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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 403rd MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 7 October 1986, at 9.30 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. CHARRY-SAMPER (Colombia)

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General debate (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 9.40 a.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4) (continued)

1. Mr. BEESLEY (Canada) expressed his gratitude to the Nansen Committee for awarding the 1986 Nansen Medal to Canada, as a tribute to the people of Canada, the Canadian non-governmental organizations, and successive Canadian governments for their continuing commitment to the protection and welfare of refugees. He wished to renew to the High Commissioner Canada's strong and active support in meeting the challenges that lay ahead.
2. The problems of refugees throughout the world in 1986 provided no basis for comfort or complacency. While there had been no recent major outflows of refugees, there were still more than 11 million refugees in need of protection throughout the world. At the same time, an estimated 70-80 million people had left their countries of origin in search of a better life. The immigration policies of many countries had become more restrictive due to economic constraints and the net result had been some degree of convergence of the immigration and refugee streams, as the refugee or asylum route had become the only opportunity for migration for large numbers of people. In that connection, the energy and initiative shown by the new High Commissioner in seeking durable solutions for refugee problems gave cause for renewed optimism. In particular, the reorganization of UNHCR would provide greater support to its field staff. His delegation was fully supportive of the High Commissioner's undertaking to seek a durable solution to the intractable problem of the Indo-Chinese refugees. It also welcomed the efforts of the High Commissioner to ensure that UNHCR management procedures facilitated cost-effective implementation of UNHCR programmes, especially in view of the projected shortfalls in budgets for both general and special programmes.
3. He reiterated the need for equitable burden-sharing, both of resettlement and financial contributions, and urged all Member States to contribute generously to UNHCR. Further co-operation with other United Nations agencies and with voluntary organizations should also be encouraged. UNHCR had played a catalytic role in promoting the concept of the linkage between refugee aid and development; however, it needed the full support and co-operation of host Governments and international financial and development agencies to achieve that objective. Moreover, his delegation shared the view expressed by the High Commissioner that resettlement should no longer be seen as the responsibility solely of traditional resettlement countries but rather as a responsibility of all concerned countries, including those of the industrial world, in providing comprehensive solutions to refugee problems. Among those problems, the particular needs of refugee women, whose overall situation remained essentially unchanged from year to year, should receive due attention.
4. His delegation pledged its close co-operation with the High Commissioner in the search for durable solutions to the problems of refugees and its support to his devoted staff, particularly those in the field.
5. Mr. SÄVE-SÖDERBERGH (Sweden) said that his Government was following with great attention the development of the reorganization of UNHCR, and especially the reorientation towards the field. He noted with satisfaction that more than 100 States had become parties to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol, but it was regrettable that an agreement had not yet been reached on a set of conclusions condemning military and armed attacks on refugee camps.

6. The escalating destabilization policies of South Africa and its use of armed force and economic pressures against neighbouring countries placed the southern African refugees in a particularly vulnerable position. The High Commissioner had recently initiated action to strengthen the co-ordination and improve the contingency planning of UNHCR programmes in southern Africa, but developments in the area called for increased international preparedness to meet the needs that would most probably arise there. His Government therefore urged the United Nations and its agencies to take a leading role in mobilizing international support and in co-ordinating concrete measures as events might occur.

7. The Afghan refugees continued to be the single largest refugee concentration in the world, and humanitarian assistance would be needed as long as the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan lasted. In Pakistan, as in many other countries of first asylum, the enormous numbers of refugees, especially women and children, constituted a heavy burden for the nation concerned. As the High Commissioner had said in his statement, voluntary repatriation was obviously the only realistic solution. However, in cases where voluntary repatriation was not feasible, the refugees must be given substantial assistance to enable them to settle in social and cultural conditions close to those in their area of origin, and the entire international community had a common responsibility in carrying out that task. The gap that existed between what the international community expected of UNHCR and the actual financial contributions must therefore be filled in a spirit of equitable burden-sharing. However, assistance to refugees should not be seen as isolated from the needs of the local population. The joint UNHCR/World Bank efforts in Pakistan were promising in that regard. The current financial crisis within the United Nations should also lead to a more rational use of the resources available.

8. As in previous years, his Government was co-operating with UNHCR in resettling 1,250 refugees, including disabled persons. It had just decided to allocate another SKr 20 million to the general programmes, which brought its contribution for 1986 to a total of SKr 120 million, an increase of almost 30 per cent over two years.

9. In his country, like all the Nordic countries, the non-governmental organizations provided wide support, especially in organizing fund-raising campaigns. Thus the "Refugee 86" campaign in Sweden and the other Nordic countries had raised the equivalent of \$US 7 million. The phenomenon of irregular movements in Europe had to be countered jointly, for it could easily lead to xenophobia; thus his Government welcomed all initiatives for closer international co-operation. There was a need for concrete actions including the encouragement of voluntary repatriation, support to first-asylum countries and measures to counter irregular movements. Unilateral government actions could only aggravate those problems.

10. No matter how much support the international community contributed to the refugee cause, the real problems could be solved only through elimination of their root causes, i.e. systematic violation of human rights, ongoing armed conflicts and poverty. UNHCR could do its share to alleviate the burden, but it remained for Governments to find the political solutions to the causes of refugees' displacement.

11. Mr. CHIBA (Japan) said that his delegation was deeply concerned about the situation of the over 10 million refugees throughout the world and stressed that UNHCR should be given encouragement and support by the international community in carrying out the tremendous task assigned to it. His Government, for its part, had committed itself to continuing financial contributions to UNHCR programmes and had recently made a new pledge totalling \$US 8.7 million to UNHCR general programmes for assistance to Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran. Furthermore, it was considering an additional pledge totalling \$US 16 million for UNHCR assistance programmes related to Indo-Chinese and African refugees. The High Commissioner's recent visit to Japan had been successful in strengthening mutual understanding and co-operation between his Office and the Government of Japan as well as Japanese non-governmental organizations. The Government shared the High Commissioner's view that existing refugee law and practice were being challenged by the current refugee situation. In that regard, it appreciated the efforts made to find practical solutions through informal consultations and requested that it be kept informed of developments.

