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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME

Thirty-ninth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 427th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 4 October 1988, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. DANNENBRING (Federal Republic of Germany)

later: Mr. JAMAL (United Republic of Tanzania)

CONTENTS

General debate (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4) (continued)

1. Mr. EL GHALI BENHIMA (Morocco) congratulated the High Commissioner on his opening statement and on the quality of the documents submitted for consideration by the Executive Committee. The refugee problem was a complex issue because of the number of refugees, the diversity of situations and a dangerous tendency towards non-respect of the recognized international standards for refugee protection. Another disturbing fact was that host countries were almost all least developed countries and they were confronted with a phenomenon of alarming proportions, yet their resources were seriously limited. In those circumstances, he noted with satisfaction the efforts made by UNHCR to ensure as far as possible the repatriation of refugees. He also noted that the High Commissioner was not forgetting the needs of refugees still obliged to remain for a long time in countries of first asylum and that he would take those needs duly and fully into consideration in the preparation of the next year's budget. For the same reasons, he welcomed the action taken by UNHCR in the area of refugee aid and development. In that context, assistance should be geared to the requirements of both refugees and host countries.
2. The refugee problem was a universal one and must therefore be treated in a spirit of solidarity through increased mobilization of financial and human resources and their rational utilization. The administrative restructuring of UNHCR should be based on a clear perception of refugees' needs and should be supported by the Executive Committee.
3. Although the record for 1988 was rather bleak as a whole, there was nevertheless reason to welcome the breakthrough in a number of crises, such as in the Western Sahara, which held out the hope of improving the lot of some refugees. The thirty-ninth session should be an occasion for the members of the Executive Committee to renew their collective commitment to moral, political and material support for joint action on behalf of refugees.
4. Mr. QIAN Jiadong (China) said that the easing of the international situation and progress in the political settlement of regional conflicts had given hope to some large groups of refugees, particularly the Afghans and groups in Central America. Elsewhere in the world, the situation of refugees had deteriorated, particularly in Africa and in South-East Asia, where new outflows were being witnessed.
5. Those developments underlined once again the fact that the refugee problem had to be settled by removing its root causes, notably policies of aggression and expansion, apartheid and racism, foreign occupation and regional conflicts.
6. The participants in the Oslo Conference held in August 1987 had pinpointed the essential causes of the refugee problem in Southern Africa and had proposed modalities for settling them. He hoped that the international community would commit itself to full implementation of the provisions of the Declaration and Plan of Action adopted by that Conference.

that, in spite of its increasing responsibilities in the area of assistance, UNHCR still regarded the international protection of refugees as its primary task. Now was the time not for broadening the High Commissioner's mandate, but for finding pragmatic and realistic solutions to enable him to meet his responsibilities. The international community had considerably increased its voluntary contributions to UNHCR during the past few years, and there could be no better proof of the confidence that Governments placed in that body. Greece had followed with great interest the reorganization of the High Commissioner's Office; through better financial and programme control, that process should eventually enhance UNHCR's ability to respond to emergencies and meet the needs of refugees.

15. He paid a tribute to UNHCR's admirable and untiring efforts for refugees. It was fulfilling its purpose in the best possible way and could count on the support of his Government.

16. Mr. KAMINGA (Japan) said that there were now more than 12 million refugees in the world. The refugee problem had thus become virtually permanent, and it must be tackled seriously not only for humanitarian reasons but also in the interest of peace.

17. In South-East Asia, long-stayers continued to represent a major burden for the countries of the region. International efforts had thus far been concentrated mainly on the resettlement of Indochinese refugees in third countries, but that process could not continue indefinitely and it was of the utmost importance to explore more actively the possibilities of voluntary repatriation and to pursue efforts to halt the outflow, particularly of boat people.

18. Pakistan and Iran had together received some 5 million Afghan refugees. Now that the Geneva talks had brought about a settlement of the conflict in Afghanistan, it was imperative to proceed with the repatriation of all the refugees. Japan, for its part, had pledged an initial contribution equivalent to \$US 60 million to various United Nations agencies for assistance to Afghan refugees, and was considering a further contribution.

19. In Africa there were approximately 4 million refugees now suffering from starvation and disease, and that problem was straining the capacities of the first-asylum countries. In other parts of the world, too, in the Middle East and in Central America, there were a great number of refugees requiring assistance and relief. The problems were immense and the role played by UNHCR was of crucial importance.

20. UNHCR's task was certainly becoming more complicated and its workload was increasing, but the resources that could be directed towards refugee relief activities were not unlimited, and UNHCR must therefore achieve maximum efficiency with the existing staff. The Executive Committee, at its thirty-eighth session, had adopted a number of conclusions relating to management, administration and programme support aimed at providing guidelines for the reorganization of UNHCR. There nevertheless appeared to be room for further improvement in the management of UNHCR activities, as indicated in the recent report by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions. In particular, as a largely field-oriented organization, UNHCR should ensure that it had a full and systematic appreciation of the situation in the field.

