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UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Regional Office for the Middle East

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT Statement by
 Mrs.. Sadako Ogata United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (Cairo.
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Mr. President. Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great privilege and honour for me to address this
 distinguished gathering. It is only appropriate that a Conference on
 Population and Development should also consider the issue of rapid and
 large-scale population movements which have become a major phenomenon of
 our times.

When my office, the United Nations High Commissioner, was established
 in 1951, there were one million refugees. Today, there are over 20

million refugees who have been forced to flee their countries for fear of persecution, war and violence. In addition, there is probably an equal number of persons displaced inside their countries for similar, refugee-like reasons. Most of the refugees and the displaced are in the poorest parts of the world. This very continent has witnessed some of the most rapid and massive flows of people. for example out of Somalia, Liberia, Burundi and most recently, Rwanda.

There are clear linkages among displacement, development and demography. Mr. President, I should like to share with you briefly some thoughts on this inter-relationship and on an effective response to the problem of coerced movements. I am convinced that the way in which governments respond to problems of population and development will profoundly affect the ability of the international community to cope with the refugee problem.

Coerced population movements today complex in their causes, distressing in their consequences and dramatic in their manifestation. Poverty, declining economies, demographic pressures particularly uneven pressure accelerate competition for scarce resources and soci-economic inequities. In turn, they cause ethnic tensions and conflicts resulting in displacements and refugees. The recent strife in Rwanda is a frightening example of ethnic conflict ignited by population pressure on diminishing land resources.

In many instances, population pressures add to underdevelopment and contribute to refugee flows and internal displacement. Situations of instability and violence which accompany such movements in turn hamper economic development. Furthermore, the sudden arrival of large numbers of refugees and displaced persons in economically fragile areas strain

the resources of those regions.

Furthermore, contemporary refugee movements must be seen against the larger global context of migration today. In many instances, particularly in the industrialized countries, refugees are mingled with other migrants who are moving, not in search of safety, but of better economic prospects. The needs of both groups must be met, but their differing needs demand different responses.

Given the inter-dependence of our modern world, no state can isolate itself from the impact of refugee and migratory movements. Not only have distant problems rapidly become domestic ones, population displacement, whether internal or international, has gone beyond the humanitarian domain to become a major political, security and socio-economic issue, affecting regional and global stability. That is the lesson to be learnt from the crises in Former Yugoslavia, Somalia and Rwanda today.

These dimensions of the refugee problem have placed before us new dilemmas: how do we balance humanitarian considerations and human rights principles with the legitimate interests of States? How do we reconcile national concerns on refugees and migrants with a longer-term global policy on population movements and international stability? How do we promote early solutions to refugee problems? Most importantly, what can be done to prevent people from becoming uprooted in the first place?

These are questions which confront States as much as international organizations. The issues and consequently the responses are inter-related. This is why I believe we must promote a comprehensive and concerted strategy, simultaneously at global, regional and national

levels, which meet immediate needs as well as long-term goals. Let me indicate the four major components of such a strategy which must be pursued simultaneously. They are:

- firstly, to provide effective protection to those fleeing persecution, war and violence. The institution of asylum must continue to be upheld, at least on a temporary basis until a durable solution can be found. Allow me to stress that in providing protection and assistance, we must remain sensitive to the needs of women and children, who are particularly vulnerable to violence and abuse.

- secondly, to study and develop migration policies for those who are moving for economic and social reasons. In the meantime, contribute to economic and social development with a view to remove the causes which induce people to leave.

- thirdly, to vigorously pursue solutions to refugee problems. This cannot be done effectively unless the development issues are addressed in the areas of asylum and return of refugees. Development assistance could facilitate the local integration of refugees in countries where refugees have been allowed to settle. But it is in the context of voluntary repatriation that development needs are today most vital.

In Mozambique there are 1.5 million people who are returning home after years in exile or displacement. In Afghanistan, 2.5 million refugees have returned, and another 3.5 million refugees are still waiting in Pakistan and Iran. In Eritrea, Ethiopia, Myanmar, maybe soon Georgia, hundreds of thousands of people will be returning to their homes, eager to rebuild their lives and their country. Even to war-torn Bosnia, Somalia and Rwanda, people are beginning to return in search of

solutions to their plight. In almost every repatriation operation, UNHCR's challenge is to ensure the minimum conditions of safety and economic and social well-being for those who are returning. Our role as a humanitarian organization is limited, but the task of rehabilitation is immense.

As conflicts are resolved, countries must be rebuilt, so that they can begin to support once again their own population, including the returning refugees and displaced persons. Our experience in Central America, Cambodia and other parts of the world has clearly shown that returning refugees form an important component of the confidence building exercise essential for reconciliation. But in order to be effective, they must be made part of the national rehabilitation and development effort. The link between the solution of refugee problems, and national reconstruction and development is thus of paramount importance.

- fourthly and finally, Mr. President, refugees are a symptom of the world's ills. It would be counterproductive to focus solely on treating the symptoms: we must continue to examine and treat the root causes that force increasing numbers of people to flee their homes.

Recurrent humanitarian emergencies and the associated tragedies of large-scale population movements serve to remind us of the limited results of development to date. Decades of development efforts have not succeeded in alleviating poverty or eliminating social inequalities. The gap between rich and poor nations, and between the rich and poor within nations continue to widen.

The problems of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, unprecedented population growth and poor health conditions must be urgently

addressed. The role of women as a productive force in the development of their society should be recognized. Programmes need to be established to enhance their role within their families and in all sectors of their communities. Adequate resources must be made available to achieve these goals. Indeed, the availability of resources is but one manifestation of the necessary political will without which there can be little progress on these issues.

The time of fragmented approaches is over. We must accept the impact of interdependent issues and strive to find solutions in a global and integrated manner. UNHCR has for several years cooperated with UNFPA and other concerned agencies in providing valuable family planning services to refugees in many parts of the world. Similar services are currently being jointly considered for Rwandan refugees. In future, we plan to systematically and more rigorously address the need for reproductive health among refugees.

The risks of large-scale displacement are enormous. The way population movements is managed will affect directly stability security and economic progress. To link humanitarian concerns with development and population in the promotion of peace, stability, economic growth and social well-being is a tremendous responsibility. The task is daunting. But it is not impossible. For my part, Mr. President, I fully commit my Office to this challenge, and call upon all governments for their support.

Thank you.