



General Assembly

Fifty-fourth session

72nd plenary meeting
 Tuesday, 7 December 1999, 10 a.m.
 New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Gurirab (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 24

Return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/436)

Draft resolution (A/54/L.47)

The President: As the General Assembly begins its consideration of agenda item 24, I wish to say a few words on the subject, for this is an issue on which I have spoken many times over the years and intend to continue doing so.

Members will recall that in my acceptance speech before this body, on 14 September 1999, I stated that the horrors of slavery and destruction wrought upon Africa and its peoples could not be forgotten. Then I emphasized that the time was opportune for reconciliation and healing. I also pointed out that such an act of mutual affirmation would, however, never be complete unless Africa's sacred relics, icons, artworks and other priceless cultural objects were returned lock, stock and barrel to the rightful owners.

Moreover, I expressed Africa's corporate sadness and anguish in seeing that today these stolen African treasures adorn public museums, libraries, art galleries and private homes in foreign lands, and I insisted that they must come home to assuage the pain and anger in the hearts of

succeeding generations of Africans. For me, it is a moral problem of heart and soul and of conscience.

What I stated then about the return of priceless African art and icons is equally applicable to the cultural treasures illegally exported from other countries throughout the centuries. It is time to return them home. The lapse of time has not in anyway whatsoever diminished the weight of ownership or the quest for justice and restitution.

The report of the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, annexed to document A/54/436, which is before the Assembly this morning, describes the actions taken by the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in Case of Illicit Appropriation. This report is a testimony to the efforts that are being made worldwide for the return of all cultural and artistic treasures. It also cites measures being undertaken to establish a code of ethics for dealers in cultural property, to establish international standards for recording minimal data on movable cultural property, to set up data banks of stolen cultural property in order to assist in the tracing and return of cultural and archaeological objects, and to sensitize civil society, and specifically the young, to protect their environment and cultural heritage.

These are all efforts that I wholeheartedly endorse. We all know only too well that the cultural objects of a people play an integral role in defining their identity,

personality and forms of self-expression. It is my intention to help keep this campaign alive and contribute to its success, for the return not only of African cultural objects but also of all other precious treasures illegally removed from their countries of origin. Using the bully pulpit to further justice and the restoration of cultural property is no vice.

We should strive to make the next millennium one of peace, tolerance, fairness and restitution. This means leaving behind this sad history and its consequences.

I now give the floor to the representative of Greece to introduce draft resolution A/54/L.47.

Mr. Gounaris (Greece): It is an honour for me to take the floor in order to introduce to the plenary Assembly a draft resolution on the return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin, submitted for the first time by Greece, under agenda item 24.

Draft resolutions like the one we are presenting today, without reference to a Main Committee, have been before the General Assembly for many years and reflect concerns that are shared by a vast number of Member States of the United Nations.

The return of cultural property to its countries of origin or its restitution in case of illicit appropriation is an issue depicted in the report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/54/436. It is an issue that is methodically promoted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

I would like to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General and to the Director-General of UNESCO for their efforts and ask that they continue their endeavours. In this context, I would also like to express our appreciation to the 22 member States of the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in Case of Illicit Appropriation for their valuable recommendations adopted this year in Paris, under the chairmanship of Canada, during the tenth session of the Committee.

The increasing support and interest expressed on this agenda item by a vast number of Member States, both from the developing and developed worlds, have strong and deep roots. This biannual draft resolution, which is based on the texts of previous resolutions on the same subject, refers to several Conventions, *inter alia*, Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed

Conflict, adopted at The Hague on 14 May 1954, as well as the Second Protocol to the Convention, just recently opened for signature, also at The Hague, on 26 March 1999.

Last year, the Unidroit Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects, adopted in Rome on 24 June 1995, entered into force, underlining the need for the widening of international cooperation on this issue, the voluntary restitution of cultural property to its countries of origin, the increasing use of international databases and the importance of protecting our underwater cultural heritage and dealing effectively with the looting of shipwrecks.

Given that raising public awareness is essential for combating the illicit trafficking in cultural property, this year's draft resolution introduces, in full compliance with existing working methods of the United Nations, a new element: the electronic transmission of information concerning stolen cultural property and the linking of existing databases and identification systems on this issue.

Greece, being the repository of a cultural heritage that now belongs to all mankind, firmly believes that cultural objects are a treasure to be freely cherished and enjoyed by all nations. However, future generations throughout the world, having recovered from past traumas, need to fully appraise and value their cultural heritage and be given the opportunity to see it exhibited at its own birthplace, as a matter of respect for its origin.

In this context, the continuous cooperation between Member States, the transparency of information and the open exchange of views between parties concerned are all essential elements in addressing and, hopefully, achieving a satisfactory solution to the issue of the return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin.

I hope that this year's draft resolution continues the momentum already shown by the relevant Conventions for the protection of cultural property.

On behalf of my Government, I would like to thank those Member States that, as of today, have sponsored the draft resolution contained in document A/54/L.47, and to extend our sincerest appreciation for their support. In fact, I have just been informed that the following countries will also sponsor the draft resolution: Algeria, Peru, China and the Marshall Islands.

I hope that consultations on the text of the draft resolution, which are still under way among the delegations concerned, will successfully conclude with a consensus text, to be adopted in the coming days by the plenary General Assembly.

Mr. Šimonović (Croatia): The issue of return or restitution of cultural property to countries that are victims of appropriation involves, undoubtedly, many a thorny and complex question. These difficulties, however, should not deter the concerted efforts by the United Nations and other intergovernmental organizations to continue to work in coordination with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), within their mandates and in cooperation with Member States, to resolve this important matter.

For Croatia — whose cultural heritage has emerged and survived at a millennial crossroads of different cultural currents — this issue is of particular importance. In this context, Croatia is best described as a diverse borderline country, both lodged in the heart of Central Europe and spread along the Mediterranean coast of the Adriatic Sea. Given such a geographical location, Croatia has always been faithful to its complex heritage and yet extremely open to new influences from abroad. Due to its location as well as rich heritage, Croatia has often, even in present times, been devastated by foreign conquests on the frontiers of past empires or civilizations.

This is why, shortly after its independence, Croatia acceded to international instruments for the protection of historical monuments and cultural heritage, such as the landmark Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict of 1954. Unfortunately, this in itself has not protected us from wanton destruction and pillage of our monuments and cultural artifacts. By way of illustration, it has been established by independent foreign reports that more cultural artifacts were destroyed during the first seven months of war in Croatia than during the entire duration of the Second World War in the former Yugoslavia. Out of 204 museums, galleries and collections in Croatia, 66 museum buildings were destroyed, while 45 museums and galleries suffered either theft, damage or devastation. More precisely, 6,551 artifacts disappeared, 1,430 were destroyed and 728 were damaged.

Croatia is particularly sensitive to the issue of the return of cultural property taken from Vukovar and the Dubrovnik area. The artifacts taken from the City Museum of Vukovar, the famous Bauer Collection, the Memorial

Collection of the Nobel Laureate Ružička, the Historical Museum, various private collections and the Catholic Church in Vukovar have been well documented by the fact-finding missions of the Council of Europe, UNESCO and others.

For the reasons just described, Croatia commends UNESCO and the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in Case of Illicit Appropriation on their tireless efforts to promote bilateral negotiations for the return or restitution of cultural property.

Despite our sour experiences, we do not wish to overlook the fact that significant advances have been made, particularly during the latter half of this century. Hence, we wish to reaffirm the importance of the provisions of the 1954 Hague Convention, as well as the role played by the International Council of Museums during armed conflict. At the same time, it is clear that, in both international and internal armed conflicts, adherence to and implementation of the Hague Convention are either partial or impossible. The immense destruction of cultural property that was witnessed by the world during armed conflicts and wars in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia and Croatia, amongst others, demonstrated best the urgent need to improve the 1954 Convention.

Accordingly, my country welcomed the Second Protocol as an important development and was one of 20 signatory countries involved in the process of revising the Hague Convention during regular meetings convened by UNESCO. Croatia views the Second Protocol as a comprehensive improvement to the original text of the 1954 Convention. The Second Protocol goes further to develop the Convention's protective powers with regard to military involvement and the need to strengthen the system of protection for those categories of cultural property deemed of vital importance to mankind or whose exceptional cultural and historical value is recognized by national legislation. It also contains a series of new mechanisms reflecting the actual situation of war damage. It is hoped that the latter shall simplify and shorten the existing and often lengthy process of obtaining adequate response from and, ultimately, the requisite protection of the relevant bodies and organizations.

The entry into force of the International Institute for the Unification of Private Law (UNIDROIT) Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects is welcomed by my delegation, whose hope is that its new

important provisions will fulfil our expectations in further enhancing and strengthening existing protective mechanisms to date. With the celebration next year of the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, signed in Paris in November 1970, it is time to revisit the notion of an international strategy for combating such crimes.

The means to achieve this must, however, be reviewed in the context of evolving challenges. Cooperation between Member States, in collaboration with UNESCO and other international organizations, must be further developed, taking on board all possibilities for realizing the attainment of the objectives of the body of international norms in this field.

At the national level, my delegation supports the initiative encouraging Member States to draw up, in cooperation with UNESCO, systematic inventories of their cultural property. Furthermore, the efforts of UNESCO to link existing databases and identification systems to allow for electronic transmission of information concerning stolen cultural property, including those removed from areas of conflict and occupied territories, is viewed by my delegation as a primary weapon in the ongoing struggle to achieve an advantage over those engaged in the smuggling trade. The possible adoption of an international professional code of ethics for dealers in cultural objects would certainly be conducive to regulating, to a certain extent, the illicit yet very lucrative trading of cultural property into private collections.

The protection and preservation of each country's cultural heritage, and in particular making young people aware of the value of our respective heritages, allows us to acquire a deeper insight into our common historical destiny. This in turn helps us to predict and better understand historical developments throughout the world, as well as to act more humanely in regard to them, than has been the case so far in our world. My delegation is encouraged by the ongoing consultations on the draft resolution on return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin and is of the view that it encompasses the requisite political will for the promotion of the return or restitution of cultural property. Therefore, the onus falls upon us, the international community, to show real commitment that will enable us to take significant steps towards ensuring that the threat of the extinction of our respective cultural heritage never becomes a reality.

