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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 25th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. CISSÉ (Senegal)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.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/49/186, A/49/218-S/1994/801, A/49/287-S/1994/894 and Corr.1, A/49/380, 533, 534, 577 and Corr.1, A/49/578; A/C.3/49/12)

1. Mr. TURAY (Sierra Leone) said that, despite the popular perception, the needs of refugees varied according to their backgrounds and traditions; an understanding of the societal traditions, kinship patterns and household structures of refugee populations, especially in Africa, would facilitate their sudden transfer to an alien environment. The consequences for his country of the recent Liberian conflict were still visible in the large number of refugees and internally displaced Sierra Leoneans, currently totalling 300,000 and 400,000 respectively. While the responsibility for protecting those groups rested with his Government, international organizations could play an effective role by helping Sierra Leone and other third-world countries come to grips with their economic problems through various schemes, in particular those which tackled their debt burden. He appealed for support, through the United Nations system, in working out a programme for rehabilitation of the devastated areas and resettlement of refugees and displaced persons.

2. The tragedy in Rwanda was an example of a new type of complex emergency, and it confronted the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) with one of its biggest challenges. The huge numbers of refugees and displaced persons there and in other parts of Africa had had a devastating effect on economic and social structures.

3. The concept of the family had a wide range of definitions. That was particularly true in Africa, where kinship systems and residence and marriage patterns created family shapes, values and obligations that varied among regions and ethnic groups. The functions of the family, which played a vital role in development, had been disrupted in Africa, where civil strife and natural disasters had caused involuntary migration and created large refugee populations, damaging economic growth and having a negative impact on communities and families.

4. His Government attached great importance to the work of UNHCR and other organizations seeking to improve the status of refugees and displaced persons. The machinery for attaining that objective should be given an opportunity to function as efficiently as possible; he therefore urged the international community to contribute to the funding of UNHCR.

5. He paid tribute to the untiring efforts of non-governmental organizations in alleviating suffering. They deserved praise for their significant contributions to humanitarian tasks and to deeper awareness of the sufferings of refugees. There was no more noble task, and he called for continued cooperation between non-governmental organizations and Governments.

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6. He called upon all Governments to contribute generously to the proposed budget of UNHCR to help implement its resettlement programme, and stressed the importance of broadening the donor base.

7. Mr. SAKONHNINHOM (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that the international community should redouble its efforts to meet the enormous challenge of the refugee problem, which affected every part of the planet. The situation in Africa was alarming: ethnic conflicts had led to huge refugee flows, as in Burundi and Rwanda. Measures for the protection of the uprooted populations and increased efforts to find fair and durable solutions were imperative. In the former Yugoslavia, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina, tension had also led to situations requiring urgent assistance, and current problems in Central America, the Middle East and Western Asia required serious attention to avoid new refugee flows.

8. He welcomed the recent improvement in South-East Asia, where as indicated in the High Commissioner's report (A/49/12, para. 126) some 2,735,000 refugees and displaced persons had been resettled, repatriated or integrated locally. More than 20,000 Lao refugees (ibid., para. 132) had so far voluntarily returned home with the help of UNHCR, and it was estimated that two or three times that number had returned without assistance. His Government had repeatedly stated that Lao refugees could return voluntarily, safely and with dignity, and was endeavouring to overcome certain practical difficulties regarding resettlement. An agreement on voluntary repatriation had been signed with the Government of Thailand, and at a recent tripartite meeting involving UNHCR and the Lao and Thai Governments, a three-stage plan had been devised to complete the repatriation of the 14,000 Lao refugees still in Thailand. The ambitious plan required real cooperation from all concerned, and major financial support from the international community. He appealed to friendly States, international organizations and non-governmental organizations to contribute to its implementation.

9. Mr. McKINLEY (United States of America) drew attention to how the work of UNHCR increasingly cut across the various boundaries established for purposes of the deliberations of the Committees of the General Assembly. For example, the Office's approach to the Rwandan crisis combined peace-keeping with refugee assistance. In the case of Haiti, it was providing humanitarian follow-up on his Government's political action to restore democracy. And at a recent meeting, the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme had addressed the issue of providing temporary protection not only to refugees but also to other persons in need of protection as a result of conflict or serious human rights abuses. As those cases illustrated, a combination of political, peace-keeping, humanitarian and human rights efforts was needed to prevent refugees flows, deal with emergencies and provide durable solutions.

