



General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/AC.96/SR.433
10 November 1988

ENGLISH
Original: FRENCH

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME

Thirty-ninth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 433rd MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 6 October 1988, at 8 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. JAMAL (United Republic of Tanzania)

CONTENTS

Review of developments in UNHCR activities relating to

- (a) Assistance
- (b) Durable solutions
- (c) Refugee aid and development (concluded)

Review of UNHCR programmes financed by Voluntary Funds in 1987-88 and adoption of the revised 1988 budget and proposed programmes and budget for 1989

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Official Records Editing Section, room E.6108, Palais des Nations, Geneva.

Any corrections to the records of the meetings of the Executive Committee at this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

The meeting was called to order at 8.10 p.m.

REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENTS IN UNHCR ACTIVITIES RELATING TO:

- (a) ASSISTANCE
- (b) DURABLE SOLUTIONS
- (c) REFUGEE AID AND DEVELOPMENT (agenda item 6) (concluded) (A/AC.96/708 and 709; A/AC.96/CRP.3 and Add.1 and CRP.8)

1. Mr. BROUWERS (Netherlands) said that the conference room paper on refugee aid and development (A/AC.96/CRP.3) contained a comprehensive review of current developments and future projects. His delegation endorsed the general terms of the principles for action in developing countries described therein.
2. Since 1979, when three new major flows of refugees and displaced persons had taken place in South-East Asia, South-West Asia and the Horn of Africa, the search for new approaches in linking refugee aid and development had been under way. It had been recognized that, in addition to providing political solutions, it was necessary to go beyond mere humanitarian assistance. However, progress had been rather slow despite the efforts made by the Executive Committee and UNHCR to build an international consensus. The situation was ripe for that consensus to be translated into practical action.
3. It was encouraging that host countries and countries of origin were committed to pursuing development policies for the benefit of local populations, returnees and refugees. Policies designed to enable beneficiaries rapidly to achieve self-sufficiency would also be in the interest of donors, whose financial burden would thereby be lightened.
4. His delegation thus fully supported UNHCR's co-operation with specialized agencies and bilateral donors with a view to linking humanitarian assistance and structural development projects in the countries concerned. His Government was taking part in several projects of that kind and would continue to do so.
5. It was nonetheless surprising that UNDP and other development agencies were not more fully involved in such projects. The question of the link between refugee aid and development was never discussed by the governing bodies of those agencies and it was high time for them to take their responsibilities more seriously. Countries of asylum should also give those projects greater prominence in their own development plans. In addition, closer co-ordination in the field between UNHCR representatives and those of other agencies could only be beneficial for integrated development projects.
6. His delegation was, however, not convinced of the need to establish a project planning fund for refugee aid and development. Permanent mechanisms for co-operation between UNHCR and its partners were already in place and UNHCR had voluntary funds and the technical expertise of the Technical Support Service (TSS). At the current stage, his Government was therefore not in favour of the establishment of a new financial mechanism. It was nevertheless prepared to give further consideration to the matter during the coming year in

the light of the explanations provided by the Deputy High Commissioner at the preceding meeting and the comments made by some participants, in particular the representative of UNDP.

7. In view of the importance of the link between refugee aid and development, his delegation suggested that the question should remain on the agenda of the Executive Committee as a standing item and it supported the Canadian proposal, which should first be considered by the Sub-Committee on Administrative and Financial Matters. The question might also be put to a limited number of interested persons, so that they might discuss it freely and frankly.

8. Mr. El GHALI BENHIMA (Morocco) said that he wished to provide some clarifications concerning Western Sahara. He once again recalled that the displaced persons were not all from the Sahara. He also questioned their number, which had been exaggerated. During the census which had been conducted by Spain in 1974 and which had served as the basis for the electoral rolls drawn up for the future referendum on self-determination, the population of Western Sahara had been 74,000. Even in the very unlikely case where the entire population had left the territory, it was hard to believe that the number of displaced persons had more than doubled in 12 years. Moreover, the figure of 165,000 that had been given had never been officially recognized either by UNHCR or by donor countries. There were thus some doubts about the real identity of the persons benefiting from UNHCR assistance.

9. Mr. TORGENSEN (Norway) said that his country devoted 1.1 per cent of its gross national income to official development aid and was also the highest per capita contributor to UNHCR. It was therefore in favour of giving increased attention to the link between refugee aid and development and, in principle, it supported the idea of a mechanism to provide UNHCR with the necessary flexibility for swift action in favour of projects that lent themselves to co-operation with development agencies. It was, however, not yet in a position to express its opinion on how such a mechanism should be set up. That matter would require further study.

