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New York

Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Abarry	(Niger)
<i>Members:</i>	China	Mr. Zhang Jun
	Estonia	Mr. Jürgenson
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	India	Mr. Tirumurti
	Ireland	Ms. Byrne Nason
	Kenya	Mr. Kimani
	Mexico	Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez
	Norway	Ms. Huitfeldt
	Russian Federation	Mr. Kuzmin
	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Ms. King
	Tunisia	Mr. Ladeb
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Kariuki
	United States of America	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield
	Viet Nam	Mr. Pham

Agenda

Briefing by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Briefing by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Grandi.

Mr. Grandi: I thank you, Mr. President, for the invitation. I am very honoured to be able to have this opportunity during the Niger's presidency. I apologize for not being able to be there in person to address the Security Council.

This is an opportunity, from the perspective of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), to highlight the role that the Niger has played over the past few years. It is a very exemplary role in terms of addressing forced displacement. As a country with limited resources in the middle of a very troubled area, the Niger is always ready to host people in distress, in a good spirit of solidarity. I am talking about both people coming from neighbouring countries and people evacuated from Libya.

Just to remind everyone, more than 11,000 more refugees arrived in the Niger from northern Nigeria just last month — bringing to 600,000 the total population of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Niger.

Like in many other developing countries — and I would like to remind everyone that 90 per cent of the world's 84 million refugees and displaced persons find themselves in developing countries — people in the Niger face a perfect storm as the consequences of the coronavirus disease pandemic, climate change and conflict come together, often creating situations of forced displacement, which in themselves create additional challenges.

For example, the Sahel is the place where it is most obvious that there is a direct correlation between the

climate emergency, conflict over scarce resources and forced displacement. That serves to underscore the importance — which I know the Council has discussed many times — of putting the climate emergency front and centre on the Council's agenda.

With such challenges, which of course are present as well in other parts of the world, the multilateral system has probably never been as important. Yet, sadly, as we all know, the international system seems to be more prone to failure than ever before. And international failure has many faces. It includes instability and insecurity, which are issues the Council deals with every day, but also famine, disaster and the collapse of States, which, again, the Council hears very much about.

But it also includes forced displacement, which is one of my main messages today. This continues to draw attention, although perhaps a bit more intermittently and, in particular, if I may say, when it affects countries in the global North. That is when it hits the headlines and attracts attention, although it is always a consequence of all other failures. Forced displacement also continues to be subjected to political manipulation and, many times, to generate overblown reactions. Very recently, we saw a mix of all those elements in the crisis that developed on the border between Belarus and some European Union countries.

Failure and inaction have other consequences as well. For example, they compel us humanitarians to work in situations that are increasingly uncertain and that expose us to very difficult dilemmas. International failures compel us to engage with all types of interlocutors, including some that are not recognized internationally. More and more, we speak about dealing with "de facto" authorities in many countries — which, of course, we do. As humanitarians, we speak to whomever is in control of the areas in which we have to operate.

But the types of situations in which we are finding ourselves create limitations to our very work. Such situations are also very often made more complicated by political difficulties, the existence of sanctions and other restrictions to the necessary dialogue and engagement. That prevents the finding of solutions and often aggravates humanitarian needs and makes them more protracted. As has frequently been the case, that leaves humanitarians to work alone in the face of the difficulties and challenges, amid an increasing

set of expectations that humanitarians can “solve”, while in reality it is becoming even more difficult to “save” — which is our primary responsibility.

Think of Myanmar. Think of Yemen. Think, to a certain extent — where we have seen this lately, but hopefully we will emerge from it — of the Sudan and other places. Most starkly, we see such a situation in Afghanistan. I would like to recall, as the Council probably knows already, that there are 39 million people in Afghanistan, 23 million of whom face extreme levels of hunger. But they are also facing other humanitarian challenges, such as a lack of housing, poor health and a lack of clean water, as well as a host of protection challenges. Of course, forced displacement also continues to be an important feature of the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, with an estimated 3.5 million people displaced by conflict, and 700,000 in recent months alone, especially just before 15 August. I saw that myself when I visited Afghanistan in September. I also saw humanitarian agencies stepping up. Just to give a sense from our perspective, each week my organization, UNHCR, is able to reach 60,000 displaced persons with concrete assistance. The same goes for other humanitarian agencies.

As Council members know, we are proud of the choice we made in August to stay and deliver, because that has also allowed us to engage the Taliban on the very important issue of rights — the rights of women and girls and the rights of minorities — on which limited progress has occurred. But I think we need to continue to note that progress and build on it and try to push that those agendas further.

I have one word of warning that Council members will have heard before. Humanitarian agencies, in spite of the work that we do and are doing, cannot replicate the role of States. We cannot save economies. We cannot make societies fully functional. We are not a replacement for real engagement and political solutions. I fully understand the complexities of the situation. I appreciate the work that is being done, with the cooperation of many countries represented here, to try and find a way forward to ensure services, cash flow and the functioning of society of the economy.

But I wish to join colleagues who have already warned the Council many times that slow progress around this fundamental issue is very risky at this point. From my perspective — the perspective of the refugee organization — I have to report that, although

it is certainly not dramatic and not yet a major symptom or a major consequence, we have seen an initial sign, an uptick, of Afghans trying to leave the country in recent weeks. We firmly believe, and I said this many times, that a deeper and more and more widespread implosion of states and of the economy will almost inevitably trigger a much bigger outflow of Afghans to neighbouring countries and even beyond.

Of course, meanwhile, I can assure the Council once more that we will continue to use what is now a relatively safer space — safer than before — prevailing in the country. Just to give one example, we estimate that about 150,000 internally displaced persons have actually returned to their homes following the 15 August change in authorities. We will continue to meet urgent needs, prepare for winter and try to prevent that major outflow, and we will continue to need humanitarian resources. If I may make a very specific appeal to the Security Council, we need the widest scope for humanitarian exception for the sanctions regime in order to be able to function properly.

Finally on Afghanistan, I would ask the Council not to forget that it is important to keep a supportive eye on its neighbours and step up the support that is provided to them. Iran and Pakistan have hosted Afghan refugees for generations. They continue to host millions, and enhanced aid and resettlement places are in order at this difficult time and in the uncertainty of what may happen next in terms of outflow.

Another outcome of what I hold to be an international failure and that I want to bring to the Council’s attention today is the increasing politicization of humanitarian and, specifically, refugee work. I am not naive. I have learned through many years of working on this issue that we must be able, as humanitarian and refugee workers, to navigate very intricate political issues. What I fear more, or more specifically, is the paralysis of humanitarian action that is generated by conflicting political agendas interfering with that action. This increasingly prevents us from helping people as much as we should be able to.

The situation of Syria presents some such features. The humanitarian situation inside the country, which I visited in October, is worsening as a result of conflict, lack of resources, the effects of sanctions and the political and economic crisis in nearby Lebanon. What I have observed is queues for bread and fuel, for example, that have not been seen in Syria for a long time, and a

very severe lack of services and access to livelihoods, especially outside Damascus. Once again, I appreciate the very complex politics around this situation, but I am also concerned that the slow progress — I think we cannot call it otherwise — towards political solutions is increasingly condemning millions to very hard lives.

Yes, while I understand that reconstruction, in the full sense, must wait for a political agreement, it is important that what we define as “humanitarian” encompass at least the basic needs in the spirit recognized in resolution 2585 (2021). It is important that this apply to all Syrians, whoever controls the area where they live, including, by the way, those who choose to return, be they internally displaced persons — and many internally displaced persons, for one reason or the other, have made the choice to return home — or returning refugees. Of course, many fewer refugees than IDPs have returned home, but those who do make that choice — and there are some who do — must be helped.

I know that this has always been a very controversial issue, but I wish to reiterate my point. The objective here is to remove the obstacles that prevent or discourage people from returning, but removing those obstacles, as I have discussed in Damascus and in many other capitals, will require international corporation — the cooperation of Syria, of course, first and foremost, in removing the security, legal and human rights obstacles that may prevent people from returning, but also the cooperation of donors in ensuring that at least basic humanitarian support is provided to those returning to their communities. We must bear in mind, of course, that this has to happen in parallel with the continuation of support to the countries in the vicinity that are still hosting almost 6 million Syrian refugees, and Lebanon in particular.

Finally, I would like to make a point that I have made many times but that I would be remiss if I did not repeat here today. This is a point that is even more directly related to the Security Council’s core work. The point is that the apparently growing inability of the international community to make and build peace obliges us humanitarian and refugee organizations to work more and more in situations of active conflict and rampant crisis, with rising expectations, once again, of what we can deliver but in circumstances that in reality offer decreasing possibilities to actually deliver.

