

**Executive Committee of the
High Commissioner's Programme**

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Summary record*, Tuesday, 8 March 22, at 3 p.m. (hybrid)

Chairperson: Ms. Ahmed Hassan..... (Djibouti)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Ms. Ahmed Hassan (Djibouti), Vice-Chairperson, chaired the discussion.

Regional activities and global programmes *(continued)*

a. Regional updates *(continued)*

ii. Middle-East and North Africa *(continued)*

1. **Mr. Kabbaj** (Morocco), speaking via video link on behalf of the Arab Group, said that the Group regretted the continued increase in refugees and displaced persons worldwide because of the lack of solutions to global conflicts, showing the need for dialogue and all parties honouring their commitments. In light of the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Ukraine, all host countries must commit to receiving refugees while designating humanitarian corridors without discrimination.

2. The deep impact on his region of 16 million refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) was an incommensurate burden. Its path forward held many obstacles, as the Group had stressed at the High-Level Officials Meeting (HLOM) in December 2021 while discussing progress on voluntary pledges: the international community must share humanitarian responsibility fairly, as stated at the first Global Refugee Forum (GRF) in 2019. The pledges made had not been followed by increased financial aid.

3. He drew attention to the UNHCR report on the challenges for refugees in the Arab region in light of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Given the prevalence of virtual meetings, UNHCR must make efforts to provide refugees with access to strengthened education systems. The success of vaccination against the virus depended on equitable distribution of the burdens involved. A number of sustainable solutions had been presented to that end.

4. Voluntary returns had increased in 2021, but at a level lower than before the pandemic. Refugees and IDPs were risking their lives travelling by land and sea and must be protected while in transit to other countries. Opportunities should be given to repatriate them in application of the principle of burden-sharing. Repatriation remained the most suitable solution to ensure development, peace and positive impacts in general on the lives of refugees.

5. **Ms. Clifford** (European Union) said that the EU remained concerned about the protection challenges and needs of forcibly displaced and affected host communities across the Middle East and North Africa. Continued conflicts, crises and instability, compounded by COVID-19, had affected the region and negatively impacted refugees, IDPs and their host communities. While she commended the efforts of the countries and host communities in and around the region for their longstanding generosity and solidarity towards those forcibly displaced, the lack of progress in tackling the root causes of forced displacement was a cause for concern, as evident from the large UNHCR budget for the region.

6. The EU remained deeply concerned by the worsening humanitarian crisis within the Syrian Arab Republic and growing needs in the region, and was committed to alleviating the suffering within Syria as well as to continued efforts to protect and assist refugees, migrants and host communities in the region. Access to lifesaving humanitarian assistance in Syria remained paramount. She welcomed United Nations efforts to carry out two cross-line missions into north-west Syria. However, cross-line assistance alone could not meet the needs of over 3 million people living outside government control in the north-west. In that context, it remained crucially important to renew United Nations Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 2585 on cross-border aid delivery from July 2022.

7. With the eleventh anniversary of the Syrian uprising, a just political solution should allow millions of Syrians to return home without fear of arrest or forcible disappearance. To keep Syria high on the political agenda, the EU would hold the sixth EU–AU Summit in Brussels in 2022, both to mobilize much-needed financial assistance for millions of Syrians inside and outside of Syria, and to reassert the international community’s commitment to full implementation of UNSCR 2254 and support for the United Nations Special Envoy’s efforts for a negotiated political solution. As previously, the Conference would also serve to deepen dialogue with Syrian civil society. The EU called for UNHCR’s continued and principled engagement, inside Syria and in neighbouring countries including Lebanon. Return must be voluntary, safe and dignified.

8. The EU remained seriously concerned by the situation in Yemen, which after nearly seven years of war was one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. Over 20 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance. People in vulnerable situations, such as those forcibly displaced, continued to be the most affected. There was an urgent need to ensure protection of civilians, secure humanitarian access, enable a principled and accountable response, and increase the impact of programmes, in line with the consensus from the Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) process. The SOM Co-Chairs' visit to Yemen in February 2022, joined by Switzerland, had confirmed the importance of maintaining a united voice to conduct principled negotiations with parties having an influence on how humanitarian aid reached populations in need. A political solution through a negotiated agreement under the auspices of the United Nations remained essential to set the path for peace.

9- The EU commended UNHCR's efforts to provide protection and basic needs support to the most vulnerable refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons in Libya, despite access constraints and extremely challenging working conditions. Notably, UNHCR had also continued humanitarian evacuations to the Niger, Rwanda and Italy, and resettlements to third countries for the most vulnerable persons in need of international protection. It remained crucial to preserve humanitarian space in the region and ensure that assistance reached the most vulnerable, in full respect for international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles. She called for more advocacy and support to international and local NGOs to maintain their space and operating capacities. The EU strongly supported their commitment to including refugee children and their families in national systems and services and clear priorities on protection, shelter, camp coordination and camp management.

10. To mitigate the socioeconomic and protection impacts of COVID-19, it was central for UNHCR to keep adjusting its assistance, particularly cash programming, which had demonstrated positive mitigating effects, reducing poverty. Further, she commended the continued priority given to prevention, risk mitigation and response to sexual and gender-based violence. Finally, the EU supported UNHCR's engagement with development actors, thereby facilitating work towards solutions in the MENA region, with all actors contributing in line with their mandates.

11. **Mr. Al Qaralleh** (Jordan) said that the lingering effects of the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic, now entering its twelfth year, meant that his country's infrastructure was still overwhelmed with 1.3 million Syrian refugees, most of whom were outside refugee camps. All of its resources – health, education, water, electricity, and most importantly job opportunities – had been shared with them, reflecting Jordan's success as a host country, but at great cost. The welcome efforts of UNHCR and the international community only scratched the surface of what was needed in Jordan for refugees. A decline in support would have grave repercussions. Of the \$4.32 billion needed, only \$431 million had been met over 2021. Nonetheless, Jordan continued to lead in work permits for Syrian refugees in 2021, with 62,000 permits issued for a total of 278,000 workers, deemed major progress by UNHCR in labour market integration. Unemployment, however, was rising, and schools were overwhelmed: 152,000 Syrian students had enrolled in Government schools for 2021–2022, with UNHCR assisting them in accessing education using online learning platforms.

12. The rate of return of Syrian refugees remained very modest, at around 52,000 since October 2018. The international community must expand its support beyond grants and aid, in order to alleviate the burden on host countries with complementary paths such as reunification between countries and more work visas for refugees outside of host countries. Responsibility lay with the international community as a whole. Until the conflict was resolved and return was possible, the best way to assist refugees was to maintain dialogue about their needs and those of their host countries. In conclusion, it must not be forgotten that the statistics represented generations of refugees – some of whom had spent 12 years of their lives in Jordan, some of them born there – and all with rights to be protected by his country and the international community. The international community had an obligation to resolve that crisis, which had critically affected the lives of people and host communities.

13. **Mr. Ferzli** (Lebanon) said that his region had been struck by a complex and protracted refugee crisis – the largest in the world. The Syrian crisis had caused great problems for its neighbours such as Lebanon, which had had the situation imposed on it but nonetheless had only a minor voice in matters. Despite its limited capacities and collapsing economy, his country continued to help displaced Syrians on its territory with the help of UNHCR and the international community, renewing its efforts for 2023 to assist over 3.2 million people with their basic needs: 1.5 million

displaced Syrians, 1.5 million vulnerable Lebanese, 29,000 Palestinian refugees in Syria, and 150,000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

The mounting pressure of a crisis in its eleventh year had catalysed an economic crisis in Lebanon. International support, while commendable, remained insufficient. With no end in sight, unmet needs were growing exponentially. There were currently a greater number of more vulnerable refugees in host communities with deteriorating conditions. In 2022 the number of vulnerable Lebanese had reached a peak of 1.5 million, which threatened to become worse if ignored. Good-faith implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) was key for sharing responsibility. Host countries such as Lebanon should not be abandoned to their fate; rather, humanitarian aid must be increased. Even though there was as yet no solution, the gradual return of refugees could be considered to alleviate host communities' situation, along with the international community redoubling its efforts. He hoped that the follow-up meetings subsequent to September 2021 would promote further action towards durable solutions with safe and dignified return, given the low settlement figures in the report.

