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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 36th MEETING

Chairman:

Mr. AL-SHAALI

(United Arab Emirates)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.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, 371, 428-435, 471, 501/Rev.1, 568, 612)

1. Mr. RAZI (Afghanistan) stressed the need to address the root causes of refugee flows and underscored the importance of preventive measures, particularly with regard to man-made causes. In the case of the Afghan refugees, war was a major cause of refugee flows. His Government therefore sought to end the war in order to pave the way for the voluntary return of the refugees. The 1988 Agreements on the Settlement of the Situation Relating to Afghanistan set forth the fairest solution. Under the Agreements, the parties had the obligation to take all necessary measures to ensure the voluntary return of the Afghan refugees temporarily living in Pakistan.

2. All Afghan refugees wishing to return to their homeland could do so freely. All returnees had the same rights and obligations as other nationals of Afghanistan. In spite of economic constraints, his Government provided the necessary facilities for resettling returnees in their provinces of origin, including free transportation, accommodation in the Peace Guest Houses, and employment. More than 70,000 Afghans had returned through the Voluntary Repatriation Pilot Project, and an additional 30,000 spontaneous returnees, mainly from the Islamic Republic of Iran, had been assisted through the UNHCR Guest House Programme. The number of spontaneous returnees in 1990, unassisted by UNHCR, was estimated at 100,000.

3. Serious consideration should be given to the fact that no large-scale, organized repatriation of Afghan refugees from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan had taken place in 1990. Experience showed that there were obstacles impeding organized repatriation. His Government was ready to discuss those obstacles and insisted on consultations before launching any repatriation projects. He hoped that Member States and humanitarian organizations would make a positive response in order to implement similar projects, as called for under General Assembly resolution 45/174. The pilot projects helped to ensure the orderly and safe return of Afghan refugees. His country was prepared to cooperate with the relevant United Nations organizations to remove any obstacles in that regard.

4. His delegation appreciated the continued support of UNHCR and the World Food Programme for the Peace Guest House project in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the Peace Guest Houses situated in the border cities, especially in the western part of the country, faced serious difficulties due to the large number of returnees. The reception centres and guest houses should be expanded and the Office should give more attention to providing food, medication and air transport.

(Mr. Razi, Afghanistan)

5. The new political climate in Afghanistan raised hope for a durable solution. UNHCR, with the cooperation of the United Nations Humanitarian and Economic Assistance Programmes Relating to Afghanistan, should prepare for the resettlement of the refugees. His Government was willing to allow all Afghan refugees to return to their homeland and condemned any attempt to slow that process.

6. Mr. NECAJ (Albania) said that his country, like the other Eastern European countries, had embarked on a series of reforms to create a truly democratic society and a market economy. Those reforms, however, were being carried out in a very tense economic situation, marked by high unemployment, industrial paralysis, trade and financial deficits and lack of food. The sudden collapse of the old political system and the severe economic crisis had led to the mass exodus of Albanian citizens to Greece, Italy and other countries to find a better life. That exodus had created difficulties for neighbouring countries and his Government, in collaboration with the Governments of those countries, sought to find the best solutions to that problem. Aware of the lack of local funds, Albania viewed foreign investment and credits as a means to bring about economic stability.

7. The great political changes that had occurred in Albania had convinced neighbouring States and the relevant United Nations bodies that Albanian nationals leaving the country should be considered economic immigrants rather than political refugees and that their problems should be solved on that basis. His Government considered all Albanians who had left the country illegally in July 1990 and through the mass exodus in 1991 as full-fledged nationals, who could enter and leave the country whenever they liked. Tens of thousands of Albanians had returned to their country and were being reintegrated into its social and political life.

8. Albania considered it had the right to take an interest in the way its nationals were integrated into the social and economic life of host countries and to ensure dignified treatment for all of them. His Government had informed the High Commissioner of that position and underscored its concern about Albanian nationals who had been mistreated and subjected to discrimination in Yugoslavia. It was hoped that that would not recur.

9. His country would be grateful if the States concerned showed understanding and support in order to enable Albanian refugees to cope with difficulties, particularly in finding temporary employment. In that connection, he expressed sincere appreciation to the Governments of Italy, Greece and Germany for the readiness that they had shown in that regard. Concluding international agreements on legal migration for temporary employment coupled with foreign investment would be very useful. His Government had negotiated with the International Organization for Migration on ways to help legal migrants.

