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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME

Thirty-fifth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 369th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 9 October 1984, at 10 a.m.

Chairman:

Mr. MEBAZAA

(Tunisia)

CONTENTS

General debate

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4)

1. Mr. ROBERTSON (Australia) said that during the past year Australia's refugee and humanitarian resettlement programmes had been extended to provide new homes for thousands of people from South-East Asia, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Africa, South Asia and Latin America. Australia's contribution might appear small in relation to the scale of refugee and humanitarian problems throughout the world, but it perceived its growing involvement in other regions of the world as an important commitment to the concept of international burden-sharing.

2. In order to illustrate Australia's approach, he would refer particularly to the refugee and humanitarian problems in Latin America. The Australian community's interest in and concern about Latin America was not new. Its efforts to provide a new home for people who could no longer live in safety in their own countries dated back to events in Chile in 1974. The present situation in the volatile region of Central America had been brought to the attention of the Australian public through visits by the Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs to Mexico, El Salvador, Costa Rica and Argentina, where he had held discussions which had enabled him to report to the Australian Parliament his general impression that Australia's Central American programmes were valuable, carefully managed and correctly targeted. Broad refugee policies for the region would, however, continue to recognize that local solutions, including local resettlement of displaced persons, remained the preferred solution.

3. In approaching the Latin American situation, Australia believed that resettlement should be limited to small numbers whose lives were at risk, a realistic approach based on the following principles derived from its experience of refugee problems in recent years: recognition that some major outflows of people had a variety of causes and that only some of those concerned would be fleeing actual persecution which engaged the attention of UNHCR; recognition that the aspirations of many of those leaving their countries could not and should not always be covered under the UNHCR mandate; recognition of the very real and legitimate concerns of countries in regions experiencing influxes of population, and of their concern to limit their responsibilities where, for example, economic motivation might be involved; finally, recognition of the need for the international community to strive, through mechanisms and forums other than UNHCR, for solutions to the problems giving rise to mass outflows. Underlying those principles was the belief that unregulated mass population flows might gravely destabilize regions and exacerbate regional and political tensions, institutionalizing populations which lacked viable social or economic structures and the status or capacity to realize their aspirations for a secure and peaceful future.

4. The problems of Latin America illustrated very clearly the difficulties confronting the international community in attempting to alleviate the plight of the refugees and to achieve durable solutions which were, after all, the culmination of all the Office's activities. In Central America - and wherever there were flows of refugees - a UNHCR presence was the most effective means of facilitating international protection for refugees and ensuring efforts towards durable solutions.

5. The question of military and armed attacks on refugee camps and settlements had been raised two years ago. It was then, and remained, a problem of repeated occurrence. Failure by the Committee to agree on a statement condemning those

attacks would be most regrettable and might be interpreted as indicating a lack of resolve on the part of the international community to respond in a forthright manner to a matter of serious humanitarian concern. While his delegation appreciated the range of perspectives that needed to be accommodated, it regretted that the Sub-Committee on International Protection had not yet been able to agree on a text of conclusions.

6. The Central American situation demonstrated also the importance of an interplay of regional and international responses to refugee problems. The generosity displayed by countries in the region, such as Mexico and Costa Rica, in admitting mass inflows of refugees and displaced persons had been striking, as had been the number of countries that had ratified the Convention and Protocol. There was general consensus that resettlement was not the appropriate solution to such population displacements. Voluntary repatriation when circumstances changed or, in some cases, local settlement must be the preferred solutions.

7. The link between refugee aid and development assistance was vital; like many countries offering refuge in Africa and Asia, Central American countries had their own serious economic and development problems, which were aggravated by the heavy burden imposed by refugees. The international community had accepted its obligation to assist not only by relieving the burden but also by ensuring that the long-term development of the country was not jeopardized and his delegation looked forward to the Committee's deliberations on refugee aid and development assistance.

8. The Central American situation had highlighted the invaluable role of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations; he noted with appreciation the role performed by the Inter-governmental Committee for Migration in meeting the problems posed by population displacements.

9. The humanitarian needs of refugees should be separated from political polemics and be addressed calmly and objectively. All too frequently, the presence of refugees had become politically contentious and a further obstacle to peaceful settlements.

10. UNHCR's mandate required it to protect and assist those deemed to be refugees and one aspect of its task was assistance to a growing number of States in assessing individual claims to refugee status. Australia had instituted some years ago a refugee determination procedure not only to deal with landed claimants to refugee status but also for selecting people overseas for refugee resettlement in Australia, in order to preserve the integrity of assistance programmes and mechanisms for refugees. Australia believed that the 1951 Convention itself provided for such distinctions which were important safeguards for States experiencing or likely to experience a mass influx, if they made such assessments within procedures developed by the Executive Committee. Australia was prepared to face up to the corollary of those procedures, namely, that people with unsubstantiated claims might be required to return to their country of origin. Against that background, it wondered why there were constraints in implementing the procedures. They had not been implemented or apparently contemplated in the context of the massive outflow from Indo-China.

11. His Government believed that refugee resettlement programmes should not perpetuate outflows or displacements which could seriously destabilize particular regions and add to political tensions. In the South-East Asian region, there had been a growing realization that resettlement could not provide the only answer and might indeed serve to perpetuate population displacement. There were 260,000 Khmer currently gathered along the Thai-Kampuchean border who were regarded as still being within their country of origin and therefore not refugees. Surely, third-country resettlement of those persons would not help efforts to secure a safe and peaceful future for Kampuchea.

