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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS
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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 512th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 9 October 1996, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. SKOGMO (Norway)

CONTENTS

ANNUAL THEME: THE PURSUIT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SOLUTIONS (continued)

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In the absence of Mr. Mchumo (United Republic of Tanzania), Mr. Skogmo (Norway), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

ANNUAL THEME: THE PURSUIT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SOLUTIONS (agenda item 4)
(continued) (A/AC.96/863, 867 and 872)

1. Mr. GOAGOSEB (Namibia) said that the members of the international humanitarian community, faced a momentous task calling for substantial logistical, material and financial assistance, but they also had to interact with a strong and unbiased political will in order to ensure durable peace and stability.
2. Peace and stability prevailed in the countries of southern Africa, with the exception of Namibia's northern neighbour, Angola. Three years ago, hopes had been expressed for peace in Angola, but they had not been fulfilled. None the less, his delegation was grateful for the continued efforts made by the Heads of State of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) countries to establish peace and stability in Angola and for international efforts, as illustrated by the presence of UNAVEM III in Angola, in which his own country's armed forces were participating. Unfortunately, the continuing flows of refugees from Angola into neighbouring countries made the repatriation exercise impossible.
3. The Memorandum of Understanding between SADC and UNHCR was a noteworthy example of the measures taken to prevent refugee flows. One of the objectives of the Memorandum was to address the region's social, economic and political issues, particularly those with a bearing on the root causes of population displacement, refugee protection, the provision of humanitarian assistance and the search for durable solutions, an aim that was in keeping with the objectives of SADC.
4. Prevention of refugee flows not only required countries to lend a helping hand; it also encompassed the concept of burden-sharing and of the country of first asylum, which was of particular concern to Namibia as some of its refugees were arriving from outside the region, a development that might in the long term lead to the emergence of xenophobia.
5. In 1994 his Government had developed a clear policy based on the 1951 Convention, the 1967 Protocol and the 1969 OAU Convention. It had made only one reservation, to article 26 of the 1951 Convention, on freedom of movement for refugees. However, Namibia had relaxed its policies towards refugees and asylum seekers and offered them increased opportunities to study and seek employment. The Government had already started to issue work permits to skilled refugees and a number of refugees had also been admitted to university.
6. Priority was given to refugees from Angola, on account of the continuing conflict there, although other asylum seekers were treated in accordance with the requirements of the Conventions. Refugees were encouraged to integrate in local communities and to engage in small income-generating projects to develop self-sufficiency.

7. The tide of refugees continued to rise relentlessly, stretching to the limits the international framework of protection, which was based on one simple powerful commitment: to protect refugees and offer a lasting solution to their plight. Refugee problems raised not only humanitarian and human rights concerns, but also focused on fundamental issues of international peace and security. The optimistic forecasts of the early 1990s, when the number of refugees throughout the world had declined, had been replaced by a far more sober reassessment of the impact of the new geopolitical realities on refugees. The reduction in East-West tension had created new possibilities for international cooperation to settle disputes, although the proxy wars of the previous decades had proved to have lives of their own, as was clear in many African countries, including Rwanda, Burundi and Liberia.

8. Mr. AL-TIKRITI (Observer for Iraq) said that, although the High Commissioner's latest report showed a drop in the number of refugees, there had been no improvement in the overall situation and efforts were still needed to work towards durable solutions, in which regard he paid tribute to UNHCR's efforts to assist and protect refugees in conformity with its international commitments.

9. As to humanitarian activities and particularly emergency assistance, despite the difficult economic situation caused by the economic embargo, Iraq supported a refugee population of more than 70,000, including 40,000 Iranian refugees. The Government was devoting considerable resources to meeting the needs of the refugees and provide them with the same food ration as Iraqi citizens. It was assisted in that task by the UNHCR Office in Baghdad. Iraq also hosted a population of 20,000 Kurdish refugees in the north, and their situation was being monitored by UNHCR.

10. Since 1991 Iraq had experienced extremely difficult conditions on account of the aggression and economic embargo against it, which had compelled Iraqi citizens to move to other countries, where they were often victims of various forms of abuse, occasionally of the most extreme kind. A Memorandum of Understanding between the United Nations and Iraq would permit the voluntary repatriation of large numbers of Iraqi Kurds.

11. At the beginning of August 1996 Iran had illegally sent armed forces into northern Iraq in support of Kurdish factions, thereby compelling Iraq to respond. In the process, numerous Kurds had been displaced to Iran. In the immediate wake of those events the Revolutionary Council had declared a general amnesty, on 11 September 1996, and the majority of the Kurds had since returned to Iraq. For many years the Iraqi authorities had been concerned to ensure the return of Iraqi refugees, and in 1991 had granted an amnesty which had led to the safe return of large numbers of Iraqi refugees from Saudi Arabia. His Government was ready to cooperate with UNHCR in order to ensure the safe and orderly return of both Iraqi and Iranian refugees.

12. Iran and Iraq had signed an agreement to permit the return of Iraqi refugees from Iran and of Iranian refugees to their own country. Unfortunately, Iraq's attempts to draw up lists, with the assistance of UNHCR, to enable it to accommodate its refugees had been frustrated by Iran's

failure to attend the second meeting organized for that purpose. The Iraqi authorities had been informed by UNHCR that the Government of Iran refused to allow the Iranian refugees in Iraq to return home. Iraq was endeavouring to find a solution to the problems of its Iranian refugees and was convinced of the need for radical solutions to permit the refugees to repatriate. The Government was prepared to receive its own refugees on the basis of the decisions taken by the Revolutionary Council on 21 July 1991, which had granted a general amnesty for all Iraqis and for those who had deserted from the armed forces, and of the general amnesty decreed on 11 September 1996 for all Iraqi citizens in the autonomous regions.