Ms. Widstam (Sweden), commending UNHCR for its tireless work in increasingly complex and often dangerous humanitarian crises around the world and the vital solidarity and generosity of countries continuing to receive and host refugees in tragically and senselessly growing numbers, said that more than eleven years into the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, the situation remained one of the most severe protection crises of the day. There were increasing humanitarian needs, a severe lack of access to services and employment, ongoing hostilities and people too often at risk of violence and abuse having to resort to negative coping mechanisms. UNHCR's role in strengthening the centrality of protection in that context was crucial. Through its regional strategy for the Syria crisis for 2016–2023, Sweden was providing a total of over \$300 million for strengthening the resilience of the Syrian population and of vulnerable groups in Syria's neighbouring countries, as well as contributing to early recovery and rehabilitation of basic public services in Syria. Her country remained concerned, however, by restricted humanitarian access throughout the whole country. Sweden underlined the importance of additional support to neighbouring countries still hosting Syrian refugees and of durable solutions. Any returns must be safe, dignified and voluntary. Resettlement remained a lifesaving tool for international responsibility-sharing, and resettlement activities had to increase, with additional countries contributing. Sweden remained a leading resettlement country with 5,000 quota places annually, of which Syrian quota refugees had been the single largest group in recent years.

The situation in Yemen also remained of great concern, with a recent escalation of violence currently exacerbating needs and vulnerabilities. Sweden was proud to support UNHCR's crucial efforts in Yemen, not least in addressing the protection crisis and supporting protection mainstreaming, and it welcomed the increased focus on the most vulnerable groups in response review and planning. Sweden remained active on the ground in trying to improve the operating environment for humanitarian workers in Yemen, and conveying messages on the need for full, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access. Turning to UNHCR's important role in supporting IDPs, her country would like to know UNHCR's current strategies to ensure increased presence and improve the quality of the IDP response in Yemen. In times of rapidly emerging and growing crises, Sweden was committed to ensuring that the humanitarian crisis in Yemen remained high on the international agenda. The following week on 16 March 2022, together with the United Nations Secretary-General and Switzerland, Sweden was co-hosting High-Level Pledging Event on the Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen. She called on donors to contribute urgently needed funding, show their continued support to the people of Yemen and counteract recent funding shortages that deprived people of vital assistance.

Mr. Zniber (Morocco), speaking via video link, said that the crisis continued to displace millions against a tragically worsening global backdrop. Steps must be taken to solve those problems and respect the GCR. His country would join the United Nations and neighbouring countries in contributing humanitarian assistance for the regrettable new crisis in Europe.

Inhumane acts and refusal of asylum were troubling abuses and violations of human rights, as the High Commissioner had recently stated with reference to constant violations of the human rights of refugees and displaced persons, namely those travelling to Europe and in the Sahel. Morocco continued to support international efforts to solve issues in the region, particularly in the Sahel and Libya, and for all parties to reconcile through dialogue. While he welcomed the High

Commissioner's visit to the Sahel in 2021, he was concerned by the bombing of displaced people and refugees in the region. Morocco supported all refugees and displaced persons who were victims of international crises, for example by providing humanitarian assistance in Yemen and Lebanon as well as to Palestinians and Tunisia against COVID-19 by creating a field hospital. In general, his country continually provided humanitarian assistance in Africa.

Morocco was also involved in working towards a solution for the Western Sahara problem after 45 years of conflict. There were refugees still in camps and needing legal status, either by settling in a host or third country or, preferably, through voluntary return. Their rights were enshrined in the Moroccan constitution of 2011, and his country would spare no effort towards ending the conflict in Western Sahara, which it had long requested to avoid keeping refugees in camps with their status in contradiction with norms and standards. They were subject to abuse, including from military personnel in the camps. A solution for voluntary return to their country was needed. Beyond the refugees' own reports, the Tindouf camps attested the isolation of their populations and reliance on support, and the lack of regional human rights monitoring. At one camp, the Algerian regime was reportedly prolonging the conflict along with fake figures intended to put camp inhabitants at risk. Furthermore, the European Anti-Fraud Office had made similar findings. As King Mohammed VI had said, history would judge those responsible, those who had assisted, and all who had used refugees as a tool and weapon for diplomatic conflict.

Ms. Rasmussen (Denmark) said that the humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, including the North-East, remained a cause for concern along with its continuous impact on the region, particularly the social and economic decline in Lebanon. She welcomed UNHCR's tireless efforts to protect the millions of people affected: IDPs, refugees and their host communities. A continuous, holistic approach, focusing on protection and host communities while scaling up early recovery activities for those returning, was of great importance. Further, Denmark welcomed UNHCR's strong, region-wide focus on tackling sexual and gender-based violence, calling for greater efforts in that regard.

Finally, the devastating number of deaths in the Mediterranean Sea required new ways to protect refugees and irregular migrants and counter the business model of people smugglers, addressing the root causes of those dangerous journeys. People in the regions of origin must receive better help. The primary entry for refugees for protection in Europe should be legal pathways including United Nations resettlement, not people smugglers. A new, fair and humane asylum system must be introduced into international law. The continuing humanitarian crisis across the Middle East and North Africa region remained a deep concern. Denmark would continue its strong support for the people and host communities affected.

Mr. Ishida (Japan), expressing deep concern at the continuing humanitarian crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic, commended UNHCR and all humanitarian workers on the frontline who were working under severe and challenging conditions to help refugees and displaced persons. Japan continued to support UNHCR's response to the humanitarian needs of vulnerable people in Syria and its neighbouring countries. Since 2012, Japan had provided a total of approximately \$3.2 billion to Syrian refugees and IDPs, and to Syria's neighbouring countries. In addition, Japan had decided to provide around \$14.1 million for humanitarian assistance and social stabilization to Syria and its neighbouring countries in 2022. Japan intended to play a responsible role in improving the humanitarian situation of the Syrian people, hand in hand with the international community.

Regarding the situation in Iraq, his country was concerned by political instability after the fifth elections for the Iraqi Council of Representatives held in October 2021. Stability in Iraq being essential for sustainable peace in the Middle East, Japan hoped that a new administration would be inaugurated as soon as possible. Japan had decided to provide \$5 million for assistance focusing on IDPs, returnees and Syrian refugees in the country.

Mr. Doğan (Turkey) said that the alarming situation required action on several fronts. Turkey continued to host more than 3.6 million Syrian refugees, and had been the largest host country for several years consecutively with more than 4.3 million people. Including Syrian IDPs, his country supported around 9 million Syrians inside and outside their country. The Syrian crisis was the largest displacement crisis in the world, and over more than a decade had only become more protracted and complex, especially in light of COVID-19. The situation in Ukraine had rendered existing issues yet more difficult to address – the international community could not afford the luxury of ignoring them.

Despite the pandemic, Syrian refugees enjoyed the same rights as Turkish citizens, including education, social cohesion programmes and employment. His country cooperated with international partners including UNHCR, and had instigated Kızılaykart, a debit card for refugees created by Turkish Red Crescent. For IDPs in Syria, Turkey continued to provide a lifeline for humanitarian support, for which it was seeking to increase its resilience and cooperation with organizations such as UNHCR. Any step towards resolving the crisis ignoring Syrian IDPs would remain inadequate. Though itself insufficient, the United Nations cross-border mechanism to increase the resilience of millions of IDPs must continue and be expanded to avoid similar tragedies to those over winter 2021.

Paying tribute to the neighbouring countries Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq's generous hosting of Syrian refugees, he emphasized that that situation was not sustainable: burden- and responsibility-sharing was more relevant than ever. During the HLOM in December 2021, there had been a clear need for a more rapid GCR implementation. That issue was significant for the entire international community, not solely for host countries, and UNHCR should continue to increase its efforts to address it.

Ms. Lehoux (Switzerland), noting her country's concern at the worsening situation of refugees in Libya and the population in Tripoli following security raids and activities carried out by the Libyan Government in late 2021, called on UNHCR and its partners to continue to urge the Libyan Government to respect the rights of those vulnerable groups and pursue more sustainable solutions. Limited humanitarian space and the restrictive situation in the country still hindered large-scale aid to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Libya. UNHCR should collaborate at a high level to urge the Libyan Government to join efforts for a more favourable protective environment. While the overall humanitarian situation had improved with the decrease in IDPs in 2020, challenges remained regarding returnees' access to basic services, protection and assistance with reconstruction, and required collective action. She welcomed UNHCR's efforts to protect vulnerable people in Libya despite its considerable organizational difficulties in 2021.

