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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 467th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 9 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 10.25 a.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4) (continued)

1. Mr. IDOYAGA (Observer for Uruguay) said that his country's continuing participation in UNHCR's work was motivated by its commitment to the principles enshrined in the 1951 Convention, the 1967 Protocol, the International Covenants on Human Rights and, in the inter-American setting, the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees. Uruguay's desire to work for the development of refugee law had led it to participate in the Working Group on Solutions and Protection whose report (EC/SCP/64) gave a pragmatic picture of the refugee situation which reinforced the principles of solidarity, collective responsibility of States and international commitment to coordinated and durable solutions such as CIREFCA and CDA. The decision taken by the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection to continue the work and set up a follow-up mechanism was appropriate. In future work, it would be important to ensure that the various categories of persons mentioned in the report should be treated in a balanced manner taking into account the different priorities that various countries attributed to each category. Uruguay attached particular importance to the place of category 2 - persons covered by the OAU Convention/Cartagena Declaration - in the order of priorities for reasons which it had already explained.
2. The new and complex situations in respect of asylum and migratory movements called for progressive development of the law and international protection mechanisms in order to reinforce the response capacity of the system. The traditional concepts of protection must be reconsidered and updated to meet new realities. The OAU Convention and the Cartagena Declaration fulfilled that need. Resolution 2768/91 adopted by the most recent General Assembly of the Organization of American States reflected the political will of the American countries to strengthen the legal regime of protection for refugees on the basis of the Cartagena Declaration.
3. UNHCR was aware of those new realities and his delegation attributed particular importance to the reference in the High Commissioner's statement to the inclusion of development projects in the Office's humanitarian work. Social and economic variables were often the cause of displacement and at both the prevention and resettlement levels, durable solutions entailed a solution to the problem of underdevelopment. His delegation therefore supported UNHCR's intention to act as a catalyser, cooperating with countries and development organizations in the quest for humanitarian solutions based on long-term economic development.
4. In conclusion, he referred to Uruguay's firm commitment from the outset to the work of CIREFCA which had paved the way for a peaceful solution to the conflict in Central America. His delegation welcomed the progress made so far, in which UNHCR had played an outstanding role, and urged the international community to continue to support the peace process.
5. Mrs. GALVIS (Colombia) welcomed the new action strategy outlined in the High Commissioner's statement. An emergency preparedness and response mechanism was essential to enable UNHCR to take immediate action on the spot

in places where people were forced to leave their homes in order to seek refuge. That form of assistance would be more efficient if conducted by teams trained to cope with emergency situations.

6. The steady increase in the number of refugees made it necessary to encourage voluntary repatriation. In spite of the general context of current political instability, conditions in some countries were improving sufficiently to ease the way for the return of refugees. It should be possible to implement programmes that offered better guarantees for the reintegration of persons returning to their country of origin. A complex follow-up procedure was needed in that phase of refugee assistance to avoid a repetition of conditions which gave rise to their original migration. The work of returnee resettlement called for concerted action by the United Nations agencies responsible for international development cooperation and by bilateral cooperation arrangements. Programmes to encourage repatriation must be consistent with the strategies of international development cooperation in taking into account both the needs and expectations of the individual refugees and the overall requirements of the countries of origin. In that way, they would contribute to eradicating the root causes of forced displacement.

7. There was an urgent need for a clear and common definition of those persons who should be considered as refugees. A universally accepted definition would make UNHCR's task easier and would have to take into account the current circumstances which generated refugees. The Latin American countries had on several occasions proposed that a universally accepted and updated definition of refugees might be based on the regional instruments on the subject - the OAU Convention and the Cartagena Declaration.

8. However, the real causes of refugee flows were to be found in the social, economic and political conditions in their countries of origin. Those causes must be considered in a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach by all the international agencies involved with development in order to establish a development strategy which met the real requirements of populations and also took into account the need to rationalize the use of natural resources and to develop disaster preparedness programmes. Those issues had been raised and discussed in the Working Group on Solutions and Protection. Although its report (EC/SCP/64) reflected the exchange of views, it was clear that further study of the issues involved was required; her delegation supported the recommendation to that effect. The Working Group had not fulfilled its mandate merely by identifying the various categories of person displaced for reasons other than their desire to migrate. Even the so-called economic migrants left their homes for reasons of force majeure. Colombia had always been interested in the overall consideration of the status of refugees and its linkage with general migratory movements. The Working Group's study showed the need to work out arrangements to protect all categories. Economic migrants also needed the assistance of the international community and above all in the form of improved conditions in their place of origin. It should not be forgotten that social and economic security safeguarded political security.

9. Her delegation attached special importance to the care of refugee women and children. Refugee women were a particularly vulnerable group and every effort must be made to protect the welfare of women in refugee camps. Her delegation endorsed the proposal to appoint a coordinator for refugee children.

10. In conclusion, her delegation congratulated UNHCR on the work it had carried out on behalf of the world's refugees since its inception 40 years earlier.

11. Mr. SENE (Observer for Senegal) said that UNHCR had to meet the challenges of a new world order which had transformed the geopolitical aspect of the world. The new era was a time of promise for liberty, the promotion of human rights and democratic progress but also a time of stress and uncertainty. In that context, UNHCR had performed admirably, extending protection and assistance as well as repatriating thousands of refugees to their homes in all regions of the world. The recent agreement signed with the South African Government was a prelude to the advent of a free and democratic South Africa. At the same time, new emergency situations had made it necessary for UNHCR to increase its activities by 60 per cent over the preceding 18 months. Such situations obviously required enhanced operational capacity on the part of UNHCR.

