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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 37th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. AL-SHAALI (United Arab Emirates)

later: Mr. ALFARO-PINEDA (El Salvador)
(Vice-Chairman)

later: Mr. AL-SHAALI (United Arab Emirates)
(Chairman)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 97: REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS (continued) (A/46/3 (chap. VII, sect. H) and Add.1, A/46/12 and Add.1, 134 and Corr.1, 139, A/46/323-S/22836, A/46/344, 428-435, 471, 501/Rev.1, 568, 612)

1. Mrs. MAHAWA BANGOURA (Guinea) said that most natural or man-made disasters occurred in developing countries, which were already seriously affected by the economic crisis. Consequently, her delegation supported the recommendation put forward by the Secretary-General in his report (A/46/568) that coordination of United Nations emergency humanitarian assistance must be strengthened in order to guarantee a rapid, effective response.
2. Her delegation welcomed the Secretary-General's emphasis on the importance of sharing responsibility among the various agencies of the United Nations system, issuing consolidated appeals and establishing a central emergency revolving fund.
3. As development, humanitarian assistance and the economic situation were closely linked, strengthening the economic capacity of affected countries must obviously be the chief priority in seeking to strengthen humanitarian assistance. However, any humanitarian assistance should be provided solely with the consent and at the request of the State concerned. In future, it would also be desirable if resolutions on humanitarian assistance took into account the need for a transition from an emergency situation to medium- and long-term development.
4. Her delegation wished to express its appreciation to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRG) for the important work they carried out in order to provide relief to victims of all kinds of disasters and, in particular, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP), the World Health Organization (WHO) and relevant non-governmental organizations, for their valuable assistance to displaced persons in Liberia.
5. Unfortunately, despite that assistance and the efforts realized by the Economic Community of West African States, the Liberian crisis persisted and both Liberian refugees and host populations still suffered the consequences of that tragic situation. The international community must undertake ongoing, far-reaching measures, particularly with respect to food. Her delegation therefore appealed to all Member States and governmental and non-governmental organizations to provide assistance to Liberian refugees in the areas of education, health, and environmental protection, and to pool their efforts with those of the Economic Community of West African States in order to end the suffering of the Liberian people.

6. Miss ATTAH (Nigeria) said that the majority of the world's 17 million refugees were located in developing countries and that, despite the enormous efforts and resources deployed by UNHCR in order to assist them, the situation of refugees and displaced persons continued to deteriorate, especially in Africa.

7. Populations that felt seriously threatened and fled their countries often sought refuge in neighbouring countries which were generally in no condition to withstand the pressure of refugee flows. The "natural" reaction of certain countries was to expel, detain or refuse to admit those seeking refuge - and those countries which did open their doors were liable to find themselves in terrible situations. That was the case in Malawi, whose refugee population was almost equal in number to the national population. The most distressing cases were in the Horn of Africa: the situation of States affected by internal strife, States which themselves had suffered the effects of natural disaster, or newly independent States which had to impose stringent economic reforms on their populations was aggravated by the burden of a refugee presence.

8. In the light of that situation, her delegation appealed to donor countries to contribute additional funds to humanitarian assistance agencies and urged those agencies to adapt their methods and approaches to the needs and realities of the affected countries.

9. The manner in which UNHCR and its staff fulfilled the difficult mandate, despite the shortage of resources and supplies, was commendable. Over the past year, the High Commissioner had, with great courage and determination, taken up some of the most severe challenges the Office had ever faced.

10. Any durable solution to the refugee problem must take into account, in addition to the issues of poverty and development, the main root causes of refugee flows, namely, political conflict and human rights violations. Development components must also be incorporated in refugee projects with a view to enabling refugees to work in the host country and, on their return, to participate in the socio-economic development of their country of origin.

11. In conclusion, her delegation wished to express its appreciation to the non-governmental organizations which had provided relief to refugees and urged UNHCR to continue developing close cooperation with them.

12. Mr. SAEED (Pakistan) said that the state of the world was such that opportunity and hope dwelt side by side with uncertainty and concern. Large numbers of persons, mainly women and children, had fled from their countries of origin to take refuge in neighbouring countries which, unfortunately, were usually poor developing countries incapable of absorbing that burden. The situation was aggravated by migratory trends resulting from growing economic disparity between various regions, or from environmental degradation. Obviously, if a solution was not found to those problems, international peace and security would be threatened.

