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PROVIS IONAL VERBATIM RECORD OF THE SEVENTY-FOURTH MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Thursday, 8 December 1988, at 9.30 a.m.

President: Mr. CAPUTO (President) (Argentina)

later: Mr. ESSY (Vice-President) (Côte d'Ivoire)

Expression of sympathy to the Government and people of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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Fortieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [38]
(continued)

(a) Note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

(b) Draft resolutions

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Mrs. AGNELLI (Italy): I should like to express the solidarity of the Italian Government and people with the Government and people of the Soviet Union in the tragic sufferings caused by the earthquake which occurred yesterday.

As the General Assembly is drawing to a close I should like most sincerely to congratulate you, Mr. President, on behalf of the Government of Italy, and on my own behalf, for having presided over the forty-third session of the General Assembly with pragmatism and competence and for contributing to the advancement of dialogue and consensus.

To praise the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on its fortieth anniversary is a task which is, perhaps, too simple. The long way that we have travelled in these 40 years in our search to broaden and reinforce the protection of the fundamental rights of the individual is visible to all. The credit for those results goes above all to the Declaration, the ethical, political and educational value of which is of the utmost relevance. Moreover, it has provided the

(Mrs. Agnelli, Italy)

foundation for the outstanding work of the United Nations in the establishment of international standards for the protection of human rights.

If we reach back in our minds to the memories of the immediate post-war era, we cannot help but look with satisfaction upon the progress that has been made in the course of those years; yet the system that has been established by the United Nations is, as are all things of this world, certainly not perfect. The universality which characterizes the Declaration did not become throughout the years universal respect for human rights, but by now all the members of the international community recognize the existence of a minimum common denominator which can certainly be considered as a universal standard. This indestructible foundation has been gradually expanding.

The Declaration, throughout its 40 years of life, has been a point of reference for numerous States that have established new constitutions. In fact, such States have incorporated the principles of the Declaration into their respective fundamental laws. A phenomenon of great relevance in this process is the establishment of regional conventions concerning human rights. Paradoxically, the regionalization expressed by the European Convention of 1950, the Inter-American Convention of 1969 and the African Convention of 1981 have given rise not to a fragmentation but rather to an increased homogeneity which has favoured the process of universality. Those pacts have in fact accepted and developed the fundamental guidelines of the Declaration.

It is significant that the principle of non-interference in internal affairs is invoked less and less often whenever the international community turns its attention to the human rights situation in a given country. In that way international vigilance proves to be one of the most appropriate instruments for assuring the fulfilment of obligations assumed by the State for the protection of the individual.

(Mrs. Agnelli, Italy)

The enduring commitment of the United Nations to human rights seems to have reached a juncture that is perhaps more favourable than ever before. The initiatives for peace which we have witnessed have created great hope for humanity. We must not forget that peace and human rights have been closely linked from the very beginning. Respect for human rights was originally conceived as the principal defence of peace in the aftermath of the tragic conflict that shook the world.

We are currently witnessing an ever-growing interest in the field of humanitarian issues. I may recall the results achieved in establishing humanitarian rules in the conduct of armed conflicts; but also the efforts to establish new principles in case of natural and man-made disasters and the defence of categories of people who need special protection in the community in which they live.

As stated in the report of the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues, abstractions such as growth, stability and order are not ends in themselves, but have value only if they bring about the greater welfare of the people. And this proceeds from the recognition that each one of us is no more but no less than a human being.

The new humanitarianism may have extremely useful developments if the principles on which it is founded are enhanced, on the one hand, by the growing role of multilateralism, and on the other, by the wider acceptance by States of the need to sacrifice their own sovereignty whenever human interests are at stake.

Mr. BADAWI (Egypt) (interpretation from Arabic): We have learned with great sorrow the sad news about the earthquake in the Soviet Union and of the large number of victims. I should like to express our deepest condolences to the Government and people of the Soviet Union upon this sad occasion.