13. The Iraqi Government stood ready to implement the agreement reached with Iran. Host countries should not exploit refugee issues to achieve other ends. His Government appreciated the valuable role played by UNHCR in Iraq and in other countries in the region in seeking durable solutions. It was grateful for the assistance UNHCR had provided to refugees in Iraq and appealed for an increase in the resources allocated to those efforts, so as to permit UNHCR's office in Baghdad to perform its vital role.

14. Mr. DEMBELE (Observer for Mali) said the world still included areas of tension which challenged the conscience of mankind. In Africa, Asia and Europe, the conflicts, humiliations and suffering imposed on man by his fellows continued to engender vast population movements whose main victims were women, children and the elderly. Unfortunately, his own country, Mali, was among the countries that had contributed to the flow of refugees.

15. In June 1990 an uprising had broken out in among the Arab-Touareg population in northern Mali, which had tried by force of arms to express its concern about the economic backwardness of the northern regions. The confrontation, which had lasted almost two years, had come to an end with the signing, on 11 April 1992, of the National Agreement between the Government and the rebels, under the auspices of Algeria. However, the insecurity engendered by the conflict had not been cleared until the end of 1994, and further refugee movements and population displacements had occurred in the meanwhile.

16. Since early 1995 and thanks to the efforts of all parties involved, Mali had left no stone unturned to restore peace and calm in the north. Regional and national meetings had been organized throughout the country to involve the nation as a whole in the search for a solution to the problems in the north. Information campaigns had been carried out among refugees in the countries of asylum to assure them of the Government's good will. A meeting had been organized at Timbuctoo with development partners to consider jointly ways and means of consolidating peace through the revival of development activities and the return of the refugee and displaced populations. In October 1995 the former combatants had been grouped in order to disarm them and allow them to return to civilian life. In June 1996, the arms recovered had been burned in a symbolic ceremony at Timbuctoo. With the exception of isolated acts of banditry, the north of Mali was sufficiently secure to allow the return of the refugees and displaced persons and the resumption of the area's economic revival.

17. For several years, UNHCR had been working alongside the Malian Government and population to provide protection and assistance to Mali's citizens. It had made a precious contribution to reassuring refugees, preparing transit and resettlement sites, in conjunction with its repatriation operations and reintegration activities. The High Commissioner had modestly referred to UNHCR's contribution to the return of 50,000 refugees, but, the Office's input had been far greater, and the repatriation of Malian citizens for which it was responsible was an essential element in the consolidation of peace in the north of Mali and in the development of democracy, which should culminate in the forthcoming elections. He expressed the deep gratitude of the Government and people of Mali to the UNHCR and their hope that the international community would respond favourably to UNHCR's appeal for funds to finance programmes for the repatriation and reintegration of refugees from Mali and the Niger. Moreover, Algeria, Mauritania, Burkina Faso and the Niger had offered asylum, assistance and protection to his compatriots, often at the expense of their own environment. His delegation endorsed the approach advocated by UNHCR to the identification and implementation of durable solutions, in particular by mitigating, if not eliminating, the manifold causes of forced population displacements. Prevention was certainly better than cure.

18. Mr. Tae Yul CHO (Observer for the Republic of Korea) said the new thematic format for the Executive Committee's discussions would enhance UNHCR's productivity as it confronted the complex tasks ahead. The protection of refugees was primarily the responsibility of individual Governments, although an international system was required to ensure durable solutions to the problems refugees faced as a result of mounting pressure from many sources. UNHCR had a central role to play in meeting that need.

19. He commended UNHCR's ongoing efforts to adopt a more effective, transparent and leaner management. The Action Plan drawn up under Project Delphi was an example of the High Commissioner's determination to translate her commitment into action. Korea welcomed the basic directions and objectives envisioned by Project Delphi and particularly the "situational approach", whose emphasis on the field rather than on headquarters was in itself a comprehensive approach which tackled refugee problems in an integrated fashion and focused on durable solutions. Secondly, his delegation supported the recommendation in the Action Plan for the establishment of a new strategic policy formulation mechanism and it was gratifying that the Centre for Documentation and Research (CDR) had already been engaged in formulating a global strategy paper. Thirdly, the emphasis on regional approaches in formulating and implementing UNHCR's operation-specific policy, as exemplified by the recent CIS Regional Conference in May 1996 was a welcome development and could serve as a model for a comprehensive regional approach, particularly in regard to prevention. Lastly, high priority should be placed on ensuring cost-effective financial management, with a particular emphasis on streamlining to eliminate duplication. The Office's financial health was critical if it was to respond to ever-increasing challenges.

20. It was impossible to prevent forced population displacement and achieve durable solutions through a single isolated approach. Concerted action, and a collective response from the international community were required with improved coordination between UNHCR and its partners, based on the comparative

advantages and complementarity of the agencies concerned. UNHCR had considerably improved coordination with other humanitarian organizations, as requested in Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/56. He encouraged the Office further to develop its cooperation and coordination with organizations such as UNDP and the World Bank, as durable solutions were facilitated by linking relief with post-conflict rehabilitation and development.

