

Check against delivery

57th Meeting of the Standing Committee
Agenda item 3: International Protection

Introductory Statement by

Volker Türk
Director of International Protection

Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to address the Standing Committee once again on protection issues and to introduce this year's Note on International Protection [contained in document EC/64.SC/CRP.10]. My colleagues in the Division of International Protection will introduce more specific topics later during this agenda item. The June Standing Committee, focusing on protection, is an important opportunity for us to reflect on what we have collectively achieved, but also to share some of our preoccupations and to explore with you the way forward.

We are witnessing today displacement on a scale not seen since 1994. As I speak, thousands of Syrians are fleeing daily to neighbouring States, joining another 1.6 million refugees already outside the country. As I speak, we are witnessing refugee outflows from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Afghanistan, Sudan and the Central African Republic, albeit not on the same scale. And as I speak, neighbouring countries are hosting these refugees despite the high cost in terms of national stability for some and significant strains on host communities, often in the most impoverished parts of their territories.

We must commend here this remarkable sign of empathy, compassion and generosity. When I was in Jordan a couple of weeks ago, the Governor of Irbid made an impassioned plea. While affirming his strong commitment to accommodate Syrian refugees, he explained to me compellingly the impact of an additional 200,000 people on his Governorate, in the areas of health care, education and basic services, as well as the need for equitable distribution of precious water resources in a particularly water-scarce part of the world.

Madam Chairperson, by the end of 2012, 45.2 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide, of whom some 35.8 million were of concern to UNHCR – the second highest number on record. There were 1.1 million newly displaced refugees and another 6.5 million

freshly displaced internally within the borders of their countries – almost twice as many as in 2011.

Given the size and scale of the refugee problem, one of today's most urgent challenges is to maintain protection space by better supporting host States and communities in shouldering large-scale influxes. The essence of international cooperation is to share burdens and responsibilities on matters that spill over national boundaries, becoming a matter of international concern. The Syria situation, for example, has grave consequences for its immediate neighbours and the international community as a whole. The needs go well beyond the resources an organization like UNHCR can mobilize alone. But UNHCR can and must continue to play an important catalytic and convening role, by drawing attention to the critical link between increased burden sharing and the preservation of protection space for refugees. It is up to States in the international community to make policy choices that ensure that hosting large numbers of refugees is properly acknowledged and encouraged in financial and other terms. This would include, for example, direct financial assistance to host States to help them meet critical needs in the areas of basic services and infrastructure, especially where large numbers of refugees are living nestled amongst local populations.

Behind the staggering figures are a multitude of human faces and individual experiences that will mark many lifetimes: the girl faced with an early marriage proposal forced upon her; the boy lured into the underworld of violent gangs; the woman with eight children waiting to hear news of her disappeared husband; the man who weeps over the loss of his partner; the girl who has been deeply traumatised as a result of shell-shock; the older man who has now been displaced for the third time in his life and whose empty eyes convey only despair; the adolescent girl, stateless, whose most fervent wish is to continue her studies; the 16-year old boy protecting his younger siblings from being forcibly recruited; the woman belonging to an indigenous group who is shunned by her neighbours. I should add here that I have met each one of the people I have just described during my missions to Colombia, Jordan and the Democratic Republic of Congo over the past six months.

Behind these figures are also the local communities that host them: the unsung heroes – away from the limelight and the noisy headlines of the day – demonstrating what it means to take in the stranger and to welcome them, often sharing what meagre resources they have. Behind the numbers are also our own worries of what more we can do within UNHCR and collectively, Madam Chairperson, including in this Standing Committee, to make the case for the forcibly displaced and the stateless – the case to ensure that their fate is high enough on your respective political agendas to find solutions for them, to channel the necessary funds to affected host countries and communities.

Madam Chairperson,

We have come to learn over the years that protection also means crises, profound human tragedies, high risk and intractable challenges. Yet amidst all this it is also important to recognize that most refugees, who are able to reach safety, find a welcoming home and are in fact protected, with the majority of States – whether parties to international refugee instruments or not – acting in accordance with broadly-agreed standards for their treatment. This would be impossible without a solid international protection regime in place, which is at the very heart of what we are discussing here. This regime is specifically designed for the neutral and humanitarian handling of complex and potentially even explosive matters, firmly embedded in core human rights protection and humanitarian concepts.

