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Summary record of the 694th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Monday, 3 October 2016, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. Staur (Denmark)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

1. **The Chairperson** said that, in 2016, for the first time in history refugee athletes had been able to take part in the Olympic and Paralympic Games thanks to a joint effort by the International Olympic Committee and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), an unprecedented initiative that had not only increased international awareness about the situation of refugees but had also sent refugees a resounding message of hope.

2. *The participants were invited to watch a video presentation on the Olympic refugee athlete team.*

General debate (*continued*)

3. **Mr. Rwegasira** (United Republic of Tanzania) associated himself with the statement made by the representative of the Sudan on behalf of the African Group. The United Republic of Tanzania already hosted some 250,000 refugees, including 162,000 from Burundi, but would continue its open door policy even though the funding available for refugee operations was only 30 per cent of what was needed. More must be done to improve the situation of host communities, which in many cases, especially in the least developed countries, were even worse off in terms of education, health, water and sanitation facilities than the adjacent refugee camps and settlements.

4. **Mr. Zolfaghari** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that in spite of the efforts by UNHCR to increase international assistance for Afghan refugees the amount provided to the Islamic Republic of Iran was minimal compared to the cost of meeting the needs of the large number of Afghan refugees who had been in Iranian territory for more than 40 years. Moreover, even though voluntary repatriation was the best solution, Afghan refugees were reluctant to return to their country given its lack of development. The International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries held in May 2012 in Geneva had provided a basis for resolving the stalemate, although some of the solutions proposed needed to be reviewed.

5. **Mr. Digna** (Sudan) said that the funds his Government received from donors towards its operations on behalf of the more than 2 million refugees in its territory continued to shrink. He requested emergency funds from UNHCR to cover the services the refugees needed. The international community should implement in practice the principle of shared responsibility for the safety and protection of refugees. The problems the Sudan faced in relation to refugees included migrant smuggling and human trafficking, evils it had made considerable efforts to combat: it had adopted a law to combat trafficking in 2004, amended its asylum legislation in 2014 and entered into numerous agreements with neighbouring countries to secure its borders.

6. **Mr. Gigaba** (South Africa) associated himself with the statement made by the representative of the Sudan on behalf of the African Group. He said that States must spare no effort to reduce and eventually put a stop to the forced displacement of populations between and within States. He welcomed the adoption of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. South Africa would contribute meaningfully to the development of a framework for safe, orderly and regular migration. South Africa had met its obligation under the Declaration regarding early childhood education, tertiary education, skills training and vocational education as long ago as 2005. His Government was reviewing its immigration policies to bring them into line with the Constitution, international standards and the principle of human solidarity.

7. **Mr. Kampyongo** (Zambia), associating himself with the statement made by the representative of the Sudan on behalf of the African Group. He welcomed the report of the

Secretary-General entitled “In safety and dignity: addressing large movements of refugees and migrants” (A/70/59), which called for a more predictable and equitable response to refugee and migrant crises in line with the Global Compact on Responsibility-Sharing for Refugees. Zambia currently hosted more than 52,000 persons of concern to UNHCR. Under a three-year local integration programme parts of the Meheba and Mayukwayukwa refugee settlements had been converted to land allocations for the refugees, who were also being issued residence permits. Furthermore, full local integration would be offered to refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo who had lived in Zambia for more than 10 years and wished to make it their home. Despite the economic difficulties it faced Zambia was committed to maintaining its open door policy. It also intended to ratify the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness as an expression of support for efforts to prevent, combat and eradicate statelessness.

8. **Mr. Agalga** (Ghana) said that Ghana hosted almost 18,500 refugees, including nationals of Togo and Côte d’Ivoire. Consultations had been held with the Ivorian authorities with a view to creating an environment that would encourage the voluntary return of Ivorian refugees to their country, while efforts were being made to ensure local integration of Togolese refugees. Local integration was increasingly seen as the preferred solution for refugees and steps had been taken in the last quarter of 2015 to develop a strategic plan for refugee management. As to statelessness, he said that Ghana was taking steps to ratify the two conventions on that issue and provided civil documentation to all refugee children born in its territory so that they would not be considered stateless.

