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THIRD COMMITTEE
39th meeting
held on
Wednesday, 14 November 1984
at 3 p.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 39th 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, A/39/443, 444,
445, 446 and 447)
- (b) ASSISTANCE TO REFUGEES IN AFRICA: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (continued)
(A/39/402 and Add.1)

1. Mr. MILES (United Kingdom) said that, although there had been no new refugee emergencies for the second year in a row, the number of refugees throughout the world continued to be distressing. There were currently 10 million refugees, while 25 years earlier, during the World Refugee Year, 1.2 million refugees had received help. However, too little attention had been paid to the efforts made by recipient countries to deal with such an influx. A welcome interest had been shown in that question at the Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa, held at Geneva in July 1984, during which the United Kingdom had pledged £5 million. To meet some of the urgent humanitarian needs in Africa, which currently had the largest share of refugees, the United Kingdom had made contributions in 1984 totalling over £30 million.

2. Nevertheless, it was in Asia that the greatest concentration of refugees could be found - the Afghan refugees in Pakistan and in Iran. The continued Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in defiance of successive General Assembly resolutions prevented the repatriation of millions of Afghans who wanted to return home. The United Kingdom acknowledged the help which UNHCR gave to those refugees and, for its part, continued to provide them with financial assistance (£24.4 million since January 1980), channelled primarily through UNHCR.

3. Of all the durable solutions to refugee problems which UNHCR sought first and foremost, the ideal was voluntary repatriation: it was necessary to create the conditions in which refugees could return of their own free will to their countries of origin. However, the problem was at root a political one which called for a demonstration of political will. In that connection, he recalled the role which the Committee might play in preserving and strengthening the indispensable consensus which enabled UNHCR to remain effective in carrying out its non-political humanitarian tasks. He also noted that the search for durable solutions to refugee problems was closely linked to the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms, a question which the Committee dealt with under several other agenda items.

4. With regard to the financial situation of the High Commissioner's Office, his delegation wished to stress the need to provide UNHCR with a steady and substantial flow of resources. The United Kingdom had always been a staunch supporter of that agency and had contributed generously to the regular budget and in response to special appeals. However, in view of the constraints on his country's assistance programme, he hoped that the High Commissioner would ensure that every possible economy was made and that the needs of refugees were given priority. The magnitude

(Mr. Miles, United Kingdom)

of the financial problems of UNHCR was currently such that a widening of the circle of donor countries was clearly necessary. His delegation hoped that the High Commissioner's appeal in that regard would be heeded and that he would receive the funds which he needed.

5. Mr. XIE Qimei (China) noted with satisfaction that UNHCR had done much useful work over the past year in rendering international protection to refugees in various parts of the world and in providing them with material assistance. The refugee situation remained serious throughout the world, largely because the root causes of massive refugee outflows continued: Afghanistan and Kampuchea remained under foreign military occupation, the South African authorities obstinately pursued their system of apartheid and Israel persisted in its expansionist policy. Under those circumstances, consideration of the refugee problem continued to be a matter of urgency.

6. The Government and people of China had consistently shown compassion to refugees throughout the world. China had helped to settle more than 276,000 refugees of Indo-Chinese origin and had made contributions, to the best of its ability, on behalf of refugees in Asia and Africa and to UNHCR general assistance programmes. His delegation believed that the refugee problem was a world problem, and that all members of the international community should share fairly the responsibilities which that problem place on them. His delegation welcomed the humanitarian spirit demonstrated by the countries of first asylum and recipient countries, as well as the efforts of solidarity made by donor countries.

7. At the Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa, the African countries had put forward new concepts and principles - specifically, the idea of linking refugee assistance with development aid - which ought to be used in solving the refugee problem in Africa. At present, those ideas must be translated into action, and his delegation hoped that the developed countries would, in the interest of world political and economic stability, provide the countries of asylum and recipient countries in Africa with more humanitarian aid and development assistance.

8. With regard to the international protection of refugees, his delegation noted with concern that the personal safety of refugees was often violated, and that military attacks on refugee camps had increased, particularly in Asia. The international community must take concrete measures to put an end to such attacks and punish those responsible; to that end an international instrument should be worked out that was acceptable to all parties. The Chinese Government supported the action taken in that direction by the UNHCR Executive Committee.

9. The number of refugees in the world had increased sharply since 1979, which not only imposed a heavy financial burden on the international community but also constituted a serious threat to security in some regions. Thus it was only right that the international community had paid increasing attention to the problem since that time. While it was generally agreed that the ideal solution was voluntary repatriation, there was a divergence of views as to how to achieve that objective. China had always maintained that the refugee problem must be solved both by providing international protection and humanitarian relief and by eliminating the causes of the problem. While both approaches were indispensable, the latter was

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(Mr. Xie Qimei, China)

even more fundamental. Furthermore, UNHCR efforts since 1981 to help African and Latin American countries with such voluntary repatriation operations had been successful. The Chinese Government was determined to work with other countries in a joint effort to eliminate the root causes of the refugee problem.