(Mr. Saeed, Pakistan)

13. The aggravation of refugee problems had put United Nations assistance mechanisms, under the dynamic and able leadership of the High Commissioner, to the test, and had underlined the urgent need for increased international cooperation in that area.

14. During the past year, serious new refugee situations had emerged. Others, which were long-standing - as in the case of Afghan refugees in Pakistan - had continued to require the attention of the international community. Notwithstanding its own serious economic situation, Pakistan had extended generous assistance to refugees living in its territory. Of course, that would not have been possible without the assistance of the international donor community, UNHCR, the World Food Programme and other international agencies. However, whether because of so-called "donor fatigue" or the optimistic expectation that, after the signing of the Geneva Agreements and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, refugees would return to their country, the sad truth was that donors had cut supplies and Pakistan found it increasingly difficult to maintain the refugees' standard of living.

15. His delegation believed that voluntary repatriation remained the best solution to the refugee problem. Therefore, the necessary conditions for their return must be created and internal conflict in Afghanistan must be ended in order to restore peace. To that end, power must be transferred to a broad-based Government established in Kabul which embodied the aspirations of the Afghan people. The Secretary-General's proposal of 21 May 1991 and the recent tripartite talks were a major stride towards a comprehensive political settlement.

16. UNHCR and other relief agencies must not scale down their support at that critical juncture. On the contrary, assistance levels must be maintained in order to speed up the process and facilitate the early return of the Afghan refugees to their homeland. He drew attention to the 1988 agreement between UNHCR and Pakistan under which UNHCR was committed to continue extending assistance to Afghan refugees pending their voluntary return to their homeland.

17. In conformity with its policy of encouraging voluntary repatriation of refugees, Pakistan had extended all possible assistance to various United Nations agencies in order to make the repatriation programme a success. Pakistan deeply appreciated the rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes implemented by the United Nations in Afghanistan. However, despite the activities carried out by UNDRP for Afghanistan through Operation "Salaam", the Voluntary Repatriation Pilot Project and the UNHCR Guest House programme, only 100,000 persons had returned to Afghanistan; and a large number of them had apparently returned to camps in Pakistan because of the difficult situation prevailing in their country of origin.

18. Another possible durable solution mentioned by the High Commissioner in her report was "local settlement". For valid reasons, Afghan refugees in Pakistan were not mentioned under that heading. Their local settlement would

(Mr. Saeed, Pakistan)

be fraught with serious socio-economic and political consequences for Pakistan and would constitute a major departure from UNHCR's own policies.

19. His delegation wished to draw attention to the insufficiency of the international assistance being received by the Afghan refugees. Donors were currently providing wheat and oil only, in quantities which fell a long way short of minimum requirements. Since the supply of those two commodities had been reduced even further, on the recommendation of UNHCR and WFP, Pakistan, which up to the end of 1990 had already provided 750,000 metric tons of wheat, would continue to have to meet the shortfall. In spite of the difficulties which had been caused by the Gulf crisis, Pakistan had already spent 2.5 billion rupees on the supply of the wheat required for the refugees.

20. In addition to the negative economic impact of the presence of the Afghan refugees, damage had also been caused to the environment. The destruction of forests, the erosion of fertile topsoil and pressure on roads and irrigation canals would have long-lasting, and in some cases permanent, effects. The situation called for a major human and financial response. Consequently, Pakistan was hoping for generous international assistance in order to help remedy the grave situation which had arisen.

21. Mr. Alfaro-Pineda (El Salvador), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

22. Ms. COOMBS (New Zealand) said that UNHCR's fortieth year had been a turbulent and challenging one. The flight of hundreds of thousands of persons from Iraq within a matter of days and the worsened situation in the Horn of Africa had been real trials by fire for the staff of UNHCR, who were unable to improve the overall situation of the dispossessed of the world in spite of their untiring work, undertaken in some cases at the cost of their own lives, sacrificed in the performance of their noble task.

23. Although it was well known that most people preferred to remain in their own communities if their basic human rights were respected and they had, or could at least aspire to, a decent standard of living, the fact of the matter was that there were 17 million refugees in the world. The most desirable solution to that grave problem was voluntary repatriation. An outstanding example had been the return to her native Namibia, as a member of the Government of the country, of Libertine Amathila, one of the 1991 Nansen Medal winners, after years spent trying to provide medical assistance for her fellow refugees.