12. The issue of migration and refugees was becoming a matter of crucial importance at the international level and was sorely testing the very institution of the right of asylum in certain countries of asylum, thus placing UNHCR at the heart of the discussion on solutions and protection. The institution of asylum must be safeguarded at all costs: it was the keystone of the status of the refugee, which required the authorities in countries of asylum to show a certain tolerance, a spirit of fraternity and respect for international legal instruments. The inevitable confusion between economic migrants, asylum seekers and political refugees was creating a problem which required a multilateral response adapted to situations of distress if lapses into racism or xenophobia in the treatment of refugees were to be avoided.

13. The need to reinforce the mechanisms for humanitarian coordination was assuming political and diplomatic dimensions. His delegation agreed with the High Commissioner's choice of three objectives in that regard. First of all, all the means at the disposal of the United Nations system must be brought into play to enable UNHCR to provide a coordinated operational response involving protection and assistance to those in need in emergency situations. In that connection, a reserve fund must also be established. Secondly, every opportunity for voluntary repatriation should be pursued, guaranteeing refugees reintegration in security and dignity in their countries of origin. That procedure obviously involved acceptance of responsibility on the part of the countries of origin and solidarity on the part of the international community in order to ensure that refugees were integrated in local, national and regional development programmes. In that way, specialized agencies and donor countries could contribute to durable solutions which conferred greater stability on long-term economic development, for the benefit of the entire population.

14. The third objective was to work out a preventive strategy to deal with the root causes of large-scale movements of refugees or economic migrants in order to anticipate the phenomenon. The problem was to find preventive and warning mechanisms to deal with the worldwide challenges to peace, security, respect for human rights and the preservation of ecological balance in order to ensure durable development. His delegation also supported the approach adopted by UNHCR to the environment in the solution of refugee problems and considered that the guidelines drawn up on refugee women and children should be implemented in order to improve their living conditions.

15. He paid a tribute to Dr. Libertine and Dr. Weiz, jointly awarded the 1991 Nansen Medal, and applauded their work and action in the service of humanity. Dr. Libertine had mentioned the assistance provided by Senegal to Namibian and South African refugees. Senegal, despite its limited resources, had always opened its doors to refugees as the overview of UNHCR activities and the UNHCR draft programme budget for 1992 clearly showed. Senegal was at present host to 58,115 refugees, most of whom were women and children. The financial crisis through which UNHCR had passed in 1989-1990 had been the main obstacle to achieving the goals of the health, food aid and other programmes under way for such refugees. Senegal was grateful to the World Food Programme, which had provided the bulk of the food aid required, and to donor countries, international organizations, humanitarian organizations and non-governmental organizations for their assistance to the refugees. Senegal also appreciated the assistance provided by UNHCR and its Dakar office to the refugees on its territory and noted that the High Commissioner had appealed for additional funds to be provided by development agencies for refugees.

16. Senegal, together with other African countries, was engaged in the quest for peaceful solutions to regional conflicts in Africa, with the objective of promoting national stability and alleviating the plight of refugees. It had participated in the ECOWAS Summit at Yamoussoukoro aimed at finding a peaceful solution to the crisis in Liberia.

17. Senegal continued to believe that in the effort to eliminate the cause of refugee movements, the international community should stand together to fight for freedom, respect for justice and human rights and the lasting development of peoples and nations in order to achieve a shared prosperity for all mankind and peace throughout the world.

18. Mr. DUBAD (Somalia) said that UNHCR had made a commendable response to the challenges of 1991, which included new refugee movements, opportunities for repatriation and the unprecedented emergency situation in the Persian Gulf. It had continued to improve management and implementation of its programmes. The fact that those improvements took account of the needs of refugee women and children was particularly welcome. Those achievements were made possible by the quality of UNHCR's leadership and the considerable support made available by the international community.

19. He welcomed the High Commissioner's proposals and her championship of prevention. The emphasis on voluntary repatriation as the most viable solution for many refugee problems was noted with satisfaction and he joined the High Commissioner in considering 1992 as the year for voluntary repatriation.

20. The Horn of Africa had one of the largest populations of refugees and returnees in the world, which presented problems for all parties concerned. The refugees had undoubtedly sustained both physical and psychological scars as a result of their precarious life in crowded refugee camps, while UNHCR and the donor community had been discouraged by the absence of durable solutions and the consequent need for continued relief. Above all, the countries of asylum had suffered from the continued presence of such concentrations of people and had suffered incalculable damage to the environment and to infrastructure. The financial support made available by the international community to alleviate the burden placed on such countries was unfortunately not adequate. However, recent events in the region provided new opportunities and new challenges. In Somalia, the civil strife following the overthrow of the Siyad Barre regime had prompted the return home of the Ethiopian refugees who had been in the country for over a decade. Somali refugees in eastern Ethiopia similarly began coming back in their thousands to northern Somalia. To make such repatriation durable, assistance was required from the international community to ensure the smooth reintegration of the returnees, such as by development of returnee areas. Although the role of UNHCR was limited, it was hoped that through its advocacy such endeavours could be strengthened. As the Secretary-General had said, the return movement would be nothing more than a shift of misery and destitution unless the international community helped to create the necessary conditions for the refugees to start a new life in their home areas. In that context, the recently launched Special Emergency Programme could serve as a catalyst for further action.