10. His delegation stressed that the point at issue was financing for the launching of projects, not for their implementation, and that UNHCR's responsibilities and those of development agencies had to be clearly defined.

11. Mrs. PERTTUNEN (Finland) said that her country fully supported assistance programmes designed to promote durable solutions and self-sufficiency projects. She agreed with the High Commissioner that it was pointless to try to deal with refugee problems without also dealing with those of the surrounding population and that any action on their behalf had to take account of the host country's development plans.

12. Her delegation was therefore in favour of the idea of linking refugee aid and development, but it would have liked a clearer definition of the mandate of the proposed trust fund for joint project planning. It hoped that it would be possible to find a generally acceptable way of financing the project planning phase. UNHCR could count on her country's support for the planning of its programmes and projects, on the understanding that the development agencies would also have a role to play, since they had a great deal of experience that could only enhance UNHCR's catalytic role. Her delegation hoped that further progress in co-operation would be made in the coming year.

13. Her delegation attached great importance to UNHCR's concern for women refugees. Women who were separated from the other members of their family had to meet the needs of their children who had fled with them. Family reunion was a basic right of refugees and displaced persons and it should be a priority objective of humanitarian action.

14. Mrs. SELMANE-BOUAMRANE (Algeria) recommended that most of the budget should be used to promote durable solutions, the best of which was voluntary repatriation. She noted with satisfaction that the main efforts along those lines had been made in Africa. The fact that Sahrawi refugees in Algeria would be able to vote on self-determination in the referendum to be organized by the United Nations and the Organization for African Unity as part of the United Nations peace plan was a particularly welcome development.

15. When voluntary repatriation was not possible, local integration might be a solution, although it was a heavy burden for countries of asylum. It was therefore necessary to resort to resettlement in third countries, as recently recommended in the Oslo Declaration and Plan of Action.

16. With regard to refugee aid and development, the efforts UNHCR had been making in co-operation with various governmental and non-governmental organizations were designed to promote equitable burden-sharing and to provide support for economically weak host countries. Her delegation hoped that UNHCR would give its support to the implementation of the projects arising out of the International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa (ICARA), particularly in least developed countries.

17. Her delegation was in favour of the establishment of a project planning fund for refugee aid and development, on the understanding that contributions to that fund would be in addition to present funds, and not deducted from humanitarian assistance.

18. With regard to assistance activities, the report on UNHCR activities financed by voluntary funds (A/AC.96/708) and the overview of UNHCR activities (A/AC.96/709) showed that the situation of refugees in Africa had worsened and that their number had increased. International assistance for that region would have to be increased in order to meet the needs of the refugees themselves and also to lighten the burden on the host country's economies. In addition to providing emergency relief, such assistance could advantageously be used for activities aimed at promoting self-sufficiency.

19. Assistance to Sahrawi refugees was part of a general UNHCR programme. It was designed both to meet immediate needs and to promote self-sufficiency. For many years, the refugee status of the beneficiaries of such assistance had been recognized by bilateral and multilateral governmental and non-governmental donors, which had always been able to see how and where their contributions were being used. Until a durable solution could be found for the Sahrawi refugees, her delegation would like the programme of assistance from which they were benefiting to be maintained.

20. Mr. LAUREL (Observer for the Philippines) welcomed the consensus reached by the Working Group on the admission of observer Governments to the Sub-Committees and to informal meetings of the Executive Committee. His delegation would submit a formal application for admission.

21. His delegation also welcomed with satisfaction the results of the International Conference on the Plight of Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons in Southern Africa and supported the convening in 1989 of an international conference on refugees in Central America.

22. His Government hoped that the growing magnitude of the refugee problem in all parts of the world would not mean less attention to the situation in South-East Asia and that resettlement programmes for Indo-Chinese refugees would be strengthened. It invited the international community to support the draft decision submitted by the delegation of Thailand on behalf of ASEAN concerning the holding of a conference on that question.

23. His delegation took note of the reforms UNHCR had undertaken in order to meet its growing commitments despite the financial constraints it faced. His Government had made similar efforts to rationalize refugee assistance and administration. It had recently re-established the inter-ministerial task force on international refugee assistance and administration. In the past 13 years, it had taken part in processing operations for the resettlement of approximately 240,000 Indo-Chinese refugees. It had also resettled some 40,000 first-asylum cases.

