



General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/AC.96/SR.428
10 October 1988

Original: ENGLISH

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME

Thirty-ninth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 428th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 4 October 1988, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. JAMAL (United Republic of Tanzania)

CONTENTS

General debate (continued)

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Chief, Official Records Editing Section, room E.6108, Palais des Nations, Geneva.

Any corrections to the records of the meetings of the Executive Committee at this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4) (continued)

1. Mr. SEKHONYANA (Lesotho), after congratulating the High Commissioner and his entire staff on their untiring efforts to better the lot of refugees and other displaced persons and on the excellent documentation placed before the Committee, thanked the OAU, the United Nations system and the Kingdom of Norway for organizing and hosting the International Conference on the Plight of Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons in Southern Africa held at Oslo in August 1988. Lesotho attached great importance to the resolutions adopted at the Conference and was keenly looking forward to their speedy implementation.

2. Despite its unique geographical situation, Lesotho reaffirmed its long-standing and unequivocal commitment to all the principles enshrined in the international conventions on refugees. It stood ready to receive all bona fide refugees fleeing from political persecution and harassment in their countries of origin, especially from apartheid, which was the root cause of the refugee problem in southern Africa. In Lesotho, however, the refugee problem was a sensitive and often complicated issue because it invariably bordered on the country's national security and, indeed, on the personal security of the refugee community itself. While it was relatively easy for refugees from South Africa to flee to Lesotho because of its strategic geographical situation, that same situation was exploited by the notorious South African Defence Force, which had entered Lesotho with impunity and staged acts of brutality. Lesotho, in its genuine attempt to provide as comfortable and safe an asylum as possible for refugees, had put into place legislative instruments such as the 1983 Refugee Act, the 1984 Human Rights Act, and the 1986 Refugee Regulations. However, as a vulnerable enclave unable to guarantee the safety of some of the refugees, Lesotho had agreed to the preparation, by the liberation movements and UNHCR, of a plan under which South African refugees whose safety was deemed to be threatened would be amicably evacuated to third countries of asylum. Those who remained behind were fully integrated into the mainstream of society, competed freely in the trade and labour markets, and their children were equally integrated in the schools.

3. He thanked those who had always endeavoured to show sympathetic understanding for Lesotho's most unenviable position. His Government appealed to those who had deliberately chosen to misinterpret Lesotho's difficult dilemma to cease doing so, since their criticism was both unjust and unfortunate. The team of journalists representing a broad section of the international media which had visited Lesotho in May 1988 in preparation for the SARRED Conference at Oslo would endorse that appeal, since they had seen for themselves and approved of the situation of adult refugees in Lesotho. His Government had appealed to the international community and to the United Nations system to help it to do more for the refugee community, and there were indications that help was on its way, specifically through ILO.

4. He wished to reiterate the appeal made by the Foreign Minister of Lesotho at Oslo during the SARRED Conference with regard to Lesotho refugee returnees under the general amnesty declared in January 1986. He reaffirmed his Government's desire to accept back into the country all fugitive nationals now living abroad and to reinstate them in the social conditions they had been in

prior to their displacement or even better them. Since Lesotho, with its scarce resources, could not cope with the situation alone, the international donor community was being asked to assist.

5. Finally, he welcomed the delegations of Somalia and Pakistan as new members of the Executive Committee.

6. Mr. MUSHEGA (Uganda), after paying a tribute to the High Commissioner and his entire staff for their dedicated service to refugees, said that the causes of the refugee problem were many but in Africa the problem was partly a product of the colonial policy of divide and rule, the attendant artificial boundaries and the continued plundering of the continent's resources. The legacy of that policy had continued to thrive even after independence. The political victimization of opponents systematically carried out by backward elements had made Africa the biggest refugee-producer in the world. A collective effort should be made to eliminate that scourge.

7. The causes of the immense suffering in southern Africa had been clearly identified at the SARRED Conference in Oslo. They included the plundering of the immense resources of southern Africa by foreign forces, apartheid and acts of aggression and destabilization by the South African régime against front-line and other States. One million Africans had been forced into exile, and an even larger number had been displaced.

8. While commending the Government of Norway, the OAU, the United Nations and the international community for contributing to the success of the Oslo Conference, his Government requested the High Commissioner to ensure the timely and effective implementation of the SARRED Plan of Action. However, apartheid had to be eliminated and the plundering of resources had to cease before a solution of the refugee problem in southern Africa could be found. His Government supported the ongoing talks between Angola, Cuba, the United States of America and South Africa and looked forward to an early implementation of Security Council resolution 435 (1978) and to the complete withdrawal of South African troops from Angola and Namibia.