21. Japan, for its part, would continue as far as possible to make generous contributions to UNHCR. The Japanese Government was ready to make a further contribution equivalent to approximately \$US 10.5 million, in addition to the contribution of more than \$US 33 million it had already made in 1988.

22. Mr. SUWIT SUTHANUKUL (Thailand) said that, while there were certain universal principles that should be applicable to all refugees, it was nevertheless essential to take account of prevailing realities, since it was realities with which refugees found themselves confronted and it was in a world of realities that solutions to their problems must be found. At the same time, it was becoming increasingly apparent that the norms and principles formulated at an earlier time in one part of the world and under a particular set of circumstances could not always be applied automatically to other regions or situations. It was therefore useful to convene international conferences in an effort to solve the specific problems raised by refugees in a particular region.

23. The changing character of the refugee problem in South-East Asia had thus compelled the member countries of ASEAN to convene a conference on Indochinese refugees. It would be recalled that, 13 years after the end of the Viet Nam war, refugees and displaced persons were still flowing out of Indochina and continuing to place a severe strain on the countries providing first asylum. With the possibilities of refugee resettlement in third countries diminishing and with the proportion of Indochinese migrants growing, there was apprehension in first-asylum countries that the unending flow would impose unacceptable political, economic and social strains on their societies. New comprehensive and durable solutions were urgently needed. More attention must be given to eliminating the root causes of refugee flows so that refugees would be able to consider living in their own countries again, yet at the same time it was essential to avoid holding out false hopes to those who, without compelling reason, were contemplating leaving their countries in an irregular manner. He hoped that an international conference on Indochinese refugees would be able to elaborate a programme of action that not only accommodated the legitimate concerns of the countries of the region, but also ensured continued adherence to basic humanitarian principles, as well as assistance and protection for genuine refugees.

24. He asked the Executive Committee to support the draft decision relating to the international conference on Indochinese refugees which he would submit for its consideration on behalf of the ASEAN countries. He wished to commend the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on the excellent work he was carrying out.

25. Mr. AZIKIWE (Nigeria) said it was clear that, since the previous session of the Executive Committee, many positive as well as negative developments had affected the refugee situation. For UNHCR to be able to cope with those changes and discharge its mandate to ensure the international protection of refugees or, where possible, help in the voluntary repatriation of refugees to their country of origin, his Government was more than ever convinced that there was a need for concerted action by the international community.

26. As the High Commissioner had noted in his statement, the effort of assisting millions of uprooted human beings had put UNHCR's means to a severe test. Also, following the peaceful settlement of a number of regional

7. With a similar object in mind, the ASEAN countries were, for their part, proposing to convene an international conference to seek a durable solution to the problem of Indochinese refugees, who were a heavy burden for various countries of the region. That settlement called for the withdrawal of the foreign troops stationed in Kampuchea and an end to the war of aggression waged by Viet Nam, which must face up to its international responsibilities.

8. The situation in Afghanistan was still precarious and prevented the large-scale repatriation of refugees. It was clearly essential that the parties to the peace accords should strictly fulfil their obligations.

9. The deterioration of the situation of refugees in certain parts of the world would undoubtedly increase the workload of UNHCR, while the improvement of the situation in other regions would bring to it new tasks. UNHCR should continue its efforts to raise its efficiency and make more rational use of its resources, and the Executive Committee should support it more fully in that endeavour.

10. No member of the international community could refuse to accept its share of responsibility towards refugees. Many first-asylum countries, although themselves poor, had made enormous sacrifices to cope with the increasing flows of refugees. They should be provided with more assistance, particularly in the form of development aid. Countries which had strong economies and the potential to resettle refugees should make greater contributions to solving the refugee problem in a spirit of international solidarity. China, for its part, had received 280,000 Indochinese refugees, expending considerable material and human resources for that purpose. In carrying out that difficult task, it had maintained a good co-operative relationship with UNHCR.

11. Mr. KERKINOS (Greece) thanked UNHCR for the excellent work it had done for refugees in 1988 and wished to acknowledge the role that non-governmental organizations were playing in supporting the Office's mission. He welcomed the decision taken by the Executive Committee concerning the participation of observers in its work.

12. As the High Commissioner had pointed out in his opening statement, many events of the past year had had a direct bearing on the refugee situation, which was one of both hope and challenge. He was convinced that the international community would give its full support to UNHCR to carry on its important and manifestly difficult mission.