Regarding UNHCR's dialogue with the Syrian Arab Republic to overcome obstacles to voluntary return, she asked how the issue was framed to avoid becoming a call for premature return. She wished to know why in the regular update on Iraq UNHCR had made no mention of its area-based programming approach, which was important for UNHCR's contribution to sustainable solutions for integrating refugees and IDPs. The troubling humanitarian situation in Yemen must remain a priority. To that end, Switzerland would co-host the upcoming Pledging Conference on Yemen with the United Nations and Sweden.

Ms. Irish (United Kingdom) expressed concern that while Syrian refugees in Lebanon remained extremely vulnerable, the escalating economic crisis had implications beyond host communities. Potential restrictions in wheat imports from Ukraine, on which the country relied heavily, raised further concerns for food insecurity, against the backdrop of a "whole-of-Lebanon" crisis. While UNHCR played a welcome and crucial role in the country, the various United Nations framework responses must be managed effectively to make best use of limited funds, support implementing partners and target those most in need.

Turning to Syria, she welcomed UNHCR's efforts in supporting cross-border contingency planning in relevant sectors, and requested an update on how the organization was involving clusters and cluster partners to ensure that such planning was transparent and inclusive. While work to improve conditions in al-Hol and support the return out of formal camps in the north-east was welcome, the UNHCR – and the wider United Nations system – should be encouraged to adopt a more forward-leaning and ambitious approach to accessing the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic and engaging with Kurdish authorities as part of a more principled approach and response, particularly in relation to the safe and effective management of formal camps. She further requested that UNHCR provide updates on the anticipated plan to review and update its regional operational framework for refugees returning to Syria.

Turning to Iraq, she noted with satisfaction UNHCR's engagement with IDPs and durable solutions, including facilitating voluntary return when feasible. Given that access to civil documentation remained the biggest barrier to IDP and returnee reintegration, it remained unclear how the organization planned to engage with the new administration in Iraq to refocus attention on protracted displacement and ensure the reintegration of some 1.2 million citizens.

Lastly, she requested further clarification on how UNHCR planned to work with other agencies in Yemen in 2022, and whether it was liaising with authorities in the north of the country to re-establish a presence there. Finally, the protection cluster plays a critical role, and we support UNHCR's efforts in providing coordination around protection activities in Yemen.

Ms. Shin (Republic of Korea), noting that the protracted displacement in the Syrian Arab Republic required a coordinated, focused and prioritized response, said that her country welcomed the “whole-of-Syria” and “community-based” response of UNHCR and its partners. She expressed her support for the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), in which neighbouring host countries were actively engaged. Nonetheless, her country would welcome further clarification on the status of, and potential improvements to, humanitarian access.

Supportive of the “one refugee” approach, her country was grateful to Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Egypt for their substantial burden-sharing. In the wider region, she noted the need to focus on economic and social inclusion in Iraq, given the gradual shift from a purely humanitarian response to a longer-term development approach. There was also a need for further clarification on the risk management strategy in Libya, following the raids on districts hosting migrant and asylum-seekers and the widespread demonstrations outside the UNHCR premises in late 2021.

Mr. Chemakh (Algeria) recalled that his country had been consistently providing protection and assistance services to refugees hosted in camps near Tindouf for almost half a century, following Morocco's illegal annexation of Western Sahara. While his country was grateful to UNHCR, its implementing partners and funding agencies for supporting Sahrawi refugees, who relied heavily on humanitarian aid, he called for better provision of services, especially in the light of a 2018 inter-agency study which had estimated the number of Sahrawi refugees at 173,600.

Regrettably, the UNHCR's regional report did not take into account the dangerous evolution of the situation in Western Sahara, and only briefly referenced the plight of Sahrawi refugees. Algeria strongly deplored the attempts to expunge Sahrawi refugees from the record, and called on UNHCR to faithfully report on their situation and accord them the visibility and attention they deserved, not least because those refugees were suffering psychological warfare at the hands of Morocco, which was attempting to distort reality and discredit the work of UNHCR and its partners.

Algeria remained convinced that addressing forced displacement required tailored and durable solutions, underpinned by international law, aimed at removing obstacles to the right to a safe and dignified voluntary return. Many refugees were deprived of such solutions and continued to live in forced exile, owing to a failure to secure their inalienable right to self-determination and independence. The ongoing political stalemate, attributable to Morocco, thus required the entire international community to uphold international law and respect international rule. Algeria hoped for the return to effective and serious direct negotiations, in good faith and in the absence of pre-conditions, between the two parties to the conflict. In that regard, he called for the reactivation and revitalisation of the Settlement Plan, endorsed on two occasions by the Security Council.

Mr. Smith (United States of America) said that despite UNHCR's best efforts to ensure that Syrian refugees and IDPs could make informed return decisions, pressurizing those groups to return prematurely would only lead to greater domestic and regional instability. Despite cross-border assistance in the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic, the region was fraught with humanitarian challenges which could only be solved by large-scale cross-border assistance. In that regard, his country remained committed to improving the UNHCR's “one refugee” approach.

While the scale of UNHCR's work in Yemen was commendable, his Government remained concerned that ongoing escalations in the country could lead to further displacement. In particular, the Houthi interference in aid operations was preventing vulnerable people from receiving life-saving assistance, a situation compounded by bureaucratic impediments to, and interference with, humanitarian work by authorities in southern Yemen. He encouraged UNHCR to ensure close coordination with other United Nations agencies and respond to the vast resulting humanitarian needs.

Addressing barriers to durable solutions remained critical in Iraq in the light of widespread IDP camp closures and protracted displacement. Having demonstrated its commendable leadership in coordinating assistance for IDPs and refugees, UNHCR should be encouraged to develop its long-term planning for such solutions, in coordination with Iraqi authorities and other actors.

Moreover, although UNHCR had provided commendable protection and assistance in Libya, the situation in that country remained deeply troubling. In that connection, he called on the Libyan authorities to improve collaboration with UNHCR, permit unimpeded access to affected populations and end inhumane detention practices.

Lastly, he encouraged UNHCR to continue to work with governments and civil society to resolve and prevent the countless cases of statelessness through the provision of identity documents and conferral of nationality.

Mr. Sender (Germany), while supportive of shifting the humanitarian response to a longer-term development approach, noted that certain humanitarian needs still required the international community's continued support. In that regard, UNHCR's focus on durable solutions and access to civil documentation for IDPs and returnees was much appreciated.

Germany was grateful to UNHCR for delivering in areas of new and protracted displacement across Yemen, recognizing the extremely challenging operating environment. In particular, he commended the protection services for survivors of gender-based violence. Germany was also grateful to UNHCR for having jointly led the inter-agency humanitarian intervention in the country, and encouraged it to incorporate the critical findings, lessons and recommendations into its planning, decision-making process and response when feasible.

As humanitarian needs intensified across the Syrian Arab Republic, Germany appreciated the continued "whole-of-Syria" approach, including cross-border assistance in the northwest, which provided a lifeline for some 2.7 million IDPs. Nonetheless, the conditions for large-scale return were still not in place, as evidenced by the low return figures. While the situation in neighbouring countries, particularly in Lebanon, remained very concerning, his country appreciated UNHCR's continued efforts to provide assistance to refugees and create longer-term solutions.

In Libya, the numerous reports of human rights violations and arbitrary detentions experienced by refugees and migrants was deeply troubling. All interactions with those groups must be underpinned by a human-rights-based approach, in accordance with international law. Despite the extremely difficult working conditions in that country, he noted with appreciation the re-enactment of the direct resettlement mechanism and the emergency transit mechanism. Lastly, in the light of the events leading up to the closure of the community day centre in Tripoli, Germany would continue to advocate for the closure of detention centres, while creating alternative solutions in urban space and facilitating unhindered access for humanitarian workers.

Ms. Moussa (Egypt), speaking via video link, noted with appreciation that UNHCR was prioritizing needs-based assistance. As host to 275,000 refugees and asylum seekers, in addition to a further 6 million persons in refugee-like situations, her country had launched a joint platform to mobilize resources and respond to the needs of refugees and migrants in line with the "one refugee" approach. While Egypt was grateful to donors for their efforts, which enabled the country to provide health-care, education and other basics services to refugees, it was clear that equitable burden and responsibility sharing would take a long time to achieve. She therefore called on the international community to commit additional financial resources to refugees and host communities.

