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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME

Thirty-fourth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 358th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva
on Wednesday, 12 October 1983, at 3 p.m.

Chairman:
later:

Mr. MEBAZAA
Mr. EWERLÖF

(Tunisia)
(Sweden)

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General debate (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4) (continued)

1. Mr. CHILWANE (Observer, African National Congress of South Africa), said that ANC was awaiting a response to its request to the UNHCR for assistance to the ANC (South Africa) Development Centre at Dakawa in Tanzania. That centre would initially accommodate 5,000 people, but the number was expected to increase as a result of the activities of the apartheid regime.
2. ANC strongly condemned the unprovoked aggression of the Pretoria regime against Lesotho and called upon the forces of peace and social progress to express their solidarity with the people of that country and the other front-line States.
3. Behind such slogans as "constitutional reform", the Botha and Malan regime was preparing schemes to divide the Coloured and Indian people from their African brothers and had passed the so-called Orderly Removal and Settlement of Black Persons Bill with a view to the further domination of the African people. Hundreds of Africans were forcibly removed from their homes and dumped in areas totally devoid of the normal amenities. ANC therefore appealed for material and moral support to be rendered to those people who had been displaced in the land of their birth.
4. During the preceding year, the liberation struggle had intensified and the growth in opposition was exemplified by the recent gathering at Cape Town which had launched the United Democratic Front. The enemy was being confronted with a heightened spirit of revolutionary defiance within South Africa. Africans, who were in revolt against the whole brutal system, were rallying to the call of ANC (South Africa) and a battle was currently being waged against the President's Council and Koornhof Bills. Their struggle required major resources, but their difficulties had been eased by the support received from international and other organizations. He thanked those organizations and called upon them to intensify their support for ANC (South Africa) and the oppressed people of South Africa.
5. Mr. GQOBOSE (Observer, Pan Africanist Congress of Azania), having emphasized the importance of the second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa (ICARA II), said he had been interested to note that durable solutions might involve rehabilitative and development projects which encouraged the refugees' sense of self-reliance. PAC had always believed that relief assistance alone was not a permanent solution, and that the introduction of development projects was the best way of assisting and rehabilitating refugees.
6. The refugee problem in southern Africa was the result of the abominable policies of the South African racist Government. Because of the arrogance of that regime, the problem had affected neighbouring countries: Lesotho and Mozambique had been invaded with a resultant loss of life, and Botswana, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe lived under the threat of military attack by South Africa. The people who had been granted asylum in those countries greatly admired their commitment to the liberation struggle, and their courageous policies should have the full support

of the Executive Committee and the international community. That was particularly so in view of the fact that the racist regime was using the presence of refugees in certain neighbouring countries as a pretext to force them to recognize the so-called independent Bantustans inside South Africa.

7. PAC wished to express its appreciation to UNHCR for the assistance its people had received over the years. It was particularly grateful to the Government of Tanzania which had granted them farmland for the priority objective of self-sufficiency in food. It fully supported UNHCR in its promotion of development projects which constituted a positive and durable solution in that they provided a sound basis for the rehabilitation of refugees. Lastly, PAC wished to express its appreciation to all the donor countries.

8. Mr. NAHOLS (Observer, South West Africa People's Organization) said that the failure to solve the Namibian independence issue remained a serious impediment to finding a durable solution to the Namibian refugee problem. The intensification of the mass murder and persecution of people in Namibia continued to compel them to search for security in neighbouring countries. In addition, the criminal activities of the South African armed forces and their surrogates in the countries of asylum posed a serious threat to the security of the displaced Namibians. That grave situation called for continued humanitarian assistance and an eradication of the root causes.

9. Despite such unfavourable conditions, SWAPO, with the generous assistance of the international community, had continued to improve the living standards of the refugees. More specifically, with the help of UNHCR, it had significantly improved their educational facilities, health, accommodation, food and clothing. The current UNHCR/SWAPO programme for Namibian refugees encompassed social and health infrastructure, agricultural development activities and a scholarship programme for young people entering secondary education.

10. SWAPO's refugee programmes were motivated by its firm belief that its displaced people should be assisted with a view to their ultimate self-reliance and independence. The intention was to consolidate achievements with regard to basic needs while embarking upon activities that would develop the people's potential. Such activities included programmes to develop skills, for which purpose centres were being established in the settlements. They were supplemented by correspondence courses provided by the Namibia Extension Unit, and SWAPO appealed for further support for both those activities.

11. Another area of prime importance was the basic education of refugee children. For a number of years, SWAPO had been organizing primary and junior secondary schools at its centres, while UNHCR provided scholarships to enable the children to complete their secondary education. However, SWAPO had recently developed a project to build a secondary school for Namibian children, and the Government of the People's Republic of Congo had invited it to establish a school in that country. In that connection, SWAPO wished to renew its request to UNHCR, since such a school would, in addition to its immediate educational purpose, also serve as a blueprint for the future secondary school system in Namibia.

12. Lastly, SWAPO was hoping for increased assistance with a view to developing the creative potential of its people. It also appealed for increased material assistance to the front-line States, which continued to shoulder the burden of receiving the victims of apartheid.

13. Mr. BAKWESEGHA (Observer, Organization of African Unity) said that, in many African countries, the refugee population was almost as large as the local population. Those same countries were often also poor, afflicted by a variety of climatic handicaps, and prone to natural disasters. Their underdeveloped state was frequently compounded by internal political instability and inter-State disputes. In short, when it came to refugees, it was the poorest and weakest countries of Africa that bore the heaviest burden.

