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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME

Thirty-fifth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 379th MEETING

held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 16 October 1984, at 10 a.m.

Chairman:

Mr. CHIBA

(Japan)

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

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

1. The CHAIRMAN said that 16 October was World Food Day. It had been so designated in 1981 as a tribute to those who produced food, and as a time when matters pertaining to food should receive special attention. Its aim was to focus attention on the problem of hunger and the need to increase agricultural production, especially in developing countries. In that spirit World Food Day in 1984 had been dedicated to women in agriculture, in response to the need for a better understanding of the many roles of rural women in the developing world. World Food Day 1984 would also help to make both the public and the policy makers aware of the need to gear policies and programmes to the special needs of women as food producers.

ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL MATTERS (item 10 of the agenda) (continued) (A/AC.96/639 and Corr.1 and Add.2; A/AC.96/646; EC/SC.2/19)

2. Mr. KHARMA (Lebanon), noting that a consensus had not been reached on the Administration's proposals, said it was perhaps due to the fact that delegations considered there were certain financial implications that could be avoided if other measures were taken.

3. In the first place, the Executive Committee had been told that the costs of the additional 11 posts requested would be met from voluntary funds until 1989, after which time they would be apportioned between the regular budget and voluntary funds. If he understood correctly, that meant that, in the five-year period up to 1989, and allowing for inflation, voluntary funds would have to bear a total sum of approximately \$2.5 million.

4. Secondly, on the question of upgrading of posts, some delegations had expressed the view that, for reasons with which all were familiar, posts in the field should be upgraded as a matter of urgency, whereas the upgrading of posts at headquarters could be deferred for the time being. That, in his view, was the wrong approach: upgrading should be conceived as an over-all process, covering both field and headquarters staff. To separate the two would be tantamount to discrimination, which was unacceptable to his delegation.

5. There seemed to be a certain malaise and he would therefore suggest that the matter be referred back to UNHCR to prepare a balanced and more condensed package for submission to the Executive Committee's informal meeting in January 1985. That would allow time for reflection which would be more conducive to the general acceptance of such proposals.

6. Mr. CHRAIBI (Morocco) said that, since a consensus on the job classification exercise was not possible at the present stage, his delegation considered that discussion on the matter should be deferred until the next session of the Executive Committee, when a decision could be taken in the light of all the facts of the case.

7. Mr. KOULISCHER (Director, Administration and Management Division), replying to points raised, said he first wished to assure members that UNHCR was keenly aware of the budgetary limitations placed both on the regular budget and on voluntary funds, and his remarks would be made in that context. He would also assure members that UNHCR was not losing sight of the need for a global management plan, particularly since matters such as classification and recruitment were, of course, closely intertwined.
8. So far as the long-term financial implications of the job classification exercise were concerned, it was a little difficult at that point to make a more accurate forecast. Any increased expenditure under voluntary funds would, however, be offset by the transfer of posts from one budget to another.
9. One member had said that it was difficult to see the need for growth in the number of classified posts when UNHCR was a purely temporary organization. That was quite true but UNHCR was caught between the desire for stability, on the one hand, and development, on the other. It should also not be forgotten that a post that had been reclassified could be declassified subsequently.
10. The United Kingdom representative had referred to "grade creep". In that connection it should perhaps be pointed out that 8 per cent of posts were recommended for declassification, and the relevant figure therefore had to be deducted from the number of posts recommended for reclassification. The exact nature of the exercise was explained in detail in the note on the Professional job classification exercise (A/AC.96/639/Add.1). There was no question of a race for promotion. The exercise had been based solely on the need to ascertain how UNHCR should be graded to show that a number of posts, particularly in the field, had been undergraded.
11. The United States and Belgian representatives had stressed that the regular budget should have a zero growth rate. As was apparent from the documentation before the Executive Committee, however, the regular budget figures revealed an increase in expenditure. UNHCR none the less hoped to remain within the proposed limits for 1985, although it could not give a guarantee to that effect at the present stage.
12. With regard to the specific recommendation in paragraph 27 of document A/AC.96/639/Add.1, the High Commissioner would place all the facts before the Secretary-General, who would also be apprised of the content of the Executive Committee's debate as reflected in its report. In that way the Secretary-General would be kept abreast of the situation.
13. Among the positive consequences of the exercise, of course, was the strengthening of programme management in the field. The job classification exercise would also serve to encourage rotation up to and including the D-2 level, since five D-2 posts for representatives in the field had been requested.
14. Agreeing on the need for a more global presentation, he said that the High Commissioner had decided for the time being to dissociate the proposal in paragraph 27 from the other proposals. The Sub-Committee on Administrative and Financial Matters had, however, been provided with a set of figures prepared on the basis of the figures set forth in table 1 (Regular Budget + Voluntary Funds Posts -

