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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 29th MEETING

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9 November 1982

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

CONDUCT OF MEETINGS

1. Mr. SORZANO (United States of America) read out the text of a letter from his delegation addressed to the Chairman and requested that it should be circulated as an official document of the Second Committee. In the letter, the United States registered its strong objection to the fact that, at the afternoon meeting on the previous day, the procedure for exercise of the right of reply had not been strictly enforced and, what was even more serious, the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic had used the totally unacceptable expression "little Nazi" in a personal reference to the representative of a Member State in the Second Committee. Every effort must be made to prevent such practices, which demeaned the Committee's debates.

2. Mr. HILLEL (Israel) supported the statement made by the representative of the United States of America.

AGENDA ITEM 74: SPECIAL ECONOMIC AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE (continued)
(A/37/3 (Parts I and II), A/37/121-140, 209 and Add.1, 235 and Corr.1, 333, 508 and Add.1; A/C.2/37/L.9)

(a) OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS DISASTER RELIEF CO-ORDINATOR: REPORTS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

(b) SPECIAL PROGRAMMES OF ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE: REPORTS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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3. Mr. ZIDOUEMBA (Upper Volta), after emphasizing the seriousness of the situation in the countries of the Sahel, said that the Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), which had been created to combat drought and desertification in member States of the Committee, had set itself the following priorities: achievement of food self-sufficiency, implementation of measures to alleviate the effects of future periods of drought, promotion of the economic and social development of drought-prone areas and desertification control. In order to implement that programme, the countries concerned were relying, firstly, on their own - unfortunately very limited - resources and, secondly, on mobilizing resources at the international level. Although certain regions of the Sahel had again been hard hit by the drought that year, there was no cause to be discouraged. On the contrary, now that the concerted action of all was beginning to bear fruit efforts must be redoubled.

4. Noting that nine years had elapsed since the establishment of the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office, he said that efforts should be made to strengthen that body both as regards its structure and its operations. His delegation was satisfied with the untiring action carried out by UNSO, particularly with regard to the implementation of priority projects submitted by member States of CILSS, and

(Mr. Zidouemba, Upper Volta)

believed that its success was due, inter alia, to effective co-ordination between UNSO and CILSS, the active support of the various organs of the United Nations system, the complementary nature of the resources mobilized by UNSO among bilateral and multilateral sources of financing and the flexible conditions of implementation of the programmes. Those various factors had combined to enable UNSO to expand its activities considerably.

5. A programme relating to the building of secondary roads had been under way in Upper Volta since July 1978. The programme, which had been drawn up by UNSO, had been implemented under UNSO auspices by the National Bureau for the Promotion of Labour. It had been financed jointly by the Government and UNSO and its continuation was now assured by further contributions from various sources. The roads were being built by a national public works party thereby not only strengthening the national capacity for executing the work but also ensuring that the roads built were maintained with the equipment available to Upper Volta and providing for the training of national personnel.

6. Other projects had also been implemented through such collaboration, including a reforestation project in the centre of the country, designed to assist the peasants to develop an independent means of producing trees and restoring formerly wooded areas. That project had been financed by a contribution from Sweden. UNSO was contributing to the implementation of a project relating to the improvement of animal husbandry in the Sahel. His Government hoped that the support given so far to member States of CILSS, in particular by UNSO, could be intensified so as to ensure the implementation of priority actions.

7. Lastly, he drew attention to the concern of his delegation at the considerable drop in UNDP's power to intervene in recipient countries. For the least developed countries, the decrease in UNDP resources was a disaster in so far as a number of basic projects would have to be abandoned owing to lack of funds. He therefore echoed the appeal made by the Administrator of UNDP and urged countries which were in a position to do so to increase their financial contribution to UNDP.

8. Mr. RAKOTONAIVO (Madagascar) said that his delegation had considered the report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator (A/37/235 and Corr.1) and had noted that substantial progress had been made in improving the relief programmes and that the measures taken had, by and large, been in keeping with the new guidelines laid down in General Assembly resolution 36/225.

9. Firstly, it was encouraging to see that UNDRO's role in the mobilization and co-ordination of international disaster relief had been reinforced. The initiatives taken in that area - for example, the organization of multi-agency missions and information meetings and the speedy dissemination of information - had greatly contributed to the success of the emergency relief programmes undertaken in several countries.

10. Secondly, damage assessment was of capital importance for it made it possible to determine objectively the extent of the relief needed. His delegation was happy

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(Mr. Rakotonaivo, Madagascar)

to learn that UNDRO was currently studying the possibility of developing objective and broadly acceptable criteria for assessment in order to enhance the accuracy of data on relief needs. The provisions of General Assembly resolution 36/225, paragraph 10, should play an important role in that connection.