Yemen, Libya and others are cases in point. Perhaps the most significant example of this situation today is Ethiopia, which Council members know very well. For 13 months now, we have struggled to deliver aid to people in danger amidst two sides that are fixated on a military outcome but have been so far unable to achieve it and have not heeded the Council’s appeals for political negotiations. This has created some of the worst possible humanitarian contexts in the world. Council members know the statistics. Some 20 million people — up to a fifth of the population of that very large country — are estimated to be in need. That is true in Tigre, of course, but also increasingly in other regions like Afar, Amhara and beyond. At least 4 million of those people — one-fifth of those in need — are internally displaced. Access has been very erratic, inadequate and often dangerous. In that context, humanitarian organizations — including United Nations agencies, my own organization and me personally — have been unfairly accused by all sides of taking sides.

There have been phases in those 13 months in which we have been able to step up. For Council members’ information, as they probably know, at UNHCR we have been focusing particularly on situations of displacement — internal displacement and refugees — in Ethiopia through protection, the distribution of aid and the quest for solutions, for example moving people to safer areas. But I have to report that, after the start of the October offensive, the latest round of fighting and now the counter-offensive that we have observed in the past few days, we are actually very quickly sliding back in the limited gains that we made in terms of access and delivery of health.

Many of my colleagues have come to the Security Council to speak about Ethiopia. I would like to join their cause in stressing some very important points.

First of all is the need to impress upon the parties that they need to respect the neutrality of United Nations humanitarian organizations and non-governmental organizations working in the humanitarian field and ensure their safety, including that of national staff of all ethnic origins, which has been an issue, as Council members know. It is important that access not only be granted — much has been said and many words have been spent on that — but also be allowed for the enablers of humanitarian operations, such as the use of cash and the availability of fuel. Otherwise, access alone will not be sufficient.

Of course, from my perspective, a very special appeal is not to lose sight of the refugee angle. For decades, Ethiopia has been host to very large refugee populations — approximately 800,000 — from most neighbouring countries. As is known, those most at risk at this point are the Eritreans who have been severely impacted by the conflict both in Tigray and in urban centres throughout the country. I make a special appeal for the protection of those groups to continue and to be granted without, of course, forgetting — and that may be an indication of things to come in the future — that there are already about 60,000 Ethiopian refugees in the Sudan, with more having arrived in recent days. We hope that it will not be necessary but, just to let Council members know, we are preparing contingency plans for not only more displacement inside Ethiopia, but also for the arrivals of more refugees in countries neighbouring Ethiopia, some of which, as is known, are undergoing a crisis of their own.

I will conclude with a couple of general points. From what I said, and I could provide many other examples, forced displacement continues to be driven by conflict and prices, of course mixed, as I said, with many other factors. I have just returned from 10 days in Mexico and Central America, and I could see how those complex factors intersect with each other, creating incredibly difficult phenomena of human mobility. As I have already said many times today, we at UNHCR understand very well the complexity of political solutions. That is why the Council works on those political solutions.

We spare no effort in continuing to deliver humanitarian aid, often in very difficult circumstances. However, responding has become very expensive. The Security Council knows that the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs recently issued a global appeal, asking for \$41 billion for almost 200,000 people in severe humanitarian need. This very morning here in Geneva, I appealed to the UNHCR donors for \$9 billion for 2022 for 84 million people who are refugees or displaced around the world.

I can assure Council members that we continue to be as creative as we can in our responses. The global compact on refugees and the pledges that were subsequently made at the Global Refugee Forum have been invaluable. We are multiplying the channels of response and support, and we continue to develop new and innovative partnerships with the private sector, international financial institutions and development

actors. Much of that has been truly transformational, which is very important because lives continue despite the lack of political solutions. People continue to need help. They cannot wait. Saving lives cannot wait for political solutions to happen. But, without those solutions, without stopping and reversing conflict and violence and without establishing those all-important foundations of peace, the efforts that we humanitarians make will remain very fragile and millions will continue to be exposed to great insecurity, uncertainty and fear. I am afraid that a failure to find solutions will contribute to more complex and less manageable human mobility. That challenge is clearly evident in many of the countries of Council members.

My final invitation is to reflect on that I have said. Once a year. I have the privilege of briefing this very important organ. It is an opportunity to ask Council members to reflect on all that as they navigate the very complex challenges of peace and security and as they strive, as I hope they do, to be united and coherent in that pursuit.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Grandi for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

I call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway.

Ms. Huitfeldt (Norway): First of all, let me thank the High Commissioner for his very important briefing to us today. Sadly, the high numbers and the grave situations that he highlighted are not new to us, but that does not make them any less serious.

I took note of several of his statements, for example when he underlined the number of refugees in the world living in developing countries. When people leave everything behind to escape from conflict and natural disasters, they often become internally displaced or they seek refuge in neighbouring countries, adding strain to already fragile communities, with many finding shelter in the refugee camps managed by the United Nations and others. Others end up in dangerous situations at the mercy of ruthless smugglers or become unwilling pieces in international power politics. On top of that, the pandemic has made the situation for the most vulnerable even worse.

Let me be clear — we must all help. I believe that we should first help those who are in the most vulnerable situations. For Norway, that means refugees

and internally displaced persons, living in camps and settlements. However, we know that helping and responding to humanitarian needs will not, in itself, tackle the root causes of displacement. We need political will. There is a new momentum created by the High-level Panel on Internal Displacement. Let us use that momentum to strengthen our efforts to find solutions to internal displacement. I believe that we, as an international community, must do three things to address displacement.

First of all, we must focus on prevention. Too often we act too late, with devastating effects on people and communities. We must aim our efforts at preventing situations that force people to flee. That means focusing on armed conflict, climate change and poverty.

Secondly, we must strengthen the links among our humanitarian, development, peacebuilding and human rights work. For our part, that is reflected in Norway's strong commitment to the principles of the nexus. That approach is now being put to the test in Afghanistan. Humanitarian and development actors need to work closely together to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe. If we fail, 20 years of development gains will be at risk.

Thirdly, we must recognize that there are complex links among climate change, natural disasters, vulnerability and displacement. We need better, more reliable information and data on climate and security risks. The work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the Sahel is an encouraging example of how to address those links.

We know that the impacts of modern warfare on the civilian population are devastating. The risk is particularly high when armed conflicts take place in densely populated areas. All parties to conflict must comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law. They must ensure the protection of civilians. Strengthening the protection of civilians will reduce forced displacement, and I urge everyone to recognize the connection between those two.

Norway is a strong supporter of UNHCR and the tremendous work it does for the most vulnerable among us. It can count on our continued support for its work to improve the situation for those who are forced to flee and support for host communities. The challenges are enormous, but we have no other option than continuing to work better together to prevent, protect and support.

Mr. Tirumurti (India): Let me begin by thanking the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for his briefing. I would also like to welcome the presence of Her Excellency the Foreign Minister of Norway.

India's humanitarian response to the refugee issue, particularly those facing persecution, has always been driven by the ideals of compassion and empathy. Throughout history, India has been a land of refuge for those who have faced persecution in foreign lands. Zoroastrians and Jews, when faced with persecution centuries ago, found a ready home in India. If not for India, the Zoroastrian faith may not have survived. Now, both are very much part of India's proud pluralistic culture and heritage. For many of the refugee communities in India, but for India's protection and nurture, they may have lost their heritage, culture and even language.

In contemporary history, India's hospitality and assistance for refugee communities from neighbouring countries are well recorded and appreciated. Be it with respect to the Tibetans or our brothers and sisters from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Myanmar, India has always responded with compassion and understanding. When West Pakistan unleashed genocide on East Pakistan, India hosted millions of refugees and saved them from massacre. India's humanitarian response to the issue of refugees from Bangladesh was one of the most sophisticated and empathetic in contemporary history. That may well have represented one of the first instances of the United Nations concept of the responsibility to protect. If judged by today's standards of human rights and international humanitarian law, the perpetrators should have received a drastically different fate.

Today, India is host to a large number of refugees and our programmes to assist them are managed entirely from our own resources. India has clearly demonstrated at all times abiding commitment towards the principles of international law in protecting refugees. That has been deeply appreciated by the previous United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, who is now the Secretary-General. I hope the current High Commissioner shares those sentiments. India is also committed to facilitating dignified, safe and sustainable return of refugees to their homelands.

On another note, India has also assisted refugees elsewhere, notably through its long-standing partnering with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for

Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). India continues to remain supportive of UNRWA's role in human development and the delivery of humanitarian services. We have enhanced our contribution further in recent years. India's Minister of State for External Affairs participated in the recent UNRWA Ministerial Conference in Brussels and renewed India's commitment to continuing to contribute \$5 million to the Agency in 2022 as well.

The High Commissioner, in his briefing earlier, updated the Council on the refugee crisis across the world and the challenges associated in handling them. We note with concern the surge in the number of refugees and internally displaced persons under the mandate of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which has reached over 91 million people. The magnitude of the problem is indeed worrisome. India appreciates the efforts made by UNHCR in helping refugees in various countries. In that regard, let me make following observations.

