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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 19th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. GHEZAL (Tunisia)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 12: REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (continued)

International Decade for a Natural Disaster Reduction (A/44/3, A/44/322 and Add.1-2)

AGENDA ITEM 25: SHORT-TERM, MEDIUM-TERM AND LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEMS OF NATURAL DISASTERS IN BANGLADESH (A/44/355, 409 and Corr.1, 434)

AGENDA ITEM 88: SPECIAL ECONOMIC AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE (A/44/3, 169, 235, 361, 409 and Corr.1, 477)

- (a) SPECIAL PROGRAMMES OF ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE (A/44/261, 373 and Add.1-2, 418, 519, 559, 627, and 629)
- (b) INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE FIGHT AGAINST THE LOCUST AND GRASSHOPPER INFESTATION, PARTICULARLY IN AFRICA (A/44/314 and Add.1)

1. Mr. BLANCA (Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation) said that the preparatory phase of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction was drawing to a close. The International Ad Hoc Group of Experts appointed by the Secretary-General in 1988 had completed its work, and the Secretary-General had, with the assistance of the United Nations Steering Committee, formulated a number of recommendations regarding the Decade.

2. The General Assembly must now set out clear and valid policy directives for activities to reduce the destruction caused by natural disasters. The Decade must promote an awareness at the national level which must extend to all other levels. National Committees for the Decade must be set up and seek the input of all segments of society capable of contributing to hazard reduction.

3. Hazard reduction could be carried out in many ways: through warning systems, construction projects, a redistribution of the financial burden imposed by hazards or incorporating preventive measures in development plans. The recent hurricanes and earthquakes in different parts of the world pointed to the need for a genuine acknowledgement of man's vulnerability in the face of hazards posed by natural disasters. Minimizing that vulnerability must be viewed as an integral part of development, and the developing countries must be given full access to scientific progress and the support they needed to make use of it. Man must not remain passive in the face of natural phenomena.

4. Governments had a specific role to play in the activities of the Decade: they must establish an international mechanism to implement the activities approved by the Assembly. While the existing capacities of the United Nations system should not be overlooked, the scientific community and other interested non-governmental agencies should also be fully involved in the development of that mechanism.

5. The Secretary-General had called for the establishment of a board of trustees for the Decade composed of high-level individuals who were personally committed to

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(Mr. Blanca)

the Decade's objectives and could help generate public support as well as public and private financing for Decade activities. The Secretary-General had also suggested that a committee for the Decade, composed of experts in the field of science, including representatives of organizations of the United Nations system, be established to formulate an integrated strategy for the prevention of natural disasters. The strategy should lead to a global programme that would be drawn up on the basis of priorities identified at the national level and would comprise activities to be financed bilaterally or multilaterally.

6. It was extremely important that the Decade should be adequately funded. The mechanisms which had been proposed must be financed through additional extrabudgetary resources and contributions from organizations within the system. Financing in the form of government and private-sector contributions should also be secured.

7. The success of the Decade would depend largely on the active involvement of the public, which was why emphasis must be placed on measures to enhance public awareness and education. The secretariat unit which had been set up in the United Nations for the preparatory phase of the Decade had functioned successfully and provided a model that could be used to co-ordinate Decade activities and serve as liaison between the Organization and national agencies and the scientific and industrial communities.

8. Mr. ESSAAFI (United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator) recalled the many disasters which have occurred throughout the world during the past year. The various reports before the Committee on assistance to specific countries made it clear that the effects of natural disasters lingered long after the event.

9. Bangladesh was a country which suffered from many natural disasters, including drought, cyclones and floods; in September 1988, it had been ravaged by the worst floods in its history. The response of the international community to the country's request for assistance was a good example of international solidarity. Of particular importance, however, was the resilience of the people of Bangladesh to disasters as well as the strong determination of their Government to take the necessary measures to reduce the impact of such occurrences. The strategic stockpiling of food supplies, the effective deployment of the armed forces and the creation of medical teams had done much to alleviate the impact of disasters on the country's population. As indicated in the Secretary-General's report on natural disasters in Bangladesh (A/44/434), UNDP had assisted the Government in the formulation of a national flood policy. For all those efforts to succeed, however, Bangladesh required the full support of the international community.

10. In April 1989, exceptionally heavy rains had caused severe flooding in Djibouti, affecting more than half the total population, with a major portion of the nation's social and economic infrastructure destroyed. At the request of the Government, the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator (UNDRO) had launched an appeal for assistance, the response to which was described in

(Mr. Essaafi)

document A/44/629. The Government of Djibouti was to be commended for its determination to strengthen national institutions involved in disaster management.

11. Heavy rains in March 1989 had caused severe flooding in the central and eastern regions of Democratic Yemen, with assistance for rehabilitation estimated at \$72 million. The international community's response was reflected in the Secretary-General's report (A/44/627), and the Government was currently developing a programme to restore productive capacity and essential economic infrastructure. External assistance would be required for that undertaking.

12. The increased frequency of natural disasters had necessitated greater investments in disaster relief and made it clear that vulnerability to disasters could be reduced by applying scientific and technological breakthroughs. Projects undertaken by UNDR0 in such areas as seismic risk reduction and comprehensive disaster mitigation reflected the growing concern of disaster-prone countries to take the necessary preventive measures. It was just such commitment at the national level that must form the corner-stone of the Decade.

