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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Forty-first session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 453rd MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 1 October 1990, at 10 a.m.

Temporary Chairman: Mr. DANNENBRING (Federal Republic of Germany)

Chairman: Mr. AZIKIWE (Nigeria)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

OPENING OF THE SESSION (item 1 of the provisional agenda)

1. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN declared open the forty-first session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme. He said that despite the serious crisis in the Gulf, developments in the global political situation gave some grounds for optimism as far as the solution of some refugee problems was concerned. East-West antagonism was coming to an end, a process of democratization was taking place in countries of Eastern Europe, and the settling of ideological conflicts throughout the world was bound to have a positive impact on the dialogue between nations. Namibia had acceded to independence, and UNHCR had secured the repatriation of some 43,000 Namibians. The move towards a peaceful settlement in Cambodia was gaining greater momentum, and it was to be hoped that a political solution would soon permit the Afghan refugees to return to their country.
2. However, there were still some 2.3 million refugees in the developed countries, and about 12.5 million in developing countries. Twenty-nine out of the 41 low-income countries had recently encountered refugee problems, problems which were often the result not only of political factors but also of economic and ecological pressures. The Conference on the Least Developed Countries which had taken place in Paris in September 1990 had alerted the international community to the fact that large-scale population displacements in the poorest countries of the world could become a major security threat. The new exodus caused by the military annexation of a State Member of the United Nations was also a cause for serious concern.
3. The world had changed considerably since the adoption of the Geneva Convention in 1951, and the international community would have to make every effort to adjust to the new realities. It was clear that current trends in refugee movements called for urgent action, from the High Commissioner and from the United Nations system as a whole.
4. During the summer of 1990, he had visited two countries affected by serious refugee problems, namely, Thailand and Pakistan. In Thailand, some 100,000 refugees were receiving UNHCR assistance, and some 300,000 Cambodians were being helped under the United Nations Border Relief Operation (UNBRO). Prospects for the repatriation of the Cambodians seemed recently to have improved; however, where the Vietnamese were concerned, granting of first asylum and implementation of the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) were still encountering difficulties. For example, no solution had yet been found for the 80 per cent of the people in the camp of Phanat Nikhom who had been refused refugee status.
5. Pakistan was the country with the largest refugee population (around 3.3 million). The Pakistani authorities, the United Nations and both intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations were carrying out a variety of activities to assist them. The main difficulty stemmed from the fact that the most desirable solution, that of repatriation, depended on political factors over which international bodies had little influence. After 10 years, the question was being asked whether the international community would be prepared to keep up the same level of aid for a further decade. Fortunately, the special repatriation programme had taken off, and there was hope that an increasing number of Afghan families would be enabled to return to their country.

6. Over the past year the Executive Committee had been forced to concentrate on UNHCR's serious financial problems. At its fortieth session, it had been faced by an unprecedented financial crisis, which had threatened to bring General Programme activities to a complete standstill before the end of 1989. The Committee had accordingly decided to authorize the High Commissioner to carry over from 1989 to 1990 up to \$40 million in unliquidated obligations, thus enabling the Office to continue its programmes, although at a reduced pace. In the event, the 1989 financial year had closed with a deficit of \$38 million, which would have to be absorbed in 1990 and would consequently have to draw on the current year's funds.

7. The Executive Committee had tried hard to avoid the recurrence of such a deficit. As a first step, obligations during the first six months of 1990 had been limited to \$190 million. In addition, a Temporary Working Group had been set up to make a thorough review of the Office's General Programmes and other assistance activities, giving particular attention to budgetary and administrative reforms and to the division of responsibility between UNHCR and others. Between November 1989 and May 1990 the Working Group and its four task forces had met almost without interruption. The exceptional crisis had called for an exceptional engagement: representatives of member States and UNHCR staff alike had shown a remarkable spirit of compromise and co-operation, which had greatly facilitated the work.

