



General Assembly

Distr.: General
31 March 2020
English
Original: French

Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Seventieth session

Summary record of the 719th meeting

Held at the Palais de Nations, Geneva, on Monday, 7 October 2019, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Delmi..... (Algeria)

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* Reissued for technical reasons on 10 January 2020.



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

Opening of the session, adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters

(A/AC.96/LXX/1)

1. **The Chair** declared open the seventieth session of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. He said that he wished to welcome all the participants. During his mandate, he had had the opportunity to see the important work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and its committed partners, particularly during his field visits to Burkina Faso and Mauritania in the spring of 2019. He had been deeply moved by the plight of the refugees whom he had met and had been impressed by the efforts of both countries in hosting them and promoting their self-reliance.

2. There were currently more than 70 million individuals around the world who had been forcibly displaced as a result of conflict, persecution and human rights violations, and the previous year had been marked by numerous large-scale emergencies unfolding against a backdrop of political, social and economic turmoil. The situation had exacerbated the humanitarian landscape and imposed unprecedented challenges on host countries and communities, and on the United Nations and its partners.

3. Against that backdrop, efforts by the international community to prevent and resolve conflicts, while providing protection, promoting self-reliance and inclusion, and enhancing solutions, were more important than ever. The global compact on refugees would be key going forward, and the role of the Executive Committee as an advisory body was crucial in that respect. He wished to pay special tribute to the humanitarian workers who laboured tirelessly to tackle the devastating consequences of conflict.

4. *The agenda was adopted.*

5. *Participants were invited to watch a short film entitled “Belonging”, which gave an overview of the challenges to be overcome and action to be taken to combat statelessness and, more generally, forced displacement.*

Remarks by the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations

6. **Ms. Mohammed** (Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations) said that she was grateful to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for inviting her to take part in the discussions on forced displacement and its implications for collective efforts to ensure a future of peace, dignity and prosperity for all.

7. Addressing forced displacement and statelessness was fundamentally linked to a central purpose of the 2030 Agenda, namely, to enable marginalized populations to contribute to, and benefit from, sustainable social and economic development processes. At the same time, major refugee host countries required tangible support to be able to cope with large-scale influxes and protracted refugee situations. Host communities and refugee populations had benefited from ever greater development cooperation in areas such as education and health.

8. In order to better respond to increasingly complex challenges, the Secretary-General had undertaken far-reaching reforms based on the mandates issued by the General Assembly in 2018 to reposition the United Nations development system. At the beginning of 2019, a reinvigorated resident coordinator system had been launched, under which the 129 country team leaders around the world reported directly to the Secretary-General. Independent and empowered resident coordinators were responsible for bringing the whole United Nations system together to deliver on the ground, according to national needs. That new way of working had enabled a more efficient use of resources and capacities, and freed up time for resident coordinators to invest in their coordination activities.

9. New structures had been put in place to support the reinvigorated system: a new management and accountability framework, which set out a new system for holding agency representatives accountable to their respective entities and to the resident coordinator; the redesigning and renaming of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework as the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, which would become

the backbone of the United Nations development system in terms of planning, performance and reporting; and a new funding architecture, which was now operational and which created new incentives for innovative forms of collaboration. To date, 38 Member States and 19 United Nations entities had made commitments and contributions of around US\$ 195 million to the special purpose trust fund for the resident coordinator system.

10. Recognizing that a fully funded United Nations development coordination architecture was essential for the successful implementation of the reforms, a funding compact was also agreed upon between Member States and the United Nations system. A draft system-wide strategic document had been published to reduce duplication and build on comparative advantages. The United Nations system was therefore on the path towards greater efficiency and effectiveness, while its capacity for partnerships – which were essential for realizing the Sustainable Development Goals – was being enhanced.

