-based management through the Global Needs Assessment and FOCUS, he said the reform process should be consolidated and even strengthened, which would lead to stronger relations between the agency and donors.

He wanted to make three points, in particular, he said. First, it was necessary for all parties, including non-State parties, to facilitate humanitarian access. The UNHCR staff often served in difficult and dangerous situations, and the increasing attacks on humanitarian personnel, including UNHCR workers, was deplorable. Second, he agreed with the importance of the development and universalization of normative instruments. He welcomed the initiative of African countries to adopt a new Convention on the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa. He also welcomed Slovenia's new membership of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the UNHCR. He added it was vital to further respect the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, and called on Member States which had not yet acceded to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol to consider their accession.

Third, he said, the root causes of displacement should be addressed since, in complex emergencies, it was vital to develop political and peace processes and to deal with the various problems faced by displaced persons in the peacebuilding phase. Issues such as property rights and landmine clearance were impediments to reconciliation and the establishment of durable peace worldwide. Because the reintegration of displaced persons was a global problem, a strategic framework should be developed in various parts of the world that was similar to the Peacebuilding Commission's Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding in the Central African Republic.

He stressed that, although natural disasters could not be prevented, the impact of those calamities could be mitigated through risk-reduction efforts, which could drastically reduce new displacement. The UNHCR must address the problem of protracted refugees, respond to the needs of internally displaced persons, and tackle new challenges such as urban refugees. Structural reforms of the organization were needed if the UNHCR was to cope with such a variety of challenges. As a

demonstration of its commitment, Japan planned to start a pilot resettlement project in fiscal year 2010, in which Japan would receive refugees from Myanmar -- the first project of its kind in Asia.

DOUG MERCADO (United States) said a key goal for his country was endorsing the political stability, human rights and progressive socio-economic conditions worldwide that were necessary to prevent and minimize global refugee flows and displacement. It would work with implementing partners to protect and assist those in situations of displacement due to conflict. The United States reaffirmed UNHCR's noble purposes and shared the organization's objective. Indeed, the UNHCR was heading in the right direction in its mandate and programmes. The United States believed that the protection of persons around the world, who were victims of persecution or armed conflict, should be at the centre of foreign policy and national security decision-making. Moreover, there was a moral imperative to save and safeguard lives.

He noted that the diversity of protection needs was increasing and required a range of responses, drawing upon human rights law, humanitarian law and refugee law. As the UNHCR broadened its mission's scope to assess needs more comprehensively, the protection challenges were ever more complex. The United States supported a global approach that addressed a variety of populations and circumstances, but believed that protection of conflict-affected populations must remain a priority. Policy-makers involved in humanitarian responses must not only provide assistance once the conflict had emerged, but should engage in measures to prevent displacement and strengthen norms for the rights of those displaced by conflict. Their interests should be a central part of the policy debate and the root causes of their displacement addressed. Humanitarian diplomacy played a critical role in protection and the United States strongly supported UNHCR efforts to engage Governments on the fundamental issues of principle, such as freedom of movement, minimum standards relating to food, shelter and health and protection from violence.

He said that finding durable solutions was one of the best investments that could be made in advancing the security and welfare of refugees. Work to that end was inextricably linked to humanitarian assistance efforts. At the same time, the United States sought to move beyond care and maintenance towards increasing the self-reliance of all refugees, and especially those in protracted situations. In the months and years ahead, the United States would continue to fulfil its commitment to protecting vulnerable populations at home and overseas, while providing diplomatic and financial support to the UNHCR. As the single largest donor to that Office, the United States anticipated continued progress in its ongoing reform efforts.

JEAN-DANIEL VIGNY (Switzerland) addressed three issues: protection; humanitarian access and the safety of humanitarian personnel; and the issue of urban refugees. Noting that the primary responsibility for the protection of refugees lay with States, he advocated the ratification of, and respect for, the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol by the largest number of States. Those instruments were the cornerstone of the High Commissioner's mandate. In that context, he welcomed UNHCR efforts to devise instruments and approaches to strengthen the reception and protection capacity of countries confronted with large refugee flows. He further welcomed the adoption of a management approach that was both results-based and took into account the numerous aspects of protection under UNHCR's mandate.

He expressed grave concern at increasingly frequent restrictions imposed on humanitarian access in conflict zones and following conflicts, urging States and concerned parties to respect humanitarian space and guarantee the protection of personnel from the UNHCR and its partners. As part of a Swiss initiative to that end, a manual on the regulatory framework, for use by national authorities, international organizations and those in the field, was just one practical instrument in formulation. Further, noting that 50 per cent of the world's refugee population lived in urban areas, he said that new solutions must be found to ensure that they were provided protection and assistance. He looked forward to the High Commissioner's dialogue and welcomed the recent publication of the new UNHCR policy on the subject.

MAIA SHANIDZE (Georgia) said the human rights situation in the occupied territories of Georgia, the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region of South Ossetia, had deteriorated after the 8 August war. The independent fact-finding mission had confirmed the occurrence of serious human rights violations. No international presence was permitted on the ground to report on developments there. The ceasefire agreement of 12 August "lay in tatters", since its northern neighbour refused to implement it. The General Assembly had passed a resolution on the status of internally displaced persons in Georgia, which underlined the need to act urgently.

She said Georgia was committed to addressing issues related to internally displaced persons. Since May, it had been working to register people displaced by the war, and was granting internally displaced status to people who were unable to return. There were 131,169 such persons. So far, fewer than 30,000 internally displaced persons had been able to return. Income-generation programmes were

being put in place to restart local economies. Education and medical assistance was covered by the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Science. Families living far from schools were given free transportation. In addition, the Government was also taking care to provide assistance to people displaced in the early 1990s.

To ensure employment among internally displaced persons, she said the Government was moving their place of work closer to them. Land was being distributed to persons who were employed in agriculture prior to their displacement. It was also providing education and social services near newly constructed residences for displaced persons. The State Action Plan was adopted in May, whose main goal was to promote socio-economic integration and to improve living conditions. The Action Plan would respect the principles of voluntary and informed decision-making and gender equality.

THORALF STENVOLD (Norway) said the High Commissioner's statement had been informative, analytical and factual. Mr. Guterres always told the truth, even if it was inconvenient. Norway considered that to be real leadership. He noted that internally displaced persons had much weaker legal rights than refugees and stateless people, and it was of the utmost importance that the international community, including the UNHCR, intervene to protect them. In that respect, the recent adoption of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa was a positive development. It provided a comprehensive regional framework governing the protection and assistance of internally displaced persons before, during and after displacement. He encouraged all African Union member States to sign and ratify that Convention and to implement it nationally, and said his Government was prepared to support that process.

Turning to the approximately 8 million people who had lived as refugees for more than a decade, he said those people typically lived in camps under harsh conditions, deprived of the rights most of the world took for granted -- such as the right to move, work and shape their own future. Trapped in protracted refugee situations, they were kept passive and not able to show their added value to society. They needed not only more attention, but protection. To that end, Norway appreciated the discussion that took place at the Dialogue on Protection Challenges last year and supported efforts to reach a conclusion on protracted refugee situations this year. He hoped a consensus could be reached in ongoing talks in Geneva. Regardless, the High Commissioner should continue to take the lead and raise the issue with Member States, affected States, populations and development actors.

