

United Nations
GENERAL
ASSEMBLY

FORTY-SECOND SESSION

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THIRD COMMITTEE
50th meeting
held on
Tuesday, 17 November 1987
at 3 p.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 50th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. RITTFER (Panama)

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Distr. GENERAL
A/C.3/42/SR.50
20 November 1987

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 103: OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES (continued) (A/42/3, A/42/12 and Add.1, A/42/491; A/C.3/42/L.6, L.27; A/42/112, A/42/270; A/42/323-S/18899, A/42/376-S/18959, A/42/381-E/1987/117; A/42/390, A/42/393, A/42/398; A/42/477-S/19048, A/42/525-S/19092)

(a) REPORT OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

(b) QUESTION OF THE CONTINUATION OF THE OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

(c) ASSISTANCE TO REFUGEES IN AFRICA: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

1. Mr. CHIDUMO (Mozambique) said that his delegation shared the view that the question of refugees, displaced persons and returnees required a global solution. It commended the efforts of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in particular its emphasis on measures to promote the voluntary repatriation of refugees. Repatriation alone was not enough, however. If durable solutions were to be found to refugee problems, it was necessary to first deal with their root causes. In southern Africa, for example, the refugee problem must be seen in the context of South Africa's strategy of destabilizing the entire region. The undeclared war being waged against the front-line States, particularly Mozambique and Angola, by the apartheid régime, coupled with severe natural disasters, was the root cause of the massive population exodus from those States. One third of the Mozambican population had been affected; most of them had been displaced within the country, while others had sought refuge in neighbouring countries.

2. The international community bore global responsibility for the situation of southern African refugees and for solving their problem. In that context, his delegation supported fully the proposal to convene an international conference on the situation of refugees and war victims in the southern African region, as an expression of the international community's grave concern over the deterioration of the situation in southern Africa and its consequences for peace and security in the region. He hoped that the United Nations and the entire international community would provide all possible support to enable the conference to achieve its objectives. Mozambique was prepared to co-operate fully with the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the United Nations and the international community in making the conference a success.

3. His delegation reiterated its gratitude to donor countries and the international community as a whole for their valuable support, which had made it possible to save thousands of lives in Mozambique.

4. Ms. MARCOULLIS (Cyprus) said that UNHCR's commitment to the cause of alleviating the suffering of refugees and displaced persons was a source of pride for the United Nations. Her delegation had always taken the position that UNHCR's functions were and should remain purely humanitarian and non-political. It was not

(Ms. Marcoullis, Cyprus)

up to the High Commissioner and his staff to seek political solutions to the problems that gave rise to the uprooting and mass displacement of peoples.

5. In Cyprus, hundreds of thousands of people had been forcibly uprooted from their ancestral homes and lands and made destitute refugees in their own country. The political causes of that problem were well known and it was not necessary to restate them. She reiterated, however, that the displaced persons in her country continued to place their hopes in the United Nations, and in the rules of international law and the precepts of international morality which the United Nations represented. The fate of Cyprus and its people was not of concern to Cyprus alone. Cyprus could be viewed as a test case for humanity and the United Nations. If the claim that "might is right" prevailed in Cyprus - along with aggression, occupation and the forcible uprooting and geographical separation of people on the basis of racial, ethnic or religious criteria - then the very existence of many States would be at stake. Their unity would be threatened by separatist elements and their independence and sovereignty would be at the mercy of powerful neighbours. The people of Cyprus were convinced that the international community would not allow such a crime to be committed against them, and that one day they would return to the ancestral homes and lands from which they had been forcibly expelled. The right of displaced Cypriots to return was inalienable and sacrosanct. The firm belief in that right, coupled with the consistent support of the international community, remained the foundation for her peoples' struggle for freedom and justice and for a unified country and a united people.

6. Ms. POC Yanine (Democratic Kampuchea) said that the UNHCR report showed clearly that during the period under review the world refugee situation had remained a matter of grave concern. In Africa, natural disasters coupled with the critical economic situation had further aggravated the already precarious situation of millions of African refugees. Her delegation commended OAU for its active role in monitoring, in co-operation with UNHCR and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the implementation of the Declaration and Programme of Action of the Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa (ICARA II).

