UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

FORTY-SIXTH SESSION

Official Records

THIRD COMMITTEE
35th meeting
held on
Friday, 8 November 1991
at 10 a.m.
New York

FEB 1 6 1992

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 35th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. AL-SHAALI (United Arab Emirates)

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Distr. GENERAL
A/C.3/46/SR.35
15 November 1991

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

91-57190 5201S (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 97: REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS (continued) (A/46/3 (chap. VII, sect. H) and Add.1, A/46/12 and Add.1, A/46/134 and Corr.1, A/46/139, A/46/323-S/22836, A/46/344, 371, 428-435, 471, A/46/501/Rev.1, 568, 612)

1. Ms. LAFONTANT-MANKARIOUS (United States of America) commended the High Commissioner for her initiatives to ensure emergency preparedness and response capability. Those initiatives focused on adequate and flexible funding, deployment of qualified staff and stockpiling of critical supplies. Her delegation had supported emergency response efforts of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) through the design and financing of an emergency management training programme, and welcomed the recent doubling of the amount of the Emergency Fund. Her Government's recent additional contribution, in response to the High Commissioner's initiative, would assist in establishing stockpiling arrangements to improve delivery time of urgently needed assistance. The question of timely and adequate staffing to respond to the immediate needs of new refugee flows remained her delegation's major concern. She emphasized the need for increased female representation among UNHCR staff and that of the implementing partners.

2. Voluntary repatriation of refugees in safety and dignity was acknowledged as the most lasting solution. In 1991, plans had been developed for the return of South African, Cambodian and Western Saharan refugees, and prospects for the return of refugees in several other regions appeared bright. For voluntary repatriation to be successful, however, other agencies must play their part in the pre- and post-repatriation phases by creating conditions conducive to safe return and providing services enabling returnees to become self-reliant.

3. UNHCR had made strides in developing the Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women, but the increased participation of refugee women was required in all phases of planning and implementation of assistance and protection. Action on their behalf must be based on the principle of integration. To implement those policy guidelines fully, visible commitment on the part of senior management, rigorous accountability of operational staff, expanded training, and officers assigned solely to protection and assistance of refugee women and children would be needed.

4. The High Commissioner had before her a daunting agenda for 1992, but with the support of States, non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies, she could succeed.

5. Mr. SIR EL KHATIM (Sudan) said that his delegation was grateful for the Secretary-General's efforts to address the critical humanitarian situation in the Horn of Africa and welcomed the establishment of the special emergency programme for the Horn of Africa. It also appreciated UNHCR efforts to reduce pressure on host countries.

6. For the past 30 years, the Sudanese people had extended ungrudging hospitality to refugees. Though its people had shouldered a heavy burden, the Sudanese Government had remained committed to international and regional conventions governing refugees and continued to protect and assist them. In view of those sacrifices, the international community must share the burden of developing the areas inhabited by refugees. His delegation appealed for timely and adequate support. Development assistance to refugees was vital, as it raised them to the level of producers, rather than simply recipients. An atmosphere conducive to voluntary repatriation currently existed in the region, and understandings reached with the Governments in Ethiopia and in Chad were encouraging. Support from the international community would be needed. Political stability, security and availability of basic services in the country of origin were also determining factors.

7. The presence of refugees over a long period of time had affected the environment: continuous cutting of trees for fuel had led to soil erosion and desertification. The international community must assess the situation and mobilize appropriate resources in such areas. That topic should be discussed at the forthcoming United Nations Conference on Environment and Development as well.

8. He renewed the appeal for financing of rehabilitation projects called for in General Assembly resolution 45/160. Certain projects had been reduced in scope because UNHCR had not received adequate contributions. Currently, the Government of the Sudan was offering a favourable exchange rate to encourage specialized agencies to carry out their projects in the country.

9. His delegation welcomed the High Commissioner's new ideas and suggestions, especially with reference to preventive measures, and pledged its continuing cooperation with UNHCR.

10. Mr. Jong Moon CHOI (Republic of Korea) said that his delegation had mixed feelings regarding the current and future world refugee situation. On the one hand, it unequivocally commended the achievements of UNHCR in protecting and assisting refugees. Yet, at the same time, it was dismayed by the grave realities hampering efforts to remedy their plight necessitating the extension of the UNHCR mandate. Over the years, UNHCR had been forced to expand and diversify its activities to adapt to massive population movements caused by natural and man-made disasters.

