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Summary record of the 696th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 4 October 2016, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. Staur..... (Denmark)

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

General debate (*continued*)

1. **Ms. Basilia** (Georgia) said that the integration of asylum seekers, refugees and persons entitled to protection on humanitarian grounds was an imperative for the Government of her country. They were provided with access to health care, education, employment and, since 2016, free legal assistance; they also received a monthly allowance. In the past three years, Georgia had received some 4,000 asylum seekers, including 706 in 2016 alone. As a result of the armed conflicts of the 1990s and the war between the Russian Federation and Georgia in 2008, which had resulted in the occupation of more than 20 per cent of Georgian territory, over 270,000 Georgians were still living in protracted displacement. Her Government was committed to ensuring that all displaced persons lived in dignity and providing them with lasting solutions. To date, such solutions had been found for only 33,534 Georgian families.
2. **Mr. Abera** (Ethiopia) said that his country aligned itself with the statement made by the Sudan on behalf of the African Group. Ethiopia had nearly 750,000 refugees, a number that was expected to increase in the coming months, as in September 2016 there had been an influx of nearly 30,000 refugees from South Sudan, which had placed a heavy burden on the already overstretched programme of assistance to refugees. The shortage of basic services, the search for alternative sources of fuel and resource constraints were potential sources of conflict between the refugees and host communities. Ethiopia had made eight far-reaching pledges at the United Nations Summit for Refugees and Migrants, held in New York in September 2016; they had included a pledge to expand eligibility for the “out-of-camp” policy to 75,000 refugees, provide 20,000 hectares of irrigable land, ensure the local integration of 13,000 refugees, and provide work permits and access to education and other basic services. Without enhanced international support and development financing, however, it would not be possible to honour those pledges.
3. **Mr. Valero** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that his country had granted international protection to hundreds of thousands of immigrants, chiefly Colombians, and that it was promoting the integration of the 7,578 refugees in its territory, of whom 98 per cent were from Colombia. Specific measures had been taken to ensure the protection not only of asylum seekers but also of potential victims of smuggling and trafficking in human beings, and persons at risk of statelessness.
4. **Ms. Menéndez Pérez** (Spain) said that her country which endorsed the statement made on behalf of the European Union (EU), had decided to take in nearly 16,000 refugees within two years to help resolve the humanitarian crisis of 2015. Special attention would be given to the most vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied minors, minors with disabilities and women, and measures would be taken to promote their integration into Spanish society. In 2016, Spain had allocated 44 per cent of humanitarian funding to programmes or projects for refugees or displaced persons. The efforts made by countries hosting millions of refugees, to the detriment of their own economic and social fabric and their legitimate aspirations to development, must be acknowledged and lead to enhanced support and cooperation with a view to helping them manage the situation. Mass displacement crises could not be resolved unless the international community, through appropriate political responses, proved capable of addressing the root causes of those crises and preventing conflict. Spain intended to be a constructive participant in the process of developing a global compact on refugees.
5. **Ms. Rebong** (Philippines) said that her country was committed to providing humanitarian assistance to refugees and continuing its support for the Emergency Transit Mechanism set up by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration to ensure the protection, in host

countries, of refugees who were at risk of refoulement or persecution in their countries of origin. The Philippines continued cooperating under the Mechanism despite the human and financial challenges posed by attending to thousands of persons displaced by the typhoons and other disasters that affected the country every year. The Philippines would also continue to participate in the search for methods of addressing the root causes of cross-border movements.

6. **Mr. Van Schreven** (Netherlands) said that his country endorsed the statement made on behalf of the EU. The world seemed to be getting used to the huge numbers of refugees and protracted humanitarian crises, when in fact the situation was abnormal and unacceptable. The Netherlands proposed that the international community should set a target to bring the number of displaced persons down by two thirds by 2030, from the current 65 million to less than 20 million. The international community must make every effort to ensure that consensus was reached on a global compact on refugees in 2018. UNHCR, which played a crucial role in addressing the consequences of the ongoing conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, played a similar role in other crises — most of them protracted or forgotten — and should therefore be able to rely on unearmarked funds. The Netherlands had increased its unearmarked contribution to UNHCR and called on all donors to do likewise. In return, UNHCR could explain more clearly how those funds were spent.