12. It had been following very closely the Indo-Chinese refugee situation and was concerned that durable solutions still seemed remote in that region. On the other hand, it was highly appreciative of the efforts made by Thailand and other countries in the region to provide first asylum for so many refugees, and it was prepared to continue extending support to their efforts.

13. His delegation re-emphasized the urgent need to find durable solutions for the Indo-Chinese refugee problem and the fact that the highest priority should be given to voluntary repatriation. It gave full support to UNHCR efforts in that direction.

14. It also fully supported the reorganization exercise of the High Commissioner's Office to strengthen field activities and had expressed its wish to discuss that matter at the next informal meeting of the Executive Committee in January 1987. In that connection, he recalled that the Group of High-Level Intergovernmental Experts was to present to the General Assembly at its forty-first session a report containing a wide range of recommendations to improve the efficiency of the administrative and financial machinery of the United Nations. UNHCR might find it useful to study the report and to reflect on the recommendations in its reorganization exercise.

15. Reorganization should lead to a revitalization of UNHCR refugee assistance activities and an improvement in their level of efficiency. The establishment of the regional bureaux at Headquarters clearly demonstrated UNHCR's reorientation to the field. In addition, reorganization would best serve the mandate of UNHCR by leading to the elaboration of a long-term strategy for international protection, assistance and durable solutions for refugees.

16. Mr. THUYSBAERT (Belgium) said, with reference to the ideas put forward in the statement by the High Commissioner, that it was extremely important to maintain a close dialogue among the countries, to set up a global strategy to find durable solutions for refugee problems and to effect the structural and financial reorganization of UNHCR. The High Commissioner's Office had a leading position among international humanitarian organizations, and his Government wished to assure the new High Commissioner of its complete support for his efforts to carry out his mission. That mission was by no means an

easy one, given the internal organizational problems UNHCR was facing, the complexity of the problems of protection and material assistance and the financial difficulties arising from the current economic situation, but in carrying out the duties entrusted to him, the High Commissioner could rely on the competence of his staff and the goodwill and co-operation of all Governments and of all the non-governmental organizations concerned.

17. His Government welcomed the steps taken by UNHCR to improve its structure and efficiency, thus enabling it to meet its responsibilities both in the field and internally. In that connection, he hoped that the next auditors' report would refer to the improvements requested, for it was necessary to be more and more strict in assessing the problems and the action to be taken as well as in programme implementation and budget and personnel management, since the purpose of UNHCR's existence was to respond effectively to the needs of refugees, with full regard for local requirements.

18. UNHCR's task basically consisted of seeking durable solutions while providing refugees with international protection, and he therefore hoped that the Executive Committee would, as suggested by the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection, make a solemn appeal to those States that had not yet done so to consider acceding to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, so that the refugees that had been admitted to the States parties to those instruments could enjoy the social, economic, legal and administrative advantages needed to make it easier for them to live in their host countries. He also hoped that the Sub-Committee of the Whole would receive the necessary encouragement from the Committee to bring a successful conclusion the work it had begun on attacks on refugee camps, on arbitrary detention and other restrictions on individual freedom, and on irregular movements of refugees.

19. In that connection, his Government was particularly concerned at the flows of so-called refugees, especially from Africa and Asia, into several countries of Europe. Some people were resorting to procedures meant for refugees, solely to avoid refoulement, and were thus succeeding in staying in certain countries and often enjoying material and social aid, abusing in fact the good faith of public and private services. In the interests of the refugees and of the general population alike, it was important to take steps to contain that inflow of illegal immigrants, if possible with the collaboration of UNHCR.

20. His country's Parliament would shortly be examining a bill to establish an administrative department and an administrative court to determine the status of refugees in Belgium. The proposed procedure would replace the system in force in his country since 1952, but would provide an important role for the representative of UNHCR, who had hitherto been competent in matters concerning refugees applying for the benefit of the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol. In that connection, his country's authorities welcomed the manner in which the UNHCR representatives at Brussels had carried out their duties, with complete independence and impartiality, and those authorities, for their part, pledged themselves to maintain close co-operation with UNHCR.

21. Mr. HUSLID (Norway) said that his Government was fully prepared to help, on the basis of fair burden-sharing, in the search for durable solutions and to work, by all the means at its disposal, for peaceful solutions to the conflicts that created refugee flows.

22. Although it was not among the countries most seriously affected, the inflow of asylum-seekers into his country in unprecedented numbers was creating severe problems on the reception side. A large number of those asylum-seekers were in fact economic migrants. Public opinion was unable to distinguish between such migrants and genuine refugees and, moreover, the large number of asylum-seekers constituted a serious drain on resources intended for the reception of quota refugees. Comprehensive solutions to those problems could not be found without attacking the root causes that made people leave their countries in the first place. The reasons were very often poverty and underdevelopment, which the international community must intensify its efforts to eliminate.

23. The refugees coming within the High Commissioner's mandate were often victims of the non-observance by their own Governments of basic human rights, whether of a political, religious or racial kind. Where that was the case, the responsibility lay squarely with the Governments concerned and it was for them to face up to that responsibility.

24. Military or armed attacks on refugee camps were continuing, and it was most disappointing that no agreement had been reached on a set of conclusions on the prohibition of such attacks. His Government also fully shared the High Commissioner's concern at the increasing resort to unjustified detention of refugees and asylum-seekers.

25. Efforts to achieve durable solutions to refugee problems must continue, and it was encouraging to note that the relative share of UNHCR programmes devoted to such solutions was increasing once more. His Government welcomed the increased attention being paid by UNHCR to the protection of refugee women and children.