First, preventing armed conflicts, countering terrorism, building and sustaining peace by facilitating sustainable development and good governance will prevent people from being forced to leave their homelands. We cannot have States following policies that exacerbate conflicts, on the one hand, and then refusing to tackle refugee influx on the other.

Secondly, the primary duty and responsibility of protecting and assisting internally displaced persons is that of the State concerned. International action should remain within the bounds of the concept of sovereignty, which should not be diluted in any manner. Such action should therefore be taken only at the request of the country concerned.

Thirdly, the refugee issue is a global challenge, and no country alone can resolve it. We must continue to foster a global perspective that promotes the collaboration and participation of all Member States and relevant stakeholders, in line with relevant international law. India supports the central role of the United Nations in dealing with refugee issues. A multilateral platform is always more effective than small groups in building a global consensus and encouraging united action.

Fourthly, we firmly believe that the principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality must be upheld in dealing with refugee matters. That is crucial to maintaining the credibility of the international refugee protection mechanism. Member States and UNHCR

must remain committed to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and avoid the politicization of humanitarian work.

Fifthly, the coronavirus disease pandemic has exacerbated existing humanitarian challenges and refugees are highly exposed to the socioeconomic impact of that crisis. Humanitarian aid has become more important than ever. Member States should provide non-discriminatory and equitable medical services to refugees and take them into account in national pandemic response strategies. We need empathy more than ever.

In conclusion, India remains committed to the humanitarian protection of refugees. We also believe that this humanitarian endeavour must be consistent with welfare objectives and national security. We strongly believe that determined action, solidarity and multilateralism are needed more than ever to address the refugee issue.

Mr. Jürgenson (Estonia): I thank Mr. Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, for his comprehensive briefing and determined efforts. We remain strong supporters of his work and mandate — politically as well as financially. Since 2001, we have supported the agency with operational grants and direct contributions in order to help alleviate specific humanitarian crises around the world.

Despite the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire, new conflicts and crises have erupted and some old ones have deepened and escalated in the world this year, including in Ethiopia, Myanmar, Afghanistan and in and around Gaza. An unprecedented number of people around the world are being forced from their homes, and the delivery of humanitarian aid has become more important than ever.

We are deeply concerned about a dire humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. At the beginning of the year, the situation in Afghanistan was already one of the worst in the world. Now it could even be called catastrophic. More than 22 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. Estonia, together with other European Union members, pledged almost \$800 million in humanitarian assistance as part of the flash appeal. We commend the scaled-up emergency response of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Afghanistan, particularly in anticipation of the harsh winter season, in order

to provide essential assistance to more than 60,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) over the winter.

We are also deeply concerned about reported widespread sexual and gender-based violence and other forms of violence and abuse in Libya and Ethiopia, as well as child recruitment and use in Yemen and Mali. We must prioritize our responses to those specific challenges, including by stepping up efforts to prevent, mitigate and respond to sexual and gender-based violence against refugees and internally displaced persons and support their access to sexual and reproductive health services, as well as mental health and psychosocial support.

Among persons on the move, women and girls are often most vulnerable. They also face specific challenges in the context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Therefore, we need to scale up steps to mitigate the unprecedented social and economic impact on refugees and other forcibly displaced people, as well as to facilitate the equitable, safe and unhindered delivery and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, which is particularly urgent in countries like Myanmar, Syria and Yemen.

Climate change is a powerful driver of displacement because of its impacts on persons' livelihoods and loss of liveability in highly exposed locations. The World Bank's updated *Groundswell* report, released in September, finds that climate change could force 216 million people across six world regions to move within their countries by 2050. We therefore need more concrete actions if we are to realize commitments that are essential for protecting vulnerable communities around the world, including millions of refugees and displaced people living on the front lines of the climate crisis, from Somalia to Central America.

We need to ensure the effective return of those with no right to stay and step up efforts to combat migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings. In recent months, we have seen attempts by some States to exploit the vulnerability of human beings for political purposes. We condemn any attempt to instrumentalize migrants and refugees by orchestrating their flow across borders for political motives.

The trend in rising forced displacement has continued this year, with global numbers now exceeding 84 million as more people flee multiple active conflicts around the world. Due to aggression against Ukraine, which has lasted already 7 years, there

are 1.5 million IDPs across the country. The situation of displaced persons, in particular women, children and elderly people, is precarious in Ukraine. Life-saving assistance, such as temporary shelter or minimum financial assistance, can be provided along the 20 kilometres of the contact line — but unfortunately only in Government-controlled areas.

It has become more evident than ever that we need digital solutions in order to improve the ability of the international community to collectively respond to crises. Two years ago, during the first Global Refugee Forum, Estonia pledged to cooperate with UNHCR on digital identification. Since then, we have been taking steps to implement that pledge. We are sure that the High-Level Officials Meeting, to be held in a week, will help to identify opportunities and set priorities going forward.

Finally, as we mark the seventieth anniversary of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees this year, I would like to underline that the work of the UNHCR is more relevant than ever in ensuring that refugees and displaced people are fully protected by international human rights law, humanitarian law and refugee law.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): Let me first thank High Commissioner Grandi for his comprehensive briefing and for the dedicated work of his teams around the world.

The United Kingdom is committed to a longer-term, holistic approach to refugee assistance and protection that restores dignity and offers refugees a viable future. To that end, the United Kingdom has contributed over \$570 million to the vital work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) over the past five years.

I would also like to acknowledge the tremendous generosity of host nations in opening their borders and homes to those forced to flee. United Kingdom funding has played a key role in helping communities to strengthen resilience and self-reliance. For example, the United Kingdom has provided \$970 million to support refugees in Lebanon since 2011, \$424 million to the Rohingya refugee response in Bangladesh since 2017 and \$278 million to programmes in Uganda over a six-year period.

The High Commissioner raised a number of important themes in his presentation. I would like to

address three issues: conflict, climate change and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

First, on conflict, Security Council efforts to support political solutions to humanitarian crises are clearly an essential part of the picture. But actors on the ground have responsibilities too. That includes adherence to international humanitarian law and ensuring that any refugee returns are voluntary, safe and dignified. It is only through demonstrated compliance with the humanitarian principles — humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence — that humanitarian actors can build the trust necessary to gain and maintain access to displaced populations in need.

In that connection, I would like to touch upon some regional issues.

In Myanmar, the United Kingdom has spent over \$23 million in humanitarian aid in order to support displaced people since the military coup in February, while backing efforts of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the United Nations and regional partners to find a political solution.

In Ethiopia, as we heard, the conflict has displaced millions. We continue to support African Union Special Envoy Obasanjo's efforts to find a political route to sustainable peace.

In Syria, while we hope that refugees will ultimately be able to return home, we agree with the Organization's view that conditions do not currently allow that. We firmly believe that resolution 2254 (2015) offers a clear path out of the conflict that protects the right of all Syrians — one in which civil society, women and minorities must play a role.

Turning now to conflict and climate change, as the High Commissioner said, the devastating convergence of these factors bears day-to-day consequences for those forced to flee. In the twenty-sixth United Nations Climate Change Conference, we came together and delivered an ambitious road map to keep global warming to 1.5°C and, in doing so, lessen the impact on vulnerable populations, including refugees and displaced persons. But, as we saw on our visit, Mr. President, to your country, the Niger, the security implications of climate are real and present.

Finally, on COVID-19, the United Kingdom has encouraged the Security Council to be alert to the impacts of COVID-19 on international peace and security and to consider the ways in which COVID-19

has created socioeconomic conditions that fuel conflict, unrest and subsequent displacements. The implementation of resolutions 2565 (2021) and 2532 (2020) can help to deliver equitable access to vaccines in conflict and humanitarian settings, including to refugees and internally displaced populations. As a leading donor to the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access Facility, the United Kingdom welcomes news this month that coronavirus vaccine doses are reaching Afghan refugees through the humanitarian buffer of last resort. We hope to see even more refugee communities helped by that mechanism next year, and we look to further discussion within the Council next week.

Mr. Pham (Viet Nam) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank High Commissioner Filippo Grandi for his comprehensive briefing, and we express our deep appreciation for the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and its staff in assisting and protecting refugees around the world.

(*spoke in English*)

Globally, 82.4 million people have been forcibly displaced, a record-high number since the Second World War. Of those, 35 million refugees are children, 1 million of whom were born as refugees. Refugees have lived without knowing when, or even if, they will ever return home. Some of them are likely to remain refugees for life. Due to the pandemic, they face even more uncertainty and hardship on a daily basis.

In that context, we highly appreciate the generosity of host countries and wish to highlight the following points.

First, to prevent a dramatic refugee influx, the Governments concerned should assume the primary responsibility for ensuring peace and security, as well as addressing the root causes of conflict in a comprehensive and inclusive manner. At the same time, they should provide their people with basic needs and a development-enabling environment. The international community should assist those efforts, as required.

