



SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 29th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. NAVAJAS-MOGRO (Bolivia)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 86: SPECIAL ECONOMIC AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE (continued)
(A/43/3, A/43/399, A/43/402, A/43/457-E/1988/102, A/43/463-E/1988/106, A/43/480,
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(a) OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS DISASTER RELIEF CO-ORDINATOR (continued)
(A/43/375 and Corr.1-E/1988/73 and Corr.1)

(b) SPECIAL PROGRAMMES OF ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE (continued) (A/43/449 and Add.1 and
2, A/43/483, A/43/514, A/43/703, A/43/727)

1. Mr. N'GREGAI (Central African Republic) said that most delegations had referred to an improvement in international political relations and had noted that a similar trend was not yet discernible in current economic relations, which heavily penalized the developing countries, particularly those in Africa.

2. The Central African Republic, which was one of the least developed countries, besides being land-locked, could not on its own create and organize the conditions necessary for its reconstruction and development. That had been the reason for the adoption of the special programme of economic assistance to the Central African Republic, for which the Government had expressed its sincere gratitude to the international community. It had initiated a programme of economic and social recovery focusing mainly on the key development sectors such as health, education, agriculture and road infrastructure. A round table on the Central African Republic had also been held in Geneva in 1987 under the auspices of UNDP and with the participation of donors, since the efforts undertaken by the country, particularly in the area of structural adjustment, had earned it both bilateral and multilateral support.

3. However, the country's economic situation called for greater efforts if the Government was to have any hope of achieving its development targets. The collapse in the prices of the main commodities such as cotton and coffee and the consequent sharp fall in export earnings, the high proportion of the budget earmarked for debt servicing, the inadequate flows of external financing and exchange-rate fluctuations, were all factors impeding the improvement of the economy and the resumption of growth. The assistance of the international community was therefore essential, as stated in the Secretary-General's report on special programmes of economic assistance (A/43/483). It was for that reason that his delegation hoped that the easing of political tension and the desire to promote international economic co-operation would prompt the international community to support even more actively the efforts of countries such as the Central African Republic to stabilize their economies.

4. Mr. MANIKFAN (Maldives) expressed his appreciation to the United Nations system for its efforts in assisting developing countries confronted by natural disasters. He paid special tribute to the Secretary-General for the urgent attention he had personally accorded to the problems of Maldives. Coastal defence was a matter of the utmost importance for Maldives, since the average elevation of the islands comprising the archipelago was two metres above sea level. He recalled the extensive damage caused by the tidal swells in 1987. The main island, Malé, had been particularly hard hit in that one quarter of the urban land had been flooded and 30 per cent of the land reclaimed over the preceding seven years had been washed away. Harbours, breakwaters, boats and a number of houses had also been badly damaged. Crops and vegetation had been affected by saltwater encroachment. Throughout the country, beaches had been damaged, resulting in a loss of earnings for the tourist industry, one of the main-stays of the economy.

5. In addressing the General Assembly in 1986, the President of the Republic of Maldives had emphasized the disastrous consequences of a general rise in ocean levels for the world as a whole and for his country in particular. On that occasion, he had requested the generous assistance of the developed countries and international organizations in taking preventive measures. His delegation wished to express its sincere gratitude to those friendly countries and international agencies which had responded to that appeal, and in particular to the Government of Japan for the support which it was currently providing as part of a major coastal defence project. However, the assistance received thus far was far below the level needed even for the most urgent needs, let alone for a long-term strategy for the creation of a nationwide coastal defence system. Further resources must be mobilized in the near future simply to complete the work already begun. His Government was thus compelled to appeal again to the generosity of the international community. At the preceding session, President Mamoon Abdul Gayson had stated that the rich and developed countries were better equipped to deal with the consequences of a rise in the level of the sea. As the small countries were very vulnerable, they must concentrate their efforts on prevention. However, Maldives lacked the economic, technical and technological resources to undertake such large-scale action alone and to prevent a catastrophe for which it were not responsible.

6. As stated in the Secretary-General's report on special assistance to Maldives (A/43/703), his Government wished to organize a round table early in 1989 under the auspices of UNDP. At that meeting, it would submit a national plan of action defining the country's technical, financial and material needs. The donor countries and international organizations were invited to participate actively in that round table.

7. Despite its very precarious economic situation as a small, least developed island State, Maldives had always responded favourably to other countries' appeals for emergency assistance. It would continue to do so as far as its resources permitted.

8. In conclusion, he expressed the hope that the international community would contribute generously to assist his Government in repairing the damage caused by the tidal swells of 1987 and ensuring effective preventive measures for the future.

9. Mr. SEPELAK (Czechoslovakia) said that the introductory statement by the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator had reflected the growing involvement of the United Nations in the area of disaster relief and special emergency assistance.

10. His delegation wished to reiterate its support for the work done by UNDRO in keeping with its mandate. During the preceding year, Czechoslovakia had improved the procedure for reporting on its bilateral humanitarian and disaster relief assistance, as the General Assembly had requested in its resolution 41/201, and planned to improve the flow of information further. Document A/43/402 provided information on Czechoslovakia's economic and humanitarian assistance to developing countries, which had amounted to 1.03 per cent of the country's national income for 1987.