8. On the basis of the Working Group's report, the Committee, at its extraordinary session in May of that year, had approved a revised budgetary target of \$378.9 million for General Programmes in 1990, and had identified a number of questions left pending. Some of those questions had been taken up recently by the Sub-Committee on Administration and Finance, but the work had not yet been completed and the Sub-Committee would need to conclude its task as early as possible if it was to be in a position to submit recommendations to the Executive Committee at its forty-second session. Another working group had been established to look into the question of solutions to the refugee problem and the question of protection. That group's task should be to make a further study of the essential aspects of a comprehensive and coherent refugee policy, to make proposals, and to develop strategies.

9. The increasing number of refugees, their concentration in third world countries, and the fact that countries of first asylum and resettlement were neither willing nor able to admit further refugees, were all developments which gave rise to serious problems. More emphasis should be laid on preventive action. In that regard, the High Commissioner's decision to create a UNHCR working group to serve as a focal point for early warning was to be welcomed. When prevention failed, an appeal had to be made to international solidarity by inviting countries of origin as well as donors to join forces in a combined effort. In addition, the United Nations system would have to address itself to the task of creating instruments with a clearly defined function and with the capacity to react quickly. In conclusion, he expressed the hope that the Executive Committee would continue to fulfil its unique function in the international endeavour to mitigate and ultimately to solve refugee problems, wherever they occurred.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS (item 3 of the provisional agenda) (A/AC.96/XLI/L.1)

10. The provisional agenda (A/AC.96/XLI/L.1) was adopted.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS (agenda item 2)

11. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN invited the members of the Committee to nominate candidates for the offices of Rapporteur and Vice-Chairman.

12. Mr. BENEDETTI (Italy) nominated Mr. D'Alotto (Argentina) for the office of Rapporteur.

13. Mr. WALKER (Australia) seconded the nomination.

14. Mr. D'Alotto (Argentina) was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.

15. Mr. MAHIGA (Tanzania) nominated Mr. Ceska (Austria) for the office of Vice-Chairman.

16. Mr. FAN (China) supported the nomination.

17. Mr. Ceska (Austria) was elected Vice-Chairman by acclamation.

18. Mr. SEMICHI (Algeria) pointed out that because of the departure of his predecessor, the Executive Committee would, for the first time, have to elect a chairman who had not held the office of Vice-Chairman at the previous session. Algeria had indicated that that departure should in no way be taken to imply a disengagement on its part, on the contrary, it continued to be willing to discharge the responsibilities assigned to it at the fortieth session.

19. However, unexpected obstacles had prevented Algeria from completing its mandate. The African Group, faced with a dilemma arising from the interpretation of the rules of procedure, had requested the opinion of the United Nations Legal Counsel in New York. Although that opinion had received the full support of the Algerian delegation, it had not been fully complied with, in that the Executive Committee had not come to any decision on the question of principle, namely, whether or not its members were at liberty to nominate the new representative of Algeria to the office left vacant by his predecessor.

20. While deploring that situation, which might well create an unfortunate precedent, Algeria wished to reaffirm its unfailing support for the cause of refugees, its willingness to strive unceasingly to reach solutions to the problems arising in Africa, and its complete endorsement of the activities of the High Commissioner and UNHCR.

21. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN said that officers of the Committee were elected in an individual capacity, and vacant posts had to be filled in conformity with the rules of procedure and past practice. It would be preferable for the Chairman to be elected by acclamation, but if that were not possible, the Committee would proceed to a vote.

22. Mr. VERNOUX (Madagascar), speaking on behalf of the African Group, asked that the meeting be suspended for about 15 minutes.

The meeting was suspended at 11.05 a.m. and resumed at 11.45 a.m.

23. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN requested the co-ordinator of the African Group to inform the Executive Committee of the outcome of the Group's consultations.

24. Mr. VERNOUX (Madagascar), on behalf of the African Group, said that the Group was now ready to take part in the election of the Chairman of the Committee.

25. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN invited members to nominate candidates for the office of Chairman.

