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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 105: REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS (continued) (A/51/12 and Add.1, A/51/206-S/1996/539, A/51/329, A/51/341, A/51/367, A/51/454)

1. Mr. GHEBREMARIAM (Eritrea) said that one of the most daunting challenges Eritrea had faced when it had declared its sovereignty in 1993, while the country was in a state of extreme poverty and devastation, had been the repatriation, mostly from the Sudan, and reintegration into society of tens of thousands of refugees. To deal with that challenge, it had established the Commission for Eritrean Refugee Affairs.

2. Within that context, a dialogue had been established with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on the modalities of repatriation. However, the parties had taken different positions on the issue. Eritrea had proposed that organized repatriation and reintegration of refugees should be viewed as a continuous process within the overall rehabilitation and development of the country, while UNHCR believed that its role should be limited to repatriation and that other agencies should handle reintegration and development.

3. In 1993, an inter-agency donor joint mission had reviewed and revised the programme, with the participation of UNHCR and the United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs. The Programme for Refugee Reintegration and Rehabilitation of Resettlement Areas in Eritrea had been adopted for implementation in three phases, to be concluded in 1997. With a budget of $262.2 million, its twofold objective was to assist in the repatriation of refugees from the Sudan in an organized manner and to ensure their social and economic integration once they arrived in their home country.

4. Given how complex that task was for a devastated economy like Eritrea’s, the Government had appealed for assistance to the international donor community. The pledging conference held in Geneva, however, had not met with the expected response. Nevertheless, the Government of Eritrea had continued its efforts, and in April 1994 it had signed an agreement with UNHCR for the execution of a pilot project to begin in November 1994 for the repatriation of 25,000 persons at a total cost of $13.5 million. The project was successfully completed in May 1995. It had been hoped that the pilot project would be a prelude to the first phase of a resettlement programme that would accommodate 100,000 refugees beginning in December 1995.

5. The Government of Eritrea had accorded top priority to the plight of refugees in the Sudan because of the major social, political and economic hardship they had been forced to endure for so long. Although the brotherly hospitality the Sudanese people had offered to Eritrean refugees over three decades must be acknowledged, it was no secret that the refugees had been subjected to maltreatment, restrictions and abuse. There was no alternative to voluntary repatriation, but that operation could not take place because of obstacles raised by the Government of the Sudan.

6. Respecting the mandates and responsibilities of UNHCR, the Government of Eritrea had signed a Memorandum of Understanding with UNHCR in April 1994 which guaranteed the Office's cooperation in the implementation of the principles of voluntary repatriation. The Government of the Sudan had concluded a similar agreement with UNHCR in September 1994. However, during the course of the pilot project in 1995 the Sudanese authorities had hampered the process, in violation of the fundamental principles governing the rights of refugees and in contravention of that country's obligation to cooperate with UNHCR in discharging its mandate.

7. Weary of waiting for an organized repatriation, over 140,000 Eritrean refugees had spontaneously returned from the Sudan without the necessary legal protection and safety assurances. Eritreans remaining in the Sudan had been denied access to survival food rations and other basic services as a result of restrictions placed on the movement and delivery of such provisions. The Government of Eritrea had brought the widespread human rights abuses to the attention of UNHCR.

8. The welfare of some 300,000 Eritrean refugees was being endangered by the non-compliance of the Sudanese authorities with the humanitarian principles of the international conventions to which they were party. Voluntary repatriation had been frustrated because the Sudanese Government had refused to respect the agreement reached with UNHCR. Eritrea believed that the international community, and particularly UNHCR, had a legal and moral responsibility to guarantee respect for humanitarian principles. The Office must not remain a passive observer to the obstacles put in its way in fulfilling its mission to protect the refugees. The Government of Eritrea pleaded with the United Nations and its Member States to adopt tangible measures to guarantee that hundreds of thousands of Eritrean refugees would not become victims of certain political and economic objectives.

9. He wished to refute the usual allegation by the Sudanese authorities that the Government of Eritrea was selective and discriminated against different social groups and political factions in its repatriation programme. Even more outrageous was the accusation that Eritrean refugees were taking Sudanese nationality because of discrimination by the Government of Eritrea. Those were baseless fabrications devised by the Sudanese National Islamic front to mislead the international community about its obstructive posture to seek, in a desperate attempt, to legitimize the recruitment of young Eritreans to participate in the jihad movement against Eritrea. The truth was that the Government of Eritrea had given full responsibility and freedom to UNHCR to organize the entire operation in the Sudan, in accordance with the Office's criteria for setting priorities.

10. Ms. MUTAI (Kenya) said that Kenya was perturbed by the deteriorating situation in the Great Lakes region, which had exacerbated the plight of the refugees in that part of Africa. It believed that the problem was essentially a political one and that the solution must also be political. Kenya hoped that the regional summit which was scheduled to be held in Nairobi on 5 November 1996 would provide the necessary impetus for a lasting and comprehensive solution to the problems of the region.

11. Her delegation believed that those efforts together with those being undertaken by the Secretary-General through his Special Representative were

complementary and mutually reinforcing, particularly with regard to the stated objectives of developing plans to defuse tensions, achieve a cease-fire and pave the way for negotiations within the framework of the regional conference on peace, security and development in the Great Lakes region.

12. Countries of asylum in the region were excessively burdened by the huge inflows of refugees, returnees and displaced persons, which had contributed to the social and economic instability of those countries. It was a source of concern to note that the patience of donor countries was beginning to wear thin. She wished to take the opportunity to urge those countries which had consistently funded the activities of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to continue to provide assistance, even in situations of great financial difficulties. The Kenyan delegation welcomed the initiative taken by UNHCR to implement small community-based assistance programmes to pave the way for repatriation and resettlement and to accelerate the rehabilitation process.

13. She was gratified by the active support of UNHCR for the efforts being made by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and hoped that that support would play a decisive role in peace-building as a precondition for subregional stability, security and sustainable socio-economic development.

14. The Kenyan delegation shared the view expressed by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) that any voluntary repatriation in the Great Lakes region would prove futile unless serious attempts were made to separate the bona fide refugees from the armed elements and to assure them some degree of security, build their confidence and facilitate their safe return to their countries of origin.

15. Kenya wished to reaffirm its strong and unwavering support for UNHCR and its efforts to comprehensively consider, review and resolve the problems of refugees, returnees and displaced persons, as well as related migratory movements and appealed to the international community to continue to support that important United Nations agency.

16. Mr. BULL (Liberia) welcomed the implementation of the Delphi project which was being undertaken to reform UNHCR and to make it more responsive to the needs of refugees, an initiative that was consistent with the overall restructuring efforts being pursued within the United Nations system.

17. It was paradoxical that during a period of general relaxation of tensions following the end of the cold war, it had not been possible to achieve greater international cooperation to promote socio-economic development and improve the qualify of life of all peoples. Instead, the international community had had to increasingly concentrate its resources and time on addressing the humanitarian needs of the victims of crises resulting from natural or man-made disasters, which were mainly inter-State conflicts. Such conflicts pointed to the urgent need for concerted international efforts to find lasting solutions that addressed the root causes of the conflicts.

18. The tragic developments currently unfolding in Zaire highlighted the urgent need for international measures to avert another humanitarian catastrophe in that region. According to UNHCR, Africa was home to the largest refugee population in the world. Regrettably, the mass migration was the result of

internal strife in many countries. In the case of Liberia, 750,000 people had taken refuge in neighbouring countries, particularly Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, and the number of internally displaced persons was over 1.3 million.