11. The new arrangements for implementing General Assembly resolution 42/433 did not imply any changes in the mandates of the relevant bodies of the United Nations system, including UNDRO. His delegation had taken note with interest of the joint UNDP/UNDRO task force established to work out improved mechanisms for co-operation in the area of disaster relief, disaster mitigation and recovery. The task force's report reaffirmed the guiding principles of United Nations efforts: respect for State sovereignty and the responsibility of recipient Governments for requesting and co-ordinating assistance. The report also contained a number of important suggestions for improving the co-ordination and dissemination of information.

12. His delegation had been a sponsor of General Assembly resolution 42/169, proclaiming the 1990s as the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. The information provided in the Secretary-General's progress report on that subject (A/43/723) confirmed the need to strengthen international co-operation in that area. Steps had already been taken within the United Nations to establish an effective framework consisting of the steering committee and the international ad hoc group of experts on the Decade. The participation of a highly qualified Czechoslovak expert was sure to contribute to the work of that group. His delegation believed that the group had an extremely important role to play in launching the Decade. Work should focus on the formulation of balanced recommendations and the achievement of a consensus. His Government was currently exploring the possibility of establishing a co-ordinating body for the Decade.

13. M. MAPSORO (Indonesia) said that the reports before the Committee on disaster relief and special programmes of economic assistance attested to the growing importance of humanitarian relief. They also showed that disaster relief was becoming increasingly international in nature and that UNDRO was being called upon to play a focal role in co-ordinating the efforts of the United Nations system. The biennium 1986-1987 had been particularly difficult for UNDRO. The number of emergency situations it had had to deal with had increased while its budget and staff had grown smaller. His delegation was encouraged to note that the General Assembly and the Secretary-General had reaffirmed the importance of the Office's mandate.

(Mr. Hapsoro, Indonesia)

14. The co-ordination of disaster relief was indeed the core of UNDRO activities. While the period 1986-1987 had once again been dominated by emergency situations in Africa, other disasters should also be noted: floods in Bangladesh, drought and locust infestation in Africa and the recent hurricanes in the Caribbean and Latin America. To be successful, relief operations must combine speed and effectiveness in mobilizing and co-ordinating resources, which was why the inter-agency consultation process was important. The post-operation evaluation procedure, carried out in consultation with all the parties concerned, including representatives of national emergency relief services, was another helpful mechanism.

15. UNDRO had a second function: disaster mitigation through prevention and preparedness. While less visible, disaster mitigation was growing in significance. In recent years, it had become clear that the effects of disasters had been far more pronounced in the developing countries than in the developed countries. Through adequate prevention and preparedness measures, those effects would be largely avoided. The countries of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) were well aware of that fact. Consequently, they had established the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre at the Asian Institute of Technology at Bangkok in 1986. In his introductory statement, the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator had described a counter-disaster campaign that would have three elements: an international strategy, international solidarity and efficient and co-ordinated action when a disaster occurred. His delegation believed that such an approach would prove both beneficial and cost-effective. The International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction would also promote prevention. One of the main goals of the Decade should be the closing of the gap in disaster and emergency information and knowledge between the developed and developing countries. Demonstration projects should also be developed during the Decade.

16. Disaster-related information, the third area with which UNDRO activities dealt, was likewise of the utmost necessity. To achieve maximum effectiveness, UNDRO must be able to collect, evaluate and promptly disseminate all relevant information. His delegation was pleased to note that the use of disaster situation reports (SITREPS) was becoming widespread, that the number of requests for information from national disaster offices had increased and that specialists were increasingly making visits to consult the UNDRO Reference Centre and Data Bank. His delegation also welcomed the recent establishment of an information network for international disaster management (UNDRONET).

17. Indonesia was no stranger to natural disasters, being situated in a volcanic region. Consequently, the country had special disaster-mitigation needs: early warning systems, enhanced preparedness, and training and education programmes. His delegation concurred with the Co-ordinator's recommendation that disaster mitigation strategies should be incorporated in national development plans. Such a project involving four ministries, had been implemented in Indonesia. Almost 200 national and preventional disaster management officials had already been trained. In addition, measures had been identified for inclusion in the country's next five-year development plan.

(Mr. Hapsoro, Indonesia)

18. Special assistance programmes had originally been created to respond to special situations which neither fell within the field of activity of a specific body nor were adequately co-ordinated. The fact that emergency situations had been seriously aggravated by the international economic crisis in recent years demonstrated the need for political will and assistance on the part of the international community. Moreover, it was significant that the relevant General Assembly resolutions had usually been adopted by consensus. Indonesia recognized the validity of such special programmes and emphasized that their purpose was to play a catalytic role for a limited period.

19. In conclusion, his delegation expressed, once again, its solidarity with the countries which had recently been stricken by severe natural disasters, in particular, Bangladesh, the Sudan, Jamaica, Nicaragua and Costa Rica. It also fully supported the special assistance to front-line States and other bordering States, in accordance with the recommendation of OAU, in document A/43/596.

20. Mr. DOUTOUM (Chad) said that the majority of the least developed countries, which included Chad, had tried to overcome the difficulties brought about by the world economic crisis, but the unfavourable economic environment and other negative factors, in particular various man-made or natural disasters, had made it impossible to mobilize all the resources necessary for the economic development of those countries.