26. Mr. KAMEL (Pakistan) nominated Mr. Azikiwe (Nigeria).

27. Mr. MARTIUS (Federal Republic of Germany) supported the nomination.

28. Mr. Azikiwe (Nigeria) was elected Chairman by acclamation.

29. Mr. Azikiwe (Nigeria) took the Chair.

30. The CHAIRMAN thanked members of the Committee for the confidence they had placed in him, and through him, in his country, Nigeria.

31. In order to save time, he suggested that the Committee should consider the question of the participation by government observer delegations in the informal meetings of the Executive Committee and its two Sub-Committees during 1991 (agenda item 3) under agenda item 7 (any other business). If there was no objection, he would take it that the Committee agreed to the proposal.

32. It was so decided.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4)

33. Mr. STOLTENBERG (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) expressed the hope that his working relations with the newly elected Bureau would be as fruitful as with the outgoing Bureau. The support and trust of the Executive Committee were of the highest importance for his Office.

34. Since the Committee's last formal meeting, there had been a number of dramatic developments. The advent of the Middle East crisis had blighted hopes that 1990 might mark the dawn of a new era in international relations. Although the situation was serious, it should not be forgotten that the end of the cold war, the replacement or radical transformation of many authoritarian régimes, and the new central role of the United Nations, nevertheless provided unprecedented opportunities for multilateral co-operation. It was for UNHCR to seize those opportunities and thereby contribute to the building of peace.

35. The crisis in the Middle East had triggered off a new wave of destitute people across international boundaries; the great majority of them were foreign workers desperately trying to get back home. In the minds of many people they were refugees. Bureaucratically, the situation may have posed a dilemma. In fact, the great majority of those in need were migrant workers who could return, and wished to return, to their own country. They were not refugees in need of international protection. However, as he saw it, there could be no dilemma in such a situation, since one did not ask a dying man to decide who had caused the accident; one tried to generate and mobilize the necessary resources to provide help for the victim.

36. That was the reason why, from the early stages of the crisis, he had made personal contacts with representatives of Governments in the region and had offered UNHCR's support and expertise. UNHCR had also held meetings with representatives of relevant organizations in order to establish, on an informal basis, what should be done, and by whom. Throughout, he had remained in close contact with the Office of the United Nations Secretary-General. At a time when the political machinery of the United Nations might finally be fulfilling the function for which it had originally been designed, it was disquieting to note that the parallel humanitarian machinery might prove inadequate. There was clearly an urgent need to take a fresh look at the capacity of the United Nations and of the international community to respond swiftly to today's humanitarian emergencies. UNHCR intended to take an active part in such efforts.

37. Concerning the conflict in Liberia, UNHCR, from the very beginning, had been in contact with Governments and with the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in an attempt to contain the crisis. Unfortunately, those efforts had been unsuccessful, and the conflict had continued to worsen, provoking one of the largest refugee exoduses witnessed anywhere in recent years; more than 500,000 Liberians had sought asylum in neighbouring countries, while many others had been displaced within Liberian territory. After several appeals, UNHCR had now received adequate funds for the coming months. A major humanitarian catastrophe had thus been, if not averted, at least contained, thanks to the generosity of host countries and of the local population, the hard work of some non-governmental organizations, and the intervention - regrettably limited in the initial stages by funding constraints - by UNHCR and other United Nations agencies. Developments in the political and military situation, as well as some recent contributions of funds, might prevent a further deterioration.

38. In order to be able to respond meaningfully and effectively to the realities and challenges of the present, UNHCR had spent a good part of the first nine months of the year rationalizing the structures, procedures and funding basis of its programmes.