13. He was greatly concerned about the increasing number of new refugees in several parts of the world in recent years. He noted with dismay that many were not considered as genuine refugees, but were accused of abusing the 1951 Geneva Convention's protection for illegal immigration. Greece would follow closely the efforts made by the High Commissioner to meet the needs of those new influxes. His Government felt that UNHCR should give special consideration to the return of refugees to their homes. He was pleased to note that the process of voluntary repatriation had continued in Africa and elsewhere, notably in Sri Lanka, where it was to be hoped that the process would be expanded.

14. The recent Geneva Accords on Afghanistan and the progress in the negotiations concerning Angola and Namibia and Western Sahara portended a large-scale UNHCR involvement in those regions. He noted with satisfaction

conflicts, particularly in the Persian Gulf, in Afghanistan, in Western Sahara, in Central America and to some extent in Namibia, it was now up to the international community to provide the High Commissioner with the necessary financial support to enable him to organize the repatriation of all the refugees from those regions who wished to return home in safety and dignity.

27. His delegation wished to commend UNHCR for its contribution to the success of the International Conference on the Plight of Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons in Southern Africa and, in that regard, hoped that the existing mechanisms within the United Nations system would be strengthened to secure the inclusion, among areas of priority, of the Plan of Action adopted by that Conference. It would also like ICARA I and ICARA II projects in first-asylum countries in Africa, and in particular the development-related assistance projects to be revitalized, and it urged the international community to help those countries which, in spite of their limited resources, were providing hospitality to several millions of refugees.

28. He noted with satisfaction that UNHCR had been closely following developments that might lead to early implementation of Security Council resolution 435 (1978) and to the independence of Namibia. As the High Commissioner had indicated in his statement, UNHCR had a role to play in ensuring the timely repatriation of Namibians. While some positive changes in Angola could be anticipated with the withdrawal of the racist forces of apartheid, the refugee situation in Mozambique and in other front-line States was continuing to worsen. The way to solve the refugee problem once and for all was to tackle its root causes. For that reason, Nigeria once again called on the international community to condemn strongly the obnoxious policy of apartheid, which was the basic cause of the refugee flows in that region.

29. The refugee problem, however, was not unique to the African region and it was clear that the refugee situations in Asia and Central America were demanding more and more attention from UNHCR. In that regard, his delegation welcomed the forthcoming international conference on refugees, to be held in Guatemala in May 1989 and hoped that enough preparatory work would be done to ensure that it could adopt a plan of action providing not only for the resettlement of returnees and displaced persons, but also for implementation of a development programme for their benefit.

30. Regarding the question of military or armed attacks on refugee camps and settlements, his Government was profoundly distressed to see that, despite the conclusions adopted at the thirty-eighth session of the Executive Committee, such attacks had persisted, particularly in southern Africa and in the Middle East. He condemned the military or armed attacks carried out by the apartheid régime of South Africa on refugee camps and likewise condemned the attacks on innocent Palestinians.

31. Nigeria, for its part, had maintained an open-door policy towards all de facto refugees and had continued to support UNHCR's programmes. Its contributions to ICARA, to the African Fund for the rehabilitation of infrastructures in the front-line States and, more recently, to the Mozambique programme, to mention only a few, testified to his country's commitment to alleviating refugee problems.

32. He also wished to thank all the donor countries which made generous cash and material contributions, as well as all those providing asylum to more than 12 million refugees throughout the world.

33. Lastly, his delegation welcomed the marked improvement in the relations between the UNHCR management and the staff. Further internal disharmony could only erode the confidence of the Office and distract it from its objective, which was to provide protection and assistance to refugees.

34. Mr. TARRAH (Somalia), after having warmly thanked all the States which, through their support, had enabled his country to become a member of the Executive Committee, recalled that Somalia still hosted a refugee population of some 835,000 located in more than 40 camps in 5 different regions. In addition to those assisted refugees, there was an approximately equal number of "invisible" refugees who had self-settled in urban and rural areas and were receiving no assistance.

35. In order to meet the basic needs of refugees, his Government had turned to the international community. Food, non-food items and limited financial support still made up the bulk of the aid provided under care and maintenance programmes. Owing above all to the success of the World Food Programme (WFP) and UNHCR in mobilizing more adequate food supplies on a more effective basis, the daily ration target of about 500 grams of foodstuffs had been reached and the nutritional status of the refugees had by and large improved.

36. With regard to other aspects of the general programme, implementation constraints had been minimal. Inflationary tendencies resulting from the considerable devaluation of the local currency had been the principal problem and measures had been taken to guard against adverse effects on the programme.

37. Mention should also be made of the resumption of the refugee re-enumeration exercise in July after a temporary halt following the completion of the aerial survey phase. The final results, expected in mid-1989, would help in plans for durable solutions and in improving general assistance to the refugees.