10. As the dates for the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women drew closer, it was necessary to increase support for the High Commissioner's efforts to draw attention to the needs of refugee women, especially in terms of the comprehensive approach endorsed at the International Conference on Population and Development: reproductive health, family planning,

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empowerment, improved infant and child health, and sustainable patterns of consumption.

11. At its current session, the General Assembly would be considering the applications of the Russian Federation, India and Bangladesh for membership in the Executive Committee. While all interested States should be given an opportunity to become members, his Government believed that once those three applications were approved, the Executive Committee should attempt to arrive at a consensus recommendation to the Economic and Social Council on more stringent criteria for membership. One criterion might be a country's ratification of the 1951 Convention or the 1967 Protocol. Another might be facilitation of the work of the High Commissioner, whether through contributions in kind or cash or as a refugee host country.

12. In closing, he expressed his Government's support and appreciation for the excellent work of UNHCR in an era of complex humanitarian crises and said that it intended to pledge generously to the 1995 UNHCR general programmes.

13. Mr. LEPESHKO (Belarus) said that the overall situation of refugees and displaced persons in the world was catastrophic and required joint efforts and resources at both the national and international level. In that connection, his country supported the convening of a United Nations conference for the comprehensive consideration and review of the problems of refugees, returnees, displaced persons and migrants, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 48/113. In view of the complex nature of the problem, however, the holding of regional conferences as a first step would be completely acceptable to his delegation. The conference should consider questions relating to legislative measures to determine the status of refugees, xenophobia with regard to refugees, and ways to deal with the problem of transit refugees and asylum-seekers.

14. Belarus welcomed the initiative of UNHCR to develop a comprehensive strategy to solve the problem of refugees, returnees, displaced persons and migrants in the countries of the former Soviet Union and expressed its readiness to participate in implementing such a strategy. His country had recently been confronted with the problem of refugees and forcibly displaced persons resulting from the social and economic instability in a number of States of the former USSR, worsening relations between nations, the adoption of discriminatory legislation on citizenship and the official language in certain States, and insufficient laws governing property and labour relations. At the same time, incomplete legislation on migration and lack of experience in dealing with such matters, together with his country's open borders and geographical situation and its relatively stable domestic situation, had increased the problem of international migration in the Republic. In the past two years, approximately 22,000 refugees, principally from Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Baltic States, had been registered, and there were also a number of refugees residing illegally in Belarus.

15. According to projections, immigration to Belarus would continue from the Baltic region, Georgia, Central Asia and Kazakhstan. Since the policy of

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Western European States with regard to refugees and migrants was becoming more restrictive, Belarus might become a receiving country for persons unable to immigrate to the West. Accordingly, his delegation supported the proposal to develop special mechanisms ensuring communication and cooperation between countries of origin, transit and desired refuge in solving the problems of transit refugees and asylum-seekers. His Government was taking steps to enact legislation governing immigration in the Republic. Laws on refugees and forcibly displaced persons and on immigration were being drafted. Nevertheless, the problems had to be tackled in close cooperation with neighbouring countries and international organizations. Belarus had signed an agreement on assistance to refugees and displaced persons between the members of the Commonwealth of Independent States and was preparing to sign a number of bilateral agreements to protect the rights of refugees from those States and neighbouring countries. Lastly, his delegation supported the speedy elaboration and adoption of an international convention dealing with the safety and security of United Nations and associated personnel.

16. Mr. DÉKÁNY (Hungary) said that the magnitude and complexity of the worldwide refugee problem was symbolic of the challenges facing the United Nations system in a constantly changing world. It called for preventive action and comprehensive conflict-resolution efforts. An overall strategy should also include a neutral and effective humanitarian component. Solutions were contingent upon the viability of sustainable political arrangements and conflict-management efforts which were respected on the ground and were built upon international law.

17. Recalling that UNHCR was in the forefront of concerted international efforts to alleviate the sufferings of refugees, he welcomed its growing emphasis on the prevention of forcible displacement and on the need to persuade States to take responsibility for the welfare of people within their territory. The United Nations should act resolutely and promptly wherever massive violations of human rights or humanitarian law occurred; such violations were the main cause of the plight of the uprooted millions. The fundamental principles of asylum and non-refoulement should not be allowed to become hostage to political bargaining and decisions; on the other hand, UNHCR should continue to place its humanitarian concerns on the political agenda in implementing all facets of its three-pronged comprehensive strategy of prevention, assistance and durable solutions.