11. Prevention was obviously the most effective solution. Early-warning systems would mitigate and sometimes eliminate the impact of refugee problems. The experimental UNHCR Emergency Alert System deserved attention

(Mr. Jong Moon Choi, Republic of Korea)

and further reinforcement, along with enhanced cooperation with the similar systems developed by other United Nations agencies.

12. Inter-agency cooperation should not, however, be limited to early-warning systems, considering the daunting magnitude of the refugee problem. For example, UNICEF and UNESCO had undertaken a joint programme in refugee education assistance, and such programmes could be extended to such areas as sanitation, transportation and nutrition. During the Persian Gulf crisis, United Nations agencies and other relevant organizations had established a joint humanitarian plan of action which had allowed a multidimensional crisis to be handled effectively. UNHCR had assumed responsibility for managing camps, while food, medical services and transportation had been provided by the most capable organization. His delegation favoured some form of systematic and institutionalized cooperation.

13. A key element of any comprehensive approach would be the cure of the root causes of refugee flow, such as civil strife and human rights abuses, but development stood out as one of the most significant factors. Fostering development could have the dual effect of defusing the underlying force driving refugees from extreme poverty, as well as providing the conditions for voluntary repatriation. His delegation was aware of the limits of the UNHCR mandate and resources which prevented it from becoming involved in development, yet it could achieve significant results as a catalyst.

14. Despite the financial constraints, refugee children should be given top priority. They would some day return to their homeland to live a normal life, but without a solid foundation from which to face the future, saving the child's life had limited significance. Options should be thoroughly explored so that refugee operations would no longer depend on stop-gap fund-raising.

15. In conclusion, his delegation noted with satisfaction the recent agreement reached between South Africa and UNHCR establishing the parameters for repatriation of exiles and refugees.

16. Mr. VILLAGRAN DE LEON (Guatemala), speaking also on behalf of the delegations of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua, said that they had welcomed the High Commissioner's recent visit to Central America and her participation in the meeting of the Follow-up Committee of the International Conference on Central American Refugees held in Managua. The Central American countries worked closely with UNHCR and appreciated its advice and humanitarian assistance. They were currently cooperating with the Office on voluntary repatriation, in pursuance of the Governments' commitments under the peace aims of the Esquipulas II Agreement. Refugees had to be protected, and their human rights, security and well-being assured, pending voluntary return in safe conditions, or settlement in new communities, according to individual choice. It was a continuous process, calling for measures at every stage, starting with protection of human beings, particularly women, children and older people, who constituted the largest proportion of the refugee population.

(Mr. Villagran de Leon, Guatemala)

17. The five Central American delegations shared the concern expressed in the High Commissioner's report over the unprecedented deterioration in the world refugee situation and the heavy burden imposed on countries of asylum - most of them developing countries already facing formidable difficulties. There had, however, been some encouraging developments, such as the adoption of comprehensive regional plans for achieving lasting solutions and the establishment of new mechanisms such as the Tripartite Commission. The International Conference on Central American Refugees and its Concerted Plan of Action had marked a step forward in the regional peace process started by the Esquipulas II Agreement. Its objectives had been to consolidate progress in protection and assistance for refugees, draw up programmes for durable solutions, enlist the international community's support and mobilize funds for voluntary repatriation and integration. Follow-up measures included the establishment of national coordination committees and national support groups in every country, with the assistance of UNHCR and UNDP. An important conclusion of the Conference had been the need for continued support from the United Nations system.

18. The progress of peace and reconciliation in Central America brought new challenges, with the impact of returned refugees on other population groups and the persistence of internal migration. A transition period would be needed between the emergency-assistance phase and the integration of returned populations. The Follow-up Committee had agreed to establish a framework for cooperation with non-governmental organizations and the international community and to strengthen national follow-up mechanisms. The Governments of the five Central American countries had shown their will to create the conditions necessary for the repatriation of thousands of refugees. They had devised flexible strategies so as to adapt the Plan of Action to regional conditions. They continued to give priority to voluntary repatriation and already a number of refugee camps had been closed. The return of refugees would be followed by reconstruction, rehabilitation and integration into all spheres of productive life.

19. Mr. PADILLA (Philippines) said that the political changes sweeping the world today were helping to create conditions for solving certain refugee problems. His country supported the view that UNHCR must chart a forward-looking strategy focusing on prevention and addressing the totality of the refugee problem. He noted with appreciation the work done by the Working Group on Solutions and Protection in defining who needed international protection. A distinction between real refugees and economic migrants would help identify the ways to prevent outflows.