Headquarters/Field), but revised to take account of the implications of the proposal in paragraph 27. That revised set of figures could be made available to members if they so wished.

15. A number of formulas had been suggested, including the possibility of a comparison between UNHCR and other United Nations agencies. He had, however, tended to discourage such a comparison given the special nature of UNHCR and its protection function.

16. It was important to correct any impression that the exercise had been conducted for hierarchical reasons. Rather, UNHCR was convinced that the complexity of the refugee problem in the modern world, and the level of contacts which UNHCR had to maintain with Heads of State and high-ranking Government officials, meant that UNHCR had arrived at a historic moment in its mission and that its senior posts should be strengthened accordingly.

17. A number of delegations had questioned the need for the proposed additional 11 posts. Without repeating what he had said in his introductory statement, he would point out that the request had been made after a lengthy and arduous study conducted over a four-month period. An attempt to apply the zero growth rate had been made, but unsuccessfully.

18. With regard to a point raised by the Japanese representative, it was not possible, given UNHCR's protection function, to fix an exact proportion between the number of staff, on the one hand, and the number of refugees or volume of assistance material, on the other. There were sometimes new situations which called for new staff or material. But UNHCR could close down offices and indeed had already done so, in Bangladesh, Burma and Zaire. The basic consideration behind its action was: what did the international community expect of it? Furthermore, it would be difficult to establish priority among those 11 posts, although if absolutely essential it would be done.

19. Redeployment, which a large number of delegations had considered necessary, involved reassigning posts not only from headquarters to the field but also as between field offices. The offices of UNHCR in various parts of the world did not have a fixed number of personnel or an established minimum staff - everything depended on how a particular situation evolved. It had been suggested that posts might perhaps be redeployed from the offices of UNHCR in Europe other than headquarters. However, the Administration and Management Division of UNHCR felt that the European offices performed a very important function, a view shared by the authorities of a large number of countries. At times, some of those offices even took part in the procedure for determining the status of refugees. Personnel was undoubtedly needed for that purpose. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that Europe received applications for asylum from everywhere in the world and that a large number of its countries had a backlog of requests to examine. Many examples could be cited to show that the European countries had become extremely sensitive to the refugee situation in recent years. Europe could also make a valuable contribution to UNHCR in terms of generating support among public opinion. Countries which received refugees already supported the work of UNHCR in general, but the so-called "donor" countries also had a very important contribution to make. If all

aspects of the current economic situation in Europe - including the increasing number of refugees from all over the world - were taken into account, the importance of the offices of UNHCR in Europe would become apparent.

20. Redeployment was taken extremely seriously at headquarters. A number of posts there had already been discontinued. In addition, in-depth studies were being conducted by the Administration not only to determine where there was duplication and posts which could be saved, but also to see if the volume of UNHCR documentation could be reduced. The problems involved were not at all simple, for even the smallest units of the UNHCR structure had a function to perform.

21. He concluded that redeployment and a study of job duplication were indeed necessary. Although he could not see how additional posts could be made available for redeployment in the immediate future, efforts would be continued to that end.