MONZER SELIM (Egypt) pointed out that, although the report of the High Commissioner for Refugees that was before the Committee reflected a number of achievements, Egypt remained concerned about the negative effects of the international crises, the most recent of which was the international financial crisis, as well as the negative impacts of climate change resulting in an increase in the number of refugees. Those factors, along with others, jeopardized and constrained the availability of resources to finance UNHCR activities, further underscoring the necessity to maintain the sustainability of pledged contributions, and the need to increase them in order to enable the UNHCR perform the duties and functions expected of it under its mandate.

Taking note of the Commission's contribution to the provision of protection and assistance to internally displaced persons in the context of inter-agency coordination in that field within the United Nations system, he however re-emphasized that such activities needed to be consistent with relevant General Assembly resolutions and within a framework of cooperation and complete transparency when working with Member States.

Also, the world was witnessing an exponential increase in the number of internally displaced persons as a consequence of natural disasters, drought and armed conflicts, he said. Those numbers could well multiply as a result of climate change, if coordinated efforts did not address the root causes. That serious problem required increased attention from the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and development institutions, so developing countries could continue their pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals. Further, any solution should not be at the expense of the original mandate of the UNHCR.

He outlined a number of prime objectives he said were necessary to intensify international action in the care and protection of refugees, returnees and displaced persons. Among them he listed: consolidation of international efforts towards the elimination of the inherent causes of conflicts in the world; addressing the protection of refugees within the context of promoting the respect of International Refugee Law; implementing the principles of international solidarity and effective partnership in sharing the burdens and responsibilities of protecting and supporting refugees; and securing appropriate conditions that encouraged the voluntary repatriation of refugees to their home countries. The refugee problem was, first and foremost, a humanitarian issue, but it had political and economic roots. A "holistic humanitarian vision" was needed in dealing with the problem, one founded on international legal principles and that enhanced the possibilities of uprooting the causes for asylum-seeking.

CLAUDIA BLUM (Colombia) said her Government had assumed its primary responsibility for providing assistance to displaced persons. It provided protection through a solid legal and policy framework. The Constitutional Court and the Government had developed indicators that allowed progress and challenges to be assessed. In line with the Court's recent decisions, the Government and indigenous communities had begun consultations on a national programme to guarantee the rights of indigenous peoples affected by displacement. In addition, it had begun consultations to elaborate safeguards for 34 groups of indigenous persons, aimed at strengthening their protection against violence and displacement. The office of the presidential counsellor for gender equity had recently adopted a guideline on gender.

She said the presidential agency for social action presented the annual report on its activities, which stated that, since 2006, State investment in comprehensive assistance to the displaced amounted to \$500 million. A similar amount was guaranteed for 2010. The capacity to provide humanitarian assistance had also been strengthened, by an increase in the budget from \$23 million in 2007 to \$80 million in 2008. In support of durable solutions, the presidential agency supported 75,000 families through income-generating programmes and that number was expected to reach 100,000 by the end of 2009. Several hundred thousands were given cash transfers and, to preserve land ownership, 3.2 million hectares of land were being held under special protection by the Government.

She said the number of displaced persons had gone down compared to 2002, as a result of the decline in violence and crime. The UNHCR report did not reflect that decline, nor did it reflect the number of people who had been returned. As for the work of the UNHCR, she stressed the importance of strengthened cooperation with States, in line with States' international obligations.

AIDA A. EL-MAGIED (Sudan) said her country had, over the course of four decades, opened its doors to refugees from neighbouring countries. In that, it had become an example for brother countries based on its heritage, which encouraged it to be generous to visitors. But the camps in Sudan's east, as well as the central provinces, were facing reductions in services. She stressed that any discussion of refugees should not forget the refugees being hosted by other countries. For its part, Sudan's Government of National Unity had adopted appropriate legislation, including a policy on refugees, based on its commitments under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and other international conventions. The Sudan had developed that policy on the basis of the firm belief that the primary responsibility rested on the State. Moreover, refugees should live in dignity and freedom throughout all phases of displacement. That included women and children.

She said that the problem of displaced persons and refugees was being addressed, despite the limited financial resources available to build and provide services. She, thus, appealed to donor countries to bolster the programmes aimed to support refugees. The Sudan remained true to its responsibility and kept its doors open to brother countries. It was also working to consolidate its efforts to strengthen the means of protection. It would also work towards strengthening the implementation of the Geneva Conventions and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. She underscored her country's current efforts to organize implementation of the 1974 Regulation of Asylum Act to ensure the return of refugees.

FARHAD MAMDOUHI (Iran) said the outbreak of crises in countries neighbouring Iran had caused millions of refugees to enter his country. Fortunately, because of improvements in the security environment in Afghanistan and Iraq, most Afghan and Iraqi refugees had voluntarily repatriated to their own countries. But, more than 1 million Afghan and Iraqi refugees still remained. In the last three decades, Iran had spent billions of dollars to provide subsidized food, energy, public transportation, health care and social services, and legal services to millions of refugees. The Iranian Government supported voluntary return as a preferred durable solution and, at the conference on the return and reintegration of Afghan refugees and displaced persons in October 2008, had stressed that donor assistance be allocated to housing for returnees. Distribution of land greatly enhanced the trend towards voluntary return.

He encouraged the international community not to remain indifferent to the situation of Afghan refugees and displaced persons after repatriation. It should facilitate the repatriation process until refugees and displaced persons could be reintegrated. To advocate for local integration could spark a crisis for host countries, especially in "mass influx situations", and he expected the international community to refrain from providing unrealistic and irrational remedies. A small number of resettlement cases, 0.5 per cent, were from Iran. The UNHCR said of 85,000 refugees and displaced persons in Iran, only 1,400 cases were considered in 2009. The lack of participation by developed countries, as well as the low number of resettlement cases, was disappointing, especially considering the fact that an increasing number of refugees wished to resettle in third countries. The UNHCR should encourage more participation by the international community in resettlement efforts.

He said international assistance for refugees and displaced persons located in Iran did not

match their real needs. Medical costs for refugees in Iran this year cost more than \$12 million.

Ms. MTAWALI (United Republic of Tanzania), aligning herself with the SADC, noted that a majority of refugees and displaced persons were being hosted by developing countries. In the quest for durable solutions to the refugee problem, the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, in conjunction with the UNHCR, had repatriated 591,639 Burundian and Congolese refugees since the voluntary repatriation exercise began in 2002. Since then, not a single refugee had returned to her country out of fear for his or her life. She acknowledged the help given by donors in the repatriation process, which was overseen by a tripartite commission that included ministers from origin countries. The commission ensured that operations were conducted with strict adherence to the principle of voluntariness; refugees were never forced to return home.

She said local integration was another pillar in the country's strategy for a durable solution. Out of 74,000 refugees above the age of 18 who had applied for naturalization, 12,000 were granted citizenship. The decision to offer local integration was made with the understanding that the international donor community would provide funding, and she called on donors to fulfil their commitment. In terms of protracted refugee situations, her Government had called for the invocation of the cessation clause with respect to Burundian refugees, in view of the burden they imposed on host communities. It seemed logical that, when situations in countries of origin improved and when conditions that gave rise to flight no longer existed, refugees should return home. She noted that resettlement had never been fully explored as a durable solution, and she raised a plea to the developed world to open up their doors for more resettlement opportunities.