21. His Government welcomed the return of the Somali refugees who had fled to eastern Ethiopia following persecution by the previous regime. However, after their mass exodus their homes had been bombarded and over half a million land-mines planted in and around Hargeisa. In the circumstances, the return of the refugees should be carried out in stages over at least one year in order to enable the new Government to cope with the situation. Priority should also be given to restoring the ruined infrastructure in order to accelerate the reintegration process. Mines should also be removed as a matter of urgency to render the city habitable. The efforts already made in that direction by the European Communities and the United States of America were appreciated. In the supply of food, a careful balance should be struck between providing food aid and encouraging agricultural activities. The creation of refugee camp conditions should be resisted as far as possible to prevent creating dependency among returnees. It was hoped that the 1992 refugee programme proposals for Somalia, which had not yet been completed, would focus on the implementation of the solution-oriented strategy devised in 1990 under the auspices of the Tripartite Commission.

22. His delegation was deeply grateful to the donor community and to asylum countries for their unfailing support to the plight of refugees worldwide. It also paid a tribute to the humanitarian work carried out by UNHCR. The contribution of the non-governmental organizations to that effort was also greatly appreciated.

23. Mr. YBARRA ROJAS (Nicaragua) said that at the previous meeting the representative of Honduras, the outgoing Chairman of the CIREFCA Follow-Up Committee, had described the substantial progress made in Central America

towards solving the refugee problem. That action was, however, still only in its initial stages and despite the welcome improvement in the international climate, its final solution still lay in the future.

24. Two important topics, refugee status and the responsibility of States, were at the centre of the general debate, as they had been at the meeting of the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection. A constructive and realistic approach was needed to defining refugee status, otherwise the resulting confusion would prevent any durable solution. He therefore applauded the adoption by the Sub-Committee of the report of the Working Group on Solutions and Protection (EC/SCP/64). Similarly, a failure by countries of origin to accept their responsibilities would make it difficult to achieve a lasting solution to the refugee problem. Nicaragua, whose national reconciliation policy had led to a massive and rapid return of refugees, provided a good example of the swift progress that could be made when Governments were prepared to guarantee their nationals a safe return to their homes. Similar national reconciliation policies aimed at absorbing returnees had been adopted in other CIREFCA countries.

25. Acceptance of their responsibilities by the countries of origin of refugees, did not, however, absolve the international community from its responsibility to deal with refugee problems as they occurred, nor could it in any way delimit the exercise of national sovereignty. The High Commissioner had clearly outlined the problems faced by returnees and had set out the responsibilities of the international community with respect to repatriation. Nicaragua considered that successful repatriation demanded the provision of at least a minimum of conditions that would ensure social and economic integration. Unfortunately, the economies of countries of origin were frequently in crisis; uprooting a refugee community that had already grown away from conditions in its homeland and transplanting it to an impoverished economy could well be disastrous.

26. A successful start had been made to repatriation in Nicaragua. It had been based on three types of international assistance, each corresponding to the three different phases of the repatriation process. First, emergency assistance had been sought and provided as an extension of international protection in order to meet the basic needs of returnees. In the second instance, rapid impact programmes (RIPs) had been introduced. They were intended to meet easily identified group needs in areas with many returnees to enable them to overcome their dependence on food aid and to serve as a bridge between the phases of receiving aid and full reintegration. The returnees involved actively participated in such projects. Of the 60 RIPs so far initiated, half had been completed. A further 100 were under consideration by the Nicaraguan Government, UNHCR and UNDP and would soon be ready for implementation. In a third phase, it was hoped to achieve full integration of returnees through funding development projects in the areas for their resettlement. The relevant plans had been worked out in 1989 at the first CIREFCA Meeting, and the previous Government of Nicaragua had submitted 33 such projects to the international community. The present Government had set up a National Reconciliation Programme to adapt the CIREFCA plans to meet national social and economic policies aimed at both

national reconciliation and comprehensive rural development. The projects were intended to provide for all the needs (education, health, infrastructure, basic agricultural production and non-traditional production) of a specific community in a devastated area. The aim was not to create a bureaucratic strait-jacket, but to encourage individuals to assume responsibility for their own future, to provide incentives to local private enterprise and initiative, which had almost disappeared in remote areas, and to assist in the repair and reconstruction of basic services and infrastructure. Decentralization and the delegation of greater power to municipalities to ensure participation by the community in the task of social reintegration was the goal. Such a strategy could not be carried out without the help of the international community, which should not forget that all that had so far been achieved in Nicaragua, 5 programmes covering 28 communities containing a total of 350,000 families, was fragile and could easily be stopped in its tracks. Nicaragua was grateful to the international community for the assistance it had already received in its endeavours. A number of projects had already been fully funded and were in the course of implementation. Individual projects had been sponsored by Italy, Spain, the United States of America, the European Communities and the Netherlands and other countries were cooperating in providing assistance to repatriation and reintegration programmes.

27. In the repatriation process, Nicaragua had for its part redistributed over 300,000 hectares of cultivable land. National social programmes offered assistance to all returnees without distinction, an example being the nationally run and funded emergency reseedling programme, which had expended \$US 4.3 million, benefited 19,230 families and produced 70 per cent of the crops required for national daily consumption.

28. The Nicaraguan Government, apart from its general interest in the advancement of women, considered women to have an essential part to play in ensuring the successful reintegration of returnees, since in rural areas women were often the effective heads of households and were deeply committed to community participation. Children were also accorded high priority in repatriation strategies. The National Commission for the Child, under the chairmanship of the country's President, was endeavouring to limit the impact of the damage their uprooting had left in refugee children and to prevent the recurrence of such suffering in future. The High Commissioner was applauded for her firm commitment to the protection of women and child refugees.