24. UNHCR was faced with the enormous tasks of assisting the reintegration into democratic life of large numbers of victims of apartheid in South Africa and returning 350,000 refugees to Cambodia, a country ravaged by war and littered with mines. After the hard lesson of the Gulf crisis, UNHCR was attaching increasing importance to preparedness measures and to inter-agency coordination in order to enable it, as far as possible, to provide a rapid and adequate response to whatever crises might arise, to determine more precisely and consistently the legal status of refugees and, in particular, to provide

(Ms. Coombs, New Zealand)

special protection to the largest and most vulnerable group, women and children.

25. New Zealand had contributed directly to the funds to assist the repatriation of refugees from South Africa and Cambodia and in addition was providing specific assistance with the task of deactivating the mines scattered throughout Cambodian territory in the form of a team of specialists being placed at the disposal of the United Nations Advance Mission in Cambodia (UNAMIC). New Zealand was also contributing to the Comprehensive Plan of Action in order to help identify and resettle Vietnamese refugees who had sought asylum in Hong Kong and the countries of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), and pledged its full support for all future activities of UNHCR.

26. Mrs. KABA-CAMARA (Côte d'Ivoire) said that after 40 years of work by UNHCR the situation was worse rather than better. In 1951, at the height of the cold war, there had been 1 million refugees; in 1960 that figure had doubled as a result of the struggles of the third world to achieve independence. The number had risen exponentially as the years had passed, to 8 million in 1980, 12 million in 1989 and more than 17 million at the present time.

27. The number of refugees in the developing countries was increasing at the rate of 3,000 per day (1 million per year) as a consequence of regional conflicts and civil wars. In Africa 2,500,000 persons had left Ethiopia, Somalia and the Sudan, 450,000 persons had left Burundi and Rwanda because of ethnic conflicts, and there were 2 million refugees from Angola and Mozambique, 165,000 from Western Sahara and 700,000, one third of the population, from Liberia. In other regions of the world 450,000 Cambodians, 6.9 million Afghans, 2.4 million Palestinians, 1.1 million Salvadorians and Guatemalans and - most recently, as a result of the Gulf war - 2 million Iraqis had all left their countries.

28. Although movements of refugees were to a large extent the result of wars and large-scale violations of human rights, increasing numbers of persons were fleeing their country or region simply in order to escape from hunger. She asked whether it was right to ignore those people because they did not fit exactly the definition of the term "refugee" contained in the Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 28 July 1951. That measure had clearly been aimed at protecting the victims of the Second World War, and a new protocol had been needed in order to overcome the restrictions imposed by a time-limit and a specific geographical area.

29. Her delegation therefore advocated a broader interpretation of the term "refugee" which would retain the criterion of displacement from the customary place of residence and accept the aim of escaping from hunger as well as from violence, taking into account, for example, the countless victims and refugees of the great drought of 1984 and 1985 south of the Sahara.

(Mrs. Kaba-Camara, Côte d'Ivoire)

30. Côte d'Ivoire had complied with its humanitarian responsibilities without expecting international assistance in return. Thus, it was providing emergency assistance to the 300,000 refugees from Liberia, with the help of UNHCR and other governmental and non-governmental organizations, operating through a National Coordinating Committee for Assistance to Liberian Refugees, set up for the purpose. The donations and material assistance received were handed over to the International Committee of the Red Cross and to the Red Crescent Society for distribution.

31. As local settlements were already overcrowded, 13,000 new shelters had been built with the assistance of the European Community and the French branch of the organization Médecins sans frontières. The Government of Côte d'Ivoire was coordinating the supply of commodities and the provision of health services to the refugees with the assistance primarily of WFP, USAID, FAO and UNICEF.

32. Côte d'Ivoire considered that the restoration of peace and security in Liberia was a fundamental condition for the return of that country's refugees. The States of the region had held various meetings within the framework of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) with a view to achieving that objective. As a result of those meetings the cantonment and disarmament of the troops would be taking place under the supervision of the ECOWAS Cease-fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in order to allow the holding of free and democratic elections in the presence of international observers.

33. Her delegation believed in the need for recourse to a regional approach as mentioned in the High Commissioner's report (A/46/12). Such an approach could be effective not only with regard to prevention, through the activation of early-warning methods, but also in respect of efforts to encourage the voluntary repatriation of refugees.

