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

Forty-first session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 460th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,  
on Friday, 5 October 1990, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. AZIKIWE (Nigeria)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF THE PROVISIONAL AGENDA OF THE FORTY-SECOND SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (agenda item 6) (A/AC.96/XLI/CRP.8)

1. The CHAIRMAN said that, if there were no objections, he would take it that the Executive Committee decided to approve the provisional agenda for its forty-second session.

1. The provisional agenda was approved.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS (agenda item 7)

Applications by delegations of observer Governments for participation in informal and sub-committee meetings of the Executive Committee in 1991 (A/AC.96/XLI/CRP.6)

3. The CHAIRMAN said that Guatemala should be added to the list of observer Governments which had applied to participate in informal and sub-committee meetings of the Executive Committee in 1991. If there were no objections, he would take it that the Executive Committee approved the list.

4. It was so decided.

ADOPTION OF THE DRAFT REPORT OF THE FORTY-FIRST SESSION (agenda item 8) (A/AC.96/XLI/CRP.7)

5. Mr. D'ALOTTO (Rapporteur) said that the draft report had been prepared following consultations held in a spirit of compromise and co-operation. He thanked the Friends of the Rapporteurs, the representatives and the secretariat for their valuable assistance, and expressed the hope that the draft report would be adopted by consensus.

Paragraphs 1 to 19

6. Paragraphs 1 to 19 were adopted.

Paragraph 20

7. Mr. WALDEN (Israel) expressed a reservation concerning the words "including a large number of Palestinians" in the seventh section of paragraph 20, and asked that the reservation should be noted in the report.

8. The CHAIRMAN said the request would be dealt with.

9. Mr. LUMBANGA (United Republic of Tanzania) suggested the insertion of a new section after the third section of paragraph 20. The addition, which had been drafted in consultation with the representative of Australia, would read:

"Notes with concern that in certain instances, specific activities by some refugees have been incompatible with national security interests and, in this context, reconfirms its conclusion 48 (XXXVIII) on military or armed attacks on refugee camps and settlements, in particular its paragraph 4 (a);".

10. Paragraph 20 was adopted as amended.

Paragraphs 21 to 25

11. Paragraphs 21 to 25 were adopted.

12. Mr. LE LUONG MINH (Observer for Viet Nam), referring to paragraph 25, proposed the addition of a phrase at the end of the section beginning with the words "Welcomes the decision of the Secretary-General", to read: "and to co-ordinate the provision of humanitarian and economic assistance to the areas to which returns take place".

13. Following a discussion in which the representatives of Australia, Germany, the United Kingdom, Viet Nam, and United States of America and Sweden took part, and during which the representative of the United States of America asked whether the delegation of an observer country could submit amendments to the draft report, the CHAIRMAN suggested that the secretariat should be entrusted with the task of making appropriate changes in paragraph 25 in order to reflect the proposals and suggestions that had been made.

14. It was so decided.

Paragraphs 26 and 27

15. Paragraphs 26 and 27 were adopted.

Paragraph 28

16. Mr. AL SAYED JALAL (Suden) suggested that the English version of the penultimate section of the paragraph should be modified to begin "Invites the host countries to continue to pursue measures ...".

17. Paragraph 28, as amended, was adopted.

Paragraphs 29 and 30

18. Paragraphs 29 and 30 were adopted.

19. The draft report of the forty-first session of the Executive Committee (A/AC.96/XLI/CRP.7) as a whole, as amended, was adopted.

CLOSING OF THE SESSION (agenda item 9)

20. Mr. ABRAM (United States of America) said that the present session of the Executive Committee had been particularly satisfactory since the Committee had approved the 1991 budget, framed useful conclusions on international protection and on administrative and financial matters and adopted a long-overdue document on refugee women.

