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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 20th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. GHEZAL (Tunisia)

later: Mr. PAYTON (New Zealand)

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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)

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AGENDA ITEM 153: EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE TO THE SUDAN (A/44/3 and 571)

1. Mr. FARAH (Under-Secretary-General for Special Political Questions, Regional Co-operation, Decolonization and Trusteeship) said that the Secretary-General's report on special assistance to front-line States and other bordering States (A/44/373 and Add.1-2) had been prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 43/209. The report indicated that various States and the United Nations system had provided support in the form of grants, concessional loans, food-relief assistance, and development and technical assistance, particularly in the priority sectors identified by the front-line States. Such assistance had been provided under bilateral agreements, through regional networks, such as the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC) and the AFRICA Fund established at the Eighth Summit Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries, and through programmes sponsored by United Nations agencies and organizations such as the World Bank, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). While the report showed an increase in the number of donors supporting the front-line States, he hoped that more States and organizations would participate in that international endeavour to enable the front-line States and those States bordering South Africa to overcome their critical problems

2. The Secretary-General's report on emergency assistance to the Sudan (A/44/571) described the nature and extent of the complex emergency problems facing the people and Government of the Sudan, the measures which had been taken to deal with those problems and the problems which still remained to be resolved. The essential objective of Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) had been to transport, within an extremely short time-frame, some 120,000 tons of food and relief commodities to regions of the Sudan where some 2 million civilians were in need of assistance. Despite enormous obstacles, the Operation had been able to deliver over

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(Mr. Farah)

106,000 tons of food and non-food items by the end of September 1989. The Executive Director of UNICEF and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, and the Special Co-ordinator for Emergency and Relief Operations deserved special tribute for their personal efforts and their leadership during the critical period.

3. Those officials had now relinquished their responsibilities in OLS, which had been entrusted to the Secretary-General's recently appointed Special Representative in the Sudan. His mandate was to develop, in close consultation with the Sudanese Government, the second phase of OLS, which, while continuing past emergency programmes, would gradually shift emphasis from emergency relief to rehabilitation. In order to formulate precise plans for future operations, several working groups had already been established at Khartoum.

4. Unfortunately, the main causes of the crisis in the Sudan remained unresolved. A resolution of the differences which were amenable to settlement would be of invaluable assistance in relieving the humanitarian crisis afflicting the country. The international community must share the hope that the second phase of OLS could soon be followed up by a national reconstruction effort which would place the country firmly on its way to economic recovery.

5. Mr. MOHIUDDIN (Bangladesh) said that his delegation was deeply grateful to all those who had assisted Bangladesh during the 1988 floods, and wished to express its deep appreciation to the Secretary-General for his timely response to that emergency and for his appointment of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator as his Special Representative to co-ordinate international assistance to flood victims.

6. Since November 1988, a massive national effort had been undertaken under the direct supervision of the President to rehabilitate and reconstruct the flood-affected areas, readjust and revitalize the economy and institute effective measures to prevent natural disasters or mitigate their effects. As Bangladesh looked towards a permanent solution, its primary concern would be to co-operate effectively with all its concerned neighbours with a view to formulating a coherent and well co-ordinated policy. Such efforts should be backed by international support and co-operation.

7. At the forty-third session of the General Assembly, the President of France and a number of Ministers for Foreign Affairs had underscored the need to mobilize the international community in order to find long-term and durable solutions to natural disasters in Bangladesh. On 15 September 1988, the European Parliament had adopted a resolution calling for a study of the causes of the severe natural disasters which affected Bangladesh and in June 1989, the European Economic Community had declared its resolve to provide co-ordinated and effective assistance to Bangladesh. The Group of Seven Industrialized Countries, meeting in Paris on 16 July 1989, had also stressed the need for effective and co-ordinated action to help Bangladesh find a solution to the periodic devastation caused by catastrophic floods. In 1988, the Government of the United States of America had enacted legislation to provide Bangladesh with disaster assistance in addition to regular assistance, in 1989.

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(Mr. Mohiuddin, Bangladesh)

8. Four major studies on flood control, undertaken by the United States, Japan, France and UNDP, had been completed, and an international group of experts had been appointed to integrate the major recommendations contained in those reports. The World Bank was to convene an international conference on floods in Bangladesh in London in December 1989.

9. The Government of Bangladesh had identified three major activities to prevent flood control. Those programmes would require considerable investment both in infrastructure development and in the various studies required. Multilateral and bilateral donors should consider supporting such efforts. Assistance would also be needed to improve flood forecasting and early warning systems, data collection and analysis, and a number of other projects.

10. Ms. de WHIST (Ecuador) said that the case of the recent earthquake in the United States of America illustrated what disaster prevention really meant. The use of modern anti-seismic construction technologies and of remote-sensing and information systems had made it possible to limit the effects of the earthquake, especially in terms of loss of human life.