26. Voluntary repatriation was universally acknowledged as the best durable solution, and his delegation noted the positive developments in Uganda which had enabled a large number of refugees to return home safely. However, in cases where the conditions in the country of origin that had caused people to flee still persisted, the utmost caution was necessary, since there must be no doubt about the voluntary aspect of repatriation.

27. Local and regional integration appeared more and more often to be a viable solution. However, many refugee-receiving countries were faced with serious economic and developmental problems and could not be expected, therefore, to bear the full costs involved in such integration. Refugee assistance should, wherever possible, be shifted from relief to self-sufficiency projects of a more permanent character and, where relevant, be linked to development efforts in host countries. In that context, he was interested in the idea of establishing an internationally-accepted list of "refugee-affected countries" which would be entitled to special treatment in terms of international development assistance, as suggested in document A/AC.96/677 (part I). The High Commissioner should be given instructions to explore that possibility further.

28. In 1985, his Government had decided to make a significant increase in its refugee quota, which would be maintained at a high level. It had also followed the recommendation that States should receive handicapped refugees and, to help solve the problem of the long-stayers in camps in South-East Asia, a commission had recently selected a number of refugees in that category for resettlement.

29. His Government, which was already one of the major donors, had increased its contribution to over \$US 16 million for 1986, or to about 10 per cent more than in 1985. It had also advanced the date of payment of its regular contributions. Some further funds might be made available to UNHCR before the end of the year. As for 1987, contributions would be maintained at a high level. He would, nevertheless, like to take the opportunity to reiterate the need for improved burden-sharing among the donors, so that UNHCR programmes might be fully financed in 1987. In that context, his Government accepted the proposed general and special programmes for the following year (\$US 452 million in all).

30. He commended the High Commissioner for his initiative to restructure the organization with a view to increased field orientation, more efficient management and financial streamlining and savings. He trusted that it would lead to marked improvements in the organization of activities and benefits for the refugees themselves. The High Commissioner could be assured of the full support of his Government in those endeavours.

31. Mr. ANDRES (Switzerland), noting that the Executive Committee was a forum for dialogue, said that his delegation appreciated the fruitful contacts which the High Commissioner and his staff held with the representatives of the member States. The High Commissioner hoped that the joint efforts, carried out in an atmosphere of mutual trust, would act as a melting pot for the forming of a collective will to seek solutions to the refugee problems.

32. No sharp reduction in the number of refugees throughout the world could be hoped for as long as certain situations of conflict, causing mass outflows, had not emerged from the blind alley and entered the road towards a permanent political settlement. The concern shown for the refugees' future and aspirations should constitute leverage for efforts to solve the conflicts of which they were doubly the victims. However, the political context was fortunately not always an obstacle to the implementation of durable solutions and more particularly the refugees' return to their homeland. His delegation noted with satisfaction the priority given to voluntary repatriation in a number of programmes, and the concern for preserving that option whenever possible.

33. Far from limiting itself to the role of a care-giving agency, UNHCR conceived every one of its interventions as a dynamic process aimed at reabsorbing the group of refugees to which it was being applied. The cycle went from emergency aid to the durable solution possible in the particular political context, via the establishment of basic services and measures aimed at promoting the refugees' self-sufficiency, measures which were as far as possible integrated into development programmes.

34. The Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa (ICARA II) had brought out the advisability of integrating self-sufficiency activities into development programmes. His delegation hoped that the end of the drought would make it possible to implement the agreed projects and pointed out, in that connection, that the success of the programme implemented jointly with the World Bank in Pakistan had ushered in an era of increased co-operation with that institution, as also with UNDP, especially in the Horn of Africa.

35. By regularly taking stock of the status of programme implementation and financing, the programme financing service facilitated the task of the authorities of the countries which financed UNHCR activities. The solidarity demonstrated by their contributions was an essential element in the political will to co-operate with UNHCR. In 1986, his country had contributed more than SwF 20 million to UNHCR, SwF 15 million of which had been in cash, SwF 3.2 million in kind and SwF 1.8 million in support operations for the Swiss Disaster Aid Corps. A third of his country's contribution was not linked to any particular activity. The rest was intended chiefly for general programmes and emergency programmes in Africa. In that connection, he stressed the admirable work of the developing countries, which were harbouring countless refugees.

36. His delegation regarded the current reorganization of UNHCR as an extensive reform aimed at adapting structures and working methods to the requirements of UNHCR's duties. The redeployment and training of staff showed that the reform was taking into account the financial constraints within which it was acting. However, it was true that a reorganization of that size could not produce immediately the savings expected of it and might even provisionally involve additional administrative costs. However, it was clear that UNHCR was anxious to learn from its own mistakes.

37. With regard to the protection of refugees, his delegation would like to see the international instruments underpinning protection make more rapid progress towards universal acceptance. States which had lodged geographical reservations when acceding to those instruments might consider withdrawing them.

38. The question of irregular movements of refugees and asylum-seekers in Europe was quite rightly a matter of concern to the High Commissioner. While reaffirming its attachment to the principles of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, his delegation thanked the High Commissioner for the encouragement he had given to co-operation among the States concerned with a view to seeking solutions in keeping with their humanitarian tradition and equitable burden-sharing.

39. In conclusion, he announced that his country's authorities would, before the end of the year, release a substantial contribution to the budget for the current financial year. He expressed his gratitude to the High Commissioner and his staff for the work they were doing, often under difficult conditions, and assured them of the respect and support of the authorities and people of his country.

40. Mr. QIAN Jiadong (China) said that the issues of where the solution to the world-wide refugee problem was to be found, whether it could be solved in the near future and how it was to be solved were of great concern to the whole international community. In recent years, the number of refugees - never less than 10 million - had been tending to increase rather than diminish, with most of the refugees concentrated in developing countries where they depended solely on relief from the international community. Their fate was a tragic one. The armed attacks launched during the previous year by South African troops against the neighbouring countries of southern Africa and by the Vietnamese troops against the refugee camps along the Kampuchean-Thai border had further aggravated the refugees' sufferings.

