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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS
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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 465th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 8 October 1991, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. RIEDMATTEN (Switzerland)

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General debate (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.17 a.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4) (continued)

1. Mr. von HERTZEN (Finland) commended the determination shown by the High Commissioner to find solutions for the root causes of refugee flows and expressed appreciation of the ideas she had put forward in her statement.
2. UNHCR played a pivotal role in implementing the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. His delegation urged those countries that had not yet acceded to the Convention to reconsider their position and also hoped that the new democracies as well as the countries that had regained their independence would soon become parties to the Convention. It was vital that the international community should widen the Convention's geographical applicability and make every effort to enhance respect for its principles.
3. The profound changes of the past four decades had affected the whole United Nations system, including UNHCR, and recent years had seen an increasing number of emergencies, mostly in developing countries, with their aftermath of devastation, famine or displacements of unforeseen magnitude. In the past year, the events in the Persian Gulf and in the Horn of Africa had confronted UNHCR with new challenges, which had been met with skill and professionalism.
4. His Government valued highly the activities of UNHCR and was confident in its ability to answer the challenges of the changing times. Finland had shown its appreciation in concrete terms by continually increasing its share of assistance to UNHCR, and had made contributions of \$US 34.4 million to UNHCR in 1991.
5. The Working Group on Solutions and Protection had carried out valuable work and his delegation wished to pay a special tribute to its Chairman and the Rapporteur. Effective measures needed to be taken to eliminate the underlying causes of refugee flows and his delegation felt that those issues could be further elaborated. Such measures had to be accomplished urgently and comprehensively, with the objective of furthering economic and social development while simultaneously guaranteeing respect for human rights. His delegation welcomed the contribution made by UNHCR at the first Preparatory Committee meeting for the World Conference on Human Rights and hoped that among the many issues to be addressed at the Conference itself would be the question of how to eradicate the root causes of refugee flows.
6. An issue that had received too little attention was the question of internally displaced persons, and his Government considered that the international community should improve the support extended to internally displaced persons and create a framework for their protection.
7. The worldwide consensus as to the need for a stronger involvement by the United Nations system in humanitarian assistance and relief operations was based on the comparative advantage that could be derived from the impartiality and universality of the United Nations system. Governments had clearly indicated the need for an improved performance by the United Nations and of its specialized agencies, and the Nordic countries had contributed to the

ongoing discussion and efforts to find ways in which the United Nations could efficiently meet the challenges in the field of emergency response. His delegation looked forward to the General Assembly's consideration of the reform proposals and commended that made by the High Commissioner for improved UNHCR emergency response. It also stressed the importance of flexible and efficient cooperation with NGOs outside the United Nations system not only at the administrative level, but especially in the field.

8. In view of the clear evidence of increasing misuse of the asylum mechanism, with detrimental consequences for those entitled to refugee status, it was important to clarify the distinction between refugee flows and other population movements. Women and children were the two most vulnerable groups among refugees. His delegation was highly appreciative of UNHCR's decision to make the issue of refugee women one of its priorities, and stressed the importance of implementing the guidelines prepared by UNHCR for the protection of refugee women.

9. It was gratifying to note that the unprecedented increase in the number of refugees had been matched by an enhanced international effort to meet their needs and by growing international burden-sharing which was reflected in the governmental contributions to UNHCR's programmes.

10. In conclusion, he pledged his Government's continuing support for the work of UNHCR.

11. Mr. KHAN (Pakistan) said that in her statement the High Commissioner had comprehensively surveyed refugee situations throughout the world and brought home the plight of human suffering and the problems confronting the international community. Her complex and difficult task was compounded by gradually falling levels of funding, increasing refugee requirements, with as an added irony the fact that most of the countries hosting refugees were third world countries whose economies were scarcely able to absorb the extra burden of refugees.

12. For more than a decade Pakistan had been closely associated with the problem of Afghan refugees, to whom it had provided generous and prompt help, although it would have been impossible for it to do so without the magnanimous moral and material support of the international donor community. However, cuts in aid supplies from the donor community, whatever their cause, be it the so-called "donor fatigue" or the euphoric expectations raised by the Geneva Accords, rendered Pakistan's task more difficult and shifted an additional burden onto its already meagre economic resources.

13. The Executive Committee was aware that UNHCR and the Government of Pakistan had had an exchange of communications on the Afghan refugee situation in Pakistan and that the Deputy High Commissioner had visited Pakistan to assess the requirements of refugee assistance. Pakistan had taken comfort from the fact that its own perceptions, based on its experience of over 12 years, and those of the Deputy High Commissioner, based on his varied contacts with officials and with Afghan refugees themselves, were shared. Pakistan was not unaware of the difficulties faced by UNHCR as a result of the inadequate funding and the rapid and unexpected emergence of new refugee situations. However, while reviewing its aid programme, UNHCR should not lose

sight of its commitments and of reality. He drew the attention of the Executive Committee to the 1988 Agreement between UNHCR and Pakistan, under which UNHCR was committed to continue, as required, to extend its assistance to Afghan refugees pending their voluntary return to their homeland.