11. Following the earthquake which had occurred in Ecuador in March 1987, her Government had been able, with the co-operation of the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator (UNDR0), to carry out a number of important activities at the national and regional levels. That experience had demonstrated that, despite the Office's severe personnel and budgetary restraints, UNDR0 was capable of rendering prompt and effective assistance.

12. Ecuador had enthusiastically supported the designation of the 1990s as the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. Her delegation believed that UNDR0 should be provided with the necessary qualified personnel which would enable it to carry out the requirements of the Decade. There was no need to set up additional bureaucratic structures for the conduct of the Decade, since any expansion of the international bureaucracy would reduce the financial resources urgently needed for programmes to assist the developing countries. UNDR0 should co-ordinate the activities of the Decade and should also be responsible for collecting, evaluating and disseminating information which would help achieve the goals of the Decade. If a secretariat was required, it should be a part of UNDR0.

13. The Decade provided an exceptional opportunity for promoting solidarity among Member States and their populations, and the agencies of the United Nations system. Therefore, in accordance with the lofty ideals of the Charter of the United Nations, participation in the Decade should be open to all.

14. Her delegation understood that the studies conducted and meetings held in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 42/169 had produced a broad and interesting collection of information which was summarized very briefly in the relevant Secretariat documents for the current session. Accordingly, Ecuador requested the preparation of a list of the publications and documents used during those meetings, as well as of interdisciplinary publications related to the consideration of natural disaster reduction.

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15. Mr. WEIBKEN (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) said that, in recent years, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) had supported a considerable variety of emergency actions in the Sudan for the relief and rehabilitation of rural and displaced populations affected by drought, floods and civil strife. Such actions had taken the form of assessment of the food supply and agriculture situations, and proposals to remedy problems; crop assessments; the improvement of food-storage facilities; the provision of agricultural inputs; and small-scale irrigation projects. The Director-General had approved the allocation of emergency food aid from WFP resources to displaced persons and those affected by drought and floods.

16. During the first phase of Operation Lifeline Sudan, FAO had provided technical advice to the Sudanese Government and bilateral and non-governmental agencies involved in agricultural and related activities. In addition, FAO co-ordinated the procurement and delivery of agricultural inputs, assuring that relief, food and seeds and other inputs and tools were delivered simultaneously and on time. FAO was also taking part in the planning of the second phase of the Operation. In the view of FAO, the crop and food supply situation continued to be extremely serious in several parts of the country; the relief stage was continuing in the south and urgent action was required to help people produce and expand their food supplies and reduce the need for imports in the coming months. Emergency operations should evolve into a recovery and rehabilitation programme of the food, human and animal health, and agriculture sectors. The second phase should include drought-affected areas in the western parts and on the east coast of the Sudan. In addition, special attention should be paid to the displaced persons from the south now in Khartoum and other northern areas.

17. Mr. HARRISON (United Kingdom) welcomed the fact that the Secretary-General's report on the International Decade for National Disaster Reduction (A/44/322 and Add.1-2) focused on preparedness and mitigation rather than on disaster relief. The United Nations system should be actively involved in activities relating to risk assessment, early warning and education. His delegation was prepared to work for the success of the Decade.

18. The Decade should be administered efficiently and in a cost-effective manner. He welcomed the recommendations of the International Ad Hoc Group of Experts that the Decade secretariat should be small and that a steering committee should be retained under the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation. However, he questioned whether both a board of trustees and a committee of experts were necessary.

19. National Governments had the most important role to play in the Decade, and efforts should be made to avoid setting up too many regional or subregional structures. The Government of the United Kingdom had set up a network linking various departments and was holding consultations with the private sector. A focal point had also been designated. His delegation was studying the draft resolution which was being prepared on that subject and had taken note of the proposals for a centre for emergency environmental assistance, all of which should be considered in relation to other proposals being put forward in the context of the Decade.

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20. Miss COURSON (France) said that, while resident co-ordinators must be given chief responsibility for evaluating disasters and co-ordinating relief efforts, the Secretary-General should, as a rule, appoint a special representative to deal with major and complex disasters. Assessments of assistance needs must be thoroughly and regularly updated so that donor countries could respond to disasters effectively. The disaster-related training given to staff in the field must be improved and emphasis placed on prevention and preparedness projects, in the context of UNDP country programmes or development strategies as appropriate. Close co-ordination must be established in disaster-prone countries among all providers of assistance. Efforts must be made to counteract the two main weaknesses observed in relief programmes: delayed response and irregular delivery of non-food relief supplies. Further national and multilateral efforts were required in that regard.

21. She stressed the importance of UNDR0's role in managing information pertaining to disasters, and noted the efforts UNDR0 had made to improve its communication system. Her delegation believed that any consideration of disaster prevention must take into account the link that existed between UNDR0 and the Decade on the one hand and environmental issues on the other. The link between emergency assistance and development activities must also be strengthened by means of pragmatic efforts in the field involving the agencies and non-governmental organizations concerned. Because the United Nations already possessed a wealth of experience in the area of disaster prevention, her delegation believed that Decade activities should be carried out, to the extent possible, within the context of existing structures. Nevertheless, her delegation was prepared to consider any appropriate measures that would lead to the achievement of the Decade's objectives.