13. For the Decade to succeed, the full potential of disaster mitigation must be recognized and transformed into political will. In that connection, he urged all countries to establish multisectoral national committees for the Decade, as requested in General Assembly resolution 43/202.

14. The Secretary-General had proposed that the Decade secretariat should be funded by extrabudgetary resources and established in association with UNDR0. Early activities were described, inter alia, in paragraph 138 of document A/44/322/Add.1.

15. The secretariat for the Decade, though small, would have to include scientific consultants and staff seconded from Governments, United Nations agencies and the fields of science and technology. For its part, UNDR0 would be responsible for the collection, analysis and exchange of information.

16. Interest in the Decade had been evidenced in all regions of the world, and various organizations within the United Nations system had begun to implement Decade-related activities. It seemed certain that global efforts would gain momentum once the General Assembly had decided on the international framework it wished to set up for the Decade.

17. UNDR0 would also pursue and accelerate its own activities in the area of disaster mitigation, thereby making a significant contribution to the Decade. A major task was to generate awareness of the need for greater attention and more resources to be dedicated to disaster mitigation. UNDR0 was also seeking to improve its disaster management and co-ordination capabilities by applying the latest technology.

18. The Decade presented a unique challenge to Governments and to the United Nations: its goals and objectives were ambitious and its success required

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(Mr. Esseafi)

motivation, dedication and adequate resources. The positive reactions from developing and donor countries during the previous two years had been encouraging, and he was convinced that, working together, the international community would be able significantly to reduce the impact of natural disasters and their consequences for vulnerable communities.

19. Mr. RAMIREZ-OCAMPO (United Nations Development Programme), speaking in his capacity as Co-ordinator for the Special Plan of Economic Co-operation for Central America, introduced the report of the Secretary-General on the Special Plan (A/44/519), recalling that implementation of the Special Plan had begun in September 1988.

20. Implementation of the Special Plan could be viewed from several different perspectives. The Plan provided a frame of reference and set out priorities for international co-operation for the development of the Central American region. A computerized information system financed by UNDP would begin operation at the end of 1989 and was intended to facilitate the co-ordination of assistance. Donor countries were working with the Central American countries in the identification, formulation and implementation of projects and kept UNDP, as co-ordinating agency, fully informed of their progress.

21. Institutional arrangements for the implementation of the Special Plan included a mechanism for the preparation of technical documentation needed in connection with the submission of project proposals for financing. Further details of that aspect of the Plan's implementation could be found in paragraphs 14-16 of the Secretary-General's report.

22. The report provided a detailed analysis of the progress made in all sectors of the Plan and discussed the main results of the first meeting of Central American Governments with co-operating Governments and institutions (paras. 62-65). The meeting, held at Geneva from 4-6 July 1989, had been particularly successful.

23. Given that additional meetings would soon be held with donor and co-operating countries and institutions, he wished to draw attention to four key areas dealt with by the Special Plan: assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons; reactivation of the Central American common market; the electricity sector; and agricultural development. One concrete achievement of the Plan thus far was the programme for displaced persons, returnees, and refugees, which had received generous financing from the Italian Government and would begin operation in January 1990, providing support to the five Central American countries and to Belize. The International Conference on Central American Refugees, welcomed in General Assembly resolution 43/210, had made it possible to update the assistance needs of the displaced population. The Conference had produced a joint plan of action, and a meeting was to be held in March 1990 to secure financing for specific projects.

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(Mr. Ramirez Ocampo)

24. With regard to the reactivation of the Central American common market, the European Economic Community was in the final stage of approving a co-operative plan to provide the payments system with over 100 million ECUs. To that end, the Central American countries had concentrated their efforts on reforming the Central American Monetary Stabilization Fund. The region hoped that those reforms would increase the Fund's financial resources by some \$400 million for the purpose of supporting the balance of payments of countries of the region.

25. As to the strengthening of the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI), the Central American countries had co-ordinated their action with the World Bank, IDB, the European Economic Community, Sweden and the Netherlands. As a result, the international community would have in November 1989, a document on a technical co-operation project amounting to \$2.7 million. The project was designed to strengthen CABEI in operational, financial, institutional and legal areas and would be financed partly by UNDP. It was also hoped that funds would be forthcoming from other sources with a view to increasing CABEI's extra-regional fund by approximately \$200 million.

26. With regard to the electricity sector, the identification of priority investment projects and supplementary technical studies were being carried out with the technical assistance of the World Bank and ECLAC and with UNDP financing. In November 1989, the countries and institutions concerned would have before them the necessary technical documentation describing in detail the projects and equipment requirements amounting to \$230 million. A meeting was to be held in February 1990 with the parties concerned to mobilize financing. The Government of Spain had been working with electrical enterprises to determine the feasibility of a new interconnected electricity network.

27. Lastly, agricultural development in Central America had been the object of special attention. The work carried out by the Ministry of Agriculture in regard to the formulation of investment programmes and projects had enjoyed the support, since January 1989, of the RUTA II project, implemented by the World Bank, with financing by UNDP, IFAD and the Government of Japan. A meeting between the countries and institutions concerned would be held in June 1990.

