



THIRD COMMITTEE
38th meeting
held on
Tuesday, 13 November 1984
at 3 p.m.
New York

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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 38th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. MADAR (Somalia)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 100: OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES
(continued) (A/39/92, 133, 165 and Corr.1, 185, 189 and Corr.1, 204, 212, 254
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- (a) REPORT OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER (continued) (A/39/12 and Add.1, 443, 444, 445, 446, 447)
- (b) ASSISTANCE TO REFUGEES IN AFRICA: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (continued) (A/39/402 and Add.1)

1. Mr. MONTAÑO (Mexico) said that his delegation shared the concern of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees with regard to the erosion of the concept of asylum. In his opinion, care should be taken, however, not to make hasty judgements about certain decisions which might appear to be contrary to international practice: that would be to misunderstand the global explanation of refugee problems. It should be recalled that the mass flows of refugees were occurring primarily in developing countries, which were the theatre of conflicts that in some cases were attributable to the after-effects of colonial domination, outmoded economic and social structures and struggles for hegemony. Given those circumstances, it would be unfair to require only the Governments directly concerned to supply the resources needed to solve the problems caused by such refugee flows. In keeping with the principle of interdependence, responsibility in such matters clearly belonged to the international community as a whole, and its solidarity should be directed to UNHCR. For that reason, the Mexican Government had decided always to channel through that body all international assistance to solve the problem of refugees in its territory.

2. His delegation noted with satisfaction that, on the whole, States respected the principle of non-refoulement, to which Mexico - a traditional land of asylum - strictly adhered. It agreed that the most appropriate durable solution to the problems of refugees was voluntary repatriation, a fundamental complement of that principle. In that regard, it welcomed the indication in the report of the High Commissioner (A/39/12 and Add.1) that the existing situation in various regions of the world had allowed a great number of refugees to return to their countries of origin.

3. Resettlement, another formula for responding to the mass flow of refugees, required an effort of solidarity on the part of the international community, as well as the understanding of Governments, so as to avoid the irreversible isolation of those involved. In that context, some developing countries, including Mexico, had launched, with the help of UNHCR, various programmes aimed at providing community, health and educational services for resettled refugees. In that connection, Mexico renewed its appeal to donor countries to continue to contribute substantially to UNHCR without earmarking the funds they provided.

4. Since 1981 Mexico had been dealing with an influx of Guatemalan nationals across its southern border (approximately 46,000 in 1984) and for that purpose had

(Mr. Montaña, Mexico)

established the Mexican Refugee Aid Commission, which had concluded agreements with UNHCR and the world Food Programme to enable it to receive technical and financial support from the international community. Given the continuing risks of border conflicts, the difficulty of access to the forests where the refugees were located, and the lack of agricultural land in that area, the Mexican Government had decided, after having studied all the possible solutions, to transfer 18,000 refugees to the border States of Campeche and Quintana Roo, situated in the Maya region and having physical and demographic features similar to those of the regions from which the Guatemalan population had come. A number of measures had been taken as part of the resettlement effort, including self-help programmes for the construction of traditional dwellings, food assistance, medical and educational services, organization of production and self-sufficiency programmes, and the institution of a minimum wage scheme identical to that covering Mexican dayworkers in the region.

5. Latin America had played a pioneer role in the development of international instruments on political asylum. However, that tradition did not enable it to deal with the current phenomena, which were characterized by their vast size. That was precisely what concerned both the authors of the Document of Objectives of the Contadora Group and those of the draft Contadora Act on Peace and Co-operation in Central America, which the four States members of the Group and the five Central American States had endorsed.

6. In that context, the President of Colombia and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees had convened a symposium to be held shortly on legal and humanitarian questions concerning refugees, in which representatives and experts of the above-mentioned nine countries would participate. Mexico welcomed such co-operative efforts.

7. Moreover, his delegation was concerned at the financial situation of UNHCR and felt that collaboration with the latter's programmes should not be discontinued. Lastly, it hoped that, as in previous years, the draft resolution concerning the report of the High Commissioner would be adopted by consensus.

8. Mr. EKBLÖM (Finland) noted that, while the number of States which had acceded to the international refugee instruments continued to grow, there had been - paradoxically - a resurgence of violations of the physical safety of refugees and asylum-seekers, growing xenophobic tendencies and increasing instances of refoulement and denial of asylum during the period covered by the report of the High Commissioner (A/39/12). In that regard, his delegation expressed its full support for the High Commissioner's efforts to reverse those unfortunate trends.

9. It was regrettable that, for the second consecutive year, the Executive Committee of UNHCR had been unable to reach consensus on the principles concerning the prohibition of military attacks on refugee camps and settlements and hoped that the remaining difficulties in that regard would be overcome before the next session of the Executive Committee. It also regretted that the Rescue at Sea Resettlement Offers (RASRO) for asylum-seekers had not aroused sufficient interest on the part of Governments and had therefore been unable to be initiated; it hoped that the programme could be undertaken in the near future.