22. Where the problems of natural disasters in Bangladesh were concerned at the initiative of the French President France had financed a pre-feasibility study from January to June 1989, following guidelines set down by the Government of Bangladesh, aimed at finding permanent solutions to the problem of flooding while fostering the development of irrigation and drainage so as to increase food production without harming the environment. The French Government had obtained the endorsement of the Government of Bangladesh for the study prior to submitting the project to the European Community and to the Heads of State of the seven major industrialized countries. The World Bank, which had agreed to co-ordinate the international community's efforts to assist Bangladesh, had prepared a memorandum for a meeting of donors to be held in London in December 1989 which was based, inter alia, on the French study. Her delegation was pleased to note that the measures recommended in the memorandum fully reflected the concerns of the Government of Bangladesh and were set out in the context of the long-term strategy.

23. Mr. CASTANEDA-CORNEJO (El Salvador), speaking also on behalf of Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, said that the Secretary-General's report on the Special Plan of Economic Co-operation for Central America (A/44/519) was realistic and concrete. Central America was modernizing its political and socio-economic systems, and the countries of the region believed that peace, development and democracy were inextricably linked with the building of a free and pluralistic political system. Their efforts to establish and strengthen such a system had been recognized by the General Assembly in its resolution 44/10, adopted earlier that

(Mr. Castaneda-Cornejo,
El Salvador)

very weak. If those efforts were to be successful, however, they must be reinforced by genuine regional development.

24. The damage wrought by nearly a decade of conflict and natural disasters as well as the region's economic problems, including a significant loss of income caused by declining prices for Central American exports, posed enormous obstacles to development. Co-operation on the part of the international community was therefore indispensable.

25. The elaboration of the Special Plan of Economic Co-operation for Central America had been a lengthy and complex effort. In that connection, three important developments had occurred in 1989. Firstly, the fifth conference of Central American ministers, the European Community and the Contadora Group and its support group had been held at San Pedro Sula, Honduras, in February 1989, at which time participants had reaffirmed their commitment to activities designed to bring about economic reactivation and development in the region. Secondly, the International Conference on Central American Refugees had been held in May 1989 and had produced a plan of action for refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Central America. Lastly, the First Meeting of Central American Governments with Co-operating Governments and Institutions, held at Geneva from 4 to 6 July 1989, had highlighted the need to mobilize additional resources through sectoral or thematic meetings within the framework of the Special Plan. Accordingly, several such meetings had been scheduled for 1990.

26. The progress made thus far by the Central American Governments in securing peace and implementing adjustment measures represented only a beginning, but the Special Plan served as a beacon of hope, and he was certain that the pledges of aid and co-operation made in the context of the Plan would be honoured in the near future.

27. The Central American countries also fully supported the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, as they were familiar with a wide variety of such disasters. The Decade provided a historic opportunity for strengthening the role of the United Nations in disaster mitigation. Preparations for the Decade should focus on the health sector in particular, emphasizing activities to reduce the vulnerability of hospitals or health centres to natural hazards and improve water and sanitation systems. He also welcomed the Decade's emphasis on public education for disaster preparedness. In conclusion, he endorsed the statements made by the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation and the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator on the subject of the Decade.

28. Mr. MAHMOUD (Lebanon) said that the Secretary-General's report on assistance for the reconstruction and development of Lebanon (A/44/559) gave an accurate, if rather gloomy, picture of the situation obtaining in that country between August 1988 and July 1989. The continued violence and disintegration of national institutions had had devastating social repercussions. Constant shelling had caused extensive damage to the infrastructure of Beirut and its environs, and had

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(Mr. Mahmoud, Lebanon)

led to a general exodus of the urban population. The emigration of competent professionals and technicians was likely to have a profound and lasting effect on the national economy. While general calm had prevailed since the proclamation of a cease-fire on 22 September 1989, thousands of displaced families who had returned to Beirut faced widespread loss of property and a rising cost of living.

29. As the Secretary-General's report made clear, the Lebanese economy had undergone a significant transformation since 1975. The country's prosperity had been replaced by poverty, with much of the population unable to meet its basic needs. Once the most modern country in the region, Lebanon could no longer generate sufficient gross domestic income to provide basic services or maintain the existing infrastructure. The appalling living conditions and political instability in the country had caused a shift in the emphasis of assistance activities from reconstruction and development to relief and emergency aid.

30. The report provided a detailed account of the assistance provided to Lebanon by the specialized agencies of the United Nations system. In addition, the Secretary-General's repeated appeals to the international community for urgent humanitarian assistance had been met with a generous response from donor countries and organizations. He thanked all who had responded so positively and commended in particular the specialized agencies as well as the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, which also provided humanitarian assistance to the population in its area of operation. His delegation looked forward to the day when circumstances would allow the agencies to refocus their efforts on human resources development and the reconstruction of an advanced infrastructure for Lebanon.