29. Mr. AMORIM (Brazil) reiterated his Government's full support for the High Commissioner's role of protecting and assisting refugees with a view to their voluntary repatriation as the most promising of the desirable durable solutions. The effective and broad implementation of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees was the only possible way of making the High Commissioner's actions effective. That conviction had led the Latin American countries to adopt the Cartagena Declaration, which broadened the definition of refugees and ensured their better protection. In his Government's view, the provisions of such regional mechanisms should inspire not only regional and national legislation, but UNHCR as well, since there was an urgent need to adapt to a changing world and to new realities which required more flexible solutions.

30. His delegation reaffirmed the need to attain universal respect for the principles of humanitarian law and the right to asylum as a fundamental step towards the realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. In that spirit, his Government had withdrawn the geographical clause and the reservations relating to articles 15 and 17 of the 1951 Convention. All necessary internal measures had been taken to grant refugees the right to obtain identity cards, travel documents, social security and work permits, and to join labour unions or any other representative institution. However, like many developing countries, Brazil was facing a deep economic recession and would be unable to absorb the burden of providing jobs, language training and material facilities for refugees.

31. His Government noted with deep concern the aggravation of internal and regional situations due to either natural or man-made factors and its impact on refugee flows in the world. Special attention should be given to the "economic refugees" who migrated to developed countries in an attempt to escape from the famine, extreme poverty and other phenomena, such as population growth, inherent in underdevelopment. The international community could not remain insensitive to the problem of mass flows of displaced persons who did not fall within the original definition of political refugees.

32. The new categories of refugees listed in the document prepared by the Working Group on Solutions and Protection constituted a first attempt to deal with that issue in a global way and to consider situations not covered by the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol. As noted by several delegations of developed countries in the general debate at the present session of the General Assembly, the growing flows of migration towards the northern hemisphere might have a serious destabilizing effect. In his Government's view, the promotion of solutions through preventive measures at the source of the problem, which the High Commissioner included among the objectives of her strategic plan of action, was essential to avoid measures such as the adoption, by certain developed countries, of border constraints which seemed to be not only self-centred and ineffective but which could possibly jeopardize the institution of asylum itself and, to a certain extent, international peace and security. In an interdependent world where electronics and mass media had a global effect, raising invisible obstacles to migration from the South and the East in one group of wealthy countries did not constitute a sound and durable solution.

33. Thus the preventive approach to the phenomenon should take into account the fact that countries affected by extreme poverty or natural and man-made disasters could rely only on international assistance to minimize the consequences of those factors. His delegation supported the idea that cooperation for the achievement of sustainable development might be one of the best ways of reducing the displacement of persons and of preventing flows of "economic refugees" from gaining greater momentum. It was important not only that such cooperation should be based on technical and developmental assistance, but that it should also take into account financial and economic factors. Developing countries should be granted fair access to the markets of developed countries, particularly markets for their traditional exports such as agricultural produce and textiles, as well as unimpeded access to the technology which would help to raise their productivity and to prepare them for a competitive insertion in the world economy of the 1990s.

Closer contacts should be instituted between UNHCR and development and lending institutions as a tool to establish a link between finance, trade, development and the effective action necessary to avoid refugee flows.

34. On the fortieth anniversary of UNHCR's activities, it was important that the Programme should have the capacity to respond promptly to the many and overwhelming changes taking place in the world. The refugee issue could no longer be considered in isolation but should be examined in the broader context of development. If it was accepted that durable solutions for refugees in developing countries could, in the majority of cases, be attained through a development-oriented approach, a new understanding of refugee problems and a new and more adequate interpretation of durable solutions would be achieved.

35. Mr. RASAPUTRAM (Observer for Sri Lanka) said that events in the recent past had posed new challenges to UNHCR with regard to the interpretation of its mandate and its ability to act promptly in situations of international humanitarian concern. It was evident that, since refugee situations had a large number of root causes, whether they were due to economic factors, natural disasters or man-made emergencies, the humanitarian response capacity of UNHCR and the United Nations system would have to be strengthened. Recent events had also proved that, apart from strengthening the emergency response capacities of United Nations organizations, broader interpretations would have to be given to the mandates of existing institutions to enable them to respond to the requests of Governments faced with increasingly complex refugee situations.

36. The measures outlined in the High Commissioner's opening statement and in document EC/SC.2/1991/CRP.4 were concerned with those issues. A rearrangement of UNHCR's internal administrative structures and the maintenance of the staff and stocks of emergency supplies needed for that purpose were evidently called for. It was to be hoped that the necessary resources would be made available, since successful emergency preparedness was a means of preventing even greater suffering and expenditure.

37. The characteristics of present-day migrations had also highlighted the link between not only the human rights and the political causes of refugee movements, but also the equally relevant economic dimension. As some of the background documents had suggested, successful durable solutions to present refugee movements would have to take into account both the political and the development aspects.

38. The UNHCR programme in Sri Lanka, which was now well into its fourth year, was an example of flexibility in the mandate of the Programme, which, at the request of the Government of Sri Lanka, had initiated in 1987 a special programme of limited assistance with the resettlement of returnees from southern India. In collaboration with the Ministry of Reconstruction, the UNHCR programme had successfully catered for approximately 45,000 returnees and for internally displaced families. The comprehensive programme, jointly implemented through UNHCR and his Government's Unified Assistance Scheme, had aimed at preparing both returnees and other displaced persons, as well as the receiving community, for long-term self-supporting livelihoods and integration. The success of those activities had, however,

been interrupted in June 1990 when the Tamil terrorist group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), had unilaterally abandoned the peace talks in which it had been engaged for over a year with the Government of Sri Lanka. LTTE's terrorist activities had not only interrupted and threatened the security and continuance of UNHCR's activity in the north and east of Sri Lanka; it had also once again forced innocent civilians of all communities to leave for safety to other areas of Sri Lanka and to neighbouring southern India.

