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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 24th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. Cissé (Senegal)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 99: REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS (continued) (A/49/12 and Add.1; A/49/380, A/49/533, A/49/534, A/49/577 and Corr.1, A/49/578, A/49/218-S/1994/801, A/49/287 and Corr.1; A/C.3/49/12)

1. Mrs. GUSTAVA (Mozambique) said that, with regard to the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (A/49/12 and Add.1), her delegation supported the strategies for prevention and solutions to the problems faced by refugees and displaced persons and therefore agreed that there must be an intrinsic link between emergency relief and rehabilitation and development.

2. As was well known, 16 years of conflict in Mozambique had forced about 1.5 million people to flee the country and seek refuge in neighbouring countries. Within Mozambique itself, 4.5 million people were displaced persons. With the signing of the General Peace Agreement two years previously, her Government had established a comprehensive plan for national reconstruction which provided for the rehabilitation of economic and social structures, including the reintegration and resettlement of returnees and internally displaced persons. In order to ensure that the process of repatriation was carried out expeditiously, tripartite agreements had been signed by her Government and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on the one hand, and the Governments of host countries on the other. So far, over 60 per cent of the refugees had returned home as a result of that concerted effort and voluntary repatriation.

3. At the internal level in Mozambique, after the end of hostilities two years previously there had been a large-scale mass movement of about 2.7 million people towards their places of origin or choice. With peace and stability at hand, her Government hoped that the process could be concluded as early as possible, on the assumption that the necessary resources would be received in time.

4. Another point at stake for the normalization of lives of millions of refugees and displaced persons in Mozambique was the need for a speedy conclusion of the demining process so that agricultural production could be resumed in rural areas. That task was not only delicate but also of enormous scope because of the nature of the conflict and the extensiveness of the territory. Her delegation therefore reiterated its appeal to the international community to continue to render generous financial, material and technical assistance for mine clearance in Mozambique in accordance with General Assembly resolution 48/7 of 19 October 1993. In that context, her delegation welcomed the call for a moratorium on the export of land mines and endorsed the appeal contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization (A/49/1) for the international community to take measures to limit the production, use and sale of anti-personnel land mines, with a view to achieving a complete ban. It was equally important to create adequate facilities for the

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returnees and displaced persons on a continued basis, especially water supply, agricultural tools and seeds, health care and education.

5. Ms. BURROWS (Canada) said that Canada was pleased at the unprecedented degree of consensus achieved at the International Conference on Population and Development, held recently at Cairo, regarding the need for continued protection of refugees and the need to address the daunting problems facing the international community in a comprehensive and global manner. At the Conference, a programme of action on international migration had been produced which could serve as a foundation for improving current legal, policy and institutional frameworks and instruments for responding to migration challenges. The international community must mobilize political commitment in support of concerted and comprehensive action on global migration issues. Canada supported the proposal to convene a United Nations conference on migration, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 48/113, provided that the conditions were in place to ensure that such a meeting could achieve progress towards an orderly and humane migration regime at the global level through the articulation of clear and agreed objectives, coordination with other initiatives such as the proposal emanating from the International Conference on Population and Development for an international conference on migration and development and the success of preliminary regional efforts to formulate migration strategies.

6. For the international community, the need to explore ways and means of better addressing the problem of involuntary internal displacement was of critical importance. UNHCR had increasingly been called upon to use its expertise in that area. However, Canada believed that any activity by UNHCR on behalf of the internally displaced should be carried out on a case-by-case basis under the authority of the Secretary-General. Canada welcomed the efforts of UNHCR to provide new guidelines to its own staff and to the staff of its implementing partners, particularly with regard to refugee women and children, since the protection of the most vulnerable victims of violence could not be overlooked. Given the prevailing levels of violence in many areas of the world, it was perhaps inevitable, but none the less unacceptable, that the staff of the United Nations and other humanitarian organizations should find themselves in situations in which their lives were at risk as they strove to bring solace and assistance to others. That tragic circumstance was all too familiar to Canadians, who had lost friends and compatriots in peace-keeping missions. In that regard, her delegation welcomed the elaboration of a draft convention on the safety and security of United Nations and associated personnel.

