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Report of the seventy-seventh meeting of the Standing Committee (10-12 March 2020)

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I. Introduction

1. The Chairperson of the Executive Committee, His Excellency Ambassador Geert Muylle (Belgium), opened the seventy-seventh meeting of the Standing Committee. Statements and presentations made by UNHCR's senior managers can be found [here](#).
2. Regarding the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the Chairperson noted that the decision to proceed with the meeting, with distancing measures in place, was aligned with recommendations by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Swiss authorities. Live-streaming was also made available to limit presence in the room.

II. Adoption of the Standing Committee work programme for 2020

3. The Committee adopted the agenda for the meeting (EC/71/SC/CRP.1) and the 2020 work programme (EC/71/SC/CRP.2) as presented.

III. Regional activities and global programmes

4. The Deputy High Commissioner highlighted recent milestones for the organization, including the first Global Refugee Forum (GRF) in December 2019, and briefed on UNHCR's change process. As of January 2020, UNHCR's seven regional bureaux were operating from their respective regions. This decentralization would allow UNHCR to respond faster and more flexibly, align its policies and procedures with key partners, adapt to system-wide reforms, and ensure consistent and predictable support to operations. The High Commissioner had created the Division of Strategic Planning and Results, reconfigured the Division of Resilience and Solutions, and established the Global Data Service. The Deputy High Commissioner also underscored the importance of strengthening accountability, reducing abuse of authority and power, and ensuring protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. UNHCR was on track to meet its "grand bargain" commitments, while continuing to advocate reduced earmarking from donors. Noting that UNHCR's needs-based budget was higher this year, with cash-flow a concern and COVID-19 having potentially serious financial repercussions on the organization, donors were asked to advance their contributions and help UNHCR mitigate the risks. She also added that the new Assistant High Commissioner (Operations) would be leading UNHCR's COVID-19 response.

5. Briefing the Committee for the first time, the Assistant High Commissioner (Operations) stated that decentralization had already established improved oversight of field operations and a more coherent regional management of refugee situations. With the number of persons of concern expected soon to exceed 72 million, UNHCR's ability to respond to unfolding crises remained critical. He noted that the Global Compact on Refugees was an exceptional instrument for enhancing international cooperation and effective solidarity, and that multi-stakeholder approaches were easing pressure on host communities, building self-reliance and offering solutions. The three support platforms launched at the GRF, moreover, were a tangible demonstration of a "new deal" for refugees. The Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement established with the World Bank was also crucial for the success of socio-economic inclusion. In response to the growing number of internally displaced persons (IDPs), UNHCR had updated its IDP policy, strengthened its engagement and prioritized funding for IDP operations; however further financial support was needed. The Assistant High Commissioner (Operations) also mentioned the achievements of the campaign to end statelessness and the appointment of a Special Advisor on Climate Action, given the link to displacement. On COVID-19, UNHCR was collaborating with host governments and WHO to ensure refugees were included in response plans and would soon be launching an appeal.

A. Regional updates

i. Africa: West and Central Africa; East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Region; Southern Africa

6. The Directors of the Regional Bureaux for West and Central Africa; East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Region; and Southern Africa presented updates on operations in their respective regions, highlighting the impact of decentralization. In these three regions, UNHCR was working on emergency preparedness, regional response plans and scaling up emergency responses, including for IDPs in line with the new policy on internal displacement. There were encouraging political developments in some countries, with hope that viable conditions for return would be established. Food insecurity and declining rations were of great concern, as was the decrease in resettlement places. UNHCR continued to work with host governments and partners to strengthen protection, including support for asylum systems, registration and refugee status determination. Achieving solutions was also a priority, with a particular focus on voluntary repatriation where possible. UNHCR and partners continued to promote the inclusion of refugees and mobilize international support for such efforts.

7. Delegations expressed appreciation for the GRF, particularly for the support platforms. The need to follow up on the pledges made and implement the Global Compact on Refugees was emphasized. The decentralization process was welcomed, and UNHCR was asked to provide an update on the related change process.

8. Member States expressed concern for the sharp rise in forced displacement in Africa and urged UNHCR to scale up its response in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. They asked about UNHCR's preparedness measures, including with a view to upcoming elections. Delegations expressed concern about the escalating violence in the Sahel as well as the rise in terrorism in the region. The importance of responding to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), especially in the Sahel, and to the specific protection needs of women, children and unaccompanied minors was underscored. Governments in the region were called upon to ensure the safety of civilians and humanitarian workers. Support was expressed for the emergency transit mechanisms in Niger and Rwanda, as well as for the legal and policy advancements in some countries, including the granting of nationality to refugees.

9. Voluntary repatriation was underscored by some delegations as the preferred durable solution, while others stressed that returns should only take place when essential conditions were met. UNHCR was encouraged to strengthen its work in urban areas and to include non-governmental organizations (NGOs) at the outset of a response. The Committee also encouraged UNHCR to enhance its regional and development partnerships, while keeping protection at the forefront. Delegations expressed support for the recently established United Nations High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement and urged the Office to address internal displacement comprehensively. Some delegations suggested that UNHCR should strengthen its response to climate and disaster-related displacement, and support clean energy and eco-friendly responses to displacement, including reforestation in refugee-hosting areas. Education and skills training were also highlighted as being essential to self-reliance.

