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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 47th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. RITTER (Panama)

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(continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

ACENDA ITEM 103: OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES
(continued) (A/42/3, A/42/12 and Add.1, A/42/491; A/C.3/42/L.6 and L.27; A/42/112,
A/42/270; A/42/323-S/18899, A/42/376-S/18959; A/42/381-E/1987/117; A/42/390,
A/42/393, A/42/398; A/42/477-S/19048; A/42/525-S/19092)

1. Mr. OSMAN (Somalia) said that the work of the United Nations in the field of refugees was essential and irreplaceable because mass refugee flows usually occurred in the developing countries of the world which were least able to support such a burden. Somalia welcomed with appreciation the international protection given to refugees and asylum-seekers by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner (UNHCR), its efforts to ensure that international and regional instruments were scrupulously observed, the provision of emergency relief and basic services, the promotion of refugee self-sufficiency and the search for durable solutions.
2. Somalia was host to the largest refugee population on the continent of Africa. Although the overall refugee situation in Africa might not have worsened, for many countries the refugee presence was still a problem of disastrous proportions. The situation was not helped when commitments made at the Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa were sidetracked by the emergency need of the African economic crisis.
3. As pointed out by the Secretary-General in his report, the 5 million refugees and returnees in Africa would become a forgotten problem unless special efforts were made to ensure that their plight and needs were kept before the international community (A/42/491, para. 51). In the prosperous countries of Europe an insignificant number of refugees caused great alarm over the social and economic effects of their presence. On the other hand, in spite of international assistance, such a presence in the African countries imposed severe strains on their already inadequate services, infrastructures and overused environments. It was certainly time for a renewed commitment by the international community to a greater sharing of the burdens that had been borne by the African countries for so long and with such patience.
4. Somalia welcomed the strong emphasis placed by the Secretary-General in his report on the need for development programmes in refugee situations. There was an urgent need for the promotion of durable solutions such as voluntary repatriation, resettlement in host countries and the rehabilitation of returnees. Development programmes were also necessary to replenish resources that had been depleted or undermined by the refugee presence. Such assistance should be provided in addition to regular development assistance. Similarly, Somalia welcomed the strengthening of the role of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in refugee situations and the co-ordination established between the humanitarian and developmental roles of UNHCR and UNDP.

(Mr. Osman, Somalia)

5. With regard to the report of UNHCR on assistance to refugees in Somalia (A/42/498), he wished to reaffirm his Government's policy towards the refugee situation, namely, that voluntary repatriation remained the optimum solution. However, Somalia, supported by international assistance, would facilitate a programme of local settlement for refugees who did not wish to return home or who could not attain self-sufficiency in the centres where they were currently residing. In seeking durable solutions, Somalia would act only in accordance with international agreements and with the decisions of the refugees, who would never be compelled to return against their wishes. Of course settlement in Somalia would only be allowed within the limited possibilities of the country.
6. The problem of enumerating a large refugee population had always given rise to difficulties in assessing the need for assistance. The UNHCR report (A/42/498, para. 4) gave an original figure of 700,000 plus 140,000 later refugees. However, those figures did not include an almost equal number of refugees living at large in the boundary areas on the Somali side and in rural and urban centres around the country. The Somali Government was just as anxious as the donor countries and United Nations agencies to assess accurately the number of refugees and had concluded an agreement with UNHCR for a survey which would provide the donor community with a firmer base for refugee assistance.
7. When international food aid and other types of emergency assistance were interrupted by delays, Somalia was obliged to use its own slim resources, at the expense of its own population, in order to ensure that the basic needs of the refugees were covered. Moreover, the level of food aid to the refugees was low by any standards, as was confirmed in paragraph 11 of document A/42/498. The joint mission of the World Food Programme and UNHCR had recommended an increase in the amount and in the nutritional value of refugee rations.
8. The inter-agency mission on assistance to refugees in Somalia had rightly pointed out (A/42/645) that refugee-related projects should be funded in addition to the resources provided under regular assistance programmes and should form part of a structured, co-ordinated and comprehensive programme, which was commensurate with the magnitude of Somalia's refugee problem and the urgency of the situation. Somalia hoped that the donor community would give careful study to the report of the inter-agency mission.
9. Mr. VAN SCHAİK (Netherlands) said that the deliberations of the thirty-eighth session of the Executive Committee of UNHCR had concluded with a strong reaffirmation of the humanitarian and non-political character of international co-operation on behalf of refugees. However, during that session there was a growing tendency to politicize the work of UNHCR in contravention of its statute and the pertinent resolutions of the General Assembly. His delegation believed that it was absolutely essential to respect and ensure the essentially non-political, neutral and humanitarian character of the work of UNHCR.