9. **Mr. Okio** (Republic of the Congo) associated himself with the statement made by the representative of the Sudan on behalf of the African Group. In 2015 the Congo had hosted 54,000 refugees and asylum seekers, most from Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic. The majority were in the department of Likouala where in some areas the refugee population was double that of the host community. There had been problems in that department following the closure of the UNHCR offices in Loukoléla and Impfondo, in 2012 and January 2016 respectively. He reiterated his country’s commitment to protect refugees in its territory and not close the border to asylum seekers but stressed that the socioeconomic situation in the Congo meant that it was not possible to guarantee the local integration of those refugees, 60 per cent of whom were under the age of 35. The search for durable solutions should include continued processing of requests for exemption from the cessation declaration in respect of Rwandan refugees. It was vital to resume that process, begun in 2016 in cooperation with UNHCR but suspended on 31 July the same year.

10. **Mr. Laourou** (Benin), associating himself with the statement made by the representative of the Sudan on behalf of the African Group, said that refugee movements and internal displacement of persons were the result of political conflicts, religious intolerance, terrorism, extremist violence and natural disasters linked to climate change. In 2015 serious acts of violence committed by terrorist groups such as Boko Haram and Daesh had caused 65 million persons to flee their countries in conditions of extreme deprivation. The international community should address that situation in an appropriate and structured manner by providing them with assistance. At the same time, States should work together at the local, national, subregional and international levels to find durable solutions. Multi-sectoral integrated strategies and policies should be developed in that context and implemented in a coordinated manner. Benin hosted refugees from western Africa and other regions of the world and called for strengthened cooperation and international solidarity for countries of origin, transit and destination of refugees, displaced persons and migrants.

11. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that many African States had described the challenges they faced in accepting large numbers of

refugees and migrants into their territory. As the representative of the Sudan had said, the various categories of migrants required different responses. The United Republic of Tanzania had described its challenges in meeting the needs of large numbers of refugees while the Congo had stated that it did not have the resources to cope with large numbers of refugees and ensure their integration into society. His Office would continue to contribute positively to the international partnership for refugees and would not shirk its responsibilities. It would deal with the urgent situations in the United Republic of Tanzania and the Sudan. He welcomed the fact that several States, including Gambia, Tanzania and Zambia, were seeking local solutions for the integration of refugees, for example naturalization and permanent residence. The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants underscored the importance of local solutions and proposed innovative funding mechanisms as well as funding for the risks faced by the communities concerned. He agreed with the representative of Benin on the need to deal with population movements triggered by climate change and commended South Africa for its efforts to ensure refugees had access to education.

12. **Ms. Mukantabana** (Rwanda) said that Rwanda hosted more than 163,000 refugees, mainly from the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo and from Burundi, and most of whom lived in camps and therefore relied on humanitarian assistance. At the United Nations Summit for Refugees and Migrants Rwanda had undertaken to increase their socioeconomic empowerment through, for example, expansion of their access to the national education system, timely issuance of refugee cards for eligible persons and enrolment of urban refugees in the national health insurance scheme. Rwanda was grateful to UNHCR and other key partners for their help in meeting the needs of refugees, in particular during emergency situations when tens of thousands of refugees had arrived from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi. Rwanda supported the voluntary return and reintegration of Rwandan refugees but recognized that after decades in exile many Rwandan refugees had established close ties to their host communities and had therefore requested identity documents from the Rwandan authorities in order to facilitate their integration into their host country. Her Government had made a commitment to support such efforts and established a simplified process for requesting official documents either online or at Rwandan embassies. It was implementing, in cooperation with the One UN Fund, a joint programme for the return and reintegration of Rwandan refugees aimed at meeting the specific needs of returnees and addressing the major challenges Rwandans faced during reintegration. Every effort was made to ensure that returnees' rights were restored. Her Government was committed to the flexible application of the main elements of the comprehensive solutions strategy for Rwandans who had fled the country between 1959 and 1998 with the aim of winding it up as soon as possible but not later than December 2017, as agreed at the ministerial meeting held at UNHCR headquarters, Geneva, on 30 September 2016.

13. **Ms. Mbaikoua** (Central African Republic) said that her country had had to deal with decades of recurring armed conflicts. At the height of the crisis there had been 900,000 internally displaced persons and 450,000 had taken refuge in neighbouring countries. Since the restoration of constitutional government with the election of President Touadera the number of internally displaced persons had dropped to 384,313 and many refugees had returned voluntarily to the country. Her Government had adopted a policy of national reconciliation and social cohesion with a view to creating durable solutions to facilitate the return of refugees and displaced persons. Humanitarian aid to needy groups should in future be distributed by the administrative authorities, including in the most remote communities, and joint efforts would have to be made to promote the gradual restoration of the authority of the State across the country. The international community should help all developing countries including the Central African Republic, to combat the root causes of large movements of refugees and migrants. In spite of the wide-ranging support provided by

UNHCR the security and humanitarian situation continued to be a concern in some regions of the country. That must not be forgotten when the time came to move from emergency response operations to development.