21. The economic plight of Chad had been described in the Secretary-General's summary report on special programmes of economic assistance (A/43/483). In addition to the factors hampering its development efforts, Chad had been stricken by natural disasters which jeopardized the progress already made. After a prolonged drought, the heavy rains of July and August had wreaked vast material damage which would have a negative impact on the current crop year. Moreover, the locust threat was hovering over Chad once again: locusts had invaded the préfectures of Ouaddaï and Biltine and the regions of Batha and Kanem, which, given the absence of food reserves, could lead to another famine.

22. Chad therefore urgently required various forms of assistance from the international community. It had already benefited from the international community's very positive contribution to its national reconstruction. The Interim Plan for 1986-1988, presented at the round-table conference for Chad in 1985, was under way. Two follow-up sectoral meetings had been held in December 1987 and February 1988, for the agro-sylvo-pastoral sector and the transport and communications sector, respectively. The human resources and industrial sectors would be reviewed in 1989. In the meantime, his Government would organize, in co-operation with UNDP, a round table of donors for the reconstruction and development of the Borkou-Ennedi-Tibesti region. That round table was of major importance because the region had been laid waste particularly by the foreign military occupation and natural disasters. The recovery programme would include the following sub-programmes: development of palm groves; restoration of nomadic herding; environmental protection; repair of communication lines; restoration of postal service to the region; telecommunications and radio broadcasting;

(Mr. Doutoum, Chad)

reorganisation of social, educational and civil administration services; urban development; mining resources inventory; and study of rural improvement and development. His Government called upon friendly countries and international organisations to participate actively in that round table.

23. Having restored the main infrastructures, his Government had to consider development, on the basis of the guidelines laid down at the Geneva round-table conference in 1985. Chad would soon begin drawing up a four-year development plan for the period 1989-1992. As in the case of its reconstruction projects, it sought the assistance of friendly countries and international organizations. It hoped that the General Assembly would adopt a new resolution that would constitute the legal basis for all forms of assistance the co-ordination of which would be assigned to UNDP.

24. Mr. BAKOTONAIVO (Madagascar) congratulated the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator (UNDRO) for its continuing and untiring efforts to help countries which had been stricken by natural disasters. UNDRO had had to cope with an increasing number of grave situations in several regions of the world; nevertheless, as a result of the Organization's financial crisis, its resources had shrunk by 15 per cent and its capacity for action had been reduced by half. Initiatives such as the organization and dispatching of inter-agency missions and the rapid dissemination of information had often contributed to the efficient co-ordination and success of emergency relief. Accurate damage assessment was particularly important because it made it possible to determine objectively the level of assistance required. The Office had facilitated low-cost or free delivery of aid, but shipment to the disaster site itself could, with good reason, also require assistance because of the poor domestic transport facilities in certain countries. The study of the longer-term economic effects of a disaster and relief operations also deserved attention. Madagascar, which was very often stricken by natural disasters because of its geographical position, had to make plans in advance.

25. The General Assembly had decided to designate the 1990s as the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. Madagascar had noted with interest the action which the Secretary-General had taken by way of preparations for that Decade; the activities of the Panel on Tropical Cyclones, one of the regional bodies established by WMO, was an example of co-operation which was of interest to several countries in his region. Meeting in 1987 for its eighth session at Antananarivo, that Group had established a centre and two regional sub-centres, which would increase the capacity of the region to monitor and predict tropical disturbances. At the end of that session, the Panel had adopted a detailed regional co-operation programme whose implementation would require assistance from various sources, in particular UNDP. Madagascar had always been in favour of strengthening and streamlining the work of UNDRO, and had supported all proposals to provide it with a sound and sustainable financial basis. He expressed his thanks for the generous assistance provided when his country had been stricken by cyclones - a frequent occurrence - and reiterated his support for the special programmes of assistance to developing countries, in particular to the States of southern Africa which were against the racist régime.

26. Mr. BISTA (Nepal) thanked UNDR0 for its extensive assistance to Nepal during the violent earthquake which had hit that country on 21 August 1988. The disaster had resulted in 700 deaths, destroyed 66,000 homes and damaged 1,200 schools, roads and electrical installations; since Nepal had very limited resources, mobilisation of assistance had been difficult; its mountainous terrain had only added to the difficulties. The actual assistance phase was over and the phase of reconstruction was under way. Nepal thanked all friendly countries, non-governmental organisations and public and private donors which had offered assistance. UNDR0 had played a commendable role in co-ordinating emergency relief assistance; it had carried out its mandate in exemplary fashion. Its resources should therefore be strengthened, in particular in the area of disaster prevention and preparedness. Nepal supported the General Assembly's decision to designate the 1990s as the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (resolution 42/169) and hoped that it would succeed in bringing the problem of natural disasters into sharper focus. By their nature and dimension, natural disasters were a global problem and needed to be tackled through international co-operation; the United Nations had been very effective in sensitising public opinion to the various aspects of such disasters. However, those disasters were also regional in nature - for example, floods and droughts were common to several countries of South Asia - and UNDR0 could enhance its effectiveness by encouraging regional approaches towards mitigating the impact of natural disasters.

27. Mrs. DE WHIST (Ecuador) thanked the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator (UNDR0) for the assistance given to her country immediately after the earthquakes of March 1987, when direct damage to the economic and social infrastructure was estimated at \$185 million and indirect damage, at \$815 million. She had studied with interest the UNDR0 programme for Ecuador for the biennium 1988-1989, which included risk assessment in connection with various Andean volcanoes, hazard mapping, the setting up of early warning systems and devices for preventing landslides in mountain areas, risk assessment in connection with flooding and tidal waves in the coastal region, and the formulation of contingency plans. The Ecuadorian Directorate for Civil Defence was considering possible ways of contributing to the activities of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction.