7. **Ms. Hakala** (Finland) said that her country contributed more to UNHCR than to any other humanitarian organization and that more than one third of the funds it contributed were unearmarked. Finland echoed the call made in New York in September 2016 for more countries to share responsibility for refugees and establish resettlement programmes. In 2015, on the arrival in Finland of an unexpected number of asylum seekers, the Government had scaled up its reception capacity, with special attention to vulnerable persons. Finland had also taken in a large number of asylum seekers arriving from Greece and Italy as part of the EU relocation plan.

8. **Ms. Korka** (Greece) said that she welcomed the adoption of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, the first step towards a comprehensive response to the refugee problem, based on the principles of international cooperation, solidarity and shared responsibility. Greece also welcomed the commitments made at the United Nations Summit for Refugees and Migrants. Countries on the front line could not shoulder alone the burden of refugees fleeing war and persecution. A million people had crossed the Aegean Sea in 2015, and many had perished on the way. In 2016, the implementation of the agreement between the EU and Turkey had made it possible to reduce the number of deaths in the Aegean and to combat trafficking more efficiently. Nonetheless, some 60,000 people had been stranded in Greece, particularly in Idomeni, as a result of the closure of the Balkan route. The entire country had organized to deal with the situation. It currently had the capacity to host nearly 64,000 refugees, many in apartments, thereby facilitating integration and strengthening social cohesion. On the islands, registration and identification centres were still overcrowded; the relocation of refugees to the mainland was a priority. Greece thanked UNHCR for its contribution to the pre-registration of asylum seekers and expressed the hope that the European Asylum Support Office would also provide additional support, especially on the islands. Lastly, the country was particularly attentive to the situation of refugee children; the measures taken had made it possible to enrol approximately 18,000 of them in school for the 2016/17 school year.

9. **Mr. Choi Kyong-lim** (Republic of Korea) said that his country was concerned about the financing of UNHCR activities. The commitments made in Istanbul and New York must be honoured, contributions must increase, including by engaging more actively with the private sector, and scarce resources must be used as effectively as possible. The Republic of Korea, which received many refugees from the Democratic People's Republic

of Korea, had adopted a refugee law and quintupled its contribution to UNHCR over the past five years. It was particularly focused on the situation of women and children. An unprecedented crisis required unprecedented measures. It was to be hoped that the international community would make the necessary efforts.

10. **Ms. Kostadinova** (Bulgaria) said that her country fully supported the statement made on behalf of the EU. Bulgaria welcomed the adoption of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and would participate in the negotiation of the global compact on refugees. It had launched its first national resettlement programme: 40 people were expected to be resettled in 2016, and 50 in 2017. Throughout the asylum procedure, efforts were focused on the most vulnerable persons and children, the aim being to facilitate their integration in Bulgarian society. As at the end of August 2016, 12,116 applications for international protection had been registered, putting the Bulgarian asylum and accommodation system under increasing migratory pressure. Her country nonetheless remained committed to providing support to the countries most affected by the crisis and to continuing to cooperate with UNHCR and other partners.

11. **Mr. Serra** (Italy) said that his country endorsed the statement made on behalf of the EU and its member States. For 2016, Italy had pledged US\$ 24.5 million for the resolution of major crises in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Since 2011, Italian Development Cooperation had helped more than 4 million Syrian refugees in Libya, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. The notions of responsibility and burden-sharing must be at the core of the international response to the refugee crisis. With that in mind, Italy had developed a plan for partnership with African countries of origin and organized the First Italy-Africa Ministerial Conference, held in Rome on 18 May. Italy had also participated in the launch of the Khartoum Process and contributed to the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. Lastly, Italy, which played a leading role in rescue operations in the Mediterranean, congratulated Greece on the efforts of the Hellenic Rescue Team and Efi Latsoudi, joint winners of the Nansen Refugee Award.