Protection systems

Against this background, it won't come as a surprise that this year's Note on International Protection has as its overarching theme the very foundation of this regime, which is building and enhancing protection systems. As the Note elaborates, protection systems for the forcibly displaced are the guarantors of stability in turbulent times. To be effective, protection systems need to encompass a number of building blocks: that individuals can access safety, including in the case of refugees that they are able to cross international borders; that protection needs are properly and efficiently assessed; that they are treated with dignity and humanity, and are able to exercise the widest possible range of human rights; and, more importantly, that opportunities to resume a normal life – even in exile – are available as early as possible.

Protection systems are most secure when legislative and institutional frameworks are in place and which are, in turn, respected in practice. They must be sufficiently robust to withstand political grand-standing or the pressures of xenophobic public opinion. Even against a challenging environment of mixed migration, security and economic challenges, I can report on a number of positive developments. At least six countries, including Turkey in the midst of a large-scale influx, adopted new or amended asylum laws, while many others have begun to do so, in line with the ministerial pledges made in December 2011. A number of States also improved their asylum procedures, including working with UNHCR on quality assurance initiatives.

The picture is not all positive, however. A number of countries have revised their national laws to make them more stringent: one country removed the broader regional refugee definition from national legislation; several have introduced more restrictive procedural requirements, making it more difficult for asylum-seekers to present and access asylum procedures; one even “excised” its entire territory from the application of the 1951 Refugee Convention for persons arriving by boat. Another country took the decision to relocate all urban-based refugees to camps, albeit a decision that is presently being challenged before the national courts; while detention – including on a mandatory basis and merely for the fact of being an asylum-seeker – has continued and expanded in some countries. Cases of *refoulement*, while still exceptional, took harsh new forms during the reporting period, with a number of blatant abductions of asylum-seekers and refugees. The number of States parties to the 1951 Refugee Convention retaining reservations, including to important provisions such as work rights, remained unchanged in 2012, with the exception of Honduras, which is to be congratulated for removing its reservations to several articles.

I'd like to say a few words more specifically about refugee status determination procedures, which are at the heart of refugee protection systems. UNHCR remained the world's second largest refugee status determination decision-maker. Over the last ten years, UNHCR registered 900,000 individual RSD applications, with its annual global share increasing from 7% to 13%. In 2012 alone, UNHCR registered 115,800 individual RSD applications in 66 countries where RSD procedures do not exist or are not fully functional. The Office's involvement in RSD could be seen as a litmus test for the state of refugee affairs in those countries, and points to a need for concerted action to change the *status quo*. In a welcome development we are pleased that the Democratic Republic of Congo assumed responsibility for RSD in 2012 and that Cameroon is following suit.

Maintaining our capacity to effectively carry out RSD under the mandate remains a priority. This is reflected in on-going initiatives to professionalize UNHCR's RSD workforce and to enhance specialized RSD training for UNHCR and partner staff. We are now in the process of

updating the *Procedural Standards for Refugee Status under UNHCR's Mandate*, to incorporate the experiences of field operations and partners as well as significant developments in the decade since these core standards were first issued in 2003. Despite UNHCR's increased RSD capacity and output, demands have outstripped capacity. UNHCR's own backlog of pending asylum claims has steadily increased. We are therefore looking forward to continuing to work with States on stronger engagement and co-ownership of identifying and protecting those in need of international protection through RSD.

UNHCR is also working with governments and other partners to enhance regional and national protection systems for IDPs, as well as assisting States to put in place proper statelessness determination systems. We will hear more about these developments later in the meeting. Let me now turn to some of UNHCR's own operational protection response and systems issues, especially in areas that have been of particular interest to this Committee.

Age, Gender, Diversity [AGD]

Inequality and discrimination based on gender, age or other factors such as disabilities, sexual orientation or belonging to a minority group, is contrary to fundamental freedoms and the development of the rich human potential. In recognition of this fact, we need to continue to “infuse” an AGD approach into whatever we do. We have made considerable progress in the revision of the Results Framework and its tool, *Focus*, in this regard, thus ensuring a higher degree of integration into our programmes but also a possibility to capture better targeted action. In 2012, we developed a checklist for implementation of an AGD-sensitive protection strategy to guide operations. The Americas Bureau issued a “best practices” compilation in AGD mainstreaming, and different offices in Europe undertook studies on how an AGD approach plays out in the industrialized world. We also published two new volumes in the *Need to Know* guidance series: *Working with Men and Boy Survivors of SGBV in Forced Displacement* and *Working with Older Persons in Forced Displacement*.