10. The Director of the Regional Bureau for the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes noted that analysis and prioritization of the GRF pledges were planned at the regional level. She indicated that regional legal approaches now covered all refugee populations and that the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) support platform would ensure coherence of initiatives in the humanitarian, development and peace nexus. She spoke about UNHCR's efforts to prevent and respond to SGBV, acknowledging that information in this area was lacking in the update. With regard to upcoming elections, contingency planning was underway with UNHCR's Division of Emergency, Security and Supply, and relevant country operations. She highlighted UNHCR's data-driven approach to improve refugee self-reliance in the region. She also noted that strong coordination existed among the regional bureaux, notably for situations covered by two bureaux.

11. The Director of the Regional Bureau for West and Central Africa acknowledged that returns sometimes took place in adverse conditions, often when the situation in the host country became more challenging than in the country of origin. In such a context, UNHCR supported return operations and monitored the situation closely. On the Sahel, where the situation had deteriorated, she noted that UNHCR aimed to ensure the centrality of protection with a special focus on SGBV prevention and response. UNHCR was also working with affected governments on community-based protection approaches. She also noted that a new protection monitoring tool would be rolled out in mid-March and was expected to support a harmonized regional approach. Regarding cash-based interventions for persons of concern, she confirmed that distribution was confidential and that monitoring had not revealed any attacks on recipients.

12. The Director of the Regional Bureau for Southern Africa noted that UNHCR was working with the South African Government on a project to clear the refugee status determination backlog over the next four years. He assured the Committee of UNHCR's commitment to scale up plans to assist IDPs. With respect to the GRF, UNHCR was in the process of reviewing the operationalization of pledges with its partners, such as the Southern African Development Community, to ensure commitments would be implemented in the region. Regarding the complex situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, he lamented that SGBV was on the rise and noted that UNHCR was supporting prevention through community-based mechanisms and by providing legal and psychosocial assistance, as well as safe access to firewood.

ii. Asia and the Pacific

13. The Director of the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific gave an overview of UNHCR's operations in the region. He spoke about the impact of environmental disasters exacerbated by climate change, affecting host communities and approximately 9.2 million persons of concern. He emphasized the spirit of solidarity that abounded in the region, exemplified by the numerous pledges made during the GRF to concretize international burden-sharing.

14. Delegations recognized that the support platform for the "Solutions strategy for Afghan refugees" launched at the GRF provided an opportunity to redefine the way in which the international community responded to the Afghan refugee situation, and more actors were called upon to join the efforts. Delivering on the key objectives of the support platform was seen as a litmus test for the Global Compact on Refugees, in particular its applicability to protracted refugee situations and promise of greater responsibility-sharing, including by enlarging the support base beyond traditional donors. Host countries were commended for their longstanding generosity, with calls for additional support to be provided to them.

15. The Committee commended the Government of Bangladesh for the pilot project which allowed some 10,000 Rohingya refugee children to study, following the Myanmar school curriculum. This step was seen as crucial for their successful reintegration, once conditions were conducive for return to Myanmar. UNHCR's efforts to expand formal education for all Rohingya refugees were praised, as was the completion of the biometric registration. Addressing SGBV was highlighted as a priority, and delegations expressed concern about the funding situation.

16. Delegations noted with concern the lack of access to persons of concern in northern Rakhine State and emphasized the importance of updating the memorandum of understanding of UNHCR and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with the Government of Myanmar. UNHCR's advocacy on the implementation of the Advisory Communication on Rakhine State was commended, and the quick impact projects to improve conditions were highlighted in this regard. The Committee called for the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return of refugees to Rakhine State, as long as the conditions were conducive for such return.

17. Several delegations highlighted the admirable efforts of many countries in the region towards ending statelessness. Concern was raised regarding the possible impact of COVID-19 among vulnerable populations living in high density areas, such as refugee camps.

Concern was also raised about the capacity of some national health care systems to respond to the COVID-19 threat and the need to ensure access to food, essential health supplies and medical support. UNHCR was encouraged to mobilize more resources and, in cooperation with relevant partners, to address this global threat to refugees and host communities. The Committee requested more information on how UNHCR was preparing for a possible outbreak, including in contexts where access might be limited.

18. Regarding the Afghan situation, the Director welcomed the solidarity expressed and engagement of States wishing to join the support platform. UNHCR was working closely with the Government of Afghanistan to support and enable returns, and urged States to reinforce their support in areas of return. He expressed appreciation for the generous support in the area of youth empowerment, a direct investment in the next generation in terms of durable solutions and nation building. In Myanmar, while access in many places was hampered by the challenging security situation, the Director noted that UNHCR continued working to enhance access and invest in quick impact projects to create confidence among refugees in the areas they have identified as inhibiting their ability and willingness to return. He stressed that UNHCR would continue to advocate freedom of movement, access to education for children and youth, access to birth registration and other civil registry procedures, the preservation of housing, land and property rights, and the improvement of conditions in northern Rakhine State. With regard to the situation in Nepal, UNHCR remained in dialogue with the Government and continued to advocate for the rights of refugees to be respected.

