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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 13th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York
on Thursday, 30 April 1981, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairman: Mrs. SEMICHI (Algeria)

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Human rights questions (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 11.10 a.m.

HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS (A/36/209; E/1981/25 and Corr.1 and 28) (continued)

1. Miss CAO-PINNA (Italy) said that, since discussion of the report of the Commission on Human Rights (E/1981/25) could not be as exhaustive as it deserved to be, she would confine her comments to certain aspects of the Commission's work.
2. First she pointed out that, as the press attended few, if any, of the Commission's meetings, no echo of the Commission's work reached the public. That was prejudicial to the image of the Commission as the principal organ of the United Nations in the field of human rights. The press generally dealt with human rights situations through its direct channels of information making no use of the documentation available to or the action taken by the Commission. Noting that resolution 24 (XXXVII) on the development of public information activities in the field of human rights, which had not been submitted to the Council for approval, inter alia invited the Secretary-General to consider ways and means of stimulating public interest in the promotion of human rights and to report thereon, she suggested that the Council might wish to recommend that the Secretary-General should also include suggestions on ways of attracting the press to at least the closing meeting of each session of the Commission. One idea might be to hold a press conference with the officers of the Commission.
3. Referring to requests which the General Assembly sometimes addressed to the Commission, she said that proper implementation of such requests required that they be given due priority and that the work be concluded in a reasonable time. It was an established practice of the Commission to establish a working group to study each such request, thereby satisfying the first requirement. The method of working by consensus did not, however, ensure expeditious implementation. Although the Commission had completed the preparation of a single draft declaration on the elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief as requested by the General Assembly in resolution 3267 (XXIX) - the draft resolution was currently before the Council even though it had not received general consensus and constituted a major achievement - the Commission had been unable as yet, as was clear from resolution 23 (XXXVII) to take any decision on the request in General Assembly resolution 32/130 for an over-all analysis of the alternative approaches and ways and means for improving the enjoyment of human rights. The divergent results achieved could be explained by the different methods of work followed by the two working groups involved. Her delegation was not suggesting that working groups should abandon the quest for a mutually agreed conclusion because the method of working by consensus was always desirable no matter what the subject. However, the Commission should not be led to feel that inability to reach consensus excused it from carrying out the mandate of the General Assembly. In bringing Commission resolution 23 (XXXVII) to the Assembly's attention the Secretary-General might wish to consider the possibility of including her delegation's comments and those of other delegations in his report.
4. Turning to the confidential procedures on communications established by Council resolution 1503 (XLVIII), she said that although 11 years had elapsed since

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that resolution had been adopted, the Commission had not yet brought to the Council's attention any instance of violations of human rights under paragraph 6, subparagraphs (a) and (b), or paragraph 8, although there were a few cases which the Commission had asked the Council to publicize or which it had decided to consider in public meetings. Her delegation had drawn attention to the situation in 1977 and had pointed out that it might create the erroneous impression that there were no human rights cases requiring thorough study or investigation. She had suggested that the Council should request the Commission to prepare a report providing information of a largely statistical kind (number of instances considered, kinds of action taken, average time required to complete consideration of situations examined and general comments on the results achieved through the implementation of the confidential procedures). The Council should begin to consider what steps it might take in order to evaluate the results and, if necessary, amend the provisions of resolution 1503 (XLVIII). In that connexion, she recalled that her delegation, in voting in favour of the resolution, had expressed the view that adoption of the confidential procedure should not prejudice the future adoption of other measures which would render the action of the United Nations more prompt and effective.

5. Her delegation viewed with interest the proposal in connexion with resolution 36 (XXXVII) to establish a working group of governmental experts to study the scope and contents of the right to development. That concept must be defined further for, although much had been said and written about the right to development, there was as yet no common understanding of the concept. If the right to development was viewed as an individual right, it could be asked whether it was a new right to be added to those already proclaimed in the Universal Declaration and the two Covenants or if it was a synthesis of all those rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural. Was it consistent to recognize that all human rights were indivisible and then ask the group of experts to study the scope and contents of the right to development only in relation to the achievement of economic, social and cultural rights? If it was viewed as a right of peoples, the question arose as to whether the right to development was a universal right of all peoples or a right only of the developing countries. Finally, it was necessary to determine what the difference was between that right and the right "of" development as a branch of international law. Those were some of the questions that the working group should debate in a spirit of understanding in order further to clarify the concept prior to drafting a declaratory instrument.

