

United Nations

**GENERAL
ASSEMBLY**

THIRTY-FOURTH SESSION

*Official Records**



UN/SA COLLECTION

THIRD COMMITTEE

44th meeting

held on

Tuesday, 13 November 1979

at 10.30 a.m.

New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 44th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. SOBHY (Egypt)

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REPORT OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER (continued)

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79-58401

Distr. GENERAL
A/C.3/34/SR.44
27 November 1979
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: FRENCH

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The meeting was called to order at 10.50 a.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, 385, 389 and Corr.1, 627; A/C.3/34/7-8)

1. Miss CHICOYE (France) said that France was and had always been a country of asylum for persons who had to flee their own countries because of warfare or persecution, regardless of their geographical or national origin and their political or ideological beliefs. The functions of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was likewise humanitarian and apolitical, and it was in that that its strength lay.
2. Africa was still the continent that had the greatest number of refugees. The outbreak or resurgence of armed conflict (in Uganda, Zimbabwe and the Horn of Africa) was still causing new influxes of displaced persons, but the situation was nevertheless encouraging. Her delegation was particularly gratified by the voluntary repatriation of Zairian refugees from Angola as a result of Zaire's amnesty law. It was also gratified by the Pan-African Conference on Refugees, held at Arusha in May 1979, in which France had participated.
3. Her delegation was using Africa as an example because most African States acknowledged and applied the liberal principles on asylum laid down in the OAU Convention governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa adopted in 1969. There were still many regions of the world in which the problem of refugees was acute but was not specifically covered by an regional convention and in which no State of the region was party to the 1951 Geneva Convention or the 1967 Protocol on refugees. It was vital that all States should ratify those two instruments. However valuable temporary asylum and emergency relief were from a humanitarian point of view, final solutions were only possible if the universal principles governing humanitarian refugee law were recognized and applied. While UNHCR had had to expand its emergency relief programmes enormously, it should not be forgotten that its original function was to give priority to the legal protection of refugees and to assistance directed towards lasting solutions.
4. It was probably in the case of South East Asia that international action had been most successfully co-ordinated. The meeting held at Geneva in July 1979 had induced the international community to undertake new commitments and to intensify its efforts to resolve the problem of Indo-Chinese refugees. As a traditional country of asylum, France was making an unusually strenuous effort to take in Indo-Chinese refugees and settle them into French society. It had taken in approximately 70,000 refugees since 1975 and a further 70,000 since the Geneva meeting, and would continue to accept displaced persons in the months to come. Accordingly the target of one refugee per 1,000 of the population had been greatly exceeded in the case of refugees from South East Asia, and to that end a network of reception centres and shelters managed by private associations had been

(Miss Chicoye, France)

established and was being co-ordinated and subsidized by the public authorities. The French office for the Protection of Refugees and Expatriates, which occupied a central role in France's policy for refugees, acted in close co-operation with UNHCR.

5. For five years the French State had been spending the equivalent of \$50 million a year on receiving refugees from South-East Asia, and that sum did not include medical costs or the cost of schooling, for which purposes refugees were treated in the same way as French citizens. At the Pledging Conference for Emergency Humanitarian Relief to the People of Kampuchea the French Minister of Foreign Affairs had announced a national contribution of \$5 million - in addition to the EEC's contribution - part of it earmarked for the UNHCR programme of action for Cambodian refugees in Thailand. Moreover, her delegation was in a position to announce that France's contribution to the regular budget of UNHCR would be substantially increased.

6. Mr. PASTINEN (Finland) said that recent events had proved that the problem of refugees was a permanent element in international relations. It was therefore the joint responsibility of the international community to strive to alleviate the suffering of refugees and displaced persons whenever the over-all situation was assessed. In his Government's view, the plight of refugees was only one aspect of the general question of human rights. The fact that the international community had been able to take action quickly with respect to refugees and displaced persons in South-East Asia, particularly as a result of the Conference in Geneva in July 1979, showed that co-ordinated steps could be taken on a large scale and could produce practical results. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that so far only partial solutions had been achieved. All Governments were jointly responsible for giving immediate relief and for reaching peaceful solutions to political crises that might cause flows of refugees.