Secondly, the lives of people are the most important asset. In the interest of each and every refugee, we call on all relevant stakeholders to prioritize saving lives so that no one dies crossing a border or sea. Constructive engagement and dialogue among the parties concerned are the most effective ways for the safe return and reintegration of refugees.

Thirdly, the solution to the issue and international cooperation and assistance must be people-centred, non-politicized and in line with the principles of respect for the sovereignty of the countries concerned and non-interference in their internal affairs.

Last but not least, on emerging challenges to asylum, we would like to further emphasize the need to ensure transparency in granting refugee status to asylum seekers. At the same time, in decision- and policy-making, it is necessary to differentiate between refugees and irregular migrants who migrate for economic purposes, especially in the context of emerging non-traditional security threats.

Viet Nam always attaches great importance to regional and international cooperation on this matter and upholding of international law, including the implementation of treaty obligations. We will continue to work with others to address this global concern in an active and responsible manner.

Mr. De La Fuente Ramírez (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Filippo Grandi, for his insightful briefing and for the work that he and his team do daily for millions of people. As he shared with us today, the outlook for refugees in the world is complex and sensitive. We only have to look at the activities of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Syria, to name but a few places.

It is an indisputable fact that the international community is facing an increasing number of internal and international displacements. While armed conflicts and situations of widespread violence continue to be the main cause of displacement, such as in the cases of the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo, we cannot ignore the fact that other factors are also having an increasing impact on the movement of people, as we heard. The effects of climate change, whether in the form of acute extreme weather events or in gradually evolving phenomena, put greater pressures on people. In addition to that, the coronavirus disease pandemic and its effects on the economy and social structures are elements that have also exacerbated the issue.

It is clear that the combination of such diverse factors, including poverty, requires comprehensive responses. Each situation, of course, has its particular complexities. For example, I mention Myanmar, where

we reiterate our appeal to redouble efforts and create the necessary conditions for refugees and other forcibly displaced persons, particularly the Rohingya, to return to their places of origin voluntarily.

We already heard what is happening in other contexts, such as in the case of Syrian refugees or Afghanistan. Some among us have certainly pointed out to the Security Council the need to ensure that all Afghans who wish to leave their country can do so without any restrictions.

In Libya, where we recently heard of fatal incidents in the Mediterranean, it is important to take measures to protect the lives and human rights of persons seeking international protection. In short, as we can see in other areas, when talking about refugees it should also be highlighted that more preventive diplomacy is required.

As the High Commissioner found during his most recent visit to Mexico and Central America, in our region we are not strangers to this phenomenon. In the first six months of 2021, Mexico was the country that received the third-highest number of requests for asylum in the world. By the end of November, our country had received more than 123,000 applications for refugee status, which is an exponential growth compared to previous years. The rate of recognition of refugee status in Mexico exceeds 70 per cent. In that regard, Mexico counts on the valuable collaboration of UNHCR, for which we express our gratitude, and we reiterate our commitment to continue working together.

We underline that for Mexico, solidarity and regional and international cooperation are the way to respond to asylum seekers. As is the tradition in my country, Mexico will continue to undertake the protection and care of refugees with responsibility and openness.

In conclusion, I will briefly, but importantly, mention the global compact on refugees. That is one of the international instruments at our disposal. It provides the international community with principles, mechanisms and programmes of action to respond to the influx of people seeking international protection. The Security Council must make use of the compact, which represents an operational framework that allows us to effectively implement solidarity. Given the situation that we heard described in the High Commissioner's briefing and the opinions expressed so far today, it is clear that solidarity is not an option, but rather an unavoidable duty in the face of this issue.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Mr. Grandi for his briefing. Under the leadership of the High Commissioner, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has overcome numerous challenges, including armed conflicts, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and natural disasters, and has made tremendous efforts to alleviate the plight of refugees and uphold their dignity, which China appreciates.

According to UNHCR statistics, the number of refugees and displaced persons worldwide is increasing, reaching over 82 million. The High Commissioner has just shared information with us that is worth our thorough consideration. The international community must remain committed to the spirit of humanity, actively cooperate and mobilize resources so as to provide refugees with the necessary protection, in accordance with international law.

In order to resolve the issue of refugees, historical perspectives and national realities must be taken into account. All parties must assume their responsibilities.

Developing countries host some 86 per cent of refugees worldwide. Countries that are capable and accountable must help ease the stress and burden facing developing countries.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, all countries must include refugees in their pandemic response plans and provide them with the necessary protection.

In addressing the issue of refugees, double standards and politicization must be avoided. The international refugee-protection mechanism must not be abused by terrorists and criminals.

Armed conflicts are major drivers of refugees. The Security Council must focus on its primary responsibility of maintaining international peace and security and push for a political settlement to regional hotspot issues with a view to creating the conditions for the return of refugees. It is imperative to ensure humanitarian access based on respect for national sovereignty, strictly observe the United Nations guiding principles on humanitarian assistance, and refrain from using the issue of refugees for political motives.

Cooperation must be seriously promoted, unilateral sanctions lifted, and excessive pressure avoided so that the countries concerned can receive tangible assistance and avoid facing additional obstacles.

The question of Palestine has remained unresolved for over 70 years, with the lives of more than 5 million refugees torn apart and the prospect of nation-building lost for several generations. A comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine is the only way to end the suffering of Palestinian refugees.

Ten years ago the so-called Arab Spring led to incessant wars in Libya, Syria and other countries, spawning large populations of refugees. As of now, 6.7 million Syrian refugees are still stranded abroad. That is the bitter fruit of foreign military intervention and the imposition of democratic change. The initiators must bear the primary responsibility for supporting the reconstruction of the countries concerned and create conditions for the return of refugees. At the same time, we must also ensure that the Security Council performs its functions properly so that history does not repeat itself.

Africa is the continent with the largest refugee population. China highly commends refugee host countries in Africa for their solidarity and resilience. Along the way, we call upon UNHCR to continue to prioritize Africa and maintain its resource mobilization and assistance efforts for Africa.

The war in Afghanistan has displaced tens of millions of Afghans. Reconstruction is urgently needed to prevent a larger wave of refugees. Cash liquidity is crucial to Afghan economic reconstruction. We call on the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to resume, as soon as possible, the normal use of the account of the Afghan Government, disperse funds and provide economic assistance to Afghanistan with a view to alleviating the suffering of its people.

For people who, fleeing turbulence, crossed into Bangladesh from Rakhine state, Myanmar, we support UNHCR and other international relief agencies in their humanitarian efforts and commend the efforts of the Government of Bangladesh to improve their situation. We hope that Bangladesh and Myanmar will conduct bilateral consultations in a constructive political atmosphere with a view to creating conditions for the gradual repatriation of Rohingyas.

With regard to the refugee problem along the border of some eastern European countries, there is a need for dialogue and cooperation to seek a proper solution. No matter what, the rights and dignity of those refugees must be fully guaranteed.

We are gravely concerned about the reports that Lithuanian border police are suspected of deliberately murdering refugees and subjecting them to violence. The authorities of Lithuania must immediately conduct investigations, bring the perpetrators to justice and prevent a recurrence of such incidents.

Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): I thank High Commissioner Grandi for his frank and sobering briefing on the worldwide refugee situation. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has our unwavering support. We appreciate the dedication of the High Commissioner's teams and other humanitarian workers as much now as ever. I also welcome Norway's Foreign Minister joining us here today.

Recently, I saw first-hand the amazing work the UNHCR teams do on my trip to Jordan last month, where I visited the Zaatari refugee camp, home to nearly 80,000 Syrian refugees. What I heard and saw is a microcosm of today's refugee landscape of 84 million refugees. Countries, such as Jordan, have opened their doors with compassion to provide protection from the Al-Assad regime's senseless brutality. We are inspired by and grateful for Jordan's generosity, as well as that of many others in the world, who have welcomed the largest refugee population since the Second World War.

I was impressed by how UNHCR and others are integrating the latest technology in refugee camps. At Zaatari, I saw cash credits used at a World Food Programme supermarket, which ensures that shopping is done with dignity; a solar grid, which will ensure that kids have electricity to study; and a centralized water system run by UNICEF, which provides families with clean water and sanitary living conditions. Those programmes represent major progress from what I used to see in the 1990s at the Dadaab refugee camp, where Kenya has generously hosted refugees for more than two decades. I hope that the standard that I saw in Zaatari will not be an exception, but a rule for UNHCR moving forward.