Egypt had organized the first meeting of the Group of Friends on Burden and Responsibility Sharing in December 2021, which had provided a much-needed platform for the free and candid exchange of views on the relationship between displacement, peace building and humanitarian development and on operationalizing burden and responsibility sharing. In particular, the links between durable solutions and effective peacebuilding, and the importance of coherent approaches across the development, humanitarian and peace-building sectors, had been emphasized.

Mr. Banzet (Canada), noting with concern the worsening situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, called on all parties to ensure unimpeded humanitarian access. He further called on all parties to respect their obligations under humanitarian law and remove all obstacles to assistance in Yemen. In the light of recent camp closures in Iraq and its impact on IDPs, Canada sought clarification on how UNHCR intended to support displaced persons in that country.

Mr. Hashim Mostafa (Iraq as Observer, speaking via video link) said that his country had taken a number of measures to support and assist refugees and help IDPs preserve their dignity and meet their basic needs as part of voluntary repatriation programmes. Moreover, Iraq had supported

national reconciliation in refugees' countries of origin to support their return. As a host country which provided health, education and other assistance, in accordance with international human rights standards, Iraq nonetheless faced challenges which had been amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic. He therefore called for more international aid to ensure a more equitable distribution of assistance.

Mr. Hemsley (Danish Refugee Council on behalf of NGOs), speaking via video link on behalf of NGOs, said that the situation in Yemen had been compounded by continued hostilities, a worsening economic situation, the non-renewal of the Group of Eminent Experts – as the sole independent mechanism for investigating IHL violations – and a disregard for the plight of East African migrants. He urged stakeholders to prioritize an inclusive peace process in Yemen, including by establishing a new international and independent accountability mechanism for documenting violations, ensure funding to meet life-saving needs, address root causes of vulnerability and build community resilience, and advocate for freedom of movement, access to services and the ability to exercise rights for migrant communities.

In the Syrian Arab Republic, active conflict continued to threaten civilians and impede aid delivery, while the economic crisis had worsened living conditions and access to services. Mindful that food insecurity could cause further displacement, he called for early recovery assistance to ensure equitable access to public services. Furthermore, while access had improved in Damascus, he called for increased protection space to support refugee self-reliance and pathways to durable solutions, as well as a cross-border aid delivery mechanism for hard-to-reach areas, subject to the renewal of Security Council resolution 2585.

Against the backdrop of increased community tensions, inconsistent approaches in aid coordination and further deteriorations in public services, most Syrian refugees in Lebanon faced increased risks and barriers to protection. All relevant parties should develop a “whole-of-Lebanon” approach aimed at prioritizing humanitarian action and optimizing response architectures and accountability. They should also ensure that the Government provide an equitable approach to social protection schemes and establish a cash working group, in addition to advocating for resuming UNHCR refugee registration.

Increasing social tensions and the economic crisis were pushing refugees in Turkey into extreme poverty. Funding should target short-term humanitarian needs, protection and social cohesion. Furthermore, national authorities and NGOs should be supported to strengthen the legal framework, uphold refugee rights and ensure access to employment and education, while continuing to support resettlement.

Camp closures in Iraq in 2020 had forced thousands of IDPs into informal and inadequate settlements, presenting obstacles to durable solutions, while the country also hosted 250,000 Syrian refugees. Stakeholders were thus urged to work with the Iraqi Government to support pathways to durable solutions and ensure that labelling people as “returnees” acknowledged obstacles in overcoming displacement-related needs.

The situation in Libya continued to deteriorate owing to the flagrant denial of rights and detention of migrants. Access to documentation remained a major challenge for many. Donors should provide multi-year flexible funding to support NGOs' complex negotiations for safe and unhindered access to deliver timely assistance at scale throughout the country, while UNHCR should establish a refugee status determination process and recognize asylum applications beyond the nine pre-defined countries. Arbitrary detention of migrants and refugees must end, with an immediate, unconditional, and coordinated release of the most vulnerable. Furthermore, the country's migration/refugee policy and legal framework should be urgently reformed, centred on human rights, guaranteeing non-refoulement and access to asylum, with due process.

As the pandemic had entrenched inequalities across the region, increased availability of vaccines and campaigns to address low take-up rates were required. Along with all duty-bearers, all stakeholders should advocate across the region to increase civic space and ensure protection for activists, while ensuring that humanitarian response was heavily informed, if not led, by local voices.

Mr. Gharaibeh (Director of the Middle East and North Africa Bureau, UNHCR) said that 11 years later, the Syrian region remained plagued by conflict. Entire generations of Syrians had never known their country nor envisaged a future there, and that was reflected by a limited interest in return, according to the intention-to-return survey. That fact notwithstanding, no changes to the policy on

return were envisaged, and UNHCR would continue to support Syrian IDPs and refugees to make informed choices. For any changes to be envisaged, the protection thresholds set out in the Comprehensive Protection and Solutions Strategy would have to be met. Furthermore, despite the updates issued by the durable solution working groups, there were no changes in the thresholds that would warrant the revision of the strategy.

Assistance to displaced persons in the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic could only be robustly addressed through the cross-border operation. Contingency planning had been under way for six months with all sectors leads in order to ensure implementation and funding in the event that Security Council resolution 2165 was not extended, especially given the tensions arising from Europe. To that end, UNHCR had identified partners and shared its plans with the three cluster leads. Delivering cross-line assistance, meanwhile, remained challenging given the inadequate complementarity between cross-border and cross-line response.

He thanked the EU for its continued support, including in so-called hotspots. In particular, the sixth Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region was an important avenue for gauging the international community's commitment to supporting Syrian refugees in the region and beyond. He also underscored the importance of cash, particularly during the pandemic, as a key means of supporting and protecting victims of domestic violence and the unemployed. As a protection agency, UNHCR put protection at the very heart of its work and wished to thank the EU for the earmarked contributions to assist victims of gender-based violence during the pandemic.

UNHCR was working to address refugees' primary concerns around security guarantees and conscription and would work with the Syrian Government to remove obstacles to return, including by ensuring legal protection, housing, land and property rights and documentation. Progress had been achieved on the latter, including through the country's 96 information centres, which nonetheless remained a serious impediment to return and integration for IDPs across the region.

Turning to the closure of camps in Iraq, he stressed that the responsibility for IDPs lay with the Government of that country. Although unified ID cards had been successfully issued in camps, allowing IDPs to access pensions and claim their properties, the return grant had not materialized. Moreover, some impediments, such serious security issues and tribal disputes, could not be addressed by funding alone and required a national Government-led reconciliation. He therefore called on Iraq to intervene and work with the international community to provide basic infrastructure and services.

The dire crisis in Yemen was multi-layered and demanded further attention. Staffing levels had returned to full strength in the region, and a mission had been planned for Sana'a with a view to developing a national IDP strategy. Meanwhile, a number of challenges remained in Libya, and undertaking meaningful advocacy in the country was proving very difficult, given that UNHCR's mandate was being called into question.

iii. Americas

Mr. Samaniego (Director of the Regional Bureau for the Americas, UNHCR) presented an update on UNHCR's operations in the Americas, noting that the region contained one in every five displaced people in the world.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had had a devastating impact on refugees and displaced people throughout the continent, further complicating the issues that they faced. Many of those people had found relative stability in South America, including Haitians living in Chile and Brazil, and Venezuelans living in Andean countries, although most aimed to reach North America and faced a number of challenges in that regard, including rejection at the border or deportation. Such measures aggravated protection risks and resulted in serious humanitarian situations. There had been a number of reports in recent months of violence against women, abuse of unaccompanied minors and even deaths in Andean countries, Central America and the Caribbean. In that context, efforts had been redoubled to mitigate the risks, particularly for the most vulnerable people, and to create better conditions for inclusion and stability.

The first priority highlighted was to strengthen protection systems. One of the most urgent activities had been the registration and documentation of refugees and migrants. During the pandemic, many people had not been able to obtain or renew their identity documents. Several countries had

introduced regularization programmes, including biometric registration, to provide temporary protection status or residency permits for Venezuelans. It was important to continue strengthening asylum systems and adopt measures to speed up the process.

By the end of 2021, Mexico had become the world's third largest recipient of asylum claims and Brazil had recognized almost 50,000 refugees, many of those as a result of implementing the extended definition contained in the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees. The flexibility shown by a number of countries with regard to the modernization and decentralization of asylum systems was appreciated. UNHCR would continue to provide technical and material support to respond to protection needs and resolve the almost 2.4 million pending asylum applications in the region. Civil society also had an important role to play, as non-governmental organizations and religious organizations were often on the front lines dealing with populations on the move. Their support and orientation centres continued to provide humanitarian assistance and refer cases with protection needs in the most remote areas, particular border areas.

