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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME

Thirty-sixth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 396th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 15 October 1985, at 9.30 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. CHIBA (Japan)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

UNHCR ASSISTANCE ACTIVITIES (agenda item 11) (continued) (A/AC.96/657 and Corr.1 and 2 and Add.1)

ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL MATTERS (agenda item 12) (continued) (A/AC.96/670, 656 and 659)

1. Mr. BISKUP (Federal Republic of Germany) said that the question of the losses sustained by UNHCR as a result of the use of an unfavourable exchange rate in a recipient country had been referred to arbitration. The fact remained that there was still a deficit of \$US 4.9 million in the 1985 General Programmes target and neither additional contributions nor UNHCR efforts to achieve savings would be sufficient to reduce the deficit to zero. Although the correct approach would be a further reduction of the target, his delegation was prepared to agree the proposed \$US 4.9 million increase.
2. UNHCR should, moreover, rationalize its procedures, improve programme planning and implementation, introduce stringent financial controls, co-ordinate its activities more effectively and establish closer co-operation with UNDP. Greater attention should also be paid to establishing priorities and there might be a case for a more restrictive interpretation of UNHCR's mandate.
3. As to the General Programmes target for 1986, he strongly recommended that it should be set at a lower, more realistic level of, for example, \$US 200 or 250 million, which could be expected to be funded. It was more reasonable to set a lower target at the beginning of the year than to start out with an unrealistically high target, such as \$US 330 million, which would have to be revised subsequently. His Government saw no possibility of substantially increasing its contribution to UNHCR in 1986.
4. Mr. PURCELL (United States of America) said that, although his delegation could agree on humanitarian grounds to UNHCR's request for a \$US 4.9 million increase in the 1985 General Programmes target to cover the exchange rate deficit, its support should not in any way prejudice the arbitration proceedings on that issue. If the arbitration verdict proved favourable to the United Nations, UNHCR accounts could be adjusted accordingly. He appealed to all Governments to accord UNHCR the most favourable exchange rate possible.
5. Mr. BOLDUC (Canada) said his delegation shared the view that all forms of bilateral and multilateral humanitarian assistance should be accorded the most favourable exchange rate possible.
6. Ms RUBOW (Denmark) said that her delegation also recommended approval of the \$US 4.9 million increase in the 1985 General Programmes target. If, however, unfavourable exchange rates continued to be used in 1986 and future years, the amounts available for refugee relief would not only be reduced, but confidence in UNHCR might be undermined, thereby making it difficult for the High Commissioner to raise the necessary funds.
7. Mr. BENHIMA (Morocco) said that his Government's efforts to find a solution to the problems of the persons living in the camps near Tindouf had still not met with a favourable response. His delegation could therefore not agree to the inclusion in the 1986 budget of funds amounting to \$US 3,522,000 for assistance to persons in the camps near Tindouf who were known to be in favour of, and were providing financing and weapons for, acts of aggression against Morocco.

8. The CHAIRMAN, summing up the discussion of agenda items 11 and 12, said that, since assistance activities should be aimed at helping refugees to become self-sufficient and independent, UNHCR should continue its efforts to rationalize the mechanics of assistance, but should never forget that refugees and their human dignity were inseparable. It must also bear in mind the need for constant improvements in programme management, as well as in personnel and administrative management.

9. The Executive Committee had taken note with satisfaction of the functioning of the UNHCR field offices recently established in Algiers, Bangui, Stockholm and Teheran as a result of decisions by the Committee. It had also drawn attention to the need to promote durable solutions, particularly voluntary repatriation, in accordance with UNHCR's mandate. UNHCR field representatives had to work with the Governments concerned to promote and encourage such solutions as part of their function of ensuring international protection for refugees. He therefore appealed to all States to co-operate fully with UNHCR to enable it to fulfil its mandate, particularly through the application of headquarters agreements giving UNHCR representatives free access, without prior authorization, to refugee camps and settlements.

10. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Executive Committee decided to approve Schedule A of document A/AC.96/657, bearing in mind that, in paragraph (b), the revised financial target for 1985 had been increased by \$US 4.9 million to cover exchange rate losses and now amounted to \$US 309,050,300 (not including the \$US 10 million Emergency Fund).

11. It was so decided.

CONSIDERATION OF THE PROVISIONAL AGENDA OF THE THIRTY-SEVENTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (agenda item 15) (A/AC.96/672)

12. The CHAIRMAN invited the Executive Committee to adopt the provisional agenda of the thirty-seventh session.

13. The provisional agenda of the thirty-seventh session of the Executive Committee (A/AC.96/672) was adopted.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS (agenda item 16)

14. Mr. van SCHAIK (Netherlands) said that, under item 11, delegations had raised a number of questions to which the secretariat had not yet had an opportunity to reply.

