

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 26th MEETING

Chairman:

Mr. BURKE

(Ireland)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 12: REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (continued) (A/46/3)

AGENDA ITEM 83: INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR NATURAL DISASTER REDUCTION (A/46/3, A/46/266 and Add.1-E/1991/106 and Add.1, A/46/336, 344 and 520)

AGENDA ITEM 84: SPECIAL ECONOMIC AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE (A/46/3, 288 and 306)

(a) OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS DISASTER RELIEF COORDINATOR (A/46/568)

(b) SPECIAL PROGRAMMES OF ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE (A/46/217-E/1991/94, A/46/316, 369, 452, 457, 458 and 557)

AGENDA ITEM 85: INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE FOR THE ECONOMIC REHABILITATION OF ANGOLA (A/46/396)

AGENDA ITEM 91: EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE FOR THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL REHABILITATION OF LIBERIA (A/46/403)

1. Mr. SPIERS (Under-Secretary-General for Political and General Assembly Affairs and Secretariat Services), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on assistance for the reconstruction and development of Lebanon (A/46/557), said that the report covered the efforts made by the United Nations system from 1 August 1990 to 30 July 1991 to address Lebanon's urgent humanitarian and development needs. Lebanon had undergone a profound change in the past year. The Lebanese National Assembly represented a Government of national unity and had ratified the Charter for National Reconciliation. The Government had consolidated and extended its authority and control, Beirut was unified and the militias had been dissolved. The Government and people were now focusing on rehabilitation, reconstruction and development. However, the prolonged period of strife had left behind a devastated and crippled country. The infrastructure had been severely disrupted and the economy shattered.

2. The international community had been prepared to be a partner in the reconstruction of Lebanon since 1975, as numerous General Assembly resolutions indicated. During the past several years, security conditions had limited the United Nations response to emergency and humanitarian needs. Many United Nations agencies and programmes, including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO) had served admirably in

(Mr. Spiers)

providing essential humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable population groups.

3. The Secretary-General's Trust Fund for Lebanon established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 33/146 had only been used to meet humanitarian needs while security conditions had not been conducive to reconstruction and development. Needs in the latter two areas had been addressed mainly by the programme of United Nations Assistance for the Reconstruction and Development of Lebanon (UNARDOL), directly through and in close cooperation with UNDR0, which had served as the focal point for relief assistance.

4. After summarizing the information contained in the report on the Government's reconstruction and development efforts (A/46/557, paras. 2-6), he said that the Inter-Agency Needs Assessment Mission dispatched to Lebanon in July had recently completed its task, and its findings had been forwarded to the Secretary-General. The Mission estimated that a \$120.3 million technical assistance programme was required for immediate needs for up to three years, with an additional \$111.9 million required for medium-term programmes extending to five years. A further \$45 million was needed for food aid. After emergency assistance, the first priority was technical assistance programmes to rehabilitate Lebanon's infrastructure, followed closely by programmes to address urgent social and human concerns, reform the civil administration and revitalize the economy. The Government of Lebanon also hoped to mobilize its own resources and attract private capital. Estimated capital requirements for a few select sectors, to assist with chiefly telecommunications, electricity, water supply and environment, as well as education and agriculture, totalled slightly over \$3.7 billion.

5. A senior United Nations/UNDP official would soon be appointed resident representative and UNARDOL coordinator to review the situation in Lebanon and make recommendations concerning the expansion of the United Nations presence there. The Secretary-General would shortly arrange a pledging conference for the Trust Fund for the reconstruction and development of Lebanon and, on the basis of his firm commitment to the full implementation of General Assembly resolution 45/225, called upon the international community to provide the financial support needed to assist Lebanon on its road to recovery.

6. Mr. BLANCA (Director-General for Development and International Economic Cooperation), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the review of the capacity, experience and coordination arrangements in the United Nations system for humanitarian assistance (A/46/568), said that a succession of recent disasters had highlighted the important role of the Organization in providing leadership to the international community in anticipating and dealing with emergencies.

7. A major factor limiting the capacity of the United Nations system to respond to emergencies was inadequate financing, as UNHCR, UNDR0 and many other United Nations organizations which provided humanitarian assistance and

(Mr. Blanca)

were also involved in development activities could attest; they frequently faced budgetary shortfalls and relied for the bulk of their funds on voluntary contributions mobilized for each emergency. The need for adequate resources was particularly critical in the initial phase of an emergency when casualties and damage tended to be the greatest. Donor Governments must therefore work closely with the United Nations system to ensure that the requisite financial support was available.