Finally, Sir, allow me to commend you for your personal commitment to this issue, which will surely add impetus to the efforts to address the complex problem of the return or restitution of cultural property.

Mr. Krokmal (Ukraine): I would like to start this statement on the question of return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin by recalling that the historical and cultural heritage of each State is recognized as a basic element of the culture and identity of peoples. Indeed, we know from our own experience how great are the losses inflicted on a whole range of generations by the illegal expatriation of cultural property from its original location.

Ukraine attaches great significance to finding practical solutions to the persisting and complex problems that hinder the restitution of stolen or illicitly removed cultural property to the countries of origin. Numerous valuable pieces of our cultural property have been removed from the territory of Ukraine and dispersed throughout the world, thus becoming inaccessible to my country and withdrawn from its scientific and cultural life. The development of statehood and the increased level of historical and national consciousness of the Ukrainian people urgently require the assessment of the actual amount of losses in historical monuments, works of art and religious and cultural relics.

Our country is developing international cooperation both at bilateral and multilateral levels and is ready to start an open and constructive dialogue with all interested parties in this respect.

In this matter, we proceed from the understanding that the return of cultural property to the country of origin is a delicate problem politically, legally and ethically. That is why we are prepared to address every individual case appropriately and carefully, with due regard for the conditions under which a masterpiece was relocated from our country.

We believe that the solution to these problems should be based only on international law. Our country actively participates in the elaboration of rules governing the restitution of cultural property and supports the initiatives of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in Case of Illicit Appropriation.

In our view, convening a special session of the Committee to consider the problem of the restitution of cultural property illicitly taken from the countries of origin during and following the Second World War would be extremely important. Ukraine has ratified a number of international instruments, including the 1970 UNESCO Convention and the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. Furthermore, Ukraine will soon become a party to the recently adopted Second Protocol to the 1954 Hague Convention. We are convinced that this important legal instrument will become a solid foundation for the protection of cultural treasures for future generations.

We should also like to emphasize the need to bring restitution relations into line with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the decisions and initiatives put forward by many international organizations, including UNESCO and the Council of Europe, and by the Governments of the Member States.

In this context, my delegation notes with appreciation the report of Secretary-General submitted in cooperation with the Director-General of UNESCO. The report provides a helpful account of the work done by UNESCO in promoting bilateral negotiations for the return or restitution of cultural property as a matter of cultural continuity and justice, of the preparation of inventories of movable cultural property and of the dissemination of information to the public in this field. At the same time, we share the view that the role of UNESCO and other relevant organizations in this regard should be strengthened.

We also believe there is a need to establish, under the auspices of UNESCO, a special fund for promoting the restitution of cultural property. In our view, UNESCO could also contribute to the establishment of an international cultural order and initiate a fruitful dialogue between nations in terms of a global culture of peace.

Ukraine considers that the coordinated international approach towards the problem of returning cultural property to the countries of origin and the reduction of the effects of its illicit trafficking should become a significant component of the global cultural strategy. Every piece of cultural and historical heritage contains a universal message for mankind and, at the same time, an individual message for the citizens of a particular State or representatives of a particular nation.

Members may recall that at the fifty-second session of the General Assembly Ukraine put forward an initiative to

proclaim an international year for the preservation, protection and restitution of cultural property. We did so with a sense of concern and urgency, with a view to reaffirming our commitment to working together in reviewing and removing the fundamental constraints to achieving progress in this critical area. Ukraine has been at the forefront of efforts to find a solution to the persistent and complex problems related to the return and restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin. We shall continue to seek ways to provide for this.

Mr. Zackheos (Cyprus): The issue of the return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin constitutes an area in which international relations are put to a noble test to ensure that cooperation among State and non-State actors can effect change in the right direction in a wider area on which there is consensus at the international level — that of the absolute need to protect the cultural heritage of mankind.

My delegation attaches particular importance to this issue and to the efforts of the United Nations in general — and UNESCO in particular — for the considerable work that has been done in this direction. In this respect, we welcome the Secretary-General's report and the nine recommendations contained in the report of the Director-General of UNESCO on the action taken by the Organization for the return and restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin.

Since our last discussion on this item in this body, a major development has taken place. The entry into force of the International Institute for the Unification of Private Law (UNIDROIT) Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects on 1 July 1998, a development which we warmly welcome, has added yet another important tool to our common efforts to protect the cultural heritage of the planet.

Cyprus, as a State party to the Hague Convention of 1954 and a signatory of its Second Protocol, adopted earlier this year, also follows with interest the work undertaken in the preparation of a Draft Convention on the protection of the underwater cultural heritage and expresses its support for efforts in this direction.

Cyprus notes the decision of the British Museum to organize an international conference on the cleaning and conservation of the Parthenon marbles and welcomes the draft resolution submitted by the European Parliament for the return of the Parthenon marbles to their natural home,

the Acropolis of Athens, well before the year 2004, when the Olympic Games are to be held in that city.

We believe that the Parthenon marbles constitute a special case in the issue of the restitution of cultural property. They are not simply another item whose legal ownership is contested; they present a unique case. They are an integral part of a major monument of civilization that has survived for more than two and a half millennia. We believe that the efforts for their return to Greece should be intensified and that such a development would contribute to the spirit of cooperation between two friendly countries whose bonds of friendship run very deep.

Combating illicit trafficking in cultural property is a task that requires perseverance and multifaceted efforts. One of the major areas in this context is the exchange of information and the compiling of inventories. Cyprus supports all efforts in this respect, including the establishment of an on-line network by UNESCO that will include the widest possible inventory of cultural artefacts that have been stolen from their legal owners, including those removed illegally from areas of conflict and occupied territories.

Another area of cooperation which has to be expanded is that of the collaboration between police forces, museum staff and customs officers. Cyprus welcomes the efforts of the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) in promulgating this cooperation and the protocol established between UNESCO and the World Customs Organization, as well as the agreement between UNESCO and the development by the latter of a database containing 14,000 objects.

At the national level, Cyprus welcomes the adoption of several codes of ethics relating to the acquisition of property by many museums in industrialized countries, along the lines set by the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property and the International Council of Museums Professional Code of Ethics. We consider it important that, as we prepare to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the landmark 1970 Convention next year, an international code of ethics will come into being, further establishing the code that should regulate trading in cultural objects.

My country's 9,000 years of recorded civilization have left us with an immense cultural heritage that we have an obligation to protect and to bequeath to future generations. By virtue of Cyprus's geographical position at the

crossroads of three continents and many civilizations, its cultural heritage has been continually enriched through the millennia and provides insight into the many civilizations that have existed on the island during its long and colourful history. Many of the artefacts of this rich cultural heritage can be viewed in museums throughout the world.

There are many more that have become objects of illicit traffic, especially those removed illegally from the territory of the island currently outside the Government's control. The plundering of the cultural heritage of Cyprus in this area has been so widespread that it led to a decision by the United States, a decision which we warmly welcome, to impose an emergency import restriction in April of this year on Byzantine ecclesiastical and ritual ethnological material from Cyprus, unless such material is accompanied by an export permit issued by the Government of Cyprus.

Our determination to investigate the fate and to pursue the return of every object of our cultural heritage removed illegally from Cyprus to its legal owners is unshakable. In this effort, we look to the international community to extend its support.

Mr. Amer (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): Cultural properties assume an extremely important priority among peoples' and nations' interests. The cultural heritage is part of peoples' histories; it is a symbol of their time-honoured traditions and a reflection of their civilizations. For this reason, our discussion of the item assumes extreme importance.

This is a new campaign against States and individuals so that they will return stolen carvings, manuscripts and works of art to their original countries. At this session, we note from the report contained in document A/54/436 that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is attaching increased importance to the question of cultural property. I would like to take this opportunity to commend the achievements of UNESCO and the efforts made by its Director-General. I would like to mention in particular the interest it allotted to increased international awareness of cultural property and to assistance offered for recovering and returning such property to their original countries.

Libya, like many other countries, has been subject to widespread attempts to steal its cultural property throughout the past five centuries. The circumstances

imposed by the colonialists on the Libyan people opened the way to an orchestrated campaign of theft against some of the most important and time-honoured elements of Libyan culture. Visitors to famous museums, research centres and palaces in Asia, Europe and the United States have come to know first-hand the valuable contribution of creative Libyan individuals to various art forms and their sophisticated taste in such forms. The colonialists have already dissipated most of this work and its history.

Suffice it to say that in the last quarter of the nineteenth century over 165 artifacts were stolen from the Shahat archaeological site in eastern Libya. Hundreds of pieces of clay pottery, a record of the history of that city, were stolen. Thousands of gold and bronze coins of different sizes were smuggled out of that same city. Historical sources affirm that in 1860 alone, dozens of huge columns and fascinating colonnades were transferred from Leptis Magna, in western Libya, to Great Britain, where they were used to decorate one of the King's gardens. The same sources confirm that one European stole 350 marble columns and thousands of small artefacts from the same city. Another European stole over 600 prehistoric artefacts from Benghazi; these are currently displayed in a famous European museum.

The United Nations, through UNESCO, has tried to assist in the return and restitution of works of art, manuscripts and other artefacts to their original countries. However, as clarified in the Secretary-General's report, progress in this field has remained limited despite the repeated attempts that began over 25 years ago. It is a cause of concern that the majority of States that own such treasures have not had the will or made any serious attempt or taken any practical measures to implement the General Assembly's resolutions on this item.

It must be recalled that the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya was one of the countries behind the initiative to include this item on the General Assembly's agenda, because we attach great importance to the subject of returning cultural property to its country of origin. Moreover, most countries that have cultural property belonging to others have refused up to now to adhere to the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. This exposes the intentions of those who claim to be the leaders of modern civilization and the caretakers of human heritage. It shows that their thoughts still belong to a period that consecrated the stealing of property and cultural heritage of others. Libya is an ancient country with a great cultural history and has been subject to plundering of its works of

art; therefore, we insist on recovering our artefacts, our manuscripts, our jewellery and our works of art.