12. Resettlement of course played a valid part in solving the Indo-Chinese refugee problem and Australia continued to maintain a generous capacity to resettle persons who met its refugee intake criteria. He drew attention to the High Commissioner's reference to the need for a favourable climate of public opinion in determining the ability of States to respond positively to refugee situations. In a time of high unemployment and serious economic recession, minority views were likely to surface. It had happened in Australia, but his Government had made it clear that there would be no surrender to minority pressures calling for the reduction or termination of some refugee programmes.

13. Australia commended the objective of the proposed Rescue At Sea Resettlement Offers scheme and the question of participation in the scheme was under serious consideration. The tragedy of loss of life at sea had highlighted the importance of developing and expanding the Orderly Departure Programme inside Viet Nam.

14. His delegation had listened with particular interest and sympathy to the High Commissioner's description of arrangements to provide emergency assistance to those who had sought sanctuary on Papua New Guinea's border with Irian Jaya. It noted the progress in recent discussions between the Indonesian and Papua New Guinea authorities and hoped that the High Commissioner would remain alert to the possibility of making a further contribution.

15. Much had happened during 1984 to develop a broader understanding of refugee problems. ICARA II had helped to establish the complementary roles of refugee aid and development assistance. The Conference had, however been overshadowed to some extent by disturbing incidents in the field of international protection. There had been instances in which the principle of non-refoulement had been disregarded or more restrictive policies adopted towards the granting of permanent asylum. There had also been a tendency for countries of first refuge and those of origin to agree on repatriation programmes without the involvement of UNHCR. In such circumstances, the voluntary nature of the return movements could not always be guaranteed.

16. His Government had welcomed recent initiatives by UNHCR aimed at strengthening nourishment policy and devolving authority to the field. Australia supported the principle and goal of the job classification exercise, but would have preferred the resulting proposals to have concentrated more on improving the professionalism of UNHCR, rationalizing its structure in accordance with its broadened responsibilities and facilitating rotation of staff and the devolution of authority to the field. The numbers and levels of women within the UNHCR secretariat required continuing attention. The discussion on the subject in the Sub-Committee brought to mind the need for special emphasis on assistance to refugee women. Their needs and responsibilities should figure more prominently in UNHCR documentation and current programmes. His Government appreciated UNHCR's commitment to the improved management of emergency situations and in particular the special training of UNHCR staff and operational partners. It had noted with interest the current UNHCR effort to improve and extend emergency response capability by entering into agreements with specialist disaster and emergency bodies of member countries.

17. Mr. HUSLID (Norway) expressed his Government's particular satisfaction that the Nansen Medal had been awarded to three American seamen for the rescue of Vietnamese refugees in distress at sea. It hoped that the award would focus attention on the problem of the rescue of asylum seekers in distress at sea and set an example which would contribute to an increased respect for basic human rights and full adherence to international maritime conventions.

18. The High Commissioner's programme might seem to have reached a level of consolidation, but the world's refugee problems was still extremely grave. Genuine efforts toward durable solutions for refugees had yielded positive results in most continents, and it was encouraging to note the greater emphasis given by UNHCR to durable solutions. Large numbers of refugees had been voluntarily repatriated or resettled, although a major proportion of the remaining refugees would have to find durable solutions in the countries of first asylum.

19. He welcomed the positive follow-up of the initial discussion on the connection between refugee aid and development. The process should lead to the integration of refugee aid into the development planning of the host countries and of bilateral and multilateral development organizations. It was gratifying that UNHCR and UNDP had agreed on a set of guidelines for co-operation on development activities for refugees and other agencies and organizations should follow suit. Most of the countries hosting large refugee or returnee populations would require additional resources for settlement schemes, for income-generating activities and for strengthening their economic and social infrastructures. Further progress had been made in that direction at ICARA II, at which his country had pledged an additional 15 million Norwegian kroner (about \$2 million) for refugee programmes in Africa and had indicated its preparedness to finance development projects for refugees in Africa with an additional \$2 million. Five such projects had been identified, and negotiations with the authorities of Botswana, Tanzania, Kenya, Sudan and Zambia would start shortly.

20. Norway made the highest per capita contribution of any country to the High Commissioner's programmes and its contribution in 1984 would amount to Nkr 110 million, an increase of nearly 25 per cent over the previous year. In addition, it was carrying out a rather costly national resettlement programme. Norway would continue its strong commitment and financial support to UNHCR in the years to come. His delegation also wished to draw attention to the valuable contributions by various Norwegian voluntary agencies, in particular the Norwegian Refugee Council and the Norwegian Church Aid, both as donors and executing agencies.

21. The international protection of refugees was a vital element in the High Commissioner's mandate. His delegation deplored strongly the recent serious incidents and it considered that every effort should be made to prevent their recurrence.

22. The Executive Committee had dealt at length in 1983 with the problem of military attacks on refugee camps, but had failed to agree on a set of principles. His delegation hoped that the existing differences of view as to how some of the principles should be formulated could be overcome and the principles adopted as soon as possible. What was important, however, was to ensure that military attacks on refugee camps did not occur and that in the future any such attacks would incur the unanimous condemnation of the international community.

23. Protection measures continued to be urgently called for in other situations. As highlighted by the High Commissioner, refugees in distress on the high seas were not only exposed to the natural elements but also to increasingly brutal pirate attacks. There were also reports that distress signals were ignored and that ships passed by without offering assistance. His Government welcomed the decision of the Royal Thai Government to extend the Anti-Piracy Agreement with UNHCR; Norway contributed Nkr 1 million to the extended programme, and also provided an expert for temporary assignments. Norway had also pledged support to RASRO; until the scheme

became fully operative, Norway would maintain its guarantees for all refugees rescued by Norwegian vessels. In addition to boat refugees received in Norway, a large number of other Indo-Chinese refugees had been accepted on grounds of family reunification under the Orderly Departure Programme and from camps in South-East Asia. His Government had also decided to admit an additional quota of 100 family reunification cases from camps in South-East Asia for refugees with more remote family links with refugees already in Norway.