12. **Archbishop Jurkovič** (Holy See) expressed the concern of the Holy See at the unprecedented scale and nature of the ongoing crises. The international community had an ethical duty to address them without delay and in a spirit of solidarity. Promises and pledges had been made, but the rights of refugees continued to be violated, and the globalization of indifference was a growing risk. The provisions of the conventions relating to refugees must be implemented, and the investments that would enable refugees to be agents of development rather than merely tolerated guests must be made. The international community must address the root causes of mass displacement and develop effective early warning mechanisms. It must address issues involving the arms trade, the provision of raw materials and energy, sustainable development, corruption and inequality. Prevention, protection and solutions were inextricably linked. Political will and leadership, at both the national and the global levels, were essential.

13. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that he welcomed the efforts made by the various countries and their support for UNHCR activities.

14. **Mr. Thioune** (Senegal) said that his delegation supported the statement made on behalf of the African Group. The international community had become aware of the magnitude of the problem of refugees and displaced persons, but the situation was still worrisome. Humanitarian assistance as a whole should be reworked to focus on preventing conflict, resolving domestic and international disputes, and deterrence with regard to the use of weapons. The resettlement and reintegration of refugees must also be facilitated. The international community must make new commitments equal to the challenges of protecting refugees and displaced persons. Senegal, for its part, had incorporated into its legislation the principles of international protection for refugees, and it remained a haven for

population groups in difficulty despite the insecurity and political instability in sub-Saharan Africa.

15. **Mr. Haljanov** (Turkmenistan) said that, in view of the current state of world affairs, closer, more coordinated and more transparent cooperation would be required if peace and security were to prevail. Countries of origin, countries of transit and countries receiving refugees must find a reasonable balance between the protection of their interests and that of the interests of the entire international community. Refugees were not to blame for the situation: they were the victims. There was a need to address the root causes of displacement — namely, political instability, humanitarian disasters and economic hardship. States should rely on international law and on the United Nations to defuse conflicts and resolve disputes. Turkmenistan had incorporated into domestic law the provisions of the instruments relating to the status of refugees and stateless persons to which it was a party. In 2005 and in 2011, it had thus granted Turkmen citizenship or resident status to thousands of refugees or stateless persons. In 2012, his Government, together with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and UNHCR, had organized an international conference on refugees in the Muslim world. Turkmenistan remained committed to contributing to global security.

16. **Mr. Chir** (Algeria) said that his delegation endorsed the statement made by the Sudan on behalf of the African Group. The unprecedented flows of refugees and displaced persons had aroused both sympathy and rejection. The host communities and countries, most of which were developing countries, had shown great solidarity, but they were being sorely tested, as the burden was distributed unevenly. The international community must make every effort to prevent and resolve conflicts and collectively address their root causes. Strengthening the link between humanitarian action and development could provide short-term responses to the needs of refugees, but such an approach entailed a risk of politicizing and making conditional the delivery of the humanitarian assistance to which refugees were entitled. In the future, UNHCR would need to take into account possible signs of fatigue on the part of donors, host countries and refugees. Algeria, for its part, maintained its tradition of offering hospitality and assistance and its commitment to the prevention and resolution of crises, as reflected in the welcome that, for more than 40 years, it had extended to Saharan refugees.

17. **Mr. Stachańczyk** (Poland) said that his country supported the statement of the EU and that it had increased the humanitarian and development aid it provided to the Middle East and to countries in the East. Aid took the form of in-kind support and financial contributions made to the United Nations and the EU and in the context of bilateral cooperation. Poland, fulfilling its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention, kept open legal pathways for the entry of Ukrainian nationals, including through a simplified mechanism for the migration of labour. Since the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine, 120,000 Ukrainians had applied for temporary residence and more than 1 million had entered Poland on special visas. Poland welcomed the adoption of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants.