11. Thirdly, UNDRO had made commendable efforts to facilitate the transport of relief supplies. Appropriate assistance should also be given for shipping such supplies to the actual site of the disaster, bearing in mind the difficulties encountered by some countries in the field of transport.

12. Fourthly, it should be noted that particular attention was being given by UNDRO and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development to the study of the longer-term economic effects of disasters and relief operations on the development programmes of affected countries.

13. Fifthly, it was essential to implement the programmes outlined in the International Strategy for Disaster Prevention in order the better to prepare disaster-prone countries to deal with such situations.

14. Sixthly, the actions undertaken by UNDRO following disasters which were not caused by natural phenomena were extremely complex. Owing to the, at times, political nature of the events which gave rise to such situations, the maximum amount of information possible should be collected in that regard. Furthermore, the activities of the international community in that area must fully respect State sovereignty.

15. Emergency situations, whether of natural origin or caused by man, had in recent years assumed a particularly alarming dimension, and it was natural that the resources available to the Office of the Co-ordinator should be strengthened. His delegation was therefore in favour of continuing the special trust fund for an indefinite period so that the activities of the Office of the Co-ordinator might be better planned. It was unfortunate that the international community had not yet succeeded in defining a viable policy for financing those activities. In the spirit of General Assembly resolution 31/173, his delegation had always supported every proposal for providing that body with a firm and lasting financial base until such time as a permanent and functional institution responsible for dealing with natural disasters was established. His delegation also supported the proposal to increase the ceiling for relief assistance in the event of major disasters to \$50,000. The organ responsible for making decisions on those cases should mainly consider the economic and financial capacity of a disaster-affected country to cope with the damage caused and its impact on the country's development. His delegation also supported the Co-ordinator's plans for strengthening the activities of his Office in the area of co-ordination and logistical support for measures to be taken at the international level.

16. The Government and people of Madagascar wished to thank the Co-ordinator and his field staff for their continued and untiring efforts to deal with the cyclones and floods which had struck Madagascar in early 1982, and to express once again

(Mr. Rakotonaivo, Madagascar)

their deep gratitude to the States, the international and regional organizations, the specialized agencies and all other bodies that had not hesitated to offer assistance to his country during that difficult time. As the Co-ordinator had noted, international assistance was still required, particularly for the restoration of transport facilities and compensation for agricultural losses. Capital equipment and infrastructure restoration would indeed put a heavy strain on the State budget. In addition, the drop in production would slow down normal economic growth, and the loss of traditional export goods would worsen the balance-of-payments deficit. His Government therefore hoped that the States and international organizations concerned would consider participating in a recovery and reconstruction programme in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1982/5.

17. He wished to pay a special tribute to the Co-ordinator for his efforts to set up a concerted relief programme for Lebanon in the wake of the barbaric invasion perpetrated by Israel, which had caused great suffering to the Lebanese and Palestinian people. He also reaffirmed his support for the special assistance programme for developing countries, particularly the southern African States combating the racist régime. His delegation was likewise ready to support the draft resolution on international assistance to alleviate the economic and social problems faced by Nicaragua and Honduras as a result of the May 1982 floods.

18. Mr. MIHALJEVIC (Yugoslavia), noting that his country had always supported the activities of the United Nations, particularly those of the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator, said that his delegation welcomed the decision by the appropriate legislative bodies to renew the terms of reference of the Office of the Co-ordinator, to reaffirm its role as the focal point of the United Nations system for disaster relief co-ordination and to call for the strengthening and improvement of the capacity and effectiveness of the Office. His delegation hoped that the statement of the functions of the Office contained in the report of the Secretary-General (A/37/235), would help to improve certain aspects of UNDRO activities. As the Office of the Co-ordinator could do much more if it had greater financial resources, it was essential to continue the special trust fund and would be desirable to open additional subaccounts. His delegation also supported the proposal that the Co-ordinator should be authorized, in the event of major disasters, to exceed the normal ceiling of \$30,000 granted under the regular budget up to an amount of \$50,000.