7. In many cases, massive flows of refugees and displaced persons were triggered by man-made causes, such as acts of aggression, alien domination, apartheid, foreign intervention and occupation, and violations of the United Nations Charter and international human rights instruments. That was the case in southern Africa, where the racist apartheid system and the use of Namibia as a springboard for launching unprovoked attacks on the front-line States had further aggravated the extreme suffering of thousands of refugees, and in South-West Asia, where the presence of foreign troops in Afghanistan had displaced and uprooted millions of Afghans. There was no doubt that those massive outflows of refugees and displaced persons could be stemmed only when their root causes were removed.

8. In South-East Asia, the invasion and occupation of Kampuchea by Viet Nam had created a man-made refugee situation in which millions of Kampucheans had fled their homeland, forcing neighbouring countries to bear heavy social, economic, financial and security burdens. Since 1979, almost one million Kampucheans had

(Ms. POC Yanine, Democratic Kampuchea)

sought refuge in Thailand and other countries and several million more had been displaced within Kampuchea. The occupying forces had attacked and destroyed refugee camps, killing and wounding hundreds of civilians, taking thousands of others prisoner and leaving hundreds of thousands homeless. Since 1985, hundreds of thousands had been rounded up and sent to perform forced labour along the western border of Kampuchea. The Vietnamese aggressors were pursuing a deliberate policy of trying to impose demographic changes in Kampuchea, thereby driving the Kampuchean population from their ancestral lands and homes and forcing them to become displaced persons in their own country.

9. There was an urgent need to take concrete measures to effectively protect refugees and displaced persons from military and armed attacks on refugee camps and settlement areas. Such attacks violated all principles of international law and the sovereignty and territorial integrity of asylum countries. In that connection, her delegation endorsed fully the conclusions regarding attacks on refugee camps and settlements adopted by consensus at the thirty-eighth session of UNHCR's Executive Committee. It also welcomed the Executive Committee's conclusions on refugee children and reiterated its appreciation of the initiatives taken by the High Commissioner to ensure the protection and meet the specific needs of women refugees.

10. Although it agreed in principle that voluntary repatriation could be one of the major components of a durable solution to the refugee problem, her delegation believed that voluntary repatriation could not be applied in Kampuchea, because it would endanger the lives of Kampuchean refugees, who would face possible death at the hands of the occupying forces. The only effective solution to the problem of Kampuchean refugees was the total withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Kampuchea, which would enable the people of Kampuchea to decide their own destiny freely in conformity with the relevant United Nations resolutions. Her delegation renewed its appeal to the world community to continue to render humanitarian assistance to Kampuchean refugees and displaced persons, and reiterated its deep gratitude to Thailand, which had shown exemplary generosity and compassion in giving shelter and assistance to hundreds of thousands of Kampuchean refugees, and to all countries which had welcomed Kampuchean refugees, donor countries, international organizations and UNHCR for their generous work to save the lives and relieve the suffering of the Kampuchean people.

11. Mrs. ARUNGU-OLENDE (Kenya) said that her delegation agreed that the settlement of regional conflicts through dialogue and negotiation should be encouraged in order to address the root causes of refugee flows. The Organization of African Unity and, in some cases, individual heads of State in Africa and other regions of the world had been involved in such dialogues, and their efforts should be encouraged and respected. Humanitarian assistance must remain a temporary measure; it should not be regarded as a lasting solution to any refugee problem and should not be used to such an extent that it became a way of life, while the underlying problems remain unsolved. Lasting solutions such as resettlement and voluntary repatriation should be the goal.

(Mrs. Arungu-Olende, Kenya)

12. Kenya was one of the many African countries which had continued to receive refugees over the past 10 years. Their Governments were grateful for the international assistance they had received but believed that there should be a much more proportionate form of burden-sharing.

