



General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/49/534
19 October 1994
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: SPANISH

Forty-ninth session
Agenda item 99

REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES,
QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND DISPLACED
PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS

International Conference on Central American Refugees

Report of the Secretary-General

I. FIVE YEARS OF ASSISTANCE TO THE UPROOTED

1. The convening by the Secretary-General of the United Nations of the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) in May 1989 in Guatemala, at the request of Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua, was a prompt and effective response to the proposals set forth by the Presidents of the Central American countries in the historic Esquipulas II agreements. 1/ Those agreements established the groundwork for the search for a negotiated peace and expressed the conviction that peace and development were inseparable. It was also stated on that occasion that a durable peace could not be achieved without initiatives which would help to resolve the problem of over 2 million persons displaced by the conflicts.

2. A highlight of CIREFCA was the adoption of the Concerted Plan of Action, 2/ which set out a strategy for the pursuit of solutions to the problems of uprooted populations, comprising refugees, returnees and displaced persons. The Plan of Action was based on commitments made by all the participants in the Conference: convening Governments, cooperating countries and the United Nations system. In order to ensure the implementation of the Plan, national, regional and international mechanisms for promotion and follow-up were established: support groups and committees at the national level and the CIREFCA Follow-Up Committee at the regional level. For their part, and in response to the request for support expressed at the Conference, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) created the UNHCR/UNDP CIREFCA Joint Support Unit.

3. CIREFCA made a substantial contribution to the peace process in the region by linking the rights of refugees to respect for human rights. It showed that peace, development and human rights were all closely linked and were interdependent, in other words, that a solution to the problem of uprootedness was a precondition for the consolidation of peace. Respect for human rights was the key element in the contribution of the seven countries towards regional peace.

4. The CIREFCA process linked, for the first time, the problems of refugees with those of returnees and displaced persons. That conceptual advance opened the door for the inclusion of development components in emergency assistance. The programmes and projects ranged from immediate emergency assistance to efforts to integrate populations into development processes. They benefited both the uprooted and the local communities which received them. Various innovative solutions were applied, from the so-called "Quick Impact Projects" (QIPs) to the local development strategy embodied in the Development Programme for Displaced Persons, Refugees and Returnees in Central America (PRODERE).

5. CIREFCA facilitated the voluntary repatriation, in conditions of security and dignity, of 70,000 Nicaraguans, 30,000 Salvadorians and 16,000 Guatemalans, shut down enclosed refugee camps, and promoted the adoption of specific measures to regularize the situation of refugees and returnees.

6. CIREFCA promoted dialogue and cooperation throughout the region, drew attention to the human aspect of the conflicts, eased internal tensions and created opportunities for dialogue and cooperation between opposing parties. The voluntary repatriations and the implementation of projects in areas affected by internal conflicts helped to reconcile society, while fostering understanding and respect for human rights.

7. Mention should also be made of the adaptation of protection mechanisms to the gender-specific needs of women and of their increasing participation in the planning, execution and evaluation of projects and in the study and promotion of their rights as human beings and citizens. These efforts were made possible by the inclusion of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in the CIREFCA Joint Support Unit and the holding of the first Regional Forum on Refugee, Returnee and Displaced Women (FOREFEM).

8. To sum up, CIREFCA provided a regional forum for joint humanitarian action which facilitated a concerted search for solutions by the convening and the cooperating countries, the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations. Efforts could thus be combined to facilitate the implementation of the Concerted Plan of Action.

9. At the Third, and last, International Meeting of the Follow-Up Committee, held in Mexico City on 28 and 29 June 1994 and attended by many representatives of the international community, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and agencies of the United Nations system, the CIREFCA process was formally concluded and a broad framework for sustainable human development was adopted. Within that framework, the experience and achievements of CIREFCA will be applied to the elimination of extreme poverty and social exclusion, while

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efforts will continue to be directed towards the pending problem of uprootedness.