MOURAD BENMEHIDI (Algeria) said the High Commissioner's report described the challenges confronting the international community in providing assistance to refugees. The UNHCR was tasked with providing assistance to internally displaced persons, as well as refugees from such events as natural disasters. His delegation called on the international community to provide appropriate aid, as well as to maintain the distinction between refugees and economic migrants in its work. Developing countries bore a higher burden, particularly those in Africa, where there were an estimated 11.6 million internally displaced and 2.1 million refugees. The numbers spoke for themselves, and Algeria welcomed the adoption of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa. He called for support for those efforts from the international community.

Algeria, which had lived under the yoke of colonialism, had a great interest in the question of refugees, he said. It had been hosting refugees from Western Sahara for three decades. It upheld its obligations with respect to those populations and welcomed the commitment of the staff of the UNHCR to supporting the Saharawi population. Algeria welcomed the decision to revise upward the budget of the UNHCR. It also welcomed the confidence-building measures that would allow refugees in the Tindouf camps to restore familial contacts and bonds. A political resolution to the conflict should be reached that was mutually acceptable and that would allow the Saharawis to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination.

MARINA VIKTOROVA (Russian Federation) said the UNHCR had an important role to play in assisting refugees, and in providing pointers for improving work in that area. The Russian Federation supported the UNHCR as it stepped up efforts to provide assistance to refugees and other displaced persons. For its part, the Russian Government would work to improve protection of refugee rights. It believed that influential international organizations, like the UNHCR, should conduct open and direct dialogues with all parties involved in assisting refugees. In addition, it supported UNHCR's efforts towards reform, optimizing its expenditure, and regionalizing its functions. Its Executive Committee had conducted itself in a highly professional manner, and in its future work, she would encourage it to focus on coordinating the activities of member States of the Committee.

She said the cluster approach was effective in emergency situations, especially in times of mass exodus. In situations linked to refugees, the UNHCR should take a lead role. As regards internally displaced persons, she said the main responsibility should be taken by the Governments of the State where displacement was taking place. In meeting protection needs, there must be respect for national procedures, especially in terms of mixed migration, curbing illegal migration, and making sure that people did not abuse their status as refugees. There must be an exchange of information on legal developments.

She raised the issue of statelessness, commending the High Commissioner's position on that issue. She noted the Executive Committee's adoption, in 2006, of a declaration on statelessness. Her Government was concerned by the high number of refugees, and noted that, in Latvia and Estonia, no solution had been found for the numerous people who were stateless. There must be a coordinated effort to overcome the stalemate in statelessness, through measures that were free from political calculation and double standards. For its part, the Russian Federation was seeking to modernize its refugee laws. It had made progress in defining the status of refugees, with national procedures and legal

guarantees to protect their rights. It supported UNHCR's policy on voluntary settlement as a long-term solution option. There must be a more balanced approach to mass settlement in third countries, and such an approach must be developed in consultation with regional partners.

ZAHIR TANIN (Afghanistan) thanked the High Commissioner for his commitment to the refugees, internally displaced persons and returnees of Afghanistan. Unfortunately, Afghanistan held the unfortunate record of being the leading country of origin of refugees worldwide, with 80 per cent of those refugees having been in exile for more than 20 years. Fortunately, that trend was beginning to change. Afghanistan's lost citizens had at last begun to find their way home. Since 2001, over 5 million had returned, with over one quarter of a million returning in the past year. He expressed gratitude to Iran and Pakistan for hosting and assisting over 2.7 million Afghan refugees that had settled in those countries, as well as gratitude to all other host countries and the UNHCR and other relevant organizations. Without their assistance, efforts to encourage repatriation would be severely limited. Still, those seeking refugee status or asylum deserved attention, as well, and efforts were needed to ensure they did not fall through the cracks.

Despite the success of Afghanistan's voluntary repatriation programme -- which was UNHCR's largest in the last seven years -- it did not have the resources required to provide for the needs of those returnees. Repatriation alone did not equal success, and coordinated work to ensure that refugees returned safely, voluntarily, gradually and with dignity was needed. Moreover, repatriation had also been affected by the twin threats of terrorism and insecurity, as proven by the continuing rise in the number of internally displaced persons in provinces with the most insecurity, and particularly along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Humanitarian organizations still had limited access to Afghanistan's most insecure areas and a challenging humanitarian situation had been further exacerbated by a rise in food prices and continued attacks on international and non-governmental aid organizations.

He underlined the Afghan Government's commitment to implement the strategy on refugees, returnees, and internally displaced persons as outlined in its National Development Strategy. That Strategy aimed to increase the country's absorption capacity, so it could manage and assist sustainable reintegration. Reforms to that end were being undertaken in the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation. However, Afghanistan would have difficulty implementing its strategy for refugees without sustained financial assistance from the international community.

Finally, he noted that the Afghan Government was continuing to work closely with the Governments of Pakistan and Iran, as well as the UNHCR, to achieve shared objectives. The seventeenth trilateral meeting had been held in July. Among other important commitments, Pakistan had made a commitment to extend its programme that provided Afghan refugees in Pakistan with P.O.R. cards until 2012.

MUYAMBO SIPANGULE (Zambia), aligning himself with the SADC, said it was futile to address a symptom without addressing the cause of the problem. It was disheartening to see the continued proliferation of conflict in Africa and other parts of the world, and he called on the international community to deliberately devote more time, effort and resources to address armed conflict, which was the root cause of internal and external displacement. It was vitally important to develop greater respect for human rights, democratic values and good governance in refugee-producing countries. Challenging though it might be, States were obliged to devote time, effort and resources to "reinvigorate" the refugee protection regime. In that regard, he welcomed efforts by the UNHCR and the African Union to convene a special summit on African refugees, and welcomed elaboration of a convention on the protection of displaced persons.

He said peace in Zambia's region had led to fewer refugees, with the exception of inflows from the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Horn of Africa, especially Somalia. But, the large presence of refugees in Zambia meant that it would continue to prioritize voluntary repatriation as a preferred solution, and facilitate resettlement to third countries. Efforts would be directed to local integration where possible. In the case of refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, it was well on the way to achieving the target of 18,500 voluntary repatriation that it set for itself in 2009. But 30,000 refugees still remained, which meant a review of the voluntary repatriation agreement would have to be reviewed. As for Angolan refugees, new modalities agreed with the Angolan Government had helped facilitate their return. In terms of Rwandan refugees, he called on the UNHCR to assess the applicability of the cessation clause, because Zambia seemed to be making no progress with repatriation efforts. He said Zambia faced challenges in mixed migration into urban areas. The High Commissioner's dialogue on that topic would be welcome.

LULIT ZEWDIE G/MARIAM (Ethiopia) said the Secretary-General's report "assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa" (document A/64/330) contained unsubstantiated facts regarding the situation of internally displaced persons in Ethiopia. However, her delegation would not dwell on that issue, since it had been addressed in the morning. She went on to say that, while

millions had been able to return home, their reintegration was often challenged by the absence of appropriate infrastructure, sustainable development measures and low attention given to the link between relief and development. Undoubtedly, the increase in the global humanitarian and environmental crisis was overstressing the already scarce resources and response capacities of the UNHCR. Greater multilateral and international cooperation was needed to strengthen the response of the UNCHR and those countries already sharing their meagre resources with refugees.