13. As the High Commissioner had said, it was becoming difficult to distinguish a genuine refugee from an "economic migrant", especially in the case of masses of people who crossed borders and settled in remote rural areas. That was one reason why some countries were not even sure how many refugees they had. Genuine refugees should not be made to suffer in such circumstances, however, and proper investigations should be carried out before anyone was turned away.

14. Her delegation was pleased to note that the plight of refugee children had received considerable attention at the latest session of the Executive Committee. Kenya wholeheartedly supported the conclusions reached at that session concerning such children. Her delegation also noted the support offered by UNHCR and its Executive Committee for the proposed international conference on the situation of refugees and war victims in the southern African region.

15. Mr. MEKONYO (Chad) said that the refugee situation stemmed from the instability which continued to afflict the world community. The scale and frequency of population flows had in recent years become one of the world's major concerns. In less than two decades, the number of refugees had risen to 12 million - over 4 million on the African continent alone. The influx of refugees and displaced persons created serious political, economic and social problems which were of concern not only to States and humanitarian organizations but also to immigrant and host populations. Refugees themselves, besides posing a humanitarian problem whose solution called for increased international co-operation, faced constant problems of insecurity, overcrowding, shortages and difficulties in integrating into host countries. In some host countries refugees were received with sympathy, in others with hostility.

16. In the matter of international protection, his delegation reiterated the importance of strict compliance with international instruments, including the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol. It endorsed the High Commissioner's recommendation that efforts in the area of international protection should aim at practical solutions.

17. His delegation's interest in the question of refugees stemmed from a desire not only to make a positive contribution but also to promote awareness of the situation in Chad. The country's geographical and climatic difficulties were being exacerbated by the unjust war waged against it by the expansionist Tripoli régime and many of Chad's meagre resources were being expended on dealing with refugees. The Government had set up a special programme to assist persons displaced by the war and had created a department to evaluate needs, foster reconstruction initiatives and co-ordinate rehabilitation efforts in the affected region. His delegation renewed its call for assistance with such efforts and would be submitting a draft resolution on the subject.

(Mr. Mekonyo, Chad)

18. The valuable assistance provided to Chad by UNHCR had been noted by the Secretary-General in his report. UNHCR's special programme of limited assistance had enabled help to be given to some 70,000 refugees who had returned to Chad after the 1986 season; during the same period, UNHCR had provided assistance to over 45,000 Chadian refugees in the Sudan and to a similar number in neighbouring countries, including the Central African Republic and Cameroon.

19. His delegation thanked the High Commissioner and his staff for their exemplary work and donor countries for their generous assistance. The remarkable progress made by UNHCR in Chad and elsewhere should not be allowed to obscure the difficulties faced by the agency, however. Although 103 countries had ratified the Geneva Convention, the High Commissioner had noted that international humanitarian law ossified steadily once it ceased to respond to a rapidly and constantly changing reality. Refugees also felt that donor countries' efforts would come to nothing unless the root causes of population exoduses were tackled. Repatriation, integration and resettlement remained the only durable solution to the refugee problem. The international community must step up its efforts to that end in order to activate refugees' productive potential.

20. Mr. KHYBERI (Afghanistan) said that all humanitarian problems required a concerted, objective, realistic and non-political approach. It was from that standpoint that his delegation viewed the question of assistance to refugees and displaced persons. It appreciated UNHCR's humanitarian work and reaffirmed its commitment to working closely with the Office in the firm belief that such co-operation could help rehabilitate and repatriate genuine Afghan refugees. Given its apolitical, neutral character, the Office could play a significant role in promoting constructive dialogue and negotiation with Afghanistan's neighbours - an important element of any solution.

21. Refugee flows were caused not only by natural disasters but also, increasingly by problems such as the imbalance between developing and developed countries, racism, State terrorism, mercenarism, banditry and activities to destabilize the political systems of independent sovereign States. His own country had been affected by a policy of deliberately creating a refugee problem, but the Government had consistently taken practical steps to permit the return and rehabilitation of Afghan refugees. It had established a ministerial department to deal with them and promulgated various decrees providing for the return of their property and the protection of their civil, political and economic rights.

