

GENERAL
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Chairman : Mrs. Ana FIGUEROA (Chile).

In the absence of the Chairman, Mr. Dehousse (Belgium), Vice-Chairman, presided.

Refugees and stateless persons (*continued*)

[Item 30]*

Problems of assistance to refugees : reports of the International Refugee Organization and of the High Commissioner for Refugees (A/1884 (chapter VI), A/1948, A/2011, A/C.3/563) (*continued*)

[Item 31]*

GENERAL DEBATE (*continued*)

1. Mr. CORLEY SMITH (United Kingdom) said that the refugee problem was one of the most important questions on the Third Committee's agenda. It was also one of the relatively few questions in which the Committee's decisions would directly affect the welfare of thousands of human beings.

2. The Committee could not unfortunately remove the causes of the refugee problem; they could only be tackled through the easing of international tension. The fear which drove men and women from their homes could be dispelled only by the advent of a spirit of tolerance throughout the world.

3. The noteworthy results achieved by the International Refugee Organization had not solved the problem, since there were residual groups of refugees which IRO had been unable to settle, and new refugees were daily arriving in Western Europe, where the demographic situation was such that some countries were already experiencing great difficulties. The International Refugee Organization itself had recognized that the only solution for most of those residual refugee groups was to settle them in the countries where they were, and advocated that they be assimilated there through broad programmes of economic development.

4. The United Kingdom Government shared that view. It was most important that refugees should speedily be placed on an equal footing with nationals of the countries where they were resident, and should not receive a special economic or social status, either from the High Commissioner or from the government concerned. It was true, of course, that an improvement in the economic conditions in a country would not automatically solve the refugee problem, but good economic development plans would take into account the potential contribution of the refugee population. Refugees were not a mere drain upon national resources as was too often assumed; they could do much to enrich a country through their knowledge, skill and labour.

5. The United Kingdom Government agreed with the distinction made by the High Commissioner in his report (A/2011) between the problem of emergency relief and that of assimilation, the latter being a long-term problem. The problem of emergency relief was fortunately of such a scale that it could be almost entirely dealt with through voluntary agencies.

6. The residual groups of refugees formerly under the mandate of IRO and remaining in the Middle East, Turkey, Spain and Portugal could be handled in that way. The circumstances of the refugees in Trieste would be much improved if they were allowed to circulate freely in Italy. In that connexion, there appeared to be some discrepancy between the High Commissioner's report and the report of IRO concerning the attitude of the Italian Government towards refugees. The United Kingdom delegation had learned with satisfaction that the High Commissioner was investigating the status of the refugees who were being driven into Turkey from Bulgaria.

7. The emergency relief situation was undoubtedly most critical in the Far East, and the United Kingdom Government agreed with the High Commissioner and IRO that the refugees in Shanghai headed the list for emergency relief. Serious also, but not so grave, was the plight of the refugees in Samar; owing to the gene-

* Indicates the item number on the General Assembly agenda.

rosity of the Philippine Government they could at least remain there until a permanent solution was found.

8. With regard to the problem of assimilation, the United Kingdom delegation hoped that the High Commissioner would maintain close contact with the International Labour Organisation and the international migration agency emerging from the Brussels Conference, in order to ensure that refugees might enjoy equal opportunities for immigration with other candidates, and that priority might be given to refugees who had obtained immigration papers but had been unable to emigrate before the discontinuance of IRO. As regards refugees who could not be employed and must be assimilated locally, the United Kingdom delegation believed that the problem should be solved not by granting them supplementary relief, but by integrating them into the economic life of the countries where they were resident. It was to be hoped that the High Commissioner would maintain close contact with the States and specialized agencies concerned, when they were working out plans for financing and implementing economic reconstruction.

9. With regard to the High Commissioner's recommendation for the establishment of a relief fund, the United Kingdom delegation was prepared to agree to the High Commissioner being authorized to launch the necessary appeals, if it was understood that such relief would be limited to the most necessitous groups. It should also be clearly understood that his delegation's vote for a proposal in that sense would in no way commit his Government to contributing to the fund; the United Kingdom Government could take no decision in that regard until it had studied the plans for the administration of the fund. The United Kingdom had already contributed over \$ US 76 million to IRO, a contribution exceeded only by that of the United States of America, and had taken in some 233,000 refugees, a figure again exceeded only by the United States.