7. His Government's support for the activities of UNHCR was backed by growing awareness among the public of refugee problems and by several non-governmental organizations, church organizations and the trade union movement. Finland had become a member of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme and hoped that its membership would further strengthen co-operation between the Government and UNHCR. During the current year his Government had made two special contributions to the High Commissioner's Programme in addition to its regular annual contribution. It had also assisted other international humanitarian organizations that co-operated with UNHCR and was engaged in reunifying the families of refugees living in Finland. Moreover, the Government had decided to make a contribution of 100,000 Finnish marks to the special account established by the Executive Committee at its most recent session. It was revising its legislation and procedures concerning the status and protection of refugees in accordance with the recommendations of a special commission which had studied Finland's policy in that sphere.

8. While the position of refugees in South-East Asia was particularly acute, it should not be allowed to overshadow the fact that in Africa the number of refugees

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(Mr. Pastinen, Finland)

had increased to about 4 million and that the situation in Latin America was still critical. Equity was therefore required in the allocation of the resources available, and Governments should continue their contributions to the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees to the extent possible so as to enable it to plan its activities well in advance.

9. The extensive publicity which the assistance activities of the High Commissioner had recently received, should not cause a less visible, but equally important, part of his functions, the international protection provided to refugees in accordance with the Statute of the High Commissioner's Office and the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, to be forgotten. Further accessions to those instruments, to which Finland was a party, were needed in order to make them universally applicable and thereby to guarantee refugees adequate protection and freedom from such arbitrary measures as expulsion, detention and refoulement.

10. Mr. SHARIF (Somalia) said that the refugee problem was frequently a symptom of deeper problems which the United Nations and its regional organizations would sooner or later have to tackle and resolve. Meanwhile, however, the issue of refugees was of immediate and vital concern to Somalia and to the whole African continent.

11. The report of the High Commissioner for Refugees described the enormity of the issue, and its findings were endorsed by several other reports prepared by United Nations organs, the Organization of African Unity, voluntary associations throughout the world and the Governments of certain countries.

12. He expressed his Government's satisfaction at the fact that the Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity at the Monrovia Conference had endorsed the report and the recommendations adopted by participants at the Conference on the Situation of Refugees in Africa held at Arusha from 7 to 17 May 1979. One of the first matters dealt with by the Organization of African Unity after its inception had been the problem of refugees. Its 1969 Convention governing the specific aspects of refugee problems in Africa was to date the only such convention adopted by a regional organization. It was therefore natural that Governments of African States, the Organization of African Unity, the Economic Commission for Africa, UNHCR and other concerned humanitarian agencies should have organized the Arusha Conference, at which the participants had translated into clear and concrete terms the experience gained over the past decade and had devoted special attention to the need for the formulation of a well-prepared and comprehensive assistance programme in order to secure the maximum concrete support for refugees. They had also expressed deep concern over the constant deterioration of the living conditions and the ever-increasing number of African refugees and had called for a study of ways and means of translating the principle of burden sharing into practice.

13. The situation in South-East Asia had deteriorated to the point where the High Commissioner had felt obliged to convene a Meeting on Refugees and Displaced Persons in South-East Asia, which had immediately resulted in numerous offers of assistance. The situation in Africa was no less grave. His Government had

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(Mr. Sharif, Somalia)

recently been obliged to declare a state of emergency, which was a measure very rarely taken. Vast sectors of the Somali people had long been subjected to persecution by one or other of the colonial Powers which had illegally parcelled out the traditional grazing lands in the Horn of Africa. Over the years, surviving herdsmen and farmers had fled from the cruel campaigns which alien military occupation had involved. The issue was thus not a new one, but today the scale of the exodus was unprecedented. The previous month the Minister of Local Government and Rural Development had pointed out that the Somali Democratic Republic now hosted - not only in comparison to its population and resources but also in absolute figures - the largest number of refugees in all of Africa and indeed in the whole world. In the first half of 1978, there had been some 80,000 refugees housed in Somali refugee camps and a somewhat greater number at large in various settlements and elsewhere in the country. By October 1978, that figure had reached 350,308. It was well nigh impossible to estimate accurately the number of non-registered refugees but the increase had been equally alarming. The total population of refugees and displaced persons now topped the million mark. It was thus understandable that it had been necessary to declare a state of emergency.

14. The 22 refugee camps which the Government had been obliged to establish had housed in mid-October 109,496 children under six years of age, 96,659 children aged between 7 and 15, 32,351 men and 111,809 women; all those figures had been confirmed by impartial observers, such as the League of Red Cross Societies, which had appealed for emergency aid. That organization had indicated that one third of the 1,000 refugees who daily crossed into Somalia had to be fed, clothed, housed and provided with other care, including emergency medical care if epidemics were to be prevented.