22. He noted that there was some confusion regarding the concepts of "redeployment" and "discontinuation". In jargon, "discontinuation of a post and creation of a new post" were equivalent to "redeployment". For example, if a post in country X were to be discontinued and a post in country Y created, the procedure could either be called "discontinuation of a post and creation of a new post" or "redeployment". The small difficulty with redeployment was that the two posts concerned had to be of the same kind and at the same level, which was not always possible. Consequently, it was easier to take, on the one hand, all the posts that could be saved or discontinued and, on the other hand, all the posts that were to be created and then determine how the two could be made to coincide. That was redeployment. The Administration and Management Division felt that document EC/SC.2/22 would be clearer if the jobs which were to be created were considered first, followed by an examination of the jobs which were to be discontinued. After the redeployment exercise, the Administration and Management Division could have submitted 11 posts to the Executive Committee, but instead submitted 31, feeling that 20 of them could be compensated and that the Executive Committee would thus gain a better understanding of the situation.

23. With regard to the question of durable solutions in Thailand, which included the further question of whether posts of a sufficiently high level had been created, he said that the delegate in Thailand, who was to be reclassified to level D-2, would be the person best able to put durable solutions into effect and to negotiate at the highest level. He pointed out that technical posts had an important function in the quest for durable solutions.

24. Regarding the question of the employment of female personnel by UNHCR, he said that there would be fewer recruits than in the past. Even if the 11 new posts were approved, UNHCR would still not be in a position to recruit additional female staff, since the organization was no longer in its expansion phase. He said that he had conveyed the wishes and instructions of the Secretary-General in respect of recruitment to the Sub-Committee and had explained that regular budget posts were concerned for the most part, but that the same principle would be applied to voluntary funds posts. On the whole, progress in the area of recruitment would not be as great as in the past.

25. Addressing the problem of an imbalance at the higher levels, he said that many criteria were being taken into consideration, including those which had been mentioned in the Executive Committee meetings, such as the work of the Committee, appointments and promotions, which were extremely complicated factors. More favourable and flexible conditions for advancement had also been discussed. The Administration and Management Division was still caught between trying to give all personnel exactly the same rights and using different categories. He hoped, however, that progress would soon be made.

26. In response to observations which had been made by the delegation of the Netherlands regarding trainees and Junior Post Officers (JPOs), he pointed out that only two trainees had been taken on during the previous year. While a few more could be recruited during the current year, it should be borne in mind that their numbers were very small in comparison with the number of JPOs. There was also a difference between the two concepts. A JPO was assigned directly to a specific post (Protection or Assistance), whereas a trainee moved from section to section until he was placed. He conceded that there could be some overlap between the two, although care would be taken to avoid it, but there was no question of a conflict.

27. The Administration and Management Division understood very well the constraints to which UNHCR was subjected. In that respect, it did not wish to be regarded as a "petitioner" by the Executive Committee. Nor did it wish to be viewed as lacking in clarity. Therefore, the Division would be pleased to explain any points on which it might not have been clear enough either at a meeting of the Executive Committee or in a bilateral context with individual delegations. The Division's aim was to present to delegations the result of the efforts which had been made by the UNHCR Administration, whether in respect of job classification or additional jobs.

28. In conclusion, he thanked the Executive Committee for all its support and said that he hoped it had complete confidence in the efforts of the Administration and Management Division.

STATUS OF CONTRIBUTIONS AND OVER-ALL FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS FOR 1984 AND 1985
(agenda item 11)

29. Mr. VOLPING (Director, External Affairs Division) said that since the problems related to the funding of UNHCR programmes were presented in some detail in document A/AC.96/641 and in the report of the Sub-Committee on Administrative and Financial Matters which had been submitted to the Executive Committee, as well as in the other documentation which had been made available to the Sub-Committee, he would deal only with the main issues.

30. He wished to express deep appreciation to all donors to UNHCR. The support which the Office had received had been magnificent, bearing in mind the very difficult economic situation which many donors faced. Despite the effect of the strong dollar, it might be possible in 1984 to reach the same level of contribution income as in 1983, since many Governments had made significant increases in the level of their national currency contributions in 1984.

31. He also wished to thank those Governments which had recently announced contributions to UNHCR. They would be of considerable help in bringing UNHCR nearer to the full funding of the 1984 General Programmes.