10. Mr. LAUTENSCHLAGER (Federal Republic of Germany) said that the new flows of refugees, in particular in Asia, Africa and Latin America, had taken on dramatic dimensions. He welcomed the way in which the United Nations system, through the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, was responding to the emergency facing the African continent in particular. Nevertheless, the primary objective of UNHCR should remain the search for lasting solutions to the problem of refugees, at the regional level especially, and the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany, which paid particular attention to the local integration of refugees, had earmarked funds for that purpose, both bilaterally and multilaterally and in the form of trust funds to UNHCR.

11. His delegation was gratified to note that the international community was giving enhanced emphasis to the need to develop lasting solutions to the global refugee problem. The importance of addressing the multi-faceted causes of the refugee problem had been stressed in the final document of the Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa.

12. That was the approach that the Federal Republic had taken in launching, at the thirty-fifth session of the General Assembly, its initiative on international co-operation to avert new flows of refugees. It noted with satisfaction the progress achieved by the Group of Governmental Experts on International Co-operation to Avert New Flows of Refugees, which had been established as a result of that initiative. His delegation reiterated the hope that a comprehensive approach to the refugee problem, combining measures of international co-operation aimed at eliminating, or at least reducing, the causes of the problem with compassionate efforts to protect and assist refugees, would defuse one of the gravest problems of the twentieth century, which increasingly posed a threat to peace and stability around the globe.

13. His Government appreciated the concept of establishing a link between refugee aid and development, which, it noted with satisfaction, was receiving more and more support. It had already implemented several assistance projects for refugees and was also participating in multilateral projects. UNHCR should, indeed, show flexibility in its role in that area, but there seemed to be general agreement that its role basically should be that of co-ordinator and catalyst. In that light, his Government welcomed the agreement concluded between UNHCR and UNDP on guidelines for co-operation with regard to development activities affecting refugees, and the co-operation that had developed between UNHCR and ILO, UNICEF and certain other organizations. It believed that non-governmental organizations could also be associated more effectively with UNHCR activities in the field of development assistance.

14. With regard to follow-up action to the Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa, his Government was ready to co-operate with the Governments concerned in the various fields of development assistance and had an abiding interest in the implementation of the Programme of Action of the Conference.

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(Mr. Lautenschlager, Federal
Republic of Germany)

15. Recent cases of retoulement and involuntary repatriation in different parts of the world were a cause of serious concern to his Government, as was the dramatic decrease in recent months in rescues of asylum-seekers in distress in the South China Sea. It had therefore, like many other Governments, instructed the authorities concerned to confirm to shipmasters the modalities to be followed in cases of rescue at sea. The Federal Republic of Germany also intended to participate in the Disembarkation Resettlement Officers (DISERO) scheme. With regard to pirate attacks on asylum-seekers at sea, his Government had participated in efforts to solve the problem and welcomed the fact that the anti-piracy arrangement would be extended for another 12 months. It hoped that the implementation of the arrangement would help to improve the situation.

16. The question of access to refugee camps for the High Commissioner was another question of concern to his Government, which urged all parties involved to give him the necessary support for the protection of refugees and for the fulfilment of his mandate.

17. The Government of the Federal Republic of Germany remained committed to playing an active role in financing UNHCR activities in all areas of assistance. The Federal Republic was one of the main contributors to UNHCR programmes. Apart from its share in the contribution of the European Economic Community, it had contributed approximately \$19.5 million to the UNHCR budget for 1983 and, so far, approximately \$21.3 million for 1984.

18. However, his delegation was seriously concerned about a possible budget gap in 1985 of about \$60 million, though that deficit could not be blamed on UNHCR or on Governments. A more careful approach to special programmes was advisable; the High Commissioner should also continue to avoid undertaking activities that were not clearly within his mandate, which should not be enlarged. It was in that light that his Government would examine the results of the job classification for professional posts, as well as requests for additional posts.

19. Mr. MATELJAK (Yugoslavia) said that, as was evident from the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (A/39/12 and Add.1) and the report of the Secretary-General (A/39/402), the situation of refugees in the world was very serious. It was therefore fitting that the High Commissioner had decided to devote an increased percentage of annual programme resources to the pursuit of durable solutions. His delegation welcomed the initiatives taken by the High Commissioner in developing the concept of development-oriented assistance to refugees and considered that activities aimed at implementing that concept should be increased. In fact, the current situation was difficult not only for refugees, but also for a large number of developing countries, which were often the countries of first asylum. For that reason, it was necessary for all the competent bodies of the United Nations, Member States and the whole international community to take urgent and effective action to increase financial and material assistance to refugees and to developing countries of first asylum.