9. However, it was sad to note that South Africa was not alone in creating refugee problems in Africa. It was estimated that Africa was currently accommodating well over 5 million refugees - almost half of the world's entire refugee population. Steps should therefore be taken to remove the political and social causes responsible for the creation of refugees. At present Uganda was a host to over 100,000 refugees from a number of countries, mainly Rwanda, Zaire and Sudan. Despite the heavy burden, progress in integrating the refugees into the local community had been impressive, especially with regard to education and employment. Intermarriage had also facilitated the process of local integration. Refugees were free to move within and outside the country.

10. Relations between the Government of Uganda and refugees had not, however, always been happy. In 1982 and 1983 some powerful but backward members of the Government of the day had victimized refugees of Rwandese origin and, as a result, Uganda had helped to add to the already large refugee population that it had created since independence. The bulk of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) leadership, including the President, had at one time been forced to leave Uganda as a result of political intrigues and gross violations of human rights by previous régimes. It was ironic that while Uganda under

previous régimes had been proudly playing host to over 100,000 refugees, at the same time it had ruthlessly forced well over 400,000 of its own citizens into exile.

11. The NRM Government had halted and reversed the refugee-generating trend. Over the past three years Ugandan refugees had returned to their country in safety and dignity as a result of the correct handling of the country's political issues and other steps taken by the new Government. Thus there had been a massive voluntary return of over 300,000 Ugandan refugees from Sudan, Zaire and elsewhere. His Government wished to thank the international community, through UNHCR, for the assistance it had rendered in transporting the returnees. Continued assistance with the repatriation and reintegration of the remaining refugees would be appreciated. Returnees were assured of being accepted in the family of peace-loving Ugandans. If Uganda's example was followed by African and other countries that still had their own citizens living in other countries as refugees, a great contribution would be made towards a total solution of the global problem.

12. His Government's offer of an amnesty to all rebels had received an encouraging response. The Government's commitment to the rule of law, respect for all people and the upholding of human rights had created conditions for the rebels to surrender and for peace to be restored in all parts of the country.

13. His Government hoped that the international community would bring pressure to bear on those countries which denied their nationals their right to return home in peace and dignity. The principle of burden-sharing required the international community not only to provide assistance but also to ensure that refugees could exercise their right to return to their countries of origin if they wished to do so. There was no justification whatsoever for the continued exile of nationals of countries where violence, persecution and violations of human rights had ceased to occur. Voluntary repatriation was the best durable solution to the refugee problem, and Uganda would continue to encourage countries which had overcome the conditions that had created refugees to facilitate voluntary repatriation of their nationals. His Government had already initiated a dialogue with neighbouring States so that their nationals living as refugees in Uganda could be repatriated. He reiterated his Government's request that the High Commissioner, acting in consultation with the OAU and the countries concerned, should convene a regional conference to find durable solutions to the refugee problem in East Africa.

14. In an effort to put an end to past practices emphasizing separate development for refugees, his Government had decided to incorporate refugee settlements in the overall national development plan. As a result, UNHCR-sponsored projects had been resumed and were being implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Local Government. While progress had been made, much remained to be done and it was therefore premature to contemplate phasing out UNHCR's involvement.

15. The previous régime in Uganda had pledged to contribute US\$ 3,650,660 towards UNHCR's 1983 programme, of which US\$ 1,490,660 had remained unpaid until recently. The NRM Government had paid that outstanding contribution and promised to pledge a further contribution at the pledging

conference in New York next month. That would be in addition to the long-standing contribution in kind which Uganda continued to make for the welfare of refugees living in the country.

16. In conclusion, the Committee could rest assured of his Government's total commitment to the search for a meaningful and lasting solution to the refugee problem.

17. Mr. TAYLHARDAT (Venezuela), after welcoming Somalia and Pakistan as new members of the Committee, said that since the previous session important events posing new challenges for international action to protect refugees had taken place. It was to be hoped that the favourable developments in the international situation and the solution of regional conflicts would lead to an attenuation of the burden which the international community had to bear, as populations displaced by the conflicts returned home. At the same time, however, new outflows of population were occurring, especially in Africa, giving rise to new refugee situations that required urgent attention. His Government reiterated its support for United Nations action for the protection of refugees, as demonstrated by its active participation in the work of the Executive Committee since its inception, in its ratification of the various regional and international instruments designed to promote international solidarity for the benefit of refugees, and in its modest contribution to the United Nations voluntary funds for refugees.

18. Venezuela particularly supported the efforts made by UNHCR to find durable solutions for refugee situations. While the international community had an obligation to display solidarity by helping to attenuate the sufferings of refugees and to lighten the burden borne by the countries that received them, individual States had to make an effort to prevent the emergence of situations that could lead to new refugee outflows by solving the problems that could give rise to them and by ensuring that the fundamental rights of individuals and communities living in their territories were respected.