14. **Ms. Dlamini** (Observer for Swaziland) said that refugees continued to be the most vulnerable and exposed group because they were highly mobile. It was therefore incumbent on governments to provide extra support to them and ensure that their rights were protected. Swaziland had completed the rehabilitation of the Malindza Refugee Reception Centre, which was now ready to receive new arrivals, but still faced the challenge of dealing with long-term refugees who showed no desire to integrate into society. In order to motivate them, her Government had granted citizenship to some and continued to encourage them to become self-reliant. Despite the effect of the global economic crisis on Swaziland, her Government continued to allocate human and financial resources to improve the protection of refugees.

15. **Ms. Bibalou Bounda** (Observer for Gabon) associated herself with the statement made by the representative of the Sudan on behalf of the African Group. She said that the international community should look into the causes of the mass displacement of 65 million men, women and children forced to flee conflicts and persecution because of their race, religious beliefs or nationality and avoid at all costs sending them back to the areas they had come from or where they were no longer safe. All States had a responsibility to give due consideration to asylum applications from those in real need and the international community had a responsibility to support countries like Gabon that still had thousands of asylum seekers in their territory. Gabon would continue to meet its commitments, in particular those under the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, which had made non-refoulement a fundamental principle of international protection. She called on all countries that had the capacity to receive refugees to ensure their integration in application of the principle of surrogate international protection, which was not intended to be permanent.

16. **Mr. Kaluderović** (Montenegro) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Denmark on behalf of the European Union and would continue to support all international efforts to resolve the refugee and migrant crisis. While not directly affected by current migration routes in Europe, Montenegro had adopted the necessary measures to receive a sudden influx of migrants and refugees, in the form of a plan of action based on close cooperation between the competent national authorities and international organizations, including UNHCR, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Montenegro Red Cross. It had also developed a draft Schengen Action Plan that would control and prevent irregular migration and deal with other asylum issues. His Government would continue to meet the needs of asylum seekers to the extent its resources and capabilities allowed. Montenegro was in the process of negotiating accession to the European Union and supported the development of a new strategic framework for foreign and security policy that provided, among other things, that the European Union remained committed to addressing the causes of the migrant crisis. It would take all steps necessary to promote close cooperation with its neighbour countries, destination countries and countries of origin in order to find a more effective and durable solution to the problem of refugees and migrants.

17. **Ms. Kabia** (Observer for Sierra Leone) associated herself with the statement made by the representative of the Sudan on behalf of the African Group. Committed as it was to the cause of international protection for refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR, in May 2016 Sierra Leone had become a party to the two conventions on statelessness and had also established a focal point on statelessness at the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The 2007 Refugee Protection Act would be amended, with technical assistance from UNHCR. The Government had also launched a national civil registration project under which identity

documents would be issued to refugees. To date identity cards valid for one year had been issued to 432 refugees; discussions were under way on the possibility of issuing identity cards valid for at least five years. As part of efforts to integrate refugees locally, her Government had stamped residence permits in the passports of the 994 refugees to whom the Government of Liberia had issued passports and was working with UNHCR to find solutions for Liberian refugees who had been denied a passport. Countries that were closest to crisis situations received a disproportionately large number of displaced persons relative to their capacities. The international community should accept its share of the responsibility for funding humanitarian assistance for the more than 60 million displaced persons in the world. There must be a global shift from meeting need to ending need by making prevention and peaceful resolution of conflict a priority, with the involvement of those most affected.

18. **Ms. Mupfumira** (Observer for Zimbabwe) said that her delegation aligned itself with the statement made by the representative of the Sudan on behalf of the African Group and agreed with the High Commissioner's remarks on funding gaps and the hidden costs of hosting refugees, which meant that many host countries struggled to meet their obligations. The international community had a collective responsibility to offer protection to displaced persons as well as to address the root causes of displacements, whether armed conflicts or natural disasters linked to climate change. Zimbabwe therefore welcomed the call for a comprehensive refugee response framework that was part of the outcome of the high-level meeting on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants in September 2016 but stressed that so long as the difficult issue of resources remained unresolved the populations concerned and the host countries would continue to struggle as the number of refugees continued to increase. Pledges should be honoured and adequate resources must be allocated to meet the needs of refugees. Some African host countries, including Zimbabwe, were experiencing economic challenges that had been exacerbated by drought caused by the El Niño effect. Those countries needed international support to provide for the refugees in their territory.