28. The proposal which had prompted the General Assembly two years previously to request the preparation of a Special Plan of Co-operation for Central America, which would complement the peace effort initiated with the Esquipulas II agreements, was still fully effective. The plan reflected priorities agreed by the five Governments, and mechanisms had been set in motion for the development of regional programmes and projects requiring the assistance of the international community. It was appropriate to point out that all the countries were making efforts to meet the requirements for stabilization and structural change. Some had already made considerable progress with regard to diversifying and expanding their production structures and adjusting the public sector.

29. Nevertheless, the economic and social prospects of the region remained discouraging. It was estimated that by the end of 1989, the regions gross domestic

(Mr. Ramirez-Ocampo)

product would have grown less than in 1988. On the one hand, the prices of export commodities, in particular coffee, would decline, and, on the other, the persistent shortage of foreign exchange, together with the concern to reduce the fiscal deficit and curb inflationary pressures would cause the countries of the area to redouble fiscal discipline and maintain a restrictive monetary policy. That situation would perpetuate the unemployment problem and tend to aggravate poverty in the region.

30. With regard to the attainment of a firm and durable peace, there were several encouraging signs. The two summit meetings at the presidential level held during the year had achieved significant agreement which had revitalized the regional peace process. The Central American countries had made important progress in the economic and political spheres. All that indicated that it was possible to construct a foundation in order to achieve in the next decade sustained economic growth within the framework of pluralistic and democratic societies.

31. While the attainment of that goal would require primarily efforts by the Central Americans themselves, it could be said that international co-operation was also necessary.

32. In conclusion, he said that the Special Plan was playing a guiding and organizational role with regard to international co-operation aimed at the Central American region. Within that context, he wished to draw attention to the extraordinary joint efforts made at co-ordination by the five Central American Governments at every level. They continued to play the leading role which the United Nations had recognized from the outset. He also expressed gratitude for the generous co-operation of the United Nations system, the European Economic Community, the Organization of American States, the international financial institutions and the various countries concerned.

33. Mr. GUDMUNDSSON (Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Reconstruction and Development of Lebanon), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on assistance for the reconstruction and development of Lebanon (A/43/727), said that, unfortunately, over the past 12 months the general situation in that country had been marked by political difficulty and instability resulting in the continued disintegration of the institutions of government and society. Armed violence greatly reduced the possibility of productive economic and social activity. Thousands of people had been displaced and material damage was widespread. As a result, the public administration was functioning at a much reduced level.

34. The United Nations was making every effort to continue its action in Lebanon. However, the precarious political situation made its task very difficult at times. That applied in particular to long-term developmental efforts which required counterpart support and governmental commitments both financial and otherwise. The reactivation of UNDP activities had had to be deferred. Consequently, the activities of the United Nations system had had to focus on emergency relief.

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(Mr. Gudmundsson)

35. In April 1989, the Secretary-General had launched an appeal for a \$87 million for humanitarian assistance for the groups most affected by the crisis. The generosity of the international community had been remarkable and contributions from Governments and international organizations exceeded \$100 million at the present time. The basic needs of the most deprived groups were being met.

36. The emergency effort must continue, for the critical needs were great and the support of the international donor community remained essential. The United Nations system would continue to carry out its activities to the fullest practical extent. Operational conditions were not ideal and were a matter of constant concern. The precarious security situation severely limited the possibility of posting international staff. It was to be hoped that general conditions would improve. In that connection, the current cease-fire and the ongoing diplomatic efforts were encouraging signs.

37. The United Nations system and all its partners were looking forward to the day when the focus of their efforts could be shifted from the provision of emergency relief assistance to activities of a developmental nature. In conclusion, he said that the Secretary-General was committed to emergency relief efforts and hoped that additional assistance would be forthcoming for the reconstruction and development of Lebanon in an improved political climate.

38. Mr. La MUNIERE (Director, Unit for Special Emergency Programmes, Department for Special Political Questions, Regional Co-operation, Decolonization and Trusteeship) said, with regard to General Assembly resolution 43/206, that an inter-agency mission had been dispatched to Somalia in February and that its findings and recommendations had been brought to the attention of the international community in the Secretary-General's report to the General Assembly (A/44/261).

39. Pointing to a few salient features of the report, he said that the inter-agency mission had recommended an interim programme of assistance to meet the urgent requirements of approximately 67,500 persons who had been identified by the Somali authorities as having been displaced by the conflict in the north-western province of Somalia. It included an initial one-time food aid contribution covering requirements for a three-month period, to be followed by a special ration of food to be given over a period of six months to those who returned to their place of origin. The programme also included the rehabilitation of water supply systems, assistance in the field of basic health care, the provision of emergency and rehabilitation assistance for hospitals and the re-establishment of basic services in affected areas.

40. The mission had noted that although a much larger number of persons had been displaced, many of them had sought refuge beyond Somalia's borders. Consequently, it recommended that when conditions made it possible for them to return home, and when the authorities were able to identify other displaced groups currently living at large, a more substantial programme of assistance would be required to respond to their needs. Such a programme should involve not only humanitarian help but also assistance for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of their homes and of devastated public services, facilities and infrastructure.