19. With the signing of the Abuja Agreement in Nigeria in 1995, the international community had hoped that the Liberian conflict would shortly be resolved, because, for the first time, the leaders of the warring factions had been included in the governing Council of State. The outbreak of fighting in April of 1996 with the attendant looting, destruction and killings had dealt a major blow to the peace process. The new Abuja Agreement, signed in August 1996, revised the timetable for the implementation of the peace Agreement, which would permit the holding of democratic elections in 1997. According to the revised timetable, the process of disarmament and demobilization of combatants was to begin by the end of the current month.

20. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Committee of Nine on Liberia had recommended the imposition of sanctions against any member of the warring factions that failed to implement the terms of the Agreement and had threatened to recommend to the Security Council the establishment of a war crimes tribunal. The establishment of war crimes tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda were significant milestones and reaffirmed the decision of the international community not only to help protect human rights but also to impose sanctions on violators.

21. The Liberian delegation joined in the appeal made by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for assistance to be provided to ECOWAS to enable it to increase to 18,000 the number of its peacekeeping troops. It had been recognized that the failure to provide the necessary logistical and financial support to ECOWAS following the signing of the first Abuja Agreement had contributed to the breakdown in the peace process. The deployment of additional troops throughout the country was needed in order to guarantee the disarmament and demobilization of combatants and their reintegration into civil society.

22. The results of the meeting of the contact group of donors and other interested parties held recently to review the progress made in the Liberian peace process was most encouraging. The Liberian Government looked forward to working closely with the concerned authorities to address issues relating to the involvement of UNHCR in the provision of assistance to Liberian refugees. Liberia had every confidence that UNHCR would resume its repatriation programme, which had had to be discontinued following the outbreak of hostilities in April. Most Liberian refugees residing in neighbouring countries had expressed their desire to return home voluntarily.

23. While countries of asylum were to be commended for their assistance to refugee women and children, those countries had a moral responsibility and a legal obligation to honour the international conventions to which they were parties. Had there been a greater commitment to those principles, particularly that of non-refoulement, the tragic consequences of the exodus of Liberian refugees by sea following the April fighting might not have occurred.

24. The Liberian delegation was encouraged by the spirit of cooperation that existed between the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, UNHCR and other governmental and non-governmental organizations in addressing issues relating to

refugees, returnees and displaced persons, as well as humanitarian issues. It therefore welcomed resolution 1995/56 of the Economic and Social Council on the strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations, and urged its full implementation.

25. He recognized the importance of programmes of disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, rehabilitation and national reconstruction implemented by UNHCR in cooperation with other United Nations bodies in various countries and, in that connection, stressed the importance of establishing an effective coordination mechanism to realize the full potential of such programmes. In conclusion, he reaffirmed the Liberian Government's appreciation for the assistance which UNHCR continued to provide Liberian refugees and for the plans which were being formulated for their repatriation.

26. Ms. ARYSTANBEKOVA (Kazakstan) welcomed the efforts of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to resolve the problems of population displacement. In that regard, she stressed the importance of the Regional Conference to Address the Problems of Refugees, Displaced Persons, Other Forms of Involuntary Displacement and Returnees in the Countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and Relevant Neighbouring States (A/51/341), at which attempts had been made to find joint solutions to those problems.

27. Involuntary displacements in the region were caused by very complex political as well as historical, social, economic and other factors. In Kazakstan, for example, emigration was sparked by social and economic reasons stemming from the decline in production during the period of transition, inadequate social reforms, and the decline in the standard of living, as well as by ethnic and cultural factors and environmental problems. Furthermore, many persons who had been deported to farm virgin land in Kazakstan and meet industrial objectives, especially during the Second World War, 1941 to 1945, wanted to go back to their areas of origin. In recent years, while emigration had increased as a result of the lack of employment in Kazakstan, the country's political stability had attracted refugees from other countries. That was the main reason behind the return of people of Kazak ethnic origin. The increase in the number of refugees in the country was also attributable to the large number of political asylum-seekers.

28. In that regard, her Government was grateful to UNHCR and its regional office for their efforts to determine the nationality of the persons returning to Kazakstan. She pointed out that, in paragraph 174 of its report (A/51/12), UNHCR referred to the resettlement in Kazakstan of "refugees" of Kazak ethnic origin. The reference should have been to "returnees", because those people had been forced to flee their country.

29. The Republic of Kazakstan intended to use its migration policy to regulate migration flows and to establish legal, economic and social mechanisms to promote the stability of the process. To that end, in the framework of the above-mentioned Regional Conference, it had put forward a migration programme. It had enacted the relevant legislation for its implementation.

30. Mr. REZVANI (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the traditional causes of displacements and refugee movements were political instability, social injustice, human rights violations and intolerance; however, the worsening economic situation in some parts of the world should also be taken into account.

The international community should give priority to the question of development since most of the countries of origin and countries of asylum were developing countries. Therefore, a comprehensive approach was needed to address the root causes of involuntary population movements.

31. It was regrettable that, despite the number and magnitude of humanitarian emergencies, UNHCR and other international humanitarian organizations lacked sufficient resources to implement development programmes after providing relief assistance, and that the donor community had lost the incentive to contribute to rehabilitation, reconstruction and development programmes. In that connection, UNHCR should strengthen its ties with international financial and development institutions.

32. The Islamic Republic of Iran, a traditional country of asylum, continued to host the largest number of refugees in the world, 1,420,000 Afghans and 585,000 Iraqis (Kurds and Arabs), as noted in the UNHCR report. The situation had been further complicated by crises in neighbouring countries and illegal immigration. His Government had been unable to implement the plan it had drawn up to repatriate Afghan refugees to northern Afghanistan, because of recent developments in that country. For that reason, the Islamic Republic of Iran believed that UNHCR should consider other solutions, in particular the resettlement of those refugees.

33. Moreover, UNHCR and other international relief organizations should provide more financial assistance in order to alleviate the situation of women, children and vulnerable groups of Afghan refugees. His Government had also provided emergency relief to newly arrived Iraqi refugees in the country and had accommodated 60,000 people in five camps along its border. It had spent $10 million to meet the needs of those refugees alone. Moreover, because of the deterioration of the situation in northern Iraq, the Iranian Red Crescent Society had had to address the needs of 10,000 more Iraqi Kurds who had recently sought asylum in his country. Since all those refugees would remain in the Islamic Republic of Iran at least through the winter, his Government wished to appeal to the international community to provide adequate assistance to the refugees until such time as they could return to their country. It welcomed the role of international organizations and non-governmental organizations in providing assistance in emergency situations and wished to reiterate that, with their help, it would continue to provide food, shelter, health services and security to all those people who sought asylum in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

34. Mr. CHAUDHARY (Nepal) said that the flows of refugees and displaced persons caused by political strife, ethnic conflicts and human rights violations in many parts of the world posed a serious challenge to the international community. According to the UNHCR report, there had been 24 million refugees and displaced persons worldwide at the end of 1995, many of them in the former Yugoslavia and in the Great Lakes region of Africa, where refugees were still in need of emergency humanitarian assistance.

35. While his Government welcomed the attention given by UNHCR to the special needs of refugee women and children, and to the environmental issues resulting from the presence of a large number of refugees in the countries of asylum, it felt that UNHCR needed to strengthen its strategy of preparedness, prevention and solutions. In that regard, Nepal hoped that UNHCR would make further efforts to improve coordination with other United Nations agencies.