14. When Pakistan had extended humanitarian assistance to the Afghan refugees, it had never been in any doubt that the refugees would remain in Pakistan only temporarily, until they were able to return voluntarily to their homeland. In keeping with that unswerving policy, Pakistan had not only drawn up its own plans for repatriation on the eve of the Geneva Accord but had also extended wholehearted support to the United Nations sponsored project for voluntary repatriation. However despite the efforts of the Coordinator for United Nations Humanitarian and Economic Assistance Programmes relating to Afghanistan, there was not yet any evidence of a large-scale movement of Afghan refugees to Afghanistan. Their return would depend on the attainment of a political solution in Afghanistan, which Pakistan sincerely desired and was trying to promote. Pakistan had not only endorsed the recent initiative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations but was striving to mobilize support in favour of his five point plan, through tripartite meetings at Islamabad and Tehran, and through the impending visit of Mujahidin leaders to New York and Moscow. That process would receive a severe setback if UNHCR and the international donor community were to scale down their assistance.

15. In some quarters the view seemed to be emerging that those Afghan refugees who had attained self-sufficiency might be legally integrated into the local population. While the self-sufficiency of Afghan refugees was a moot point, any suggestion concerning their local integration at that critical time would further complicate the situation and delay the process of their voluntary return to Afghanistan. Such a suggestion would also be fraught with serious socio-economic and political consequences for Pakistan. It would, moreover, constitute a major departure from UNHCR's own policies.

16. Turning to the level of burden Pakistan had to shoulder for the maintenance of Afghan refugees, he said that the six or seven commodities initially provided to refugees had been reduced to two, wheat and edible oil, and supplies from donors had never matched requirements. In the case of wheat, the total shortfall, which Pakistan had met out of its national stocks, was 818,000 metric tonnes up to the end of 1991, and in the case of edible oil, a pledge of 12,460 metric tonnes had been indicated by the World Food Programme as against an approved requirement of 24,100 metric tonnes. The decline in the supply of those essential commodities, if not arrested, was bound to affect adversely the health and nutritional standards of the Afghan refugees.

17. Pakistan was also deeply concerned about the future of the large number of Pakistani employees of the Afghan refugee organizations, whose services would have to be dispensed with once those organizations had wound up their activities. In the current year, about one third of the directly recruited employees (2,141 persons) had been retrenched, after being paid compensation. The total compensation package to the retrenched staff, estimated to be \$US 5 million, needed urgent donor attention. UNHCR had asked for a further one-third reduction in 1991, but Pakistan genuinely felt that the request

could not be complied with, as the necessary trimming had already been made during the earlier retrenchment. However, staff strength would be reviewed and reductions made where possible.

18. The damage to the ecology and environment in the areas occupied by Afghan refugees in Pakistan was well known and Pakistan had constantly drawn the attention of the Executive Committee and of other international forums to that phenomenon. UNDP had fielded a mission to assess the extent of the damage, and Pakistan had accepted its report, with some minor modifications. According to the report, the situation in some areas was almost irretrievable, and colossal human effort and financial resources were required to make good the damage. Pakistan looked forward to prompt and generous international help in carrying out that tremendous task.

19. Finally, Pakistan had endorsed and extended unqualified support to all UNHCR plans and programmes. Fully realizing the difficulties faced by UNHCR, it had not only agreed to the reduction in scale of food items, but had met shortages from its own resources. The Committee would agree that Pakistan's support for the efforts to find a durable solution to the Afghan problem entitled it to receive continued international assistance for Afghan refugees as long as they were present on its soil. Any other measures, such as reducing relief assistance would not yield the desired results. Until a conducive environment had been created in Afghanistan, the refugees had no option but to stay in Pakistan.

20. Mr. GARBA (Nigeria) said that the fortieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees offered a suitable opportunity for the international community to reflect on the achievements and shortcomings of UNHCR, the only organization in the United Nations system with universal competence to protect and assist refugees, and to search for and find durable solutions to their plight. UNHCR operated within the parameters set for it by the international community. In that respect it mirrored the interrelationships among the community's members, a fact that in part accounted for the renewed calls voiced in the international arena for the rejuvenation of the United Nations system. While the efforts to secure a more efficient machinery capable of responding promptly and effectively to the expectations of the world community were welcome, it was perhaps true that those expectations regarding protection and assistance to refugees had not received satisfaction. However, it had to be recognized that not only UNHCR, but the entire United Nations system, could only operate within the parameters laid down by the international community.

21. The expectations of world public opinion with regard to UNHCR went far beyond the scope of its mandate, and the time had perhaps come for the international community seriously to address that huge gap. Resorting to legal arguments that sought to restrict the activities of organizations such as UNHCR could only dampen the rising enthusiasm for an enhanced United Nations role in global affairs, and disappoint the expectation that multilateral agencies would respond to issues and problems requiring international cooperative action.

22. UNHCR should perhaps seek to develop a higher profile, following the example of organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, which were perceived by millions throughout the world as action-oriented. After 40 years of existence, UNHCR should also cultivate such a positive image, as a means of freeing itself from the vicious circle in which it had been trapped in recent years: on the one hand, a lack of adequate resources had prevented it from taking effective measures in emergency situations, and on the other, those very resources had been denied because of its alleged lack of effectiveness in responding to refugee emergencies.

23. One of the reasons for the exceptional effectiveness of organizations such as ICRC was their cooperation with national counterparts, an approach that was also currently being adopted by the secretariat of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. UNHCR could vigorously promote the establishment of national commissions for refugees, where they did not exist, and make more extensive use of those already in place, especially where it was unable to take prompt action, either for lack of mandate or of adequate resources. In addition to the inter-agency working group proposed in the Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/777), national commissions could provide early warning of developing emergencies, an area in which UNHCR had hitherto been restricted because of its political sensitivity. The process of establishing a national commission in Nigeria had started after the promulgation, in 1989, of a National Decree on Refugees. That legislation was intended to complement the 1951 United Nations Convention and the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. Nigeria's commitment to the promotion of refugee law had been demonstrated by its hosting of a seminar organized by UNHCR on national refugee law, attended by both governmental and non-governmental representatives. Among the conclusions of the seminar had been the recognition that although determination of refugee status was a legal matter, the process concerned human beings in circumstances of great distress. That point should be borne in mind when calls were made for expedited status determination procedures.