7. Canada had taken note of the initiative of UNHCR to harmonize and improve its relationship with non-governmental organizations and welcomed the Partnership in Action (PARINAC) process as an initiative which should enhance existing cooperation. Her Government would continue to support the High Commissioner and her team even as it was being forced to re-evaluate its own resources and options so as to better focus on meeting the most compelling needs. The world clearly needed an organization such as UNHCR, and Canada, mindful of its own humanitarian role, viewed its own relationship with UNHCR with confidence and hope.

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8. Mr. DLAMINI (Swaziland) said that the problem of displaced persons and refugees was one of the biggest challenges of the century. His Government hoped that as the States Members of the United Nations focused on the strategy of prevention by peaceful means, there would be a positive change in the different regions of the world concerned.

9. Swaziland was a small country, with a population of around 820,000, and faced not only the problems common to all non-industrialized nations, but a high level of unemployment as well. Despite those problems and the severe drought that had afflicted the country over the past few years, it had managed to accommodate some 60,000 refugees, equivalent to at least 7.5 per cent of its total population. Most of those refugees had come from neighbouring countries, although recently there had been an influx from other parts of the world.

10. Swaziland had implemented a number of programmes for local settlement of refugees, with the help of various organizations and agencies. UNHCR, for instance, in coordination with the World Food Programme, had supplied foods with high nutritive value to refugees in the two settlements in his country. The Government had also provided refugees with land for farming, but because of the ongoing drought the crop yield had been scarcely adequate to meet their needs.

11. Education had played a major role in the settlement process. Primary and secondary schools had been built within walking distance of all the children in formal settlements; children settled in local communities throughout the country were able to attend school without difficulty. Health care had been another major focus of his Government's efforts in cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and non-governmental organizations, particularly the Red Cross. Special programmes had been instituted for refugee women and children. His delegation believed that every individual had the right to be with his or her own family, and it endorsed family reunification for refugees as a human right. That was why even in the refugee settlements in his country, the family unit had been respected and promoted.

12. In August 1993, Swaziland, UNHCR and Mozambique had jointly inaugurated the voluntary repatriation process. By October 1993, around 6,000 refugees had been repatriated to Mozambique, and that process had continued steadily until June 1994. Many more refugees had returned home spontaneously after the war had ended. Moreover, following the liberation of South Africa, other refugees had returned home voluntarily to that country.

13. His delegation hoped that the Programme of Action adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo and the outcome of the forthcoming World Summit for Social Development would result in the kind of development that would strengthen the ailing economies of developing countries and countries destabilized by conflicts. That would be one way of ensuring the smooth reintegration of returning refugees and displaced persons.

14. Mr. DIONE (Guinea) noted with satisfaction that 126 States were now parties to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, its 1967 Protocol, or

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both, and that many African States were parties to the 1969 Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. The refugee problem was complicated by the fact that the African States did not have sufficient resources effectively to fulfil their responsibilities for preventing or resolving cases of involuntary population movements.

15. Despite the many initiatives to improve planning for emergency measures, most notably the creation of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in most refugee crises in Africa help had generally been too little and had come too late. The fact that aid was dependent almost entirely on intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and on outside financial and material resources meant that new approaches must be found. The possibility should be considered of setting up an international emergency relief system to coordinate the activities of the various participants, each of which had a different mandate, on the basis of close cooperation between the organs of the United Nations and the regional organizations most familiar with the situation in the areas concerned.

16. If the OAU mechanism for the prevention and resolution of conflicts could be brought into full operation with the support of the international community, it would provide solutions to catastrophes involving refugees in Africa. His delegation appealed to the international community to contribute to the OAU Peace Fund in order to support its conflict prevention and resolution activities. In Guinea's own case, he wished to mention the support provided by the international community, primarily through UNHCR but also through the World Food Programme and FAO, in the form of assistance to the more than 600,000 refugees from Liberia and Sierra Leone who were living not in refugee camps but in villages totally integrated into local life. Even so, there were problems with food aid, because the estimates made had been hypothetical and the solutions proposed had not been very pragmatic. Income-generation projects had also been set up which had been offered to refugees without informing the Government of Guinea and without taking into account the special situation of refugee farmers and craftsmen or determining precisely when a refugee could be expected to become self-supporting.

17. Given that situation, his delegation proposed that multilateral cooperation between United Nations agencies and regional and subregional organizations should be strengthened and that the dialogue with Governments of asylum countries should be improved in order to make refugee assistance more effective. Lastly, he urged the international community to participate more actively and more directly in the search for a peaceful solution to the conflicts in Liberia, which were having a particular impact on Guinea, in that it had to shoulder a large share of responsibility in the subregion for finding a speedy, effective solution to the crisis.