36. His Government was grateful to UNHCR for its continued assistance to 100,000 refugees living in camps in eastern Nepal, and upheld the right of every refugee to return to his or her homeland safely and with dignity. It would make every effort to solve the problem of refugees from Bhutan through talks with that country's authorities. Finally, he urged States to strive to solve the problem of refugees, since their large-scale presence in many countries of asylum, particularly in least developed countries like Nepal, aggravated economic problems, caused environmental degradation and worsened social conditions.

37. Ms. SETYAWATI (Indonesia) said that, while UNHCR was strengthening its capacity to undertake emergency responses to future crises in cooperation with other United Nations bodies, the situation in central Africa continued to be alarming. She called on all the parties concerned in that area of conflict to respect the rights of refugees and displaced persons.

38. The real and potential burden of protecting refugees had at times resulted in the denial of entry to asylum-seekers or the forcible return of refugees to their countries of origin. That situation underscored the need to seek lasting solutions to the problem. Indonesia welcomed the recognition of the need for international solidarity and burden-sharing with countries of asylum, which, more often than not, were developing countries with limited resources. International solidarity for development was also required in order to promote conditions that would make voluntary repatriation possible.

39. Her delegation welcomed the reinforcement of the Office's operational linkages with agencies and partners that had the capacity to address the impact of refugee influxes on the development resources of asylum countries. The agreement with the United Nations Development Programme on a framework for inter-agency initiatives to promote a smooth transition from humanitarian assistance to sustainable human development was one such example.

40. Her delegation also welcomed the participation of UNHCR in the work of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee established by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, which would further facilitate implementation of Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/56. The signing earlier that year of the Memorandum of Understanding between UNHCR and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) as well as the signing of one with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) should strengthen the operational capacities of those organizations, ensuring greater predictability and a more timely, coherent and coordinated response by the international community.

41. Indonesia was encouraged that UNHCR was taking the initiative to bridge the gap between the inter-agency and the intergovernmental processes, as described in paragraph 206 of the High Commissioner's report. Only through a genuine partnership with the intergovernmental process would it be possible to begin to mitigate the consequences of refugee situations while also moving toward lasting solutions and the prevention of future crises. That procedure should be followed in all activities undertaken by the United Nations system, in keeping with the commitment to international cooperation set out in the Charter of the United Nations.

42. UNHCR was taking measures to strengthen its activities in support of national legal and judicial capacity-building, which must be carried out in

consultation and cooperation with Governments. Moreover, UNHCR was paying increased attention to the promotion of human rights standards in refugee and returnee contexts. In that regard, her delegation would appreciate receiving clarification from the High Commissioner as to how the promotion of human rights standards was being undertaken by her Office, and what role the intergovernmental process was playing.

43. Her delegation welcomed the activities of UNHCR in support of refugee women and children. The staffing of regional refugee women coordinator posts should strengthen the field implementation of existing policies and guidelines on refugee women. Likewise, it was beneficial that UNHCR was participating in the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

44. Indonesia and the countries of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) continued to uphold the rights of refugees, which were protected under international law as well as by moral obligations, as amply demonstrated over the past two decades by the treatment and care that had been provided to Indo-Chinese refugees by Indonesia and its neighbours. The Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees had come to a successful conclusion, and Indonesia wished to express its appreciation to UNHCR and all countries which had helped to bring about that positive conclusion.

45. Mr. BAALI (Algeria) said that the origin of the dramatic events currently taking place in the world lay, even more than in colonialism and the disintegration of communism, in the resurgence of violence provoked by the exacerbation of nationalistic, ethnic, religious and tribal sentiments and fed by foreign intervention. Those events also had purely economic and social causes, and were the direct result of underdevelopment, poverty, structural adjustment programmes, natural disasters and other evils that afflicted the countries of the South. They could also be explained by the serious lack of communication among different societies. In view of the large exoduses of people and the tragedies they entailed, there was a need to work together to find appropriate solutions not only to the phenomenon itself, but also to its root causes. Despite its broad and comprehensive mandate, UNHCR could not solve the problem on its own.

46. Of the population served by UNHCR, basically concentrated in the southern hemisphere, 80 per cent were women and children, more than a third of whom were to be found in Africa. The States of the South were providing assistance to the extent permitted by their scarce resources, and the disparity between the need for assistance and the resources available to States and international organizations could only exacerbate the needs of which the South’s refugees were victims. Moreover, humanitarian assistance was generally intended only to ensure the survival of those victims. Algeria had provided humanitarian assistance to Saharan refugees and to displaced persons from Mali and the Niger.

47. Determined to continue assisting Saharan refugees, Algeria called upon UNHCR to increase its levels of assistance in order to respond more effectively to the needs of that population. Economic problems and conflicts in the northern regions of Mali and the Niger had led to the displacement of many people into southern Algeria.

48. Algeria had made great efforts, in conjunction with international organizations and the countries concerned, to accelerate the return of displaced

persons to their countries of origin and their socio-economic reintegration there. Algeria had concluded agreements with Mali and the Niger, as well as with UNHCR and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). In 1996 peace began to be restored and conditions for reintegration improved in the two countries. The gradual repatriation of displaced persons was made possible with assistance from UNHCR and through collaboration with the States concerned. Algeria would continue to give its full support to the efforts being undertaken to eliminate the sufferings of the masses of displaced persons throughout the world and would help to eliminate the causes of that problem.

49. Mr. JAYANAMA (Thailand) said that the world had witnessed a dramatic increase in internal ethnic conflicts and violence which had created a massive wave of forced population movements. As a consequence, UNHCR was facing greater demand for humanitarian assistance. Recent events in Africa, particularly in the Great Lakes region, and Bosnia had been of concern to the international community. To find lasting solutions and sustainable political settlements that would prevent such humanitarian catastrophes required the political will of all parties to the conflicts.

50. UNHCR must not be left to shoulder its burden alone, as the refugee problem was indeed the responsibility of the entire international community. Since 1975, Thailand had been discharging its humanitarian responsibility by hosting hundreds of thousands of refugees from Cambodia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Viet-Nam.

51. Despite its limited financial resources, Thailand had cooperated closely with UNHCR, donor countries and related United Nations agencies to find peaceful and durable solutions to the Indo-Chinese refugee problem. In 1989, a Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees had been adopted in Geneva to address the humanitarian crisis in South-East Asia, in particular, the problem of Vietnamese and Laotian refugees. The Plan was based on the principles of international burden-sharing and took into account the interests of all parties concerned, including the asylum-seekers themselves. He was pleased to report that most of the Vietnamese and Laotian refugees in camps in Thailand had returned to their homelands safely and with dignity. The Government of Thailand wished to express its gratitude to all the parties concerned, particularly UNHCR, donor countries and the Governments of Viet-Nam and the Lao People’s Democratic Republic for their great cooperation and understanding.

52. The implementation of the Comprehensive Plan of Action had been successful because of its balanced design and comprehensiveness. It addressed the refugee issue in all its dimensions, from the root cause of the outflow in the countries of origin to the return of refugees to the countries of origin, without creating an indefinite burden for the international community or residual problems for countries of first asylum.

53. In the case of South-East Asia, the Comprehensive Plan of Action had offered the international community valuable lessons in further developing its strategy of prevention, preparedness and solutions in dealing with future crises. Since many facets of the refugee problem had been linked to the issues of the maintenance of international peace, economic development and humanitarian assistance, it was important for the United Nations to take those issues into consideration in coordinating its activities.

54. It was obvious that the best solution to the refugee problem was the prevention of situations which forced people to flee and, in that regard, Thailand supported the preventive approach of the United Nations. It was extremely important that all parties concerned, including non-governmental organizations, the United Nations system and the entire international community, should work in tandem and continue to provide UNHCR with the necessary resources to overcome the problem of refugees and displaced persons worldwide.

