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Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues  
Commission Indépendante sur les Questions Humanitaires Internationales

ICHI

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HUMANITARIAN COMMISSION CONCLUDES FIRST PLENARY MEETING

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NEW YORK, 13 November 1983 - The Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues assembled for its first plenary meeting in New York November 11-13 to consider reports dealing with a range of humanitarian issues of global significance.

Essentially, the Commission's task is to propose ways to reduce the suffering of millions of people arising from man-made and natural disasters. They also hope to examine to what extent the causes of that suffering might be removed.

In particular, the Commission considered the escalation of armed conflict, not least in the developing world, and the failure of many governments and warring factions to respect fundamental humanitarian norms of conduct. This failure is a principal concern of the Commission, together with the protection of individuals who are victims of armed conflict.

Of particular value in this connection was the expert evidence of Alexander Hay, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Mr. Hay posed the following questions: "How should one go about stimulating this awareness of humanitarian values among political leaders? How should one foster the humanitarian spirit in politics? How can one demonstrate that in every political situation there are humanitarian aspects which one ignores at one's peril? "

During its deliberations, the Commission also studied the problems of "disappeared persons" in Latin America and other parts of the world.

Statements were heard from the following :

- Hipolito Solari Yrigoyen, former Vice-President of the Argentine Senate and a former "disappeared person". He recently has been appointed to a senior position in the newly elected government of Argentina.
- Julio Cortazar, the well-known Argentine author.
- Representatives of the Association of Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina.

- Marta Casal de Gatti, an Uruguyan now living in Spain. Her husband and pregnant daughter disappeared and subsequently lost their lives. Her son-in-law disappeared in 1977 and is still missing.

The tragedy of the "disappeared" is far from resolution. As Sr. Cortazar testified before the Commission, it is akin to "... a planetary cancer, whose malignant proliferation barely diminishes in one zone only to reappear with virulence in another".

He also strongly supported the adoption of a declaration which would make "disappearances" a recognized international crime. "The countries which refuse to accept it would demonstrate in the most flagrant way their complicity with the worst criminals on earth -- those who commit crimes against human rights, those who commit crimes against Humanity", he said.

Sr. Solari Yrigoyen concluded his statement to the Commission by affirming: "No strategic principle, no doctrine of national salvation, no theory approaching collective security can shipwreck the rights of the people ....".

In their statement to the Commission, which particularly addressed itself to the question of "disappeared" children, the Association of Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo said:

"All the children should be restored to their real families -- recover their identity -- find their proper history and roots, and above all, know that they never were abandoned by their relatives.

"We have to find them before they begin looking for us because this would constitute a new facet of the drama, one too painful even to contemplate."

Sra. Casal de Gatti concluded her statement by saying: "We, the relatives, do not seek vengeance, only justice. We are deeply hurt by this human problem, but have to grow beyond our own sorrow. Today, international opinion supports us in recognizing that no amnesty can cover such crimes. This is a way of preventing forever the massacre of helpless beings."

The Commission noted that the U.N. Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances has received reports of "disappeared persons" in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Cyprus, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Guinea, Indonesia, Lebanon, Lesotho, Mexico, Morocco, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Zaire.

The Commission recorded its unanimous concern at this gross abuse of human rights and condemned the practice unequivocally. It commended the efforts of voluntary agencies in bringing such poignant issues to the attention of the World.

Evidence also was heard on the scale and effect of natural disasters from M'Hamed Essaafi, U.N. under-Secretary General and U.N. Coordinator for Disaster Relief (UNDRO); Anders Wijkman, Secretary General of the Swedish Red Cross; and Jean-Pierre Hocké, Operations Director of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

In concluding its session, the Commission agreed to set up a series of Working Groups, chaired by individual Commissioners, to report on subjects of concern of the Commission. These include statelessness, humanitarian norms in times of armed conflict, including the protection of innocent victims, the expanding deserts and deforestation.

The Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues expects to issue a series of reports from these Working Groups starting in 1984.