19. The Director thanked countries in the region for their efforts to end statelessness and encouraged further implementation of the commitments made in the context of UNHCR's iBelong campaign. With respect to refugee participation, he highlighted the various ways in which refugees were contributing to UNHCR responses, spanning from inclusion in planning, participatory assessments and real time feedback through communication with community-based mechanisms. Regarding COVID-19, the Director indicated that UNHCR's response focused on ensuring that persons of concern and staff were safe; securing business continuity where possible; and aligning country operation responses with guidance issued by WHO and national health authorities. He assured the Committee that there would be further updates and requested that States provide support to address the situation.

iii. The Americas

20. The Director of the Regional Bureau for the Americas regretted the deterioration observed in the four main displacement situations affecting the continent. She commended States for the commitments made at the GRF, which were predominantly linked to strengthening protection capacity, inclusion, the provision of jobs and livelihood opportunities, and solutions.

21. The Committee expressed concern about the socioeconomic crisis in Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) and the continued exodus of the country's nationals. Several States highlighted the success of the solidarity conference on Venezuelan refugees and migrants which took place in Brussels in October 2019, and called on the international community to support the upcoming pledging conference. UNHCR and IOM were congratulated for helping to establish the Quito Process secretariat and the "friends of the Quito Process" group. UNHCR's leadership within the framework of the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform was also appreciated, and a clarification was requested with respect to how the 2020 Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan would be funded and aligned with the Humanitarian Response Plan inside Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of). A number of host countries described activities they had undertaken to address the situation, including regularizing the migratory status of Venezuelans, improving case management through biometrics, scaling up reception capacity, providing access to labour markets and reducing discrimination against Venezuelan refugees and migrants. A number of delegations expressed appreciation for UNHCR's efforts to provide access to basic services for vulnerable persons of concern and encouraged these activities to continue. The need for disaggregated data on persons of concern for designing programmes and public policies was also raised. Collaboration between UNHCR and IOM was seen to be effective, as was the role of the Joint Special Representative.

22. With regard to displacement in and from the north of Central America, delegations commended the comprehensive regional refugee response framework (known by its Spanish acronym MIRPS) as an effective example of how to implement the Global Compact on Refugees. It was highlighted as an important mechanism for responding to displacement and enhancing responsibility-sharing. Efforts to build the protection capacity of the Mexican Refugee Commission were welcomed. UNHCR's collaboration with IOM in Costa Rica to support the protection transfer arrangement was given due recognition, but it was stressed that additional funds would be needed to sustain this mechanism in the long-term.

23. Delegations expressed concern about the resurgence of violence in Colombia, which was resulting in growing numbers of IDPs as well as an increase in the number of Colombian asylum-seekers in Ecuador. There were fears over a potential reduction in funding for the IDP programme and the resulting gaps in protection. UNHCR was urged to continue supporting the IDP populations in Colombia, focusing on vulnerable Afro-Colombians and indigenous populations, as well as to ensure that new arrivals in Ecuador were provided with adequate assistance.

24. Recognizing the exceptional solidarity demonstrated by countries responding to the different displacement crises, the Director assured them of UNHCR's full support. While addressing concerns over the financial repercussions on host countries, she recalled the World Bank's studies in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru that had demonstrated the long-term benefits of integration. She informed delegations that UNHCR was working with countries to consolidate the MIRPS support platform. Border monitoring had been strengthened, and UNHCR was working with other UN agencies to strengthen local capacities. The creation of an NGO platform within the MIRPS framework was also underway and aimed to improve information-sharing and strengthen coordination. The Director commended measures taken by States to regularize the status of foreigners, support integration and provide humanitarian assistance, noting the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder approaches in finding solutions. She also commended initiatives aimed at reducing statelessness, including in the Caribbean where discriminatory legislation persisted. Responding to concerns related to registration gaps in Colombia and cash assistance, the Director explained that the registration of some 300,000 people had been prioritized for 2020 and that UNHCR was working with the World Food Programme to carry out assessments and provide cash transfers based on vulnerability.

iv. Europe

25. The Director of the Regional Bureau for Europe provided an overview of UNHCR's activities in Europe. She commended Member States of the European Union for working to expand complementary pathways and highlighted the success of community-based initiatives in countering negative stereotypes. Recognizing the right of States to manage their borders efficiently, consistent with international law, she reiterated the imperatives of preserving the right to seek asylum and avoiding the use of excessive force. The Director called for improvement of reception conditions and assistance for children and survivors of SGBV.

26. It was noted that the GRF had conveyed a powerful message regarding the need collectively to address migration and asylum matters. EU Member States had reported over 700,000 new asylum requests in the past year, mainly from Afghanistan and the Syrian Arab Republic but also reflecting a two-fold increase in applicants from Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of). In south-eastern Europe, there were also considerable increases in arrivals, which resulted in growing protection concerns, including a rise in the number of unaccompanied minors. In this context, delegations called for measures to address the root causes of forced displacement, with emphasis on the resolution of armed conflict. Delegations expressed concern about the recent escalation of conflict in the north-western region of the Syrian Arab Republic and about the increase in arrivals in Europe. Calls were made to respond in accordance with international law.