10. Dealing with the High Commissioner's observations on the budget reductions recommended by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, Mr. Corley Smith said that his Government did not deny that there was a very close relationship between the nature and scale of the work which the High Commissioner would be able to undertake and the funds voted by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the Fifth Committee. It considered, however, that the responsibility of the Third Committee was to lay down the guiding lines for the High Commissioner's general policy, while it was for the Fifth Committee to study in detail any proposals concerning the administration and finances of the High Commissioner's Office.

11. The Third Committee must not lose sight of that distinction when it considered the question of the number of field offices to be established in 1952 and the strength of their staffs. Those offices accounted for the bulk of the funds requested by the High Commissioner. Broadly speaking, the United Kingdom delegation was convinced that some branch offices would have to be opened. But as the magnitude of the High Commissioner's task was still unknown, it might be enough, for the moment, to set up fewer, or at any rate smaller, offices; the number of offices and their size could always

be increased later on. However, those technical details should be discussed in the Fifth Committee.

12. The High Commissioner had voiced some doubts as to the meaning of the term "administrative expenditures" used in the Statute of the High Commissioner's Office (General Assembly resolution 428 (V), annex). The United Kingdom delegation interpreted the term as meaning those expenditures arising directly from the performance of the purely administrative functions of the High Commissioner, as defined in his Statute. The Statute deliberately introduced a distinction between administrative and other expenditures, because underlying it was the general view taken by the Third Committee when the Statute was drafted at the fifth session of the General Assembly, that the High Commissioner was primarily responsible for dealing with the refugee problem as a whole, and not with individuals.

13. The United Kingdom delegation would be prepared to support a proposal inviting States to sign the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.¹ That convention, which had been signed by the United Kingdom, was perhaps not so liberal as the United Kingdom Government had wished, but it represented a very real advance and provided firm ground for international agreement.

14. In conclusion, the United Kingdom delegation expressed its confidence in the High Commissioner, congratulated him on the zeal and devotion with which he had approached his work, and assured him of the United Kingdom Government's support in carrying out his task.

15. Mr. DA COSTA REGO (Brazil) said that his country was always favourably disposed towards the efforts made by the Western democracies to improve the lot of the refugees. If practical solutions were to be found, however, the Committee must not be carried away by excessive idealism; it must bear in mind the realities of the situation, in particular the national legislations of the various countries, which could not renounce the right of choosing the persons to be admitted to their territories. The principle of an advisory committee for the assistance of the High Commissioner had been approved by the General Assembly (resolution 428 V, annex, para. 4), and the High Commissioner was proposing the establishment of eleven field offices, two of which would be situated in Latin America. Brazil believed those measures to be in accordance with the terms of the Charter of the United Nations, and would support any action likely to bring a rapid solution of the refugee problem.

16. Mr. ROCHEFORT (France) said that the lack of enthusiasm shown during the discussion seemed to indicate that governments were no longer interested in the refugee problem. In actual fact, the problem still retained the same importance for those governments which had set up IRO, and those which were directly affected; many of them were sparing no effort in that respect. Reference had been made, very relevantly of the Naples

¹ See United Nations Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Status of Refugees and Stateless Persons: *Final Act and Convention relating to the Status of Refugees* (Palais des Nations, Geneva, 1951).

conference organized by ILO, and the Brussels Conference, where those same governments had urged that the refugee question be accorded high priority in immigration schemes. He was grateful to his Danish colleague for having recalled (373rd meeting) the very valuable work of the Committee of Experts on the Problem of Refugees and Overpopulation, a committee of the Council of Europe. He pointed out that during the liquidation period, IRO was attempting to deal with problems that were still outstanding, and that, recently, a number of governments, in a gesture of international solidarity, had extended a welcome to groups of "hard-core" refugees.

17. It was not out of any lack of interest that the French delegation had so far refrained from taking part in the discussion, and the reason for the Third Committee's apparent lack of enthusiasm was doubtless either that it was not quite ready to deal with the problem, or that the conditions in which the debate had been initiated were unfavourable. The Committee had, in fact, had to break off in the midst of an absorbing discussion; and, in addition, its work was hampered by the interference of the Fifth Committee and by financial considerations which it could not ignore. That was regrettable, since principles and policies should be examined on their own merits, independently of the cost of implementation. In reviewing the position of his own country, he would start with a number of general observations, since the role of the Third Committee was rather to outline a policy than to issue recommendations on points of detail.

18. The Committee was examining the problems of the High Commissioner's Office for the third time: 1949 had been a year of preparation, 1950 a year of consolidation, and 1952 would be year of practical achievement. The Committee was called upon not only to take note of the first achievements, but also to examine the general policy and principles of the scheme, and so guide the High Commissioner in his work. While the French delegation was pleased to note that the High Commissioner, in his report (A/2011), had accentuated problems of assistance, it regretted that he had failed to supply, in his first report, the details for which the French delegation had asked at the Economic and Social Council's session in Geneva. Mr. Rochefort was therefore obliged to repeat his criticisms which referred to two points.