We have focused in particular on enhancing the protection of persons with specific needs, including those with disabilities. All UNHCR operational plans identify and include provision for persons with specific needs. These needs are identified through a combination of methods, including population profiling, registration, the production of disaggregated data, and participatory and community-based assessments, as well as planning and monitoring activities with persons of concern and partners. We have mainstreamed disability and other diversity concerns into new and updated guidance and policy documents and are also enhancing our ability to identify different types of disability at registration, in the context of revising the *ProGres* registration tool.

One of the more important AGD lessons learnt is the need to engage better with communities themselves. It is not just about participatory assessments and consultation, but also enhancing their operational engagement. As you will hear later, we are in the process of revising the community services function and have just issued a protection policy paper on community-based protection.

Another result of the 2012 AGD accountability exercise is that we need to do more to ensure women's meaningful participation in all aspects of decision-making affecting them, their families and communities. Financial, cultural and other obstacles – including a lack of education and training – often preclude women from doing so. Their needs are therefore all too often not properly recognized or addressed. As a result, we have decided that we will strengthen our focus on enhancing women's representation in leadership and management

structures, building on good practices. By way of examples, in Ecuador we are training refugee women as community mobilisers, educating women in areas such as human rights, community leadership and gender issues. In Zambia, UNHCR and partners are involving women in designing and implementing project interventions. Women also received training on leadership, rudimentary business management, record keeping and marketing practices.

To measure progress in improving women's participation, we have included promoting active participation by persons of concern in decision-making as a Global Strategic Priority for 2014-2015, with a specific impact indicator on female participation in leadership and management structures.

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence [SGBV]

Sexual and gender-based violence is a scourge. It is not only a serious human rights violation but sadly a perennial protection issue. A recent World Health Organization study analysing data from all countries that keep records of violence against women found that one-third of all such violence occurs in the home. But women and girls are at particular risk of sexual violence in the displacement context, often due to family separation, lack of basic structural and social protection systems, and inadequate or unsafe access to services, including livelihood opportunities. The prevalence of SGBV is a sign of collective failure regarding gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment.

In 2012, UNHCR launched a series of projects to reinforce endeavours to address the specific threats and vulnerabilities faced by women and girls. In doing so, the Office expanded the scope of its efforts to operationalize the *Updated SGBV Strategy*. A report on this has just been published. We are also promoting recognition of sexual violence as a form of persecution for refugees fleeing their home country and are working with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sexual Violence in Conflict to advocate with the UN Security Council in order to include this in a resolution. Moreover, it can't be emphasized enough that SGBV prevention and response are life-saving interventions and need to be prioritized in the acute phase of an emergency. This requires a coordinated and multisectoral approach by all humanitarian actors, and necessitates appropriate funding.

Not only are SGBV prevention initiatives significantly strengthened in communities where men and boys have become actively involved, but there is also growing awareness that men and boys are often themselves silent victims, including in recent conflict and displacement situations. In 2012, UNHCR issued guidance on *Working with Men and Boy Survivors of SGBV in Forced Displacement* in order to assist UNHCR staff and other aid workers to identify and support male victims of rape and other sexual violence. This guidance will hopefully contribute to alleviating the stigma and lack of understanding of this rarely broached subject.

Child Protection

Children represent 46 per cent of all persons of concern to UNHCR and their protection remains an area we need to work on more collectively. The launch in 2012 of the *Framework for the Protection of Children* has brought focused attention to this core protection function. Eleven countries were part of the first roll-out of the strategy, representing a range of geographic and camp/urban contexts. We hope that this will go some way to redressing the gaps in child protection that were identified in the *Global*

Analysis 2012-13: UNHCR Accountability Frameworks for Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming and Targeted Actions. This report is available at the back of the room.

Child protection in emergencies is an issue that has attracted considerable attention in 2012, particularly in relation to the Syria situation. UNHCR has learnt that when it comes to protecting children in emergencies, it is key to 'get it right' from the start - with effective mechanisms to prevent family separation, to identify children at risk, to ensure that their protection and care needs are met and that individual cases are monitored and followed up. Failure to put in place child protection response from the start of an emergency comes at a high price for children, families and communities.