15. The United Nations had rightly mobilized resources to assist the "boat people" and the thousands of refugees from Kampuchea, but it was regrettable that it was held more "dramatic" to die in a boat in a storm than in the deserts of Africa. The question must be asked whether Africa was receiving a fair share of the available assistance and how the over-all assistance activities could best be improved.

16. His Government believed that a determined effort must be made to uplift the morale and restore the dignity of the refugees and to afford them the possibility of productive work. That involved time, skill and a lot of money. Unfortunately, the Somali people had scarcely any resources to share with the desperate and destitute who were flooding across the borders. Such an influx of refugees would have long-term consequences for any country. Somalia was not rich, and the transhumantic pattern of life of the majority of the population was seriously threatened, particularly in terms of grazing and water. The vegetation was affected, and the delicate ecological balance, so crucial for the survival of livestock and the prevention of famine, was disturbed. Moreover, in order to build shelters and get food and warmth, the refugees had had to destroy virgin bushland in alarming proportions. The recent construction of four new camps - making a total of 22 in all - had made the situation even more critical.

17. His Government thanked UNHCR, the World Food Programme and all the voluntary organizations and sympathetic countries which, in response to earlier appeals, had

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(Mr. Sharif, Somalia)

enabled it to launch basic assistance programmes. However, without prompt action, the refugee problem threatened to spiral out of control in Somalia and spread throughout the Horn of Africa and beyond, with repercussions regarding which he did not wish to speculate.

18. He would submit a draft resolution on the refugee problem.

19. Mr. HASSAN (Pakistan) pointed out that a considerable increase had taken place in the magnitude of work undertaken by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees during the period from April 1978 to March 1979, as a result of new influxes of refugees and displaced persons in Africa, Asia and Latin America. His delegation nevertheless believed that the two major events which had taken place during the past year, namely, the Conference on the Situation of Refugees in Africa, held at Arusha, Tanzania, in May, and the United Nations Meeting on Refugees and Displaced Persons in South-East Asia, held at Geneva in July, had contributed significantly to advancing the cause of refugees in the world.

20. Pakistan too was a host country. Following the events of 1971, refugees from Bangladesh and, more recently, nearly 200,000 from Afghanistan had been admitted to its territory. In that connexion, his delegation wished to point out that those refugees had been accepted purely for humanitarian reasons, in accordance with the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of another State, in the present instance, Afghanistan. It also wished to thank UNHCR for the efficient and rapid assistance which it had provided to those refugees. His delegation hoped that at the forthcoming pledging conference the international community would place at the disposal of UNHCR the funds which he needed to discharge his obligations effectively. Pakistan, for its part, would continue to contribute, within the limits of its resources, to the various programmes of the Office of the High Commissioner.

21. Mr. AASEN (Norway) said that the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees merited the gratitude of the international community for its efficiency in fulfilling its mandate. Nevertheless, new methods should be found for improving the protection of refugees and increasing their opportunities for resettlement. It was indeed sad to realize that, in spite of the considerable results which had been achieved, the refugee problem in 1979 was more acute than in 1978, because it was frequently of a political nature.

22. Although the largest number of refugees was still to be found in the African continent, the refugee situation in Asia was the most critical. In that respect, it was encouraging to note the spirit of co-operation which had prevailed at the Geneva Meeting in July and at the recent Pledging Conference for Emergency Humanitarian Relief to the People of Kampuchea, convened by the Secretary-General. On the latter occasion, in particular, the international community had clearly demonstrated its will to ensure that the implementation of relief programmes was not hampered by political considerations. His delegation appealed to the parties directly involved to co-operate constructively with the international organizations working in the area.

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(Mr. Aasen, Norway)

23. His Government had noted with satisfaction that in recent years the number of countries contributing financially to the work of UNHCR had increased. However, the burden of contributions was far from being equally shared. In 1978, 87 countries had made financial contributions to the general programme; but out of the total of \$146 million raised in contributions for that year's programme, \$120 million had come from only nine countries. His delegation hoped that the next annual pledging conference would result in a more equitable distribution of the financial burden.

24. Norway was one of the main contributors to the regular budget of UNHCR, but numerous non-governmental organizations in Norway were also trying to alleviate the plight of refugees. Two weeks earlier, the Norwegian Refugee Council had organized a televised campaign to raise funds for the benefit of refugees all over the world. The campaign had produced a total of 70 million Norwegian kroner, or approximately \$14 million. That was one example of the active concern felt in Norway for the fate of refugees throughout the world, and his delegation wished to assure the High Commissioner of the continued support of his Government.

