



SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 9th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. DIALLO (Guinea)

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AGENDA ITEM 76: INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION TO AVERT NEW FLOWS OF REFUGEES: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.45 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 76: INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION TO AVERT NEW FLOWS OF REFUGEES: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (continued) (A/39/327 and Corr.1; A/SPC/39/L.4 and L.6)

1. Mr. ALLAH YAR KHAN (Pakistan) said that those countries whose policies and actions had caused refugees to leave their homeland should bear the moral and political responsibility for the problems caused by flows of refugees. The countries which gave asylum to refugees were justified in expecting the international community, particularly the more affluent countries, to share that burden by providing relief assistance. In that regard, he expressed satisfaction with the work done by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in mobilizing resources for the care and maintenance of refugees.
2. It was equally important for the international community to address the root causes of the problem and take preventive measures to ensure that flows of refugees were reduced to a minimum. His country attached great importance to the early completion of the task entrusted to the Group of Governmental Experts on International Co-operation to avert new flows of refugees. It was hoped that the Group would be able to make practical recommendations to the General Assembly.
3. Pakistan was providing shelter in its territory to nearly 3 million Afghan refugees, the largest single concentration of refugees anywhere in the world. Those unfortunate people had been uprooted from their homeland because of foreign military intervention. It was hoped that the day would come soon when foreign forces would be withdrawn from Afghanistan and the refugees would be able to return to their own land in safety and honour.
4. There were hundreds of thousands of refugees in South-East Asia who had fled their homeland because of foreign military intervention and persecution. Countless other refugees in southern Africa had been forced to flee their country to escape the policies of apartheid and colonialism of the racist Pretoria régime. Millions of Palestinians had been driven from their homes through the aggressive and expansionist policy of Israel. Millions of people in Africa had been uprooted because of political factors and natural disasters.
5. It was, therefore, evident that the basic causes of flows of refugees were political in nature: military intervention, occupation, colonialism, racism, apartheid, the use of force, denial of the right to self-determination and violation of human rights. The response of the international community would also have to be political. As long as powerful nations continued to resort to the use of force against weaker States, the problem of refugee flows would increase. The solution was to ensure full respect for human rights and the norms of international conduct in accordance with the Charter and international law. Those norms included the principles of non-use of force, non-intervention and non-interference, the sovereign equality of States and the peaceful settlement of disputes.
6. Lastly, his delegation expressed satisfaction at the progress made by the Group of Experts and supported the extension of its mandate for another year. It was hoped that, in preparing its study, the Group would duly reflect the primary importance of political factors causing the flow of refugees.

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7. Mr. SIBAJENE (Zambia) reaffirmed his delegation's support for the mandate of the Group of Governmental Experts on International Co-operation to Avert New Flows of Refugees. The Group should continue its efforts to elaborate comprehensive guidelines to enhance international co-operation. Such guidelines should be based on the root causes of flows of refugees in order to find a permanent solution to the problem. The countries of asylum must provide refugees with food, shelter and social services. Zambia, where there had been thousands of refugees for almost two decades, was fully aware of the severe economic and social problems caused by the influx of refugees.

8. His Government expressed satisfaction with the humanitarian efforts of the United Nations and the international community in alleviating that burden. He commended the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in that regard.

9. The international community must take steps to eliminate refugee problems caused by racial discrimination and foreign domination or occupation. The refugee situation in southern Africa was caused to a large degree by the apartheid policy of Pretoria and the illegal occupation of Namibia. South Africa had created political and social instability in that region and posed a serious threat to international peace and security. A greater effort should be made to bring about the independence of Namibia and eliminate apartheid in South Africa. The international community must show the necessary political will and must strictly observe the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations. Although humanitarian assistance to refugees and countries of asylum was certainly important, the problem could be solved only through the return of the refugees to their homes in safety and honour.

10. Mr. GATERA (Rwanda) said that the 10 million refugees throughout the world constituted a very heavy economic, humanitarian and political burden for the countries of asylum, particularly when they were developing countries. That was especially true of the African countries, which had fragile economies and which were sheltering more than 4 million refugees.

11. Rwanda had always dealt with its refugee problems with scrupulous respect for the corresponding provisions of the Charter and of the relevant international instruments. In that connection, he expressed appreciation for the tireless efforts made by the United Nations, which were reflected, for example, in the convening, on two occasions, of the International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa (ICARA). Rwanda had actively participated in both Conferences.

