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Chairman: Mr. Al-Hinai (Oman)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.40 p.m.

Agenda item 114: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions (*continued*) (A/56/3, A/56/12 and Add.1, A/56/128, A/56/333, A/56/335)

1. **Mr. Musambachime** (Zambia) said that he fully associated himself with the statement made by the representative of Mozambique on behalf of the member countries of the Southern African Development Community. His country had been a traditional home for refugees and asylum-seekers escaping from colonialism, racism, occupation, repression and internal strife. Although thousands of refugees had returned home, the protracted conflicts in Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo continued to generate a large number of refugees who sought shelter in Zambia, where over 270,000 refugees were currently living in camps under the supervision of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Over 130,000 other refugees had settled among the local populations in the country's border areas and the fact that they received no humanitarian assistance created additional pressure on the facilities available to the local population, which were already limited.

2. The arrival of civilian refugees had often been accompanied by the entry into the country of armed elements and former combatants, which posed a serious threat to the local population and to the refugees themselves. Light weapons had also infiltrated into the border areas, thereby compounding the severity of the security situation. In collaboration with UNHCR, his Government had disarmed the former combatants and transferred them to a camp far from the areas of possible incursion and the refugee camps. That particular camp was currently hosting a total of 2,278 refugees, whose requests for asylum were being screened by the National Eligibility Committee, in conjunction with UNHCR.

3. He appealed to the donor community to alleviate the impact of the heavy financial burden of the refugees on Zambia by providing UNHCR with the financial and logistical assistance needed to implement its development programmes in the areas hosting refugees. Such programmes should focus, *inter alia*, on health, education, water, sanitation and road

infrastructure in order to mitigate the negative impact on the country's limited infrastructure caused by the long-term hosting of refugees. Zambia had always assisted and protected refugees. He therefore appealed to the donor community to assist in developing its capacity to pursue its role as a refugee host country.

4. **Mr. Moniaga** (Indonesia) said that the work of UNHCR had saved millions of lives and afforded many more people the opportunity to resume their lives in peace and security. In addition, UNHCR was required to undertake operations in increasingly difficult situations throughout the world with a view to alleviating suffering and facilitating political solutions to problems. Together with other humanitarian aid agencies, UNHCR was poised to provide assistance and comfort to millions of Afghan refugees. Indonesia had also extended assistance to those same refugees through close coordination with the Pakistani Red Crescent Society and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

5. Heavy demands, however, were placed on UNHCR in other parts of the world. If the developing countries, which hosted the majority of refugees, were to continue assisting UNHCR they would have to receive substantial international assistance. As a past country of transit for refugees from South-East Asia, Indonesia itself had enjoyed the full support and cooperation of the international community, as a result of which it had been able to meet its moral and legal responsibilities in that regard.

6. As East Timor entered a new chapter in the transition towards independence, UNHCR was continuing its pursuit of repatriation operations for demilitarized soldiers, former civil servants and other refugees to East Timor, whose situation had been helped by the assistance rendered. Indonesia had also disbanded and disarmed militias and was proceeding with the prosecution of those responsible for the deaths of UNHCR staff or for serious human rights violations. The international community should, moreover, support the Indonesian efforts to offer loans to the remaining refugees in West Timor with a view to facilitating the continuum from relief to development.

7. Bearing in mind that the establishment of conditions for repatriation was closely linked with the promotion of sustainable development in East Timor, the international community should provide assistance

in order to ensure that the people of East Timor reaped the benefits of development.

8. Indonesia was currently working with the Office of the Resident Coordinator of the United Nations system for Operational Activities for Development on the arrangements for the return of United Nations agencies to the province of East Nusa Tenggara. He urged the international community to provide the necessary support with a view to enabling the earliest possible repatriation of those refugees who had indicated during the registration process their desire to return. In that connection, he commended the tireless efforts of those individuals on the ground, including the officials of the provincial government of East Nusa Tenggara, aimed at ending the problem, as a result of which a number of refugees had been repatriated.

9. Indonesia would continue to work with other countries by participating in events such as the fifth annual plenary meeting of the inter-governmental Asia-Pacific consultations on refugees, displaced persons and migrants. Moreover, in December 2001 it would host a regional meeting on the issue of illegal immigrants, which involved human smuggling and sometimes resulted in deaths. He was confident that, with the cooperation of all the countries in the region, such dangerous practices could be brought to an end.

10. **Archbishop Martino** (Observer for the Holy See), noting that over 22 million refugees were the direct concern of UNHCR, lamented the tragedy of the Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran, whose numbers, according to the latest UNHCR reports, currently approximated over 3.5 million.

11. The short-term answer to attenuating or solving the world's refugee problem was to provide security and humanitarian assistance to refugees so that they had access to food, water, clothing, shelter and basic health care. He therefore welcomed the basic concept of the Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/930), which emphasized that protection was a dynamic and action-oriented function rather than an abstract concept.

12. The concrete understanding of the requirements for protection would also lead to a better understanding of the reasons which forced people to abandon their homes. The defence and promotion of the human dignity of refugees and those of concern to UNHCR were an important part of UNHCR's programme. Furthermore, the protection of the fundamental rights

of all people, which included the right to life, as well as the rights to marriage, family, migration, asylum and religious freedom, was the essential key to changing the situation of refugees and displaced persons. Short-term aid was necessary but insufficient; the goal should therefore be to build more just and peaceful societies, the lack of which was the main cause of population displacements.