(Mr. La Muniere)

41. In the meantime, effective action had been taken to strengthen the United Nations capacity in Somalia to deal with the situation. He had visited Somalia in June 1989 to assess the situation and to consult with the Somali authorities as well as with the local representatives of the donor community on ways and means of improving the organization and distribution of humanitarian relief supplies.

42. Unfortunately, the unsettled situation in the north-west had made it necessary for the United Nations to curtail its activities severely in the area and had seriously hampered the delivery of emergency relief supplies to the affected population. The Economic and Social Council had called upon all States and relevant international and non-governmental organizations to contribute generously to meet the urgent needs identified by the inter-agency mission.

43. The troubled conditions in the regions concerned had inhibited the response of would-be donors to the appeal. While emergency assistance had been provided, contributions towards rehabilitation requirements had been minimal. Many donors had expressed their desire to provide assistance but had underlined the great difficulties which they continued to encounter in delivering it. Yet, the emergency and rehabilitation requirements of the populations concerned were as acute as ever and in several areas had in fact increased. It was therefore hoped that conditions in the regions concerned would improve rapidly in order to make it possible to respond to the needs of the populations fully and effectively.

44. Mr. AXFORD (World Meteorological Organization), referring to the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, stressed the strategic importance of planning and prevention to mitigate the effects of extreme events which might otherwise lead to disasters, in other words the importance of disaster prevention through the exercise of organized preparedness.

45. Among the most devastating of natural disasters were those directly caused by severe weather, such as tropical cyclones and hurricanes, severe extra-tropical storms, tornadoes, severe snow and freezing rain. All those were the subject of meteorological forecasting at the present time. In addition, there were other kinds of disaster caused by weather conditions, for example, severe flooding, avalanches, landslides, and locust infestation. All those could be planned for and alleviated if the possibility of forecasting their likelihood could be improved.

46. WMO provided the international framework through which such forecasts could be provided through its World Weather Watch.

47. In all the above cases the prediction and warning systems combined with national preparedness activities could greatly reduce loss of life and property damage. Those benefits were being achieved through the global and regional systems by most developed countries. However, many developing countries did not yet have adequate prediction capabilities or early warning and preparedness systems in place.

48. A major challenge of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction was to ensure that the known life and property saving techniques were applied to

(Mr. Axford, WMO)

all affected countries. His organization was prepared to work actively within the framework of the Decade to improve the work of the five Regional Tropical Cyclone and Hurricane Warning Centres, to enhance the effective use of flood-warning systems and to improve the communications system and training needs of developing countries with regard to weather prediction. It supported the Secretary-General's proposal for a multi-agency secretariat for the Decade to be based at Geneva. Lastly, it urged all countries to co-operate in the Decade so that the existing knowledge could be applied to reduce avoidable deaths, damage and destruction.

49. Mr. CAMARA (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations), introducing the report of the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations on the international strategy for the fight against the locust and grasshopper infestation, particularly in Africa (A/44/314/Add.1), said that while the situation in Africa was calm at present, there would inevitably be seasonal upsurges when rainfall provided favourable breeding conditions and such upsurges could develop into plagues if there were several successive seasons of good rainfall.

50. The international strategy for locust control was aimed at preventing the seasonal upsurges from developing into plagues. That called for well-equipped units capable of making extended reconnaissance surveys in the vast desert and semi-desert areas of the recession areas lying between Mauritania and north-west India, guided by satellite imagery showing where rain had fallen and supported by control units that could be mobilized at short notice. In its role as the overall co-ordinator of anti-locust operations, FAO was actively seeking the support of the international community, including donor countries and multilateral agencies such as UNDP and IFAD to ensure that adequate assistance was made available to the locust-affected countries and to regional organizations and commissions for survey and preventive control operations.

51. At the same time, FAO was collaborating with UNDP and donors in fostering and sponsoring research aimed at reducing reliance on chemical pesticides.

52. Advantage should be taken of the experience gained and the co-operation established during the emergency control campaigns. In that respect, support would be needed to strengthen the monitoring and control capabilities. For west and north-west Africa, a five-year plan had been developed jointly by FAO and IFAD.

53. Agreement had been reached between UNDP and FAO on the co-ordination of desert locust research. A consultative group on locust research was to be established, composed of agencies, development organizations, international organizations and foundations providing substantial support to the programme and representatives of the locust-affected regions. The group would consider and approve the scope of the programme on the basis of the advice of a scientific advisory committee; it would seek the necessary financial support for the programme. The scientific advisory committee would advise on programme research priorities, review research proposals, evaluate ongoing research projects and recommend to the consultative group which research proposals should be supported.

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54. Mr. BEN MOUSSA (Morocco) said, with regard to the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, that natural disasters struck suddenly with terrible energy. As indicated in the report of the Secretary-General (A/43/723), not a single day passed without a natural disaster occurring somewhere in the world, upsetting the daily lives of individuals with ensuing misery, death and destruction. Far from being an exceptional phenomenon, natural disasters constituted part and parcel of life on earth.

55. Many believed that natural disasters were inevitable and could not be foreseen. Disaster prevention was far from being the foremost concern of Governments. In most cases, a natural disaster could not be prevented but it was possible to limit the damage they wrought. It was currently possible to predict the place and time where certain kinds of natural disasters might occur. Information existed on measures which could be taken in advance to reduce the destabilizing impact of such disasters.