24. Recent developments in southern Africa gave reason for cautious optimism regarding the return and reintegration of thousands of South African refugees and exiles. He hoped that the repatriation operation would be implemented with the same level of efficiency and enthusiasm as the Namibia programme.

25. One of the few exceptions to the overall improvement on protection-related matters over the previous year, described in the Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/777), was the situation in the Horn of Africa. He hoped that the international community would play its proper role by providing much-needed assistance, in a spirit of international solidarity and burden-sharing.

26. Lastly, the international community was in agreement that the 1951 Convention was a most valuable instrument in refugee protection, constituting as it did the most comprehensive codification of the rights of refugees. It had to be recognized, however, that it had addressed a particular situation in a particular context 40 years ago. His delegation would like the Convention to reflect contemporary refugee reality, and hoped

that in the not too distant future the global approach to issues that was gaining currency would have a positive impact on how the international community viewed and reviewed the Convention.

27. Mr. GUELL BOGRAN (Honduras), speaking as the outgoing Chairman of the CIREFCA Follow-up Committee, recalled that his Committee had been set up in May 1989 by the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA). It was composed of representatives of the Governments of Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua, and was supported by the Office of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, UNHCR and the United Nations Development Programme. The Committee was responsible for evaluating the implementation of the CIREFCA Plan of Action, receiving reports from the National Committees and mobilizing political and financial support for the programmes being implemented. CIREFCA had been convened to deal with the refugee situation which had built up during the 1980s. There had been over 250,000 officially recognized refugees from Central America in other Latin American countries and many more without refugee status or displaced within their own countries.

28. The political situation had begun to change dramatically after the successful implementation of the "Procedure to Establish a Firm and Lasting Peace in Central America" signed by the Central American Presidents in August 1987. Over the preceding 12 months, the war in Nicaragua had ended and peace negotiations in El Salvador and Guatemala were proceeding in a promising manner. As a result, successes had been achieved not only in the resettlement of returnees and displaced persons but also in respect of the international protection of refugees in the region. Belize and Mexico had amended their domestic legislation to introduce the term "refugee" and establish mechanisms to determine refugee status and the rights and duties of persons recognized as such. The Refugee Act in Belize had implemented the recent ratification by that country of the 1951 Convention, and the 1967 Protocol and the 1990 amendments to the Mexican General Population Act were not only important legal instruments but also contained a broader definition of the term refugee than that established in the 1951 Convention. In Costa Rica, the 1990 Emergency Government (Régimen de excepción) gave over 30,000 refugees and externally displaced persons the right of legal abode in the country and assistance with their local integration.

29. As a result of the progress made, CIREFCA had moved to a state of affairs in which the majority of its beneficiaries were currently returnees and displaced persons or local communities. Over 150,000 Nicaraguans, Salvadorians and Guatemalans had decided to return to their respective lands of origin in the changed social and political context, and voluntary repatriation had been supplemented by local integration in their countries of asylum for those refugees who did not opt to return home. Belize, which had had the highest proportion of refugees and displaced persons in relation to its own population, had taken steps to legalize the stay and promote the local integration of such persons. However, the Government required further assistance with the funding of priority projects. The closing down of refugee camps in Costa Rica was proof of that country's will to integrate locally some 15,000 refugees who had opted to stay in Costa Rica. The international community had responded by financing six out of the nine projects submitted by Costa Rica to the First International Meeting of the CIREFCA Follow-up Committee, held in New York in June 1990.

30. Some 26,000 Salvadorian refugees from Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama had returned home in the preceding year. Resettlement was being promoted by two of the four projects submitted by El Salvador to the meeting of the Follow-up Committee and which were being implemented by non-governmental organizations and funded by the European Committee and Sweden. The Government was currently studying ways and means to speed up the process of providing documentation for returnees. Finally, in anticipation of a peace agreement between the Government and the FMLN, the Ministry of Planning was preparing a National Reconstruction Plan which aimed at the total integration of the uprooted populations into national life.

31. The situation of 45,000 Guatemalans in Mexico continued to be the largest unresolved problem. However, the growing desire of the group to return home quickly was a sign of optimism as was a series of recent changes in the political and institutional structure of Guatemala. Mention should be made of the Comprehensive Peace Plan proposed by the President of Guatemala and the Agenda for the Peace Dialogue in which the question of Guatemalan refugees was a priority item. Another step had been the establishment of a National Peace Fund to assist people affected by the armed conflict and to find land on which to settle them.

32. Honduras still had some 1,700 Salvadorian refugees under UNHCR protection. Furthermore, several hundreds of refugees had opted to stay in the country in addition to tens of thousands of Central Americans who had settled down all over the country. The irregular foreign population was estimated at about 50,000 while large numbers of the local population had been displaced as a result of tension in the frontier regions. In conformity with the CIREFCA Plan of Action, Honduras had submitted projects to re-establish economic, social and environmental balance in traditionally depressed areas which had become overpopulated owing to the massive inflow of refugees.

33. In Mexico, self-sufficiency programmes in the States of Campeche and Quintana Roo had made sufficient progress for discussions to be taking place about the total transfer of responsibilities which had so far been discharged by Mexican institutions with international help. The self-sufficiency policy had encouraged activities to improve living conditions for those who had opted to remain in Chiapas.