(Mr. Ekblom, Finland)

10. In the field of assistance, his delegation noted with satisfaction that the global refugee situation had been stabilized and that assistance activities continued to evolve towards the promotion of durable solutions. It was particularly satisfied with the success of the voluntary repatriation programmes, especially in many African and Latin American countries, and it hoped that programmes of that type could also be encouraged in other regions, such as South-East Asia. However, it was primarily the responsibility of the Governments concerned to create conditions favourable to the return of the refugees, which UNHCR, for its part, could only facilitate.

11. The most important result of the Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa, held in Geneva in July 1984, had been the acknowledgement of the link between aid to refugees and development assistance in promoting durable solutions to refugee problems, notably local settlement. In his view it was essential that the follow-up activities of the Conference should be carefully monitored, and in that connection he welcomed the co-operation between UNHCR and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the implementation of the projects proposed at the Conference. He stressed, however, that while development projects were needed to improve the situation of refugees, the High Commissioner's role should essentially be limited to that of catalyst and co-ordinator. At the Conference his Government had pledged \$US 10 million for projects in Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan, and feasibility studies were being undertaken with the aim of implementing those projects in 1985.

12. His delegation noted that UNHCR continued to strengthen its administrative structures in accordance with the recommendations of the United Nations Administrative Management Service and of the UNHCR Executive Committee and it particularly welcomed efforts to strengthen the UNHCR field offices. It had noted with concern the forecasts of UNHCR's financial situation for 1985, which, in its view, further underlined the need for careful project planning and increased efforts to make the most of the available resources.

13. In conclusion, he emphasized his Government's firm support for the appeal of the High Commissioner that UNHCR be kept purely humanitarian and non-political.

14. Ms. COLL (Ireland), speaking on behalf of the ten States members of the European Economic Community, noted from the report of the High Commissioner (A/39/12 and Add.1) that the absence of new influxes of refugees had allowed UNHCR to consolidate existing assistance programmes and to devote 30 per cent of its General Programme resources in 1983 to durable solutions. The Ten noted with particular satisfaction the increased volume of voluntary repatriation movements, particularly in Africa, which constituted in their view, the most desirable durable solution for the majority of refugees. Where voluntary repatriation was not a possibility, the solution of local settlement should be adopted, and assistance should be provided to host countries to ease the additional burden which that entailed.

(Ms. Coll, Ireland)

15. The Ten noted the concern expressed by the High Commissioner with regard to the international protection of refugees, since there appeared to be a growing unwillingness to give due recognition to the special status of refugees, who were increasingly regarded as ordinary aliens. The Ten, which were parties to the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol thereto, believed that the fundamental rights of refugees as human beings should be respected and that it was the responsibility of the international community to take appropriate measures to ensure that they were protected and to respect the principle of non-refoulement. They had given tangible evidence of their concern by accepting refugees and contributing 30 per cent of the total UNHCR budget. The total value of the community's aid for refugees from 1978 to October 1984 amounted to approximately \$US 255 million, including \$US 130 million in emergency aid and \$US 124 million in food aid. The European Community had created a new budgetary line to contribute to the self-sufficiency of refugees and it therefore welcomed the emphasis placed in the UNHCR report on that aspect.

16. The Ten considered that the Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa had been a success: not only had it adopted a Declaration and a Programme of Action and reaffirmed the obligations of States to refrain from any action which would create or aggravate refugee problems, but, more important, it had recognized the relationship between aid to refugees and the development of host countries. Projects which attempted to integrate refugee aid into development had been submitted to the Conference and had received a positive response from donors. Following the Second Conference, the European Economic Community had addressed the question of how to satisfy the long-term needs of host countries in the framework of the negotiations for the Third Lomé Convention. It was envisaged that the new Convention would include specific provisions on assistance for the implementation of long-term projects and programmes to promote self-sufficiency and the local integration or resettlement of refugees. Special assistance might be provided through the specialized agencies.

17. The Ten recognized that refugee problems in Africa were exacerbated by the grave economic and social crisis affecting the continent and reiterated their gratitude and admiration to African countries which, despite their very limited resources, were ready to grant asylum and hospitality to refugees. The Ten therefore strongly endorsed paragraph 1 of the Declaration adopted by the Conference, which stated that the condition of refugees was a global responsibility of the international community.