21. Professional, experienced NGOs were also a crucial element in refugee protection and assistance, and UNHCR's efforts to reinforce its working relationships with them, in the interests of maximum efficiency, were a welcome development. The Office's comprehensive, strategic and solution-oriented approach gave it the potential to achieve far more. However, failure to address the root causes of forced population displacement and refugee outflows doomed such an approach to failure. For that reason, he supported UNHCR's prevention activities, even though they fell largely outside its mandate. In that area too, it was important to avoid overlapping and duplication.

22. In the past three years the Republic of Korea had greatly increased its contributions to UNHCR's General and Special Programmes: its contribution to the General Programme alone had increased sevenfold from \$100,000 in 1994 to \$700,000 in 1996, figures that testified to his Government's commitment to UNHCR's activities in facing the challenges ahead.

23. Prince SOBANDLA (Observer for Swaziland) said that the local populations of many developing countries viewed the refugee situation as a threat to their own survival. With the help of UNHCR and NGOs, however, Swaziland had neglected neither its own people nor its United Nations responsibilities. UNHCR had held regional seminars to assist the local media in explaining the refugee crisis to the general public, NGOs had identified a number of practical solutions to the refugee problem and the Partnership in Action (PARINAC), composed of Governments, UNHCR and NGOs, had designed innovative and practical refugee programmes. Swaziland was working closely with refugees in order to instil the concept of self-sufficiency and promote a culture of peace. It had organized workshops on small-scale business management, group dynamics and leadership styles, and reconciliation and conflict resolution.

24. Although the present generation claimed to be the most developed in human history, it was still tightly bound by chains of ignorance that defined a person by the colour of his skin, the size of his territory or the balance of his bank account. It was, therefore, of particular significance that King Mswati III of Swaziland, President Chissano of Mozambique and High Commissioner Ogata had personally visited refugees in Swaziland, thereby helping to restore the human dignity shared by all.

25. Swaziland was proud to have been unanimously nominated by UNHCR and the NGOs of its subregion as regional PARINAC coordinator for the next two years and would strive to meet that responsibility. The demise of apartheid in South Africa, the restoration of peace in Mozambique and the workshops

sponsored by UNHCR on international refugee policy and the principles and procedures of refugee determination were important factors that augured well for the future of the refugee situation in the subregion.

26. Mr. TARMIDZI (Observer for Indonesia) said that durable solutions depended on the full commitment of all the parties concerned and the shared responsibility of the international community. The completion of the Comprehensive Plan of Action in South-East Asia (CPA), which had charted a durable solution to the question of the Vietnamese boat people, was attributable to that principle.

27. As a country of first asylum since 1975, Indonesia was fully committed to finding a durable solution for the thousands of Vietnamese boat people encamped on Galang Island. On 8 September 1996, a joint statement had been issued by UNHCR and the Government of Indonesia, officially completing the implementation of the CPA for Galang Island. The 18 people waiting to be resettled in third countries had been given temporary accommodation, and it was incumbent on the international community to help solve their plight.

28. He expressed his Government's deepest gratitude and appreciation to UNHCR, resettlement and donor countries and the Government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam for their full commitment to the completion of the CPA for Galang Island, Indonesia.

29. Mr. NDIAYE (Senegal) said his delegation supported UNHCR activities, in particular the changes taking place in the framework of Project Delphi. The theme under discussion, the pursuit and implementation of durable solutions, was more important than ever.

30. As many documents indicated however, the decrease in the number of refugees had not been accompanied by a drop in the causes of refugee flows. Conflicts continued in numerous regions of the world, while asylum, the cornerstone of refugee status, was being eroded in an unfortunate trend away from solidarity. Such a context required a comprehensive approach, one that would involve all the actors concerned at the international, regional and national levels and foster the emergence of the political will to enforce human rights and the rights of refugees at all stages of the process. Protection of refugees was of paramount importance.

31. Better strengthening of humanitarian coordination mechanisms and greater cooperation among countries of origin, transit and asylum countries were indispensable in arriving at long-term stability for the entire population, including refugees. It had to be acknowledged, however, that despite its vague nature and difficulty of implementation, prevention might be the best way to avoid the need for protection. It must deal with the root causes of massive refugee outflows and ways should be examined of strengthening the High Commissioner's political role in informal consultations and in raising political leaders' awareness of the consequences of conflicts.

32. In New York recently, the "Friends of Rapid Reaction Group" had proposed a new concept, the "Rapidly Deployable HQ", in addition to the idea of a "Stand-by Brigade". That showed the international community was seeking innovative solutions to avoid past delays and errors in peace-keeping. It

also showed that there was room to expand the scope of UNHCR's role in regions where there were signs of an impending crisis. Discreet action without media exaggeration might yield valuable results; in many countries, the humanitarian side of the United Nations was perceived quite differently from the political side.

33. He encouraged the High Commissioner to continue UNHCR's cooperation with the Organization of African Unity, especially in the framework of the implementation of the African conflict prevention and settlement mechanism.

34. Mr. ULUCEVIK (Turkey) said that, although refugee problems had become less severe in 1996 in terms of numbers, their gravity in terms of human suffering persisted throughout the world. The need for effective solutions was more pressing than ever, and the preferred solution should continue to be voluntary repatriation. To that end bilateral contacts between the country of origin and receiving countries should be encouraged, and the international community should play a constructive role in that process through UNHCR. Third-country resettlement, however, should also be kept as a viable option.