8. The United Nations system must also develop adequate stand-by capacities which could be rapidly activated in response to an emergency. At present, critical delays occurred in the mobilization of funds, food and other relief supplies and in the deployment of staff to administer and monitor the delivery of assistance. A well-coordinated system-wide stand-by capacity which could be readily mobilized by the Secretary-General was needed, and he should be able to draw upon the relief capacities of Governments, non-governmental organizations and intergovernmental organizations.

9. It was also essential to ensure a clear division of responsibilities, particularly in the case of major complex emergencies, given the inherent overlap in the mandates of United Nations organizations providing humanitarian assistance. Although UNDRO had been established as the focal point in the United Nations system for the provision of assistance in the event of sudden natural disasters and other emergency situations, the magnitude and complexity of recent emergencies had made the direct leadership of the Secretary-General necessary. He had exercised that role by establishing ad hoc operations to coordinate the international community's response. However, an inevitable consequence of such arrangements had been the diffusion of coordination responsibilities, since each operation tended to have a different structure, operating procedure and modality for launching appeals. Moreover, emergencies sometimes had to be widely publicized by the media before donors provided the resources needed to initiate ad hoc operations. Greater coordination within the United Nations system was therefore needed. Coordination was equally important at the national level: affected countries had frequently expressed the desire to deal with a single United Nations coordinator or focal point at the country level which had the authority and capacity to mobilize multilateral and bilateral assistance.

10. It was also necessary to ensure that emergency assistance was provided in ways that would directly support recovery and long-term development. Emergency measures should be viewed as an initial step towards the solution of longer-term problems and should not create new patterns of dependency, undermine incentives to local production or make unsustainable demands on future resources. Development assistance organizations of the United Nations system should therefore work closely with those responsible for emergency relief and recovery from an early stage in the operation.

11. Finally, while the United Nations must continue to provide humanitarian assistance in an effective manner, it must also devote greater attention to

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addressing the root causes of such emergencies and every member of the international community must do its part to facilitate that effort.

12. Mr. ESSAAFI (United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator) said that he would focus on agenda items 84 (a) and 83. The need to enhance the role of the United Nations system in providing humanitarian assistance and the organizational and financial constraints facing the system had been graphically demonstrated during the past two years. To facilitate the discussion, two informal papers prepared by his Office had been circulated among the Committee members. The first contained factual information on UNDRO and the second, entitled "UNDRO in the 1990s", presented a strategy for the strengthening of his Office.

13. The discussion of organizational issues relating to humanitarian assistance at the most recent session of the Economic and Social Council had been fruitful and had reaffirmed UNDRO's own analysis of the situation, which was examined in detail in the paper entitled "UNDRO in the 1990s".

14. The various documents before the Committee on the activities undertaken within the framework of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction indicated that political authorities, scientific organizations and United Nations agencies had formed a unique partnership to combat natural hazards in order to prevent them from becoming disasters. The close relationship that was developing between the Decade secretariat and UNDRO augured well for the future. He hoped that the Committee would support the precise Decade-related targets and functions described in the documents before it. In particular, financing was urgently needed for the projects endorsed by the Scientific and Technical Committee, and the call for a global meeting in 1994 of national committees for the Decade under the auspices of the General Assembly warranted careful consideration.

15. Proper mitigation efforts were of critical importance in saving lives and property when disaster struck. While long-term trends as to the frequency and intensity of future hazards were difficult to predict, certain hazards could be expected to increase as a result of climate change brought about by natural and man-made causes. It was imperative that sufficient resources should be mobilized to support disaster-mitigation programmes, particularly in view of their close link to developmental and environmental issues. Such programmes were not costly when compared with the billions of dollars of damage they could prevent. The Decade secretariat should also be strengthened, as its current level of resources would not permit it to carry out the tasks entrusted to it.

16. Although many resolutions, and especially General Assembly resolution 45/221, called for the strengthening of UNDRO, UNDRO currently received a smaller allocation for established posts from the regular budget of the United Nations than it had in 1980, a situation that impaired its ability to discharge its mandate. Fortunately, UNDRO had also received strong

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extrabudgetary support from some Member States which would fund nearly half the Office's staff, 80 per cent of its communications needs and 99 per cent of its operations in the coming biennium. However, that was an insufficient base for the future development of the Office, particularly in view of the significant progress it had made during the past two years. UNDR0 had expanded its disaster-management training efforts, was upgrading its information management systems, and had professionalized its disaster relief operations. Moreover, UNDR0 called an inter-agency committee meeting in Geneva to deal with each disaster. Increasingly, the Office had been able to respond to requests from Governments for technical advice and assistance for mitigation and relief activities; it was involved in important disaster telecommunications programmes and in the establishment of an inter-agency roster of disaster specialists, and it had strengthened its relations with non-governmental organizations and the media.