18. International humanitarian and human rights presence in the field should be mutually reinforcing in order to pre-empt the development of conditions which forced people to flee. The various representatives of the United Nations and of regional organizations together constituted a valuable early-warning system in detecting potential refugee flows, thus allowing time to coordinate assistance. Adequate responses could be generated provided that roles and responsibilities were clear and that humanitarian and human rights activities were placed within the political agenda of the United Nations. Regional mechanisms were increasingly capable of defusing tensions and curbing violence. Regional peace-keeping forces or monitoring missions would have an important role in future in assisting UNHCR in its work.

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19. The feasibility of UNHCR's comprehensive approach to crisis situations seemed to be challenged by the extreme situations it had encountered during peacemaking and peace-keeping operations. Peace-keeping could buy time and provide support for humanitarian operations, both in filling the temporary gaps in response capacity and in protecting safe havens and safe corridors, enabling the impartial delivery of humanitarian assistance. However, neither a peacekeeping nor a humanitarian operation should be allowed to become hostage to a political stalemate. While the neutrality of UNHCR operations should be maintained, it should not serve as substitute for political solutions. On the other hand, peace-keeping operations should complement, not replace, humanitarian action.

20. He welcomed encouraging trends in voluntary repatriation, notably in Central America, East Africa and South-East Asia, and commended UNHCR for devising innovative procedures to protect the rights of returnees and assist in their reintegration. Although not always possible, voluntary repatriation remained the best solution. Moreover, the capacity of countries of asylum was limited as in the case of Hungary, which continued to shelter thousands of refugees from the former Yugoslavia. In that respect, temporary protection should be really temporary, and there was an urgent need to find a durable solution. A further reason for concern was the disguised use of so-called "resettlement activities" to alter the ethnic composition of a region already torn by nationalistic aspirations and ethnic tensions. In Africa, too, particularly in Rwanda, the international community also faced a dramatic humanitarian situation.

21. Hungary had given a detailed account of its refugee policy at the latest session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme. The majority of asylum-seekers in Hungary continued to be sheltered in private homes. His Government appreciated the support of UNHCR, the European Union, individual donor countries, relief organizations and non-governmental organizations. The plight of those in distress gave the international community an added reason to renew its efforts to care for their safety and security. To the extent of its modest possibilities, Hungary would continue to make its contribution to that truly universal humanitarian endeavour.

22. Ms. SAPCANIN (Bosnia and Herzegovina) welcomed the Office's cooperation with the human rights and military components of other United Nations-mandated operations. She expressed appreciation for the contribution of the committed staff of international agencies and various non-governmental and other humanitarian organizations as well as the efforts of the countries that provided the necessary resources in support of humanitarian assistance. Her Government highly appreciated the international appeal for the first half of 1995 for the former Yugoslavia and urged Governments to give serious consideration to the recommendations made.

23. The scale of humanitarian emergencies in 1994 had been unprecedented. The situations in Bosnia and Rwanda had shown the shortcomings in the response by the international community and frameworks established to deal with such matters. The international community still failed to address the causes of

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crises, dealing with the consequences without putting an end to the expulsions, abuses and murder that had brought about so much human suffering.

24. Almost two thirds of Bosnia and Herzegovina was under brutal occupation. Over the previous five months, 50,000 Bosnian Muslims and Croats remaining in the occupied territory had been subjected to systematic barbarity. More than 10,000 non-Serbs from northern Bosnia had been expelled since mid-July and it was feared that, as the "ethnic cleansing" entered its final stages, there would soon be no non-Serb Bosnians left there. The influx of new refugees as a result of those expulsions continued to overburden the already stretched resources for some 2,750,000 displaced persons, mostly women and children. Despite the committed efforts of humanitarian aid workers and UNPROFOR, the suffering seemed only to be increasing in many parts of her country.

25. Humanitarian assistance alone could not replace a long-term solution. Although it could be most effective as a supplement to peacemaking, it could also be a convenient way to cover a lack of political will to confront the reality of war with the necessary means. In February 1994, Sarajevo had witnessed how greater resolve by the international community to respond appropriately to the massacres and relentless shellings by the Serb aggressor could bring relief. Under the threat of the use of force, the siege of Sarajevo had been loosened and humanitarian efforts facilitated. But the international community had failed to respond to the Bosnian Serb offensive against Goražde later in the spring. Having rejected the five-nation peace plan put forward to them, the Bosnian Serbs were once again on the rampage. As winter approached and Bosnian Serbs were again attacking the lifelines to Sarajevo, Bihać and enclaves in eastern Bosnia, her country could anticipate another bleak winter of hardship and the threat of starvation.