25. Mr. MELLBIN (Denmark) said that although, as the report of the High Commissioner showed, every part of the world had a refugee problem, the situation was particularly disturbing in southern Africa, where people from Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe were coming in ever greater numbers to the African front-line States. An equally alarming situation existed in the Horn of Africa. In that regard, the conference held at Arusha in 1979 under the auspices of OAU had served to focus world attention on the refugee problem in Africa and to demonstrate once more that the principle of asylum was being applied in African countries in a truly humanitarian spirit.

26. More recently, the attention of the international community had been concentrated on the tragic fate of refugees from South-East Asia, whose numbers had grown considerably within a short span of time. Against that background, the meeting convened by the Secretary-General at Geneva in July 1979 had been of special importance. The participating countries had shown a clear intention to express their solidarity with human beings in distress in concrete terms by promising to receive 125,000 more refugees and to contribute an additional \$190 million to UNHCR programmes in South-East Asia. The same spirit of co-operation had been shown at the Pledging Conference on 5 November for the thousands of refugees and displaced persons from the Kampuchean region.

27. Assistance to refugees in Latin America seemed to have been largely satisfactory, on both the international and the bilateral levels, in particular in the case of refugees from Nicaragua.

28. In view of the scale of the world refugee problem, it was evident why there had been such a sharp increase in UNHCR expenditure and why heavier demands were being placed on donor countries. In 1979 his Government would be contributing about \$8 million to UNHCR. However, Denmark's over-all assistance to refugees,

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(Mr. Mellbin, Denmark)

either by receiving them in the country or by contributing to international organizations such as the International Red Cross and the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM), would exceed \$30 million in the current year. Under its resettlement programme, Denmark received 500 refugees each year from Latin American, African and Asian countries. The figure would be doubled in 1979 in order to receive Indo-Chinese refugees, in response to the special appeal made at the Geneva Meeting.

29. The question of the protection of refugees, which had been included in the deliberations of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme at its thirteenth session, called for special consideration. The protection of refugees was a primary function of UNHCR, and the Executive Committee, of which Denmark was a member, had emphasized a number of extremely important points in that regard. It had called upon all States to respect the rights of refugees, especially the fundamental principles of asylum and non-refoulement. He stressed the heavy responsibility of UNHCR. If its authority was undermined, which could happen when political considerations interfered with humanitarian concerns, it would be unable to fulfil its mission, and the first to suffer in consequence would, of course, be the refugees themselves.

30. His delegation hoped that an increasing number of countries would support the work of UNHCR, and it intended to introduce a draft resolution relating to the report of the High Commissioner.

31. Mr. ELARABY (Egypt) said that UNHCR was confronted by an enormous task, even though the resources at its disposal were inadequate, in meeting the needs of refugees, who, for various reasons, such as political upheavals and natural disasters, were growing more numerous throughout the world. The number of refugees in Africa alone had reached 4 million. The question of the total number was extremely important, since the amount of assistance given to each region depended on the number of refugees there. It should be borne in mind in that connexion that no region of the world should be given any advantage over others. All men were equal in the face of suffering. His delegation intended, together with other African countries, to submit a draft resolution on the subject of refugees in Africa.

32. The disastrous increase in the number of refugees in South-East Asia had rightly drawn the attention of the international community. He commended the Secretary-General for his initiative in convening a United Nations meeting in July to mobilize world support for the refugees from that region, and he hoped that the initiative would bear fruit.

33. He also wished to draw attention to an issue which was frequently ignored, namely, the legal status of refugees. It was very important to have an exact definition of the rights of refugees and those of host countries. Past efforts to elaborate international instruments guaranteeing respect for those rights had been fruitless. But it was not too late to take action, and the time had come for the international community to consider that important issue once more.

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34. Mr. NAGY (Hungary) stressed that the root causes of the question under consideration were obviously political, and the mere mention of them would not alleviate in any way the tragic plight of the refugees. At the Committee's 42nd meeting, the Chinese representative had regrettably not heeded the Chairman's appeal to Committee members to confine their remarks to the humanitarian and non-political aspects of the matter under discussion. China did not seem interested in solving the refugee problem but rather sought to exploit it by attacking a country whose people deserved, more than any other, to live in peace at last. That was nothing new. The imperialist and reactionary forces of colonialism and neo-colonialism and expansionist China had been pursuing a policy of hostility towards Viet Nam for the past 30 years and had therefore made the most of the so-called refugee problem to cloak their own criminal acts, mislead world public opinion and undermine the international prestige of Viet Nam. Chinese forces were currently trying to provoke hostilities between the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam and the other States of South-East Asia and thus thwart the development of co-operation between those countries, Viet Nam and the Office of the High Commissioner, while pursuing other patently political goals. But mankind would never forget the outrageous crimes perpetrated against the Vietnamese people, which were at the root of the refugee problem in the region. Nor would mankind ever forget that at the very time when the Vietnamese people were in a position at long last to start building their future, in the most difficult circumstances, they had had to repulse two wars of aggression launched against their northern and south-western borders.