14. The refugee problem had assumed such significance in Africa, however, that the numbers were virtually irrelevant. There were countries that accommodated only a few thousand refugees - fairly negligible by some standards - but they were enough to shake the very foundations of government in the countries concerned.

15. Africa was entering upon a dangerous era in which some refugee-producing countries claimed the right to dictate what kind of treatment should be given to the refugees by the countries of asylum, even if that meant that the countries in question had to derogate from the international instruments that applied in the matter. South Africa's raid on Lesotho in December 1982, on the pretext that Lesotho was harbouring dissidents, was one of the incidents that had exacerbated the already complex refugee situation in Africa.

16. The positive attitude of African Governments towards asylum-seekers was exemplified by their open-door policy to such people at frontier posts; their ratification of and accession to the relevant international instruments; their endeavours to incorporate into their legislation recognition of the rights of individuals; their commitment to the victims of apartheid, of internal political upheavals or of natural disasters; their humanitarian obligations towards their fellow men; and the amnesties granted to returning refugees. It was deeply gratifying, in that connection, that the Nansen medal for 1983, has been awarded to President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, one of the founding fathers of the OAU.

17. But no matter how liberal their policies towards refugees might be, most African countries were no longer capable of shouldering the burden. Their prime motivation for accepting refugees had, of course, been the cherished notion of African traditional hospitality, but the capacity to accept asylum-seekers was reaching saturation point. As time went on the refugee influx continued, and the resources of the host country were drained, the local population became impatient, any measure on behalf of refugees became unpopular, and hostility developed between the locals and the refugees. Given that correlation between Africa's tradition of hospitality and resource availability, it followed that the intervention of the international community was needed to supplement those resources.

18. At ICARA II, Africa would again be calling on international donors to assist in the developmental needs of African countries that harboured refugees and/or received returnees. The OAU was mindful of the fact that the success of ICARA II would depend on the ability of the African Governments to provide evidence that everything possible was being done to reduce the number of refugees in the continent. To that end, the OAU Commission of Fifteen on Refugees had called on the African Governments to establish a dialogue on the refugee issue and its root causes, and it would be making a recommendation to that effect to the OAU Council of Ministers.

The OAU Commission was also sending missions to certain African countries that were particularly affected by the presence of refugees. In addition, the OAU secretariat was represented on the ICARA II team currently visiting certain African countries.

19. A meeting had been held in early 1983 between the OAU secretariat and the voluntary agencies that rendered assistance to Africa and OAU was to publish a manual incorporating the recommendations made at that meeting. Africa had reason to be grateful to all those who had contributed to the success of that meeting.

20. Military attacks on refugee camps and settlements caused much distress to the feelings of African leaders and peoples, and the OAU was most grateful for the endeavours that were being made to put an end to such crimes against humanity.

21. Mr. MOLAPO (Lesotho) said that his Government's policy of integrating refugees into the local community had encouraged a large exodus of political asylum-seekers from South Africa, although the exact number was difficult to estimate owing to the lack of controls. While his country did not solicit South African refugees, it was all too aware of the fact that the inflow would continue as long as apartheid remained the official policy of South Africa.

22. Because of the geopolitical situation of his country, his Government had made it a condition of asylum for all refugees that they were not to use its territory to plan and launch attacks against their countries of origin. It was a matter of record that South Africa's own investigations had failed to show his country as hosting any action intended against her security. Recently, however, South Africa had applied pressure through unilateral border closures and embargoes on essential security equipment. His Government genuinely wished to normalize relations with its neighbours, but could not be forced to abandon its obligations under international conventions. South Africa demanded, as a condition for the normalization of relations, the refoulement of all refugees of South African origin, or else their expulsion from his country. Such demands were totally unacceptable, especially as South Africa had failed to supply proof that any of those refugees in fact posed a threat to its security.

23. The dispersal of the refugees outside the southern African countries would not solve what was an internal problem of South Africa, but would rather destabilize the entire region. Under South Africa's policy of creation of black homelands, all the South African blacks were, in the final analysis, to lose their nationality. In addition, the recent South African legislation for a new three-chamber parliament, including the coloured and Indian populations but totally excluding the black majority, would entrench that loss of nationality in the Constitution. Over 80 million people were thus to be deprived of their basic birthright of citizenship of their own country. The politically ostracized black majority would continue to struggle for its rights, and that would lead to more refugees, more attacks from South Africa on his country, more economic and arms embargoes, and a constant threat to its very existence as a nation. That grave situation was compounded by South Africa's rejection of Security Council resolution 527 (1982) which called for compensation to be paid to Lesotho citizens for the damage caused by South African attacks.

24. Lastly, his Government wished to thank the international community for having assisted the refugee population to improve its economic situation through the funding of a project for the development of small enterprises, as well as the other projects being implemented in Lesotho for the benefit of the refugees; his Government would submit further projects to ICARA II. The manner in which the plight of the refugees in his country had been understood and alleviated by the moral, political and material support of the international community was most gratifying.

25. Mr. PURCELL (United States of America) said that the essence of UNHCR's task was to deal with a wide range of emergencies as well as long-standing refugee problems, while maintaining an impartial and humanitarian focus. Its main achievements were to ensure respect for human rights generally, and observance of the specific rights of refugees under international law; the preservation of life during the early days of emergencies; the provision of opportunities for refugees to regain their human dignity through self-reliance programmes; and the promotion, from the very outset, of more satisfactory durable solutions. In his statement, the High Commissioner had called attention to two of those objectives: refugee protection and the promotion of durable solutions. Protection and assistance were mutually reinforcing, and there was often no clear-cut line between them. Both were required in the early days of an emergency, as well as at later stages. In addition, in stable situations, refugees must be prepared for the future through self-reliance activities.