34. Her delegation regretted that in recent years, while contributions to assist refugees had risen by 25 per cent, the number of refugees had increased by 50 per cent. It appeared that donor fatigue was spreading among the rich countries precisely at the moment when the capabilities of the poor countries of first refuge were decreasing. The root causes must be tackled and attempts made to improve political, economic and social conditions if 1992 was to be the year of voluntary repatriation.

35. She welcomed the gradual return of refugees to Iraq and the countries of Central America and hoped that the same process would begin in Angola, Mozambique, Western Sahara, Afghanistan, Cambodia and Liberia. She also commended the action taken in response to appeals for assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons, as described in document A/46/371. Finally she repeated the comment of the former High Commissioner, Mr. Stoltenberg, to the effect that the ability of States to deal with the problem of refugees was a measure of their moral well-being.

36. Mr. SLABY (Czechoslovakia) said that his country had recently established close working contacts with UNHCR, after acceding to the 1957 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees. He hoped that Czechoslovakia's policy and legislation could be coordinated with those of other European States, in particular, by participating in the so-called hexagonal working group for migration and in the European international conferences held under the auspices of the Council of Europe.

37. Czechoslovakia therefore welcomed the final document of the 1991 conference on migration from Central and Eastern Europe, which unequivocally engaged the solidarity of the participating countries in the solution of all the problems of migration, including the special needs of the first-asylum countries.

38. While such organizations as the United Nations and UNHCR played an irreplaceable role at the global level, Czechoslovakia believed that priority should be given to the creation of an all-European mechanism to deal with migration, with special emphasis on prevention. The problem of effective assistance to first-asylum countries remained unresolved and attention should also be given to the economic problems inseparably linked to migration.

39. His delegation believed that the problem of refugees and migration should be considered in the broader context of human rights. From that point of view such unresolved questions remained as the responsibility of the country of origin and the conflict between the right of a citizen to leave his country and the immigration measures implemented by countries which did not recognize that right in their legal systems. It was also necessary to reconcile the principle of national sovereignty with humanitarian access to internally displaced persons.

40. Mrs. SEMAMBO (Uganda) said that voluntary repatriation, accompanied by reintegration and development, was the most appropriate solution to the refugee problem. That approach required the cooperation of Governments and of the United Nations development agencies. Furthermore, the countries of origin were obliged to accept returning nationals and to cater for them in their development programmes.

41. There had been favourable developments in the voluntary repatriation of refugees in different parts of the world, and the prospects for peace in Cambodia, Ethiopia, South Africa, El Salvador and other areas raised hopes that many more would return to their countries of origin. The conflicts in the Persian Gulf, Liberia, Yugoslavia and the Horn of Africa, however, had resulted in new refugee situations. As a result, the total number of refugees had grown to the unprecedented level of 17 million, the majority of whom were from the developing countries.

42. The problem was further compounded by the growing number of internally displaced persons and of others fleeing their countries in search of a better life. That development required new priorities from UNHCR and particular attention should therefore be to the reinforcement of the Office. For that

(Mrs. Semambo, Uganda)

reason, her delegation strongly supported UNHCR's new forward-looking strategies, which focused on preventive measures, emergency preparedness, response mechanisms and durable solutions. With regard to preventive measures, UNHCR should be encouraged to give economic support both to communities affected by the flight of their people and to those affected by their repatriation. Importance also attached to cooperation with human rights bodies and with the dissemination of information, as well as to close cooperation between UNHCR and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

43. With regard to emergency preparedness, Uganda welcomed the measures planned by UNHCR, such as the creation of five emergency teams, internal and external stockpiling of relief goods and agreements with government officials and non-governmental personnel. For more complex cases, such as those of Iraq and the Horn of Africa, she believed that the international community should promote the strengthening of the response capacity of the United Nations, and in particular, that of UNDRO and of UNHCR, which would take responsibility for the coordination of operations.

44. With regard to durable solutions, she insisted that voluntary repatriation, integration and development offered the most effective course of action.

45. No early end could be seen to the refugee problem and its solution therefore necessitated concerted efforts. Uganda commended the work of the United Nations agencies and the assistance provided by the donor community and the countries of asylum. Despite its own economic limitations and the pressures on its society, Uganda continued to offer asylum to refugees and to encourage its own nationals, refugees or economic migrants, to return home.

