

Mr. Secretary-General,

We are gathered here to address yet another human tragedy. Nowhere in the world is the refugee crisis as severe as that which prevails today in Africa. Five million African refugees and many more displaced persons throughout the continent are locked in a grim daily struggle for survival. The dimension of the need is compelling: inadequate food, shelter, water and sanitation. The numbers of refugees are increasing daily. Where the largest concentrations are found, their plight is shared by the citizens of the countries which have given them asylum.

I wish to commend you, Mr. Secretary-General, for personally presiding over this important conference convened by the General Assembly in co-operation with the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), to address these grave problems.

The response of African nations in providing asylum and care for refugees stands as a glowing example of brotherhood and humanity. The Organization of African Unity has promoted and fostered this attitude through political consultations and through the adoption of comprehensive international legal instruments for the protection of refugees.

African countries of asylum have borne an immense burden and one that in some countries has grown far beyond their capacity. Indeed, in certain countries the refugee problem has become the greatest national problem. It overshadows and engulfs all others. In others countries, refugee problems make doubly difficult efforts to meet national development challenges. They compound staggering difficulties inherent in the present international economic situation -- difficulties often exacerbated by drought and other natural disasters.

Mr. Secretary-General, the OAU Conference on the Situation of African Refugees, held in Arusha, Tanzania, in 1979, directed international attention to the deteriorating conditions of ever-increasing numbers of African refugees. It is timely that this United Nations' conference has been called to focus international attention squarely on the gravity of the situation. It is unreasonable to expect African nations to bear the burden without additional assistance from the international community. This conference should at its outcome reflect an agreement that the burden must be more fairly shared.

A preliminary target of \$1.15 billion in assistance has been identified by African countries. The OAU, in consultation with the UNHCR and the other international agencies involved, are making serious efforts to establish priorities. We understand that they have identified as the highest priority providing for