26. UNHCR had to face the challenge of being simultaneously equipped for all of those functions all the time. The emergency response capability was, perhaps the most important function, as the urgency of protection and assistance needs was greatest at the beginning of an emergency. His Government had observed with appreciation the steps taken by the High Commissioner to strengthen that capability. The recently issued handbook on emergency field operations was most valuable, especially if followed up by a thorough staff-training programme. It would be advisable, however, to regularize UNHCR's structure for initial emergency response and establish clear guidelines as to how that structure related to other UNHCR offices at headquarters and in the field.

27. The effectiveness of UNHCR had been bolstered by the creation of a new Specialist Support Unit, made up of experts in various fields. The expertise in question was essential both to enable the High Commissioner to respond effectively to emergencies and in the post-emergency phase when material assistance programmes had to be rationalized and projects developed. Over-all project management in UNHCR had considerably improved, with increased attention being paid to programme evaluation. The full co-operation of host Governments was required in providing access to those who needed help, developing accurate estimates of refugee numbers and relief needs, facilitating logistical arrangements, and drawing up practicable local integration projects.

28. Those demands were, perhaps, greatest in Africa, which continued to shoulder the burden of large groups of refugees, and in Pakistan, which hosted the largest number of refugees of any single country. His Government wished to praise not only the generosity of the many host governments, but also the vital role played by many voluntary non-governmental organizations in the actual provision of assistance, not to mention the expert contribution made by the Intergovernmental Committee for Migration.

29. The High Commissioner's note on international protection (A/AC.96/623) provided a useful recapitulation of the principal issues involved in that subject. His delegation was particularly encouraged by the renewed expression of UNHCR's willingness to play a catalytic role in the development of innovative approaches to international protection problems. It had taken the lead on the issue of rescue at sea, as well as practical measures in Honduras on behalf of persons displaced from El Salvador and in Rwanda on behalf of persons expelled from Uganda; while in South-East Asia, where pirates continued their attacks on defenseless refugees at sea, it had provided tireless and effective leadership in the international protection effort. Success in such action depended on assistance from the political and security resources of individual Governments, the collective capabilities of regional associations, and the diplomatic possibilities of the United Nations Secretariat. UNHCR should further strengthen its close collaboration with the International Committee of the Red Cross in situations where refugees were victims of war.

30. Durable solutions to refugee problems included voluntary repatriation, local integration and, as a last resort, resettlement in a third country. That solution of last resort had occupied much of UNHCR's attention and energy since 1979, when it had successfully mobilized an international effort to provide resettlement opportunities for great numbers of refugees and to relieve the burden borne by the countries of first asylum during the "boat people" crisis. It had also negotiated with Viet Nam a safe and orderly system for selected emigration under the Orderly Departure Programme.

31. Nevertheless, a refugee problem involving huge numbers of peoples persisted in the South-East Asian region, while the pressure from the underlying regional political forces continued unabated. Consequently, where some measure of success had been achieved, as in the case of the Orderly Departure Programme, every effort should be made to expand that approach. That would become critically important if Viet Nam should agree to allow re-education camp inmates to emigrate: the long years of detention of large numbers of political prisoners in Viet Nam was a major human tragedy of concern to the entire international community.

32. Voluntary repatriation was certainly the most desirable solution, and the successful repatriation of most of the refugees in Djibouti was a tribute to the commitment of the Governments concerned and to UNHCR's leadership. Voluntary repatriation of the refugees from Laos and Kampuchea appeared rather more difficult. His Government, like many others, was prepared to support repatriation to Kampuchea when it was truly voluntary in nature and when UNHCR was in a position to ensure that the conditions of those who returned could be satisfactorily monitored. Careful attention and support should also be given to the programme for repatriation to Laos. The Government of that country continued to assert its willingness to co-operate, and conditions of reception and reintegration monitored by UNHCR had been found generally acceptable.

33. He had dwelt on the specific problems of the Indo-Chinese refugee situation for three reasons: first, because it was one of the most intractable problems facing UNHCR; secondly, because it exemplified the possibilities and difficulties of two out of the three durable solutions to be discussed by the Executive Committee; and finally, because the history of the UNHCR response to the Indo-Chinese refugee problem was a supreme example of effective multilateral burden-sharing. Special tribute should also be paid to the countries of first asylum in South-East Asia which had harboured hundreds of thousands of innocent victims, while UNHCR was trying to find durable solutions for them.

34. Mr. OULD-ROUIS (Algeria) said that, over the past 30 years, the activities of UNHCR had expanded considerably, and it had acquired much experience in the field of international protection and assistance. The discussions of recent years on its structures and working methods had resulted in recommendations whose implementation had enabled it to adapt more effectively to the diversity of situations in the field. While the improved functioning of UNHCR increased its efficiency, the degree of commitment of the international community to the refugee cause obviously remained the determining element for a solution.

35. It was the developing countries that were offering asylum to almost all the refugees. That burden grew heavier as their economies suffered from the continued deterioration in the international economic environment. The international community must therefore adopt an approach based on solidarity and equitable burden-sharing.