31. Mr. MUKHTAR (Sudan) expressed his Government's deep gratitude to the Secretary-General for his prompt response in addressing the complex emergency situation in the Sudan. Operation Lifeline Sudan was a model of United Nations co-operation which had saved thousands of lives in the southern part of the country. His delegation also wished to thank donor countries and organizations for their invaluable help in alleviating the suffering of the Sudanese people caused by devastating floods in 1988. Other Arab countries had also provided timely assistance which had helped to mitigate the effects of that disaster.

32. Although the Sudanese Government had spared no effort in mobilizing national resources to cope with a veritable accumulation of disasters, the magnitude had exceeded the country's capacity to do so. The situation in the Sudan, described in the Secretary-General's report (A/44/571), had resulted in widespread destruction of the country's socio-economic infrastructure. His delegation was thus particularly gratified by the firm commitment of donors to the World Bank Emergency Flood Reconstruction Programme, described in paragraph 83 of the Secretary-General's report. For its part, the Government of the Sudan was determined to create an atmosphere conducive to peace, stability and development.

33. Mrs. SCOTT (Jamaica) said that the people of Jamaica had not forgotten the assistance which had poured in from all over the world as Jamaica recovered from Hurricane Gilbert one year before. Thus, when Hurricane Hugo had hit other Caribbean countries a few weeks earlier, Jamaica had joined in providing assistance, drawing on the lessons gained from its own experience.

34. The frequency of natural disasters during the past two years had been alarming. Predictions of increased hurricane activity caused by such phenomena as climate change were of particular concern to Jamaica which, as an island developing country, was extremely vulnerable to natural disasters. Limited resources prevented many developing countries from preparing adequately for such events. The sharing of information and technology as a result of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction would thus be of particular value to those developing countries, which already faced many economic hardships.

35. While natural disasters could not be prevented, measures could be taken to mitigate their impact. The United Nations must continue to play an active role in the implementation of Decade activities, but the international community must bear in mind that the success of the Decade would depend on the availability of financial resources.

36. National policies for disaster preparedness and management must form the core of Decade activities. Her Government had already set up a natural disaster committee under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister. A new national response plan had been ratified and legislation pertaining to disasters was under review and should soon be enacted.

37. At the regional level, the countries of the Caribbean were well served by the Pan-Caribbean Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Project, which had been consistently supported by UNDR0, whose invaluable work her delegation supported. In that connection, she urged that UNDR0 should be placed on a sound financial footing so that it might continue to operate effectively and efficiently.

38. Mr. LAZAREVIC (Yugoslavia) said that the developing countries had suffered extremely severely from natural disasters, especially where preventive measures had not been undertaken in time. The least developed countries had been particularly affected and the havoc caused by natural disasters had set back their development goals for years, even decades. Regular exchange of information on experience in preventing or forecasting major disasters could significantly help to reduce fatalities and material destruction.

39. The designation of the 1990s as the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction would strengthen efforts to expand bilateral and multilateral co-operation in that field. An appropriate programme of the Decade must be established, with precise objectives. It would also be necessary to define the role of the United Nations. The need for an intergovernmental mechanism to monitor the implementation of the programme should be carefully examined, taking into account various options, including the role of UNDR0 which had acquired appropriate experience in co-ordinating international natural disaster relief assistance.

(Mr. Lazarevic, Yugoslavia)

40. Through its Red Cross organization, Yugoslavia provided assistance, within the limits of its possibilities, to many countries and peoples. It had responded to the needs of front-line States by contributing \$12 million to the AFRICA Fund. His delegation hoped that the United Nations system and the international community would continue to render economic and humanitarian support to all countries affected by natural or man-made disasters.

41. Mr. PLATA (Italy) said that recent natural disasters in various countries highlighted the topical nature of the subject. When it was realized that even in the United States, a country with the most advanced technologies, increased preventive measures could have reduced the impact of the recent disasters there, it was clear that much could and should be done elsewhere, particularly in countries where warning systems and preventive measures were inadequate or totally lacking.

42. Public awareness of the possibilities must be increased, and the current tendency to fatalism which in most areas of the world accorded preventive measures a low degree of priority in national economic planning must be changed. Countries which had developed preventive measures should share their experience, knowledge and technologies in order to improve conditions elsewhere in the world.

43. The role of the United Nations system in promoting such exchange co-ordinating activities would of course be extremely important. In his delegation's view, the United Nations should also be responsible for monitoring the progress of the Decade and establishing a centre for the exchange of information and documentation. Regular progress reports should be submitted to the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly.