10. Mr. OULIA (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that lack of respect for human dignity harmed international social relations and had created the problem of refugees. The refugee crisis must be dealt with in a responsible manner by Governments, international organizations and domestic groups. In conformity with holy Islamic prescriptions, his country had welcomed millions of refugees during the past decade.

11. Earlier in 1991, their number had exceeded 5.3 million, making the Islamic Republic of Iran the primary host country for refugees. It was doing its best to settle those remaining and to ensure their safety and well-being. There had been almost 3 million Afghan and almost 1 million Iraqi refugees in his country. The honourable return of the Afghan refugees was coming closer to realization because Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran had declared their readiness to facilitate voluntary repatriation.

12. A few months earlier, faced with the largest and swiftest refugee influx in the history of UNHCR, his country had taken immediate steps to meet the refugees' basic needs. The generous assistance by the international community and the United Nations system to help Iraqi refugees had had to be complemented by enormous resources mobilized by his country, which had already contributed almost \$2.7 billion in order to cope with that human tragedy. His delegation hoped that the United Nations would ensure the continuation of and consolidate essential services to Iraqi refugees before the coming winter, in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1991/5. His delegation appreciated the efforts of the Executive Delegate of the Secretary-General, UNHCR, other international organizations, and States members of the European Community in providing assistance.

13. The Islamic Republic of Iran attached great importance to speedy improvement of the United Nations humanitarian system; the existing structure should be enhanced in order to satisfy the immediate needs of refugees in times of crisis. A mechanism for increasing financial contributions could be considered in connection with the Office's mandate. The provision of emergency aid must not be politicized. A new world outlook on that problem must be based on humanitarian values. He hoped that it would be possible to bring about the honourable and safe return of all refugees throughout the world, including the Palestine refugees, who had been deprived of their fundamental rights for so long.

14. Mr. SAMPOVAARA (Finland) reaffirmed his country's commitment to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol and urged all States that had not yet done so to accede to those instruments. Finland attached particular importance to the relationship between development cooperation, democracy and respect for human rights and stressed the need to eliminate the underlying causes of refugee flows. It was becoming increasingly necessary to promote measures to avert new mass movements of people and bring about durable solutions.

(Mr. Sampovaara, Finland)

15. Voluntary repatriation was the best way to reach a lasting solution. Finland strongly supported UNHCR in its efforts to make full use of the favourable developments in Cambodia, Western Sahara, South Africa and elsewhere in order to resolve some of the most difficult refugee issues of recent times. The Office played a useful catalytic role when the possibility of voluntary repatriation existed. The international community should also improve the assistance provided to internally displaced persons.

16. Finland stressed the need to clarify the distinction between refugee flows and other population movements. Methods must be developed to reduce the increasing misuse of asylum in order to ensure better treatment of persons entitled to refugee status. There was a need for commonly accepted measures to deal with persons clearly ineligible for refugee status and bring about their speedy repatriation.

17. Women and children were the two most vulnerable groups among refugees. The reports of continuous violations of their rights called for immediate action. Finland commended UNHCR for its efforts to integrate the specific needs of refugee women into programming and welcomed the initiative of establishing the post of a Senior Coordinator for Refugee Children.

18. There was a consensus in favour of ensuring greater involvement of the United Nations system in humanitarian assistance and relief operations. The Nordic countries had promoted efforts to enhance the effectiveness of the United Nations system in meeting the challenges in the field of emergency response. His delegation commended the Commissioner for her initiatives aimed at enhancing the Office's response capability and valued highly the activities of UNHCR. Cooperation with non-governmental organizations was of vital importance in dealing with emergencies and such cooperation must be further improved in that area.

19. Mr. SZELEI (Hungary) said that, despite the spread of freedom and democracy, the global refugee situation had deteriorated significantly and required concerted international action, to which his country was fully committed.

20. In the aftermath of the cold war, Hungary continued to receive large influxes of refugees, including over 50,000 Romanian refugees in recent years. In addition, the recent events in Yugoslavia had caused over 40,000 refugees, 70 per cent of whom were women and children, to flee to Hungary in the past four months. In accordance with its obligations under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, Hungary had stretched the limits of its capabilities by protecting and assisting those refugees, who brought the number of refugees who had fled to Hungary in the past three years to almost 100,000. The assistance and solidarity of the international community and of UNHCR had been invaluable in Hungary's efforts to respond to the rapidly worsening refugee situation.