II. CONTRIBUTION OF CIREFCA TO PEACE IN THE REGION

A. Progress achieved in the convening countries

10. The CIREFCA process began in 1989 in a conflict region. The end of the conflict in Nicaragua, the signing of the Peace Agreement 3/ in El Salvador and the progress achieved in the peace negotiations in Guatemala made it possible to devote more attention to uprooted populations. In turn, CIREFCA contributed to the regional peace process by achieving progress in protection, the implementation of durable solutions for refugees, returnees and displaced persons, and the creation of opportunities for consultation and dialogue.

11. This progress was made possible by the promulgation and implementation, by the Governments of the seven countries, of policies conducive to lasting solutions for uprooted populations, especially policies relating to the protection of such groups, internal legislation and human rights, and assistance and development programmes. In their endeavours and activities on behalf of uprooted populations the Governments relied on the support of the international donor community, non-governmental organizations and the United Nations system, particularly UNHCR and UNDP. The advances achieved by the seven CIREFCA countries include the following:

(a) Belize acceded to the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees 4/ and to the 1967 5/ Protocol; it adopted national legislation incorporating those international instruments, as well as the definition of a refugee contained in the Cartagena Declaration. Over 30,000 Central American refugees and displaced persons (about 15 per cent of the total population of Belize) are currently residing in 80 per cent of Belizean communities. The Government nevertheless adopted a global policy aimed at the local integration of those groups. This policy was implemented through programmes and projects benefiting both refugees and Belizeans, including a nationwide programme of Quick Impact Projects (QIPs);

(b) Costa Rica has pursued a set of policies ranging from recognition of and respect for asylum and support for and promotion of the repatriation processes to the political resolve to facilitate the local integration of refugees. The Government took major steps in the area of immigration policy: a state of emergency was declared on two occasions (July 1990 and January 1994) and an Executive Decree was issued in November 1992 which facilitated a change in the status of over 10,000 refugees from immigrant to permanent or temporary resident. These immigration policies provided for a gradual planned process of the legal and socio-economic integration of refugees, as a result of which the country's refugee camps were closed. Of the 45,000 Central Americans who had sought refuge in Costa Rica, some 25,000 opted to remain there;

(c) The Peace Agreement signed at Chapultepec, Mexico City, between the Government of El Salvador and the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) in January 1992 led to an increase in requests for voluntary repatriation to El Salvador. In March 1992, the Government promulgated Decrees

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Nos. 204 and 205 which facilitated the replacement of registries destroyed during the conflict and the issue of personal identity documents: as a result, over 1 million individuals were provided with documentation through a CIREFCA project. That project contributed to the process of the consolidation of peace and democracy in the country inasmuch as it allowed many Salvadorians to exercise their political and civil rights in the recent general elections. At the same time, a number of social, economic and infrastructure projects were implemented with a view to promoting the reintegration of returnees, former combatants and internally displaced persons, projects which also benefited the populations of the communities which had received them. Some of these projects form part of the Government's National Reconstruction Plan;

(d) In Guatemala, CIREFCA has evolved in the political context of peace-building and it has therefore been closely bound up with the question of assistance to uprooted populations; this was given special attention in the substantive negotiating agenda agreed upon between the Government and the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG). The launching of the national peace plan promulgated by the Government in October 1993 gives priority to assistance to the uprooted population, enhancing the operational capacity of the National Commission for Returnees, Refugees and Displaced Persons (CEAR) and promoting its closer relationship with the National Peace Fund (FONAPAZ). In recent months the peace process has made considerable headway; the Agreement between the Government and URNG, signed in Oslo on 17 June 1994 (A/48/954-S/1994/751, annex I), establishes the necessary framework for the integration of the populations uprooted as a result of the conflict in Guatemala. The number of returnees registered between 1989 and 1994 amounted to 16,000, over half of them having returned after the signing of the agreement of 8 October 1992 between the Government and the Permanent Commissions of Guatemalan Refugees in Mexico (CCPP);

(e) Honduras acceded to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol in October 1991 and its accession was ratified by the Congress in December 1991. In addition, Honduras facilitated the provision of assistance to over 66,000 persons (recognized refugees and non-recognized refugees) both in camps and integrated into national communities. Having also facilitated the voluntary repatriation of those refugees, Honduras closed all the refugee camps in the early 1990s and undertook development projects in favour of Honduran communities which had received refugees for more than a decade and which were suffering from extreme poverty;