22. A considerable number of Afghans had indeed fled the country, driven by the terror, subversion and psychological warfare waged against Afghanistan by extremists and warmongers. More than 100,000 had returned home, however, and the number was growing daily, despite the obstacles raised by neighbouring States to Afghanistan's official attempts to help. His delegation was extremely grateful to UNHCR for its assistance but was disturbed at the dubious activities of some so-called international humanitarian organizations, many of which were involved in covert actions against Afghanistan and other countries of the region and used Afghan refugees for terrorist purposes.

(Mr. Khyberi, Afghanistan)

23. Co-operation and genuine understanding would help solve the Afghan refugee problem. Afghanistan supported UNHCR's humanitarian efforts and wished to co-operate with it further in the rehabilitation and resettlement of Afghan refugees.
24. Mr. IRUMBA (Uganda) said that the reports before the Committee demonstrated clearly the seriousness of the global refugee situation. The problem called for a concerted international response involving countries of origin, countries of asylum or resettlement and the world community at large. If the High Commissioner was to afford refugees international protection, the support of Member States was imperative and it was regrettable that increasing obstacles were being encountered in that regard. His delegation shared the High Commissioner's concern at the tendency of many countries to take unilateral measures to restrict the entry of asylum-seekers and to adopt an overly restrictive interpretation of the concept of refugee as defined in the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol. Such measures eroded the principle of asylum, derogated from the relevant principles of international law and exacerbated fear and hostility.
25. His country was particularly concerned at the growing violation of the principle of non-refoulement, in some cases even against acknowledged refugees. Despite the difficulties caused by the worsening world economic situation, countries of first asylum must shoulder their international responsibility for the lives and welfare of refugees within their territories, pending resettlement or voluntary repatriation. That was even more necessary in the case of refugees arriving in unsavoury vessels. States had an international obligation to avert the catastrophes that interdiction could cause.
26. Military attacks on defenceless refugee settlements were abhorrent. The racist South African régime perpetrated many such attacks in the front-line States. In addition to maintaining the repugnant system of apartheid in defiance of all international appeals, thus forcing many of its people to flee racist oppression, that régime had uprooted large numbers of civilians in neighbouring States by engaging in aggression and terrorism beyond its borders. He hoped that the international community would support OAU's initiative in convening an international conference, to be held in 1988, on the situation of refugees and war victims in the southern African region.
27. Uganda understood fully the agony of refugees, the disruption caused in their lives and the negative effects on the countries concerned. It had given asylum to thousands of refugees from neighbouring countries, many of whom it had resettled and integrated. The present Government, whose domestic and foreign policies alike upheld respect for human rights, had taken steps to repair the damage done by previous Governments' human rights violations. As a result, many Uganda who had been forced to flee the country had returned and been resettled. In addressing the General Assembly at the current session, President Yoweri Museveni had cited statistics testifying to the large number of Ugandan returnees and to the resettlement in their places of origin of thousands of internally displaced

(Mr. Irumba, Uganda)

persons. As he had said, there was no surer sign of a return to normality than the return of refugees to their country. Uganda needed international co-operation in resettling and rehabilitating its returnees.

28. Voluntary repatriation was the best solution to the refugee problem, but as long as it remained unworkable the international community had a clear obligation to help alleviate the burden on the developing countries which received refugees and strove to integrate them into their societies. In his own country, refugees from other countries had been provided with the means to settle down and become integrated into society. Uganda was encouraged by UNHCR's policy of promoting self-reliance and durable solutions by linking the refugee problem with development.

29. It was important to address the root causes of refugee problems. In many countries, the cause was ethnic difference originally fostered by the colonial system of divide and rule and later manipulated by unscrupulous leaders and foreign interests. Education and information had an important role to play in eradicating that cause by demonstrating the benefits of ethnic and cultural diversity and the commonality of interests. His Government was committed to that task; unfortunately, its efforts were being hampered by a disinformation campaign launched by powerful foreign interests.