27. UNHCR was commended for improving the protection and socioeconomic integration of refugees. Its work in support of European States to further develop their asylum systems in a harmonized manner was also appreciated. UNHCR's efforts to put an end to statelessness at birth were recognized, including in countries where these populations were displaced by conflict.

28. The Director affirmed that UNHCR stood ready to assist with the development of measures aimed at avoiding secondary movements, while managing borders in a practical and humane manner. Answering one delegation's concern over the risk of COVID-19 contamination on Lesbos, Greece, the Director indicated that UNHCR was working with the authorities and sharing information with persons of concern, and that improvements in the areas of water, health and sanitation were underway.

v. The Middle East and North Africa

29. The Director of the Regional Bureau for the Middle East and North Africa presented the regional update, elaborating on the ongoing displacement crises in the region and UNHCR's work to protect and assist those in need. He underscored the challenges of achieving durable solutions and the need for greater burden- and responsibility-sharing with host countries.

30. Delegations echoed concern over the deteriorating humanitarian situation and ongoing displacement in the region, particularly in the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic and the north of Yemen, and outlined the ways in which they were supporting responses. The cross-border mechanism was highlighted as a critical lifeline for millions of displaced people in the Syrian Arab Republic. UNHCR was encouraged to put in place contingency plans well ahead of the expected vote on extending the authorization for cross-border humanitarian operations in the United Nations Security Council in July 2020. In the north of Yemen, where humanitarian aid operations were at risk of being suspended, the humanitarian community was urged to pursue a coordinated approach and to ensure an independent and principled response. The Committee recalled the obligation of all parties to the conflict to allow safe and unhindered access to humanitarian relief for people in need in accordance with international humanitarian law.

31. With regard to returns to the Syrian Arab Republic, delegations reiterated that these should take place in a voluntary, safe and dignified manner. Support was expressed for UNHCR's current approach, and the Office was encouraged to provide refugees and IDPs with information about conditions in places of origin to facilitate informed decision-making. The ongoing pressure on host countries and the need for concrete burden- and responsibility-sharing was highlighted. In this context, pledges made at the GRF were considered a positive step, although their implementation would constitute the true test of success. New and expanded resettlement programmes were also critical for enhancing burden- and responsibility-sharing.

32. The Committee voiced concern over the protection risks facing refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants in Libya. While support was expressed for UNHCR's decision to suspend its operation at the gathering and departure facility in Tripoli due to safety concerns, it was hoped that activities could resume as soon as possible. The Office was encouraged to leverage its presence on the ground to seek more information about the condition of disembarked people who had been transferred to investigation units, where monitoring remained extremely difficult. Concern was also expressed about the protracted situation in the camps near Tindouf, and the need to achieve a durable solution was highlighted. One delegation emphasized its continued commitment to providing refugees with additional services, including connection to the national electricity grid and improving health and education services. It also renewed its call for the issuance of the vulnerability assessment to allow the provision of humanitarian assistance commensurate with the needs. Another delegation renewed its call for UNHCR to proceed with the registration of this population, in accordance with its mandate and in line with relevant Security Council resolutions, taking into account that registration improves the integrity of UNHCR's operations by reducing the risk of fraud and misappropriation.

33. The Director expressed appreciation for the continued generosity of both countries hosting refugees and donors in responding to displacement crises across the region. He assured the Committee that UNHCR, together with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis, was working on contingency plans should the authorization for cross-border humanitarian operations not be extended beyond July 2020.

34. With regard to returns, the Director reiterated that UNHCR's approach was guided by the decisions of Syrian refugees. On the basis of surveys, the number of returns was projected to double in 2020. The Director stressed that this was not as much due to changing conditions in the Syrian Arab Republic as it was to worsening socioeconomic conditions in the host countries. The Committee was reassured that should returns increase in scale, an inter-agency preparedness plan had already been developed by the Regional Durable Solutions Working Group. Furthermore, discussions were underway with donors and other partners, including NGOs, to determine the level of assistance provided prior to departure. Responding to questions about Yemen, the Director confirmed plans to reduce operations for the time being in view of the extremely challenging operating environment and great personal risk to staff. He elaborated on a number of measures undertaken by the United Nations Country Team to ease access constraints and allow humanitarian aid to reach people in need. In relation to the gathering and departure facility in Libya, negotiations were underway with the authorities to re-establish the purpose of the facility as a transit centre and resume its operation.

B. Oral update on global programmes

35. The Director of the Division of Resilience and Solutions (DRS) presented the oral update on global programmes and provided a brief overview of UNHCR's response to COVID-19.