24. Mr. SAMAD OTHMAN (Observer for Malaysia) said that he fully supported the draft decision submitted by the delegation of Thailand concerning the convening of an international conference on Indo-Chinese refugees and hoped that the proposal would receive the unanimous support of the members of the Executive Committee.

25. A durable solution had to be found to outflows of Indo-Chinese refugees, which had continued to increase. Since the situation had changed in the past few years, the decisions taken at the 1979 Geneva Conference no longer matched current needs. It was therefore time to convene a general conference in order to solve that problem, which had lasted for too long. In view of the favourable reaction of many delegations, he had no doubt that the Executive Committee would be in a position to endorse the draft decision proposed by Thailand at its current session.

26. Mr. BANDA (Observer for Malawi) stressed the need to link refugee aid and development assistance, particularly in the case of low-income countries such as Malawi. His delegation would like a specific conclusion to be adopted on that question. The conclusion should recognize the complementarity between international solidarity and receptive asylum policies, so as to lighten the burden on low-income host countries. It should also recognize the need to provide support for those countries through special development assistance that would supplement general development programmes; and it should designate the High Commissioner as the continuing focal point for activities to provide countries of asylum or of origin with technical and economic assistance.

27. His delegation considered that the concept of development assistance applied to countries of asylum, so that they might meet the needs of their own nationals as well as those of refugees.

28. Mr. AMED (Observer for Afghanistan) said that, despite the advantages of local integration and resettlement, voluntary repatriation was the best durable solution and UNHCR had to give it priority.

29. In accordance with the institution of asylum, a distinction had to be drawn between genuine refugees and persons who fled their country in order to foment unrest from outside. It was particularly important to ensure that refugee camps were not being used as bases for subversion and sabotage and to prevent the plight of refugees from serving as a pretext for interference in the affairs of their country of origin.

30. It was equally important for refugee communities to be well informed of the measures being taken by their own countries on their behalf in order to encourage them to return home with the assistance of the host country and the country of origin.

31. His Government had always tried to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of its nationals. For the sake of national reconciliation and for humanitarian reasons, it had offered them honourable conditions for return, in accordance with the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan and other legal instruments, particularly the Geneva Agreements. Two new ministries, namely, the Ministry of Repatriates' Affairs and the Ministry of Rehabilitation and Rural Development had been set up, and several other ministries and departments had taken measures to enable repatriates to enjoy a normal and economically productive life. Reception centres that could accommodate 12,000 persons had been set up in several border areas. In addition to the rights enjoyed by all citizens, returnees had been granted special privileges, particularly in respect of employment, taxes and security.

32. In February, a UNHCR fact-finding mission had visited two border areas, where it had been able to inspect facilities and services for returnees and to speak with some of them. The mission had led to the establishment of a UNHCR office in the country.

33. Repatriation required the assistance of the international community, especially in Afghanistan, a least-developed country that had been hard hit by a long devastating war. His Government was grateful to the Secretary-General of the United Nations for his international appeal on behalf of Afghanistan and for having appointed a co-ordinator for economic and humanitarian assistance programmes relating to Afghanistan. His delegation welcomed the signs of support for the Geneva Agreements shown by the Executive Committee and thanked the representatives of those Governments which had expressed their support for the United Nations assistance programme relating to Afghanistan. His Government would do its utmost to facilitate the Co-ordinator's task.

34. His delegation supported the initiatives taken by the High Commissioner, particularly with regard to refugee protection and the search for durable solutions.

35. Mr. HACHED (Observer for the Organization of African Unity) recalled that Africa was the continent with the largest number of refugees, even though it had a weak economy because of the imbalance of North-South trade and the natural disasters which had struck it. He welcomed the success of the International Conference on the Plight of Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons in Southern Africa (SARRED), which had been an example of co-operation between United Nations agencies (UNHCR and UNDP), a continental organization (OAU) and a country (Norway). The Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at that Conference reaffirmed the link between relief, recovery and development assistance, as well as the principle of solidarity and burden-sharing. The

implementation of the Plan of Action required the mobilization of United Nations bodies and specialized agencies, especially UNHCR and UNDP. OAU would contribute to the follow-up to the Plan of Action.

36. In 1969, OAU had adopted the Convention on Refugees, set up a refugee office and organized international meetings, the most important of which had been the Arusha Conference, ICARA I and II and SARRED. In 1980, it had adopted a continental development plan, the Lagos Plan of Action and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, followed in 1986 by a priority programme for economic recovery. Those initiatives all showed that Africa was determined to develop in peace. In view of the maintenance of a state of emergency throughout South African territory under the control of the Pretoria régime and the weakness of the African economies, that determination would require the international community's support if it was to find practical expression.