19. Turning to the question of the special economic assistance programmes, he stressed the need for strengthening them, especially since they were of concern mostly to the least developed countries, whose problems were described in the reports of the Secretary-General. It was important to note that those countries had developed programmes of their own which should enable them to improve their present situation. However, the magnitude of their economic difficulties did not allow them to solve them without greater assistance from the international community. While bilateral assistance did constitute a significant contribution to the development process, his delegation considered that multilateral assistance was more appropriate in that area, and it therefore regretted that the special trust

(Mr. Mijaljevic, Yugoslavia)

fund set up at United Nations Headquarters had received only relatively small contributions to date. For that reason, his delegation supported the organization of donor conferences and round tables which would foster a better understanding of the development needs of the countries concerned and ensure the most effective use possible of allocated resources.

20. Mrs. FANG PING (China) noted that the countries referred to in agenda item 74 were the victims of unfavourable geographical conditions and had to confront serious problems resulting from natural phenomena and, on occasion, political troubles. Given their poor economic base and inadequate resources, those countries were incapable of developing their national economies by themselves. The international economic crisis had only multiplied the difficulties, for the prices of the export commodities on which the economies of those countries were largely dependent had declined while the prices of industrial goods had greatly increased, thus causing trade deficits and a worsening in those countries' balance-of-payments deficits. The relevant United Nations bodies had, to be sure, made a considerable effort to examine the needs of those countries and to plan and co-ordinate international assistance, but that assistance must be intensified.

21. Her delegation had been pleased to learn that UNSO, which had increased its co-operation with the States members of CILSS, had made progress in mobilizing resources for the Sahel region, particularly as part of the medium-term and long-term recovery and relief programme. It should be noted that many organizations of the United Nations system had also made a contribution. As a result of the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 36/225, the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination had redefined the role of the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator, and had thus made it possible for the Organization to take more timely and effective action in the event of disasters. The Office of the Co-ordinator also appeared to have taken steps to mobilize greater resources and strengthen the co-ordination of disaster relief activities. Her delegation wished the Office continued success in its activities on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of its establishment.

22. The country currently in the greatest need in that respect was Lebanon, the victim of the barbaric Israeli aggression which had left thousands of dead and wounded Palestinian and Lebanese civilians, as well as numerous homeless; the Lebanese economy had also suffered greatly from the war. The international community must therefore aid that country, as some United Nations organizations and institutions had already begun to do by carrying out an effective and timely relief plan. Her delegation congratulated those institutions on their efforts and reiterated its support for the just struggle of Palestinian Arab people and its condemnation of Israeli crimes.

23. China itself had experienced many difficulties and had been the victim of disasters during the economic recovery that had followed the establishment of the People's Republic; it thus understood the problems of developing countries that found themselves in a similar situation. It was for that reason that her country provided bilateral assistance to some of those countries and maintained excellent economic relations with most States referred to in item 74.

24. Mr. FERNANDEZ (Philippines) said that the subject of disaster relief had a special significance for his country; lying within an earthquake zone and having several volcanoes, the Philippines each year experienced an average of 20 typhoons as well as other natural disasters, such as floods and tsunamis.
25. When disaster struck, assistance was needed to provide immediate relief to the victims who might require food, clothing, shelter, medical attention and transport. Subsequently, assistance would also be required to help the affected areas rebuild damaged facilities and infrastructures. His delegation was of the view that each country must bear primary responsibility for meeting the problems posed by natural disasters, since assistance must be adapted to geographical and cultural imperatives which were best known to local authorities. Moreover, in most cases, the response must be instantaneous. In countries where natural disasters struck frequently, preparations might be made so that the necessary relief could be provided immediately. Thus, in his country, relief materials were kept in stock for shipping to disaster victims on short notice. Such preparedness programmes might be more easily organized at the national level.
26. This did not mean, however, that international assistance was not required. On the contrary, natural disasters depleted the resources of the countries affected, and those countries therefore required assistance. Moreover, during major catastrophes, the countries affected might not have the means to provide relief assistance, and in such cases international assistance was essential. Nevertheless, the most efficient way of providing assistance to victims of disasters was by strengthening national disaster preparedness and disaster prevention capacities, for example, through the construction of earthquake-resistant structures and the development of flood-control projects.
27. In that connection, he was gratified that the Office of the Co-ordinator was participating in the typhoon operational experiment, the goal of which was to mitigate the damage caused by typhoons by improving forecasting and warning capabilities. The Philippines was participating in that project under the auspices of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, and hoped that it would result in better organization of relief during natural disasters of that type. His delegation appreciated that it was not the function of the Bureau of the Co-ordinator to provide large-scale relief assistance. Under its mandate, it should be a catalyst and a co-ordination point for international assistance. The activities of the Office had been far wider than many countries had initially expected, and the number of cases it had attended to, as well as the effectiveness it had shown in obtaining contributions from donors, was impressive. The Office of the Co-ordinator should also be commended for the assistance that it had provided to victims of man-made disasters in Chad and Lebanon.
28. The Secretary-General had recommended that the ceiling for the Office of the Co-ordinator's contribution to emergency relief should be raised to \$50,000 from its current level of \$30,000. Considering the magnitude of the requirements for relief and bearing in mind that the balance would be financed out of such voluntary contributions as might be available, the increase requested appeared to be reasonable.