35. Turkey, in a volatile region of political fluctuation, had always been affected by population movements. It was at present hosting approximately 30,000 refugees and cooperated with UNHCR in seeking durable solutions and in meeting intermittent emergency situations in the region. The exemplary cooperation between the Turkish Government and UNHCR meant that the voluntary repatriation of nearly half a million people who had taken refuge in Turkey in 1991 had been completed successfully.

36. The refugee problems in Bosnia and Herzegovina, together with those in the Great Lakes region of Africa, had posed a daunting challenge for UNHCR in recent years. Although the Dayton Agreements had put an end to the genocide perpetrated against the Bosnians, enormous tasks lay ahead in restructuring the State of Bosnia and Herzegovina and remedying the agony of the war-stricken population, including the refugees. UNHCR was to be commended for the work it had accomplished since the signing of the Dayton Agreements.

37. He endorsed Project Delphi, which would render UNHCR more dynamic, less bureaucratic and more responsive to the exigencies of the present. Project Delphi highlighted the new notion of a comprehensive regional approach, based on the past examples of CPA, CIREFCA and the latest CIS Conference. The Office should proceed in a "lessons-learned" approach in consultation with the Governments concerned. He welcomed the conclusions of the CIS Conference, but regional processes must be complemented with bilateral contacts among interested countries. It should also be borne in mind that definitions and principles formulated in regional processes were applicable only in the relevant regional framework.

38. Turkey attached great importance to the security of the refugee camps under international protection. Any armed activity around refugee camps, particularly with the aim of destabilizing Governments, was carried out in violation of the camps' civilian and humanitarian character. The international community and UNHCR must be vigilant, to make sure that refugee camps would never be used by terrorists for training or logistical purposes.

39. Mr. LE LUONG MINH (Viet Nam) said that armed conflicts, external interference, poverty and hunger persisted in many parts of the world, leading to massive flows of refugees. Africa and Asia had always been the regions with the highest numbers of refugees. That was natural, since many countries on those two continents had for half a century been denied the peace needed for development activities, a situation that the recent positive changes on the international scene had not been sufficient to counteract. In that regard, the present topic of debate for 1996 was appropriate and he fully agreed that the essential elements in solving the root causes of refugee problems were peace, friendly international relations and international cooperation for the sustainable development of all countries.

40. After seven years of implementation, the Comprehensive Plan of Action for the Indo-Chinese refugees had been widely recognized as a successful durable solution. A great number of asylum-seekers meeting the requisite criteria had been resettled in third countries and most of the others had returned to their countries under voluntary repatriation programmes. The CPA had been a success thanks to the attention of the international community and cooperation between the countries of first asylum, resettlement and origin, and, of course, the very important supervision and steering role of UNHCR. He extended his Government's sincere appreciation to the Governments of the countries concerned, the staff of UNHCR, the donor countries and the many non-governmental organizations for their valuable assistance.

41. Although the CPA had officially ended in June 1996, more than 11,000 people were still in camps in Hong Kong and a small number in some South-East Asian countries. His Government was committed to doing its utmost, in close cooperation with UNHCR and other countries concerned, to accelerate their repatriation on a voluntary basis, with respect for their dignity and without violence or coercion. He hoped that the resettlement countries would simplify their procedures to speed up that process and that the international community would continue to provide the necessary assistance for the reintegration programmes.

42. There had been a reference during the debate to "Indo-Chinese refugees in China". He wished to state that there were no Vietnamese refugees in China. At the end of the 1970s, at the call of their own Government, a number of Chinese citizens who had been living in Viet Nam had left for China; they had been living in their homeland for the past two decades. That was a question of the past and should be closed.

43. Mr. SOOKLAL (Observer for South Africa) said that every possible solution to the growing refugee problem had been implemented and the time had come to examine durable solutions. It was also necessary to approach refugee problems from the wider perspective of conflict resolution. Human catastrophes of the kind witnessed in Burundi, Rwanda and Bosnia might have been prevented or minimized if conflict-prevention mechanisms had been in place.

44. His Government viewed the situation in the Great Lakes region in a very serious light. It had responded financially to United Nations inter-agency appeals and President Mandela had appointed a special envoy to promote

dialogue between the various parties. He wished to acknowledge the spirit and generosity of the neighbouring countries which had received refugees from that troubled area.

45. South Africa had acceded to the 1951 Convention, the 1967 Protocol and the OAU Convention in January 1996. The Government was drafting legislation on refugees, which it expected to enact during the next parliamentary session in 1997. The celebration of Africa Refugee Day had been marked by a special debate in Parliament on the issue of refugees, with support from all political parties in Parliament for just implementation of international and regional instruments.

46. Even before becoming a party to international refugee instruments, South Africa had implemented their provisions when it had signed the Basic Agreement with UNHCR on 6 September 1993. It had fully complied with the various conclusions relating to the voluntary repatriation of Mozambican refugees. The cessation clause would take effect on 31 December 1996, and the estimated 90,000 Mozambican refugees who might find themselves in South Africa after 31 December 1996 would be given the option of becoming permanent residents. The voluntary repatriation programme, one of the success stories in Africa, had been achieved with the excellent cooperation of the Government of Mozambique and assistance from UNHCR.