44. Italy had implemented ample measures in its own territory for natural disaster prevention and mitigation, and gave due priority to such activities in its co-operation with developing countries. In response to the General Assembly's recommendation Italy was proceeding to set up the Italian national commission for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. In the meantime, it had organized at Trieste in July 1989 an international workshop for the purpose of helping to identify scientific priorities for the Decade. The membership of the committee proposed in the Secretary-General's report should be considered carefully in order to ensure a balance between scientific experts and administrators, bearing in mind that it must be action-oriented in order to achieve positive results during the first years of the Decade.

45. Mr. TOROU (Chad) said that his Government wished to thank UNDP for its support of Chad's reconstruction and development effort.

46. According to the report of the Secretary-General on special economic assistance to Chad (A/44/418), current developments seemed to indicate that the country was in a better position to restructure its economy. Nevertheless, the economic situation as a whole remained subject to the whims of nature and low raw material prices, factors over which the State had little control. Despite its considerable mining potential, Chad remained essentially an agricultural country.

(Mr. Torou, Chad)

Action by the Government focused primarily on attaining food self-sufficiency, and despite the devastating effects of the drought, rinderpest and repeated locust and grasshopper invasions, encouraging signs had emerged during the past three years. However, considerable food shortages might still arise as a result of the uneven rain-fall during the current growing season. Chad's financial situation also remained difficult, primarily because of the fall in the price of cotton.

47. In response to that situation, Chad had agreed with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund on a structural adjustment facility characterized by a programme under which expenditures were limited to firm commitments, credit to the economy was closely monitored and a time-table for the settlement of public debts had been adopted. It would be very difficult for Chad to balance its modest budget without external assistance. In that connection, he expressed his Government's gratitude for the multi-faceted aid extended to Chad in its reconstruction and development efforts by the international community. At the third Geneva conference on assistance to Chad, in April 1990, his Government would be submitting to the donor community the broad development guidelines contained in its five-year development plan for the period 1990-1994. Moreover, in view of the importance of the human factor in development, two series of meetings would be held in 1990, on education and the development of human resources and on public health and family well-being. His Government invited all States and intergovernmental organizations to participate in those meetings.

48. Chad was not only large and land-locked, but also a Sahelian country, and therefore subject to desert encroachment. Action taken to combat drought and desertification had included the development of forest belts, sand-dune stabilization and the establishment of plant nurseries. Within the Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), and with the support of the international community, joint efforts had been made to halt the progress of desertification. However, the countries of the Sahel were confronted with the lack of financial resources to protect their natural environment. The work of the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office (UNSO) deserved to be supported, and on behalf of all the member countries of CILSS, his delegation appealed to the international community to assist them, through UNSO and the United Nations Environment Programme in combating the degradation of the Sahelian environment and in preserving the region's eco-system.

49. Mr. Payton (New Zealand) took the Chair.

50. Mr. FERNANDO (Sri Lanka) said that in an increasingly interdependent world, there was greater awareness of natural disasters than ever before, and a greater realization of the need for concerted action to alleviate, if not totally eliminate, their effects. This delegation welcomed the decision by the General Assembly to designate the 1990s as the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, and commended the efforts of the international community, both within and outside the United Nations, to provide emergency relief to Bangladesh and Sudan and help find long-term solutions to the problems those two countries were facing as a result of natural disasters, compounded by the unfavourable economic

(Mr. Fernando, Sri Lanka)

environment. All States should continue to extend their support to those endeavours.

51. Mr. YUAN Shaofu (China) said that in an average year, natural disasters in China, caused damage equivalent to approximately \$4 billion. His Government had therefore always attached great importance to disaster resistance and relief, and its ability to deal with disaster situations continued to improve. Disaster relief work in China was based mainly on self-reliant efforts of local communities, supported by funds allocated by the central Government. International assistance also had a part to play, and his delegation thanked all donor countries and organizations which, during the past 10 years, had provided disaster relief assistance amounting to \$50 million to China.

52. In order to tackle the issue in a fundamental way, serious study must be given to finding ways of preventing natural disasters and minimizing their scope. The international community should make concerted efforts to that end and, in the context of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, for which China had established a national committee, the United Nations system should further strengthen the financial and human resources allocated to special economic and disaster relief assistance, and should regard such assistance as an integral part of international strategies and long-term development plans.

53. Mr. MacARTHUR (United States of America) said that his country would undertake to support the efforts of the Government of Bangladesh to achieve progress on flood control and water management issues. During fiscal 1989, the United States had provided Bangladesh with \$20 million in food aid and \$13 million in development assistance above the levels initially anticipated.

54. With regard to disaster preparedness, the United States believed that the Government of Bangladesh should strive to develop a single central entity which could effectively co-ordinate national disaster policy and mobilize the operational capacity to deliver emergency services in times of disaster. The forthcoming meeting of donors in London was the proper forum in which to continue discussions of the action plan for flood control which the World Bank had prepared at the request of the Government of Bangladesh. His Government would give immediate consideration to the plan when it was made available to donors, and intended to participate fully in the London meeting.