In Zaatari, I was invited into the home of Nadia, a widow from the war in Syria. An inspiring single mother of 11 children, Nadia shared her harrowing story of fleeing the conflict and her years-long struggle to rebuild her life in a refugee camp. The livelihood programme at the camp, which we supported, empowered her to establish a successful tailoring business. Today I am wearing a scarf she embroidered

with my name and gave me. This scarf reminds me of our collective obligation to Nadia, and particularly to her children. Nadia told me that she works every day to make her children proud. She should be proud that she makes all of us proud. Many of the children in Zaatari have grown up knowing nothing beyond 10 years of war and displacement, but the children whom I met still have dreams, and they still have hopes. The international community must build programmes that support their integration into host countries so that they can achieve their dreams.

Finally, I heard over and over that no one felt safe returning to Syria. They feared what might happen if they were forced back. I promised that I would use my platform in New York to tell the world that we will continue to protect them and that we will remain vigilant in ensuring that any return is safe, voluntary and dignified.

As we work together to address the Syrian refugee crisis, we must also unite on the situations in Venezuela, Afghanistan and Ethiopia, to name just a few. We continue to support United Nations agencies and other humanitarian partners to reach Venezuelans in need of aid, and we are working with UNHCR to promote humane migration policies that will address the factors driving irregular migration. After the United States and our partners evacuated thousands of Afghans, who feared for their lives, as part of one of the biggest airlifts in history, we must continue to support Afghan refugees in any way possible.

On Ethiopia, the humanitarian situation continues to worry us. We appreciate the High Commissioner's point concerning protection access assistance and the need for a political solution.

No matter where one comes from, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic remains a serious threat to refugees and internally displaced persons everywhere. The work that host countries do to provide vaccines and support is critical. For our part, in partnership with the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access Facility, the United States is committed to donating 1.2 billion doses of safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines to the world by 2022. In 2021, we provided nearly \$215 million to UNHCR to fight COVID-19. We will continue to share doses, scale manufacturing and invest in vaccines abroad. We thank other Member States for their commitments and urge everyone to further step up efforts so that we can overcome this pandemic together.

America stands as a beacon of liberty and refuge to the world's most vulnerable. We have resettled more refugees than any other country. In October, President Biden raised our annual refugee admissions ceiling to 125,000. We will always support forcefully displaced populations, and we remain committed to the vital work of UNHCR and its partners in supporting those populations.

Ms. King (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): Saint Vincent and the Grenadines commends the Republic of the Niger for convening this discussion, and we thank High Commissioner Filippo Grandi for his sobering briefing. I also welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway, who joined us earlier today.

During this most challenging moment, experienced globally though unevenly by all countries and peoples, the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) provides hope and encouragement to us all. Efforts to shelter and protect the most vulnerable — particularly stateless persons, refugees and internally displaced people — are critical to the maintenance of international peace and security.

The socioeconomic dislocations triggered by armed conflict, exacerbated by the coronavirus disease pandemic and further magnified by the climate crisis demand urgent, focused and well-coordinated international action. The High Commissioner has underscored that loudly and clearly, but it bears repeating. Vulnerable people from Haiti, across the Sahel and the Lake Chad basin, through the Central African region to the Horn of Africa and in Yemen, Syria and Afghanistan, among other places, require a renewed multilateralism that, first and foremost, provides urgent humanitarian assistance and critical life-saving support; secondly, reinforces sovereignty and restores social contracts; and thirdly, comprehensively addresses the root causes of conflict and insecurity wherever they persist.

Greater political will and wide-ranging multilateral engagements are needed now, more than ever, in order to assist conflict-affected and fragile States to cultivate peace processes, strengthen the rule of law, rebuild public trust, enhance institutional capacities and advance reconciliation processes within communities and at the national level. In that connection, the High Commissioner underscored that UNHCR cannot replace the necessary political will of the international community. Furthermore, all international stakeholders,

particularly developed countries and international financial institutions, should accelerate their efforts to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals. That must be done promptly and in line with the needs, priorities and aspirations of the countries concerned.

It is no coincidence that the challenges of today bear disproportionately on the most vulnerable. Indeed, the countries that suffer the worst effects of conflict also experience striking levels of acute hunger, mass human displacement, recurring public health emergencies and social and economic disruptions of the most debilitating kind. As rampant climate change, increased biodiversity loss and widespread environmental degradation add further strain to those already complex and often insurmountable situations, we must work together to advance practical, people-centred and climate-sensitive solutions to our peace and security, development and humanitarian challenges.

It is imperative that all development plans, policies and programmes be centred around the fundamental tenets of inclusivity and equality. Vulnerable persons, groups and nations must feature as the key contributors and beneficiaries of international development efforts. In all circumstances, the interests of, and implications for, stateless persons, refugees and internally displaced people should be fully considered. So too should the rights and perspectives of indigenous societies, ethnic and religious minorities, women and girls and other marginalized groups be extensively examined and safeguarded.

When addressing any crisis, the bedrock principles of international law, in particular the sovereign authority of States, ought to guide our response. Humanitarian operations must be tethered to precepts of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. And the return and reintegration of displaced persons should always be conducted in a safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable manner.

In conclusion, it is essential that social, economic and environmental justice serve as the primary edicts in all efforts to maintain international peace and security. Only through a comprehensive and synergistic approach can we achieve the lasting peace and security that we all deserve. We join the High Commissioner's plea for concerted efforts to be made for a reversal of international failure and the paralysis caused by conflicting political aims within the international community.

To be sure, our global struggles are colossal in both scope and magnitude. But, if we work collectively through sincere political commitments and with a steadfast resolve, a better future awaits all countries and peoples and, in particular, those most exposed to the perils of our time.

Mr. Kuzmin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are very grateful to Mr. Filippo Grandi for his very informative briefing.

The Russian Federation is making a significant contribution to strengthening the international refugee protection regime and resolving migration problems. We are conducting large-scale humanitarian activities in many countries around the world and are making efforts to prevent and overcome crises. We attach great importance to strengthening cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as the main international body for resolving forced migration issues. We highly appreciate the outcome of the visit to Moscow this June by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Filippo Grandi. The exchange of views confirmed the mutual interest in further strengthening cooperation between Russia and UNHCR.

We believe that resolving large-scale migration crises requires employing multilateral cooperation mechanisms, with the United Nations playing a key coordinating role. We commend UNHCR's part in improving the international protection of refugees and other groups of persons under its responsibility. We note the Office's efforts to respond to the spread of the new coronavirus disease. Our country supports, including financially, the activities of UNHCR in that area.

The most effective way to resolve the issue of forced migrants is to address the root causes that compel people to leave their homeland. A successful solution to that problem lies primarily in a political settlement in the countries of origin of migrants, as well as in assisting them in socioeconomic development, State-building and combating terrorism. External interference in the internal affairs of other States must be avoided. We believe that the countries actively involved in such interference should bear the primary responsibility for the consequences of the mass influx of migrants and refugees.

Of particular concern is the situation in Afghanistan, where, according to UNHCR, the possibility of forced migration has sharply increased

amid extremely limited access to basic services. The significantly worsening socioeconomic situation poses the risk of mass migration of the population from that country. We believe that the international community, in particular the traditional Western donors that have been present in Afghanistan for the past 20 years and bear the primary responsibility for the events there, should actively assist the Afghan people in rebuilding the country and preventing forced migration.

In the context of a settlement in Syria, the priority is to ensure the voluntary return of refugees. In that regard, we again highlight the relevance of the Russian initiative for the repatriation of Syrian refugees. We believe that promoting favourable conditions for the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their places of permanent residence is an absolute priority and an important step towards achieving long-term stabilization in Syria. We are confident that Syrian returnees, whose socioeconomic situation in neighbouring States is becoming increasingly difficult, will significantly contribute to the reconstruction of their country. We call on UNHCR to step up its efforts to further mobilize the international community to assist the repatriation of Syrian citizens.

We are committed to strengthening the work of UNHCR regarding the return of internally displaced persons and refugees to the Nagorno-Karabakh region and adjacent areas, as stipulated in the statement of the leaders of Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia of 9 November 2020 concerning a ceasefire and the cessation of all hostilities in the conflict zone. We believe that UNHCR could provide comprehensive, non-politicized assistance, with an emphasis on the purely humanitarian aspect. We urge UNHCR to continue its dialogue with Yerevan and Baku in order to obtain humanitarian access to the region.

Mr. Kimani (Kenya): I want to thank Mr. Filippo Grandi for his comprehensive briefing.

Kenya takes note of the growing number of refugees globally as a result of protracted conflicts, economic crises and the effects of climate change. It is worth noting, as other Council members have, that the overwhelming bulk of refugees globally — 86 per cent in this case — are being hosted by developing countries, with the least developed countries providing asylum to 27 per cent of the global total.

While acknowledging the push factors that force populations to flee from their homes, we are also

conscious of the challenges that the refugee problem poses to host States, particularly with regard to socioeconomic and ecological conditions. Those include resource competition, leading to exerting stress on the livelihoods of host communities, acute environmental degradation and economic and security challenges.