The Commission's Members are (in alphabetical order) :

H.H. Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan	Iran
H.R.H. Prince Talal Bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud	Saudi Arabia
H.E. Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns Archbishop of Sao Paulo	Brazil
H.E. Mohammed Bedjaoui Judge, International Court of Justice	Algeria
Mr. Henrik Beer Secretary-General Emeritus League of Red Cross Societies	Sweden
H.E. Mr. Luis Echeverria Alvarez Former President Director-General, Center for Economic and Social Studies of the Third World, Mexico City	Mexico
H.E. Mr. Pierre Graber Former President of the Confederation	Switzerland
Mr. Ivan Head President, International Research Centre of Canada	Canada
H.E. Mr. M. Hidayatullah Vice-President of the Republic	India

Mrs. Aziza Shoukry Hussein President, International Planned Parenthood Federation	Egypt
H.E. Dr. Manfred Lachs Professor of International Law Judge, International Court of Justice	Poland
H.E. Mr. Adam Malik President, 26th Session of the U.N. General Assembly Former Vice-President of the Republic	Indonesia
Mr. Robert McNamara Former Secretary of Defense Former President, World Bank	U.S.A.
H.E. Mr. Lazar Mojsov President, 32nd session of the U.N. General Assembly Federal Secretary for Foreign Affairs	Yugoslavia
H.E. Mr. Mohammed Mzali Prime Minister	Tunisia
Professor Sadako Ogata Institute of International Relations for Advanced Studies on Peace and Development in Asia	Japan
The Rt. Hon. Dr. David Owen, M.P. Former Foreign Secretary	United Kingdom
H.E. Dr. Willibald Pahr Former Foreign Minister	Austria
H.E. Shridath Surendranath Rampal Commonwealth Secretary-General	Guyana
H.E. Mr. Salim A. Salim President, 34th Session of the U.N. General Assembly Foreign Minister	Tanzania
H.E. Mr. Leopold Sedar Senghor Former President of the Republic	Senegal
Mr. Soedjatmoko Rector	U.N. University
H.R.H. Crown Prince Hassan Bin Talal	Jordan
Mrs. Simone Veil Former President, European Parliament Former Health Minister	France
The Hon. E. G. Whitlam Former Prime Minister Former Foreign Minister	Australia

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HUMANITARIAN COMMISSION CONCLUDES FIRST MEETING

GENEVA, 7 July 1983 - The newly-established Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues concluded its first official meeting here today.

The two-day meeting of the Commission, composed at present of twenty-four eminent personalities, decided upon its terms of reference, its life span of three years and had detailed discussions on its work programme. The Commission will address pre-selected humanitarian issues, one after the other.

The members of the Commission reached consensus concerning subjects to be taken up at the next meeting. These include: disaster relief including questions such as desertification and the protection of man and nature in that context; the question of protection of persons in special situations and the observance of humanitarian norms in times of armed conflict.

Led by Sadruddin Aga Khan with Crown Prince Hassan as Co-Chairman, the Commission also elected four Vice-Chairmen: Prime Minister Mohammed Mzali of Tunisia, Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns of Brazil, Mrs Sadako Ogata of Japan, Former Foreign Minister Willibald Pahr of Austria, with Ivan Head of Canada as Treasurer.

The Commission of twenty-four, which includes such well-known figures as former presidents Leopold Senghor of Senegal and Luis Echeverria of Mexico, the Foreign Ministers of Yugoslavia and Tanzania, Lazar Mojsov and Salim A. Salim, former cabinet ministers David Owen of the U.K. and Simone Veil of France, Robert McNamara of the U.S. and Adam Malik of Indonesia, stressed the importance of balanced regional representation. A prominent Indian figure is expected to join the Commission shortly. His addition, along with those who will join later, reflects the desire of the Members that the Commission is widely representative.

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The Commission will convene two-to-three times a year, but the working groups are expected to convene more frequently. Special panel discussions will reflect the Commission's role as a catalyst. More than half of the Commission's funds will be spent on research and on utilizing the world's leading experts on subjects with which the Commission will deal.

Funding will come from governments and private sources.

In pursuing its issue-by-issue approach, the Commission will call upon eminent persons to provide their views to the Commission. The first to appear before the Commission today were Sir Robert Jackson of Australia, a well-known figure in the humanitarian and development fields, and Julia Taft of the U.S., an expert in refugee matters who is at present engaged in research to develop humanitarian concepts for armed forces.

At its inauguration, the Commission received strong support from the United Nations Secretary-General, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar. The Commission will co-operate closely with the existing humanitarian agencies, both governmental and non-governmental. It will particularly call upon the youth of the world to lend its support to the work of the Commission, which will be devoted exclusively to looking into practical ways and means to render contemporary society more humane in its attitudes and actions.