26. The supply lines were vulnerable and with the coming of winter the situation could even get worse. Bosnian Serbs were already obstructing the delivery of winterization supplies to Sarajevo, Bihać and other besieged areas. The United Nations also had to struggle for deliveries of fuel to maintain its operations in the face of brazen Serb demands and blackmail.

27. Her Government felt very strongly about ensuring humanitarian assistance and the safety of humanitarian workers. It was essential to provide appropriate protection to the staff of UNHCR, ICRC and other international organizations and to United Nations troops. Measures must be taken to halt the obstruction of humanitarian aid and attacks against aid workers. The international community and the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina must not allow themselves to be held hostage by criminals who had defied all international and humanitarian laws and chosen the path of war. The lifting of the arms embargo against Bosnia and Herzegovina would not widen the war but, instead, would empower the Bosnian Army to protect all civilians in the Republic. The weapons imbalance was a main factor underlying the "ethnic cleansing" of non-Serbs. The inferiority of the Bosnian Army with regard to weapons, both quantitatively and qualitatively, allowed Serb aggression to continue and necessitated the assistance of UNPROFOR to mitigate its consequences. Preserving the status quo in Bosnia could lead only to further destruction and increase the number of displaced persons and

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civilian casualties. Prolonging the war would merely benefit the original aggressors. Her country must be empowered to determine its own future.

28. Mr. MATESIC (Croatia) expressed appreciation to the entire staff of UNHCR, especially those who risked their lives in the performance of their noble duties, and called for the strongest possible legal protection of UNHCR and other United Nations humanitarian personnel.

29. According to the most recent statistics, Croatia was accommodating some 183,000 refugees, most of whom were Bosnian Muslims who had fled the carnage in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In addition, his country sheltered 196,000 displaced persons, forced out of their homes by the policy of "ethnic cleansing" used by the Yugoslav Army and the Serbian paramilitary forces in their aggression against Croatia, which had resulted in the occupation of over one quarter of his country's territory. The needs of those refugees and displaced persons, who represented 9 per cent of the population, severely burdened Croatia's economy and social infrastructure.

30. It should be noted that over 5,000 Croat citizens of Serb origin had returned to regions in Croatia under Croatian Government control. In contrast, not a single Croat had returned to the Serb-occupied parts of Croatia. Instead, the genocidal policy of "ethnic cleansing" still continued against the small number of remaining Croats and other non-Serbs residing there. His Government was extremely concerned about the continuation of "ethnic cleansing" in the Banja Luka region of Bosnia, forcing thousands of Bosnian Muslims, Croats, Gypsies and others to flee into Croatia. His delegation therefore called upon the international community, particularly the Security Council, to take effective measures to reverse that policy.

31. In order to find a lasting solution to the refugee global problem, it was necessary to transform humanitarian relief into longer-term development projects. Pilot programmes and other development programmes should be set up for establishing appropriate security structures in places designated for repatriation, rebuilding destroyed homes of refugees, providing basic services and promoting income-generating programmes. Equal importance should be given to assisting both displaced persons and refugees.

32. The root cause of the refugee problem in Croatia and the region was Serb aggression and "ethnic cleansing", which was still being carried out in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. That policy must be reversed: the occupied territory in Croatia must be returned to the Republic's administrative and political system in order to permit the return of displaced persons. In Bosnia, efforts must be made to achieve a just and lasting peace to enable the uprooted persons to return home. If those goals were not achieved, the problem would adversely affect not only regional stability but also international peace and security.

33. Ms. ALGABSHAWI (Sudan) said that the High Commissioner's report (A/49/12) showed that, despite the laudable efforts made by UNHCR and the States parties to the international and regional agreements on the status of refugees, the

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overall number of refugees and displaced persons was continuing to rise. The Sudan had been host to more than one million refugees from neighbouring countries over the past three decades and had afforded them shelter, assistance, protection and the opportunity for absorption for those desiring it. It had facilitated their access to employment and to education and health services, had allowed them the opportunity to work the land and had facilitated repatriation and voluntary return. The refugees had shared the country's already meagre resources with the Sudanese people, and their presence on such a large scale had increased the burdens placed on the Sudanese Government in view of its limited resources.