34. Over 70,000 Nicaraguans had returned home through programmes under CIREFCA and the International Support and Verification Commission (CIAV). The Government of Nicaragua, as part of its global reconciliation policy, had established a National Reconciliation Programme, updated the CIREFCA projects submitted in New York, and, in collaboration with UNHCR and UNDP, had begun to execute "quick intervention" projects, funded by Finland, Norway, Sweden, the European Community and the United States, which established the necessary linkage between emergency assistance and longer-term development projects.

35. With the evolution of the situation in Central America, CIREFCA faced new challenges which required adequate solutions integrated with national development policies. Accordingly, the Governments in the region had decided to hold a Second International Meeting of the CIREFCA Follow-up Committee in El Salvador in March 1992, in order to submit national strategies to the international community. The widespread repatriation movement had produced

categories of persons who required greater attention; for example, ex-combatants needed programmes to facilitate their economic, political and social reintegration. The Follow-up Committee considered it essential to extend in time CIREFCA activities: CIREFCA was part of the Esquipulas II process and until the refugee problem had been solved, it was not possible to complete the process of re-establishing normal conditions in the region. Furthermore, the extension of the CIREFCA process would enable priority areas in its Plan of Action to be tackled such as the situation of women, development of children, preservation of the ethnic and cultural values of beneficiary groups and protection of the environment in affected areas. The Follow-up Committee reiterated its commitment to the objectives of the Plan of Action, and reaffirmed the importance of the document on Principles and Criteria for the Protection and Assistance of Central American Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons in Latin America. On behalf of the Committee he wished to thank UNHCR, supported by UNDP and the international community, for its efforts to make CIREFCA an example of an integrated solution to the problem of uprooted populations, a catalyser for regional integration and a contributor to the pacification and development of Central America.

36. In conclusion, he announced his Government's decision to subscribe to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol during the proposed forthcoming visit of the High Commissioner to Honduras.

37. Chief OLUSOLA (Nigeria), speaking as Chairman of the Organization of African Unity Commission of 15 on Refugees, said that the Commission had brought to the attention of African leaders gathered in Abuja, Nigeria, in June 1991, the deteriorating condition of African refugees. The Council of Ministers in its resolutions, later endorsed by the Summit of the Heads of States and Governments had appealed to Member States of OAU to comply with provisions of the 1969 OAU Convention relating to the status of refugees in Africa, appealed to the donor community to increase its resources to meet the assessed needs of refugees and displaced persons, had appealed to OAU member States to promote conditions conducive to the voluntary repatriation of refugees and had requested the African Group in Geneva and New York to seek to revive the political will of the international community for increased assistance to refugees and displaced persons.

38. Early on in her term of office as High Commissioner, Mrs. Ogata had attended the June meeting of African leaders and subsequently toured refugee settlements in Ethiopia. Such visits conveyed better than reports or films the discomfort, thirst, disease and exhaustion that was the lot of African refugees and inevitably led to direct positive action. African leaders visiting each other's countries should be taken by their hosts to the places where refugees were accommodated. Such visits were bound to have a direct effect on solving the root causes of refugees and remind them of the saying "no condition is permanent".

39. The OAU Commission of 15 on Refugees saluted the many field representatives of UNHCR who worked under considerable hardship in many African countries, including his own. Those countries were not necessarily producers of refugees. In fact, most were asylum countries. His Commission also saluted the asylum countries of Africa for playing their traditional role as their brothers' keepers in spite of the burdens of soil degradation,

desertification and political inconvenience. In particular, it saluted the Republic of Djibouti which, with a population of half a million, was currently hosting about 100,000 refugees. Africans understood the limitations that their friends in the non-African world were beginning to place on the number of refugees in their own countries. However, he appealed to them to consider the peculiar situation of some asylum countries in Africa which might be too close physically to the refugee-producing countries to provide a truly secure asylum. Furthermore, from the African viewpoint, the OAU Commission of 15 would like to comment on the distinction often made between refugees and displaced persons and returnees. In distinguishing the estimated 5 million refugees from the 12 million displaced persons in Africa, it must not be forgotten that shelter, food and water and health services were no less vital for displaced persons than they were for designated refugees. In terms of resources, it was not possible to overlook the millions of displaced persons in Angola, Liberia, Mozambique and Sudan.

40. Turning to the important question of root causes of refugees in Africa, he said that African leaders had taken vital steps towards resolving conflicts and dissension within and among themselves. The OAU Commission of 15 had followed with interest moves for the resolution of conflicts in Angola, Ethiopia, Liberia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia and Sudan, and the important changes taking place in South Africa. It appealed to friends in the more developed parts of the world to make special resources available to those countries willing to reabsorb their own national refugees. It commended the ongoing design of a plan to resettle Rwandese refugees and looked forward to the proposed donors' conference for that purpose.

41. In conclusion, he appealed again to the international community in the name of common humanity that the current condition of the African refugee should not be perpetuated.

42. Mr. SEMICHI (Algeria) said that, although UNHCR had originally been set up for a period of only three years, its admirable humanitarian work had proved indispensable ever since to meet a growing number of needs. UNHCR was currently facing daunting challenges and was seriously short of the resources needed to enable it to discharge its tasks as effectively as it had done in the past. There were various reasons for its material difficulties which were not due only to the constant increase in the number of refugees. They were also explained by the emergence in recent years of restrictive trends in a number of countries with regard to refugee policy and procedures relating to refugees and asylum-seekers characterized by expulsions, refoulement and other discriminatory treatment. There had also been the phenomenon described as "compassion fatigue". As a result, during the preceding decade UNHCR resources had proved to be inadequate to meet the essential needs of refugees. In 1990 UNHCR had only half the amount of money for each refugee that it had had in 1980.

