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Chairman: Mr. RITTER (Panama)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 103: OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES (A/42/3, A/42/12 and Add.1, A/42/491; A/C.3/42/L.6; 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. HOCHE (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), introducing the item, said that the experience gained since his first report to the Committee had strengthened his understanding of the questions he had tackled at that time and his informal meetings throughout the year with members of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and with other Governments concerned with refugee questions had facilitated a continual dialogue on problems that were constantly evolving.

2. The four factors he had mentioned in 1986 - that most refugees were compelled to stay longer and longer in the countries of first asylum, that the number of refugees was multiplying, that refugees and asylum-seekers were arriving at the frontiers of a growing number of countries on all continents and that the increasing tendency to confuse refugees and economic migrants could lead to an impasse - gave rise in certain countries to fear of and hostility to refugees and the adoption of restrictive unilateral measures which gradually eroded the principle of asylum and might in the long run paralyse international co-ordination and co-operation in dealing with the problem. As he had pointed out, in order to reverse that trend, the Office should strive to intensify the search for durable solutions - voluntary repatriation, local integration, and resettlement in third countries - and go beyond the provision of emergency aid for refugees forced to stay a long time in the country of first asylum and also for refugees returning to their countries. To that end, it was essential to encourage greater co-operation between the countries whose contribution to any solution of the refugee problem was decisive.

3. With regard to the present situation, 250,000 refugees had returned home voluntarily in 1986 and early 1987. The mass returns to Ethiopia, Uganda and Chad were encouraging and partially offset the new crises in Africa, despite renewed fears caused by the drought in Ethiopia. He trusted that the convening of an international conference on the situation in southern Africa under the auspices of the Organization of African Unity, the Secretary-General of the United Nations and UNHCR would produce concrete measures in favour of refugees in that region.

(Mr. Hocke)

4. The return of several thousand refugees to El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua under UNHCR auspices was an important task, since it emphasized the potential and the reality of voluntary repatriation even after years of temporary residence in countries of first asylum and was evidence of the political will of Governments in providing the necessary guarantees for refugees. A peaceful settlement of the conflicts in Afghanistan, Kampuchea and the Horn of Africa would involve the return to their respective countries of between 6 and 7 million refugees. The Office was grateful to the Governments of Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran for their hospitable and generous welcome to Afghan refugees. The Office would like to contribute to the voluntary repatriation of Laotian refugees in Thailand who constituted nearly half the refugee population in South-East Asia. Negotiations were in progress to assist the voluntary repatriation of Sri Lankan Tamils from India and to assist certain displaced persons in the interior of Sri Lanka.

5. Local integration - except for Africa, China and Mexico - was the least used durable solution, but he was aware of the social, economic and political difficulties of host countries and refugees and the Office had in no way lost confidence in that solution.

6. As far as resettlement in third countries was concerned, the successful resettlement of 1.4 million Indochinese refugees from war, conflict and persecution should not obscure the disappointed hopes of the 130,000 who - sometimes after 10 or more years - were still languishing in refugee camps in South-East Asian transit countries and receiving UNHCR assistance. Efforts must be renewed with urgency to tackle the deep causes of the uninterrupted exodus of refugees from Indochina and to study all possible solutions. Otherwise the possibilities of resettlement would dwindle and perhaps disappear.

7. His recent mission in South-East Asia had strengthened his conviction that countries of resettlement, transit and origin must as a matter of urgency agree on a settlement of humanitarian problems still in abeyance, each making its contribution to the achievement of a durable solution. The Office had conducted consultations throughout the year with countries that could work towards one or other of the envisaged solutions and a consensus was now necessary. He had raised those issues during his recent visit to the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam and the country's highest authorities had affirmed their support for the Orderly Departure Programme which it should be possible to restart during the next few months.