39. Those developments had ushered in the new phase of cooperation between UNHCR and the Government of Sri Lanka. Since June 1990, UNHCR had successfully operated two open relief centres and six sub-centres in the district of Mannar. Nearly 60,000 displaced persons were being cared for there, and food supplies provided by the Government were being distributed by them.

40. In a parallel development due to the resumption of terrorist activities by LTTE, nearly 200,000 civilians had been forced to flee from the north and east of Sri Lanka to southern India. As the security situation in the north and east returned to normal as a result of the Government's success in restoring civilian administration in areas clear of LTTE activity, the Governments of Sri Lanka and India would cooperate in expediting the voluntary return of refugees to their former places of residence in Sri Lanka. The return of the bulk of those refugees would initially impose a heavy burden on the Government of Sri Lanka in terms of finance and work involved in their reception, temporary lodging and subsequent resettlement. His Government therefore looked forward to further cooperation with UNHCR, with its long-standing expertise in the voluntary repatriation of refugees, while expressing its deepest gratitude to the High Commissioner and her staff for the invaluable work carried out so far.

41. In conclusion, the presence of UNHCR and other international humanitarian organizations such as MSF and the International Committee of the Red Cross in Sri Lanka was necessitated by the suffering caused by LTTE. There was a definite link between refugees and human rights violations by terrorists. No durable political solutions to the current situation in the north and east of Sri Lanka could be envisaged until LTTE accepted the invitation of the Government of Sri Lanka to engage in a political dialogue and to discuss issues of national significance with all other political parties. In the meantime the Government of Sri Lanka remained fully committed to - in the High Commissioner's words - "accepting responsibility for its own citizens, both in terms of conditions which avert forced exile, and also which promote voluntary return".

42. Mr. ENNACEUR (Tunisia) said that his delegation had given careful consideration to the High Commissioner's Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/777), which suggested new orientations for UNHCR's activities and shed realistic and up-to-date light on the need to promote and reinvigorate the principles of protection. The interesting proposals contained in the Note required appropriate decisions by the Executive Committee.

43. On the fortieth anniversary of UNHCR, he noted with satisfaction that the drive for peace throughout the world had been conducive to the establishment of repatriation programmes for refugees. Nevertheless, the international community was still facing problems and challenges posed by the increasingly large number of refugees and by the complexity of population movements. The refugee situation was therefore still a source of concern, as were other current problems of protection involving various categories of persons who were victims of xenophobic excesses. The Working Group on Solutions and Protection had examined those matters, although no consensus had yet been reached on all the points which it had studied; nevertheless, it was important to safeguard the principles of protection by adopting realistic and flexible attitudes. The international community was called upon to shoulder its responsibilities for refugees on the basis of worldwide solidarity. It was therefore essential that, in the search for durable solutions to refugee problems and in any global approach to the difficulties inherent in international protection, account should be taken of development assistance.

44. UNHCR and the international community should also strengthen measures designed to facilitate the voluntary repatriation and reintegration of refugees as the ideal way of putting an end to their suffering.

45. The High Commissioner's intention to appoint a coordinator for refugee children, similar to the post of coordinator for refugee women, was to be welcomed as a further indication of UNHCR's efforts to alleviate the sufferings of vulnerable groups. However, in order for the Programme to be able to guarantee, in dignity, the survival and proper treatment of such groups, it must have adequate resources, especially in view of the need for it to improve its capacity to intervene promptly in emergency situations. Other international organizations, development institutions, agencies and non-governmental organizations cooperating with UNHCR also played a commendable role and should be given every encouragement, as well as other donors.

46. Tunisia was making every effort to help to achieve the international community's humanitarian objectives with regard to refugees. In that connection, its experience in UNHCR's first repatriation operation outside Europe for the benefit of Algerian refugees in the early 1960s should be borne in mind. His Government would continue to work for the maintenance of good relations between UNHCR and the League of Arab States, the Islamic Conference, and the Organization of African Unity. As in the past, it was still concerned about the painful situation of the Palestinians living in camps in the occupied Arab territories, who were still without any kind of international protection.

47. In the new international order, the international community was called upon to assume new responsibilities which, in addition to ensuring that refugees were granted asylum, must also ensure that they could return to their country and be protected there so that further departures need not take place. A greater international effort therefore had to be made to deal with the causes of population movements as well as their effects. In the new international humanitarian order, UNHCR would certainly have a leading role to play in refugee and migration matters.

48. Mr. RUKINGAMA (Observer for Burundi) said that at certain times in its history his country had had the misfortune to produce refugees but it also acted as host to a large number of foreign refugees despite the smallness of its territory. It was therefore aware of both sides of the painful problem. The total number of Burundi refugees was approximately 240,000.

49. The Burundi people, had resolutely opted for peace and unity among all Burundis, both within and outside its national frontiers. Top priority had been given to national unity, and a free and far-reaching debate on the question had been organized throughout the country and among all sectors of the population as a result of an important report submitted on 13 May 1989 by the National Commission on National Unity. The Commission, consisting of 24 leaders of all ethnic, regional and socio-professional origins had considered the country's past and the causes of the divisions which had shaken it on several occasions. The Commission's recommendations had been carefully studied by the Government, particularly those relating to sensitive issues such as education, employment, security and national institutions. The Commission had completed its work by drawing up a charter of national unity. Within that framework of national reconciliation, a solution also had to be found for the question of Burundi refugees, since peace and understanding among the Burundis would not be complete as long as one group of citizens felt itself excluded from the process.