The pandemic had also impacted the integration of displaced people into host communities. Therefore, a second priority was the promotion of socioeconomic inclusion policies and programmes. In terms of public health, the Americas were leading the way in COVID-19 vaccination. Most countries in the region had taken measures to include refugee and migrant populations in their vaccination programmes. UNHCR remained committed to providing operational support and information campaigns in that regard. Several countries had also taken measures to include refugees and migrants in national socioeconomic recovery plans. Notably, with support from the private sector and from local authorities, Brazil and Mexico had implemented internal resettlement programmes enabling families to move away from the border and into cities, which provided greater employment opportunities. No country could respond to the crisis alone, so a third priority was to strengthen regional cooperation and coordination mechanisms. The Brazil Plan of Action continued to serve as a reference point and a roadmap for protection and solutions. As demonstrated by the evaluation process led by Mexico, it also represented a concrete contribution to the Global Compact on Refugees.

In Central America and Mexico, the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS) was strengthened with a forum for dialogue and collaboration on issues of displacement, with a particular focus on strengthening asylum systems and protecting displaced persons. Work was being done to improve links with the private sector in order to facilitate employment for displaced populations. The Government of Honduras, which had assumed the pro tempore presidency for 2022, had indicated that its main focus would be dealing with the structural causes of displacement and promoting durable solutions, in cooperation with local governments. In addition, the Quito Process was continuing to work on a regional protection and integration agenda. Under Brazil's leadership, the priorities for the coming year were: access to regularization programmes, strengthening international protection systems, specific attention on indigenous populations and combatting xenophobia.

The fourth priority area was international cooperation. A strategic priority had been to promote concerted action to facilitate the exchange of information and maximise the impact of support initiatives. In the context of the Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) situation, the Group of Friends of the Quito Process involved cooperating states and development banks providing technical and financial support to host countries. In the MIRPS Framework, the support platform, emanating from the global compact on refugees, had been developed to provide technical support and increase resettlement and complementary pathways for people in need from Central America. The signature event planned for the end of May 2022 would be an opportunity to scale up UNHCR's resettlement programme in the region. There had also been a number of resource mobilization initiatives, including the International Donors' Conference in Solidarity with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants, convened by Canada, which raised almost \$ 900 million in humanitarian grants. That contribution had been fundamental to RMRP implemented by the Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V) co-led by IOM and UNHCR. The next International Donors' Conference would hopefully secure the continuity of the regional response.

The engagement of international financial institutions and other development actors was also key to addressing the root causes of displacement in countries of origin and to strengthening socioeconomic inclusion in host countries. The World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) had done studies on the impact of the displacement crisis to assist with the development of public policies

and the approval of concessional loans. The first policy loan funded jointly by the World Bank and the IDB to support the regularization programme in Colombia was significant and could hopefully soon be replicated in Ecuador and elsewhere. UNHCR would also continue to work closely with the World Bank to mobilize development funding under the Global Concessional Financial Facility and to operationalize the strategic priorities agreed in the Memorandum of Understanding signed with the IDB.

In closing, he expressed the solidarity of the Americas region for the serious refugee crisis affecting Ukraine. A number of countries in the region had announced their intentions to establish humanitarian visa programmes and participate in resettlement efforts. He also welcomed the firm commitment of all countries in the region to continue contributing to the implementation of the global compact on refugees.

Ms. Clifford (European Union), speaking on behalf of the European Union and its Member States, expressed concern over the increasing humanitarian and protection needs in the Americas region, with growing numbers of forcibly displaced persons and the additional impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. She commended the regional and country efforts to provide protection and assistance to address forced displacement and mixed migration flows.

The increasingly desperate humanitarian emergency in Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), as well as the growing needs in the region to assist those who had fled the country, was a grave concern. The European Union remained committed to efforts to alleviate the suffering in the country and to provide protection and assistance to refugees, migrants and host communities in the region. The European Union had supported and attended the International Donors' Conference in Solidarity with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants and would continue to advocate for a coordinated response. Colombia was to be commended for its exemplary decision to provide temporary protection status to Venezuelans in the country for a ten-year period. Access for Venezuelans in their host countries to health services, including COVID-19 vaccination, was significant, although the emergency response should go hand-in-hand with a longer-term approach. In that context, she welcomed the outreach of UNHCR to development actors and international financial institutions, as such joined-up efforts were key to addressing the magnitude of needs and providing a more long-term response. She also expressed appreciation for the collaboration between UNHCR and IOM within the R4V. The European Union and several of its Member States were members of the Group of Friends of the Quito Process.

The European Union and its Member States continued to support the MIRPS Framework, which was a conducive format for addressing the root causes of forced displacement and enhancing responsibility-sharing in the region. They would also continue to support efforts to provide protection and assistance to vulnerable populations as well as strengthening resilience and community preparedness. The participation of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in the support platform was appreciated, as a step towards broadening the base and building on the regional response. Further exchanges between existing regional support platforms to share experiences and best practices would be welcome.

With regard to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and children, she encouraged UNHCR to use a strong gender-sensitive approach in its operational response, paying particular attention to the needs of those in the most vulnerable situations. In that regard, she expressed appreciation for the role of Ecuador and Honduras as pilot countries in the Blueprint for Joint Action for Refugee Children, in partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Mr. Tincopa Grados (Peru) agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic had most affected people in vulnerable situations, including in Peru. Nonetheless, Peru continued to welcome Venezuelan citizens into the country and appreciated the support received from the High Commissioner in that regard. In addition to providing humanitarian assistance, Peru was implementing programmes and mechanisms for registering migrants, in an environment conducive to regularization, order and security. Since most of the migrants that had reached Peru intended to settle there, one of the main priorities was integration into the various host communities. National efforts needed to be accompanied by action to mobilize international resources to address the needs of the refugees and migrants, since the challenges of the humanitarian crisis went way beyond the national response capacities of developing countries such as Peru, in both institutional and financial terms. He therefore welcomed the organization of a 2022 International Donors' Conference in Solidarity with

Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants in order to finance the R4V and thereby the activities of UNHCR and the United Nations Specialized Agencies in support of host countries. He urged the international community to maintain its engagement with the situation in the Americas region, without taking anything away from refugees resulting from situations in other regions. Peru remained committed to working to find solutions to the various challenges faced by Venezuelan migrants and refugees.

Mr. Dávalos Dávalos (Ecuador) said that the work of UNHCR in the early part of 2022 had demonstrated its resilience, its capacity to adapt and its leadership. Human mobility would continue to be a priority issue for the international community and States would need support to manage it. The Americas region was experiencing a complex situation that required a coordinated effort of solidarity and shared responsibility. It was important that the related instruments – including the global compact on refugees, the Brazil Plan of Action and the Quito Process – remained consistent. It was essential to strengthen asylum systems for those needing international protection. It was also vital to continue digitalizing refugee systems and implementing distinct procedures, especially for women, children and adolescents, as well as to establish inter-institutional coordination mechanisms.

In addition, it was important to strengthen integration programmes in host communities, so he encouraged UNHCR to strengthen its development cooperation for countries in the region, in order to enable more longer-term integration services and programmes. Since Ecuador hosted the largest number of refugees in South America, it was vital to ensure an equitable distribution of responsibility for the hundreds of thousands of people in need of international protection. Since 1999, Ecuador had received thousands of refugees, mostly victims of the internal conflict in Colombia. Many more people had arrived as a result of the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), for whom the country had provided universal free access to basic services. The Government of Ecuador would be undertaking a second round of regularization for foreign nationals, which would also be accompanied by a socioeconomic inclusion strategy aimed at creating employment and providing recognition of foreign qualifications, as well as initiatives to combat discrimination and xenophobia. The Government had also implemented a successful COVID-19 vaccination plan, which had included refugees and migrants regardless of their migration status.