8. Informal consultations were being held with European Governments on the granting of asylum, resettlement and voluntary repatriation. The concerns of UNHCR in that field were: that Governments should not attempt to settle refugee problems with measures designed to control immigration; that those fleeing from persecution and violence must be clearly identified and distinguished from economic migrants; that the rules and procedures applicable to asylum-seekers must be preserved; that all measures relating to immigration control should have the flexibility needed to preserve the rights of asylum-seekers and refugees seeking protection; and the need to determine the relationship between government consultations aimed at regulating

(Mr. Hocke)

the immigration problem and informal consultations to seek solutions and procedures for the benefit of refugees and asylum-seekers. Progress achieved during the European consultations included recognition of the complexity of the present situation, and awareness of the fact that a collective approach created the conditions for a solution, while unilateral action simply unloaded the problem on to another country. The need to take account of the delicate situation of transit countries whose burden was growing continuously, was now generally recognized. The need now was for concrete measures which would emphasize the principle of burden-sharing with the countries of first asylum.

9. On the broader subject of international protection - UNHCR's primordial task - the Office remained vigilant and intended to resist anything that might undermine its responsibility and efficiency in that field. Its consultations with Governments and other partners were based on the humanitarian and universal nature of UNHCR and on the body of international legislation which constituted the legal basis for its mandate and its sphere of competence. International humanitarian law progressively settled into rigid form once it no longer had to fit a rapidly and constantly changing reality. The latest session of the Executive Committee had witnessed a remarkable example of the international community's ability to reach consensus on protection issues, in particular on military and armed attacks against refugee camps and settlement areas. A giant stride had been taken in the crucial task of protecting refugees in conflict areas or precarious situations. He intended to work in close co-operation with Governments in order to strengthen their capacity in the area of protection, without losing sight of the unique responsibility of the High Commissioner, who must rise above parochial considerations and take a global approach to humanitarian situations. The consensus on the issue of refugee children at the latest session of the Executive Committee was also an example of joint ability to attain such goals.

10. Activities in Central America were another example of the Office's determination to ensure the physical protection of refugees in areas of conflict, through regular consultations with Governments and solution-oriented assistance. Ample support had been received from Governments as a result of their renewed determination to take account of humanitarian factors. The Peace Agreement of Guatemala signed by the Heads of State of five countries of the region on 27 August 1987 contained many references to the situation, welfare and protection of refugees and specific recognition of the essential role of UNHCR. The Governments of the region had given a favourable reception to the recommendations of a recent meeting of a consultative group in Geneva, including the convening in 1988 of a regional conference to formulate specific solutions.

11. The Office was not losing sight of the fact that at the very time when solutions for some refugees were beginning to develop, new refugees were appearing. In the past 18 months 600,000 new refugees had appeared, in addition to the 12 million already in countries of first asylum, particularly in the third world. Those refugees required a wide range and a considerable amount of assistance. In order to meet that challenge, an effort had been made to go beyond emergency assistance and deal with the needs of both refugees and the host country,

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(Mr. Roocke)

for which the protracted presence of refugees was a source of economic and social tensions, by strengthening the link between projects designed to provide refugees with assistance and development-assistance projects. Host countries were encouraged to take account of the refugee component in the regions of their territories where they implemented development plans.

12. The Office had continued to co-operate with the World Bank in launching the second phase of the successful project for developing income-generating activities for refugees in Pakistan and in a number of joint initiatives in Somalia and the Sudan. In the current year UNHCR had considered the possibility of co-operating with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in Uganda, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Somalia. Co-operation between UNHCR and UNDP was increasing and an agreement had been reached on guidelines for programmes for returnees and for ensuring an effective transition from emergency response to development. The Second International Conference for Assistance to Refugees in Africa - the ICARA II process, started three years earlier - remained a UNHCR priority.