12. His Government believed that new plans of action should be adopted in order to improve the conditions of refugees throughout the world and to support the economic infrastructures of the countries of asylum. To that end, every country must display the necessary political will for the strengthening of co-operation and the establishment of dialogue based on good-neighbourliness and peaceful coexistence. His Government had always supported any effort to prevent the massive flow of refugees and, accordingly, had been a sponsor of every draft resolution submitted on that item since the thirty-seventh session. Moreover, his delegation would continue to support the search for a lasting solution to the refugee problem.

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13. Mr. COSTA (Portugal) said that the refugee problem had always been a source of profound concern for the Government and people of Portugal and that his country had supported the establishment of the Group of Governmental Experts. Unfortunately, the refugee problem had continued to grow.

14. The diverse causes of new flows of refugees included some factors which were outside human control, but others were frequently political in nature and required appropriate political solutions, elaborated and executed by Governments and by the international community as a whole. The search for such solutions must be pursued in accordance with the principles of international relations, such as non-use of force, non-interference and the right of peoples to self-determination, and in conformity with the relevant international instruments.

15. Countries of asylum, which were often developing countries, must not be subjected to political pressure and obliged to bear economic and social burdens, because other States were unable to guarantee the rights or fulfil the aspirations of their own peoples. Moreover, the massive flows of refugees often threatened not only their independence and integrity but even their very existence.

16. Portugal had always co-operated in efforts to solve the problems created in that regard and, despite its financial limitations, had actively participated in ICARA II. It was also one of the main contributors to the UNHCR programmes.

17. His delegation had carefully reviewed the report of the Group of Governmental Experts (A/39/327 and Corr.1 and 2) and recognized that, considering the complexity of its task and the divergent interests of its members, it had made considerable progress. The magnitude and the implications of the refugee problem required the urgent adoption of tangible measures, and his delegation therefore hoped that the General Assembly would extend the mandate of the Group of Governmental Experts.

18. Mr. SASORITH (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that there were many different causes of flows of refugees in the modern world. The three countries of Indo-China were still feeling the effects of the war of foreign aggression, the record tonnage of bombs dropped by the United States Air Force and the spraying of noxious defoliants.

19. Statistics still did not fully reflect the economic effects of the human and material damage caused by those criminal acts. Moreover, strategic colonialism, in which a territory and its inhabitants were used as a military springboard, included forced urbanization. In an agricultural society, the country concerned thus became dependent on a rich consumer society and that, in turn, created an unskilled and untrained younger generation. The imperialists, hegemonists and reactionaries were trying to prove that, even if peoples could win a war of national liberation, they would eventually be defeated by economic warfare.

20. In his country, some 700,000 people had been displaced by strategic colonialism. The thousands of people thus uprooted could not achieve self-sufficiency and were therefore dependent on United States aid. He pointed out that, before the war, the country had exported a considerable amount of rice.

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(Mr. Sasorith, Lao People's
Democratic Republic)

21. Against that background, the total liberation of the country in 1975 had inevitably been accompanied by countless difficulties. The brain drain and outpouring of manpower, brought about by carefully orchestrated psychological warfare, had been devastating for his country, particularly in the face of its enormous reconstruction needs. The continuing outflow of refugees was being cleverly maintained by systematic capitalist lies, particularly from Thailand, the capitalist bastion in Asia.

22. Through their economic blockade and their creation of a war scare, aided in that endeavour by the Chinese hegemonists and expansionists, the reactionaries among the Thai ruling circles had sought consistently to bring his country to its knees. Recently, they had committed an act of aggression and had occupied three Lao villages in an attempt to paralyse every recovery effort undertaken by the Lao people, who wished merely to live in peace with their neighbours. Every inch of national territory was sacred, and no violation could constitute a "minor incident". Moreover, almost all the inhabitants of the three Lao villages had been forcibly deported to Thailand, where the reactionaries of the extreme right were shamelessly claiming that they were "refugees" who had voluntarily left their villages. His Government vigorously condemned that criminal action.

23. Refugees from the three countries of Indo-China, particularly the boat people, faced enormous dangers at the hands of nature and professional pirates as well as from the military or the police responsible for monitoring their movements. Despite both international and governmental anti-piracy programmes, from one third to one half of the refugee boats had fallen prey to pirates, and thousands of people had been killed or raped or had disappeared.