She further emphasized the need to financially strengthen the UNCHR, particularly in Africa, in ways that were commensurate with the continent's high number of refugees. Likewise, the international community's cooperation was vital in supporting Government efforts to address the problems of internally displaced persons. African countries were doing their best to find durable solutions to the plight of refugees and displaced persons. Efforts to end conflicts and measures to address the impact of the current global crises were among the steps being taken by African leaders to end the root causes leading to the flight and displacement of people. Further, the adoption of the African Union Convention on the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa was a strong reaffirmation of Africa's commitment. As a result of the consolidation of peace and stability in some countries of origin, voluntary repatriation, local reintegration and resettlement of millions of refugees were also increasingly possible.

She said Ethiopia attached great importance to the 1951 United Nations Convention and its Protocol of 1967, as well as the 1996 Organization of African Unity Convention governing the specific aspects of refugee problems in Africa. It had also enacted a National Refugee Law that established procedures for applying for asylum. The Government worked closely with the UNHCR and the WFP to provide assistance and protection for refugees. However, Ethiopia was surrounded by conflict and instability, and the number of people seeking refuge there was rising. It currently hosted 110,000 refugees and was working relentlessly to find durable solutions in that regard through voluntary repatriation, reintegration and resettlement. More than 6,000 Eritrean refugees had been resettled in the United States and 250,000 Somali refugees had been voluntarily repatriated to the north-west of Somalia between 1997 and 2005. However, three refugee camps were opened between 2007 and 2009 to host the recent large influx of Somali refugees. Roughly 36,000 Sudanese refugees had also been voluntarily repatriated to their country and preparations were under way to do the same with those remaining.

SARAH ROBERTSON (Canada) said durable solutions to displacements must be central to UNHCR's efforts and of Member States. Canada looked forward to the upcoming High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges, which would focus on people of concern to the UNHCR in urban settings. It welcomed UNHCR's policy on refugee protection and solutions in urban areas, and looked forward to discussing how to operationalize that policy. It also welcomed the UNHCR's leadership on resolving protracted refugee situations, and supported the agency's efforts to ensure that it had the capacity to fulfil its protection cluster responsibilities, while also ensuring that it fulfilled its refugee protection mandate. She took note of the High Commissioner's recent expression of interest to lead, where appropriate, the protection cluster for conflict-affected populations, including internally displaced persons, and looked forward to a discussion within the Executive Committee of the parameters of such engagement.

She stressed the need for age, gender and diversity mainstreaming in analysing protection needs, and commended the UNHCR for its efforts to take a rights- and community-based approach to the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers. She called on the UNHCR to continue its reform process and to report on achievements generated by those reforms. But, the needs-based budget might raise the expectation of stakeholders, and it was possible that they would remain unfulfilled in difficult economic times. She encouraged the UNHCR to ensure that those expectations were managed.

Recognizing the need for a comprehensive approach to displacement, she encouraged the formation of partnerships between development, peace and security and humanitarian actors. She said the UNHCR should continue to strengthen the links between the protection cluster and work in the field. She also called on all State and non-State actors to respect humanitarian principles and to ensure the safety of aid workers.

SULJUK MUSTANSAR TARAR (Pakistan) said the protracted presence of refugees in any country entailed political, social, economic and environmental consequences that needed to be fully appreciated, evaluated and compensated. Efforts to rehabilitate damaged ecosystems and socio-economic structures needed to be redoubled. The UNHCR should ensure international assistance to host countries in developing refugee-impacted areas and host communities that had been adversely affected. For its part, Pakistan had hosted the largest refugee population in the world since the 1980s, with the refugee population rising at its peak to 4 million. It had exhibited generosity and hospitality for over a quarter century and had adhered to the principle of gradualism in repatriating Afghan refugees. However, that had had a negative impact on the economic, socio-cultural and security sectors of Pakistan. Host communities were further stressed by the present global financial and food crises.

The Government of Pakistan appreciated the visits of the High Commissioner for Refugees, as well as his deputy over the past months, he said, condemning the acts of terrorism carried out against humanitarian workers in the country. Pakistan was determined to eliminate that menace. In assisting the repatriation of Afghan refugees, Pakistan adhered to the principle of voluntarism and gradualism enshrined in the Tripartite Agreement and, in consultation with the UNHCR and the Afghan Government, had agreed to continued-assisted repatriation programmes beyond 2009. In that regard, he highlighted the signing of a Letter of Mutual Intent based on a revised strategy for the management of Afghan refugees living in Pakistan.

Beyond the principle of voluntarism, returns needed to be sustainable, he said. Thus, a “pull factor” should be created that included the design of viable individual and family return packages. Rehabilitation and sustainable reintegration of Afghan refugees into their own society would contribute immensely to regional stability. But, until this repatriation, however, the international community must share responsibility in maintaining Afghan refugees in Pakistan. The assistance regime, which had been reduced in 2002, needed to be strengthened.

MOHAMMED LOULICHKI (Morocco) paid tribute to humanitarian personnel carrying out their duties under difficult circumstances, and voiced support to the High Commissioner for his work. The threat facing humanitarian workers complicated their goal of providing protection and achieving a lasting solution for refugees. At the end of 2008, the number of people under UNHCR’s purview had risen to 34.4 million. In that year, around 1.3 million internally displaced persons and 600,000 refugees were able to return home as a result of voluntary return programmes. He commended the UNHCR and its partners for their work in improving living conditions for refugees and displaced persons, for maintaining the civil character of camps, and for facilitating family reunifications. He welcomed its decision to build the capacity of international protection services in the area of education, and in its effort to evaluate food needs based on proven data.

He urged the UNHCR to do its part to end the dreadful conditions under which refugees in Tindouf had lived for over 30 years, as they awaited their voluntary return to Morocco. The Government of Morocco favoured a plan of action based on voluntary return as a favoured solution. During his visit to the region, the High Commissioner had seen for himself the tragedy of family separation at the camps. He was able to note the refusal of Algerian authorities to honour their commitments, refused since 1967. In his statement, the Algerian representative had touched on the issue of the Sahara, but talk was not enough. That Government must act to solve the problem, and should allow those refugees to express themselves, move freely and to leave their areas without risk to their lives.

He noted that the Algerian representative had called for a political solution, as the Security Council and General Assembly had called for. Political solutions lay in voluntary actions exercised through political will. Being a neighbour carried commitments; neighbours were obliged not to obstruct the quest for solutions, as Algeria had done for 32 years, but to adopt a constructive attitude towards regional disputes. Instead, Morocco continued to be disappointed by Algeria’s negative attitude towards achieving the goals launched by the Special Envoy.

ROMAN TODER (Ukraine) aligned himself with the statement from the European Union and said that Ukraine’s Parliament had adopted a law on refugee status in June of 2001 which, among other things, established State guarantees for refugee protection, in accordance with international standards. It had processed hundreds of asylum-seekers and built facilities for them in several regions, and was building another with the support of the UNHCR and the European Commission. Further, Ukraine was an active participant in a number of international migration projects and maintained ties with numerous relevant organizations, among them, the UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration and the Danish Refugee Council. A civil council had been established by the State Committee for Nationalities and Religions to improve refugee legislation and, in July of 2009, an action plan on integrating those granted asylum had been launched.

