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REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

THE SITUATION IN CENTRAL AMERICA: THREATS TO INTERNATIONAL PEACE
AND SECURITY AND PEACE INITIATIVES

OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Letter dated 25 October 1989 from the Permanent Representative
of El Salvador to the United Nations addressed to the
Secretary-General

I have the honour to forward the text of a communiqué issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of El Salvador on 23 October concerning action taken by the Government of El Salvador in connection with the forthcoming voluntary repatriation of Salvadorian nationals in Honduras (see annex).

This communiqué reaffirms the political will of my Government to help to deal with the flow of Central American refugees, displaced persons and returnees, pursuant to the agreements between the Presidents of the region.

I should be very grateful if you would have this note and the annex hereto circulated as an official document of the General Assembly under agenda items 12, 34 and 110.

(Signed) Ricardo G. CASTANEDA
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Annex

ACTION TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT OF EL SALVADOR IN CONNECTION WITH THE
FORTHCOMING REPATRIATION OF SALVADORIAN NATIONALS IN HONDURAS

In connection with the repatriation of over 13,000 Salvadorian refugees living in the camps of Mesa Grande, Colomoncagua, San Antonio and Buenos Aires in the neighbouring Republic of Honduras, the Government of El Salvador has reaffirmed from the outset its willingness to facilitate the voluntary return of the refugees in an orderly, safe and dignified manner without politicizing the operation, within the framework of Salvadorian domestic legislation, international humanitarian law, the Esquipulas II agreements and those reached at the presidential summit meetings in Costa del Sol and Tela and the first International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA), and in the spirit of all the commitments made by El Salvador in this matter.

The Government of El Salvador considers that the repatriation process should be governed by unqualified respect for the principles of free choice, freely and individually expressed, by the refugees, security, and a gradual approach, as dictated by conditions and circumstances, and should take place on the basis of the agreements reached at the series of meetings held by the Tripartite Commission on the voluntary repatriation of Salvadorian refugees in Honduras, comprising the Governments of Honduras and El Salvador and representatives of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, so that returnees can be reabsorbed into Salvadorian society with the safeguards, duties and rights established by the laws of the Republic for each and every Salvadorian.

In order to give due attention to the problems of the returnee population, both during their journey and during the phase of resettlement and reabsorption into society, the Government of the Republic, headed by Alfredo Felix Cristiani Burkard, has taken the following action:

- It has proceeded to establish a National Committee for Salvadorian refugees in Honduras, representing all the ministries and institutions directly concerned with the task of providing comprehensive care for the returnees, co-ordinated by the Ministry of the Interior and the Office of the President; the ministries involved include Public Health and Social Assistance; Agriculture and Livestock; Public Works; Foreign Affairs; and the Salvadorian Institute for Agrarian Reform. Likewise, there has been established under this Committee, a Sub-Committee on registration and documentation to work out the procedure for the personal identification, both provisionally - for the purpose of entering the country - and permanently, of the returnee population, in order to facilitate their entry, safety and freedom of movement within the country.

The Sub-Committee is currently issuing documents in Mesa Grande and Colomoncagua and co-ordinating its work with the Government of Honduras and with UNHCR.

In addition, as part of its institutional work the National Committee through the Salvadorian Institute for Agrarian Reform (ISTA) and after careful analysis, identified two high-yield agricultural properties suitable for settlement of the returnees and equipped with all the necessary infrastructure services, which were offered to the refugees for their resettlement in areas close to centres of development, so that they could quickly be reintegrated in the life of the country. However, this offer was rejected by the refugees, who insisted on returning to places of their own choice.

- The Government of El Salvador, desiring to obtain direct knowledge of the situation of the refugees in Honduras and in response to invitations from the various camps, sent two delegations, one technical and one high-level, in August and October of this year respectively, to the camps at Colomoncagua, Mesa Grande, San Antonio and Buenos Aires. Their object was to learn at first hand about the needs and requirements of their Salvadorian compatriots who had taken refuge in Honduras and to obtain the information which needed to be taken into consideration in the forthcoming repatriation operations, in particular, the need for co-ordination with the Government of Honduras and UNHCR, and the need to meet the basic requirements of the returnees, such as health care, return routes, logistics, food, documentation, etc.

In order to ensure that the main activities to be pursued by the Government in connection with the forthcoming repatriation operations are conducted systematically, the National Committee for returnees prepared a national plan of action indicating the broad lines and fundamental points on which the Committee has been basing its work, and delimiting the spheres of competence and defining the activities to be undertaken by each of the ministries and institutions involved in the general process of supervising the repatriation operations. The national plan of action was adopted by the Council of Ministers on 26 September of this year, thus giving an official stamp of approval to the work being done by the Government of El Salvador to ensure comprehensive care of Salvadorian refugees in Honduras.

Accordingly, the various sectoral plans are already being developed by the national bodies involved in the plan for comprehensive care of the refugees.

- In addition, in order both to move ahead with the internal work and to establish the necessary international co-ordination, as well as to comply with the requirements of the bodies which make this work possible, the Tripartite Commission met for the ninth time and established the operational plan to be carried out for the forthcoming repatriation operations. It includes *inter alia* the provisional and permanent registration and documentation procedures; possible return routes; visits by official Salvadorian missions to the camps and by camp representatives to the resettlement points in El Salvador; modalities of assistance during and after repatriation, etc. In addition, in order to obtain the greatest benefits from co-operation, a follow-up survey was made in May of the projects submitted to the countries co-operating in CIREFCA and El Salvador reiterated its appeal to those countries for assistance at the high-level meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland.

In the specific case of Mesa Grande the refugees have been issued documents in the camp in order to facilitate their entry into the country, and the repatriation process is being co-ordinated with the Government of Honduras and UNHCR; for this purpose the Government has drawn up an emergency plan to cope with the situation in an orderly and safe manner, without politicizing the operation.