46. Her delegation similarly welcomed the adoption and implementation of regional initiatives on refugees. UNHCR and the South African Government had recently signed an agreement on the establishment of a UNHCR presence in South Africa, as a first step towards the return of refugees. She hoped that the outbreak of violence in black townships would not jeopardize that arrangement.

47. In recent years, increasing attention had been given to the flow of refugees moving for economic reasons from poor areas to centres offering better opportunities. Her delegation was concerned about the hostility and violence directed at those refugees. Even though that aspect of the problem fell outside the mandate of UNHCR, it was necessary for other competent agencies to make increased efforts to ensure the return of rejected persons, in safety and dignity. Uganda remained convinced that the ideal solution to the problem lay in a new, more equitable economic order, in which all societies could meet the basic needs of their populations.

48. Mr. STREJCZEK (Poland) said that in 1989 his country had entered a new era marked by full independence and the desire to fulfil all the obligations of a modern and civilized State. Accordingly, it had recently acceded to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and to its 1967 Protocol.

(Mr. Strejczek, Poland)

In addition, it had ratified the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the Convention on the Rights of the Child and had acceded to the additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and to the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

49. In 1989, Poland had also become a host country for persons seeking asylum. Its Government had not hesitated in providing the necessary humanitarian assistance to those refugees, in meeting their needs and in creating favourable conditions for their stay in Poland.

50. The post and office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Refugees had been created in 1990 in the Ministry of Internal Affairs. At the end of 1990, allocations to refugees totaled 1,700 million zlotys. At the invitation of the Polish Government, UNHCR representatives had made two visits to Poland in 1991, to inspect the conditions and protection provided for the refugees. The Polish Government would shortly sign an agreement with UNHCR on the opening of a branch office in Warsaw.

51. Poland had started to elaborate its new comprehensive policy towards refugees in conformity with the basic provisions of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol. It had revised the law on procedures relating to aliens and was preparing a new comprehensive law based on the international conventions to which Poland had acceded.

52. With the cooperation of UNHCR, Poland intended to put into effect an integration programme for refugees which embraced the establishment of two accommodation centres, the organization of language and other courses, and vocational training for refugees. The National Office for Refugees was to establish a housing subsidy fund to operate independently from the normal social welfare housing budgets.

53. Recent events in Central and Eastern Europe marked the beginning of a new age in Europe. Freedom of movement in Europe had opened up new possibilities for refugees and other migrants. Poland was located in the historical path of European migrants who had been moving westwards over the years. Since 1989, there had been no political or ideological reason for them to flee. Nevertheless, Poland was currently the preferred centre for migration from the countries of Eastern and Southern Europe, the Soviet Union and even Asia and Africa, though mainly as a transit country.

54. As a State party to the 1951 Convention, Poland was prepared to try to promote the basic humanitarian standards and principles for dealing with refugees' problems. The challenge confronting the international community was to eliminate the factors that impelled people to take dramatic decisions.

55. Mr. BURCUOĞLU (Turkey) said that the current year had been marked by events that aroused both concern and hope. It was a matter for concern that the number of refugees had increased to the unprecedented figure of 17 million

(Mr. Burcuoğlu, Turkey)

as a result of events in the Middle East and Africa, and that the continuation of the Afghan refugee problem was putting an ever increasing burden on developing countries. On the other hand, hope was inspired both by the greater possibility of voluntary repatriation in some regions, thanks to positive political changes on the global scale, and by the greater awareness of the urgent need to fight the causes of large population movements.

56. The High Commissioner had given an eloquent explanation of her three-point strategy: (a) to improve the ability to respond to emergency situations, (b) to make the most of opportunities for voluntary repatriation and (c) to seek solutions through preventive measures. His delegation trusted that her strategy would succeed and that 1992 would be the year of voluntary repatriation. In that connection, it welcomed the financial measures taken in respect of UNHCR and the agreement reached between UNHCR and South Africa for the establishment of a presence in that country.