(f) During the past five years, Mexico has provided assistance to over 45,000 Guatemalans settled in the south-eastern part of the country and has assisted 5,000 urban externally displaced persons and over 1,000 political refugees. In July 1990, in fulfilment of commitments under the CIREFCA Concerted Plan of Action, additions and amendments to the General Population Act were promulgated to make provision for refugees. The regulations introduced under the Act entered into force in October 1992 and ensured appropriate status for the country's refugee population. In addition, in order to promote the self-sufficiency of Guatemalan refugees in Campeche, Chiapas and Quintana Roo, the Mexican Government implemented a series of CIREFCA projects which included activities relating to production, the infrastructure and social development. In the States of Campeche and Quintana Roo, the "multiple-year plan" financed by

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the international donor community succeeded in meeting the planned targets, thus advancing the processes of local integration and development of the refugee communities in those States;

(g) In Nicaragua, the principal result of the activities undertaken within the framework of CIREFCA by the Government, the international donor community, NGOs, and UNHCR and UNDP has been support for the process of reconciliation in Nicaraguan society. These activities have contributed to the socio-economic integration of the target population in areas severely affected by the war, which were being repopulated by some 70,000 returnees and by demobilized combatants and war victims. From the outset, the programmes and projects were based on an integrated approach. In the first stage, priority was given to the rehabilitation and construction of basic infrastructure (schools, health centres, roads) with the introduction of the innovative Quick Impact Projects (QIPs), which facilitated the settlement of uprooted populations. The next stage saw the rehabilitation and development of agricultural and livestock production through development programmes such as PRODERE and the Project for the integrated development of the displaced, refugee and returnee population in two areas of the Atlántico Sur Autonomous Region (PRORAAS), as well as those of the European Commission. Moreover, during the CIREFCA process, a mechanism for coordination through community participation was developed in the form of so-called municipal development committees in which each of the various organizations in the municipality is represented.

12. In the preamble to the CIREFCA Concerted Plan of Action, it is recognized that solutions to the problems of uprooted populations can be achieved only with the cooperation of, and respect for, all the interested parties. It is for that reason that the continuing pursuit of consensus among all the actors has permeated the entire CIREFCA process from the outset. In this context, significant progress has been made in cooperation between Governments and NGOs, especially in Belize, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua. In the case of El Salvador, the process of reconciliation that resulted from the Peace Agreement facilitated, and in turn was facilitated by, concerted action between the Government and NGOs within the framework of CIREFCA. In that case, as in the case of the other countries concerned, the strategies and projects based on revised priorities which were presented to the international community for financing at the Second International Meeting of the CIREFCA Follow-up Committee in San Salvador (April 1992) were described in coordinated national documents.

13. Among the coordination mechanisms provided for in the Concerted Plan of Action mention should be made of the participation of the seven convening Governments in the Follow-up Committee, the main task of which was to monitor the implementation of the Plan of Action and to adapt policies and strategies to the changes taking place at both the national and the regional levels. During the five years of the process, the Committee met regularly, holding 22 working meetings. Representatives of cooperating countries and national and international non-governmental organizations were invited to attend three of those meetings; this greatly facilitated rapprochement between the various actors involved in the process. The Follow-up Committee provided a regional forum for the discussion of topics relating to support for and the strengthening of the peace process, the importance of respect for and the effective exercise of human rights and the need to coordinate and expand dialogue among various

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sectors of society, as well as the recognition of NGOs as institutions which complemented governmental activities in favour of uprooted populations.

B. Support of the United Nations

14. In accordance with the principles enunciated in the Secretary-General's Agenda for Peace 6/ and Agenda for Development, 7/ the role of the United Nations system in regional peace and democratization processes has comprised a whole range of activities, including participation in peace negotiations and the signing of agreements; the verification of such agreements and support for their implementation; assistance in the processes of the demobilization of combatants and their socio-economic reintegration; supervision of electoral processes; the strengthening or restoration of democratic institutions; and the provision of assistance for reconstruction, reconciliation and development activities. Similarly, the treatment of human rights, based on the principle of the importance of the individual, recognizing that these rights include not only civil and political rights but also economic, social and cultural rights, has been central to the activities of the United Nations system in the region.