56. In just a few years, scientific perception of those phenomena had changed considerably, giving rise to new hope. In adopting resolution 42/169, the General Assembly had turned what had previously been a problem dependent solely on nature's whim to a global political problem calling for a concerted effort by the entire international community.

57. During the twenty-first century, measures to prevent natural disasters and concern for the environment would come to rank with health, education, housing, food and the development of human resources in general as priorities. It was now acknowledged that the present age had sown the seeds of major disaster. Population densities in afflicted areas had revealed the paralysis of communications, the inadequacy of safety standards, the fragility of rescue services and the lack of public information. Urban concentrations had sprung up anarchically close to active volcanoes or in acknowledged seismic areas. Deforestation had increased the risk of flooding. Sensitive infrastructures like dams, chemical plants and nuclear power plants had been constructed with scant regard for common sense. At the same time, the populations concerned were usually neither properly prepared nor adequately informed regarding participation in evacuation or relief efforts. In the developing world the situation was even worse. A single disaster could cancel out decades of development, and sometimes upset political and social equilibrium. However, recent progress by the developing countries, and their efforts to prepare for disaster management, justified optimism.

58. The International Decade resembled no other, in that it was based on an abandonment of prevailing fatalistic attitudes in favour of a positive attitude by Governments and the public. It also differed in that, for the first time, there was a strong perception of the need to bring together the world scientific community and all participants at international level, including the United Nations system and all sources of financing, with a view to preparing jointly a world plan of action and a strategy for planning the Decade at international level. In the light of paragraph 18 of the Experts' report, the United Nations must play a catalytic and guiding role in ensuring the success of the Decade. Moreover, scientific and technological advances, which helped to minimize the impact of

(Mr. Ben Moussa, Morocco)

natural disasters, meant that the Decade would be launched in propitious circumstances. It was therefore important that the programme for the Decade should benefit the developing countries, and that special attention should be given to the establishment of early warning systems, the preparation of educators and technology transfer to the developing world.

59. The constitution of national committees was of crucial importance, since Governments were first and foremost responsible for concerted action in the framework of the Decade. Good emergency planning and its integration in national development plans would also be extremely useful in planning for other types of disaster, such as industrial or technological disasters. Moreover, as the Group of Experts stressed, there must be an organic link between the national committees and the committee of the Decade.

60. His delegation fully supported the report of the Secretary-General and the report of the Ad Hoc Group of Experts.

61. Finally, as co-ordinator for the Group of 77 on the subject, his delegation would shortly be presenting a draft resolution on the proclamation and implementation of a frame of reference for the International Decade. It was to be hoped that the draft resolution would not only be adopted by consensus, but would be co-sponsored by the entire international community. Human solidarity and international co-operation on the Decades which constituted a test of a new era of international relations, was the best way for the world to prepare for entering a new millennium.

62. Mr. SEZAKI (Japan) said that over the past two decades, natural disasters had taken the lives of more than 3 million people and had adversely affected the living conditions of at least 800 million. While disasters could occur in any area of the world, developing countries were the most vulnerable. His delegation shared the view expressed in the report of the Ad Hoc Group of Experts that natural disasters should not be regarded as inevitable. By making use of the most up-to-date scientific and technological knowledge, it was possible dramatically to reduce the damage caused by such disasters, particularly in developing countries. To achieve that end, concerted international action was urgently needed, and his delegation had therefore vigorously promoted the idea of an international decade for natural disaster reduction.

63. Since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 42/169, intensive preparatory work had been done, and satisfactory progress had been made. The International Ad Hoc Group of Experts appointed by the Secretary-General submitted its report, which, in addition to serving as the basis for the Secretary-General's report to the Committee, had also enhanced momentum for the Decade and enormously increased awareness of the importance of natural disaster mitigation.

64. General Assembly resolutions 42/169 and 43/202 called upon all Governments to participate during the Decade in concerted international action for the reduction of natural disasters and, as appropriate, to establish national committees. His

(Mr. Sezaki, Japan)

delegation shared the view that successful Decade programmes required activities with strong community-based, national, regional and international components, and that national committees were essential. Fully conscious of the importance of a focal point for co-ordination of domestic and international efforts in the area, the Japanese Cabinet had recently decided to establish a Government Headquarters for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. Over the coming Decade, Japan intended to expand its contribution to the alleviation of natural disasters, by such means as technical co-operation, including training and hosting of seminars in the field of disaster prevention, the dispatch of disaster relief teams, and disaster relief grants or soft loans.

65. The Decade required the full participation of central and local Governments and non-governmental organizations, including the scientific and technological community, insurance firms and banks. The United Nations could do very little by itself. However, the international community needed a core body for effective implementation of the activities of the Decade: the United Nations must therefore play a catalytic and facilitating role.

66. His delegation agreed that participation in the activities of the Decade should take place primarily at national level. National programmes for disaster mitigation should be formulated, and incorporated into national policies or development programmes. The international community should co-operate in those efforts, either bilaterally or within the multilateral frameworks centred upon the United Nations system. The co-operation of non-governmental organizations and the scientific and technological community was essential in that regard. As focal points for Decade activities, national committees could play an important role in promoting international co-operation.