55. With regard to the Special Plan of Economic Co-operation for Central America, his Government believed it essential that economic assistance to that region should promote continued progress towards democracy. Accordingly, such assistance should be based on implementation of the commitments made by the Central American Presidents at Esquipulas II and Tesoro Beach. The United States welcomed the efforts made by the United Nations system to help the countries of Central America achieve peace, social progress and economic development.

56. His Government remained greatly concerned about the welfare of the Chadian people. United States economic support to Chad, which amounted to nearly

(Mr. MacArthur, United States)

\$18 million in 1989, sought to stimulate the agricultural marketing sector and provide budgetary support. His Government was pleased that a development plan for 1989-1992 was being prepared and urged that continued attention be given to meaningful economic and structural reforms.

57. The Government of the United States provided more than \$200 million in assistance to southern Africa a year, and would continue to provide substantial amounts of assistance to counter the economic and political effects of apartheid in southern Africa, while continuing to believe that no realistic amount of assistance would suffice to protect the front-line States from the adverse effects of economic measures taken by or against South Africa.

58. The United States supported the goals and objectives of the proposed International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, but was concerned about the resource implications and, in general, believed that the Decade should be funded solely from extrabudgetary resources and voluntary contributions. UNDR0 should not be the lead agency; it should improve its performance and co-ordinate its efforts with UNDP, rather than assume new responsibilities in conjunction with the Decade. His delegation commended the Secretary-General on the establishment of the United Nations steering committee to assist in preparing an administrative framework for the International Decade.

59. Mr. KRAMER (Canada) said that recent disasters had brought home the importance of the objectives set out by the General Assembly in resolution 42/169 for an International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. The task of the current session would be to define the scope of the Decade, the machinery required to support it and the role of the United Nations system. His delegation supported the proclamation of the Decade and intended to work constructively with other interested delegations in finalizing its mandate.

60. The work done so far on priorities for the 1990s had heightened awareness that the negative impact of certain natural phenomena could indeed be mitigated by the application of predictive technology, improved construction design and other measures. The fact that the human and social cost of disasters so often fell on economically vulnerable communities and on the geographically disadvantaged underscored the need for urgent supportive action. His delegation welcomed the organizational arrangements put forward in the report of the Secretary-General (A/44/322), which situated the support structure for the Decade more directly within the United Nations system. In its view, the voluntary efforts of national scientific and technical entities were crucial to the success of the Decade, within which the United Nations was envisaged as playing a facilitative and catalytic role. The structure must be tailored to reflect that specific role, and must be as lean as possible, given the need for cost-effectiveness, the overall environment of restraint, and the resultant competition for resources among compelling priorities. To avoid making the structure unduly cumbersome, the function of each committee should be examined prior to its establishment, and consideration should be given the variety of related initiatives being put forward under the environment item. Finally, strong technical co-operation elements should be built into the

(Mr. Kramer, Canada)

Decade so as to ensure dissemination of relevant technology to developing countries, and adequate attention must be paid to the public information aspects of the Decade.

61. The Canadian authorities were preoccupied by the recurrent flooding in Bangladesh. After the 1988 floods, Canada had provided \$Can 14.5 million to support recovery efforts, and allocated \$Can 61 million to water management over five years. The factors contributing to the problem were complex, and had important international dimensions. His delegation welcomed the serious attention given to the search for long-term solutions, in which multilateral agencies were playing a leading part.

62. Regarding emergency assistance to the Sudan, the recent focus had been upon Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS). While recognizing that there were important needs elsewhere, Canada was relieved that OLS had helped to avert a tragedy similar to that of the previous year. The cease-fire and the co-operation of combatants in the relief exercise had been important factors in the successes achieved. Canada welcomed current plans for the preparation of a second phase of the Operation, which would focus on rehabilitation and economic reintegration of the displaced. Renewed efforts for the peace process, maintenance of corridors of tranquillity, and continuation of the cease-fire would be important elements of future success.

63. Mr. MUCHANGA (Zambia) speaking on behalf of the front-line States of southern Africa and the National Liberation Movements in Southern Africa, said that special assistance to front-line States and other bordering States was intended, first, to generate the necessary international solidarity against the apartheid system; and secondly, to strengthen the economic and financial capacity of those States to resist apartheid and its acts of aggression and destabilization. The most significant developments during the past year had been the independence process in Namibia, and the on-going peace negotiations in Angola and Mozambique. Those developments had led to a halt in direct military incursions by South Africa into the independent States of the region.

64. Nevertheless, UNITA and RENAMO bandits had continued their senseless carnage and destruction, not only in Angola and Mozambique, but also in neighbouring countries, resulting in the displacement of people from their homes and means of livelihood, the destruction of vital social and economic infrastructure, and the continued erosion of southern Africa's development potential. Such activities would cease if UNITA and RENAMO ceased to receive external support and encouragement. The enemies of peace and security in southern Africa were being identified by their own activities.