17. While performance was not necessarily contingent upon the availability of resources, it was impossible if resources were unavailable. Disaster relief and mitigation were high on the agenda of Member States. Accordingly, he suggested that the established posts currently funded from extrabudgetary resources should be absorbed into the regular budget as a way of securing funding for staff positions and attracting experts. That would not prejudice other organizational arrangements designed to strengthen the humanitarian sector in general.

18. The question of the future activities and strengthening of UNDR0 had been discussed at the fourth International Meeting of National Emergency Relief Services convened by UNDR0 with the participation of 34 countries. The results of that meeting had been taken into account in the paper "UNDR0 in the 1990s".

19. He thanked the Governments which had consistently supported his Office's efforts to fulfil its mandate. The UNDR0 staff was dedicated, professional and productive, and he hoped that with the further support of Member States, the Office would be able to play an even more important role in future efforts of the United Nations system to provide emergency humanitarian assistance.

20. Mr. JONAH (Under-Secretary-General Special Political Questions, Regional Cooperation, Decolonization and Trusteeship) began by introducing the report of the Secretary-General on special assistance to front-line States and other bordering States (A/46/369) prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 45/224, noting that the basic purpose of such assistance was set forth in General Assembly resolution 41/199. The report contained information from Member States, the organizations of the United Nations system, and other international organizations on their assistance activities.

21. The report on emergency assistance to the Sudan and Operation Lifeline Sudan (A/46/452) had been prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 45/226. The past year had been a dramatic one in the Sudan: in addition to

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the continuing civil war, the country had been affected by a drought which had threatened the lives of almost 8 million people. In March 1991, the Secretary-General had launched a consolidated appeal for emergency assistance totalling more than \$700 million, including 1.2 million tons of food aid and \$30 million in non-food assistance. The international community had responded generously and, despite serious logistical difficulties, the emergency programme had succeeded in averting a massive tragedy. Technical discussions on the extension of Operation Lifeline Sudan had been initiated and were still in progress. Meanwhile, relief supplies were being delivered to the conflict zone on the basis of ad hoc arrangements coordinated by the United Nations. In view of the Government's assurances that internally displaced persons were being voluntarily relocated and resettled, the international community had become increasingly willing to provide basic services for those relocated and resettled.

22. The terms of reference of the Secretary-General's report on emergency assistance to Somalia (A/46/457), prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 45/229, had been rendered obsolete by subsequent events. The focus of the United Nations response had shifted from the emergency needs identified by a 1989 inter-agency mission to those caused by civil conflict. By the end of 1990, the security situation in Somalia had deteriorated to such an extent that all foreign diplomatic missions and international organizations had been forced to evacuate. Subsequently, in April 1991, the Secretary-General had authorized the re-establishment of a limited United Nations presence in the country in order to carry out emergency humanitarian relief activities as soon as circumstances permitted. Several assessment missions had taken place, and preliminary estimates of overall requirements had been brought to the attention of the international community. While security conditions still precluded country-wide emergency relief operations, the United Nations stood ready to initiate such operations as soon as the situation permitted.

23. The report of the Secretary-General on international assistance for the economic rehabilitation of Angola (A/46/396), prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 45/233, outlined the assistance provided by organizations of the United Nations system and other donors. Once again, the terms of reference of the resolution had to some extent been overtaken by developments. Thus, the focus had shifted to emergency humanitarian assistance provided under the Special Relief Programme for Angola launched in November 1990, for which the Secretary-General had issued a renewed appeal on 28 March 1991. Consultations were currently under way to assess requirements for the coming year, and it was expected that a further appeal would be issued in the coming weeks so as to enable the Programme to continue until the end of 1992. In addition, in support of the peace agreement signed on 1 May 1991 between the Government of Angola and UNITA, the United Nations had launched a special programme to feed the demobilized combatants in Angola.

24. The Secretary-General's report on emergency assistance for the economic and social rehabilitation of Liberia (A/46/403) had been prepared in response

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to General Assembly resolution 45/232. On 5 December 1990, the Secretary-General had launched a \$14.4 million appeal to cover the critical first months of a resumed emergency relief operation in the Monrovia area. Following consultations with the various parties involved, it had been agreed that the United Nations should expand the emergency relief programme to cover the entire country. Following an inter-agency assessment mission, a country-wide emergency programme had been formulated for the period July 1991-July 1992, and the Secretary-General had issued an appeal for \$135.6 million to cover its costs. The report contained information on the response by Member States and other donors to that appeal.