6. The increasing attention being paid by the Commission to full respect of the right to self-determination of independent peoples, particularly in the cases of Afghanistan and Kampuchea, was a welcome development in view of the trend that seemed to be emerging towards encroachment on the right of such peoples to self-determination. Her delegation therefore fully supported resolutions 11 and 13 (XXXVII). It would be highly appropriate for the Council to endorse the former which recommended that the Council should consider the situation in Kampuchea at its current session. Her delegation was ready to lend its full support to any move in that direction.

7. Mr. NORDENFELT (Observer for Sweden) said that the State had a duty to the individual to respect, protect and promote human rights which could not be denied, limited or bargained over no matter what political winds might be blowing. It was particularly necessary to remember that at the present time when powerful countries were tending to make security considerations prevail over the obligation of all Member States to protect and promote human rights. Such a breach of duty was not acceptable. The Swedish Government would continue to intensify its efforts to achieve universal acceptance of human rights as expressed in the Universal Declaration.

8. Many delegations had spoken on the subject of terrorism at the recent session of the Commission on Human Rights. Terrorism - that was to say, acts of violence committed for political purposes against individuals - had always existed but it had become a more frequent occurrence recently. When perpetrated by individuals, such acts constituted a serious crime and, when carried out by agents of a State or by groups supported or condoned by a State, they constituted grave violations of human rights against which a citizen often had no protection or remedy. In such cases the international community had a particular obligation to speak up in defence of the victims.

9. Countries which were prepared to safeguard their own power system at the expense of human rights had a tendency to justify their actions by claiming to be fighting terrorists. His Government opposed violence wherever it occurred. At the same time it could not accept the argument that people fighting for legitimate economic and social changes in their own society should automatically be classified as terrorists.

10. The so-called disappearances that occurred in several Latin American countries and elsewhere were a particularly cruel form of terror and oppression. His Government had welcomed the establishment of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances. The report of the Group showed how widespread that method of repression was, that progress could be made in some cases and that Governments were sometimes more willing to co-operate with the Group than they would be to act on individual requests. His Government was pleased to see that the Group's mandate had been extended and hoped that all Governments would co-operate with it.

11. Torture was another widespread method of government terror and oppression. The Working Group on the subject had agreed, in principle, on the substance to be covered in a convention but there were several views on the international control mechanism to be adopted. The rules of implementation should become as effective as possible and the Working Group should be able to study the matter again before the next session of the Commission. His delegation hoped that, in the meantime, Governments would have an opportunity to consider the various possible solutions.

12. His delegation supported the proposal of the Commission on Human Rights to redesignate the United Nations Trust Fund for Chile as a voluntary fund for victims of torture.

(Mr. Nordenfelt,
Observer, Sweden)

13. Finally, the different organs within the United Nations should continue to look into the question of the abolition of capital punishment with a view to taking further steps in that direction.

14. Mr. ERDOS (Observer for Hungary) welcomed the closer attention being given to the work of the Commission on Human Rights and the positive results achieved by the Commission at its recent session. The resolutions adopted by the Commission on the question of the violation of human rights in the occupied Arab territories, including Palestine, could contribute to a settlement acceptable to the international community. The same was true of the position taken by the Commission with regard to the problems of southern Africa and apartheid. However, so long as certain monied interests continued to co-operate with the racist régime the world would not be rid of institutionalized racial discrimination.

15. The resolutions adopted with regard to the situation in Chile demonstrated the mature and consistent approach of the Commission which had quite rightly continued to concern itself with the persistent violations of human rights and to reaffirm its indignation at the deterioration of the human rights situation in that country.

16. His delegation attached particular importance to United Nations action to combat nazi, fascist and neo-fascist activities and all totalitarian ideologies. It had sponsored General Assembly resolution 35/200, paragraph 2 of which urged all States to give due consideration to taking the necessary measures against activities of groups and organizations practising such ideologies, in accordance with the national constitutional systems. Experience of the past 80 years had shown repeatedly that elements which overtly or covertly advocated racial or ethnic intolerance and the denial of human rights and fundamental freedoms were particularly likely to emerge during periods of turmoil. It was particularly necessary at the present time, when efforts seemed to be directed towards recreating the cold war climate, that the international community should move on to the adoption of effective universal measures to combat the evil which had been elevated to the rank of government policy in some politically sensitive areas of the world. The apartheid régime in South Africa was an eloquent example. In that connexion, the international community had a particular responsibility to youth and to future generations. His Government had already sent the comments requested of it to the Secretary-General on those problems and on measures that should be taken at the national and international levels to eradicate such ideologies and it hoped that the other nations would follow suit.