36. Delegations welcomed decentralization and other reforms to better position UNHCR to deliver on its mandate and to act as a catalyst and facilitator for the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees. They congratulated UNHCR for having met its "grand bargain" commitment to double the use of cash as a proportion of assistance. UNHCR's collaboration with other agencies to ensure more coherent responses was commended, including the launch of the common cash platform. Appreciation was expressed for the focus on inclusion of refugees in national systems, in line with the Global Compact on Refugees. It was noted that the transition to national systems should be done strategically and only when the quality of services and protection could be maintained. UNHCR was urged to produce rigorous assessments on the viability of such transitioning and to identify appropriate monitoring mechanisms to ensure the continued protection of refugees.

37. Delegations expressed support for the progress achieved in the area of education and encouraged UNHCR to continue promoting access to national systems, identifying innovative solutions for refugees in remote locations and ensuring that all refugee children had access to education. The Committee expressed concern over the high level of SGBV and stressed that funding for prevention and mitigation remained essential. UNHCR was urged to ensure an adequate allocation of funding to its SGBV response, which was described as an essential form of life-saving humanitarian assistance. UNHCR was requested to include its work on combatting SGBV and the delivery of appropriate health services in the updates on global programmes, as these issues were seen as cross-cutting and needed to be fully mainstreamed.

38. UNHCR's engagement with the private sector was commended, and the Office was encouraged to continue to develop innovative and strategic partnerships. UNHCR was urged to collaborate with other UN agencies to ensure consistent and synchronized messaging from the United Nations to the private sector. Working with development actors to better meet the long-term development needs of the displaced was highlighted as crucial, and UNHCR's collaboration with the World Bank was commended in this regard.

39. Delegations expressed support for UNHCR's work on the clean energy challenge and looked forward to frequent updates as the work progressed. There was also a call for UNHCR to pay more attention to the subject of climate change and environmental sustainability. Delegations welcomed the release of UNHCR's data transformation strategy 2020-2025, aiming to bring together the various systems in a comprehensive approach. Delegations requested more information regarding the roll-out of the strategy and how data from other programmes and partners, including the Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement, would inform UNHCR's new results-based management system.

40. The Director noted that an update on the new division's functions would be provided shortly. The work undertaken with the World Bank on the impact of hosting refugees was already showing results at the field level. The next workshop on this theme would take place in the near future, and more information would be shared. On education, although the Director was pleased to report progress, he acknowledged that there was still a large gap in secondary education.

41. One of the Deputy Directors of DRS informed the Committee that UNHCR would issue guidance on financial service providers for cash-based initiatives and was verifying the interoperability of platforms to avoid duplication of efforts by other agencies. She noted that cash-based initiatives had been deployed in an additional 12 countries, with the aim of reaching all operations where this type of assistance would be possible by the end of 2021. The other Deputy Director emphasized that GRF pledges on livelihoods and socioeconomic inclusion were considered critical. He noted that making sure these pledges were implemented was a priority for UNHCR and that the Office looked forward to close collaboration in this regard.

42. The Assistant High Commissioner (Operations) informed the Committee that the 2020-2025 data transformation strategy aimed to change the way that UNHCR collected and managed information. Whereas previously data was viewed as merely a source of refugee statistics, the work with the World Bank on the Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement was key to efforts towards socioeconomic inclusion and responding to the evolving needs of refugees and host communities. In terms of official refugee statistics, he informed delegations that UNHCR was looking at ways of disseminating this data in a more flexible manner.

IV. Management, financial control, administrative oversight and human resources

43. The Head of the Investigation Service presented the oral update on the work of the Inspector General's Office (IGO), briefing the Committee on a number of recent policy developments, and on the work of the Investigation Service, the Strategic Oversight Service and the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) UNHCR Audit Service.

44. Member States congratulated the newly appointed Inspector General, who would be taking up his position shortly. They welcomed the various efforts undertaken by UNHCR to strengthen accountability, risk management, and procedural compliance and transparency, as well as the new policy on oversight and the administrative instruction on investigations. UNHCR was commended for its work on preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment, including its victim-centered approach, and was urged to continue these efforts. There was a query regarding the online training being developed for implementing partners on how to conduct investigations related to sexual exploitation and abuse and whether it could be made available to others. Delegations conveyed support for the efforts made to increase the number of female investigators and those of diverse backgrounds. The importance of continued and timely sharing of critical information with member States was also underlined. Several delegations highlighted the importance of having sufficient resources in place to address the sustained number of allegations and increased investigations in a timely manner, and called on UNHCR to ensure the necessary support was provided. Interest was also expressed in receiving an update on the main findings of the oversight data management tool, and UNHCR was asked whether the tool would be shared with member States.

45. The Head of the Investigation Service indicated that the data management tool was still being developed and that the findings should be made available to Executive Committee members in due course. Regarding the recommendations of the peer review by UNDP, he clarified that they pointed to a lack of adequate resources and the need for two investigators on every case. The recommendations also called for the IGO to be more robust in its intake work and to formalize some of its internal processes further, especially in the intake phase. He noted that the implementation of the recommendations that did not require additional resources was already on track.

46. In response to a question about coordinating follow-up measures in response to recommendations from internal and external oversight bodies, the Deputy High Commissioner noted that this was being done by the Chef de Cabinet through a tracking system. With respect to resources, she noted that UNHCR endeavoured to build capacity not only in the IGO but also in other relevant parts of the organization such as the Ethics Office, the Ombudsperson's Office and the Psychosocial Wellbeing Section. While it was important to be able to respond to reports of misconduct, investments were also being made in prevention.