50. The President of the Republic and the Uprona Party had appealed to Burundi refugees to return to the country. To allow for their appropriate reception and resettlement, a National Commission for the return, reception and rehabilitation of Burundi refugees had been established on 22 January 1991. The Commission's work so far had been satisfactory. It had provided emergency aid, plots of land for the construction of dwellings, employment in both the public and private sectors, school places, health care and other necessary emergency assistance. So far 15,000 Burundis had been repatriated.

51. The spontaneous return of the refugees involved certain disadvantages that could be avoided by setting up adequate structures for organized voluntary repatriation. That is what Burundi and Tanzania, in collaboration with UNHCR, had just done by signing, on 27 August 1991, a Tripartite Agreement for the establishment of a Technical Working Group responsible for promoting durable solutions for Burundi refugees living in Tanzania. Under the Agreement, Tanzania would grant Tanzanian nationality to those refugees who did not want to return to Burundi and who applied for it. Tanzania would also facilitate the integration of such refugees. The Burundi Government wished to pay a heartfelt tribute to the Government and people of Tanzania for their humanitarian solidarity.

52. The Technical Working Group provided for under the Tripartite Agreement had just visited the settlement areas of Burundi refugees in Tanzania to give them the relevant information on the durable solutions available to them - namely, repatriation or naturalization and local resettlement. His Government would like the recommendations made by the Technical Working Group to be considered by UNHCR and the international community so that the operation could be successful. Particular stress was laid on the establishment of transit centres and of a UNHCR office at Kigoma, Tanzania,

as well as on the mobilization of the resources needed to register candidates for repatriation, and for their transportation, settlement and rehabilitation in their country of origin. Help would also be needed for those who wished to settle in the host country. If successful, the operation would make it possible to settle once and for all the question of Burundi refugees in Tanzania and would also constitute an example to be followed wherever necessary in the future.

53. His Government had also undertaken economic reforms to secure the welfare of the population. At the same time the process of democratization, including the institution of political pluralism, was under way. At the present time the report of the Constitutional Commission submitted on 10 September 1991 was being debated by all sectors of the population. The recommendations that would emerge from the exchange of views would help with the elaboration of the future Constitution that would regulate the new democratic institutions.

54. In conclusion, he wished to reiterate the appeal already made to Burundi refugees living in exile to return freely to their country in the knowledge that their compatriots would welcome them and that structures for their reception, resettlement and socio-professional rehabilitation were being progressively put into place, so that they could participate in the work of consolidating national unity, democratization and development for everyone.

55. Mr. LANUS (Argentina) expressed his Government's satisfaction with the High Commissioner's activities during her first eight months in office, and indicated its willingness closely to cooperate with her in the task ahead.

56. During UNHCR's existence, some 20 million people had died as a direct result of war, 12 million of them in civil wars in developing countries. The dramatic legacy of violence between and within States had recently been further compounded by a new factor, unforeseen 30 years ago, in the form of a disturbing economic and social climate in some parts of the world, which also engendered population movements that fell within UNHCR's competence or within the undefined limits of its responsibility.

57. UNHCR had to perform its humanitarian task in an environment determined two variables: the concept of refugee protection contained in the 1951 Convention and the overwhelming and unforeseeably huge number of displaced persons that did not always fall within a neat legal classification. While UNHCR's task was defined by its Statute, the occasionally dramatic course taken by history overflowed the limits of legal responsibility, but none the less gave rise to moral obligations.

58. The fundamental aim of protection was to achieve lasting solutions in a humanitarian context and in accordance with the basic principles of asylum. Its components were the day-to-day obligation to protect individuals and groups of persons that had crossed national frontiers and whose fundamental rights were threatened, and the responsibility to consolidate and extend the legal framework governing the status and rights of refugees.

59. The cause of refugees had a long history in Argentina and in Latin America, starting with the 1889 Montevideo treaty which had for the first time conferred legal status on political asylum, followed by

the 1928 Havana convention and the 1933 Montevideo Convention on Political Asylum, all of which had formed the legal background to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. His delegation recognized that the report of the Working Group on Solutions and Protection (EC/SCP/64) was a suitable starting-point for further work to provide UNHCR with legal instruments to allow it to intercede in situations currently not covered by the 1951 Convention or the 1967 Protocol.

60. While Argentina fully respected the views of those who thought that it was preferable not to extend the concept of refugee, it believed that UNHCR should provide services and assistance wherever required. Accordingly, the High Commissioner should cooperate with Governments in providing solutions that often required considerable physical and logistical support. In that connection, the issue of refugee women and children, who constituted the bulk of many mass population movements, was of capital importance, and his delegation regretted that the medium-term plan for 1984-1989 made no reference to women and children.

61. Two phenomena currently required coordinated international action between Governments and international agencies: the factors that caused refugee flows, and responsibility for protecting refugees. In order to eradicate the causes of refugee flows, large-scale and complex measures, beyond the capacity of UNHCR, were required to promote respect for human rights, to lay down the foundations of sustainable development and to overcome the root causes of civil or international violence. However, UNHCR could play a valuable preventive role, and he concurred with the High Commissioner on the desirability of a country of origin database that would help not only to develop action to avoid outflows, but to provide advice on refugee status determination, the application of cessation clauses and the "safe country" concept. His delegation also endorsed the suggestion made by the French delegation for the establishment of a file of national experts and members of non-governmental organizations available to assist UNHCR.

62. UNHCR had a vital protective role to play by providing assistance in emergencies and giving priority to the voluntary repatriation of refugees. It was not simply a question of running refugee camps or providing transport, but of providing lasting solutions to problems.