13. It would be clear from the foregoing that a greater concerted effort would bring together all contributors to the provision of assistance to host countries to enable them to grant asylum and to the simultaneous implementation of the three durable solutions of repatriation, integration and resettlement. Experience had shown that joint benefit from co-operation on the part of all concerned was the only way to make genuine progress in achieving solutions and ensuring that some countries did not feel that they always bore the burden. While expressing gratitude to the donor community for its support, he appealed urgently for the \$US 50 million that UNHCR still needed to enable it to complete its 1987 programmes in the coming two months.

14. In that connection, he referred to measures being taken to ensure the rigorous management and flexible operation needed to achieve its objectives in an increasingly complex and changing international context. The reforms involving a 15 per cent reduction in staff and the gradual reabsorption of the temporary increase in staff were part of an effort to improve the structure of UNHCR and increase its capacity to adapt itself to a refugee situation in a constant state of flux. The Office now had a precise frame of reference for staffing, a time-table for post reductions, which recognized the need for operational flexibility given the unpredictability of events which could give rise to refugee flows or circumstances in which durable solutions might become practicable. He paid a warm tribute to the UNHCR staff for their exemplary professionalism and total dedication and commitment to the cause of refugees, in particular those who had tragically lost their lives in the line of duty.

15. It should not be forgotten that UNHCR received its mandate from the community of States and that the ultimate responsibility for ensuring respect for refugee law and making it possible - or impossible - for UNHCR to carry out its work lay with Governments. Non-governmental organizations, too, as well as voluntary agencies, played an important part in the execution of UNHCR programmes of assistance, for

(Mr. Hocke)

example by helping to find solutions for asylum-seekers that were in keeping with the principles and procedures of refugee law, and by forming public opinion and increasing awareness of refugee problems.

16. Ms. PEARCE (Australia) said that her Government actively supported the valuable humanitarian work of the High Commissioner and his Office. Refugee situations were an integral part of political, social and economic changes. There was an increasingly urgent need to tackle the underlying causes of refugee movements; the full co-operation of Governments was needed to develop an effective preventive process.

17. Her Government commended the High Commissioner for his active pursuit of durable solutions to refugee situations, premised on the understanding that refugee situations must never become institutionalized. Different situations required different responses but always, from the earliest possible stage, the appropriate permanent solution must be identified and practical measures implemented to achieve it. Underpinning that approach was the important principle of international burden-sharing. Refugee situations were global and required an international response: countries of origin, asylum and resettlement must all contribute to the search for durable solutions. Australia was a country of resettlement; it also recognized the contribution made by countries of first asylum, many of which were least able to offer permanent or temporary protection to refugees. Encouraging progress had been achieved on voluntary repatriation, which was the best solution. That solution must be pursued on a purely voluntary basis, in conditions guaranteeing full safety and security. Governments must support UNHCR fully in ensuring that those conditions were satisfied.

18. It was encouraging to note in the report that new refugee influxes had generally been offset by organized or spontaneous repatriation. Her delegation fully supported efforts to pursue non-resettlement solutions to the problem of the continuing outflow of people from Viet Nam. Australia maintained its resettlement quota for Indo-Chinese refugees for 1987-1988. The traditional high levels of resettlement could not be maintained, however, and indeed they had become part of the problem. All parties to the Indo-Chinese refugee situation must vigorously explore alternative solutions.

19. The principles of international protection for refugees were an essential component of the body of international humanitarian law and should be applied without discrimination. The adoption of the conclusions on military and armed attacks on refugee camps and settlements was a significant achievement reflecting the predominance of humanitarian over political interests. The principles contained in the conclusions must be put into practice. Australia also supported UNHCR in its efforts to strengthen the protection of particularly vulnerable groups, particularly refugee women and children, and supported the conclusions adopted on those groups at recent sessions of the Executive Committee.

20. Her Government fully supported the ambitious objectives of the reorganization plan of UNHCR, particularly the focus on decentralization of responsibility at

(Ms. Pearce, Australia)

headquarters and, most importantly, in the field; further efforts should be made to effect real delegation of authority within the Office.