43. It seemed timely to make an urgent appeal to the international community to renew its solidarity with the 17 million refugees currently in the world. It was clear from the copious documentation available that overall the situation of refugees continued to deteriorate and that large numbers of them were enduring great suffering owing to an absence of adequate international

protection. An outstanding example was that of the Palestinians, dispossessed of their land and the victims of every kind of violation of their fundamental rights by the Israeli occupation authorities.

44. Africa, with over 5 million refugees, 12 million displaced persons and thousands of returnees was likely soon to be unable, despite its tradition of hospitality, to cope alone with the problem of providing secure havens. Economic and social crises, natural disasters and famine were currently facing many African countries and for the first time in Africa the spectre of xenophobia loomed, when a refugee would no longer be regarded as a welcome guest but as a problem, as the Secretary-General of the OAU had said on the occasion of the High Commissioner's recent visit to Ethiopia. It was thus a matter of urgency that the international community as a whole should increase all forms of assistance to African countries to enable them to meet their international obligations with respect to the refugees they were sheltering. Any initiative by the Executive Committee to that end would be warmly welcomed by Algeria.

45. In the more general context, the international community should become more actively involved in assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons. There was an increasing need to improve cooperation and coordination in the field between UNHCR and its other partners in the United Nations system. It was imperative that all decisions adopted on the subject should be implemented, including United Nations General Assembly resolution 44/137 and Economic and Social Council resolution 1990/78. While the question of refugees and migration in general merited consideration in depth in a spirit of international solidarity, and it was encouraging that discussions were in train at many international levels to deal with the uncontrolled movement of persons within and out of countries, it was necessary to stress the continuing and absolute need to safeguard the right to asylum, to protect refugees and to seek lasting solutions to their problems.

46. As the international climate continued to improve, he hoped that the cessation of various conflicts would allow millions of refugees to return home. In that context, Algeria welcomed the United Nations peace plan for the Western Sahara and the positive response the international community had made to the Secretary-General's appeal for funds to help repatriate Saharan refugees.

47. He assured the High Commissioner of the full support and trust of his delegation. Algeria was a firm supporter of the cause of refugees throughout the world and would be a willing partner in any efforts making an effective contribution to solving the refugee problem.

48. Mr. SIR ELKHATIM (Sudan) said that the Sudan had for three decades been bearing a heavy burden in sheltering refugees fleeing war, famine and natural disasters from elsewhere in the Horn of Africa. To prevent the conditions of such refugees and displaced persons from worsening, humanitarian assistance was required from the international community. The appeal made to that end by the Secretary-General had been very welcome. UNHCR itself was contributing nobly to the international effort through its country programmes in the area.

49. Conditions in the Horn of Africa were in a state of flux under the pressure of recent political events, which had impelled new waves of refugees into the Sudan, among them members of the Ethiopian armed forces and their families who had fled their country after the fall of the former regime and had had to be moved to an area distant from the frontier for their own safety. In talks between the High Commissioner and Sudan on ways to deal with the problem there had been agreement on the need to repatriate refugees where possible. Following the events of May, however, over 52 million refugees in Sudan became susceptible to repatriation. Logistic problems had, however, allowed the successful return home of only 9,000 of them. That gave an idea of the difficulties involved even where the voluntary repatriation of homogeneous groups of refugees was concerned. Sudan therefore appealed for concerted efforts to tackle the problem.

50. The people of Sudan were proud of the respect they had accorded over the years to the conventions and other international instruments on refugees. Despite the country's limited resources and inadequate infrastructure it had done its best to assist and protect refugees. Sudan was now seeking the cooperation of the international community and all other countries in the region in an attempt to find a lasting solution to the refugee problem by facilitating voluntary repatriation in dignity and safety. The current international climate was propitious for the return of Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees. Cooperation between Sudan, the Ethiopian Government and the Eritrean administration, supported by a concerted effort from UNHCR and other United Nations specialized agencies, should enable agreements on the subject to be concluded.

51. Repatriation programmes were also needed to enable refugees to return to other countries such as Chad, Uganda and Zaire. Those refugees should receive the same interest and attention as those from Ethiopia and Eritrea. Their successful voluntary repatriation would depend on the achievement of political stability, improved economic conditions and guaranteed safety of persons in their countries of origin and on the volume of assistance devoted to the purpose by the international community. Cooperation between the United Nations specialized agencies and the countries of origin and asylum would also be necessary and every effort should be made to dispel the understandable fears of refugees so that they would feel encouraged to return home.

52. The repatriation of refugees also required additional resources to be allocated at regional level in the form of a special fund to finance repatriation in an orderly way in several gradual stages in order to respect the capacity of absorption of the countries of origin. A refugee problem which had been in existence for over three decades could not be solved overnight. A positive objective approach was also needed when refugee programmes were drawn up; refugees should be enabled to meet their own essential needs and so helped to end their refugee status. Special funds for the purpose were lacking and should be constituted by the international community.

53. He proposed that UNHCR should conduct and fund studies on the adverse effects of refugee populations on the environment, a subject which should also be placed on the agenda of the Conference on the Environment to be held in Brazil in 1992. Country projects for alleviating the environmental damage caused by refugees were needed and might well be associated with United Nation programmes of assistance to the least developed countries.

