



SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 51st MEETING

Chairman: Mr. GARVALOV (Bulgaria)

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ORGANIZATION OF WORK

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The meeting was called to order at 11 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 78: OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES: REPORT OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER (A/35/3/Add.21, A/35/12 and Add.1, A/35/68, A/35/73, A/35/84, A/35/154, A/35/169, A/35/239, A/35/255, A/35/275, A/35/292, A/35/328, A/35/353, A/35/354, A/35/374, A/35/441, A/35/457, A/35/469 and A/35/594)

AGENDA ITEM 12: REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (A/35/149, A/35/360 and Corr.1-3, A/35/409 and A/35/410)

1. Mr. HARTLING (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that UNHCR experience had developed considerably since the thirty-fourth session of the General Assembly, particularly in dealing with new emergency situations calling for rapid action on a large scale, and emergency activities had now become a permanent feature of the work of UNHCR, along with its traditional search for durable solutions. Today the world community was faced with large-scale emergencies calling for concerted human action and for the strengthening of the capacity of the United Nations system to take that action. Adequate co-ordination of the work of all organizations concerned was imperative if the system was to respond efficiently.
2. Whatever its involvement, one fundamental aspect of UNHCR's action was its eminently and exclusively humanitarian character. That had again been stressed by the Executive Committee at its thirty-first session when it had reiterated its conviction that the human and social aspects of emergencies involving refugees must be kept distinct and separate from the political activities of the United Nations concerned with the root causes of such emergencies, and that they should therefore be handled by a body that could clearly be seen to be purely humanitarian, social and entirely non-political. He firmly believed that the root causes of any refugee problem must consistently be addressed as a matter of priority. The ideal would be that those who assisted in a refugee situation by providing humanitarian assistance should be assured that parallel efforts, aimed at conciliation, were being redeployed by the parties entrusted with the settlement of the problem which had caused the uprooting of people. However, the promotion of such political endeavours should be carried out in appropriate forums, distinct from UNHCR. Over the years, the humanitarian character of UNHCR had been maintained and that had proved to be an invaluable asset in its work.
3. In order to strengthen its response capability, UNHCR had created an Emergency Unit specifically to help develop emergency preparedness and to support the various key sectors of the Office which had to act in emergencies. Furthermore, in view of the magnitude of many of the recent new refugee problems, the present provisions for the use of the UNHCR Emergency Fund had proved inadequate. The Executive Committee was therefore recommending to the General Assembly that it authorize the High Commissioner to allocate from the Emergency Fund up to \$10 million annually for refugees emergencies, it being understood that the amount made available for one single emergency would not exceed \$4 million. Other measures, which applied equally to emergencies and to UNHCR's more long-term activities, were aimed at better planning, programming, implementation and control. In addition, modern management techniques were being introduced and electronic data processing was being developed.

(Mr. Hartling, UNHCR)

4. In Africa, the best durable solution to refugee problems was voluntary repatriation to the country of origin. Following Zimbabwe's independence, for example, UNHCR had undertaken to co-ordinate the repatriation of Zimbabwean refugees from the neighbouring countries of Botswana, Mozambique and Zambia, as well as from other parts of Africa and other continents. With regard to refugees from South Africa and Namibia, UNHCR continued, especially in the front-line States, to provide assistance and protection measures. Educational aid to individual refugee students continued to be an important part of UNHCR activities. In the Horn of Africa and the Sudan, the refugee situation remained very serious. Because the problems were interrelated, UNHCR had endeavoured to maintain a regional approach and, in 1978, he had launched an appeal to assist refugees and displaced persons in the Horn of Africa. In addition, a severe drought in the area had affected most of the countries concerned and had further aggravated the situation. As could be seen from his report (A/35/12 and Add.1), UNHCR continued to carry out its activities in various countries of Africa, the continent with the largest number of refugees and displaced persons, probably some 5 million. Receiving countries had shown great understanding and a generosity towards the uprooted and had gone through great sacrifice while at the same time facing their own development problems. Finally, UNHCR welcomed the initiative embodied in resolutions of the Organization of African Unity and the Economic and Social Council to explore the possibilities of holding an international pledging conference for refugees in Africa.