Mr. Gonzalez Mayagoitia (Mexico) said that in the Americas, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and of climate change had increased the need for people to seek international protection. In keeping with their tradition of providing refuge, countries in Latin America and the Caribbean continued to show commitment and solidarity towards those seeking international protection, as reflected in various regional frameworks and mechanisms, including the Brazil Plan of Action and MIRPS. Those frameworks had been a great help in directing States' efforts and showed how important it was to tackle refugee challenges at the regional level, ensuring that countries of origin, transit and destination all worked together. They had also helped encourage greater international cooperation, in line with the objectives of the global compact on refugees. The MIRPS support platform in particular had been very useful in mobilizing technical and financial support.

Mexico continued to work with UNHCR and other partners, including the United States and Canada, to build capacity in its refugee system, enabling it to deal with increasing numbers of people. Mexico also continued to strengthen its public policies and programmes to ensure the full respect of human rights of refugees, with particular emphasis on protecting the most vulnerable. It was important to ensure that refugees were able to access mechanisms to help them become self-sufficient and integrate into their host communities. In that regard, continued attention would be given to the refugee resettlement and employment programme.

Mexico had made some progress on the question of internal displacement and thanked UNHCR and other actors for helping to improve the availability of relevant data, ensuring that legal frameworks were in place and providing institutional training. The United Nations Secretary General's draft Action Agenda on Internal Displacement was an excellent roadmap in that regard.

Lastly, all efforts would be in vain without a greater emphasis on addressing the root causes that led people to seek international protection. He called on the international community to support the existing regional initiatives, in particular the Comprehensive Development Plan for El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and south-southeast Mexico, which aimed to boost socioeconomic development in countries of origin as well as to strengthen environmental protections in order to

reduce the risk of natural disasters. Strengthening the humanitarian-development-peace nexus was the only way to provide long term solutions to the challenges faced by all.

Mr. da Silva Nunes (Brazil) noted that Brazil had a long tradition of welcoming migrants and refugees from all over the world, although today the largest number came from within the same region. Its response to the Venezuelan situation – ‘Operation Welcome’ – had focused from the outset on supporting those in vulnerable situations and promoting local integration. Brazil had expanded access to health services and social protection for migrants and refugees, and the Government had also facilitated the regularization process, including migrants and refugees in social programmes. All migrants and refugees in Brazil, regardless of status, had access to all public services and social benefits, including the emergency income benefit established in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. They had also been included in the national vaccination plan.

An innovative feature of the Brazilian response showing very good results was the interiorization process – the effort to voluntarily relocate Venezuelan migrants and refugees to cities all across the country, ensuring better integration and helping to relieve pressure on services at the border. Partnerships and coordination with UNHCR, IOM, civil society, local authorities and the private sector were essential in that regard. As the pro tempore president of the Quito Process, Brazil was promoting discussions about the need to support host communities, provide assistance to vulnerable groups, offer opportunities to young people and further support the efforts of host countries to foster international protection and regularization. Those things could only be achieved through enhanced partnerships and sustained commitment.

Ms. Irish (United Kingdom) noted that there had been concerning reports of increased violent clashes with armed groups in Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) throughout 2021 and 2022 and asked for information about the situation of internally displaced persons in the country. Although borders were gradually reopening, unsafe routes continued to be used, exposing people leaving Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) to significant protection risks, particularly women and children. She would therefore appreciate information about the actions that UNHCR was taking to ensure the protection of people on the move and their access to regularization and asylum.

The deterioration of the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) and the large number of people leaving the country was concerning. Acknowledging the leadership of UNHCR and IOM in coordinating regional responses to the ever-growing challenge, she requested more information about the gap in funding for the RMRP in 2022. She would also appreciate further information on what more could be done to reduce xenophobia towards Venezuelan migrants fuelled by domestic economic challenges. Important steps had been taken in 2021 with regard to regularization processes in a number of countries. Were those measures having a positive effect?

The United Kingdom had joined the Group of Friends of the Quito Process in 2020 and since then had been an active participant in discussions. She commended the leadership of Canada to enhance coordination efforts. However, a lack of information about the exact needs of the Quito Process countries remained a challenge to more effective donor engagement. She would be interested to hear the view of UNHCR on the effectiveness of the Quito Process over the past year.

Mr. Damiani Pellegrini (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) lamented the focus on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in the regional update. The figures provided suggested that there were six million Venezuelan refugees and migrants in other countries, with 186,000 recognized as refugees and 952,000 having lodged asylum claims. That meant that there were 4,862,000 Venezuelans that did not fall within the Organization’s mandate as they were in fact economic migrants. He reiterated his country’s request for more information on the methodology used to collect those figures and to make the distinction between economic migrants and refugees. He repeated his dissatisfaction with the way the figures were being used in the report and regarded it as the result of repeated politicization. The data had been provided by Governments that were openly engaged in actions to politically and economically destabilize the country, taking advantage of the opportunity to criticize the migratory process that they themselves encouraged in order to then request significant international financial support. UNHCR should make a greater effort to explain the various cultural reasons for Venezuelan migratory flows. Politicized reports did not provide an objective view of the process and the exogenous causes had been intentionally omitted. The report also failed to include the true causes of the xenophobia in the host countries.

He condemned the recent statement made by the Vice President of Colombia, which revealed an intolerant, xenophobic, discriminatory and classist attitude towards Venezuelan migrants with low economic means. He recalled that the more than 6 million Colombian migrants and refugees who had integrated into Venezuelan society, largely from low-income rural backgrounds, had escaped more than 60 years of armed conflict, deep social inequality and a lack of opportunities in the Colombian labour market. Poverty was the primary driver of migration in the region. That was why Colombia had received enormous sums of money from UNHCR and other agencies, as well as other donor countries and private financial institutions, in order to assist with the integration of Venezuelans in that country.

Turning to the Government of Colombia's "children first" initiative, as outlined in the report, he reiterated that children born to Venezuelan parents outside the country were not stateless, since the country had a mixed system of *jus solis* and *jus sanguinis*. The erroneous interpretation of the Colombian initiative had no legal basis at all. With regard to the clashes between illegal armed groups that were continuing to impact communities on both sides of the border between Colombia and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), he noted that the situation in Colombia had displaced thousands of Colombians into Venezuela. However, the report only presented one side of the situation. He noted with concern that there had been a number of violent and xenophobic demonstrations against Venezuelans in Chile over the past four months. He called on the humanitarian agencies to implement programmes to combat xenophobia using the ample resources granted to the host countries. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela was committed to using multilateralism and dialogue to resolve the problems confronting humanity. However, some other countries in the region refused to enter into coherent practical dialogue with the Venezuelan authorities. He called for an end to the hostile xenophobic political agenda and a return to international cooperation.

Ms. Arango Blanco (Colombia) said that she appreciated the work carried out by UNHCR in the region, particularly its support in assistance and protection for the more than 6 million Venezuelans who had left their country. Her country had received more than 1.8 million Venezuelan citizens, which was 30 per cent of all Venezuelan citizens who had left since 2015. As part of cooperation to provide assistance to the Venezuelan migrant population, her Government prioritized the mobilization of support for their socioeconomic inclusion. To that end, Colombia's Temporary Statute for the Protection of Venezuelan Migrants, announced in February 2021, had played a fundamental role. As at 2 March 2022, her country had received more than a million applications, over 600,000 of which had been approved, thus enabling the Venezuelan migrant population to access services such as health and education, and formal employment.

UNHCR had been a key ally in supporting mass communication, thereby helping Colombia's migration authorities to inform the large number of Venezuelans of the benefits and procedures to follow in order to be covered by the Temporary Statute. Such cooperation demonstrated the high level of understanding and coordination between her Government and UNHCR, facilitated by the representatives in the country. She highlighted the important role of UNHCR in supporting the preparation of the International Donors' Conference in 2020 and 2021. The Conference had helped to raise the international community's awareness of the magnitude of the mixed flows originating from Venezuela and the importance of supporting the host countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. She called on the international community to support the response to migration from Venezuela, which was a shared responsibility not only among the host countries but also other countries and actors. Her Government hoped to have the support and leadership of UNHCR in organizing the 2022 International Donors' Conference, for which the support of the international community was also necessary.

While Venezuela continued to deny the situation, Colombia continued to provide protection measures to Venezuelan refugees, particularly children, through a targeted programme in coordination with UNHCR, IOM and UNICEF. Since 2005, the programme, which was in force until 2023, had granted nationality to over 70,000 children born to Venezuelan parents in Colombia, who could not be registered as Venezuelan as they lacked the necessary papers. It was important that such children were not left stateless, that their rights were respected, and they were visible in society.