(Mr. Szelei, Hungary)

21. The violation of human rights through systematic repression continued to be the major cause of refugee movements. He welcomed the growing recognition of the responsibility of Governments to address the root causes of such movements, particularly those involving the persecution of individuals or ethnic communities.

22. His delegation supported the view that UNHCR should, in the future, focus on emergency preparedness and response mechanisms, early-warning capabilities and voluntary repatriation. It also agreed that the United Nations response to the Kurdish refugee crisis should be thoroughly analysed so that such responses could be made more effective in the future. Modalities should be worked out for system-wide emergency responses to major humanitarian disasters, and early warning capabilities should be strengthened within an inter-agency United Nations structure, through which preventive measures could also be taken.

23. The right of refugees to return to their own countries in safety and dignity and without fear of reprisals was indispensable for a durable solution. Voluntary repatriation should also involve compensation for confiscated, lost or damaged property. On the fortieth anniversary of the establishment of UNHCR, Hungary reaffirmed its solidarity with refugees and its continuing commitment to caring for them.

24. Ms. RODNEY (Canada) said that the international community was at a crucial point in dealing with the persistent problem of refugees. It had to take measures which would bring relief to refugees but would avoid abuse by individuals seeking asylum for economic reasons, an all-too-common phenomenon, particularly in developing countries. Poor economic prospects, civil strife and environmental degradation would continue to give rise to irregular flows of immigrants, whose demands on the systems for the determination of refugee status threatened the sovereignty of States and imposed on them a significant fiscal burden. The industrialized countries needed to cooperate in solving refugee problems, basing their efforts on a system of international law.

25. Finding solutions would require, on the part of both North and South, international and national commitments in addition to the necessary political and institutional will. Her country therefore favoured developing an international strategy to deal with the links between refugee, asylum-seeker and irregular migrant flows.

26. The international community had already been innovative in its approach to the problem of mass displacements, for example in applying the safe-haven principle to the situation of Iraqi citizens displaced as a result of the Gulf war. The Gulf crisis had also shown that, despite organizational shortcomings and misgivings concerning its mandate, the international community, on the strength of its political will, had been able to respond in a coordinated fashion.

(Ms. Rodney, Canada)

27. As a result of the Gulf crisis, UNHCR had received unusually high levels of funding. Canada had contributed more than \$35 million in 1991, an increase of more than 50 per cent over the previous year. Although it would make every effort to provide UNHCR with the necessary resources in 1992, her Government could not guarantee the same level of funding as in 1991.

28. The Gulf war and its aftermath had highlighted the need for greater coordination of the various United Nations agencies dealing with displaced persons. Her Government believed that it was time to appoint a senior official for humanitarian relief and disaster assistance. It strongly rejected the view that greater assistance to refugees and displaced persons could be provided merely by broadening the definition of the term "refugee" contained in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Such action would only further spread out the severely limited funds available, thus harming those most in need.

29. Canada had traditionally been a country of resettlement for refugees and would not abandon that role. However, like UNHCR, it was placing greater emphasis on resettlement as an instrument of protection rather than as an overall solution.

30. Not all individuals claiming refugee status were genuinely motivated by a well-founded fear of persecution, as the expression was understood under the 1951 Convention. Attempts to use the refugee-status determination procedures as a means to avoid return to the country of origin were not only an abuse of the system but also placed an unnecessary burden upon it, making it more difficult to identify persons genuinely in need of protection. Refugee-status determination procedures, combined with the social assistance provided by most industrialized countries, were costly; as a result, a disproportionate amount was being spent on a relatively small population, leaving few resources available for other refugee groups.

31. For those reasons, it was essential to re-establish control over international population flows. Failure to do so would result in loss of domestic public support, which was vital to assistance efforts for refugees. Governments were to some extent responsible for the current situation: they had long failed to harmonize their procedures for determining refugee status under the Convention. At the same time, the international community had to develop effective multilateral, bilateral and regional agreements on the issue of asylum-seekers. In that regard, her country was pleased to note that, at the recent session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, the Subcommittee of the Whole on International Protection had begun consideration of the concept of transferring asylum-seekers to safe third countries.