Reaffirming that the protection of refugees and the prevention and reduction of statelessness were primarily the responsibility of States in cooperation with the international community, consistent with relevant General Assembly resolutions and international law, he said that Ukraine fulfilled its international obligations under the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol in good faith. He welcomed UNHCR’s new role as a leader in the clusters of camp coordination and camp management, protection and emergency shelter, in areas of conflict-related internal displacement. Further, he expressed support for UNHCR’s organizational reform policies.

JAKKRIT SRIVALI (Thailand), citing his own country’s three-decade history of partnership with the UNHCR, said Thailand, home to more than 130,000 displaced persons from its neighbours, was highly appreciative of UNHCR’s work in that country and elsewhere in the world.

As host to such large and often sudden influxes of displaced persons, Thailand was convinced that durable and comprehensive solutions for the displaced required the involvement of the entire international community, all stakeholders and all sectors of society, to work closely together in the spirit of burden-sharing. In that vein, he looked forward to the upcoming Dialogue on Protection Challenges at the end of the year, and expressed a keen interest in learning more on the issue of “persons of concern to UNHCR in urban settings”, and, in particular, how the refugee agency viewed the unique circumstances, challenges and responses to that particular caseload.

He urged partners to engage one another in a thorough discussion on that particular group and hoped that, in all such discussions, a comprehensive picture of the root causes, as well as of durable, practical and other solutions, would emerge from the exchanges of views, experiences and perspectives.

Concluding, he said Thailand, as a troop-contributing country to United Nations peacekeeping forces, was all too aware of the dangers faced by the dedicated men and women who volunteered for such missions. In that context, he strongly condemned any attacks on peacekeepers and other humanitarian personnel, noting that, without those brave men and women, on-the-ground assistance for displaced persons would be much more difficult, if not impossible, to accomplish.

NEBOJSA KALUDJEROVIC (Montenegro) said his country was committed to playing an active role in assisting States in meeting their international obligations that aimed at protecting and resolving refugee issues. Aligning his remarks with those made on behalf of the European Union, he said common responsibility and activities should be aimed at ensuring transparency, neutrality and impartiality in the coordination of international humanitarian responses to that issue. For its part, Montenegro had demonstrated its openness and solidarity to thousands of displaced persons from the territory of the former Yugoslav republics, regardless of their religious or national belief. Currently, the number of displaced represented 4 per cent of the population. To address the problem of displaced and internally displaced persons, Montenegro provided equal treatment for all, particularly in areas of employment, education, health, protection and opportunities for entrepreneurship. It had also adopted several legal documents providing guidelines and setting out the obligations of relevant Government institutions.

He said the re-registration of displaced and internally displaced persons was ongoing. That process was fully supported by the UNHCR and would be completed in December 2009. It would also determine the exact number and collect all relevant data on internally displaced persons from Kosovo, thereby allowing for better coordination of joint regional efforts aimed at resolving remaining problems. Moreover, amendments to the Law on Foreigners provided all displaced persons the opportunity to acquire the status of foreigners with permanent residence. That gave them the ability to enjoy full rights. Displaced persons could also be registered as refugees if they wanted to fulfil the requirements of the Law on Asylum, which would allow them to apply for Montenegrin citizenship.

He stressed that the problem of displaced persons in Montenegro, and the Balkans region as whole, required coordinated regional approaches, as already demonstrated in the Sarajevo Declaration of 2005. His country expected the European Community, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the UNHCR, as well as countries of the region, to intensify their efforts to create appropriate conditions for the unhindered return of displaced persons. Returns that had already taken place must be consolidated to make them sustainable.

NAHIDA SOBHAN (Bangladesh) hailed the work that the UNHCR had been doing all over the world. She said it was alarming to see that conflicts, violence, persecution and deprivation had spiralled out of control, coupled with new global threats such as climate change, which were giving displacement a more menacing twist. She urged the UNHCR to come up with strategies to address such challenges. She regretted that the work of refugee-hosting countries had, despite the social and economic strain placed on them, often gone largely unnoticed. In that regard, over the past 30 years and despite huge environmental, social, economic and security risks, Bangladesh had done a remarkable job in hosting incoming refugees from Myanmar. In that regard, she called on the international community to carry its share of the refugee burden.

She said the only viable solution to the global refugee crisis would be to repatriate them, making it critical that favourable conditions be created in their homelands. She was also concerned that the international community tended to forget about prolonged refugee situations. Nonetheless, she was encouraged to see that the UNHCR had striven to devote its resources to field operations, and refugees stood to benefit more from a structurally reformed and decentralized refugee agency. Bangladesh endorsed UNHCR’s efforts to uphold its core protection mandate, and hoped that it would strike a balance between all six goals of the Agenda for Protection. Finally, she encouraged all segments of society to lend a helping hand to the agency’s mandate, adding that people were morally obligated to ensure the well-being of some 31 million refugees and internally displaced persons throughout the world today.

B.K. HARIPRASAD (India) observed that refugees and stateless persons were a particularly vulnerable group, and had no choice but to rely on the hospitality of the country where they had sought refuge. It was important to extend what help was needed to allow such groups to live a life of dignity. The UNHCR's work was much appreciated, although there was some concern that it had not been able to gain access to some of the people it was supposed to protect. Non-State actors in situations of armed conflict had prevented humanitarian assistance from reaching victims, and it was important that States worked to foster respect among non-State actors for the international humanitarian framework and machinery. It was equally important that the determination of refugee status conform strictly to UNHCR's mandate, to ensure that those guilty of terrorist and criminal acts did not abuse the asylum systems and the international protection regime.

He said the primary responsibility for internally displaced persons lay with national authorities, and UNHCR's involvement should only take place with their agreement. Or, its involvement should take place in the situation of where national authority had collapsed, and then in conformity with conditions approved by the General Assembly. Further, such involvement should be based on due consideration of UNHCR's mandate, modality of intervention, availability of resources and after careful examination of all implications. India was not a signatory to the 1951 Convention in Refugees, because it did not believe that the document addressed issues relating to massive migration and mixed refugee flows. But it respected international principles pertaining to refugees, and upheld the principle of non-refoulement.

He said India had shouldered two of the biggest movements of populations in modern history, one related to the partition of India in 1947 and the other during the liberation struggle of Bangladesh in 1971. It was still host to some of the largest refugee populations in the world. It had successfully managed repatriation through bilateral arrangements.

FEODOR STARCEVIC (Serbia), aligning his delegation with the statement made on behalf of the European Union, particularly welcomed its recognition that the fact of voluntary return was often hampered by insecurity and lack of economic and social infrastructures in the country of origin. If properly addressed, that problem could be overcome to the benefit of citizens forced to find refuge in other countries. It had been almost two decades since Serbia had begun actively cooperating with the UNHCR and other international organizations providing protection and assistance to a large number of refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, as well as internally displaced persons from Serbia's southern province of Kosovo and Metohija. From over half a million refugees registered in Serbia in 1996, over 86,000 continued to hold refugee status. The decrease of the refugee population by over 80 per cent had been primarily from the fact that more than 250,000 of them had acquired Serbian citizenship, as a first step to local integration. However, most still faced a harsh social and economic situation, due to the repossession of their property and lack of access to acquired individual rights in their countries of origin. That was particularly important for those still in refugee status.