55. As for the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Thailand welcomed the actions taken by UNHCR relating to refugee women, including the strengthening of field implementation of existing guidelines on refugee women, the continuation of UNHCR training programmes for gender issues and the development of the Office's human rights training module targeted at refugee women. However, his delegation wished to propose that greater efforts should be made to establish appropriate arrangements, especially in conflict situations, to prevent human rights abuses and violence and protect refugee women and girls from them. His delegation reiterated its intention to continue working in close cooperation with UNHCR and other international organizations to ensure a peaceful and durable solution to the refugee problem.

56. Ms. ESHMAMBETOVA (Kyrgyzstan) commended the work of UNHCR in providing assistance and protection to refugees, returnees and displaced persons, as well as its prevention strategy to avert new refugee flows. Although it was gratifying that the repatriation of refugees from Afghanistan, Myanmar, Mozambique and Guatemala had been completed, the worsening of the situation in the Great Lakes region of Africa was a matter of concern. She hoped that the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General would be able to help bring about a solution to the conflict and create conditions enabling UNHCR to fulfil its mandate.

57. The UNHCR repatriation programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina had proved to be more complex than expected and, with the approach of winter, thousands of persons were currently unable to return to their homes and continued to be literally homeless. In the case of Afghanistan, the success of the Office's work had been tarnished by the events which had taken place in that country since the end of September. Nevertheless, she commended the staff of UNHCR and other international institutions and non-governmental organizations, who had, despite the complex military situation, remained in Afghanistan and provided valuable humanitarian assistance.

58. The Conference held in Geneva in May 1996, sponsored jointly by UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in order to analyze the problems of refugees, displaced persons, other involuntary migrants and returnees in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), had not only achieved the goals that had been set out, but had also created a Steering Group to supervise the follow-up process for the decisions adopted. That Conference had been preceded by preparatory work of almost two years in which Kyrgyzstan had collaborated with UNHCR, international organizations and other countries. On the eve of the Conference, Kyrgystan had acceded to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol. That accession had later been ratified by Parliament.

59. UNHCR had opened two new offices in Kyrgystan, in addition to the existing ones, to provide assistance in various areas. Kyrgystan highly valued the work of UNHCR in providing assistance to the 15,000 refugees present in the country, who had basically come from Tajikistan, and to monitor the situation in order to prevent the outbreak of hostilities among the different ethnic groups. The high population density in the country, where 83 ethnic groups coexisted, high levels of unemployment, social problems, the shortage of food and water, as well as the proximity of Tajikistan, trafficking in drugs and weapons, and other problems were factors which threatened peace and stability in the region and required the attention of the Governments and international organizations concerned. The level of financing for the UNHCR programme in Kyrgystan, which had amounted to $500,000 in 1996, should be increased.

60. Within the framework of assistance to refugees, Kyrgystan would also welcome the implementation of small-scale income-generating projects. In order to reduce and prevent migrations, joint projects were being carried out in the country with UNHCR and other organizations, and migration centres were being created with cooperation from the Office, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and other organizations to train staff, provide advisory services, set up migration programmes, plan and distribute humanitarian assistance, and to carry out tasks of supervision and early warning.

61. Since it was basically the responsibility of the Government of each country to implement the Geneva Programme of Action which had been adopted at the Conference referred to, Kyrgystan had set up its own national action programme, which was the basic instrument for implementing Government policy in respect of the various categories of immigrants. The success of the work of UNHCR was due to a great extent to its collaboration with other international organizations and with the Governments of countries, which showed what could be achieved by working in tandem.

62. Mr. TSHERING (Bhutan) said that his delegation commended the efforts of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees towards finding a durable solution to the plight of refugees and persons displaced by conflicts and civil strife, whose numbers had reached 24 million. The reduction of that number by 3.5 million in the course of the past year could be attributed to the effective manner with which the High Commissioner had fulfilled his mandate.

63. At that precise moment, the High Commissioner was facing the major challenge of providing for the well-being of several hundred thousand refugees because of the conflicts in the Great Lakes region of Africa. His delegation welcomed the efforts of UNHCR to enhance, through organizational reform, its capacity to respond to emergency situations. The initiative to conduct extensive reviews of country operations was also a step in the right direction.

64. He welcomed the Office’s efforts to strengthen its operations through collaboration with other United Nations agencies such UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA to address the specific problems of women and children in conflict situations, in accordance with the recommendations of the Beijing Platform for Action.

65. In many parts of the world, the refugee problem was worsened not only by the increase in conflicts and civil strife, but also more and more by high population growth and pressure on resources and the environment, poverty and

illegal immigration, which were issues that must be addressed if future refugee situations were to be avoided.

66. As for the reference that had been made to people in camps in Nepal who claimed to be refugees from Bhutan, the situation was quite different from other refugee problems, since all the persons in those camps were ethnic Nepalese whose origin and status were a matter of ongoing dialogue between Bhutan and Nepal.

67. The situation of Bhutan, a small country with a comparatively good ratio of land to its population of 600,000 and relatively better economic opportunities compared to neighbouring regions, had prompted waves of illegal immigration. Bhutan was already host to a large community of people of Nepalese origin, who enjoyed all the privileges of citizenship in its territory, but the country could not continue to absorb an unending tide of illegal immigration.

68. The Bhutanese Government fully appreciated the humanitarian dimension of the problem of the people in the camps, and it therefore welcomed the statement of Nepal, a country with which it shared a long history of friendship, to continue bilateral dialogue in the traditional spirit of goodwill and friendship which existed between the two countries in order to find a speedy, just and durable solution to the problem.

69. Mr. SNOUSSI (Morocco) said that his delegation shared the growing international concern regarding tensions, civil wars and the re-emergence of certain conflicts in various parts of the world which had caused large flows of refugees and displaced persons, and believed that the international community should continue to strive to meet their pressing needs and remedy the situations of extreme emergency in which they found themselves.

70. The tragic situation in Africa, where one third of the refugees on the planet could be found, was of particular concern and necessitated wide-ranging and sustained action by the international community in view of the grave threats to the economy and stability of the host countries. The best way to address the problem was to adopt preventive measures, since the causes of the problem went beyond political tensions to embrace all factors of instability, in particular natural disasters and chronic economic difficulties, which occasioned continuous and increasing population movements.

71. Although humanitarian assistance was helping to alleviate the hardships faced by refugees, it was no substitute for lasting solutions, which UNHCR considered the most appropriate. His Government reiterated its ongoing support for the coordinated and integrated approach of voluntary repatriation and hoped that the solutions which had been achieved through the Office’s praiseworthy efforts in certain regions of Africa, Asia, Central America and Eastern Europe would be brought about in other areas of the world, thereby enabling refugees to return freely to their countries in conditions of safety and dignity.

72. Having carefully considered the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (A/51/12) and the report of the Secretary-General on assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa (A/51/367), his delegation wished to express its disagreement with the paragraphs in both documents, which put at 165,000 the number of Saharans in the camps at Tinduf. Despite having raised that objection on an ongoing basis, his Government had not

yet received a satisfactory response from UNHCR, since the written reply sent to the Permanent Representative of Morocco in Geneva dated 22 August 1996 had not been encouraging. In that letter, UNHCR had indicated that the figure of 165,000 persons had been provided to it by the Algerian authorities in 1982, without mentioning that Morocco had always disputed the figure.