65. In South Africa itself, the new leadership of the National Party had not yet matched the readiness of the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC), the internal democratic mass organizations and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to negotiate for a democratic, non-racial and unitary South Africa. Consequently, a need for the imposition of effective international sanctions against South Africa still existed. Only when

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international pressure against apartheid was maintained would real initiatives for its abolition come from the National Party. While telling the world to give it a chance to dismantle apartheid, the new leadership was preparing for prolonged resistance to change, as exemplified by the recent debt rescheduling agreement with banks, concluded eight months earlier than necessary. The world must judge the new leadership in South Africa by its deeds, not by its words.

66. The apartheid régime had always responded to its relegation to the status of a social, political and economic pariah by destabilizing the front-line and other bordering States. Its principal targets had been economic, in a bid to reinforce the argument, rejected by all the peoples of southern Africa, that sanctions against South Africa could only hurt the blacks inside South Africa and neighbouring States, and to disrupt the struggle of the majority-ruled southern African States for economic independence. The costs of destabilization had included 1.5 million dead - more than 50 per cent of them children under the age of five - and \$US 60 billion in lost and destroyed regional GDP. Apartheid's war in southern Africa was destroying socio-economic processes, and it was in that context that the special assistance programme to front-line and other bordering States must be understood and its relevance appreciated.

67. Those States had not been daunted by aggression and destabilization, although the resultant cumulative losses were higher than cumulative GDP. In a bid to recover lost output, SADCC had initiated a programme of investment in production. Its aims were to establish production complementarities among SADCC economies as a first step towards expanded regional trade, and to expand regional and international business activity. The programme of investment in production initiated in 1987 had yielded positive results such as an enhanced business climate, an important lever for boosting the economic vitality of the region. SADCC was aware that it would take time for the programme to enable States to recover their losses of existing production, economic growth and exports, and the costs of embargoes. In 1988 the region had recorded a real growth rate of 4.5 per cent, higher than its population growth rate for the first time in 15 years. If peace came to the region, development potential would be enhanced and such growth performances could easily be repeated.

68. There was still an urgent need for additional finances for infrastructure. Health, education, transport and communications and the energy sector, the strategic targets of the apartheid war, still required reconstruction. The health sector faced the new problem of traumas among children who had been the victims of apartheid violence, and who now required rehabilitation in facilities that the civil administrations of SADCC States could ill afford.

69. The States on whose behalf he was speaking would be sponsoring a resolution on special assistance to the front-line and other bordering States. It was their hope that the resolution would be acceptable to all, as one step among the many needed to remove the threat to international peace and security posed by the apartheid war.

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70. Mr. OSMAN (Somalia) said that his Government was grateful to the Secretary-General for his prompt response in mobilizing international assistance to address the large-scale emergency in the northern part of Somalia, and to the inter-agency mission which had been entrusted with the responsibility for carrying out an on-the-spot assessment of urgent humanitarian, relief and rehabilitation needs.
71. The interim programme was restricted to providing aid to 67,000 displaced persons. However, according to official Somali Government estimates, almost 1 million persons had been affected by the disaster. Apart from those located in camps, a substantial number of displaced persons were scattered throughout the neighbouring regions. There had also been a large influx of refugees into the capital, Mogadishu. Obviously, once those people began to return to their places of origin, a much larger assistance programme would be required to cater for their humanitarian needs. The long-term rehabilitation and reconstruction needs of the affected towns and villages must also be considered. There had been heavy loss of life and extensive damage to public and private property, seven hospitals, 106 schools and utility and other facilities, and approximately 63 per cent of private properties, while the whole communications network of the north-west and Togdher regions had been essentially put out of service. His delegation therefore believed that the recommendations and findings of the inter-agency mission should be supplemented by an additional report on the developmental aspects of the problem.
72. The Somali Government had taken all appropriate measures to provide relief assistance to the affected populations. An Inter-Ministerial Committee had been set up to co-ordinate relief programmes, working closely with the donor community. In addition, a Constitutional Commission had been established to examine the root causes of the conflict and seek a political solution. By a Presidential Decree of March 1989, a high-level committee had been established, chaired by the Assistant Prime Minister, with full authority to take the necessary measures to restore peace and stability and promote national reconciliation. The committee had been given a full mandate to open dialogue with the traditional community elders, religious leaders and prominent figures, revitalize trade and facilitate the importation of vital commodities, particularly food and the necessary materials and equipment for the reconstruction of towns and villages. Peace and stability had now returned to the affected northern regions. The initiatives taken by the Government bore witness to its clear determination to create a climate of reconciliation, peace and stability.
73. The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Somalia, addressing the General Assembly on 27 September 1989, had stated that in view of the magnitude of the human problem, a great deal of international assistance would be required, but that unfortunately, the response of the international community so far had not been adequate, and that his Government therefore appealed for the necessary support so that a programme for rehabilitation and reconstruction, as recommended by the United Nations mission, could be fully implemented. His delegation wished to reiterate the formal appeal made by the Minister, and to call upon donor countries and the competent intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to contribute generously and urgently to meet the needs identified by the mission. In that regard, it requested the Secretary-General to continue his efforts to mobilize international assistance to help Somalia in the implementation of its emergency and rehabilitation programme.