37. UNHCR had to continue its humanitarian and economic assistance on behalf of refugees; and, in that spirit, it was necessary to ensure the follow-up to SARRED and to reactivate ICARA.

38. Mr. DEWEY (Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees) assured the Executive Committee that the secretariat would carefully study the many suggestions made during the discussion on assistance to women refugees, an activity which generated more enthusiasm and dedication on the part of the staff of the High Commissioner's Office than any other that had been undertaken. He hoped that the Committee would continue to support UNHCR in the efforts it was making in that regard.

39. He had taken note of the general support for the link between refugee aid and development, as well as for joint action by UNHCR and international organizations, Governments and non-governmental organizations.

40. With regard to the proposed trust fund for joint project planning for refugee aid and development, account would be taken of the concerns of the delegations which had requested further study. To that end, the secretariat would rapidly arrange for consultations with its partners.

41. As to the burden on countries of asylum, it was essential to support the recommendations made by the representatives of Sudan and Tanzania and to recognize the principle of the additionality of humanitarian assistance, which should be provided over and above general programmes of economic assistance for development.

42. He had listened with interest to the statements by several delegations concerning their countries' experience of voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement.

43. UNHCR hoped that the Executive Committee would endorse the proposals for international conferences on Indo-Chinese refugees and refugees and displaced persons in Central America and would take part in them in accordance with the Committee's decisions.

44. The CHAIRMAN said that the Executive Committee had concluded its consideration of agenda item 6.

REVIEW OF UNHCR PROGRAMMES FINANCED BY VOLUNTARY FUNDS IN 1987-1988 AND ADOPTION OF THE REVISED 1988 BUDGET AND PROGRAMMES AND BUDGET FOR 1989 (agenda item 7) (A/AC.96/708, parts I to V; A/AC.96/709).

45. The CHAIRMAN said that the head of each regional bureau would introduce the part of the report for 1987-1988 relating to his region. Following the introduction of each part of the report, delegations would be able to put questions to the head of the regional bureau concerned.

46. Mr. KPENOU (Head of the Regional Bureau for Africa) confirmed that, as the High Commissioner had noted in his introductory statement, the situation in Africa had worsened in the past year and said that he would like to explain the reasons for that development.

47. The increase in the number of refugees was attributable to human rights violations and disturbances of public order for which the Government of the country of origin was not always responsible. In many cases, however, it was responsible for restoring order and for creating conditions that were conducive to repatriation. The situation in Africa was worrisome, since national security considerations sometimes had to take precedence over the rights of refugees. Nevertheless, the balance was not completely negative, as shown by the number of voluntary repatriations and the acceptance of the principle that the granting of asylum could not be considered a hostile act.

48. Economic and social factors were the reason for the negative balance. They were analysed in the Khartoum Declaration, which clearly described the problems involved in humanitarian assistance. Refugees were particularly hard hit by economic stagnation, which was, in some cases, even responsible for their flight. It affected all countries, made repatriation and resettlement in the country of origin difficult and gave rise to tensions between foreigners and the local population in the country of asylum.

49. African Governments had few means of remedying that situation. Persons concerned with the debt problem, the balance-of-payments problem and the worsening of the terms of trade in Africa were, moreover, not convinced that there was any link between those problems and refugees. All those factors only added to UNHCR's burden and responsibilities. It had had to face several complex emergency situations in the past year. In addition to providing emergency assistance, it had to help promote the development of the regions receiving refugees. The countries of asylum themselves had understood that refugees should be provided for in their national development plans, although, in order to do so, they would require increased support, both bilateral and multilateral. UNHCR had a role to play in the economic reconstruction of Africa by mobilizing international solidarity.

50. The Office faced a major task in southern Africa, to which it hoped to repatriate Namibians when their territory became independent.

51. The cause of refugees in Africa required large-scale measures that went beyond the framework of UNHCR and it was perhaps not the Executive Committee's responsibility to take the initiative in that regard. However, it could ensure liaison between UNHCR and other organizations and help to make international public opinion more aware of refugee problems in Africa.

52. Mr. EL BASHIR (Sudan) said that, with the help of UNHCR and the Executive Committee, his country had been able to carry a caseload of over 1.5 million refugees from different backgrounds. About 40 per cent of them had received continuous assistance and were now becoming self-sufficient. However, the remaining 60 per cent received no direct assistance from UNHCR or from donor countries, with the result that the infrastructure and services provided by his Government were becoming overburdened, particularly at a time when the country had been hard hit by one natural disaster after another.