39. At the 1990 extraordinary session, he had referred to better use of resources as one of the six pillars of UNHCR's funding strategy. Some major steps had been taken in that direction. UNHCR headquarters had now been given a new structure, leaner at the top, and now had new machinery, in the form of the Senior Management Committee, for taking and following through policy decisions. A 15 per cent reduction in posts was currently taking place, and the number of UNHCR offices either closed or shortly to be closed in various parts of the world was to be brought to 19. Although those measures would in the long run lead to significant economies, their implementation within a very

tight time frame would require additional resources for separation indemnities to staff in cases of termination. He knew he could count on the understanding and support of the Executive Committee in that regard.

40. As part of those changes, more than 130 UNHCR staff members had been reassigned at short notice and had left, or were ready to leave, for their new posts. Although such reassignments had undoubtedly had a disruptive effect on the individuals concerned and on their families, as well as on the overall functioning of the Office, the deferral of the necessary decisions in the past had made them unavoidable. Throughout that difficult operation, UNHCR staff and their elected representatives had shown an exemplary spirit of co-operation and understanding.

41. Other pillars of UNHCR's financing strategy had also been developed. However, initiatives to promote new support from Governments and private donors required further efforts, also investment in time and resources which UNHCR did not at present have. Nevertheless, the limited results which had been achieved so far indicated the importance of continuing efforts.

42. Support from traditional donors had not failed, for which he was deeply appreciative. Thanks mainly to that group of donors, UNHCR had so far received \$406 million, of which \$286.7 million was for General Programmes and \$119.3 million for Special Programmes. That income, covering three quarters of UNHCR's annual requirements, corresponded to slightly less than three quarters of the projected income for 1990 of \$550 million. However, he was concerned that after taking into account anticipated secondary income, UNHCR would still need some \$60 million to fund its General Programmes, and that the response of donors to a number of Special Programmes was still very disappointing.

43. In general, UNHCR's financial problems were above all affecting its more difficult operations, the success of which required not only careful planning but also minimum contingency resources. Food supplies presented a particular problem, but inadequate resources could also result in missed opportunities for solutions, as, for example, repatriation from Malawi to Mozambique and local integration in Somalia. In addition, inadequate funding affected protection and asylum policies, an issue which was taken up in the Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/750). Finally, the precarious financial situation had an impact on education programmes, such as the building of schools and the provision of teaching materials. However acute the financial problems might be now, their impact would be felt even more severely with time, notably in the transport sector.

44. Generally speaking, the uncertain nature of UNHCR's system of funding greatly limited the effectiveness of its activities, by depriving it of the flexibility it needed to act swiftly and effectively in emergencies, as well as of the capability to plan ahead. That matter deserved further thought in the course of the current session.

45. To ensure the best use of the limited resources available, one was obliged to set priorities. Two fundamentally important elements must be taken into account: UNHCR's access to the refugees and conditions of security for refugees and agency personnel, without which the Office was unable to fulfil its protection mandate. Accordingly, the Office would give priority to countries or situations which provided at least basic security conditions.

46. Women with dependant children represented the largest number of beneficiaries of UNHCR programmes, and were thus a priority target for its activities. Accordingly, existing procedures would have to be adapted, and Governments, implementing partners and UNHCR staff made responsive to the needs of refugee women. In the coming year that policy should be given practical effect.

47. Another priority was that UNHCR should be capable not only of dealing with problems when they arose, but also of anticipating them, whence the importance of an early warning system. Such a system, which constituted the first step in the protection function, implied a link between protection and human rights. On that point, he referred participants to the Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/750), which outlined UNHCR's thinking on future directions of refugee policy which might be developed by joint consultations.

48. It was all too often necessary to plan ahead while at the same time grappling with the immediate problems of protection and assistance. Thus, in South-East Asia, the immediate problem was to ensure that refugees arriving in boats had access to first asylum, on which their very survival at times depended. At the same time, it had long been clear that the main characteristics of the outflow were no longer solely that of a refugee phenomenon. On the basis of the Comprehensive Plan of Action, UNHCR was ready to work with the Governments concerned to seek a consensus on the issue of those persons found not to be refugees, in order to protect the interests of those genuinely in need of protection and at the same time provide for the return, in safety and dignity, of the other exiles. Combined efforts, including information campaigns and economic assistance to the communities of origin of the non-refugees, together with strict application of fundamental protection principles, were proving to be increasingly successful in South-East Asia.