41. The international community could not be unmoved and impotent vis-à-vis such a state of affairs. It was paying increasing attention to the root causes of the refugee problem, which must be linked with the search for a durable solution, as the High Commissioner had repeatedly and correctly stressed. The refugee problem was the outcome of international political, social and economic contradictions and turbulences. It was often closely connected with conflicts in "hot spots". A fundamental solution to the refugee problem could thus be achieved only when just and reasonable political solutions for those conflicts had been found. His delegation was prepared to work with the international community and UNHCR in continuing efforts to make progress in that direction.

42. UNHCR was facing a long-term phenomenon and would have an arduous role to play for a long time to come. Thanks to the joint efforts of the members of the international community, some progress had recently been achieved in local integration, resettlement and voluntary repatriation, three approaches to resolving the problem which had helped to mitigate the sufferings of refugees. The facts showed that those three options were effective ones and that the members of the international community should co-ordinate their actions in those areas in a spirit of burden-sharing. The developing refugee-receiving countries had already borne heavy burdens by receiving and resettling locally great numbers of refugees. It seemed unrealistic, therefore, to expect them to take on additional burdens. Although their capacity to provide assistance and resettlement opportunities to refugees was not unlimited, the developed countries had, as compared with the developing countries, a potential that was not yet exhausted.

43. In principle, voluntary repatriation was the best solution; regrettably, however, in certain areas such as Indo-China and Afghanistan, conditions were not currently favourable thereto, since the root causes of the mass outflows still existed. Consequently, it was necessary for the international community to strengthen its work on assistance and resettlement in those areas.

44. With the support and co-operation of the international community and UNHCR, his Government had helped to settle 280,000 refugees from Indo-China in the country. The recent economic reform in the country had created favourable conditions for the refugees in their efforts to develop production and improve their standard of living. During the High Commissioner's visit to the country the previous September, he had exchanged views with the Chinese authorities and had visited refugee settlements. That visit was bound to contribute to the enhancement of the friendly co-operation between his country and UNHCR.

45. His country had consistently given its support, to the extent of its capabilities, to the work of UNHCR and would continue to do so in the future. His Government would contribute its donation to the following year's general programmes in the near future.

46. Mr. JAMAL (United Republic of Tanzania) expressed his Government's appreciation to UNHCR, and to the Governments and the voluntary agencies that had participated in joint endeavours to accommodate those who had sought asylum in his country, which would continue to do all that it could - although its capacity was modest - to meet the challenges to come.

47. UNHCR represented the collective political will of the international community. It was sufficient to ask what would happen if UNHCR did not exist to realize the worth of what had been accomplished so far. Many developed countries had underlined their humanitarian concerns by resolving to continue to contribute to the effective functioning of UNHCR. If, therefore, he spoke of difficult days to come, it was because the horizon up ahead gave cause for concern despite very noble and concrete actions. The issue of military attacks on refugee camps was not a purely academic one. A very clear commitment was called for to uphold the integrity of all States and to defend the unprotected and the dispossessed, who were an easy prey to forces such as those representing the evil doctrine of apartheid. The slightest hint of even tacit acceptance of a practice whose objective was the destabilization of a whole society or societies was fraught with immense implications, not least for UNHCR.

48. There had been several references to the need to encourage the will to return. It was important, however, to consider that matter in the context of events such as those currently occurring in southern Africa, without forgetting the unequal demographic distribution characterizing parts of the globe. It was thus important not to overlook either the amazing temerity and confidence with which the South African régime continued to destabilize and demoralize a mass of human beings whose only crime was to have been born in their own country, or the demographic transfrontier overspilling which would certainly occur in some regions of the world.

49. The Chairman of the Executive Committee had rightly spoken of the need to prepare for and prevent emergency situations. If those anxieties were weighed together with the concern to encourage conditions favourable to a voluntary return, it would be seen just how challenging was the task ahead. If national interests alone were taken into account, that would dim the glow and chill the warmth of the flame of hope that UNHCR had kindled for so many over some three decades.

50. Endless debate was inevitable regarding the factors, primary and secondary, historical and other, that caused mass migration of peoples against their will. The mandate of UNHCR had its limits. Those who had endowed UNHCR with its mandate should, however, be generous with resources and persevering in their commitment to humanity beyond narrow national interest, if much more onerous burdens were to be avoided in the not too distant future. Devoting astronomical resources to the acquisition of means of mass destruction while begrudging the resources for the certain amelioration of human misery did not seem to be a rational way of discharging international obligations.

51. He concluded by reiterating the pledge of whole-hearted co-operation by his Government with UNHCR.

52. Mr. BUDIAKI (Zaire) said that the Executive Council of the Republic of Zaire once again pledged its unfailing support to the High Commissioner. Since its accession to independence, his country had always considered itself to be bound by its traditions and by the law to a sacred duty of reception, hospitality and solidarity towards the successive and numerous waves of asylum-seekers. The authorities of his country intended to pursue that liberal tradition of asylum in keeping with the legal instruments in force. Nevertheless, like many other countries of the third world, it did not always

have available means commensurate with its generosity and thus the various assistance programmes financed by UNHCR were an indispensable contribution to the welfare of the refugees.

53. It was none the less true that the contribution represented by international financing was in no way comparable to the considerable burden on the economic and social infrastructures of his country represented by 25,000 refugees. It was thus most deplorable that ICARA II should have had so few concrete results. The adoption of stopgap pressures would only worsen the problem of irregular movements of refugees from the third world, more and more of whom were leaving their countries of first asylum to head for the wealthier countries. He made a solemn appeal to the High Commissioner to undertake, in collaboration with other competent institutions, studies aimed at selecting for reactivation those ICARA II projects which met the ever-current need to strengthen the socio-economic infrastructures of the countries of asylum in Africa.