(Mr. Van Schaik, Netherlands)

10. His delegation was gratified to note the Executive Committee's conclusions on issues relating to management, programme support and administration. It wished to refer, in particular, to the guidelines set forth in section A of paragraph 211 of the Executive Committee's report (A/42/12/Add.1). It trusted that the High Commissioner would pay proper attention to the implementation of the guidelines, in close consultation with members of the Executive Committee.

11. Even though the trend towards stabilization in the overall number of refugees continued, refugee problems throughout the world were becoming increasingly complex. Pragmatic, effective and durable solutions must be found, and the High Commissioner's mandate must be strictly implemented, in accordance with the relevant international and regional humanitarian standards. The Netherlands attached great importance to full execution of the High Commissioner's mandate and effective functioning of his office, under the guidance of the Executive Committee and the General Assembly. It would therefore continue to contribute its share towards meeting financial requirements and resettlement needs.

12. In performing its primary function of providing international protection for refugees, UNHCR was ultimately dependent on the co-operation of Governments. Governments themselves must provide refugees with legal protection and give them just treatment. The best refugee policy was to promote the observance of human rights, with a view to averting new flows of refugees and enabling refugees to return voluntarily to their countries of origin. The Netherlands therefore supported the UNHCR policy of promoting voluntary repatriation of refugees, without prejudice to their safety and well-being and provided that there was no form of duress. It was even more important to ensure their physical safety and to protect them against refoulement than to succeed in repatriating them.

13. Serious incidents were continuing to occur in various parts of the world, such as boat-people being attacked by pirates and refugees in distress in the South China Sea being ignored by commercial vessels. The Netherlands was co-operating with UNHCR by contributing to the implementation of programmes in the region in question.

14. The Netherlands supported the conclusions on military and armed attacks on refugee camps and settlements adopted by consensus at the Executive Committee's thirty-eighth session. Those conclusions represented a small step towards solving the political and legal problems involved. Unfortunately, they did not contain an unequivocal statement of principle that protection should be extended only to refugee camps and settlements of a civilian and humanitarian character and they did not sufficiently stress the obligation of States both to protect such camps and settlements and to enforce their civilian character. The unsatisfactory formula for UNHCR access to camps also fell short of what his Government considered essential. His delegation therefore hoped that the High Commissioner would remain

(Mr. Van Schaik, Netherlands)

vigilant in those matters and ensure that, to the extent possible, the attacks on refugee camps and settlements did not continue.

15. Although not generally in favour of giving special attention to specific refugee groups, his delegation welcomed the High Commissioner's initiatives on behalf of the most vulnerable ones, the refugee children. It therefore supported the relevant conclusions adopted by the Executive Committee. Where refugee women were concerned, it hoped to be kept fully informed about relevant programmes that UNHCR was implementing.

16. At the thirty-eighth session many delegations had voiced their grave concern at the increasingly serious phenomenon of refugees, who, having found protection in one country, moved in an irregular manner to another country. His delegation invited the High Commissioner to continue consultations on that important matter and suggested that the role played by UNHCR in the process in question should be strengthened. If UNHCR and Governments succeeded in making the global situation more manageable, Governments could consider increasing their resettlement quota. The Netherlands had doubled its resettlement quota, as of 1987.

17. With regard to the search for durable solutions to the refugee problem, resettlement should be a last resort. As far as local integration was concerned, the Netherlands Government would continue to take a fair share of the financial burden from developing countries that were hosting large numbers of refugees.

18. On the issue of assistance programmes, the recommendation made by the Board of Auditors that further economies should be made must be fully implemented. Donor and recipient countries should seek to extend and deepen the discussion on the matter and they should call on the governing bodies of multilateral development programmes and agencies to devote attention to refugee-related development problems. The Netherlands had made a contribution of approximately \$10 million to the joint UNHCR/World Bank project in Pakistan for Afghan refugees and the local population and in principle was prepared to provide further support for viable projects in the field in question.

19. His delegation hoped that the reorganization and financial-management problems were of a transitional nature. The High Commissioner should be left a certain margin of discretion in organizing his office and in choosing priorities for action. The Netherlands fully supported the goals of the reorganization. However, careful consideration should be given to the warning from the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) that the ensuing costs could be very high in the longer term. Measures should be adopted to guard against such developments. Where financial management was concerned, the Netherlands welcomed the High Commissioner's commitment to pursue budgetary policies in conformity with the principles of restraint and rationalization implemented in other sections of the United Nations machinery.