18. Mr. GÖKTÜRK (Turkey) said that, as could be seen from the report of the High Commissioner (A/39/12 and Add.1), although there had been some encouraging developments in Africa and South-West Asia in seeking immediate or long-term solutions to refugee problems, the overall picture remained gloomy. In many parts of the world, the number of refugees was on the rise, and the countries which faced the most massive influxes of refugees were also the ones with the least resources to devote to their own development. The Governments of some host countries adopted restrictive measures which made it increasingly difficult for refugees to exercise their fundamental economic and social rights there. It was, therefore, a matter of

(Mr. Göktürk, Turkey)

high priority to establish an organic link between the development efforts of countries of asylum and assistance to refugees. In that connection, he noted with satisfaction that the Declaration and Programme of Action adopted at the Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa emphasized the complementarity between development assistance and refugee-related aid as part of a collective strategy for finding durable solutions. Turkey intended to provide \$US 10,000 for aid to African refugees. In addition, the follow-up mechanisms established by UNHCR and UNDP for co-ordinating projects and programmes within their spheres of competence, which also required active co-operation from the Governments of countries of asylum, would undoubtedly make it possible to respond more effectively to the basic needs of African refugees, as well as to carry out self-sufficiency activities, which would substantially alleviate the negative impact on the economies of host countries. The spirit of understanding and co-operation shown to UNHCR by various African Governments, notably the Government of Somalia, augured well for success in achieving the goals set by the Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa.

19. In South-west Asia, Pakistan had the largest refugee population in the world. The international community must give as generously as possible, through UNHCR, until such time as the situation in Afghanistan permitted the Afghan refugees to return safely to their country. The active co-operation recently established between the Islamic Republic of Iran and UNHCR for the implementation of a local integration programme for Afghan refugees was very welcome. In Indo-China, where large numbers of refugees were still being accommodated in countries of first asylum, especially in Thailand, and where assistance was being extended with limited resources, the renewed influx of Kampuchean refugees into that country and the protection they required continued to cause serious concern. In that tense area, all countries should refrain from military attacks on refugee camps and civilian settlements which would either hamper efforts to assist refugees or result in new massive influxes. In addition, it was important to give renewed attention to the suffering of some 42,000 boat people.

20. It was unfortunate that the number of refugees had increased in Central America. The efforts of several Governments to find durable solutions had been set back by the need to provide emergency assistance to newly arrived refugees. In Europe, Turkey, which respected the principle of non-refoulement, continued with certain other countries to accommodate a relatively high number of refugees and, despite difficulties, to provide transit facilities (A/39/12, paras. 127 and 128).

21. The purely humanitarian character of the refugee problem could not be overemphasized, whatever political crisis or conflict might have caused the refugees to leave their countries. To allow political considerations to interfere with relief activities would not only delay immediate and durable solutions, but might put an end to assistance altogether. In addition, while the principle of asylum should not be given a discriminatory character, it should also not be exploited for political purposes against the country of origin. The High Commissioner was right in wishing to remain systematically outside political quarrels.

(Mr. Göktürk, Turkey)

22. The magnitude and complexity of the refugee problem amply justified maintaining UNHCR in existence, and it was important for Governments to support it more actively, not just by providing material or financial aid but also by fostering a more functional approach. He wished to underline the important role of the Executive Committee of UNHCR, because it was through dialogue between the Committee and UNHCR that practical measures for the administration and management of UNHCR programmes were identified. There should be a more equitable distribution of posts in UNHCR, and care should be taken to ensure that recruitment policy did not impose additional burdens on its budget.

23. Mr. BOEL (Denmark) said that the search for lasting solutions to major refugee crises had reached a stalemate, and efforts must be made to remove the conditions which gave rise to refugee flows. Although such efforts were political in nature and fell outside UNHCR's mandate, they directly concerned that body because lack of progress toward that goal jeopardized its activities.

24. The modern phenomenon of asylum-seekers who arrived in large numbers by air and by sea, sometimes illegally, in countries far away from their homelands was often exploited by xenophobic attitudes in the host population complaining of the burden which was sometimes imposed on the countries of asylum by those who were fleeing not only insecurity but also unsatisfactory living conditions and had nowhere else to resettle. The entire international community must address those problems and arrive at a solution.

25. Denmark, which pursued liberal policies on refugee problems, believed that only individuals fulfilling the conditions set out in article 1 of the 1951 United Nations Convention should be granted refugee status, but was concerned about the erosion of the concept of asylum and the restrictive policies of some Governments with regard to the admission and treatment of asylum-seekers, often with a view to deterrence. Restrictive interpretation of the criteria defining the refugee status violated the rules of international humanitarian law and the principle of international burden-sharing. Violations of the principle of non-refoulement within the framework of general agreements aimed at normalizing bilateral relations between countries of asylum and origin were also regrettable. UNHCR must ensure that all repatriation was voluntary. Guaranteeing the physical safety of refugees and asylum-seekers was a fundamental principle of international humanitarian law, and his delegation regretted that the Executive Committee of the Programme of UNHCR had been unable to arrive at conclusions concerning military attacks on refugee camps and settlements.