5. In Asia, the three main areas of concern had been the refugee situations in Pakistan and in Thailand and the question of the boat people. In Pakistan, refugees now totalled some 1.2 million and it had been necessary to reassess the nature and volume of UNHCR assistance and to formulate revised programmes. Where possible, emphasis had been placed on projects oriented to assist refugees in attaining self-sufficiency. In Thailand, at the request of the Government, UNHCR had started a major assistance programme because growing numbers of Kampuchean were arriving in the frontier zone. UNHCR had been given the responsibility for refugees outside Kampuchea and that problem continued to be among its priority concerns. Programmes were also being continued for assistance to other land cases in Thailand and for boat people throughout South-East Asia. While the response from the international community had been generous with respect to resettlement, efforts on behalf of the boat people were still vital. Pirate attacks continued to be perpetrated against those people on their fragile boats and resettlement efforts were also needed for large numbers of land cases still in camps in Thailand. Once they had been resettled, the refugees had to be successfully integrated and resettlement countries deployed considerable efforts to that end.

6. Throughout its activities, UNHCR retained its basic responsibility for extending international protection to refugees. The scope and importance of its protection function had grown with the increase of refugee problems in different areas of the world. Refugee rights must be improved at the universal, regional, national and individual levels and the fundamental principles of asylum and non-refoulement must be respected in practice.

7. In carrying out its more general activities and commitments, UNHCR had participated in the recent World Conference for the United Nations Decade for

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(Mr. Hartling, UNHCR)

Women, held at Copenhagen, where it had submitted a report on the situation of women refugees the world over. In addition, UNHCR was preparing to participate in 1981 in the International Year of Disabled Persons. Indeed, a substantial number of disabled refugees required special attention, treatment and rehabilitation where possible.

8. UNHCR was at the close of its third decade of existence. To enable it to respond to world events and to the confidence vested in it by the international community, it had been substantially increased in size and was managing considerable funds. Fortunately, results were visible and everyday large numbers of refugees were being settled. No result, however, would be possible without strong support from Governments and he appealed for the continuation of such support.

9. Mr. GOUNDREY (Assistant Secretary-General, Joint Co-ordinator, Special Economic Assistance Programme), reporting on the United Nations programme of assistance for South African student refugees (A/35/149), recalled that the Programme had begun in February 1977 following the riots in Soweto against the Bantu education system in South Africa and the flight of the students to neighbouring States. The original programme had involved capital investment of about \$7 million and recurrent expenditure of \$1.4 million to expand educational facilities, establish reception or transit centres and provide for the maintenance and care of the student refugees in the countries of asylum. At its thirty-fourth session, the General Assembly, in resolution 34/174, had decided that the Programme should also include the needs of student refugees from Namibia and Zimbabwe and had requested the Secretary-General and UNHCR to organize a programme of assistance for student refugees from southern Africa who had found asylum in Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and Zambia. It had also requested the Secretary-General, in consultation with UNHCR and other appropriate agencies and organizations of the United Nations system to mobilize assistance to facilitate the resettlement of refugee families from the border areas of South Africa. In June 1980, the Secretary-General in co-operation with UNHCR, had dispatched a mission to southern Africa to report on the situation of the student refugees.

10. A considerable amount of assistance had been received from the international community to help Governments in southern Africa provide accommodation, maintenance, care and education for the student refugees. Contributions to the programme through UNHCR had amounted to \$60 million and in addition, there had been bilateral contributions of about \$5 million. A large number of scholarships had been provided to student refugees at all levels of education, including assistance from the United Nations Educational and Training Programme for Southern Africa. The Programme had done much to improve the conditions of those young and homeless people and to assist the Governments of Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and Zambia in bearing the burden of refugees.