24. It was his Government's policy to accept the voluntary repatriation of all its nationals, in small groups, and excluding those who had been found guilty by its courts. He pointed out that international assistance intended for the some 130,000 refugees in camps in Thailand was often scandalously diverted.

25. Despite all the difficulties and thanks to the dedicated efforts of the High Commissioner for Refugees, more than 2,000 Lao refugees had been able to return since 1980. In the first six months of 1984, 140 persons, some of them from the United States, had already returned. A great many more had come back through their own means. They were all being reintegrated into Lao society under the auspices of the High Commissioner, in close co-operation with the relevant national committee, and were given the necessary land and agricultural equipment to produce rice, cotton, sugar cane or tobacco. The same assistance was provided to refugees from Kampuchea fleeing the genocidal Pol Pot régime, many of whom wished to settle in his country.

26. In conclusion, his delegation believed that a solution to the tragic refugee problem would be greatly facilitated through the establishment of a more just and more equitable new international economic order. However, only the political will of the international community as a whole, together with a perception of the common destiny, would bring about a lasting solution.

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27. Mr. SIMENI (Nigeria) said that collective international action, which alone could avert new flows of refugees, should not be restricted to paying lip-service to the principles of human rights but should consist of measures to give practical effect to those principles.

28. While appreciating the complexity of the task facing the Group of Governmental Experts, his delegation had nevertheless hoped that the Committee would have been able to consider its final report at the present session. Since that had not been possible, and in view of the seriousness of the situation that had led to the convening of the Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa, his delegation thought that there was no alternative but to extend the Group's mandate, as provided for in draft resolution A/SPC/39/L.4, in order to enable it to hold two more sessions during 1985 and to submit its final report to the General Assembly at its fortieth session. The Group should complete its work in 1985 even if it meant postponing its adjournment until all members could agree on the final report.

29. Mr. SHEHATA (Egypt) said that an effective international response to the problem of massive flows of refugees required a co-ordinated approach to both causal and remedial aspects. States experiencing large-scale influxes were entitled to receive from other States, either directly or through such bodies as UNHCR, co-operation in providing assistance and in arriving at lasting solutions.

30. Action at the international level required a number of simultaneous approaches with a view to identifying causes, developing guidelines for the conduct of States in order to avert new flows of refugees, and monitoring situations that might result in such flows in order to take timely preventive action. Any such guidelines developed should respect internationally recognized principles of human rights and, in particular, the right of refugees to return to their homelands. They should also ensure that, in the event of armed conflict or military occupation, inhuman policies and practices were not adopted. They should protect the victims of armed conflict, who should be allowed to seek the assistance of the competent international bodies pending a permanent solution.

31. Massive flows of political and economic refugees were largely a twentieth century phenomenon. They had challenged the general principles of international law and custom and had forced a re-examination of the basic tenets of international instruments relating to refugees. For host countries, flows of refugees caused destabilization and political and security problems and hindered development.

32. The international community had begun to realize that the trend was for large-scale refugee problems to increase rather than diminish. They were not temporary dislocations calling for ad hoc measures, but enduring elements of the contemporary world system calling for productive solutions. The composition and distribution of the refugee population had also changed, about 98 per cent of all refugees being in developing countries and one half of them in Africa alone.

33. Many third-world refugee flows had their origin in development problems, with the accompanying political instability, civil strife and inequality. The refugee issue was, therefore, increasingly a part of the North-South debate.

(Mr. Shehata, Egypt)

34. Unless the international community could agree on a coherent and far-sighted policy on massive flows of refugees, the entire international system and the human rights of individuals could be seriously undermined. The ideal of the equal distribution of wealth and power could not be achieved in a world where individuals fled from underdeveloped or oppressive States. It was not in the interest of the international community to allow such negative aspects of underdevelopment to persist, since they not only led to massive flows of refugees but also to overall instability, dissatisfaction and political inequality among States.

35. The international community might deal with the problem by reaching agreement on the principles governing State responsibility for massive flows of refugees, by devising a formula for the equitable sharing of burdens imposed by them, and by carefully scrutinizing their root causes with a view to improving international response. In spite of the difficulties involved, a start had been made in formulating the basic idea that States had no customary right to order the mass expulsion of groups of people for discriminatory reasons. Carefully planned development aid could be effective in eliminating the underlying causes themselves.