21. Her delegation reiterated its support for the conclusions adopted at the thirty-eighth session of the Executive Committee. UNHCR must identify priorities and ensure that reorganization included an appropriate focus on cost-effectiveness. Australia supported UNHCR's efforts to improve inter-agency co-ordination and co-operation.

22. Mr. KLINGENBERG (Denmark), speaking on behalf of the 12 member States of the European Community, said that, while further improvements were still required in the Office of UNHCR, it was a dedicated non-political humanitarian institution. Efforts to improve the protection of the world's refugees should be undertaken on the basis of international solidarity, with UNHCR as the international focal point. The commitment of the Twelve to support UNHCR was demonstrated by their total contributions of \$US 124 million to its budget in 1985. The European Community as such had also contributed more than \$US 50 million to UNHCR. The Twelve fully supported the aims and objectives of the reorganization of the Office and wholeheartedly endorsed the conclusions on management, programme support and administration adopted at the thirty-eighth session of the Executive Committee. As to the shortfall in financial contributions, the Twelve wished to point out that, in addition to making monetary contributions, they had granted asylum in their countries to increasingly large numbers of refugees over the years.

23. UNHCR must continue to play an active role in finding durable solutions to the world refugee problem, while preserving the traditional consensus approach. Concerted action by the whole international community was essential. Strict compliance by all States with the obligations they had freely undertaken in the Charter and international human rights instruments would not only prevent many new flows of refugees but also help create the conditions which would allow refugees to return home. The Twelve remain convinced that voluntary repatriation was the best solution to any refugee situation. They paid tribute to the generosity of many countries of first arrival, particularly those with limited resources of their own; such countries needed increased support from the world community, and the Twelve welcomed the efforts undertaken by UNHCR in co-operation with other United Nations bodies to help them.

24. The Twelve supported UNHCR's role to promote resettlement as a durable solution for refugees to whom no other solution was available. It was of the utmost importance to find a satisfactory solution to the problem of the increasing abuse of asylum procedures by persons with economic or other motives so that proper attention could again be directed at providing assistance and protection to those most in need. The Twelve actively supported the High Commissioner's endeavours in consultation with interested Governments to develop a concerted approach.

25. The Twelve welcomed the consensus on the vital issue of protecting refugees from military and armed attacks on refugee camps and settlements; it hoped that the consensus would set an example of pragmatic approaches to other vital issues confronting UNHCR.

26. Ms. MARTIN (Canada) said that the Government and people of Canada were concerned about the rise in the global refugee population, which reflected the complex interaction between the political, social and economic factors which were the root causes of continued outflows. Those circumstances called for a renewed and concerted effort by Member States to address the fundamental causes of the problem. Canada supported the High Commissioner's appeal for a collective search for durable solutions through co-ordination on the part of countries of origin, countries of first asylum and countries of resettlement. It had repeatedly called for broader participation, both in terms of financial assistance to refugees, and local integration or resettlement, by all Member States.
27. Canada continued to support the work of UNHCR and remained fully committed to its obligations arising out of the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its Protocol. As a major financial donor and as one of the principal countries of resettlement, it was an active contributor to all three durable solutions. It was also committed to the preservation of standards for the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers. The rapidly growing influx of asylum-seekers was linked to an increasing tendency to abuse determination systems by individuals who were essentially economic migrants. There had been encouraging progress in the consultations between UNHCR and a number of countries on that problem; Canada had maintained a close and constructive dialogue with the High Commissioner with regard to reform of its refugee determination system, while ensuring protection of genuine refugees.
28. Canada supported the High Commissioner's initiatives in pursuit of durable solutions, particularly voluntary repatriation, and called upon all States to exercise collective political will in support of those efforts. It was pleased with the emphasis the High Commissioner had placed on international protection as a fundamental objective. It welcomed the consensus reached on the subject of military and armed attacks on refugee camps and settlements, and the conclusions on refugee children, as well as the increased attention being paid to the needs of women refugees.
29. Canada endorsed the High Commissioner's efforts to promote more effective linkages between refugee aid and development. In order to facilitate the socio-economic reintegration of returnees, and assist in the local integration of refugees, it was crucial that the refugee component be fully incorporated into international development plans. Canada welcomed the increased collaboration between UNHCR and other United Nations agencies such as UNDP and the World Bank and called upon the Secretary-General to promote greater co-operation on refugee assistance within the whole United Nations system. Canada had been participating in the UNHCR/World Bank project in Pakistan, and was prepared to support similar programmes in other countries, including updated projects of the Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa (ICARA II).
30. Canada had been actively calling for improvements in the management and cost-effectiveness of UNHCR programmes and a more direct correlation between UNHCR's assistance activities and durable solutions. It welcomed the improvements made, and UNHCR's commitment to further remedial measures. While it supported the