(Mr. Fernandez, Philippines)

29. Finally, his delegation expressed the hope that heed would be taken of the Co-ordinator's request concerning the strengthening of the information and logistical support capability of his Office, since the effectiveness of the Office depended primarily upon its ability to act as a centre for the exchange of information between recipient and donor countries.

30. Mr. TURE (Guinea-Bissau) said that, in their constant search for ways of ensuring harmonious development and the solutions best suited to that end, the countries of the third world found in the United Nations system the universal forum where, despite all vicissitudes, they had decided to make a positive, consistent and multidimensional contribution in keeping with the seriousness of the crisis affecting international economic relations.

31. The problem of the development of poor countries remained as acute as ever, while it appeared increasingly difficult to lay the basis for international co-operation which would fulfil the hopes of the great majority of peoples throughout the world and which could become a reality if the rich countries became aware of the importance of what was at stake and the consequences that it involved in the medium and long term for their own economies. World-wide interdependence and the mutual interests of various countries called for a radical change in the current economic order. The realization that there was a link between development, peace and international security had led the United Nations to establish various mechanisms and institutions to support the individual and collective efforts of the developing countries to achieve progress.

32. The worsening of the world economic crisis was the logical result of structural disparities and the persistence of inequities in international economic relations. The Republic of Guinea-Bissau, which was one of the least developed countries, had also been affected by the current international economic situation. Its economy was going through a crisis, the main features of which were: increasing national indebtedness and a steadily deteriorating balance of trade; total depletion of foreign currency reserves, making it difficult to obtain imports essential to the functioning of the economy; and inability to provide for the most basic needs of the country's population, particularly food. At the root of that situation was the considerable increase in the prices of manufactured goods and fuel, the magnitude of the investment in economic development infrastructure and the disastrous agricultural seasons of 1977, 1979 and, above all, 1980 caused by the drought. With the fall in output, there had been a sharp drop in exports, 75 per cent of which were agricultural, and the increasing imports of foodstuffs were exacerbating the trade deficit.

33. The economic and financial situation of Guinea-Bissau was therefore extremely fragile, and the country was becoming increasingly dependent on outside sources in regard to food, technology, trade and finance. Despite all those difficulties, Guinea-Bissau had many resources which, if properly exploited, could break the vicious circle of poverty and lead the country along the road to development. Among the resources worthy of mention were the continental shelf, which offered excellent opportunities for the fishing industry; the cultivable areas, which could

(Mr. Ture, Guinea-Bissau)

amount to 1 million hectares; the extensive forestry resources, which were currently under-exploited; the production capacity already in place, which was under-utilized; and the existence of major reserves of bauxite, phosphate, petroleum and other minerals. The new development policy advocated by the Government of Guinea-Bissau aimed essentially at reducing the effects of the crisis by mobilizing all resources capable of promoting the development of all sectors, particularly agriculture, of fostering the diversification and expansion of production in order to ensure self-sufficiency in food, and of reducing the balance-of-payments deficit.

34. The reasons justifying the measures taken by the Government in its national development strategy were: the increase in foreign indebtedness, the sharp rise in inflation, the consequences of the continuing increases in the prices of manufactured goods and fuel, the drop in export prices as a result of the deterioration in the terms of trade, and the fact that the country was increasingly dependent on foreign aid. Those measures, which were intended to promote the implementation of a four-year economic and social development plan, included the organization of a round-table conference in early 1983 and the adoption of an economic and financial stabilization programme. The primary aim of that programme was to take specific political measures in such areas as budgetary policy and trade, foreign assistance, the restructuring of trade and the implementation of an appropriate investment policy. In addition, the priority objectives of the first four-year plan (1983-1986) were: to increase agricultural output and thus achieve self-sufficiency in food, to improve the balance of payments and to develop human resources to meet the requirements of the national economy.

35. In conclusion, he thanked all those countries and United Nations bodies that had done their utmost to provide assistance to his country.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

36. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the list of speakers on agenda item 72 should be closed on Thursday, 4 November 1982, at 6.00 p.m.

37. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 4.25 p.m.