36. It was a regrettable fact that the refugee problem had become a permanent aspect of the international scene, and the question of possible solutions must be thoroughly examined. UNHCR sought to meet the immediate and pressing needs of the refugees while deploying praiseworthy efforts to promote durable solutions wherever possible. The search for durable solutions, however, should not lead UNHCR to overlook the priority needs of refugees in terms of emergency assistance. It should also seek to enable refugees to achieve a degree of self-reliance, to reduce their vulnerability and dependence. The High Commissioner's opening statement contained some positive elements which the Executive Committee should develop so as to guide the general policy of UNHCR with regard to assistance. The conclusions of the Meeting of Experts on Refugee Aid and Development (A/AC.96/627) likewise constituted an important contribution to the discussion of future UNHCR action.

37. Traditionally three possible durable solutions existed, voluntary repatriation being, generally speaking, the most appropriate. However, that solution could not be envisaged until the causes of the situation which had created the refugees had disappeared; and it must also be ensured that repatriation was, indeed, entirely voluntary. Once that condition was satisfied, the actual modalities of their return appeared relatively simple, as shown by recent cases such as Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Zimbabwe. In such cases, repatriation was linked to the global political solution of the original problem. His delegation was, incidentally, convinced that the political solution of the conflict in the Western Sahara would make it possible for the Sahrawi refugees in his country to return to their homeland, once the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the OAU had been implemented. In other cases, UNHCR could act as an intermediary for voluntary repatriation, as had been done in the case of the operation carried out in Djibouti.

38. The second possible durable solution was settlement of refugees in their first country of asylum or local integration, but that was difficult in the case of mass refugee movements. Where such flows were generated by a conflict resulting from foreign or colonial occupation, the victims remained profoundly attached to their country of origin, to which they wished to return once the causes of their departure had disappeared. Pending such a definitive solution, the host country and the international community had the responsibility not only of ensuring the survival of such groups but also of providing them with the infrastructure to live decently.

39. The third possibility was the resettlement of refugees in third countries: there again, the limitations were obvious in the case of mass exoduses. Furthermore, that solution might disrupt the cultural and ethnic identity of the population groups concerned, or lead to the break-up of families.

40. In the interim, UNHCR should act as a catalyst for international solidarity to assist the refugees through co-ordinated action based on equitable burden-sharing. The forthcoming second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa (ICARA II) should provide a suitable occasion for drawing up more effective policies to assist the refugees in that continent particularly in the poorer countries. The problem of assistance to refugees and development aid was nowhere more acute than in Africa, which continued to shelter more than half the world's refugees and contained a majority of the least developed countries. UNHCR's efforts to ensure the success of ICARA II were a source of satisfaction, as was the increase in the volume of assistance to Africa for 1984. However, that aid was far from meeting the needs of some 5 million refugees, and UNHCR should make a further effort to step up that aid, as requested in General Assembly resolution 37/197.

41. Countries of asylum, particularly developing countries, made great efforts to meet the needs of refugees. The participation of the international community was very often little more than symbolic and amounted to a very small part of the burden directly shouldered by the countries of asylum. For its part, his own Government had never failed to make its contribution to the refugee cause, within the bounds of its possibilities. It had offered asylum to more than 200,000 refugees, as well as hospitality to scores of thousands of victims of the Sahel drought. Its assistance to Sahrawi refugees alone exceeded 100 million United States dollars a year. It provided bilateral assistance to refugees in other countries, and contributed to the regular budget of UNHCR. It also sought to contribute to the solution of refugee problems at the regional level. Thus, at ICARA I, it had both deliberately refrained from submitting projects for refugees on its own territory, in order to favour the financing of projects of other African countries, and made a contribution to the trust fund.

42. The international protection of refugees was another crucial aspect of UNHCR's work. During the current year, refugee camps had once again been attacked in several parts of the world. It was most regrettable that the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection had not yet been able to reach consensus on the draft principles prohibiting military attacks on refugee camps, and to proclaim the unqualified principle that such attacks could never be justified. Besides constituting an act of aggression against the country of asylum, such attacks were a violation of the most elementary rules of international humanitarian law. UNHCR should pursue its efforts to find ways of guaranteeing the physical integrity and fundamental rights of refugees.

43. Mr. KAMYAB (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that, while emphasizing the humanitarian character of its work, the Executive Committee should not deal with the refugee problem in isolation without appropriate reference to its political context. The refugee problem was basically a political problem and the principle objective for all countries should be to eliminate the political root causes and enable the refugees to return to their homes.

44. The influx of Afghan refugees into the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan - since the Soviet military intervention more than 20 per cent of the total population of the country had fled - constituted one of the gravest refugee problems of contemporary times; it had changed the demographic equilibrium of his country and imposed an unprecedented economic burden, over and above that of the war-stricken displaced Iranians and more than 100,000 Iraqis that had been expelled.

45. Steps should be taken by the international community to share the burden imposed on the receiving country in terms both of the financial effort and of the necessity of finding a durable solution by creating conditions permitting the voluntary repatriation of the refugees. More particularly, it was imperative to end the wave of mass expulsion of refugees from Iraq to the Islamic Republic of Iran, and his delegation requested UNHCR to furnish a special assistance programme for such refugees.

46. On the subject of the protection of refugees, the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection had reached general agreement on draft principles on the prohibition of military attacks on refugee camps, but his delegation believed that it was absurd to call upon those who had committed a crime against humanity in Sabra and Chatila to join that general agreement.