32. Additional funds were still needed to cover requirements for the current year, but if projections proved correct, it seemed possible that the 1984 General Programmes would be fully funded. On that basis, he expected total Voluntary Fund expenditure in 1984 to amount to some \$410 million, which was a slight increase over 1983.

33. The funding of programmes for 1985 posed a major problem. Total Voluntary Fund requirements in 1985 could be in the neighbourhood of \$430 million. However, the funding of the General Programmes requirement of some \$385 million was the most serious concern.

34. The cost of the General Programmes of UNHCR was determined on the basis of identified need. UNHCR had to plan on that basis, since the refugees had direct and urgent needs which would not be met from any other source. The planning and costing of UNHCR refugee assistance was not merely a matter of deciding what was desirable. It was a matter of what must be done if refugees were to be helped to resume decent and dignified lives.

35. Therefore, the identification of refugee needs must be the starting point for UNHCR programme planning and the result of that planning would be equal to the funding requirement for the General Programmes.

36. With regard to the funding problems for 1985, the various sources of income generation for the General Programmes were becoming increasingly limited. Since UNHCR was totally dependent on voluntary contributions for the financing of refugee assistance, that situation implied that to cover the \$385 million required for the General Programmes in 1985, UNHCR would need to receive some \$60 million in additional contributions that year. While the problem was obviously very serious, it should not be regarded as insurmountable. Problems of similar gravity had been overcome in previous years through the co-operation and best efforts of all concerned.

37. He wished to stress that the need for an additional \$60 million in contributions in 1985 was not owed to increased requirements as much as to a marked reduction in the sources of income for the General Programmes.

38. Many speakers had commented on the issue during the general debate. The basic feeling which emerged was that everyone had become fully aware of the gravity of the problem and that determination and joint efforts would be needed to overcome it. For its part, UNHCR would exercise maximum budgetary restraint and apply strict priorities with regard to programme control and review. Every effort would also be made to explore new income possibilities. If UNHCR could continue to count on increased levels of national currency contribution by the Executive Committee and other donors as a means of support and, in particular, if the United States dollar value were to change in favour of other currencies, it might be quite possible to obtain the additional contribution income required in 1985.

39. He therefore appealed to all Governments to bear the situation in mind in their planning of contributions to UNHCR's 1985 programme. He hoped that at the Pledging Conference due to take place at United Nations Headquarters on 16 November 1984, a maximum number of Governments would be able to announce firm and sizeable contributions. UNHCR would only be able to start off the General Programmes for 1985 at the reasonable level approved by the Executive Committee if substantial contributions were made available on 1 January.

40. In conclusion, he said that the understanding and tremendous support which donors had given to UNHCR in recent years made it possible to hope that, with a realistic approach to the situation and a determination to succeed, the difficult, but not impossible funding problem would be overcome.

FIELD AFFAIRS (agenda item 12)

41. Mr. HOMANN-HERIMBERG (Director for Field Affairs) reminded the Executive Committee that at the informal meeting in January 1984, the High Commissioner had advised it of his decision to establish in his Executive Office the function of Field Affairs. To that end, he had created, through redeployment of existing posts, the positions of Director for Field Affairs and Senior Field Affairs Officer with a small support staff. The main purpose of those posts was to strengthen and streamline policy aspects relating to UNHCR's field establishment. That was one important objective of the United Nations Administrative Management Service report, and it was given equal importance in the so-called consensus paper on "Proposals for strengthening UNHCR's management policy", dated 4 August 1983. A more detailed description of the responsibilities of the Director for Field Affairs was provided in paragraphs lxiv to lxvi of the introduction to the report on UNHCR assistance activities in 1983-1984 (A/AC.96/639); in short, he was the High Commissioner's principal policy adviser on matters concerning UNHCR field activities.