11. She commended the strength and reliability of UNHCR throughout that profound transformation, as well as the leadership of the High Commissioner who, alongside the World Food Programme, co-chaired the inter-agency team responsible for providing the country teams with effective tools. She congratulated the High Commissioner for having consistently used direct lines of communication with UNHCR representatives and resident coordinators on the ground, who worked with country teams to better connect development and humanitarian efforts in line with the global compact on refugees.

12. Achieving the greatest synergies when supporting countries in fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals meant going beyond short-term humanitarian assistance – though it was still urgently needed – and adopting a more holistic and long-term approach that allowed countries and communities to prevent crises and to recover more swiftly when they hit. Activities in which UNHCR was the centrepiece were essential for achieving the 2030 Agenda for all. The global compact on refugees, adopted in December 2018, was a remarkable road map.

13. The Executive Committee needed to continue offering guidance and to maintain the momentum for reform. The development system as a whole had much to learn from UNHCR, particularly its partnership with the World Bank, its cooperation with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and its work with the United Nations Network on Migration.

14. At the high-level political forum on sustainable development held in September 2019, the Secretary-General had issued a global call for a decade of action to narrow the gap between vision, reality and implementation, and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The Global Refugee Forum to be held in December 2019 would be an excellent opportunity to support the implementation of the global compact on refugees. Through its various thematic high-level dialogues on subjects such as education, livelihoods and energy, the forum had the potential to kick-start the decade of action and generate specific measures and commitments that would allow stakeholders to work together and leave no one behind on the journey towards peace, prosperity, dignity and opportunity for all.

Statement by the High Commissioner

15. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the modern concept of refugee protection had been born in the middle of the twentieth century, after two devastating conflicts and before the cold war. One of the earliest priorities of the United Nations had been to ensure the safety of the millions of people who had been uprooted and to resolve the problem of displacement. Seven decades on, forced displacement remained a global concern. While the context was different, the situation remained complex and driven by many overlapping elements: resource-based conflicts that transcended borders, loss of hope, conflicts premised on ethnic and religious differences, collapsing ecosystems and natural disasters, and damaging forms of nationalism. It was a sign that things were going wrong and that more ambition was needed.

16. That realization had been the driving force behind the development of the global compact on refugees, which had been designed at the same time as the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. Indeed, the refugee crises could not be addressed in

isolation from larger global challenges and without adopting effective migration policies. The global compact on refugees took a comprehensive approach that preserved the humanitarian imperative while using a set of tools more suited to the dynamics of current refugee flows. The Global Refugee Forum would be an opportunity to showcase achievements and make fresh commitments.

17. The previous year had underscored why the global compact on refugees was needed and how it was starting to shape the collective response. While much of the discussion on forced displacement had focused on arrivals in the global North, the most profound consequences were on host countries in the global South. Preserving the right to asylum and helping host communities there required more substantial and sustained international support. For example, the 14 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean where the majority of the 4 million Venezuelan refugees had gone had mostly shown commendable solidarity despite immense pressures. It was vital to sustain that solidarity by supporting the services, infrastructure and economy of impacted countries. Furthermore, he welcomed the recent decision taken by Colombia to grant citizenship to children born in its territory to Venezuelan parents, the role of the Plan of Action of the Quito Process on the Human Mobility of Venezuelan Nationals in the Region in shaping a regional approach, the engagement of the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank's decision to extend support to Colombia through its Global Concessional Financing Facility and the forthcoming solidarity conference organized by the European Union, UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