In this regard, I would like to mention that we have reached important agreements with the Government of Italy. At the meeting of the joint Italian-Libyan commission held in August of this year, Italy agreed to return the famous Venus Virgin to Libya. It has also agreed to conduct a survey to find all the historical artefacts or Libyan manuscripts in Italian universities, museums or other centres, and to start returning this property to Libya.

We highly value this positive response on the part of the Italian Government and hope that other Governments will follow suit and will return to us some of our cultural and artistic property that was flagrantly stolen. Any kind of stalling or obstruction of attempts to return this property and to implement the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly, including resolution 3148 (XXVIII), will force us to resort to all available means to recover our property. We cannot remain silent as long as our cultural artefacts are lost regardless of for how long or for how many years. They are rightfully ours, they are a symbol and representation of our culture and identity, and our future generations will insist on recovering them.

Mr. Kim Chang Guk (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): The delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea takes note of the report of the Secretary-General on the return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin, contained in document A/54/436, submitted in association with the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

The cultural property of each country and nation is a priceless national cultural heritage formed through a long history with national wisdom, talent and cultural tradition. Cultural property is a treasured wealth making it possible to hand down and inherit national tradition and spirit through generations. It should therefore be duly preserved in the territory or country of origin.

The preservation and protection of cultural property is a fundamental right of each country and nation. Countries and nations of the world preserve and take care of their own cultural property as a national treasure.

However, many developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, which experienced the colonial rule of foreign forces in the past, have lost numerous items of

cultural property as a result of looting and destruction by colonialists, and have faced serious problems in the continuation of national tradition and the systemic development of national culture.

My country, which was under the military occupation and colonial rule of Japan for over half a century in the early twentieth century, is not an exception.

My delegation wishes to take this opportunity to draw the attention of the Assembly to the communiqué of the Permanent Mission of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the United Nations, contained in document A/54/179, concerning the plunder and destruction by Japan of Korean cultural property in the past.

Great efforts have been made by developing countries to regain national cultural property pillaged in the past. Since 1973 the General Assembly has been considering the issue of return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin as a matter of great importance, reflecting the just demand on the part of developing countries. Up to now, a number of resolutions have been adopted urging the countries responsible for the plunder and destruction of the cultural property of other countries to return or restitute illegally possessed property to the countries of origin.

The question of preservation and protection of cultural property has only recently become a subject of discussion by the international community. The international community has paid close attention to the protection of national cultural property and established concrete norms of international law in the area of preserving the cultural property of nations through relevant international treaties and conventions.

The Hague Convention concerning Laws and Customs of War on Land, adopted in 1907, provides the principles for the protection of cultural property in occupied territories during time of war. The 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property stipulates as illicit the compulsory transfer of ownership of cultural property arising directly or indirectly out of occupation by a foreign Power.

There is ever-increasing international awareness on the importance and urgency of the return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin through the activities of the relevant organizations, including the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the

Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in Case of Illicit Appropriation. This promotes the legal rights of countries to regain their pillaged cultural property.

It is commendable that the United Nations, UNESCO and other relevant organizations have made great efforts to facilitate the return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin.

The international community demands that the countries responsible for the illicit plunder and destruction of cultural property during their occupation of, or colonial rule over, other nations should return or restitute such property to the countries of origin. That is an inescapable international obligation of those countries that plundered and destroyed other nations' cultural properties in the past.

The resolutions regarding the return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin adopted in the General Assembly on many occasions are far from being implemented satisfactorily. This is related to the fact that certain countries continue to intentionally turn their backs on the return of cultural property plundered by illicit means in the past to the countries of origin.

In this connection, my delegation wishes to underline the fact that Japan, *inter alia*, has neither returned nor restituted numerous items of cultural property it pillaged and destroyed by barbarous means in the past. Still worse, it even refuses to consider or recognize its responsibility for the illegality of its past wrongdoing.

Such an attitude on the part of Japan remains a challenge to the aspirations of the Korean people to restore their national cultural heritage and to the demand of the international community as reflected in the resolutions of the General Assembly on the return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin.

My delegation is of the view that countries which acquired cultural property of other nations by illegal means in the past, like Japan, should demonstrate their will to return or restore them in conformity with the will and demand of the international community, through, among other things, their sincere attitude regarding the consideration of the item under consideration.

It is regrettable that we have to enter the twenty-first century with unresolved problems of the twentieth. The United Nations, UNESCO and other relevant organizations are expected to play a more active role in

resolving such problems as the return or restitution of illegally transferred cultural property to the countries of origin. My delegation hopes that at its current session the General Assembly will make a substantive contribution to the settlement of this important and urgent matter by seeking and adopting practical measures to facilitate the return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin at an early date.

Mr. Ouch (Cambodia) (*spoke in French*): We are meeting here today to consider for the seventeenth time since 1973, the very important question of the return or restitution of cultural property to the country of origin. The report of the Secretary-General in document A/54/436, which contains the report of the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), concisely sets forth all the work done and the activities conducted by both the international organizations concerned and the members of our Organization to promote the return or restitution of cultural property to the country of origin. The report describes the measures taken by UNESCO to follow up the recommendations adopted by the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in Case of Illicit Appropriation at its ninth and tenth sessions, held successively in September 1996 and January 1999, in order to achieve the objectives of the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property.

Although progress has been made, my delegation believes that much remains to be done. This in no way means that we should not pay tribute to the Secretary-General and to the Director-General of UNESCO for their tireless efforts in this regard. We would also like to express our gratitude for the efforts by a number of international organizations, such as the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol), the International Council of Museums (ICOM), the United States Information Agency (USIA) and the Customs Cooperation Council.

In its desire to make its modest contribution to these noble activities, the Kingdom of Cambodia is prepared to host the eleventh session of the Intergovernmental Committee, which is to be held in the year 2001.

The plundering of and illicit trafficking in works of art and archaeological treasures is one of the most serious problems we have experienced since the beginning of the twentieth century in countries with an ancient civilization like the Kingdom of Cambodia. These inhuman and

immoral activities have been conducted on a large scale over the last few years, in spite of international efforts aimed at ending this phenomenon. No country has been spared. According to Interpol, in the year 1997 alone there were 2,476 documented thefts of works of art in Germany, 2,944 in Russia, 2,244 in the Czech Republic and 5,569 in France. In Italy, the customs police recorded over 30,000 thefts of works of art in 1996. In the Kingdom of Cambodia, over 100 twelfth-century Khmer sculptures were stolen in the month of January 1999 alone from the Banteay Chamr temple in the north of the country.

The main threats of damage to and destruction of works of art of Khmer culture are worsening daily. For over 20 years now, monuments that are part of the Angkor archaeological site — which extends over more than 200 square kilometres and is comprised mostly of isolated ruins buried under vegetation — have been the principal targets of thieves and traffickers in stolen works of art and antiques, a phenomenon that has attained dramatic proportions. Because of the systematic plundering of our archaeological sites, many of our cultural treasures have been taken away and illegally acquired by museums and collectors in many countries. This tendency has been encouraged by the fact that demand remains high and collectors are ready to pay vast sums to get hold of examples of Khmer art.

Of course, the development of comprehensive safeguarding operations, which involve a permanent presence at many monuments at our archaeological sites, will make it possible to ensure better protection against plundering. Many measures have already been taken, both practically and in terms of regulations, in cooperation with Interpol and ICOM to combat these practices.

Every people has its own culture and civilization and has created its own values that are dear to it and which express its genius. The cultural heritage of a country is an integral part of its life and an expression of its national and historic identity. It is for this reason that the ongoing illicit trafficking in and the systematic plundering of its works of art are harmful not only to the countries that own these works of art and archaeological treasures, but also to universal culture and human civilization. It can lead to a deliberate falsification of history, which is why artistic and archaeological treasures must be returned to their historic sites — whatever the reasons for the transfer of these cultural properties from their countries of origin in the past to wherever they may now be — so that the world can recover its true historic characteristics.

Restitution is a human, noble and moral act that strengthens international cooperation in other fields and represents a positive factor in relations between States.

The Kingdom of Cambodia, as a signatory to the 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, and faithful to its commitments under these Conventions, fully intends to recover its cultural property stolen and fraudulently exported overseas.

My Government very much appreciates the activities of UNESCO and the Intergovernmental Committee, which have made a significant contribution over the years to the strengthening of international cooperation through negotiations and multilateral and bilateral agreements.

We would also like to express our great appreciation to ICOM for drawing up detailed inventories of hundreds of stolen cultural objects, which have contributed to the restitution of some of those objects. For instance, in March 1997 the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art returned a head of Shiva at a ceremony at Phnom Penh. On that occasion the curator of the Museum also returned to Cambodian authorities a second object that had previously been in the possession of a private collector who, as a result of this campaign, decided to return it through the Metropolitan Museum.

In December 1996, a London art dealer went to Cambodia to restore officially to my Government a stolen head that she had obtained from another dealer. In May 1997, in Zurich, a bust of Uma was returned to the Cambodian authorities by a New York museum. On 19 November last, the Thai authorities handed back to my Government more than 120 historic artifacts plundered from Khmer temples and seized in Thailand.

The Kingdom of Cambodia, a least developed country with limited resources, is helpless to protect these sites and prevent thefts and vandalism. It is indebted, therefore, to those persons and institutions that have made, and continue to make, contributions to the return and protection of our cultural heritage.

My delegation reaffirms its strong conviction that it is necessary to strengthen and extend every possible form of cooperation among all countries within the framework of mutual respect, respect for international law and the relevant international conventions, in order to ensure, at the

international level, the protection and restoration of archaeological, historical and cultural treasures.

We hope that international efforts will bear fruit and that the restoration of cultural properties to their legitimate owners will be encouraged, so that our various cultural heritages, which not only have historical and ancestral value but which also represent the intellectual and moral heritage of future generations, can be preserved.