20. Mr. LEHMANN (Denmark) said that the draft resolution submitted the previous year by his country on the issue under consideration (A/C.3/41/L.51) had contained the main elements of what, in Denmark's view, should constitute a comprehensive approach to the refugee problem: increased financial support to countries of first refuge; increased United Nations presence in the regions exposed to heavy flows of refugees, with a view to facilitating, inter alia, resettlement in third countries; and the establishment of a voluntary global resettlement scheme. Unfortunately, there had not been a favourable response to the draft resolution in the General Assembly the previous year. Denmark had held consultations with Governments in all regions of the world in the mean time, but there still did not appear to be enough common ground for the text to be adopted.

21. Two main arguments against the draft resolution had been put forward. The first argument was that the term "regional integration" gave the impression that an attempt was being made to contain the refugee problem in each region. That impression was not correct. On the contrary, the aim was to broaden the customary notion of "local integration", which almost always meant that refugees should be integrated in the country of first arrival. Other countries in the region as well as outside the region should assist the countries of first arrival and share the burden in a spirit of international solidarity.

22. The second argument was that UNHCR's role in the screening of asylum-seekers on the spot was an infringement of the sovereignty of Member States. That was not so. It was indeed for the competent national authorities to make the final decision as to the granting of asylum. A strong UNHCR presence in all regions with refugee problems would help countries in deciding to whom to grant asylum and would give guidance to States in determining who should qualify as refugees. It would also prevent duplication of work by Governments and UNHCR.

23. Refugee situations had to be tackled with a triple strategy. In the country in which the problem originated favourable conditions must be created for voluntary repatriation. In the country of first refuge attention must be given to repatriation, financial assistance to the country of first refuge, and resettlement inside or outside the region. Lastly, in the possible resettlement countries outside the region UNHCR must be provided with sufficient resettlement places. A combination of efforts in those three areas would probably reverse some of the negative trends of the last decade and help to distribute the burden more equitably.

24. However, it must be stressed that the potential resettlement countries would not themselves be able to offer a substantial number of places if at the same time they had to cope with the arrival of unregulated numbers of spontaneous asylum-seekers. In order to establish a workable system for reception of refugees, all States Members of the United Nations without exception should make resettlement places available to UNHCR. The uncontrolled movement of spontaneous asylum-seekers hampered all the efforts to give assistance to refugees registered with UNHCR, who had often been waiting for years for the offer of a resettlement place.

(Mr. Lehmann, Denmark)

25. There were precedents for the system which his country was proposing. Since 1985 a resettlement scheme had been in operation, with the co-operation of UNHCR, for refugees rescued at sea (RASRO), in which sixteen countries were participating. There was also the mechanism established in July 1986 by the Government of Thailand in co-operation with UNHCR to determine the status of Lao refugees. Denmark strongly believed that the solution of the refugee problem required the mobilization of the collective political will of the world community.

26. Mr. CHENAUX-REPOUD (Observer for Switzerland) said that for historical and ethical reasons his country had always been concerned about the plight of refugees. Switzerland's support of UNHCR was one of the main elements of its humanitarian policy and a very clear manifestation of its participation in multilateral co-operation within the United Nations system.

27. With regard to the international protection of refugees, his country attached great importance to strict observance of international commitments, especially in the matter of procedures, and to the maintenance of the legal concept of refugee embodied in the international texts. It therefore welcomed the participation of the Office of the High Commissioner in the consultations and meetings organized by countries of Europe and North America and by Australia. UNHCR's contribution ought to facilitate better co-ordination among the competent organs of different States with regard to refugee movements. It should also facilitate the task of the authorities responsible for taking decisions on requests for asylum.

28. Where protection was concerned, Switzerland noted with satisfaction the conclusions of the Executive Committee about the military or armed attacks on refugee camps and settlement areas. The balance achieved between condemnation of the attacks and the definition of the duty of refugees and of States to preserve the civil character of the camps amounted to an important step forward. His country also attached great importance to access by UNHCR to refugee camps.

29. Switzerland supported the search for lasting solutions to the refugee problem. The voluntary repatriation operations carried out by UNHCR in Africa and Central America were an encouraging example in that respect.

30. In view of the serious economic difficulties of the countries of asylum and origin, the viability of the self-sufficiency and local-integration approaches and of the return programmes required the incorporation of assistance to refugees or returnees in development co-operation programmes. His country supported the High Commissioner's efforts to play a part in that process from the initial phase, in collaboration with multilateral development bodies and bilateral co-operation programmes.