V. Programme/protection policy

A. UNHCR's programme in the Secretary-General's proposed programme budget for 2021

47. On behalf of the Director of the Division of Strategic Planning and Results, the Controller and Director of the Division of Financial Administration and Management presented UNHCR's programme in the Secretary-General's proposed programme budget for 2021 (EC/71/SC/CRP.3). He noted that this programme was linked to the small portion of the overall General Assembly appropriation to the United Nations regular budget which was intended to fund a proportion of UNHCR's management and administrative costs, as per UNHCR's Statute. He also noted that the contribution from the UN regular budget was being reduced each year, to slightly over \$40 million for 2020.

48. The decision contained in annex II was adopted.

B. Oral update on the Global Compact on Refugees and the outcomes of the Global Refugee Forum

49. The Assistant High Commissioner (Protection) briefed the Committee on the progress made in the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees and on the outcomes of the GRF. The Head of the Global Refugee Forum Coordination Team described the work that UNHCR was carrying out to track pledges and report on their implementation.

50. Delegations commended UNHCR for successfully co-hosting the first GRF, which was considered a milestone in advancing the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees. The large number of pledges and the broad range of stakeholders which participated in the event were welcomed and deemed a demonstration of the international community's commitment to improving the lives of refugees and easing the burden on host countries. The importance of implementing pledges, particularly at the country and regional levels, was emphasized. Delegations underscored that realizing the success of the forum was incumbent on all relevant stakeholders and that tracking the implementation of pledges was a collective responsibility. In this context, a number of delegations reiterated their contributions and commitments towards the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees and outlined the measures undertaken to implement them.

51. Several delegations reiterated the importance of producing an outcome document with the analysis of the pledges and to facilitate the pairing of commitments, where possible and relevant. Progress made in measuring the impact of hosting, protecting, and assisting refugees was welcomed and deemed essential in promoting greater burden- and responsibility-sharing. Delegations expressed appreciation for the engagement and contributions of a wide range of stakeholders, including refugees, private sector entities and development actors. UNHCR was encouraged to maintain this engagement in the implementation process with a view to broadening the base of support towards advancing the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees. Furthermore, some delegations recommended that the co-sponsorship groups continued to help facilitate the pairing of pledges and multi-stakeholder collaborations. The ongoing development of the digital

platform was welcomed. UNHCR was encouraged to provide regular updates on the progress made in the implementation of the pledges and the remaining gaps to the Standing Committee and at the annual session of the Executive Committee.

52. The Head of the GRF Coordination Team expressed appreciation for the contributions and pledges made by various stakeholders. While the responsibility for implementation rested with pledging entities, UNHCR would continue to support this process, including by establishing mechanisms for follow-up and reporting. Responding to questions about the role of the co-sponsorship groups in the follow-up process, she confirmed that a number of these groups had convened after the GRF with a view to taking this work forward. While the vast majority of pledges would be implemented in displacement settings at the country level, the groups would play a key role in maintaining mobilization efforts and collaboration at the global level.

53. The Head of the GRF Coordination Team noted that refugee engagement in the lead-up to the forum had established a positive starting point and that UNHCR was exploring ways to increase refugee participation more systematically in similar processes. An initial progress report on the implementation of pledges would be released in June 2020, followed by the launch of the online reporting mechanism. UNHCR was also conducting an internal evaluation of the GRF, the main outcomes of which would be shared at the next meeting of the Standing Committee in July 2020, together with a further update on progress made.

VI. Strategic partnerships and coordination (including United Nations reform)

54. The Director of the Division of External Relations (DER) presented the update on strategic partnerships and coordination (EC/71/SC/CRP.4), providing an overview of UNHCR's efforts to strengthen partnerships and key developments in coordination over the past year. She also outlined how UNHCR was contributing to broader reforms in the United Nations.

55. UNHCR was commended for having made significant progress on strengthening coordination and strategic partnerships over the past year. The Committee emphasized the importance of the multi-stakeholder approach supported by UNHCR, in line with the Global Compact on Refugees. UNHCR was asked how it would ensure refugee participation in the run up to the 2021 high-level officials meeting and the continuation of the implementation of the GCR. UNHCR was also applauded for its efforts to broaden partnerships with development actors, in particular the World Bank Group. The Committee urged UNHCR to continue this work, both at the global and country levels, and emphasized the importance of protection remaining at the centre of these efforts. Several delegations expressed an interest in hearing more about partnerships with the private sector and requested UNHCR to include more information on private sector partnerships in future updates.

56. Delegations highlighted the importance of cooperation between United Nations agencies, particularly with regard to the COVID-19 response. One delegation stated that a United Nations fund would be preferable to having separate appeals by different agencies to respond to the health crisis. UNHCR's independent review of the refugee coordination model was considered timely given the development system reform process and the implementation of the GCR. Many delegations expressed an interest in receiving the findings of the review. UNHCR was congratulated for reaching the "grand bargain" commitment of disbursing 25 per cent of expenditures through local responders. At the same time, delegations requested more information about quality control and capacity-building efforts, noting that reliable and timely funding to partners, with a focus on transparency and accountability for results, was key.