32. Many refugee situations were rooted in long-standing ethnic animosity which was very difficult to eliminate. Yet, there were some Governments which exploited those divisions for political reasons. The international community must strongly condemn such practices, which violated human rights and could lead to persecution.

33. Ms. ZINDOGA (Zimbabwe) said that, as noted in the report of the High Commissioner (A/46/12), the global refugee situation had deteriorated in an unprecedented manner. UNHCR needed to be restructured so that it could be even more responsive to the problem. In that regard, her delegation welcomed the proposed emergency preparedness and response mechanism, which would enable UNHCR to respond effectively to humanitarian emergencies. To avoid duplication, UNHCR should function as the coordinating body in all emergency situations. Furthermore, to make the proposed mechanism most effective, there should be greater cooperation between UNHCR and other relief agencies, in close consultation with Member States.

34. Her Government endorsed the establishment of a United Nations central emergency revolving fund. However, it would appreciate clarification with regard to the purpose of that fund, since the High Commissioner had already expressed the view that the Emergency Fund would help UNHCR respond more effectively to emergency situations. A permanent inter-agency committee would also strengthen inter-agency cooperation.

35. Her delegation welcomed UNHCR efforts to find durable solutions. While the situation in Latin America had improved with the return of large numbers of refugees to Nicaragua and Chile, it was likely that the situation in Haiti would lead to an outflow of refugees. Zimbabwe supported the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees and urged that the rights of Vietnamese refugees should be respected, in accordance with the relevant Geneva convention. It applauded the joint effort of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), UNHCR and UNICEF to identify ways in which the United Nations could help alleviate the suffering caused by the conflict in Yugoslavia. It also endorsed the efforts of UNHCR and other relief agencies to deal with the refugee problems caused by the Gulf war.

36. Equally commendable were UNHCR activities in Africa. Since the political situation in many African countries remained unstable, voluntary repatriation of refugees was not possible. UNHCR had therefore to work closely with the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the host States to find other ways of dealing with refugee populations. Financial and material resources were needed for that effort, particularly in view of the strain placed by migrant flows on the already fragile economies of some of the host countries.

37. Her country expressed its appreciation to those countries listed in document A/46/371, the United Nations system and the European Community for responding to General Assembly resolution 45/137, which had called upon countries and agencies to undertake the measures required of them under the 1988 Oslo Declaration and the Plan of Action on the Plight of Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons in Southern Africa.

38. While there had been important political progress in southern Africa, the basic problem of refugees, returnees and displaced persons in that region remained unchanged; the Oslo Declaration and the Plan of Action were still relevant. The situation in Mozambique was giving rise to an increasing outflux. UNHCR had opened an office in South Africa to deal with

(Ms. Zindoga, Zimbabwe)

repatriation issues. That office needed to work closely with South African liberation movements; it could also be involved in monitoring the new wave of refugees fleeing the unstable political situation in South Africa.

39. Apartheid had been identified at the 1988 International Conference on the Plight of Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons in Southern Africa as the root cause of the problem of refugees and displaced persons in that region. While it was no longer on the books, apartheid was far from being eradicated. She appealed to the international community to continue its efforts to eliminate that system, which had caused untold suffering.

40. Mr. JIN Yongjian (China) said that, despite multilateral efforts, the refugee situation remained extremely grave. None the less, there had been some encouraging progress in certain regions, particularly Central America and southern Africa. With the settlement of the Cambodian conflict, voluntary repatriation of a large number of Cambodians would soon be a reality. All of that progress was a result of the efforts of the international community, UNHCR and other relief agencies.

41. While far from perfect, the report of the Working Group on Solutions and Protection to the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme provided a sound basis for further study of the root causes of the problem of refugees, displaced persons and asylum-seekers and the mechanisms for solving that problem. Generally speaking, the report was balanced and dealt with issues of concern to all parties. It was regrettable that, owing to the insistence of certain countries, the Executive Committee had been limited to accepting the report, rather than adopting it, as had been advocated by the majority of Committee members. His country endorsed the Executive Committee's proposal to convene an inter-sessional meeting of the Subcommittee of the Whole on International Protection for further consideration of the report.