19. It was regrettable, first, that the report failed to draw a clear enough distinction between the different problems of refugees in Europe, according to whether the refugees were resident in over-populated countries or not; and secondly, that it conveyed the impression that the refugees resettled in Europe were generally in a bad way.

20. To take the first point, the figure of 400,000 refugees resident in France was given, in paragraph 16 of the report, alongside the figures for Germany and Austria, although the position of the refugees varied fundamentally as between those countries. There was in fact not one refugee problem, but several; merely to add up the total number of refugees resident in various countries was to misrepresent the question, to make it appear greater than it was, and to hide the fact that,

for the international community as a whole, resettlement in those countries of Europe constituted much less problem than a solution.

21. His second observation applied to paragraph 22 of the report, which showed that the position of refugees unable to emigrate overseas would always be serious. He asked whether the various European countries which, since 1920, had accepted so many hundreds of millions of refugees, could subscribe to that statement. France, at all events, could not. The countries of Europe maintained that they were still habitable, and that if refugees remained there, it was not always for lack of a chance to go elsewhere, but because they wished to stay.

22. Nor was it entirely true to say that local assimilation was the only possible solution for the "hard-core" groups. At the instigation of IRO, the countries of immigration had opened their doors more widely; often, also, workers who had emigrated brought out their elderly relatives to join them. The generous attitude of the United States of America in that respect should not be forgotten. In 1948, at the General Council of IRO, one delegation had urged that the position of the "hard-core" groups should be given first priority. That delegation had been accused of being unrealistic, but the result of its lack of realism had been the allocation of a sum of \$ US 22 million for those groups. What had been done under IRO could be done again on another plane.

23. In his opinion, the prospects for immigration were less gloomy than they had been painted. On the other hand, it must not be thought that the assimilation problem was simple, or that it was easier for European countries to naturalize refugees who were unadaptable and unfit to work than it was for overseas countries to grant them entry visas. Any attempt to link asylum and naturalization too closely would merely lead to a less liberal policy of asylum, and would force the European countries to erect other barriers to take the place of the sea.

24. Dealing with the question of branch offices, he thought it regrettable that the Third Committee should be asked to decide on that purely administrative question, instead of confining itself to laying down the policy to be followed by those offices. He asked whether the High Commissioner's Office should be regarded as a kind of government for refugees, as had been suggested on one occasion by a representative of the High Commissioner; whether it should, as the General Assembly apparently thought it should, be regarded as an instrument for collaboration with the national authorities. The High Commissioner seemed to favour the second thesis, which was more in line with current international conceptions. The first, moreover, involved the danger that certain national governments might feel authorized thereby to disclaim responsibility for the refugee problem and hand it over to the international authorities. But the task was so heavy that it should first be assumed by the national authorities and he hoped that the High Commissioner, rather than recommend naturalization, which was in many cases impossible, would encourage closer collaboration between the various administrations so that in every country, the refugees might cease to form an isolated group cut off from the national community.

France had no objection in principle to the establishment of a branch office in Paris, but it was not sufficiently clear to the French delegation what policy the High Commissioner intended to pursue through the agency of such offices. That was the question the Committee had to consider.

25. In conclusion, he summarized his country's position. The principle of branch offices was not in question. The question of economies came within the competence of the Fifth Committee. France had no objection to the assistance fund, but regretted the absence of any concrete programme and reserved its position with regard to any future contribution. The advisability of a resolution inviting governments to accede to the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees seemed doubtful since it might have the appearance of a reprimand addressed to governments which, for various reasons unrelated to the refugee problem, had not yet been able to accede to the convention. Lastly, in regard to the long-term projects, France had always been conscious of the need to do something for refugees, but problems must be ranged in their proper order and refugees were only one aspect of other much vaster problems, such as that of over-population.

26. On that basis, and if he followed an elastic policy, one that took into account every facet of the problem, the High Commissioner would find the French delegation ready to support him before the various international authorities, just as it had always supported the policy of the International Refugee Organization.

27. Mrs. MARSHALL (Canada) thanked the High Commissioner for the effort he had made to supply the Third Committee with further information but wished to ask for additional details on certain points before she could come to a decision on his suggestions.

28. The High Commissioner seemed to wish the General Assembly to authorize the establishment of field offices and also to agree to his launching an appeal for voluntary contributions from governmental and non-governmental sources.

