

United Nations

**GENERAL
ASSEMBLY**

THIRTY-FOURTH SESSION

Official Records*



THIRD COMMITTEE

43rd meeting

held on

Monday, 12 November 1979

at 3 p.m.

New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 43rd MEETING

Chairman: Mr. SOBHY (Egypt)

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Distr. GENERAL
A/C.3/34/SR.43
26 November 1979
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: SPANISH

79-58349

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

AGENDA ITEM 83: OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES: REPORT OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER (continued) (A/34/12 and Add.1, A/34/58, A/34/385, A/34/389 and Corr.1, A/34/627; A/C.3/34/7-8)

1. Mr. CARIAS (Honduras) said that his country was moved by the tragedy of the South-East Asian peoples and acknowledged the efforts to provide relief to the Kampuchean refugees. The United Nations system had channelled humanitarian aid in the most effective manner possible through the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNICEF, the Meeting on Refugees and Displaced Persons in South-East Asia, held in Geneva, and the Pledging Conference held on 5 November. He trusted that Governments would co-operate as closely as possible with the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General.
2. UNHCR had broadened its activities in response to the needs which arose from massive displacements of peoples. It deserved the support of Governments, non-governmental organizations and the public. The Pan-African Conference on Refugees, held in Arusha in May 1979, had been an important step in overcoming the difficulties which arose from the struggle for liberation by peoples subjected to colonialism.
3. The work of the Latin American Office of the High Commissioner had led to the more efficient mobilization of resources when unforeseen crises struck. Since the end of 1978, Honduras had received as many as 50,000 refugees from Nicaragua to whom asylum and protection had been afforded. The International Red Cross was playing an active part in those efforts, particularly in the administration of refugee camps. UNHCR had made an effective contribution, especially by helping families to become reunited. In June 1979, the Government of Honduras had signed an agreement with UNHCR, which had been renewed in October 1979. Although many refugees had returned to Nicaragua, developments in that country had caused others to leave, so that there were still some 13,000 Nicaraguan refugees in Honduras.
4. No country could think itself safe from such problems. All States should therefore assist in facilitating the tasks of the Office of the High Commissioner.
5. Ms. LOPEZ (Venezuela) recalled that her country had been a member of the Executive Committee of UNHCR from the outset. Venezuela had undertaken to admit refugees from various countries in the region, and as a party to the American Convention on Human Rights, applied the right of asylum and the principle of non-refoulement.
6. Venezuela was concerned by the effects of problems arising from social, economic and political conflict, generally brought about by expansionism and totalitarianism and affecting both the domestic politics of countries and international relations. The High Commissioner could only put forward solutions to alleviate the plight of the refugees, as evidenced by his efforts in Latin America during political crises, especially that in Nicaragua. Her Government fully supported those efforts.

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(Ms. Lomez, Venezuela)

7. Venezuela shared the conclusions on the refugee situation in South-East Asia set out in the High Commissioner's report (A/34/12). An entire generation was at risk. The work undertaken by the High Commissioner demanded the active participation of those responsible for the situation.

8. Venezuela had decided to quadruple its voluntary contribution, beginning in 1980, in appreciation of the work of UNHCR.

9. Mrs. NGUYEN NGOC DUNG (Viet Nam) said that her Government applauded the activities of UNHCR. Beginning in 1973, UNHCR had helped to resettle millions of Vietnamese displaced by the war, and hundreds of thousands of Kampuchians who had had to abandon their country and seek asylum in Viet Nam before the end of the genocidal régime in January 1979. In the three months which had elapsed since the Meeting on Refugees and Displaced Persons in South-East Asia, some countries of first asylum had made commendable efforts. Her Government had held continuous talks on the matter with South-East Asian countries, and had attempted to implement the decisions taken at the Meeting. Legal departures had been facilitated as far as possible and it was hoped to provide more transport. At the same time her Government was trying to prevent illegal departures by programmes of public information and by moving against the organizers of clandestine and illegal departures. As a result, the number of illegal departures had decreased noticeably. In spite of such progress, recorded departures were not running at the desired level. The formalities of the recipient countries and their selection criteria for would-be immigrants were partly responsible for that.