47. South Africa had also embarked on a number of initiatives to expedite the asylum-determination process. With assistance from the UNHCR Southern African Regional Office, it had trained more than 1,000 officials, including immigration officers and selected officials from the South African National Defence Force and the South African Police Services. It had also developed a computer program to monitor the flow and status of asylum applications as well as refugee movements. A database of all asylum-seekers and refugees in South Africa would be compiled to allow machine printing of identity documents for refugees. The program would also facilitate the reunification of refugee families and would be made available, with assistance from the Raoul Wallenberg Institute, to all member States of the Southern African Development Community.

48. Mr. BENITEZ (Argentina) said that the reform of the Executive Committee's working methods and the innovative approaches adopted by UNHCR were appropriate responses to the challenge of the refugee crisis throughout the world and, in that connection, he expressed his support for Project Delphi. He also shared the view of the Director of the Regional Bureau for the Americas and the Caribbean about the considerable progress made in that region, which was consistent with a long Latin American tradition of hospitality. He, too, joined other delegations in commending the gesture made by Mexico. In the near future, Latin America, especially South America, would undoubtedly provide fewer challenges for UNHCR and many more opportunities for cooperation in assisting refugees throughout the world. In that respect, his Government had embarked on a policy of international humanitarian cooperation, which included an international voluntary assistance network for resolving humanitarian emergencies. The white helmet initiative was in itself a channel for efficient cooperation that could become operative practically immediately.

49. As the refugee problem was primarily one of the developing countries, the possibility of South-South cooperation in aid and rehabilitation activities should not be neglected. For that reason, his Government viewed with concern the decision to transfer the Buenos Aires regional office. Notwithstanding the level of development achieved by Argentine institutions and the virtual non-existence of refugees in Argentina, it was not logical geographically speaking for the three regional offices for the Americas and the Caribbean (including South America) to be located in the northern hemisphere. He trusted that UNHCR would review that arrangement and maintain the present distribution of regional offices in Latin America. The decision was not justified from a budgetary point of view and might jeopardize channels of cooperation between UNHCR and Argentina that had existed for over 30 years. Such a decision should not be based merely on conflict prediction but should take account of possibilities for cooperation.

50. Of the possible durable solutions, the international community had indicated its preference for voluntary repatriation, underlining the responsibility of the country of origin and the need to identify the root causes of displacements. Clearly solutions would only be durable in a context of political stability, respect for human rights and primacy of the rule of law. UNHCR's network of branch offices was in an excellent position to identify hazardous situations, to which end it should intensify its dialogue with the various actors and coordinate activities in the field. Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/56 set out bases for better coordination of humanitarian assistance efforts. The CIS Conference was an example to be followed with regard to prevention, and UNHCR's work in organizing it was commendable.

51. Mr. BIN GHANEM (Observer for Yemen) said UNHCR had contributed to solutions to a number of refugee problems over the past year, and thousands of refugees from, inter alia, the Balkans, the Great Lakes region of Africa and China had voluntarily returned to their homes. Since the challenges facing UNHCR could be overcome only through international cooperation, donor countries should increase their assistance with a view to ensuring respect for the rights of refugees throughout the world. Since the 1980s, Yemen, inspired by traditional Muslim values, its historic ties with neighbouring countries and the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol, had acted as host to thousands of refugees from the heart of Africa and its experience had led it to conclude that acceptance of refugees was a humanitarian duty shared by all.

52. The pursuit of durable solutions required action to prevent armed conflict and blatant human rights violations and to halt them when they occurred. Such acts threatened the international community as a whole.

53. Yemen had supported the initiative for peace in Somalia and was attempting to mediate between the parties to the conflict with a view to finding possible solutions and ways to achieve national reconciliation. In the event of success, Yemen would have helped to halt the flow of refugees from that region and to promote their voluntary return to their homes, which would be the best solution to the problem. It was a flagrant human rights violation for countries of origin to object to the return of their citizens or

to place illegitimate obstacles in the way of their return. Many refugees now in Yemen were quite prepared to return home but were prevented from doing so by their own Governments. UNHCR should promote dialogue with a view to making that return possible.

54. Yemen, the first country to sign the 1951 Convention, reaffirmed its commitment to the Convention and asked the Executive Committee to increase the resources of the UNHCR office in Yemen, and so enable the office to speed up its relief operations. Yemen alone could not meet the needs of the large number of refugees there.

55. Ms. SIMBIZI (Observer for Burundi) said Burundi was only too well aware of the problems in the Great Lakes region of Africa. Following its recent experience as a host for many Rwandan refugees, it had experienced massive departures of Burundians as a result of internal crises and, since October 1993, the problem of internally displaced persons. Burundi was, therefore, aware that host countries bore a heavy burden, and it thanked Tanzania and Zaire for their hospitality to Burundian refugees.

56. Burundi supported voluntary repatriation as a durable solution. While it fully endorsed the resolutions and plan of action resulting from the Regional Conference on Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons held at Bujumbura in February 1995, it was also convinced that return, resettlement and reintegration were impossible without the re-establishment of peace and security. It therefore called on the international community, the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the international and subregional organizations to help it achieve that goal. All parties must avoid engaging in manipulation or globalizing the problems of the subregion, thereby spreading disinformation and disillusionment and compromising the possibility for a lasting peace. Only through dialogue could the root causes of the crisis be eliminated and solutions found for a return to peace, security and democracy.

57. The Burundian crisis entailed humanitarian problems: refugees and internally displaced persons led a precarious existence and had increasing difficulty in obtaining even the most basic types of assistance. The sanctions imposed on Burundi were producing harmful effects, particularly on the most vulnerable groups: children, women and older persons, both in the refugee camps and elsewhere. Burundi was counting on the support of the international community to alleviate the suffering of its people, who had a right to humanitarian assistance. The embargo could only worsen the situation of those victims.