42. He said that since the small team had assumed its duties, he and the Senior Field Officer had spent a good part of their time in the field. They had also tried to take advantage of visits by field staff to headquarters to discuss their problems and concerns. For their appraisals of field activities, they tried to associate the geographical and functional units of headquarters. The methodology was simple and was based essentially on listening, looking, absorbing and asking questions in order to form an over-all picture. They examined the performance of UNHCR in a given country, particularly with regard to the effectiveness and orientation of the entire range of UNHCR activities, the exercise and effectiveness of existing and newly delegated authority (including the question of how Headquarters related to the field), field management, working methods and conditions of service in the field. They asked outsiders - colleagues from the United Nations system, representatives of non-governmental organizations and diplomatic representatives - about their view of the refugee situation and the performance of UNHCR, spoke to their own colleagues - both the international and local staff - and also to the refugees. They had discussions with Government representatives of the host country about their attitudes towards refugees and the role of UNHCR, including the orientation of its over-all activities, and, in the process, tried to examine the prospects for possible long-term solutions. Their over-all observations and recommendations - some of which confirmed existing attitudes and policies, whereas others suggested a change - were brought to

the attention of the High Commissioner and the senior management. The result was sometimes immediate remedial action while observations of a more complex nature became part of the ongoing policy review and decision-making process.

43. Although generalizations from individual observations were usually to be avoided, he was sure that the Executive Committee would wish to hear of the experience he had gained in some of the fields which he had been requested to examine, such as the delegation of authority within the Office, working methods in the field, the complexity of the refugee caseload, staffing and conditions of service.

44. It had been found that, with some minor exceptions, the texts of existing manuals and regulations had been brought into line with the all-important policy of delegation or devolution of authority to the field. True delegation of authority, however, depended on the genuine co-operation of all concerned, the acceptance by the recipients of the delegated authority and the quality of support provided by Headquarters. The delegation of authority should not be limited to the branch office level, but should be practised, to the extent possible, within the field offices, i.e., out-posted field offices and sub-offices which were in the front line of daily refugee concerns. In some countries visited there appeared to be room for improvement and his comments had been accepted and corrective action initiated.

45. One of the purposes of examining working methods had been to minimize bureaucratic procedures. In recent years, the Office had made great strides towards more sophisticated management and monitoring systems, which had produced an improved information flow and greater transparency. At the same time, sophistication should not be allowed to stifle other activities essential to the protection and assistance of refugees.

46. A further question which he had looked at was the refugee caseload and its complexity. His staff had become acutely aware of the increasing difficulties encountered by some field offices in dealing with individual cases, particularly in countries where there was no reliable network of competent voluntary agencies, thus necessitating a total operational involvement on the part of UNHCR staff. The point was important, since there was sometimes a tendency to relate the size of UNHCR's staff to the numbers of refugees and the volume of assistance alone.

47. Appraisals in the field of staffing had dealt with a variety of issues, including the optimal utilization of human resources, internal organizational structures, etc.; some of the relevant recommendations were reflected in the budgetary proposals before the Committee. Programme support and the administration function in the field had been found to require increased attention; more care was also needed in ensuring that staff members with sufficient experience and maturity were assigned to the field. He fully supported the proposed introduction of a national officers category as an important means of strengthening the field establishment.

48. In regard to conditions of service, many of the measures taken during the year had had a beneficial effect on UNHCR's staff, but isolated and difficult duty stations required continued and increased attention and there was always the problem of the basic inadequacies of the United Nations system with regard to field service. Those issues were being pursued.

49. He drew the Committee's attention to the recommendations of the United Nations International Conference on Population held in Mexico City from 6 to 14 August 1984 on the subject of international migration (A/AC.96/INF.170). The large number of speakers who had given prominence to the specific problem of refugees was certainly significant. Recommendations 54 and 55 merely corroborated the policies of international refugee work, already well-known to the Executive Committee.

50. Mr. TRAUTTMANSDORFF (Austria) said that the primary aim of establishing the post of Director for Field Affairs within the High Commissioner's Executive Office had been to strengthen the field organization of UNHCR by providing the High Commissioner with policy advice and further emphasizing the devolution of authority to the field; it had further been intended to increase the efficiency of the field organization, in particular, by improving working methods in field offices. The Director had essentially a travelling brief - he was a contact man between headquarters and the field. It had also been hoped that he might be able to improve the working conditions of UNHCR's field officers by making discreet contact with the authorities concerned.