18. "Mixed flows" of refugees and migrants continued to generate very divisive debates in which political rhetoric exploited the anxieties of those left behind by globalization. Measures taken or invoked to reduce flows eroded refugee protection without really addressing their root causes or the challenges of integration. A wide range of measures was undoubtedly needed to address those complex situations. Saving the lives and safeguarding the dignity and rights of all displaced persons must remain a priority, together with ensuring access to international protection for those with valid claims. The establishment of legal migration pathways would prevent the abuse of asylum systems. The challenges affected not only northern Central America and the southern border of the United States, but also southern Africa and South-East Asia. He welcomed the recent decision of four European Union member States to establish a temporary cooperation mechanism that allowed people rescued in the Mediterranean Sea to disembark on European soil, and he hoped that it would galvanize rescue-at-sea arrangements. All of that action had to be matched by a broader ambition, namely to address the root causes of refugee flows and to support the host and transit countries of refugees. UNHCR continued to evacuate the most vulnerable people from Libya, efforts for which the Niger and Rwanda provided invaluable assistance. In those efforts as elsewhere, UNHCR worked closely with IOM. However, those operations could only be sustained as part of a comprehensive responsibility-sharing approach that aimed to preserve life and allow access to international protection.

19. In the absence of a political solution, long-standing and recurring displacement crises persisted, while other major crises became protracted. Although Afghanistan had decided to apply the comprehensive refugee response framework, just 15,000 refugees had returned to the country in 2018. The action taken by Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, particularly in terms of refugee inclusion and self-reliance, was groundbreaking, but required more international support while the crisis in Afghanistan continued. In Somalia, while the commitment of the Government to reduce forced displacement was evident and commendable, conflict and drought led to further displacement and prevented the situation from improving. Governments in the East and Horn of Africa were at the forefront in terms of implementing the refugee response framework. Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya and Uganda were among the countries that had benefited from the expertise and financing of the World Bank, which had already transformed the lives of many refugees and refugee-hosting communities across the region and which proved the validity of the framework enshrined in the compact.

20. The issue of repatriation continued to be the subject of much attention. The people, and not politicians, should drive repatriation. UNHCR worked with Governments to create the conditions for refugees to return, which must be voluntary and sustainable. Taking the

situation in the Syrian Arab Republic as an example, some 200,000 refugees had returned since 2016 and over three quarters of the almost 6 million refugees in the neighbouring countries hoped to return one day. The views of the refugees had to be heard before action was taken, and support should be provided to those who wished to return, without exposing them to further hardship. In the meantime, international support to asylum countries must be sustained. In 2018, 1.3 million Syrian refugee children had attended school and 110,000 work permits had been issued to Syrian refugees. The Government of Myanmar had recognized the right of refugees in Bangladesh to return and had started an important dialogue with them. UNHCR and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) were working on social cohesion projects in northern Rakhine State to help pave the way for eventual returns. UNHCR also supported tripartite approaches to facilitate dialogue and solutions, for example with Burundian refugees in the United Republic of Tanzania and Nigerian refugees in the Lake Chad region.

21. It was also necessary to accelerate the adoption of solutions. UNHCR was closely following events in the Sudan and South Sudan, where more than 200,000 refugees had already returned. Since 2017, UNHCR and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) had promoted the inclusion of refugees and displaced people in the South Sudan peace process. Resettlement was another solution, albeit for far fewer people. While some countries were stepping up their programmes, the number of resettlement places had plummeted, which was very disappointing. Resettlement saved lives and offered stability to the most vulnerable refugees. The new three-year strategy of UNHCR (2019–2021) could help intensify resettlement efforts.

22. At the end of 2018, over 41 million people had been displaced within their own countries. UNHCR was undertaking major operations that were very complex in political and operational terms in Iraq, the Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen, the Lake Chad basin, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ukraine. With the help of its partners, UNHCR was currently mobilizing more resources in its response to the Ethiopian Government's call for support in addressing recent large-scale internal displacement.