18. **Mr. Ramadan** (Egypt) said that his country, which endorsed the statement made by the delegation of the Sudan on behalf of the African Group, hosted many refugees but that the refugees who were registered accounted for a small fraction of the real number in Egypt. In general, developing countries absorbed more than three quarters of all refugees despite their limited resources and their economic difficulties, a situation that confronted them with the dilemma of honouring their international commitments or providing an adequate standard of living for their people so that they did not emigrate. As the annual budget shortfall of UNHCR constituted a great burden for African countries, Egypt called on States and donors not to earmark the contributions they made to UNHCR and to grant it flexibility in the management of its resources.

19. **Mr. Lomónaco** (Mexico) said that his country was concerned about the steady increase in the deficit of UNHCR, which would reach 49.4 per cent of its total budget in 2016. Mexico had supported the adoption of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and co-sponsored the Leaders' Summit on the Global Refugee Crisis, organized by the President of the United States. Those two events had been an opportunity for participating States to reject indifference. Mexico was a member of the steering group of the Platform on Disaster Displacement and participated in the implementation of the Brazil Plan of Action. It had taken part in the London conference entitled "Supporting Syria and the Region", and at the Leaders' Summit on the Global Refugee Crisis it had contributed US\$ 4 million to the 2016 Syrian Arab Republic Humanitarian Response Plan. In the past four years, Mexico had received nearly 12,000 applications for asylum. In the first eight months of 2016, it had already received 5,000, four times more than in all 2013. Given that situation, Mexico was in favour of taking seven specific steps: engaging in closer dialogue with the countries of Central America, the United States, Canada and UNHCR; promoting the socioeconomic integration of refugees; strengthening procedures for refugee status based on international standards; expanding the presence of the Mexican Commission for Aid to Refugees; encouraging alternatives to the administrative detention of asylum seekers; running outreach campaigns on the right to seek asylum; and identifying the protection needs of unaccompanied minors.

20. **Mr. Matthews** (United Kingdom) said that his country, which supported the statement of the EU, had made an abiding commitment at the General Assembly to spending 0.7 per cent of its gross national income on international development and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. At the Leaders' Summit on the Global Refugee Crisis, the United Kingdom had announced that it would increase its annual humanitarian assistance to more than US\$ 2 billion for the period 2016-2017. It had signed a jobs compact, to which it would contribute US\$ 104 million, with the Government of Ethiopia, the World Bank, the EU and the European Investment Bank for the creation of 100,000 jobs and to enable refugees to work outside camps. On 21 September 2016, at the General Assembly, the Secretary of State for International Development, Ms. Priti Patel, had reported on the substantial progress made since February 2016; US\$ 4.7 billion had been delivered, 80 per cent of the US\$ 6 billion pledged for 2016.

21. **Mr. Auajjar** (Morocco) said that he welcomed the adoption of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and the efforts made by UNHCR to set up a biometric system for refugee registration and identity management in several countries. In that connection, he drew the attention of UNHCR to the need to register the people living in the Tindouf camps, in accordance with the overall mandate of UNHCR and recent Security Council resolutions, pending their return to Morocco. In 2013, Morocco had put in place a migration policy based on a humanitarian approach, which included a plan for the integration of migrants and refugees that would enable them to enjoy civil, political, social and cultural rights on the same basis as Moroccan citizens. In November 2013, it had initiated the large-scale regularization of migrants in an irregular situation, which had continued throughout 2014 and 2015. In addition, Morocco had taken steps to regularize 5,000 Syrian refugees and thus give them access to the labour market. It had also decided to offer scholarships to Syrian refugees in order to alleviate the burden on the countries neighbouring the Syrian Arab Republic.