38. His Government was actively pursuing durable solutions. By 15 September 1988, a total of 5,050 refugees in the Bur Dhubo camps had returned home under the organized repatriation scheme established two years earlier. The repatriation process should nevertheless be speeded up to avoid discouraging other refugees in the region who also wished to return home.

39. Perhaps the most significant development in 1988 had been the momentum gained by local integration as a durable solution. All parties, in a concerted effort, seemed to be facilitating integration of the refugees into the national fabric, thus making them independent of support from the international community. His Government, for its part, had not only redistributed viable plots of land to refugees in the Hiran and Lower Shabelle regions, but had also decided to offer them vast areas in fertile regions such as Gedo. As a result, small local settlement schemes were under way. Those small but very promising projects were being funded by NGOs, UNHCR or the United States Agency for International Development and were being executed by voluntary organizations, including World Concern International in the Gedo region and Save the Children Federation (United States) and Concern Ireland in

restoring normality required a tremendous effort for the resettlement of millions of refugees which had fled from their homes because of prolonged hostilities - and, on the other hand, new upheavals elsewhere in the world that had created additional waves of refugees. Thus, the past year had seen the emergence of a new refugee population of close to 1 million people in southern, central and eastern Africa. More recently, in the Middle East, close to 100,000 Kurds had fled from Iraq because of chemical warfare.

47. Those new refugee groups created pressures for the States offering first asylum. In that context, high praise was due to the countries of southern Africa, and in particular to Malawi, for their reception of the refugees from Mozambique. The humanitarian spirit displayed by the Government of Ethiopia in granting asylum to hundreds of thousands of refugees and for its active co-operation with UNHCR should likewise be commended. He hoped that the Ethiopian authorities would show the same humanitarian attitude towards those Ethiopian Jews who longed to be reunited with their close relations in Israel. The Government of Turkey was also to be commended on having readily granted asylum to the Kurdish refugees who had fled their country of origin in particularly tragic circumstances.

48. In that regard, he wished to inform the Executive Committee that his Government had decided to offer asylum to 200 Kurdish orphans and hoped to be able to follow up that offer as soon as possible.

49. UNHCR, for its part, had responded well to those new emergency situations, which placed an additional burden on it. Mention need only be made of the work done in connection with the refugees from Mozambique, Sudan, Somalia and Burundi, of the swiftness with which UNHCR teams had been sent to the Kurdish refugee camps in order to ascertain their needs and offer help, and of the preparations made for the repatriation and rehabilitation of Afghan refugees.

50. UNHCR had been able to rise to the situation because of its strength in the field. It was there that it protected and assisted refugees and it was there that it needed the help of the international community. Israel supported the process of enabling UNHCR to face the challenges of multiplying refugee situations and it wished the High Commissioner success in ensuring the Office's continued effectiveness in the field.

51. The essential task of UNHCR, however, was to find durable solutions. That was the real test of its effectiveness. While repatriation was very often the most obvious solution, there were cases in which the disruption that caused a refugee problem was irreversible and other solutions were needed. Self-reliance and integration in countries of first asylum were valid solutions that had traditionally been applied in rural areas - in Africa, about 25 per cent of the refugee population lived in organized rural settlements - as well as more recently in urban areas. UNHCR had been able to achieve such integration through refugee protection, counselling and financial assistance in the form of loans or small grants.

52. Where repatriation was ruled out and integration in countries of first asylum was not possible, resettlement in third countries remained the only solution. In that way, UNHCR had been able to resettle nearly 100,000 refugees in 1987.

the Lower Shabelle, which were carrying out remarkable work. The World Bank, IFAD, Swedish Church Relief, the Comité européen d'aide aux réfugiés (CEAR) and the Japanese Volunteer Center were also responsible for encouraging initiatives.

40. Somalia, in providing asylum to a refugee population that might well represent a quarter of its own population, had shown great generosity but had been compelled to approach the international community for additional help to cope with the situation and offset the negative effects on the domestic environment and infrastructure of such a large number of refugees. Several inter-agency delegations and other complementary technical missions had been sent into the field and voluminous reports had been written, but no concrete measures had yet been taken. He wished to emphasize, however, that the type of intervention desired by his Government was completely in keeping with the principle reaffirmed at the thirty-sixth session of the Executive Committee that refugee assistance and development aid should be combined, and he welcomed the High Commissioner's intention to intensify efforts in that direction in the coming years.

41. His delegation was also pleased to inform the Committee that, following the peace agreement between Somalia and Ethiopia, the two countries had resumed diplomatic relations, exchanged prisoners of war and begun the formation of demilitarized zones. That new political climate was generally expected to facilitate the pursuit of durable solutions for the refugees in Somalia. Ironically, however, the signing of the peace agreement had been immediately followed by suicidal attacks of armed groups on two northern districts with large refugee populations.