Structural problems and violence persisted in Colombia despite the Government's efforts to implement the 2016 peace agreement. Illegal armed groups were present in Colombia, associated

with drug trafficking, arms trafficking and flagrant violations of human rights. Her Government had denounced, and would continue to denounce, the fact that those groups were being protected in exile in neighbouring countries. As noted in the report, the presence of such groups had an impact on border communities in Colombia and Venezuela. UNHCR support for the most vulnerable populations was appreciated and her country would continue to cooperate to assist, protect and integrate migrant populations.

Ms. Fábrega Larrucea (Spain) said that while there was already a very high number of persons needing protection in the Americas prior to the pandemic, the needs of the continent had since skyrocketed and had had a significant socioeconomic impact. In 2021 in the Americas, there were over 16 million refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons and stateless persons. That number had currently reached 18.4 million persons, the protection of whom would not be possible without the work of UNHCR, among others, and, above all, the generosity of the region's host countries.

Her country was committed to protecting those vulnerable groups and to supporting the host countries' efforts to ensure, with the cooperation of all stakeholders, the achievement of lasting and tangible solutions that had a real impact on the living conditions of those people. Her Government remained concerned about the situation of refugees and migrants from Venezuela, who had been affected by the measures that many neighbouring countries had had to take as a result of the pandemic. The progress made regarding the regularization and socioeconomic inclusion of such groups was nevertheless laudable and should be maintained to ensure their protection. Her country hosted a significant number of Venezuelans and had doubled its 2019 pledge, amounting to €100 million to be disbursed by 2024, over €37.5 million of which had already been distributed.

With regard to the situation in Central America and Mexico, Spain had the honour of chairing the MIRPS support platform, in the context of which a fundraising event had been organized with UNHCR in June 2021, raising more than \$110 million. Her Government maintained its commitment to the platform by working to strengthen the capacities of host countries, particularly regarding vocational training to improve the integration of refugees and displaced persons. The regional cooperation mechanism was apt for creating solutions that depended on joint collaboration. Her Government's commitment had also been reflected in its donations of vaccines to Central and South America, making it the second largest donor in 2021. A total of 22 million of the 50 million vaccines distributed through COVAX had been distributed to Latin America.

Despite the violent situation currently unfolding in Europe, the many other crises in other parts of the world must not be forgotten. The scenario was complex, and its consequences were as yet impossible to predict. The importance should therefore be emphasized of the principle of solidarity and shared responsibility enshrined in the Global Compact on Refugees, to which her country was firmly committed.

Ms. Quezada (Chile), speaking via video link and thanking UNHCR for the report under discussion, said that, in addition to the devastating consequences of the COVID19 pandemic for the living conditions of displaced persons and asylum seekers, the world was now facing the complex situation in Ukraine, following the Russian Federation's violence towards that country. Her country had categorically condemned the military offensive of the Russian Federation, which had led to a loss of life and mass exodus, causing a new humanitarian crisis that required the efforts of all international actors.

The report eloquently described the consequences of the pandemic in the region of the Americas on both health and economies that had gone into recession. The increase by 2 million in displaced and stateless persons, asylum seekers and refugees since 2021 was a matter of concern. There were over 500,000 Venezuelan migrants in Chile in 2022 and her Government sought to provide protection for all migrants, irrespective of their origin, taking into account the particularities of each case. Chilean and foreign nationals had been treated on an equal basis with regard to vaccination during the pandemic. Despite the willingness to host those who had to flee their countries, the capacities of the region's countries were limited, and bilateral and multilateral cooperation mechanisms thus played a key role in broadening coverage for the protection of migrants. Mechanisms, such as MIRPS, had been effective in developing a global response to the humanitarian crisis resulting from increasing migratory flows. She called for these fora to be strengthened to share best practices across countries.

It was important to recognize the support of UNHCR and IOM in implementing such mechanisms for the development of migrant response policies and programmes.

Chile's new Act on migration set out effective actions to facilitate asylum applications and incorporated the Global Compact on Refugees and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. Her country had also adopted family reunification programmes and authorized Chilean consular missions abroad to issue safe-conduct for Venezuelans without documentation or who had spouses or dependents residing in the national territory.

Her country was committed to the protection and assistance of displaced persons seeking asylum or refuge, and all vulnerable persons who had been forced to migrate, and the agreement signed between her country and UNHCR in October 2021 was fully aligned with that commitment.

Ms. Lehoux (Switzerland) asked, given the nature of mixed flows in Central America, how activities and responsibilities were distributed among UNHCR and IOM, and whether there was a coordinated political dialogue. During 2021, Panama had received an unprecedentedly high rate of mixed migratory flows, predominantly from Colombia through the dangerous Darien Gap. As this was not mentioned in the report, she asked about the specific response of UNHCR in the country and any cooperation between the Government of Panama and UNHCR. Almost 30,000 Haitians had been subject to mass deportation to Haiti from North America in early 2022 without an examination of the grounds on which those people had been forced to flee. Given the presence of gangs and rates of abduction in Haiti, what was the legal assessment of UNHCR in this regard? With regard to the situation in Venezuela and as part of the Group of Friends of the Quito Process, her country was willing to consider the possibilities for supporting the countries concerned with the technical review of le Corps Suisse d'aide humanitaire on the basis of a specific request. Her country remained committed to working within the framework of MIRPS for the protection of migrants in the region.

Mr. Smith (United States of America) said that, despite the record-breaking rates of migration and increasing humanitarian needs in Northern Central America, exacerbated by the pandemic and by environmental disasters, the progress achieved by UNHCR in collaboration with host countries and regional partners was heartening.

In line with his Government's comprehensive approach, addressing the root causes of forced displacement and enhancing legal migration pathways for vulnerable populations in the Americas region remained key priorities for his country. His country would continue to support governments' efforts to implement the MIRPS framework to address the root causes of forced displacement in the region. Ahead of chairing the MIRPS support platform, he welcomed continuing discussions with UNHCR, OAS and other support platform members on how to best leverage private sector partnerships and the role of multilateral development banks to enhance collective efforts towards solutions for forced displacement in the region. His country would also work closely with Canada to continue its work on empowerment and protection of displaced women and girls.

He acknowledged the generosity of host countries in the region towards Venezuelan refugees and migrants, and the development of regularization processes for those groups. The efforts of UNHCR to improve the lives of the Venezuelan people who had been forced to flee or who had humanitarian needs within the country, were commendable. Violence against Venezuelans was a matter of concern, and host governments and community leaders should condemn discriminatory and xenophobic actions, and promote policies of inclusion. He encouraged UNHCR to continue raising the visibility of the Venezuela regional response and to pursue financial support from other donors in the international community, including international financial institutions.

Turning to Nicaragua, in the crackdown on opposition in the leadup to the November 2021 elections, increasing numbers of Nicaraguans had fled the country, and more Nicaraguan asylum-seekers, refugees and economic migrants could be expected in 2022. His Government continued to support UNHCR's efforts with regard to that situation, and would continue to advocate an improvement of the human rights situation in Nicaragua. UNHCR's support of Costa Rica in protecting migrants from Nicaragua was appreciated.

He expressed support for Colombia as it hosted the largest number of Venezuelans in the region while grappling with, inter alia, mass displacements and recruitment by illegal armed groups. UNHCR's monitoring of new displacements, and provision of protection for internally displaced persons and conflict victims was also appreciated. The focus for UNHCR in 2022 on priority

thematic responses, including the prevention of forced recruitment and exploitation of children, and strengthened coordination and capacity-building at the national and local level to prevent displacement and provide protection was welcome.

Mr. Banzet (Canada) said that he was concerned about the humanitarian and protection needs of refugees from Venezuela and Nicaragua, internal conflict in Colombia and forced displacement from northern Central America. He commended the countries of the Americas for adopting innovative methods to ensure continued access to protection space supported by UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies. Canada was exploring options for collaboration with other partners to strengthen asylum and protection systems in the region through capacity-building assistance. His Government strongly supported the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees, the regional application of which included measures which would advance responsibility-sharing and mobilize greater support for comprehensive refugee responses. As chair of the MIRPS support platform, his country championed the protection and empowerment of displaced women and girls. It looked forward to continuing work with the United States of America, as the incoming chair of the platform, to supporting the efforts of countries in the region towards comprehensive responses.

Mr. Sender (Germany), thanking UNHCR for its engagement in the refugee crisis in the region of the Americas and the host countries for their solidarity and compassion, said that the R4V had proven invaluable. Given the increasing needs and refugee numbers in the region, the response must remain flexible.