19. A number of the topics discussed in the Sub-Committee on International Protection during 1988 needed to be given thorough consideration by the Executive Committee at the appropriate time. Some of the documents prepared gave the impression that, if the opinions expressed in them were accepted, the scope of UNHCR's responsibilities could be extended and new obligations not provided for in the international instruments in force could be attributed to Governments. At the same time, there was a tendency to expand the powers of the Executive Committee by attributing to it a legislative function which the international community had never conferred upon it. It would appear that an attempt was being made to fill the gaps in international refugee law by giving the Executive Committee's conclusions the status of rules to govern the conduct of States. It had even been said that the Executive Committee's conclusions and decisions constituted "soft law". His delegation took the view that the conclusions adopted by consensus in the Executive Committee could only be considered to be guidelines on which States could base their conduct in the solution of refugee problems.

20. At its recently concluded session, the Sub-Committee on International Protection had considered in particular the question of stowaway asylum-seekers. Because of its sensitive nature, conflicting opinions had been expressed on the subject. His delegation had serious doubts as to whether the question of stowaway asylum-seekers really was a refugee problem

and whether the assimilation of stowaways to refugees would not unduly extend the competence of the United Nations. His delegation wondered whether the Executive Committee could take it upon itself to try to fill the existing legal vacuum by establishing rules of conduct for States in a matter which was not provided for in international legal instruments, and whether, for example, it was competent to decide that the principle of non-refoulement applied absolutely to all stowaway asylum-seekers. Similarly, his delegation wondered whether the Executive Committee could decide that stowaway asylum-seekers should be recognized as refugees and consequently be afforded the protection accorded to refugees by the international instruments in force and by the generally accepted principles of international law. In any case, such an approach might constitute an incentive leading to an increase in the number of stowaway asylum-seekers, with all the attendant consequences. The question obviously had to be solved, but governments needed time to study it in greater detail. Further discussion of it should therefore be postponed for the moment.

21. Thanks were due to UNHCR for the results obtained in its efforts to find a solution to the refugee problem in Central America, where 12,200 persons had been voluntarily repatriated during the first eight months of 1988, in addition to the 11,000 which had returned home in 1987. The High Commissioner should continue his efforts. In that connection, Venezuela attached particular importance to the conference on refugees in Central America, a matter which was shortly due to be considered by the Executive Committee. Venezuela fully supported the convening of the conference and called upon other Member States to support it and to participate in the implementation of any measures that might be recommended by it.

22. Mrs. MALIYABWANA (Zaire) said States had yet to apply to the daily life of refugees the principles that were reaffirmed at each session of the Executive Committee. States must attack the root causes of movements of refugees particularly if they were responsible for them. Most real solutions were dependent on the political will of States.

23. She commended the Notes on International Protection and that on refugee women and the guidelines on refugee children. Since women and children accounted for over two-thirds of the refugee population, they deserved particular attention. She congratulated UNHCR for its contribution towards the execution of the United Nations Plan for Namibia in view of the progress made in the negotiations on the situation in Angola and Namibia which was likely to result in the latter's independence. It was to be hoped that an early start would be made on the implementation of the Plan of Action adopted at the SARRED Conference in order to alleviate the suffering of refugees and displaced persons in southern Africa.

24. The resumption of the repatriation of Zairian refugees in Angola was delayed only by material problems since Zaire encouraged the repatriation of its nationals wherever they were. However, voluntary repatriation required considerable financial and logistic resources, including the rehousing of repatriated persons. Zaire was grateful for UNHCR assistance with the repatriation of 936 refugees from Angola but the strain on Zaire should not be underestimated.

25. The Executive Council of Zaire and UNHCR had always offered the due assistance and protection to the 300,000 refugees in Zairian territory. Zaire co-operated with its neighbours with regard to the repatriation of their

nationals and it sought to integrate refugees by establishing agricultural infrastructure and co-operatives and by training refugees in community development techniques, in accordance with the objectives of ILARA II. Increased assistance to host countries would be particularly appreciated by African countries whose economic situation was very difficult.

26. Her delegation congratulated the High Commissioner on his management and hoped that he would be able to mobilize resources to cover UNHCR's deficit. It supported the improvement of the conditions of UNHCR field personnel whose devotion deserved encouragement.

27. Mr. ASADI (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the steady increase in refugees in different parts of the world, including his own country, called for a serious solution. In his view, the solution required the simultaneous application of two types of measures: first, a solid system of international protection for refugees which called for solidarity and co-operation on the part of the entire international community; co-operation to prevent acts of aggression, to resolve conflicts and to rectify unjust imbalance between the rich and poor countries. Secondly, a speedy and timely response, particularly to emergency refugee situations, was very important. Rendering assistance to refugees was first and foremost an ideological and humanitarian responsibility and subjecting such assistance to political preconditions and considerations merely led to the weakening of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol.