23. Climate-related displacement intersected and underpinned all of the major challenges in that regard. Climate issues were a growing cause of internal displacement and were a far bigger driver than conflict and violence. They were often also a pervasive factor in cross-border displacement, which was why the term "climate refugee" had captured public attention. In response, UNHCR had worked to highlight the relevant legal frameworks and address protection gaps for cross-border displaced persons. The organization would continue to steer the international discussion on climate change by taking part in the Platform on Disaster Displacement. In cases of disaster-induced displacement, temporary protection and residence arrangements, as well as emergency responses, were often needed. UNHCR had strong expertise in that area, and it would continue to use it to support all States. Climate factors drove people out of their homes, but large-scale refugee movements themselves had an environmental impact. For years, UNHCR had worked to reduce the impact by offering renewable energy options, organizing reforestation activities and facilitating access to clean fuels and technologies for cooking. It had revitalized its energy strategy and was engaging with its private sector partners, including the IKEA Foundation, to develop new solutions. Action was also being taken to reduce the environmental impact of its operations.

24. Without the help of its donors, UNHCR would not be able to respond to all of the challenges it faced. The funds available in 2019 were expected to be around US\$ 3.82 billion, and private sector income was projected to increase by 11 per cent over the 2018 figure to US\$ 470 million. UNHCR continued to diversify its funding base to ensure a stable platform for its work. Its partnerships with development organizations were becoming stronger. Proper management of the organization was also vital. In late 2016, he, as High Commissioner, had initiated a structural reform process, which had given greater authority and flexibility to the country offices and had helped bring them closer to refugees. UNHCR was now entering the last phase of the structural changes, which would involve adjustments to the headquarters divisions. Efforts had also been made to transform its organizational culture and to improve evidence-based planning, as shown by the recently

adopted data transformation strategy and the creation of a joint data centre with the World Bank. UNHCR was committed to embedding a strong risk management culture and to strengthening mechanisms for preventing and responding to misconduct such as sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment.

25. In 2014, the “#IBelong” campaign had been launched to bring an end to statelessness. Now, at the halfway point, it was time to take stock of the progress made in achieving that bold aim. The substantial measures adopted to that end included tackling gender discrimination in laws on nationality, introducing laws to prevent childhood statelessness and developing procedures to find solutions for persons who would otherwise be stateless. Furthermore, 15 States had acceded to at least one of the statelessness conventions and Kyrgyzstan had formally announced that all known cases of statelessness on its territory had been resolved. The initiatives taken by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Bank, civil society, academic networks and especially the group of friends of the campaign to end statelessness should also be acknowledged. With two months to go until the first Global Refugee Forum, it was time to consider what changes should be made for the coming decade. The question was whether it would be marked by regressive policies or, conversely, whether the challenges and opportunities of international cooperation would be embraced. It was hoped that the second route would be taken, and that the international community would inspire future generations and honour its enormous responsibility by acting in the interests of host communities and refugees.

High-level segment on statelessness and general debate

26. **The Chair** thanked the High Commissioner for his address and declared open the high-level segment on statelessness. He said that Ms. Rani would moderate the discussion among the panel members, namely Ms. Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Ms. Blanchett, Goodwill Ambassador for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Ms. Mamo, a former stateless person, and Mr. Zannier, High Commissioner on National Minorities, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

27. **Ms. Blanchett** (Goodwill Ambassador, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that, while statelessness was an invisible phenomenon, it nevertheless had concrete and devastating effects on millions of people around the world. Many everyday things, such as identity documents, credit cards and driving licences, were symbols of belonging. In order to have a better understanding of statelessness, it was crucial to imagine being without such things and to wonder how, in a world that was comprised of nations, persons with no nationality defined themselves. It was equally important to consider the impact statelessness had and how its profile could be raised, in order to be better equipped to combat it.

28. **Ms. Mamo** (former stateless person) said that she had been born in Lebanon in 1988 to Syrian parents. She had been unable to obtain Lebanese nationality, which was passed on through the paternal line, and she had also been refused Syrian nationality. She and her brother and sister had therefore been stateless from birth. She had gradually become aware of that fact over time. During her childhood and as a teenager, she had realized that certain doors were closed to her and that she was unable to do things that to other people seemed mundane, such as buying a SIM card, participating in sports activities, going to a nightclub or camping in a neighbouring country. It was only later that she had discovered that the cause of her suffering had a name – statelessness – and that she had grown up without a legal identity. She had wanted to study medicine, but none of the universities offering medical courses would admit her because she had no identity papers. The only higher education institute that had accepted her was a computing school. She had decided to study there because she had wanted to continue her education above all else. She had had to take a job in order to finance her studies at the private institute, but had been unable to work legally because she had no identity documents. Stateless persons faced countless obstacles that affected all aspects of daily life. For nine years, she had tried every means possible to remedy her situation and obtain an identity. She had contacted high-ranking government officials, applied for asylum in a number of countries, sought to be adopted, declared