49. In Europe, too, Governments were increasingly confronted not with refugee flows in the strict sense, but rather with migratory flows of persons who did not meet the refugee criteria. It was nowadays realized that what was needed was not so much stringent border controls as international co-operation, combining asylum and resettlement with economic aid to countries or regions of origin and the speedy return of those not meeting the refugee definition.

50. In America, the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) stood out as a model of solutions to the problem of uprootedness. That approach, which linked UNHCR's limited activities with the longer and more durable process of development in the region, could serve as a model for other regions. The Conference had given rise to Belize's accession to the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951), the adoption of legislation in Mexico designed to reinforce the status of refugees, and changes in attitude towards voluntary repatriation and to actual repatriation movements. The process set in motion by CIREFCA had led to a fruitful co-operation between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNHCR, co-operation which could also serve as an example to other regions.

51. Unfortunately, the outlook was not so favourable everywhere in the world. Apart from the Gulf crisis, there were other situations which were equally serious, but which commanded less interest. While the new political climate of openness prevailing in some parts of the world was cause for rejoicing,

in others the socio-economic prospects remained bleak. It was known that instability and mass population movements were due chiefly to underdevelopment. Consequently, appropriate development aid could contribute to the prevention and eventual solution of refugee problems. The plight of the developing countries should thus be addressed immediately if the situation of refugees the world over was not to deteriorate. The Horn of Africa was a case in point. In that region, refugees were in an almost hopeless situation for a number of reasons, including conflicts, drought and famine, poverty, underdevelopment, and neglect on the part of the international community. However, there were indeed possibilities for voluntary repatriation. Unfortunately, not only had UNHCR been unable to take advantage of those possibilities due to lack of funds, but there had also been early warning signals of a recurrence of famine in the region. The Office had set up a task force and had contacted other United Nations agencies, Governments, and non-governmental organizations to set up contingency plans.

52. Two of his aims, had been to strengthen the credibility and prestige of UNHCR and to sustain the morale of the staff. Those were both necessary tools for making UNHCR the focal point for the efforts of the international community in favour of 15 million refugees, men, women and children. He had been encouraged by the response. An increasing number of appeals were being made to UNHCR, and its staff were responding to those appeals with their traditional devotion to duty, and, he might say, enthusiasm. He now had three major ambitions. The first was to promote voluntary repatriation, which was the best solution for refugees, ensured the most productive use of resources, and made a concrete contribution to peace and stability. The recent return home of over 43,000 Namibians and over 30,000 Central Americans had shown that it was possible. Favourable conditions had also given momentum to the voluntary return of Chileans. More than 50,000 Afghans had returned to their country under the voluntary repatriation pilot project launched earlier that year, and a further 125,000 had spontaneously returned home from Iran and Pakistan. Political developments in Western Sahara and Cambodia augured well for a global settlement under the auspices of the United Nations. In both situations, the return of refugees was of necessity one of the first priorities, and UNHCR should be prepared to play a key role in that regard.

53. In the case of Cambodia, in the light of the framework agreement now accepted by all parties and endorsed by the Security Council, accelerated steps were being taken to prepare the ground for the safe return of refugees and displaced persons. Those preparations would require substantial advance funding. The Office would have to shoulder heavy responsibilities, and would need to be provided with the resources necessary to discharge them. He had been in contact with the United Nations Secretary-General on the matter.

54. UNHCR was also prepared to contribute - when the time came - to the voluntary return of South Africans and Mozambicans. He intended to seek political and financial support from the international community when the conditions for voluntary repatriation were attained.

55. His second ambition was to secure asylum for refugees in the years to come. A fundamental principle in that respect was protection against return or refoulement of a refugee to situations which would endanger his life or his freedom. However, in order to secure admission and asylum for those in need of protection, there was need to address the larger issue of migratory flows.