25. Turning to the question of the critical humanitarian situation in the Horn of Africa, which fell under agenda item 12 but had been deferred for consideration under the present cluster of items, he said that the overthrow of the Mengistu regime in Ethiopia in May and June 1991 had resulted in substantial refugee flows in various directions. The Secretary-General had immediately called an emergency meeting at Abuja, Nigeria, which had led to a mission to the area. Subsequently, in response to donors and Member States, he had instituted the Special Emergency Programme for the Horn of Africa (SEPHA). An office had been established for the Programme, and some of the donors' conditions had been met. A consolidated inter-agency appeal had been launched and the first situation report published, with a further report expected soon.

26. Although calm now prevailed in Ethiopia, serious logistical problems had been encountered in the delivery of humanitarian assistance, especially to the Ogaden region. The ports of Djibouti and Aseb were seriously congested, and the World Food Programme had taken steps to ease that congestion.

27. Efforts had been made to deal with the effects on the Sudan of the events in Ethiopia. Following those events, many Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia had returned to their own country. Since the roads had been impassable, it had been necessary to launch a costly programme of air-drops in order to deliver humanitarian assistance to the refugees. He had recently participated in talks with a view to reopening the old Operation Lifeline Sudan land corridors, as well as some new land corridors. Some progress had been made, but political factors had intervened. Nevertheless, everything possible was being done to reduce the cost of delivery of humanitarian assistance.

28. There was reason for concern at the lack of response to the appeal launched by the Secretary-General on 16 September 1991. The situation in the Sudan was once again critical: all the food aid pledged was now running out, and there was an urgent need for further assistance. While grain was generally available, other foods necessary for a balanced diet were in short supply, resulting in high levels of malnutrition in the area. He therefore wished to reiterate the Secretary-General's latest appeal for resources in support of SEPHA.

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29. Joint assessment teams were currently being set up to visit the Horn of Africa, to ensure that the international community would be better able to cope with the situation in 1992. FAO projections already suggested that there would be very considerable needs in 1992, albeit not on the same scale as in 1991. Furthermore, the Secretary-General had been able to improve coordination within the United Nations, both at Headquarters and in the field. It was thus to be hoped that, with a combination of improved coordination and a quicker response on the part of donors, it would be possible to bring succour to the suffering people of the Horn of Africa.

30. Mr. ZUMBADO (Assistant Administrator, United Nations Development Programme), speaking in his capacity as Coordinator of the Special Plan of Economic Cooperation for Central America, introduced the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the Special Plan (A/46/458). The progress made in the execution of the Special Plan over the past 12 months had doubtless been stimulated by the significant advances made in bringing peace, democratization and institutional consolidation to the region. Nevertheless, final agreements had still to be reached on a negotiated settlement to the armed conflicts, just as obstacles still remained to the consolidation of democratic processes.

31. In 1990 the Central American economies had continued to be characterized to various degrees by recession and macroeconomic disequilibria, and poverty had been widespread. The situation in Central America thus posed great challenges for economic and social development and for the relaunching of the integration process. At a succession of summit meetings, the Central American Presidents had drawn up priorities for the economic and social development of the region, which were reflected in the Central American Economic Plan of Action. At the summit meeting scheduled to be held at Tegucigalpa in December 1991 they would be setting concrete goals for the alleviation of poverty in the region, according special attention to the problems of human development, young children and youth.

32. In that context, the general objectives of the Special Plan remained valid, a fact confirmed by the General Assembly's decision in its resolution 45/231 to renew the mandate of the Special Plan for three years. In addition, the UNDP Governing Council had provided for \$20 million in additional budget appropriations to allow UNDP to continue to provide support to Central America under the Special Plan from January 1992.

33. Central America's new economic and social agenda posed new challenges for the Special Plan. The Central American Governments had recently approved a revised strategy for the Plan, described in paragraphs 13-17 of the Secretary-General's report. Other initiatives were also being developed in the framework of the Special Plan, through ad hoc mechanisms or parallel contributions. Those initiatives included a subregional payments programme sponsored by the European Economic Community and the initiative coordinated by WHO and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) entitled "Health and Peace

(Mr. Zumbado)

towards Development and Democracy". Recently, additional resources had been mobilized for the forestry sector through the Tropical Forestry Action Plan for Central America.

34. Details regarding technical assistance projects were to be found in paragraph 16 of the report. Particular attention should be drawn to the projects described in paragraphs 28, 30, 57 and 60.

35. The strategy for the Special Plan over the next three years focused on four priority areas: assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons; poverty reduction; the environment and sustainable development of natural resources; and private sector policies and activities. Assistance to uprooted populations would continue to be a key theme of the Special Plan, with emphasis placed on development projects; such assistance would be closely linked to national peace initiatives. UNHCR and UNDP continued to support the Plan of Action of the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA), and an international meeting with donors would be convened in March 1992.

