

MEETING ON AID FOR VICTIMS OF THE CONFLICT IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

(Geneva, 29 July 1992)

The magnitude of the refugee problem in the former Yugoslavia, unprecedented in Europe since the Second World War, prompted the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to convene an international meeting in Geneva on 29 July 1992 aimed at mobilizing support for some 2,300,000 people who have fled the fighting since the beginning of the Yugoslav crisis in 1991.

The meeting was presided over by Swiss Federal Councillor Arnold Koller. The representatives of 86 countries and of various intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations attending the meeting heard statements by Mr. Jan Eliasson, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mrs. Sadako Ogata, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and Mr. Cornelio Sommaruga, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

After denouncing what he called "a deliberate plan based on the exclusion of other groups", the ICRC President stated in particular: "I am referring, of course, to the terrible ravages of 'ethnic cleansing', in whose name whole populations are being terrorized, minorities intimidated and harassed, civilians interned on a massive scale, hostages taken, and torture, deportation and summary executions are rife. Such methods, which we thought had been consigned to museums showing the horrors of the Second World War, have become almost common practice in the war-torn territory of what was Yugoslavia."

Noting that despite the ICRC's numerous public appeals and confidential approaches at all levels and to all the parties, breaches of international humanitarian law and of human rights had become almost commonplace, especially as regards the civilian population, Mr. Sommaruga called on the States to use every means at their disposal to seek a political settlement to the conflict. The ICRC, for its part,

pledged to pursue its emergency operations for all victims of the tragedy and to spare no effort in promoting dialogue on humanitarian issues among the parties concerned.

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In another development in Geneva the same day, Mr. Milan Panić, Prime Minister of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and Mr. Mate Granić, Vice Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia, signed an agreement under ICRC auspices providing for the release and repatriation of all prisoners still held in connection with the Croatian conflict.

The agreement stated that, in accordance with Article 118 of the Third Geneva Convention and with the agreements reached at ICRC headquarters on 6 November 1991, about 1,200 prisoners were to be released unconditionally by both parties.