31. It noted with satisfaction the work carried out by UNHCR in the field and the steps taken to strengthen programme evaluation. It was advisable for donor and recipient countries to participate in the evaluation exercise, as was the case in other humanitarian institutions of the United Nations system, but without interference in the Office's activities or in the decisions taken by the High

(Mr. Chenaux-Repônd, Observer, Switzerland)

Commissioner. That would provide UNHCR with useful comments on its operational work and with information that would help it to determine the relevance of the direction given to field activities.

32. As to the reorganization of UNHCR, he noted that the States members of the Executive Committee had expressed the wish for the Office to have management tools and mechanisms that would ensure the optimum utilization of the funds and human resources at its disposal. To that end it needed qualified and motivated personnel, although in small numbers. The austerity measures introduced on the basis of the recommendations of the Group of 18 were welcome. However, in a humanitarian institution austerity measures should not compromise the independence and flexibility needed to cope in the field with contingencies and emergencies.

33. UNHCR's activities were based on legal instruments which defined clearly the commitments undertaken by States parties and on numerous General Assembly resolutions. That double foundation invested the Office with an unusual intervention capacity which must be preserved if it was to continue its purely humanitarian function in the difficult context of the domestic and international conflicts, economic crises and disasters of today's world. Taking into account the encouraging factors which he had mentioned and in response to the High Commissioner's appeal, Switzerland would make a considerable increase, subject to approval by the Federal Council, in its contribution to UNHCR for 1988.

34. Miss FUNDAFUNDA (Zambia) said that the growing number of refugees in the world remained for the international community a problem which, because it was an international responsibility, required collective action by Member States. In that connection States should continue to be guided by the principle of burden-sharing. In addition to the protection given to refugees in transit and in the countries of asylum, increased assistance should be given to the countries of asylum themselves, which were mostly developing countries, to improve their capacity to care for the refugees. The Programme of Action adopted by the Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa, held in July 1984, provided a good basis for effective action.

35. Regrettably, the implementation of the projects adopted at the Conference had not progressed, chiefly because of the lack of funds. Zambia hoped that increased resources would be provided to ensure the implementation of those projects, which were so vital to the well-being of the refugees. The central role played by UNHCR should be strengthened, and everything should be done to provide it with adequate resources to enable it to discharge its duties satisfactorily.

36. In the search for solutions, serious attention should be paid to the need to address the root causes of the refugee problem. In southern Africa it was due largely to the reluctance of some States to adopt effective measures to force South Africa to abandon its apartheid policy, which had been mainly responsible for the huge refugee flows in that region, as well as to South Africa's continued illegal occupation of Namibia, and the repeated acts of destabilization carried out by

(Miss Fundafunda, Zambia)

South Africa and its surrogates in Mozambique and Angola against independent neighbouring States. The only peaceful and effective way to end apartheid was to impose comprehensive, mandatory sanctions against South Africa. As for Namibia, an internationally accepted independence plan embodied in Security Council resolution 435 (1978) already existed. Its immediate and unconditional implementation would put an end to the problem.

37. The figures shown in the report of the Secretary-General (A/42/491) and in that of UNHCR (A/42/12) further illustrated the gravity of the situation in southern Africa. For that reason, it had been decided at the recent summit meeting of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to convene, in September 1988, an international conference on the plight of refugees, returnees and displaced persons in southern Africa. She appealed to the Assembly to support that important OAU initiative.

38. Lastly, she expressed her delegation's concern about the difficult plight of refugees in other parts of the world, particularly that of the Palestinian people. Efforts to bring about a permanent solution to that problem should be intensified. She supported the idea of convening an international conference on the Middle East under United Nations auspices, with the full participation of all interested parties, including all permanent members of the Security Council and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

39. Mr. WILLE (Norway) said that his delegation fully endorsed the High Commissioner's view that the promotion of durable solutions remained the primary and long-term aim of his activities. It was necessary to continue to seek such solutions and ways to prevent new situations which compelled the inhabitants of a country to flee their homeland.

40. Norway believed that, in addition to armed conflicts, acts of aggression, foreign intervention and occupation, violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms had been, and continued to be, the principal cause of massive flows of refugees. It was thus necessary to urge States to fulfil their obligations under the Charter and other international human rights instruments. Moreover, such compliance would help to create the favourable conditions necessary for the refugees' return to their homes, which was the best and most durable solution.

41. Should voluntary repatriation be impossible, another solution must be found, preferably the integration of the refugees in countries of the same region, with a similar culture and language.