67. At the same time, his delegation shared the view that the United Nations was uniquely placed to play a leading role in the Decade; and it concurred with the Secretary-General's views on the roles it should play, in areas such as information exchange, operational activities, and enhancing world-wide public awareness. In that connection, co-ordination of activities at the national, regional and international levels would be particularly critical to the success of the programmes for the Decade.

68. There must be a close relationship between the arrangements for the Decade and the United Nations system. In that regard, his delegation believed that the current organizational framework of the United Nations was inadequate. In particular, it was concerned about the difficulty of mobilizing support for the Decade from the scientific and technological community and the wide range of other private entities. It thus supported the organizational arrangements suggested in the report of the Secretary-General.

69. There was a need to establish a committee of governmental or non-governmental experts under the aegis of the United Nations, with responsibility for developing programmes of work to which countries and international bodies could refer as they planned and implemented their activities during the Decade, which the committee

(Mr. Sezaki, Japan)

would then assess and comment on. A group of eminent persons was also needed to enhance public awareness about the activities of the Decade, and to mobilize the necessary support from the international community. The establishment of a small secretariat in association with UNDR0 would be appropriate.

70. In co-operation with the delegation of Morocco, Japan intended to submit to the Second Committee a draft resolution to officially proclaim the beginning of the Decade in 1990 and to adopt its international framework of action. His delegation hoped that all member States would join actively in that endeavour, which would surely benefit the entire human race.

71. Turning to agenda item 25, he welcomed the various studies that had been carried out by international organizations and interested donor Governments, including that of Japan, to devise effective international action to cope with the problems arising from the recurrent flooding in Bangladesh. Bangladesh was the largest recipient of grant assistance from Japan. After the devastating flood in October 1988, Japan had sent an official mission to study means of addressing the medium- and long-term problems as well as easing the immediate situation, followed by several missions to carry out feasibility studies for flood control measures. The findings of those missions were now described in a report, which was one of a number currently being reviewed by the parties concerned, including the World Bank. It was to be hoped that the international meeting to be held in London in December would achieve the desired results and delineate the future course of action. Japan commended Bangladesh for its vigorous self-help efforts, while recognizing that, given its limited resources, it required financial and technical assistance from both bilateral and multilateral donors. Japan would continue to do its utmost to promote international co-operation to assist the efforts of Bangladesh.

72. Mr. OKSAMITNIY (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the Soviet Union had considerable experience in providing assistance to the developing countries, and its co-operation with those countries was increasing and becoming more diversified. In accordance with a long-term programme of economic and trade co-operation, the Soviet Union provided assistance to Mozambique through more than 40 diverse projects. Co-operation between the Soviet Union and Democratic Yemen was also increasing. In recent years, the Soviet Union had been providing substantial assistance free of charge to Ethiopia in order to eliminate the effects of drought. At the beginning of 1989, the overall volume of Soviet assistance, including deliveries of foodstuffs, medicines and oil and oil products in connection with the drought, had exceeded \$516 million.

73. The Soviet Union provided considerable material support to Nicaragua; between 1981 and 1988, the overall volume of Soviet economic aid to that country, including non-reimbursable deliveries, had amounted to more than 2 billion roubles. Soviet assistance to Nicaragua was in keeping with practically all the basic provisions relating to that country in the special plan of co-operation for Central America. The Soviet Union would also assist Central American countries in the implementation of a number of projects which came under programmes of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

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(Mr. Oksamitniy, USSR)

74. At the United Nations conference on Afghanistan, the Soviet Union had declared its intention to make available, within the context of United Nations programmes of assistance, material resources amounting to 400 million roubles, or over \$600 million. From the very beginning of the programme of long-term assistance to Afghanistan, the Soviet Union had strictly adhered to the principles of honest, constructive co-operation within the framework of United Nations activities. In addition to participating in United Nations programmes, the Soviet Union provided considerable assistance to Afghanistan on a bilateral basis and, in 1989, Soviet humanitarian assistance to that country would amount to 120 million roubles. The Soviet Union was Afghanistan's principal trading partner and had extended major credits to that country to assist its economic and social development.

75. The General Assembly's decision to designate the 1990s as the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction provided new opportunities for enhancing the effectiveness of international economic assistance. His delegation commended the considerable volume of work which had been carried out by the International Ad Hoc Group of Experts, as well as the discussion at the second regular session of the Economic and Social Council on preparations for and the conduct of the Decade. The global nature of the problem called for a responsible approach on the part of the international community, as well as the development of a broad range of measures for preventing natural disasters and mitigating their effects. The United Nations should play an active role in that area.

76. UNDR0 could act as an international centre for the exchange of experience and information on the prediction and prevention of natural disasters, and for the co-ordination of international efforts to mitigate their effects. The mandate of the Decade could also include problems related to the prevention, and elimination of the effects of, major industrial accidents. The strengthening of the organizational potential of the United Nations in the area of natural disasters and industrial accidents could also lead to the implementation of the Soviet proposal on the establishment of a Centre for Emergency Environmental Assistance. The establishment of an international space laboratory or manned space station to monitor the Earth's environment might also help prevent environmental cataclysms. In the Soviet Union the Academy of Sciences had established an international institute on the theory of earthquake prediction, which would provide a scientific base for dealing with problems relating to the security of major cities, and the prediction of droughts and potential climatic disasters.