47. The presence of 10 million refugees could be better understood in the context of the attitude of the Superpowers and some Western countries which were directly responsible for the aggravation of internal differences among third-world countries and sought to introduce instability within States or regions.

48. His delegation supported the efforts of UNHCR for ICARA II, and hoped that it would contribute to the well-being of the African refugees.

49. Mr. IJEWERE (Nigeria) said that a major improvement was taking place in the management of UNHCR, its organizational structure, flow of information, and programme delivery and in its relationship with the Executive Committee. One area of the humanitarian work of UNHCR, however, had yet to be given a concrete framework for a solution: the problem of providing international protection for refugees was threatening all the achievements of UNHCR.

50. While his delegation believed that national legislative procedures regarding the status of refugees were supreme, adhesion to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol would help in the application of their principles. His delegation also believed that the Office of the High Commissioner was in a position to assist with any national legislation concerning the determination of refugee status.

51. While there had been some hope at the thirty-third session of the Executive Committee of a solution to the burning issue of military attacks on refugee camps and settlements, the draft principles submitted by the Working Group on the subject had not obtained a consensus in the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection. Attacks were still occurring and new threats of such attacks were daily events. The Committee should spare no effort to reach a concrete decision on ways of prohibiting them.

52. With reference to the preparations for ICARA II, specific guidelines on contributions should be sent to the potential donor countries; a technical committee was advising the African countries concerned on the use of the guidelines for submission of projects. His delegation hoped that the attention of the international community, focused by the conference, would help to bring more understanding of the magnitude of the refugee situation in Africa at a period of serious social instability.
53. His delegation felt that the award of the Nansen Medal to President Nyere of Tanzania was a reassurance to African Governments that their efforts in shouldering refugee burdens were, in fact, appreciated.
54. Mr. ALESSI (Italy) said he welcomed the efforts made and results obtained by UNHCR in the sphere of international protection, but there was a growing need for durable solutions, particularly in the context of development aid to the countries of asylum. The report on Refugee Aid and Development (A/AC.96/627) provided a clear summary which would be enhanced by contributions from the Office of the High Commissioner and Governments. His own Government's commitment to development aid programmes was considerable, particularly in Africa. It would be happy to assist in the preparation of refugee settlement projects as part of the co-operation among the competent international organizations of the United Nations.
55. In its co-operation for development, his Government had included several programmes on behalf of refugees in various parts of the world. A total of more than 12 million dollars had been earmarked for programmes in Sudan, Uganda, Thailand, Somalia, Pakistan, El Salvador and Lebanon.
56. His delegation, which much appreciated the acceptance by the High Commissioner of most of the recommendations on management policy made by the United Nations Administrative Management Service (AMS) and the members of the Executive Committee, particularly in connection with a balanced rotation of personnel, an equitable distribution of vacancies, and the zero growth in the budget, considered that clarity was essential in personnel and administration matters.
57. The question of military attacks on refugee camps was one of the most delicate political problems facing the Executive Committee. It was regrettable that a consensus had not been reached, but it was to be hoped that one would prove possible in the future. The Committee could not but be aware that atrocities had occurred during the year under consideration, and the international community and public opinion would not understand its silence regarding episodes whose victims had been refugees. Moreover, a text adopted by the Executive Committee, reconfirming the principles which must be respected to ensure the predominance of humanitarian values, would be of great consequence. Those principles included the responsibility of the countries of asylum and of other States to ensure respect for the obligations deriving from the exclusively humanitarian function of refugee camps. That would imply the condemnation of all military attacks as a violation of the guarantees protecting refugees and the recognition of UNHCR's role in ensuring their safety. Without reconfirmation of those principles, the Committee's support for efforts to protect those helpless persons would have been a failure.

58. Mr. GREGORIADES (Greece) said that his delegation fully realized the difficulties facing the High Commissioner in a world economic situation in which donors tended to be less generous while refugee problems continued to pile up. The most practical way of dealing with those problems was, of course, through the application of durable solutions.

59. As for the activities of the High Commissioner in the field of protection, the report on military attacks on refugee camps placed the question in the right perspective. In dealing with the matter in the Executive Committee, care should be taken not to dilute the main issue, which was the protection of refugees, by qualifying that protection by conditions alien to the humanitarian nature of the problem.

60. The first positive results of the implementation of the anti-piracy programme in South-East Asia gave reasons to hope for its success in the future. As far as the problem of asylum-seekers in distress at sea was concerned, the solution should be sought in an equitable system of burden-sharing among the countries. The function of the DISERO Scheme proved the validity of that approach, and the programmes in question should be further expanded so as to attract the participation of additional countries.

61. The renewed emphasis on combining refugee settlement with development offered new avenues for the solution of refugee problems. That approach sought to transform what were originally emergency situations into constructive ventures conducive to the development of the receiving countries, although not all situations were susceptible to the same kind of solutions. The importance of finding durable solutions to the problem of refugees in Africa had been stressed in the preparatory work for the forthcoming ICARA II to which his delegation was looking forward.

62. The restructuring of the High Commissioner's administration and management policy had, for several years, been the object of extensive consideration by the Executive Committee, and his delegation was confident that the guidelines included in document EC/SC.2/15 would be implemented by UNHCR in a uniform way. Document EC/SC.2/15/Add.1 suggested that efforts should be made to correct the existing imbalance in the staffing of UNHCR. That could not, however, be a justification for overlooking a minimal representation on the High Commissioner's staff of countries which had been members of the Executive Committee since its inception.