15. Progress in the peace and reconciliation process in the region has facilitated a growing process of repatriation, especially of Nicaraguans, Salvadorians and Guatemalans. This has permitted the closing of all refugee camps in Central America, as the numbers of returnees have exceeded those of refugees, and assistance to these populations is gradually being seen as falling within the framework of development. In this evolving process, the international community has conferred on UNDP the role of monitoring the observance of peace agreements and supporting the processes of democratization. Similarly, the complementarity of the mandates of UNHCR and UNDP has allowed a gradual shift in leadership between UNHCR and UNDP within the framework of CIREFCA. CIREFCA represents a successful example of inter-agency cooperation, in coordination with the Secretary-General.

16. The joint work of UNHCR and UNDP within the framework of CIREFCA has spanned many fields, including in particular: conceptual advances in the debate over the transition from emergency to development; assistance in the preparation of coordinated national strategies in favour of populations and areas affected by extreme poverty, conflicts and uprootedness; the gradual incorporation of a gender-specific approach into all activities, as a result of the inclusion of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in the UNHCR/UNDP CIREFCA Joint Support Unit; the monitoring of progress in the area of the protection and defence of the human rights of uprooted populations; participation, through the Joint Support Unit, in the discussions on the problems of internally displaced persons undertaken by the Standing Conference on Internally Displaced Persons in the Americas; training programmes in the identification, preparation, evaluation and follow-up of projects for government officials and NGOS (jointly with PRODERE and the Regional Unit of Technical Assistance (Central America) (RUTA) agricultural project); the search for both humanitarian and development financing through constant efforts to make donors aware of the needs; support for the processes and mechanisms of coordination, especially between Governments and NGOS; and assistance in promoting the recognition by Governments of the legal status of certain NGOS.

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17. Through CIREFCA, the coordinated response of the Secretary-General, UNHCR and UNDP made it possible to establish conceptual and practical links between the search for peace, development, respect for human rights and concerted action. The functions of the mechanism of inter-agency cooperation, the CIREFCA Joint Support Unit, included discussion, consciousness-raising among the actors participating in the process, prevention, information, follow-up, technical cooperation with the Governments of the convening countries and support for the operation of the mechanisms of the Plan of Action. Moreover, in the majority of the countries of the region, working relations were developed between the field offices of the two agencies in support, for example, of the processes of repatriation and integration, the local integration of refugees, documentation of uprooted populations and technical cooperation with Governments.

18. CIREFCA provided a framework to facilitate the discharge of the respective mandates and roles of UNHCR and UNDP. As an innovative solution for the transition from emergency to self-sufficiency, UNHCR developed the formula of Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) in Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua in the amount of approximately \$20 million, contributed by various donors. The QIPs benefited communities in which not only populations falling within the sphere of UNHCR but also internally displaced persons, former combatants and the local population were located; the same could be said of the populations which were the target of the documentation project executed by UNHCR in El Salvador. These activities were in addition to those carried out by UNHCR as part of its traditional role of providing protection and assistance, such as the mass and individual repatriation operations in El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua and the local integration projects in Belize, Costa Rica, Honduras and Mexico.

19. As part of CIREFCA, the Development Programme for Displaced Persons, Refugees and Returnees in Central America (PRODERE) has made a substantial contribution, during the past four and a half years, towards alleviating the adverse effects of the conflicts and social exclusion in 11 areas of the subregion. To date, it has benefited more than 1 million people living in poverty in areas directly or indirectly affected by the war and it represents a significant contribution to the consolidation of peace in Central America.

20. The Government of Italy has contributed \$115 million through UNDP for this programme, which is to conclude in the middle of 1995. A number of other sources, including UNDP (from its own resources), the Capital Development Fund, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Government of Guatemala, have made additional resources available, bringing the total to \$158 million.