74. Mr. URIARTE (Chile) said that the potential impact of natural disasters was everywhere increasing as a result of population growth, the growth of cities, inadequate maintenance of infrastructures and the degradation of the environment. Chile, as a country which had suffered extensively from natural disasters, attached particular importance to the forthcoming International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. A national committee had been set up, and was already working on questions relating to the Decade. A National Bureau for Emergencies had been in existence for many years. During 1989 Chile had participated actively in several important regional meetings and seminars held to adopt a regional policy for promoting co-ordinated action for natural disaster reduction, develop preparedness for disasters, discuss the administration of states of emergency on an international scale, exchange relevant experience and define the role of diplomatic officials at home and abroad during the various stages of a disaster.

75. After the devastating earthquake in March 1985, the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs had set up an Office for External Aid, which had initially processed relief contributions from abroad and had subsequently been responsible for sending aid to other countries affected by natural disasters, a recent example being the substantial aid sent to the victims of the earthquake in Armenia. His Government hoped that such co-operation would acquire a new dimension with the launching of the International Decade, particularly with regard to the least developed countries.

76. In preparing for the Decade, Governments should regard preparations for emergency situations in the health and education sectors as a priority in resource allocation, and his delegation hoped to see resolute support for those areas incorporated in the resolution to be adopted. He stressed the important role played by the Pan American Health Organization in relation to the health aspects of disasters in Latin America.

77. Special emphasis should also be placed on adequate protection and conservation of the environment. There was an important link between prevention of natural disasters and environmental protection measures.

78. Chile would continue to participate actively in the preparations and work in connection with the Decade, particularly at regional level, drawing on its many years' experience of coping with natural disasters, which had enabled its citizens to face such challenges with resilience.

79. Mr. MALAPA (Vanuatu), speaking on behalf of the seven States members of the South Pacific Forum, said that the issues relating to the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction were of particular importance to the countries of the South Pacific region, all of which had experienced the impact of natural disasters, and some of which had received valuable moral and financial support from the international community on such occasions.

80. There were important lessons to be learned from the natural disasters that had recently made news headlines. In the case of the disaster in northern China, the destruction caused by the earthquake represented a major setback for the survivors and constituted an added impediment to development. On the other hand, the

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magnitude of the San Francisco earthquake would have led one to expect a far greater loss of life. One of the most significant reasons why that had not happened was the preventive measures taken over many years to compensate for just such an occurrence. San Francisco's resilience pointed the way forward in dealing with natural disasters.

81. Those lessons pointed to the role the United Nations system could and should play in preparing for them and seeking to limit their impact. Any country affected by a natural disaster should be able to bring its plight to the attention of the international community through the United Nations system. The efforts of UNDP and the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator in that field were commendable, and should be further co-ordinated and complemented.

82. His own region had first-hand experience of the long-term consequences of natural disasters. In 1986 the Solomon Islands had been devastated by Cyclone Namu. In February 1987, Cyclone Uma had wrought similar destruction in Vanuatu. In each case the response of the international community had been swift and highly appreciated. Rebuilding the economic base of those countries had proved to be a lengthy and difficult task, which would continue well into the future. While 1989 had seen no major natural disaster in the South Pacific, one could not assume that such would always be the case. For that reason, the members of the Forum looked forward to the start of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction as an opportunity to work towards ways of reducing the impact of inevitable natural disasters.

83. The current session of the General Assembly would be responsible for starting the Decade off on the right footing. It was thus very important for the Second Committee, when considering how to set up the relevant mechanisms for the Decade, to retain a clear picture of what the United Nations system could and could not do. It could disseminate accurate and timely information on natural disasters, co-ordinate reactions by the international community where such was the wish of the affected country, and provide immediate relief assistance. It should not, however, generally be required to be the principal mobilizer of resources. Nor should it be expected to set priorities for relief and rehabilitation. Those tasks must fall to the affected country. Indeed, in the weeks following a major natural disaster the United Nations system must demonstrate flexibility and sensitivity in its actions. In many cases the close bilateral links between a country and its key development partners would set the pace and nature of reactions. Where the United Nations system had an important role to play was in preparedness and prevention. The members of the South Pacific Forum expected the Decade to concentrate on those vital areas and leave other aspects to existing mechanisms.

84. The members of the Forum attached great importance to practical action within the parameters of the Decade. It was essential that the actions of the United Nations system should demonstrate to all countries the relevance of those 10 years of effort. The resolution to be adopted by consensus must give clear guidance to the various parts of the Secretariat as to the expectations delegations had of that major initiative. The delegations on whose behalf he spoke pledged themselves to that end.

The meeting rose at 1.25 p.m.