53. His Government therefore needed the international community in order to meet its humanitarian commitments. To that end, he requested that the \$38 million allocation for Sudan indicated in the report on activities financed by voluntary funds (A/AC.96/708 (part I)) should be revised upwards, by agreement between UNHCR and his Government.

54. Mr. NGOUBEYOU (Observer for Cameroon), noting that the head of the Regional Bureau for Africa had attributed refugee problems in Africa primarily to economic problems whose solution would go beyond the framework of UNHCR, asked which organization might be called upon to solve those problems and whether the definition of a refugee changed depending on whether reference was being made to Africa or to another continent.

55. Mr. KPENOU (Head of the Regional Bureau for Africa) said that he had taken note of the comment by the representative of Sudan concerning the inadequacy of the allocation for his country and said that UNHCR was prepared to discuss the matter.

56. Replying to the representative of Cameroon, he said that the situation in Africa was being complicated by economic factors and by human rights violations. Since human rights violations had already been studied in depth, he had focused on economic causes, which he did not think had been sufficiently stressed. Economic questions were the responsibility of other bodies and he had therefore wished to draw the Committee's attention to other agencies that were more competent than UNHCR in that field. However, UNHCR was in no way trying to avoid its protection responsibilities or to provide a new definition of the term "refugee".

57. Mr. AMUNATEGUI (Head of the Regional Bureau for South-West Asia, North Africa and the Middle East) welcomed recent developments that were likely to make life easier for many refugees throughout the world. The peace initiatives taken by the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the various agreements and talks on Afghanistan, Cyprus, the Iran-Iraq war and Western Sahara would allow exiles to return home with UNHCR's assistance.

58. Afghanistan would need the international community's assistance to repatriate 5 million persons from Iran and Pakistan. That operation, which would be carried out in co-operation with the Co-ordinator for Economic and Humanitarian Assistance Programmes relating to Afghanistan, would require meticulous preparation. A special unit within the Regional Bureau was working on the problem, together with the host countries, the country of origin, voluntary organizations and the persons concerned. Missions had been sent into the field to ensure that conditions for voluntary repatriation were being met. In Iran and Pakistan, the measures taken in 1988 to pave the way for the refugees' resettlement included a vaccination programme and training projects. Programme implementation had produced excellent results in the past

year, partly because projects were better suited to problems and partly as a result of contributions by UNHCR's operational partners, especially voluntary agencies.

59. At the same time, UNHCR had continued its dialogue with regional agencies, such as the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States.

60. While there was no shortage of grounds for satisfaction, there were still a number of causes of concern in the region. For example, there had been no accessions to international legal instruments since the Committee's thirty-eighth session. The importance which States attached to UNHCR's humanitarian work must, however, find tangible expression in legal commitments.

61. Another cause of concern was that cases of refoulement - which were fortunately quite rare - had occurred in countries that had hitherto respected the principle of non-foulement. UNHCR representatives had stepped in to prevent the worst and to urge that such practices should not be repeated. During preparatory missions for the return of refugees and in conflict situations, UNHCR representatives often had to face the same dangers as refugees.

62. For the sake of the refugees themselves, a permanent UNHCR presence had to be established in certain strategic locations, but, because of the lack of funds, UNHCR could not always finance the establishment of the necessary field posts. It deplored the fact that inadequate resources were preventing it from performing its mission as well as it would like.

63. Mr. YIANGOU (Observer for Cyprus) recalled that, as a result of the events of 1974, there were about 200,000 refugees and displaced persons in Cyprus; that was an enormous percentage - almost one third - of the population. His Government was making every effort to improve the living conditions of those persons until a durable solution could be found. However, its resources were limited and it would continue to need the international assistance being channelled through UNHCR in order to fulfil its responsibilities to the persons who had become refugees in their own country. The only durable solution was voluntary repatriation, which depended not only on the persons concerned, but also on the political will of Governments.

64. He therefore hoped that the dialogue which had begun between the President of the Republic of Cyprus and the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community under United Nations auspices would enable the refugees and displaced persons to return to their homes and property in safety and with dignity, in accordance with United Nations resolutions. He also hoped that fundamental human rights and freedoms would be restored to all Cypriots, Greeks and Turks alike, throughout the territory of a new federal republic which should rapidly be established.

65. His Government was determined to work together with the international community to find a peaceful, just and lasting solution to the problems facing the people of Cyprus as a whole.