21. PRODERE has promoted and established participating mechanisms and systems in the field of human rights, education (more than 340 schools constructed or repaired; 4,700 educators trained and 53,000 beneficiaries of adult education programmes), health (105 centres constructed or repaired), vocational training, local development agencies, credit and production-related projects (micro-enterprises, agricultural development), infrastructure (drinking water supply for 91,000 people and more than 1,300 kilometres of roads constructed or repaired) and, in general, local development.

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22. The experience acquired by PRODERE in Central America has made it possible to transfer politically acceptable and operationally feasible solutions to other nations and regions of the world affected by internal violence. This is being carried out in close association with other organizations in the United Nations system, in particular UNHCR. UNDP itself has used this experience as a basis to formulate and administer new programmes in Mozambique, Somalia, Rwanda, Eritrea and Cambodia and to devise regional initiatives, particularly for the Horn of Africa.

23. Above and beyond situations of conflict, PRODERE has been recognized as an example in the application of the principles of sustainable human development at the local level and the programme approach advocated by UNDP.

24. UNDP is also executing other projects within the framework of CIREFCA such as the PRORAAS project in the Atlántico Sur region of Nicaragua funded by the Netherlands, and the municipal strengthening project in Nicaragua and El Salvador funded by France.

C. Support by the international donor community

25. One of the characteristic features emerging from the CIREFCA process has been the mobilization of the support of the international community. This support has had three main components: political commitment, the provision of non-reimbursable financial resources, and the monitoring of progress in the implementation of the Plan of Action. Both at international meetings of the CIREFCA Follow-up Committee and at informal meetings at the regional level or through participation in support groups in countries where they have been established, the international community has clearly stated its position with regard to the promotion and protection of the human rights of the target population and its active support for the processes of dialogue and cooperation, in accordance with the principles and criteria set out in the Concerted Plan of Action.

26. The commitment of the donors cooperating with CIREFCA has been constant throughout the period 1989-1994; their financial contribution has been considerable - more than \$400 million - and they have adapted and developed their assistance in keeping with the evolving situation and the problems of the convening countries. In CIREFCA the donors have found a framework for regional action which has facilitated the coordination of efforts beyond political frontiers. This framework has been sufficiently broad and flexible to accommodate their various centres of interest and their very varied forms of assistance. Various bilateral and multilateral donors have participated in CIREFCA, both in policy-making and financially, from the outset. Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, the United Kingdom and the United States of America have cooperated on a bilateral basis; at the multilateral level, important contributions have been made by the European Union and various United Nations agencies.

D. The role of non-governmental organizations

27. CIREFCA established the conditions for an increase in the active and visible participation of humanitarian NGOs. Through cooperation and dialogue with their respective Governments, the considerable financial support of the international community (more than one third of external aid provided within the framework of CIREFCA has been channelled through NGOs) and the support of similar organizations in Europe and North America, NGOs have succeeded in: strengthening their programmes; establishing collaborative links with each other, transcending the narrow vision which many of them had of their own work; consolidating their role in promoting the protection of uprooted populations; and identifying and executing projects. In some cases, NGOs have complemented the activities of UNHCR with regard to the protection of refugees, especially in areas in which the dispersion of refugees and the lack of formal recognition of the status of refugee was preventing UNHCR from responding promptly when individuals or groups required international protection.

28. The dialogue between NGOs and Governments led to the preparation of concerted strategies in favour of the uprooted populations, which included the treatment of their rights; this has facilitated reconciliation in the countries of origin and local integration in the countries of asylum.

29. CIREFCA promoted coordination within NGOs themselves. It also facilitated a process of rapprochement and mutual awareness between UNDP and NGOs working with uprooted populations. In March 1993, the first regional event in which representatives of international and regional humanitarian NGOs and two regional NGO networks concerned with development participated with UNDP took place in Managua. This meeting was followed by seminars on the concept of human development and a training programme on the formulation of projects for the reintegration of the uprooted.

30. One of the outstanding characteristics of CIREFCA is that it has actively incorporated NGOs into the official processes of discussion and decision-making with regard to assistance to the uprooted in Central America; this is one of the main legacies of the process.