20. The situation of refugees in Africa was especially precarious, not only because half of all refugees were to be found on that continent, but also because of the extremely critical economic situation of African countries, further

(Mr. Mateljak, Yugoslavia)

aggravated by the severe drought. His delegation therefore fully supported the Declaration and Programme of Action adopted at the Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa, which it believed to have been the beginning of a process that might lead to a speedy and effective solution of the refugee problems of that continent. His Government, which regularly contributed to the UNHCR budget, had announced its decision to make an additional donation for assistance to refugees in Africa.

21. For Yugoslavia, the problem of refugees was essentially a humanitarian one. It participated actively in the efforts of the international community to solve that problem at the global level, particularly within the framework of the Programme of the High Commissioner for Refugees. It was, moreover, a member of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the High Commissioner for Refugees. Yugoslavia had ratified the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and complied with the provisions of that instrument.

22. Mrs. LOMONACO (Italy) said that refugees were forced to leave their homes and countries because of intolerance and oppression, a telling indication of the fact that human rights were not universally respected. It was the duty of the international community to protect such weak and defenceless individuals. The assaults on their personal safety and the attacks which they suffered in reception camps or on the seas of South-East Asia were disquieting facts. Italy agreed with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees that responsibility for patrolling the high seas should be shared by all countries and was accordingly taking part in the anti-piracy programme being carried out in co-operation with the Thai Government.

23. It would be desirable to formulate a text stating the principles of international law which States should comply with so as to guarantee respect for the civilian and humanitarian character of refugee camps. Although it was gratifying that new States had ratified the 1951 United Nations Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, there was cause for concern, as stated by the High Commissioner in his report, in the fact that States had denied asylum for fear of damaging or compromising bilateral relations with countries of origin.

24. Voluntary repatriation was no doubt the best durable solution. Adequate guarantees of personal safety and of respect for their fundamental civil rights should, however, be given to repatriates. Moreover, the importance of another lasting solution, namely resettlement in a third country, should not be underestimated. In the view of her Government, which had long experience in the matter, such a solution would require broad international co-ordination so that all parties could discharge their responsibilities.

25. The Italian Government had followed with great attention developments at the Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa, the main topic of which had been the integration of refugees in countries of reception. Her Government had announced that it would make a contribution of \$15 million to finance a group of projects submitted by African countries. At the conclusion of the Conference, Italy had informed Ethiopia, Somalia and the Sudan that it was ready to send special missions to those countries immediately to execute the

(Mrs. Lomonaco, Italy)

projects selected. Similar missions would soon be sent to Angola and Zambia. The Italian Government hoped that the Conference would not only lead to an increase in aid supplied by donor countries and the co-ordination of aid but would also promote awareness in the African continent of the need to avoid dangerous situations liable to cause mass outflows or refolement.

26. Mr. NGO PIN (Democratic Kampuchea) said that refugee flows were often caused by the annexation of one country by another. It was clear from international developments in recent years that wars of aggression and occupation continued to worsen, particularly in Asia - especially in Kampuchea and Afghanistan - and in the Middle East, Africa and Central America. In Afghanistan, 3 million inhabitants, expelled from their homes by the occupier, had become refugees in their own country and another 4 million had taken refuge in Pakistan. The situation of the millions of Palestine refugees remained tragic. In Africa, despite the success of the Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa, the problem of refugees remained unresolved and the continued occupation of Namibia only served to aggravate the situation.

27. In South East Asia, the invasion and occupation of Kampuchea and the repressive and expansionist policy pursued by the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam towards neighbouring countries had provoked a mass outflow of refugees towards Thailand and other Asian countries. Tens of thousands of Vietnamese continued to flee their country. Although the outflow was largely due to the oppressive policy of the Vietnamese Government, it was also the logical consequence of the destruction of the Vietnamese economy, ruined by the occupation of Kampuchea. The occupation, which had caused a mass outflow of Kampuchean refugees to Thailand in 1979 and population movements within Kampuchea, was turning into colonization. Hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese settlers had expelled the Kampucheans from their rich ancestral lands, making them refugees in their own country.

28. His delegation was grateful for the fraternal humanitarian assistance provided by Thailand and its people to the hundreds of thousands of Kampucheans who had escaped the death, famine and slavery brought by the invaders. Kampuchea's gratitude was all the more profound since, as the report of the United Nations Border Relief Operation pointed out, the Thai population in border areas shared the sufferings and misfortunes of the Kampuchean refugees during the numerous attacks on refugee camps in Kampuchea and in Thailand.