Terrorist and militant groups have been known to exploit refugee camps to facilitate indoctrination and recruitment, which enable them to carry out attacks. Refugee camps have also been captured, or have been used, to further the criminal economies that are utilized by militants and terrorist organizations. It is critical that the United Nations and all humanitarian agencies that are charged with taking care of refugee camps make every effort to ensure that such criminality does not occur in the camps.

Despite such challenges, throughout the years Kenya has continued to host refugees from neighbouring States. We remain committed to upholding the principles of international refugee protection through the implementation of international, regional and domestic policy documents. In November of this year, President Uhuru Kenyatta enacted the Refugees Act 2021, which strengthens the management of refugees in Kenya by consolidating the provisions of several international legal instruments. Kenya is also committed to fulfilling the global compact on refugees, whose four main objectives are the easing of pressure on host countries, enhancing refugee self-reliance, expanding access to third-country solutions and supporting conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity.

Even as Kenya continues to host refugees from neighbouring States in the region, we call for concerted efforts for them to be accorded basic rights within the confines of national laws. To that end, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has a crucial role to play in ensuring that radicalization and support for acts of terrorism are eradicated from their camps. In addition, it is crucial to reinforce the tenet that encampment is not permanent but a preparation for suitable conditions for resettlement once peace and normalcy have been restored.

For its part, the international community needs to honour its obligations to support refugees, host countries, countries of origin and all other relevant stakeholders in the protection, assistance, integration and eventual repatriation of refugees to their home countries. Adequate and consistent funding, as requested

by host countries and UNHCR, is an imperative that we must all meet. Funding aside, the wealthiest countries, with their high-employment economies, can undertake a great deal more resettlement of refugees. Financing is only one pillar of responsibility. Hosting is the other pillar. Financing itself, as presently practised, may be disguising deeper challenges for refugees.

I want to say that, of course, the most effective way of dealing with the refugee problem remains addressing the root causes of forced displacement, promoting peace and security, supporting efforts to alleviate poverty, reducing disaster risks and providing humanitarian and development assistance to countries of origin, as well as countries hosting refugees.

I am interested to learn, if we have the opportunity, from the High Commissioner whether he has detected a surge of refugees due to climate change and its effects. We noticed an opinion piece of his in *Al Jazeera* last month that nodded towards that possibility as the world went to the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, but it did not have any figures or data behind it. It would be very interesting to hear how much he has apprehended this issue.

I also want to commend the High Commissioner on his repeated statements over the past few years noting that thousands of refugees and migrants suffer extreme human rights abuses on their journeys to the Mediterranean coast and their attempts to cross the sea. In July, he called for more action on hosting and relocation, and he engaged the European Union Commission on a rights-based mechanism for refugees from Africa and Asia. I would like to know whether there has been any progress since July and whether he believes that there is a realistic hope that Europe's refugee policies towards African migrants and refugees will change.

Finally, the High Commissioner may not yet have seen it, but *The New Yorker* magazine, published here in New York, on 28 November, published a long exposé entitled, "The Secretive Prisons that Keep Migrants Out of Europe", by Ian Urbina. The thrust of that investigation is that a series of funding decisions to United Nations and humanitarian agencies, as well as to coast guard forces that have links to militias, have been used to stop African migrants from crossing to Europe. Does the High Commissioner have any sense

as to whether that scandal will come to an end any time soon?

Ms. Byrne Nason (Ireland): It was very good to hear from the Foreign Minister of Norway earlier. I also want to thank the High Commissioner for his briefing and particularly for the warnings he delivered this morning. As always, Mr. Grandi has been honest with us. He tells us what we need to hear, not what we want to hear, and that is no surprise. I think the challenges that are faced by the High Commissioner and his staff on a daily basis are really immense, and I want to pay tribute to the tremendous and tireless work of all staff of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and their implementing partners in what is really an increasingly complex and dangerous environment globally.

I also want to recognize the deep generosity of the countries hosting very large refugee populations. We recognize the strain it places on host communities and on the refugees themselves, as we have heard this morning. We are deeply respectful of the solidarity those countries show on behalf of all of us, and particularly on behalf of those of us at this table who have the capacity to make decisions that we do not always rise to.

Since the Security Council last heard from the High Commissioner (S/2020/560, annex I), the number of those forcibly displaced has increased again — a record high of 84 million people. Conflict — and I want to underline our collective failure to prevent or resolve it — is the reason for that. Indeed, looking at our agenda over the past year, it is surprising, frankly, that the increase has not been more pronounced. In Afghanistan, almost 700,000 people have been newly displaced over the past year — women, girls, boys and men, joining almost 3 million existing internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 2.2 million Afghan refugees. That means about 6 million Afghans are now affected, more people than the entire population of the country I come from, Ireland. The scale, let alone the human cost, of that is truly shocking.

The level of humanitarian needs confronting those, we have heard today, is seismic. The urgency of our response must match the level of need. The Security Council has a responsibility to act and to remove barriers or blockages preventing the provision of urgent, unhindered life-saving and life-sustaining aid. Many of those fleeing Afghanistan, we know, are women and

girls. They are fleeing to secure the dreams they hold for themselves or for their daughters, fleeing a regime that would deny them an education. Today is day 81 when Afghan girls cannot attend school. And some, particularly those women who speak out, are literally fleeing for their lives. It is those women and girls — their rights, freedoms and political voices — who we need to keep in mind in the Security Council as we determine the future mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

We are also now 10 years into the devastating conflict in Syria. Almost half of that population remains displaced. The vulnerability and hardship endured by those who have been internally displaced in Syria is now exacerbated in tragic ways during this winter period, as we see harsh winter conditions destroying tents and schools; and, of course, we see loss of life. That demonstrates once again — as if we needed a reminder — the fragility of that situation and the imperative of ensuring that help can reach those most in need, regardless of political considerations.

In Ethiopia, too, violence and instability over the past year have driven people from their homes, as lives and livelihoods have been lost, with the denial of humanitarian aid, in particular, leaving many, many thousands of individuals with no choice but to flee. While we have seen some welcome, if limited, access for food aid in recent days, the Security Council must remain united in its demand to all parties to respect international humanitarian law and for sustained, safe, unhindered humanitarian access.

We at this table here also have a responsibility to prevent any further worsening of that crisis. Without concerted action by all sides to seek a pathway to peace supported by the region and by the Security Council, forced displacement will surely have catastrophic consequences for neighbouring countries and throughout the Horn of Africa. In our view, we cannot afford to let such a catastrophe unfold on our watch.

We have heard today the importance of addressing the root causes of displacement. We know that insecurity drives displacement globally, but we cannot discount other related factors, such as hunger and climate change. The Security Council is only starting to fully grasp of how climate-related security risks are impacting its mandate and the people we serve.

We thank UNHCR for meeting with the Informal Expert Group on Climate and Security, chaired

by Ireland and the Niger. That meeting last month enlightened members of the group on the interlinkages between climate displacement and security, particularly in the Sahel. It is vital that the Security Council continue to draw on evidence from the field to inform its decision-making.

As the High Commissioner told the Council last year, when leadership fails, when multilateralism — which we in the Security Council represent in theory — fails day in day out, the consequences are felt by the most vulnerable, those with the least power, by those who quite literally have no refuge.

Ireland remains committed to an approach that is principled and emphasizes the rights of refugees. At the core of that is the need to protect citizens, improve humanitarian conditions and respect international humanitarian law. Any return of refugees and internally displaced persons must be safe, voluntary and dignified. Displaced persons should retain as much autonomy and control as possible.

I conclude by emphasizing once again Ireland's support for the stalwart work of UNHCR, reflected also by our pledge this morning to UNHCR for 2022, in advocating for the worldwide protection of refugees. For those refugees living in overcrowded refugee camps, for those IDPs dwelling within host communities under strain and for the families of those who have lost their lives fleeing insecurity, we need to step up.

Mr. Ladeb (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi for his briefing, and I welcome the participation of Her Excellency Ms. Anniken Huitfeldt, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway, in today's meeting.

Tunisia's views on refugees, asylum, migration and humanitarian work are based on its adherence to noble humanitarian principles and values and on its commitment to the relevant international humanitarian instrument, as well as on its experience as a destination and transit country and our specific combination of Arab, African and Mediterranean identities.

The African continent, the Arab region and the Mediterranean are crisis hotspots. Moreover, their countries and peoples bear the brunt of those crises by hosting an increasing number of displaced people and refugees.

The ongoing crises are becoming increasingly complex and global due to transboundary phenomena

and threats such as pandemics, climate change and terrorism, against a backdrop of conflict, occupation, transition and fragility. All these have boosted the waves of human movement and their social, humanitarian and security repercussions. Due to the worsening humanitarian situation of refugees and displaced persons, these crises call — more than ever — for the mobilization and intensified efforts of the international community as a whole, particularly the Security Council.