77. Mr. VIESTENZ (German Democratic Republic) said that, in 1988 and the first six months of 1989, the German Democratic Republic had provided relief assistance amounting to approximately 250 million marks to such countries as Armenia, Nicaragua, the Sudan, Bangladesh, Jamaica, Panama and Democratic Yemen. The German Democratic Republic had also dispatched, through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), large quantities of baby food, powdered eggs and medicines to Palestinians in the Israeli-occupied territories. Funds had also been allocated to long-term projects aimed at mitigating emergency situations caused by natural disasters, complicated climatic conditions or social conflicts. Six thousand students and more than

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(Mr. Viestenz, German Democratic Republic)

2,000 apprentices from Africa, Asia and Latin America were currently being trained in the German Democratic Republic; in 1989, more than 100 million marks would be drawn for that purpose from donation funds.

78. Support for the front-line States in southern Africa was of particular importance, and his country had provided 3 million marks' worth of assistance to Mozambique and had enabled young Namibians to study or receive vocational training in the German Democratic Republic. However, peace was necessary for the achievement of a lasting solution to the crucial problems of southern Africa and for the revitalization of the region's economies. The German Democratic Republic therefore supported all measures and initiatives which helped defuse the conflict in the region.

79. His delegation welcomed States' readiness to devote greater attention to the problem of reducing the hazards caused by natural disasters. It supported the concerns of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. The proposals and suggestions on the technical and substantive framework for the implementation of the Decade contained in the Secretary-General's report (A/44/322) were useful and practicable. At the same time, the German Democratic Republic was guided by the mandate of UNDRO, which should retain its usefulness.

80. Mr. ZEHENTNER (Federal Republic of Germany) said that the General Assembly's decision to call an International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction for the 1990s represented, at long last, a credible attempt to move beyond post-disaster action to pre-disaster thinking, planning and responsibilities. As Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher had made clear on two recent occasions, the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany was resolved to encourage and contribute to that development.

81. It could be seen from the report of the Secretary-General (A/44/322) that, more often than not, the victims of natural disasters were the nations and peoples of the developing world. Looking at the catalogue of recent tragedies, one could not but ask the question, were such natural disasters inevitable? The international community was now replying with an unequivocal "no". Scientific and technical progress and managerial skills meant that natural disasters were no longer an inescapable fate. Thanks to the vision and determination of the President of the American Academy of Sciences, Professor Frank Press, the General Assembly was now ready to open the debate and translate into action a distinctly humanistic and humanitarian concept, whose spirit and idealism were eloquently formulated in the so-called Tokyo Declaration.

82. The Inter-Agency Working Group formed under the auspices of the Steering Committee had agreed to take as a starting point for the concept of the Decade a critical analysis of the phenomenon of natural disaster and its definition. The definition contained in paragraph 7 of the report stressed that it was vulnerability to, or the measure of protection and defence against the elements which, in the last analysis, decided whether a disaster had taken place, and how

(Mr. Zehentner, Federal
Republic of Germany)

damaging its impact was. The specific areas for preventive policy and action listed in paragraph 12 of the report illustrated the wide spectrum of interventions required within the scope of the Decade. A great variety of operators were called upon to play a role in reducing natural disasters. The pluralistic character of the Decade ought to lead to a collaborative effort of culturally and economically diverse nations - a conclusion already spelled out in resolution 42/169.

83. In realizing the goals of the Decade at national level, it was obvious that many sectors of the population must become involved: academic and research institutions, industrial and financial institutions, civil protection authorities, voluntary organizations, the media, and, last but not least, the individual citizen.

84. Scientific and technological organizations at the international level were effective mechanisms for facilitating the exchange of existing scientific and technical knowledge, identifying gaps and promoting endeavours to close such gaps.

85. The Group of Experts had suggested a number of areas in which Decade-related activities could be promptly taken up. Those activities - hazard prediction, risk assessment, disaster preparedness and disaster management - were likely to yield results which could provide a very desirable visibility for the Decade. In that context, the list of some 20 project-profiles contained in document A/44/322/Add.2 clarified the general direction of the Decade and provided a stimulus for the countries concerned. Many of the project-profiles had been drawn from ongoing programmes undertaken by various institutions both within and outside the United Nations system and could be carried out within three years.

86. Chapter VI of the Secretary-General's report (A/44/322) contained proposals on the organizational arrangements for the Decade. His delegation believed that the operational structure for the Decade should be open to, and in contact with, all existing expertise, have the full support of the General Assembly and be organized in a financially realistic and sound manner.

87. The United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator had stated that a temporary secretariat for the Decade had been set up within UNDRO and was composed of officers seconded by Governments or by staff drawn from within the United Nations. That organizational pattern seemed pragmatic, economical and flexible. The relationship between UNDRO and the secretariat for the Decade had been characterized as association, and his delegation understood that to mean a dovetailing arrangement which allowed a reasonable degree of independence and ensured mutual support and co-operation. Common sense and an intelligently interlocking mechanism between UNDRO and the Decade secretariat should make it possible to achieve the right division of labour and avoid duplication.

88. The Decade Committee was responsible for exercising an advisory function and designing an overall programme for the Decade. Furthermore, it was expected to accomplish a link-up between contributions coming from the scientific and technical communities at large and those coming from bodies of the United Nations system.