36. Refugee problems were, in general, so deeply embedded in intractable political and diplomatic issues that the refugees themselves became little more than expendable pawns. The realization by the international community that massive flows of refugees constituted an international problem that would not go away perhaps represented one small step towards its solution.

37. His delegation firmly believed that the extension of the mandate of the Group of Governmental Experts, with the full participation of the experts from the least-developed countries, would contribute to the successful accomplishment of its task.

38. Mr. MOONYANE (Lesotho) said that his country had a long tradition of receiving refugees and integrating them into its society. The massive influx of refugees into Lesotho in recent years, however, had made it clear that the approach to the whole question was inadequate. The problems encountered were immense. As a source of friction in Lesotho's foreign relations, the refugees had at times been attacked by foreign forces. Resources had been stretched beyond the limit. His Government's relief efforts and the invaluable humanitarian assistance of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other United Nations agencies must be supplemented with international and domestic action to cope with the root causes of the refugee problem.

39. The number of refugees throughout the world continued to increase. It was essential, therefore, to adopt a new approach in dealing with the problem. The report of the Group of Governmental Experts showed that some modest progress had been made in co-ordinating international co-operation.

40. In southern Africa, the flows of refugees had been caused by the continued illegal occupation of Namibia and the apartheid system of Pretoria. The unconditional withdrawal of South African troops from Namibia and an end to racial discrimination in South Africa would eliminate the two major causes of massive flows of refugees into neighbouring countries.

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(Mr. Moonyane, Lesotho)

41. The strict observance of the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other States and compliance with international instruments such as the Charter of the United Nations and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights would do much to eliminate the problems caused by flows of refugees. That whole question should be given further consideration. His delegation, therefore, had joined the sponsors of draft resolution A/SPC/39/L.4 and called for its unanimous adoption.

42. Mr. SHAHABUDDIN (Malaysia) said that his delegation was a sponsor of draft resolution A/SPC/39/L.4, which would extend the mandate of the Group of Governmental Experts and enable it to complete its work. He hoped that that draft resolution could be adopted by consensus.

43. It was incumbent upon the international community not merely to provide humanitarian assistance to refugees but also to find ways and means of dealing with the root causes of the refugee problem. While it was true that natural calamities were a major cause, millions of people had been forced to flee their homes as a direct result of foreign aggression and the occupation of their homelands, as had been the case in the Middle East, Afghanistan and South-East Asia.

44. The denial of basic human rights also contributed to the refugee problem; in southern Africa oppressive racist policies had forced many to flee; in South-East Asia, the boat people had taken flight in search of freedom and a better way of life.

45. States which, on humanitarian grounds, offered temporary shelter or transit facilities did so at considerable political and economic cost to themselves. Despite the commendable response of the international community with relief and other material assistance, including the resettlement of refugees in third countries, host countries inevitably suffered from the political and economic overspill of refugee problems.

46. His delegation believed that guidelines on international co-operation to avert new flows of refugees should take into consideration such basic causes as failure to observe the principles contained in the United Nations Charter, such as those of respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of States, and the peaceful settlement of disputes.

47. Mr. FISCHER (Austria) said that there was growing acceptance of the idea that an attempt should be made to undertake a preventive approach to the problem of large-scale flows of refugees. That was an important first step in the right direction. It was hoped that in the future both the humanitarian aspects of the problem and its root causes would be considered. In that regard, he expressed satisfaction with the approach adopted at ICARA II. In addition to assistance programmes dealing with existing refugee problems in Africa, emphasis had also been placed on measures designed to prevent future large-scale refugee flows. A similar approach should be taken with regard to cases of massive flows of refugees elsewhere in the world. Once the root causes of that phenomenon were given the same priority as humanitarian measures, it would be possible to take concrete steps to prevent such flows of refugees in the future.

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(Mr. Fischer, Austria)

48. It was gratifying to note the progress made by the Group of Governmental Experts. With regard to chapter III of the comprehensive review dealing with the circumstances causing new massive flows of refugees, it was particularly gratifying to note that a consensus had been reached on the inclusion of a paragraph reaffirming the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other existing international instruments relevant to the responsibility of States concerning new flows of refugees. His delegation was optimistic about further progress in the consideration of chapters IV and V of the review. Lastly, he pointed out that his delegation was a sponsor of draft resolution A/SPC/39/L.4.

49. The CHAIRMAN announced that Australia, Canada and Luxembourg had joined the sponsors of draft resolution A/SPC/39/L.4.

The meeting rose at 12.10 p.m.