36. In the area of poverty alleviation, UNDP had financed a project prepared by the World Bank in association with WHO/PAHO, the Institute of Nutrition of Central America and Panama (INCAP) and UNESCO to set up a regional technical cooperation body to improve the efficiency and fairness of public expenditure, and target the poorest groups more effectively. That body would provide technical advice and training to broaden and improve the financing and delivery of social services, particularly basic education, primary health care and nutrition.

37. In the area of the environment and natural resources, projects for sustainable development were being promoted, with particular attention accorded to strengthening the Central American Commission on Environment and Development (CCAD). Technical support was also being provided to the forestry sector and to the drafting and implementation of agro-forestry activities to increase small farmers' productivity and promote the conservation of natural resources.

38. Another priority was the creation of a framework conducive to private sector development. UNDP was encouraging a number of initiatives jointly with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the International Trade Centre and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) dealing with industrial modernization, technological development, trade, and services, with emphasis on expanding exports.

39. In implementing the strategy for the Special Plan, UNDP would continue to focus on coordinating assistance with other bilateral and multilateral programmes with a view to securing the greatest possible complementarity and impact for the benefit of Central America. UNDP was also coordinating

(Mr. Zumbado)

management of the Special Plan with technical cooperation programmes and projects financed at the national level in each country, thereby extending successful national experiences to the regional scale while ensuring that regional projects strengthened national initiatives in each of the participating countries.

40. Mr. HAMILTON (Acting Director, International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction secretariat) said that the Decade secretariat had undertaken a survey of priorities and gaps in technical knowledge at the national level as the basis for developing Decade programmes. To date, about 100 national committees or focal points had been established in response to the call by the General Assembly. The meeting of Latin American countries that had preceded the recent session of the Scientific and Technical Committee in Guatemala, had stimulated the formation of several new committees and had contributed to the formulation of guidelines for regional cooperation for disaster mitigation. About one quarter of the relevant national entities had provided information about their disaster mitigation plans, and the number of Decade-related activities was growing steadily. Yet while the situation was encouraging in terms of commitment, specific measures for disaster mitigation were still only at the identification phase in many countries.

41. The Inter-Agency Working Group and Steering Committee had met at Geneva in July 1991. The participants had identified numerous activities for furthering the Decade, including the establishment of a directory of disaster-related information systems and databases, compilation of an inventory of Decade-related projects, examination of the economic aspects of disaster mitigation strategies, and preparation of information for national committees. The Steering Committee had endorsed the Working Group's conclusions, and the Decade secretariat was currently obtaining the resources needed to undertake the programme of work thus outlined.

42. The Scientific and Technical Committee had held its first session at Bonn in March 1991 and its second in Guatemala City in September 1991, with financial support from Japan and the assistance of the Pan American Health Organization. The Committee's first annual report, which identified targets, strategies and international demonstration projects for the Decade, appeared as an annex to document A/46/266/Add.1.

43. The membership of the Special High-Level Council had been announced by the Secretary-General on 6 September 1991, and the Council had met for the first time on 9 October 1991, the International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction. The major topics of discussion had been "Natural disaster reduction and development" and "Awareness of policy-makers and role of the media". The session had concluded with the adoption of the New York Declaration (A/46/266/Add.1, annex I), which constituted a significant step towards raising awareness of the importance of decisive action in vulnerable countries to reduce the impact of disasters.

(Mr. Hamilton)

44. With regard to the Decade secretariat itself, funds provided by the Government of Finland were being used to hire an economist, who would begin work in January 1992. There were also prospects for the loan of a senior earthquake engineer, the secondment of a junior professional and the recruitment of a public information specialist during the coming months. If those services could be obtained, the augmented staff would considerably increase the secretariat's capabilities. However, the secretariat still required an additional secretary, an administrative assistant, and, most importantly, long-term support for a Director and Deputy Director.

45. In the area of public information, three bimonthly issues of the Decade newsletter had already appeared. Following a recommendation by the United Nations Publications Board, the secretariat had organized a competition among national organizations to choose a logo for the Decade. The Publications Board had chosen the winning design, which was being circulated among delegations at the current meeting.

46. Although the Decade was moving ahead, resources commensurate with the needs deriving from the Framework of Action specified by General Assembly resolution 44/236 must now be provided. The resources currently available for the Decade were insufficient either to build the secretariat's staff to a level that would provide adequate support to participants or to plan more than a few months ahead.

47. It was clear that most Member States that were willing to support Decade-related projects preferred to do so on a bilateral basis. While several Member States had generously funded specific Decade-related events, there appeared to be a general reluctance to provide the financing necessary to sustain the basic administrative staff and the operational costs of the secretariat. However, the Decade was making good progress and deserved continued support. Such support could be classified as sustaining support and project support.