58. Mr. DELMI (Organization of African Unity (OAU)) said that Africa now had nearly 7 million refugees, the highest total for any continent, and nearly 20 million internally displaced persons. At the Committee's previous session, the OAU Secretary-General had emphasized the need to provide protection and humanitarian aid, particularly since armed conflicts were often the cause of forced displacement.

59. The situation in the Great Lakes region was a source of serious concern. The genocide in Rwanda in April 1994 had caused an unprecedented influx of refugees into Tanzania and Zaire with a consequent deterioration in the

environment and destruction of health, educational and other infrastructures, that would take a long time to rebuild. Despite efforts to implement the Plan of Action adopted at the Bujumbura Regional Conference, there had been little voluntary repatriation of refugees in the Great Lakes region, and insufficient assistance had been pledged for rehabilitation, reconstruction and repairs for damage caused in the asylum countries. The tension in Burundi had also increased pressure on neighbouring countries.

60. In West Africa, OAU was concerned by the situation of Liberian refugees in neighbouring countries, such as Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea. The international community should support the efforts of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to find a solution to the conflict and make it possible to restore the country's political institutions, of which the first task would be to create favourable conditions for the return of Liberian refugees. There had been some improvement in East Africa, but much remained to be done to halt the exodus of populations fleeing the conflicts in Somalia, southern Sudan and northern Uganda. As to southern Africa, the situation in Angola was particularly serious, and OAU regretted the slowness and problems that were hampering implementation of the Lusaka Agreement and the return of peace. In North Africa, the situation of Sahrawi refugees was another source of concern. The obstacles to the implementation of the United Nations peace plan for Western Sahara were hindering the organization of a free, fair and credible referendum as a step towards a final solution to that fratricidal conflict.

61. The topic under discussion coincided with OAU's objective of promoting peace and security on the African continent, without which there could be no lasting solution to the refugee problem there. In that context, OAU was attempting to assist in conflict settlement and to promote the economic development and integration of African countries within the framework of the Treaty establishing the African economic community. OAU's encouraging experience in Mozambique, Mali and the Horn of Africa convinced it that the search for and implementation of lasting solutions required certain conditions that must be based on specific principles. Those conditions included, on the one hand, the need for a global approach that would take into account humanitarian, political and economic objectives and, on the other, coordination of efforts by the countries of origin, asylum countries and the rest of the international community. The underlying principles for lasting solutions included, at the domestic level, the promotion of national reconciliation and tolerance, at the regional level, cooperation between asylum countries and countries of origin and, at the international level, solidarity and internationally shared responsibilities.

62. Mr. GRIFFITHS (Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA)), speaking on behalf of Mr. Akashi, Emergency Relief Coordinator, said that over 26 million people had been forced from their homes, enduring both psychological and physical suffering, and had no other choice than the road to exile. The international community must make increased efforts to address not only far-reaching solutions, but also daily problems in the field. Humanitarian response to emergency crises was the mandate of DHA and UNHCR, which should, therefore, continue to cooperate. There were many examples of such productive cooperation in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS); in Moscow, Armenia, Georgia and Tajikistan, individuals had worked simultaneously as

UNHCR and DHA representatives. Unfortunately, renewed violence in Tajikistan had resulted in a resurgence of humanitarian needs and a large number of internally displaced persons.

63. In the Great Lakes region of Africa, humanitarian assistance was part of a larger issue in which security, reconciliation and justice meted out to the perpetrators of the genocide were inextricably linked, a fact which posed an unprecedented challenge to the humanitarian actors in the field. With that in mind, DHA would be holding a regional meeting in Nairobi in late October 1996 to formulate a humanitarian strategy for the Great Lakes region. Growing tensions made it necessary to undertake contingency planning, yet such planning would never be enough if the worst was yet to come. He therefore appealed to the international community to step up its efforts to defuse such tensions before it was too late.

64. In addition to its field activities, UNHCR had helped to establish the Military and Civil Defence Unit, which was currently setting up a government service package register and would be responsible for maintaining the capacity to re-establish an air operations coordination cell based on lessons learnt from the Sarajevo airlift; Relief Web, a project which gathered and circulated information of relevance to the humanitarian community in order to improve the common base for sound operational decisions; and the Complex Emergency Training Initiative (CETI), a DHA-coordinated forum dealing with issues of common concern to United Nations agencies and international organizations which sought ways to address problems in a cost-effective way through joint activities and training for complex emergencies. He noted with appreciation the importance that was attached to CETI.

65. The lead agency concept was one of several options to be considered in humanitarian response. UNHCR had been in the forefront of discussions regarding the question of when to make use of that approach, and conclusions on the matter should soon be reached. It was for the Emergency Relief Coordinator, working in close consultation with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), to determine whether a lead agency approach was appropriate in a given emergency, but that task would become easier when clear criteria had been established. The lead agency would, in all cases, be accountable to the Emergency Relief Coordinator. Observance of those guidelines would make it possible to provide the desired predictability of response and coordination.

66. He welcomed the support for IASC and its role as a forum for both policy and operational issues. The Emergency Relief Coordinator continued to support IASC as the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination and, to that end, would convene a meeting of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to address that issue on 30 October 1996.