24. Recent regrettable incidents involving not only individual cases of refoulement but even violations of the rights of large groups of refugees through their expulsion by the country of asylum appeared to indicate a diminishing respect for international instruments for the protection of refugees. The High Commissioner, supported by the Executive Committee, should always be the guardian of international instruments of protection.

25. He was pleased to note that the High Commissioner's Office, in response to requests from the Executive Committee, had raised the programme delivery rate to 96 per cent in 1983. That figure, surely unique in a United Nations context, had however reduced the traditional carry-overs to the following year's budget, so that UNHCR was in urgent need of additional contributions and an early payment of pledges.

26. His delegation could accept the proposals contained in document A/AC.96/639/Add.1, since they implied a strengthening of important professional posts in the field, but did not consider the proposed upgradings of top level posts at Headquarters to be justified.

27. In conclusion, his Government greatly appreciated the work undertaken by the High Commissioner as well as the intergovernmental and voluntary humanitarian organizations like ICM, the Red Cross and various national NGOs, who were the High Commissioner's partners in the actual implementation of his programmes for refugees.

28. Mr. PRASONG SOONSIRI (Thailand) expressed his Government's appreciation of the role and activities of UNHCR under the dynamic leadership of the High Commissioner. Although the efforts of UNHCR to provide assistance to refugees around the world were truly praiseworthy humanitarian activities, the refugee problem could only be effectively tackled at its source. As long as oppression and persecution of human beings on political, ideological or religious grounds continued, the influx of refugees from one country to another would continue.

29. Thailand had borne the heaviest burden in the South-East Asian region as the country of first refuge. Since 1975, it had granted temporary refuge to 614,128 Indo-Chinese refugees, providing shelter, medical services and security; in some cases it could even be said that the refugees received better treatment than many Thais. The burden for a small developing country with limited resources and many domestic problems of sheltering some 600,000 refugees was indeed a heavy one, with serious repercussions on its political, economic and social structures as well as on its national security. Although a large number of refugees in Thailand had been resettled in third countries, the remaining caseload of refugees was still very high and the reduction rate of the number of refugees in the camps appeared to be falling. At the present time, 125,859 Indo-Chinese refugees were still in Thailand, while more than 250,000 Kampuchean, scattered along the Thai-Kampuchean border, were bound to spill over into Thailand if their camps were attacked by Vietnamese troops.

30. Despite a slight improvement in the resettlement rate in 1983, the marked increase in the number of Laotian refugees entering Thailand in the preceding eight months was a matter of major concern to the authorities. If the trend continued, at least 15,000 Laotian newcomers could be expected by the end of the year. Inevitably, as in the past, Laotian refugees would have difficulty in finding resettlement countries and more and more of whom would remain in holding centres in Thailand.
31. Since the state of war between Viet Nam and Laos had ceased long since, the question was why the people of those two countries continued to flee. Was it because of economic hardship, deprivation of fundamental human rights, or oppression of the people by State officials? So far as the Kampucheans were concerned, one of the factors was the "Vietnamization", or colonization, of Kampuchea under which Vietnamese had been resettled in Kampuchea and the country's administration taken over by Vietnamese officials. Life must have become so unbearable for Kampucheans that many of them had decided to flee to Thailand which was why the number of Kampucheans along the border continued to swell.
32. Thailand had had to cope with other groups of refugees, too, including Burmese, Vietnamese and Karens, all of which placed an added burden upon Thailand. Mindful of its humanitarian responsibility, the Thai Government had granted temporary refuge to those people until such time as they could return to their homes.
33. The majority of Indo-Chinese refugees appeared to have opted for resettlement in third countries. Recently, however, large numbers had been rejected as many resettlement countries now applied rigid selection criteria. It seemed that Thailand must stand alone in continuing to accept its humanitarian responsibilities. One of the disadvantages of such rigid criteria was that false hopes were raised when refugees were interviewed and promised resettlement. The refugees, having been given a hope did not wish to return home. The voluntary repatriation programme for Indo-Chinese refugees had been at a virtual standstill because of lack of interest on the part of the Indo-Chinese Governments. Despite UNHCR's efforts following agreement in principle with the Government of Thailand in 1981 on the programme, no progress had been made with voluntary repatriation for Kampuchean refugees in holding centres. The Vietnamese and Phnom Penh regimes were uncooperative and sought to use the repatriation issue for political ends.
34. Tens of thousands of Vietnamese land refugees, passing through Kampuchea, had arrived at the Thai-Kampuchean border, and hoped eventually to be resettled in third countries. Repatriation was not possible for them, and 3,174 were living along the border. For humanitarian reasons, Thailand had allowed approximately 9,000 of them to resettle in third countries since 1980. Hundreds of Vietnamese army defectors had also fled to Thailand. While the Thai authorities had no objection to countries accepting Vietnamese civilians and army defectors for resettlement, it considered there should be some assurance that once they were allowed into Thailand to await resettlement they would not be left there as an added burden on Thailand.

35. It had recently been noted that among people seeking refuge in Thailand were so-called economic refugees in search of a better life in a third country. The Thai authorities believed that close interrogation would reveal which individuals were genuine refugees and which were economic refugees. Genuine refugees would come under UNHCR auspices, while economic refugees would be dealt with in accordance with the local law. Only in that way would it be possible to deter those who were not genuine refugees from coming to Thailand.