54. With regard to the situation of refugees in central and eastern Africa, his Government, which was anxious to foster voluntary repatriation, welcomed the return of several thousand refugees to their countries and reaffirmed its will to work towards re-establishing conditions of peace in the region. It respected the provisions of the OAU Convention and was taking all due steps to see that refugees were settled far from the frontiers of their countries of origin so as to avoid any activity harmful to the latter.

55. Since the Executive Committee was preparing to adopt a solemn declaration on accession to and implementation of the essential legal instruments - the 1951 Convention and its additional Protocol - he appealed to all States to treat asylum-seekers and refugees in a humanitarian way with respect for human dignity and without discrimination on any grounds whatsoever. He also appealed to the Committee not to adopt the approach of a restrictive re-interpretation of the most fundamental precepts of refugee law. It should refrain from interpreting the law under the pressure of events, since it was the guardian par excellence of certain fundamental principles, together with the High Commissioner, and if it allowed itself to be used by certain interests, it would create an unfortunate precedent which might have irreparable consequences.

56. Mr. BOUFARES (Tunisia) said that his delegation shared the sense of priorities, the concern for efficiency and the spirit of reform which infused the High Commissioner's statement and noted with satisfaction that the concerns emanating from it were fuelling a new impetus and methods of organization and work which would augur a better future for international action for refugees.

57. His Government valued the international instruments for the protection of refugees, their necessarily universal nature and the strict respect for obligations which emanated from them; a joint effort to bring national legislation and practices into line with the international conventions continued to be necessary in that regard. At a time when international humanitarian law was developing, refugee law should on no account be subjected to restrictive interpretations; it would be extremely regrettable if, because of the economic crisis or current regional conflicts, which in the last instance were only ephemeral events, there should be any kind of calling into question which could be prejudicial to refugee law. The answer which the

Executive Committee could contribute at that time of troubles surely consisted in promoting a specific and distinct law applicable to refugees and in guaranteeing that it was respected by everyone. The Executive Committee and the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection had been and would be useful in contributing to that aim.

58. Referring to the international protection issues on the agenda, his delegation noted once again with much surprise that the Executive Committee was still unable to reach a decision concerning military attacks on refugee camps. It also deeply deplored the fact that the camps of Palestinian refugees were still left to their fate, thus encouraging incursions of a most bloody nature which produced no significant reaction from the international community.

59. In conclusion, it welcomed the importance attached to promoting durable solutions in the context of the programme budgets and the priority given to field activities and stressed its interest in strengthening the link between UNHCR and the Executive Committee so that the High Commissioner could be constantly sure of a hearing, of his effectiveness and of the support of the entire international community for his actions.

60. Mr. EL GHALI BENHIMA (Morocco) said he thought that the 11 million refugees currently to be found in the three most seriously affected continents underscored the extent of the problem facing UNHCR. While the stability and even an occasional reduction in refugees' numbers in some countries were a matter for rejoicing, there were unfortunately new flows in other regions to be deplored.

61. At the informal meetings in January and June 1986, the High Commissioner had warned Governments of the temptation of subjecting humanitarian considerations to the yoke of politics and clinging too closely to outdated legal texts and had invited them to engage in a concerted search for new answers. The Government of Morocco shared the hope that a new approach, supported by joint efforts, would make it possible to find solutions which would take account of the diversity of situations.

62. In his opening statement, the High Commissioner had outlined the new directions and defined the major lines along which UNHCR was to develop its efforts by giving priority to local integration, the transition from emergency assistance to self-sufficiency and the return of refugees to their homes.

63. His Government had noted with relief the clear improvement in UNHCR's financial situation, as a result, in particular, of the response to the repeated appeals by the High Commissioner, and welcomed the fact that international solidarity had made it possible largely to ensure the financing of ongoing programmes and the implementation of emergency activities. The international community must nevertheless continue its efforts and support the salutary improvements initiated by the High Commissioner.

64. His Government continued to recommend more vigorous action to implement durable solutions without, however, underestimating the obstacles encountered due to the lack of political will by certain States; only solutions of that kind would restore their dignity to those concerned and lighten UNHCR's burden, so that it could devote the resources thus released to more pressing activities.

65. Since the early 1980s, the international protection of refugees had been one of UNHCR's essential tasks, since armed attacks on refugee camps and settlements were becoming more frequent. The camps in the countries bordering on South Africa and the camps of the Palestinian refugees had been particularly affected by those attacks, which still continued despite indignant international opinion and their condemnation by the Security Council. His Government deprecated such barbarous actions which were incompatible with humanitarian law or international ethics. The Executive Committee had been trying for the past six years to define the principles to be adopted to deal with that problem, but it could not be said to have been successful. It was to be hoped, however, that a set of rules would secure the necessary consensus in the near future.

66. For the last 10 years, UNHCR had been seized of the problem of the Saharan refugees; his Government had constantly denounced the special nature of the camps which were used as bases for the recruitment, indoctrination and military training of the so-called Polisario movement, in defiance of the international conventions. It continued to declare that the camps in question contained not more than a few thousand persons who genuinely originated from the Western Sahara and who had been displaced against their will for political purposes. To remove any uncertainty on the subject, it had constantly urged that a census be made of those persons so that their country of origin could be determined. The census carried out by Spain in 1974, the results of which had been deposited with the United Nations Secretariat, should serve as a basis for that purpose. In any case, his Government requested UNHCR to protect the persons improperly held in those camps from political and moral exactions and pressures. They would thus have an opportunity to decide freely on the possibility open to them of returning home in safety and dignity, with all the guarantees which UNHCR could require and which his Government was prepared to underwrite. The ongoing negotiations between the authorities of Ethiopia and Somalia should encourage other initiatives along the same lines.