21. Yet fundamental questions remained. Since the adoption of the 1951 Convention on Refugees, the world had changed radically and mass movements of people had increased exponentially. Only a portion of the new migrants were refugees under the 1951 Convention. Today's migrants could, it seemed, be grouped in three broad categories. The first was composed of refugees in the sense of the 1951 Convention. The second, much larger group was made up of those seeking a better economic life. Those were the people who had settled America. Today, many factors swelled their numbers. On the one hand, emigration barriers were falling in many countries, although the right to leave did not necessarily entail the corresponding right to enter another country. On the other hand, air travel had become very cheap and media networks covered the whole world, informing everyone of distant economic opportunities. Finally, there was the hydraulic pull of affluent societies which needed low-cost labour. In contrast to previous times, countries receiving economic migrants acknowledge obligations to them and provided an expensive social safety net. Those costs limited the numbers of economic immigrants that could be taken in by the rich countries, which were also obliged to cope with illegal immigration. Nevertheless, that had not prevented the United States, for example, from accepting more than 500,000 legal immigrants in 1990, together with 111,000 refugees.

22. The third category of migrants had a special claim to the protection of the international community. It was made up of people who had been forced to emigrate by circumstances beyond their control: war, insurrection, ethnic strife, human rights violations and drought, among others. In that category fell the 500,000-odd third country nationals who had been obliged to flee after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Although few of those migrants were refugees in the strict sense under the 1951 Convention, none could deny their right to international assistance.

23. Those factors highlighted the narrow focus of the 1951 Convention, which, though valuable, did not make it possible to deal with all refugee situations in the present-day world. A new, comprehensive and humanitarian approach must therefore be found to contemporary movements of people. For that purpose there was a need to craft international mechanisms that responded effectively and could inspire the confidence and support of international opinion.

24. The objective, of course, remained that of ending the conditions that drove people from their native lands by reducing conflict and restoring order. But that was not UNHCR's job. That, he thought, might be to seek pragmatic solutions to new problems. The international community's response to those fleeing Iraq was a good example; the response to the problems in

South-East Asia under the Comprehensive Programme of Action was another. While defending the integrity and singularity of the 1951 Convention, UNHCR could help catalyse the international community's thinking on those problems. In that area, the High Commissioner's initiatives were to be commended.

25. There was also a need to ask honestly and quickly what was the role of other organizations and how co-operation among elements of the United Nations could be improved. Countries of origin must address the root causes of migratory flows. Only if all countries co-operated would donor nations be determined to shoulder their share of the burden.

26. In conclusion, he paid tribute to Mr. Stoltenberg, who had steadfastly shouldered a terrible burden during a difficult year.

27. Mr. STOLTENBERG (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) thanked the Bureau, the secretariat and the staff of UNHCR for the smooth running of the session. He welcomed the consensus which had emerged on the UNHCR programme, which could not but fortify UNHCR in performing its task. He was also pleased that, for the first time, representatives from eastern and central Europe had participated in the discussions; such participation augured well for the future of the new Europe, and reflected the universal dimension of UNHCR's activities.

28. However, he recalled that the financial situation remained precarious, and urged all delegations to strive to ensure that the budget targets laid down at the special session in May were reached. He assured the participants that the rationalization of the secretariat's activities would continue. In particular, he would endeavour to reduce the volume of documents at the next session.

29. He had tried to present to the Executive Committee a two-phase strategy. At the May session, he had proposed action based on six major points to buttress UNHCR's finances; he was happy to note that many participants had taken up his proposals - an encouraging sign for the future. At the present session, he had made an effort to outline three major immediate activities - repatriation, asylum and the placing of the issue of refugees and migrations on the agenda of international political forums; the latter point fell in with the message just spelt out by the representative of the United States.

30. In conclusion, he said that the session now ending gave him grounds for hope, which alone could make it possible to achieve the objectives laid down.

31. The CHAIRMAN expressed appreciation that the Committee had completed the task assigned to it, and thanked all those who had contributed to the success of the session. He hoped that the spirit of co-operation displayed by all the participants would be sustained and enhanced in a concern for international solidarity and burden-sharing on the perennial problem of refugees.

32. He looked forward to a close working relationship with the Office of the High Commissioner. He stressed the crucial importance of the High Commissioner's proposal on an appropriate funding mechanism, and expressed the hope that with the good will and generosity of the international community, durable solutions could be found to the world's refugee problems.

33. The CHAIRMAN declared the forty-first session of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees closed.

The meeting rose at 11.55 a.m.