18. Mrs. KYEYUNE (Uganda) said that the commendable results achieved by UNHCR with voluntary repatriation, mainly in Africa and Asia, had been almost totally offset by the new waves of refugees and displaced persons throughout the world. To judge by the statistics, the outlook was gloomy everywhere. As could be seen

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from the report of the Secretary-General (A/49/578), internal conflicts were still causing massive flows of refugees. The astronomical numbers of refugees showed that, while the strategy of focusing on particular situations was an essential means of alleviating the plight of refugees, it had little impact on stemming the refugee tide. It was imperative urgently to address the root causes of the conflicts which forced people to flee their countries.

19. In Uganda the number of refugees had tripled since 1990. The Ugandan delegation agreed entirely with the High Commissioner for Refugees that the search for solutions must focus not only on human rights but also on economic security. The conflicts which caused displacement had many different causes, including economic difficulties, social injustice and political oppression. The States members of the Organization of African Unity had established a mechanism for conflict prevention, management and resolution as part of their regional peace-making initiatives. Uganda was committed to making the mechanism effective and usable and urged the United Nations and the international community to provide the necessary support, especially in view of Africa's difficult socio-economic situation.

20. The Great Lakes region of Africa deserved special attention, for its huge refugee population had recently been swollen by a further two million from Rwanda. The volatile situation in Rwanda and Burundi would quite possibly create new waves of refugees fleeing to neighbouring countries. Apart from the suffering of refugees in the camps, the social and economic resources of the host countries were over-stretched; the international community must therefore share the burden by furnishing humanitarian and development assistance both to the refugees and to the host countries. Moreover, particular attention should be paid to the needs of the local people whose resources were directly affected. In that context Uganda reiterated its commitment to continue to offer a haven to refugees. It supported the UNHCR position that voluntary repatriation was the ideal solution to the refugee problem, since the countries of origin bore the primary responsibility for their citizens, and it appealed to those countries to create conditions conducive to repatriation. The activities of the former militias of the Government of Rwanda were particularly worrying because they were obstructing the voluntary repatriation work of UNHCR in eastern Zaire. The Ugandan delegation had noted the agreement achieved by the Secretary-General to accord top priority to the situation in Rwanda and hoped that concrete steps would be taken to salvage the situation.

21. Encouragement could be drawn from the action taken to address the particular needs of refugee women and establish an extensive network of information about women refugees with a view to the compilation of national reports for submission to the 1995 World Conference on Women. It was to be hoped that representatives of women refugees would be helped to attend and take part in the Conference. Uganda also fully supported the UNHCR approach to the protection and care of refugee children, which had three main elements: direct services, assistance to children through assistance to their families, and assistance to children and families through community services; the provision of schooling for refugee children, even in emergency situations, was also important.

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22. Uganda welcomed the steps taken by the High Commissioner and the members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to investigate ways of giving effect to the conclusions of the Economic and Social Council and the resolutions of the General Assembly designed to secure greater coordination of humanitarian assistance and stronger links between emergency relief, rehabilitation and development. It also welcomed the continued collaboration between UNHCR and other United Nations bodies, in particular the World Food Programme, UNICEF, WHO and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, for it was essential to faster and coordinated intervention in emergency situations. Uganda also commended the non-governmental organizations for their crucial role, particularly in the provision of funds, and for their physical presence in refugee crisis areas.

23. Mr. SUTOYO (Indonesia) said that the Indonesian delegation welcomed the initiatives designed to secure a more comprehensive approach to the crises of refugees and displaced persons which would enable UNHCR to concentrate on its mandated tasks while drawing on the experience and activities of agencies with related concerns. The work must be coordinated in order to avoid duplication of expenditures and measures and employ the full potential of the United Nations in the search for durable solutions to the problems of refugees and displaced persons. Indonesia was encouraged by the decision of UNHCR and the members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to investigate ways of implementing the resolutions of the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly in order to achieve greater coordination of humanitarian assistance; the collaboration between UNHCR and other bodies such as the World Food Programme, UNICEF, WHO and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs was also encouraging.