51. The first impression gained from the interesting report by the Director for Field Affairs was that the High Commissioner had made a wise decision. At the same time, means would have to be found of providing the Executive Committee with more detailed information on the activities of the Director for Field Affairs and on the impact of his work on priority aspects of refugee policy. That might best be achieved by including a full formal report by the Director in the documentation of annual meetings of the Executive Committee.

52. Ms. LAOHAPHAN (Thailand) said that, as a host country of one of the UNHCR branch offices of the East Asia region, Thailand welcomed the establishment of a Director for Field Affairs at headquarters. Although small in number, the Director's staff had significant responsibilities. Her Government had held frank discussions with the Director during his recent visit to Thailand on evaluating the practical effectiveness of UNHCR's programmes; she hoped its views would be taken into account in future decisions.

53. She was strongly in favour of authority being delegated to branch or field offices as far as possible, since such delegation would not only shorten the response time to urgent requests but also enhance the flexibility of programme implementation. The proposed rotation of staffs between headquarters and the field would, at the same time, contribute to a better understanding of local conditions at the policy-making level. The link between headquarters and the field offices could be further strengthened by the assignment of a consulting role

to high-ranking staff at headquarters in regard to negotiations with Governments, organizations or inter-organizational bodies concerned with UNHCR activities.

54. Mr. LAMBACH (Federal Republic of Germany) supported the Austrian proposal that a fuller formal report by the Director for Field Affairs should be submitted to the Executive Committee annually. Since there was a tendency for the Committee to be confronted at its sessions with extensive documentation giving an excellent but rather theoretical picture of the work of the Office, it would be helpful also to hear the Director for Field Affairs paint in some of the details of the day-to-day functioning of the field organization and comment on any special problems that might have cropped up in the implementation and evaluation of UNHCR programmes.

55. Mr. HARTLING (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the post of Director for Field Affairs had been established 11 months previously, mainly to strengthen relations between the Executive Committee, headquarters and the field. He had been delighted to hear the positive reactions of so many delegations to developments so far. A formal report by the Director for Field Affairs could certainly be included in the documentation of the annual meetings of the Executive Committee.

56. The CHAIRMAN invited the Executive Committee to approve the inclusion in the agenda of its thirty-sixth session of an item concerning a formal report by the Director for Field Affairs, to be supplemented by an oral statement to the Committee.

57. It was so decided.

PROPOSED INTRODUCTION OF ADDITIONAL LANGUAGES (agenda item 13) (A/AC.96/638)

58. Mr. VOLFIN (Director, External Affairs Division) said that the introduction of Arabic, Chinese and Spanish as official and working languages of the Executive Committee had been discussed at the thirty-fourth session and the High Commissioner had been asked to make a full report on the practical and financial implications.

59. The report now before the Committee (A/AC.96/638) attempted to make a succinct presentation of the practical impact of the proposed additional languages not only on UNHCR but also on the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG). UNHCR itself had no language services, relying on the common services of UNOG for the translation, printing and distribution of all official documents submitted to the Executive Committee. Since it was those services that would be most directly affected by the introduction of the new languages, the document before the Committee had been drawn up in close consultation with them and representatives of those services had been invited to be present, to respond to any technical questions that might be raised concerning matters within their competence. As far as UNOG was concerned, the feasibility of handling the additional languages depended largely upon approval of budgetary allocations by the General Assembly, permitting the recruitment of additional staff under the regular budget. Should the Executive Committee decide in favour of the additional languages and the

General Assembly make the required funds available for the 1985 session, immediate notice would have to be given to UNOG services in order to allow time for the necessary arrangements to be made.