28. A clear distinction should be made between two types of natural disaster. First, there were those caused by earth phenomena, which were impossible to predict accurately, but for which risks to the population could be assessed. Furthermore, contingency plans could be prepared, in the case of both assistance in the short term and relief operations on a much larger scale. The Office of the Co-ordinator had done commendable work in connection with that type of disaster, in terms not only of immediate assistance, but also of resource co-ordination and mobilization. The cut in the resources made available to it were therefore highly regrettable. The second type of "natural disaster" was attributable to human action which destroyed the natural ecological balance. It could be seen, for example, in the numerous calamities afflicting humankind, in encroaching desertification, drought and nuclear accidents. Such disasters, which could sometimes be even more serious than those caused by earth phenomena, called for immediate action because they were

(Mrs. De Whist, Ecuador)

linked directly with the development process. The activities of the Decade were quite clearly necessary for the well-being of humanity, and the Office of the Co-ordinator deserved all possible support.

29. Referring to the statement she had made under agenda item 82, she regretted that the poor quality of the interpretation into English, French and Russian had given listeners to understand that, so far as Ecuador was concerned, all peoples were responsible for the damage caused, which was quite the opposite of the position of the Latin American countries and of the members of the Group of 77. It was unfortunate that the interpreters relied exclusively on the text of the speech, instead of conveying what was actually said.

30. Furthermore, press release GA/EF/2348 in English contained errors of substance: she had not said that "the developing countries could not protect their small farmers from the erratic behaviour of the developed countries", but that "the developing countries could not protect their small farmers from the erratic behaviour of the world markets", which was altogether different. She hoped that such a mistake would not be repeated.

31. Mrs. BERTRAND (Austria) expressed appreciation for the efforts made by the United Nations in carrying out the special economic and disaster relief assistance programmes, and for the action taken by the Office of the Co-ordinator to solve economic and humanitarian problems in Afghanistan. At a time when the financial crisis was resulting in staff out-backs, and when natural disasters seemed to proliferate, the Office was endeavouring to focus its activities and streamline its operation, in other words, to pinpoint its specific functions. It had also made efforts to improve its co-operation and co-ordination with its partners inside and outside the United Nations system. It had taken steps, for example, to improve the International Disaster Management Information Network (UNDRONET). The ability of the Office to fulfil its mandate clearly depended, however, upon the willingness of other United Nations bodies to co-operate with it.

32. The report of the UNDP/UNDRO joint task force (A/43/731) showed that it was possible to establish clear-cut demarcation lines of mutual responsibilities. On the basis of its exhaustive list of recommendations and conclusions, it would be possible to move on to the next phase, the drafting of precise guidelines for UNDP staff at headquarters and in the field. Similar arrangements could be made with other United Nations bodies. Distribution of the evaluation reports on relief activities to all those concerned in an operation could help to improve the response capacity of the United Nations system and of its partners outside.

33. Nevertheless, however appropriate the administrative and technical arrangements, genuine progress could not be made unless there was increased awareness on the part of the international community, such as would be generated by the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, which must be carefully prepared. Furthermore, a more systematic and methodical approach must be adopted. She emphasized the importance of encouraging the developing countries to include in their development plans strategies for systematically mitigating the effects of

(Mrs. Bertrand, Austria)

natural disasters. Meanwhile, in accordance with the observations made by the Economic and Social Council in resolution 1988/51, UNDP could facilitate even further the integration of disaster prevention projects into national programmes, especially in disaster-prone countries. Ultimately, however, technical knowledge would not suffice, and international solidarity would continue to play a vital part in humanitarian disaster assistance.

34. Mr. AL-ERYANY (Yemen), speaking also on behalf of Democratic Yemen, emphasized the growing importance of special economic and disaster relief assistance for developing countries, a factor well reflected in the work of the Second Committee. In many countries, a deteriorating economic situation had been aggravated by natural disasters. That applied, in particular, to the Sudan, Bangladesh, the Philippines and Jamaica, while Africa had suffered from drought and locust infestations. The international community must find the ways and means to help those countries improve their peoples' lot.

35. Better international political relations would help to create a climate conducive to closer co-operation, which could also serve to improve economic relations, thereby increasing economic assistance to disaster-stricken countries. For the people of those countries, who faced urgent health and food problems the sympathy of the international community was not enough.

36. Yemen and Democratic Yemen welcomed the efforts made by the Organization in that connection, particularly the work of UNDRO which, they urged, should focus its attention on the study of sudden natural disasters, together with preparation and prevention measures, and on the collection and evaluation of relevant information, to be disseminated, as need be, at the international level.

37. Co-ordination should be enhanced between the donor countries and the competent agencies and specialized institutions, on the one hand, and the beneficiary developing countries, particularly the least developed countries, on the other, both bilaterally and multilaterally.

38. The assistance must be aimed primarily at strengthening economic structures in key sectors so as to enable the beneficiary countries to improve their situation, with the Governments concerned being able to maximize the impact of assistance by taking measures which matched the priorities of their economic and social plans. Yemen and Democratic Yemen welcomed the aid given by the international community to developing countries afflicted by natural and other disasters, and particularly to the Palestinian people in the occupied territories and to the front-line States in southern Africa.