30. Measures to strengthen international security, develop good-neighbourly relations and create a climate of confidence would greatly enhance international co-operation. In pursuance of its good-neighbour policy, Uganda had taken steps to strengthen regional co-operation for mutual benefit and it trusted that they would help to prevent further refugee flows.

31. Mr. MOTTAGHINEJAD (Islamic Republic of Iran) observed that, despite the international community's humanitarian efforts, the world refugee situation was worsening. The massive flow of refugees from natural disasters, foreign occupation and aggression continued unabated. Attacks on refugee camps had become a matter of policy for the racist régimes of Pretoria and the Zionist occupiers of Palestine. His delegation was pleased to note the conclusions on military or armed attacks on refugee camps and settlements adopted by the UNHCR Executive Committee at its thirty-eighth session.

32. While the High Commissioner's commitment to concentrate on humanitarian aspects and refrain from introducing political elements was justified and essential, it was obvious that treating the symptoms without tackling the root causes would never bring about a lasting solution to the refugee problem. The humanitarian efforts of the United Nations, and other concerned bodies and Governments, to alleviate the sufferings of the displaced Palestinian and Afghan peoples demonstrated the ineffectiveness of a strategy which was not designed to tackle the political causes of the problem, namely the occupation of their homeland by foreign Powers. No solution which did not involve the eventual voluntary repatriation of refugees was worthy of serious consideration. Since family ties were broken when oppressed peoples sought asylum in other lands, permanent resettlement could be considered as a humane alternative only as a last resort. Cultural differences, lack of national identity and other social and cultural

(Mr. Mottaghinejad, Islamic
Republic of Iran)

problems prevented refugees from becoming fully assimilated in countries of asylum. Any serious attempt to solve the refugee problem should be aimed at achieving voluntary repatriation by alleviating the conditions which had given rise to the problem in the first place. Finding second-asylum countries should be only a secondary objective.

33. The Government and people of Iran had provided hospitable conditions for different groups of refugees, including refugees from Afghanistan and half a million refugees of another nationality, without looking to the international community to share the burden. However, it hoped that the international community would take due account of the plight of those large numbers of refugees.

34. As paragraph 108 of the UNHCR report (A/42/12) indicated, Iran had been hosting more than 2.2 million Afghan refugees without substantial support from the international community and despite its own limited economic resources. While it was pleased that closer co-operation had been achieved following consultations with UNHCR, it was clear from the report that the financial contributions from UNHCR indicated in paragraph 108 were very small, in proportion to the number of refugees being hosted, when compared with those given to other countries. That issue should be dealt with more seriously and real burden-sharing should be organized.

35. His country believed that assistance to refugees should be aimed at self-reliance, which had been the cornerstone of its policy towards its guests. It also expected UNHCR to devote more resources to income-generating and employment-generating assistance, which could not only help provide food and shelter for refugees but also preserve their self-respect.

36. While his country felt bound to offer hospitality to Afghan refugees, with whom it shared religious, cultural and linguistic ties, it believed firmly that providing permanent asylum for them and other refugees from foreign occupation and internal persecution prevented serious consideration from being given to a lasting solution for the problems that had produced the refugees. The withdrawal of foreign forces was the only viable solution to the Afghan refugee problem, just as the removal of the Zionist entity was the only solution to the Palestine refugee problem. While the refugee problem could not be dealt with effectively unless the international community tackled its underlying political causes, however, it was imperative to keep UNHCR free from manipulation and prevent it from becoming an instrument of pressure for certain countries. The abuse of UNHCR for short-sighted political gains was a dangerous trend that should not be allowed to develop.

37. Mr. KITTIKHOUNE (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that the root causes of the refugee problem were the heinous policies of imperialism, hegemony, interference in the internal affairs of States, oppression, repression and aggression, which were being pursued with increasing persistence by the apartheid, Zionist and other dictatorial régimes.