20. He agreed on the need to improve the Office's emergency preparedness and response mechanism and supported arrangements that would enable UNHCR to utilize fully the political and humanitarian potential of the United Nations system, particularly a stand-by arrangement for funds, personnel and equipment with an inter-agency secretariat. The Philippines welcomed the decision to establish a new post of coordinator for refugee children within UNHCR, which would help meet the needs of one of the most vulnerable groups.

(Mr. Padilla, Philippines)

21. His country supported all efforts that encouraged voluntary repatriation - the most desirable solution - and welcomed regional, comprehensive approaches, such as that adopted by the International Conference on Central American Refugees, and the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees.

22. As a country of first asylum, the Philippines was providing temporary asylum to some 25,000 Indo-Chinese refugees. The Comprehensive Plan of Action should be implemented in a coordinated manner with the full cooperation of the countries of origin, the first-asylum countries, the countries of resettlement and donor countries. Implementation of the Plan would lead to the resettlement of all refugees and the repatriation of all non-refugees.

23. His delegation expressed its appreciation to the European Community for its rehabilitation and reintegration programme in Viet Nam for Vietnamese returnees and, at the same time, stressed the responsibility of the countries of origin to ensure conditions which averted forced exile and promoted the return of refugees. In view of the signing of the Paris agreements on Cambodia, the international community should fully support the repatriation of Cambodian refugees and displaced persons under the auspices of UNHCR and should give equal priority to the reconstruction of Cambodia to prevent conditions that might cause returnee emergencies.

24. The Philippines called for full implementation of the Oslo Plan of Action on the Plight of Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons in Southern Africa. It was a matter of great concern to learn that the basic situation in the area had not improved. The international community must address that situation and provide additional resources for urgent relief.

25. Mr. ELARABY (Egypt) said that the positive changes that had come about in the world had not yet led to a fundamental restructuring of the international economic system, without which the international community would continue to witness a worsening socio-economic situation in the developing countries.

26. In the past year, moreover, several disasters and upheavals in the Middle East and Africa had caused an unprecedented exodus of people within a short period of time. Those new phenomena underscored the need to reconsider the definition of refugees and persons deserving protection under the relevant United Nations conventions. There was a need to avoid strict adherence to rigid concepts of a bygone period, which might hamper humanitarian assistance. In that connection, the Convention of the Organization of African Unity Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa and the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees could provide considerable guidance. The recommendations by the Working Group on Solutions and Protection, which related to a wide range of refugee situations, provided an important practical step in that direction. Egypt stressed the need for coordination between the United Nations system and all other relevant international organizations in order to ensure a swift response to emergency situations and take preventive measures where necessary. The International Committee of the Red Cross had

(Mr. Elaraby, Egypt)

played a constructive role by providing invaluable assistance in many emergency situations, particularly armed conflicts.

27. The lack of growth in the UNHCR budget for general programmes, despite the enormous increase in the number of refugees, highlighted the need for increased resources. His delegation commended UNHCR for converting the deficit in that budget in 1989 to a surplus in 1990 and expressed satisfaction at the part played by the donor countries, enabling UNHCR to fulfil its role during the Gulf crisis.

28. On the other hand, the success of the Office's financial management had also been due to numerous restrictions in allocating the limited resources available for existing programmes. In some cases that had reduced the ability of UNHCR to deal with substantial aspects of the relief programmes such as education and the environment, especially in Africa. Its efficiency in dealing with major crises demonstrated that resources and efforts should be increased to enhance the preventive potential of the Office and the United Nations system in general.

29. He reaffirmed Egypt's unequivocal support for the efforts by UNHCR and all other relevant international organizations in the field of humanitarian assistance. His country spared no effort in promoting peaceful mediation in regional conflicts in Africa and the Middle East to eliminate the causes of migration. The breakthroughs achieved by UNHCR in dealing with refugee problems in Asia, Central America and Africa as well as the emergency situations in the Gulf and West Africa were indeed commendable. Nevertheless, much remained to be done to ensure adequate international protection for thousands of refugees in many parts of the world, especially Palestine and Africa. The international community should address the root causes, including poverty, social degradation, oppression, persecution and violations of human and peoples' rights.

30. Mrs. SYAHRUDDIN (Indonesia) stressed the need to gain a better understanding of the root causes of the endless cycle of mass migration and refugee problems. The establishment of an early-warning system would facilitate a quick response by the international community to crisis situations and perhaps pre-empt migration. Her delegation was encouraged by the attention given by UNHCR to inter-agency cooperation. Those efforts should provide for complementarity of activities and broaden the Office's capacity to respond to current and emerging situations.