28. Both during and after its long war, the Islamic Republic of Iran had been continuing its humanitarian role as the second largest refugee host country in the world and its assistance to new waves of refugees showed that his country recognized no frontiers in the matter.

29. The presence of refugees in the developing countries placed heavy strains on their limited resources and assistance programmes should be designed to strengthen the infrastructure of the country of asylum and to give a creative role to refugees in their own lives. To limit assistance to basic needs might well lead to a departure from the original ideas behind protective measures for refugees. Accordingly, his delegation appreciated the document entitled "Refugee Aids in Development" (A/AC.96/XXXIX/CRP.3).

30. Although the Islamic Republic of Iran was not a party to the Geneva Accord on the situation in Afghanistan, it was following with concern the implications of its implementation on the Afghan refugee situation and on the possibility of a durable solution for the Afghan problem. His Government had already announced its readiness to co-operate with the United Nations Special Co-ordinator for Afghanistan and the international organizations working to assist the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees. It considered that keeping the projects at their existing levels could help refugees to decide to repatriate "voluntarily".

31. His delegation wished to draw the attention of the international community to the recent arrival on its territory of new waves of Kurdish Iraqi refugees through Turkey. He assumed members of the Executive Committee knew why they were in flight. UNHCR had provided assistance to such refugees in 1987 and 1988 but the new situation called for a more comprehensive assistance programme. Provision of a rather small part of domestic needs could not affect even the damage their presence caused to the domestic economy, apart from other implications.

32. The refugee problem was definitely a problem of the international community and it was the direct duty of that community to render appropriate assistance to the countries of asylum in the most appropriate manner and in conformity with the magnitude and urgency of each case.

33. Mr. CORDERO ARIAS (Observer for Costa Rica) said that in Central America the tension had certainly decreased in recent months because the countries of the region had equipped themselves with an instrument through which they could work towards achieving a lasting peace. Escapulos II set up machinery through which tolerance, common sense and the elementary principles of democracy could prevail. Much, however, still remained to be done. The Presidents of the Central American countries had reached the decision to deal urgently with the problem of refugees and displaced persons in the region, as part of the peace process. Considerable progress had been achieved, with the collaboration of UNHCR, in the matter of the voluntary repatriation of Salvadorians from Honduras. A similar agreement had been made between Costa Rica, Nicaragua and UNHCR for the voluntary repatriation of Nicaraguans but unfortunately, the results had not been encouraging.

34. The International Conference on Central American refugees to be convened in May 1989 in Guatemala would be strictly apolitical and humanitarian. Its object was to ask the international community for its co-operation and solidarity: sufficient and timely economic assistance was urgently needed in order to design successful projects for both voluntary repatriation and integration. The international community would realize that what was at stake was not only the lives of many thousands of refugees but also the strengthening of democratic institutions in the Central American region. Repercussions of the grave political situation in that region extended far beyond its borders to Mexico, the United States and Canada which were currently offering assistance to Central American asylum-seekers.

35. Mr. HARUN-UR-RASHID (Observer for Bangladesh) said there was no denying that in most cases refugee problems could not be viewed in isolation - more often than not, they were profoundly influenced by the local and international political environment and the demonstration of political will on the part of all concerned was therefore a prerequisite for positive results. Refugee situations generally arose suddenly and it was essential that UNHCR's emergency preparedness and response capability was adequately strengthened to meet the challenge. He hoped that States which were in a position to do so would respond to the High Commissioner's appeal for generous contributions. His delegation fully shared the views expressed by the Chairman on the two core elements of UNHCR activities, refugee relief and protection.

36. Bangladesh attached great importance to the work of UNHCR and greatly appreciated the support and assistance it had received from UNHCR in the past.

37. His country welcomed UNHCR's recent involvement in organizing income-generating projects for refugees and displaced persons. In that context, he recalled that pursuant to a memorandum of understanding signed between the Government of Bangladesh and UNHCR, the latter had established a mission in Dhaka, which had been functioning since May 1988 with the full co-operation of his Government. His Government also wished to thank the High Commissioner for his decision to earmark \$100,000 to strengthen the efforts of the Government of Bangladesh to provide relief for the refugees, who like the 46 million Bangladeshis had been victims of the recent

unprecedented floods which had devastated the economy of the country. He shared the High Commissioner's optimism that the establishment of a Trust Fund, co-sponsored by Pakistan and Rabita would facilitate the repatriation to Pakistan of Pakistan nationals known as "Biharis" in Bangladesh.

38. His delegation had noted the High Commissioner's efforts in the matter of institutional reform and the quality of staff. A prerequisite for UNHCR officials who dealt with refugees, both at Headquarters and in the field was their understanding and respect for the socio-cultural values of the refugees themselves. One way of ensuring that was to fill such posts by experts from the region concerned. It was good to see that the High Commissioner was keeping that point in mind.