39. Yemen and Democratic Yemen had had to face a critical situation because of the problems they had inherited from the previous régime and colonialism notwithstanding the natural difficulties they had encountered, they had endeavoured to build a State with the resources at their disposal thanks particularly to realistic plans; however, now they needed increased aid to improve the economic and social situation of their people.

(Mr. Al-Eryany, Yemen)

40. As for South Yemen in particular, it was essential that the United Nations bodies should continue to provide assistance, and also that the international community should increase its bilateral and multilateral aid in order to contribute to the implementation of economic and social plans in the light of the observations contained in the report of the Secretary-General.

41. Mr. WILLIS (United Kingdom) said that 1988 had been marked by an exceptionally large number of natural disasters which had wrought destruction on an unprecedented scale in South Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and Central America. The Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator was to be congratulated for its diligence in responding to calls for assistance following those disasters. However, UNDR0's resources had diminished, and complementary action was needed from the various agencies of the United Nations system. The close co-operation between UNDR0 and UNDP was a good example of that principle in action. During the debate in the Economic and Social Council his delegation had expressed the hope that the outcome of the work of the joint UNDR0/UNDP task force would be promulgated as soon as possible throughout UNDP's field network. His delegation therefore welcomed the steps that had been taken to co-ordinate the production of a disaster management manual and to organise inter-agency consultations on co-ordination within the framework of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination.

42. Co-ordinated action was one of the keys to the success of a strategy for disaster prevention and assistance. Since effective co-ordination depended on access to relevant, reliable and up-to-date information, the creation of the new international disaster management information network (UNDRONET) was to be welcomed.

43. The international ad hoc experts group preparing the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction had already begun to consider what contribution the international scientific community could make. The Secretary-General had established a steering committee for the Decade to help him to establish an appropriate framework for the achievement of its aims and objectives. Preparations for the Decade seemed to be going well. In many cases the knowledge that was required to secure improvements in forecasting and preparedness systems already existed; what was needed now was to apply that knowledge with discrimination and to consider how the United Nations system could play its critical catalytic role in support of the Decade.

44. Mr. CAHILL (United States of America) considered that the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator should act firmly and effectively in order to be able to respond to the ever increasing number of requests for assistance from countries which had been the victims of disasters. At a time of budgetary constraint, UNDR0 must have a clear understanding of its role and objectives, and must strengthen its capability and seek to manage its human and financial resources more efficiently and in a more cost-effective manner.

(Mr. Cahill, United States)

45. In that regard, the United States welcomed the increased co-operation between UNDRO and UNDP in the field. While welcoming UNDRO's efforts to improve its operations, the United States urged it to take more practical measures in implementation of General Assembly resolution 41/201. UNDRO's effectiveness would be enhanced if it reduced its headquarters' staff and devoted more of its resources to field work. It was also important that preparatory work on the International Decade for Disaster Reduction should not distract UNDRO from its basic task of co-ordinating relief.

46. During the 1988 financial year, which ended in September, the United States had allocated more than \$US 03 million in various forms of non-food emergency relief to the victims of more than 60 disasters in response to requests from some 50 countries. That humanitarian action had been possible partly due to substantial contributions from private and voluntary organisations in the United States.

47. The rapid increase in needs resulting from disasters over the past five years was truly alarming. The people of the United States would continue to help the victims of those tragedies. At the same time, the United States called on all countries, donors and beneficiaries alike, to co-operate with it and with the United Nations in seeking new means to reduce the vulnerability of disaster-prone countries and to increase their self-sufficiency and self-reliance in the face of future threats.

48. Mr. DUARTE (Cape Verde) said that the fact that the General Assembly had before it a number of requests for emergency assistance showed once again the weakness of the developing countries in the face of the devastating consequences of natural disasters. His delegation expressed its full solidarity with the Governments and peoples of countries affected by natural disasters and associated itself with the appeals made for international solidarity.

49. While acknowledging the positive role played by the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator, his delegation noted that the frequency and scale of the disasters required permanent structures for prevention and intervention at the national, regional and international levels. That required considerable human, technical and financial resources and it was therefore a matter of urgency to mobilize the attention of the international community.

50. His delegation welcomed the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 42/169 designating the 1990s as the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. It encouraged the international ad hoc experts group preparing the Decade to conduct its work with a view to establishing an appropriate mechanism in conformity with that resolution.

51. The locust and grasshopper infestation affecting a large part of the continent of Africa, including Cape Verde, was one such disaster. The situation in Cape Verde had been deteriorating steadily since March and had recently assumed alarming proportions. The Government had presented FAO with a request for urgent assistance which had yielded technical support for the national plant protection department

(Mr. Duarte, Cape Verde)

and had enabled the Government to enhance its national intervention capability. But the resources which had been mobilized were not adequate. Aerial spraying had to be organized, and his delegation was appealing to donor countries to increase their technical and financial assistance.

52. His delegation also hoped that the international conference on the locust and grasshopper peril which had been held in Fes at the end of October would contribute to drawing up a strategy for combating that plague which threatened to jeopardise the development efforts of the countries of Africa.