63. Greece, with its long-standing tradition as a country of first asylum, was playing its part in the joint humanitarian effort both in terms of contributions to the regular budget of the High Commissioner and in its function as a receiving and transit point. Moreover, the contribution to the High Commissioner's assistance programmes by the European Economic Community was the second largest in 1982, quite apart from the national contributions of its member States.

64. Mr. LOPEZ OLIVER (Venezuela) said that his delegation, which welcomed the efforts being made to produce satisfactory documentation for the work of the Executive Committee, was able to support the ongoing initiatives of UNHCR in connection with the international protection and assistance programmes and gave special support to the programme concerning central American refugees.

65. As the international community was aware, his country was not only receiving refugees but making special efforts to deal with the root causes producing the problem. His Government was a member of the Contadora Group which was working towards peaceful solutions in central America. The relatively low figures for refugees in Venezuela given in the documentation did not fully reflect the factual situation, since refugees and asylum-seekers were entering the country with visas of all types and most of them had not found it necessary to seek the protection of UNHCR.
66. Although his country had not yet ratified its adherence to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, it was already complying with the norms laid down in them for the protection of refugees.
67. His delegation hoped that the Executive Committee would be able to reach a consensus on all the items of the agenda and particularly that of military attacks on refugees.
68. Mrs. CONTRERAS (Observer for Guatemala) said that her country had acceded to and ratified the international instruments concerning the status of refugees, and had taken all appropriate steps to establish contacts with the Office of the High Commissioner in order to obtain advice in that important sphere. The contacts that had been made and the recent visit by a high-ranking official from her Government to the High Commissioner showed its interest in co-operating with UNHCR, and she also wished to express her Government's thanks to UNHCR for its assistance in the search for durable solutions and, in general, for the humanitarian work it was doing.
69. Mr. TRINH VAN ANH (Observer for Viet Nam) said that his Government had adopted a series of measures to reduce illegal departures from the country and to facilitate the implementation of the Orderly Departures Programme. Consequently, for the first time the number of ODP departures had surpassed the number of so-called boat people; that progress clearly demonstrated the humanitarian policy and the goodwill of his Government. His delegation wished to express appreciation to UNHCR for its activities in Viet Nam, and to those countries of resettlement which had applied immigration regulations in a flexible way.
70. Viet Nam was both a country of origin and a country of first asylum as far as refugees were concerned. There were about 30,000 Kampuchean refugees in the country, to whom his Government has applied a policy in conformity with the accepted humanitarian principles, giving them the choice of resettlement in a third country, voluntary repatriation or local integration. His Government was ready to create favourable conditions for UNHCR and the resettlement countries to carry out the formalities for the departure of Kampuchean refugees who chose the first solution.
71. His delegation shared the concern expressed by the High Commissioner in the Report on the Resettlement of Refugees (A/AC.96/624) that many resettlement countries had applied increasingly restrictive selection criteria. That development had worsened the refugee problem and had, in many instances, encouraged illegal departures. It was imperative, therefore, that resettlement programmes be accelerated to meet the needs of refugees for whom resettlement was still the only durable solution.

72. Concerning international protection, his delegation welcomed the recommendations of the High Commissioner that countries of first asylum should observe the principle of non-refoulement, treat refugees in accordance with accepted humanitarian standards and ensure that refugee camps and settlements were, as far as possible, located at a reasonable distance from the frontier of the refugee's country of origin. It urged that those principles be applied to the refugee camps along the frontiers of the Indochinese countries, so as to contribute to the best safety of the refugees and to the return of peace and stability in the region.

73. It was regrettable that the Government of Thailand should have systematically exploited Kampuchean refugees for political and military purposes, as the International Herald Tribune had revealed in its edition of 14 August 1983. Under the pretext of helping refugees, it was using humanitarian aid to maintain and supply the Pol Pot regime and pursuing a policy of using Kampuchean refugees as a tool to destabilize Kampuchea. Vietnamese troops in Kampuchea were given strict instructions to refrain from attacking civilians and the allegation of attacks by Vietnamese forces on refugees were therefore unfounded.

74. On the question of the return of Kampuchean refugees in Thailand, the People's Republic of Kampuchea was prepared to negotiate for their voluntary repatriation through the intermediary of an international organization. In that connection his delegation welcomed the suggestion of establishing a dialogue between the country of asylum and the country of origin, so as to bring about a solution to that humanitarian problem.

75. Mr. NGO HAC TEAM (Observer for Democratic Kampuchea) said that, representing as it did a country ravaged by invasion and occupation, his delegation particularly appreciated UNHCR's efforts to relieve the distress of refugees. The coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea was especially grateful to Thailand and the four other ASEAN countries for their generous aid to Kampuchean refugees.

76. The main cause of the continuing flow of refugees in South-East Asia, both by land and by sea, was Viet Nam's aggressive and expansionist policy. So long as that policy remained unchanged, there was small hope of peace and stability in the area.

77. Problems relating to refugees outside the borders of their native countries were well known, but the no less tragic fate of millions of Kampucheans who were refugees inside their own country still required attention. For nearly five years, the population of Kampuchea had been suffering what amounted to genocide, resulting in the death of over 2 million persons and forcing many others to seek refuge in forests, mountains and remote villages within the country. Not all those people were capable of walking to the frontier in order to receive assistance. The burden upon the coalition Government in endeavouring to ensure the survival of such internal refugees was a very heavy one, and international assistance, channelled through the Government, would be very welcome.

