Panel discussion

Promoting and building peace: linking refugee and humanitarian assistance with longer-term development

(2 October 2000)

Panellists: Mrs. Sadako Ogata, High Commissioner for Refugees
                H.E. Mr. Leonardo Simão*,* Minister for Foreign Affairs and
                  Cooperation of the Republic of Mozambique
                Mr. Poul Nielson*,* Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian
                  Aid, European Commission
                Mr. Michael Aaronson*,* Director, Save the Children Fund

Moderator: H.E. Ambassador Johan Molander, Permanent Representative of
                Sweden

<u>Outline of summary remarks</u>

The following themes emerged from the presentations by the panellists, questions from the floor and responses made:

Main obstacles

These include:

- ❑ The sheer number of conflicts, and extreme fragility of societies in post-conflict situations (in certain regions, a 50% risk of returning to conflict);
- ❑ The complex nature of the root causes of conflict: poverty is an essential cause but there are others such as weak governments, competition for natural resources (notably diamonds), fanaticism in its various forms;
- ❑ The absence of linkages between humanitarian and development aid, of which the gravest is the ODA gap (as "mother of the transition gap");
- ❑ Incompatibilities between procedures and methodologies of the various institutions (for example the European Commission bases its activities on projects, whereas UNHCR works through programmes);
- ❑ Similarly, the needs of a transition process do not always conform to the constraints of the timelines and budget constraints of institutional programmes and structures;
- ❑ Protracted situations that change in character with passing time and engender new problems;
- ❑ Uneven media attention, leading to "forgotten" situations;

❑ The difficulty for communities to overcome the hatred and brutality that had torn them apart during the years of conflict.

Some solutions

While recognizing the challenging scale and nature of these various constraints, several speakers commended the example offered by Mozambique, which had successfully managed the return of refugees and peace had proved sustainable.

It was also recognized that creating an environment for the peaceful coexistence of divided communities requires a combination of measures by governments, international agencies and NGOs. With this in mind, the moderator has sought to group such measures under three headings, as follows:

Action by governments

❑ Forward planning is vital, combined with broad consultation with other actors involved. In the case of Mozambique, the Government had already engaged in reconstructing the country before the return took place;
❑ Dialogue at regional level is also important, and can prove very effective in providing support; it is particularly crucial to involve neighbouring countries of the State emerging from crisis;
❑ Donor coordination is essential, rather than sporadic and piecemeal funding;
❑ Above all, political commitment to solutions is essential. This may require long-term efforts (witness the recent settlement in Northern Ireland, requiring a heavy investment of time and effort, including the intervention of friendly States, to bring to an end a strife of over 30 years).
❑ It is critical to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian personnel through coordination; training; adequate resources (financial and human); bringing perpetrators to justice.

Action by international agencies

❑ The Security Council must exert political pressure in a consistent manner. Tribute was paid to the High Commissioner for strengthening ties with this body. This momentum must be sustained;
❑ It is crucial to recognize and understand the constraints imposed by distinct mandates and working methods of agencies, and work towards overcoming these divergences. Discussions are already underway between UNHCR and the European Commission for this purpose;
❑ Humanitarian assistance must have a long-term perspective, with forward planning even in emergencies;
❑ Programmes and structures for peace building and transition need to be flexible to take advantage of local and grass-roots opportunities, which must proceed at their own pace;
❑ Exit strategies must be planned by these agencies, and respected;
❑ Brookings process represents a flexible, pragmatic approach that can provide a way forward, but needs donor support;

- Lending institutions are inevitably reluctant to engage in programmes in unstable situations. However, some flexibility could be shown (for example, UNDP discontinued all programmes during the conflict in Somalia, even though some line ministries continued to function). NGOs have demonstrated that even in a failed state, it can still be possible to operate;
- Learn to respect and exploit complementarities of mandates, avoiding "turf battles".

Action by civil society

- Better use must be made of the advantage offered by civil society, notably NGOs, and of their grassroots perspectives. Each situation is different. Understanding the community is essential in defining solutions and NGOs have this understanding;.
- Encourage initiatives involving women and children in view of the power of their contribution in restoring confidence in the future;
- Give priority to education of children including in emergency situations, and to the demobilization of children (boys and girls) having been involved in conflict.
- Promote co-existence through a wide range of projects at community level. "Imagine co-existence" - a project being designed by UNHCR – is intended to help war-torn communities to learn to live together as the first step on the path towards reconciliation;
- Recognize the important role played by traditional culture in healing the scars of conflict and enmity.

Concluding remark

Need for creativity at all levels, combined with awareness that building peace and development takes time and unwavering commitment by all actors.

Ambassador J. Molander
2 October 2000