53. Mr. BABINGTON (Australia) said that his delegation was generally satisfied with the efforts made by UNDRO to mobilize emergency relief promptly and efficiently and to inform donors of sudden natural disasters. At the previous session of the General Assembly, his delegation had made detailed comments on document A/42/657, including two important points. On the one hand, it had emphasized the need to clarify whether UNDRO should improve its performance by, inter alia, focusing its activities on emergency relief, or by maintaining and strengthening its preparedness and prevention measures. Given the interest and priority which disaster-prone countries attached to disaster mitigation activities, it was important that such activities should be undertaken within the United Nations system in the most effective manner possible.

54. His delegation had also stressed the need to establish clear lines of authority within the United Nations system, especially with regard to UNDRO's role. It regretted that there had not been a more thorough discussion of the matter at the previous session. Nevertheless, document A/43/731, which reported on the progress made in establishing a focal point in the Office of the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation to ensure prompt and effective response by the United Nations system to disasters and other emergency situations, appeared to address many of his delegation's concerns about co-ordination.

55. His delegation was not convinced that the current division of responsibility between UNDP and UNDRO, particularly in relation to prevention, necessarily represented the most efficient use of the Organisation's limited resources. It was necessary to rationalise the assistance and co-ordination functions of UNDRO and the United Nations and to work out clear operational guidelines for the system as a whole. It was to be hoped that the Committee would consider the matter more thoroughly.

56. Mr. EL GHAOUTH (Mauritania) associated himself with the statement made by Tunisia, on behalf of the Group of 77, reaffirming the importance of UNDRO's role. The Committee was entitled to congratulate itself on the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 42/169, designating the 1990s as the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR). The appalling number of major disasters which had occurred in the world in 1988 fully justified the proclamation of that Decade.

(Mr. EL Ghaouth, Mauritania)

57. Noting that the Economic and Social Council, at its first and second regular sessions of 1988, had adopted resolutions on the locust and grasshopper danger which menaced the African continent, he expressed the hope that the Committee would adopt a substantial resolution on the matter. A number of conferences and seminars had been organised since the appearance of the scourge, and calls had been made by many different authorities not only for compassion on the part of the world community, but especially for a large-scale united effort to provide prompt and concrete financial and technical assistance.

58. For nearly a year, Mauritania had been experiencing a dangerous invasion of migratory locusts. As its geographical location and climate made it a potential centre of infestation, it had quickly mobilized its modest resources and had launched an appeal for international solidarity, which UNDR0 had disseminated throughout the world. Unfortunately, the international and regional solidarity effort had been neither prompt nor sufficient, and the steady progression of the scourge, which was growing to catastrophic proportions, seriously threatened his country's development. Massive action was urgently needed, and his Government had already taken a series of measures to strengthen its forecasting methods and ground eradication capabilities. It had also undertaken to enhance public awareness with a view to mobilising the population in the fight against locusts and grasshoppers, and had even called out army units. Nevertheless, his Government reiterated its call for international solidarity in helping it contain the disaster.

59. Mr. TANIGUCHI (Japan) said that after hearing of the untold loss of human life and the tremendous damage caused by all of the disasters which had occurred in the world in 1988, and realizing that a disaster could destroy in a flash 5 or 10 years of development efforts, his delegation was more than ever convinced that the United Nations should adopt a more direct approach to the problem of natural disasters.

60. In 1987, his country, itself disaster prone, had co-authored with Morocco the draft resolution on IDNDR (A/42/169). His delegation was pleased to see that progress had been made towards the launching of the Decade. He had had the honour of being invited to speak at the first meeting of the international ad hoc experts group for IDNDR, and the final meeting of the group was expected to take place in Tokyo in 1989. The group, which had discussed many important issues in the course of its two sessions, should continue its work; there were several broad areas which must be kept in mind in order to make the Decade a success.

61. First, it was important to fully utilize past lessons and experiences, for example by compiling a record of all past disasters, analysing them, and conducting case studies of the most serious ones. Reports should be prepared and kept in a central file by each country. Second, Member States should establish national committees to address the problem; his country had established such a committee in May 1988. Third, it was necessary to enhance citizen awareness. Following Japan's example, other countries could designate a disaster prevention day. The United Nations could also consider proclaiming an international disaster prevention day. International seminars and symposiums could also be useful, as could effective use of the mass media. Fourth, it was necessary to define the modalities of

(Mr. Taniguchi, Japan)

international co-operation, which would be largely technical in nature. The training of local personnel in charge of disaster prevention in developing countries would help to improve prevention systems. Fifth, an information network on natural disasters should be established for the developing countries. Sixth, it was necessary to develop an early warning system, and the information network referred to previously was essential in that regard. Seventh, emergency relief measures carried out by the United Nations system and bilaterally should be promoted. Finally, it was necessary to strengthen co-ordination among United Nations bodies for effective preparation and implementation of the Decade. The Steering Committee was playing a crucial role in that regard.

62. His delegation was pleased that UNDR0 had responded more actively to recent natural disasters, for example in Bangladesh. It urged UNDR0 to continue those efforts. A more active participation of bodies such as the United Nations Development Programme, the World Health Organisation and the International Red Cross, as well as the regional economic commissions, in the work of the international ad hoc experts group would be welcome.