73. The reasons which UNHCR claimed had prevented it from carrying out a census of the Saharans at Tinduf, and the reasons which supposedly prevented their voluntary repatriation, were unjustified. With regard to the first point, the Office had stated that it did not wish to obstruct the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). However, that Mission had been established in April 1991, and it was therefore incomprehensible why a census could not have been carried out prior to that date. Such a course of action would not have violated any provision of the settlement plan, which did not bar UNHCR from applying universally recognized principles of humanitarian law, such as repatriation with the free consent of those involved.

74. In its repatriation programme, UNHCR estimated at 105,000 the number of persons to be repatriated, basing its calculation on the hypothetical figure of 30,000 identification applications, which had been multiplied by the average number of family members (3.5 individuals). That assumption was a biased assessment of the results of the census because it assumed that everyone who had filed identification applications could take part in the referendum; that constituted interference in the mandate of the Identification Commission, the only body authorized to determine who was Saharan and who was not.

75. Regarding free access by UNHCR to Saharans at Tinduf, the Office had indicated in its reply that its officials enjoyed such access and that from mid-1995 to date, representatives of UNHCR and other related bodies had organized some 15 missions. A total of 4,000 Saharans had crossed the border to return to Morocco, despite the threat posed by mines. His delegation welcomed those efforts and hoped that they would continue and that Member States would be kept abreast of developments. In that regard, by proclaiming in his appeal on that subject that "the motherland is merciful and compassionate", King Hassan II had given a solemn guarantee to the refugees that they could return home in conditions of safety and dignity.

76. Mr. KRA (Côte d'Ivoire) said that, in his statement of 31 October 1996 on issues relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons, the High Commissioner had stated that his Office was responsible for a total of 26 million people, over half of whom were refugees. The report of the Secretary-General on assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa (A/51/367) stated that 9,145,400 of that total were Africans. The entire African continent faced a refugee problem.

77. The situation in West Africa was especially worrying to his country. One of the most serious consequences of the conflict which had been afflicting Liberia for over six years was the exodus of several hundred thousand Liberians to neighbouring countries, especially Côte d'Ivoire, which had received approximately 350,000 refugees, not counting those living in the big cities, especially Abidjan, who were not being cared for by UNHCR. In Côte d'Ivoire, refugees had integrated into the local population rather than remaining in

camps; they freely engaged in agricultural work and other income-generating activities.

78. That situation enabled UNHCR and the World Food Programme to foresee the gradual suspension of food distribution to those refugees. However, the presence of Liberian refugees in Côte d'Ivoire had created a problematic situation in which the number of Liberians in many villages was higher than the number of indigenous inhabitants. That situation was even more worrying owing to the repeated incursions of warring Liberian factions into the territory of Côte d'Ivoire, which had resulted in material losses and casualties and made it difficult for the local population and the refugees to coexist.

79. His Government was worried by the cost, especially in financial terms, of protecting and assisting refugees on an indefinite basis, which was why his delegation welcomed the fact that various other delegations had laid emphasis on that issue. His country was grateful for the support of international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and the countries which had supported its efforts; he also trusted that aid would continue to be forthcoming.

80. He noted with satisfaction the Secretary-General's decision to appoint a special envoy for the Great Lakes region, since the confrontations which had flared up some weeks previously in eastern Zaire, where refugee camps were located, gave rise to fear that a humanitarian disaster might occur. His delegation urged the international community to adopt urgent and specific measures to ensure that the situation which had come about in other regions of Africa would not be repeated in Zaire.

81. Mr. AMIR (Yemen) commended the report of UNHCR for the clear explanation of policies and description of work carried out. However, his delegation was surprised at the figure given in the report for the number of refugees in Yemen, and insisted that it should be rectified, since it constituted unfair treatment of Yemen. In 1994, despite its limited resources, economic exhaustion caused by the separatist war and the burden represented by the return of thousands of Yemenis as a result of the Gulf War, Yemen had received more than 60,000 Somali refugees and hundreds of refugees of other nationalities. In cooperation with the UNHCR office in Sana'a, camps had been established in many Yemeni towns, the last of which, Shrukrah, would receive 9,000 Somali refugees and would replace the Al Koud camp, which had been destroyed by arbitrary separatist bombings in mid-1994.

82. The continuation of assistance would depend on the solidarity of the international community, international and regional organizations, and the donor community, however, since the number of refugees was much greater than indicated in the UNHCR report. His delegation therefore called on governmental and non-governmental organizations and all those associated with Yemen to increase their assistance to UNHCR and fulfil their humanitarian responsibility, since the refugee burden particularly affected the poorest and least developed countries.

83. He was concerned about the constant flow of fugitives and infiltrators who arrived illegally in Yemen across the Red Sea. Yemen reserved the right to adopt measures in relation to that problem and urged the international community to provide assistance in containing that infiltration into Yemeni territory.

The lasting solution to the refugee problem was repatriation, resettlement and reintegration of refugees into their countries of origin, and that could be achieved only through an effort by all the parties and the search for politically satisfactory solutions. His delegation endorsed the call to convene a regional conference on the situation of refugees in the Horn of Africa. It also supported the High Commissioner's proposal to convene a regional conference for the countries of Central and South—West Asia.

84. Lastly, he expressed appreciation for the High Commissioner's efforts in the implementation of the Delphi project, with a view to eliminating bureaucracy and allowing more direct involvement of UNHCR personnel in assistance activities. Yemen was prepared to offer all possible assistance to the High Commissioner.

85. Mr. KHAN (Pakistan) said that his delegation agreed with the High Commissioner's assessment that the international environment remained volatile. It expressed satisfaction with the role of UNHCR in Bosnia and Herzegovina after the signing of the Dayton Accord in November 1995. The Bosnian Women's Initiative could go a long way in the rehabilitation of Bosnian women and children; his delegation therefore encouraged the High Commissioner to take a similar initiative in Rwanda.

86. With regard to the problem of Afghan refugees, which was of great concern to Pakistan, his delegation endorsed the view of UNHCR that, despite the situation in Afghanistan, voluntary return remained the preferred durable solution for the 2.1 million Afghan refugees living in Pakistan and Iran. His Government believed that the number of Afghan refugees in Pakistan was approximately 1.4 million, and not 864,000 as indicated in the UNHCR report.

87. Although the international community was no longer providing financial resources to Pakistan to alleviate that burden, Pakistan had continued to provide humanitarian assistance to those refugees at levels which exceeded its capacity as a developing country. That generosity had deeply affected Pakistani society at all levels. Large-scale movements of refugees from rural to urban areas and their participation in economic activities had created massive administrative, economic and social problems.

88. When a new influx of refugees had occurred in 1994, Pakistan, because of its financial difficulties, had been forced to close its borders to refugees from Afghanistan, after having received a further 200,000 refugees. Pakistan felt that UNHCR and other United Nations bodies should give priority to the return of internally displaced persons to their areas of origin and their reintegration and resettlement. However, the will to commit resources and personnel to bring about the repatriation of Afghan refugees appeared to be missing. Pakistan had been pressed to accept local integration, which could not be regarded as a solution to the problem of those refugees.

89. His delegation was concerned about the slashing of assistance, which revealed a preplanned strategy for imposing local integration of the refugees as a solution, and therefore called for an end to that strategy and for a search for solutions to enable the refugees to return home in safety and honour.

90. If assistance for reconstruction, rehabilitation and the repatriation of Afghan refugees was withheld, millions of innocent Afghanis, especially women

and children, would be condemned to displacement and destruction. The prospects for peace should be accompanied by an acceleration and expansion of international assistance and cooperation as the best option for Afghanistan in humanitarian and political terms.