42. Those murderous attacks had brought about a climate of tension and movements in the affected areas had been very limited with the result that food deliveries had been seriously disrupted for a time.

43. The camps, moreover, had not been spared in those attacks. Over 60,000 refugees in the Agabar and Las Dhure camps had, like many nationals, fled to Borama, a town about 120 km from Hargeisa. In attacks on Saba'ad and Biyoley camps, a total of 37 refugees had been killed and 30 wounded. As for the infrastructures, the headquarters in Hargeisa housing workshops, warehouses and stores had been completely destroyed.

44. He appealed to UNHCR, and through it, to the United Nations system and to the international community as a whole, to help his Government to implement the rehabilitation programme now being drawn up for the areas affected.

45. With regard to UNHCR's activities, his delegation was pleased to note the seriousness with which Mr. Hocké had embarked on streamlining the human and material resources of UNHCR and enhancing its effectiveness. UNHCR's efforts to co-operate more closely with other international organizations and voluntary agencies in the pursuit of durable solutions also deserved high praise.

46. Mr. ELIAV (Israel) said that the refugee problem had grown and intensified in the past year. Paradoxically, that was because of two diametrically opposed tendencies in the development of the international situation: on the one hand, the progress made towards the peaceful settlement of long-standing conflicts in Asia and Africa - although the process of

53. Regarding organizational matters, his delegation fully shared the High Commissioner's view that UNHCR was concerned with seeking solutions for problems that fell within its competence and not with the expansion of its mandate, since that might lead to overlapping with the tasks of other agencies.

54. However, while operating within its mandate, UNHCR should co-operate as far as possible with other organizations, in particular the Inter-Governmental Committee for Migration (ICM), which was soon to become the International Organization for Migration. ICM, with its great expertise in dealing with large flows of people and with the integration of displaced persons and migrants, could play a much more significant role in the various practical fields of refugee rehabilitation. It was to be hoped, therefore, that the conference on the settlement of refugees in Central America, which was to be held in May 1989 and at which UNHCR, UNDP and ICM were to devise complementary plans of action, would be only the first in a series of joint ventures.

55. Mr. VAN SCHAİK (Netherlands) said that the international community must find additional resources to finance refugee assistance while at the same time ensuring the long-term viability of UNHCR, which would be facing greater challenges in the years to come, because of the ever-increasing number of refugees in the world.

56. In those circumstances, there was a need to focus on the structural trends in the situation and particularly on the scope and limits of UNHCR's mandate. UNHCR's role had broadened considerably over the past few years. In his delegation's view, UNHCR's tasks should be modified gradually to allow the increase of resources to keep up with evolving needs. The Executive Committee would have to describe the contours of UNHCR's mandate and functions more clearly, in particular by establishing priorities, so as to protect refugee activities from setbacks on the international scene. To that end, it was necessary to strengthen co-operation and to establish a division of labour between UNHCR and its partners, especially non-governmental or intergovernmental organizations.

57. Considering the size of the budget, it was reasonable that the governing bodies should have a greater right of examination over UNHCR's operations, and he welcomed the efforts made by the Office to keep the Executive Committee better informed. In that regard, he was in favour of a new method of presentation of support costs. He would, however, prefer the documents to focus more on fundamental trends, leaving matters of detail to the competent United Nations bodies such as the Board of Auditors and ACABQ.

58. His delegation supported the increased emphasis placed by UNHCR on protection and deplored the fact that the principle of non-refoulement was not universally respected. The Executive Committee must consider practical measures of protection in the pursuit of durable solutions, having regard to the specific situations in different parts of the world.

59. Concerning refugee aid and development, his Government was making a sizeable contribution to projects to benefit refugees and local populations and would provide further support in that area.

60. His country welcomed the efforts of the High Commissioner to intensify co-operation with other organizations, particularly UNDP, WHO and IFAD, on development projects in certain countries.

61. Lastly, his delegation urged UNHCR to implement as soon as possible the guidelines set out in the High Commissioner's note on the international protection of refugees, particularly in respect of refugee women and children.

Mr. Jamal (United Republic of Tanzania) took the Chair.

62. Mr. CHAVARRIA (Nicaragua) recalled that Nicaragua and the other countries of Central America had initiated joint action to bring peace to the region, in the spirit of the Esquipulas accords. In Nicaragua itself, negotiations had led to the conclusion of various definitive cease-fire agreements and the return of more than 32,000 people to their homes. Nicaragua was grateful to UNHCR and WFP for their assistance in settling returnees. In the past year, many Nicaraguans had returned to the country, either voluntarily or through the good offices of UNHCR, thanks to the tripartite commission which brought together the Governments of Nicaragua and Honduras and UNHCR. That co-operation had made it possible not only to provide transport for people and their goods, but also to improve the state of health of the returnees, in particular children. Nevertheless, there was a great deal still to be done. It was expected that some 7,000 Nicaraguans now in Honduras would be repatriated. Once the immediate problems of survival had been resolved, attention would have to be given to the future of the repatriated population. A tripartite commission had also been set up with the Government of Costa Rica for the purpose of repatriating refugees now in that country.