54. Turning to the problem of Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries, most of whom did not benefit from UNHCR assistance, he noted that a number had indicated their willingness to return voluntarily to Sudan but were still awaiting action from UNHCR, which he hoped would soon be provided as it had been in the case of refugees returning to other countries.

55. Aid to former refugees was dwindling as assistance was diverted to new cases. That adversely affected their well-being by curtailing essential services such as medical assistance, drinking water and food. Sudan had already drawn attention to budget shortfalls in those areas the previous year and had suggested ways of improving the situation, but nothing had been done. The Sudanese Government, in an effort to ease UNHCR's difficulties, had devalued its currency against the dollar but that initiative had not been followed by any increase in available funds. He hoped that a solution could be found to the problem.

56. He paid tribute to the new ideas put forward by the High Commissioner in her address to the Executive Committee and endorsed her appeal to donor countries to continue their aid. He further endorsed her suggestion that the question of refugees and the environment should be placed before the Brazil Conference on the Environment. He also agreed with the High Commissioner that the relationship between refugees and development would have to be tackled through close cooperation between Governments, UNHCR, other United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations. He concurred with the need to strengthen the ability of international organizations to respond to emergencies but warned that an excessively bureaucratic approach to the task would defeat the object of the exercise and increase costs to an extent that would have a negative impact on refugee programmes.

57. The efficient protection of displaced persons in conformity with international instruments required not only cooperation between United Nations bodies, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other humanitarian organizations, but also the agreement of Governments and implied a respect for national sovereignty. The proposal put forward by the United States delegation was very pertinent on that point.

58. There were 10 million Sudanese children at present living in distressing conditions in southern Sudan. Their plight was a consequence of the compulsory mobilization carried out by the local secessionist movements. He appealed to the international community to assist the Sudanese Government in providing the necessary humanitarian assistance.

59. In the coming year, Sudan would continue its cooperation with UNHCR and looked forward to the introduction of many practical measures that would help to remove the causes of the refugee problem. The Sudanese Government would do

everything in its power to assist in developing the political will to that end in the Horn of Africa and in constituting a solid basis for peace and stability in the region that was a precondition for that solution.

60. Mr. SEKONYANA (Lesotho) welcomed UNHCR's continuing commitment to tackling pressing refugee problems throughout the world, and particularly in Africa, and commended the support it was giving to asylum-seekers and those ready for repatriation. UNHCR had worked hard to assist thousands of exiled South Africans to return home after the collapse of apartheid, once the foundations for lasting peace had been laid in South Africa. Despite the disillusionment caused by township violence, which had led to the loss of over 3,000 lives, the neighbouring countries were heartened by the strong inflow of returnees, who could make a decisive contribution to stabilizing the political situation in their country. Protection was the key aspect of UNHCR's work; he hoped the returning exiles would be able to look to the High Commissioner for protection, since if protection could not be afforded, the organization's aim of encouraging the return of exiles would be defeated.

61. The challenge before the world today was how to prevent the creation of refugees throughout the world, a staggering task given the present geopolitical situation.

62. The definition of a "refugee" given in article 1 (2) of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees was certainly relevant in Africa, since the national boundaries created by the colonial scramble for the continent did not correspond to the geographical distribution of the diverse ethnic groups, with the natural result that endemic and chronic ethnic conflicts had broken out.

63. The situation had been much worse farther south, where a bitter racial conflict created by apartheid had rendered South Africa not only ungovernable but had also turned it into a monster that churned out numerous refugees every day. Moreover, the rest of Africa also had to cope with refugee problems, particularly at the source. The kind of nationalism that had inspired the African peoples to fight for their political independence must be revived in the new challenge to create democratic rule and a sense of nationhood that would render the refugee problem obsolete. In order to achieve that, leaders would have to tackle the problem of political development, since political systems that were fairly well developed were unlikely to produce refugees. Nationhood, which entailed the translation of diffuse and unorganized sentiments of nationalism into a spirit of citizenship and the creation of State institutions that could translate the aspirations of nationalism and citizenship into policies and programmes was rooted in political development. Only in nationhood would the world, and Africa in particular, succeed in minimizing the refugee problem. When nationhood was achieved, it would be rare for any person to express a "well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality or political opinion".

64. Lesotho had committed itself to democratization and to the installation of a government representative of the people by the end of 1992. That process would help the country to maintain its proud record of not having a single registered Mosotho refugee in a foreign land at the present time. Lesotho also pledged to continue its traditional practice of admitting asylum-seekers into the country whenever necessary. Time and again it had hosted refugees

from South Africa, and only one week previously refugees had come from as far afield as Zaire. With the usual cooperation of UNHCR, Lesotho had extended its hospitality to those asylum-seekers, despite its worst drought in 55 years, which, should it continue, would affect the country's ability to help in a manner commensurate with its culture. In any event, Lesotho intended to pay its assessed contribution to UNHCR.

65. The world had come to look upon UNHCR as the global institution which could provide both the vision and the mechanisms for producing meaningful relief for refugees and ensuring that the other collective concerns of humanity enshrined in the conventions on refugees adopted by the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity were taken up. In that regard Lesotho wished to thank all those countries which had so generously supported UNHCR's budget in the present very difficult times and to urge them to continue to respond favourably to the High Commissioner's calls for more assistance.