22. **Mr. Hajnoczi** (Austria) said that his country greatly admired the efforts made by the countries neighbouring the Syrian Arab Republic, which received the overwhelming majority of Syrian refugees (a total of about 5 million people), and applauded their generosity. The contribution made by Austria for direct bilateral development aid had doubled, and the amount allocated to the main federal fund for humanitarian assistance had increased fourfold. In 2015, more than 1 million people had transited through Austria on their way to other European countries, and nearly 100,000 had decided to settle in Austria

and seek asylum there, thus giving the country the second largest number of asylum seekers per capita of the 28 States members of the EU. Since 2015, Austria had made substantial investments to address the situation, and asylum seekers in need were entitled to basic services, including shelter, food, health care, pocket money, clothing, school supplies, recreation and social assistance. Austria had also increased its expenditure on integration measures, such as language and orientation courses. It had responded to the appeals launched by UNHCR since 2013 for the admission and resettlement of Syrian refugees on humanitarian grounds, as it had undertaken to admit 1,900, including 1,500 who had already arrived in the country, where they enjoyed permanent protection. Another programme to resettle 400 refugees had recently been launched in close cooperation with UNHCR.

23. **Ms. Kosa-Ammari** (Latvia) said that her country, which endorsed the statement of the EU, had contributed 50,000 euros to the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan designed to provide assistance to Syrian refugees, and taken in refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic, Eritrea and other countries. Her Government was exploring the most appropriate integration methods, and Latvian NGOs were at the forefront of efforts to ensure that the newcomers felt at home. Latvian volunteers were involved in the “I want to help refugees” initiative on Facebook, the purpose of which was to organize sporting, cultural and seasonal events, meet the needs of new arrivals and encourage people to get to know each other. Latvian families also provided accommodation to families of refugees whose status in Latvia had been defined. Latvia supported #IBelong, the UNHCR campaign to end statelessness and had acceded to both statelessness conventions. It had taken in a small number of stateless persons (178 on 1 July 2016) and they were given the care they needed: they were registered, their applications for naturalization were examined free of charge and they were offered avenues for acquiring Latvian citizenship in due time.

24. **Ms. O’Brien** (Ireland) said that her country aligned itself with the statement made on behalf of the EU. As a result of the mass emigration experienced by Ireland (in the 1960s, the population of Ireland had been less than half of what it had been in the 1840s), the Irish naturally empathized with people fleeing war and persecution in search of a safe haven for themselves and their families. Ireland welcomed the adoption of the New York Declaration for Migrants and Refugees and the commitment to implementing a Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework. It was proud to have facilitated, together with Jordan, the holding of the United Nations Summit for Refugees and Migrants. In the belief that the Summit’s outcome documents conveyed a political commitment to ensuring that refugees were provided with the essential services to which they were entitled, Ireland recognized the critical importance of international and regional cooperation in that regard and subscribed to the resettlement and relocation solutions adopted by the EU.

25. **Ms. Laurin** (France) said that her country endorsed the statement of the EU. In the period 2016-2018, France would set aside more than 1 billion euros for the Syrian crisis and support for the countries neighbouring the Syrian Arab Republic. It had undertaken to allocate 200 million euros over three years for emergency humanitarian assistance, education and vocational training, mainly in Lebanon, and it would make available to Jordan loans totalling about 1 billion euros. In the framework of the Valletta Action Plan, France had supported the establishment of a new European trust fund designed to prevent irregular migration and forced displacement in Africa. France, which viewed safeguarding humanitarian space as a priority, continued to call for assurances of safe, immediate and unhindered humanitarian access for all people in need of assistance. It supported an approach informed by age, gender and diversity perspectives, which was an effective tool in protection and prevention.