66. He thanked UNHCR for the excellent work being done by its Cyprus office and, in general, for the efforts it was making on behalf of refugees throughout the world and assured it of his Government's support.

67. Mr. DEMIRALP (Turkey) stressed the fact that the Executive Committee was a humanitarian body in which political considerations had no place. The situation of the displaced persons in Cyprus was quite different from that which had just been described for purposes having nothing to do with the item under consideration.

68. Referring to the relevant agenda item, namely, the situation described in the UNHCR report, he said that UNHCR's mandate was limited to co-ordinating United Nations humanitarian assistance programmes for the two communities in Cyprus. His delegation was confident that UNHCR would distribute that assistance equitably between the two communities.

69. Mr. AMUNATEGUI (Head of the Regional Bureau for South-West Asia, North Africa and the Middle East) once again invited the States of the region to accede to the 1951 Convention, to respect the principle of non-refoulement and to support UNHCR assistance programmes, particularly for Afghanistan. He thanked all Governments that were co-operating with UNHCR in the field, sometimes in extremely difficult conditions.

70. Mrs. CAPELLI (Head of the Regional Bureau for Europe and North America) said that the region for which she was responsible faced unabated demands for first asylum, as well as the challenge of sharing the burden borne by countries on other continents.

71. Asylum-seekers, whose number was unlikely to drop in 1988, were subject to laborious immigration procedures and practices which differed from one country to another. In a spirit of international responsibility for humanitarian action, Governments, UNHCR and voluntary organizations therefore had to continue to work together. Changes in national legislation could offer only short-term solutions and joint action was thus required in order to guarantee international protection.

72. Europe and North America were called upon to provide resettlement opportunities for refugees who had been able to find only temporary asylum in other countries. That clearly demonstrated the importance of international burden-sharing and solidarity.

73. European economic, financial, social and political integration had important implications for refugees and asylum-seekers. Steps had been taken in several regional bodies, including the Council of Europe and the European Communities, to harmonize national asylum procedures and practices. What was to be avoided, however, was any lowering of protection and assistance standards and UNHCR was available to Governments for advice on that complex question.

74. The process of informal consultations which had begun in 1985 between UNHCR and Governments was intended to deal with those concerns and to encourage a constructive and solution-oriented approach, which also involved non-governmental organizations, such as the European Consultation on Refugees and Exiles, that were working with UNHCR to define specific aspects of a comprehensive refugee policy.

75. UNHCR was concerned with the Surinamese nationals who had fled to the French Department of Guiana. Under an agreement signed in August 1988 by the Governments of France and Suriname and by UNHCR, a tripartite commission was seeking solutions to the problems of those persons.

76. The bulk of UNHCR expenditure in Europe and North America was for refugees in several European countries who were awaiting a durable solution. Intensified efforts would have to be made to find original solutions and UNHCR would devote particular attention to that question in the coming months.

77. Mr. KUSSBACH (Austria) said that, since 1985, increasingly larger numbers of asylum-seekers had been arriving in his country, mainly from eastern Europe. Most of them were not eligible for refugee status under the 1951 Geneva Convention: they left their countries for economic reasons, not because of a well-founded fear of persecution. In many cases, Austria was only a transit country where those persons stayed before they could emigrate to a third country. However, immigration procedures in some host countries were extremely lengthy and could take several years, thus creating a heavy financial burden for transit countries. His country's annual budget expenditure for refugee assistance had risen steadily since 1985. The 1988 budget allocation of S 520 million had already been exhausted. According to estimates, total expenditure would amount to S 1 billion for the year.

78. He thanked UNHCR for the assistance it had given his country and expressed his satisfaction at the excellent relations established between the UNHCR representative and the Austrian Government.

79. Mrs. CAPELLI (Head of the Regional Bureau for Europe and North America) confirmed that UNHCR was well aware of the problems the Austrian Government faced as a result of the increased influx of asylum-seekers. It had therefore strengthened its Vienna office, which was involved in the application of eligibility procedures.

80. Mrs. SELMANE-BOUAMRANE (Algeria) said that the African members of the Executive Committee would submit draft conclusions on refugee aid and development. Copies of the draft had been given to the secretariat for distribution.

81. The CHAIRMAN suggested that consideration of part II (Asia and Oceania) and part IV (Latin America and the Caribbean) of the report for 1987-88 on activities financed by voluntary funds and the adoption of the revised 1988 budget and the proposed programmes and budget for 1989 should be deferred until the next meeting.

The meeting rose at 10.25 p.m.