39. His delegation welcomed the decision of the Committee to widen the participatory role of observer States in the functioning of UNHCR in accordance with the wishes of the Economic and Social Council. The participation of such States in the various sub-committees and informal sessions of the Committee would strengthen UNHCR.

40. Mr. MAZA MARTELLI (Observer for El Salvador) said that particular attention was devoted to the problem of Central American refugees in the integrated solution for the Central American crisis proposed in Esquipulos II. Within that framework, with the assistance of UNHCR and the goodwill of the Central American countries, many refugees had already returned home in spite of the continuing crisis. For example, over the preceding two years, more than 8,000 of his fellow countrymen had returned to El Salvador.

41. Nevertheless, the refugee problem still persisted and in some countries in the Central American region there was also the problem of displaced persons who, if the crisis worsened, might become refugees. A few weeks previously, the representatives of UNHCR, Mexico and the Central American countries, meeting in El Salvador, had decided to convene an international conference on Central American refugees in May 1989. Such a conference would not only be a step towards an integrated solution to the crisis but would also enable Central American countries to exchange experiences and to appeal for the generous support of the international community. It appeared from comments by previous speakers that most of the members of the Executive Committee supported the conference. They might rest assured that by contributing to the solution of the problem of Central American refugees, they would be directly contributing to the solution of the Central American crisis.

42. Mr. NKOMO (Observer for Zimbabwe) said that his country's commitment to the cause of protection of refugees was still as strong as when it had originally acceded to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and to the OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa.

43. The refugee problem in southern Africa was linked to the apartheid system, and to that system's campaign of destabilization of neighbouring States, which had caused widespread misery and terror and had uprooted many people from their homes. Although he realized it was not part of the Committee's functions to deal with political issues, he wished to stress the need to address the root causes of the refugee problem in the region.

44. Zimbabwe was now having to divert a portion of its scarce resources - resources which were urgently needed for its own development - to the care and maintenance of refugees. He hoped that the Committee would be vigorous in pressing for funding from the international community to assist host countries such as his own, thus enhancing their capacity to serve the cause of refugees effectively.

45. He reminded the Committee of the commitment to the cause of refugees in southern Africa entered into by the donor community at the historic SARRED Conference recently held in Oslo, and hoped that that Conference had helped to strengthen the fund-raising activities of the High Commissioner's Office. The Programme of Action adopted at the SARRED Conference called for support both for countries of origin and for host countries. There was special need for such support in Zimbabwe, where bandit raids had done great damage to the country's economy and infrastructure. There was also need for a massive reafforestation programme to replace trees cut down in and around refugee camps.

46. His delegation would like to put on record its strong desire to be admitted to full membership of the Executive Committee. He believed that Zimbabwe could make an effective and meaningful contribution to the Committee's work, and that its participation would be in the best interests of southern African refugees. Zimbabwe had already demonstrated beyond doubt its commitment to the cause of refugees both in the African region and throughout the world.

47. On the basis of the concept of burden-sharing, his country would highly appreciate it if other countries could offer training facilities for refugees on their own territory. Facilities for resettlement, and not merely financial aid, needed to be provided in order to relieve the strain imposed on African countries.

48. In conclusion, he wished to thank the High Commissioner's Office and the international community for the assistance given to refugees in Zimbabwe. His Government was equally grateful for the support given to its programme for Zimbabwean returnees, more than 3,000 of whom had now returned to their homes and were being reintegrated into their own communities.

49. Mr. PRAKASH RATILAL (Observer for Mozambique) said the campaign of aggression and destabilization being conducted by the apartheid régime against front-line States, notably Angola and Mozambique, had now reached record levels. Armed bands were terrorizing and massacring innocent civilians and were pursuing a "scorched earth" policy, resulting in the destruction on a massive scale of schools, health centres, transport, and other elements of the social and economic infrastructure.

50. Some 6 million citizens of Mozambique were now totally dependent on foreign aid, and of those 3.3 million were internally displaced persons; in addition, some 800,000 Mozambique nationals were now externally displaced persons in neighbouring countries. The campaign of aggression had led to the deaths of over 100,000 persons, and several thousand had been kidnapped or subjected to physical abuse and torture. Some 200,000 children had been traumatized as a result of the loss of parents or relatives.

51. The people of Mozambique were becoming displaced both within the country and across national borderlines not because they opposed their own Government, but rather because they were fleeing from the random and wanton attacks of terrorist bands. There was no substantial difference in the plight of displaced persons within Mozambique and the plight of those outside it; they were merely separated by an international frontier. The only international organization which dealt systematically with that very complex situation was UNHCR, but it concerned itself only with that part of the problem that related to externally displaced persons and refugees. As had been recognized by the SARRED Conference in Oslo, there was no United Nations body with the specific task of assisting internally displaced persons. He hoped that the United Nations Secretary-General, in consultation with the international community and with specialized agencies, including UNHCR, would find a solution to that problem and thus facilitate overall co-ordination of the relief and rehabilitation programmes for displaced persons which were being provided by different agencies.