It is in this spirit that my delegation wishes to express, on behalf of the King of Cambodia, His Majesty Norodom Sihanouk, a man of great culture, and Her Majesty Queen Norodom Monineath Sihanouk, as well as on behalf of the people and Government of Cambodia, their profound gratitude to the Government of the United States of America for its decision last week to impose urgent restrictions on the import of cultural property from Cambodia. This decision is a noble, humane, moral and exemplary act.

My country is a sponsor of draft resolution A/54/L.47, which is before us. We hope it will represent a historic landmark in the application of the Convention on the protection of cultural property and that it will be adopted by consensus.

Mr. Al-Humaimidi (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): The General Assembly's consideration today of the item on "Return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin" reflects the importance that the international community attaches to the humanistic dimensions of the cultural property of peoples as their principal contribution to human civilization as we know it today.

It also reflects the international community's recognition of the need to restore cultural property to the countries of origin, because its fundamental value lies in its presence at its sites of origin and because of the civilizational and historical implications that such sites bear. Removing such property from its original site deprives the countries affected of fundamental spiritual and cultural components of their heritage. It further deprives humankind of identifying a great segment of its history.

In addition, the restitution and return of artifacts, sacred relics, works of art and other civilizational treasures to their countries of origin will strengthen international cooperation in preserving and developing cultural values. This was stated in the Convention

concerning the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, adopted in Paris in 1970.

Iraq has contributed effectively to the building of human civilization for more than 7,000 years. The first agricultural village was established there, the nucleus of the state and civil society took shape in it, during the Sumerian kingdoms in 4000 BCE, and humankind learned to write there. On its land, the first laws appeared and humankind took its first steps in all the arts and sciences. The cultural role of Iraq has continued throughout the ages, and Baghdad, the capital of the Abbassids, was a beacon of civilization for all the world.

This rich history made Iraq a repository of civilizational treasures. All parts of Iraq, north and south, contributed to the history of the civilization that emerged and developed therein and bore fruit for the whole of humankind. For this reason, Iraq has become a prime victim of antique thievery by those forces that colonized it as well as those that are eager to add its archaeological artifacts to their museums.

Because of the continued organized plunder of Iraq's archaeological artifacts, foreign museums and galleries are packed with these antiques, as are the special collections retained by art traffickers and professional collectors.

The military aggression in 1991 and the comprehensive sanctions on Iraq have led to a further draining of Iraq's cultural heritage. On the one hand, the aerial bombing led to the partial or total destruction of many cultural landmarks such as mosques, churches and archaeological sites. A case in point was the bombing by British and American jets of an archaeological site in the historic city of Ur. That city witnessed the birth of the father of prophets, Abraham. This left huge craters 10 metres wide and four metres deep. One of the fighter jets made more than 400 holes in one side of the wall of that site. The American soldiers used their bayonets to dislodge antiques. This left many holes in the wall. Many holes were also made in the walls of another archaeological site in Ur.

On the other hand, the continued sanctions and external interference in the internal affairs of Iraq have led to illicit excavations and to the continued smuggling of cultural artifacts, rare works of art, manuscripts and other relics. The methods used to smuggle such artworks constitute a crime against the heritage of humanity. Smugglers and art thieves do not hesitate to break archeological works of art into small pieces so they can

easily smuggle them across the borders. Daily aerial bombardments against Iraq in the illicit, so-called no-fly zones are destroying many archaeological sites, including churches and mosques.

Iraq has tried its best, through recourse to international organizations and by means of bilateral contacts, to ensure the restitution to Iraq of manuscripts and artworks that are being held in European States and whose owners have confessed to have been smuggled from Iraq. Despite the numerous international conventions that stress the right of States to the restitution of their cultural property and that prevent illicit trafficking in such property, many of the States that have acquired such works refuse to accede to those conventions and do not respond to bilateral negotiations for the restoration of such antiquities to their countries of origin. The international community and its institutions should exercise their legal and ethical role to force those who have stolen antiquities, States as well as individuals, to restore them to their countries of origin.

Iraq appreciates the efforts made by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to increase international public awareness of this problem. At the same time, we call for an improvement in the current international conventions so as to protect international cultural heritage and provide technical assistance to those States that are suffering from serious problems related to illicit trafficking in their cultural artefacts. We hope that the United Nations, through its specialized agencies, will continue to raise the awareness of the international community of the irreparable damage inflicted upon the cultural heritage of certain States, that are the victims of continued destruction and plunder. Such damage constitutes a major cultural loss for the world and for humanity as a whole, now and for generations to come.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

I should like to inform Members that, at the request of the sponsors, action on draft resolution A/54/L.47 will be taken at a later date, to be announced.

Agenda item 101

Operational activities for development

(a) Operational activities for development of the United Nations system: follow-up to the World Summit for Children

Draft resolution (A/54/L.51)

The President: Members will recall that at its 33rd plenary meeting, on 11 October 1999, the General Assembly decided to consider directly in plenary meeting sub-item (a), entitled "Operational activities for development of the United Nations system", of agenda item 101, Operational activities for development, which had been allocated to the Second Committee on the understanding that only the topic entitled "Follow-up to the World Summit for Children" would be considered in plenary meeting.

In this connection, the Assembly has before it a draft resolution issued as document A/54/L.51, entitled "Special session of the General Assembly for the follow-up to the World Summit for Children in 2001".

I give the floor to the representative of Pakistan to introduce draft resolution A/54/L.51.

Mr. Haque (Pakistan): I have the honour to introduce the draft resolution entitled "Special session of the General Assembly for follow-up to the World Summit for Children in 2001". First of all, I should like to inform the Assembly that, since the publication of the most recent draft, a number of additional countries have joined in sponsoring the draft resolution. In addition to the 102 countries listed in the draft resolution, Andorra, Antigua and Barbuda, Armenia, Brazil, Eritrea, Gabon, India, Israel, Madagascar, Monaco, Senegal, Sri Lanka, the Sudan and the United Arab Emirates have joined as sponsors. This brings the total number of sponsors to 116. I would also like to announce that the name of the United States was inadvertently included in the list of sponsors; the United States is not sponsoring the draft resolution.

Ten years ago, the heads of State or Government of Canada, Egypt, Mali, Mexico, Pakistan and Sweden issued a call for the holding of a summit to consider, at the highest political level, the situation of the children of the world. The idea received overwhelming support from the international community. Leaders and high-level representatives from more than 150 countries gathered at the World Summit for Children, held on 30 September 1990. The Summit heralded the bringing of issues relating to children to the forefront of the consciousness of humanity.

The Summit agreed on a number of ambitious global goals for the 1990s. These included reduction of the infant mortality and under-five child mortality by one third and of maternal mortality by half, cutting down by 50 per cent the number of children under five suffering from malnutrition, enabling every child to attend primary school, immunizing 90 percent of the world's infants and protecting children in especially difficult circumstances, particularly in situations of armed conflict.

The Plan of Action adopted by the Summit placed the interests of children at the centre of the development endeavours of the international community. It stipulated that the specific and quantifiable goals enumerated in the Plan should be achieved by the year 2000. The adoption of the Plan mobilized the nations of the world to address the problems being faced by children, and parts of the Plan were made an essential element of the development programmes of a vast majority of countries. A comprehensive mid-term review held in 1996 indicated that many countries had made significant progress towards the achievement of the targets established for the protection, development and welfare of children.

I would be remiss, however, if I did not note that the near-universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child contributed greatly towards the realization of these goals. Similarly, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has played an important role in advancing the cause of children by promoting the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has always played a sterling role in promoting the welfare of the children of the world. We deeply appreciate the support of UNICEF in the follow-up to the World Summit for Children, especially its help to Member States in the preparation and implementation of their national plans of action. Other agencies and organizations have also made a significant contribution in promoting the well-being of children. We express our deep appreciation to them as well for their commitment and devotion to the welfare of children.

Progress has been made, but much remains to be done. One of the major challenges facing us today is to eliminate the significant disparities in the conditions and quality of life available to children of different regions of the world. The pace of progress in this respect has been painfully slow in some regions, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and in South Asia, which together account for three fourths of all deaths of children under the age of

five. There has also been limited progress towards the goals established for better nutrition, reduced maternal mortality, basic education and education for the girl child.

Most countries of the world have made extraordinary efforts over the last decade to meet the targets established at the Summit. Their inability to fully achieve the desired results has been for reasons beyond their control and has been due primarily to the lack of necessary resources. The close link between the progress made on issues relating to children and the gains made in the achievement of overall goals of development has also become apparent during the past decade. We believe that these two goals complement each other and must be pursued in tandem.

It is also generally conceded that, because of their heavy debt burden, the developing countries have not been able to allocate sufficient resources to achieve the goals and objectives of the Summit. The large and ever increasing debt burden and debt servicing of the developing countries have had an adverse impact on the achievement of the goals set at the Summit. Without the alleviation of the debt burden, there is little likelihood that national policies can be fully implemented or the goals of the Summit achieved any time soon. Large-scale debt relief and debt cancellation would release resources to launch a war against poverty and to direct much-needed resources to the problems being faced by children.

The success of the Summit must, however, not be assessed on the basis of the achievement or otherwise of its goals. The impact of the Summit has indeed been profound. It created a new understanding of the problems faced by the children of the world and prepared the ground for new partnerships between Governments, non-governmental organizations and international agencies in pursuit of a shared and noble objective. The international community must build on the momentum generated by the Summit, and efforts must be redoubled to ensure that all children benefit from the commitments made by world leaders at the Summit.

In order to give a new and strong impetus to the realization of the goals of the World Summit for Children, the sponsors of draft resolution A/54/L.51 have proposed the holding of a special session of the General Assembly in 2001, at the highest level, to conduct a 10-year review of the implementation of the Plan of Action adopted at the Summit. The special session would be preceded by a number of events at the national, regional and international levels.

The draft resolution being submitted to this body by more than 115 sponsors emphasizes the need for a renewed commitment to the agreed targets and to setting the agenda and time-frame for future action for the welfare of children. We are confident that the entire international community will lend its full support to the preparatory process leading to the holding of the special session of the General Assembly.