78. In addition to conventional weapons, the weapons of famine and chemical warfare were being used against the Kampuchean population; aircraft were used to spray toxic chemical substances, shells filled with toxic gas were fired, and springs and watercourses were poisoned. At the start of the current rainy

season, the inhabitants of several villages in the province of Siemreap had been confined in strategic hamlets and forbidden, on pain of death, to engage in any productive activity. In January, March and April 1983, camps housing several hundred thousands of Kampuchean refugees had been attacked and the casualties - for the most part women and children - had amounted to over 200 dead and wounded.

79. Another, even more serious, problem was the Vietnamization of Kampuchea. Over 600,000 Vietnamese had settled in the country since 1978, especially in the most fertile areas. Those colonists were heavily armed, so that, for example, they were able to fire on any Kampuchean caught fishing in the lakes.

80. Far from paying heed to the voice of reason of the international community, the Vietnamese authorities were intensifying their crimes against the Kampuchean people. While forces were ostensibly withdrawn along one highway, reinforcements were brought up by another. There was no guarantee that, in the dry season which was beginning, attacks on camps on the frontier between Kampuchea and Thailand would not be resumed.

81. In the light of that situation, his delegation was obliged to express serious reservations with regard to the portion of the Report on UNHCR assistance activities (A/AC.96/620) relating to the problem of the so-called Kampuchean refugees in Viet Nam. At previous sessions, his delegation had already warned against the Vietnamese authorities' policy of passing off the long-standing Khmer minority living in southern Viet Nam and Vietnamese who had previously lived in Kampuchea as Kampuchean refugees, thus achieving the two-fold end of dispossessing those Khmers of their ancestral lands and attracting international aid towards the Vietnamese economy that had been bled white by the war in Kampuchea.

82. In that connection, he also wished to point out that development assistance in the area temporarily occupied by foreign troops in Kampuchea was not only likely to be seized by the occupying authorities, but might also confirm them in policies which the international community refused to legalize.

83. Lastly, he would refrain from commenting upon the statement made by the Observer for Viet Nam since it was beyond all reasonable comment.

84. Mr. WOLDEGIORGIS (Observer for Ethiopia) said that his Government greatly appreciated the close relationship and co-operation it had built up with the High Commissioner's Office. Recent developments in the sub-region had given Ethiopia an opportunity to intensify its already excellent co-operation with UNHCR. In particular, the establishment of a Tripartite Commission composed of the Governments of Djibouti and Ethiopia and UNHCR had led to a successful start in the voluntary repatriation of Ethiopian refugees from Djibouti. His Government was committed to the decisions reached by the Tripartite Commission and was determined to ensure the attainment of the goals it had agreed upon. The warm reception accorded to the repatriates from Djibouti had been witnessed by representatives of the international community, and the start of the repatriation process had been reported by the local and international press as being well-organized and successful and as setting a historical precedent which could lead to the eventual solution of the refugee problem in that part of the African continent.

85. With a view to creating favourable conditions for the repatriation of the refugees, his Government had issued an amnesty declaration for Ethiopian refugees in the Sudan in 1980 and set up a commission to receive, assist and rehabilitate returnees. In addition, the Ethiopian Head of State had appealed to all Ethiopians to return to their country and participate in its economic reconstruction. In 1980 also, the Government had issued an amnesty proclamation for Ethiopian nationals who had fled to Djibouti in 1977 and 1978; in 1982, that proclamation had been extended for a further period of two years. Under the proclamation, returnees were exempt from prosecution for any crime they might have committed for political reasons before leaving Ethiopia or prior to the date of their return. They were also to be granted assistance in resuming a normal life, and were entitled to resettlement and rehabilitation.

86. The Government had established reception centres at suitable locations in border areas and was meeting the refugees' basic needs such as food, shelter, medication, clothing, etc. Nine reception centres together with the necessary facilities had also been established in four administrative regions. Further administrative, legal and other measures to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Ethiopian refugees were under consideration, and an inter-ministerial committee was examining possible legislation with a view to expanding and expediting the process.

87. As a result of all those measures, in addition to those being repatriated from Djibouti, some 150,000 Ethiopians had already returned to their homeland, where a programme for their benefit was being implemented under the joint responsibility of the Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Commission and UNHCR. Hundreds more who were not included in the ongoing programmes were also returning.

88. As on many previous occasions, Ethiopia categorically rejected the numbers of Ethiopian refugees appearing in the Report on UNHCR assistance activities (A/AC.96/620) which were ridiculous and misleading in that it was suggested that the alleged number of refugees in Somalia was greater than the total population of their supposed place of origin. At the same time, he did not wish to deny the presence in Somalia of Ethiopian nationals taken there by force or attracted by free distribution of food across the border. A programme of free food distribution inside Ethiopian territory would, doubtless, bring the same people back to the Ethiopian side of the border.

89. All Governments claiming to harbour Ethiopian refugees were urged to follow the example of the Djibouti Government and enter into an agreement with Ethiopia and UNHCR, establishing the necessary tripartite commissions and working wholeheartedly towards the voluntary repatriation of the refugees in question. They should declare their willingness to conclude agreements of that kind and to allow the Ethiopian authorities to see and talk to their nationals wherever they might be. Those people could then be given a free choice between being re-integrated in their own society and staying in the country of asylum.