42. In the majority of cases, refugee flows took place from one developing country to another. That situation imposed a heavy burden on countries with already strained economies. The international community thus had a clear obligation to help to alleviate that burden. To that end, it did not suffice to provide emergency assistance and to help to establish basic health and educational services. More attention must be paid to income-generating projects and to the promotion of self-reliance. UNHCR must co-operate closely with other United

(Mr. Wille, Norway)

Nations organizations which carried out development-oriented activities, and which were better equipped to cope with those tasks.

43. Where local solutions were not available, or where it was necessary to ensure the safety of particular refugees, resettlement opportunities must be sought. Norway operated a resettlement programme based on the principle that only the full integration of refugees in their new environment could provide a satisfactory solution. However, if resettlement became the rule instead of the exception, it could be counter-productive. It could also serve to attract people who were not refugees in the strict sense of the term, but who simply sought better life-styles.

44. During the past years the number of people seeking asylum in western Europe had increased considerably. With improved means of transport, most of them came from other continents, and not from neighbouring countries. In the case of Norway, many came from countries of first asylum. The number of those refugees was significantly lower than that of refugees seeking asylum in countries in their regions of origin. However, it must be recognized that the problems confronting Governments could not be measured solely in numerical terms, particularly in countries like Norway, where asylum-seekers were entitled to significant socio-economic benefits.

45. His Government would continue to co-operate with UNHCR in the task of providing asylum to refugees. However, it was concerned about the current irregular movements of asylum-seekers, and would appreciate any initiative on the part of the High Commissioner to achieve closer co-operation between States in tackling that situation in an orderly and humanitarian manner.

46. Norway noted with satisfaction that more than 100 States had become parties to the Convention of 1951 relating to the Status of Refugees or its Protocol of 1967, and urged States which had not yet done so, to accede to those instruments, so that they could acquire a truly universal character.

47. The conclusions on military and armed attacks on refugee camps and settlements, adopted by the Executive Committee (A/42/12/Add.1), were an important reaffirmation that such attacks were unlawful, and that all refugee camps should have an exclusively humanitarian and civilian character.

48. His Government was seriously concerned about breaches of the principles concerning refugee protection in many parts of the world, particularly the principles of non-refoulement of refugees and the guarantee of their physical safety. His delegation called upon the High Commissioner to pursue his protection function relentlessly, and to set clear, relevant priorities which were carried through in any situation in which the protection of refugees was threatened.

49. Norway was one of the major donors to the High Commissioner's programmes. So far, in 1987, its contributions exceeded \$18 million. Moreover, Norway was carrying out a comprehensive national integration programme, at a cost equal to that of the High Commissioner's programmes. He pledged the firm commitment and financial support of his Government to the work of UNHCR in the coming years.

50. Mrs. de PERALTA (Guatemala) said that the problems of refugees could not be solved by the High Commissioner alone. The assistance of all States and the political will of Governments were also essential. The refugee problem had changed considerably since the establishment of UNHCR in 1951 and had become more complex. It was therefore essential to prescribe practicable measures and to tackle with determination the root causes of the displacement of thousands of refugees in the world.

51. As far as Guatemala was concerned, there were two aspects to the refugee question: on the one hand, many Guatemalans were outside the country; on the other hand, the Government and people of Guatemala had become more sensitive to the problem, because thousands of Central Americans had sought refuge on Guatemala's territory.

52. In recent years, Guatemala had suffered a black period under various régimes. That had been the origin of the displacement of a large number of inhabitants, many of whom had sought refuge in Mexico. It had also caused displacements within the country.

53. Today, Guatemala had a government which was taking steps to consolidate democracy and which ensured absolute respect for civil and political rights. Those were important factors for the return of refugees. Furthermore, the human rights situation had changed radically, as the Commission on Human Rights had recognised at the international level, in its decision to end the mandate of the Special Rapporteur responsible for reporting to the General Assembly on respect for human rights in Guatemala. Guatemala had also withdrawn its reservations concerning article 4 of the American Convention on Human Rights, under which the death penalty could in no case be imposed for political or related common offences.

54. The administration of justice was guaranteed by a fully independent judiciary. The constitutional court had been reinstated; there were no trials by special courts and the remedy of habeas corpus assured the integrity of all prisoners.

55. All those factors had facilitated the return of refugees to Guatemala and the establishment of UNHCR offices in three Central American countries. The return to normal in Central America had also helped and the numbers of returning refugees were increasing.

56. The Guatemalan Government's policy of active neutrality had helped to promote the Esquipulas I forum at which the Presidents of the five Central American countries had discussed common problems. The discussions had concluded with the adoption in August 1987 of the Esquipulas II agreement entitled "Procedure for the establishment of a firm and lasting peace in Central America", in which the Central American Presidents expressed their political will to establish peace in the region.