In that connection, finding solutions to end violence and conflict, protect lives and provide protection and assistance to those in need is a top priority. That must be done through a coherent and holistic approach based on the close link between peace, security and sustainable development and on the meaningful interaction between the various United Nations organs and agencies, on the basis of the principles and mechanisms of solidarity and international cooperation and shared but differentiated responsibility.

In that context, I would like to share the following priorities:

First, the traditional focus on the ongoing management of protracted forced displacement crises, based on short-term, limited humanitarian solutions must be replaced by an approach that addresses root causes and finds proactive and lasting solutions to them. That will require the Security Council to focus more on ending conflicts as a key priority through an effective effort supported by consensus among its members.

In that context, Tunisia has spared no effort in supporting the peaceful settlement of the conflict in Libya and addressing the repercussions of the situation. In 2011, my country took in approximately 1 million refugees and migrants who left Libya. We continue to take all preparation and response measures within the national emergency plan, in partnership with United Nations agencies and civil society organizations.

Secondly, we must strengthen the development and solidarity dimension when addressing human mobility crises. The causes and consequences of migration and displacement remain a humanitarian and development issue. Through migration and displacement, people seek a better life and the enjoyment of their human rights and dignity. It is therefore necessary to enhance development and solidarity among States and peoples in order to help address the root causes of crises and prevent human suffering, particularly on the basis of

the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Our Common Agenda (A/75/982), the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees.

That will require the international community to provide sustainable support to developing and least developed host countries through partnerships oriented towards sustainable development, thus contributing to building the capacities of refugee-hosting communities and institutions to recover from crises and contain their long-term spillover effects. Finally, we stress the need to enhance the contribution of migration to sustainable development by facilitating movement through safe and orderly channels.

Thirdly, we must effectively address migration and refugee crises in accordance with human rights standards and the Charter of the United Nations. In the context of addressing migration and asylum, we stress the need to strike a balance between the imperatives of protecting their sovereignty of States and the security of their peoples, on the one hand, and the need to provide relief and respect human rights, on the other. It is also necessary to more closely monitor the trends, developments and indicators of these migration waves in the light of the growing terrorist threat and organized crime activities.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm the importance of settling the issue of Palestinian refugees. In the interests of reaching a final settlement, Tunisia will continue to support the efforts and role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

Mr. De Rivi re (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Grandi for his briefing and for his excellent work at the head of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

As we commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, UNHCR's mandate is now more important than ever, and we commend the remarkable work of its entire staff.

Our action must be guided by the principle of shared responsibility. As the High Commissioner noted, the number of displaced persons in need of protection has never been so high. A case in point is the Sahel, where the situation is tragic and getting worse. Helping people forced into exile is our duty. We must do everything we can to support the countries that are on the front line

of large-scale displacement. Only through solidarity can we succeed in improving the plight of refugees and displaced persons.

In that context, the implementation of the global compact on refugees is a priority. France is actively working to implement the commitments it undertook at the Global Refugee Forum in 2019, notably through asylum capacity-building programmes — in the Niger, for example — and through its resettlement programme, now implemented in nine countries in the Middle East and Africa. We also nearly doubled our contribution to UNHCR in one year, reaching \$100 million this year, including \$45 million for the Afghan crisis response.

In addition, we will not compromise on the fundamental principles of refugee return. Such returns must be voluntary and safe. In that regard, we recall that those conditions have yet to be met in Syria and Burma. There are reports of serious human rights violations committed by the regime against refugees upon their return to Syria. Refugees will be unable to return as long as the regime continues to threaten their lives and deprive them of their rights, particularly property rights. It is therefore essential that UNHCR be able to ensure effective monitoring of returning Syrian refugees.

We strongly condemn any political instrumentalization of migration flows. A case in point is the situation at the Polish-Belarusian border — it is unacceptable to put the lives of vulnerable individuals at risk for political purposes.

Moreover, the Security Council must create the conditions for a sustainable resolution of these crises in order to address the root causes of displacement. Insecurity and massive human rights violations are the primary causes of displacement. Whether, for example, in Syria or Burma, only political solutions will make it possible to durably stabilize the situation where displacement takes place and to overcome the challenges linked to the displacement of people.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement as the representative of the Niger.

I heartily thank Mr. Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, for the scope and excellence of his briefing, as well as for his tireless advocacy on behalf of refugees as well as host countries, many of which face enormous challenges. That is the case with my country, the Niger, which is nevertheless one of the most generous in that regard.

Mr. Grandi was right to say it: saving lives cannot wait for political solutions. That is certainly true in the Sahel region, which faces a deterioration in the security situation. That is the reason that the Niger calls for a long-term solution to the refugee crisis in the Sahel — and elsewhere — above and beyond a humanitarian approach. From our perspective, such a solution should be based on a holistic, multilateral approach focused on development and peacebuilding. In that regard, and as Mr. Grandi also mentioned, the international community should redouble its efforts to restore peace while also ensuring that resources are available for displaced communities and their hosts. In other words, we must save lives. It is the countries and communities with the least resources that continue to bear the greatest burden when it comes to providing protection and caring for forcibly displaced people. They should be better supported by the rest of the international community.

We would also recall the Niger's proactive role in fostering conditions conducive for the voluntary and sustainable return or relocation of refugees from Libya in dignity and security. My country has extended its memorandum of understanding with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in order to expand the space for those refugees and asylum seekers until 2022.

Above and beyond the voluntary and dignified return of refugees from Libya, the Niger has committed itself, in coordination with Nigerian officials, to do everything possible to create security and material conditions for the repatriation of refugees from Borno state fleeing Boko Haram atrocities. We encourage our partners to join us in that new initiative so as to make it possible for those people to return home — but above all to ensure that their children do not become a lost generation owing to a lack of education.

For those who cannot return to their countries, especially refugees from the Tillaberi region, west of the Niger, my country, working in cooperation with UNHCR and partner countries, has contributed to the process of their integration by moving refugees and displaced people from camps to innovative host communities where they will not only be able to enjoy freedoms and fundamental rights such as education and health care, but will also be able to be independent and participate actively in the economic life of the communities in which they live by having a chance to work.

Another advantage of that initiative is that it strengthens social cohesion and affords better coordination between the local population and the displaced persons, as well as the effective restoration of governance in those areas where it was not present before.

At this point in my statement, I should like to echo the following points.

First, it is essential that stateless persons and people who have been forcibly displaced should be included in all national responses to sexual and gender-based violence and violence against children. The onset of the coronavirus disease pandemic has also unleashed a shadow pandemic, namely, one involving that type of violence. We encourage UNHCR to ensure that those people do not continue to live in insecurity, but also that they have access to appropriate education and health care.

Secondly, we would like to underscore the need for appropriate strategies to reduce and manage risks linked to climate change, given that the degradation of the environment and natural catastrophes have been increasingly accentuated, driven by refugee movements.

Thirdly, I would like to reiterate the Niger's commitment and that of its armed forces to protect civilians in the challenging context of combating terrorism, as well as to ensure the need for humanitarian and development assistance to meet the needs of affected populations.

In conclusion, the Niger is resolutely committed to overcome the changes linked to statelessness and the significant risk that poses in terms of human rights, development and security. In cooperation with UNHCR, my country has begun an ambitious project — known as the administrative census for development with a humanitarian focus — as proof of its commitment to also address the issue of statelessness.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to Mr. Grandi to respond to the comments and questions.

Mr. Grandi: I thank you, Mr. President, for your statement in your national capacity, as it links up very well the various elements raised in the discussion. That is no surprise for, as we said already, your country is

facing the outcome of many overlapping challenges. You therefore have a very clear sense of how those challenges intersect and aggravate the problem of forced displacement. Thank you, as well, for raising the issue of statelessness, which is another important dossier for my organization.

I would also like to thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway for being present at this meeting. I will begin my comments by picking up on some of the points she made.

First of all, I would recall that the majority of the 84 million displaced people around the world — about two thirds — are internally displaced persons. The renewed focus on addressing situations of internal displacement in the report of the Secretary-General's high-level panel is therefore very welcome. Even more welcome is the report's sharp focus on solving internal displacement. Solutions to internal displacement are sometime the same, but sometimes differ, as the solutions to refugee issues. There are many points of contact, though, which is why I have made the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) available in the follow-up to the report to contribute in particular, besides our own institutions functions in respect of protection for internally displaced persons, to the search for solutions to internal displacement.

The Foreign Minister as well as almost everyone else, myself included, raised the link between the climate emergency and displacement. It is a very complex link, ranging from immediate displacement due to natural disasters, which are compounded by climate change, to more complex causal chains — for example, due to conflict that is itself caused by climate change. As in the Sahel, for instance, resources become scarce, communities enter into conflict with each other and that causes displacement. From the Council's perspective, I would certainly encourage focusing increasingly on that link between climate, conflict and displacement, as we see that chain of causes becoming a pattern in many parts of the world. It requires urgent attention.