(Ms. Martin, Canada)

overall objectives of the ongoing restructuring of the Office of UNHCR, it shared the concerns expressed at recent meetings of the Executive Committee.

31. Mr. KRENKEL (Austria) said that his country, because of its neutrality and geopolitical situation, had traditionally been a country of first asylum and, consequently, had always attached great importance to the work of UNHCR.

32. The primary role of UNHCR was the exercise of the "protection function", and that role should be fully taken into account during the current reform phase of the High Commissioner's Office. In the context of protection, one of the main achievements of the 1987 session of the Executive Committee was the adoption by consensus of "Conclusions on military and armed attacks on refugee camps and settlements". In that connection, his delegation wished to emphasize the importance of free and regular access of the High Commissioner to camps and settlements. Among other protection issues considered, the problems of refugee children were receiving special attention, which his delegation believed to be appropriate and timely.

33. At the thirty-eighth session of the Executive Committee, questions had been raised regarding certain details of the proposed reform of UNHCR. While those questions had led to useful discussion, it might have been preferable to have had that discussion a few months earlier. None the less, his delegation was confident that the conclusions adopted in that connection would serve as guidelines for future action.

34. Mr. FARAH (Under-Secretary-General for Special Political Questions, Regional Co-operation, Decolonization and Trusteeship) introduced three reports of the Secretary-General (A/42/491, A/42/645 and A/42/646). Document A/42/491 dealt primarily with progress in the implementation of the Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa (ICARA II) in 1984. At that conference it had been universally acknowledged, for the first time, that the solution to refugee situations required an integrated strategy combining humanitarian, developmental and, where necessary, political approaches.

35. Notwithstanding the generous assistance provided by countries and organizations outside of Africa, the African countries of asylum were actually the greatest donors to the African refugee presence. The price of that open door policy had been very high, in particular, in countries that had only marginal capacities to sustain their own populations. Furthermore, the worsening economic situation in the majority of host countries was undermining their capacity to absorb additional refugees. Despite its commitments, the international community had failed to provide the necessary resources to alleviate the refugee problem in Africa. Therefore, it was more important than ever to implement the solutions advocated by ICARA II, which called for international assistance at three levels: (a) adequate programmes for the relief, care and maintenance of refugees; (b) long-term solutions through voluntary repatriation or voluntary settlement in countries of asylum or elsewhere; and (c) technical and capital assistance to countries of asylum and countries receiving returnees.

(Mr. Farah)

36. The most significant new element to emerge from ICARA II was the general acceptance that a genuinely durable solution to the problems of refugees required their productive integration in society. That in turn called for a greater link between refugee assistance and development aid and, in that respect, the United Nations Development Programme had a leading role to play. To be viable, settlement programmes had to be linked to national development plans, which meant that adequate resources had to be provided in both areas. Consequently, the Secretary-General called upon States to consider contributing additional resources for refugee-related development projects in Africa.