29. The Canadian delegation had been glad to hear the High Commissioner say that field offices would only be set up where they deemed essential and that they would not employ more staff than efficiency demanded. She whole-heartedly approved those principles but wondered why the High Commissioner thought it necessary for each office to have an official in charge of administrative matters when the whole staff would consist of only three to five members. Such questions would, of course, be more appropriate to the Fifth Committee, but the Canadian delegation raised them in the Third Committee in order to show how closely it felt the principles set forth by the High Commissioner should be adhered to.

30. The Canadian delegation had some doubt as to the number of field offices which the High Commissioner suggested should be opened in Europe. It wondered whether, if the London office was to ensure liaison with Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the other Commonwealth countries, and since there was already the High Commissioner's Office at Geneva, it would really be necessary to set up offices in Brussels and Paris.

31. The Canadian delegation hoped that the High Commissioner would be granted the necessary powers to carry out his duties effectively. It realized that the establishment of offices in certain regions might help to achieve that aim and would give any proposal to that effect sympathetic consideration, provided the principles of efficiency and economy received due attention.

32. It would be desirable to have more specific information on the proposal concerning the appeal for the collection of voluntary contributions. In suggesting the establishment of a special assistance fund of about three million dollars the High Commissioner had based his figure on the funds supplied to refugees in 1951 through IRO and other assistance agencies. However, it would appear that in many areas IRO had been able to organize local relief for refugees, so that the amount of international assistance still needed might be reduced accordingly.

33. In any event, the Canadian delegation felt that it was not sufficient to indicate the distribution of the three million dollars by areas; in order to justify a plan of that kind, it would be necessary to know exactly how many refugees would need assistance in addition to that already supplied by ordinary government assistance services. She could not support the principle of an international assistance programme without some assurance that national assistance programmes were not or might not suffice.

34. The provision of international assistance should be regarded as a purely exceptional measure. The Canadian delegation thought that the High Commissioner's first duty was effectively to discharge the functions already assigned to him by the General Assembly (Assembly resolution 428 (V)). He should also, within the limits of the resources at his disposal, contribute to the implementation of other projects which might lessen the difficulties with which certain groups of refugees were faced. It was to be hoped, therefore, that the High Commissioner would try to co-operate as closely as possible with local authorities with a view to assisting refugees within the territories of those authorities, before appealing for aid from the international community.

35. According to paragraph 10 of his Statute, the High Commissioner was authorized to administer funds reaching him from public or private sources for the assistance of refugees, but he had no right to solicit such funds. If a special appeal was to be made, the reasons for it should be indicated in detail and it should be backed by specific estimates. The Canadian delegation was sure that the High Commissioner would do all that he could to provide such information, in order to enable governments to estimate the grounds for any appeal which might be addressed to them. The High Commissioner no doubt realized the difficulties which would face any government if it were invited regularly to supply temporary relief to refugees, without any certainty that parallel long-term projects were being pursued for the removal of the circumstances that had brought about the straits to which the refugees were reduced. In other words, it was impossible to regard the activities of the High Commissioner's Office as capable of replacing effective programmes designed to achieve a final solution of the refugee problem. She wished to

make it clear that her remarks concerned only particular points of the High Commissioner's statement and report and that the Canadian Government regarded the work done by the High Commissioner's Office, and in particular the preliminary work of organization, as satisfactory.

36. Her country had given many proofs of its interest in the refugee problem and made its contribution towards solving it. That interest had not declined and Canada warmly desired to assist the High Commissioner, with a view to increasing the effectiveness of his work and lightening the burden of his responsibilities.

37. Mr. DONS (Norway) said that Norway had from the first taken unfailing interest in the refugee problem and had been happy to contribute to the work of IRO. The Norwegian Government, which had already signed the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, intended to ask Parliament for authorization to ratify the convention as soon as the necessary changes had been made in Norwegian social legislation.

38. The Norwegian delegation felt, like the Danish delegation (373rd meeting), that to carry out his duties effectively the High Commissioner would need a number of field offices. It was not for the Third Committee to determine the number of such offices but it was its duty to decide on the principle of their establishment and to provide information on which the Fifth Committee could base its decision.

39. He agreed with the Danish and United Kingdom representatives, that the High Commissioner ought to be able to appeal to governments, international organizations and perhaps even private persons with a view to obtaining voluntary contributions which would help to relieve refugees in distress. It did not, however, follow that the Norwegian Government undertook to reply favourably to any appeal which the High Commissioner might be authorized to address to governments under any such resolution.

The meeting rose at 4.55 p.m.