63. His delegation was convinced that the world could mitigate the effects of natural disasters to a great extent, and that that was an area in which international co-operation was truly important and where the United Nations could play an essential role, especially in co-ordination. It intended to submit a draft resolution at the current session on preparations for the Decade. It would not be easy to finalize a useful and effective programme of activities, however, the United Nations, Governments and the scientific community must all work together on that unique joint venture. It was necessary to show that the United Nations was still a valuable organization which could meet challenges such as those posed by natural disasters.

64. His country was ready to make every effort, in co-operation with as many countries as possible, to ensure a successful start of the Decade.

65. Mr. FERNANDEZ (Philippines) said that UNDR0 had responded quickly to the request for assistance made by his country, which had recently been struck by a typhoon. That major natural disaster had left over 500,000 people homeless, half of them in the Manila region, and had caused considerable damage to the infrastructure. As a result, President Aquino had declared a state of emergency in the Manila region and in 36 of the country's 73 provinces. The Philippines was grateful to the Governments and organizations which had provided relief, and was confident that others would do likewise. The primary obligation to deal with natural disasters rested with national authorities. It was often difficult, however, for them to fulfil that obligation on their own, because of the magnitude of the relief requirements and the speed with which relief had to be provided. It was even more difficult when the country concerned already had economic problems. Fortunately, human compassion was never lacking when disaster struck.

(Mr. Fernandez, Philippines)

66. UNDRO had a satisfactory record in fulfilling its mandate, especially with regard to the mobilisation and co-ordination of relief, even though it could do more and much more needed to be done. For example, while it was possible to mobilise funds when a disaster occurred, it would be desirable to have them available in advance. In that connection, it was regrettable that UNDRO's budget for emergency grants had been reduced from \$US 360,000 to \$US 180,000 per year. UNDRO should give priority attention to disaster preparedness and prevention, and augment its efforts in that area, which would substantially reduce human suffering. It could, for example, disseminate information on the need to stockpile food and other emergency supplies, which could save many lives, and on the need to establish early-warning systems and prepare disaster contingency plans. Those were some of the activities for which UNDRO's expertise and advice could be of great benefit. All the parties involved in providing relief should carefully examine the problems identified during the post-operation evaluation carried out by UNDRO with the assistance of officials of the National Emergency Relief Services (A/43/375, para. 27). In view of the vital importance of co-ordinating relief programmes and assistance, there should be a smooth flow of information among the various relief agencies. It was also essential to establish mechanisms to ensure the quick launching of appeals for international assistance and to reduce the time between the provision and the utilisation of assistance. Instead of operating as though they were pursuing different objectives, national authorities and international agencies should co-ordinate their efforts so as to ensure timely and effective intervention. In that regard, he welcomed the decision to proclaim an International Decade for National Disaster Reduction.

67. Miss COURSON (France) said that, regrettably, she had been unable to give due consideration to the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of General Assembly decision 42/433 (A/43/731), because it had been circulated too late. While her delegation subscribed to the analysis by the joint UNDP/UNDRO task force of the mechanisms for co-operation between UNDP and UNDRO and of the agreements concluded with a view to improving co-ordination, it wished to lay emphasis on the following: first, the leading role of the UNDP resident representative or resident co-ordinator in evaluating natural disasters and co-ordinating relief; second, the importance of sound evaluations, revised on a regular basis to take account of changing relief requirements, so as to allow donor countries to respond effectively; third, the need to improve disaster-response training of field staff; fourth, the importance of prevention and preparedness projects, which in the case of disaster-prone countries, should be part of UNDP country programmes or part of a long-term development strategy; fifth, the need to establish, in respect of disaster-prone countries, close co-ordination among all the parties concerned. Her delegation also endorsed the arrangements made at United Nations Headquarters to enable the Secretary-General to fulfil his responsibilities in the event of a major disaster.

68. UNDRO played an important role in managing disaster-related information. It was performing that task effectively, despite its heavy burden, and was responding promptly to requests from countries, often under difficult conditions.

(Miss Courson, France)

69. France, which had been one of the sponsors of resolution 42/169 and was a contributor to the special trust fund for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, regretted that the very preliminary report on that question (A/43/723) did not permit a substantive discussion. Her delegation hoped that the report to be submitted to the General Assembly at its forty-fourth session, through the Economic and Social Council would make it possible to define the role of the United Nations system in the Decade.

70. Mr. GEBREMEDHIN (Ethiopia) welcomed the priority being accorded to disaster prevention and preparedness, and paid tribute to the Secretary-General for his efforts to implement resolution 42/169, concerning the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction.

71. Because of the many natural disasters that had occurred in recent years, it was imperative to strengthen the capacity of international organizations to assist the developing countries. In that connection, the next medium-term plan should include provisions to enable the United Nations system to take effective action when disaster struck. It was gratifying that efforts towards co-ordination had been made by UNDP and UNDRO. Also deserving of commendation was the launching of the international disaster Management Information Network (UNDRONET), referred to in paragraph 49 of the report of the Secretary-General (A/43/375).

72. Ethiopia had improved its national emergency response capability, and had established early-warning systems as a means of mobilising national efforts. However, it would need international assistance in improving its early-warning and preparedness mechanisms.

73. Mr. PAYTON (New Zealand) expressed his country's solidarity with those countries that had recently been struck by natural disasters. It was particularly distressing that natural disasters set back development and dragged down living standards, often destroying years of hard-won progress.

74. Co-operation went to the very heart of the item before the Committee. It was therefore important for the international community to give full support to the United Nations organizations mandated to assist with immediate relief, longer-term rehabilitation and disaster prevention. Those organizations must be fully aware of the need for effectiveness, system-wide co-operation and, most of all, tangible results.