11. The need for assistance continued as explained in detail in the report of the Secretary-General (A/35/149). A special problem related to the influx into Swaziland of large groups of people fleeing to escape inclusion in the Bantustan which the South African Government had decided to establish in their traditional

territory. The mission which had gone to southern Africa in June 1980 had visited the area in which the refugees, numbering over 4,000, were being settled. A tripartite agreement had been signed between the Government of Swaziland, the Lutheran World Federation and UNHCR to meet the immediate needs of the refugees and to finance feasibility studies into possible water sources and into the agricultural potential of the settlement. The Government of Swaziland was making additional purchases of land in the same area to settle more refugee families and their livestock.

12. Although encumbered by economic difficulties and constrained by limited resources, the Governments of Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana and Zambia had shown a commendable willingness to provide asylum for those who sought it. Yet they could not be expected to carry an inequitable share of the burden and increased support was required from the international community. Projects and programmes costing nearly \$5 million were identified in the report of the mission to help provide facilities for student refugees in southern Africa. The Secretary-General hoped that the international community would respond generously. The number of student refugees in southern Africa was still significant and places must be found for them in educational institutions.

13. Mr. BERKOL (United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator) said that, in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1980/8, the Secretary-General had sent a multiagency mission to Ethiopia between 6 and 16 July 1980 to assess the extent of the problems of displaced persons and the magnitude of the assistance required. At the request of the Government of Ethiopia, the principal efforts of the mission had been devoted to the situation in the affected areas of the southern administrative regions of Bale, Sidamo and Hararge; a small group had also visited Asmara and Massawa in Eritrea. The terms of reference of the mission required it to assess the needs of displaced persons and draw up a comprehensive programme of assistance for them on the basis of the submissions received from the Government and the mission's assessment of the situation. Submissions from the Government had dealt with immediate or emergency needs as well as rehabilitation programmes to meet the other needs of the displaced persons.

14. The populations of the regions affected were in general characterized by extreme poverty, malnutrition, disease and illiteracy, a situation made worse by recurrent drought. The words "a comprehensive programme of assistance" were interpreted as meaning the kind of programme which would result in the establishment of self-sustaining settlements, with the basic education, health, communication, agricultural and trading facilities necessary to a viable community. Almost no physical facilities were to be found in the areas visited by the mission, which were representative of other affected regions. Even if the facilities had been there, properly trained personnel to staff them were not available. The mission had recommended appropriate assistance for the nomad people, which basically consisted of restocking their herds and meeting their emergency requirements. Despite those preoccupations, the mission had tried not to neglect the needs of children, the elderly and the disabled.

(Mr. Berkol, UNDP)

15. The report of the mission (A/35/360 and Corr.1-3) described many of the activities necessary for an immediate amelioration of the conditions of life of the displaced persons who were in urgent need. The programme developed was based upon a time frame of 3 1/2 years, the period which, in the mission's opinion, was necessary before self-sustaining settlements could be envisaged. He requested the assistance of the international community in carrying out the proposals contained in the mission's report.

16. Mr. CLARKSON (Sweden) said that during the past year there had been an alarming increase in the number of refugee emergencies. To the disasters that nature created through floods and droughts were added man-made disasters of terrible magnitude. By far the best, quickest and most humane way of eliminating those man-made catastrophes was through political action: through Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, Vietnamese withdrawal from Kampuchea and peaceful settlement of the conflicts in the Horn of Africa. The responsibility for the tragedy of the refugees weighed upon the States which failed to work out the necessary political solutions. As a result of that failure, an unprecedented 10 million people were now the concern of the High Commissioner for Refugees. The consequences of political conflict were borne by people who had little or no say in the formation of policies which fundamentally affected them. He appealed to the political leaders of the world for more compassion and respect for human rights in their dealings with conflicts between States, races, ideologies or religions.