36. The fate of the genuine refugee was far worse than that of the economic refugee, particularly since the former regularly came under military attack from Vietnamese troops in Kampuchea. During the attacks on refugee encampments along the Thai-Kampuchean border in 1983, shelters, a hospital, and a school built by international organizations had been destroyed. In 1984, Vietnamese troops had again attacked refugee encampments when there had been 450 casualties and an influx of 83,500 Kampucheans had sought temporary refuge in Thailand. In addition, 2,600 Thai villages had been forced to evacuate their homes.

37. Such occurrences caused the Kampucheans immense suffering. In addition to bearing the burden of being a first asylum country Thailand also had the task, in co-operation with UNDRO and ICRC, of assisting Kampucheans living along the Kampuchean side of the border to safety inside Thai territory. As a result of close co-operation and forward planning, there had been fewer losses in the attacks in 1984 than in previous years. Such brutal military attacks were in flagrant violation of humanitarian principles and should be condemned by the international community. So long as countries continued to disregard the principle proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations and used force to intimidate or attack weaker nations, it seemed pointless to lay down principles regarding protection.

38. Another issue that had attracted much attention was piracy. His Government's policy was to combat piracy in co-operation with the UNHCR through the special Anti-Piracy Programme. That programme had once again been renewed for a further year since its value in enhancing the capabilities of the Thai authorities had been generally recognized. Under the programme, acts of piracy had been reduced by 50 to 60 per cent in the past two years.

39. It was, however, a matter of great concern to his Government that the Western media frequently misreported the piracy problem in the Gulf of Thailand. The facts of the matter were that Thailand had, since 1975, provided assistance to hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese refugees who had landed on its shores. The vast Gulf of Thailand was not Thailand's domain alone. Other States bordered upon it; the fishermen who fished in it were of various nationalities and those who committed acts of piracy might be any one of those nationalities. But such pirates posed a serious threat and his Government had undertaken to put an end to all acts of piracy.

40. Lastly, the responsibility for the daunting tasks which lay ahead could be entrusted to no other organization than UNHCR, whose staff had amply demonstrated their readiness, over the years to make personal sacrifices as well as their effectiveness in performing their duties. His delegation thanked all the members of the international community and of the various international and charitable organizations involved for their assistance in seeking a solution to the refugee problem in Thailand.

41. Mr. ANGELS (France) said it was clear from the report on UNHCR assistance activities (A/AC.96/639) that UNHCR had managed to cope with most of the problems, and his delegation fully endorsed the results achieved. His Government noted, in particular, the significant work undertaken in two fairly new areas of activity, Africa and Central and South America. It considered that the activities undertaken there, which ranged from emergency assistance to voluntary repatriation, should be treated as a matter of priority and trusted that with further aid from member States they would be extended.

42. The report also underlined the need for durable solutions. His Government was favourably disposed towards such solutions, particularly when they took the form of voluntary repatriation. The main objective, particularly in South East Asia, should be to enable refugees to return to their own homes. That, however, required negotiations at government level to guarantee the security of refugees after resettlement and, for most of them, that goal was far from being achieved.

43. With regard to special programmes, results for 1983 had been significant, particularly in the case of the return of the Bolivian refugees, a programme to which France had contributed. France had also decided to contribute to the special repatriation programmes in 1984 involving Argentina and Laos. There was also the Cambodian programme and the question of the resettlement of refugees who had spent many years in Thailand. Sooner or later the countries concerned would have to endeavour to solve that problem.

44. The results of ICARA II had been encouraging and had made it possible to pinpoint needs and determine what resources would be required to meet them. France had decided to spend 7.5 million francs on development projects in Angola, Ethiopia and Sudan and those projects would also help to solve the refugee problems of the countries concerned.

45. One area with which his country was particularly concerned was South East Asia. France had admitted almost 125,000 Indo-Chinese refugees since 1975, on the basis of criteria of family reunification and ties with France, and was ready to pursue its endeavour. It was also prepared to continue to take part in the DISERO plan for refugees in the Gulf of Thailand and was considering the modalities of its participation in the RASRO scheme.

46. France also believed that UNHCR's efforts to combat the scourge of piracy in the Gulf of Thailand should be supported and had pledged 1 million francs to the programme in 1985. It trusted, however, that there would be no recurrence of the incidents that had undermined its credibility.

47. The report on assistance further underlined UNHCR's financial difficulties. Despite its difficult economic situation, France would ensure that its financial contribution was not eroded.

48. The other fundamental aspect of UNHCR's work was protection of refugees. The question of military attacks upon refugee camps had already been debated at length at the Committee's previous session. Since that time, the Committee,

working through a small group, had been endeavouring to conclude the work, with a view to enabling UNHCR to ensure more effective protection of the refugees in the camps. Needless to say, his Government had never failed to condemn publicly such attacks.

49. As to asylum, France was proud that it had always been ready to receive those who, when persecuted or threatened in their own countries, had sought refuge elsewhere; it regarded the 1951 Geneva Convention as a valid and comprehensive basis, specifying as it did the conditions to be met by those who aspired to the status of political refugee. Obviously, however, there was need to guard against a spate of applications for refugee status when such applications did not comply with the stipulated conditions. His Government had launched a plan of action to expedite the consideration of applications for refugee status by the bodies required to apply the provisions of the Geneva Convention. An initial series of decisions had served to strengthen both the staff and operations of the departments concerned with the protection of refugees and stateless persons as well as of the final Appeals Board.

50. Another aspect of international protection concerned the assistance rendered by the host country to refugees to enable them to resume a normal life and to facilitate their integration. The Office of the High Commissioner had convened a seminar on the question in 1983, and the High Commissioner's views on the matter would be welcomed.