15. Mr. ZOLLNER (Director, Assistance Division) said that, during the debate on UNHCR assistance activities, delegations had raised questions with regard to UNHCR emergency preparedness in the field, the possible redeployment of staff in crisis situations and the feasibility of setting up an early warning system.

16. Emergency preparedness in the field had been the subject of a training course which had been attended by UNHCR staff from headquarters and from the field and had dealt primarily with the practical problems involved. A more intensive emergency management training course was scheduled to be held in a few week's time in Wisconsin, United States of America, and it would be attended by UNHCR staff and by

representatives of non-governmental organizations. The Handbook for Emergencies, which had been compiled at headquarters and issued to all UNHCR field offices, contained a great deal of useful information and served as a manual to train UNHCR staff to respond in emergency situations.

17. With regard to the possible redeployment of staff in crisis situations, UNHCR already maintained a mission roster of staff members who were prepared to undertake fairly long-term missions at short notice when an emergency arose. At that time, the staff members concerned or their superiors might, of course, encounter problems, but, in the past, UNHCR had always been able to despatch staff members and specially recruited consultants on mission to emergency areas at short notice. Participants in the emergency management training course to which he had referred also constituted a further reserve of trained manpower on which UNHCR could rely in an emergency.

18. The representative of the Netherlands had suggested that an early warning system might be set up to anticipate emergencies or at least provide information that large-scale refugee movements might be likely to occur. In that connection, it was worth noting that UNHCR had co-operated very closely with OEOA in dealing with the emergency situation in Africa, for example, in publishing periodical information bulletins giving statistics on refugee movements and maintaining close liaison on the ground, especially in the most severely affected countries, namely, Ethiopia and the Sudan.

19. An early warning system might, for example, be used in connection with crises in existing refugee situations. For example, in the Sudan, where some rural settlements had been achieving some degree of self-sufficiency, it had been planned to stop the food assistance being provided by the Food and Agriculture Organization. However, as a result of the practice of sending consultants to monitor harvest forecasts, it had been learned that, because of the conditions in the field, the harvest in the Sudan would in fact be too small to permit the refugees concerned to become self-sufficient. The World Food Programme had therefore been requested not to stop its food assistance at that time, but, rather to continue it. That had been a fortunate step, since, as everyone knew, the situation in the Sudan had not improved, but had worsened considerably and there had been further influxes of refugees.

20. In cases of new influxes of refugees, the 80 or so UNHCR delegations, subdelegations and field offices served as a useful information network, making it possible to learn in advance that influxes might occur in certain countries or regions. Early warning was, however, not really the problem, for UNHCR was rarely taken completely by surprise by a sudden, unexpected influx of refugees. The difficulty was that UNHCR and potential countries of asylum often could not estimate the size of an influx and take measures to deal with it. For example, UNHCR had been aware of the crisis in the Sudan as early as 1983, but had been unsuccessful in urging that measures should be taken immediately. It seemed that public opinion and, therefore, Governments did not mobilize until a tragedy actually occurred and the pictures were shown on television. Nevertheless, UNHCR did attempt to set up contingency plans in such situations.

21. In reply to a question raised by the representative of the Sudan, he said that the Plan of Operation which UNHCR had worked out in that country in co-operation with its operational partner had proved to be a very useful tool. However, the Plan had had some drawbacks and it should not be regarded as all UNHCR was doing in that country. The lessons learned from the Plan had been extremely valuable and should make it possible to develop a better plan of operation for the future.

22. The CHAIRMAN said that the explanations and information provided by the Director of Assistance would be included in the chapter of the Executive Committee's report relating to item 11.

23. Mr. BIELER (Switzerland), supported by Mr. JURKOVICH (Canada), Mrs. RUESTA de FURTER (Venezuela), Mr. van SCHAIK (Netherlands) and Mr. KUSSBACH (Austria), requested that the reports of the Sub-Committee on International Protection (A/AC.96/671) and the Sub-Committee on Administrative and Financial Matters (A/AC.96/670) should be included as annexes to the Executive Committee's report on the current and future sessions. Several important points raised during the meetings of those Sub-Committees had not been taken up during the Executive Committee's general debate.

24. Mr. LUKE (Secretary of the Executive Committee) pointed out that reports by the Sub-Committees automatically became official documents of the Executive Committee. However, if the Committee so wished, they would be included as annexes to its report.

The meeting rose at 10.55 a.m.