35. Nor was mankind likely ever to forget the reign of terror brought to Cambodia by the Pol Pot bands, which had made people into refugees in their own land, wiped out human beings by the million and brought about the most harrowing of situations. The countries which wished to burke those facts had started a campaign of denigration, shedding crocodile tears over the fate of the boat people, but they had been very careful not to ask any kind of humanitarian aid for the hundreds of thousands of souls who had fled to Viet Nam to escape the Pol Pot terror.

36. For its part, the Government of Viet Nam had repeatedly said that it understood the problems raised by the influx of Vietnamese into neighbouring countries, and had co-operated fully with the Office of the High Commissioner in seeking satisfactory solutions, as witness the seven-point programme agreed to by the competent authorities in Viet Nam (A/C.3/34/7). His delegation was certain that that programme represented the best means of solving the problems of Viet Nam and the other States in the area.

37. As the Geneva Meeting had acknowledged, the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam was sparing no effort to find the best solution to the refugee problem. Such a mass exodus was obviously a complex and difficult political phenomenon, and there was no immediate solution inside Viet Nam itself because the country's grave economic problems could not be solved overnight. Therefore, aid to the countries of the region in meeting their economic problems would at the same time help to staunch the flow of refugees. The Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam

(Mr. Nagy, Hungary)

had said at Geneva that a rational solution must be found which would enable those wishing to leave the country to do so; in that way, countries which genuinely wished to find a humane solution to the problem could demonstrate their readiness to co-operate.

38. His delegation hoped that the Governments of interested countries, like the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, would subordinate their political goals to humanitarian principles, since that was the only way to arrive at a solution. In conclusion, he stressed that the problems of refugees in Africa and Latin America could only be solved if the countries concerned co-operated with the Office of the High Commissioner in achieving its humanitarian objectives.

39. Baron von WECHMAR (Federal Republic of Germany) said that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees had been faced with a task of unprecedented magnitude because of the presence of 4 million refugees in Africa at the present time and upwards of 600,000 in South-East Asia. To a large extent also, the refugee problem was the result of disregard for human rights; no Government should pursue a policy which forced its citizens to flee their own country in large numbers at the risk of their lives. It would be an illusion, however, to try to solve the refugee problem in isolation from the underlying political problems.

40. Under the terms of the High Commissioner's mandate, the search for permanent solutions to the refugee problem was primarily a humanitarian task based on international solidarity. The Refugee Conference held in Arusha (United Republic of Tanzania) and the Meeting on Refugees and Displaced Persons in South-East Asia held in Geneva in July 1979, on which the Secretary-General had reported (A/34/627), as well as work of the Executive Committee of UNHCR at its recent session, had shown that States were willing to co-operate at the regional and international levels. But more countries must participate in humanitarian relief operations for refugees and be ready to grant them legal protection.

41. The Government of the Federal Republic of Germany paid a special tribute to the High Commissioner for his efforts in the matter of international protection for refugees. The Federal Republic of Germany had long since ratified the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol on the Status of Refugees, and had given refugees all the rights deriving from that Convention. The right of asylum was laid down in article 16 of the Basic Law, as a fundamental human right. The Federal Republic of Germany co-operated closely with the offices of the High Commissioner in implementing the Convention. Special institutions had been set up to deal with applications for asylum, and their decisions were reviewed at three different stages of jurisdiction. Notwithstanding the steady increase in the number of applications for asylum, the competent authorities and courts were doing their best to expedite admission procedures, and a law to streamline the proceedings had been passed in 1978. The Federal Republic of Germany had also ratified the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, and was a party to the Agreement relating to Refugee Seamen. His Government endorsed the High Commissioner's appeal for ratification by as many States as possible of the international instruments relating to refugees.

(Baron von Wechmar, Federal
Republic of Germany)

42. In view of the vast numbers of refugees, the Federal Government had decided to increase its contribution to UNHCR in 1979; in addition to the DM 15 million for various UNHCR relief programmes, on 12 November 1979 the Minister of State had handed to the High Commissioner's representative in Bonn a cheque for DM 20 million. Further relief would be given for Kampuchean refugees, as the delegation of the Federal Republic of Germany had announced at the Pledging Conference for Emergency Humanitarian Relief to the People of Kampuchea held on 5 November 1979.