91. The successive waves of refugees from Indian-held Kashmir since 1947 had been assimilated in Azad Kashmir and Pakistan. Thousands of Kashmiris had fled from massive repression and grave violations of human rights by the Indian troops. That situation was becoming a serious humanitarian crisis. Successive Governments of Pakistan had provided assistance to those displaced persons and had provided each family with tents, a monthly subsistence allowance, educational allowances for children, free books, funeral expenses and medical care.

92. Pakistan had been persistently calling for an end to Indian atrocities in Kashmir and for a solution based on the wishes of the Kashmiri people in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council so that the displaced people could go back to their homes in safety and honour.

93. Refugee crises transcended national boundaries; the United Nations should therefore play a more assertive role in preventing and resolving conflicts that caused refugee movements and use its existing mechanisms of preventive diplomacy, peacekeeping, peacemaking and peace-building, to avert humanitarian disasters. His delegation hoped that UNHCR would be able to increase its capacity so as to play its role.

94. Mr. PASHAYEV (Azerbaijan) voiced concern at the continuation of internal conflicts, conflicts between States, acts of aggression, terrorism and environmental disasters which caused new flows of refugees, displaced persons and other forms of involuntary displacement of people and were the source of great suffering. Considerable material resources must be allocated for the elimination of the impact of such phenomena.

95. Referring to the armed aggression of Armenia against Azerbaijan, and the occupation thus far of one fifth of his country’s territory, he said that, currently, it had 1 million refugees and displaced persons, an extremely high figure when compared to the country’s 7.5 million inhabitants. The aggression had caused huge material and human losses, a drop in production, inflation, unemployment and the destruction of infrastructure, which, coupled with the difficulties of an economy in transition, had virtually negated the country’s ability to provide assistance to the persons affected.

96. His delegation wished to express its gratitude for the assistance provided by various United Nations organizations and bodies participating in the programme of emergency humanitarian assistance to Azerbaijan, elaborated following the joint needs assessment mission organized by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and UNHCR in February 1996. In addition to expressing its appreciation, his delegation wished to request that, together with other types of humanitarian assistance, assistance for the provision of services should be increased; without those services, the situation would never cease to be an emergency situation. It also requested donor countries not to reduce their financial assistance to Azerbaijan and to make every effort to ensure that scheduled projects and programmes were implemented.

97. In May 1996, the Regional Conference to Address the Problems of Refugees, Displaced Persons, Other Forms of Involuntary Displacement and Returnees in the Countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and Relevant Neighbouring States had been held under the auspices of UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). During the Conference, consideration had been given to questions relating to the displacement of people following the disintegration of the former Soviet Union and the elaboration of a comprehensive strategy for resolving the problems of refugees and displaced persons and preventing possible refugee flows in the future. The Conference had culminated with the adoption of a Programme of Action.

98. In Baku, a two-day international conference had recently been held on the problems of refugees and displaced persons, sponsored by charitable organizations from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, in which more than 70 representatives of those two countries had participated, together with Turkey and other States. As a country with 1 million refugees and displaced persons, Azerbaijan welcomed the consideration of the problem in all its aspects, including the convening of conferences and the adoption of bilateral or multilateral measures or initiatives designed to resolve the problem and to establish economic, political and social conditions for the repatriation and return of refugees and displaced persons to their places of origin.

99. The UNHCR report (A/51/12) indicated that, in the absence of massive new refugee influxes, unlike previous years, the work of UNHCR in the first quarter of 1996 had been characterized by the consolidation of programmes and mechanisms launched in response to previous emergencies and the elaboration of preventive strategies. His delegation welcomed that positive trend, and the activities of UNHCR to coordinate with other agencies of the United Nations system, in particular the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), with which it had recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding, the World Food Programme (WFP), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and others. Moreover, the consultations held with other institutions, through the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, would make it possible for UNHCR to enhance the effectiveness of its work.

100. In view of the great number of refugees and displaced persons, more vigorous action, including specific political, economic and other measures, should be taken against States which occupied foreign territory. That would help to eliminate the causes of many flows of refugees and displaced persons. Otherwise, the process of resolving the problem and post-conflict voluntary repatriation might be prolonged for years and might eventually deplete the resources which donors allocated for emergency situations.

101. Azerbaijan attached great importance to improving the work of UNHCR and enhancing its effectiveness in implementing projects and programmes. It supported the work of reform and restructuring, known as Project Delphi, being carried out in order to reduce losses to a minimum, in particular, the elaboration of the "change management" mechanism, and believed that the work of the High Commissioner in that regard deserved attention and support.

102. Prince ZEID RA’AD ZEID AL-HUSSEIN (Jordan) said it was ironic that, at a time when enormous technological and social progress was being made, the

international community could not resolve the situation of millions of human beings. It was regrettable that the promises made at the end of the cold war concerning a new world order remained unfulfilled. His delegation therefore hoped that greater importance would be attached to the item relating to a new international humanitarian order and that the number of Member States sponsoring resolutions on it would increase.

103. Jordan appreciated the assistance and support it had received from the Department of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat and welcomed the work carried out by the Independent Bureau for Humanitarian Issues, particularly the activities it would implement on the basis of existing mechanisms, norms and principles in order to respond more effectively to new challenges. Without downgrading the existing conventions and humanitarian infrastructure, the new international humanitarian order would make it possible to address new dimensions of old problems and to consider the grey areas of humanitarian issues that threatened human life and dignity.

104. His delegation was sponsoring a draft resolution on the new international humanitarian order which had no programme budget implications. It was a recapitulation of the provisions of previous resolutions and highlighted the tremendous responsibility of the international community to provide emergency assistance during prolonged periods where lasting solutions could not be found, and the need to build upon principles and norms relating to emergencies and to ensure respect for them.

105. In that context, his delegation noted the importance of taking preventative action in addition to remedial action during humanitarian emergencies and of taking action at the national and regional levels before humanitarian problems became international in scale. He also pointed to the need to strengthen local and regional capacity to develop mechanisms of self-reliance when emergency situations arose and to develop more effective measures to increase international cooperation on the basis of the principle of burden-sharing.

106. Mr. PAULAUSKAS (Lithuania) commended the work carried out by UNHCR and, with reference to the report of the High Commissioner (A/51/12), wished to make some additional remarks on the situation of refugees in Central Europe.

107. In June 1995, the Lithuanian Parliament had adopted a law on the status of refugees in the Republic of Lithuania. In accordance with the provisions of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, that law established a procedure for ensuring refugee status for asylum-seekers, provided legal and social guarantees for the protection of refugees and assigned relevant jurisdiction to institutions responsible for refugee matters. In order to ensure the smooth implementation of the law, the Government had adopted regulations that complemented the laws on emigration and immigration in force since 1992.

108. At the same time, the Government had taken measures to ensure the appropriate accommodation of refugees. A unified system of information on migratory processes was nearly completed. In addition, training programmes had been carried out for the staff of migration authorities and there had been campaigns to promote public awareness of refugee issues.

109. That progress had been achieved thanks to the logistical and financial assistance amounting to more than US$1.5 million provided by the Nordic countries. The UNDP office in Vilnius and the UNHCR Regional Bureau had also contributed to those activities and had helped to coordinate them. By the end of the current year, Lithuania, which was already a party to numerous international legal instruments, would ratify the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees. In the meantime, Lithuania was complying with the principle of not returning persons to territories where they might be persecuted.