17. The forthcoming seminar on the relations between human rights, peace and development would undoubtedly mark an important phase in efforts to ensure effective enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights in all countries.

18. He could not conclude without mentioning certain phenomena which had not contributed to the success of the thirty-seventh session of the Commission, namely, the consideration of the questions of Afghanistan and Kampuchea. The United Nations could facilitate a solution to any problems that might exist between the

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(Mr. Erdos, Observer, Hungary)

countries of South West and South-East Asia but it would be a mistake to think that activities could be a substitute for a dialogue or regional consultations between Governments since the latter method was the most direct and most appropriate way of bringing the contending parties together. The declarations and communiqués from the Governments of Afghanistan and Kampuchea demonstrated their sincere desire to start a process leading to the settlement of disputes. The greatly desired solution to the problems in those two regions of Asia could be brought about by facilitating the resumption of contacts between the countries involved rather than by creating further problems.

19. Mr. SCHLEGEL (German Democratic Republic) said that the report of the Commission on Human Rights on its thirty-seventh session showed that the deliberations of the Commission had once again focused attention on the systematic and mass violations of human rights in southern Africa, in Chile and other Latin American States and in the Arab territories occupied by Israel. It also made reference to the increasing dangers to peace and international security caused by the activities of those terrorist régimes. Among the important achievements of the Commission's recent session were the resolutions adopted with regard to human rights violations in southern Africa, which reaffirmed the need to take effective measures against the apartheid régime. The Commission had once again called for effective sanctions against South Africa, in order to force the apartheid régime to its knees and for an end to the far-reaching imperialist support for South Africa, without which that régime would long ago have ceased to exist.

20. His delegation also welcomed resolution 9 (XXXVII) on violations of human rights in Chile. In contrast to certain other delegations, his delegation felt that the Commission should deal with the situation in Chile under a separate agenda item until fundamental human rights were restored in accordance with international norms. It therefore considered it logical to extend the mandate of the Special Rapporteur for an additional year. With full justification the Commission had spoken out against the intensified terror practices of the Chilean junta, which had still not made any serious effort to provide information on the whereabouts and fate of 2,500 patriots arrested for political reasons or deported to unknown places. That constituted a serious affront to international public opinion, which for years had been demanding information on the fate of those people. At the recent Geneva session the Commission had also discussed the situation in El Salvador, Bolivia and Guatemala and had taken appropriate decisions. The Commission's appeal to States not to provide any military support in the present situation in El Salvador was particularly important in view of the fact that an imperialist Power was sending military advisers to El Salvador and intensifying its military assistance to that régime.

21. The Commission had again drawn attention to the gross violations of human rights in the Israeli-occupied Arab territories, including Palestine, and had condemned the expansionist policy pursued by Israel and its continuous aggression against the Arab-Palestinian population as serious obstacles to the implementation of self-determination and independence of the Palestinian people. Lasting peace and security in the region could only be established if Israel withdrew completely from all occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, if the inalienable rights of

(Mr. Schlegel, German
Democratic Republic)

the Arab people of Palestine, including their right to return to their homeland, to self-determination and to establish an independent State of their own were implemented and the right to existence was guaranteed for all States in the region. The Palestine question was at the heart of the entire problem.

22. With the discussion of the agenda item relating to questions of measures to be taken against ideologies and practices based on terror or incitement to racial discrimination or any other form of group hatred; the Commission had complied with the request of the General Assembly in resolution 35/200. In adopting its resolution 3 (XXXVII) it had made its own important contribution to the struggle against the increasing danger of nazism, fascism and neo-fascism in many parts of the world. The Commission had thereby showed its awareness of the constantly increasing activities of fascist and terrorist groups and organizations and of the mounting dangers emanating from their actions. The forces that glorified war and military adventurism and tried to establish and justify an entire system of domination and subordination through the dissemination of racial theories were the most serious enemies of détente, disarmament and progress. The activities in question were not those of a few people of pathological predisposition or persons who acted in isolation; on the contrary, such activities could be seen at present in more than 50 States. Their actions were co-ordinated on an international scale and there existed strong and clear relations among the national organizations, as well as between national and international organizations. Their ideas had gained ground even in governmental, juridical and military circles. It was imperative to do everything possible to protect young people against the inhuman ideology of fascism.