57. Several delegations noted that the inclusion of refugees in national development plans was essential and welcomed the strong refugee participation at the GRF, reflecting UNHCR's accountability to affected populations. The commitment of the humanitarian community, for example in co-leading the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) results group on accountability and inclusion, was seen as critical to strengthening operational responses and

ensuring that persons of concern were informed and could participate in prioritization throughout the year. UNHCR's role in developing the IASC guidelines on disability inclusion was commended, and the Committee stressed that it would be important to monitor their impact on the Office's programme. Delegations expressed an interest in learning more about how UNHCR was strengthening its monitoring and evaluation capacity at the field level and how this informed its results-based management renewal project. Also highlighted was the importance of partnerships in areas such as mental health, gender and accountability, and climate change and environmental sustainability.

58. The Director indicated that UNHCR would provide information on its partnership with the private sector in future briefings and that an update on the review of the refugee coordination model would be organized in the near future. In response to queries on multi-year funding for implementing partners, she noted that UNHCR had expanded this to over 33 partnerships. She highlighted that UNHCR had observed a shift in the inclusion of displaced persons by other United Nations organizations and that the GRF had played a key role in this change. In response to the remarks on COVID-19, the Director stressed that UNHCR was working closely with IOM, OCHA and WHO on an inter-agency response to the outbreak.

59. The Head of the Partnerships and Coordination Service informed the Committee that UNHCR had worked closely with NGO partners to ensure the meaningful participation of refugees in decision-making processes and was striving to include a diverse array of actors among its partners. He welcomed the idea of the inter-agency learning programme being made available to an external audience and thanked delegations for their positive comments on UNHCR's participation in the IASC results group on mental health. In response to the interest expressed in the paper intended for UNHCR field staff on the sustainable development goals, he confirmed that it would soon be issued. Responding to a question on the evaluation of coordination structures, he welcomed this suggestion and indicated that UNHCR would consult with the IASC on the matter.

VII. Programme budgets and funding

A. Update on budgets and funding (2019 and 2020-2021)

60. The Controller and Director of the Division of Financial Administration and Management (DFAM) presented the update on budgets and funding for 2019 and 2020-2021 (EC/71/SC/CRP.6). He noted that the budget for 2019 had remained stable at \$8.6 billion and that provisional figures for 2019 indicated a record high expenditure of over \$4.4 billion. The Controller informed the Committee that the budgets for 2020 (\$8.7 billion) and 2021 (\$8.6 billion) had not changed, compared to the appropriation levels approved by the Executive Committee at its seventieth session in October 2019.

61. The Director of DER provided an update on the funding situation for 2019 and 2020. She noted that 76 per cent of contributions came from governments; 13 per cent from United Nations pooled funding and intergovernmental donors; 10 per cent from the private sector (mostly individual giving); and 1 per cent from the United Nations regular budget. She highlighted the importance of unearmarked or loosely earmarked funding for the Office and noted that UNHCR had currently received some \$1.7 billion against a budget of nearly \$8.7 billion for 2020.

62. Member States expressed concern about UNHCR's funding gap of approximately 45 per cent over the last 10 years, despite the increase in the number of persons of concern. One delegation questioned the sustainability of a budget that was so much larger than the funding available. The importance of early disbursement of contributions and flexible funding for the continuation of UNHCR's programmes was emphasized. Concern was also expressed about the lack of funding for protracted situations, in particular in Africa. One delegation requested a briefing on detailed earmarking and called for a "one refugee approach" to ensure that governments could assist all refugees on their territory according to

the same standards. Several delegations noted that the Global Refugee Forum presented a unique opportunity to mobilize further support for refugees and host countries, including from non-traditional donors. One delegation encouraged other donors to step forward and contribute more to UNHCR. A request for an annual update or briefing on management efficiencies and savings was requested, and UNHCR was urged to conduct its prioritization exercises in a transparent manner, involving donors in the field.

63. The Controller thanked delegations for their continued support and reiterated the importance of timely cash payments to ensure the continuity of UNHCR's operations. He informed the Committee that UNHCR was working on a statement of internal control to be signed by the High Commissioner and also agreed to organize an annual briefing on management efficiencies. Regarding UNHCR's efforts to expand its donor base, the Director of DER noted that the Office was working on this, including with the countries of the Cooperation Council of the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) and China, as well as with development actors.

64. The draft decision on budgets and funding for 2019 and 2020-2021 was adopted.

B. UNHCR's reserves as of 2022

65. The Controller and Director of DFAM presented the paper on UNHCR's reserves as of 2022 (EC/71/SC/CRP.5), proposing to reduce the operational and new and additional activities-mandate related (NAM) reserves. He explained that these reductions would not affect UNHCR's operational budgets, as it was rather a reduction of budgetary space. Experience of the last years showed that the organization did not have a need for such a large reserve, set at 10 per cent of pillars 1 and 2. There were two possible scenarios, with the first one setting the operational reserve at 5 per cent and abolishing the NAM being the preferred one. The Controller also explained that, currently, transfers from the operational reserve were limited to \$10 million per transfer. It was proposed to increase this cap to \$50 million in order to reduce the number of transfers. If the Committee agreed with these proposals, UNHCR would present a revision of its financial rules to the seventy-first session of the Executive Committee for endorsement, which would then be promulgated by the High Commissioner with effect from 1 January 2022.