24. It commended the work done by UNHCR in mobilizing emergency response teams, implementing its emergency management training programme to enhance the skills of its staff, and establishing a stockpile of essential emergency equipment. It was encouraging to note the expanding scope of the search for durable solutions to the plight of refugees. Violations of human rights were one of the many factors causing the displacement of people, as had been recognized by the World Conference on Human Rights. It should also be noted that the denial of the right to development had condemned many countries to poverty and their peoples to a life of suffering and despair. Indonesia concurred with the UNHCR assessment that efforts to provide durable solutions to refugee problems had to combine humanitarian and development aid. In that context, support should be given to the use by UNHCR of quick impact projects which linked assistance to refugees with the longer-term development needs.

25. The Indonesian delegation supported the special efforts of UNHCR to address the specific needs and concerns of refugee women and children and it urged other United Nations agencies involved in humanitarian relief work and the non-governmental organizations to increase their support for the training of women and for measures to meet the specific needs of refugee children. In that regard the collaboration with UNICEF and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs should be continued and, if possible, strengthened. The refugee situation in South-East Asia was under control and the voluntary repatriation programmes were clearly succeeding. Indonesia reiterated its commitment to continue to help to find global solutions to the problem.

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26. Mrs. AITZAZ (Pakistan) said that since the end of the cold war the international community had demonstrated that by addressing the causes of refugee movements - civil strife, human rights violations, drought, famine and environmental degradation - it was possible to pave the way for the consolidation of peace and the return and rehabilitation of refugees. Pakistan was pleased to note the promising achievements in that sphere, which included the return of refugees to Cambodia, Myanmar, Mozambique and Central America. However, new refugee flows were developing, particularly in Africa, the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Balkans, posing a grave threat to international peace and security and to long-term socio-economic development in those regions. The United Nations preventive diplomacy mechanisms should be used to the best advantage with a view to resolving conflicts and stemming the flow of refugees.

27. There was an irreversible trend towards linkage between humanitarian action and peace-keeping and peace-making operations. However, that linkage should not blur the distinctions between the mandates of the different bodies. Pakistan supported UNHCR's plans to enhance its cooperation with the High Commissioner for Human Rights and to place on the political agenda issues and conflicts that generated forced displacements. UNHCR had confirmed that 80 per cent of the world's refugees were women and children, thereby highlighting the need to provide special protection and assistance to those vulnerable segments of refugee populations. UNHCR should intensify its activities on their behalf. Moreover, Pakistan urged UNHCR to disseminate widely its papers entitled "Some Aspects of Sexual Violence and Refugee Women", "Guidelines For the Protection of Refugee Women" and "Refugee Children: Protection and Care" as they were extremely useful.

28. Unfortunately, the emergencies occurring in the world that attracted the most attention had pushed the "silent emergencies" into the background and diminished the UNHCR focus on care and maintenance programmes, which were just as important as emergency assistance. Pakistan believed that to achieve long-term durable solutions, UNHCR should allocate more funds to the care and maintenance programmes.

29. Some 4 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran were awaiting favourable conditions to return to Afghanistan. Pakistan fully supported the efforts to achieve peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan, which would permit the repatriation and rehabilitation of the Afghan refugees and the recovery of the Afghan economy. The number of refugees in Pakistan had decreased from 1.5 million in 1992 to 1.4 million at the beginning of 1994. However, the continuing strife in Afghanistan had slowed down the pace of repatriation and caused a fresh influx of 126,000 new refugees into Pakistan.

30. Repatriation of the refugees was also being hindered by a shortage of funds. The drastic reduction in the services to Afghan refugees in Pakistan, as a result of UNHCR's phasing down approach, had increased the burden that Pakistan, with its already limited resources, had to bear. Donor countries and UNHCR had adjusted their contributions in anticipation of a much reduced case-load in Pakistan, but as the rate of repatriation of the refugees had slowed down, UNHCR, WFP and the donor countries should take a fresh look at the

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situation and increase their assistance. In view of the situation prevailing in Afghanistan, Pakistan would continue to provide relief and shelter to the Afghan refugees. Nevertheless, it hoped that the international donor community would share that burden with it. Moreover, the presence of Afghan refugees on Pakistani soil for the previous 16 years had caused serious ecological damage.