26. His Government, which was concerned about the attacks on refugees in distress at sea, had contributed regularly to the anti-piracy programme undertaken by the Thai Government and was pleased that passing ships were being encouraged to come to the rescue of asylum-seekers in distress at sea in conformity with their obligations under international law. It had taken an active part in the elaboration of the "Rescue at Sea Resettlement Offers" (RASRO) plan and was pleased to note that 11 countries already supported it. If additional countries pledged their support, the plan could soon be implemented on a trial basis.

(Mr. Boel, Denmark)

27. It was encouraging that at the Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa, many countries had agreed on a new integrated approach linking refugee aid with development assistance. Donor countries should try to incorporate refugee aid in their bilateral assistance programmes, while host countries should make an effort to integrate refugees in their national development programmes. UNHCR should essentially play the role of catalyst and co-ordinator in that area and should not assume the functions of a development agency: the agreement concluded recently between UNHCR and UNDP and the co-operation between UNHCR and other intergovernmental and non-governmental agencies were welcome developments in that context. Many of those agencies had acquired experience that UNHCR could draw upon.

28. Although voluntary repatriation remained the preferred solution to refugee problems, it was possible only in a few cases, and for most refugees, resettlement in third countries was the only hope. Denmark, in the spirit of burden-sharing, was committed to international resettlement programmes.

29. With regard to funding, he said that Denmark had contributed 12 million Danish kroner to UNHCR's General Programmes in Africa, was considering supporting some bilateral projects there, and had given approximately \$1.1 million to UNHCR's general programmes in Pakistan and South-East Asia. Thus, its total contribution for 1984 amounted to \$8 million. UNHCR's financial situation might become difficult in 1985 because its requirements would increase by some \$60 million as a result of the decrease in funds carried over from the previous year. That reduction had been caused partly by improved programme delivery and, additionally, by a sharp increase in the value of the dollar. In the circumstances, UNHCR must proceed with caution, and the international community must be more generous. As in the past, Denmark was ready to shoulder its share of that burden.

30. Mr. RAY (United States of America) said that nearly 800,000 Indo-Chinese refugees had been received in the United States over the past 10 years. Their placement in cities and communities could not have been accomplished without the dedication of thousands of United States citizens working through voluntary agencies or, in Iowa, through a State programme. The case of Iowa was exemplary in many respects. With no available farmland and a homogeneous population dependent on an agricultural economy - characteristics which were often invoked to justify the inability of some countries to make room for refugees - Iowa had resettled 10,000 refugees. The experience had been rewarding, both for the refugees who had received assistance from local community organizations and for the members of those organizations, who had welcomed the refugees, found them places to stay and work and were now benefitting from the contributions they were making to society.

31. Although 1984 had been a year without major new refugee emergencies, the new problems looming on the horizon must not be ignored and the fate of other refugees, whether it was the 3 million Afghans who had fled the Soviet invasion and whom the Pakistani Government and people had so generously welcomed, or the many refugees who continued to flee Cambodia and other Indo-Chinese countries to escape the persecution of those who had been elevated to power by external forces, must not be forgotten. The famine in Africa which was now forcing thousands to flee to Somalia

(Mr. Ray, United States)

and Sudan also must not be neglected. That alarming situation required not only an immediate and full response from the international community, but also long-term solutions to enable refugees to become self-sufficient and to enable the international community to prevent such disasters in future. In that connection, the Secretary-General's personal visit to drought-stricken areas and his appointment of a special representative to mobilize the necessary resources were to be applauded.

32. The developing countries which accepted the greatest number of refugees, and the industrialized nations which provided essential material support, would benefit from assuring the High Commissioner both the means of protecting refugees and the resources for assisting them. The countries which contributed space and financial resources to refugees, and above all the refugees themselves, had a right to seek assurances that the High Commissioner's activities were efficient and that the most effective use was made of resources.

33. Refugee protection required a mastery of the relevant legal provisions, compassion, and discriminating judgement in distinguishing between bona fide refugees and the economic migrants or others who were arriving in growing numbers in the countries of asylum but who did not qualify for refugee status. That was a delicate problem which might admit of various solutions: denial of refugee status in some cases, encouraging potential emigrés to remain in their countries of origin and voluntary repatriation of refugees.

34. In addition to his traditional responsibility for the legal protection of refugees, the High Commissioner had been called upon in recent years to secure their physical protection, particularly as a result of the barbarous pirate attacks in the Gulf of Thailand and the South China Sea. The United States was glad to hear that, thanks to the efforts of the Governments of the region to ensure that the law was enforced and to UNHCR's programme designed to enhance the anti-piracy capability of those Governments, the number of pirate attacks seemed to have decreased. It hoped that the programme, which had demonstrated its effectiveness, would be given financial support by Member States in 1985 and subsequent years. The United States was pleased that the Nansen Medal had been given to three American seamen who had saved the lives of 85 refugees at sea and believed that that gesture should encourage other passing vessels to rescue refugees in distress at sea. For that very purpose, the United States had contributed over \$500,000 to a fund administered by UNHCR, in co-operation with the International Maritime Organization, to compensate shipowners for the costs of such rescues. In the light of those facts, it was now more than ever essential to implement the Rescue at Sea Resettlement Offers (RASRO) plan to ensure that refugees rescued at sea would not add to the burden of the countries of first asylum and in order to supplement the Disembarkation Resettlement Offers (DISERO) plan for refugees rescued by the ships of countries which were not themselves able to resettle refugees. Both of those creative programmes deserved the international community's support.