67. Mr. VIDAS (Yugoslavia) said that the refugee situation was not encouraging and that the tasks facing UNHCR were still very complex. However, his Government supported the humanitarian character of UNHCR's work, the developmental approach to its activities and the search for durable solutions. It attached equal importance to voluntary repatriation, local settlement and resettlement in third countries, all solutions which should be applied in accordance with the peculiar situation in each case. In particular, his delegation supported assistance to the development efforts of countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, whose economic problems were aggravated by the serious problem of refugees. It encouraged UNHCR's efforts to promote co-operation and to co-ordinate its activities with other United Nations agencies, and with intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

68. The proposed restructuring of the High Commissioner's Office should strengthen its operational work, since the choice of priorities, rationalization of work, constant evaluation and follow-up and improved staff training seemed to be the only realistic approach to the advancement of programme delivery. His Government was pleased to note that the Office had already implemented, or intended to implement, measures of that kind.

69. As far as international protection was concerned, the new Division of Refugee Law and Doctrine should contribute to the progressive development of

UNHCR activities in that field. The organization of courses, seminars and colloquia on the protection of refugees could contribute to a better understanding of the new dimension of the refugee problem and provide the necessary elements for its definition. His Government welcomed the declaration calling upon States to accede to the international instruments relating to the protection of refugees and attached great importance to the effective implementation of the principles and provisions embodied in those instruments by all the States that had signed them.

70. His delegation regretted that it had not been possible, even after several years of deliberations, to reach a consensus on conclusions concerning the prohibition of military attacks on refugee camps and settlements, and would support all further efforts to arrive at such conclusions. Countries should adhere to their legal obligations regarding the treatment of refugees and particularly with respect to their detention. Yugoslavia, as a transit country, exerted maximum efforts to provide humane treatment to ever-increasing numbers of refugees through health care and social welfare. It had developed a special assistance programme for handicapped and aged refugees.

71. Nevertheless, he wished to stress the urgency of finding final solutions for all refugees and facilitating their resettlement in asylum countries. In conclusion, he reiterated his Government's commitment to the humanitarian principles on which UNHCR's activities were based, and its desire to continue co-operating with the Office in the future.

72. Mr. CANGELARIS (Greece), having expressed his Government's gratitude for the devotion which the High Commissioner and his staff, both at Headquarters and in the field, brought to the task of providing protection and assistance to refugees, said that, during the first nine months of his mandate, the High Commissioner had already shown a remarkable competence and had introduced new ideas both in the sphere of administration and in that of contacts with Member States. The restructuring of headquarters services, the regional bureaux and assistance in the field as well as close and lasting relationships between UNHCR and the Governments concerned, could not but, in the last analysis, be of benefit to the refugees.

73. As emerged from the documents submitted at the session, the situation of the nearly 12 million refugees continued to be extremely alarming and his Government was firmly convinced that UNHCR must be able to count on support from the international community as a whole in order to be in a position to cope with the numerous refugee problems. The increasing numbers of crises and the difficulties, particularly those of a financial nature, facing UNHCR inevitably gave cause for concern.

74. His delegation unreservedly supported the efforts of the High Commissioner to find durable solutions for refugees, whether in the form of voluntary repatriation, local settlement or resettlement in third countries, on the understanding that the criteria used should facilitate the economic and cultural integration of those refugees.

75. In conclusion, he reaffirmed his Government's support for the High Commissioner's objectives and its intention to co-operate with his Office.

76. Mr. ISAKSEN (Denmark) said that millions of people had, in recent years, fled oppression and violence to seek protection under the auspices of UNHCR, but that millions of them were still living in camps because of the lack of political will to address the problems which had forced them to flee and because international procedures for the protection of refugees were not sufficient. The search for durable solutions continued to be the only hope for hundreds of thousands of those refugees, who were still struggling simply to survive.

77. Responsibility for solving the world's refugee problems must be shared by all sovereign States and by all individuals, who had the obligation to do their utmost to defend human rights, and to help provide the refugees with protection and material assistance.

78. In 1985, his Government had contributed \$US 14.3 million to UNHCR, which made it the sixth largest contributor. In 1986, it had already contributed more than \$US 15.7 million and would give favourable consideration to the possibility of making a further extraordinary contribution before the end of the year.

79. His delegation agreed, however, with the High Commissioner that financial contributions alone could not solve the refugee problem. There must also be the political will to address the root causes. Non-governmental organizations played an invaluable role by keeping those problems within the public gaze. Information campaigns had proved extremely helpful. Thus, in Denmark, the "Refugee 86" campaign, organized by the Danish Refugee Council, had met with a very positive response and collected more than \$5 million, confirming his country's commitment to international efforts to solve refugee problems.

80. It should be recalled that, over the past few years, UNHCR had responded admirably to the refugee situation in Africa, by setting up a special emergency programme which had been extended until the end of 1986. The emergency situation having passed, his Government fully agreed with UNHCR's decision to transfer the remaining parts of that programme to the general programmes as from January 1987, that meant that the time had come to shift the emphasis from emergency relief to durable solutions, of which voluntary repatriation remained the preferred option.

81. His Government welcomed UNHCR's proposal to create a list of "refugee-affected countries" that would be entitled to special treatment with regard to development assistance. It was prepared to discuss it further in relation to other ideas to promote regional solutions.

82. As for international protection, the situation continued to give rise to concern with regard to cases of refoulement, the absence of physical safety in transit centres and refugee camps; violence, especially against refugee women; and military and armed attacks on refugee camps. Legal protection was the cornerstone of the High Commissioner's Office and all efforts must be made to protect refugees. His Government shared the Office's concern regarding the unjustified and unduly prolonged detention of refugees and asylum-seekers, and hoped that a consensus could be reached on that subject during the current session or in 1987. It also deplored the fact that agreement had still not been reached on the question of the prevention of military attacks on refugee camps.