63. His delegation expressed its deep regret that events beyond UNHCR's responsibility had caused the death of six international civil servants in Somalia and prevented the provision of humanitarian assistance to hundreds of thousands of Ethiopian refugees. It was, however, gratified that the joint UNHCR/CARE needs assessment team had made it possible to implement a rehabilitation and reintegration programme in the border region between Ethiopia and Somalia. In Asia and Oceania, UNHCR's efficient work had made it possible to repatriate 350,000 Cambodians from Thailand, while in Latin America the activities of UNHCR within the framework of CIREFCA had allowed numerous Central American refugees and displaced persons to return, together with their families. However, there was all the more reason to continue CIREFCA's task in the region, as the huge strides made towards peace in the area would make it necessary to plan for the return of thousands of displaced persons and refugees to their countries of origin.

64. His delegation took the opportunity to pay a tribute both to the countries of asylum, most of which were developing countries, and to the donor countries, whose generosity made possible the implementation of programmes to attend to the dramatic refugee problem. It also paid a tribute to the unswerving, courageous and anonymous devotion of the officials and employees of UNHCR, and congratulated the Regional Office in Argentina on its valuable work, which had included cooperation with the Argentine Government in organizing a national seminar on refugee rights, attended by members of the Supreme Court, federal judges and other central and provincial officials.

65. He concluded by underscoring the three key issues which in the view of his Government required the international community's attention: rules of conduct to facilitate sustainable economic development in all countries; universal commitment to protecting the environment and a solution to the problem of population movements, in respect of which UNHCR had a leading role to play.

66. Mr. TOTH (Observer for Hungary) said that recent developments had demonstrated the difficulties of overcoming the distrust among neighbours and national and religious intolerance, whose undesirable influence would be felt for years to come. Issues such as the breakdown of economic infrastructures, environmental hazards and the crisis of health and social welfare systems forced people to move, and the real remedy was to accelerate the transition of Central and Eastern European countries so that sustainable development and integration would enable them fully to implement political, civil and cultural rights, including minority rights, thus eliminating many of the root causes of mass refugee outflows.

67. However, in Eastern Europe those deep-rooted problems coexisted with a number of political time bombs that were still ticking even after the removal of the confrontational military and political structures. Moreover, a real war, with all its awful consequences was being waged in Europe, just beyond Hungary's borders, in neighbouring Yugoslavia. Since June 1991 approximately 35,000 Yugoslav citizens, only 26 per cent of whom were ethnic Hungarians, had requested temporary asylum in Hungary. Seventy per cent of the asylum seekers, who had brought the total number of refugees in Hungary to 60,000, were women and children.

68. In order to cover all the expenditure relating to the refugees from Romania, a Government Settlement Fund had been established in 1988, and had so far spent \$35 million. A further \$17 million had been provided by ministries and government organizations from their own budgets. In addition, since 1989, UNHCR had also contributed \$5.6 million, covering about 10 per cent of the expenditure incurred by the Hungarian Government.

69. The new influx posed an additional challenge to the Hungarian economy and infrastructure. Although all the expenditure connected with the new influx had so far been covered by the Government Settlement Fund, the Government's budgetary resources were almost entirely exhausted, and the additional financial assistance expected in the 1992 programmes would entail a burden that Hungary was not capable of bearing alone. Political, moral and financial

burden-sharing was needed to tackle that emergency and a clear demonstration of international solidarity would hopefully generate a new willingness to help the masses of asylum seekers.

70. People would not leave their homes and their country if economic and social development, democracy and the observance of human rights were guaranteed. Multilateral cooperation, conducive to sustainable development, was capable of pre-empting mass exoduses of peoples, and an effective approach to those problems was inconceivable without the incorporation of development aspects into refugee policies. Recent experience had shown that the international response to massive displacements of people sometimes came belatedly. The development of UNHCR's emergency preparedness and response capabilities was of vital importance, both for refugees and potential countries of first asylum. The idea of an early warning might be an additional means of ensuring better preparedness, by providing information on refugee situations without which a timely response was hardly imaginable. An early warning required data collection and information handling processes, and he stressed the need to make wider use of computerized networks and pools of information shared by UNHCR, Governments and non-governmental organizations. The creation of a comprehensive and widely accessible database might prove the ideal means of meeting that need.

71. He concluded by expressing his confidence that the mutual efforts of countries would lead to a better understanding of the plight of refugees, and expressed his Government's willingness to make every possible effort to achieve that goal, hopefully as a member of the Executive Committee.

72. Mr. ARTEAGA (Venezuela) said that during her first nine months, the High Commissioner for Refugees had successfully restored the confidence of the international community in UNHCR while simultaneously implementing ideas and provoking reflections that would certainly lead to improved care for the world's refugee population. He paid a tribute to the professional spirit and dedication of the staff of the Office of the High Commissioner, and particularly to the six officials who had lost their lives in the performance of their duty.

73. His delegation wholeheartedly endorsed the three-point strategy set out in the High Commissioner's opening statement in the hope that, thanks to a genuine international effort, solutions could be found so that people would no longer be forced to flee their homes, or alternatively, solutions could be found so that people ceased to be refugees.

74. He was gratified to note that Central America, where the regional peace initiatives and the CIREFCA Plan of Action had made it possible to repatriate large numbers of refugees, provided an illustration of those solutions. However, he endorsed the observation made earlier on behalf of the countries of Central America that programmes in that area could not be considered complete, because the return of refugees was such a heavy burden for most Central American countries that they continued to depend on international solidarity.