Mr. Claros Cordova (Honduras), speaking via video link, and thanking UNHCR for the update and overview of the situation in the Americas, said that the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic were ongoing, disproportionately affecting refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced and stateless persons. International and regional conflicts and climate change, inter alia, had undermined progress in development and had limited opportunities and prospects for a life of dignity and peace. Only through respect for the fundamental principles of international law, non-refoulement and shared responsibility, among others, could efforts be redirected towards sustainable development and the preservation of peace.

The situation in the Americas region was unprecedented, with the number of asylum applications rising and exerting pressure on reception and refugee systems. The countries of the region had nevertheless demonstrated their solidarity by welcoming millions of people through various mechanisms to ensure the restoration of their rights and dignity. UNHCR, in coordination with key actors, played a fundamental role in providing technical assistance through a “whole of society” approach, in line with the cross-cutting nature of the needs on the ground.

UNHCR’s proactive work in various strategic areas of his country was appreciated, and included assistance in the areas of institutional strengthening, prevention of violence and internal displacement. Policies on the prevention of internal displacement were thus welcome.

His Government was committed to effective cooperation with UNHCR under the priorities established by the new Government in Honduras. His Government had assumed the pro-tempore presidency for 2022 for MIRPS and in that context would continue to work actively with the countries composing the MIRPS on the principles and objectives of the mechanism for the direct benefit of the populations concerned. He thanked UNHCR and the MIRPS support platform for raising awareness of the region and supporting the parties to the mechanism in institutional capacity-building, coordination of initiatives and commitments relating to asylum, protection and opportunities for displaced persons.

Ms. Garcia (HIAS on behalf of NGOs) speaking via video link, said that there had been a striking deterioration of the rights of displaced people in the Americas during the pandemic, with millions being forced into dangerous irregular routes and criminal networks, and exposed to serious human rights violations. Over 18 million people had been forcibly displaced in the region and there were over 8 million internally displaced persons in Colombia, El Salvador and Honduras. The pandemic and recurrent climate events continued to impact the region, exacerbating extreme poverty and income inequality, while displacing more people. Added pressure on host communities and local authorities had aggravated xenophobia, and governments had introduced harsher measures,

including border militarization, to tackle migration. While displaced populations were included in national COVID-19 vaccination plans, lack of access to healthcare, water and sanitation remained acute.

It was important to highlight the mixed flows that continued on the Colombian-Panamanian border and involved serious protection risks, such as human trafficking. Haiti had experienced profound instability for several reasons and in 2021 thousands of Haitians had risked their lives trying to reach Mexico and the United States of America. Expulsions at the Mexican border disregarded the right to claim asylum, with few exemptions for unaccompanied children and vulnerable asylum seekers. Migrant protection protocols in the United States of America had been reinstated by a federal court ruling and expanded to additional nationalities. While the situation in North and Central America had been compounded by increasing internal displacement, it was hoped that the launch of the humanitarian response plans in the countries concerned would help to address the root causes. To date, 6 million Venezuelans had sought safety from violence and insecurity, mainly within the region, and further mixed flows were expected. While her group welcomed various national measures to facilitate Venezuelans' access to migratory alternatives in many host countries, long-term solutions were also necessary for such groups, who often faced xenophobia and obstacles to access information.

The humanitarian situation inside Colombia had also deteriorated and thousands had suffered confinement and movement restrictions from armed groups, and faced massacres, targeted killing and child recruitment. Colombia's Temporary Statute, benefiting 1.8 million Venezuelans, was exemplary but international support was needed to accelerate access to documentation. Over 110,000 Nicaraguans had fled their country since 2018, stretching asylum processing capacities in Costa Rica. Conditions for Venezuelans in the Caribbean were also worrying, with few prospects for reception and integration.

Her group therefore called on governments to refrain from using the pandemic to normalize border closures, renege on their international commitments or deny the right to seek asylum. Irregular entry and stay must not be criminalized, penalties must be proportionate and alternatives to detention must be prioritized. Urgent policies to prevent and respond to xenophobia and discrimination against refugees and migrants must be implemented. Humanitarian reception centres should be guaranteed for vulnerable groups, in line with human rights standards. Deportations and similar measures must only be carried out after exhausting all administrative and judicial options with fair procedural safeguards and access to justice, legal remedies and counsel. Long-term policies guaranteeing economic and social rights should also be established. It was important to enhance adaptation measures for frontline communities facing current humanitarian situations, and to increase flexible planning and funding mechanisms to guarantee accountability.

Given its key protection role on internal displacement, UNHCR should expand its operational presence and financial resources in affected countries, in line with the Cartagena Declaration and Brazil Plan of Action. Stronger action from UNHCR was needed to prioritize the region and secure funding. Her group supported UNHCR's emphasis on local partnerships in refugee and stateless protection, which would respond to the need to adopt new and localized modes of operation to reach the most vulnerable. The response to Venezuelan displacements should address needs in Venezuela itself, as well as in host countries. Her group called on the United States of America to terminate the so-called "remain in Mexico" policy and Title 42 immediately, and resume asylum processing. Her group looked forward to continuing partnerships with all stakeholders.

Mr. Samaniego (Director of the Regional Bureau for the Americas, UNHCR) thanked the participants for their positive comments on R4V and MIRPS, and mechanisms such as the Quito process. It was clear that host countries not only expressed commitment and solidarity, but also had an immense capacity for responding to new challenges. Certain countries had adapted their legal framework to strengthen asylum and promote alternatives to ensure residency for refugees and migrants.

Some comments had focused on the importance of a differential approach targeting the most vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied minors, and combining an immediate humanitarian response with a longer-term vision of support for those communities. In that regard, collaboration with development banks was fundamental, and UNHCR had signed a memorandum of

understanding with the Inter-American Development Bank, and was in dialogue with the World Bank to map out problems and set out a development response.

With regard to the concern expressed by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela relating to data, the R4V had been established at the request of the Secretary General to respond more effectively to mass movement with multiple causes, which had a widespread impact throughout the region. One of its main functions was to collect data compiled by the States themselves to quantify the refugee and migrant populations.

Responding to a question by the representative of Switzerland, he said that there was strong coordination among UNHCR, the United Nations and other United Nations agencies to address the different needs regarding mass flows in Central America. Such coordination mainly involved working together to manage the different flows to improve protection mechanisms and also, increasingly, to address the root causes of displacement. To that end, development actors, including development banks, should be more closely engaged to further invest in addressing the root causes of displacement and, in turn, to create opportunities, address violence and improve protection systems in countries of origin.

With regard to questions relating to internal displacement and the response inside the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the humanitarian response plan was in place. UNHCR was particularly well-positioned in the capital as coordinator of the protection cluster, and also had a strong presence in border States.

With regard to questions on the response to new mixed flows, which had been observed predominantly during the second half of 2021, although movements involving various nationalities had always existed, the magnitude of recent flows had surprised the States affected and the international community. The first response had therefore been coordinated at national level, designed in coordination with United Nations response teams on the ground in, for example, Panama, the south of Mexico and the north of Colombia, and focused on ensuring access to the territory for persons in need of protection, which led to strengthening the asylum system in various countries. Second, given that not all persons fell under the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees, alternative mechanisms of access and protection had been established. In that regard, he commended, for example, the creation of humanitarian visas in Mexico for the Haitian population. Third, the humanitarian response was crucial, and significant efforts had been made in areas such as the Darien Gap, the north of Costa Rica and the south of Mexico in terms of food provision and health services. Lastly, it was important to target the support provided to the main regions affected by such crises, as not all regions had the same capacity to deal with such movements. As an example, efforts were made to support both the migrant and refugee population in the north of Costa Rica, as well as the host communities. The two communities could not be treated in isolation, and it was important to strengthen the capacities of both to ensure assistance for the migrant population and those living in remote border areas.

Xenophobia was a matter of concern anywhere in the region. To combat it, campaigns had been launched and complaints filed, but the most important response remained inclusion, for which more resources were needed. It was therefore essential to continue mobilizing resources for the region. He thanked the leadership of the United States of America, Canada, Spain and the European Union in supporting the R4V, and organizing the International Donors' Conference. The humanitarian crisis in the Americas must remain on the agenda of international cooperation, and host countries assisting populations in the region should be supported.

The meeting rose at 6.20 p.m.