83. His Government had participated actively in UNHCR's efforts since the early 1980s to counter the destabilizing effect of the irregular movements of asylum-seekers to Western countries, and to provide appropriate solutions to the problem at The Hague meeting in April 1986 and through the working groups on specific refugee situations. The number of asylum-seekers had more than doubled from 1984 to 1985, and might double once again in 1986. A substantial number of those asylum-seekers had been accepted as refugees, as a result of collective and individual efforts, but the total public funds spent annually on the integration programme equalled more than one third of the High Commissioner's entire budget. That problem had led his Government to submit a bill to Parliament with a view to establishing more orderly conditions for the reception of asylum-seekers, while respecting the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol.

84. Of the three durable solutions, voluntary repatriation was, in principle, the most desirable, and local integration in the country of first asylum generally was much more appropriate than third-country resettlement, which was a solution of last resort. All efforts to deal with the refugee problems on a global scale must be based on that distinction. In his statement to the United Nations General Assembly on 23 September 1986, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of his country had outlined some ideas on the establishment of a mechanism whereby the international community, basing itself on the principles of burden-sharing and solidarity, could take a major step towards solving the world refugee problem. The key elements in that mechanism would be voluntary repatriation, regional integration, increased United Nations presence in the various regions of the world, and allocation of quotas based on a United Nations scheme. The Minister had announced that a more detailed presentation of those ideas would be made in the Third Committee of the General Assembly, in order to stress the global character of refugee problems and the obligations of all the States Members of the United Nations. UNHCR would play an important role in the discussions to come. The informal meeting of the Executive Committee in January 1987 would be able to deal in greater detail with new ideas for the reorganization of the High Commissioner's Office itself, many of which should enable the High Commissioner to assist and protect the world's refugees more effectively.

85. Mr. TETTAMANTI (Argentina) said that, despite a stabilization in the absolute numbers of refugees, the extent of the phenomenon was still vast. The international community had thus the double task of providing assistance to persons who had left their countries and of helping to neutralize the causes of their movements and outflows. In the case of the first task, the international community could only support UNHCR in its activities, but, in the case of the second, it was for Governments to identify those causes and to endeavour, by political means, to mitigate their effects. His delegation had noted from the documentation that UNHCR was increasingly concerned with identifying those causes and inducing awareness of the need to eliminate them - an indispensable move if UNHCR's work was to preserve its temporary nature. Meanwhile, that work could not be interrupted, and his delegation was consequently supporting the efforts being made to finance UNHCR programmes and enable it to continue its humanitarian mission of protection and assistance.

86. The fate of the refugees was one of his Government's major concerns and it had taken steps to facilitate the repatriation and resettlement of Argentine exiles, with co-operation from UNHCR and ICM and from friendly Governments. When persons sought asylum in Argentina, their cases were

studied by a committee which decided on the merits of their application, taking particular account of the provisions of the 1951 Convention regarding which his Government had lifted its previous geographical reservation. While awaiting a decision, asylum-seekers enjoyed all the freedoms and guarantees recognized by the Argentine Constitution.

87. His delegation welcomed UNHCR's reorganization efforts which should enable Governments better to follow the progress of UNHCR's operations, in particular, it supported the strengthening of field activities and the inauguration of an improved system of project assessment which would lead to a more rational use of resources.

88. His delegation was deeply concerned about the serious violations of refugee rights in various parts of the world, as emerged from the UNHCR reports which referred to xenophobic attitudes in certain countries and, most importantly, to military attacks on refugee camps. The Executive Committee should insist on seeking practical and legal ways of putting an end to that alarming phenomenon. Cases of illegal detention and expulsion of asylum-seekers, in violation of all the international instruments in force, had also increased recently. Efforts must be made to speed up the preparation of the international regulations needed to avoid such situations, and the recommendation contained in the report of the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection (A/AC.96/685) merited support.

89. Mr. NAFFAH (Lebanon) said he associated himself with the members of the Executive Committee who had drawn the attention of the international community to the increasingly serious and complex situation of refugees throughout the world. Since its establishment in 1950, UNHCR had passed through considerable difficulties and had become an efficient and necessary institution in the sphere of humanitarian policy. The administrative restructuring of UNHCR and the development of legal and humanitarian concepts was encouraging.

90. Despite the tragic events it was living through, Lebanon would spare no effort to help to settle all the humanitarian problems which were the responsibility of the international community. Traditionally, it had always been a country of refuge for the persecuted and the needy.

91. The award of the 1986 Balzan Prize to the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees was to be welcomed, since the international community owed a profound debt of gratitude to the High Commissioner and his staff for all the sacrifices and efforts they had made.

92. His delegation could not but observe that, where asylum and the protection of refugees were concerned, trends and practices varied from State to State, since national laws differed and were differently applied. The solution to that lack of homogeneity might be found in an increased co-operation of States with UNHCR. Without prejudice to State sovereignty and the subjection of refugees to national laws, the means must be found to prevent armed attacks on refugees and their camps.

93. It was undeniable that the presence of refugees in certain countries, particularly developing countries which were already grappling with untold difficulties, was a burden which they could not shoulder alone. They should be given assistance by other States either directly or through United Nations organs such as UNHCR.

94. Without going into political considerations, his delegation was bound to emphasize that the refugee phenomenon was, in most cases, a product of politics and an expression of injustice. If durable solutions were to be found to serious refugee problems, it was essential that the political process should be conducted with a minimum of justice.

95. His delegation wished to express its deep gratitude to UNHCR for the assistance which it had been continuously providing to his country since 1976, and which was estimated at approximately \$10 million. Nearly one quarter of the population had been forced to move within the country in order to escape the fighting and all the consequences of the tragic events which were tearing Lebanon apart. Conditions were difficult and the merit of the representative of the High Commissioner and his staff in continuing with their humanitarian task was thus all the greater. The people and Government of Lebanon were grateful to UNHCR and hoped that its assistance and presence would continue and expand, for that was a comfort to them in their determination to find peace once more.

96. Monsignor MULLOR (Holy See) said that 1986 had been proclaimed the International Year of Peace but that, despite the measures adopted by the international community, war, conflict, oppression and famine continued to make UNHCR's activities still more timely and urgent.