29. While agreeing that the principles of international protection and refugee rights should be strengthened, his delegation felt that United Nations organs and the international community should firmly condemn, as a crime against humanity, direct attacks on refugee camps. It was essential for the Executive Committee of UNHCR unreservedly to condemn such attacks and unequivocally to state that they could not be justified under any circumstances and that they constituted a grave violation of international law and humanitarian principles. In that connection, his delegation strongly supported the decision of the Executive Committee of UNHCR to request its Chairman to ensure continued consultations to prevent such attacks.

30. The only way of finding a definitive solution to the problem of Kampuchean refugees was to secure the total and unconditional withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Kampuchea and thus to enable the people of Kampuchea to freely exercise its

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(Mr. Ngo Pin, Democratic Kampuchea)

right to self-determination. As H.R.H. Prince Norodom Sihanouk had recently said during his statement before the General Assembly, the problem of Kampuchean refugees and, of course, that of restoring peace could not be resolved so long as Viet Nam and its allies continued to oppose the just resolutions of the United Nations.

31. His delegation renewed its sincere thanks to all the donor countries and to the international agencies and humanitarian organizations for their tireless efforts to assist and protect Kampuchean refugees and the people of Kampuchea in their struggle against foreign aggression and occupation and hoped that such assistance would be increased.

32. Mr. HAWKES (Canada) said that today's major refugee problems were in Africa, Asia and Central America, namely those areas of the world that could least afford the costs of an adequate compassionate response. According to the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (A/39/12), about half of the States Members of the United Nations contributed money to the UNHCR assistance programmes. Refugees were all too frequently the victims of the failure of the international community to resolve political problems by peaceful means. The least that should be done was to strive, collectively, to alleviate their suffering.

33. The objective of the long-term integration of refugees into the development process, which had clearly emerged at the Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa, should now be translated into truly effective projects. Canada intended to participate in projects with a total value of \$15 million destined for at least six countries.

34. In the quest for lasting solutions to the problems of refugees, a step-by-step approach should be adopted: relief, care and maintenance, self-sufficiency activities and development projects. The integration of refugees into the development process would require political will on the part of countries concerned, which was not easily generated when the countries in question had limited resources. The international community should therefore assist those countries in attaining their development objectives and thus facilitate the integration of refugees.

35. His delegation agreed with the High Commissioner that local settlement and voluntary repatriation were the best solutions to refugee problems. Third country resettlement did, however, play an important role, and Canada continued to accept refugees in significant numbers. More countries should do the same. In that regard, Canada supported the initiative taken by UNHCR to organize a seminar which would promote the participation of interested Governments in planning resettlement programmes.

36. Addressing the root causes of the refugee problem - in other words, prevention rather than cure - was at least as important as the development of strategies and should remain a priority objective for the international community.

37. The High Commissioner had rightly emphasized the connection between the growth in irregular movements of asylum-seekers and the erosion of public support in many countries for generous asylum policies. Some of those movements were primarily motivated by a desire for improved conditions of asylum and were often difficult to

(Mr. Hawkes, Canada)

distinguish from conventional flows of migrants in search of economic betterment. Receiving countries, however, could not respond to such aspirations. When that phenomenon occurred, it inevitably diminished public support for the admission of refugees in genuine need of resettlement. In order to deal with irregular movements of refugees from countries of asylum to more distant countries, recipient countries must act in co-ordination with other members of the international community. For that reason, Canada had proposed, at the thirty-fifth session of the Executive Committee of UNHCR, that a study of the issue should be undertaken.

38. His delegation appreciated the High Commissioner's continued efforts to improve the management of UNHCR's resources. It shared the concerns expressed by the High Commissioner regarding the reduction in voluntary contributions. Concerning the staff of UNHCR, the policy of rotating posts should be pursued and staffing should continue to be based on merit and qualifications. His delegation supported the concept of zero growth in the international civil service and favoured the redeployment of existing resources on a priority basis to the needs of the developing countries where there were large refugee concentrations.

39. Mrs. YAMAZAKI (Japan) said it was regrettable that massive outflows of refugees were still occurring in many parts of the world; that the refugee problem in general had intensified to such an extent that it was becoming increasingly difficult to apply traditional durable solutions; and that the situation had sometimes deteriorated seriously, particularly in Africa under the effect of the drought. The Japanese Government intended to continue its active support for the humanitarian work of UNHCR and, since 1979, her country had been second only to the United States among donor countries in the size of its annual contribution to the Office of the High Commissioner. For 1984, despite financial difficulties, Japan's contribution to UNHCR would amount to \$US 48.1 million.