51. Lastly, the documents before the Executive Committee made it clear that not only was a tribute due to UNHCR and its staff both at headquarters and in the field but that an attempt should also be made to provide UNHCR with the resources it needed so urgently. He congratulated UNHCR on its efforts to manage its finances more efficiently and to perform its duty of protection by a geographical redeployment of its staff. In that way, in the years ahead, UNHCR's activities could grow and adapt to the changing needs of the times. In that global endeavour, France, in keeping with its traditions, would be ready to play its rightful role.

52. Mr. van SCHAIK (Netherlands), referring to the High Commissioner's report and Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/643), said that although the legal basis for international action on behalf of refugees had been strengthened, the High Commissioner's international protection function had become very difficult in certain areas.

53. The problem of armed attacks on refugees camps and settlements was of particular concern. His delegation hoped that the Executive Committee would be able to agree on a set of principles governing the protection of refugees and was still convinced that Mr. Ewerlöf's proposal for a draft text reflected the required balance between the responsibilities of the various parties concerned. It wished to emphasize the need to ensure that UNHCR had access to refugee camps.

54. Pirate attacks at sea continued to be a serious problem. However, the UNHCR-Royal Thai Government Anti-Piracy Programme should be able to function with greater efficiency owing to the improvements proposed for the current year. For its part, the Government of the Netherlands had conferred with the Royal Thai authorities and had decided to pledge \$200,000 to the Programme.

55. The initiative taken by UNHCR to inform the international community of the odyssey of 84 boat people, 68 of whom died of starvation before arrival in the Philippines, their distress signals having been ignored by some 40 passing ships, had helped to remind shipmasters and shipowners of their obligation under international law to rescue asylum seekers in distress at sea and the award of the Nansen medal to three American seamen was a tribute to the many who had continued to recognize their legal and humanitarian duty towards boat people.

56. His delegation urged those countries which had not yet done so to commit themselves to the RASRO Scheme, in order to facilitate an early start of the trial period.

57. The debate at the thirty-fourth session of the Executive Committee had focused on durable solutions. Voluntary repatriation was the most desirable durable solution, provided that the States concerned would agree to allow UNHCR to verify the voluntary nature of the repatriation. The existence of a prior bilateral agreement between the country of asylum and the country of origin concerning the safety of the returnees should not constitute an impediment to verification by UNHCR. In that context, UNHCR should be fully enabled to monitor the planned repatriation of asylum seekers from Papua New Guinea to Indonesia. The success of the High Commissioner's programmes for voluntary repatriation from Djibouti to Ethiopia and from Zaire and Sudan to Uganda was encouraging. Recent repatriation movements to some Latin American countries, notably Argentina, should also be considered as a promising development.

58. ICARA II had been a success in terms of the Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by consensus and the pledges made. It had also made a valuable contribution to the ongoing discussion on the relationship between refugee aid and development. In addition to its pledge of \$2 million to the UNHCR general programmes for Africa (A/AC.96/639), his Government was currently engaged in consultations on the formulation, financing and implementation of some "5 C" projects designed to benefit both refugees and the local population.

59. ICARA II had been convened in a spirit of solidarity, not only with the millions of African refugees, but also with African host countries which, in spite of their extreme poverty, had offered their traditional hospitality by granting asylum to refugees from other African countries, in the conviction that the African continent must solve its own refugee problems.

60. His delegation regretted that there had also been cases of forced repatriation of refugees by some African countries. In one country, in particular, large-scale refoulement had taken place repeatedly. Measures of refoulement often appeared to be based on a fear of compromising relations between countries of asylum and countries of origin. The fact that the granting of asylum was defined in article 2 of the 1969 OAU Convention as a peaceful and humanitarian act which should not be regarded as unfriendly by any member State and that the principle had been reaffirmed in the ICARA II Declaration should therefore be stressed.

61. His delegation appreciated the fact that meetings of independent experts, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations had been organized by UNHCR with a view to clarifying the interrelationship between refugee aid and development assistance. It stressed the importance of additional, practical initiatives, such as the UNHCR/World Bank project in Pakistan, and welcomed the consultations with specialized development agencies and, in particular, the realization of the agreed set of "Guidelines for UNHCR/UNDP Co-operation".

62. The success of the High Commissioner's "Principles for Action in Developing Countries" (A/AC.96/645/Corr.1) would depend on their implementation. Special attention should be paid to on-the-spot co-ordination and the most practicable procedures should be followed, adjusted to the needs of the local situation.

63. His delegation endorsed the High Commissioner's general approach to the problem of the irregular movement of refugees from countries of first asylum to more remote countries of second asylum and hoped that he would soon elaborate his ideas on the question. Resettlement should be resorted to if dictated by the circumstances, although as such it was the least desirable of durable solutions.

64. His delegation shared the High Commissioner's concern about the institutionalization of the Indo-Chinese refugee problem. His country would continue its efforts to alleviate the plight of those people. It was also prepared to accept Vietnamese refugees rescued at sea by Netherlands ships. A modest resettlement quota would also be established and a flexible policy applied in emergency cases. In that spirit, at the High Commissioner's request, his country had recently resettled a significant number of Vietnamese land refugees from Phanat Nikhom.

65. His delegation wished to commend the High Commissioner and his staff on having undertaken the classification of all staff posts. Although his delegation supported the proposed upgrading of the field staff and the lower echelons at headquarters, it reserved judgement on a possible upgrading of higher posts in Geneva pending submission of clearly outlined recommendations by the High Commissioner.