63. Peace in the region, of course, was closely connected with the definitive return of the refugees, a process which required the support of the international community. For that reason, his Government attached great importance to the special plan of co-operation for Central America, for refugees, returnees and displaced persons, as well as to the international conference on refugees in Central America to be held in Guatemala in May 1989.

64. Mr. CASTRIOTO DE AZAMBUJA (Brazil) said that he had acknowledged with satisfaction the High Commissioner's formal announcement of the convening of the international conference on Central American refugees, which would take place in 1989 in Guatemala, since that conference would mark the re-opening of the political dialogue in the region. His country supported all local and regional settlements that could contribute to peace and security in the world. In that spirit, he fully supported the role of UNHCR in the discharge of its mandate. In his view, the priority task in that mandate was one of protection and assistance with a view to voluntary repatriation, a prerequisite for a durable solution to the refugee problem.

65. His country was greatly concerned by the situation in Africa, which had deteriorated over the past year mainly as a consequence of the policy of apartheid. At the Oslo International Conference on the Plight of Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons in Southern Africa, his delegation had voted in favour of the Declaration and Plan of Action, which had highlighted the complementarity between assistance to refugees and the process of economic development in the region.

66. His delegation welcomed the decision by the Executive Committee to admit observer Governments to its two sub-committees and to certain meetings of the Committee itself. It also welcomed the adoption of the recommendations submitted in the High Commissioner's Note on the Report and Summary Records of the Executive Committee (A/AC.96/711) concerning the new presentation of the Executive Committee's report.

67. Mr. SHABBU (Sudan) said that for a quarter of a century his country had been playing host to more than one and a half million refugees, or approximately 7.5 per cent of the total population of Sudan. In its policy, his Government had always been guided by international and regional legislation relating to the status of refugees. Refugees were assisted by the temporary acquisition of land, job opportunities and training, and their freedom of movement was guaranteed by law. In that task, his Government had been assisted by UNHCR, with which it had excellent long-standing relations.

68. He was pleased to announce that some 60,000 Ugandan refugees had returned to their country during the past year, bringing the total number of persons who had voluntarily returned to Uganda to 153,000. The two Governments had reached an understanding with regard to the repatriation of the remaining population. However, while the refugee problem on Sudan's southern border was in the process of being settled, the same was not true on the eastern border. That region was witnessing a growing influx, which, because of the inadequacy of outside assistance, was affecting the well-being of refugees and Sudanese nationals alike. The situation was further aggravated by natural disasters that had hit Sudan: continued drought, followed by floods which had devastated several areas and displaced hundreds of thousands of families. The damage was estimated at \$US 2.4 billion in the northern region alone, and in the country as a whole there were thought to be 1.5 million displaced persons. In addition, Sudan had been threatened by an invasion of locusts which, without urgent intervention, might wipe out the crops spared by the floods. Once the emergency phase was over, the country would have to embark on rehabilitation of the infrastructure and assets destroyed by those disasters.

69. His country therefore had great difficulties in meeting its commitments to its own nationals, let alone bearing the burden of refugees, and the international community must live up to its responsibilities and obligations by applying the principle of equitable burden-sharing. Under the terms of the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the refugee problem had to be seen as an international humanitarian problem. The international community was thus required to bear that burden by taking into account the respective capacities of the countries concerned, whether refugee-sending, refugee-hosting or donor countries. In the case of Africa, the burden placed on the host countries was disproportionate. To take Sudan as an example, that country bore around 80 to 85 per cent of the responsibility and the international community less than 20 per cent.

70. The whole region of Sudan was affected by the presence of refugees; regardless of whether the refugees were settled in one area or another, their presence required the diversion of food and other goods and services to that region to strike a balance and to apply the principle of burden-sharing among the different regions of the country.

71. His country strongly supported the developmental approach to refugee aid, a solution that enabled refugees to become self-reliant and provided an effective means of compensating the Sudanese nationals for the losses resulting from the pressures that were exerted by the refugees on the infrastructure and public utilities. Since 1980, his country had called for the adoption of such a developmental approach as a principle for refugee programmes in host countries until the time came for the voluntary repatriation of refugees.

72. In conclusion, he thanked the friendly countries for their continued assistance to the refugees in his country, either through UNHCR's annual programme of assistance or through bilateral arrangements. He expressed his appreciation to governmental and non-governmental organizations for their contributions not only in urban centres, but also in remote areas.