38. In Laos, the refugee situation was the result of a protracted war waged against the Lao people by imperialist Powers with the full support of their

(Mr. Kittikhoun, Lao People's
Democratic Republic)

reactionary surrogates in the region, and, it was unfortunate that since the total liberation of Laos in 1975 part of the Lao population had left the country. Lao refugees fell into three main categories: those who did not sympathize with the new socialist régime; those who were misled by imperialist, hegemonist and reactionary propaganda; and those who preferred to seek an easier life abroad - in rich developed countries. The Government had made and would continue to make every effort to prevent that exodus and had proclaimed a policy of welcoming back all those who wished to return voluntarily to the country - except for a handful of criminals, traitors and counter-revolutionaries. As a result, more than 3,000 Laotians had returned under UNHCR auspices, from camps in Thailand.

39. Government policy on Lao refugees was motivated by three considerations: humanitarianism; the need to rebuild the country, which had been devastated by a long war of foreign aggression; and the desire to share the difficulties faced by the world community. Voluntary repatriation was the most desirable and natural solution but, despite the Government's efforts, had been difficult to implement in the case of Lao refugees because of factors beyond the Government's control. As long as imperialist forces and a certain ultra-right-wing government in the region persisted in using Lao refugees as cannon fodder for their military and political purposes, there was little chance of voluntary repatriation becoming feasible. As long as the policy of incitement to exodus was being feverishly pursued by a certain reactionary government in the region under the supervision of its powerful imperialist ally, as reported and confirmed by the Thai newspaper Neo Na on 28 September 1987, the search for a solution would remain difficult. His Government would none the less continue its humanitarian efforts towards voluntary repatriation.

40. The debate on the item had shown that there was still controversy over the definition of refugees. He had given his country's definition, but for some countries with selfish political motives refugees could be transformed into illegal immigrants, commodities, subversive agents and, more recently, refoulés. Nevertheless, his delegation still believed that a solution to the refugee problem could be found through a sincere, fair and realistic approach, and it appreciated the humanitarian efforts of UNHCR to that end.

41. Mr. MANGWAZU (Malawi) noted the continuing progress in implementing the Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa (ICARA II) in 1984, but echoed the appeal for renewed vigour on the part of all concerned to ensure the speedy completion of ongoing projects and programmes and an early start on others.

42. His delegation applauded the work done by UNHCR in the past year to help the more than 10 million refugees in different parts of the world and noted that the High Commissioner had continued to devote the same attention to supporting programmes undertaken by other international humanitarian organizations, individual States and regional organizations as he paid to UNHCR's direct provision of humanitarian assistance in conjunction with other agencies of the United Nations system.

(Mr. Mangwazu, Malawi)

43. His delegation was encouraged by the support given by the Executive Committee to the proposal to convene an international conference on the situation of refugees and war victims in the southern African region. It welcomed the support pledged by some Governments for the proposed conference and appealed for the active support of other countries, relevant international humanitarian organizations and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

44. The High Commissioner had noted that, while the total number of refugees in Africa had remained relatively stable, the situation in southern Africa had deteriorated. The refugee problem in Malawi was imposing an increasing strain on the country's economic and social infrastructure. In past years, the Government and people of Malawi had tried to deal with the problem without seeking outside assistance, endeavouring to preserve the dignity and self-respect of the refugees by helping them become integrated in the community. The influx of refugees was now reaching alarming proportions, however - 363,305 as at 31 October 1987 - and the solutions employed in the past had become totally impracticable. The impact had been most seriously felt in areas where refugees had already settled. Economic and social services and facilities, already barely adequate for the needs of the indigenous population, were having to be stretched still further to cope with the increased demands of disproportionately large additional numbers. In one district, the indigenous population had been increased by 30 per cent and 402,000 people now had to depend on one district hospital with 186 beds, manned by one doctor, one clinical officer and fewer than 10 nurses. While pressure on medical supplies, food, drinking water and other necessities had been somewhat eased by additional supplies provided by international donors, other necessities would be hard to augment or provide from external sources. Many refugees lived in temporary shelters built from wood and also used wood for fuel. That posed a threat to the short-term availability of wood and, in the long term, to the local ecology.