III. THE CHALLENGE FOR THE FUTURE

A. A broad framework of action

31. At its meeting on 22 and 23 September 1993, the Follow-up Committee emphasized the need to make the CIREFCA process lead to a regional initiative of human development in which the achievements and the pending agenda of the Conference would be taken up again. At its meeting on 14 February 1994, the Follow-up Committee spelt out the orientation of its activities as being to ratify the need to give continuity to the treatment of uprooted populations in the new Central American context, by introducing a change of emphasis to sustainable human development through coordinated national strategies, reflected at the local level and linked to macroeconomic and sectoral policies, in areas which the Central American countries, Belize and Mexico regard as priority areas for the consolidation of peace and the eradication of extreme poverty.

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32. The concern of the Governments of the seven convening countries of CIREFCA was also shared by the other actors participating actively in the process. For example, the Executive Committee of UNHCR, at its forty-fourth session in October 1993, agreed to request UNHCR and UNDP to convene an informal technical meeting to ensure the incorporation of the needs of refugees, returnees and displaced persons into the future strategies to be adopted once the CIREFCA process had been concluded.

33. Pursuant to that resolution, an informal technical meeting was held in San José, Costa Rica, in February 1994, at which more than 120 representatives of the convening countries, the international community, national and international NGOs and agencies of the United Nations system endorsed the approach to the post-CIREFCA phase proposed jointly by UNHCR and UNDP. This proposal was based on consultations with the principal CIREFCA actors and took as its central elements the Secretary-General's Agenda for Peace, 6/ the sustainable human development strategies (at the national and local levels) proposed by UNDP, and the threefold strategy (prevention, emergency preparedness and durable solutions) proposed by UNHCR for Central America.

34. The meeting recommended that a third, and last, international meeting of the CIREFCA Follow-up Committee should be convened not only so that the CIREFCA process could be formally closed but also so that renewed commitments could be made to implement sustainable human development strategies in Central America which would also deal with the unresolved problems of uprootedness. Following an intense three-month exercise involving discussion and cooperation, the convening Governments and non-governmental organizations, with the support of the field offices of UNHCR and UNDP in the seven countries, identified priority areas and formulated strategies and new or renewed commitments.

35. These national exercises in cooperation led to progress in the definition of the outlines of a broad framework of action. The emphasis has been placed on national strategies which support efforts to eradicate extreme poverty and social exclusion by focusing on priority geographical areas. This broad framework results from an awareness that is essential to eradicate poverty in order to promote the consolidation of peace and a solution to the problem of uprootedness. The challenge therefore is to try to deal with the causes of uprootedness and social exclusion and not only with their more evident manifestations.

36. The proposed framework of action centres on the following strategies:

(a) Territorial approach. It focuses activities on the territorial level in order to maximize their impact, giving priority to geographical areas that are critical to each country, areas where, depending on the circumstances, the highest levels of conflict might be compounded by uprootedness, extreme poverty, social exclusion and/or serious environmental degradation, or where there might be a specific set of border problems;

(b) Participation/coordination. It proposes expanded participation/coordination both with regard to the national actors taking part and with regard to levels of participation, including participation at the local level;

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(c) Sustainable human development at the local level. It sets in motion strategies for sustainable human development within each of the priority geographical areas;

(d) Linkage to national policies. It proposes and steers national policies in support of the strategies at the local level, and ensures that local activities are operationally linked to macroeconomic and sectoral policies and to the State's decentralization processes;

(e) Regional dimension. It recognizes that the problems being tackled transcend local or national boundaries and that certain solutions call for region-wide initiatives.

B. National strategies

37. At the aforementioned Third, and last, International Meeting of the CIREFCA Follow-up Committee, the Governments of Central America, Belize and Mexico presented concerted national strategies and made commitments as follows:

38. Belize adopted a human development strategy at the local level as a means of alleviating poverty and addressing the pending issue of uprootedness. The Government of Belize undertook to review the problem of the documentation of illegal immigrants and the consolidation of the integration of refugees, with a view to finding an equitable solution to this problem. The concerted strategy of Belize lays great emphasis on capacity-building at the grass-roots level and requests international assistance in meeting the high social and economic costs of integrating a large percentage of the immigrant and refugee population in its territory.