31. The brutal aggression and "ethnic cleansing" by the Serbian authorities had displaced 2.8 million of Bosnia and Herzegovina's people, accounting for 65 per cent of the population. It was tragic that efforts to end that situation had failed. Pakistan commended the efforts of UNHCR to bring humanitarian relief to the Bosnians. It also believed that the international community should halt the Serbian aggression and create honourable and safe conditions for the return of the refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

32. Pakistan also wished to draw the international community's attention to the plight of the refugees from Indian-held Kashmir, who had been fleeing Indian repression and terror for the past five years. The latest evidence of India's violence against Kashmiris had been provided by the organization Physicians for Human Rights, Denmark, which had recently published the findings of a visit to refugee camps in Azad Kashmir from 5 to 11 June 1994. In its report on evidence of organized violence among refugees from Indian-held Kashmir the organization corroborated a pattern of violence against men, women and children and violations of internationally recognized human rights by the Indian security forces.

33. Pakistan believed that the time was ripe to convene an international conference to address the complex problems of refugees, returnees, displaced persons and migrants in order to develop a global strategy for tackling them. Pakistan also urged UNHCR to associate itself more actively with the preparatory processes of the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women so that issues relating to refugees were adequately reflected in the declarations and programmes of action of those conferences.

34. Mr. EGELAND (Norway) said that Norway fully associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Germany on behalf of the European Union and the acceding States. The problem of refugees was reaching critical proportions in almost all parts of the world. The number of persons in need of international protection had escalated dramatically, creating a need for a more systematic approach to issues related to protection in situations of mass flight caused by war and conflict. Refugee outflows and internal displacement were basically manifestations of coerced displacement caused by fear of persecution or armed conflict, generalized violence or widespread violations of human rights. Refugees' claims to international protection were widely acknowledged, even though they did not always conform to the notion of persecution as defined in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Currently, internally displaced persons far outnumbered those considered to be refugees under the 1951 Convention. It therefore made little sense to deal only with the transfrontier aspects of coerced population movements. Norway had on various occasions advocated the idea that the international community should be responsible for the protection and assistance needs of internally displaced

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persons, and that international involvement through the United Nations and regional structures should become more manifest and coherent. Because there were close links between human rights abuses and coerced displacements in internal conflicts and situations of civil strife, Norway believed that the Representative of the Secretary-General for Internally Displaced Persons had a catalytic role to play in that area.

35. The measures necessary to resolve a refugee problem through voluntary repatriation were the same as those required to relieve the plight of the internally displaced and of those at risk of displacement. Furthermore, preventing internal displacement by removing the factors that forced people to flee their homes could also eliminate the immediate cause of refugee flows. Norway therefore welcomed further work within UNHCR on that complex subject and the Office's continued efforts to formulate criteria and principles for involvement on behalf of that group. New avenues should be explored to ensure international protection to persons in need, even if they fell outside the immediate scope of established legal instruments.

36. Humanitarian actions alone could not prevent refugee crises or provide solutions; political will would always remain essential. However, humanitarian action was increasingly part of more comprehensive approaches to conflict management. Humanitarian assistance and reintegration activities could in fact prove vital in bridging different sections of war-torn societies both during an emergency phase and in post-conflict peace-building. Norway saw non-governmental organizations as the most important operative agents for such humanitarian actions. It was proud to have been a main sponsor of the Partnership in Action process and would provide resources to implement the Oslo recommendations agreed in Norway earlier in the year.

37. For a comprehensive effort to succeed, an overall strategy with clear goals, sufficient resources and an efficient division of work among the agencies concerned was paramount. Efforts relating to prevention, protection and durable solutions would ultimately necessitate increasing collaboration with the political mechanisms and processes of the United Nations. Lessons learned from Rwanda suggested a need to coordinate measures for prevention, protection and the development of lasting solutions with the political mechanisms and processes of the United Nations. It was also important to refine the relationship between humanitarian action and peace-keeping operations, which had traditionally been kept apart to safeguard the non-political and impartial nature of humanitarian assistance activities. That remained a paramount objective. Yet, increasingly, humanitarian operations had to cooperate with peace-keeping forces, political mediators, human rights observers and others in comprehensive United Nations operations. More cooperation with military and civil defence establishments would be necessary to improve logistics and the overall response capacity. Such concerted operations should avoid politicizing protection or access to humanitarian relief, and prevent humanitarian efforts from being taken hostage by the parties to the conflict.