52. Many thousands of externally displaced Mozambique nationals were now returning home, while at the same time South Africa was expelling a daily average of 100 persons. Efforts should therefore be directed towards helping not only refugees who had remained in neighbouring countries, but also those who had decided to return. The situation of such returnees was becoming serious owing to the fact that Zimbabwe's ability to support them was extremely meagre. Such limited aid as they received was provided to them on the basis of their status as internally displaced persons by the network of governmental and non-governmental organizations already working within Mozambique.

53. In order to avoid a massive and disorganized return of displaced persons from abroad, a tripartite commission consisting of representatives of Mozambique, UNHCR and the host Government was being established. The commission would be initiating a programme for the voluntary and gradual repatriation of externally displaced persons to their country of origin, whenever circumstances were conducive to such a return. His delegation considered that to be the most durable solution, and he hoped that UNHCR's role would be to assist returnees without discriminating between internally displaced and externally displaced persons.

54. Mozambique's emergency programme sought not only to save lives but also to assist economic recovery. The international support given to that programme provided relief supplies and helped the population to resettle and to resume production, which it was hoped would eventually create a basis for self-sufficiency. He wished to express his Government's deep gratitude for the help extended to Mozambique at that difficult time by the international community as a whole, and in particular by UNHCR's special programme. Although the aid which his country was receiving was vital, it was still not enough in the light of the magnitude of the problems to be tackled.

55. The international community should not only increase its support to relief and rehabilitation efforts, but should also continue to put pressure on South Africa to halt its campaign of aggression and destabilization against independent countries in the region, and thus help to speed the end of apartheid. The Nkomati Accord, as well as current initiatives towards a solution of the problems in south-western Africa, bore witness to the desire of the front-line States for peace, stability and good neighbourliness in

southern Africa, essential conditions for the elimination of the problem of refugees and displaced persons in the region. He was sure that those efforts, backed by international support, would soon succeed in bringing peace and a spirit of co-operation to southern Africa as a whole.

56. Mr. POERWANTO (Observer for Indonesia) said that the Foreign Ministers of the ASEAN countries, in a joint statement issued in Bangkok earlier that year, had reiterated their concern about the continued outflow of refugees from Indo-China and the problems encountered by ASEAN countries in dealing with them. ASEAN, considering that the approach adopted in the past to the refugee problem was no longer adequate for the present situation, and that the refugee problem was the responsibility of the international community as a whole, had called for the convening of an international conference on Indo-Chinese refugees at ministerial level in 1989 with a view to finding a durable solution.

57. In that connection, ASEAN had decided to submit a draft decision for the Committee's consideration. That decision would be officially proposed by the delegation of Thailand, and he hoped that it would be overwhelmingly endorsed by all members of the Committee.

58. In conclusion, he wished to express his country's appreciation of UNHCR's continued assistance in dealing with the problem of refugees in the ASEAN region.

59. Mr. UPINDI (Observer for Malawi) said the Committee was meeting in the wake of the SARRED Conference, at which important decisions had been reached, and cardinal principles reiterated. It was as yet somewhat early to judge whether the conference had been successful in attaining its objective of sensitizing the international community to the needs of refugees.

60. His delegation shared the concern expressed by earlier speakers that countries should not merely pay lip-service to the concept of international solidarity and burden-sharing, but should put that concept into practice. The Committee should take a clear stand on the need to link refugee emergency relief assistance to the development needs of countries of asylum, countries which were being adversely affected by the presence of large numbers of refugees. In his own country, the refugee population totalled over one ninth of the population as a whole, and since Malawi was not rich in resources, the burden which it had to carry was a heavy one.

61. Although Malawi's needs for emergency relief assistance to refugees might appear disproportionately high, it should be remembered that for refugees from Mozambique the most natural country of asylum was Malawi. Those refugees were largely rural people, who had never known peace for three decades. They had never been able to devote their energies towards their own development, and consequently had been rendered virtually destitute over the years. Their requirements ranged over the whole gamut of human, economic and social needs.

62. He wished to thank all those Governments and relief agencies which had joined Malawi in extending assistance to refugees, and also to thank those who had paid tributes to his country's efforts in that regard.

63. Mr. DOUALE (Observer for Djibouti) said that early in its existence his country had had to accept over 40,000 Ethiopian refugees following the war in the Ogaden in 1977 and 1978. Since Djibouti's own population was only some 400,000, that influx of refugees had represented a very heavy burden. However, the generous co-operation and help provided by the High Commissioner's Office had made it possible to cope with the problem.