10. She regretted that the efforts of the High Commissioner, the Government of Viet Nam and the countries of first asylum in South-East Asia were hindered by the climate of insecurity and the permanent threat of war which hung over Viet Nam. As the Malaysian Minister of the Interior had stated in July 1979, each Chinese threat to invade Viet Nam gave rise to a new wave of panic among the Hoa, who joined the exodus. Viet Nam lived under the real threat of invasion, and was the victim of armed incursions and provocations on its northern frontier.

11. The organization of orderly departures had also been disrupted by the presence of warships which, under the pretext of assisting the refugees, were engaged in a show of strength, thereby threatening the peace and stability of the region and encouraging illegal departures. Several countries transmitted radio broadcasts in Vietnamese and encouraged many to leave, as part of the defamatory campaign against Viet Nam.

12. Whilst some new media broadcast sensationalist pictures of the refugees' plight, responsible statements on the real humanitarian aspects of the problem had been made in most countries. Viet Nam rejected out of hand the accusation that the refugee exodus was due to a policy of racist repression against the ethnic Chinese population. That misrepresentation came from a country given to slander. That same country today cultivated the friendship of those who yesterday it had termed paper tigers and its foremost enemies.

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(Mrs. Nguyen Ngoc Dung, Viet Nam)

13. The people of Viet Nam had experienced three major exoduses over the past 30 years. Following the 1954 victory and the Geneva Agreements, when South Viet Nam had been liberated from the interventionist colonialists and imperialists, they had engendered an exodus of the North Vietnamese, especially Catholics, on religious pretexts or by instilling dread of a United States nuclear strike against North Viet Nam. When faced with the imminent total liberation of South Viet Nam in 1975, the aggressors had propagated the fear of a communist "bloodbath", so that between 1 and 2 million people would flee South Viet Nam. The speed of the final victory had reduced that number to 160,000 people, who had been hastily evacuated. The third massive exodus had taken place before and after China's attack on Viet Nam. Each new Chinese threat to "teach Viet Nam another lesson" gave rise to a further wave of emigration. In all of the three exoduses, imperialists had seized on the country's economic difficulties in an attempt to promote instability, after the failure of military methods.

14. Those who had fled Viet Nam since 1975 belonged to various categories. There were torturers and pimps and others who had benefited from the war; they had collaborated with the previous régime and had not been disposed to accept the clemency of their compatriots. Others, having lived off American largesse, had been incapable of adapting to a society in which everyone had to work for his livelihood. Some of the Chinese emigrants had been important dealers, colonial agents of the former régime, while others, who had previously enjoyed good relations with the Vietnamese population, had been placed in a terrible dilemma by China's belligerence against Viet Nam.

15. The economic situation was another factor explaining the exodus. Viet Nam was the victim of a century of colonialism and of 30 years of continuous warfare. There were hundreds of thousands of sick and disabled, 1.5 million civilian victims, 1 million widows, 800,000 orphans, and 10 million peasants uprooted from their villages. It was difficult to reaccustom people to productive work after a lengthy dedication to war. There were 3 million unemployed, including 1.5 million South Vietnamese soldiers. She recalled that at the end of the war there had been hundreds of thousands of prostitutes, drug addicts, bandits and victims of tuberculosis. The country had been laid waste by a 500,000-strong army, the most modern weapons, and a bombardment twice that suffered by the whole of Europe during the Second World War. The whole country had needed material and moral reconstruction.