(Mr. Ray, United States)

35. His Government had played an active role in the Orderly Departure Programme from Viet Nam, which offered refugees a safe, legal alternative to the hazards of fleeing by sea. The United States had also announced that it would accept all Amerasian children from Viet Nam and prisoners who had been confined in so-called "re-education camps", as well as their close family members, and hoped that the Vietnamese authorities would allow those who wanted to leave to do so. Those programmes did not solve the root causes of refugee flows, although they did serve to ease their consequences. Nor did they absolve the international community from continuing to share the burden of resettling those refugees in third countries and from trying to encourage voluntary repatriation.

36. Refugee protection was a pre-requisite for any lasting solution, in particular those envisaged by the Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa and by UNHCR. Voluntary repatriation remained the most satisfactory solution for refugees and any repatriation programme required careful preparation. His delegation urged the High Commissioner to take such action in Africa and to be prepared to take it imminently in Central America and perhaps later in South-East Asia.

37. Pending a final solution, it was clear that care and maintenance activities would continue to be required for a long time to come. In such circumstances, available resources should be used cost effectively and the activities of the various participant agencies co-ordinated more closely. In that connection, the same performance standards should apply to both UNHCR and the private agencies associated with it. His delegation commended UNHCR's emergency response capacity and approved of the shift of responsibilities away from Headquarters to field posts and the support given to field operations. It also paid tribute to international organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Intergovernmental Committee for Migration, as well as to the staff and volunteers of the many private agencies who sacrificed comfort, health and sometimes their lives to assist refugees.

38. There was no greater humanitarian mission for the United Nations system than that of aiding refugees and his country assured the High Commissioner of its absolute and continued support. Not everyone had the opportunity to rescue refugees from life-threatening situations but everyone, no matter what their capacity, could help to promote a world-wide commitment to refugee assistance and protection.

39. Mrs. GRADIN (Sweden) said that, while it was a welcome fact that there had been no new large-scale exodus of refugees in recent years, the plight of long-time refugees had not diminished and, in general, refugee problems had in recent years become more complex, more serious and more time-consuming to solve. That was due, in part, to the economic constraints that had affected both donor and first asylum countries, and resettlement in industrialized countries seemed to have come closer to saturation point. Under those circumstances, it was encouraging that the High Commissioner was devoting an increasing proportion of existing resources to durable solutions. Voluntary repatriation remained the most desirable solution from all

(Mrs. Gradin, Sweden)

standpoints. However, further progress in that area seemed to be hampered by political deadlocks between the countries concerned. Since the High Commissioner naturally could not exert pressure, it was up to Governments to seek a dialogue between the parties as a first step towards ways of facilitating voluntary repatriation. With regard to the second best solution, that of local settlement in the country of first asylum, a new approach had emerged in recent years. Donor and asylum countries alike were now agreed on the need for integrated programmes in which refugee aid was linked to development, thereby preventing refugee assistance from undermining the development programmes of host countries. The third solution, that of resettlement in third countries, was likely to accommodate fewer people in future since some traditional recipient countries tended to be less willing to receive refugees and were applying stricter screening procedures. Existing resettlement possibilities must therefore be reserved for those who were in greatest need and whose physical safety would otherwise be endangered.

40. Perhaps the most pressing current problem was that of international protection since, in the past year, violations of refugee instruments had continued. The High Commissioner must initiate action when refugees' rights were threatened, and Sweden would support him in that whenever he needed it. One must also look deeper into the root causes of refugee movements, to see what preventive measures might be taken. It must not be forgotten that poverty, overpopulation, underemployment and sometimes natural disasters could trigger migratory flows similar to the refugee exodus provoked by armed conflict or ethnic or religious strife. The need to eliminate the root causes of such movements was equally great in all cases. The mere existence of refugees and displaced persons showed that United Nations machinery had failed in many respects, and renewed efforts and abundant resources were needed to reverse that trend.

41. The Executive Committee of UNHCR, at its thirty-fifth session (A/39/12/Add.1), had rightly devoted particular attention to ways of better ensuring the international protection of refugees and, in particular, preventing military and armed attacks on refugee camps, which constituted serious violations of the fundamental principles of international law and must be systematically condemned. The protection of refugees often placed a heavy burden on countries of asylum and the Executive Committee must obviously find specific ways of guaranteeing such protection in troubled areas.