45. Increasing pressure on agricultural land from the ever-growing numbers of refugees also had critical implications for food production in the affected areas in the short term, and for the national economy in the long term. UNHCR, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other voluntary organizations had assisted his Government in ensuring that the situation did not deteriorate. However, the long-term needs of areas of settlement remained critical. In the meantime, his Government would need urgent external assistance to strengthen its capacity to cope with the ever-increasing flow of refugees.

46. In that connection, his delegation was grateful for the timely initiative taken by the UNDP Administrator, in conjunction with UNHCR, in arranging for a United Nations inter-agency team to visit Malawi to study the refugee situation. That team was currently discussing with the Malawi Government ways and means of strengthening its capacity to cope with the burden imposed by the refugee presence. The team was expected to prepare a comprehensive assistance programme, combining refugee-related humanitarian needs and long-term development needs. His delegation hoped that maximum support would be given to the draft resolution to be submitted on assistance to refugees in Malawi.

47. Ms. LUANGHY (Zaire) drew attention to UNHCR's universal mandate of providing international protection to refugees and finding durable solutions to the refugee problem. The UNHCR report underlined the alarming nature of that problem, especially with regard to the international protection of refugees. The essential purpose of all UNHCR activities was to find durable solutions which would enable refugees to become self-sufficient and do without international assistance. Of the three durable solutions proposed, voluntary repatriation remained the best solution for all refugee situations. As paragraph 39 of the report stated, voluntary repatriation called for prior action in the countries of origin to promote favourable conditions. It was particularly important therefore that UNHCR should be satisfied not only that the nature of the refugees' decision to return was voluntary, but also that the refugees were fully informed of the situation in their country of origin.

48. Zaire had always sheltered thousands of persons fleeing from neighbouring countries during their independence struggle. It continued to attach importance to that tradition and would continue to apply the principle of non-refoulement. As a State party to various international instruments relating to refugees, it would continue to try to relieve the suffering of refugees, with the indispensable help of UNHCR.

49. Zaire had participated in the thirty-eighth session of the Executive Committee and was pleased that speakers in the general debate had stressed the needs of two special categories of refugees, women and children. Her delegation supported the proposal to undertake further study of the protection and assistance needs of women refugees and of the problem of refugee children, who were estimated to represent half the world refugee population.

50. With regard to refugee aid and development, her delegation commended the High Commissioner for his efforts to pursue durable solutions within a developmental context through the specialized agencies of the United Nations system. Paragraph 102 of document A/42/12/Add.1 gave some examples of the implementation of that principle in the agricultural sector of a number of countries.

51. The grave situation prevailing in southern Africa as a result of the South African régime's policy of destabilizing neighbouring countries had led the Organization of African Unity to call for the convening of an international conference on the situation of refugees and war victims in the southern African region. She hoped that, in accordance with the Executive Committee's decision, the international community and the United Nations, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations would give all possible support to the conference to enable it to achieve its objectives.

52. Mr. HOCHE (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the comments and concerns of delegations had been duly noted and that his Office would endeavour to continue to play its part in alleviating the plight of refugees. It was particularly gratifying to hear a reiteration of support for UNHCR's international protection mandate, which was his Office's main task. The recognition by the international community that the physical well-being and

(Mr. Hocke)

security of refugees was of paramount concern was most encouraging, especially as it followed closely on the conclusions recently adopted by the Executive Committee concerning military attacks on refugee camps. However, a text alone would not produce miracles. Only daily, determined efforts by everyone to have those words translated into added protection would offer true relief and hope to so many innocents.

53. The Third Committee's concerns over the vulnerability and needs of refugee women and children would also serve to heighten awareness of the special attention that would have to be given to those groups. The Committee's reaffirmation of its continuing commitment to the search for durable solutions had also been noted with great satisfaction. The Committee, while noting that many durable solutions had been found for refugees in the past year, had also acknowledged that much remained to be accomplished.

54. UNHCR pledged to renew its efforts to fulfil its mandate in an exemplary fashion. A concerted effort by all concerned was also required to revitalize the international community's commitment to avert further flows of refugees, find lasting solutions for those who had become refugees, and provide international protection and respect for the human rights of all refugees without exception.

The meeting rose at 5.35 p.m.