

**Statement by H.E Mr Anund Priyay Neewoor**  
**Permanent Representative of Mauritius to the United Nations**  
**At**  
**The Meeting of the Security Council**  
**On**  
**West Africa**  
**(The Humanitarian Situation)**  
**8 March 2001**

Mr President,

We thank Mr Rudd Lubbers for his comprehensive briefing on the humanitarian situation on the common borders between Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia.

The dire humanitarian situation portrayed by Mr Rudd Lubbers in his briefing is indeed extremely distressing. The appalling conditions in which the refugees and internally-displaced persons find themselves in both Guinea and Sierra Leone is a matter of grave concern. Unless immediate steps are taken, we would be heading towards a real human catastrophe. The situation is certainly going to further aggravate with the beginning of the rainy season in West Africa.

Mr President,

While we derive some comfort from the fact that the UNHCR and the World Food Programme have been able to dispatch some food convoys to the Parrot's Beak region where both the Sierra Leonean refugees and the internally-displaced persons in Guinea had not received any food in five months, we are particularly concerned by the predicament faced by the most vulnerable victims of the situation namely the old people, women and children. The death rate among children under five years in the refugee camps is still very high. According to a report recently issued by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) one third of infants born in the Kenema District in Sierra Leone die before reaching their first birthday. Such a situation cannot be allowed to continue.

Mr President,

My delegation welcomes the démarche by the UNHCR, in particular Mr Rudd Lubber's personal involvement, in establishing safety corridors for the return of the refugees. It is our hope that both the Government of Guinea and the military will extend

their full cooperation to the UNHCR for the operation of the safety corridors within the Guinean territory in particular along the main road between Guéckédou and Kissidougou as well as the route leading to Conakry. Let me emphasize that we are indeed very grateful to the Government of Guinea for hosting such vast number of refugees in spite of its own economic and other difficulties.

We are aware that some humanitarian organizations working on the ground in Guinea do not believe that safety corridors for the return of the refugees to Sierra Leone can work. According to them, the refugees would not like to utilize the safety corridors for fear that no matter what guarantees are secured for safe passage they may be attacked by the RUF since the corridors would pass through rebel-held areas. These organizations prefer that the refugees be temporarily re-located to northern Guinea until the situation improves for them to go back to Sierra Leone safely. We would appreciate the views of Mr Lubbers on this.

Mr President,

The impact of the civil war in Sierra Leone and its spill over effect into Guinea have been the principal causes of misery suffered by innocent civilians on both sides of the borders of the two countries. It is imperative that the leaders of the Mano River Union address the issue at the highest political level. In this regard we welcome the appeal made by H.E. the President of Mali and Chairman of ECOWAS to the leaders of the Mano River Union to urgently meet at summit level to seek a negotiable solution to the crisis.

Mr President,

My delegation believes that it is equally important for the Government of Liberia, in particular for the President of Liberia, to be fully involved in finding a comprehensive solution for the safe return home of all refugees. In this regard, we wish to reiterate the demand made to the President of Liberia, in the Security Council Resolution adopted yesterday, to stop all support provided to the RUF in Sierra Leone. The President of Liberia should also fulfill his commitments towards the UNHCR to adhere to the basic principles agreed to in his discussions with Mr Lubbers for ensuring a safe passage for the refugees.

Mr President,

We have no doubt that the community of donors and the international financial institutions will respond to the mammoth humanitarian situation existing to-day in West Africa and will contribute generously to alleviate the sufferings of refugees. In this regard, we welcome the meeting of the officials from the World Bank and IMF and the representatives of the Guinea Government to assess the country's social service needs in the wake of the humanitarian situation along its two common borders with Liberia and Sierra Leone.

My delegation agrees with Mr Lubbers that UNAMSIL must be strengthened as an urgent measure to facilitate the return of the refugees to Sierra Leone. Mauritius will support the proposal in the Security Council.

Mr Lubbers has also spoken about the need to seriously address the problem of poverty which further exacerbates conflicts in the Mano River Union sub-region. We share his assessment and call upon the UN bodies concerned to redouble their efforts in this respect. We also urge the international community and the Bretton Woods institutions to put in additional efforts towards poverty alleviation in the region.

I cannot conclude, Mr President, without paying warm tribute to UNHCR and all the NGOs which are engaged in assisting the refugees.

I thank you.