Persecution and oppression had to be met by asylum; migratory flows had to be met by preventive economic and development aid. To blur the distinction might be detrimental to the specific interests of refugees, but to ignore the links between the two factors would be unrealistic. Unless the issue of migrations was dealt with forcefully, through economic and development policies going well beyond the traditional patterns of humanitarian assistance to people in need, Governments of both developed and developing countries might find it even more difficult in the years ahead to cope rationally and successfully with mass exoduses. The Office, for its part, might find it impossible to continue properly to identify, protect and assist persons falling within its competence. His third ambition was to have those issues placed on the international agenda. In his view, it was becoming increasingly evident that the issue of refugees and migration at large was bound to be one of the major threats to security, in the broadest sense, in the coming decade. He would take every opportunity to bring those problems to the attention of world leaders, competent organizations, public opinion and the media.

56. If the causes of refugee movements went unchecked, if the poor were to be forced to flee in ever-increasing numbers towards the more prosperous regions, then the threat to the common security of mankind as a whole was a real and immediate one. However, it was not refugees and migrants who posed the threat. They themselves were victims of injustice and inequality. They were a permanent reminder of the need to combat the various forms of political and economic oppression that so gravely afflicted the world. The root causes of refugee movements and uncontrolled migration were to be found in the inequalities and injustices that the international community had itself created or condoned, and it was those phenomena which constituted the threat. The solution was not to put up barriers, or to condemn the poor to continue to endure privations. On the contrary, what was needed was a clear policy of asylum for refugees, and a firm commitment to development aid for the disinherited of the world. If the international community could move on those two fronts, it would lay the foundations for a more secure and peaceful future for generations to come. To follow any other road would be to miss the opportunity offered by the new climate of reconciliation, and would jeopardize whatever opportunity there might be of creating a safer world.

57. Mr. WALKER (Australia) recalled that when the Executive Committee had met for its fortieth session the previous year, the Office had been an organization in difficulty. Accordingly, a Temporary Working Group had been set up to consider the financial crisis besetting UNHCR, and all those involved were giving the crisis the serious attention it deserved. The document on UNHCR's response to the Working Group's recommendations showed that many of the much needed reforms had been put in place or were being contemplated. Although of course much needed to be done, he was heartened by the assurances that UNHCR would continue its efforts.

58. Since the Executive Committee's last session, there had also been a marked improvement in communication, including greater clarity and transparency in presentations. Nevertheless, the financial crisis was still very much in evidence, and in spite of increased contributions by a number of donors, UNHCR's resources were still inadequate. If UNHCR was to compete successfully for the limited international funding available for humanitarian assistance, and attract new funding, it would have to demonstrate that it was an effective organization, capable of responding to today's needs.

59. A second major issue was currently facing UNHCR: the issue addressed by the High Commissioner himself in his statement, and which was the subject of the Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/750). The pressures and inequalities that were to be found in the world today were the cause of increasingly complex movements of people. Many of those persons were refugees, and came directly within the High Commissioner's mandate. Many others had been displaced as a result of warfare, civil strife or natural disasters, either within their own countries or beyond their national borders. In addition, to an ever greater degree ordinary migratory movements were characterized as flight from poverty and hardship and hence as warranting international involvement and resolution.

60. Those were serious and troubling issues for the international community, which went well beyond the scope of any single organization, and called for commitment on the part of all.

61. The mandate of UNHCR was protection and assistance for refugees. The term "refugee" had been given a very broad interpretation. However, the Committee should operate within the framework of the Convention and Protocol, which clearly defined a refugee as a victim of persecution. Persecution itself was a gross violation of human rights, and victims of persecutions needed a very special régime of protection. That was afforded by the Convention and Protocol. In his view, those instruments were as relevant today as they had been 40 years ago. The problem was the tendency to seek a flexibility within those instruments that was not required.