More than 120 million children are added to the global population every year. Unfortunately, most of these new arrivals are born into poor families. The situation of a vast majority of children is therefore worse now than ever before. The international community must recommit itself to the goals of the World Summit for Children and undertake the necessary initiatives to improve the lives of the hundreds of millions of children growing up in extreme poverty. In a world awash with resources, it is unconscionable that so many children are suffering so grievously. This body must issue a clarion call that the present situation is unacceptable and will not be allowed to continue. We owe this to our children.

I commend draft resolution A/54/L.51 to the General Assembly for adoption.

Mr. Ka (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): The World Summit for Children, held at New York in 1990 and attended by the head of State of Senegal, His Excellency President Abdou Diouf, was an unprecedented historic meeting. It was historic in terms of the calibre and high level of the participants. It was historic also in terms of its results.

Two years later, the International Conference on Assistance to African Children was held at Dakar, Senegal, under the auspices of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Moreover, July 1990 had seen the adoption of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

The World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and the Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children, and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child continue to be the basis for our countries' national policies with regard to the protection and promotion of the rights of the child.

The World Summit for Children thus adopted the seven objectives to be met during the decade 1990-2000: to reduce the mortality rate for infants and children under five by one third; to reduce the maternal mortality rate by

one half; to reduce the malnutrition rate among children under five by one half; universal access to safe drinking water; universal access to basic education; and helping children in difficult circumstances, particularly in situations of armed conflict.

The world Plan of Action called upon donor countries and developing countries to give high priority in their budgets to the welfare of children, particularly in the framework of the 20/20 Initiative. My country, Senegal, has striven to implement the objectives through its National Plan of Action for Children, adopted in July 1991, less than a year after the Summit. This Plan targets such varied areas as the economy, health, water, sanitation, advocacy, information and legal questions.

Furthermore, these areas have all been taken into account in the various programmes of the operational plan linking the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to the State of Senegal. Thus, my Government has established, in cooperation with UNICEF, a number of programmes and projects, including a Children, Youth and Women's Programme; a project to set up community child-care centres for early childhood development; a Child and Youth Culture Programme, which involves setting up libraries and support programmes for Koran schools and for working children; advocacy programmes for children; and support programmes for non-governmental organizations, associations and other groups working for children.

Our National Plan of Action set the following priority objectives: an 80 per cent increase in vaccinations of six antigens under the expanded vaccination programme; elimination of neonatal tetanus; reduction of measles mortality by 95 per cent and morbidity rate by 90 per cent; virtual elimination of vitamin A deficiency; universal iodization of salt; combating diarrhoea infection by oral rehydration to 80 per cent; eradication of guinea worm by holding councils of war chaired by the head of State; increase in overall school attendance from 58 to 60 per cent, for girls' attendance to 42 per cent; providing 61 per cent of the population with access to safe drinking water and increasing water purification to 46 per cent; and improving living and schooling conditions for 20,000 pupils in Koran schools.

Holding parliamentary sessions with speakers from the Children's Parliament has done a great deal to contribute to a better awareness of the specific needs of children and to the wide dissemination of the rights of children. This is true also of the special events on children, including the Children's Gala presided over each year by the head of

State; the Day of the African Child, celebrated each year on 16 June; and the Week of the Child.

Through national anti-poverty programmes and community nutrition programmes, my Government, with the support of UNICEF, the World Bank and other development partners, has made significant progress in the area of the protection and promotion of the rights of the child.

Particularly with regard with child workers, it is my pleasure to stress that my country, Senegal, has ratified the principal conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO), including its Convention 5 on the minimum age in industry, Convention 6 on child labour, Convention 10 on the minimum age in agriculture, Convention 29 on forced labour, Convention 33 on the minimum age in non-industrial work and Convention 81 on work inspection.

In 1997, Senegal adopted a new labour code, raising the minimum working age from 14 to 15. The programme of cooperation between the Government of Senegal and UNICEF for 1997-2001 is under way, and a support project for child workers and street children is planned. Furthermore, the National Assembly and the Senate of Senegal have just authorized the President of the Republic to ratify ILO Convention 182, adopted on 17 June 1999, concerning the prohibition and immediate elimination of the worst forms of child labour.

I would like to add that my country also ratified in 1998 the Ottawa Convention on anti-personnel mines and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child; and, in February 1999, it ratified the Statute of the International Criminal Court. On 31 January 1999, a law was passed penalizing female circumcision, paedophilia, rape, domestic violence and sexual harassment.

Within the framework of its National Economic and Social Orientation Plan and sectoral plans, my Government is working hard to create a favourable environment for equality of opportunity between the sexes and the elimination of disparities between the sexes in the field of education. We are happy today that in Senegal the school attendance rate for girls is progressing at a faster rate, 8.6 per cent, than it is for boys, 6.1 per cent. My Government considers reducing child and infant mortality an absolute priority, as well as reducing the synthetic measure of fertility by, in particular, stepping up its efforts in family planning, functional literacy for women and school attendance for girls. Furthermore, we support

the efforts of UNICEF, other organizations in the United Nations system and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for children and Armed Conflict on children. My country also favours the raising to 18 the minimum age for recruitment into the armed forces and welcomes the preparation by UNICEF of an agenda for peace and security for children.

It is in a context of major difficulties and with the burden of constraints inherent in the implementation of structural adjustment programmes that our developing countries have committed themselves to the application of the results of the World Summit for Children. As the Assembly knows, the 1990s have been particularly hard for Africa and the least advanced countries. They saw official development assistance go down exponentially. The exorbitant rate of debt, the low rate of foreign direct investment, the many different obstacles to access to the world market for our exports, the constraints imposed by our membership in the World Trade Organization and the unexpected and undesirable effects of globalization — all those and many other factors, including armed conflicts, humanitarian crises and the spread of HIV/AIDS have had a negative effect on the implementation of the world Plan of Action and national plans of action for children.

Even if it is established that primary responsibility for the implementation of existing international commitments belongs to national Governments, it is important to stress the irreplaceable role of the United Nations and of the whole international community in the mobilization of resources and support for the national efforts of poor and deprived countries.

My country, Senegal, hopes that the national evaluations and the regional conferences to be held in preparation for the special session of September 2001 will give us a better understanding of the obstacles that have been encountered in the implementation of the results of the World Summit for children, so that the best ways and means of and new initiatives for accelerating the implementation of the commitments can be identified.

The world forum for education scheduled to take place in April 2000 in my country will be an important stage in the evaluation of the educational situation throughout the world. It will lay particular stress on the challenges that must be confronted in order to realize the objective of education for all and universal schooling.

It is therefore our hope that the special session of the General Assembly in September 2001 will give the

international community an opportunity to renew its commitment to children, by the adoption of a new action-oriented world plan.

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): One objective proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations is the saving of succeeding generations. This is to say that the future of children, of our children, is of utmost concern to the international community and we are all implicated in their plight. Guided by this concern, the United Nations decided to devote particular attention to children by convening the World Summit for Children 10 years ago, in 1990.

Like so many others who are aware of what is at stake, my country, Burkina Faso, took part in these meetings, which laid the foundation for greater understanding and better management of the problems of children.

What have been the results? That is the objective of the meeting in 2001: to assess the results of the World Summit, 10 years after it was held.

We know that in this area national experiences should guide international action. Therefore I would like to very succinctly outline a few of the initiatives that my country has undertaken within the framework of the follow-up to the World Summit.

First, on the political level, let me emphasize that Burkina Faso has signed and ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In addition, since 1995 it has been a member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

On the institutional level, in addition to the general measures that have already been implemented and that were contained in the initial report, my country has also adopted other measures. These include the establishment of a mechanism — the national committee to follow-up on and assess the national plan of action for children — which is entrusted with coordinating the follow-up and with evaluating all actions undertaken to promote children and their flourishing; and the establishment of a national committee to combat drugs, in view of the real danger that this scourge presents for children.

On the judicial level, a penal code has been adopted that identifies new infractions in order to enhance the protection of the basic interests of children. These infractions concern, in particular, forced marriage, female

genital mutilation and paedophilia, which are now severely sanctioned by the law.

However, all of these efforts to create a safer environment for children and to follow up efficiently presuppose the resolution of several difficult issues, including the thorny issue of infant health.

Unfortunately it must be recognized that in Burkina Faso, as in most African countries, the health situation of children, which is intimately linked to that of their mothers, has not changed much since 1994. This is primarily due to certain endemic illnesses, such as meningitis and malaria. It is also due to malnutrition and, in general, our weak purchasing power. This explains the high rates of infant and child mortality. In 1995 the Government adopted a plan for risk-free motherhood, in order to lower the rate of infant and maternal mortality.

In addition, as regards hygiene and health, the level of consumption of potable water remains insufficient, despite the efforts of public services to better meet the needs. The situation is also far from satisfactory in the field of sanitation.

To this rather sombre backdrop we must of course add the negative affects of AIDS. AIDS and HIV are a public health problem in Burkina Faso, where the rate of infection is estimated to be 7 per cent. An ever-more-significant number of children are AIDS orphans. Thus, in order to address the problem, the Government has set up a national committee to combat AIDS. This committee's strategy gives priority to providing information, education and communication about health matters, in particular to groups of young people and women.

Finally, despite the difficult economic context, the availability of education has increased in Burkina Faso. The number of schools has increased from 2,971 in 1994 to 3,568 in 1997. Over the same period, the overall rate of school attendance has grown from 33.9 per cent to 37 per cent, and the proportion of the students who are girls has also increased. Our objective is to ensure an overall school attendance rate of 60 per cent by the year 2005, including 50 per cent attendance by girls, and a 40 per cent increase in the literacy rate.

Without a doubt, in the 10 years since the Declaration and Plan of Action of the World Summit much important progress has been achieved. However, much remains to be done, in particular in developing countries where poverty persists. This is why we firmly support and co-sponsored

draft resolution A/54/L.51, which calls for the holding, in September 2001, of a special session of the General Assembly for follow-up to the World Summit for Children, in order to reassess the achievements, to make new commitments to help children and to consider activities to be carried out over the next decade.