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WORLD LEADERS LAUNCH HUMANITARIAN COMMISSION

Geneva, 5 July 1983 - Twenty-four of the world's leading figures in the humanitarian field established here today an Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues (ICHI).

Its purpose will be to bring to humanitarian problems and their solutions the same top-level expertise, scrutiny and decision that has been applied in international economic and other fields.

The members include Crown Prince Hassan bin TALAL of Jordan, Prime Minister Mohammed MZALI of Tunisia, former Presidents Luis ECHEVERRIA of Mexico and Leopold SENGHOR of Senegal, foreign ministers Lazar MOJSOV of Yugoslavia and Salim A. SALIM of Tanzania, Prince Sadruddin AGA KHAN, former World Bank President Robert MCNAMARA, Mrs. Simone VEIL, former President of the European Parliament, David OWEN, M.P. and former Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom and former Prime Minister Gough WHITLAM of Australia.

Among the specific tasks the Independent Commission has set for itself are:

- review problems and solutions relating to massive population movements such as those caused by natural disasters or political upheavals;
- examine various aspects of vast manpower movements, for example, migrant labourers;
- identify shortcomings and gaps in the existing body of International Humanitarian Law and practice relating to war and peace;
- review methods and means for promoting the protection of human rights; and
- inquire into ways and means to strengthen further international humanitarian institutions and their activities.

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It is problems such as these as well as solutions to them that will receive the Commission's attention.

The Commission had its genesis in the proposal for a new international humanitarian order made in 1981 at the UN General Assembly session, as well as in the growing awareness that the world community's response to the challenges of natural and man-made disasters remained essentially makeshift and fragmentary in nature. Nonetheless, the Commission will be totally independent and operate outside the framework of the United Nations or any other international or national body. Its members will participate in their personal capacity and not as representatives of any government or organization to which they may belong.

As the background document circulated at the time by the Government of Jordan stated:

" The 'quality of life' has steadily degenerated over the past decades. Human rights have, by and large, remained a peripheral issue. Problems of poverty, hunger, illiteracy and uprootedness have not received as much attention as they deserve. The individual human being, the ultimate recipient of all progress, has seen very little come his way in most parts of the world. Whether one looks at the globe in the East-West context or the North-South context, the over-all picture remains grim: we are not adequately prepared for the next century or even the next decade."

Through their collective expertise and influence, the Commission hopes to increase public awareness of important humanitarian issues, promote a climate of détente favouring progress in the humanitarian field, review, where necessary, existing instruments and mechanisms relating to humanitarian issues, and make recommendations for promoting solutions to humanitarian problems.

The Commission's other members are: H.R.H. Prince Talal Bin Abdul Aziz AL SAUD of Saudi Arabia, Cardinal Paulo Evaristo ARNS of Brazil, Archbishop of São Paulo, Mohammed BEDJAOUI of Algeria, Judge at the International Court of Justice, Henrik BEER of Sweden, Secretary-General Emeritus of the League of Red Cross Societies, Pierre GRABER of Switzerland, former President of the Confederation, Ivan HEAD of Canada, President of the International Research Centre of Canada, Manfred LACHS of Poland, Professor of International Law and Judge at the International Court of Justice, Adam MALIK of Indonesia, President of the 26th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations and former Vice-President



of the Republic, Mrs. Aziza HUSSEIN of Egypt, President of the International Planned Parenthood Federation, Mrs. Sadako OGATA of Japan, Professor at the Institute of International Relations for Advanced Studies on Peace and Development in Asia, Willibald PAHR of Austria, former Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs, Shridath Surendranath RAMPHAL of Guyana, Commonwealth Secretary-General and Mr. SOEDJATMOKO, Rector of the U.N. University in Tokyo.

This list represents only those who will be attending the first meeting of the Commission. Other prominent individuals are expected to join in order to ensure an equitable geographical representation.

Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, Secretary-General of the United Nations, Crown Prince Hassan of Jordan, and Raymond Probst, representing the host country, Switzerland, will address the Commission's opening ceremony on Tuesday afternoon, 5 July, after introductory remarks by Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan. The 24 commissioners will convene privately all day Wednesday and will conclude their first meeting at mid-day Thursday, 7 July.

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