13. Currently, the fastest growing group of "people on the move" consisted of displaced persons, who, trapped by war or persecution within State boundaries, were adrift inside their own countries. Although they needed as much help as refugees, if not more, the world had been slow to acknowledge their painful plight. They did not enjoy the legal protection or occasional political value which refugees were able to claim by virtue of having crossed a border. While having no specific mandate to care for internally displaced persons, UNHCR, together with other concerned parties, had provided assistance when and where possible. He commended such activity on the part of UNHCR and others and encouraged greater consideration of the plight of such human beings, who had the right to humanitarian assistance, even though their homeland was a sovereign territory and such assistance was against the wishes of their Government.

14. He also wished to pay tribute to those States which had been courageous enough to welcome refugees. In some instances, refugees outnumbered the local population, which presented obvious difficulties. Bearing in mind the economic problems caused by the influx of refugees, UNHCR and States were encouraged to provide appropriate compensation to local populations in order to encourage other States to display a similar openness.

15. **Mr. Coutau** (International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) said that the ICRC mandate was to provide protection and assistance to people affected by armed conflict. Since such conflicts were accompanied by the displacement of civilian populations on a massive scale, ICRC devoted a large part of its activities to the problem. It was currently providing assistance to over 5 million displaced persons in various countries, including Afghanistan, one of its most recent areas of activity.

16. Notwithstanding the vulnerability of displaced persons, the difficulties facing host communities should not be underestimated, particularly in the case

of long-standing conflicts, where the distinctions between resident and displaced populations tended to be blurred.

17. International humanitarian law aimed to protect victims of armed conflict, to which end it laid down rules which prohibited the forced displacement of civilians, and also aimed to secure the provision of humanitarian assistance.

18. In order to address the plight of displaced persons, those engaged in emergency operations should, in addition to coordinating their activities, strengthen their links with rehabilitation and development agencies. ICRC sought to achieve that goal within the limits imposed by its mandate, in particular those of preserving its independence, neutrality and impartiality.

19. At the bilateral level, ICRC enjoyed fruitful cooperation with UNHCR. At the multilateral level, ICRC and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies had taken an active part in the coordination process initiated by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the Senior Inter-Agency Network on Internal Displacement with a view to improving the response to the needs of internally displaced persons.

20. At the recent meeting of the Council of Delegates of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, ICRC, the International Federation and 178 National Societies had vigorously reaffirmed their commitment to respond to the needs of forcibly displaced populations, in accordance with their complementary mandates.

21. ICRC concentrated on meeting the immediate needs of recently displaced persons in the same way as it did for other groups of civilians affected by war. Conversely, other organizations such as United Nations agencies and National Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies, were often better equipped to meet the needs of other categories of vulnerable people, such as the long-term displaced.

22. The responsibility to take action to prevent forced displacement extended far beyond humanitarian workers to include all parties involved in armed conflicts, since their compliance with humanitarian law could significantly reduce population movements. The international community could also play a role in that regard by addressing the deep-seated causes of tension,

encouraging political solutions and providing adequate funding to humanitarian organizations and development agencies.

23. During armed conflict, the essence of humanitarian action was to prevent and alleviate the suffering of people not taking part in hostilities, as well as ensure respect for life and dignity, which were the common heritage of all nations and all civilizations.

24. **Mr. Thomson** (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) said that the recent meeting of the Council of Delegates of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement had led to the adoption of a more focused approach to the issue of refugees and internally displaced persons across the Movement. The National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies based their interventions on the vulnerability of the persons concerned in line with their fundamental principle of impartiality, which prohibited any discrimination on grounds of nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions, the sole objective being to relieve the suffering of individuals by giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress. It was essential to respond to the needs of all those affected by displacement disasters by applying a global approach that addressed all stages from prevention to return to reintegration, including the needs of local and host populations, as well as those of other populations such as migrants, in particular migrants in irregular situations.

25. Displacement disasters were long-term phenomena which could not be addressed through short-term means alone. Although emergency interventions were needed in the initial phase, they were often replaced by the need for longer term assistance, not least because, as emergency funding dried up, it was not replaced by other sources of support. The international community therefore needed to review the manner in which resources were made available to meet needs in such long-term situations by acknowledging that emergencies were rooted in failed development processes. Perhaps the forthcoming International Conference on Financing for Development would provide an opportunity for the consideration of such issues, which were all the more relevant now that UNHCR was endeavouring to refocus its activities on its core mandate, as it implied that other activities would no longer attract the same priority as before. That being so, the international community would be required to consider the steps

needed to fill any gaps by means of more strategic, better planned and better coordinated partnerships. In its resolution adopted in November 2001, the Council of Delegates had emphasized the need to coordinate its actions closely with other organizations and clarify the terms of its hitherto satisfactory cooperation with UNHCR, as well as strengthen dialogue and cooperation, particularly with the International Organization for Migration.

26. Although the International Federation and the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies had always been cautious in intervening in debates on behalf of refugees, displaced people or migrants, the growth of the problems faced by the latter had led them to reappraise their role. Accordingly, the resolution adopted by the Council of Delegates emphasized the importance of operational responses and the development of an advocacy platform with common positions for all components of the Movement.

27. The Council of Delegates had acknowledged the absolute right to asylum, as a result of which it had also reflected on its role in regard to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, particularly since 2001 was the fiftieth anniversary of that instrument. Since Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers worked at the community level, it was essential to integrate advocacy into their training with a view to combating discrimination and xenophobia (which were also part of the UNCHR mandate), as well as to include actual or potential beneficiaries in programming and planning. The International Federation was currently assisting National Societies with activities aimed at addressing the special vulnerability experienced in many countries by newly arrived populations.

28. In conclusion, the International Federation was hopeful that Governments would recognize both the obligation and the value of establishing dialogue with their National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

The meeting rose at 4.30 p.m.