16. Viet Nam had not benefited from any international relief plan in its task of reconstruction. On the contrary, it had had to endure a third war of aggression unleashed by a colossus of a country and an economic blockade imposed by another Power, added to which were natural disasters such as drought, typhoons and floods. It was hardly surprising that there were those who wished to leave the country to better their economic situation or to be reunited with other members of their families. That phenomenon had occurred in many countries following the Second World War. After the final liberation of the country the Government of Viet Nam had always ensured that all its citizens, whatever their past, had adequate work, food, clothing and medical attention.

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(Mrs. Nguyen Ngoc Dung, Viet Nam)

17. In deliberations on the refugee situation in South-East Asia, some countries had tried to place responsibility for the illegal exodus of the boat people on Viet Nam. They were the same countries which in the fairly recent past, overtly or covertly, had devastated the land of Viet Nam. In the world today there were over 10 million refugees in Africa, Asia and Latin America who were the victims of barbaric oppression and despoliation, and to whom the press and other news media of those countries did not give due importance. When, 30 years earlier, Israel had expelled almost 2 million Palestinians from their homeland, making refugees of a whole people, those countries had shed not a tear on their behalf. The outpourings of those countries were sheer hypocrisy. They were exploiting the tragic fate of the refugees to give maximum publicity to their anti-Vietnamese campaign, which aimed at the political and economic isolation of Viet Nam. The prime movers behind that diabolical campaign were the hegemonists of a great Asian nation.

18. Certain countries had raised the question of Kampuchean refugees in Thailand as an important problem. The question of refugees in general was both humanitarian and political. There were Kampuchean refugees who had fled their country before the end of the genocidal régime, and others, taken as hostages by the followers of Pol Pot, who had sought asylum in Thailand. Humanitarian relief for those people would be warmly received. It was, however, no secret that the reactionary forces of a great Asian hegemonistic Power, in connivance with imperialists, had used Thai territory to succour and re-provision the remnants of Pol Pot's army. Until the competent Thai authorities adopted stringent measures to prevent the remnants of Pol Pot's army from infiltrating the refugees and from receiving humanitarian aid in order to continue their pillaging and slaughter of the Kampuchean people, objective public opinion would rightly doubt not only the purity of the Thai authorities' humanitarian intent, but would also severely censure schemes to exploit humanitarian aid in order to interfere in the internal affairs of Kampuchea.

19. A lasting solution to the problem of the South-East Asian refugees had to be based on three elements. Firstly, the peoples of the region had to live in peace and security. To achieve that the hegemonist forces should remove the threat of renewed warfare from Viet Nam and Laos. Secondly, the international community, including those countries responsible for the devastation of the countries of the region, should provide aid, not only to those people who fled their country to live in exile, but also to those who stayed in those countries, which had been scourged by war. Thirdly, the decisions and programmes of action adopted by UNHCR and the relevant United Nations conferences should be actively implemented.

20. The Government of Viet Nam would continue to fulfil its obligations towards UNHCR and other Governments, and offered assurances of its understanding and co-operation to the countries of first asylum in South-East Asia. Similarly, it would continue to take steps to assist the refugees in the region, whether in the framework of bilateral or multilateral co-operation, on the basis of its foreign policy of peace, friendship, co-operation and good neighbourliness towards all countries and of respect for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries.

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21. Miss CAO-PINNA (Italy) referred to the persistence of the refugee problem in every continent and to the positive steps taken by the High Commissioner and his aides to assist refugees. The problem of the South-East Asian refugees and the tragic situation of the people of Kampuchea had led to a singular display of human solidarity, reflected in the international community's response to the Meeting on Refugees and Displaced Persons in South-East Asia, held in Geneva in July 1979, and the Pledging Conference for Emergency Humanitarian Relief to the People of Kampuchea, held in New York early in November 1979.

22. Nevertheless, the problem of refugees persisted in South-East Asia and other continents, especially Africa, where the largest number of refugees existed. The international community should not become complacent in the light of the positive results of the two conferences. It should remain alert to changing circumstances, given that the roots of the problem were political and that there were as yet no signs of a lasting peace in South-East Asia.