The representative of Kenya asked whether we have data. I must be honest that I refrained from putting forward figures, which would inevitably be estimates as well as difficult to compare with each other. One can count the people who are displaced by a flood, a hurricane or a drought. But that is only one impact of

climate on displacement. To quantify globally is more complex and more on a case-by-case basis. But there are patterns that we are studying, together with many of our partners, on which we as UNHCR have a role to play as experts on the protection of the displaced and on the search for solutions. We are very keen and very engaged in that respect.

Many speakers also mentioned the pandemic. Indeed, we have been very engaged in responding to the impact of the pandemic on displaced populations and their hosts. There is a health aspect that continues to be important. Refugees and displaced persons are mostly in countries that are still undervaccinated, if I may use that term. I have had pressing appeals from countries such as Uganda, Iran and Bangladesh that have very promptly included many refugees on their soil in vaccination campaigns but do not have enough vaccines or logistical capacity to vaccinate and therefore struggle under the additional responsibility of vaccinating host populations. I therefore make a strong appeal for them to be considered with special regard when countries that help others when vaccinations are rolled out.

But the main impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) on those populations and their hosts has been on the social and economic front. There, we are engaged in very interesting and important conversations with the World Bank, and even with the International Monetary Fund and many Member States, on how we can ensure that social safety nets that are put together in each country to offset the economic impact of lockdowns include populations on the move. That is politically sensitive in many places, but it is very important. Otherwise, those populations will feel the impact of COVID-19 for even many more years than populations that are not on the move.

I offer thanks in that respect to some countries represented on the Council. In particular, I would thank Ireland and Kenya for making statements that link together all these complex causes and inform our response to this crisis, as humanitarian agencies, and their response as custodians of peace and security in relation to that.

Let me move on to a few of the geographical issues or specific issues that have been raised, starting with Afghanistan. Just to be very clear, I think we can look at Afghanistan as a sequencing of steps that need to be taken. The absolute priority now is the humanitarian

response, which goes largely through humanitarian organizations like ours. I have already spoken about that. Some have spoken about the evacuations of people who would be at risk after 15 August. I think the focus now has to be really on preventing an avoidable major refugee outflow due to the collapse of State structures. That is really what needs to be the priority. This is the appeal I have heard from neighbouring countries, Turkey and countries of the region.

Efforts must be made in that respect, first through the transitional arrangements that many speakers have mentioned and that are being discussed at the moment among the World Bank, the United Nations and some other State stakeholders. But I think — and we need to be frank about this — that ultimately the Taliban, which is in control of the country today, and the international community in its entirety need to find a *modus operandi*, coexist with each other and take the necessary step for that to happen. The Taliban, of course, must deliver on the all-important issues of the rights of women, women at work and minorities, and the international community must support the functioning of the State, which must be ensured — all of this, for the sake of the Afghan people. It is politically delicate, but I think that if we do not have the full trajectory ahead of us clear in our mind, we will inevitably always stop at solutions that cannot be truly definitive for a stable, future for the country.

Some speakers mentioned Myanmar, which I did not refer to in my opening remarks. Of course, we are concerned about the situation in the country. Violence against civilians has caused fresh displacement and is likely to cause more. Political difficulties make it more complex for us to interact with those in control of the country. As Council members may imagine, UNHCR is particularly worried about the situation of the Rohingya minority in the west of the country, in Rakhine state, and about the increasing lack of prospects and opportunities for the 1 million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, which continues to bear a very significant burden in hosting this population. I therefore appeal for that situation not to be lost from the international radar screen.

The Ambassador of Kenya asked very important questions also in respect of European refugee policies and the situation at the doorstep of Europe. I assume that he was referring in particular to the situation in Libya. I have a few points to make in response to that.

First of all, naturally, we and I personally need to continue to be engaged in dialogue with the European Commission and European Union member States on the future of their asylum policies. This is a very complex discussion. The European Commission has put forward a very important proposal — a migration and asylum pact — that is still being discussed by European countries. Unfortunately, that discussion continues to encounter very difficult political obstacles, but it is clear that Europe must continue to have a welcoming policy in respect of those in need of international protection. It also needs to develop more strategically its interaction with countries of origin and transit regarding the people who reach Europe from Africa, the Middle East and other parts of the world. The compact includes a very important external component, which we have encouraged Europe to continue to pursue. We remain available to facilitate that particular discussion.

Clearly, we are worried about push-backs that are happening at the European external borders, and we are particularly worried by the situation in Libya, where the limited progress that has occurred through work by the UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration and other organizations to extract people from detention centres remains very precarious in the fragile political situation of Libya. We are engaging the Libyan Government in dialogue on these matters. We hope that the political process can advance through the election towards more stability for the country. Without that stability, it will be very difficult to also engage on the complicated issue of how to deal with migratory flows, including the flows of people in need of protection through Libya and towards Europe. But that discussion also should not be allowed to drop from the radar screen in the complex debate about Libya. I have concerns about the situation there.

Many remarks were made about Syria. If I can be frank, I appreciate the fact that the Irish Ambassador noted that I sometimes say things that perhaps are not exactly what everybody would like to hear. But I shall be frank — I still hear controversy and disagreement regarding the complex issue of Syrian refugees and their return. I would invite States to have a more open, concrete and substantive debate on these important issues.

Neighbouring countries are hosting almost 6 million people. In some of those countries, particularly Lebanon, the situation has become very difficult. I am encouraging donor countries to continue

to support and even increase support to the countries hosting Syrian refugees until the solution for this crisis is found, but at the same time I think that we must also have a frank discussion about creating conditions for return — a discussion that should encompass everybody. Everybody has responsibilities, as I said in my opening statement. Syria has responsibilities in putting in place conditions with respect to security, legal issues and access of UNHCR to areas of return, as does the donor community in supporting those returns when they happen safely and voluntarily.

This is an important discussion, and I would really hope that we can have it. We are ready to facilitate it, separate from politics, to the extent that that can happen, because it is about the fate and the future of millions of people from a country that has been impacted severely by conflict for the past 12 years.

There was a brief mention by the representative of the Russian Federation of Nagorno-Karabakh. I would reassure the Russian Federation and everybody else that we are engaged in a difficult dialogue with the parties to that conflict in order to be able to implement the task that we were given by the ceasefire agreement more than a year ago in order to ensure the safe, voluntary and sustainable return of all those displaced in more than 30 years of conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. That dialogue between those parties has not been easy. We have made some progress and are very grateful to Russia for facilitating the dialogue. We will continue to engage in that respect.

There was one more specific issue raised by some speakers — the issue of finding a solution to the plight of Palestinian refugees. As members know, that used to be my responsibility when I was the Head of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and I am therefore very grateful to those who have made a plea for that discussion to continue. It is not my responsibility anymore. It is not the responsibility of UNHCR, but I will gladly convey members' interest and support to my UNRWA colleagues.

I wish to make a few more points before I close. One is to offer my appreciation for the support that has been expressed by some speakers. The representative of India, for example, expressed strong support for multilateral action in terms of refugee responses. I can assure him that I really appreciate what India has been

doing and saying, and as I said earlier, I am always ready to travel to New Delhi to discuss this further with his Government. I also express full support for what the Kenyan Ambassador said about what is being done in Kenya — a very complex issue — and my full assurances that UNHCR remains very vigilant on the issue of law and order linked to the presence of refugees. That is, of course, the responsibility of the host countries, but as with Kenya, we are always ready to mobilize resources, if need be, to support the action of the host country to ensure that law and order are not destabilized by the presence of refugees, possible tensions with host communities or, worse, the infiltration of undesirable elements through refugee camps and other settlements. That is something that we need to remain very vigilant about.

Finally, this morning, as some speakers have mentioned, I participated in the annual pledging conference to UNHCR. We asked for \$9 billion, as I said earlier, for our activities for next year. I am glad to say that we got initial pledges — and these are just initial pledges — of over \$1 billion this morning. That is the highest level of initial pledges that we have ever received in our history, so I am very grateful for that and would like to encourage in particular those who have spoken about their own financial contributions to continue, going forward, to make such contributions as flexible, unearmarked and multi-year as possible in order to help us face the complex challenges we have talked about.

Next Tuesday, I have convened in Geneva the High-level Officials Meeting. Some speakers have mentioned that. This is two years after the Global Refugee Forum and two years before the next refugee forum, as stipulated by the global compact on refugees. I hope that it will be an opportunity to reflect on many of those themes. I will welcome the contributions of Council members and other Member States, and hope that it will be a good opportunity to renew our commitment to helping countries hosting large numbers of refugees, and in particular those that have the misfortune of having left everything behind and taken the road to exile, so that they can be protected and solutions can be found to their plight.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Grandi for his participation, responses and comments.

The meeting rose at 12.15 p.m.