37. Turning to document A/42/645, he recalled that, in response to General Assembly resolution 41/138, an inter-agency mission had been sent to Somalia in September 1987 to review that country's refugee situation. The review mission recommended a structured and co-ordinated approach and identified a number of priority areas for international assistance. It recalled the leading role of UNDP in the conceptualization, implementation and monitoring of refugee-related development projects, which would serve as a supplement to UNHCR care and maintenance programmes. The Secretary-General hoped that the international community would support the efforts being made by the Government of Somalia to assist and resettle refugees.

38. Document A/42/646, concerning the refugee situation in the Sudan, contained the report resulting from the visit to that country in September 1987 of an inter-agency mission, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 41/139. Co-operative efforts had resulted in the compilation, for the first time, of a comprehensive data base. From that information, the review mission concluded that there were a significant number of refugee-related projects which, when completed, would help improve conditions confronting the refugees and alleviate the burden they imposed on the Sudanese economy. However, when measured against the magnitude of the problem, efforts still needed to be strengthened, co-ordinated and considerably expanded. Consequently, it was essential that additional resources should be provided for refugee-related development projects in the Sudan. While reconfirming the validity of the 1986 mission's recommendations, the current review mission proposed the following additional steps: (a) highlighting the constraints on both the Sudanese Government and the international community in implementation of the 1986 recommendations; (b) identifying overall priorities in each region and in all vital sectors of the economy; and (c) calling for the immediate formulation of concrete projects in those priority sectors. The Secretary-General strongly urged the international community to respond in a timely and effective manner through active participation in the formulation, financing and implementation of the recommended projects.

39. Mr. AKYOL (Turkey) said that the refugee problem concerned the entire international community and could be solved only if Governments were prepared to open their doors to asylum-seekers. As the problem evolved, more sophisticated answers were required, but facile solutions based on inadequate data or motivated by national interests must be avoided. The well-established principles concerning refugees should be maintained, and without changing the balanced relationship between them.

(Mr. Akyol, Turkey)

40. Other countries must help relieve the disproportionate burden refugees placed on the developing countries, and some flexibility and balance must be sought in choosing between local integration and assimilation in third countries when voluntary repatriation was impossible. The international community must also understand that the refugee problem was a humanitarian one that could not be solved by financial and material assistance alone.

41. The principle of non-refoulement was sacrosanct and the responsibility for implementing it was a collective one, but it was threatened with erosion as the refugee burden fell with increasing severity on the countries of first asylum.

42. It was also important to make sure that the right of asylum was not abused and a distinction must be made between genuine refugees and those who merely exploited that right.

43. He commended the High Commissioner's efforts to ensure accuracy in evaluating needs, credibility in the formulation of programmes and effectiveness in the execution of projects, as well as the measures envisaged to protect and assist refugees in emergencies. He supported the High Commissioner's efforts to strengthen the link between refugee assistance and development aid and the activities described in paragraphs 116, 117 and 118 of his report. He welcomed the progress that had been noted in voluntary repatriation. His own country, despite many difficulties, would continue to shelter a large number of refugees because it was committed to the principle of non-refoulement.

44. Miss BYRNE (United States of America) commended the work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in pursuing humanitarian diplomacy and implementing his Office's mandate in various parts of the world. That mandate included efforts to ensure the safe, voluntary and permanent repatriation of refugees to avoid what would otherwise be serious consequences for them. The States themselves must join the High Commissioner in attempting to achieve voluntary repatriation and respect for the principle of non-refoulement. States could not arbitrarily make arrangements for refugees to return home without active UNHCR involvement nor could they decide when UNHCR should intervene in accordance with its mandate. It was unthinkable to provide material assistance to refugees who would then be returned home against their will by secret bilateral arrangements between States.