26. **Ms. Majali** (Jordan) said that her country was hosting more than 1.3 million Syrian refugees, equivalent to approximately 20 per cent of the Jordanian population, and that it

had the world's second largest refugee population in relation to national population. Only 12 per cent of Syrian refugees were living in camps. Jordan had only limited means, so for the moment it had been able to finance only 12 per cent of its Refugee Response Plan 2016-2018. Despite the assistance it had received from the international community, it was struggling to meet its humanitarian obligations towards the refugees.

27. **Ms. Horváth** (Hungary) said that her country endorsed the statement made on behalf of the EU and its member States. Hungary was convinced that the various measures it had taken — in accordance with international law and the legislation of the EU — to address the major security risk posed by migrants who illegally crossed borders were indispensable for orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration; those who wished to enter the country legally and seek asylum in good faith were always able to do so. It was important to make a clear distinction between migrants and refugees, so that the limited resources available were allocated to those in need of international protection.

28. **Mr. Cima** (Argentina) said that his country had reaffirmed its commitment to receiving in progressive and responsible fashion Syrian refugees of all faiths from the Syrian Arab Republic or neighbouring countries, with priority given to families with children. Syrian refugees were taken in through a number of mechanisms, including a special programme of humanitarian visas for foreigners affected by the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, which had been in force since 2014 and had recently been updated and strengthened. A task force on local integration of refugees had also been set up by the National Refugee Commission.

29. **Mr. Ahsan** (Bangladesh) said that for more than 30 years Bangladesh had been home to a large number of refugees from Myanmar and that it continued to meet its obligations towards them despite the limited resources at its disposal and the social, economic environmental and political challenges facing it. States must continue their efforts to find lasting solutions for refugees, and priority must be given to voluntary repatriation. Efforts should also be made, in particular by addressing the root causes of displacement, to ensure that refugees could return to their country of origin in a dignified manner.

30. **Mr. Rosocha** (Slovakia) said that his country endorsed the statement made on behalf of the EU and its member States. In 2016, Slovakia had considerably increased its financial contribution to the work of UNHCR and other partners by providing some US\$ 15 million for refugee assistance. It had also committed to receiving even more refugees in the coming years. It welcomed the progress made in the reduction of statelessness, in particular the accession of more States to the two statelessness conventions, and called on States that had not yet acceded to them to do so. Slovakia, currently holding the Presidency of the European Union, was focusing on several priorities in the area of international protection and asylum, including advocacy of respect for international law and international obligations by all parties; the establishment of partnerships and collaboration agreements with countries of origin and transit; further development of the Common European Asylum System; and the integration of third-country nationals.

31. **Ms. Camilli Prado** (Uruguay) said that her country had ratified all the international instruments for the protection of refugees and stateless persons and had also participated in the regional initiatives in support of those persons, which had led to the adoption of the Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action. Since 2014, Uruguay had in place a programme for the resettlement of Syrian refugees, and it had pledged to work with UNHCR towards the adoption in 2018 of a global compact for all refugees. It supported the UNHCR campaign for the elimination of statelessness and urged the international community to work towards the total eradication of that form of human rights violation.

32. **Mr. Muylle** (Belgium) said that his country endorsed the statement made on behalf of the EU and its member States. In 2016, Belgium had made a financial contribution to humanitarian aid for refugees that was 25 per cent larger than in 2015. It had disbursed some 92 million euros, including 19.4 million euros for UNHCR. Belgium earmarked half of the official development assistance it provided for the least developed countries to enable them to reduce the vulnerability of internally displaced persons, make them more resilient and integrate them into host communities. Belgium called on UNHCR to work towards halting and reversing the growth of the funding shortfall, including by widening its donor base and taking more innovative approaches.

33. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that he welcomed the efforts made by Senegal, Turkmenistan, Algeria, Poland, Egypt, Mexico, the United Kingdom, Morocco, Austria, Latvia, Ireland, France, Jordan, Hungary, Argentina, Bangladesh, Slovakia, Uruguay and Belgium and the support they showed for the work of UNHCR.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.