42. The Executive Committee had also dealt with the relatively new phenomenon of migratory movements from south to north which were developing alongside traditional refugee flows. There was a risk that a high volume of irregular entries might weaken public support in host countries for those who were genuinely seeking asylum. It would be tragic if that were to result in more restrictive government practices. The High Commissioner had proposed that a seminar be held in 1985 to discuss those matters; Sweden welcomed that initiative and hoped that it would meet with constructive participation by Governments which were genuinely interested in safeguarding the international protection of refugees.

(Mrs. Gradin, Sweden)

43. Another new migratory development could be observed in Africa, where persistent drought had further aggravated the refugee problem, especially in the Horn of Africa and neighbouring countries. As a result, in order to save lives the High Commissioner might find himself compelled to extend his services to drought victims who normally did not come within his mandate. It went without saying that such critical needs must be met by whatever agency happened to be at hand, but the drought problem meant that the High Commissioner must concern himself with refugees and returnees in the stricken areas and had disrupted his programmes for finding durable solutions for the area as a whole.

44. The Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa, held at Geneva in July 1984, had achieved encouraging results. The Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at the Conference constituted a balanced framework for future action. Emphasis was placed on voluntary repatriation wherever possible and all programmes, whether in countries of asylum or countries of origin, should be geared toward making refugees self-sufficient and be closely linked with economic and social development schemes for the region. Her delegation hoped that the Plan of Action for refugees in Africa would inspire similar strategies in other parts of the world. In that connection, she wished to emphasize the important role of non-governmental organizations as implementing agencies. Women too, because they often constitute - with children - the vast majority among refugees, played a crucial role which should be given due consideration when planning programmes aimed at stimulating social and productive life within the refugee community.

45. In his introductory statement (A/C.3/39/SR.36), the High Commissioner had referred to areas of the world where refugees continued to deserve the attention of the international community. For a long time now, Pakistan and Iran had been harbouring by far the largest refugee population in the world. As long as the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan continued, millions of Afghan refugees had no hope of returning to their homes. In Kampuchea, the Vietnamese invasion had contributed to a similar situation. Her Government would continue to support efforts to bring about the voluntary repatriation of refugees to Laos and Kampuchea and believed that such programmes in the region could be expanded.

46. The conflict between Iran and Iraq and the fact that it was impossible to bring about peace in the Middle East continued to inflict severe hardship on the civilian population, particularly in Lebanon, and the international community must make a greater effort to safeguard the rights of refugees and displaced persons in the countries in question. In southern Africa, where South Africa continued its abhorrent apartheid policy, its illegal occupation of Namibia and its destabilization policies directed against the neighbouring States, particularly by launching repeated attacks on refugee camps, refugees were in an extremely critical position. The High Commissioner had therefore had to strengthen his presence and had taken steps in that direction that had immediately produced positive results. In Central America, internal armed conflicts had led to the flight of hundreds of thousands of people, who had been forced to seek refuge in the neighbouring countries, particularly Mexico. In that region, the High Commissioner had

(Mrs. Gradin, Sweden)

encountered great difficulties in his endeavour to provide refugees with security, but the Governments of the countries of reception were showing much good will. She wished to urge the countries in question to step up even further their co-operation with the High Commissioner in order to facilitate implementation of the principles of protection and effective use of the resources made available to them. The refugee problems in Central America could not be solved unless the peoples concerned were given a chance to build up their societies in peace and freedom, without external intervention of any kind. In South America, although in Chile events had recently taken an alarming turn, it was encouraging to note that, where a number of other countries were concerned, a growing number of exiles were able to consider returning to their countries. They must be given the necessary material assistance.

47. Mr. ELAHMADI (Sudan) said that he wished to commend the High Commissioner for his report and for the efforts that both he and his co-workers were continuing to make in order to come to the assistance of the growing number of refugees, particularly in Africa, South-East Asia and Central America, who were often the victims of armed aggression, acts of piracy and inhumane treatment. The inflow of refugees was worsening the situation of countries and entire regions, thus exacerbating regional tensions and giving rise to further refugee flows.

48. In Africa, refugees were a heavy burden for the host countries, whose economic situation was already critical as a result of drought and various natural disasters, which had an adverse effect on the situation of the refugees and the indigenous population.

49. Since the beginning of the year, the Sudan had itself been forced to take in over 50,000 refugees and had therefore had to build three further camps for them. Refugees were continuing to flow in at a rate of 300 to 400 people a day. Since there was a severe drought in the northern part of eastern Sudan in particular, the seriousness of the problems confronting the population of that region, where water, natural resources and the infrastructure were barely sufficient for the local population, was evident to all. The Sudan had therefore requested the World Food Programme and UNHCR to send a joint mission to assess the situation on the ground and to provide the refugees with the necessary relief. The mission in question would be conducted in the course of the current week.