67. DHA also welcomed UNHCR's involvement in the pursuit of solutions, which required partnership with other organizations and clarity with regard to their respective roles, particularly on the issue of prevention. Memoranda of understanding and, in particular, the one currently under discussion with UNDP, should reflect a division of responsibilities based on a sound assessment of capacity as well as mandate. He welcomed the recommendations that the memorandum should be completed as quickly as possible. It was

essential for the complex task of prevention to be undertaken in an integrated manner and to be reflected in the United Nations system's country programme notes and strategies.

68. Assistance to internally displaced persons continued to be problematic, yet the support of Member States would certainly make it possible to work towards finding a predictable approach to providing humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons in the coming months. The international community could not simply continue to call for such clarity; it must produce it.

69. UNHCR had played a major role in the follow-up to Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/56. It was an active member of the Council's Task Force and fully participated in policy discussions within IASC. UNHCR's work on that issue, as evidenced by the meetings of the Standing Committee, had made a welcome contribution to the debate within the humanitarian community, and it was probable that, at the next Economic and Social Council session, it would be possible to submit a document with clear recommendations for improving the United Nations system's capacity for humanitarian response.

70. Mr. GRAISSE (World Food Programme) said that the World Food Programme (WFP) had a dual mandate for both development and emergency programmes. Food aid had proven to be well-suited to providing support to returnees as they tried to re-establish themselves and rebuild their lives, and WFP had worked closely with UNHCR to support returnee rehabilitation programmes. WFP not only provided food assistance to refugees when they were in asylum countries, but accompanied them back when they were able to return to their homes and continued to support them with rehabilitation activities. Its mandate enabled it to assist in the reintegration process by giving it the ability to support development-oriented programmes in countries of origin prior to the return of refugees.

71. UNHCR continued to be WFP's major partner in many of its largest operations throughout the world. In 1995, WFP had provided food aid valued at \$1.2 billion for emergency and development programmes. About two thirds of that assistance had gone to 25 million internally displaced people, refugees and victims of natural disasters. Close cooperation with UNHCR therefore represented a most important priority for WFP. The Memorandum of Understanding between the two agencies underlay their working relationship, greatly facilitating their collaboration and was particularly useful at the start of a new emergency, as the role of each agency was pre-defined. That sped up the planning process and both agencies could respond more quickly and in a more organized fashion for the benefit of the people in need.

72. The well-being of over 10 million refugees depended to some extent on the effectiveness of the working relationship between UNHCR and WFP. Important to both agencies was accountability, and much had already been done at the working level on a revised memorandum of understanding that addressed issues such as registration, food distribution and reporting. The latest memorandum would be finalized in the near future. WFP was also undergoing a major reorganization. It was instructive to note that WFP and UNHCR, both operational agencies striving for increased effectiveness, had independently come to similar conclusions. WFP's mandate was to assist the poor and the

hungry, who did not live in Rome or Geneva. The heart of its work was in the field and that was where its decision-making capacity should be. Priority was therefore being placed by both agencies on decentralization to the country level.

73. Mr. AYALA-LASSO (High Commissioner for Human Rights) said that, for the purpose of dealing with the refugee problem adequately and effectively, he was in full support of developing cooperative strategies with UNHCR, with a view to consolidating the expertise of the two offices in jointly addressing the human rights aspects of the problems of refugees and displaced persons around the world. In recent years, the value of comprehensive early-warning and prevention action had been increasingly recognized. Preventive human rights action aimed at strengthening or preserving the rule of law and the pillars of state in conformity with internationally accepted standards of human rights might indeed help avoid social disasters, the collapse of Governments and their institutions or internal or international conflicts. That in turn was an essential element in preventing flows of refugees and displaced persons as well as mass exoduses.

74. Most importantly, human rights monitoring had not only a preventive function, but should form an integral part of early warning. It was clear that in many situations, the character, level and extent of human rights violations indicated the state of political security in a given place. Human rights violations, if unchecked, undoubtedly contributed to the decay and disintegration of civil society. He was endeavouring in all such situations to undertake more concrete action with a view to addressing the root causes. His Office went to the field in order to ensure that conflict prevention was based on a dynamic analysis of the human rights situation and related matters. Often, the mere presence of human rights field officers helped reduce tensions and diminish human rights violations at a critical stage. Early warning was none the less doomed to failure if the international community refrained from taking appropriate action.

75. With that in mind, he had opened an office in Bujumbura in June 1994 to provide technical cooperation concerning justice, the media, education and training for various segments of Burundian society. Right from the beginning of those initiatives, he had considered that the monitoring aspects of his Office's presence in the country were also necessary, in order to prevent and reduce human rights violations and inter-ethnic violence as well as to foster a climate of peace, confidence and tolerance among the members of society. On the premise of the deterrent effect of a significant number of human rights observers in the field, he had decided to double the number of observers from 5 to 10. He still hoped to be able to reach at least the number of 35 human rights observers in keeping with the decisions of the Commission on Human Rights and the availability of financial resources.

76. Rwanda provided an important example of the multi-faceted approach to human rights implementation in the field. In that case, prevention had clearly failed, as the international community had not paid sufficient attention to the early-warning signals provided. He had launched the Human Rights Field Operation in Rwanda (HRFOR), a major initiative currently numbering some 110 international personnel, which had served Rwanda by charting with its Government the long and difficult path to national

reconciliation. Confidence-building, the key objective of HRFOR, was undoubtedly crucial to the return of refugees. He was ready to strengthen his Office's close cooperation with UNHCR in facilitating the process of the return of the Rwandan refugees in Zaire. HRFOR would be asked to help assess the state of readiness of home communes to receive returnees and make sure that basic human rights were respected at all stages of return, resettlement and reintegration.