We are all committed to making this special session a success. From this perspective, we wish to appeal to those States that have not yet done so to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child so that it will have universal effect.

The future of our world will be in the hands of our children. Let us make sure that we make worthy and responsible people.

Mr. Kolby (Norway): 1990 was a momentous year for children's rights. On 2 September that year, the Convention on the Rights of the Child came into force. Later that same month, the leaders of the world gathered at the United Nations to attend the World Summit for Children. The year produced a series of promises, commitments, goals and rights for children. A decade later, the time has come to take stock of how many of those promises and commitments have resulted in concrete improvements for children and to redouble our efforts to achieve further progress.

Much has been achieved for children during the past 10 years. The most noteworthy accomplishment is the growing global awareness and acceptance of the fact that children have rights. Children are no longer viewed merely as recipients of welfare. They are individuals with the rights to survival; to development, including the right to relevant quality education; to protection from abuse and neglect; and to participation in the processes that affect them. This is true for every single child born anywhere in the world. Member States have committed themselves to making sure that children's rights are promoted and protected by ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Despite the progress achieved during the past decade, it should be clear by now that reaching the goals for the year 2000 will be a very difficult task. There are many factors that have contributed to this slow progress. The global economic crises, the debt burden of many developing countries, the decrease in official development assistance, the increase in conflicts and instability and the spread of HIV/AIDS are all factors that have caused resources to be diverted from children. In addition, a lack

of political will, a lack of necessary capacity and a lack of coordination among the relevant players have also been contributing factors.

This is not the time, however, to be overcome by pessimism. This is the time for analyzing the past decade for lessons learned and best practices and for renewing and deepening our commitment to realizing the World Summit goals. World leaders must again take a stand, but they cannot do this alone. Civil society, the international community and, of course, children must all be willing to work together. In this context, we must all renew our commitment to poverty eradication.

Norway will, together with other partners, contribute to ensuring a successful outcome of the special session of the General Assembly in 2001, which will review and appraise the achievement of the goals of the World Summit for Children. This includes participating in assessments of the goals, analyzing results, raising awareness and commitment, mobilizing resources and building capacity.

However, the special session should not be a time just for looking back. It is even more important to look ahead. We must develop strategies which facilitate the full achievement of the existing goals, as well as the attainment of new goals within priority areas. All partners must play an active role in this process in order to ensure its success.

Mr. Tchoulkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The decisions of the 1990 World Summit for Children play a fundamental guiding role for the Russian Federation's activities on behalf of its children. That is why my country is interested in the convening of the special session of the General Assembly to review the implementation of the recommendations of the World Summit for Children.

In recent years, Russia has implemented fundamental changes in the system of protection of the rights of children in the light of new socio-economic realities. The medium-term state strategy for improving the status of children to the year 2000 was formulated in a national plan of action for children, approved by a decree of the President. The adoption in 1998 of a federal law on the fundamental guarantees of the rights of the child in the Russian Federation ensured the legislative determination of the goals of state policy on children and the basic guidelines for ensuring the rights of the child in Russia.

Consistent efforts have made it possible to reverse negative trends and substantially to reduce infant mortality

and the mortality of children under five. The system for child immunization has been revitalized. The implementation of a federal programme targeting handicapped children and similar regional programmes have helped us to prevent childhood disabilities. The federal law on the fundamentals of compulsory social insurance, adopted this summer, provides the legislative guarantee of the right of children to treatment and health improvement in sanatoriums and resorts at the expense of social insurance funds, which are crucial to funding children's for summer recreation and health-improvement activities.

At the same time, we are aware that the problems of the transition phase of socio-economic reform transition from a planned to a market economy can affect children in the most painful ways. This results in family problems, orphanhood, homelessness among children, juvenile delinquency and the economic and sexual exploitation of children.

We clearly see the unresolved problems, their magnitude and complexity. That is why we expect the special session of the General Assembly to review the progress achieved over the past decade, including lessons learned, and to analyze the major factors impeding this progress. We hope that it will assess the remaining problems and key issues, formulate specific recommendations for the future and determine the strategy of the international community for the next decade.

It is with deep regret that the Russian delegation notes that, in spite of our insistent requests, the initiators of draft resolution A/54/L.51, submitted under the item under discussion today, failed to ensure the transparency and openness of the consultations on this draft. My delegation learned about the existence of this draft literally on the eve of its submission to the Secretariat for publication. Although we were not involved in the process of discussion of this draft, we were ready, in the spirit of goodwill, to discuss our concerns with the sponsors. We submitted our amendments to the draft to its initiators and proposed the convening of open-ended consultations to discuss them and the draft in general. We must note that our request, regrettably, was ignored and that our concerns are not reflected in draft resolution A/54/L.51.

The amendments we suggested were not merely editorial, nor did they reflect only our national priorities. Some of them were related to a number of substantive questions, which, unfortunately, have remained unanswered. Specifically, we did not receive adequate

clarification on the holding of two sessions of the preparatory committee in the year 2000 and of further meetings in 2001.

A decision was taken in resolution 51/186 to hold a special session of the General Assembly in 2001 and to defer consideration of its preparations to the fifty-third session of General Assembly. Resolution 53/193 further deferred the consideration of this question to the fifty-fourth session. We understand that this discussion is going on right now. In accordance with the established practice, after the general debate delegations usually have the time and opportunity to calmly study and evaluate the proposals put forward. Today, it appears we will not have that opportunity.

The Russian Federation attaches the highest importance to the implementation of the decisions of the World Summit for Children. This is precisely why we want a meaningful discussion of the draft resolution. But we were denied that opportunity. The suggestions presented by us to the sponsors were not taken into account in the text, and we did not receive any answers to many of the questions we asked.

Of course, our delegation will not oppose the adoption of this resolution, if the Assembly desires to adopt it. However, we wish to express our deep disappointment at the fact that the discussion of this most important issue was held in a non-transparent manner and in contravention of established United Nations practices and traditions regarding such discussions. In our view, this does not contribute to a good start of the preparatory process and does not add universality to the participation in and preparation of the special session.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this sub-item. Before proceeding to take action on draft resolution A/54/L.51, I should like to announce that since its introduction the following countries have become sponsors: Cameroon, the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Kyrgyzstan, Mauritania and the Syrian Arab Republic.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/54/L.51. May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt the draft resolution?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution 54/93).

The President: I call on the representative of the United States, who wishes to speak in explanation of position on the resolution just adopted.

Mr. Ortique (United States of America): My delegation would like to underscore the high importance that the United States places on enhancing and protecting the rights of all children throughout the world. We look forward to participating actively in the preparatory committee in the years 2000 and 2001. We welcome the report of the Secretary-General on the progress made in the implementation of the World Declaration and the Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children. The World Summit for Children itself will be a valuable opportunity to reinvigorate our collective efforts on behalf of the world's children.

The United States delegation would also like to take this opportunity to stress our interpretation of the third preambular paragraph. We interpret this paragraph as an indication of the support by many nations for the basic principles underlying the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and we are joining consensus on this resolution. The United States will continue to work with other nations to support the rights and the well-being of the world's children.

The President: The representative of Costa Rica has requested the floor on a point of order.

Mrs. Castro de Barrish (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is not exactly a point of order, but a small statement.

Costa Rica is an enthusiastic sponsor of draft resolution A/54/L.51, which we have just adopted, regarding the special session of the General Assembly for follow-up to the World Summit for Children. We note that paragraph 12 invites the Committee on the Rights of the Child to provide its inputs to the preparatory process and at the special session. Costa Rica considers that if the Committee on the Rights of the Child had 18 experts, and not just 10, its input and cooperation could be much more effective and valuable.

For that reason, I have requested the floor to very cordially and respectfully urge States parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child to respond to the communication addressed to them by the Secretary-General pursuant to article 50 of the Convention with regard to amending article 43, paragraph 2, with the aim of increasing the membership of the Committee on the

Rights of the Child to 18, so that the amendment can enter into force.

That amendment was adopted without a vote at the Conference of States Parties to the Convention, convened by the Secretary-General in accordance with the Convention and held on 12 December 1995. Subsequently, on 21 December 1995 the General Assembly also approved the amendment without a vote in its resolution 50/155.

The Convention has a number of ratifications that makes it almost universal. Two thirds of the States parties, or 126, need to respond positively for the amendment to enter into force. However, only 64 responses have been received. My delegation would be very grateful if the States parties could respond positively to the Secretary-General, as they already have at the Conference of States Parties and at the plenary meeting of the General Assembly, so that the amendment can enter into force at the beginning of the new millennium.

The President: We have heard the only speaker in the explanation of vote after the vote, as well as the information and explanation just provided by the delegation of Costa Rica.

The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of sub-item (a) of agenda item 101.

Agenda item 31

Cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/484)

Draft resolution (A/54/L.38)

The President: I call on the representative of Algeria to introduce draft resolution A/54/L.38.

Mr. Baali (Algeria)(*spoke in French*): As representative of the current Chairman of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), it is my privilege to speak in this debate on cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity. My country, like all of Africa, clearly attaches particular interest to this cooperation, which in recent years has seen continuous development and which now embraces many fields of action of the two organizations, whether in the maintenance

of peace and conflict prevention, humanitarian assistance or economic and social development.

Indeed, this cooperation today transcends the narrow framework of institutional collaboration between two intergovernmental organizations, and it is constantly on the increase in order to better adapt itself to the many challenges facing the pan-African organization and its member States and in order to contribute more resolutely to managing the aspirations of Africa while taking into account both the recrudescence and resurgence of a series of problems in the continent and the effects of the irresistible march of globalization, which affects all fields of human activity and is leaving its mark on current and future international relations.

In his address to the General Assembly on behalf of the Organization of African Unity on 20 September 1999, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika mentioned the challenges presented by the architecture of the world today. He asked who is better placed than the United Nations system to provide momentum for meeting challenges, to find solutions to problems and to offer remedies for disputes? Who is better placed than the United Nations family to come up with new forms of cooperation with States and intergovernmental organizations such as the OAU? Who is better able than the United Nations to give shape to the idea of the solidarity of affluent nations with those that are suffering from indebtedness and economic and social backwardness?