40. In the South China Sea, thousands of Vietnamese were still leaving their country by boat every month. The number of refugees rescued at sea had been declining for some time, but piracy continued to be a serious problem. In the South-East Asian countries, there were still extremely large numbers of Indo-Chinese refugees, especially in Thailand, where many of those people had been staying for more than three or four years in camps, often exposed to armed attacks. Voluntary repatriation remained the most durable solution to the Indo-Chinese refugee problem, and arrangements made recently by UNHCR to repatriate to their homelands some 2,500 Lao refugees were most encouraging. However, since voluntary repatriation on any significant scale was not immediately feasible, UNHCR should concentrate its efforts in South-East Asia primarily on projects such as the Orderly Departure Programme and on resettlement in third countries. Moreover, in order to halt the decline in rescue operations, UNHCR should also continue to alert and mobilize public opinion, especially by its information campaigns.

41. Boat people continued to disembark in Japan, where to date there were approximately 8,000 such refugees. Of that number, Japan had granted permission to resettle in its territory to the 1,400 refugees wishing to do so, which brought the number of Indo-Chinese refugees currently resettled in Japan to more than 3,700.

(Mrs. Yamazaki, Japan)

In addition, Japan had granted financial assistance to Indo-Chinese refugees through UNHCR amounting to \$270 million, which made Japan the largest donor country in that field. Japan also extended financial aid to Thailand and the Philippines through other international organizations such as WFP and ICRC and through bilateral channels.

42. With regard to Africa, where some 3 to 4 million refugees were suffering from hunger and disease, the Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa, held at Geneva in 1984, would help in adopting a new approach to the co-ordination of purely humanitarian assistance to refugees and of development aid. That new policy should be widely applied, and her delegation hoped, in that regard, that UNHCR would perform the very important role of catalyst and co-ordinator. At the Conference, her delegation had announced that Japan would contribute approximately \$6 million to the UNHCR programme of relief for refugees in Africa and provide approximately \$6.5 million in food aid through WFP, in addition to the \$7.3 million in food aid which it had granted in March 1984. Japan had also indicated that, of the refugee-related development projects presented to the Conference by the African countries, it attached particular importance to those concerning water supply, health and hygiene. The Japanese Government would consider the feasibility of implementing some of those projects on a bilateral basis.

43. When he addressed the General Assembly, Japan's Minister for Foreign Affairs had proposed that the whole United Nations system should be mobilized to draw up a unified plan of action for the peoples of Africa, including refugees, and had called for the active support of all Member States. With a view to alerting Japanese public opinion, a campaign entitled "Africa Month" had recently been conducted in Japan, which had been remarkably useful in promoting public awareness of action needed to assist the victims of drought in Africa and had also had the effect of boosting fund-raising activities carried out for that purpose by non-governmental organizations.

44. In general, her delegation would continue to promote, as a matter of priority, the best durable solution not only in Africa but in all other regions where there were major concentrations of refugees - in South-West Asia, the Middle East and Central America - namely, voluntary repatriation. Since that solution could achieve only slow progress and could not even be contemplated in the foreseeable future in some particular cases such as that of the Afghan refugees and since, in addition, prospects for resettlement in third countries were decreasing, it was now up to the country of first asylum to absorb the largest burden. Therefore, UNHCR should also intensify its efforts with regard to projects designed to ensure, even as a temporary solution, the self-sufficiency of refugees in host countries.

45. Japan, which was a member of the UNHCR Executive Committee, had participated in the work of the thirty-fifth session of the Committee (A/39/12/Add.1). She wished to reiterate her delegation's statement that Japan was very concerned about the constraints on the resources which could be diverted to refugee relief and which remained strictly limited. The Executive Committee should again discuss those administrative and financial matters at the informal meeting to be held in January 1985.

(Mrs. Yamazaki, Japan)

46. With regard to the decision of the Executive Committee to make Arabic, Chinese and Spanish official Committee languages, her delegation recalled that the Joint Inspection Unit recommended that new languages should be introduced only if indispensable to the proper functioning of the organ concerned. Her delegation hoped that the proposed change would not result in further delays either in the proceedings of the Executive Committee or in the publication of documentation.

47. Mr. VRAALSEN (Norway) also noted with regret that global refugee problems remained extremely serious and that military conflicts and political oppression continued to be the main root causes of refugee situations. It was, however, encouraging to note that UNHCR was focusing increasingly on the need to find durable solutions, and that positive results had been achieved.

48. Although a considerable number of refugees had been voluntarily repatriated or resettled during the past year, a major proportion of refugees remained in the countries of first asylum which, as they were often situated in the least developed regions of the world, had particular difficulty in finding durable solutions for them. He was therefore pleased with the positive response to the High Commissioner's action in co-ordinating refugee aid and development. It was clear that refugee-related development projects should not be implemented at the expense of the host country's development efforts. It was therefore logical for such projects to be incorporated in the overall development planning of the host countries.

49. The Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa had represented a considerable step forward. Norway had pledged an additional amount of approximately \$US 2 million for refugee programmes in Africa, and had also indicated its willingness to finance development projects for refugees on that continent with a further \$US 2 million. Despite the financial strain currently experienced by many donor countries, it was incumbent on them to maintain an appropriate level of contributions to refugee programmes and his Government would maintain its commitment in the years to come.