herself to be a child in a street situation and tried to marry. None of her efforts had borne fruit until 2014, when she had been granted asylum in Brazil and given a *laissez-passer*, not as a stateless person but as a Syrian refugee. She and her brother and sister had arrived in Brazil in September 2014 and begun a new life with a host family. In November 2014, UNHCR had launched the #IBelong campaign, which had given her great hope. In May 2016, she had been granted refugee status, the first major victory in her quest to belong. However, one month later her brother had been murdered. She and her sister had been able to obtain his death certificate only because he had also been granted refugee status. Her brother's death had inspired in her a greater desire to ensure that the world heard the voices of stateless persons. In October 2018, she had become a citizen of Brazil. Since then, she had continued to advocate for the rights of stateless persons through her involvement in the #IBelong campaign, and had become a symbol of hope for many stateless persons. Statelessness was a humanitarian issue that could be resolved by politicians. Laws were written by human beings, and human beings had the power to change them.

29. **Ms. Rani** (moderator) said that UNHCR had invited her to moderate the discussion because of her family history and her commitment to refugees. A few years earlier, she had made a documentary for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) about the Za'atari camp for Syrian refugees in Jordan. The film had portrayed daily life in the camp and given a face to the refugees. She had subsequently made a documentary about her own family's history, which had been marked by the partition of India in 1947, when 15 million people had been displaced. More recently, she had had the honour of traveling to Kyrgyzstan on behalf of UNHCR to meet Azizbek Ashurov, who had won the Nansen Refugee Award for ending statelessness in his country.

30. **Ms. Mohammed** (Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations) said that the world was currently in a much more complicated situation than it had been at the time the #IBelong campaign had been launched. While the right to a nationality was a human right, it was first and foremost a moral obligation, both individual and collective. No one should be excluded from society. Since most of the tools and instruments to combat statelessness had been designed by men, it was important to increase the involvement of women in decision-making in that area, because the burden of statelessness often rested on the shoulders of women. Although the #IBelong campaign would run until 2024, it was crucial to take into account the urgency of the situation and to eliminate statelessness as quickly as possible.

31. **Ms. Rani** (moderator) asked what role the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe played in combating statelessness.

32. **Mr. Zannier** (High Commissioner on National Minorities, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) said that his Organization's work on minorities was relevant to the fight against statelessness because its aim was to promote the social inclusion of minorities. Statelessness was a complex issue, not least because it could arise from a variety of different situations. There was no single policy that would eliminate all cases of statelessness. For that reason, his Organization worked closely with UNHCR to determine people's needs according to their particular situation.

33. **Ms. Rani** (moderator) asked what had sparked Ms. Blanchett's interest in the issue of statelessness.

34. **Ms. Blanchett** (Goodwill Ambassador, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that she had in fact been unaware of the magnitude of the issue of statelessness until she had begun her work with UNHCR. Since then, she had been working to raise public awareness of the issue. During her first trip with UNHCR, to Lebanon, she had met stateless families who had left a deep impression on her. In 25 countries, including Lebanon, existing legislation on the transmission of nationality was discriminatory because it did not allow women to pass their nationality to their children, which led to many cases of statelessness. In that regard, she wished to commend Sierra Leone and Madagascar for their commitment to amend their laws to eliminate discrimination against women with respect to the transmission of nationality.