38. Mr. OWADA (Japan) reaffirmed Japan's strong support for UNHCR. For the first time, Japan had decided to send troops from its defence forces to provide

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humanitarian assistance; those troops were currently involved in such areas as medical assistance, sanitation, water management and air lifts in Zaire. Although the emergency situation of refugees in the United Republic of Tanzania and some parts of Zaire was supposed to have stabilized somewhat, his delegation was increasingly concerned about the problem of security in certain refugee camps in Zaire where delivery of relief supplies and essential services was reported to be disrupted by armed elements from the former Rwandan army and militia. Since the maintenance of security was essential to the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance, the international community must urgently seek appropriate measures to redress the situation.

39. His delegation was pleased to note that voluntary repatriation programmes had been showing great progress, especially in Africa and Asia. The satisfactory results in Myanmar and other countries of South-East Asia as well as in Mozambique were particularly gratifying. However, it was clear that the process of voluntary repatriation could not continue without continued political support from all parties concerned. For example, an unprecedented 1.5 million refugees had returned to Afghanistan in 1992, but the rate of repatriation had begun to fall as political instability in the country had increased.

40. Japan noted with appreciation that the High Commissioner and her staff were increasingly working within the broader context of the international community's efforts to address humanitarian crises. Refugee problems could not be solved through humanitarian assistance alone, so it was increasingly necessary to coordinate humanitarian assistance efforts with peace-keeping operations, as had been done with the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), the United Nations Operation in Mozambique (ONUMOZ) and the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in the former Yugoslavia. The utmost care would have to be taken to ensure that those operations did not jeopardize humanitarian assistance activities, since the activities of United Nations peace-keeping operations could involve the United Nations in the hostilities. That could carry risks for humanitarian assistance, which could only be provided as long as UNHCR maintained its impartial position in the conflicts.

41. His delegation supported the UNHCR plan to increase its ties with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, given the fact that human rights violations and internal conflicts were among the main causes of refugee flows. Collaboration with other organs of the United Nations system was advisable in order to cope with the problem. In that connection Japan noted with great appreciation the continuing efforts on the part of UNHCR to work closely with such other humanitarian organizations as ICRC, IOM, WFP, UNICEF and WHO.

42. The previous year the financial requirements of UNHCR had increased, which reflected the expanding role that donors expected it to play. Nevertheless it was important to achieve enhanced efficiency and transparency in the budget. In that regard his delegation welcomed and endorsed the proposal of the High Commissioner to establish an inspection and evaluation service.

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43. UNHCR had become increasingly involved in preventive activities in countries of origin, in emergency relief and rehabilitation and development, and in the protection of internally displaced persons. Although such activities were not unrelated to the original mandate of UNHCR, its organizational capacity and its effectiveness in carrying them out should be considered carefully before decisions were made on its involvement, in order to avoid overstretching its operations.

44. Japan shared the concern expressed by the High Commissioner about the security of personnel engaged in humanitarian assistance activities. All possible measures should be taken to guarantee their safety. The draft international convention on the safety and security of United Nations and associated personnel should cover United Nations humanitarian assistance operations in the same way as peace-keeping operations in the light of the danger to which relief workers were so often exposed.

45. Mr. VOLSKI (Georgia) said that the problem of refugees affected some 300,000 citizens of his country, namely Georgians, Abkhaz, Ossetians, Russians, Greeks and Jews, who had been forced to leave their homes and seek shelter and food. There had been too many examples of such tragic events in Georgia, particularly in its western part, Abkhazia. The work carried out by UNHCR in the region was critical, as were the joint efforts of non-governmental organizations and donor countries to rescue thousands of people.

46. The return of refugees to their homes could be achieved only through a negotiated settlement of the dispute. In that regard Georgia placed great hopes in the efforts of the United Nations, CSCE and the Russian Federation as a country facilitating the negotiations, the presence of the CIS peace-keeping force and United Nations military observers in the conflict zone, and, in particular, the active participation of the Secretary-General in the peace process discussed during his recent visit to Georgia.

47. A global strategy with a comprehensive approach was needed to resolve the conflict and address its causes. The initiative suggested by the High Commissioner of arranging a series of international meetings and consultations and convening an international conference to consider important issues and elaborate a strategy to address the problem properly would help to bring that objective closer. His delegation welcomed the participation of United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and international organizations in UNHCR'S preparatory work. It was also important to devise a mechanism to ensure that the rights of refugees were restored and that those who perpetrated crimes against humanity did not go unpunished. The situation in Georgia remained precarious and belief in a peaceful solution was fragile; the strenuous efforts of all concerned were necessary to sustain it.