48. Sustaining support would cover costs relating to the secretariat and would enable it to service the Scientific and Technical Committee and the Special High-Level Council. The salaries of the secretariat staff would be included, as would the operational expenses of the office and the costs of convening one meeting of the Scientific and Technical Committee and the Special High-Level Council at Geneva each year. The total requirement would be \$1-2 million a year, depending on the activity level. It would be desirable for the support to be broadly based, which could be ensured if 10 countries each pledged an average of \$100,000-\$200,000 per year for the remaining eight years of the Decade.

49. Project support would fund special projects or events in which Member States had a particular interest, including the secondment of staff to the secretariat, special activities undertaken by the secretariat, meetings of the Council and the Committee outside Geneva, especially in developing countries,

(Mr. Hamilton)

a second meeting per year of the Committee, regional or topical meetings in preparation for the proposed world conference and special activities by Council or Committee members on behalf of the Decade. He hoped that the Second Committee would give urgent consideration to his proposal, as the current pace of Decade activities could not be sustained without such commitment.

50. Mr. LOUÏ (Coordinator of Assistance to the Least Developed Countries, United Nations Development Programme) drew attention to document A/46/316 containing the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Summary reports on Chad and Djibouti", which had been submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 45/223 and 45/228. The reports were based mainly on information provided by the Governments of the two countries through the UNDP field offices there.

51. In Chad, internal strife and natural disasters had for many years hampered reconstruction and development efforts, and the situation remained difficult. For the second successive year, drought had given rise to food shortages. A substantial number of former refugees had returned to Chad and were in need of assistance; moreover, internal migration had strained local resources and facilities. Earlier in 1991 there had been an outbreak of cholera. Various United Nations offices, programmes and agencies had provided assistance over the past year to alleviate the food situation and to meet health needs. The Third Round-table Conference of Donors to Chad had been held at Geneva in June 1990. Following the Conference, a number of sectoral consultations had been launched.

52. As for Djibouti, events in the Horn of Africa had caused the country to experience an influx of refugees and displaced persons and had disrupted its traditional trade with neighbouring countries. Djibouti was also coping with the economic impact of the Gulf crisis and the effects of the disastrous floods of April 1989. Djibouti's planning priorities were being modified in the light of the country's vulnerability to external events: efforts were being made to expand and diversify the country's economic activities and to attract additional investment capital. Moreover, the Government wished to ensure that the necessary measures were taken to minimize and alleviate the social costs that might result from economic restructuring.

53. The Secretary-General had also submitted a report on a number of initiatives taken by the United Nations system in response to General Assembly resolution 45/222 to assist the Government of Yemen (A/46/217). Since the preparation of that report, UNDP had proposed a \$245 million programme for Yemen, of which \$86 million was to be provided in credits and grants, through the World Bank emergency recovery project, to assist returning migrant workers. To date, \$60 million had been provided, including \$33 million in International Development Association (IDA) financing, \$15 million from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and \$4.5 million from Germany. UNDP had also provided \$400,000 in Special Programme Resources

(Mr. Loup)

to help Yemen's project management unit coordinate the emergency recovery project and was assisting the Yemeni Government in identifying its needs and in mobilizing the necessary resources. To that end, a meeting with donors was scheduled to be held in May 1992 at Geneva.

54. Mrs. ten TUSSCHER (Netherlands), speaking on behalf of the European Community and its member States, said that the recent unprecedented number of man-made and natural disasters in the world had caused tremendous suffering and loss of life, forcing millions of people to flee their homes. Developing countries were particularly disaster-prone, since many emergencies had their root causes in poverty, environmental degradation and civil or international conflicts, and their impact was aggravated by the limited capacity of developing countries to cope with their consequences. The European Community and its member States had stretched their emergency aid budgets to the maximum in an endeavour to respond adequately to the needs of disaster victims.

55. There was a pressing need for a coordinated approach to disaster prevention, preparedness, mitigation and relief, and it was disappointing, therefore, that the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction had still failed to generate lasting and practical results. Appropriate administrative arrangements were necessary to enable the Decade secretariat to carry out its mandate fully, and she hoped that the newly appointed Special High-Level Council would contribute to that goal. In particular, measures were required to help disaster-prone countries set up their own disaster mitigation programmes, which would dramatically reduce the loss of life and property.

56. Efforts to improve the coordination of United Nations humanitarian emergency assistance must focus on enhancing the role of UNDR0 in all areas of disaster work. In view of the linkages with the overall development process and the coordinating role of UNDP in the field, close cooperation with UNDP was vital. The joint UNDP-UNDR0 Disaster Management Training Programme would greatly assist national authorities in their efforts to integrate disaster mitigation into national development plans.