60. The introduction of the additional languages would also have implications for UNHCR's reporting to the Executive Committee. The timely issue of documents depended, among other factors, on the ability of UNHCR to submit texts for translation by UNOG in accordance with the deadlines listed in paragraph 3 of the report. If those deadlines were not met, delays in the issue of translated texts could cause serious inconvenience to the Committee. The report before the Committee drew attention in paragraph 4 to the problems which already existed in translating a text of the length of the UNHCR assistance and programme budget document into French and printing it in the two existing working languages of the Committee. Those problems related not only to the increased length and complexity of that document in recent years, but also to the reporting cycle around which it was organized. To ensure that the Executive Committee had information as fully up-to-date as possible at its annual session, UNHCR had sought to maintain a reporting cut-off date of 30 June. The attempt was perhaps a little over-optimistic, because the present length of the document necessitated a start being made with submission of chapters to the UNOG Languages Service for translation from the beginning of June - i.e. a month before the cut-off date - if the document was to be issued in accordance with the six-week rule. It would be unrealistic to maintain the 30 June cut-off date in face of the additional complexities of production that would be entailed by the introduction of three new languages and the longer time that would be required for translating, printing and distribution, so that the schedule would have to be adjusted to end on 31 May. It was appreciated that the Committee would not welcome such a modification, but the technical complexity of producing a document of that length appeared to leave no alternative.

61. When considering the question of additional languages, extensive consultations had been held with other United Nations organizations on their approach to the question of the translation of documentation. Some of those organizations were specialized agencies with their own languages service which were able on occasion to produce translations more rapidly since, unlike UNOG, they did not have to take into account many competing priorities. No suggestion had, however, been made in the report that UNHCR should establish an independent languages service, which would be extremely costly and not justified by the volume of documentation produced. Other organizations, which depended on the UNOG common services for translation, printing and distribution, were obliged to observe the same deadlines for documents submission as UNHCR.

62. The decision before the Committee involved not only the question of whether the proposed languages should be introduced but also, in the event of a positive decision, whether they should be introduced as working or official languages. The various relevant options had been outlined in paragraph 10 of the report, the only difference between official and working languages being that summary records were produced in working languages only. There was no distinction in regard to other documentation.

63. Irrespective of whether the new languages were introduced in an official or working capacity, all in-session documentation would be affected, including the reports of the two sub-committees, the draft decisions and the draft report of the plenary, as well as any other conference room papers. At present, in-session documentation was translated into French or English partly by the UNOG Languages Service and partly by the UNHCR Secretariat. Since however the Secretariat had no capacity for translation into the proposed new languages, all translation would have to be undertaken by UNOG. Inevitably the increase in the number of languages would tend to slow down the production of in-session documentation, thus lengthening the proceedings of the Executive Committee and probably necessitating the continuation of the plenary into a third week. If therefore the Executive Committee were to recommend to the General Assembly approval of the three additional languages as either working or official languages of the Committee, there was a distinct possibility of a prolongation of the annual session, unless in-session documents were excluded from that decision.
64. The question of additional languages related only to official Executive Committee documents and not to other informal reports or periodic letters circulated throughout the year by UNHCR. The latter would continue to be produced in the two UNHCR working languages, which would remain English and French.
65. Mr. CHRAIBI (Morocco) said he strongly supported the introduction of Arabic, Chinese and Spanish as both working and official languages (A/AC.96/638, para. 10 (iii)).
66. Mr. IBRAHEEM (Sudan) said that his delegation had already referred to the importance of introducing Arabic as an official and working language because it would greatly facilitate the work of Arabic-speaking countries, not only in the Executive Committee itself but also in the field. Moreover, the various documents of the Committee would be available in Arabic and could be transmitted to Arabic-speaking countries.
67. ICARA II had shown clearly the need for having documents available in Arabic. His delegation fully supported the introduction of Arabic, Chinese and Spanish as official and working languages of the Executive Committee. He hoped that the Committee would be able to approve the proposal and recommend its adoption by the General Assembly.
68. Members should try to find a solution based on equality and justice. Delegations should be able to express themselves in their own language. The amount of money spent on languages was very little compared with the vast sums expended on assistance to refugees.
69. Mr. HUSLID (Norway) said his delegation was not happy with the proposal to introduce Arabic, Chinese and Spanish as official and working languages of the Executive Committee. It was clear that the introduction of additional languages would involve increased budgetary requirements at a time when the Committee was faced with budgetary constraints.
70. As had been pointed out, the introduction of the languages in question might also make it necessary for the Committee to hold a three-week session which would require additional resources. If the Executive Committee decided to increase the number of languages used in its proceedings, it should try to do so in the most efficient and least costly manner. His delegation thought that it should not be necessary to translate in-session documents into the additional languages.