31. Indonesia welcomed the encouraging signs of progress in Latin America and the Caribbean but was deeply concerned at the continuing plight of refugees in Africa. Her country provided support and humanitarian assistance to refugees in Africa and stressed the essential need for international burden-sharing in order to find just and lasting solutions.

32. The tragic events in the Gulf region and the ongoing refugee situation in the Middle East were of profound concern to Indonesia, which had contributed

(Mrs. Syahruddin, Indonesia)

food and supplies to refugees in the region and hoped that a solution would be found quickly. The recent Madrid peace conference might be the first step towards resolving the prolonged plight of the Palestine refugees.

33. In South-East Asia, a considerable effort had been made in implementing the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees, which was an effective instrument for addressing the problem and should be implemented in its entirety. The Orderly Departure Programme had been expanded and had made satisfactory progress. Regrettably, the countries in the region had experienced a renewed influx of "economic migrants". Two specific issues remained unresolved: the repatriation of persons ineligible for refugee status and the reduction of clandestine departures. A growing number of people in refugee camps did not have refugee status but refused voluntary repatriation. That problem was a matter of deep concern for Indonesia and urgently required a solution.

34. Her Government appreciated the resettlement programmes undertaken thus far and hoped that resettlement countries would further enlarge their quotas in proportion to the increased number of new arrivals in countries of first asylum. Furthermore, the countries that opposed the involuntary repatriation of persons ineligible for refugee status should offer effective intermediate solutions, instead of leaving the burden to be shouldered indefinitely by the country of first asylum. The idea of establishing a regional holding centre for such people had considerable merit.

35. In Indonesia, the refugee population had increased to nearly 20,000, some of whom were unaccompanied minors. Her delegation underscored Indonesia's concern that unaccompanied minors and children should be given priority in the screening process and accorded their rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Lastly, she expressed her country's appreciation for the efforts undertaken by UNHCR and reaffirmed Indonesia's commitment to the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan of Action.

36. Mr. IBRAHIM (Djibouti) noted that recent disturbances in the Horn of Africa had brought new waves of refugees and there were now more than 22 million people threatened with famine. The main causes were civil war, chronic drought and widespread poverty. The countries that bore the burden of displaced populations were the ones least able to support it. His country was deeply grateful to friendly countries, the United Nations system and the non-governmental organizations for their support, and to the Secretary-General for his personal commitment.

37. Djibouti had had to deal with refugee problems ever since its independence. Despite its limited resources, it had given asylum to refugees and had worked to find durable solutions, with the assistance of UNHCR. The refugee population in Djibouti of nearly 100,000 was affecting the country's economic and social situation. Overpopulation and the felling of trees was also causing environmental degradation.

(Mr. Ibrahim, Djibouti)

38. Djibouti, although one of the least developed countries, would continue its efforts to meet the needs of refugees and displaced persons and to provide for their protection in accordance with its humanitarian obligations.

39. He welcomed the dialogue on ways and means of strengthening coordination to ensure more effective and speedy humanitarian aid in the United Nations system. He welcomed UNHCR's new emergency preparedness and response mechanism. He also welcomed the proposal to set up a reserve fund.

40. It was important for emergency aid to be carried out under the broader framework of development; rehabilitation, reconstruction and development should be part of the international community's joint efforts. Although development as such was not part of the Office's mandate, its role should include urging donors and development agencies to direct their efforts towards durable solutions. He was encouraged to see that the High Commissioner's priorities included voluntary repatriation, and he welcomed her intention to act as a catalyst.

AGENDA ITEM 94: SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT (continued)

(a) QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE WORLD SOCIAL SITUATION AND TO YOUTH, AGEING, DISABLED PERSONS AND THE FAMILY (continued) (A/C.3/46/L.4, L.5*, L.6, L.18, L.19, L.21, L.24)

Draft resolution A/C.3/46/L.4 and the amendment thereto (A/C.3/46/L.24)

41. Mr. KONIG (Germany) said that his delegation's amendment (A/C.3/46/L.24) to draft resolution A/C.3/46/L.4, on the monitoring of international plans and programmes of action in the field of social development, was of a procedural nature and was intended to enable the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs to continue implementing the Guiding Principles for Developmental Social Welfare Policies and Programmes. He read out several corrections to the text of the draft resolution and of the amendment.