57. Being a country of asylum by history and tradition, Turkey spared no effort to mitigate the sufferings of those who sought refuge within its borders. It was almost five centuries since it had taken in the Jews expelled from Spain. Turkey had always been exposed to continuous population movements. In 1988, it had admitted some 80,000 people coming from the south-east, some of whom remained in the country. In 1989, over 300,000 people coming from the north-east had sought refuge in Turkey over a period of 10 weeks. That had been an exodus that had no precedent in Europe since the Second World War. Finally, in April 1991, Turkey and Iran had been the setting for population movement of a speed never previously recorded. Some 500,000 people of both sexes, including children, had gathered at the Turkish-Iraqi frontier in the space of a few days. Despite unfavourable geographical and weather conditions, the lack of a system of international assistance and the geographical limitations imposed by the 1951 Convention, Turkey had tried to meet the needs of those people in the shortest possible time, mobilizing immense human and financial resources to that end. The cost of the operations was estimated to be \$226 million, not including material assistance provided by the local population.

58. Faced with the impossibility of containing a problem on that scale by itself, Turkey had launched an appeal for urgent international assistance. Through joint assistance coordinated by the Turkish authorities and international organizations, it had been possible to meet the most urgent needs for accommodation, food and medical attention. Most of the displaced persons had since returned to northern Iraq. In its resolution 1991/5, the Economic and Social Council had commended the Governments of Iran and Turkey for their efforts to meet the crisis.

59. During the operations in question, Governments and non-governmental organizations had shown their ability to respond quickly and effectively, but the United Nations system had not been able to act with the same speed. That was apparently due, among other things, to the approach adopted by most donor countries, which had waited to see the full scale of the disaster before deciding the size of their contributions.

(Mr. Burcuoğlu, Turkey)

60. Turkey had endured the onerous consequences of the experience, which could obviously recur in other regions. Hence the need for an early warning system. It was also necessary to take account of the damage and devastation caused in the receiving country by the movement of large numbers of people. Consequently, Turkey believed that the development of proper machinery to meet any emergency situation quickly and effectively could not be deferred.

61. Lastly, his delegation disagreed with the continuing neglect of resettlement as a means of achieving a lasting solution. The gap was widening between integration in the country of first asylum and resettlement in another country and, if that trend continued, resettlement would probably cease to rate as a valid means of achieving a lasting solution. Turkey, traditionally a country of first asylum, would continue to oppose that trend, which contradicted the fundamental principle of sharing the burden internationally.

62. Mr. Al-Shaali (United Arab Emirates) resumed the Chair.

63. Mr. SEZAKI (Japan) said that, despite isolated political developments relating to repatriation, the plight of refugees had continued to worsen, especially in developing countries, creating large-scale emergencies and intense suffering. As the number of refugees had grown, the work of UNHCR had become more complicated and difficult, particularly in managing the emergency relief operations resulting from the peace talks taking place in several parts of the world. In that context, the Government of Japan welcomed the efforts being made by international humanitarian agencies to enhance coordination and efficiency so as to be able to address large-scale emergency relief operations more quickly and ably. It was imperative that the entire world should join together, in a spirit of solidarity, to alleviate the plight of the approximately 17 million refugees.

64. The Government of Japan noted the statement in paragraph 28 of the High Commissioner's report (A/46/12) that the efforts made by UNHCR were affected by the financial constraints which it had experienced since 1989, and urged donor countries to respond positively to the financial needs of UNHCR.

65. As the demands on UNHCR had grown and it had expanded its range of activities, donor countries had responded with unprecedented support. In 1991 Japan had contributed over \$100 million to UNHCR for the first time and had continued to provide extensive assistance to refugees through other international bodies.

66. With respect to the refugee problems in which Japan was involved, his Government welcomed the agreement on a comprehensive political settlement of the situation in Cambodia, recently concluded at the Paris Conference on Cambodia, and hoped that all parties concerned would work constructively for the early implementation of measures to be drawn up by UNHCR for the safe repatriation and reintegration into their society of some 350,000 Cambodian refugees. His delegation urged all Governments to make voluntary contributions for repatriation activities, in response to the appeal launched

(Mr. Sezaki, Japan)

by the Secretary-General the previous year. In addition, his delegation was concerned about the possible implementation of other plans for the repatriation of displaced persons that were not consistent with the agreement reached in Paris, and hoped that the parties concerned would adhere to their commitment not to promote any plan that did not fall within the scope of the agreement.