50. International protection of refugees was a vital part of the High Commissioner's mandate, but unfortunately serious violations of refugee rights had increased during the past year, in the form of military attacks against refugee camps, private attacks on refugees in distress at sea, detention or refoulement. His Government believed that concrete measures to prevent such incidents were long overdue, especially since the situation was constantly worsening, especially with regard to refugees at sea: their distress signals were often ignored and ships passed by without offering the assistance required by long-standing maritime tradition. That situation had led UNHCR to introduce the arrangement known as "Rescue at Sea Resettlement Offers" (RASRO). Norway was among the 11 States which had pledged their support for that scheme, and his delegation hoped that the target of 4,000 resettlement offers would soon be reached, so that the scheme could be officially launched.

51. He wished to express his appreciation for the work undertaken not only by UNHCR but also by intergovernmental and voluntary humanitarian organizations which were indispensable partners of the High Commissioner in the actual implementation of UNHCR programmes.

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52. Mr. SEIFU (Ethiopia) said that, true to its tradition of hospitality, Ethiopia was currently hosting tens of thousands of refugees. However, its limited resources and the severe drought currently afflicting Ethiopia clearly prevented it from caring for those refugees on its own. It was therefore very important to Ethiopia that UNHCR was assisting with the repatriation programme conducted by Djibouti and Ethiopia, which was achieving good results. He was also happy to note the recent appeal of the High Commissioner for urgently needed food and medical assistance for the many thousands of returnees currently in eastern Ethiopia. Unfortunately, although the League of Red Cross Societies had reported as early as January 1984 a massive influx of refugees and returnees into eastern Ethiopia, relief had been delayed by registration of the people concerned, and UNHCR assistance for that operation would also be useful. But it was to be hoped that the international community would respond generously to the appeal of the High Commissioner, otherwise the returnees would again cross the border in search of food and assistance. Indeed, the drought and the delay in the provision of international assistance had already driven thousands into neighbouring countries. It was heartening to note that UNHCR would provide them with emergency care, under a temporary special programme, until such time as climatic conditions for agriculture or actual food availability permitted those who could to return.

53. Nor should it be forgotten that the drought had caused massive population movements within Ethiopia itself. The press and television had informed the world of that tragedy, which had elicited a spontaneous and generous response from ordinary people, organizations and Governments. Assistance had begun to arrive in Ethiopia at a more adequate level. He expressed the appreciation of the people and Government of Ethiopia and appealed to all donors to continue that humanitarian assistance in a more sustained manner, so that those affected could soon be rehabilitated and the emergency programme discontinued. UNHCR would no doubt rise once again to the challenge and help the returnees and refugees affected by the situation, who were its proper concern.

54. Ethiopia had acceded to the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol, as well as to the 1969 OAU Convention governing specific aspects of the refugee problem in Africa. The Ethiopian Government was considering legislation to give effect to the provisions of those international instruments. For Ethiopia it was a moral and a legal duty to give assistance and asylum to refugees. Thousands of refugees already settled in Ethiopia were becoming increasingly self-sufficient and no longer needed to request assistance from the international community. However, Ethiopia could not over-emphasize the need for durable solutions for all such situations. It was therefore to be deeply regretted, as the High Commissioner had himself said in his preliminary statement (A/C.3/39/SR.36), that refugees could be, and often were, used for political purposes, even when they were not involved in politics themselves. Only the pursuit of durable solutions could avoid the politicization and misuse of the refugee situation. Voluntary repatriation was perhaps the best durable solution, as could be seen from the programme for the repatriation of Ethiopians from Djibouti.

55. Unfortunately there were those who continued to cast aspersions on repatriation programmes and to attach all kinds of conditions to such programmes in order to promote their own territorial and strategic ambitions. They attempted to ascribe indifference and "donor fatigue" to all those who advocated durable

(Mr. Seifu, Ethiopia)

solutions. There was nothing humanitarian in such arguments. In fact, the proponents of those arguments, by insistently underlining the need to address the root causes of the refugee exodus, were incriminating themselves: particularly in Ethiopia's part of the world, the root causes were none other than the pursuit of territorial ambitions and persistent interference in the internal affairs of States, in contravention of the principles and norms of international law as well as international treaties and conventions.

56. Ethiopia, for its part, had taken a number of measures to find durable solutions to the refugee problem. In particular, it had granted amnesty to all those who wished to return. It was ready to enter into voluntary repatriation agreements with all and any of its neighbours, even though repatriation programmes would add a further burden to the Ethiopian national economy. Furthermore, in order to depoliticize the issues of refugees and returnees, Ethiopia had co-operated with international agencies in the registration of both refugees and returnees, to qualify them for international assistance. Such registration was the first of its kind in the region. Currently the provision of assistance was based either on figures provided by Governments or on UNHCR estimates or on figures derived from registration; as that situation could lead to an unfair distribution of assistance, it would be advisable to adopt a common and uniform formula.