23. The Commission had called upon all States to accede to the various international instruments on human rights, genocide, apartheid and racial discrimination. Universal accession to those conventions and the strict observance of their provisions could contribute considerably to eliminating the danger of erosion facing human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as to preventing the atmosphere from being poisoned by fascist and racist forces. His delegation also welcomed the call addressed to intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to contribute to the struggle against the dissemination of fascist ideas wherever they might occur.

24. In that connexion the report prepared by the Secretary-General in accordance with General Assembly resolution 35/200 clearly reflected the concern of a number of States regarding the implementation of the basic principles and guidelines for the peaceful coexistence of peoples and States. It was regrettable, however, that, owing to the late completion and transmission of the documents, only a limited number of Member States had been in a position to submit their comments within the period prescribed. His delegation therefore proposed that all comments received by the Secretariat after 6 March 1981 and not taken into account in the present report of the Secretary-General should be included in the report to be prepared for submission to the thirty-sixth session of the General Assembly. Member States should be requested in a second Secretariat circular to submit their positions by the end of June.

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(Mr. Schlegel, German
Democratic Republic)

25. In connexion with the further promotion and encouragement of human rights and fundamental freedoms, he felt that some progress had been made in implementing General Assembly resolution 32/130. Although his delegation could not approve of some of the proposals submitted in the Working Group on the preparation of an "over-all analysis", it could accept the end result as reflected in resolution 23 (XXXVII) and welcomed the decision to continue in an open-ended working group the work on the "over-all analysis" at the forthcoming session of the Commission.

26. The activities of the Working Group on questions relating to missing or disappeared persons and resolution 10 (XXXVII) met with only conditional support from his delegation. It had become evident that the methods employed in the Group did not in all cases correspond with its mandate. His delegation therefore hoped that in its future activities the Group would be guided by the principles of the Charter, primarily the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of States.

27. His delegation considered resolution 36 (XXXVII) to be a significant contribution to the formalization of the right to development as a human right and supported the proposals therein, the holding of a seminar on the subject in August 1981 and the establishment of a working group to examine the scope and content of the right to development.

28. With regard to the elaboration of a convention on the rights of the child (resolution 26 (XXXVII)), his delegation welcomed the progress achieved and hoped that the codification process would make steady headway. However, it was unfortunate that certain States chose to obstruct the completion of a convention by making self-interested political proposals. He also hoped that the drafting of a convention on the rights of migrant workers and their families would also continue at a swift pace, but could not accept the manner in which a number of States had acted at the recent session of the Commission to gain acceptance of the draft declaration on the elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief. His delegation had reservations on certain individual passages of the draft declaration and could not approve of the attempts made at the recent Geneva session to destroy the principle of consensus and use majority voting strength to rebuff delegations which had been actively participating in the drafting of the articles for years.

29. The German Democratic Republic sought international co-operation for the promotion of human rights and in the struggle against mass violations. It did so on the basis of its own stable development under socialism, the only social order that ensured the well-being, freedom and dignity of the individual. The protection of human rights must be an element of peaceful international co-operation based on respect for the sovereign equality of States and must not serve as a pretext for intervention in the internal affairs of other States. Observance of the principles proclaimed in the Charter and recognition of existing economic, social and cultural realities must remain the basis for the activities of the United Nations in the human rights field.

30. Mr. SARRE (Senegal) said that, although unprecedented progress in furthering human rights had taken place since the Second World War, there was by no means agreement on their essence or substance and violations continued on a broad scale. The report of the Commission (E/1981/25) confirmed that little progress had been achieved in the major areas of concern to the Commission. Some peoples continued to be the victims of gross violations of human rights and oppression and, although they expected assistance and consolation from the international community, the established system was often not able to provide it. That applied particularly to human rights violations in the occupied Arab territories, including Palestine, and southern Africa. In that connexion his delegation hoped that the Council would adopt resolution 5 (XXXVII) and transmit it to the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Special Committee against Apartheid.

31. The report of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities on its thirty-third session (E/CN.4/1413 and Corr.1) was hardly more heartening. The Sub-Commission performed excellent work and should be encouraged. He therefore felt that any attempt to restrict its mandate would jeopardize its effectiveness. Moreover, its title no longer corresponded to its numerous functions: it would be more appropriate to rename it the Sub-Commission on Human Rights. He hoped that the Council would adopt resolution 3 (XXXIII) of the Sub-Commission, which, inter alia, recommended that the Commission should formulate recommendations on the possibility of establishing a human rights assistance fund. The fund would make it possible to assist countries seeking to make progress in the struggle against discrimination but also and more especially to support victims of racial discrimination or of violations of human rights in general.