110. Because of the illegal trafficking in migrants through Lithuania to Western European and Nordic countries, the Lithuanian Government had taken measures to protect its borders. Nevertheless, Lithuania supported readmission as an instrument for preventing illegal migration. It had therefore concluded readmission agreements and was holding negotiations with a number of countries on the subject. Lithuania invited its neighbours, the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation, to begin negotiations to conclude readmission agreements with Lithuania.

111. Those agreements represented a step forward in the implementation of the Programme of Action adopted by consensus by the States that had participated in the Regional Conference to Address the Problems of Refugees, Displaced Persons, Other Forms of Involuntary Displacement and Returnees in the Countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and Relevant Neighbouring States. Lithuania supported the provisions of the Programme of Action concerning the strengthening of bilateral and multilateral cooperation for the exchange of information on migratory processes and the return of deported persons, and efforts to prevent illegal migration and trafficking in migrants. UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) could contribute to those activities.

112. Ms. CHOWDHURY (India) said that the problem of refugees and displaced persons was a humanitarian phenomenon of global proportions and seriousness, and its causes were complex and varied. Conflict situations accounted for the worst refugee problems and usually accentuated the economic deprivations and poverty afflicting the regions in which they took place.

113. The slight reduction in the number of refugees and the existence of encouraging signs in certain cases was very positive. However, although the Dayton Accords had raised prospects for large-scale repatriation, the situation in the former Yugoslavia was still plagued with difficulties. Voluntary repatriations had taken place in Mozambique, South-East Asia, Myanmar, Ethiopia and Eritrea. Other causes for satisfaction were the success of UNHCR with the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees, the comprehensive approach to the problems of returnees, displaced persons and migrants in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the hopes of a solution to the problem of Guatemalan refugees in Mexico, and other triangular arrangements involving countries of origin and of asylum.

114. However, large numbers of people had recently been uprooted in the Great Lakes region, the Caucasus, West Africa, Iraq and other parts of Asia and Africa. Concerns about the burden of protecting refugees had caused some Governments to deny entry to asylum-seekers or forcibly return thousands of refugees to their countries of origin. Those and other violations of the rights

of refugees and asylum-seekers had strained the international protection regime for refugees.

115. The world refugee situation revealed other disturbing trends. Most of the refugee burden was being borne by developing countries, and the costs were not only economic but also included environmental degradation, social tensions and threats to law and order. Moreover, the willingness and psychological capacity of the developed countries to provide asylum and support were diminishing; that had been reflected in decreased aid and an increase in restrictive practices that circumscribed the right of asylum, particularly if persons happened to be from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds. Consequently, the most urgent task facing the international community was to reaffirm, strengthen and extend the international protection regime.

116. India fully supported the need for global efforts to address the whole range of refugee-related problems, including their security and protection, international solidarity and burden-sharing, supporting the capacity of host States to receive and protect refugees, seeking sustainable solutions to refugee problems within countries of origin in order to prevent new exoduses, developing durable solutions and creating conditions for the repatriation of refugees in a manner that ensured their safety and their effective reintegration.

117. While voluntary repatriation was sometimes the most durable option, local integration and resettlement must not be excluded. Although ethnic and cultural ties might facilitate local integration and regional resettlement, the economic capacity of receiving countries and the necessary international support must be taken into account. In that context, she noted that only about 30,000 refugees had been accepted by developed countries during 1995, as compared with the millions of people who had been offered refuge by developing countries. Resettlement should not be seen merely as a question of whether norms of international protection were respected by first-asylum countries; it should also be seen from the perspective of international burden-sharing.

118. If emergency relief was provided at the expense of long-term development assistance, a vicious circle would be perpetuated, creating conditions for possible conflicts over scarce resources. If durable solutions were found, humanitarian action could become a spur for long-term development. In that context, it was distressing to note that appeals by UNDP and UNHCR to address the huge environmental and other damage in eastern Zaire and parts of Tanzania had gone largely unheeded.

119. While it was true that comprehensive solutions required political, security, humanitarian and development efforts, UNHCR should not enter into political discourse, since that could compromise its non-partisan image, which was precisely the source of its credibility. In the interests of refugees, the credibility of UNHCR should be preserved at all costs.

120. Mr. KORNELIOU (Cyprus) said that his delegation associated itself with previous speakers who had emphasized that the safety of displaced persons must be guaranteed. In that connection, he was very concerned about the situation of refugees in the Great Lakes region, which called for urgent action. Other complex emergency situations included the problems faced by Afghan, Somali and Liberian refugees. As for Bosnia, it was vitally important to implement the

provisions of the Dayton Agreement relating to the return of refugees and displaced persons.

121. At the same time, his delegation noted with great satisfaction that during the past two years more than 3 million refugees had returned to their countries of origin, most of them to Afghanistan, Mozambique and Myanmar. His Government strongly supported the voluntary repatriation of refugees to their countries of origin. Nevertheless, a better understanding of the root causes of such mass exoduses should make it possible to prevent the continuous uprooting of millions of people. Prevention was without doubt the most durable solution, and the international community should therefore intensify its efforts to stem new waves of refugees.

122. It was an inalienable right of refugees and displaced persons to be able to rebuild their lives elsewhere, as well as to be able to return to their homes and recover their property. One of the most tragic aspects of the Cyprus problem was that of internally displaced persons. In 1974, about 200,000 Greek Cypriots and 40,000 Turkish Cypriots had become refugees in their own homeland owing to the Turkish invasion and continued occupation of the northern part of Cyprus. Since that time, not a single refugee had been allowed by the occupation forces to return to his home. A number of resolutions adopted by international bodies, such as the Security Council, the Commission on Human Rights, the Human Rights Committee and, most recently, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, had called, inter alia, for the safe return of refugees to their countries.

123. Ms. MSUYA (United Republic of Tanzania) said that the situation in the Great Lakes region of Africa remained a source of concern for the international community, particularly for her Government. Although at the beginning of 1996 there had been renewed expectations for significant voluntary repatriation, the deterioration of security in Burundi and the recent outbreak of violence in eastern Zaire had not only diminished prospects for voluntary repatriation but had triggered a new wave of asylum-seekers. That situation had led to further human suffering and destruction. The Great Lakes region had had a refugee population of 2 million since 1994.

124. Following the genocide in Rwanda, the refugee population at the border areas of the United Republic of Tanzania had surpassed the local population, making the burden on the local population and the Government unbearable. The large-scale influx of refugees had had a negative impact on the provision of social services to the local population, had damaged the environment and had overburdened the infrastructure. In addition, it had bred widespread social tension, which in the long run could undermine the traditional spirit of hospitality to refugees.

125. Given the disproportionate burden of the refugee problem on certain countries, there was a need for concerted efforts by the international community to address the problem by strengthening international instruments to provide protection for those in need of asylum and by stemming the increasing tendency towards xenophobia, refusal to protect refugees and their forced repatriation.

126. The good work undertaken by UNHCR and other United Nations agencies deserved constant support. Following the conference sponsored by the Organization of African Unity and UNHCR in Bujumbura in February 1996, a

consensus had been reached that there was a need to accelerate voluntary repatriation, since the delay in repatriation had exacerbated tension in the camps and perpetuated the burden on host countries. There was therefore a need to reinforce international solidarity and burden-sharing through resettlement in third countries.

127. Pursuant to the recommendations of the Bujumbura Plan of Action, UNDP and UNHCR had organized a consultative meeting of donor and asylum countries at the beginning of 1996 to discuss the situation regarding assistance to areas adversely affected by large numbers of refugees. A $70.5 million short-term assistance package had been presented to help repair damage to the environment and infrastructure. Since a positive response had not yet been forthcoming, her delegation urged the international community to respond generously to that appeal.