34. Although the international community had provided support to refugee projects in the Sudan in the past, that support had been reduced in recent years to an alarming degree. It had become impossible for the Sudan to continue to assume both its own responsibilities towards the refugees and those of the international community, and those responsibilities must be shared. There was an imbalance between the allocations made to UNHCR General Programmes and Special Programmes. The funds made available to the Sudan were not in keeping with the numbers of refugees in its territory, and other countries that hosted much smaller numbers had received much more. That was unjust, regardless of the criteria governing the allocation of resources and the funding of programmes. The practice of donors contributing enormous sums for particular countries while ignoring others weakened the operational capacities of UNHCR and restricted its freedom to order its own priorities and allocate resources fairly. The responsibility towards refugees was an international one, and countries of asylum should not be expected to assume the burden of the international community in its place.

35. In the light of political, economic and social developments in the region, it was necessary to consider appropriate ways of mobilizing assistance and arousing international interest in the situation of refugees and displaced persons in the Horn of Africa. The time had perhaps come for a regional conference to be convened to study the challenges presented, formulate appropriate solutions and lay down the broad outlines for regional cooperation in eliminating the root causes.

36. Despite its lack of resources, the Sudan had helped to address the problems of the refugees who had settled in its territory by giving them the right to use agricultural land and allowing them wide freedom of movement in pursuing commercial activities. UNHCR should meet its obligation to provide humanitarian assistance to refugees in the Sudan, should avoid politicizing the issue and should not reduce the amount of resources allocated to General Programmes without securing the host country's agreement. UNHCR should continue to coordinate its activities with those of other United Nations agencies in restoring overburdened services and repairing the environmental damage done in areas where refugees had settled.

37. The revised UNHCR Guidelines on Refugee Children, issued in May 1994, had focused on the Convention on the Rights of the Child as a framework for action. The treatment of unaccompanied Sudanese refugee children had been in flagrant

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violation of the Guidelines. It was without doubt a crime against humanity, and the suffering caused them had been compounded by the silence of the international community. Some 20,000 boys had been abducted by the insurgent movement for use in military operations in the southern Sudan and as a recruitment pool, and a large number of them had ended up in refugee camps in Kenya.

38. In keeping with the Guidelines, UNHCR was urged to ensure the protection of those refugee children. Their departure from the country had been involuntary, and the Sudan, as their mother country, was responsible for defending their rights and demanding their repatriation and reunification with their families. The Sudan appealed to the international community, to UNHCR, to all the United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations working in the refugee field and to the host country to ensure their protection and ultimately their voluntary return to their families.

39. The recommendations of the Partnership in Action Process, endorsed at the Global Conference held at Oslo in June 1994, had ignored the role of Governments in the protection of refugees and displaced persons. They should therefore be reformulated and the implementation mechanism clarified in order to accord with the requirements of State sovereignty and thus assist in creating a better climate for achieving the goals of the partnership.

40. In the framework of its ongoing cooperation in the search for a permanent solution through voluntary repatriation, the Sudan had signed a tripartite memorandum of understanding with Ethiopia and UNHCR for the repatriation of 350,000 Ethiopian refugees. More than 27,000 had already returned, and it was to be hoped that funds would be forthcoming so that the process could continue. In the case of Eritrean refugees, cooperation between the Sudan, Eritrea and UNHCR had opened the way for ambitious voluntary repatriation programmes, and a memorandum of understanding had been signed by the Sudan and UNHCR in September 1994 on the voluntary repatriation of some 500,000 Eritreans. It was hoped that 25,000 would leave before the end of 1994 and that the programme would be extended during 1995 to include all Eritrean refugees in the Sudan.

41. Some Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries were being harassed and murdered by the insurgent movement or forced to fight on its behalf. There was compelling evidence that even UNHCR employees had been involved in such activities. The Sudan therefore called upon UNHCR to play an active role in promoting the voluntary repatriation of Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries, particularly since there had been a decline in insurgent military activity and most of the southern Sudan was now secure.

42. After voluntary repatriation had taken place, countries that had hosted large numbers of refugees over long periods of time must be assisted in overcoming the impact on health and educational services and the environment caused by the presence of refugees. UNHCR and the international community must meet all their responsibilities to such countries, particularly those that were among the least developed countries.