42. Since the early years of UNHCR, the refugee problem had shifted from Europe to the developing countries. The number of refugees had increased considerably and attention had turned to groups of refugees rather than individuals. Many refugee problems had remained unsolved for decades. In connection with the changing face of the refugee problem, his delegation endorsed the expanded UNHCR mandate and the definition of the term "refugee" in accordance with the relevant General Assembly resolutions.

43. His Government had long believed that the refugee question could be solved only by removing the root causes, which included wars, internal conflicts, armed aggression and political instability. Those causes merited careful and realistic analysis. An important approach to solving the problem of refugees was to promote harmony between States and to establish a new international political and economic order, based on respect for human rights. Ideological issues should not be permitted to influence the work of UNHCR, which should strive to preserve the non-political and humanitarian nature of its efforts.

(Mr. Jin Yongjian, China)

44. His delegation endorsed the High Commissioner's proposals regarding the management of human resources and the stockpiling of basic materials required for emergency situations. The key to enhancing United Nations capacity to meet humanitarian emergencies was to improve the coordination among the various agencies involved.
45. The increasing flow of refugees had also highlighted the problem of internally displaced persons. That problem gave rise to additional issues relating to State sovereignty and the right of States to settle their internal affairs. Because of their colonial history, many developing countries, including China, were acutely aware of the importance of State sovereignty. His country felt, therefore, that any attempt to assist internally displaced persons must be based on the Charter and should be carried out only at the request or with the consent of the country concerned. In view of the complexity of the issue, there could be no single settlement procedure. Different methods should be used according to the circumstances.
46. As a party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, his Government had honoured all its obligations, had based its refugee policy on those instruments and had guaranteed the rights of the Indo-Chinese refugees to which it played host. It would continue to cooperate in all international efforts to resolve the problem of refugees.
47. Mr. GOSHU (Ethiopia) said that his delegation endorsed the High Commissioner's proposal to establish an emergency preparedness and response mechanism to confront the problem of refugees at an early stage. The contents of the annual report of the Office (A/46/12) were alarming. Despite hopeful signs of a settlement of a number of the outstanding regional conflicts, the global refugee situation would remain critical for some time. The international community must mobilize resources to assist UNHCR and the Governments concerned in resolving the problem through repatriation, rehabilitation and resettlement.
48. The recent events in Ethiopia, which had seen the demise of a dictatorial regime most responsible for the influx of refugees to neighbouring countries, had given rise to justifiably high hopes. A 30-year civil conflict - another root cause for the refugee problem - had come to an end, and Ethiopian refugees had begun to return, increasing the burden on an ailing economy and a land devastated by war. His Government was committed to democratic principles and to respect for human rights and the rule of law. It was determined to forge friendly relations with its neighbours and to work in concert towards resolving the refugee problem in the region. To that end, the previous week the Presidents of Ethiopia and Djibouti had called for the immediate convening of an international conference on refugees and displaced persons of the subregion with a view to securing humanitarian help for their rehabilitation and settlement.

(Mr. Goshu, Ethiopia)

49. As long as poverty reigned in that part of the world, there would be movements of populations across borders, and to meet the problem, massive assistance was needed of the type offered to Europe in the aftermath of the Second World War. In that context, his delegation welcomed the launching of a special emergency programme for the Horn of Africa. Ethiopia must cope with hundreds of thousands of refugees from neighbouring countries in immediate need of assistance and 10 million Ethiopians displaced by drought and civil war. Although strictly speaking, the latter group did not fall within the purview of UNHCR, there were precedents to justify providing such persons with assistance. There was a danger that his Government would be unable to meet the needs of the returning refugees. His Government expressed its satisfaction with the coordinated approach taken by the various United Nations agencies in responding to humanitarian needs in the Horn of Africa and would work closely with donor Governments and UNHCR in their endeavours to find a solution.

50. Mr. BARKER (Australia) said that his delegation welcomed the High Commissioner's proposals for a new emergency preparedness and response mechanism, supported the increase in the level of the Emergency Fund and subscribed to the suggestions on deploying current staff in multiskilled emergency response teams and establishing emergency stockpiles.

51. Despite encouraging progress towards administrative and financial improvement of the Office, financial discipline must be maintained and clear and realistic priorities set.