Additionally, in protracted refugee situations, an increasing number of children at risk were identified in 2012, particularly in and around the Horn of Africa region, with high numbers of unaccompanied and separated children continuing to arrive in Kenya, Ethiopia, Sudan and Yemen. The phenomenon of children on the move is also occurring in other parts of the world, as the statistics reveal in relation to Afghan unaccompanied and separated children or children from Central America seeking asylum in the industrialized world.

Together with a number of partners, UNHCR carried out a project on *Protecting Children on the Move*, with the aim of strengthening interventions that addressed the protection needs of unaccompanied children covering one of the most frequently travelled routes in Europe. It is hoped that the findings will inform the development of relevant approaches in concerned European States and at the EU level. The Office also issued a new tool - *Listen and Learn: Participatory Assessment with Children and Adolescents* - which provides practical, "how-to" guidance on conducting participatory assessments in a child-friendly way.

While the needs of unaccompanied and separated children are high, other children at risk of violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect are often overlooked in protection programmes. This is a situation we need to change. UNHCR continues to work with governments to improve child protection and to strengthen child protection systems which are accessible to children of concern to UNHCR. We will also continue to follow up on the pledges made at the December 2011 Ministerial Event.

In the context of child protection, I would like to welcome the re-launch of the Executive Committee Conclusions process. The topic of civil registration, in particular birth registration, addresses not only child protection concerns but also statelessness and reintegration issues. Birth registration will continue to be a priority for UNHCR and we will continue working closely with governments and civil registration authorities on this issue.

Education

Education is a central child protection response. Since the launch of UNHCR's Education Strategy in 2012, substantial progress has been made in supporting refugees to access education. We attach high importance to recognizing that education is part and parcel of protection, both for individuals and for societies. We are assisting host countries to mainstream refugees within national education systems, thus channelling resources to strengthen existing services for host communities and refugees alike. In addition to continuing to support hundreds of thousands of refugee children and young people to go to school, in 2012 UNHCR and partners enrolled an additional 176,000 out-of-school children in primary school.

However, many challenges to access still exist. A country's legal framework may prevent refugee children from attending local schools. They may require a "lost" birth certificate to enrol. They may be excluded because instruction is in a language they don't understand. Teaching materials and methods may be unsuitable for their age or there may be a lack of support to help them to catch up on lost schooling. A climate of exclusion may also hinder their attendance and learning. More needs to be done within the education sector to remove the barriers to learning and to ensure that refugee children are not excluded. Yet, access is about more than just getting children into school. Children need to be able to remain in school and benefit from their time there.

In relation to these three strategies [SGBV, child protection and education], I am pleased to report that in 2013 UNHCR will build on these linkages in field implementation. We are developing a framework to monitor progress and achievements in these three areas at country level from now until 2016, using UNHCR's existing reporting processes. Our plans to monitor progress and impact have the following main components: first, we plan to regularly analyse data and information on child protection, education and SGBV from target countries, to compile a global picture of progress and achievements; second, we seek to strengthen monitoring processes and data management at country level in the three areas to allow for evidence-based analysis; third, we would like this regular monitoring to be accompanied by reviews, learning and, finally, evaluations.

Since we have a specific agenda item on statelessness, I will not dwell on that. Suffice it to say that we continue to see solid progress in this area, but not yet enough to ensure that this phenomenon is eradicated. In the past two years an unprecedented 26 accessions to the two statelessness conventions have occurred. A number of States have reformed their nationality laws, while others have granted nationality to significant numbers of stateless people. Many of these positive steps are in response to pledges made at the 2011 Ministerial Event. Moreover, we are very encouraged that action is also envisaged by a much wider range of States, and not only those that made statelessness-related pledges. I am also encouraged by a much greater interest among NGOs to rally behind the cause of statelessness. The recent NGO Consultations provided fertile ground to enlist support for coordinated strategic advocacy between NGOs and UNHCR on this and other issues, including follow-up on last year's Dialogue on Protection Challenges on the theme of Faith and Protection.

Internally displaced persons

Given our role and responsibilities in relation to the protection of the internally displaced [IDPs], I would like to share with you some of our concerns, which I hope we will be able to discuss further during the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges on 11 and 12 December. In this connection, I am pleased to announce that the High Commissioner would like to focus on the particular protection challenges of IDPs during this year's Dialogue.