17. He welcomed the response of United Nations agencies and voluntary agencies to many of the recent emergency situations. At the same time, such an encouraging response created a need for co-ordination. One crucial question was where to put the main responsibility of co-ordination of disaster relief within the United Nations system. It was widely agreed that new bodies should not be created for that purpose. His Government was ready to continue informal consultations with concerned Governments and organizations. In many cases, however, it might be found that the best co-ordinator in the field was the receiving country itself.

18. A second crucial question related to resources. More Governments had to make greater efforts to meet the cost of refugee flows. Improvements could be made in the financial preparedness of donor countries to respond to appeals for emergency relief. For instance, Sweden had introduced a special emergency item in the budget for development assistance, which had given it the flexibility necessary to respond with a minimum of delay to humanitarian appeals.

19. With regard to personnel resources, the reception of refugees and the setting up, organization and administration of refugee camps required that qualified technicians for specific and often vital tasks should be available at short notice for a limited period of time. Today, the United Nations system did not have such stand-by personnel. Sweden had tried to help fill that gap by creating a disaster relief unit, consisting of people experienced in different aspects of disaster management. Part of that unit had been placed at the disposal of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for relief work in Thailand and Somalia. Other Governments might wish to consider the establishment of similar disaster relief units.

(Mr. Clarkson, Sweden)

20. Thirdly, material resources were needed; the present need to improvise large-scale transportation operations should be replaced by an organized readiness. There was also a need for good preparedness regarding the delivery of food, medicines, tents, blankets, etc. Through the Swedish Red Cross, the Swedish Government had contributed to pre-disaster planning in a number of developing countries.

21. The budget for UNHCR had increased dramatically during the last few years, an evolution which had prompted many Governments to express concern. His Government shared those concerns and welcomed the measures taken by the High Commissioner to improve the Office's effectiveness and to exchange information with Member States.

22. He drew attention to the need to strengthen the field organization of UNHCR, and to secure more technical expertise at Headquarters. There was also a need to strengthen the evaluation of project performance.

23. The Swedish Government contributed to many of the current disaster relief schemes and refugee assistance programmes. Approximately \$150 million was being used for those purposes during the fiscal year 1980/81. Africa had been the main recipient of Swedish disaster relief and refugee assistance funds. The seriousness of African refugee problems placed an enormous relief burden on some of the world's poorest developing countries, and growing food shortages had produced a problem which could not be solved without a massive effort of international solidarity. The situation in South-East Asia was proof that such massive efforts could indeed produce positive results. His Delegation hoped that the positive trend would continue and that the uprooted people of Kampuchea would at last be given a chance to cultivate their own land in peace.

24. Regional imbalances in the expenditure of UNHCR were a cause for concern. Figures for Asia still exceeded those for Africa by over \$100 million, in spite of the fact that the number of African refugees was so much higher. His delegation hoped that donors would try to make a more equitable distribution of limited funds and that the unevenness with which the mass media reported the refugee situation would not be the yardstick. The Swedish Government intended to increase its un-earmarked contribution to the general programme of UNHCR in the coming years.

25. An extremely important part of the task performed by UNHCR and individual States was to protect refugees from persecution. Refugees must never, in case of an extradition request, be deprived of the protection against refoulement. Voluntary repatriation and regional solutions were always preferable to resettlement in a country far away from the original ethnic and cultural environment of the refugee. But when those solutions were not at hand, the world community should be ready to open its doors.

26. Among the many thousands of refugees still waiting for a resettlement offer in South-East Asia were a substantial number of disabled persons faced with tremendous difficulties in finding a lasting solution to their situation. An important criterion for the Swedish selection missions in South-East Asia had been to give priority to handicapped refugees and others who had had difficulties

(Mr. Clarkson, Sweden)

in resettling. His delegation urged other countries to apply similar criteria to the extent needed to avoid a grave residual problem in the South-East Asian refugee camps.