43. The Sudan viewed with concern the efforts to expand the mandate of UNHCR to include internally displaced persons, who were not covered by the Statute of UNHCR. Since UNHCR had found great difficulty in providing for the refugees who fell within its competence, it was difficult to understand why its functions should be expanded into other areas. Each State bore primary responsibility for those of its nationals who were displaced within its own territory, where necessary with the humanitarian assistance of the international community.

44. Archbishop MARTINO (Observer for the Holy See) said that, while internal conflicts in some countries had forced people to flee, positive changes elsewhere such as democratic elections and peace settlements had somewhat diminished the flow. That highlighted the importance of promoting democracy and respect for human rights in preventing the refugee problem. Such developments could be sustained through education and vigilance with the international community playing a vital role in monitoring the human rights situation. However, that would not suffice: the foundation for international peace and security must be supported by promoting human development, for poverty and deprivation had generated a new category of refugees not covered by the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. A long-term solution through socio-economic development was not only a priority but also an effective means of prevention.

45. He hoped that the forthcoming World Summit for Social Development would help to change current thinking, which often equated development purely with economic growth. True development could occur only when all peoples and nations became aware of their interdependence and recognized their duties towards every member of the human race, particularly refugees, who were the most vulnerable. That would make for a more humane world where one group no longer progressed at the expense of others.

46. Scant attention was paid to the tragic situation of many countries such as Liberia, which was being devastated by warring factions and had suffered unspeakable carnage. The Holy See applauded the call by the OAU/UNHCR Symposium on Refugees and Forced Population Displacements in Africa to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to such people. Peacemaking efforts by United Nations agencies in such countries must be continued and the international community should share the burden in relief operations.

47. In that connection, he welcomed the "service packages" concept under which Governments had made in-kind and cash contributions to UNHCR for emergency situations that it was unable to handle alone. Prevention was also vital and the tragic events in Rwanda should serve as a lesson on the importance of recognizing impending emergencies in time. He expressed concern regarding the situation of Indo-Chinese refugees and asylum-seekers, some 90,000 of whom were currently languishing in camps in South-East Asia. The Holy See appealed to the international community to make every effort to re-settle the refugees in safe conditions and uphold the principle of non-refoulement.

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48. His delegation appreciated UNHCR efforts to reunite families but was increasingly concerned at the plight of refugee women - a matter which must be given priority. Moreover, the exodus of citizens from Haiti and Cuba had called into question the concepts of asylum and protection and had created a new dilemma for countries seeking to respond humanely to such refugees while also maintaining internal stability. The organized crime in which economic refugees often became involved must be combated at regional or global level. He commended the High Commissioner for her tireless efforts in the face of such difficult challenges. However, the escalation of the refugee problem required greater endeavours and more staff and resources so as to ensure protection and assistance. He therefore renewed his appeal to all Governments and people throughout the world to step up their support for such activities.

49. Mr. BIDI KOV (former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said his delegation was confident that under the High Commissioner's able leadership, UNHCR would continue to render an irreplaceable service to refugees and displaced persons and pledged his Government's full cooperation. With the dissolution of the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, groups of refugees from war-torn areas had begun to arrive in the small and relatively poor Republic of Macedonia. The number of refugees had subsequently increased with the escalation of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992, although some Slovenes and Croats had also sought shelter. In addition, Macedonia had already received many Albanian refugees. Over the past three years, more than 60,000 people had sought shelter or transited through the country, residing there for several months without having been officially registered.

50. There were currently over 10,000 registered refugees in Macedonia, the vast majority of whom were Bosnian Muslims. Registered refugees were given legal status and had full access to health and social welfare facilities. They were free to practise the religion of their choice and were entitled to a full education. The Government had encouraged their acceptance in families, although some had been provided with housing and efforts were being made to support their rehabilitation. Thus, despite the worsening economic situation, the people of Macedonia continued to show solidarity with the refugees in their country.

51. The Republic of Macedonia had acceded to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees. However, it had gone further with regard to their implementation by accepting and ensuring respect for those who had been forced to leave their homes because of war, "ethnic cleansing" and exile. He urged the international community to do likewise, having due regard for the provisions of the relevant international human rights instruments. His Government had established constructive cooperation with UNHCR as well as other international humanitarian organizations active in the country such as ICRC.