He noted that the UNHCR had identified Serbia as one of five countries in the world -- and the only one in Europe -- affected by protracted refugee displacement. In addition to the over 86,000 refugees from neighbouring countries, it was of concern that the 230,000 internally displaced persons from and within the province of Kosovo had not significantly declined for more than 10 years. Their return had been slow, and almost came to a halt in the last two years. For its part, Serbia had, over the last two years, undertaken several initiatives with the UNHCR to find durable solutions for refugees by fostering regional cooperation with neighbouring countries. It hoped that the recent visit by the High Commissioner would result in intensified efforts to close the chapter of refugees and internally displaced persons in south-eastern Europe. In the near future, Serbia was also planning to organize and host an international regional conference aimed at finding durable solutions for refugees.

He stressed that Serbia would continue to fulfil its responsibilities under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and would continue to provide for the local integration of those refugees who decided to stay in Serbia. For their part, countries of origin should make additional efforts to ensure sustainable returns, based on the full respect of human rights of refugees and their own citizens. Unimpeded access to all acquired individual rights should be granted in a free and non-discriminatory manner. Continuing donor assistance to displaced populations and engagement by the international community in finding durable solutions would remain important.

ENNA PARK (Republic of Korea) said more effective responses were needed to alleviate the plight of refugees during the global recession. In that context, she extended full support to UNHCR's reforms, along with its strengthened efforts on emergency shelter and protection. Expressing grave concern over continued reports of the forced returns of refugees and other persons of concern to the UNHCR, she said that there were no acceptable excuses for violating the principle of "non-refoulement" in that way. In that context, she said that attention needed to be paid to émigrés from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea who were forced to return, agreeing with the rapporteur for human rights in that country that they had a well-founded fear of persecution if they returned.

In addition, she said that more effort should be made to address the specific needs of women refugees, given their vulnerability to sexual abuse and other violence, and child refugees, who should be given special consideration in interception, border and asylum situations. In that regard, she urged the UNHCR to further enhance its partnership with international organizations and non-governmental organizations and to continue to develop and apply the Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming (AGDM) framework for protection, and she praised the organization for becoming the lead agency for the protection cluster in humanitarian assistance activities. She reconfirmed that her country was strongly committed to working in collaboration with States and with the UNHCR and its partners to respond to the needs of refugees around the world.

ADAM KUYMIZAKIS ([Malta](#)), aligning himself with the European Union, said that Malta's armed forces risked their lives in early October to rescue a drifting dinghy that was carrying 78 illegal immigrants. Later in the month, the armed forces brought ashore a group of 106 illegal immigrants when their rubber dinghy took water. So far this year, 13 boats had brought over 1,200 immigrants to Malta from 43 countries. Sinking boats in the Mediterranean were a too-frequent occurrence, and brought unnecessary strain on relations between States. In addition, given Malta's small size and high population density, the problem of illegal migration took on new dimensions. But, it would, nevertheless, continue to honour its international obligations vis-à-vis genuine refugees and persons qualifying for humanitarian protection.

Since 2005, the Government had embarked on an intensive campaign focusing on three objectives: awareness-raising; obtaining assistance from international partners in line with the principle of solidarity and burden-sharing; and pursuing strategies and policies that could provide durable solutions to the problem of illegal migration. Illegal immigration constituted a soft security threat to countries of origin, transit and destination. It took away potential labour resources from origin countries, and produced burdens to transitory and destination countries.

He said there needed to be closer security cooperation between States, including through border management measures, to help eradicate inhumane human smuggling activities and trafficking. Believing that more could be done to improve existing systems, Malta had frequently called for more solidarity with countries that experienced a high influx of illegal immigrants. Specialists should exchange best practices, and States should focus on a cohesive approach to cope with that phenomenon. They should raise awareness of the issue among their people, because those affected were often innocent victims. As the Prime Minister had said in his address to the General Assembly, the United Nations should address the issue of illegal migration in a holistic way.

ABDERRAHIM OULD HADRAMI ([Mauritania](#)) expressed condolences to the families of those UNHCR staff members who had lost their lives. He noted that, following events in 1989, many Mauritania citizens had settled in Senegal. In 2007, an agreement had been signed to allow the return and reintegration of those refugees. The Government of Mauritania had established several bodies to ensure the success of that effort. As a result of the agreement, thousands of Mauritians had returned to 62 places. Services for their basic needs were being met by the Government. The national agency for the support and reintegration of refugees also provided them with food and land, as well as support in finding a job. To date, more than 100 teachers and professors were among those who had returned.

Noting that the agreed programme of return would end at the end of the year, he said by then an estimated 22,000 people would have returned. He thanked the UNHCR and the Senegalese Government for their efforts in undertaking that programme and for their support for those refugees during the years they lived outside Mauritania.

X.L. NOFUKUKA ([South Africa](#)) acknowledged the progress made by the UNHCR in its reform efforts, adding that improved performance would make it easier for States to fulfil their responsibilities towards refugees. But, while the number of refugees had decreased, the number of internally displaced persons had increased. Africa was home to the largest number of internally displaced persons, with many of them having lived in a situation of exile for decades. When such a large number of people were forced to live in camps and settlements with limited rights, it could expose them to security threats, including possible recruitment into armed groups. Some were displaced by conflict, but a growing number were displaced by natural disasters, a reminder that the effects of climate change should not be ignored.

He pointed to the African Union Convention on Protection and Assistance for Internally Displaced Persons in Africa, which he said South Africa was looking forward to implementing, with help from the UNHCR and other partners. His Government welcomed the notion of increased partnership and better coordination with other players, under the leadership of Governments. It would continue to monitor the successes and challenges of the cluster approach, and the "delivering as one" initiative.

He noted the importance of protecting UNHCR's core mandate in the budget process. He

expressed concern over the safety of UNHCR personnel and called on States to ensure their protection. Also, because Africa carried the biggest burden in terms of protecting refugees, it was in the view of the South African Government that rich nations should do more to support African countries and to share in the responsibility of providing protection to refugees.

ANTHONY ANDANJE (Kenya) said his country had consistently supported the international protection of refugees. It established a Department of Refugee Affairs in 2005 as a testimony to its resolve to strengthen its international protection framework. Kenya appreciated the difficult circumstances and challenges faced by the UNCHR in discharging its mandate. The global food and economic crises had negatively impacted Africa -- especially the most vulnerable segments of its population, including refugees. Further, the current financial crisis had constrained the resources available to the agencies. Insecurity, instability and lawlessness in countries like Somalia had hindered delivery of humanitarian assistance and sometimes resulted in the deaths of humanitarian workers.

He said that, while the global refugee population had declined by 7 per cent in 2008 "primarily due to a number of successful voluntary return operations", that positive development failed to take account of the bigger picture. Indeed, sustained efforts by regional and international organizations had resulted in the peaceful settlement of conflicts in several African countries. Those developments had contributed in no small measures to the voluntary return of refugees.