35. **Ms. Rani** (moderator) asked what steps should be taken to involve stateless persons in efforts to eliminate statelessness.

36. **Ms. Mamo** (former stateless person) said that people were resources. States should therefore assist stateless persons not only out of a moral or humanitarian obligation, but also because those persons possessed skills and potential that could be harnessed. Brazil was setting an example in that respect. Costa Rica and Panama had taken steps to begin registering people directly at their border. Chile had set up a programme to register children who were born in an irregular situation.

37. **Ms. Rani** (moderator) asked what obstacles stood in the way of ending statelessness.

38. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the main obstacle to ending statelessness was the lack of awareness of the problem. Statelessness was a concern not only for UNHCR, but for the international community as a whole. There were two conventions relating to statelessness. The 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons was focused more on the protection of stateless persons, while the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness was more concerned with eliminating statelessness. UNCHR was aware of the difficulties States faced in designing legislation to end statelessness. It made every effort to encourage States to accede to the two Conventions with a view to ensuring that national efforts to combat statelessness were in line with international standards. States should work with UNHCR to identify stateless persons, amend inadequate laws or enact new ones, end discriminatory practices and register births. Civil society, which played a very important role in raising awareness of the problem of statelessness, should also be involved in those efforts. Ms. Mamo's story highlighted the complex relationship between exile and statelessness. It should be remembered that Lebanon had protected her for many years and granted her asylum, as it had done for millions of other people, including Syrians and Palestinians, and deserved credit for its actions.

39. **Ms. Rani** (moderator) asked how international organizations could influence decisions taken by States with regard to statelessness.

40. **Mr. Zannier** (High Commissioner on National Minorities, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) said that his Organization's efforts to combat statelessness were conducted pursuant to Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, which authorized regional organizations to engage in regional activities provided that they were consistent with the purposes and principles of the United Nations. While it was important to build coalitions among international actors, ultimately it was up to each State to act individually. In North Macedonia, for example, legislation aimed at ending statelessness in the country was currently before parliament. Latvia was in the process of adopting legislation that would automatically grant citizenship to all newborns who did not otherwise have a claim to it. He submitted regular reports to the Permanent Council of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, including on situations of statelessness in countries where no progress was being made, in order to raise awareness of the issue among the Organization's member States and influence national policies.

41. **Ms. Rani** (moderator) asked what the chances were of ending statelessness.

42. **Ms. Mohammed** (Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations) said that under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, no one should be left behind. The #IBelong campaign was aligned with the goals relating to combating inequality and injustice. The United Nations should play a more active role in the almost 30 countries where statelessness was a major problem and ensure that young persons and civil society were involved and that their voices were heard in parliaments and other institutions and in their communities. It would thus be possible to achieve greater peace and stability for all. The root causes of instability often lay in hopelessness, especially in the case of stateless persons. It should be remembered that such persons had a valuable contribution to make to the societies in which they lived.

43. **Ms. Rani** (moderator) asked what results the #IBelong campaign had achieved in the previous five years.

44. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the #IBelong campaign had helped to increase awareness of the issue of statelessness. While restrictions on the transmission of nationality from mother to child remained in place in 25

countries, some progress was being made despite the complexity of the situation. UNHCR was working with many States on determination procedures, facilitation procedures and anti-discrimination efforts. The number of stateless persons that had been quoted at the launch of the campaign in 2013 – 10 million – had been nothing more than an estimate. The statistical data available indicated that there were at least 4 million stateless persons globally. While several hundred thousand of them had been granted a nationality since the beginning of the campaign, which was a significant step forward, efforts must be made to obtain reliable data on the actual number of stateless persons in order to ensure not only that the campaign ran smoothly, but also that the Sustainable Development Goals could be achieved.

45. **Ms. Rani** (moderator) asked what the focus of the #IBelong campaign would be in the years ahead.

46. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the objectives of the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness must be achieved.