73. Mr. NAFFAH (Lebanon) observed that the concept of protection was being tacitly challenged, since refugees' rights were being interpreted more and more restrictively and were being limited by unilateral measures. Countries of asylum, the overwhelming majority of which were developing countries, were having to cope with economic problems quite apart from the additional burden of large-scale influxes of refugees. For that reason, his delegation welcomed the spirit in which UNHCR was discharging its mandate. In addition to its traditional role of providing legal protection for refugees, UNHCR was maintaining a dialogue with all the parties concerned and adopting a multidisciplinary approach to humanitarian assistance, as could be seen from the documentation under consideration. Using that approach, UNHCR could refine its working methods and respond more effectively to specific needs. A multidisciplinary perspective should be applied also to any discussion of refugee assistance and development. Assistance should be harmonized with national development plans and integrated with general multilateral assistance. In most countries of asylum, and more particularly in Africa, nationals had the same problem of poverty and suffered from the same absence of infrastructure as did the refugee populations.

74. The specific nature of UNHCR's work was illustrated by the Note on Refugee Women and the Guidelines concerning Children. Those documents combined the theoretical overview needed for a clear and objective appreciation of refugee problems with the application of specific measures: they took account of cultural values, the social and psychological dimension which must accompany material assistance and legal protection to enable refugees to regain a minimum of autonomy and dignity.

75. The Note on International Solidarity (EC/SCP/50) reaffirmed that the High Commissioner could not exercise his humanitarian functions without the co-operation of States. Dialogue was the best means of ensuring such co-operation. The initiation of a dialogue with Viet Nam, the Oslo Conference and the forthcoming conferences on refugees in other parts of the world were therefore to be welcomed. The dialogue must be pursued with all UNHCR's partners in the field and with the refugees themselves. The Executive Committee should give greater attention to the idea of involving refugees in dealing with their problems and in community development, and the idea of encouraging refugee initiatives for self-reliance projects.

76. The Executive Committee was the ideal forum for such a dialogue. Over the years, the debate had centered on financial and personnel matters and on

the imperative need for sound management of the resources available to UNHCR, but there was a need for it to be more orderly and to give priority at all times to the consideration of the needs of refugees, with objectives being set and resources evaluated and distributed according to those needs.

77. In conclusion, he hoped that international solidarity would dispel some of the pessimistic notes in the documentation.

78. Mr. KOSIN (Yugoslavia), after having congratulated the members of the Bureau on their election and having welcomed two new members, Somalia and Pakistan, to the Executive Committee, said that the High Commissioner's analysis of the situation gave rise both to appreciation of the efforts made and results achieved by UNHCR on the one hand, and to an awareness of the measures that needed to be taken by the United Nations and the international community on the other hand. The reports submitted to the Executive Committee testified to the magnitude of the problem and the considerable efforts needed to tackle it in a situation where the number of refugees was steadily increasing in the world.

79. Although in some cases the developments in the international situation opened up prospects for a settlement or the return of refugees to their countries of origin, there were still regions that offered no hope of the settlement of internal conflicts and thus an end to outflows of population. That was the case in Africa.

80. Given the persistent economic stagnation of the developing countries severely affected by refugee problems, the need for international solidarity was more evident than ever. His delegation felt bound to stress the importance it attached to the developmental aspect of solutions to the problems of refugees and it also wished to underline the fact that the situation of refugee women and children deserved special attention.

81. The Executive Committee should not lose sight of the root causes of the refugee problem. It was no coincidence that those problems arose and persisted in the regions most affected by poverty. As long as conditions were not created for a balanced development of all and for a more decent life, those problems would remain. His Government supported the efforts made by the High Commissioner and his staff to assist refugees, as well as his endeavours to achieve a more rational management of UNHCR.

82. His country paid particular attention to active co-operation with the High Commissioner and with the UNHCR Office in Belgrade. The difficulties his Government experienced in dealing with increasing numbers of refugees were mostly of a financial nature and had been aggravated by the country's economic difficulties. The role of UNHCR and its Office in Yugoslavia, as well as the role of the countries of settlement, was of great importance in that regard.

83. In conclusion, he wished to reiterate his support for the humanitarian role of UNHCR and its programme of activities for 1988 and 1989.

84. Mgr. MULLOR (Holy See), after having extended his congratulations to the members of the Bureau and to the outgoing Chairman, and having welcomed Somalia and Pakistan, whose experience would undoubtedly prove valuable to the Committee, said that the High Commissioner's statement and his notes addressed to the Executive Committee and to the General Assembly contained elements of

both optimism and pessimism. He read out several passages from those notes, which clearly illustrated that mercy, compassion, the sentiment of brotherhood and even charity were in crisis.