66. It welcomed the improvement in the rate of programme implementation and the more rapid programme delivery and wished the High Commissioner success in his further efforts to improve the management of his Office both in Geneva and abroad. It agreed that the field structure in asylum countries needed to be strengthened. A further shift of scarce resources might be made from Headquarters and European offices to field offices in areas most affected by refugee problems.

67. Thus far, in 1984, his country's general and specific contributions had amounted to some \$6.5 million. In view of UNHCR's substantive and urgent needs, his authorities were prepared to consider any possible project proposals for additional funds for the current year. Voluntary programmes would be continued and a special programme would be set up in Central America, in addition.

68. In conclusion, his delegation wished to pay a tribute to the High Commissioner and his staff for their competence and devotion, often in extremely difficult situations.

69. Mr. CHIBA (Japan) noted that the total number of refugees, throughout the world, was approximately 10 million, one refugee for every 450 persons. The refugee problem affected not only the refugees themselves but the international community as a whole, which should therefore pursue the task of tackling it energetically. The mass exodus of refugees was caused by a multitude of both man-made and natural reasons, as attested to by the situation in Africa where the prolonged drought was worsening an already terrible situation.

70. The Indo-Chinese refugee problem, however, was the one of most immediate concern to his own country. Although the number of refugees in South East Asian countries had declined from approximately 200,000 at the end of 1982 to 160,000, some 4,000 refugees still entered those countries every month. Ten years after the problem had first developed in its present form, it continued to cast a dark shadow over South-East Asia. In Thailand, there were some 130,000 refugees, approximately 90,000 of whom had been there for over four years. Many others were the target of armed attacks upon their camps. Refugees from the countries of Indo-China were a political, economic and social burden not only for Thailand but also for other neighbouring countries.

71. It had frequently been said that voluntary repatriation was the best long-term solution to the Indo-Chinese refugee problem. In that connection, his delegation regarded the repatriation to their homelands under UNHCR arrangements of some 2,500 Laotian refugees, and some 14,000 Djibouti refugees, as most encouraging and trusted that such programme would be continued. It was also Japan's hope that UNHCR would make further efforts to bring into operation the repatriation programme for Cambodian refugees which Japan had proposed at the ASEAN Ministerial Conference two years previously.

72. Beyond those initial steps, however, voluntary repatriation on any significant scale was clearly not immediately attainable. Therefore, efforts to find lasting solutions would, for the time being, have to be concentrated on resettlement in third countries, in addition to efforts to deter new outflows. His delegation commended the efforts made by the major resettlement countries, such as the United States, Canada, Australia and France, to promote resettlement, despite difficult domestic circumstances.

73. According to recent statistics, departures of Vietnamese refugees under the ODP had for the first time exceeded the number of departures by boat. However, although some 62,000 Vietnamese had departed legally for third countries since the beginning of the Programme, progress with regard to applications for departure to Japan had been quite slow. His delegation called on the Vietnamese Government to accelerate approval of applications from Japan, while working in close co-operation with UNHCR.

74. It was a grim fact that boat people were still leaving Viet Nam. Recently, the percentage of rescues at sea had been declining, while the piracy problem continued. The decline might be due mainly to the heavy burden that rescuing boat people imposed on ships, but a subtle change in the attitude of the international community at large might also be a factor. The situation had to be watched closely. The role of UNHCR in that connection would become increasingly important.

75. Boat people were still landing in Japan and to date totalled some 8,000. His Government had granted first asylum to them and had permitted the 1,300 persons wishing to settle in Japan to do so. His Government also endeavoured to resettle in Japan Indo-Chinese refugees who were in camps in South-East Asian countries. Over 3,500 Indo-Chinese refugees had been resettled in Japan, which would make further efforts to promote such resettlement.

76. The majority of boat people landing in Japan wished to resettle in other countries, but many of them found it difficult to be accepted by those countries. In 1983, his Government had established the International Refugee Assistance Centre at Tokyo in order to help such boat people and other refugees to be self-supporting in Japan, especially by providing Japanese language instruction and vocational training.

77. Japan's cumulative financial co-operation for Indo-Chinese refugees through UNHCR amounted to approximately \$270 million, making it the largest donor so far. Other financial co-operation made through international organizations such as WFP, ICRC and UNDRO, and bilateral co-operation for Thailand and the Philippines, amounted to approximately \$180 million.

78. With regard to Africa, he said that all members of the international community had a particularly strong responsibility to assist the three or four million refugees suffering from starvation and disease.

79. ICARA II had drawn attention to the need, in addition to humanitarian relief assistance, for development aid related to refugees. At the Conference, the donor countries had responded positively to that idea of refugee-related development aid and some countries had immediately declared their support in principle for the development project proposals submitted to the Conference.

80. Refugee self-sufficiency in countries of first asylum, for instance, through involvement in production and services, which of course must not adversely affect the local people, might well be important for refugees whose stay in those countries was prolonged. Such self-sufficiency would be conducive to maintaining the dignity of the refugees and to enabling them to return to normal life when durable solutions to the refugee problem had been achieved.

81. At ICARA II, his delegation had announced that Japan would contribute approximately \$6 million to the UNHCR African Refugee Relief Programme and provide food aid amounting to approximately \$6.5 million through the WFP, in addition to some \$7.3 million in food aid already provided in March 1984. His delegation had also stated that among the projects presented to the Conference by African countries, it attached particular importance to those relating to water supply, health and hygiene.

82. An epoch-making development in increasing the Japanese people's awareness of Africa and its problems and furthering friendly relations between Japan and African countries was a project called "Africa Month", which had begun in September and had the function of assisting non-governmental fund-raising activities for Africans suffering from starvation. During "Africa Month", various performances and exhibitions introducing the cultures and art of Africa were being held, thus contributing to the flow of funds for the continent. One extremely successful aspect of the campaign was the "Save your Lunch for the People of Africa" programme, whereby participants donated a sum equivalent to their usual lunch expenses.