39. Costa Rica proposed as the centre-piece of its strategy an anti-poverty campaign consistent with the protection of nature. The Costa Rican proposal involves promoting sustainable human development at the local level within the framework of Agenda 21, adopted by the Conference on Environment and Development at Rio de Janeiro in 1992. 8/ This proposal focuses on selected geographical areas, serving the interests of the most vulnerable population groups and building on the progress made within CIREFCA in integrating refugee populations.

40. As part of an approach involving integrated development and eradication of poverty, the proposal of El Salvador gave priority to areas where uprooted populations and other groups affected by the conflict are located. El Salvador laid special emphasis on the need for the various sectors of society and other participants to continue their involvement in the formulation and implementation of plans on behalf of those population groups and areas.

41. On the eve of signing the Peace Agreement, Guatemala expressed its determination to ensure that the peace would be not only firm and lasting, but also revolutionary in the sense that it would promote positive changes in the country's situation and consciousness. The Agreement signed at Oslo on 17 June 1994 (A/48/954-S/1994/751, annex I) between the Government and URNG on the integration of returnees and populations displaced as a result of the conflict affords a very encouraging prospect for the peace process in Guatemala.

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As part of a policy of addressing the issue of uprootedness within the context of peace-building, Guatemala's strategy is aimed at promoting human development and political, social and economic rights. It proposes to do so as a matter of priority in those areas identified as being of strategic importance to peace, where the problems of uprootedness are compounded by the highest levels of poverty.

42. On the basis of its national strategy to promote human development at the local level, Honduras has identified three border regions as priority regions for the implementation of programmes and projects in pursuit of that strategy, in the context of a policy to combat poverty and foster broad grass-roots involvement. Those areas provided shelter to refugees and experienced a problem of internal displacement that has not yet been resolved; action is needed to overcome the high rate of poverty and social exclusion, and to create the social and economic conditions that would encourage the displaced groups to return.

43. Mexico will support the process of voluntary repatriation, will continue offering humanitarian assistance to Guatemalan refugees and, at the same time, will expand cooperation programmes for the development of reception areas. Mexico undertook to consider fully integrating those refugees living in the States of Campeche and Quintana Roo who do not want to return to their country, depending on how the process of repatriation to Guatemala evolves.

44. The proposal of Nicaragua was consistent with its policy of national reconciliation and rehabilitation and its strategy of joint revitalization. The objective is to consolidate peace, support the process of social and economic reintegration in the context of sustainable human development, and promote human rights and broad public participation. Nicaragua presented a concerted plan of action giving priority to 16 municipalities.

45. All the national strategies place emphasis on the promotion of equal opportunities for women in the social, political and economic spheres, as well as on measures to preserve the environment and promote sustainable use of natural resources.

IV. A NEW REGIONAL COMMITMENT IN THE FACE OF POVERTY, SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND UPROOTEDNESS

46. The brief review of the national strategies shows clearly that the peoples and Governments of Central America, Belize and Mexico are willing to channel efforts to meet new challenges. Although the situations and problems are extremely diverse, there are common features in the definition of the tasks to be performed. For example, it has been decided that efforts should focus on geographical areas with the highest levels of poverty, uprootedness and environmental degradation. In the countries that have experienced conflicts, such areas are of strategic importance in consolidating peace and reconciling society. In these areas, the Governments will implement integrated and sustainable development strategies that are people-centred, fully aware that this work at the local level will be successful only if it is accompanied by an institutionalized process involving national policy measures in the social, economic and financial spheres. The national strategies stress that public

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participation and coordination among governmental and non-governmental agencies and the organized representatives of civilian society are prerequisites for national reconciliation and the strengthening of democracy. These are the specific characteristics of the policies to be applied under the new commitments assumed by Central America in the face of the challenge posed by the conditions of poverty and the fragility of the hard-won peace.

47. The Declaration of Commitments adopted by consensus at the Third International Meeting of the Follow-up Committee sets forth the commitments undertaken by all the participants in order to continue supporting the consolidation of peace in the region. The new framework of action calls for a change in emphasis - from the short-term programmes of the past to sustainable human development strategies in selected geographical areas. Likewise, there is a need to promote human rights and democratic processes, eradicate poverty and social exclusion from the region, and address the outstanding problem of populations uprooted as a result of the conflicts of the past decade.