48. Mrs. KOVALSKA (Ukraine) fully supported the statement made by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on regional positions in connection with the problem of refugees, in which reference had been made to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Baltic States. As a result of its relative political stability Ukraine had become the preferred host State for refugees

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from the republics of the former Soviet Union where inter-ethnic conflict had arisen. In 1993 almost 45,000 persons had sought refugee status in Ukraine, of whom 35,000 had been from conflict zones in the territory of the former Soviet Union and the remaining 10,000 from countries in Asia and Africa. Groups and entire peoples deported by the former regime within the boundaries of the former Soviet Union could also be equated with refugees. Hundreds of thousands of people now wished to return to their historic homelands, a singularly difficult exercise owing to the current economic crisis and the fact that other successor States to the former Soviet Union had declined to participate in the process. Ukraine had been the only State to ratify the CIS convention on the restoration of the rights of deported persons, minorities and entire peoples, signed by the Heads of State of the member countries of CIS in Bishkek on 9 October 1993. Up to September 1993 almost 260,000 Crimean Tatars, as well as thousands of Armenians, Greeks, Germans and Bulgarians, had returned to Crimea. The repatriation of Crimean Tatars, planned as an organized process, was taking place spontaneously. Although they fell with a category of persons that did not correspond at all to the definition of refugees under the convention or to the mandate of the High Commissioner for Refugees, Ukraine hoped to obtain international assistance and also hoped UNHCR would make use of all its moral influence to secure the participation of States that declined to contribute to the repatriation of victims of deportations.

49. The current scale of the problem of movement to Ukraine was such that it was appropriate to establish a UNHCR presence in Ukraine. Given its geographical situation, the country received flows of migrants who hoped to move to the West, which did not promote internal stability. Since 1991 "illicit trafficking in persons" had become characteristic of the situation in Ukraine and along its borders: in 1993 some 17,800 persons had been detained (270 times more than in 1991), more than half of whom were from countries in South-East Asia, the Near East, the Middle East and Africa. The competent State organs had taken appropriate measures to update the legal provisions governing border control and the punishment of related infringements.

50. Ukraine attached particular importance to the drafting and implementation of legislative, political and diplomatic measures to eliminate the causes of refugee flows and large population displacements, since there was a direct relationship between refugee problems and inter-ethnic instability. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, thousands of persons, including Ukrainians, had found themselves beyond the borders of their ethnic homeland. States should take appropriate steps to ensure that those persons did not join the millions of refugees and involuntary returnees. Ukrainians living as a national minority in neighbouring countries were less well protected than national minorities in the territory of Ukraine. The protection of such rights should be assured through cooperation between neighbouring countries under bilateral agreements based on the principle of equality and reciprocity and reflecting the new political and economic situation created by the existence of sovereign and independent States. Ukraine considered it to be unacceptable and incompatible with international norms of communication between States that forms of political or economic pressure should be brought to bear under the guise of upholding the rights of

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national minorities since it was necessary, in order to achieve peace and stability, to strengthen mutual respect and good-neighbourly relations.

51. The Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National, Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities was an important step towards the preparation of international agreements in that field. The endeavour to reach mutually acceptable positions concerning safeguards for the rights of national minorities would provide an opportunity to set up more effective machinery for the prevention of inter-ethnic violence, thereby helping to reduce the number of refugees and strengthen international stability and peace.

52. Mr. STEFANOV (Bulgaria) shared the view expressed in the UNHCR report that the States of Central and Eastern Europe were increasingly facing the challenge of having become countries of asylum or transit. As a result of the liberalization of travel and visa requirements since 1989, Bulgaria had become a country of transit for migrants bound for the West who remained in Bulgaria because of the more restrictive entry regulations in most other European countries. There were currently over 15,000 aliens in the country who had failed to reach their countries of destination or to renew their visas to remain in Bulgaria. A large number of those migrants applied for asylum and for refugee status even though they did not need international protection in the sense of the 1951 Convention. The number of asylum-seekers in the first nine months of 1994 was twice what it had been in the whole of 1993. Since September 1992, some 150 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina and 48 from the former Soviet Union had received temporary protection and assistance. In 1993, another 87 persons had been granted refugee status under the UNHCR mandate in Bulgaria. In September 1994 the Bulgarian Government had adopted measures for the implementation of the 1951 Convention, and a refugee bill was under preparation which would be considered by the Parliament.