66. Delegations expressed support for the first scenario of reducing the operational reserve to 5 per cent and abolishing the NAM, and agreed with increasing the cap on the transfers from the reserves. The draft decision on a proposed revision of the financial rules was accordingly adopted.

VIII. Any other business

67. The Committee was briefed on the preparations for the twelfth High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges, which would be held at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland from 8 to 9 December 2020. The High Commissioner's Special Advisor on Climate Change indicated that UNHCR was exploring the theme of climate change, disasters and displacement for this year's Dialogue. He highlighted that environmental factors, including climate change, environmental degradation and natural disasters increasingly intersected with drivers of displacement. Against this background, the Dialogue would provide a unique opportunity to assess protection considerations, including the relevance and adaptability of existing protection frameworks and tools, and to examine operational approaches such as mitigation and prevention measures. The Head of the GRF Coordination Team noted that the Dialogue would also be an opportunity to take stock of progress made in the implementation of pledges made at the GRF, particularly those related to addressing climate change and promoting refugee access to sustainable energy. The Committee was informed that UNHCR was exploring innovative ways to include affected communities in developing the concept of the Dialogue. Going forward, UNHCR would keep the Committee informed of the theme and modalities, including any preparatory meetings, particularly in light of the COVID-19 situation.

68. In line with the practice of adopting the reports of the Standing Committee meetings through an electronic circulation process, the Chairperson indicated that the report on the seventy-seventh meeting would be prepared by the Secretariat and circulated for comments by 2 April. Following a two-week review period, any comments or corrections from Member States in relation to their interventions would be incorporated, and the report would be subsequently recirculated and considered adopted.

Annex I

Decision on budgets and funding for 2019 and 2020-2021

The Standing Committee,

Recalling the Executive Committee's decisions, at its sixty-eighth and sixty-ninth sessions on administrative, financial and programme matters (A/AC.96/1176, para. 14 and A/AC.96/1187, para. 13), as well as its discussions under the programme budgets and funding item at the seventy-sixth meeting of the Standing Committee in September 2019,

Reaffirming the importance of responsibility-sharing in solidarity with countries hosting refugees,

Recalls that the Executive Committee, at its sixty-eighth session, approved original programmes and budgets for regional programmes, global programmes and headquarters under UNHCR's 2018-2019 biennial programme budget, amounting to \$7,508.4 million and \$7,352.3 million for 2018 and 2019, respectively,

Recalls that the Executive Committee, at its sixty-ninth session, approved revised programmes and budgets for regional programmes, global programmes and headquarters under UNHCR's 2018-2019 biennial programme budget (revised), amounting to \$8,275.3 million and \$8,591.1 million for 2018 and 2019 respectively,

Notes that the final 2019 supplementary budgets amounted to \$107.4 million for programmes benefiting UNHCR's global refugee programme, and projects for internally displaced persons,

Takes note of the increase in UNHCR's annual budget for 2019 to a final total of \$8,635.9 million, representing the sum of the revised budget of \$8,591.1 million and the final supplementary budgets of \$107.4 million and taking into account a budget reduction of \$62.6 million,

Recalls that the Executive Committee, at its seventieth session in October 2019, approved original programmes and budgets for regional programmes, global programmes and headquarters under UNHCR's 2020-2021 biennial programme budget, amounting to \$8,667.7 million and \$8,615.8 million for 2020 and 2021 respectively (A/AC.96/1198, para. 13 (c)),

Takes note of the UNHCR's annual budgets for 2020 and 2021 as of 31 January 2020, which have remained unchanged from the amounts originally approved by the Executive Committee,

Recognizes that emergencies and unforeseen activities unfolding in 2020 may result in the need for additional or expanded supplementary budgets and that additional resources, over and above those for existing budgets, would be needed to meet such needs, and

Urges member States to continue to respond generously, in the spirit of solidarity and in a timely manner, to the High Commissioner's appeal for resources to meet in full the annual budget for 2020.

Annex II

Decision on UNHCR's draft programme in the Secretary-General's proposed programme budget for 2021

The Standing Committee,

Takes note of part VI, section 25, programme 21: International protection, durable solutions and assistance to refugees of the United Nations proposed programme budget for 2021.

Annex III

Decision on a proposed revision of the financial rules

The Standing Committee,

Having considered the proposed revision of the financial rules for voluntary funds administered by the High Commissioner for Refugees (A/AC.96/503/Rev.10), as set out in annex I of conference room paper EC/71/SC.CRP.5,

Requests the High Commissioner to submit a final draft of the revised financial rules (A/AC.96/503/Rev.11) to the seventy-first session of the Executive Committee for endorsement, and for subsequent promulgation by the High Commissioner with effect from 1 January 2022.