In too many places around the world, chronic internal displacement of sizeable proportions has become the norm. Areas where IDPs live often have some of the lowest development indicators world-wide. In too many situations internal displacement is the result of the countless, fierce and ever changing armed groups preying on the local population or of unresolved inter-ethnic tension, even statelessness. A glaring absence of governance, a paucity of functioning government services, and no real proper infrastructure to speak of are fertile ground for abuses. Indeed, internal displacement is not only the consequence, but

also a hotbed of horrific human rights abuses, ranging from forced recruitment of children, torture, rape, killings of civilians *en masse*, to multiple forced evictions and loss of property rights.

It is regrettable that the magnitude of internal displacement has failed to galvanize national and international public attention. How we can change this collectively? I was particularly impressed by the Conference on Solutions for IDPs in Bogota in May which sought to pave the way for a stronger solutions-orientation to displacement head-on. The Conference was the first of its kind in Colombia involving eight different Ministries, UNHCR, UNDP, international experts, IDPs themselves, mayors, NGOs and other UN agencies. It was extremely well attended, with over 400 participants, and attracted lots of attention, including in the media. This kind of multi-stakeholder event, bringing to the table all those having a role, including the displaced themselves, and discussing the way forward in concrete actionable terms, could be replicated in other parts of the world.

While being strongly committed to promoting solutions for IDPs, we are painfully aware of the on-going challenges in prevention and protection. Finding solutions to internal displacement situations needs to be part and parcel of ending conflict and building peace. Experience has demonstrated that, if left unattended, such situations can fester and sow the seeds for future conflict. We must also expand our own horizons and recognize the most realistic solutions identified by the displaced themselves, thereby promoting early resumption of normal life for as many as possible.

The African continent is home to more than one third of the world's IDPs. There is no better testament to State commitment to building protection systems for IDPs than the entry into force of the African Union IDP Convention in December 2012. As with the ground-breaking OAU Refugee Convention, African States have shown they recognize the gravity of the situation and the need for individual and collective action to address it. At global level, we are encouraged to see that more than 25 States have already developed national laws, policies and strategies aimed at strengthening national response to internal displacement. We are currently providing support and technical assistance on IDP policy development in Afghanistan, the Philippines, Georgia, Nigeria and Somalia, among others. Moreover, in collaboration with the Inter-parliamentary Union, we are finalizing the first IPU Handbook for Parliamentarians on Internal Displacement. Drafted with legislators in mind, this will be a useful tool for robust action at national level. We hope to launch the Handbook together with the IPU in the second half of this year, in time for the High Commissioner's Dialogue.

Law and policies are one thing, but implementing them quite another. This is another of the challenges we hope to discuss at the forthcoming High Commissioner's Dialogue: ending the gap between frameworks and actual practice. We are often asked what UNHCR actually does in protection terms for the internally displaced and, in some cases, why we are even involved. Our protection monitoring and protection interventions, registration and profiling, peaceful coexistence projects, support for community-based advocacy and protection mechanisms, and women's empowerment programmes, all serve internally displaced populations directly, while also informing common humanitarian planning and mainstreaming protection considerations across all sectors. UNHCR continues to strengthen its capacity in these areas and seeks to provide protection information and tools for the whole humanitarian community throughout an emergency. A lot has been achieved, but we recognize that a lot more remains to be done.

Comprehensive Solutions

Madam Chairperson,

I would like to say a few words about durable solutions. The end goal of all our endeavours is ultimately to enable refugees and the displaced to rebuild their lives. Of the 10.5 million refugees under UNHCR's mandate at the end 2012, over 6.4 million were living in protracted situations. In 2012, 526,000 refugees returned home, half of them either to Afghanistan, Iraq, DRC or Côte d'Ivoire. Although this figure is an improvement on the particularly low figures of 2009 and 2010, it is still lower than all other years in the past decade. Political will and concerted action are critical to unlock protracted situations and address the root causes of forced displacement. UNHCR can only play a catalytic and advocacy role. That said there are things we have been able to do together with you.