57. Ethiopia's efforts to find a solution to the problems of refugees, returnees and displaced persons would continue. It would, however, need the full support of the international community. At the Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa, Ethiopia had presented 14 projects involving total external financing of \$40,090,000. Ethiopia hoped that financing for those projects would be forthcoming from the donor community.

58. He thanked the Secretary-General for his report on assistance to displaced persons in Ethiopia (A/39/446).

59. Mr. KASEMSRI (Thailand) said that the refugee problem presented differing characteristics in different parts of the world and consequently called for different responses. In South-East Asia the most appropriate solutions, in the view of his delegation, were resettlement in third countries and voluntary repatriation, and in that connection his delegation viewed with concern the measures adopted recently by some countries which had refused to grant refugee status to a large number of persons. Those measures had had an adverse effect on voluntary repatriation programmes as refugees who had been given false hopes of resettlement in a third country had as a result, refused repatriation to their country of origin. His delegation hoped, however, that the recent visits of the High Commissioner to South-East Asia would result in greater co-operation on the part of countries of origin and that they would take measures conducive to the security of refugees and displaced persons and thus encourage them to return voluntarily.

60. The other possible solution, namely, local integration, might well be applied in certain situations but would not be possible for Thailand, a country with limited resources which faced both external threats and the problem of alleviating the plight of more than 80,000 Thai villagers uprooted from their homes as a result of the massive influx of displaced persons from Kampuchea.

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(Mr. Kasemsri, Thailand)

61. Since 1975, Thailand had provided humanitarian aid to about 600,000 Indo-Chinese refugees and displaced persons for whom it had provided temporary shelter while they awaited resettlement in third countries. The number of such refugees was currently 125,859 and, in addition, there were approximately 260,000 Kampuchean encamped along the Thai-Kampuchean border. The problem could not be solved without tackling the root causes and seeking a comprehensive political settlement for the Kampuchean problem. In the mean time it was of vital importance that the humanitarian assistance programme for Kampuchean in Thailand and along the border should be continued under United Nations supervision and co-ordination through UNHCR and the United Nations Border Relief Operation. While the Indo-Chinese displaced persons in holding centres were awaiting the opportunity to begin a new life in third countries, the Kampuchean encamped along the Thai-Kampuchean border were in a more tragic situation as they were vulnerable to attacks from the foreign occupation forces. Between February and April of the current year, there had been hundreds of victims of such attacks in the refugee camps and, as the dry season had arrived, other attacks could be expected. On 8 November 1984, the Thai forces had repulsed Vietnamese soldiers who had made an incursion into Thai territory. The international community should be alert to those developments which only added to the suffering of the hundreds of thousands of Kampuchean refugees. It was encouraging to note that the initiatives taken by Thailand in close co-operation with the United Nations Border Relief Operation and the International Committee of the Red Cross had made it possible to reduce the loss of life from those attacks.

62. On the question of piracy, his delegation reiterated that the Royal Thai Government was closely associated with the special anti-piracy programme which had been in operation since 1982 and renewed annually. As a result of the programme, acts of piracy had been reduced by 50 and 60 per cent. Unfortunately, as long as there were people who would risk any danger on rickety boats and the root causes of the exodus remained, such attacks on the high seas would continue.

63. As a country of first refuge, Thailand was mindful of the problems faced by African countries on a continent where there were over 4 million refugees. Thailand had therefore participated in the Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa, at which it had made a token contribution of \$10,000 as an expression of its solidarity with the African States. His delegation welcomed the Declaration and Programme of Action which had been adopted by consensus at the Conference. It also noted with satisfaction that the world community had responded favourably to the appeal made on behalf of the African countries and that the United Nations Children's Fund had held a special meeting in October on the situation of African mothers and children.

64. As the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Thailand had said in his statement in the General Assembly on 2 October 1984, the international community must not only play its part in alleviating the refugee burden but it must also try to deal with the root causes of the problem.

65. Mr. HUTCHENS (Australia) said that he wished to draw attention to the support given to the High Commissioner's activities by his country, which had for a long time been taking in many refugees, chiefly from South-East Asia. In the course of the past year, Australia had given a new home to thousands of people not only from

(Mr. Hutchens, Australia)

South-East Asia, but also Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Africa, South Asia and Latin America. Australia had based its decision to expand its assistance programmes on the following findings and principles derived from its experience in the field in question. The first finding was that only a small number of the refugees concerned were fleeing actual persecution in their country. Second, many of those leaving their countries had aspirations that should not be met by UNHCR. Third, the concerns of countries experiencing great influxes of refugees, particularly in cases where refugee outflows were due to economic motivations, must be recognized. Lastly, the international community must strive, through mechanisms and forums other than UNHCR, for solutions to the problems in question. There was a serious risk of destabilizing entire regions through unregulated population flows, which could not but exacerbate existing tensions.