32. There were some bright spots in the Commission's report, however, in particular the first steps made towards drawing up rules governing the right to development. The Commission had adopted resolution 36 (XXXVII), in which it had decided, inter alia, to establish a working group of 15 governmental experts that was to submit to the Commission at its thirty-eighth session a report with concrete proposals for implementation of the right to development and for a draft international instrument on the subject. He hoped that the Council would endorse that proposal which could become a landmark in the history of human rights.

33. Similarly, he supported resolution 35 (XXXVII), in which the Commission invited the Council to recommend the General Assembly to redesignate the United Nations Trust Fund for Chile as a voluntary fund of the United Nations for victims of torture.

34. Finally, his delegation commended resolution 20 (XXXVII) containing the draft declaration on the elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief and hoped that all the Commission's recommendations would be favourably viewed by the Council and General Assembly.

35. Senegal had taken up the struggle for human rights since its earliest days. The Government had enacted legislation and regulations aimed at ensuring the freedom and dignity of all the people, subject only to the rules of the democratic process. Senegal had acceded to all the international human rights instruments, including the Covenants and the Optional Protocol and, together with only 12 other States,

(Mr. Sarre, Senegal)

had even made a declaration under article 41 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Senegalese nationals were therefore free to bring complaints concerning their Government before the Human Rights Committee. It was his country's belief that one of the best means of ensuring effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms lay in supervision, not only by competent national authorities but also by international bodies comprising qualified independent experts acting in their personal capacity. He did not feel it appropriate to ~~establish new human rights bodies; the existing ones should rather be strengthened and improved.~~ Numerous associations and commissions had been established in Senegal, not only to inform citizens of their rights but also to act in concert with public authorities to guide the Government's activities in promoting human rights. At the regional level, Senegal co-operated with other African States in the preparation of a draft African charter on human rights and the rights of peoples. The draft had been adopted at a ministerial meeting, held at Banjul, Gambia, from 7 to 27 January 1981, and would be submitted to the eighteenth session of the Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity to be held in Nairobi in July 1981.

36. Mr. DYRLUND (Denmark) said that the Commission would have to reconsider its methods of work if it was to accomplish its important task in the future. Much valuable time could be saved if it avoided rehearsals of General Assembly political debates and concentrated on human rights issues.

37. A number of important results had emerged from the Commission's thirty-seventh session. The Commission had adopted, after 17 years of preparatory work, a draft Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination based on Religion or Belief. The Council should recommend its adoption by the General Assembly so that it could take its place among international human rights instruments.

38. It was disappointing that the Commission had been unable to conclude its work on the draft convention on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Difficult problems remained in the matter of jurisdiction and implementation. It was to be hoped that those problems would be resolved at the thirty-eighth session.

39. The violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms was one of the most important matters dealt with by the Commission. It was clear that violations of the integrity of the individual took place, despite the fact that all States Members of the United Nations had solemnly undertaken to promote, in collaboration with the United Nations, respect for human rights. The Commission bore a special responsibility in the endeavours to end such violations.

40. The human rights situation in El Salvador was a case in point. Reports of grave violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in that country had shocked world public opinion. Under General Assembly resolution 35/192 the Commission had been mandated to examine the situation of human rights in El Salvador. It was gratifying that there was broad agreement within the Commission on seeking ways to restore human rights in that country. The

(Mr. Dyrland, Denmark)

Commission's decision to appoint a special representative to consider human rights violations there was a useful first step. His delegation hoped that the Council would approve that decision and that the special representative, once appointed, would be allowed to visit El Salvador.

41. Violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms had been considered by the Commission under Council resolution 1503 (XLVIII). The procedure under that resolution had certain shortcomings, attributable in part to the fact that some countries were unwilling to enter into a genuine dialogue when questioned on specific human rights issues. Yet a number of countries had demonstrated considerable willingness to co-operate with the Commission under that procedure, which constituted a useful supplement to the Commission's public procedure.

42. A recent and alarming trend was the abhorrent enforced or involuntary disappearances of persons. Denmark had strongly supported the establishment of the Working Group to consider the matter. It was gratifying to note that the Group had obtained some positive results. His delegation welcomed the Commission's decision to extend the Group's mandate for another year, and trusted that it would receive the full co-operation of all the Governments concerned.