57. Guatemala had spared no effort to achieve the return of refugees and to assist displaced persons, in particular the most vulnerable groups. There was need for

(Mrs. de Peralta, Guatemala)

closer links between projects for assistance to refugees and development aid projects. To that end, it was essential to have the co-operation of the entire international community and the efforts and assistance of governmental and non-governmental bodies, whose action should be independent and non-political.

58. Specific measures to achieve the voluntary return of refugees included the establishment of a special refugee commission (CEAR) to promote the return of Guatemalan refugees abroad, especially those in Mexico.

59. The joint CEAR/UNHCR programme on community development projects provided for the total rehabilitation of all returnees, from entry into the national territory to integration in communities of origin or in places freely chosen and for supply of the necessary equipment to enable them to join in the active life of the community.

60. In order to help refugees to decide where to settle, a special programme had been set up to enable them to visit different places of their choice. CEAR had also concluded co-operation agreements with UNHCR, the Catholic Church, CARITAS and other public or private welfare bodies.

61. Lastly, he expressed his delegation's solidarity with the people of the countries which, as Guatemala had done some years earlier, were suffering from the exodus of their nationals through lack of security and through political violence. The Guatemalans were sure that the process of national democratization and reconciliation would permit the voluntary and definitive return of all Guatemalans outside the country and that, once resettled in their communities and their places of choice, they would exercise their legitimate right to live in their homeland in peace and take part in their country's development.

62. Mrs. TAN (Singapore) said that the past 12 years had witnessed a massive exodus of refugees from Viet Nam, Laos and Cambodia, which had enabled countries of the region - particularly Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines - to gain a first-hand understanding of the problems of refugees in countries of first asylum and the problems of the countries of asylum themselves. Since 1975 nearly 700,000 Indochinese refugees had arrived in Thailand by land and sea. In the current year alone, 6,076 new boat refugees had arrived. According to the latest statistics, about 150,000 refugees remained in the countries of first asylum in South-East Asia.

63. Over the past few years the political, economic and social burden of Indochinese refugees seemed to have taken its toll not only of the countries of first asylum but also of resettlement countries. Some refugee-receiving countries had manifested an increasingly restrictive approach by adopting legislative and administrative barriers against entry. Now it seemed that the international community was beginning to accept and even propound the feasibility of local or regional integration of Indochinese refugees as an alternative means of reaching a durable solution to the refugee problem in South-East Asia, ignoring the

(Mrs. Tan, Singapore)

understanding reached at the Meeting on Refugees and Displaced Persons in South-East Asia held in Geneva in 1979. By that understanding the ASEAN countries would provide only temporary asylum to refugees and displaced persons pending their resettlement in third countries or return to their respective homelands. In the case of South-East Asia, long-term settlement in countries of first asylum would not be acceptable.

64. The ASEAN countries were particularly disturbed at that development, which would ultimately result in a slowdown in the resettlement programme and a concomitant increase in the refugee problem in those countries. That had prompted the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the ASEAN countries to issue a joint statement on refugees during their meeting held in Singapore in June 1987. The statement had reaffirmed their belief that resettlement remained the appropriate solution and that local integration in the ASEAN countries was not a viable option, since the continuation of the refugee problem would cause grave difficulties in those countries and would seriously affect stability in the region.

65. The problem of refugees in South-East Asia could not be borne single-handedly by countries of first asylum such as Thailand and Malaysia, which in 1987 had played host to the largest influx of refugees since 1982, solely because of their geographical proximity to problem areas. While acknowledging that resettlement was difficult to accomplish, her delegation wished to refer to the concept of international burden-sharing in the High Commissioner's report (A/42/12), which was not limited to financial assistance.

66. Her delegation was aware of the difficulties faced by resettlement countries and the Orderly Departure Programme should not go unmentioned in that context. However, the ASEAN countries were concerned that they would be left with the "under-ables", those who did not meet the criteria for resettlement in other countries. Her delegation therefore urged Member States to co-operate with the High Commissioner in his efforts to adjust UNHCR policy with a view to exploring alternative solutions to the problem caused by the continuing outflow of Indochinese refugees and the reduction in resettlement places available to them. In the mean time, non-traditional resettlement countries should start to share the burden.

67. Mr. HUANG Jiahua (China), referring to the root causes of the refugee problem, said that even if some refugee flows were caused by natural disasters, the facts showed that the more important causes were man-made factors, such as racism, racial discrimination and foreign armed invasion and occupation, which had produced large-scale outflows of refugees. Unless sufficient attention was paid to eliminating those man-made causes, not only would it be difficult to solve existing refugee problems but new problems were bound to crop up.