19. **Mr. Mägi** (Estonia) aligned his delegation with the statement made by the representative of Denmark on behalf of the European Union and its Member States. He expressed deep concern at the situation of the civilian population in the Syrian Arab Republic, which was deliberately targeted day after day in direct violation of international humanitarian law. The perpetrators of those violations must be held accountable. He commended UNHCR for its efforts to guarantee international protection for refugees and displaced persons in complex humanitarian contexts. The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants emphasized the need to strengthen multilateral systems and find global solutions to the refugee and migrant issue. Estonia would participate actively in the upcoming discussions on a global compact to assist refugees and migrants. It had significantly increased its humanitarian financing over the past five years. It helped fund the humanitarian work of international organizations and provided financial support to host countries. It too had begun resettlement activities for refugees in 2016, in particular Syrians arriving from Turkey and others arriving from Greece. In an effort to facilitate their integration, his Government was implementing measures to give them access to education, health care, social protection and legal aid and to combat discrimination and xenophobia. It accorded particular priority to protection of children's rights, ensuring that all refugee children attended school until the age of 17. Estonia was concerned at the situation in Ukraine, where United Nations agencies faced a serious funding gap and, in particular, did not have access to eastern Ukraine. The recent World Humanitarian Summit had led to major commitments with regard to the prevention of conflict and forced displacement, the upholding of international law and the bridging of the humanitarian and development divide. Implementation of those commitments and progress made should be monitored but follow-up should not be heavy-handed. He called on more partners to join the "grand

bargain” process, a tool that should increase the effectiveness and transparency of humanitarian aid and also restore trust.

20. **Mr. Mar Nyuot** (Observer for South Sudan) associating himself with the statement made by the representative of the Sudan on behalf of the African Group, said that South Sudan had been hosting refugees since the 1960s; after achieving independence it had adopted the Refugee Act in 2012 and ratified international and regional instruments relating to refugees. It had acceded to the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa and would probably accede to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees by the end of 2016. It was doing everything possible to guarantee protection of refugees and humanitarian workers. In cooperation with UNHCR it had issued identity cards to refugees and opened a new camp at Pamir, which would be able to host 52,000 refugees from Yida refugee camp. None of the refugee camps had been affected by the conflict in July 2016. Many South Sudanese citizens had been forced to flee to neighbouring countries or remote areas following the 2013 conflict. Internally displaced persons were hosted at protection of civilian sites with the support of the United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS). The Transitional Government of National Unity was committed to implementing the peace agreement signed in August 2015 and was grateful to the international community for supporting the peace process and responding to the needs of internally displaced persons and refugees. South Sudan already hosted over 265,000 refugees, a number that would surely increase due to its open door policy. It therefore requested technical assistance from UNHCR for the establishment of a unit for strategic studies on refugees in partnership with the University of Juba.

21. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) thanked the Islamic Republic of Iran for its assistance to refugees, in particular refugees from Iraq. He welcomed the efforts of Estonia to integrate refugees and reassured its delegation that his Office was working to address the situation of displaced persons in Ukraine. He thanked Montenegro for its efforts to support displaced persons and cooperate with neighbouring countries with a view to solving the housing problems of displaced persons from the former Yugoslavia. He commended South Sudan for hosting 265,000 refugees and acceding to international instruments relating to the protection of refugees. He assured South Sudan of the full support of his Office, but expressed concern at the conflict ravaging the country, which had forced millions of people to flee to remote areas and a million to flee the country entirely. Rwanda was to be commended for hosting refugees; countries in the region should cooperate to find appropriate solutions for the various groups of Rwandan refugees long established in a number of African countries. He welcomed the pacification efforts undertaken by the Central African Republic and the priority it was giving to creating the necessary conditions for the return of displaced persons. His Office would assist in the voluntary return of internally displaced persons and refugees to neighbouring countries. He thanked the representative of Gabon for recalling the principles of international protection and the representative of Swaziland for underscoring the importance of integrating refugees in the host country. He also thanked the delegation of Sierra Leone for highlighting the issue of statelessness and the delegation of Zimbabwe for underscoring the link between displacement of populations and the effects of climate.