66. Mr. FAN Guoxiang (China) noted that the number of refugees around the world had reached 17 million. The situation was precarious, and the search for a proper solution constituted a serious challenge for the international community. He was pleased to note the various degrees of progress that had been recorded in the political settlement of "hot spot" issues in several regions, particularly the prospect that an ultimate solution would be found to the Cambodian issue. The international community should continue its efforts to promote and consolidate the political settlement of the relevant issues. In areas where conditions were ripe, effective and timely action should be taken to promote the return of refugees to their countries of origin in safety and dignity. A satisfactory solution of the refugee problem would not only bring an end to the prolonged sufferings of the refugees themselves and reduce or eliminate the difficulties of the host countries but would also contribute to regional and world peace and security. China favoured the adoption of concerted action by the international community in that area and supported the activities of UNHCR and other agencies in the fulfilment of their respective mandates.

67. It was now widely recognized that refugee problems must be tackled at their roots in order to prevent their recurrence. China had consistently called for the settlement of refugee problems through the dual channels of stemming the cause and of providing assistance and protection. The international situation might be more relaxed, but the world was far from tranquil. The international economic environment continued to deteriorate and ecological problems were becoming increasingly serious. China considered that the prevention and treatment of refugee problems should be tackled through the promotion of international peace and security and economic development. Currently all seven categories of asylum-seekers were inextricably linked to the issues of peace and development. Therefore any serious efforts to settle refugee problems at their roots must be such as to oppose racial discrimination and apartheid, to prevent racial conflicts, to check foreign aggression and occupation, to settle conflicts peacefully, to refrain from interference in other countries' internal affairs, and to promote regional and international peace and security. At the same time an equitable and rational new world economic order must be established and the problem of the economic gap between

North and South must be properly solved. International cooperation for development must be strengthened, and the economic difficulties of developing countries must be alleviated.

68. China supported the efforts being made by the United Nations system to strengthen, coordinate and improve humanitarian relief for refugees, displaced persons and asylum-seekers, as well as coordinated action by the international community to tackle existing refugee problems and to prevent further massive outflows of refugees. The Working Group on Solutions and Protection had made a useful exploration of the causes of refugee problems and had provided a sound basis for a further exchange of views. The Working Group's report, although far from being perfect, was balanced and basically reflected the concerns of all sides. His delegation was in favour of its adoption by the Executive Committee.

69. Believing that the international community should attach great importance to the prevention and comprehensive treatment of the problems created by new and massive flows of refugees and displaced persons, China supported the strengthening of the international community's capacity to respond speedily and flexibly to emergencies and contingencies. However, international humanitarian protection and assistance should not be used to violate the principle of respect for the sovereignty of States and non-interference in their internal affairs.

70. For 40 years UNHCR had worked tirelessly to help refugees around the world. The realities of the international situation had shown that UNHCR should continue to carry out its mandate as defined in General Assembly resolution 428 (V). China favoured the enlargement of that mandate and of the refugee concept as provided for in subsequent General Assembly resolutions. Refugee problems were products of wars, conflicts and turmoils. UNHCR and its predecessor had been established to deal with the problems of refugees and displaced persons arising from the two world wars. Subsequently, UNHCR had become involved in refugee problems created by regional conflicts, foreign aggression and occupation, and racial discrimination. UNHCR's mandate should therefore be affirmed in the light of the new refugee situation. In considering the root causes of the current refugee problems and in arriving at a new definition of the word "refugee", ideological arguments should be excluded from the area of refugee protection and UNHCR's apolitical and humanitarian function and tradition should be fully recognized, since the right to survival and other basic rights of refugees were dependent on the generous assistance provided by the international community.

71. The fact that 109 States had so far acceded to the Convention and Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees testified to the importance attached by the international community to the humanitarian cause of refugee protection and relief. As a party to the 1951 Convention, China had fully safeguarded the legitimate rights of the Indochinese refugees in China and had always regarded the Convention and Protocol as the legal basis for formulating policies for the treatment of refugees. China would continue to do a good job in the resettlement of Indochinese refugees and looked forward to the cooperation of the international community and UNHCR, with which it had always enjoyed excellent relations.

72. Mr. NDZENGUE (Cameroon), after stressing the importance of international protection as a priority task of UNHCR, noted that the High Commissioner, in her excellent statement, had refrained from displaying self-satisfaction with the admirable work done by the Programme in that field and had presented, rigorously and without complacency, both the progress made so far and the problems that arose in protecting the millions of deprived persons for whom she was responsible, putting forward three main objectives for the use and mobilization of resources, which Cameroon supported.

73. His delegation found several encouraging features in the High Commissioner's Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/777). One was the closer cooperation between member States and UNHCR, without which no protection of refugees could be envisaged. In that connection, Cameroon reaffirmed its commitment to closer cooperation with UNHCR and with its Yaoundé office, which was performing admirable and greatly appreciated work. Also encouraging was the establishment of viable and rational procedures for eligibility as a refugee based on the provisions of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol and on regional conventions like that of the Organization of African Unity, whose relevance was recognized by everyone. A further encouraging feature was the recognition, by States, of UNHCR's essentially apolitical mission.

74. Account should also be taken of the fact that the international political and economic situation very often led to migrations and displacements of persons, many of whom could legitimately claim refugee status and thus fall within UNHCR's mandate. The search for greater dignity, for greater respect for human rights and for greater democracy and freedom seemed to be one of the fundamental characteristics of the late twentieth century. At the same time, there was a resurgence of local conflicts which led to the displacement of persons in search of protection and assistance, thus involving UNHCR. The growing economic gap between North and South was in turn generating a new kind of refugee whose legitimate preoccupations ought to be taken into account. In any case, UNHCR was confronted by new challenges which very often required emergency solutions.