68. Turning to the frequent military attacks on refugee camps in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, which had resulted in heavy losses of life, his delegation hoped that the Executive Committee's correct conclusions on that problem would be widely accepted and earnestly implemented.

/...

(Mr. Huang Jiahua, China)

69. In the past year, some progress had been made in efforts to achieve a durable solution to the refugee question. Some 300,000 refugees had been repatriated or resettled and, in a number of countries, a measure of success has been achieved in the local integration of refugees. At the same time, the funds used by UNHCR for durable solutions had increased. The three traditional approaches to solving refugee problems - voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement - had proved effective. Nevertheless, they should be applied flexibly, according to the causes and circumstances of individual cases. Compared with the other two approaches, voluntary repatriation was undoubtedly more desirable but its effectiveness depended on the elimination of the root causes of the refugee problem. Otherwise, it would be difficult to ensure that refugees returned to their countries of origin voluntarily, safely and with dignity. Clearly, large-scale voluntary repatriation could not succeed when the country of origin was still under foreign military occupation:

70. Most countries which gave temporary asylum to refugees were developing countries faced with the arduous task of developing their economies and raising their people's living standards. The great influx of refugees had imposed great economic and social pressures on them. It was necessary therefore to understand their difficulties fully, give careful consideration to their actual ability to accommodate refugees and offer them considerable support. It was becoming increasingly clear that the refugee question did not concern just one country or one region but was a challenge to the entire international community. Therefore, it was not enough to rely on the efforts of only a few countries and international organizations. Countries which had the ability, and especially developed countries, should act in a spirit of equitable burden-sharing, providing not only material assistance but also more opportunities of resettlement.

71. Because of the changes in the world refugee situation and the problems existing in UNHCR itself, it was necessary to reform the offices' organizational structure and working methods without, of course, disregarding the principles of economy and high efficiency. UNHCR should increase its working efficiency and put more financial and human resources into providing protection and relief for refugees.

72. His Government had always supported the international community's humanitarian efforts to aid refugees. In recent years, it had accepted 280,000 refugees and endured enormous economic and social burdens without hesitating, meeting refugees' needs for livelihood, production, employment and education. In that process, it had received valuable support and assistance from UNHCR and the international community. It had also, through multilateral and bilateral channels, rendered as much assistance as it could to the other developing countries that had accepted refugees.

73. Mrs. HELKE (United Kingdom) said that her delegation shared the general views expressed by the representative of Denmark on behalf of the European Economic Community and its member States. The reports under consideration contained some

(Mrs. Helke, United Kingdom)

distressing and some encouraging news, and the continuing indispensability of UNHCR showed that durable solutions must be found to the refugee problem.

74. The measures introduced by the High Commissioner to improve the ability of UNHCR to respond rapidly to new circumstances were important for the longer-term management of refugee situations. The speedy promotion of self-reliance activities was essential both for host countries and for the refugees themselves. In that area, co-ordination between UNHCR and development agencies and organizations was especially necessary. Her delegation was particularly concerned about the special needs of women refugees and attached great importance to the full participation of women in all development programmes, not only as beneficiaries but also as agents. It wanted to ensure that programmes were designed to enable women to participate actively in building a new life and, to that end, had asked UNHCR to report to the next session of the Executive Committee on its activities to help women.

75. The United Kingdom was also interested to see that attention was being given to how best to handle the phasing-out of UNHCR assistance once self-sufficiency programmes had been established. The organization and timing of such phasing-out was obviously crucial to the future well-being of refugees. While providing development programmes for refugees in countries of asylum was one solution, however, her delegation remained convinced that voluntary repatriation, although often not an easy one, was the best solution. It continued to encourage the active involvement of UNHCR in promoting that option and in helping countries of origin to create appropriate socio-economic conditions for the reintegration of returnees. In that context, it would give sympathetic consideration to contributing to UNHCR's Special Appeal for a rehabilitation programme for returnees to Sri Lanka, following the conclusion of the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement.

76. The United Kingdom continued to play a major part in providing help for refugees in many ways. In purely monetary terms, it had given about \$30 million in 1986 in emergency relief, including relief for refugees, through international organizations such as UNHCR, ICRC and non-governmental organizations.

77. Mrs. KIMATA (Japan) said that the refugee problem remained serious and was growing increasingly complex. In South-East Asia, for example, some 150,000 Indochinese refugees were still living in camps and the tragedy of the boat people continued. In Afghanistan, there had been an unprecedented exodus of almost one quarter of the country's population, while almost 30 per cent of the world's refugees were to be found in Africa.