42. Draft resolution A/C.3/46/L.4, as amended by Germany, was adopted without a vote.

Draft resolution A/C.3/46/L.5*

43. Draft resolution A/C.3/46/L.5* was adopted without a vote.

Draft resolution A/C.3/46/L.6

44. Draft resolution A/C.3/46/L.6 was adopted without a vote.

Draft resolution A/C.3/46/L.19

45. Draft resolution A/C.3/46/L.19 was adopted without a vote.

Draft resolution A/C.3/46/L.18

46. Mr. GANSUKH (Mongolia), introducing draft resolution A/C.3/46/L.18, on behalf of the sponsors, said that they had been joined by Australia, Belarus, Burkina Faso, Cuba, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guinea, India, Mozambique, Senegal, Thailand and Viet Nam.

47. Both International Literacy Year and the World Conference on Education for All had been made possible by partnerships inspired by the realization that the current state of education would have a profound impact on future social conditions throughout the world. Although those events had represented a turning point in the struggle for a literate world, the continued prevalence of illiteracy made the promotion of education one of the international community's most urgent tasks. The success of the education projects being implemented in Asia and the Pacific, Africa and Latin America depended on the support of all States.

48. The sponsors considered it was essential for the United Nations to follow the example of UNESCO by continuing to monitor the progress of literacy and conducting a mid-decade review of the progress made and problems encountered in that area at the fiftieth session of the General Assembly. They hoped that the draft resolution would be adopted by consensus.

49. Mrs. ZADOFF (Costa Rica) and Mr. BANDARA (Sri Lanka) said that their delegations wished to join the sponsors of draft resolution A/C.3/46/L.18.

Draft resolution A/C.3/46/L.21

50. Mrs. SAMONTE-LIMJUCO (Philippines), introducing draft resolution A/C.3/46/L.21, on the implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons and the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons, on behalf of the sponsors, said that the sponsors were acutely aware of the need to shift the focus of the United Nations programme on disability from awareness-raising to action. Paragraph 8 of the draft resolution had been revised to read:

> "8. Also requests the Secretary-General to finalize during 1992 the review of the translation into the official languages of the United Nations of the World Programme of Action, in particular the use of the terms 'impairment', 'disability', 'handicap' and 'disabled person';".

51. The Beijing Guidelines for the Establishment and Development of National Coordinating Committees on Disability, referred to in paragraphs 6 and 9, had not yet been translated into all the official languages of the United Nations. She hoped that the translations would be made available as soon as possible so that the Committee could take action on the draft resolution.

52. Mr. FISSENKO (Belarus) said that his delegation wished to join the sponsors of draft resolution A/C.3/46/L.21.

AGENDA ITEM 12: REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (continued) (A/C.3/46/L.23)

Draft decision A/C.3/46/L.23

53. Draft decision A/C.3/46/L.23 was adopted without a vote.

54. Mr. TISSOT (United Kingdom) asked the Chairman to confirm that the draft resolutions and decisions under consideration at the current meeting had no programme budget implications.

55. The CHAIRMAN replied that, according to the Secretariat, the draft resolutions and decisions had no programme budget implications.

AGENDA ITEM 93: RIGHT OF PEOPLES TO SELF-DETERMINATION (continued) (A/C.3/46/L.10/Rev.1, L.13/Rev.1)

Draft resolution A/C.3/46/L.10/Rev.1

56. Mr. HERVO-AKENDENGUE (Gabon) introduced draft resolution A/C.3/46/L.10/Rev.1 on behalf of the States Members of the United Nations that were members of the Group of African States, and read out two minor revisions to the text.

57. Mr. MOR (Israel) said he was disappointed that the revised draft resolution failed to reflect the historic negotiations which had recently taken place in Madrid and which were the basis of peace efforts in the Middle East. The bias of the draft resolutions betrayed against his country only weakened it as a whole.

58. The CHAIRMAN pointed out that the draft resolution was merely being introduced, and that action would be taken on it at a later date.

Draft resolution A/C.3/46/L.13/Rev.1

59. Mrs. OGUNLEYE (Nigeria), speaking on behalf of the sponsors, said that Viet Nam had withdrawn its sponsorship of draft resolution A/C.3/46/L.13/Rev.1, and that Ghana had joined the list of sponsors. Paragraph 10 of the draft resolution had been revised so that it began with the words "Requests the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights to report to the General Assembly ...", and ended after the phrase "highlighted in the report". The sponsors hoped that the draft resolution would be adopted by consensus.

60. Ms. MANSARAY (Sierra Leone) said that her delegation wished to join the sponsors of draft resolution A/C.3/46/L.13/Rev.1.

The meeting rose at 12.15 p.m.