He noted that Kenya currently hosted a refugee population of roughly 500,000 in two refugee camps in northern Kenya and major urban centres around the country. While it concurred with the report that the Dadaab Refugee Camp was "seriously overcrowded, straining infrastructure and basic services and creating tensions in the host community", Kenya strongly disagreed that plans to set up additional camps had been delayed pending the Government's allocation of land. That claim was erroneous and reflected a lack of understanding of the host communities. Moreover, during the High Commissioner's visit, the Government had expressed three key concerns relating to the concurrence of two Kenyan-Somali communities to host refugees from Somalia; the interest of local host communities and matters of national security. The two host countries had agreed, in principle, to the establishment of additional camps, on the understanding that they would benefit from projects providing basic services.

Needless to say, the continued influx of Somali refugees at the rate of 5,000 per month remained a concern, he said. That upsurge had placed an enormous burden on Kenya's resources, which were required elsewhere for national development. Further, the environmental degradation around the camps had been enormous, and national security was threatened when the irregular movements of refugees were exploited by criminal elements, particularly for the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

He further noted that post-election violence in December 2007 had resulted in the displacement of about 700,000 people, and Kenya was ill-equipped to handle such massive displacement. It was grateful that the world had kept faith with it, and currently the majority of the displaced had been resettled. Still, support was needed for ongoing reconciliation initiatives. Kenya supported the recommendation that State and non-State parties to conflict and international and regional organizations should work to address the root causes of all forms of displacement in Africa and urged the international community to step up efforts in sharing the burden. It further welcomed the African Union Convention on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons in Africa.

AYO LUTHER-OGBOMODE (Nigeria) said his country had established various programmes to provide protection to refugees, including local integration. The Governments of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria had a tripartite agreement on the local integration of Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees in Nigeria, based on ECOWAS treaty on free movement of persons and goods, rights of residence and establishment. In addition, because of the return to peace and normalcy in Liberia and Sierra Leone, the Government was invoking the cessation clause of the United Nations refugee Convention, but there were challenges in implementing the cessation clause. International protection and intervention activities must be synchronized, and they must not be limited to the subregion, but be carried out globally.

She said the Nigerian Government had designated a new location for refugees at Zing town, Taraba State, which was accessible and offered enhanced security. In addition, Nigeria was working with the UNHCR to implement reintegration programmes for refugees at Gembu, also in Taraba State. Around 10,401 returnees benefited from reintegration programmes that varied widely across different fields: skills acquisition, spring water projects, rehabilitation of schools, water and rural electricity supply, sensitization workshops on HIV/AIDS and microcredit schemes. The Government also had migration policies to manage displaced persons and migrants. It was seeking to organize its labour migration system and to reduce irregular migration. It was also establishing a national migrant database.

WAHEED EL-SHAMI (Yemen) said there could be no doubt that wars, poverty and instability had forced a large number of individuals to leave their homes in the quest for peace and security, thereby causing the refugee problem. Indeed, that problem was growing worse and greater efforts were

called for to deal with its root causes. Yemen's Constitution guaranteed the rights of refugees, and the country was among the first countries to sign the 1951 Convention on Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The country's national institutions also dealt with the situation of refugees.

He recalled that Yemen had received thousands of refugees from the Horn of Africa, particularly Somalia, in the past year, and the current UNCHR report indicated that 46,000 had entered Yemen since the beginning of 2009. The Government attempted to provide care and support to those individuals, and hoped its work could be an example of what could be done in that regard. Yemen believed that the best way to resolve the refugee problem lay in addressing its root problems. Moreover, the absorption of so many refugees created an economic burden for Yemen, and support was needed from the international community to provide assistance to host countries. His country reiterated its commitment to cooperating with the UNCHR, and welcomed efforts to reform that organization, including its decentralization, which would enhance its effectiveness in carrying out its mandate.

MESHAL IJI ALMODAF (Kuwait) said Kuwait continuously supported the UNHCR through voluntary contributions and by hosting a regional office, which provided refugees with humanitarian necessities. Kuwait was always keen to provide aid and humanitarian assistance to Palestinian refugees, whom now totalled nearly 4.7 million. Kuwait had also helped finance numerous infrastructure projects through international organizations and had donated \$34 million to cover emergency relief assistance to the people of Gaza, immediately after the recent attack on Gaza. It also contributed \$500 million, \$200 million of which was destined for the Gaza Strip.

Kuwait re-emphasized its political, moral and material support for the Palestinian people, out of its belief that the just cause of the Palestinian people be resolved through the implementation of resolutions of international legitimacy. It was very concerned with the obstacles, placed by the Israeli authorities, that hindered the humanitarian work of United Nations agencies in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Kuwait stressed the importance of the humanitarian aspect of the problem facing displaced Iraqis and viewed the protection and fulfilment of their needs as the collective responsibility of States and the international community, he said. It took the initiative in providing a voluntary contribution to the UNHCR for refugees inside Iraq. He praised UNHCR's services for Iraqi refugees, particularly those in Syria and Jordan.

RAYMOND WOLFE (Jamaica) said it was essential for the international community to continue to work together to effectively address issues concerning the safety and well-being of refugees. Notwithstanding its size and level of development, the Government of Jamaica worked to ensure adequate protection of the basic human rights of refugees and asylum-seekers. Although not a major recipient, it had had to deal with an influx of refugees in the past, and so had an appreciation for the challenges involved. It would not have fulfilled its obligation without the support and assistance of the international community. He applauded the UNHCR for its efforts, sometimes undertaken at great personal risk.

He said Jamaica recognized the importance of the full and effective application of its obligations. An interim refugee policy, in place since the 1990s, was now a full-fledged national refugee policy. It established, among other things, procedures and principles for managing the process of determination of refugee status. It also provided for the rights and duties of refugees and withdrawal of refugee status. In keeping with the Government's commitment to the principle of non-refoulement, the policy incorporated a transparent and objective process for evaluating applications for asylum. As it worked towards strengthening the international protection regime for refugees, Jamaica would also work to sustain peace, stability, democracy and development, thereby reducing the need for persons to flee their countries.

COMFORT SWENGBE (Liberia) said Liberian refugees in neighbouring countries continued to receive protection and other humanitarian assistance, while those who had returned home had enjoyed support to reintegrate them and to rebuild their lives. At the same time, the country was also receiving assistance for hosting refugees from other countries. The UNHCR contributed to the country's reintegration and peacebuilding effort, notably in the area of the rule of law, in rehabilitating the judicial infrastructure and by training county officials. The Government was also receiving help to develop a legal framework and to establish a special unit in the Ministry of Justice to address sexual and gender-based violence.

She commended the High Commissioner for his foresight in institutionalizing UNHCR's involvement in alleviating the plight of internally displaced persons. Liberia's experience had been positive, where partnership with the UNHCR and other United Nations agencies, as well as with non-governmental organizations, had enabled the return and reintegration of thousands of internally displaced persons. The UNHCR was strongly encouraged to continue bringing its expertise to bear on the situation of internally displaced persons. She thanked the States that had contributed substantially to the UNHCR, but noted that the wider international community needed to become more engaged financially in supporting it.

ASIF GARAYEV (Azerbaijan) noted that armed conflict persisted in the world, resulting in massive displacements. His Government was concerned about attacks on humanitarian workers, and he paid tribute to all UNHCR staff for their work and expressed condolences for the loss of lives among their ranks. He called on all parties to adhere to their obligations under international law, particularly humanitarian law and international human rights law. While mixed migration had brought on considerable debate, he said all persons needing protection should be given full access to the asylum system. His Government supported UNHCR's call, as well, to address the humanitarian consequences of climate change.