22. **Mr. Barandagiye** (Observer for Burundi), associating himself with the statement made by the representative of the Sudan on behalf of the African Group, said that as at the end of August 2016 Burundi had hosted 1,302 persons from Oman who were at risk of statelessness and 57,827 refugees and asylum seekers, 34,038 of whom were in camps. They received assistance from various international humanitarian partners coordinated by UNHCR and were treated in accordance with international standards relating to freedom of residence and movement. A new food distribution system, called SCOPE, had been introduced with a view to ensuring that food was in fact distributed to those it was intended

for. He said that trainer training should be provided nationwide to improve the management of the four refugee camps in Burundi. The relocation programme launched at the end of 2013 was continuing; to date 1,437 refugees had been relocated to the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia. As a result free and voluntary repatriation to the Democratic Republic of the Congo almost never occurred. In April 2015 Burundi had adopted draft acts of accession to the 1954 and 1961 conventions on statelessness and was considering withdrawing the reservations it had made on accession to the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. It was determined to enter into discussions with Oman to find a definitive solution to the issue of Omanis at risk of statelessness who had lived in Burundi for many years. Burundi worked tirelessly to improve the situation of refugees and asylum seekers but was faced with a reduction in the financial and material resources provided to it by UNHCR; he hoped that those resources would be increased. He also hoped that a special meeting would be organized in the near future to review scenarios for the repatriation of Burundian refugees. The country was now at peace and more than 100,000 persons had already returned voluntarily, including from the United Republic of Tanzania. The meeting participants should include representatives of the governments of Burundi and the host countries as well as the UNHCR offices in those countries.

23. **Ms. Røsland** (Norway) underscored the key role that UNHCR played in the crisis affecting the more than 65 million displaced people around the world and the crucial importance of the global compacts in that regard. Norway had increased its humanitarian aid budget by more than 50 per cent over the previous three years and had also increased its UNHCR quota to 3,120 in 2016. Norway participated in European Union efforts to resettle asylum seekers arriving in Greece and Italy. The two Norwegian ships participating in the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (Frontex) operation had rescued more than 15,000 people since the beginning of 2016. Concerned by the budgetary constraints UNHCR was facing, Norway had provided a substantial non-earmarked amount to support its activities in 2016 and would do so again in 2017. It would continue to provide funding for strategic response plans and supplementary budgets throughout 2016; in 2015 it had contributed approximately \$96 million for those activities.

24. **Mr. Hovakimian** (Armenia) welcomed the adoption of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. Full implementation of the commitments therein, in particular with regard to more equitable sharing of responsibility, would make a real difference for those vulnerable groups. For almost 30 years Armenia had been faced with the challenge of hosting and integrating refugees. Beginning in the late 1980s, as a consequence of ethnic cleansing by Azerbaijan, hundreds of thousands of Armenians had been driven from their homes in Soviet Azerbaijan and found refuge in Armenia. The military offensive by Azerbaijan in 1992-1994 against Nagorno-Karabakh had likewise forced thousands of Armenians to flee. Azerbaijan should refrain from the use of force and commit to the peaceful settlement of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh based on the principles of international law. In early April 2016 Azerbaijan had launched a large-scale military offensive against the population of Nagorno-Karabakh, committing atrocities similar to those committed by ISIL, a gross violation of core international treaties, which had caused civilian casualties and forced more than 2,000 civilians to flee to Armenia. His Government greatly appreciated the prompt and effective humanitarian response by the UNHCR Representation in Armenia at that time.

25. He expressed great concern at the humanitarian catastrophe in the Syrian Arab Republic. Armenia now hosted more than 20,000 Syrian refugees, the third largest number in Europe per capita. It offered them a variety of protection options, such as accelerated asylum procedures, facilitated naturalization and issuance of residence permits. They were also provided with State support for business development, long-term housing, free medical and emergency assistance, psychosocial support and university scholarships. Protection for

refugees had been strengthened through an amendment made in 2015 to the Refugees and Asylum Act. He called on donors to maintain and increase their support to help Armenia deal with displacement challenges, and thereby ensure a more equitable sharing of responsibility in that regard.