52. Mr. SHAMBOS (Cyprus) said that despite financial constraints the activities of UNHCR were among the most notable achievements of the United Nations in recent years. The plight of refugees and displaced persons around the world had greatly improved owing to UNHCR's concerted efforts and result-oriented action. As a beneficiary country, Cyprus expressed its gratitude to the High

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Commissioner and her staff for their indefatigable efforts to achieve durable solutions.

53. It was important to bear in mind that when UNHCR had been founded there had been only 1 million refugees, whereas now the figure well exceeded 18 million, of whom 80 per cent were women and children. He therefore welcomed UNHCR's Policy on Refugee Children, its Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women and the Executive Committee's conclusions on refugee protection and sexual violence.

54. As the world searched for a new political and economic equilibrium, the breakdown of law and order in some parts of the world had given rise to further refugee movements. The international climate and nature of the refugee problem had changed radically since UNHCR's inception and urgently required a new, comprehensive and result-oriented approach. The success of UNHCR's three-pronged strategy of prevention, preparedness and sustainable solutions would ultimately depend on a far-reaching policy encompassing human rights, peacemaking, peace-keeping, peace-building and economic and social development. Its implementation required a broad partnership of national, regional and international actors to be coordinated by UNHCR, which must preserve its non-political and humanitarian approach. The United Nations was expected to fulfil its responsibilities under the Charter regarding human rights and fundamental freedoms, and all Member States must share the burden of alleviating the refugees' sufferings.

55. The root causes of refugee flows must be addressed, for the phenomenon could have serious repercussions on international peace and security. His delegation was in favour of the proposal to convene a United Nations conference for a comprehensive consideration and review of the problems of refugees, returnees, displaced persons and migrants. The conference should focus on prevention; ad hoc solutions were no longer acceptable. In the short term, efforts should be made to improve on the conventional solutions of repatriation, regional integration and resettlement.

56. The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees should be revised to make provision for internally displaced persons. Moreover, his delegation had consistently advocated the need for a clear distinction between persons displaced owing to internal strife or natural calamities and those displaced by external intervention and occupation. Neither category was recognized under the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol.

57. As to the plight of displaced persons in Cyprus itself, he expressed satisfaction at the activities of the UNHCR special mission in Cyprus since the Turkish invasion in 1974. Likewise he expressed gratitude to the international human rights organizations and donor countries for their aid. The gross violations and crimes committed by the aggressor were widely known. However, it was worthwhile noting that for 20 years the occupying Power had been denying refugees their basic human rights by preventing them from returning to their homes; it was also systematically attempting to alter the demographic structure of the occupied part of Cyprus through the settlement of tens of thousands of

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Turkish nationals. Since the invasion, not one single Cypriot refugee had been allowed to return home. He looked forward to the day when all the refugees and displaced persons in the world would be able to exercise the rights enshrined in the relevant international instruments.

58. Ms. TOMIČ (Slovenia), paying tribute to the outstanding work of the High Commissioner, said that a clear example of the increased complexity of her responsibilities was that of the refugees from Rwanda. Her country agreed with the High Commissioner that top priority should be given to improving the very insecure situation in the refugee camps in eastern Zaire.

59. It had consistently supported her innovative proposals for eliminating the root causes of refugee flows: armed conflict, human rights abuses, political instability and economic hardship. Slovenia urged her to continue the Office's three-pronged strategy of prevention, preparedness and solutions. UNHCR should give particular attention to emergency preparedness and response capacity, which required coordination with other components of the United Nations system. Such coordination was necessary in any event, because humanitarian assistance alone could not guarantee adequate respect for international humanitarian and human rights law. To be effective, it must be accompanied by peace-keeping, peacemaking and peace-building initiatives. For the purposes of prevention and refugee repatriation and reintegration, the Commissioner needed to increase cooperation with the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Centre for Human Rights.