23. The world-wide dimensions of the refugee problem made it necessary to maintain a balanced view of the situation of refugees throughout the world, and for more countries to open their doors to refugees. Increased international efforts were also needed to raise the number of resettlement opportunities to the level required to assist those persons languishing in countries of first asylum, notably in Thailand.

24. Italy had no objections in principle to the proposed establishment of a UNHCR fund for durable solutions. The concept and aims of the fund had, in principle, been approved by the Executive Committee which, however, had recognized that the proposals should be subject to a detailed study. To that end the Executive Committee had appointed nine of its members to serve as a nucleus of a working group and had invited the High Commissioner to call an informal meeting of the Executive Committee to consider the report of that working group before the end of January 1980. Italy concurred with the Executive Committee's cautious approach and considered that the working group should take into account, inter alia, the attitude of the two regions chiefly involved in the current refugee situation, namely South-East Asia and Africa, as well as that of other regions where the problem still existed.

25. Since the establishment of UNHCR, Italy had acted mainly as a country of first asylum for refugees from the European region without excluding, however, the resettlement of refugees on a more limited scale. During the past 30 years, more than 100,000 refugees had been admitted and assisted in Italy. The regional clause had been practically abandoned in 1974-1975, when about 900 refugees from Latin America, mainly from Chile, had been admitted. Furthermore, Italy had responded to the High Commissioner's request to receive African refugees in transit, who had amounted every year to several hundred persons, some of whom had been offered permanent resettlement for humanitarian reasons. Similar efforts were being made for Russian Jews awaiting immigration to the United States and Israel. All those activities had been financed regularly by the State budget in an amount of \$1.7 million annually, to which must be added a yearly contribution of \$726,000 to the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration. Such commitments explained the relatively limited amount of the Italian contribution to the UNHCR budget, which had been \$60,000 in 1979.

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(Miss Cao-Pinna, Italy)

26. Faced with the massive and tragic exodus of Indo-Chinese refugees, her Government had established an Inter-Ministerial Committee for the co-ordination of all initiatives to be taken in favour of those refugees. At the Geneva Meeting of July 1979, in addition to the Italian share of the commitment made by the European Community as a whole (a share amounting to \$783,000) a national contribution of \$736,000 had been announced by Italy, together with the offer of a medical team equipped to assist in the processing centres in South-East Asia. Three units of the Italian navy had participated in the operations for rescuing Indo-Chinese refugees, who were now being helped to resettle in Italy. Those three units had brought 901 refugees to Italy and a further 553 from the processing camps in Thailand, Malaysia and Hong Kong; Italy planned to receive 400 more refugees before the end of January 1980.

27. At the Pledging Conference for Emergency Humanitarian Relief to the People of Kampuchea, Italy had announced a contribution of \$120,000, which had already been granted to the UNICEF assistance programmes, and a further 20 million lire in medical supplies. Moreover, Italy intended to donate 1,000 tons of rice, worth \$400,000, through the World Food Programme for distribution in Kampuchea, or alternatively was ready to provide a medical unit.

28. Ms. KEKEDO (Papua New Guinea) said that her country welcomed the measures taken by States Members of the United Nations to safeguard human rights and urged those Governments which violated human rights to take prompt and effective action to respect the dignity of their citizens.

29. The size and complexity of the refugee problem had increased at an alarming rate. While it was right and proper to assist the refugees, the problem should be tackled at its source. Such action required the active participation and co-operation of the Governments of the countries of origin - former colonial Governments and present Governments. The problem of the refugees was related to colonization and imperialism and there would be no end to it until all countries had been freed from foreign domination and until all nations were prepared to accept each other regardless of their differences in ideology, colour or race.

30. Because of its geographical position, Papua New Guinea had a special interest in seeing an end to the confrontation between Viet Nam and Kampuchea and urged both Governments to meet around the conference table and to iron out their differences far from the battlefield. The people who suffered most in such a situation were innocent women, children and the elderly.