75. Whether the international legal instruments in force were adequate in meeting the challenges of the times was an increasingly acute question. In that connection, his delegation wished to express its appreciation of the remarkable work done by the Working Group on Solutions and Protection, whose recommendations it supported in so far as they tended to clarify the concept of refugee and therefore the protection to which any applicant for refugee status was entitled to expect.

76. Although protection was based on the relevant legal instruments, it was also dependent on the economic situation of the host country or country of asylum, since socio-economic considerations constituted a major obstacle to the full implementation of the legal instruments in a number of States which were parties to them. A country confronted by an acute economic crisis or subjected to the rigours of structural adjustment did not have the means to give refugees all the assistance that they might need. In those circumstances, UNHCR had an extremely delicate task in seeing to it that the States concerned conformed to the internationally recognized standards for the treatment of refugees. It was therefore important that durable solutions in the form of

rehabilitation or local resettlement should include an economic development component with a view to making it possible for the host countries to cope with the presence of refugees while preserving a balance in their environment which, in many cases, suffered as a result of the presence of displaced persons. Better coordination between UNHCR and the specialized agencies responsible for economic development programmes was therefore called for, so as to make optimal use of the available resources, which, unfortunately, were tending to dry up. While supporting the required coordination effort and appealing for greater international solidarity, his delegation wished to point out that UNHCR was still, on account of its capacity for action and its great experience in the field, the agency best placed to manage emergency situations. His delegation therefore appealed once again for greater generosity and for greater international solidarity to cope with such situations.

77. Mrs. SRDIC-DJAKOVIC (Yugoslavia) noted that the fundamental changes over the past year had been accompanied by a series of both new and old problems. Fortunately, in the new situation, the United Nations system on the whole had lived up to its responsibilities, as had UNHCR.

78. Yugoslavia would continue to offer every support to UNHCR in its efforts to solve the humanitarian problems within its competence. In 1991, for example, the Yugoslav Government had pledged a contribution of \$US 255,000 to UNHCR-coordinated action on behalf of refugees from Iraq.

79. Yugoslavia was investing enormous human and financial resources in assistance to refugees and displaced persons. In that regard, international cooperation and solidarity were extremely important. Almost every day groups of persons and individuals entered Yugoslavia seeking help. Most of them sought temporary protection pending their departure to other countries. The Yugoslav authorities encountered numerous problems and had to make large financial outlays. In recent years slower approval procedures for the immigration of asylum-seekers into other countries had contributed to their staying longer in Yugoslavia than had been the case in the past.

80. The acute shortage of accommodation posed special problems. The Yugoslav Government had recently allocated considerable funds for the expansion of accommodation facilities, but those funds were insufficient and her Government hoped that UNHCR would make a positive response to its request for assistance.

81. In 1990, a total of 2,284 foreigners, mostly from Albania, Romania, Bulgaria and other East European countries, had applied for asylum in Yugoslavia. The upward trend of arrivals of asylum-seekers in Yugoslavia had continued during 1991, when, from 1 January to 1 September, 6,039 persons, mostly Albanian citizens, had applied for asylum. Of the latter, approximately 2,300 had applied for refugee status and for resettlement and integration into Yugoslav society. The authorities had had great difficulties in providing accommodation, food and health care for such a large number of persons, who included many children and old and sick persons. Nevertheless, care for them had been organized relatively quickly within the possibilities available. In accordance with the Convention and Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees and with domestic legislation, decisions on the granting of refugee status had already been taken for approximately 1,400 of those people so far, while the procedure for others was under way. The enormous sums needed to care for the

refugees and displaced persons had so far been fully covered by Yugoslavia, which would welcome any possible foreign assistance such as that already provided in kind by the Red Cross of the Netherlands. The integration of the persons concerned also called for outside resources, since Yugoslavia alone was not able to provide them in full. That was particularly true given the unfavourable structure of the groups involved, which included a large number of farmers and unskilled persons, children of school age, and elderly persons unable to work. The experience and assistance of UNHCR in that regard was invaluable.

82. At the moment there was a serious problem of internally displaced persons within Yugoslavia resulting from the grave crisis which had penetrated every sphere of life. The number of internally displaced persons was growing constantly. They had been forced to seek security, either in different parts of their own republic or in other republics. According to data obtained from the respective republics, at present there were nearly 230,000 such displaced persons, of which more than 100,000 were in Serbia, 80,000 were in Croatia, and about 30,000 in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Those figures had constituted a basis for the distribution of the federal budget allocations for their assistance. The majority of the displaced persons were women, children, and old people. To help them, Yugoslavia needed international assistance in addition to that which had been extended so far through the International Committee of the Red Cross and through direct contributions from some countries, which were greatly appreciated.

83. Obviously, overcoming the consequences of the large-scale internal displacements of persons was the primary concern of Yugoslavia and all the parties involved. The main, if not the only, solution would be a complete and fully respected ceasefire by all the parties in conflict. Nevertheless, the social and humanitarian problems of the displaced persons deserved attention by the international community at large. So far UNHCR had offered practical assistance to internally displaced persons, although formerly its mandate had not covered that category of persons, whose interests and social and humanitarian problems should, in her Government's view, be taken adequately into account. If a Government faced with that kind of problem requested assistance from the international community and international organizations, UNHCR should be the first to respond. In any case, the Yugoslav Government was very satisfied with its cooperation with UNHCR, which, it was convinced, would develop positively in the forthcoming period with a view to assisting refugees and displaced persons and to conceiving a long-term solution to their problems.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.