62. UNHCR also played an important role in assisting displaced persons who had crossed the boundaries of their own country. That role had been reaffirmed a number of times over the past 15 years by the United Nations General Assembly, and it was now an important element in the Office's mandate. For both groups, the search for durable solutions was compelling. Until solutions were found, the cost would be enormous, not only in terms of the financial costs involved in the care and maintenance of refugees, but also in terms of the cost in human potential. It was obvious that repatriation in safety remained the pre-eminent solution. It was increasingly recognized that additional international efforts would be required to create the necessary conditions to achieve voluntary repatriation, involving efforts at the political level, targeted development assistance, or other strategies designed to create conditions of security and stability which would facilitate the return of citizens to their country. However, it was not possible to wait until the countries of origin had been transformed socially and economically before taking any action to encourage such returns.

63. As the High Commissioner had pointed out in his statement, there was a further category of migratory flows with which UNHCR would have to come to terms, namely, the interregional migratory flows from the developing to the developed world. Owing to the revolution in global communications, the stark contrast between living standards in the developed and the developing worlds was now apparent to all, and larger numbers of people, aware of that contrast, now desired to move to a country which in their perception offered better opportunities. While it was true that everyone had the right to leave his own country, it was equally true that few Governments would be prepared to abandon their sovereign right to authorize, or not to authorize, entry into and resident within their territory. Those people whose real intent was migration should therefore observe the normal migration procedures. The difficulty

there was to ensure that refugees caught up in such population flows were given all necessary protection. That would not be achieved by widening the scope of protection to embrace everyone, whether refugee or not; indeed to do so would imperil refugees themselves, as the High Commissioner had also pointed out. While concern for the plight of non-refugees was legitimate, it was necessary to distinguish refugees and non-refugees, and to work towards wider international agreement on the need and the logic of returning non-refugees to their country of origin. In dealing with thinly-veiled migratory movements in the form of asylum claims, it should be made clear that the options available would be far fewer than those offered to refugees, and that normal migration processes must be followed. In his view, consideration of those issues and the applicable régime might be an appropriate reference for the working group on protection and durable solutions. He hoped that those questions would be taken up when the group's terms of reference were discussed, and also hoped that UNHCR would continue to provide the working group with the resources it needed.

64. In any discussion of that nature, consideration of the need for international burden-sharing was unavoidable. The asylum countries carried the major burden of refugees and asylum seekers. It was not fair that accidents of geography or history should lead to particular countries bearing an unequal load. The refugee problem concerned the international community as a whole. All first asylum countries, whether developed or developing, should have an assurance that they would not have to harbour large populations unassisted or indefinitely. The practice of asylum was fundamental to international order. It was the essential precondition for fulfilling one of the central obligations of the Convention, that of non-refoulement and protection of refugees.

65. When UNHCR and the international community addressed refugee issues, it must be explicitly recognized that the principles of the Convention were, in the long run workable only if it was also accepted that States had a responsibility towards their own nationals. Countries of origin must also be involved in the search for solutions.

66. To deal with the contemporary mass movements of people, there was a need of comprehensive and workable strategies, which would address all the elements involved. The High Commissioner had focused on that point in his statement, as had the discussions in the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection. His delegation endorsed the conclusions reached by the informal consultations on asylum seekers on those very important issues. It believed that the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA), developed as a result of the International Conference on Indo-Chinese Refugees convened by UNHCR in 1989, was a useful model of a comprehensive approach to the problem of population movements in one region.

67. While the solution contemplated for one particular situation might vary according to the various elements involved, the key to success was that all parties concerned should work together to produce a comprehensive solution. The unparalleled role played by non-governmental organizations, notably in increasing public awareness of refugee issues, must also be taken into account.

68. He welcomed the approach taken by the High Commissioner and his deputy in addressing the financial and philosophical problems confronting UNHCR, and also welcomed his recognition that new strategies were needed to deal with them. He was confident that the focus of effort already established in that regard would be maintained.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.