75. It was regrettable that the report of the Secretary-General on special assistance to Maldives (A/43/703) was such a slim document. More information on the approach taken in strengthening the coastal defences would have been useful. A rise in sea-level was expected as a result of global warming. That threatened the very existence of Maldives, and it would have been appropriate to alert the international community to the gravity of the situation. His delegation hoped that further information would be made available during the current session, either officially or on an informal basis. It wished to be assured that the United Nations system was giving its full attention to the matter. In that regard, it was

(Mr. Payton, New Zealand)

worth pointing to the need for close co-ordination of information and action. The work being undertaken by UNDRO and UNDP was commendable, but UNEP, WMO and other United Nations organisations must also be involved from the outset to ensure that the full scope of the threat was acknowledged.

76. Those criticisms had been made with a constructive purpose in mind: an opportunity existed for the United Nations system to demonstrate its capability to assist one of its smallest Member States and its commitment to doing so. There was clear evidence that the Maldives and other low-lying countries were likely to be devastated by natural disasters; it was therefore important to ensure that the term "ecological refugees" remained an abstract concept rather than becoming a reality.

77. The increase in the number of natural disasters during the preceding year suggested that the work of the Co-ordinator's Office would continue to grow. It was thus of particular importance that UNDRO should avoid any duplication of the activities of other parts of the United Nations system. In that regard, the close co-operation which existed between UNDRO and UNDP was encouraging. UNDRO would never have adequate staffing or financial resources to meet all requests for assistance. It must therefore work to the fullest extent possible with UNDP and developing countries to ensure that adequate funding was made available through UNDP disaster preparedness and mitigation programmes. In that connection, he welcomed the decision by Sweden to fund a programme of fellowships for training in disaster relief, as well as the initiative to establish regional centres for disaster mitigation in Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific, which would draw on local experience, and the development of co-ordination with regional organisations.

78. It was regrettable that document A/43/723, on the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction had been issued too late to receive careful consideration; his delegation was, however, fully committed to the implementation of the Decade, proclaimed in General Assembly resolution 42/169, and hoped that it would be marked by close co-operation between the United Nations system, the international community, the private sector and the academic and scientific community. The United Nations system could act as a powerful catalyst for concerted action.

79. It was regrettable that document A/43/731, on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 42/433, had likewise been issued so late. His delegation fully supported the role assigned by the Secretary-General to the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation of overseeing the disaster relief, prevention and mitigation activities of the United Nations system. Co-ordination was essential if the various bodies within the system were to meet the expectations placed on them.

80. Mr. VILCHEZ (Nicaragua) recalled that his country, like many other Central American countries, had recently suffered from the most serious natural disaster in its history, Hurricane Joan, which had left 116 dead, destroyed over 20,000 houses and had seriously damaged the infrastructure. The damage had not yet been evaluated, but major sectors of the economy had been affected, particularly fishing, stock-raising and agriculture, particularly the cotton and sugar-cane

(Mr. Vilchez, Nicaragua)

crops. The people and Government of Nicaragua wished to thank the friendly countries and the United Nations system for their prompt response to the request for emergency assistance, provided through concerted action, which would enable them to tackle the problem and begin reconstruction. He also thanked the General Assembly for having adopted a draft resolution (A/43/L.19) on emergency assistance to Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama and other countries affected by Hurricane Joan, and paid a tribute to the Secretary-General for his efforts to mobilize the resources needed to help the stricken areas.

81. As natural disasters affected developed as well as developing countries, the international community and the United Nations system should work together to minimize their effects, the suffering and the destruction, thereby saving thousands of lives and establishing a more secure and more promising international system.

82. The role of UNDR0, which was essential, must be strengthened so that the international community could meet any challenge, present or future.

83. Mr. HASSAN (Sudan) thanked the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator for the assistance provided to the Sudan in connection with the various natural disasters that had befallen that country, from the drought in 1984 through the recent rains and floods. The establishment in the Sudan of a relief information and co-ordination support unit had strengthened the country's indigenous capacity for dealing with disasters and for disaster preparedness. The Co-ordinator had also responded speedily to the tragic plight of displaced persons, bringing it to the international community's attention, thereby obtaining the assistance of UNDP and, subsequently, the Secretary-General himself. In August 1988, UNDR0 had been the first United Nations agency to field a mission of experts to the Sudan to assess the situation. The reports issued by that mission had led the international community and the Secretary-General to send an inter-agency mission to the Sudan. In addition, the Co-ordinator had responded positively to the request of the newly formed Ministry for Refugees, Relief and Rehabilitation for assistance.

84. The Sudanese Government wished to reaffirm its support for UNDR0 and to draw attention to the need to strengthen its role as the focal point for disaster relief operations within the United Nations system so that it might carry out the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly.

85. Mr. ESSAAFI (United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator) expressed his appreciation for the support which the international community had given to his Office; it would inspire him to work even harder to accomplish his humanitarian task. He wished to assure delegations that their remarks would be given due consideration and reflected in his report. The International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction afforded an opportunity for heightening the international community's awareness of disasters and their devastating effects on countries. The widespread support for the Decade was a source of great encouragement and augured well for the Decade and its programme.

The meeting rose at 6.20 p.m.