52. Australia welcomed the attention given to the issue of refugee women and children, a problem to which UNHCR programmes must be increasingly responsive.

53. The world had been witnessing larger and more complex movements of people. Many of those involved were refugees, for whom there was a well-established response mechanism. Others had been displaced by war, civil strife, poverty or natural disaster. A third and increasingly numerous group consisted of those whose movement was essentially migratory, but who used the language of persecution and human rights abuse to gain entry to and extended stay in countries where immigration controls would otherwise exclude them. Although the number of persons of concern to UNHCR had continued to grow, the vast majority were not refugees under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

54. The answer was not to extend the interpretation of the "refugee" concept to that third group, because the protection needs of such people and the solutions required were qualitatively different from those concerning refugees. For persons displaced by natural or man-made disasters, priority should be given to relief and humanitarian assistance and to their returning home once their return could be effected in reasonable safety. UNHCR and a number of other organizations provided assistance to the displaced, but there was no coherent and internationally accepted regime for doing so, only a variety of ad hoc responses.

(Mr. Barker, Australia)

55. Offering asylum to all those seeking it could jeopardize that very institution. The phenomenon also diverted resources from areas where they might be better used. For example, asylum procedures in countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development were costing the equivalent of one eighth of their total international assistance - 10 times UNHCR's total budget - yet only a fraction of those claiming asylum were refugees.

56. One way to respond would be to harmonize and rationalize asylum procedures. The aim should be for a fair but speedy determination of claims, and States must agree to ensure that unsuccessful claimants departed if they had no other legal basis to remain in a country.

57. Within Australia's own region, it was recognized that the outflow from Viet Nam was overwhelmingly migratory in nature, as people departed from a country with a ravaged economy and which had been isolated from international financial assistance. The Comprehensive Plan of Action, adopted in 1989 by the international community, focused on distinguishing refugees from the migratory elements of the outflow and on providing an appropriate humanitarian response to both. Only a small minority of those leaving Viet Nam were found to be refugees, usually on the basis of family links with people who had previously been resettled under humanitarian arrangements in third countries.

58. The implementation costs were very high for screening, counselling and caring for a population of 110,000 people, many of whom had already been found not to be refugees but had not yet returned to Viet Nam. Clearly, the international community must not permit that situation to continue indefinitely. Australia noted that the British, Hong Kong and Vietnamese Governments had recently signed a statement of understanding for an orderly repatriation programme from Hong Kong of those persons found not to be refugees and that the first returns under the agreement had taken place on 9 November 1991.

59. Australia had been closely involved in the conclusion of a comprehensive settlement of the Cambodia conflict. The repatriation of the 350,000 Cambodian displaced persons in camps along the Thai-Cambodian border and elsewhere in the region, for which UNHCR was the lead agency, was one of the most complex components of the settlement and would represent an unprecedented challenge for the Office. To a great extent, the success of the whole peace agreement would depend on the success of the repatriation programme. It was essential for UNHCR to be able to move ahead quickly with the operation, and Australia had already announced a contribution of \$US 1 million to the Office for the first stage of the repatriation programme. His delegation urged all parties to give their strong support to UNHCR and its partner organizations to ensure an early and successful implementation of that vital task.

(Mr. Barker, Australia)

60. Despite heartening trends in the refugee situation in Africa over the past 12 months, it was a cause for deep concern that the overall number of refugees and displaced persons continued to grow. Australia commended UNHCR for its involvement in the United Nations special emergency programme for the Horn of Africa.

61. The 1951 Convention must continue to be the foundation of UNHCR's protection work, but his delegation also saw a need for an institutional framework specifically mandated to deal with displaced persons.

62. Ms. VIKEN (Norway) welcomed the proposals to improve the UNHCR emergency preparedness and response capability. For its part, Norway had recently implemented measures enabling it to contribute more efficiently to new emergencies, and it looked forward to cooperating with UNHCR and other international organizations through the new Norwegian Emergency Preparedness System.

63. Noting that plans for several large-scale repatriation and reintegration operations were in the making, her Government was encouraged by the prospects for voluntary repatriation as the preferred solution. Norway welcomed the High Commissioner's decision to make voluntary repatriation an objective in the new UNHCR strategy. It was essential to find a funding mechanism to enable the Office to mobilize the necessary resources without delay, so that repatriation and reintegration could be carried out whenever needed.