47. **Ms. Mamo** (former stateless person) said that while she had been lucky enough to meet the right people in her life, not all stateless persons had that privilege. No one was safe from statelessness. The international community must strive to build a better world and provide stateless persons with the opportunity to contribute to the societies in which they lived.

General debate

48. **Mr. Spasovski** (Observer for North Macedonia) said that his country was committed to implementing the global compact on refugees. The Republic of North Macedonia had recently adopted the Act on the ratification of the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, which was awaiting parliamentary approval. The Ministry of the Interior was active in the process of registering persons without identity documents, stateless persons and persons with refugee status. In April 2019, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Ministry of Justice, UNHCR and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the Ministry had launched an initiative to encourage unregistered persons to attend a registration office and complete a questionnaire. In addition, mobile street teams worked to register persons without identity documents in a separate register maintained by the Citizen Registration Office. The Republic of North Macedonia wished to extend its appreciation to UNHCR for the support it had provided to the country's efforts in connection with refugees and asylum seekers.

49. **Mr. Aidarbekov** (Observer for Kyrgyzstan) said that, although the Kyrgyz Republic was not a party to either the 1954 Convention or the 1961 Convention, it had been taking steps to reduce and prevent statelessness since it had gained independence. In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, tens of thousands of people had become stateless in the region. Kyrgyzstan had subsequently simplified its legislation to facilitate the granting of citizenship to former citizens of the Soviet Union who were residing in its territory. Since 2009, more than 78,000 individuals had benefited from that measure. As part of the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness (2014–2024), pilot projects were being conducted, including the deployment of mobile teams to seek out stateless persons and persons in irregular situations and regularize their status. As a result of cooperation between the State authorities, international organizations and civil society, more than 13,700 stateless persons had been granted Kyrgyz nationality. Considerable progress had been made in the registration of births in the territory of the Kyrgyz Republic, including for children born to stateless parents, in order to ensure that all children had a birth certificate and could claim their rights. A working group composed of government representatives and independent experts had conducted an analysis of Kyrgyz legislation on citizenship with a view to bringing it into line with international law, a process which had led to the introduction of a number of amendments and the preparation of several bills. A plan of action had also been developed with UNHCR to reduce the risk of statelessness.

50. **Mr. Wannamethee** (Thailand), speaking on behalf of the Group of Friends of the #IBelong campaign, welcomed the progress made since the launch of the campaign. He

said that many States had taken concrete steps to prevent or tackle statelessness, including through the adoption of national action plans, and 15 States had acceded to one or both of the Conventions relating to statelessness. Commitments had also been made at the regional level, and some international organizations, including the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund, had mainstreamed statelessness in their mandates. However, much remained to be done to eliminate statelessness completely. In that regard, the Group of Friends wished to reiterate that statelessness was avoidable. It called on States to adopt or amend legislation and to take measures to ensure that stateless persons could acquire a nationality, including in the context of the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness. The Group also called on States to establish frameworks to prevent the emergence of statelessness in the future and to adopt a comprehensive and coordinated approach to tackling statelessness, taking into account humanitarian, human rights and development concerns. The Group called on other actors, including the private sector and civil society organizations, to work with governments in that endeavour and to listen to stateless persons. States should learn from the experiences and best practices of other countries, including in the framework of the Group of Friends, and should honour the pledges they made.

51. **Mr. Izquierdo Mino** (Ecuador), speaking on behalf of the countries of the Latin American and Caribbean Group, said that in 2019, the number of forced displacements in Latin America and the Caribbean had reached record levels. The countries in the region had done their utmost to respond to the situation by coordinating their efforts and adopting innovative solutions with regard to hosting refugees and protecting vulnerable persons. However, they were concerned about the insufficient financial support being provided by the international community. The countries of the Group called on donor countries to provide them with the means to plan and implement sustainable solutions in the region. The first Global Refugee Forum would pave the way for the implementation of the global compact on refugees, which must involve the participation of all sectors of society. At the Forum, countries in Latin America and the Caribbean would present their experiences and good practices, such as the Brazil Declaration and the Brazil Plan of Action, which were intended to strengthen protection for internally displaced persons, refugees and stateless persons and promote durable solutions. In addition, seven countries in the region would present the progress made and the challenges encountered in the context of the comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework, a subregional mechanism for sharing responsibilities in the implementation of the global compact.