27. Mr. VERKERCKE (Belgium) said that if the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenants on Human Rights had been respected in practice as well as words, UNHCR would not have to cope with the misery of masses of human beings whose plight was increasingly preoccupying world public opinion. Since 1976, UNHCR staff had practically doubled; in seven years its budget had increased twenty-fold. The explosion of UNHCR aid programmes had many consequences: traditional donor countries had to contribute even more substantially to their financing, although it was hoped that more countries would offer financial assistance in future. Moreover, UNHCR was confronted with serious management problems: administrative costs were increasing, the High Commissioner had been obliged to recruit a number of experts and the need for co-ordination with other organizations was increasing.

28. His delegation congratulated the High Commissioner for having dealt energetically with the problems of organization: two "administrative units" had been established, a computer processing group had become operational and the High Commissioner was fully co-operating in the exercise aimed at studying the co-ordination of international efforts in the case of man-made disasters. He had also improved communication with members of the Executive Committee, which had constituted a working group assigned to study the financial and administrative aspects of the management of UNHCR. His delegation felt that the experience could lead to the establishment within the Executive Committee of a financial and administrative sub-committee which would also be competent to examine the various UNHCR programmes. The new sub-committee would meet during the week preceeding the Executive Committee meeting and would make its report, thus facilitating the work of the Executive Committee, which had been unable to study UNHCR programmes in depth during its last meeting because the general debate had taken up almost all the time allotted for its meeting.

29. UNHCR continued, and rightly so, to attach great importance to the question of the international protection of refugees, scrupulously enforcing the basic principles of asylum and non-refoulement and applying the rules prescribed by the Geneva Convention of 1951 relating to the status of refugees. It also collaborated in the elaboration of regional regulations. Questions of protection were also studied by the Sub-Committee on Protection.

30. Belgium had contributed to refugee aid through UNHCR, other international organizations and non-governmental organizations. Efforts were also being made to receive refugees in Belgium, especially orphaned or unaccompanied children, handicapped persons and accompanying members of their families. His delegation supported the action undertaken by UNHCR in favour of women refugees.

31. Ms. EERSEL (Suriname) said that the growing exodus of refugees was a phenomenon which had been taking place for many years while most of the leaders of the world community stood passively by. The problem was compounded by the

(Ms. Fersel, Suriname)

magnitude of the exodus and by underlying political issues. Since there were few signs of any slow-down in the flow of refugees, it was obvious that only a massive world effort would alleviate the plight of those people, of whom women, children, the aged and the disabled were the most seriously affected. The refugee problem had social, economic and political roots which were affecting both domestic and international relations. Human rights had little meaning if the United Nations could not come to grips with the problems of the starvation and massacre of millions of refugees and if Governments were unable to put aside political considerations when dealing with that humanitarian problem.

32. Since Africa continued to be the region of the world sheltering the largest number of refugees, Suriname had been heartened by the results of the Conference on the Situation of Refugees in Africa, which had subsequently been endorsed by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity. The situation in Somalia, where hundreds of thousands of refugees were leading a precarious existence, should be of particular concern to UNHCR and the international community. The refugee problem in Asia continued to cause major concern and the already enormous problem of Indo-Chinese refugees was now compounded by the exodus of about 700,000 refugees from Afghanistan. Her delegation appealed to all the parties directly involved to act in a truly humanitarian spirit to overcome the great suffering of the Kampuchean refugees.

33. Her Government greatly appreciated the expanded activities being undertaken by the High Commissioner and his staff, by the International Committee of the Red Cross and by voluntary agencies in assisting refugees throughout the world. A strictly non-political stance greatly enhanced the functioning of UNHCR.

34. The world had an obligation to find solutions to the plight of the people who had been uprooted and made destitute and helpless. Her Government fully appreciated the gravity of the refugee problem and, on the basis of purely humanitarian considerations, had decided to allow a number of refugees into Suriname for permanent settlement. In that connexion, discussions with UNHCR were well under way.

