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REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Situation of refugees in Africa

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. At its 44th plenary meeting, on 24 July 1980, the Economic and Social Council adopted resolution 1980/55, entitled "Situation of refugees in Africa" which reads as follows:

"The Economic and Social Council,

"Having considered resolution CM/Res.814 (XXXV) adopted by the Council of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity at its thirty-fifth ordinary session, held at Freetown, Sierra Leone, from 18 to 28 June 1980, by which it expressed its deep concern over the ever-increasing number of refugees in Africa and the alarming deterioration of their living conditions,

"Aware that the serious situation arising from the growing number of refugees, currently estimated at five million, places a heavy social and economic burden on the host countries which provide the refugees with asylum or relief,

"Conscious of the need for greater attention to be paid by the international community to the plight of refugees in Africa and, for that purpose, the need for the intensified dissemination of information on the problem,

"Appreciating the assistance given so far by the international community to refugees in Africa,

"Noting, however, that the amount of assistance received falls far short of the over-all requirements to meet the needs of the refugees,

"1. Takes note of resolution CM/Res.814 (XXXV) of the Council of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity, in particular paragraph 8 thereof, relating to the need for an international pledging conference for refugees in Africa;

"2. Requests the Secretary-General, in co-operation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, to consult the Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity on appropriate ways and means of convening such a conference;

"3. Further requests the Secretary-General of the United Nations to arrange for consultation with the competent United Nations agencies and bodies for the purpose of preparing an adequate publicity programme giving special attention to the conditions and needs of refugees in Africa;

"4. Requests the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its thirty-fifth session on the progress of his consultations;

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"5. Appeals, meanwhile, to all Member States and appropriate United Nations organizations and programmes to provide the maximum financial and material assistance to refugees in Africa, as well as to the Governments of the countries of asylum, in order that the latter may strengthen their capacity to act as hosts to the refugees and to provide the necessary services for their care, rehabilitation and resettlement."

II. CONSULTATIONS UNDERTAKEN

2. In compliance with the request of the Council, the Secretary-General met with the Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) on 27 August 1980 and discussed with him ways and means of convening such a conference. The Secretary-General also discussed the matter with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

3. During the consultations, the point was stressed that Africa had more refugees than any other region of the world. It was further noted that the refugees had in most cases sought asylum in African countries which already rated among the poorest in the world and belonged to the group of least developed countries. In addition, it was felt that these considerations were not adequately reflected by the amount of assistance provided for refugees in Africa by the international community.

4. Following those discussions, as well as consultations with African leaders and various Member States, there was agreement that an international conference devoted to mobilizing additional resources for African refugee programmes should be held as soon as possible. To this end arrangements were made to set up a small task force composed of representatives of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, of the Secretary-General of OAU and of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, with a view to devising a strategy for a constructive and successful conference.

5. In addition to considering the modalities of the conference, the task force consulted with representatives of the pertinent agencies and organizations of the United Nations system on the question of a concerted programme of information. It was agreed that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees should take the lead in preparing and implementing the programme and that the agencies concerned would co-operate in the concerted publicity programme to focus attention on the condition of refugees in Africa and to create a greater awareness of the situation.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

6. On the basis of the extensive consultations carried out, it is recommended that:

(a) An international conference on assistance to refugees in Africa should

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be held at the Palais des Nations at Geneva on 9 and 10 April 1981 under the auspices of the United Nations;

(b) The objectives of the conference should be:

- (i) To focus public attention on the plight of refugees in Africa;
- (ii) To mobilize additional resources for refugee programmes in Africa;
- (iii) To assist countries of asylum, adversely affected by the large-scale presence of refugees, to obtain international assistance for projects aimed at strengthening the ability of those countries to carry the extra burden placed on their services and facilities;

(c) Participation should be at a ministerial level and the following States should be invited:

- (i) All States members of OAU;
- (ii) All States members of the Economic and Social Council;
- (iii) All other States which are traditional donors to UNHCR programmes for refugees in Africa;
- (iv) All other States proposed by OAU;

(d) Observers to the conference should include States Members of the United Nations not covered by subparagraph (c) above, all agencies, organizations and programmes within the United Nations system directly involved in refugee programmes in Africa, African liberation movements recognized by OAU and the United Nations intergovernmental organizations, as well as non-governmental organizations under the auspices of umbrella agencies;

(e) UNHCR would provide its secretariat for the conference, as well as other services and arrangements connected with its organization and documentation, and publicity.

7. The Secretary-General earnestly hopes that the international community will support the proposed conference fully and will respond generously to the various programmes for refugees in Africa.