26. **Ms. Muñoz Quesada** (Costa Rica) said that while her Government had in the past year registered more than 20,000 irregular migrants whose sole aim had been to get to the United States, the actual number of migrants was much higher. Since the beginning of 2016 the Directorate-General for Migrants and Foreigners had registered 2,313 asylum requests from the northern triangle of Central America, a 215 per cent increase over 2015. Children and young people were trying to escape forced recruitment and situations of extreme insecurity while women were fleeing the violence and vulnerability caused by gender inequality. Costa Rica was proud to have hosted, in July 2016 in San José, a high-level round table entitled “Call to Action: Protection Needs in the Northern Triangle of Central America”, organized under the auspices of the Organization of American States (OAS) and UNHCR to discuss the inclusion of prevention and protection in comprehensive solutions and regional and national strategies, and which had adopted the San José Action Statement. Costa Rica had committed itself to strengthening refugee status determination procedures through implementation of the Quality Assurance Initiative pilot project, which would also increase the information available to the competent authorities. It had also undertaken to reduce the risk of statelessness for indigenous peoples from Panama; increase the capacity of the reception and registration centre to cater for mixed migration movements to Costa Rica; and implement the persons in transit protection mechanism to provide temporary housing for refugees from the northern triangle, who were at great risk of persecution.

27. **Mr. Gorovoy** (Russian Federation) said that the best way to resolve the refugee problem was to prevent and settle conflicts, coordinate the efforts of the international community, strengthen international assistance and promote development. The large increase in the number of refugees was to a great extent the result of irresponsible intervention in the internal affairs of sovereign States aimed at destabilizing and ousting undesirable regimes and replacing them with other regimes. Those responsible for such interference should assume primary responsibility for responding to the migration movements caused by their policies. The Russian Federation supported UNHCR in its efforts to improve protection for refugees and displaced and stateless persons. That work was more important than ever as migrant flows reached unprecedented levels. Based on its own experience in hosting and integrating migrants and as the country with the second-highest number of foreign nationals in its territory, notably from the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Russian Federation had adopted a migrant policy for the period up to 2025 and established a reception system for asylum seekers and refugees. A draft federal law to improve the timeliness and efficiency of asylum procedures was being prepared. The Russian Federation was host to more than 1 million Ukrainian refugees, of whom 280,000 had been granted permanent or temporary refugee status, and to Syrian and Afghan refugees. National legislation had been amended to facilitate the allocation of housing to foreign nationals and stateless refugees in its territory. Acquisition of Russian nationality was facilitated for entrepreneurs, investors, trained specialists, and foreigners and stateless persons who had attended Russian educational establishments. The Russian Federation attached great importance to the strengthening of international cooperation for the protection of refugees and displaced persons and had participated actively in the high-level plenary meeting on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants. In keeping with the New York Declaration adopted by that meeting, UNHCR should design and launch a comprehensive response to the situations that gave rise to mass displacements of refugees. That response must be implemented with the agreement of the States concerned and in accordance with the principles of neutrality, humanity, independence and non-interference

in order to avoid politicizing UNHCR's mandate, which was still based on the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol.

28. **Mr. McDonald** (Australia) said that his delegation was proud to join 192 other States in committing itself to the New York Declaration. The key messages of the World Humanitarian Summit had been: put people at the centre; build resilience; and support inclusive local leadership of assistance. The last of those objectives would require empowering women to lead. More must also be done to prevent and combat sexual and gender-based violence. All States should endorse the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, which his delegation had championed at the World Humanitarian Summit. Australia was committed to sharing its global responsibility. It had recently announced a contribution of \$A 75 million in non-earmarked funding for UNHCR over three years, was resettling 12,000 Syrian and Iraqi refugees and would also increase the number of humanitarian resettlement places to 19,000 beginning in 2018.

29. **Mr. Vulin** (Serbia) welcomed the adoption of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. Over a period of decades Serbia had hosted 650,000 refugees from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina; 30,000 nationals from those countries still had refugee status in Serbia. Serbia was also meeting the daily needs of 200,000 internally displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija. More than 700,000 persons had passed through Serbia; all had been provided with food, medical care and shelter and been treated with dignity and respect. Despite the claims of representatives of the international community, the Western Balkans route was most certainly not closed. More than 100,000 persons had passed through Serbia since it had supposedly been closed. His Government sometimes felt that it was fighting a lone battle and that it did not have sufficient assistance and funding.

30. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) welcomed the efforts being made by States and thanked them for supporting the work of UNHCR.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.