31. The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of Papua New Guinea had informed the General Assembly that his Government fully recognized the humanitarian nature of the refugee problem and had welcomed the establishment of refugee-processing centres in countries of the ASEAN region. He had stressed, however, that the success of those centres would depend on a wider response to the need for developed nations to accept more refugees.

32. The recent announcement by the Secretary-General and by the Executive Director of UNICEF that at least \$110 million would be required to meet the needs

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(Ms. Kekedo, Papua New Guinea)

of the joint programme of UNICEF and the International Committee of the Red Cross for Kampuchea over the following six months had emphasized the gravity of the situation which had been described by the Secretary-General as a national tragedy, the proportion of which might have no parallel in history. If the situation was not arrested soon, through the infusion of massive assistance, the people of Kampuchea would face a disastrous shortage of food, medical supplies, shelter and transport. The consequence would be that the exodus of refugees would be aggravated further and neighbouring countries would become increasingly disturbed at the burdens thrust upon them.

33. She expressed her Government's appreciation to the Secretary-General, to the High Commissioner and to the humanitarian organizations for their efforts in providing assistance to the civilian population of Kampuchea. She also noted that a number of Governments had promised humanitarian assistance, and she hoped that others would follow suit. At the Meeting convened by the Secretary-General in Geneva in July 1979, her Government had pledged \$300,000 for the refugee programme in Indo-China.

34. Mr. HASSA (Jordan) noted that five years had passed since the refugee problem in South-East Asia had arisen and hundreds of thousands of persons continued to be threatened by terrible dangers. Such a situation was the responsibility of the international community, since it had dangerous repercussions on the political, economic and social situations of all countries. If immediate assistance was not afforded, thousands of persons would die of hunger and malnutrition.

35. Jordan appreciated the efforts made by a number of organizations, particularly in South-East Asia, to alleviate the plight of the refugees but the problem could be solved only if its cause was tackled. He also supported the efforts of UNHCR on behalf of Palestine refugees and would participate in all activities designed to save refugees anywhere in the world.

36. It was essential that the refugees should be afforded one of the most sacred rights: the right to return to their homeland. For the past 30 years, hundreds of thousands of Palestine refugees had remained in Jordan and had not been permitted by Israel to return to their homes. The problem must be approached from two angles: immediate measures to ameliorate the plight of the refugees and future measures designed to guarantee their right to return to their homes.

37. Mrs. MOUTOU DA GRAÇA (Gabon) said that her delegation was aware of the ever-increasing scope and complexity of the refugee problem, especially since half of all the refugees in the world were in Africa and since Gabon had taken in a considerable number of them.

38. Her delegation commended the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the organizations of the United Nations system and the intergovernmental organizations for their efforts to alleviate the plight of the refugees and paid a tribute to the Secretary-General's initiative to convene a Meeting in Geneva to find a prompt solution to the critical situation prevailing in South-East Asia.

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(Mrs. Moutou Da Graça, Gabon)

39. The High Commissioner was represented in Libreville by a Chargé d'Affaires, with whose co-operation a National Delegation for Refugees had been established with representatives from all the Ministries concerned. In agriculture, the refugees were being placed in agricultural development programmes. During the first quarter of 1979, two UNHCR experts had visited Gabon to consider the possibility of settling the refugees in rural areas.

40. In Gabon it was difficult to draw a distinction between political refugees and persons who had immigrated for economic reasons. The National Delegation, in co-ordination with the security forces was therefore compiling a register of refugees. Gabon had requested the United Nations to provide two 2-month fellowships for training in refugee protection. Her country was prepared to receive young Asians, and that question was under study by a special committee.

41. Mrs. RUSSELL (Barbados) said that the Government and people of her country were committed to the principles of true humanitarianism, which was the reason why they supported initiatives for the elimination of violations of human rights and action to improve the international machinery for the promotion and protection of those rights.