85. It would appear that the world had become accustomed to the existence of a massive and growing refugee population. The third world produced refugees in Asia, Africa and America because of a state of underdevelopment conducive to all sorts of social and political manipulations; the "second world", which was also producing refugees, although in smaller numbers, claimed not to be affected by that phenomenon or even threw the blame for it on previous colonial systems, as though there did not exist new colonial systems that were more subtle, but bore the same historical responsibilities; the "first world", for its part, was contributing to the High Commissioner's programme, but many of those countries, for economic, social or even cultural reasons, were becoming more and more exclusive. In other words, authoritarian régimes automatically produced refugees, which democratic régimes were not always in a position to welcome. The result was that a multitude of men, but above all women and children, remained penned up in camps whose traumatic impact was unfortunately only too well known.

86. In those circumstances, it was clear that the assistance of UNHCR, backed up by many humanitarian non-governmental organizations, often of a religious nature, was not enough. A world campaign exposing more incisively the immediate and real causes of refugee problems was needed. The régimes directly or indirectly responsible for that phenomenon must feel the weight of the scrutiny of every man and woman of good will upon them.

87. Would it not be possible, for example, to produce audio-visual materials to stimulate the conscience of the world community, and in particular the conscience of those who, because of their lack of respect for fundamental freedoms, were responsible for massive outflows? Would it not be possible to refine the public information campaigns of UNHCR and non-governmental organizations? Would it not be possible to increase diplomatic contacts by preparing and co-ordinating them as far as possible to show interested Governments that the principle of national sovereignty did not justify discriminatory and arbitrary policies and that their own political interests required them to respect universally accepted humanitarian principles? Those questions, although certainly idealistic, were not without foundation and perhaps deserved consideration by the General Assembly.

88. Some events of the past 12 months gave rise to a degree of optimism. He was thinking of the bilateral Geneva Accords on Afghanistan, the preparation of the conference on the problem of refugees in Central America, the return of more than 200,000 Ugandan refugees from Sudan, the announcement of the referendum to clarify the situation in North Africa and the improved prospects for southern Africa and in particular Namibia. Some of the conflicts responsible for the increasing number of refugees were in the process of being settled. There was no doubt that the weight of domestic and international public opinion, together with certain diplomatic initiatives, had had a positive influence in the pursuit of those peace settlements.

89. His delegation welcomed the achievements of UNHCR and encouraged the High Commissioner and all the members of the Committee not only to work for a

just solution of the immediate problems affecting refugees, but also to attack the root causes of the long-term problems of refugees, namely intolerance and lack of respect for the inalienable rights of the human person.

90. Mr. CARLSSON (United Nations Commissioner for Namibia) said that Namibia had been the victim of colonial domination and racist oppression for decades, despite the unanimous demands by the international community and the clear rulings of the International Court of Justice. That situation had caused nearly 80,000 Namibians, representing more than 5 per cent of the population, to flee the country to live in refugee centres in Angola and Zambia.

91. It was incumbent upon the international community to help to alleviate the plight of those Namibians by assisting in meeting their basic material needs. In that respect, he was grateful for the substantial assistance which UNHCR had continued to render to Namibia over the years. For 1989, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees proposed to increase allocations for Namibians in Angola by \$US 1.4 million to a total of \$US 4 million.

92. In providing humanitarian assistance to the Namibian refugees, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees complemented the material assistance which the United Nations Council for Namibia, in its capacity as the administering authority for the country until independence, provided through the United Nations Fund for Namibia. In that regard, the United Nations Council for Namibia was most grateful for the close co-operation that existed between the Office of the United Nations Commissioner for Namibia and UNHCR both at headquarters and in the field. Discussions had been taking place for some time with a view to formalizing that co-operation and a memorandum of understanding between the Office and UNHCR on humanitarian and educational assistance to Namibian refugees was currently being finalized.

93. The recent diplomatic initiatives to bring about the independence of Namibia through the implementation of Security Council resolution 435 (1978) had not yet yielded the results anticipated but the United Nations Council for Namibia remained hopeful. When the time came, UNHCR would be called upon to organize the repatriation of the 80,000 Namibian refugees to enable them to participate as citizens of a free and independent country in the process of national reconstruction.

94. The repatriation operation was an extremely important element in the Namibian settlement both politically and in human terms. It was evident that UNHCR would discharge that responsibility with the same competence that it had shown in similar operations around the world. The United Nations Council for Namibia pledged its co-operation in that area.

95. In conclusion, the close co-operation that existed between the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Office of the United Nations Commissioner for Namibia should be underlined. There was reason to hope that, by the next session of the Executive Committee, Namibia would have joined the ranks of independent States and become the 160th State member of the United Nations and that, as a result, the Namibian refugee problem would have been finally resolved.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.