128. In addressing the immediate needs of refugees and asylum countries, it was important to expand efforts to prevent situations that gave rise to refugee flows. Respect for and promotion of human rights and access to social and economic development were equally important. International solidarity with refugees should therefore not be limited to emergencies.

129. In conclusion, her delegation commended UNHCR on its adoption of an integrated approach to the issues of relief, rehabilitation and development on behalf of refugees. UNHCR had also fostered partnership with other United Nations agencies, notably UNDP, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and non-governmental organizations. UNHCR was also to be commended for addressing the special needs of women and children and dealing with environmental damage caused by the large-scale presence of refugees for prolonged periods in some countries.

130. Her delegation endorsed the appeal of UNHCR to the international community to redouble its efforts to address the refugee crisis. In the short term, there was an urgent need for additional financial resources to alleviate human suffering and environmental damage and to find solutions to the political problems that caused population displacements.

131. Mr. JESSEN-PETERSEN (Director of the New York Liaison Office of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), speaking on behalf of the High Commissioner, said that the High Commissioner had had to return to Geneva earlier than originally planned because of the crisis in eastern Zaire. The statements he had heard over the past few days had reflected deep concern at the new calamity unfolding in the Great Lakes region of Africa. That crisis illustrated the many difficulties that existed in providing humanitarian assistance and seeking solutions in the midst of complex and highly charged political situations, as well as the fundamental need to ensure that humanitarian action was accompanied by the political will to solve the bitter conflicts that were the immediate cause of most refugee problems.

132. Such crises had to be addressed in a comprehensive and holistic manner without ignoring their causes. In order to find lasting solutions to crises, UNHCR must continue to build linkages to political and developmental institutions at the international and regional levels while avoiding the politicization of humanitarian action. In order to speed up progress towards a

lasting solution, voluntary repatriation should be combined with local integration and third-country resettlement in host countries. UNHCR had been particularly encouraged by the examples set by Mexico and Guatemala, whose resettlement programmes had enlarged the hitherto limited circle of interested countries.

133. It was also encouraging to note that many delegations had acknowledged the link between rehabilitation and repatriation, on the one hand, and consolidating peace and resuming development, on the other. In order to ensure that that link was maintained, the scope and duration of UNHCR rehabilitation and returnee-protection activities must be better delineated by making the best use of the expertise and resources of its partners, as had recently been done in Mozambique. In addition, international burden-sharing remained essential to help reduce the negative economic and ecological impact of refugee influxes in the developing world and to sustain protection.

134. UNHCR was gratified to note the emphasis placed by several delegations on the important contribution which the Office could make to the strengthening of local institutions, including non-governmental organizations, which was one of the principal objectives of the programme of action adopted at the regional conference on the problem of refugees in the Commonwealth of Independent States, which had been held in Geneva the previous May under the joint auspices of UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The Office was counting on the continued support of all concerned Governments in ensuring the effective follow-up to that initiative and was pleased to hear that a draft resolution was being prepared on the question.

135. UNHCR was also encouraged by the emphasis placed by many delegations on the need to defend the core principles of international protection. Continuous efforts were necessary to develop the legal framework which provided the basis of international protection. He had been particularly encouraged by the statement of Lithuania, which had highlighted that country’s efforts to develop national refugee legislation.

136. UNHCR would continue its efforts to ensure that its programmes and protection activities were fully attuned to the needs of women and children, who made up the majority of the world’s refugees and whose plight had been highlighted by many delegations. The Office also recognized the important role that women could play in assistance programmes as well as in the search for solutions and initiatives aimed at reconciliation.

137. Effective coordination with a broad spectrum of actors was essential to efforts to resolve refugee problems. UNHCR would continue to strengthen its links with UNDP and the World Bank in order to achieve greater predictability in its relationships with its development partners. The Office was currently revising and enhancing its memorandums of understanding with a number of key intergovernmental partners, including UNDP and WHO. It was also firmly committed to working with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to improve coordination and achieve effective follow-up to resolution 1995/56 of the Economic and Social Council. It continued to believe, however, that inter-agency coordination on the ground was the real test and that, in many cases, it could best be achieved through the mechanism of a lead agency.

138. In its continuing efforts to protect and assist the world's refugees and to find lasting solutions to their plight, UNHCR was dependent on the support of Governments, both in countries of asylum and in donor countries. Finally, he wished to thank the Governments represented in the Third Committee for the strong encouragement which they had given to the work of the Office.

139. Mr. MEHMOUD (Sudan), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that his delegation had listened with surprise to the statement made by the representative of Eritrea, in which the latter had claimed that Sudan, which had welcomed Eritrean refugees for more than three decades, was placing obstacles in the way of the voluntary repatriation of those refugees. That claim was totally without basis. On the contrary, his Government had repeatedly invited the Eritrean authorities to conclude a trilateral agreement to begin the voluntary repatriation of Eritrean refugees, particularly since many of them were refusing to return to their country because of fears for their safety, as they had stated in a memorandum which they had transmitted to the representative of UNHCR during his most recent visit to the Sudan, in March 1996.

140. The Government of Eritrea had not responded to the repeated appeals of Sudan. His delegation wished to reiterate its Government's willingness to immediately seek a trilateral agreement for the repatriation of the Eritrean refugees. That would require, however, a willingness on the part of the regime in Eritrea to do so and a willingness to assume its responsibilities to its citizens without discrimination.

141. The contradictions between what Eritrea stated about its willingness to resolve the problem of the Eritrean refugees in Sudan and to honour the agreements already reached in that area, on the one hand, and the policy which it was implementing on the ground, on the other, were demonstrated by the statement made by the leader of that country to the BBC, in which, in reply to a question about the degree of support which it was prepared to give to the Sudanese opposition, he had stated that "the sky was the limit".

142. The reckless policies of the Government of Eritrea were eloquently reflected in the fact that it demanded the payment of exorbitant sums to permit the return of many of the refugees currently living abroad, including in Western countries. In his view, such an attitude could only be described as repugnant "blackmail" and "exploitation of humanitarian problems". With regard to the accusations of the ill-treatment of Eritrean refugees in Sudan, which had been made by the representative of Eritrea, UNHCR was at complete liberty to inspect the refugee camps in the Sudan, which was the most effective way to rebut those false accusations.

143. Mr. CHAUDHARY (Nepal), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that he wished to clarify his delegation's position on the statement made by the representative of Bhutan. The objective of the representative of Nepal in taking the floor was to comment on the two references contained in the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (A/51/12) to the situation of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal, specifically in paragraphs 125 and 128 of the report.

144. He welcomed the assurance given by the representative of Bhutan that his country was prepared to find an early, just and peaceful solution to the problem and stated again that the policy of the Government of Nepal was to do everything

in its power to resolve the problem through joint study and mutual understanding. In that connection, the two countries had already held seven rounds of discussions, which were currently taking place at the level of Ministers for Foreign Affairs and Bhutan's response to the invitation to hold an eighth round was being awaited.

145. The substantive issues raised by the representative of Bhutan were being addressed in the bilateral talks and the tone of the talks had never been marked by nationalism.

146. Mr. TSHERING (Bhutan), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that his statement had also stemmed from the concrete references to Bhutanese refugees in Nepal which were contained in the report of UNHCR. He welcomed the reference made by the delegation of Nepal to the continuation of bilateral talks and said that his country had issued two invitations to hold talks and that he was looking forward to an opportunity to continue to review the question in detail.

147. Mr. CHAUDHARY (Nepal) thanked the representative of Bhutan for his understanding and restated the views which he had expressed in his earlier statement.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.