90. In the final analysis, of course, it was for each individual refugee to decide for or against repatriation, but the refugees should be given an opportunity to know the truth and to make their own independent decisions without

any pressure or coercion. As the High Commissioner had said, it was the Governments concerned and not the UNHCR that could make repatriation possible. In the case of Ethiopian refugees in Djibouti, that possibility had been created, above all, by the firm and positive position adopted by the country of asylum. The success of the repatriation programme had demonstrated that the Ethiopian Government and people held no grudge against Ethiopian nationals abroad but, on the contrary, welcomed them home and invited them to become part of Ethiopia's productive and peace-loving society. Other Governments in the region should also prove their good intentions and their commitment to peace and good neighbourliness by facing the historic challenge and alleviating the plight of the victims.

91. Thanks were also due to UNHCR and the international community at large for the assistance being given to spontaneous returnees to Ethiopia. Without the High Commissioner's appeal, Ethiopia, affected as it was by natural disasters and particularly by the current drought, would not have been in a position to offer any meaningful assistance to those returnees. The ongoing programme of UNHCR had resulted in the achievement of self-sufficiency for a considerable number of returnees and was continuing to gain momentum. There could be no doubt that many more Ethiopian nationals would be returning home in the near future. In that connection, he wished particularly to thank the Lutheran World Federation and the League of Red Cross Societies for their dedicated and enthusiastic work.

92. The predicament of displaced persons should be of no less concern to the international community than the problem of refugees and returnees. In Africa alone, the number of displaced persons was more than three times the estimated number of refugees in the continent, and almost twice the total number of refugees throughout the world. The plight of internally displaced persons was as grave as that of refugees crossing international boundaries.

93. In addition to caring for its own displaced persons, Ethiopia was also sheltering thousands of refugees from neighbouring countries, the most recent being an influx of 25,000 refugees into South-Western Ethiopia and a further 30,000 from neighbouring Somalia. Reports from the border areas indicated that the number of people crossing the Ethiopian frontier in search of asylum was increasing daily. That situation had been brought to the attention of the High Commissioner, and a joint mission consisting of Ethiopian Government officials, UNHCR representatives and foreign journalists had visited the area on 6 October 1983 to make a preliminary assessment of the situation.

94. The problems encountered by any host country were compounded when that country was, as in the case of Ethiopia, among the least developed, with inadequate resources to sustain its own economy. International assistance should ensure, as a minimum, that the refugees did not become an additional burden upon the host country. Accordingly, the Ethiopian Government had appealed to UNHCR and the international community for assistance in dealing with the new refugee influx.

95. Mr. TARAH (Observer for Somalia) said that, although the flow of refugees from Ethiopia to his country had slowed down of late, new arrivals continued to be reported every month. Some 700,000 refugees were currently living in the 35 camps set up by his Government, with the help of the international community, and about the same number or more were living in urban centres and rural areas. The distribution of food and specific non-food items to the refugees in the camps, also carried out with the help of the international community, was under constant review, and its smooth and correct operation would be further enhanced by the introduction of rationing by the Government.

96. The recommendation by the Goundry mission of 1982 that government ministries should be encouraged to increase their participation in refugee activities had been fully implemented in the health sector and almost all the voluntary agencies working in that sector had handed over their duties to a refugee health unit set up under the Ministry of Health. Although every effort was being made to ensure the good health of refugees in the camps, outbreaks of scurvy and malnutrition were still frequent as a result of inadequate food supplies. The tireless efforts of UNHCR, the World Food Programme and bilateral donors in that field were greatly appreciated, but the problem still required constant attention.

97. In the field of education, progress in the training of refugees had been achieved by the Ministry of Education, with the assistance of consultants from Denmark. While extensive efforts had been made in the water sector, many camps were still experiencing shortages in that vital area.

98. With a view to the promotion of self-reliance, some projects with emphasis on income-generating activities had been introduced into the camps, but most of them were still in their infancy. Nevertheless, a start had been made and it was hoped to make significant progress in 1984, given the necessary financial and technical assistance. Technical community development units were being set up at both the regional and national levels. Most of the refugees seemed to intend to remain in Somalia, and programmes including provision for educational and health facilities, land preparation and irrigation, and the upkeep and administration of camps had to be envisaged until the refugees became self-sufficient and were in a position to manage their own affairs. Settlers would be encouraged to participate in the programmes to the greatest possible extent, and efforts would be made to educate and organize them in order to develop local responsibilities and to reduce reliance on outside aid. It had been decided to invite an interagency mission to assist the Government in achieving those objectives.

99. In order to apply that new policy, the Government would continue to require from the international community, financial and moral support which, it hoped, would take the form of technical and material assistance during the period of the refugees' transition to self-reliance. The Government hoped to provide training for refugees in book-keeping and the keeping of administrative records and to promote their participation in the preparation and implementation of projects in every sector of the programme.

100. There was ample evidence that, in addition to the refugees living in the camps, there were many living in urban and rural areas and not receiving refugee assistance. Nevertheless, such facilities and services as the Government did provide in the camps were a great burden upon the country's fragile economy. He noted with satisfaction that the issue was to receive attention at ICARA II, which, it was to be hoped, would meet with more success than its predecessor. He appealed to the international community to come forward and provide funds for projects submitted to ICARA II, and announced that his Government was preparing submissions for the Conference.

101. With reference to the remarks by the observer for Ethiopia, he could not but deplore the fact that a regime responsible for uprooting vast numbers of its nationals should question the accuracy of figures quoted by the international refugee body.

102. In conclusion, he assured the Executive Committee that his Government, with the international community's co-operation, would continue to protect the refugees and promote their well-being until it was possible for them to return voluntarily to their homes.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.