97. The Holy See attached particular importance to certain aspects of the High Commissioner's task, in particular his activity on behalf of refugee women. The establishment by UNHCR of a working group on refugee women was a decisive step since, by recognizing to the full the key role of women in the home and their special vulnerability as refugees, it would be easier to gain a better appreciation of their social, cultural and economic role in traditional society or in the specific new situation in which their status placed them, and would help to guarantee the success of refugee assistance programmes.

98. The Holy See also attached great importance to the praiseworthy role of the non-governmental organizations, which were endeavouring to sensitize public opinion and to collect funds for refugee assistance programmes. It welcomed the proclaimed wish of UNHCR to intensify co-operation with such organizations, by integrating them to a greater extent into the planning of assistance programmes.

99. Refugees had sometimes been responsible for the failure of some programmes because of their lack of participation or of a "dependence syndrome". It was therefore appropriate to encourage them to participate in the planning and implementation of the programmes for their benefit so as to ensure that the assistance was tailored to the real needs of the beneficiaries.

100. Child refugees merited particular attention, and the promotion and education programmes for them must take into account, in addition to their needs for food, medicine and schooling, their religious and cultural requirements and their need for leisure activities. UNHCR should apply itself to the preparation of education programmes in which concepts such as peace, respect for others, and human rights would offset the notion of revenge which parents in their distress might inculcate in their children. Religious and leisure activity programmes would allow children to develop despite the unfavourable environment of the camps, while cultural programmes would extol the values of the children's country of origin as something to be proud of, with a view to preparing their return.

101. The Holy See was particularly concerned by military attacks on refugee camps and by the detention of refugees. In the absence of a universally accepted agreement on the civilian and military nature of refugee camps, the attacks to which they were frequently subjected and which were to be condemned since they involved an extension of conflicts, would continue to be justified on more or less bogus grounds, and that would almost inevitably lead to the involvement of border countries in their neighbours' political or armed conflicts. His delegation was ready for any kind of collaboration, direct or indirect, with any working group that might be set up to study the problem of the attacks and that of the detention of refugees with prudent care but also with courage and farsightedness. Even action of a regional nature would represent considerable progress.

102. The CHAIRMAN said that, in the absence of precise regulations concerning the right of reply in the UNHCR rules of procedure, he proposed to apply the principles governing that procedure in the General Assembly, and would thus accord a maximum of two rights of reply to each delegation at the end of each meeting. Speaking time would be restricted to five minutes for the first right of reply, and to three minutes for the second. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Executive Committee was in favour of that procedure.

103. It was so decided.

104. Mr. HACENE (Algeria), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that he would make three clarifications in reply to a delegation which had tried to create confusion with regard to the problem of the Saharans. In the first place, the number of Saharan refugees was 165,000. Secondly, his own delegation was anxious to believe in the goodwill proclaimed by the delegation in question, but was awaiting the implementation of Resolution 104 of the Organization of African Unity and all the relevant United Nations General Assembly resolutions before acknowledging itself to be convinced. If, as that delegation asserted the refugee status of the Saharans was doubtful, it might be wondered why the UNHCR Executive Committee had included aid to the Saharans in its general programmes.

105. Mr. EL GHALI BENHIMA (Morocco), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said he was astonished at the statement by the representative of Algeria since the right of reply was normally exercised when a State was mentioned by name. In his own statement, he had not named any State in particular. The delegation of Morocco did not intend to allow itself to be drawn into a political discussion, since the Executive Committee was meeting to discuss humanitarian issues.

106. Mr. HUSAIN (Observer for Pakistan), having paid tribute to the High Commissioner and to the staff of his Office for their devotion and their tireless work, said it was sadly paradoxical that the largest number of refugees was to be found in the developing countries, which were already tormented by immense socio-economic problems and which had much difficulty in improving the fate of their own populations. Those difficulties were considerably aggravated by the influx of refugees, and the role of UNHCR thus continued to be of particular importance. For its part, his own country was host to the largest population of refugees - three million - representing one fifth of the population of Afghanistan. The endless flow of refugees was taxing the country's financial and material resources and, in the

North-West Frontier Province and in Baluchistan, one person in every seven was a refugee. The registered refugees were to be found in 318 camps situated in 17 districts of the North-West Frontier Province, 6 districts in Baluchistan and one district in Punjab. In some cases, the refugee population was more numerous than or nearly as numerous as the local population. Refugees needed not only to eat and to sleep, but also to live in a peaceful environment. The mass inflow placed enormous strains on the administration, the transport network, the infrastructure and the water resources of the host regions, which were also suffering incalculable damage to forests and pasture lands. Medical care and teaching programmes took their toll of the budget of Pakistan, which was trying above all to encourage income-generating activities. Unfortunately, only a very small number of refugees benefited from those activities, and the majority was still supported by the State. In that connection, mention should be made in particular of the success of a UNHCR pilot project, supervised by the World Bank. It was an innovative project, totalling \$20 million, which aimed at creating income-generating jobs for refugees and restoring and developing the economic infrastructures in the refugee reception regions. Refugees were working voluntarily on repairing irrigation networks, restoring and building roads, reforestation and improving the ranges. In view of the very concrete results obtained, his delegation welcomed the fact that it had been decided to extend that project and hoped that the second phase could begin immediately after the first had ended. His Government was grateful to UNHCR and to the donor countries, without which it would not have been fully able to help the refugees as its humanitarian and Islamic tradition required. The social peace established in the refugee reception regions bore witness to the Government's willingness to do everything possible for the refugees, but should not lead to the belief that Pakistan did not have to make sacrifices and did not need to be supported. On the contrary, the donor countries should realize that, although Pakistan was offering a temporary asylum to refugees for moral and humanitarian reasons, it could under no circumstances absorb that population definitively. The delegation of Pakistan hoped that those who wished to help the refugees to return to their country in dignity, would understand that situation and would continue to provide assistance.

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.