77. Apart from the Human Rights Field Operations in Rwanda and Burundi, his Office was currently conducting field activities in such countries as the former Yugoslavia, Cambodia and Malawi, and was engaged in preparatory activities for establishing a field presence in Zaire, Colombia and Abkhazia/Georgia. It was increasingly obvious that, in the context of both preventive initiatives and emergency response, the concerted effort of the international community was required. The problems posed by crises such as those in Rwanda or the former Yugoslavia went beyond the capacities of any one agency or organization. Increased cooperation of the human rights programme with regional bodies, including the Council of Europe, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the Organization of American States (OAS), the Organization of Baltic States and the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), had proven to be of great value. The prominent status given to human rights in the programme of action adopted in the context of the CIS Regional Conference and relevant neighbouring States could serve as a model for other regional initiatives. The continuum of protection required by the individual in terms of applicable humanitarian action and protection of human rights also implied a need to look more closely at ways and means of coordinating more effectively the work of official bodies whose mandates encompassed the objectives of each. Since the links between human rights issues and the questions on refugees and displaced persons were inseparable and required comprehensive approaches, closer consideration should be given to how the mandates of the different agencies could be mutually reinforcing in providing assistance and protection.

78. Mr. ROGIVUE (United Nations Volunteers) said that each year the partnership between United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and UNHCR was further strengthened and the involvement of volunteers in humanitarian relief, protection, human rights, rehabilitation and life-sustaining assistance was more important. In the past year alone, close to 150 UNVs had served with UNHCR in various parts of the world. The two agencies continued to explore new avenues for cooperation. Their joint work was being done in countries and regions such as Angola, Bosnia, Georgia, Sierra Leone and the Great Lakes. That work was made possible in large measure through the support of donor countries. Although UNV's recent efforts had often been defined by emergency activities in environments of conflict, its cooperation also included the essential activities of repatriation or resettlement in more peaceful areas.

79. The interests of refugees as well as the international community's efforts and resources could in most instances be better served through the active pursuit of solutions in the country of origin. UNV was especially pleased to be working with UNHCR in the essential fields of reconciliation and peace-building, and together the two could hopefully help build bridges towards the goals of good governance, human rights and sustainable

development. Participation of the people affected was inextricably linked to all aspects of those solutions. Such participation must extend throughout all levels and to all groups within the community, including, in particular, women. Only through a participatory approach that involved and empowered people could durable solutions be found to the causes of displacement. Volunteers were well placed to help foster such participation and could contribute to the finding of long-lasting solutions. As UNV celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary, it also celebrated 25 years of close and constructive work with UNHCR.

80. Mr. DE COURTEN (International Committee of the Red Cross) said that the repatriation of refugees and the return of internally displaced persons was a subject of serious concern to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), as those individuals were almost always victims of war. Because of its presence in the field, ICRC had gained a thorough understanding of the conditions for the return of refugees and people displaced within their own countries. Certain principles must be respected in the event of voluntary return. An over-hasty return might run counter to the interests of the victims themselves, especially when large numbers were involved. That could, moreover, jeopardize the entire peace-building process. Security conditions must be acceptable and housing decent for the returnees, as they were essential prerequisites for starting a new life. Factors of instability in the area of former residence must be overcome, particularly by establishing mechanisms for the restitution of property and the restoration of an efficient and independent judicial system.

81. The joint efforts of humanitarian organizations could not possibly meet such needs without the support of the entire international community and, more importantly, of the parties who only recently had been in open conflict. The return of refugees and internally displaced persons must, nevertheless, not be made subject to considerations other than those of a purely humanitarian nature. The limits of humanitarian action, which alone could not create the conditions favourable for such a return, must be recognized. ICRC fully shared UNHCR's concern regarding the return home, in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, of hundreds of thousands of refugees and internally displaced persons. In the Great Lakes region of Africa, the presence of those countless victims had imposed a heavy burden on the host countries, whose show of solidarity deserved the highest praise and must command full support. A global approach could alone lead to a solution to that grave problem.

82. ICRC was also taking part in the international debate on the legal protection of persons displaced within their own countries. The quality of the compilation and analysis of legal norms protecting internally displaced persons, prepared by the representative of the Secretary-General, should be highlighted. That report concluded that, while existing law generally afforded good protection to the internally displaced, in some areas, for example those concerning the right to voluntary return and restitution of property, the needs of the displaced were not sufficiently covered. The crux of the problem lay in failure to apply existing norms and lack of resolve to implement them. As the promoter and guardian of international humanitarian law, ICRC called upon all belligerents to assume their responsibilities to the full and also upon the community of States, which had undertaken to ensure respect for the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols. It was

imperative for humanitarian action to be taken in a coordinated manner. Not only must the various humanitarian agencies working in the emergency phase agree among themselves on the best way to cover needs, they must also ensure that links were maintained with rehabilitation and development organizations. In its emergency operations the ICRC already endeavoured to help civilians regain as much self-sufficiency as possible. The broad debate on humanitarian coordination should not obscure the fact that concerted efforts were required first and foremost in the field, that they should be based on the simplest and least bureaucratic structures possible, that they must take into consideration the specific role and mandate of each organization and that they should strive to achieve complementarity.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.