71. Mr. TILILI (Tunisia), referring to the note on the implications of the proposed introduction of Arabic, Chinese and Spanish as official and working languages of the Executive Committee (A/AC.96/638), said that there were convincing reasons for introducing the languages in question. First of all, it was necessary to make millions of people around the world aware of the refugee problem. Secondly, various institutions and societies would respond to the problem only if the Committee addressed them in their own language.

72. He appealed to the Committee to recommend to the Secretary-General of the United Nations that the three languages should be introduced as official and working languages.

73. Mr. ARCURI (Argentina) said that document A/AC.96/638 contained many details regarding the proposal but failed to draw attention to the significant positive effects of introducing Arabic, Chinese and Spanish, which were used in other bodies of the United Nations.

74. UNHCR was growing, and consideration should be given to the difficulties that arose when a delegation participating in a meeting had to consult documentation in a language other than his own. His delegation believed that the Executive Committee should adopt procedures followed in other United Nations bodies and introduce Arabic, Chinese and Spanish as official and working languages.

75. Mr. KHARMA (Lebanon) said, with regard to the proposal to introduce Arabic, Chinese and Spanish as official and working languages of the Executive Committee, that most of the refugee assistance projects and programmes were being carried out in areas where those languages were spoken. Consequently, the various administrations, legislatures and field offices would benefit from being able to consult documents issued in those languages. His delegation therefore hoped that the Committee would adopt the proposal contained in paragraph 10 (iii) of document A/AC.96/638.

76. Mr. OMARI (Algeria) observed that Arabic was spoken in the United Nations, various international organizations and specialized agencies. UNHCR was part of the United Nations family and Arabic should therefore be introduced as an official and working language.

77. The distribution of UNHCR documents in Arabic would also facilitate the work of the Office in the field.

78. His delegation noted that the introduction of Arabic, Chinese and Spanish as official and working languages of the Executive Committee would involve little additional cost. It therefore hoped that the proposal would be supported by all members.

79. Mr. HEGNER (Switzerland) endorsed the views expressed by the representative of Norway. He understood the position of those delegations who had spoken in favour of the introduction of Arabic, Chinese and Spanish as official and working languages, but the first concern of the Committee should be to ensure efficiency in its work. The Committee had to be in a position to react to emergencies and the proposed introduction would cause delays in the availability of documents. Furthermore, it was known that many countries members of the Committee were currently facing budgetary constraints and he would be most reluctant to approve any increase in contributions of a general nature.

80. Mr. PAIVA (United States of America) said that his delegation understood the legitimate interest in introducing additional languages in the Executive Committee. At the same time, it was concerned at the delay that might arise in regard to the availability of documentation. Moreover, to issue documents in additional languages would inevitably increase budgetary requirements and lengthen the duration of the Committee's session.

81. His delegation took account of a number of suggestions and recommendations made by the Joint Inspection Unit in its 1977 study on the implications of additional languages in the United Nations system (JIU/REP/77/5). It supported many of those recommendations, in particular the first, which stated that new languages should be introduced when they were indispensable for the proper functioning of deliberative organs, and the third recommendation, which said that translations of documents should be based on the principle of selectivity, i.e. that only specified documents should be translated into specified languages.

82. Having balanced all those considerations one against the other, and realizing that there would be financial and other implications in the current difficult time, his delegation could in principle support the introduction of the languages concerned as official languages. At the same time, it endorsed another recommendation of JIU to the effect that Member States requesting new or expanded language services should consider paying or contributing to their cost as was the case in ITU and UPU. It was his delegation's understanding that since 1977 that option had been adopted by other organizations.

83. It had been indicated that in-session documentation would cause delays in the Committee's deliberations and lead to a three-week session. His delegation therefore suggested that such documentation should not be translated into all working languages, thus reducing delays and costs.

84. While his delegation could support the introduction of additional languages as official languages, it could not support the introduction of further working languages since that should be done only on a selective basis and only when it was indispensable for the work of the Committee.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.