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(Mr. Zehentner, Federal
Republic of Germany)

The membership of the Decade Committee should include both academics and experienced practitioners, administrators and managers.

89. His delegation assumed that the trust fund for the Decade would operate like the UNDRO Trust Fund set up in 1975. It should include a minimum amount of extra administrative procedures. Operational activities and organizational expenses would be the same both inside and outside the United Nations and would depend largely on extrabudgetary resources or voluntary contributions. Although fund-raising would not be an easy job, the timely and urgent goals of the Decade and the global values at stake should receive sympathy and support from both Governments and the media. If, in addition to that, the operational machinery of the Decade ran smoothly, there was a good chance of raising the necessary funds. The institution of a board of trustees seemed appropriate, and eminent members of the board could provide inspirational leadership.

90. Mr. MISSARY (Democratic Yemen), speaking also on behalf of Yemen, said that the two halves of the single Yemeni nation had suffered from repeated earthquakes and floods and that over the past eight years Democratic Yemen had endured a wave of torrential rains and flash floods. General Assembly resolution 43/211 had stressed the importance of alleviating the disastrous social and economic consequences of such floods. In April and March 1989, Democratic Yemen had experienced further unprecedented flooding, which had killed or injured thousands and made hundreds of thousands homeless, in addition to causing widespread destruction of the country's infrastructure, flooding thousands of hectares of agricultural land and sweeping away whole villages or parts of villages.

91. The advanced countries were powerless to avert natural disasters, and the developing countries, especially the least developed countries, were even more helpless in that respect. His country fully supported international efforts to develop and disseminate information on natural disaster reduction and strongly welcomed the proclamation of the 1990s as the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. The two Yemens welcomed the efforts of the Secretary-General to provide emergency relief to afflicted countries and appreciated the wide-ranging activities of the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator. The international community had the long and difficult task of helping the afflicted countries to take preventive measures in order better to deal with natural disasters.

92. Both Yemens desired stronger co-operation in that field between the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator and UNDP, as well as between other United Nations organizations and programmes, in order to help the afflicted countries to implement their development programmes and alleviate the suffering of their peoples.

93. He was grateful for the aid received by Democratic Yemen for both relief and rehabilitation and reconstruction and appealed to the international community to continue such aid. He was confident that various countries and national,

(Mr. Missary, Democratic
Yemen)

international and non-governmental organizations would mobilize their resources to help to implement economic and social development programmes. He thanked the Secretary-General for his efforts, which would result in improved co-ordination between his Government and the United Nations.

94. Miss RAZAFITRIMO (Madagascar) said that a quick survey of the various reports on disaster relief and special programmes of economic assistance which had been submitted over the past three years indicated that requests for humanitarian aid had increased, as had the responsibilities of the United Nations in those areas. The reports also showed that the role of UNDR0 had been strengthened, particularly, in the mobilization of international assistance. In the view of her delegation, the Office's mandate dealt with three major concerns, namely, the co-ordination of disaster relief, the provision of information on disasters, and the mitigation of the effects of disasters through prevention and preparedness. UNDR0 had achieved notable results in the improved ability of the United Nations system to provide emergency assistance and to co-ordinate disaster relief. A joint UNDP/UNDR0 project had resulted in the establishment, in the regions of Madagascar which were most vulnerable to cyclones, of pilot emergency supply centres. However, since the UNDP/UNDR0 project did not cover all vulnerable zones, Madagascar required additional assistance, in particular to strengthen its capacity to dispatch equipment to disaster sites, which would be difficult, if not impossible, when lines of communication were cut. Because Madagascar had to take account of such factors as mud, salt water and a high level of humidity, as well as a shortage of qualified personnel, the maintenance of stored equipment continued to pose problems

95. An increasing number of projects in the area of prevention and preparedness were either under way, with the support of such specialized agencies as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), or were being studied with a view to including them in Madagascar's development strategy. Co-operation among countries in the south-western region of the Indian Ocean, which included Madagascar, was reflected in the work of the Committee on Tropical Cyclones, which had been established as part of the WMO World Weather Watch in order to ensure the better preparedness of populations. The conclusion of the Committee's eighth session, held at Antananarivo in 1987, had stressed the urgent need for financial support in order to improve the existing system through a regional co-operation programme.

96. The designation of the 1990s as the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction had elicited a favourable response from the entire international community. However, support for the Decade should be accompanied by a firm political will and a concrete programme developed on the basis of rational proposals. The Decade would facilitate co-operation between the agencies of the United Nations system and scientific and technological institutions, universities and other non-governmental organizations which could make an important contribution to achieving the goals of the Decade. Her delegation agreed with the Group of Experts that "the most extensive and important efforts to mitigate the impacts of disasters must be undertaken at the national and local levels". Madagascar had a

(Miss Razafitrino, Madagascar)

National Co-ordinating Committee and, at the same time, efforts were being undertaken at every level to educate the population in first aid and preparedness for cyclones. In general, her delegation also supported the Group's guidelines for the implementation of the Decade and, in particular, recognized the usefulness of observing an "international day for disaster preparedness" as a way of mobilizing the general public. The financing of the board of trustees and the Committee of the Decade required further clarification.

The meeting rose at 1.25 p.m.