64. Norway supported preventive measures as a way of forestalling refugee flows. Among the tools that should be used were development assistance, promotion of civil and political as well as economic, social and cultural rights, assistance to returnees and the development of burden-sharing mechanisms. Such measures would require the international community to consolidate its efforts and cooperate closely on finding solutions case by case.

65. Mr. CORNEJO (Chile) said he was pleased that one of the main objectives of UNHCR was to enhance its capacity to respond to emergencies. Another was voluntary repatriation, which would require the establishment of conditions that promoted stability in sensitive areas, and would depend on the prospects for global and regional peace and security. He therefore supported the strengthening of programmes in that area as a means of devising an integrated approach to refugee problems. Mass repatriation would require concerted action by the international community, including reintegration efforts by countries of origin and economic support from various sources.

66. Chile was grateful to UNHCR for its assistance in repatriating many Chileans who had fled their country. Those efforts had been of significant help in meeting the Chilean Government's goal of national reconciliation.

(Mr. Cornejo, Chile)

67. The High Commissioner's third main objective was the prevention of refugee flows, which would require examination of their root causes. The international community should work to eliminate migratory movements for political or economic reasons by strengthening democratic systems and institutions and by promoting macroeconomic programmes for individual and collective development.

68. Mr. CALAFETEANU (Romania) said that UNHCR was to be commended for its assistance to over 20 million refugees world wide in its 40-year history. That extraordinary accomplishment had significantly helped to reduce political tensions and to foster peace.

69. The persistence of enormous population movements involving migrant workers, displaced persons, asylum-seekers and refugees indicated that the world was undergoing a period of profound change and instability. The reasons for such movements had become more complex, and included political, economic and environmental factors. The past year had witnessed an unprecedented deterioration in the global refugee situation, owing particularly to developments in the Middle East and Africa. However, there had also been an overall improvement in the international protection of refugees, as UNHCR and Member States had consolidated their regional and international cooperation in assessing and responding to the current situation and in preventing future refugee flows. Romania fully supported the High Commissioner's three-point strategy of prevention, emergency response and solutions.

70. The radical changes in Eastern Europe had resulted in the largest westward flow of refugees from that region since the end of the Second World War. In 1989, 1.2 million people had left Eastern Europe, as opposed to an annual average of about 100,000 up to the mid-1980s. That trend, which had continued in 1990 and which involved mainly ethnic Germans and Jews, was the result of political liberalization and the abolition of travel restrictions; economic restructuring and a consequent deterioration in living conditions and job opportunities; and the growth of ethnic and national tensions in the region. Given that situation, a clear distinction must be made between refugees and other categories of migrants or asylum-seekers, since the unjustified granting of refugee status could undermine assistance efforts.

71. Until the fall of the Romanian dictatorship in 1989, many of the country's citizens had fled their homeland. However, the new Government had adopted a series of measures to establish a democratic society based on freedom and the full observance of human rights. One such measure was the guarantee of freedom of movement, including the right to return. Thus, the number of legal emigrants from Romania had sharply increased, amounting to 130,000 in 1990. To facilitate their voluntary return - the most desirable solution - his Government had concluded special agreements with some of the recipient countries, and was supported by the German Government in its efforts to stop the outflow of ethnic Germans from Romania.

(Mr. Calafeteanu, Romania)

72. Since the end of 1990, Romania had also begun to receive refugees from other countries, of whom there were currently about 1,000. Despite a lack of experience, material resources and legal structures to deal with the situation, Romania had done its utmost to fulfil its obligations, even before becoming a party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol in August 1991.

73. In June 1991, a Committee for Migration Problems had been established to coordinate all national activities and cooperative efforts with other States and international specialized bodies in connection with migration into or from Romania. The Committee was responsible, inter alia, for concluding cooperation agreements with other countries to facilitate the return and reintegration of Romanian migrants and the prevention of new outflows; developing a legal framework for the exercise of freedom of movement; standardizing rules and practices in passport and visa matters and in determining the status of foreigners, refugees and migrants; and granting emergency humanitarian assistance to migrants who came to Romania. Immigrants and returnees were assisted at the community level by local committees.

74. Romania would continue to comply with international standards on humanitarian assistance for refugees and other displaced persons, and to support the efforts of UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.