He said internally displaced persons were a problem for his country, and he welcomed UNHCR's involvement in the issue of displaced persons under the cluster approach. One fifth of its territory was being occupied, displacing approximately one out of every eight people in the country. Many children had grown up in camps or crowded temporary accommodations, or had moved with their families to the capital. A major effort had been made to solve housing problems for the refugee and internally displaced persons, but they faced other problems arising from the protracted conflict that had led to the occupation in the first place. The situation of some of those refugees, thus, fell under the UNHCR's new policy on urban refugees. For its part, the Azerbaijan Government included refugees and displaced persons in its poverty reduction and development strategies. But, he believed there was not enough attention given to their situation, because it was thought their problems had passed the emergency phase. He called on United Nations bodies to focus on those cases.

ROBERT YOUNG, of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), said that displacement of people by armed conflict and other situations of violence remained one of the most daunting challenges of the day. Its impact on not only the several million internally displaced persons themselves, but also on the countless families and resident communities that hosted them was extremely difficult, if not impossible, to measure. Violations of international humanitarian law were the most common cause of internal displacement during armed conflict. Preventing such violations was the best means of averting displacement. The Geneva Conventions of 1949 were the core treaties of international humanitarian law and the foundation for the ICRC. When applicable, and fully implemented, international humanitarian law was the strongest international legal framework not only for preventing displacement during armed conflict, but also for meeting the most pressing assistance and protection needs of the civilian population, including internally displaced persons. Primary responsibility for responding to the needs of internally displaced persons lay with the States in question; but, international law also required armed groups to refrain from arbitrary displacement of civilians and to provide protection and assistance to internally displaced persons in areas under their effective control without discrimination of any kind.

The ICRC pursued a multidisciplinary approach to persuade parties to a conflict, or some other situation of violence, to permit access to those affected by fighting and to prevent or stop violations of international humanitarian law, he went on. It also undertook humanitarian activities of substitution and support -- related, for instance, to food, water, shelter and the re-establishment of family links. It did so in response to the varied needs of targeted populations, in order that those people might recover their rights and their dignity in adequate living conditions. It was, therefore, vitally important that people everywhere understand the nature of the strictly humanitarian mission of the components of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent Movement, including the specific mandate entrusted to the ICRC by the community of States with regard to all victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence.

ANNE CHRISTENSEN, of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, said her organization had finalized its migration policy, which aimed to enhance the coherence, effectiveness and predictability of the "movement-wide" response in providing assistance and protection to migrants. The policy would go before the Federation's General Assembly this month in Nairobi. Cooperation with the UNHCR and the related intergovernmental community also moved further this year with regard to mixed migration flows, with the holding of an expert round table in Tunis, Tunisia, last July on "Different People, Different Needs". The Federation's contribution to situations of mixed flows was based on its fundamental aims for an integrated approach to needs and vulnerabilities.

She explained that, in carrying out its work, the Federation ensured that the individual needs of migrants were recognized and addressed without discrimination. Basic services must be made available to all vulnerable migrants and not restricted to asylum-seekers and refugees through legal categorization. Increasingly, restrictive administrative and legislative measures taken by Governments to reduce migration diminished migrants' access to basic protection, and it was important that humanitarian actors were guaranteed the right and means to provide services to those in need. Regarding emergency humanitarian assistance planning, it was important to include provisions in disaster preparedness plans that allowed access of humanitarian aid organizations to migrants, regardless of their status. Her organization would continue to engage in dialogue with Governments on how to address such concerns.

LUCA DALL'OGGIO, speaking on behalf of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), welcomed the first-ever Convention for the protection and assistance of internally displaced persons, an unprecedented African Union-led legal framework, adopted in Kampala last week, which would help promote and strengthen measures to prevent and mitigate such flows.

Continuing, he said in light of the global economic crisis, the distinction between economic and political migrants had become even more blurred, as well as the difference between refugees, asylum-seekers and other migrants on the ground. Since current global challenges made it ever more complicated to tackle mixed migration flows, shared understanding and partnership were crucial. That would require cooperation between the IOM and the UNHCR at a conceptual and practical level.

Although talks on where migration and asylum-seekers overlapped had deepened over the past year, both bodies recognized that they had to do more to respond swiftly and adequately to the needs of today's refugees, asylum-seekers and vulnerable migrants, each according to its mandate.

The issue of mixed migration flows was a major shared concern within both the IOM and the UNHCR, hence, various global field-based task forces. Cooperation continued to evolve with regard to addressing the needs of internally displaced people. Furthermore, they had, over the past year, worked even more closely to address the nexus between climate change, environmental degradation and population flows, something he hoped would carry on in the field. On resettlement, he welcomed new initiatives in 2009, in particular, partnership with the UNHCR and the Government of Romania, Philippines and Slovakia, in the creation of three crucial Emergency Transit Centres to enable third country settlement. He said the IOM would remain firmly committed to its operational success and to ensuring that more countries took part in such a burden-sharing initiative. He reiterated that the IOM would pursue and reinforce a mutually collaborative partnership with the UNHCR.

Rights of Reply

The representative of Sri Lanka spoke in exercise of the right of reply with regard to a comment made by the representative of Sweden, on behalf of the European Union, who had deigned to lecture his delegation on unsubstantiated facts. He assured the Committee that displaced persons in Sri Lanka were protected and cared for, with assistance from the United Nations and from non-governmental organizations. The LTTE group had used people as human shields; Government security forces had rescued them. Their situation was unlike that of displaced persons in other parts of the world, who were in situations of protracted displacement. In Sri Lanka, many had returned to their homes, and the number of displacement cases had gone down as those persons became resettled. The European Union should have acknowledged those developments.

Moreover, the Government had developed a day-pass system that allowed movement, and was protecting, assisting and resettling those persons according to international standards. Alongside United Nations agencies, he said 54 international non-governmental organizations working in displacement camps enjoyed the right of access. Walter Kälin, Representative of the Secretary-General on the Human Rights for Internally Displaced Persons, had commented positively on the situation of displaced persons in Sri Lanka, acknowledging that he had been given unrestricted access. Under-Secretary-General John Holmes was due to visit the country this month, on the Government's invitation. In sum, the statement made by the representative of Sweden was inaccurate and was rejected by his delegation.

The representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea spoke in exercise of right of reply in response to a statement made by the Republic of Korea [which he called "South Korea"]. He said he categorically denounced that delegate's remarks, which were a challenge to the aspirations of all Koreans to reconciliation, unity and reunification. It was heartbreaking that the north and south sat in the same room under two different name plates, and it was still more heartbreaking that they quarrelled in an international forum like they did today. His Government had refrained from bringing up the human rights situation in South Korea, which imprisoned pro-unification personnel. Though it was true that a number of people crossed the border illegally, it was untrue that his Government imprisoned or punished returnees. It investigated those instances on a case-by-case basis, to see whether any crime had been committed before or while they were in a foreign land. Most were allowed to return to their homes. He warned the South Korean delegation that the more they moved to incite confrontation and division between them, the further they would move from the goals of reunification. And they would be held fully responsible for any delays in the unification of a divided Korea.

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