78. The subject of international protection was of primordial importance to the international community. Japan welcomed the fact that, after six years, the Executive Committee of UNHCR had finally reached a consensus on the issue of military and armed attacks on refugee camps and settlements, as well as a consensus on the issue of refugee children.

79. The existence of over 10 million refugees in the world made it of the utmost urgency that durable solutions be pursued, along with direct relief assistance to refugees. Japan considered voluntary repatriation the best of the three existing

(Mrs. Kimata, Japan)

durable solutions, and was encouraged to hear that 250,000 refugees had returned to their homes in 1986 and 1987.

80. Resettlement in countries of first asylum and third countries remained an important option. On the other hand, a great influx of refugees into first-asylum countries and their presence there over a long period imposed a heavy burden. In such cases, there was a need for continued international assistance to the countries concerned.

81. The role of the High Commissioner in international efforts to combat the refugee problem was of the utmost importance, for he was responsible for easing the enormous suffering of those who had been forced to leave their homelands and for taking measures to help them return. In that respect, field activities were of great significance.

82. Refugee-related development aid was also important, since an influx of refugees often had negative effects on the development of recipient countries. Japan had contributed to the projects of the Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa and believed that close co-ordination between UNHCR and other international organizations, such as UNDP and the World Bank, was essential. With respect to the scope of UNHCR's mandate, her delegation was of the view that the Office should devote the utmost effort to its co-ordinating role and not shift to development-oriented activities.

83. The thirty-eighth session of the Executive Committee of UNHCR had contributed to a deeper understanding of the Office's financial difficulties and of its reorganization measures. Recognizing that UNHCR, in fulfilling its mandate with regard to refugees, must maximize its effectiveness and improve co-ordination with the relevant bodies of the United Nations system, Japan would follow closely the implementation of the Executive Committee's conclusions.

84. As long as there were refugees in the world, the international community had a responsibility to help them. The Government of Japan, which had participated actively in international efforts to that end through substantial financial contributions and by giving first asylum to boat people and resettlement opportunities to Indochinese refugees, reaffirmed its commitment to working with UNHCR in the search for a solution to the refugee problem.

85. Mrs. ALVAREZ (France) endorsed the statement by the representative of Denmark and said that the rise in the number of refugees fleeing from conflicts, violence and systematic human rights violations meant that UNHCR was facing increasingly burdensome and complex tasks.

86. The High Commissioner's report (A/42/12) showed that no emergency situations had arisen in the past year that were comparable to those that had occurred in Africa in 1985. New flows of refugees had generally been balanced out by voluntary or organized repatriation operations. As refugees had been forced to spend increasingly long periods in countries of first asylum, UNHCR had adopted a

(Mrs. Alvarez, France)

development-oriented assistance policy which encouraged self-sufficiency, sought to partially offset the burden imposed on countries of asylum and tried to prevent, as far as possible, resentment on the part of the local population. While States had made considerable efforts to ensure that refugees were treated in accordance with international norms, the violation of certain fundamental rights had reached an unprecedented level, which was totally unjustified and which the international community could not tolerate.

87. Regarding the orientation of UNHCR's work, France supported fully the Office's activities designed to achieve durable solutions. It also saw the protection of refugees as one of the most important aspects of UNHCR's work and therefore welcomed the consensus reached on the issue of military and armed attacks on refugee camps and settlements. In the past year, UNHCR had responded to numerous requests for emergency assistance. It was therefore important that it continue its co-operation with bodies such as the World Food Programme, UNDP and the World Bank and that it strengthen its working relations with non-governmental organizations.

88. Regarding the restructuring of UNHCR so that it could cope effectively with the complex tasks before it, the Office should have conceptual, human and material resources commensurate with the scale of refugee problems. That was why France supported the reforms initiated in 1986. It stressed, however, that the staff recruitment and increase in administrative costs designed to strengthen the effectiveness of UNHCR must be temporary measures since, in the last analysis, the recommendations of the Group of 18 must be followed.

89. Despite the problems caused by the rise in the number of people seeking asylum, France had maintained jurisdictional guarantees in its procedure for recognizing refugee status, in order to respect its internal constitutional order and fulfil its international commitments. There were some 200,000 refugees now living in France and their numbers increased each year since there were no quotas. In 1986 also, France had granted 900 visas to boat people, many of whom had lived in camps for several years. France had increased its capacity to respond to the growing number of requests for asylum and, at the same time, had stepped up its vigilance with regard to abuse and fraud in asylum procedures.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.