50. The situation was not much better in western Sudan, where there was also a serious drought, which had forced the Sudanese authorities to dispatch emergency food aid. The local population had recently been joined by 94,000 refugees, and it was estimated that 500 to 800 further refugees were crossing the border daily. The Sudanese population had once again been obliged to come to the assistance of the refugees in question by sharing with them their scarce resources and constructing refugee camps both in the border region and in the interior of the country. The UNHCR representative at Khartoum and the World Food Programme representative in the Sudan had themselves seen the refugee situation during the visit that they had paid to the region with the Sudanese Minister for Foreign Affairs. A tribute must be

(Mr. Elahmadi, Sudan)

paid to the African Islamic Relief Agency, a Sudanese voluntary organization that had provided the refugees with medical assistance, and to the Sudanese Women's Union, which had collected clothing for them.

51. The Sudan urged the international community to provide emergency relief for the refugees in both the western and eastern regions of the country and to supply, above all, vehicles for transporting foodstuffs, particularly to the refugee camps in the western region, since transport was an integral part of food aid.

52. The Sudan had also undertaken a number of long-term projects to establish the necessary infrastructure to enable the refugees to become self-sufficient.

53. His delegation had participated in the meetings of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, held in October, during which it had made statements on the various questions considered by the Committee that concerned the Sudan in particular.

54. In his report (A/39/12 and Add.1), the High Commissioner had reported in particular on violations affecting the security of refugees and the unprecedented suffering inflicted on them. The Sudan shared his concern in that connection and believed that the issue of the protection of refugees must continue to be given priority at the international level and that a declaration of principles designed to ensure that their rights were safeguarded and that their safety was guaranteed should be adopted. Although steps must be taken to counter any attacks against the refugee camps and villages, the camps must also be prevented from becoming military training centres or bases for launching attacks against the neighbouring States. It must therefore be possible to inspect the camps in question at any time in order to confirm that they served a purely humanitarian purpose. The Sudan also wholeheartedly supported the efforts made by the High Commissioner to ensure that the "boat people" were saved.

55. His delegation welcomed the action taken with a view to improving the financial and administrative situation of UNHCR and decentralizing refugee services. It would be desirable, in particular, to assign high-level officials to posts in Africa, Asia and Latin America and to give them greater authority so that they could deal directly and rapidly with any situation calling for emergency relief. His delegation would make more detailed comments on the administrative structure of UNHCR at the Executive Committee's following meeting in January 1985.

56. His delegation wished to express its gratitude to the international community for the efforts it had made to meet the deficit in the 1985 High Commissioner's Programme, despite the economic difficulties that a considerable number of countries were experiencing.

57. The Sudan believed that the meeting in Geneva, in July 1984, of the Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa was an extremely important initiative. It wished to express its gratitude to the countries that had

(Mr. Elahmadi, Sudan)

made pledges, as well as the hope that other countries would follow their example with a view to lightening the burden assumed by the African countries in granting asylum to the refugees. The Sudan was particularly interested in the follow-up activities to the Conference, which were to be carried out by the United Nations, UNHCR and OAU in close co-operation with the donor countries and the host countries, as well as with voluntary organizations.

58. His delegation welcomed the decision adopted by the Executive Committee to add Arabic, Chinese and Spanish to its working languages, which, it was to be hoped, would facilitate that Committee's work, and trusted that, at its current session, the General Assembly would provide the necessary financial resources for its implementation.

59. The Sudan had signed the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol, as well as the 1969 OAU Convention, and had promulgated a law on refugees in 1974. Moreover, it had established specialized bodies (National Council for the Protection of Refugees, Refugee Office), as well as a number of voluntary organizations to assist refugees. It was currently endeavouring, with assistance from the High Commissioner, to issue identity cards to the refugees.

60. The Sudan hoped that it would continue to receive the extremely precious assistance that had been provided to it so far so that it could fulfil its commitments to the refugees it had taken in. It would endeavour to implement the projects it had submitted at the Second International Conference. However, it wished to stress how important it was to find lasting solutions to refugee problems and that the best solution was unquestionably voluntary repatriation.

61. Mr. OSMAN (Somalia) thanked the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for the exhaustive report he had submitted (A/39/12 and Add.1) and on his faith in his work. Without the Office of the High Commissioner, without the contributions of all the United Nations agencies, the dedication of voluntary organizations world wide, assistance from traditional donor countries and - not often fully recognized - without the generosity of the asylum countries, themselves so impoverished, the plight of the refugees would be even worse.