42. The documentation before the Committee for consideration of the item, particularly the report of the High Commissioner (A/34/12) and the report of the Secretary-General on the Geneva Meeting (A/34/627), painted a horrendous picture of human suffering more in keeping with the dark ages than with the age of space exploration. The horror lay mainly in the fact - which all mankind could face only with shame - that little or no value was placed on human life.

43. Her delegation was disturbed by the fact that in different areas a climate unfavourable to asylum-seekers had been noted. Meanwhile there were still large numbers of refugees throughout Africa, the majority of them victims of the racist policies of the Pretoria and Salisbury régimes. But by far the greatest horror story came from South-East Asia, whose situation was described in document A/34/12, paragraph 185, and which had prompted the convening of the Geneva Meeting in July 1979.

44. In the report on that Meeting (A/34/627), the Secretary-General had pointed out the important fact that the refugee problem had political roots. In order to depoliticize that problem, it was necessary to concentrate on solving its humanitarian aspects, thereby helping to create an atmosphere in which the other aspects were more likely to be solved.

45. Her delegation whole-heartedly supported the creation of a special fund for refugees and all the efforts of the United Nations to alleviate such inhuman suffering.

46. Mrs. HOUNGAVOU (Benin) said that her delegation had always been concerned about the refugee situation, with regard both to its humanitarian aspects and to its underlying political causes. Benin appreciated the assistance rendered by donor countries for the solution of the refugee problem and reaffirmed its support for the activities of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General in that regard.

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(Mrs. Hounouvou, Benin)

47. The Meeting held at Geneva in July 1979 and the Pledging Conference for refugees showed the ever-increasing attention that was being accorded in the United Nations to the humanitarian aspects of the problem. However, thought should also be given to the possibility of tackling the evil at its roots. It was therefore necessary to distinguish between individuals who left their country voluntarily and those who did so for political reasons. The fact that there were a great many refugees was not an isolated fact but a consequence of the daily crimes of aggressive and exploitative imperialism. In Africa, refugee problems were fundamentally linked to the situation in southern Africa, namely, that in South Africa, under the apartheid régime, and that in Southern Rhodesia and Namibia, which were controlled by colonialism and imperialism.

48. It was impossible to refrain from denouncing and condemning the brutal acts of aggression and the genocide to which the refugees were subjected. If the basic causes of the problem continued to be side-stepped, it would never be possible to solve it definitively and adequately.

49. Mr. NDONGO (Equatorial Guinea) expressed his appreciation to the Secretary-General for his statement on the refugee problem, the Geneva Meeting on Refugees and Displaced Persons in South-East Asia and the recent Pledging Conference for Emergency Humanitarian Relief to the People of Kampuchea. He expressed his gratitude also to the High Commissioner for his efforts and for the report in document A/34/12, which gave a precise and detailed description of the current situation of refugees in the world. The High Commissioner's task in Africa, Asia and Latin America was arduous and sensitive, because the problem had humanitarian, political and economic aspects which frequently involved States Members of the United Nations.

50. He expressed particular appreciation to the High Commissioner for the efforts made to assist those forced to leave Equatorial Guinea because of Macías' dictatorial régime. In that regard, a general amnesty law had been enacted which guaranteed the physical integrity and the property of all nationals of Equatorial Guinea who wished to return to the country. In addition, bilateral negotiations had been held with friendly countries, such as Gabon, Nigeria, Spain and the United Republic of Cameroon, in order to promote the voluntary return of nationals of Equatorial Guinea who had taken refuge in those countries. Lastly, a mission sent by the High Commissioner had studied ways of assisting voluntary repatriation and settlement of the refugees.

51. The disorder and scarcity of resources left by the previous régime prevented the Government of Equatorial Guinea from being able to meet the costs of repatriating and resettling over 100,000 of its nationals who were currently abroad and wished to return; his delegation therefore appealed to the High Commissioner and the international community to provide emergency assistance in order to achieve their voluntary repatriation.

The meeting rose at 5.15 p.m.