UNHCR is engaged in several solutions strategies which I will mention briefly. In Africa, for Angolan and Liberian refugees, refugee status for most formally ceased as of 30 June 2012. In 2012, 29,500 Liberians returned home; while 10,812 have applied for local integration and their documentation is currently being processed. During the same period, 19,700 Angolans returned and local integration for up to 62,000 Angolans in DRC, Zambia and Namibia is underway. I would in particular like to express UNHCR's appreciation to the Government of Zambia, which has undertaken to issue some 10,000 residence permits to former Angolan refugees. We also welcome a decision by the Brazilian government to grant permanent residency to nearly 2,000 former Angolan and Liberian refugees. Regarding Rwandan refugees almost 11,200 repatriated in 2012 while local integration efforts continue in other countries. UNHCR is also pursuing comprehensive strategies aimed at bringing to a close the situation of Mauritians in Mali and Senegal, Ghanaians in Togo, Chadians in Niger and Togolese in Benin and Ghana. A regional comprehensive solutions strategy for the DRC refugee situation has commenced for the close to half a million refugees living in protracted situations in the Great Lakes and Central Africa region. A key element of this strategy will be the resettlement of 50,000 DRC refugees in the region over the next five years. To date, nine resettlement countries have expressed interest in receiving DRC refugees, including the USA, which has agreed to also receive up to 10,000 DRC refugees from the former Mudende camp in Rwanda under its group processing programme.

In Asia, a solutions strategy was agreed in May 2012 to assist Afghan refugees in the region, in particular to support voluntary repatriation and the sustainable reintegration of returnees in Afghanistan, as well as to support host countries. UNHCR is in the initial phases of designing a comprehensive solutions strategy for refugees in Central Asia. In Europe, UNHCR continues to support States in the Western Balkans to find durable solutions for those displaced during the conflicts in the 1990s. In the context of the Sarajevo process, UNHCR has committed to monitoring the Regional Housing Programme [RHP] which is being implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia to address remaining housing needs for displaced population. In the Americas, a comprehensive solutions strategy is envisaged for displaced Colombians. In Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan and Côte d'Ivoire, UNHCR and UNDP are also working together on piloting the Secretary-General's Decision on Durable Solutions.

Let me now turn to recent developments in resettlement, which is another important expression of burden- and responsibility-sharing. Nearly 71,300 refugees departed for resettlement with UNHCR's assistance in 2012 – an increase of 15 per cent over 2011 thanks

both to resettlement countries having accelerated security clearances and increased resources for processing specific populations, and to UNHCR and States' joint efforts to explore innovative processing measures where access to refugee populations was limited. In 2012, UNHCR enhanced identification and promoted the capacity of resettlement countries to receive individuals with vulnerabilities and specific needs, particularly LGBTI refugees and refugees with disabilities. This year, UNHCR will increase its resettlement submissions to 88,500 refugees, from 75,000 in 2012, since the number of resettlement places made available has grown, with Australia doubling its target, Belgium and Germany establishing regular resettlement programmes and a Joint EU Resettlement Programme providing resources for EU Member States to increase their available resettlement quotas. The Syria situation will require special efforts, given the gravity of events and its impact on host countries. I would like to recall here the humanitarian basis of resettlement, which requires flexibility in applying selection criteria and processing modalities, as well as in offering resettlement places as part of the emergency pool or in addition to the annual quota.

We also continue to explore with States how labour migration schemes could be integrated into broader solutions strategies for the forcibly displaced. In September 2012, UNHCR and the ILO, under the auspices of the Global Forum on Migration and Development [GFMD], convened a workshop on labour mobility schemes for refugees. The options discussed included temporary migration management arrangements, alternative legal stays and other mobility-related initiatives. By way of example, the Islamic Republic of Iran has shown leadership in this area, by registering 1.4 million undocumented Afghans, among whom some 135,000 have been issued family passports and Iranian residence visas, with access to work permits. Moreover, the Government of India allows for refugees recognized by UNHCR under its mandate to apply for long-stay visas and work permits. Along these lines, UNHCR also welcomes ongoing discussions taking place in the context of MERCOSUR in South America, which aim to explore how existing regional legal instruments regulating freedom of movement in the region can offer solution alternatives to refugees.

Madam Chairperson,

It is always a challenge to convey protection in all its complexity and the many UNHCR activities to this end in a statement to this Committee. In closing, I would like to once again emphasize how important it is that we deliberate together on how to enhance international cooperation in tangible ways, especially in contexts of large-scale influx such as we are experiencing today. The challenges are undoubtedly huge, but they *can* be overcome if we all collectively muster the creativity and political will to do so. The people out there who depend on what we are doing on a daily basis, including in this Committee, expect no less from us all.

Thank you.