43. Thirteen thousand resettlement places for refugees from Indochina had been offered by the Laender of the Federal Republic and 7,000 more were expected. The need to find lasting solutions to the refugee problem within the framework of UNHCR relief programmes was manifest, and the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany had supported resettlement operations, especially in Africa, through contributions from funds-in-trust. Voluntary organizations in the Federal Republic of Germany also gave assistance to refugees in South-East Asia and had contributed more than DM 20 million in 1979.

44. The High Commissioner had effectively discharged his increasingly difficult task and the Federal Republic of Germany would continue to assist him to the best of its abilities.

45. Mr. ANDERSON (Australia) said that his country, which had traditionally been a country of settlement for migrants and refugees, supported the activities of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees by making substantial contributions to the annual budget, by offering to accept refugees on a permanent basis, by acceding to the Convention and Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees and by active membership of the Executive Committee. Australia's contribution for the biennium 1978-1979 made it the tenth largest contributor.

46. Refugee outflows in Africa, Asia and Latin America had imposed great burdens on the States of first asylum, and at the recent meeting of the Executive Committee in Geneva, Australia had drawn attention to the principle of temporary refuge, which had subsequently been adopted unanimously. States unable to deal with a massive influx of people seeking asylum should grant at least temporary refuge pending assistance from other States, and the people must be resettled elsewhere.

47. Having admitted 350,000 refugees since the Second World War, Australia was particularly concerned at the tragic proportions of the problem of refugees from Indo-China. The number of refugees in camps in the countries of first asylum, which had been about 185,000 at the time of the thirty-third session of the General Assembly, had risen to 337,000, without counting the 200,000 Kampuchean refugees who had recently arrived in Thailand. There were currently about 400,000 refugees in Thailand. The international community should give special assistance to that country, which had borne the brunt of the refugee exodus since 1975. In the face of such a critical situation, which resulted in particularly heavy financial, political and social burdens for the ASEAN States and Hong Kong, it was gratifying to note that there had been a generous response by a number of countries.

(Mr. Anderson, Australia)

48. Both the High Commissioner and his staff had played a central role in organizing and channelling international aid, especially at the two special meetings on Indo-Chinese refugees held in Geneva in December 1978 and July 1979. The latter meeting had been particularly successful since the number of resettlement places offered had more than doubled, rising from 125,000 to 260,000, although that figure still fell well short of the number of refugees for whom a permanent solution was being sought. Voluntary repatriation, the ideal solution, might be possible if circumstances changed. Pledges to the High Commissioner's programmes had also increased, but further efforts were needed. In a period when the number of refugees had risen dramatically, the High Commissioner had pursued his task efficiently in collaboration with agencies such as UNICEF, WHO and FAO and various voluntary organizations. With the large numbers of refugees fleeing Kampuchea, the needs had expanded rapidly, but it was to be hoped that, as a result of the Pledging Conference, adequate assistance could be provided.

49. Australia had done its part: since 1975, more than 27,000 Indo-Chinese refugees had been resettled in Australia, and the number would rise to more than 37,000 by June 1980. Australia had also given more than \$14 million for assistance to Indo-Chinese refugees since 1975, and in 1978 alone it had given \$5.2 million to UNHCR, including \$250,000 for the refugee processing centre in Indonesia, and \$2.2 million for Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines. However, humanitarian assistance alone was not sufficient and, as Australia and other countries had acknowledged at the Geneva meeting, the refugee problem could only be solved if the underlying causes were addressed. At the meeting in Geneva in July 1979, the Secretary-General had announced that Viet Nam had agreed to make every effort to stop illegal departures for a reasonable period of time and to co-operate with UNHCR in expanding the seven-point programme designed to bring departures within orderly and safe channels. Since then, the number of refugees from Viet Nam had fallen substantially. In the addendum to his report, (A/34/12/Add.1), the High Commissioner had noted that the Executive Committee, at its recent meeting in Geneva, had expressed the wish that the root causes of the refugee problem should be taken up by an appropriate international forum, for example, the thirty-fourth session of the General Assembly.