83. In Pakistan, some 2.9 million Afghan refugees constituted the largest accumulation of refugees in the world. The Afghan refugee problem was a heavy burden for Pakistan, since it did not admit of immediate solution and the repatriation of the Afghan refugees was unlikely to be achieved in the foreseeable future. On a visit to Pakistan in May 1984, the Prime Minister of Japan had given the Government of Pakistan an undertaking that his Government would contribute some \$6 million to the UNHCR Afghan Refugee Relief Programme and provide as food aid wheat amounting to the value of some \$8.9 million.

84. His delegation wished to express its appreciation of the work of UNHCR as the principal international organization responsible for refugee relief in many other parts of the world, for example, the Middle East and Central America.

85. It must be remembered, however, that the resources which could be diverted to refugee relief activities were strictly limited and, in that connection, it was encouraging to note that expenditure for the UNHCR General Programme had remained relatively stationary in recent years. Care must be taken to keep such expenditure at a reasonable level and to utilize effectively the limited resources available.

86. UNHCR assistance activities should be concentrated not on care and maintenance but on durable solutions. His delegation therefore welcomed the fact that the percentage of UNHCR expenditure devoted to durable solutions had been increasing over the past year.

87. Referring to the general call for UNHCR to renew and strengthen its organization, his delegation believed that the Office was sincerely trying to improve its administration and management for instance in the areas of strengthening of the field organization, devolution of authority to the field and the carrying out of a job classification exercise in line with the recommendations of the Administrative Management Service.

88. Mr. RANTANEN (Finland) noted that while no new emergencies of dramatic magnitude had emerged, the refugee problem remained at an unacceptably serious level.

89. In the field of international protection, despite some positive trends, there were also many events which gave cause for serious concern. In particular, problems continued to arise with regard to the admission of refugees and to the standard of treatment accorded them. Armed attacks against refugees and the failure of passing ships to rescue boat refugees in distress on the high seas were deplorable examples of such phenomena.

90. In the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection, the main item during the current year was the proposed set of principles concerning the military and armed attacks on refugee camps and settlements. His delegation would have been prepared to accept the principles contained in document EC/SCP/34/Add.1, since it considered that they expressed in a balanced way the concern about those attacks. He hoped that in spite of the differences of opinion expressed in the Sub-Committee, it would be possible to reach a consensus during the current session.

91. Referring to the question of the rescue of boat people in distress at sea, he said that his Government had decided to participate in the RASRO scheme and hoped that it would be possible for the programme to get under way in the near future. Boat refugees were continuing to arrive in great numbers and it would be a serious setback in their protection if the programme was not implemented.

92. His delegation was pleased to see that the need for UNHCR assistance activities had been stabilized at the current level. It was also satisfied to note that the share of durable solutions was steadily growing. His delegation hoped that voluntary repatriation programmes could be increased and that difficulties met in that respect in some countries could be overcome.

93. His Government had participated actively in ICARA II and had pledged about \$10 million for projects in Ethiopia, Somalia and the Sudan. His Government was conducting further feasibility studies and hoped to begin implementing the projects in 1985. By adopting the Declaration and Programme of Action at ICARA II, the international community also accepted a set of principles concerning refugee aid and development. The High Commissioner had elaborated on the role of UNHCR in that connection in his report (A/AC.96/645), and his delegation could accept the principles outlined in the annex to that document.

94. In the field of administration, his delegation was pleased to note the further efforts made by the High Commissioner to strengthen the Office along the lines suggested by the Administrative Management Service and supported by the Executive Committee. His delegation, which recognized the value of the job classification exercise and had taken note of the report of the ACABQ, was prepared to accept the results of the exercise. It was not prepared at the current stage to give support to the idea of upgrading high-level posts; it considered that the question merited further careful consideration.

95. The High Commissioner had stressed the difficult financial situation expected in 1985. The early warning given concerning the projected deficit of \$60 million and the required increase of 25 per cent in voluntary contributions provided some time to try to find means to cope with that very difficult problem although it was difficult to see how those expectations could be met. However, the situation underlined the need for careful project planning and increased efforts to achieve savings wherever possible.

96. In Finland, the legislation concerning aliens had been revised and new instruments, containing provisions concerning refugees in conformity with the Geneva Convention on Refugees, had entered into force in April 1984. Finland would also receive in the near future a group of Vietnamese refugees, including some handicapped persons, from the closed camps of Hong Kong. His Government's financial support for UNHCR, despite the difficulties caused by the high exchange rate of the dollar, would be maintained approximately at the same level as in 1984, but it was hoped to be able to increase Finland's contributions for the following year.

97. Mr. HEGNER (Switzerland) said that his delegation was pleased that, for the third consecutive year, no new large groups of refugees had emerged, but shared the High Commissioner's concern about the future of millions of refugees whose situation remained precarious.

98. What was of concern to his delegation was the fact that although the over-all number of refugees had remained stationary, the number of hotbeds of political or social unrest giving rise to trans-border movements had not diminished. The insecurity facing millions of persons was such that they preferred exile with its enormous risks rather than to remain in or to return to their own countries. It must not be forgotten that the primary and fundamental cause of the refugee's vicissitudes was to be found in the reasons which had led him to become an exile. It was regrettable that the international community had not yet tackled the problem at its roots, by carrying out a careful analysis of the specific arrangements that might be made to ensure that action could be taken on both sides of the frontier before the process of exile began. It would be desirable for political bodies to make a realistic effort while it was still possible to do so in an organized and calm manner. He was aware that the question did not come within the purview of UNHCR but considered that within the framework of his mandate, the High Commissioner was frequently best qualified, through his presence in the field, to promote and maintain the dialogue essential for the future implementation of such measures. The humanitarian and non-political nature of the High Commissioner's mandate and the assistance which he provided were a guarantee of his impartiality.