53. He expressed appreciation for UNHCR assistance to law enforcement and other officials in Bulgaria in the protection of refugees, the promotion of refugee legislation and institution-building, and for the Office's support in organizing the International Symposium on Protection of Refugees in Central and Eastern Europe, which had been held in Sofia in June 1994. Bulgaria was particularly concerned about the humanitarian aspect of the war in the former Yugoslavia. There was still a threat that the tragic internal conflicts of that war might proliferate and cause a large-scale refugee outflow, exacerbating the alarming refugee situation in the Balkans. A system should be established for the exchange of information on potential refugee flows and on emergency situations, and measures should be taken to prevent such flows.

54. Mr. BOREL (Observer for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) said that because of the violence in Rwanda, Liberia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Afghanistan and many other parts of the world, there were some 25 million displaced persons within their own countries whose plight required urgent and effective action. Since the vast majority of those people had been driven from their homes by armed conflict, they were covered by international humanitarian law; consequently, their situation came within the mandate of ICRC and they were entitled to benefit from its protection and assistance activities.

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All too often, however, the norms of humanitarian law were disregarded, despite its universal scope. It was thus necessary for the international community to assume its responsibilities under the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, which provided that States Parties should not only respect the Conventions but ensure respect for them.

55. In order to provide displaced persons with more effective protection and assistance, the United Nations had initiated a constructive debate on that matter, coordinated by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, in which ICRC had played an active part. As civilians, the most vulnerable members of the population, namely women, children and the elderly, regardless of whether they were displaced persons, were the main beneficiaries of the protection afforded by humanitarian law. He questioned the advisability of developing rules specifically designed to protect displaced persons. To create several categories of victims might contravene the very spirit of humanitarian law, to the detriment of war victims as a whole.

56. ICRC considered it preferable to do everything possible to ensure that existing international law was respected and to explore means of improving its application. To that end, a little over a year earlier the Swiss Government, at the initiative of ICRC, had convened an International Conference on the Protection of War Victims. He hoped that the conclusions reached at that Conference would lead to practical recommendations. In that connection, the experience of ICRC in the field demonstrated how important it was for States to meet their obligation to ensure that their armed forces were informed of the rules of humanitarian law.

57. If better protection and assistance were to be provided to refugees and displaced persons, greater cooperation would be necessary among the humanitarian agencies. ICRC thus welcomed the close collaboration it had established with UNHCR, and hoped that it would develop further in the future. It was essential to maintain a coherent approach which allowed humanitarian action to develop with complete neutrality and impartiality. To strengthen the ethical framework of humanitarian action, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, in consultation with various non-governmental organizations and with support from ICRC, had drawn up a code of conduct for organizations involved in disaster relief. He hoped that it would receive the widest possible endorsement.

58. Lastly, he noted that humanitarian action could not be more than a short-term palliative, pending solutions by States - which had primary responsibility in that area - to the political and military issues which led to violence. Compliance by all belligerents with the rules of international humanitarian law would, however, pave the way for reconciliation by maintaining mutual trust.

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AGENDA ITEM 95: SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE WORLD SOCIAL SITUATION AND TO YOUTH, AGEING, DISABLED PERSONS AND THE FAMILY
(continued) (A/C.3/49/L.12)

59. Ms. ENKHTSETSEG (Mongolia) introduced the draft resolution entitled "The role of cooperatives in the light of new economic and social trends" (A/C.3/49/L.12) on behalf of its sponsors, and announced that the following countries had joined them as sponsors: Benin, Ecuador, Guinea-Bissau, India, Kenya, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Nepal, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Russian Federation, Senegal and United Republic of Tanzania.

60. Cooperatives played an important role in strengthening the productive and economic capacities of all countries regardless of the level of their development. In that regard, the Secretary-General's report (A/49/213) provided substantial information on the contributions of cooperatives to the strengthening of those capacities in developing countries, in developed market economies and in transitional economies. The sponsors of the draft resolution believed that the report provided a sound basis for exchanging practical experience on developing cooperatives around the world, and were strongly convinced of the need to continue constructive discussions of the issue in the United Nations. The draft resolution had no financial implications for the programme budget. The purpose of paragraph 2 was to have the International Day of Cooperatives become an annual observance, primarily at the national and local levels. The sponsors hoped that the draft resolution would be adopted by consensus as in the past.

The meeting rose 5.40 p.m.