50. Australia fully endorsed the sentiments expressed in paragraph 51 of the Secretary-General's report (A/34/627) which stated, inter alia, that the problem of refugees could be contained and gradually eased only if countries of origin, of first asylum and of final settlement continued to adhere to the conclusions of the Geneva meeting. It called on the Government of Viet Nam to maintain the temporary moratorium on refugee departures and to address the conditions which had led Vietnamese to leave their country illegally. Only thus could the suffering of thousands of people and the political and economic upheavals which their exodus was causing in South-East Asia be brought to an end.

51. Mr. FRANCIS (New Zealand) said it was the duty of the international community to remain united in its support for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and to extend its active commitment to his activities so as to enable him

(Mr. Francis, New Zealand)

to achieve even more in alleviating the sufferings of refugees in all regions of the world. His delegation was pleased to learn from the report of the High Commissioner that, in some cases, it had been possible to effect partial or even complete solutions by voluntary repatriation, local settlement or resettlement outside the country of first asylum. It wished to take the opportunity to thank the High Commissioner for his efforts in the administrative and financial spheres.

52. It should not be forgotten that the greatest number of refugees and displaced persons was currently to be found on the African continent; for that reason, the New Zealand Government had in 1978 made a special contribution for refugees in Ethiopia, Somalia and Djibouti, and it was appreciative of the fact that African Governments had co-operated generously with UNHCR in organizing resettlement programmes. However, despite the immense efforts made by the international community, the tragic situation of refugees in South-East Asia had not improved.

53. At the meeting held at Geneva in July, the international community had had the urgent task of drafting a programme to ease the burden forced on the countries of South-East Asia and Hong Kong by the massive influx of refugees from Viet Nam, particularly the boat people. The Vietnamese Government, for its part, had had to regulate and reduce the number of departures in order to allow the resettlement of refugees from countries of first asylum to resettlement places offered by countries in practically every region of the world. The number of resettlement places had more than doubled and the international community had considerably increased its financial support for the efforts of UNHCR. As a result, the number of refugees still in camps, particularly in the five countries of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) continued to shrink. It was clear, however, that the rate at which refugees were resettled would have to increase if the burden of first asylum countries was to remain supportable.

54. Although it should be realized that the Indo-Chinese refugee problem was related to the broader problem of the conflict in the area, and could perhaps only be resolved in that context, the results of the Geneva meeting, especially as they related to Vietnamese refugees, were far from negligible. They should encourage the international community to take urgent measures to alleviate the plight of the Kampuchean refugees, for, as the Secretary-General had stated in his report, with no exaggeration, the whole population of the country was faced with extinction. His Government wished to express its support for the Thai Government, which had decided to grant temporary asylum to all Kampuchean refugees.

55. Fundamental respect for human life must acknowledge the priority of humanitarian needs over purely political, and thus selfish, aims, and UNHCR must be permitted to bring desperately needed food and medical supplies to the people of Kampuchea. The recent Pledging Conference had provided sufficient funds to meet at least the basic needs of the surviving Kampuchean, and those funds should be speedily put to use.

56. The New Zealand Government viewed with alarm the possible consequences of the situation in Indo-China, and shared the concern of its ASEAN neighbours. The first

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(Mr. Francis, New Zealand)

aim of its national policy with regard to refugees was to provide settlement places. At the Geneva meeting, the New Zealand representative had announced that, in addition to the 900 places it had already promised to provide, New Zealand would accept a further 1,800 Indo-Chinese refugees. On 12 November, the New Zealand Minister of Immigration had announced a 50 per cent increase in the rate of resettlement of Indo-Chinese refugees. The New Zealand Government would also make an additional contribution of \$100,000 to the international programme of relief for the people of Kampuchea. The humanitarian concern of the New Zealand people and the settlement procedures followed by the Government and voluntary agencies were allowing the absorption of refugees in the community to take place with the minimum of social disruption. Indeed, the New Zealand population was glad to welcome the refugees, who lent a new dimension to the community.

57. The CHAIRMAN announced that the deadline for the submission of draft resolutions on agenda item 83 had been set for 1 p.m. the following day.

58. Mr. IBRAHIM (Malaysia) said that the exodus of hundreds of thousands of Indo-Chinese refugees and displaced persons into neighbouring countries of South-East Asia was a tragedy of unparalleled dimensions. Since 1975, his country, despite its limited resources, had extended first transit facilities to over 120,000 Vietnamese refugees. In view of the ever-increasing number of such refugees, Malaysia had sought, jointly with other countries of the Association of South-East Asian Nations, to obtain international assistance to relieve it of that tremendous burden.