99. A closely related matter was the increasingly urgent need for a clear definition of the assistance and protection which States should give to genuine refugees. All the parties concerned needed to be able to agree on the modalities for admission which would make it possible to avert dangerous political tensions in the countries of asylum. UNHCR, which had recently organized several regional seminars in that regard, had a pioneering role to play, and his delegation was prepared to co-operate actively in any discussion on the subject.

100. He stressed his Government's support for UNHCR protection activities; the protection of the rights of refugees as defined in the relevant international legal instruments should be the focus of attention of the Committee and every effort should be made to secure universal acceptance of the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol.

101. It was clear that there were situations where dialogue between UNHCR and governmental authorities concerning the protection of refugees was difficult and where a solution could be found only through the support which the Office could obtain from other international institutions or on a multilateral basis. Principles such as non-refoulement, the right to asylum and the physical integrity of the refugee should be clearly respected. A policy of active support by the international community for the work of UNHCR could certainly simplify its task; however, it would then be necessary for efficient and timely communications.

102. His Government had endeavoured over the past few months to provide concrete support to UNHCR in its efforts in the field of protection. It was participating in the Anti-Piracy Programme in the South China Sea and welcomed the decision taken by the Thai authorities to extend the Programme for a further year. His Government would also like UNHCR to play a more active role in protecting refugee camps against armed attacks, if only by maintaining a constant physical presence on the spot. While the discussions which had taken place on the question within the Sub-Committee of the Whole on Protection had not yet produced results, his delegation did intend to relax its efforts in that important field.

103. With regard to assistance, his delegation welcomed the continuity in the High Commissioner's programmes, along the lines formulated with the Executive Committee over the past few years. From the geographical standpoint, his delegation noted that the effort made to assist African refugees and Governments had not been in vain and ICARA II had offered an opportunity for the international community to define its priorities clearly with regard to development assistance on behalf of refugees.

104. The question of durable solutions had become increasingly important since 1981, when they had accounted for only 26 per cent of UNHCR's assistance budget. The difficulties which UNHCR encountered in applying those solutions and the frequently large amounts which they required showed the need for pioneer action and for the international community to endeavour to find new projects applicable to the difficult situation of refugees. His Government welcomed the work undertaken jointly with the World Bank in Pakistan to help Afghan refugees. He stressed the need for participation in projects not only by the other governmental or non-governmental organizations concerned but also by the refugees themselves, although he recognised that it was sometimes difficult to obtain the views on refugees on actions intended for them.

105. His delegation supported the efforts made to increase opportunities for voluntary repatriation. However, it was aware of the difficulties facing those involved in such efforts, especially the refugees themselves, and therefore considered it essential that UNHCR should not only ensure an on-site presence over a period long enough to enable the repatriated refugees to be completely reintegrated but should also assist in establishing the infrastructures required to facilitate reintegration.

106. It would also be desirable for UNHCR to accord priority to the many children who had lost their parents who were waiting to be placed in a home, and to disabled persons.

107. He congratulated UNHCR on its initiative in organizing several regional meetings with non-governmental organizations and hoped that such meetings would be increased, since NGO involvement in initial stages of project design and planning frequently played a vital role in the success of projects.

108. He drew attention to the close co-operation that had existed between the Committee and the High Commissioner over the past few years in the field of management and administration and said that his delegation welcomed the positive results achieved.

109. Switzerland was traditionally a country of asylum, and had therefore ratified on 21 April 1955 the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. The Act on Asylum of 5 October 1979 had been amended in 1983 to bring into effect a set of measures designed to accelerate the procedure for considering applications for asylum. Unfortunately, it had not had the results anticipated and Parliament had therefore decided in June 1984 to undertake a further revision of the Act. Despite pressures by a section of public opinion due to the increasing flow of refugees, the new revision would not bring into question either the fundamental principles governing the right of asylum or the concept of the refugee within the meaning of the 1951 Convention and the Act on Asylum. The individual examination procedure for applications for asylum would be maintained and would ensure for every refugee the right to be heard, recognized and admitted in Switzerland. Nevertheless, the federal and cantonal authorities were confronted with a difficult situation because of the presence of nearly 20,000 applicants for refugee status, in addition to the many refugees already in Switzerland. Since, at the European level, his country had admitted the highest proportion of refugees in relation to its population, the possibilities of asylum were very limited and there were serious problem in respect of accommodation and assistance.

110. Switzerland would continue to participate in UNHCR resettlement activities, particularly those carried out on behalf of disabled refugees. Thus, about 50 persons would be accepted shortly under the DISERO and RASRO plans, as would 250 disabled refugees over the next five years.

111. At the international level, his country's activities on behalf of refugees and displaced persons in the world had been maintained in 1983 at the level of 25 million francs, plus the large contributions provided by private voluntary organizations. His country's contributions to the UNHCR budget for 1983 had amounted to nearly 10 million francs, of which about 6 million francs were intended for specific UNHCR managed programmes. For 1984, his Government wished to demonstrate its support for the High Commissioner by increasing further its regular contribution to 4.5 million francs, i.e. an increase of 11 per cent over 1983. Furthermore, 3.5 million francs had already been earmarked for various specific programmes during the year.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.