67. With regard to the situation of the Vietnamese boat people, the Japanese Government was pleased that the outflow of refugees had subsided considerably, and hoped that the repatriation of some of those refugees would be further accelerated under UNHCR supervision so that the heavy burden on first-asylum countries would be substantially reduced. The Japanese Government had contributed \$24 million to that effort, including \$5 million pledged recently to a special programme under the Comprehensive Plan of Action, which faced financial constraints. As to the agreement signed on 29 October 1991 between the United Kingdom and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, his Government hoped that it would result in the return to their country of the screened-out boat people who remained in Asian countries, and that it would help to limit the outflow of such people from Viet Nam, thereby contributing to the resolution of that difficult problem.

68. At a historic time of transition, UNHCR's role in providing international protection to refugees was becoming increasingly important, and he noted four important factors in that regard. First, there was an urgent need to improve the emergency preparedness of UNHCR and its mechanism for responding to humanitarian disasters involving refugees. His Government therefore supported ongoing initiatives to continue to strengthen UNHCR capacity through the mobilization of funds, personnel and relief supplies. Japan would like to find ways of cooperating more extensively with UNHCR and other relevant United Nations agencies in providing assistance in such situations.

69. Second, the possibility of promoting voluntary repatriation as the preferred durable solution should be actively explored. In addressing the long-term need for reintegration assistance to returnees, UNHCR should act as a catalyst and coordinator of relevant international organizations. In the search for durable solutions, the whole refugee cycle should be taken into account, from exodus and relief to return and reintegration, since effective strategies could be implemented only through such a comprehensive approach. There must also be close cooperation and coordination among all parties with respect to the underlying issues of human rights, economic development and the promotion and maintenance of peace.

70. Third, a public information strategy was essential, and Japan therefore welcomed the initiative of UNHCR in seeking external advice and assessment and in trying to improve its reporting on refugee statistics. Japan hoped that UNHCR would also make efforts to improve its public information activities.

71. Fourth, closer cooperation with non-governmental organizations should be encouraged, so as to ease the burden on UNHCR and provide it with operational partners in the implementation of specific projects.

(Mr. Sezaki, Japan)

72. His delegation reiterated its position that the role of UNHCR should be strengthened in response to the increased need for emergency relief for refugees, as well as the commitment of the Japanese Government to continue collaborating with the High Commissioner in that area.

73. Mr. YOSSIFOV (Bulgaria) said that, in view of the current refugee situation, the international community should concentrate its efforts on developing programmes to help check or prevent further large-scale flows of refugees from the regions that were producing them. Preventive measures related to such areas as education and employment opportunities should encourage potential refugees to remain in their countries, while fully respecting their freedom to leave and return to them, which was one of the basic rights and fundamental freedoms codified in the main international human rights instruments.

74. His country was taking steps to bring its legislation into line with established international standards. However, legislation alone could not stop the flow of people who wished to leave the country; rather, economic prosperity and stability were the most secure barriers to mass migration.

75. His country had faced unprecedented problems since becoming a point of transit for considerable numbers of people from developing countries on their way to Western Europe. The situation, which was causing serious economic and social problems, had been considered at the European conference on the problems of migrants held in Berlin in early November 1991, at which the Bulgarian delegation had stressed the need to concentrate efforts to curb transit migration on the adoption of measures against the organized centres engaged in directing the flow of migrants to Western Europe, the United States and Canada via the countries of Eastern Europe.

76. The fact that some persons who had participated in waves of mass migration could not be classified as refugees under the 1951 Convention required the United Nations, UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration to play a more significant role.

77. After describing the steps being taken by the Bulgarian Government to address refugee problems more effectively, he said that UNHCR should direct considerable efforts towards strengthening its preventive functions. He welcomed the support for the High Commissioner's idea of establishing an emergency preparedness and response mechanism that would allow UNHCR to react promptly and effectively to refugee emergencies. Bulgaria appreciated the efforts to enhance the preventive functions of UNHCR, and reiterated its willingness to host, in 1992, a seminar on emergency situations caused by mass flows of refugees.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

78. Mr. MORA (Cuba) said that his delegation was concerned about the amount of outstanding documentation to be considered by the Committee. Some important documents under the item on human rights questions which was to be considered the following day, were not yet ready. In accordance with the decision to restructure the agenda item adopted at the previous session, all human rights questions would be considered at the end of the current session. That meant that the Committee had ahead of it two weeks of very intensive work when it would be discussing the various issues and dealing with over 30 resolutions that would have to be considered. His delegation did not wish to be rushed into adopting resolutions and reports which had not been duly considered.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.