62. He referred to the report on Assistance to refugees in Somalia (A/39/443) and in particular section IV of that document, entitled "Assistance Requirements", and observed that his country had been taking in refugees for a long time, always for purely humanitarian reasons. It should be emphasized, however, that the problem had in recent years assumed a magnitude which was quite unique in the annals of Africa. Refugee flows first escalated wildly during 1980, and Somalia had been unable to cope with a rapidly deteriorating economic situation. He gratefully acknowledged the bilateral and multilateral aid which his country had received at the time. After an apparent lull in 1983, a new flow of refugees, numbering over 50,000, had begun in August 1984. Many had been settled 50 kilometres south of Berbera, but that operation had been seriously hampered by lack of transport, even though private individuals had loaned their vehicles to the Government. In

(Mr. Osman, Somalia)

addition, food supplies, already short in the region, had come under increasing strain. The Extraordinary Commissioner who headed the National Refugee Commission had advised the High Commissioner of an imminent food crisis in the north and south of the country. The daily cereal ration, which had been 200 grams until 30 October 1984, had had to be reduced to 75 grams in the north and 150 grams in the south, but even that survival minimum, which was bound to have an adverse effect on the health of the refugees, would lead to the exhaustion of food stocks by the end of December. Somalia had learned with alarm that the shipments of wheat and pulses sent by the High Commissioner's Office and the rice from the World Food Programme would not arrive until the beginning of 1985. The situation was therefore extremely critical and called for urgent international action in the next two weeks; the future food situation of the refugees should be made more secure.

63. Somalia was one of the countries which received the greatest number of refugees; while looking after their most pressing needs on a day-to-day basis, it therefore welcomed the search for lasting solutions, such as voluntary repatriation, settlement in the country of asylum, or, alternatively, resettlement in a third country. However, since Somalia had not seen any improvement in the situation which had caused the departure of the many refugees to which it had offered asylum, and since the area remained under alien military occupation and - if certain information was to be credited - in danger of famine, it could not accept the opinion of the mission expressed in paragraph 94 of the report of the High Commissioner (A/39/12), that the Ogaden offered excellent prospects for further large-scale repatriation.

64. Man-made as well as natural disasters (drought, desertification, famine) played a part in causing the refugee flows and were difficult to separate. The international community should be deeply concerned with the famine which prevailed in a large part of Africa. It should be recognized, however, that refugee problems were more often due to political rather than climatic causes. There was a close link between refugee flows and conflict situations (civil war, alien occupation, struggle for self-determination), basic denial of human rights and the pursuit of policies frequently and forcefully condemned by the United Nations and world opinion. While that aspect did not fall within the mandate of the High Commissioner's Office, and the non-political character of that Office had to be preserved, as stressed in paragraph 20 of the Addendum to the Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (A/39/12/Add.1), the problem did come within the purview of the General Assembly. Moreover, a certain number of delegations which had participated in the two International Conferences on Assistance to Refugees in Africa held in 1981 and 1984, had called for an analysis of the root causes of the refugee problem.

65. Also, as the High Commissioner had said, human tragedies should not be politicized. Refugees certainly should never be used as pawns and traded for short-term political advantage, but the search for durable solutions should not lead to neglecting consideration of the root causes of the problem either, because the political reality could not be denied; the international community was therefore morally obligated to adopt appropriate measures.

(Mr. Osman, Somalia)

66. Somalia welcomed humanitarian assistance to peoples in need, provided that it was not diverted before it reached the beneficiaries. It also freely accepted the position of the Organization of African Unity that the granting of asylum to refugees was a peaceful and humanitarian act and should not be regarded as unfriendly by any State. It also agreed that no person should be rejected at the frontier, returned or expelled, forcing him or her to return to a territory where life, physical integrity or liberty would be threatened. It also supported the United Nations position that repatriation should be voluntary. Repatriation should follow the resolution of the political problem which had caused the refugees to flee. It was generally known, for example, that certain repatriation programmes had led to controversy. Obligatory or premature repatriation would provoke a renewed exodus of returnees to other host countries already under strain; that had happened in Somalia. Somalia therefore considered it necessary to undertake an impartial and in depth study aimed at establishing an independent and international verification procedure to determine the real number of refugees or returnees and all the conditions involved in their flight, their return, their protection and their security. Somalia, which had long been convinced that the only solution lay in voluntary repatriation, had revised its position by publishing, in March 1983, a policy statement in which the Government announced its intention to support the creation of settlement areas. Since its meagre resources did not match its generosity, it welcomed the recognition at the Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa, as well as in United Nations documentation, of the need for comprehensive development planning. Funding from the international community was imperative and the burden must be shared more equally.

67. The countries of Africa had been disappointed by the results of the First International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa since the contributions pledged had "evaporated" (by merging with contributions already agreed upon) or had for one reason or another not reached the National Refugee Commissions of the host countries. It was therefore imperative that those institutions should be properly represented on the bodies monitoring the results of the Second Conference in order to ensure not only that the pledges made were implemented in the best possible way, but also that refugee needs would be recognized and satisfied without delay. To that end Somalia would of course continue to co-operate with the international community.

The meeting rose at 6.20 p.m.