75. His Government considered voluntary repatriation the most satisfactory lasting solution and had provided a special contribution to the programmes implemented by UNHCR in connection with Nicaraguan returnees.

76. The Secretariat had provided commendable documentation both relating to administrative and financial questions and to international protection. For the first time, UNHCR's budget had reached \$US 980 million. His delegation had participated in the Working Group on Solutions and Protection, whose report (EC/SCP/64) provided an overview of the current problem and drew attention to the differences in comparison with the situation when the 1951 Convention had been adopted. In order to adopt the report by consensus, all participating delegations had had to make concessions, but the final result was encouraging and Venezuela would encourage the Executive Committee to accept the report.

77. For a number of years, Venezuela had been concerned by the demographic make-up of the refugee population, and wished to point out that it was impossible to meet the needs of refugees without focusing programmes on all components of the population. His delegation was gratified that the Office of the High Commissioner intended to improve information and statistical systems and the determination to include aspects relating to refugee women, who composed 80 per cent of the refugee population, in the planning and implementation of UNHCR's General Programme. He expressed his delegation's satisfaction with the information note on UNHCR's Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women (EC/SCP/67) and its support for any decision by the Executive Committee to transform the Guidelines on so important a component of the refugee population as women into a tool to be used both in the field and at all levels of decision-making.

78. His delegation took the opportunity to thank the Coordinator for Refugee Women for her work, which would not have been possible without the generosity of the Government of Canada. It would also support the inclusion in UNHCR's budget of a post of coordinator for refugee women at the highest level.

79. With regard to the composition of the refugee population, his delegation was gratified by the particular interest shown that year for the inclusion of the needs of children, who apparently represented 50 per cent of the refugee population, in UNHCR's General Programme. Document EC/SC.2/48/Rev.1 on the situation of child refugees spelt out in stark terms the distressing and tragic situation of refugee children, with its varied and complex legal implications. For that reason he regretted that the document had not been considered by the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection. However, Venezuela would support any decision designed to strengthen protection and assistance for refugee children in all the UNHCR programmes adopted by the Executive Committee and unreservedly supported the establishment of a post of coordinator for refugee children, which had been made possible by the generosity of the Government of Norway. He also indicated his support for the efforts made by UNHCR to disseminate and promote norms relating to the rights of refugees, and concluded by reiterating his delegation's support for the High Commissioner in achieving the three objectives she had set.

The meeting rose at 1.03 p.m.

76. Le secrétariat a soumis une documentation remarquable tant sur les aspects administratifs et financiers que sur la question de la protection internationale. Pour la première fois, le budget du HCR a atteint 980 millions de dollars. La délégation vénézuélienne a participé aux travaux du Groupe de travail sur les solutions et la protection, dont le rapport (EC/SCP/64) décrit le problème tel qu'il se présente actuellement et appelle l'attention sur le fait que la situation a évolué depuis l'adoption de la Convention en 1951. Pour que le rapport puisse être adopté par consensus, toutes les délégations participantes ont dû faire des concessions, mais le résultat final est encourageant et le Venezuela recommande au Comité exécutif d'accepter ce rapport.

77. Depuis quelques années, le Venezuela est préoccupé par la composition démographique de la population des réfugiés et tient à relever qu'il est impossible de répondre aux besoins des réfugiés sans axer les programmes sur toutes les composantes de la population. La délégation vénézuélienne se félicite de l'intention exprimée par le Haut Commissariat d'améliorer les systèmes d'information et de statistiques et de prendre en considération les besoins des femmes réfugiées, qui représentent 80 % de la population de réfugiés, dans la planification et la mise en oeuvre du programme général du HCR. M. Arteaga déclare que sa délégation a lu avec intérêt la note d'information sur les lignes directrices du HCR pour la protection des femmes réfugiées (EC/SCP/67) et qu'elle appuiera toute décision du Comité exécutif d'utiliser ces directives comme outil de travail, tant sur le terrain qu'à tous les niveaux du processus de décision.

78. La délégation vénézuélienne saisit cette occasion pour faire l'éloge du travail accompli par le Coordonnateur pour les femmes réfugiées, qui a été rendu possible grâce à la générosité du Gouvernement canadien. Elle approuve en outre l'idée d'inscrire au budget du HCR un poste de coordonnateur pour les femmes réfugiées au niveau le plus élevé.

79. En ce qui concerne la composition de la population de réfugiés, la délégation vénézuélienne se félicite de l'intérêt porté cette année dans le Programme général du HCR aux besoins des enfants, qui représentent apparemment 50 % de la population de réfugiés. Le document EC/SC.2/48/Rev.1 consacré à la situation des enfants réfugiés décrit en termes réalistes la situation tragique et déplorable des enfants réfugiés, ainsi que ses multiples et complexes répercussions sur le plan juridique. C'est pourquoi M. Arteaga déplore que ce document n'ait pas été examiné par le Sous-Comité plénier sur la protection internationale. En tout état de cause, le Venezuela soutiendra toute décision prise aux fins de renforcer les mesures de protection et d'assistance destinées aux enfants réfugiés dans tous les programmes du HCR adopté par le Comité exécutif et appuie sans réserve la création d'un poste de coordonnateur pour les enfants réfugiés, qui a été rendue possible grâce à la générosité du Gouvernement norvégien. M. Arteaga ajoute qu'il appuie les efforts déployés par le HCR pour faire connaître les normes relatives aux droits des réfugiés et encourager leur application et conclut en rappelant l'engagement de sa délégation de soutenir le Haut Commissaire dans la réalisation des trois objectifs qu'elle s'est fixés.

La séance est levée à 13 h 5.