57. The United Nations had a valuable role to play in all emergency situations, as evidenced by operations currently under way in Liberia, Angola and Central America. Negotiating efforts by the Special Coordinator for the Horn of Africa and his Deputy had been instrumental in opening up new corridors of relief in that part of the world.

58. Mr. GONZALEZ (Chile) said that, as a particularly disaster-prone country subject to severe earthquakes, flooding, volcanic eruptions, landslides and droughts, Chile had received extensive humanitarian assistance from other countries and the relevant agencies of the United Nations system. Such assistance was vital to the developing countries, which lacked the means necessary for an adequate response to natural disasters, and his delegation therefore attached great importance to the activities of the United Nations

(Mr. Gonzalez, Chile)

Disaster Relief Coordinator and to the adoption of international measures for rapid assistance.

59. Chile had adopted measures at the highest level to promote the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. A special Committee on the observance of the Decade had been established and was working in conjunction with public bodies, the armed forces and the police to heighten the Chilean people's awareness of the need for preventive measures. In addition, a comprehensive, country-wide disaster response system had been established in Chile, and bilateral and multilateral agreements had been concluded with other countries on mutual assistance to deal with disasters.

60. His delegation called on other countries and international agencies with experience in natural disaster work to assist disaster-prone countries in setting up their own adequate response systems.

61. Mr. GUERRERO (Philippines) said that while many natural disasters defied prediction, some, particularly those caused by man, could be avoided and others were predictable. Ideally, however, preparations could be made for all disasters. The necessary technology and resources should be made available to the developing nations to enable them to cope adequately with emergency situations, for it was vital that growth and development should continue to be pursued in the aftermath of disasters.

62. His delegation hailed the decision by the United Nations to designate the 1990s as the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction and called for efforts to optimize the role played by the Organization in disaster prevention and preparedness, emergency management, rehabilitation and ongoing development efforts in afflicted areas. Particular importance must be attached to the coordination and integration of the disaster-related activities of the Organization's various agencies to ensure maximum effectiveness in the shortest possible time and the optimal utilization of available resources.

63. The Philippines was a particularly disaster-prone country and in the past two years had been devastated by typhoons, floods, a major earthquake and the eruption of Mount Pinatubo, causing damage equivalent to 16.8 per cent of the country's average yearly budget. The effects of those disasters had been further compounded by the social and economic impact of the 1990 Gulf crisis, which had left 70,000 Filipino workers unemployed and stranded in the conflict area. His country was grateful to the United Nations agencies and to other States for their generous response to those emergencies.

64. Certain measures would considerably enhance the effectiveness of the United Nations response to natural disasters. A swifter assessment of the gravity of a disaster and the communication of that information to the relevant United Nations agencies and programmes, specifying the aid required, would avoid overlapping and unnecessary costs. An overall coordinator,

(Mr. Guerrero, Philippines)

assisted by a specific project officer, might be appointed to oversee an integrated United Nations response, releasing the UNDP resident representative from the duty of coordinating relief activities at the country level. Donor countries might contribute to a larger disaster fund for the provision of United Nations relief, administered by the Secretary-General through a special coordinator, without prejudice to any country's decision to send additional funds to the afflicted country should it deem such funding warranted. Finally, he stressed the importance of pursuing rehabilitation and development programmes after natural emergencies, since the capacity of any country either to prevent or to be prepared for a disaster was determined by its level of development. Assistance from the international community would be vital for such programmes.

65. Mr. GEBREMEDHIN (Ethiopia) said that his delegation shared the views of the Secretary-General concerning the problems faced by the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO) and the need for enhanced coordination within the United Nations system. Even at a time when disaster situations had been increasing around the world, the resource needs of the Office had not been met. Not only had the budget failed to reflect real requirements, but since the 1980s, it had also been subject to the zero growth rule, which had contributed to a further deterioration of response capacity. While extrabudgetary funds had provided UNDRO with some flexibility, there had been a lack of staff to manage such funds. It was therefore unrealistic to focus solely on the coordination problems of UNDRO or of the system as a whole while ignoring such tangible constraints.

66. UNDRO had become neither a focal point nor an effective coordinator of system-wide emergency assistance. Accordingly, in view of the continued relevance of its mission, efforts must be made to strengthen UNDRO so as to ensure that the system responded automatically when disaster struck. Furthermore, disaster mitigation measures must focus on prevention as well as on preparedness.

67. Ethiopia continued to suffer from the cumulative effects of natural and man-made disasters. In the past several years, both drought and a decades-old civil war had claimed many lives. Resources had been squandered and production had been hampered. As a result, more than 9 million people were currently in need of emergency assistance. In addition, the country was currently hosting more than 500,000 refugees.