35. Compared with Africa and Asia, the refugee problem in Latin America was relatively small; the biggest caseload consisted of Nicaraguans who had fled their homeland as a result of the acts of the deposed Somoza régime, and the great majority of them had voluntarily returned to Nicaragua in the course of the year. Her delegation hoped that the Committee's deliberations would contribute to a permanent solution of the seemingly perennial problem of refugees.

36. Mr. MBENNA (United Republic of Tanzania) said that it was generally acknowledged that in Africa, the problem of refugees was more serious than in any other continent. The problem was compounded by the lack of basic necessities such as water, food, shelter and clothing and, to make matters worse, the host countries themselves experienced chronic shortages of essential resources necessary for human survival. Although they were committed to giving maximum assistance to refugees, it was being recognized that the African refugee problem was basically a problem of lack of adequate support both from the host countries and from the international community.

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(Mr. Mbenna, United Republic of Tanzania)

37. Tanzania was one of the few countries in Africa which had been welcoming refugees from the first day it became independent. It now had about 200,000 refugees, 10,000 of whom were voluntary refugees. Despite its meagre resources, Tanzania, as a matter of commitment and principle, had shared the little at its disposal with the refugees seeking shelter. At the same time, his Government had maintained a consistent policy of making the refugees in Tanzania as self-supporting as possible. It had given the refugees land to use for their survival and had treated them equally with Tanzanian citizens, who were mostly peasants. Thus many refugees had been integrated into the mainstream of society. In 1980 his Government had granted citizenship to about 36,000 Rwandese refugees.

38. While naturalization was one way of solving the refugee problem, his delegation believed that the principle of burden-sharing was perhaps the best way of bringing about a lasting solution. To arrive at that goal, countries with few or no refugees should voluntarily invite more refugees to their countries and UNHCR should redouble its assistance in support activities in the agriculture and animal husbandry sectors.

39. His Government was committed to finding a lasting solution to the African refugee problem and would continue, as in the past, to give maximum support to all efforts towards that end. His delegation hoped for an early implementation of the recommendations adopted at the Conference on the Situation of Refugees in Africa, which reflected current realities and the concerns of the African Governments. It also hoped that the International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa would elicit maximum support by all countries, developed and developing, but particularly the rich countries, in resolving the problem of maintaining over 5 million refugees. The world community had a moral obligation to respond generously and with urgency.

40. His delegation would support the draft resolutions on the item. His country would continue to provide moral and material support for the projects that would be initiated for the benefit of African refugees as it had done in the case of refugees in other areas of the world.

41. Mr. ADAM (Somalia) asked the Assistant Secretary-General, Joint Co-ordinator, Special Economic Assistance Programme, what action had been taken to implement resolution 1980/53 of the Economic and Social Council.

42. Mr. GOUNDREY (Assistant Secretary-General, Joint Co-ordinator, Special Economic Assistance Programme) said that there had been consultations with UNHCR on the question of sending a mission to Somalia to assess current developments in the refugee situation and appropriate dates would be arranged with the Government of Somalia. An updated statement of Somalia's needs had been provided orally in the High Commissioner's report to the Executive Committee but it had not been possible to produce a written report for the thirty-fifth session of the General Assembly. The oral report included the latest information available but it was anticipated that a mission would be sent to Somalia shortly, probably early in 1981.

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43. Mr. ADAM (Somalia) said that since no updated report on the needs of Somalia had been issued, it would be of assistance to the Committee if the report of the interagency mission were made available to it.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

44. The CHAIRMAN, in response to a request from Mr. RADJI (Senegal) on behalf of the African Group, suggested that the deadline for submission of draft resolutions under item 78 should be extended to 5 p.m. on Tuesday, 11 November.

45. It was so decided.

46. The CHAIRMAN, replying to a question from Mr. DFRESSA (Ethiopia), said that draft resolutions submitted under item 12 would not be subject to that deadline.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.