Imbued with the strength of these convictions, and convinced of the primary role that the United Nations must play both in remedying established orders and in promoting the ideals of peace, development and international solidarity, African leaders, at the recent Algiers summit, renewed their commitment to this cooperation and their faith in its contribution to the strengthening of peace and stability in Africa and its role as a driving force in the mobilization of the international community for the development of the continent.

In his report on cooperation between the United Nations and the OAU, the Secretary-General has presented — and we thank him for this — a comprehensive picture of the work done over the last year, whether by the Secretariat itself or the various United Nations programmes and agencies. The report describes a series of cooperative actions taken with the OAU, which has inspired the thoughts I would like to share with the Assembly.

First of all, in this regard, our most important task is cooperation in conflict prevention and the maintenance of peace. The year 1999 has seen close cooperation gradually developing between the secretariats of the two organizations, with a view to circumscribing conflicts in Sierra Leone, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and between Ethiopia and Eritrea; in the latter case, consultation at the highest level has led to in the United Nations contribution to the formulation of technical arrangements designed to facilitate the implementation of the OAU Framework Agreement on the conflict between those two countries. More recently, the United Nations gave assistance to the Joint Military Commission created under the Lusaka Agreement for the restoration of peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; this took the form of the seconding of military and civilian personnel and logistical support.

I would like to take this opportunity to pay a hearty tribute, on behalf of Africa, to Secretary-General Kofi Annan, as well as to his Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Bernard Miyet, for their constant and tireless efforts to ensure the consistent commitment of the United Nations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to hasten the deployment of military observers in advance of a United Nations peacekeeping operation in that country.

The two organizations should also, in what might be the first action of this kind, deploy a joint mission within the framework of the implementation of a peace agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Similarly, the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, now considered an essential tool for dealing with questions of peace and security in the continent, should be able to count on the support of the competent services of the United Nations, whether in developing its early warning capacity or its operational resources in general.

It was from this standpoint that early this year the Department of Peacekeeping Operations began to give thought to the establishment of a working group on the strengthening of peacekeeping capacities in Africa. Designed to coordinate and channel international cooperation with African countries in this sensitive area, that body, once it is created — and the sooner the better — will consolidate the channels of cooperation between the United Nations and the OAU and will play a primary role in exchanges of expert information, training and financial and logistic support. Last August the African countries, for their part, transmitted to the Department of Peacekeeping

Operations, through me, their views and comments on the mandate that should be given to that working group.

However, in spite of certain encouraging signs that have emerged recently, we cannot fail to express our concern at the lack of enthusiasm — and sometimes even lack of interest — regarding Africa, especially when it comes to effectively supporting the peace efforts undertaken on the continent. From this standpoint, the many unfortunate events that occurred before the adoption of the last Security Council resolution on the Democratic Republic of the Congo seemed to abundantly reveal the indifference and selectivity from which Africa suffers in comparison with other parts of the world where the Security Council displays more diligence and initiative.

Various forms of cooperation between the OAU and the United Nations, including its various organs, agencies and programmes, should, in our view, effectively and regularly take shape in the field, as a clear expression of the provisions of the United Nations Charter and a constantly reiterated international will. This is particularly true with regard to the maintenance of peace and security in the world, which is within the scope and competence of the Security Council and which requires particularly sizeable logistic and financial resources far beyond the scant resources the African economies are in a position to provide.

Africa, however, is determined to assume its share of responsibility in this important endeavour in which the members of the OAU and the international community should commit themselves with faith and determination in order to meet the challenges of the moment and of the future. From this standpoint, the thirty-fifth summit of the OAU, held in Algiers, was a renewal of the commitment of African States to overcome their differences, resolve their conflicts and devote themselves to the only fight worth waging — the fight for development.

The Algiers Declaration adopted at the end of that last summit of the millennium is evidence of Africa's will for rehabilitation and of Africans' ambitions for their continent and their continental organization.

The other dimension of cooperation between the United Nations and the OAU on which I would like to dwell briefly relates to cooperation in socio-economic development. Many activities have been undertaken in this area over the past year by the programmes and agencies of the United Nations, and these have been highlighted in the report of the Secretary-General.

We would like to note in this regard the efforts of the African countries in the fight against poverty, economic reform and the creation of favourable conditions for the recovery of their economies. In the context of rampant globalization, these efforts are, however, handicapped by the unfavourable situation in which the majority of African countries now find themselves, the scope of the new sacrifices required by the new facts of the world economy and the vicissitudes of international cooperation in development.

It is paradoxical indeed that in a continent where we find the majority of the least advanced countries and where two of every five people live in a state of absolute poverty, indicators of international contributions for development continue in a downward trend. This is the case, for example, with official development assistance which, according to United Nations statistics, between 1992 and 1997, went down from \$19 billion to less than \$16 billion, at the very time when the economies of the developed countries have never been in better shape.

Africa's share of foreign direct investment was estimated in 1998 at \$5 billion, or 3 per cent of the total world volume, and its participation in world trade flows is simply insignificant. Considerable financial resources, instead of being devoted by African countries to development projects, are every year being used for the payment of the African debt, which at present exceeds \$350 billion, or three times the combined value of the exports of all African countries.

This shows the importance of the social and economic recovery of Africa, to which the United Nations system could make an essential contribution. It also shows the priority Africa and the OAU attach to this sphere of cooperation with the United Nations system. In this regard, I should like to highlight the principal role played by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in a number of African countries and to point out that, in spite of the steady decline in UNDP's resources, it has continued to make Africa its principal area of action and the fight against poverty its priority.

In this regard, even if we must admit that the necessary adaptation of UNDP to the realities of the day should enable it to find more effective means of achieving its objectives, we must at the same time reaffirm the factors that should be considered in its reform process so that it can be undertaken in the enlightened interests of all and with respect for the rules and procedures governing the institution. First, the objective of eradicating poverty should

remain UNDP's highest priority and should not be burdened with any ambiguity or preconditions. Secondly, Africa is the region most affected by poverty, and it must remain the principal area of UNDP action. Thirdly, whatever reforms may ultimately be introduced, the Programme must preserve its international nature; it must be neutral and respectful of the sovereignty of States and must maintain the character that has always made it an organization that enjoys the fondness, respect and confidence of the people of our countries. Fourthly, this reform process must respect the competence of all those taking part in defining the status and the mandate of UNDP — the General Assembly, the Governing Council and the UNDP Administrator himself.

In this regard, we are happy to note the assurances given by the UNDP Administrator, Mr. Mark Malloch Brown, to the African Group last month, in particular as regards the high priority that UNDP will continue to give to Africa and to the eradication of poverty.

Another equally important area where we find cooperation between the United Nations and the OAU is obviously that of humanitarian action. As a logical consequence of the chronically unstable situation in certain parts of the continent and the constantly growing number of refugees generated by its convulsive conflicts, dealing with the humanitarian situation in Africa today is a major challenge to Africans and to the whole international community. Africa has 9 million of the 20 million refugees registered throughout the world, and to this we must add several million more displaced persons.

In this regard, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) continues to give to Africa and the OAU valuable assistance in spite of many constraints. This year marked the thirtieth anniversary of the Cooperation Agreement between the OAU and UNHCR, as well as of the African Convention on Refugee Problems. On 12 July 1999, at the Algiers summit, an OAU prize for exceptional services rendered to refugees and displaced persons in Africa was created and awarded to two African States.

The Sudan hosted in Khartoum, in December 1998, a meeting intended to find solutions for the problems posed by refugees in Africa. One month later a special OAU/UNHCR/International Committee of the Red Cross team was created in Addis Ababa to follow up and implement the recommendations of that conference.

Furthermore, UNHCR and the OAU are cooperating closely in the implementation of a plan of action of the OAU Commission on Refugees, particularly to ensure the mobilization of international resources for the benefit of African refugees.

This is indeed the principal constraint facing humanitarian action in Africa — the absence or inadequacy of resources. Of a total of \$796 million requested in the framework of the consolidated appeal for Africa, only 40 per cent has actually been received. In the circumstances, a number of humanitarian organizations have had to reduce their activities or establish priorities, sometimes having to make painful choices. Whether in Angola, in the Great Lakes region, in Guinea or in the Horn of Africa, tens of thousands of African refugees have thus lost the urgent support they need because of a lack of resources.

The Secretary-General and the Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs have since then issued urgent appeals for the international community to mobilize some \$0.5 billion to make it possible for humanitarian organizations to deal with what could well become a humanitarian catastrophe on the continent. At the same time, appeals launched for other parts of the world have received prompt and satisfactory responses, and the programmes of humanitarian agencies are being fully carried out. All this accentuates the feeling prevailing in Africa that there are first-class refugees and second-class refugees.

In my statement to the Security Council on 29 September 1999 on the subject of the situation in Africa, I pointed out that

“Africa ... expects the rest of the world to accept it as a partner equal in rights and duties and a credible and responsible interlocutor — that is, a fully fledged participant in the conduct of international affairs and the restructuring of the world order.” (*S/PV.4049, p. 11*)

This is the sense and purpose of the draft resolution on cooperation between the United Nations and the OAU (A/54/L.38), which I have the honour to introduce to the Assembly on behalf of the members of the OAU in the hope that it will be adopted.

This year's draft resolution has been examined particularly closely by the African Group, which reviewed all its provisions in order to adapt it and to ensure that it takes into account the concerns of Africa in the areas of prevention and settlement of conflicts, the maintenance of

peace, economic and social development and humanitarian assistance.

It is our hope that this text, which has been the subject of broad agreement among other African partners, will be adopted by consensus, as has been the tradition.

Ms. Rasi (Finland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union on the cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity (OAU). The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the associated countries of Cyprus and Malta, as well as the European Free Trade Association countries members of the European Economic Area, Iceland and Liechtenstein, align themselves with this statement.

The European Union would like to express its appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report submitted under the agenda item under consideration. The report shows clearly how these two organizations are developing closer ties in order to work together effectively in various fields.