48. In the text adopted, the Governments of Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua undertook, inter alia, to guarantee equitably "to all their inhabitants [of the duly identified geographical areas] the full exercise of their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights"; to place "emphasis on measures to solve problems of access to land, land tenure and certification of land titles, as well as access to technical assistance, credit and markets"; to "execute actions to broaden employment and income opportunities for the poorer populations in the prioritized areas and to ensure the feasibility of durable solutions for the voluntary repatriation and the reintegration of returnees and displaced persons"; and to make "the necessary national and local budget allocations for investment and operation".

49. In support of the commitments undertaken by the Governments, the non-governmental organizations expressed their willingness and commitment to "participate through their presence and provide technical assistance and human, material and economic resources" to strengthen peace and democracy and promote respect for human rights; to "participate in the formulation of concerted responses to the ... needs of the uprooted population"; to "contribute to the definition, design, implementation and evaluation of programmes and projects"; to "strengthen and intensify dialogue" among themselves, as well as with government institutions, United Nations agencies and international financial institutions; and to "strengthen the presence of their networks" in the prioritized areas.

50. For their part, the donors represented at the meeting made the commitment to "continue providing their political, technical and financial support"; to participate, "while respecting the norms and procedures of each donor, in the concerted formulation, financing and implementation of strategies and actions for the prioritized areas"; and to "provide priority support to local efforts and initiatives promoted by both governmental and non-governmental actors".

51. Likewise, the United Nations agencies and programmes represented at the Meeting made the commitment to "provide joint support, through their offices, resources, services and their national and regional programmes, to the efforts and actions of the Central American Governments and societies to address the

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pending agendas related to uprootedness, development of prioritized areas and implementation of national policies adopted"; and "to continue to promote the processes of dialogue, work and reconciliation with the affected populations, non-governmental organizations and representations of society".

52. In particular, UNDP committed itself to "providing priority support, through its national and regional programmes, to the efforts and actions of the Central American Governments and societies to eradicate poverty and address the pending agendas on uprootedness, as well as to continue formulating, in a concerted and participatory manner, strategies, methodologies and periodic evaluations to make the concept of sustainable human development operational in its different dimensions". For its part, UNHCR "will continue to ensure international protection and the promotion of durable solutions for the refugees, returnees and populations 'of special concern' to UNHCR. This will be carried out in accordance with its mandate, the policy established by the High Commissioner with regard to prevention, the principles established in the conclusions of the UNHCR Executive Committee and the document adopted by CIREFCA in 1989 entitled 'Principles and Criteria for the Protection of and Assistance to Central American Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons in Latin America'".

53. Lastly, the CIREFCA convening countries decided, in view of the request made by the Government of Panama, to invite Panama to become part of the group of CIREFCA convening countries.

54. As a follow-up measure, the Governments of the convening States, non-governmental organizations, United Nations agencies and programmes, donors and intergovernmental organizations considered it necessary to establish a Temporary Commission which would have 90 days to discuss, in a joint and representative fashion, the type of national and regional mechanisms that might be proposed to favour the promotion, implementation and follow-up of the commitments embodied in the Mexico City Declaration.

Notes

1/ A/42/521-S/19085, annex; for printed text, see Official Records of the Security Council, Fortieth Year, Supplement for July, August and September 1987, document S/19085, annex.

2/ See A/44/527 and Corr.1, annex.

3/ A/46/864-S/23501, annex; see Official Records of the Security Council, Forty-seventh Year, Supplement for January, February and March 1992, document S/23501, annex.

4/ United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 189, No. 2545.

5/ Ibid., vol. 606, No. 8791.

6/ A/47/277-S/24111; see Official Records of the Security Council, Forty-seventh Year, Supplement for April, May and June 1992, document S/24111.

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7/ A/48/935.

8/ Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992 (A/CONF.151/26/Rev.1 (Vol. I and Vol. I/Corr.1, Vol. II, Vol. III and Vol. III/Corr.1)) (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigenda), Vol. I: Resolutions adopted by the Conference, resolution 1, annex II.