64. Following a repatriation operation that had been organized jointly by Djibouti, Ethiopia and the High Commissioner's Office, 22,500 refugees had returned freely and voluntarily to their country of origin since 1984, and a further 10,000 persons had succeeded in transiting Djibouti and being accepted by other countries, which had offered them either study fellowships or employment. Those repatriated had been granted material help with accommodation on arrival in Ethiopia; although that help was very basic, it was sufficient to enable them to make a new start in their own country.

65. Unfortunately, the voluntary repatriation operation, which had initially been successful, had had to be interrupted the previous year because of the drought which had again struck the region. A census carried out in co-operation with the High Commissioner's Office had revealed that refugees in Djibouti now numbered 7,513 persons. Now that the weather situation had improved, a new voluntary repatriation operation was being planned in collaboration with UNHCR and the Ethiopian authorities. That operation showed that it was possible to solve the refugee problem, given a will to succeed on the part of country of acceptance and country of origin alike.

66. Mrs. RODETH SANTOS (Observer for Angola) said that where refugees were concerned 1988 had seen the development of new situations, resulting in very serious problems for many thousands of men, women and children. On the African continent, those problems had been further aggravated by adverse climatic conditions, as in Sudan.

67. However, a more favourable development since the Committee's last meeting had been the convening of the SARRED Conference in Oslo. That Conference had been of historic importance in that it had alerted the international community to the problems of refugees, displaced persons and stateless persons in the countries of southern Africa, and notably to the underlying causes of those problems. Delegations to the Conference had been unanimous in concluding that the chief responsibility for the existence of thousands of refugees and displaced persons in the region lay with the racist régime of South Africa.

68. South Africa's policy of apartheid supported by South Africa, its illegal occupation of Namibia, and its policy of aggression, intimidation and destabilization were the root causes of the tragic situation in southern Africa. In addition, there were acts of banditry by puppet groups, financed from abroad, which led to major movements of refugees and displaced persons in the region.

69. The Conference had approved a Plan of Action aimed at dealing with the issue more effectively, and she hoped the mechanisms necessary for achieving the plan would be established. The Conference had properly identified the means for improving the situation, which included political and other measures aimed at eradicating apartheid and ensuring racial equality, national independence and improvement of economic and social conditions. To avoid the need to hold another conference a year or two hence, the SARRED Plan of Action must be implemented effectively.

70. She hoped that the negotiations under way with South Africa and Cuba with the mediation of the United States of America would make it possible to begin to envisage in the short term a repatriation operation for the Namibian refugees currently in Angola. The recent visit to Angola by the Secretary-General of the United Nations underscored the paramount importance of immediate action to implement Security Council resolution 435/1978. Voluntary repatriation for the Zairian refugees was still the major objective, and the Tripartite Commission was meeting to work out the details concerning their repatriation and that of Angolans currently in the Shaba region. The number of Angolans scheduled for repatriation, particularly from Zaire and Zambia, would increase considerably in the months ahead, Angola counted on the assistance of UNHCR in drawing up a number of projects recommended for the reintegration of those population groups.

71. Mr. RODRIGO (Observer for Sri Lanka) noted the High Commissioner's reference in his opening statement to the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of July 1987, the provisions of which included the devolution of administrative power and authority to regional units in Sri Lanka through elected Provincial Councils, as a contribution towards redressing the grievances of the minority Tamil community, particularly in the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

72. A militant minority within the Tamil community had resorted to violence and terrorism to gain its ends. In the context of the Agreement, the task of the Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF) that had arrived in Sri Lanka was to disarm the militant groups and use their considerable influence to persuade those groups to accept a peaceful approach to the settlement of ethnic issues. Despite those efforts, however, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LITE) had continued their campaign of violence, obstructing the complete return to normality in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. The number of displaced persons within Sri Lanka had increased from 100,000 in July 1987 to 215,000 families. It was to that group of internally displaced persons that the Government of Sri Lanka attached the central priority in the rehabilitation process. The UNHCR programme provided assistance to some 5,000 such locally displaced families, and the extension of assistance to a larger number of persons would be welcome.

73. With regard to returnees from India, the second major category, the Ministry of Rehabilitation and Reconstruction worked in close association with UNHCR. Of the 120,000 persons said to have left for India since the events of 1983, 36,000 had returned, and a total of 8,000 returnee families from India had been resettled.

74. The third category included those who had left for Europe and other developed countries mainly for economic betterment against the background of violence in Sri Lanka and the consequent economic dislocation. Of that category, only 400 or so out of an estimated 80,000 had returned. Those who had left Sri Lanka for economic reasons had argued that they were political victims in order to justify continued residence in developed countries as "asylum seekers" and refugees. The distinction between political refugees and economic migrants was not often easy to make, and unscrupulous commercial interests in Sri Lanka as well as in developed countries had profited from the traffic in human beings.