60. To ensure the success of voluntary repatriation - the only viable long-term solution - it was necessary to bring about political stabilization and economic recovery. She commended the Office for its repatriation of large numbers of Mozambican and Myanmar refugees. The recently concluded process initiated by the International Conference on Central American Refugees had linked peace, development and human rights as necessary components of the repatriation and rehabilitation process and provided a useful model for dealing with the problems of uprootedness, especially in the case of the exemplary cooperation between UNHCR and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

61. The ongoing efforts of UNHCR, ICRC and many other humanitarian organizations to assist Bosnian refugees and displaced persons deserved the international community's active support. In view of the magnitude of that refugee crisis, it was regrettable that the related statistics were sometimes misquoted for propaganda purposes, as in point 2 of the document submitted by the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (A/C.3/49/12), which contained some obviously inaccurate figures. The 28,000 registered refugees in Slovenia received housing, financial assistance and free basic health care, including psychological counselling. They had access to education at all levels and enjoyed complete freedom of movement. She expressed her Government's sincere appreciation to the High Commissioner and her Office for their assistance.

62. Since international law did not regulate cases of massive refugee flows triggered by armed aggression, her delegation supported the convening of a United Nations conference to review the problems of refugees and displaced persons.

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63. Mr. CHIREH (Djibouti) called on donor countries to respond favourably and rapidly to future appeals by the High Commissioner in order to prevent humanitarian crises of the sort that had occurred in Rwanda. As a result of the upheavals in the Horn of Africa, his country was host to a growing number of refugees, whom it had been able to assist with the help of UNHCR and the World Food Programme (WFP). The alarming situation of refugees and displaced persons there was described in the Secretary-General's report on assistance for the reconstruction and development of Djibouti (A/49/396). The problem was particularly acute with respect to women and children, many of whom were living on the streets of the capital. Desperate refugees and displaced persons were contributing to an unprecedented surge in crime, and his country's fragile infrastructure was strained to breaking-point. Once United Nations forces withdrew from Somalia, the situation was likely to grow worse. He pleaded for additional assistance from the international community, without which the security and stability of his country would be threatened.

64. Regarding the tragic situation in Somalia, he said that humanitarian organizations should set up a mechanism for channelling assistance to the needy in order to prevent a recurrence of the desperate situation that had prevailed prior to United States intervention. Lastly, he thanked the organizations of the United Nations system, as well as non-governmental organizations such as ICRC, for their heroic efforts in Somalia and elsewhere and expressed particular appreciation to UNHCR and donor countries for the invaluable assistance they had provided in his own country.

65. Ms. JOPLING (World Food Programme) said that WFP worked very closely with UNHCR. The Programme's refugee and emergency operations currently accounted for over half of the people it served and almost 70 per cent of its expenditure. WFP had cooperated with UNHCR in many major achievements: the repatriation of millions of people in Cambodia, Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Burundi, Rwanda and Mozambique; refugee assistance in war zones such as the former Yugoslavia; major rehabilitation programmes in such countries as Mozambique, Somalia and Rwanda; and quick responses to emergencies, such as the feeding of hundreds of thousands of Rwandan refugees.

66. The two organizations had signed a first memorandum of understanding in 1985. In 1991, a second memorandum had been signed which gave WFP responsibility for mobilizing all basic food commodities and for cash for external transport and inland deliveries in virtually all UNHCR relief operations. Under a further memorandum signed in 1994, WFP would gradually take over the management of food storage centres at extended delivery points. Refugee caseloads of less than 5,000 would be under UNHCR control, and the two organizations would use common formats for reporting on food availability. They had also agreed on closer collaboration in developing census and registration procedures.

67. The Programme's future efforts would focus on improving food distribution, improving the accuracy and timeliness of census and registration, clarifying responsibilities in each refugee programme, collaborating with UNHCR from the very beginning of each crisis on all matters of common concern, enhancing the

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development programmes available to long-term refugees, and emphasizing the important role and significant problems of women refugees.

AGENDA ITEM 94: RIGHT OF PEOPLES TO SELF-DETERMINATION (continued)
(A/C.3/49/L.5/Rev.1)

Draft resolution A/C.3/49/L.5/Rev.1

68. Ms. NEWELL (Secretary of the Committee) said that there was an error in paragraph 3 of the draft resolution. The phrase "extend their support to" should be replaced by "to continue to support".

69. Mr. ELDEEB (Egypt), introducing, on behalf of the sponsors, draft resolution A/C.3/49/L.5/Rev.1 on the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, said that Bahrain, El Salvador and Kuwait had joined the sponsors. He pointed out that, since the right of people to self-determination was enshrined in the Charter, it took precedence over all other international commitments. The draft resolution reaffirmed the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, expressed the hope that they might soon exercise that right in the context of the peace process and urged all States, specialized agencies and organizations of the United Nations system to continue to support them in their ongoing quest.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.