66. The international protection of refugees was dealt with in the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol. Australia urged all States that had not yet done so to become parties to those instruments, which laid down the obligations that any civilized State should fulfil when confronted with a refugee influx. Paramount amongst those obligations was the principle of non-refoulement, in other words, the obligation to provide a refuge, even if only on a temporary basis, to people seeking protection.

67. Among the durable solutions available to refugees, the solution of voluntary repatriation was certainly the preferred option, as pointed out by the High Commissioner, provided, of course, that conditions in the refugees' home countries were such that they could return to those countries. In that connection, Australia welcomed the role of intermediary between countries of first refuge and countries of origin played by UNHCR.

68. Although the solution of resettlement in a third country had helped to resolve refugee problems to a great extent, particularly the Indo-Chinese refugee problem, it was becoming increasingly clear that an unbalanced and unselective approach to resettlement might serve to perpetuate population displacement. In that connection, he wished to draw attention to the situation of the 260,000 Khmers currently gathered along the Thai-Cambodian border, who could not be regarded as refugees since they were still inside their country of origin.

69. Moreover, Australia believed that special attention should be paid to the needs of certain groups of particularly vulnerable refugees, namely, women and, above all, the handicapped.

70. In his view, 1984 had been an important year from the perspective of developments in the understanding of refugee problems. The International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa had demonstrated that the international community wished not only to alleviate the burden of countries of first refuge but also to do so in such a way that their long-term development was not jeopardized. In other words, a link had been established between refugee aid and development assistance.

71. Australia believed that UNHCR was carrying out with a considerable degree of humanity the extremely awkward task of assisting countries in assessing claims for refugee status.

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(Mr. Hutchens, Australia)

72. Australia entirely agreed with the High Commissioner on the need to address calmly and objectively the humanitarian needs of refugees, separately from political considerations.

73. Mr. HOUFFANE (Djibouti) said that he welcomed the outcome of the programmes executed in the framework of the tripartite voluntary repatriation agreement concluded between the Djiboutian and Ethiopian Governments and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and wished to express his gratitude to the Office of the High Commissioner for the active role he had played in that connection.

74. In view of the critical refugee situation in extensive areas of Africa, Asia and Latin America, the international community must show solidarity and provide assistance through specific action with a view to achieving durable solutions. The High Commissioner for Refugees must not bear the entire burden that the refugees represented. Nevertheless, UNHCR should spare no effort to launch long-term assistance programmes for refugees.

75. He wished to draw attention to the distress of African refugees, who, since they sought exile in countries whose scarce resources could not withstand the pressure of local requirements, were forced to struggle to ensure their own protection and survival. It must not be forgotten that Africa was in a critical economic position owing both to the adverse effects of the world economy and to persistent drought, which had deprived millions of members of the nomad and rural populations of their livelihood. The Horn of Africa, where there had been drought on a catastrophic scale for over a decade and which was sheltering over 2 million refugees in need of durable solutions, was the most striking example of the tragedy in question.

76. The two International Conferences on Assistance to Refugees in Africa, ICARA I and ICARA II, had mobilized the international community on two occasions, and he welcomed the fact that, at the Second Conference, the Secretary-General had once again urged donors to devote maximum attention to requests for supplementary assistance. His delegation supported the Declaration and Programme of Action adopted at the Second Conference and wished to express its gratitude to the people and organizations responsible for the success of the Conference.

77. It was common knowledge that Djibouti was a poor country. However, despite its extremely limited resources, Djibouti was fully implementing the provisions of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol and was sparing no effort to meet refugee needs. As a result of joint action taken by the Djiboutian Government, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other international organizations, the refugees who had been assembled in camps had received satisfactory assistance. Nevertheless, since the drought was persisting, nomads were still flowing into the capital of the country. He therefore wished to recall resolution 1984/6 adopted by the Economic and Social Council in May, in which the Council had appealed to Member States, international, governmental and non-governmental organizations and the specialized agencies to contribute generously to help the populations affected by drought in Djibouti, and also to request that the contributions in question should be increased.

(Mr. Houffane, Djibouti)

78. His Government, acting in co-operation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, was still endeavouring to solve the refugee problem through resettlement in third countries, where conditions were likely to be more favourable, or through voluntary repatriation to the countries of origin. Moreover, the voluntary repatriation of refugees in Djibouti had resulted from the efforts made by the tripartite commission, which was composed of the Djiboutian and Ethiopian Governments and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.