43. At its thirty-seventh session the Commission had considered the question of the realization of economic, social and cultural rights. Those rights, together with civil and political rights, should be guaranteed as essential parts of a whole. In that context the right to development raised a number of complex and important questions. His delegation had supported the Commission's decision to establish a working group to consider the matter.

44. It was clear that neither the future Working Group nor the Commission on Human Rights could or should deal with all aspects of development. It would be appropriate for the former to stress and define more clearly the relevance of the human factor in development, with regard to a qualitative as opposed to a purely technocratic, quantitative dimension of the development process. It was to be hoped that progress could be made on the basis of consensus.

45. Draft resolution IV had been adopted by a considerable majority in the Commission on Human Rights (resolution 35 (XXXVII)). It was a follow-up to General Assembly resolution 35/190, which had requested the Commission to study the possibility of extending the mandate of the United Nations Trust Fund for Chile. The Fund covered victims of torture, who were in special need of assistance and was to receive voluntary contributions for distribution to victims of torture and their relatives.

46. Adoption of draft resolution IV by the Council, and subsequently by the General Assembly, would symbolize the concern of the United Nations with human rights in general and victims of torture in particular. His delegation trusted that it would receive wide support.

47. He suggested that, in paragraph 2 of the draft resolution, the words "to the Economic and Social Council at its first regular session in 1982" should be replaced by the words "to the General Assembly at its thirty-sixth session", which would make the text more logical.

48. Ms. von ROEMER (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions) said that the basic situation with regard to infringements of trade-union rights in South Africa (E/1981/28) remained the same.

49. The organizers of the Western Province General Workers' Union had been released, although there had been further bannings of officials of the Media Workers' Association of South Africa. Certain newspapers serving the black community had been closed down.

50. It was not possible to speak of liberalization or labour reform when the Government of South Africa continued to interfere in industrial disputes, not only by arresting and banning trade-union leaders, but by deporting strikers to the so-called homelands in order to create a climate of fear among the workers. The difficulties caused by repressive legislation had increased in 1980. There had been cases in which people had not been allowed to work despite having found employment, since they had not been recruited in their homelands. That created particular difficulties for married couples where husband and wife had been born in different homelands.

51. The Council should call for the immediate release of detained trade unionists in South Africa and the lifting of all bans imposed on trade-union activities; an end to police and State interference in industrial disputes; the lifting of the fund-raising ban imposed on the Federation of South African Trade Unions; and recognition of the black independent trade-union movement's right to freedom of association and collective bargaining.

52. The South African Government's new labour legislation was designed to bring the growing African trade-union movement under strict control, which explained the intensified repression of independent unions. Nevertheless those unions continued to display remarkable courage and morale.

53. His Confederation welcomed the decision taken at the thirty-seventh session of the Commission to extend the mandate of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances and the attention given to violations of human rights in a number of countries. Trade unionists were prime targets for repressive régimes and were among the most frequent victims of enforced disappearances. The fact that people who fought for economic and social rights were most likely to have their civil and political rights violated was clear proof of the interdependence of all human rights.

54. It was disappointing that no progress had been made towards the establishment of the post of high commissioner for human rights. The proposal had been before the United Nations for many years, during which the international community's concern with human rights had undergone a marked evolution, making the objections against it somewhat anachronistic. Those same arguments had once been invoked against the establishment of the Human Rights Committee, a body subsequently held in high esteem. A high commissioner for human rights, far from exacerbating relations between States, could ensure that human rights questions were treated with the necessary discretion and prevent them from being used as a political ploy. Serious consideration should be given to the establishment of the post.

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55. Ms. McGILLICUDDY (St. Joan's International Alliance) said that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women crowned the endeavours of the United Nations to give legal force to the Charter's affirmation of the equal rights of men and women. The Alliance eagerly awaited the deposit of the twentieth instrument of ratification which would bring the Convention into force.

56. The Alliance also wished to draw attention to the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, on which it had submitted observations at the time of its drafting. The World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace had considered the Convention. The Alliance trusted that all organs of the United Nations system would co-operate in its implementation.

57. The Alliance welcomed a "people-oriented" approach to development. Development was a human right and at least 50 per cent of humans were women. It was time to intensify the struggle to overcome the most pervasive form of colonialism of all. Humankind was attempting to fight critical battles with only one hand, which was both morally wrong and foolish.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.