The European Union especially welcomes the ongoing cooperation between the United Nations and the OAU aimed at enhancing their mutual capacity for preventing and resolving conflicts in Africa and for coordinating their efforts in that regard, in particular through the regular meetings of the two Secretaries-General and their senior advisers.

In this context, the European Union welcomes the Secretary-General's progress report (S/1999/1008) on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the report on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa.

We are also particularly pleased to note that a United Nations liaison office with the OAU was established in Addis Ababa last year.

Today's debate on United Nations/OAU cooperation takes place at a very critical moment. On the one hand, we are able to observe some signs of political and socio-economic progress. On the other hand, more than a third of African countries are at present, or have recently been, involved in armed conflicts. The European Union is deeply concerned by the extension of armed conflicts, the huge influx of arms and military equipment and the

increasing role of non-State actors in armed conflicts. The European Union cannot but remain deeply concerned that grave breaches of humanitarian law and human rights, the plight of refugees and internally displaced persons, attacks against humanitarian personnel, the use of child soldiers, ethnic hatred and arms trafficking remain among the key problems of regional and international concern.

Peace, security, sustainable development, human rights, democracy and good governance are interdependent. Crises are triggered by a range of factors, including social, ethnic or religious strife, the violation of human rights, poverty, inequitable distribution of and the fight for economic resources and commodities, environmental degradation and large-scale migration. The European Union is of the view that a serious challenge to the international community in Africa arises from a combination of these factors.

The European Union welcomes the renewed commitment of the Security Council to contribute to conflict resolution in Africa, which is reflected in several Security Council resolutions and presidential statements adopted during the past year. It notes the Council's determination to improve further its ability to prevent conflicts and to make its responses to conflicts more efficient and effective, and looks forward to further Security Council activity in this regard. We hope that the expeditious implementation of the many aspects contained in these resolutions will contribute to strengthening further the ties between the United Nations and the OAU.

While stressing the primary responsibility of the Security Council for the maintenance of international peace and security, the European Union considers it essential that African countries and regional organizations play a leading role in conflict prevention and resolution in Africa. We are committed to working in partnership with Africa to secure peace and democracy, respect for human rights and international humanitarian law, political stability and economic and social development. A number of concrete measures have been taken to strengthen African political will, ownership and capacity to focus on the prevention of violent conflicts.

The European Union commends the efforts by African leaders and States and regional and subregional organizations — in particular the Organization of African Unity — to resolve conflicts by peaceful means. Under its common position on conflict prevention and resolution in Africa, the European Union is ready to assist in building capacities for conflict prevention in Africa, particularly

through the OAU and African subregional organizations. We also recognize the importance of regional peacekeeping efforts in Africa and express our support for measures to develop African capacity in this regard. We welcome particularly the development by the OAU of plans to enhance its capabilities in this area and the issuing in October of its programme for strengthening the Conflict Management Centre. Many European Union member States attended the OAU's presentation of its plans to donors earlier this month in Addis Ababa. We will be considering how we can cooperate with the OAU in this area, and we call on other States to do likewise.

The European Union has adopted a Common Position on Human Rights, Democratic Principles, the Rule of Law and Good Governance in Africa. It gives a high priority to a positive and constructive approach with a view to supporting efforts of the OAU, subregional groups and individual countries to promote respect for human rights and good governance.

The European Union has a consultative mechanism with the OAU which we wish to develop further. We will strengthen the dialogue with the OAU and subregional organizations on concrete possibilities for backing their efforts, *inter alia* in the fields of early warning, preventive diplomacy and peacekeeping and of awareness of the importance of respect for human rights and international humanitarian law, the rule of law, a pluralist society, democratic institutions and practices, and a culture of tolerance.

We welcome the OAU's favourable response to the European Union's proposal for the holding, in April 2000, of a summit of the heads of State or Government of the European Union and of Africa. We have started preparations for the summit, which should adopt a balanced approach between political and economic issues, reflecting the global nature of the European Union-Africa partnership in order to ensure concrete results.

The European Union attaches great importance to the regular contacts and dialogue which it holds with regional and subregional organizations in Africa, and we are working to enhance our dialogue, *inter alia* with the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Eastern Africa and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Cooperation between the European Union and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has continued to progress, and a comprehensive dialogue has been established in various areas of cooperation.

Regarding the Great Lakes region, we give full support to the diplomatic efforts of the United Nations and the OAU as well as to those of regional leaders and other concerned personalities to restore peace to the region and promote national reconciliation. The European Union Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region, Mr. Aldo Ajello, will continue to work closely with the relevant organizations and personalities.

The European Union welcomes the signing of the Lusaka ceasefire agreement earlier this year by all parties involved and calls on all parties to implement it fully. The European Union will support the implementation of the Lusaka agreement, provided that the parties respect and implement it.

The European Union adopted, on 15 November last, the Common Position to support the implementation of the Lusaka ceasefire agreement and the process towards peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The European Union will contribute towards operational, non-military expenditure to enable the Joint Military Commission to deploy its observers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo during a six-month period and fulfil its tasks, as specified in its rules of procedure. To this end a reference amount of 1.2 million euro is foreseen. The funds will be channelled through the Organization of African Unity and be covered by a separate agreement with the OAU.

The European Union affirms that lasting peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo can be achieved only through a negotiated peace settlement which is fair to all parties; through respect for the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and for democratic principles and human rights in all States of the region; and by taking account of the security interests of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its neighbouring countries. Once peace is restored, the European Union will be ready to consider long-term cooperation in support of national reconstruction.

The European Union strongly urges the parties involved in the conflict to respect human rights and humanitarian law and to abstain from acts of indiscriminate violence, especially against civilians, and ethnic propaganda and harassment. We urge the parties to secure safe and unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance and its personnel.

The European Union will consider support for the concept of and possible preparations for an international conference on security and cooperation in the Great Lakes

region in order to enhance political stability, conflict management and resolution capacities, and economic integration in the region.

The European Union is deeply dismayed at the resumption of civil war in Angola in December 1998, for which the responsibility lies primarily with UNITA, under the leadership of Mr. Jonas Savimbi. The European Union condemns the targeting of civilian populations, including refugees, and humanitarian organizations, and reiterates that both sides have an obligation to respect the rights of civilians and to stop using non-combatants in the pursuit of military objectives. The European Union is convinced that lasting peace in Angola can be achieved only through political dialogue.

The European Union reiterates its appeal to UNITA to cease military activities and implement its commitments unconditionally and without further delay. The European Union is taking every measure to fully implement the sanctions imposed by the Security Council against UNITA and urges all States to do likewise. It welcomes the decisions contained in Security Council resolution 1237 (1999), aimed at improving the implementation of the sanctions regime against UNITA. In this context, the decision on Angola adopted at the OAU Summit in Algeria is an encouraging step.

The European Union welcomes the Angolan Government's decision to accept a continued multidisciplinary United Nations presence in Angola and is looking forward to its establishment. We consider that a United Nations presence, including a humanitarian rights component, will contribute positively to a peaceful settlement of the Angolan conflict.

The European Union welcomes the efforts of the OAU to bring a negotiated settlement to the border conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia. We strongly support the OAU package of peace agreements and the mediation through its Algerian presidency to find a peaceful settlement to the conflict. We urge both parties to implement the peace agreements and to refrain from hostilities.

With regard to Sierra Leone, the European Union encourages all parties to the peace agreement to do their utmost to foster the peace and reconciliation process in the country. We call on all parties to implement the Lomé Peace Agreement fully and appeal to all combatants to lay down their arms and participate in the disarmament programme.

Regarding the conflict in Somalia, which has taken a terrible toll, especially among civilians, the European Union remains deeply concerned at the Somali leaders' inability to negotiate a peaceful settlement of their disputes. The European Union calls upon both parties in the civil war in the southern Sudan to cooperate constructively and to reach an agreement to end the long-standing conflict. The European Union remains concerned about the human rights situation in the Sudan, although we have noted that some positive developments have taken place. The European Union has decided to start a critical dialogue with the Government of the Sudan, in which issues such as human rights, democracy and the rule of law are key areas.

For the European Union, Africa's sustainable development is a priority. The commitment of the European Union to Africa is based on shared interests, values and objectives. We wish to help Africa achieve peace and stability in order to improve the quality of life of its people. An enabling political environment conducive to human rights, good governance and a vibrant civil society are essential for sustainable development. In this respect, development cooperation has to play an important role.

The European Union remains committed to the fight against poverty and to meeting the target of reducing by half the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by the year 2015. The European Union is the world's leading source of development assistance to Africa, providing more than two thirds of the total official development assistance flows to sub-Saharan Africa. Development assistance plays a key role in supporting the policies pursued by the African countries. This is particularly the case in the least developed countries, three quarters of which are in Africa. Donors and African countries share responsibility for ensuring that development assistance is used effectively.

The European Union is currently negotiating the renewal of the Lomé Convention. The challenge is to put European Union political, trade and economic cooperation on a new footing to cope with poverty, social and political instability and the effects of globalization. For the European Union, an active development policy with the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries is an important component of its global responsibility. We are actively committed to improving the operational coordination of development cooperation among ourselves, with partner Governments and other international development actors, such as the United Nations family and multilateral development banks.

External debt continues to be a serious impediment to sustainable development for many African countries. Unless

the external debt is reduced to sustainable levels, especially for the poorest countries, the benefits of reform are at risk of being swallowed up by increased debt service. The Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative provides a major opportunity for achieving debt sustainability and should be speedily extended to more countries within the terms agreed upon. We welcome the progress recently achieved at the Cologne economic summit and at the annual meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, including the recognition that the central purpose of debt relief is poverty reduction. The 1999 Cologne debt initiative is designed to provide deeper, broader and faster relief through major changes to the HIPC framework.

Africa bears the primary responsibility for creating an environment where development is sustainable and prosperity ensured. Each Government has to take good governance seriously, ensuring respect for human rights and the rule of law and strengthening democratization.

In conclusion, let me underline the importance of close cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity. We want to encourage the strengthening of this process and to bring the expertise and political weight of both Organizations together in order to best face the challenges of the next millennium.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.