52. The Latin American and Caribbean Group wished to recall that 14 countries in the region had acceded to the Conventions on statelessness and had undertaken constitutional and legislative reforms to better implement the provisions of those Conventions. Measures had also been taken to improve the birth registration system and simplify the naturalization procedure, as well as to prevent statelessness with the aim of eliminating it completely.

53. With regard to the process of regionalization, while the countries of the Group understood why UNHCR wished to decentralize its activities, they hoped that the dialogue between the permanent missions in Geneva and the Agency's headquarters would continue.

54. **Mr. Stevens** (Observer for the European Union), speaking on behalf of the member States of the European Union and the candidate countries Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, the Republic of Moldova, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine, said that migration was among the key priorities of the new Commission. In that context, a New Pact on Migration and Asylum would be agreed, and steps would be taken to strengthen the European Border and Coast Guard Agency. Europe would continue to help persons fleeing persecution or conflict by hosting refugees and providing them with resettlement opportunities or assistance in finding complementary pathways to Europe. In that regard, there was a need for better sharing among countries of the burden of receiving refugees and for a more sustainable approach to search and rescue at sea. However, addressing the root causes of forced displacement remained a major priority of the European Union, which would continue to play an active role in global conflict resolution. The European Commission also intended to strengthen its partnership with its neighbours and with third countries, particularly in Africa. It would continue to invest in education, job opportunities, health and infrastructure. The European Union looked forward to participating in the first global

refugee forum, where it would co-sponsor four of the six priority areas, building on its experience in those fields. The European Union and its member States wished to commend those countries that were applying the comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework and would continue to support them.

55. The majority of member States of the European Union had ratified both Conventions relating to statelessness. In 2015, the European Union had adopted Council conclusions on statelessness, and the European Migration Network had launched a platform for member States to exchange information and good practices on statelessness with a view to addressing the gaps. The European Union supported measures designed to prevent and reduce statelessness as part of its development assistance. It also believed that displaced persons, who were sometimes more vulnerable than refugees, should not be overlooked. To that end, it had asked the Secretary-General of the United Nations to establish a High-level Panel on Internal Displacement, which would make recommendations to support States in preventing and addressing displacement and finding solutions to it.

56. The European Union supported the reform of UNHCR, including the decentralization of its regional offices.

57. **Mr. Mushayavanhu** (Zimbabwe), speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, said that by adopting the global compact on refugees, the countries of Africa had committed themselves to a new approach to forced displacement that prioritized burden- and responsibility-sharing, the strengthening of protection and the provision of adequate assistance to victims. Furthermore, the Group was committed to reducing forced displacement by seeking solutions to the conflicts and wars which were responsible for a significant percentage of displacement.

58. It was worrying that more than 50 per cent of the funds needed to assist persons of concern to UNHCR in Africa had yet to be found. In that regard, the Group of African States welcomed the efforts made by UNHCR to engage new donors, including through innovative funding mechanisms. Such initiatives should not, however, place heavy demands on the resources of host countries, which already provided significant assistance to victims of forced displacement.

59. The Group of African States supported the creation of seven UNHCR regional offices, including three in Africa.

60. The Group was participating in the campaign to end statelessness by 2024. Other initiatives to combat statelessness in Africa included the Banjul Plan of Action on the Eradication of Statelessness of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Brazzaville Declaration on the eradication of statelessness. African countries had granted nationality to many nationals of neighbouring countries who were present on their territory.

61. Given that much displacement was caused by climate change, Africa also wished to call for the development of an environmental protection strategy.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.