68. The Secretary-General had recently launched a consolidated appeal designed to raise \$400 million to meet the needs of more than 22 million people in the Horn of Africa from September to December 1991. So far, only \$110 million, or 23 per cent of the total, had been raised. Unless assistance arrived in time, many of those affected would be at serious risk. While expressing gratitude for the assistance provided thus far, he urged the donor community to finalize its pledges. He also reaffirmed his Government's commitment to facilitating the unhindered delivery of emergency assistance.

69. Mr. PARIENEC (Panama) said that since December 1989, when a democratically elected Government had taken office in his country, a difficult process of economic and social reconstruction had been initiated through extensive structural adjustment measures. The Central American countries had been among the first members of the international community to re-establish diplomatic relations with Panama. In April 1990, the Central American Presidents, meeting at Montelimar, Nicaragua, had formally invited Panama to take part in the regional integration and development process. A decision in that regard had been adopted by consensus at the presidential summit meeting held at San Salvador, El Salvador, in July 1991.

70. Since the 1950s, Panama had participated in various regional forums and had maintained trade links with other Central American countries through bilateral and international agreements. It was also taking part in various international cooperation programmes, including the United Nations Special Plan of Economic Cooperation for Central America. While Panama had not been included as a beneficiary country in General Assembly resolution 42/231, which had established the Special Plan, it participated in all of the intraregional coordination mechanisms, especially the meeting of Central American Vice-Presidents. The 14th meeting of deputy ministers overseeing the implementation of the Special Plan had been held in August 1991 at Panama City.

71. Among the regional projects to which Panama was contributing were the RUTA II expansion project, which provided technical assistance to the agriculture and livestock sector of various countries, and joint projects with the Governments of El Salvador and Nicaragua in the electricity and agricultural sectors, respectively.

72. Panama fully supported the revised strategy of the Special Plan, which placed emphasis on social development, particularly health and poverty alleviation, and on external cooperation programmes. In view of the activities which it had undertaken and the support which it received from the five other Central American countries, Panama requested to be included as the sixth beneficiary country of the Special Plan.

73. Mr. WANG Xinggen (China) said that his country was prone to natural disasters. During 1991, 24 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities had been struck by flood, drought, earthquake or other calamities; as a result, 3,074 people had been killed and 61,000 injured. Direct economic losses amounted to more than \$15 billion.

74. The Chinese Government had provided large amounts of emergency assistance, both in cash and in kind, to the affected areas. Chinese living around the world and the international community had also responded quickly and generously, and he expressed appreciation for the assistance provided.

75. Since the launching of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, some 90 countries had established national committees for disaster mitigation, which were helping their respective Governments to prepare

(Mr. Wang Xinggen, China)

disaster-prevention programmes and providing information and recommendations to government agencies and other relevant organizations.

76. Natural disaster reduction was of vital importance to developing countries because their economic infrastructures were fragile. When disasters occurred, those countries faced not only great losses, but also enormous difficulties in rehabilitation and reconstruction. Accordingly, the establishment of an early-warning system for natural disasters was crucial. China supported the efforts of the Scientific and Technical Committee to apply modern technology to disaster reduction and to promote the establishment of such a system. It also supported the trust fund for the Decade and encouraged those countries which were in a position to do so to contribute to it.

77. While the secretariat for the Decade had made a valuable contribution to the implementation of various programmes, his Government believed that a small and efficient secretariat was preferable to a large and cumbersome one. The existing United Nations structures and facilities should be fully utilized so as to avoid duplication and overlapping. It was essential to focus on enhancing the disaster-mitigation capacity of developing countries in order to foster their self-reliance.

78. Mr. MILINTACHINDA (Thailand) said that no country was safe from natural disasters. In 1988 and 1989, sudden floods in southern Thailand had caused torrential rain and typhoons, resulting in massive destruction of lives and property. Assistance to the stricken areas had been provided by the Thai Government, Thai private agencies and UNDRO. Short- and long-term rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes in the two most seriously affected villages had been partially supported by contributions from UNDP.

79. His Government attached great importance to international cooperation in natural disaster reduction and, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 42/169, had established a national committee for coordination with the United Nations in that area. Thailand had also provided food, medicine and cash to flood victims in Maldives, Cambodia and China and to the victims of the Pinatubo volcano eruption in the Philippines.

80. For developing countries, reducing the losses caused by disasters was of vital importance. However, as noted by the Secretary-General, in document A/46/266, the situation of the trust fund was far from satisfactory, and urgent action was necessary if the activities of the Decade were to be supported. His delegation encouraged donor countries to contribute to the fund so that the annual target of \$3 million might be reached.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.