45. Of particular concern were the debilitating effects of years of forced absence from home on women refugees, particularly in view of their important role as transmitters of culture and primary teachers in traditional societies. The international community must therefore continue its support of UNHCR intervention to assist refugee women. The plight of children languishing in refugee camps without opportunities for education and training also required urgent attention and she endorsed for that purpose a long-term programme of teacher training, curriculum development and educational programmes, with provisions for implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The High Commissioner should address the need to eliminate illiteracy in the refugee camps with maximum speed and vigour.

46. Mr. ARTACHO (Spain) said that his delegation fully supported the statement by Denmark, on behalf of the Twelve, concerning agenda item 103. Consistent with its full support for the work of the UNHCR, his country had been increasing its contribution to that body's annual programmes and would continue to do so, within the limits of its possibilities. Events in his country over the past 10 years had broad implications for refugees: not only had many exiles returned, but Spain had also become a host for thousands of refugees, in particular, from Latin American countries.

47. Some 1,600 requests for refuge or asylum, representing approximately 2,300 people, were processed annually in his country by the Interministerial Commission. Since 1984, his Government had been providing social and material assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers with the invaluable co-operation of the Spanish Red Cross and the Spanish Commission of Assistance to Refugees. Nevertheless, despite all the praiseworthy efforts for the cause of refugees, there was a risk that those efforts might be seen as an end in themselves. The international community must eliminate the root causes of the unending outflows of refugees, which included armed conflicts, natural disasters, and persistent violations of human rights and fundamental liberties. In that connection, efforts on the international and national levels to ensure respect for political and civil rights and to eliminate obstacles to the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights would represent a major achievement.

48. Disaster situations, while not as extreme as that of Africa in 1985, continued to exist and required generous reactions on the part of the international community. In addition, the troublesome persistence of specific areas of armed conflict gave rise to continuous flows of refugees. In that connection, he recalled the words of King Juan Carlos I, to the effect that the refugee problem worldwide could not be solved until all States demonstrated a willingness to co-operate in finding equitable and lasting solutions to ongoing conflicts, in particular, in the Middle East, Afghanistan and Kampuchea, southern Africa and Central America. In the meantime, the members of the international community must confront the existing situation by lending financial assistance and by adopting an open policy, in so far as possible, when formulating legislation regarding refugees.

49. Mr. KASEMSRI (Thailand) said that the magnitude of the unabating and tragic problem of refugees was a burden on the entire international community, but particularly on the limited human and economic resources of the developing countries that were the countries of first asylum. Natural and man-made calamities had resulted in growing numbers of refugees, particularly in Africa and Asia, and in the past 12 to 18 months resettlement opportunities had dropped sharply because many developing countries had tightened their resettlement procedures. Restrictive measures based on immigration criteria failed to take humanitarian requirements into account and the humanitarian practice of sharing the refugee burden was being jeopardized. He drew attention in that connection to paragraphs 6 and 90 of the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (A/42/12).

(Mr. Kasemsri, Thailand)

50. Voluntary repatriation was the best solution to the refugee problem. It had already proved successful in Africa and Latin America and should be applied elsewhere, but it required improvement in the conditions that were responsible for the creation of refugees and asylum-seekers. Humanitarian efforts must therefore be supplemented by effective international action to remove the root causes of the refugee problem.

51. Many first-asylum countries, including Thailand, were faced with the dilemma of more refugees entering than leaving and were confronted with an unacceptable burden because the developed countries had adopted restrictive measures that reduced the intake of refugees for resettlement. Efforts must be intensified to promote resettlement because local integration placed a disproportionate burden on countries that were already overburdened in terms of their limited resources. Local or regional integration would weaken the principle of international burden-sharing and undermine the humanitarian tradition of the first-asylum countries, and efforts to promote durable solutions were needed. He welcomed in that connection the reinstatement of the Orderly Departure Programme and the success of the anti-piracy programme in preventing attacks on refugee boats in his part of the world. Those efforts did not remedy the causes, however, and he urged the parties concerned to co-operate with the international community to address and overcome the root causes of such a mass exodus.

The meeting rose at 12.35 p.m.