75. The Government of Sri Lanka was not insensitive to the human dimension of the question of Sri Lankan Tamils abroad or of the difficulties posed to Western Governments, but its special priority remained the rehabilitation of the 215,000 families displaced within Sri Lanka and the returnees from South India.

76. Rehabilitation programmes for the locally displaced and returnees from abroad were the same. While relief activities received immediate priority, long-term rehabilitation programmes were laying increasing emphasis on reconstruction. The rehabilitation process had been streamlined into a Unified Scheme of Assistance providing grants to lower-income groups and soft loan facilities to those who had the capacity to re-pay. A house-to-house survey was under way to collect further information relating to damaged houses, with a view to reconstruction. A three-year reconstruction programme had been set in motion at the district level, and projects approved by the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank had been started in addition to support from donor countries such as the United States of America for the Unified Assistance Scheme. The Government was increasing emphasis on the needs of youth. UNHCR had launched a programme to generate employment for displaced persons, and greater assistance in the area of vocational training would be most welcome.

77. UNHCR's Sri Lanka programme was proceeding in a satisfactory manner and his delegation wished to thank the High Commissioner and his staff for their support and assistance to the rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts in the country.

78. Mr. NGO Hac Team (Observer for Democratic Kampuchea) expressed his country's deep gratitude for the assistance extended to his country by the ASEAN countries, and in particular Thailand, and by all the donor countries, and expressed support for the planned international conference on refugees in Latin America and for the ASEAN countries' proposal to hold an international conference on refugees in South-East Asia.

79. For years, some 300,000 Kampuchean refugees and displaced persons had been living in camps in Thailand along the frontier. Those camps continued to be subjected to indiscriminate attacks by the occupier. A total of 1 million of his compatriots had become refugees abroad and more than 1 million had died since the occupation.

80. For 10 years, the Kampuchean people had been in danger of losing its national identity due to the occupation and the policy of Vietnamization being pursued. The fighting was not diminishing; for the seventh time, the announcement of a so-called partial withdrawal had raised false hopes. While lip-service was paid to a peaceful political solution, consignments of arms and thousands of troops, some disguised as civilians and others as Khmer soldiers, continued to arrive in the country.

81. Enormous numbers of Vietnamese boat people had recently been arriving in Thailand, Hong Kong and Malaysia; that phenomenon was related to the war of occupation in Kampuchea, which was draining the occupier's human and economic resources.

82. In its sincere desire for national reconciliation, his Government had spared no effort to find a peaceful solution. Its generous proposals of

March 1986, 25 June 1988 and 15 August 1988 bore witness to its desire for reconciliation among Khmers and conciliation between Kampuchea and Viet Nam. In its view, reconciliation meant, after the effective withdrawal of the occupying forces, the formation of a provisional quadripartite Government presided over by H.R.H. Prince Norodom Sihanouk and the reduction of the Khmer armed forces under international supervision. As a gesture of conciliation towards Viet Nam, his Government would waive any claims concerning war damages.

83. Unfortunately, those efforts had been unrewarded and the other party continued to act with arrogance and duplicity.

84. His country was left with no other alternative than to request the international community to continue and step up its efforts towards a comprehensive just and enduring peaceful settlement based on the total and unconditional withdrawal of foreign troops and the respect for the inalienable right of the Kampuchean people to self-determination. Such a settlement would enable hundreds of thousands of Khmer refugees to return to their country in dignity and ease the burden of humanitarian assistance at present assumed by the international community.

85. Mr. PARAMESWARAN (Observer for Malaysia) recalled that since the 1979 Geneva Conference on Indo-Chinese refugees, Malaysia and other countries in the region had been providing first asylum to the "boat people". Both those countries and the international community had expected the flows of refugees to decrease with time, while in fact, they had in fact increased by more than 50 per cent. The situation had led to serious economic and social difficulties for Malaysia and could have political and security implications for the region as a whole.

86. Unfortunately, the liberal policy and humanitarian assistance extended by countries in the region had been misinterpreted in certain quarters and the flow of refugees to Malaysia had continued unabated. The Government had announced that it would be compelled to close one of its transit camps within the year, a decision that had elicited negative reactions. Malaysia would, however, endeavour to find solutions for the refugee problems in a humanitarian manner consistent with the way it had resolved such problems in the past. Nevertheless, it believed that the time had come to find a comprehensive durable solution to the problem of the Indo-Chinese refugees, while reinforcing existing mechanisms such as the Orderly Departures Programme. His delegation therefore endorsed the proposal to hold an international conference on Indo-Chinese refugees with a view to identifying solutions to long-standing problems. Such a conference would be all the more valid at present, since the mechanisms agreed at the 1979 Conference were no longer adequate to cope with the situation. The ASEAN countries attached great importance to the convening of such a conference early in 1989, and they were optimistic that the international community, including the Executive Committee, would support that proposal.

The meeting rose at 5.50 p.m.