59. His country was gratified that the Geneva meeting had somewhat reduced the humanitarian problem with which his country had to grapple; he expressed gratitude in that regard to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the High Commissioner for Refugees and the major resettlement countries. His Government was also appreciative of the fact that the Vietnamese Government had agreed to co-operate in regulating the flow of refugees and to broaden the seven-point Memorandum of Understanding concluded with the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees. The international co-operation which had been demonstrated at the Geneva Meeting should be further consolidated and translated into action to resolve the tragic problem of refugees and displaced persons without leaving any residual problems for the countries of first transit.

60. Today, there were still approximately 42,000 Vietnamese in Malaysia, and his Government urged those States which had given a pledge to receive them to respect their commitments. His Government was doing all it could to relieve the sufferings of the refugees, in particular the "boat people", and it was now for the international community to relieve the difficulties of the countries of first transit.

61. While the problem of illegal Vietnamese immigrants was not yet settled, thousands of Kampuchean were suffering from starvation and disease. His Government commended the Secretary-General's convening of the Pledging Conference

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(Mr. Ibrahim, Malaysia)

and expressed its admiration for the Government of Thailand, which was doing all in its power to assist those unfortunate people. As an expression of its deep concern for the sufferings of the Kampuchean people, the Malaysian Government had pledged a token contribution of \$US 15,000; it had been motivated in that by purely humanitarian considerations, to the exclusion of any other motive.

62. His Government would continue to extend its full co-operation and support for efforts aimed at resolving the problem of refugees, wherever they existed. He appealed to the international community to recognize the fact that the facilities in countries of first transit, particularly in South-East Asia, were already overloaded and that for those countries, and for Malaysia in particular, the granting of temporary refuge depended to a large extent on commitments for resettlement in third countries and the avoidance of residual problems.

63. Mrs. LORANGER (Canada) said that her country had always taken a close interest in the activities of the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, in which it played an active part. Her Government believed that the refugee problem had world-wide dimensions and that its solution required the support of the entire international community. All Governments should share that burden, to the best of their capacity, either by offers of first asylum, financial contributions or permanent settlement places. It was heartening to note that international support for the programmes of the High Commissioner was continually growing. Nevertheless, in view of the considerable increase in the number of refugees and, consequently, the financial burden on the Office, it was essential that that support should be further strengthened.

64. Her Government was gratified that the High Commissioner for Refugees had co-sponsored the Conference held in May at Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania, on the problem of refugees in Africa and hoped that the Conference's recommendations, in which the basic principles of asylum and non-refoulement had been reaffirmed, would be widely accepted by the international community.

65. Although the refugee problem had world-wide dimensions, certain aspects of it were so serious that they merited priority attention. For example, Africa had a refugee population of 4 million. Although the situation in South-East Asia had stabilized somewhat in recent months, there was no proof that the Vietnamese Government intended to change the policies and practices which were the root cause of the exodus of the refugees. Such changes were, however, essential for a long-term solution of the problem. Not much progress had been made in the formulation of a procedure for orderly and planned departures. Out of humanitarian concern, her Government would continue to co-operate with the Vietnamese Government and, to the extent possible, with the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees in order to facilitate the success of a family reunion programme. Her Government hoped that all the commitments made at the July meeting in Geneva would be honoured by all the countries concerned: the countries of origin, the countries of first asylum, the countries of resettlement and the countries which had pledged financial contributions.

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(Mrs. Loranger, Canada)

66. Unfortunately, the problem of refugees in South-East Asia had augmented as a result of the new exodus of Kampuchean refugees to Thailand. In that regard, her Government commended the Thai Government for its positive attitudes. That latest episode in the tragedy of refugees in Indo-China showed how necessary it was for the international community to tackle the underlying causes of the instability in the region. Her Government believed that it would be inadequate if action by the international community was limited to relieving the sufferings of the refugees - however important that objective might be - without tackling the fundamental political causes of the problem.

67. Canada attached great importance to the activities of the High Commissioner for Refugees. In 1979 it had doubled its contribution to the general budget. Its programme of resettlement for 55,000 Indo-Chinese refugees would cost \$110 million. That special programme, which had been drawn up because of the exceptional nature of the situation, had not prejudiced other resettlement programmes for refugees from Eastern Europe and Latin America.

68. In his introductory statement at the latest meeting of the Executive Committee of the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, the High Commissioner had acknowledged that the problems of the refugees were tremendous and that, however great the efforts expended, they would never be equal to the task. Nevertheless, those efforts would not have been in vain. Since its inception, the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees had provided relief for very real sufferings and had resolved many tough problems; her Government therefore intended to continue to support it.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.