



Wednesday, 2 January 1952, at 11 a.m.

Palais de Chaillot, Paris

**C O N T E N T S**

Refugees and stateless persons .....	Page
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) .....	} 151

*Chairman: Mrs. Ana FIGUEROA (Chile).*

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

**Refugees and stateless persons**

[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]\*

1. The CHAIRMAN trusted that the absence of Mrs. Figueroa, Chairman of the Third Committee, would be short.

2. At its 371st meeting, the Committee had decided to suspend for the time being its consideration of the draft international covenant on human rights in order to take up the question of refugees and stateless persons and that of problems of assistance to refugees, items 30 and 31 respectively of the General Assembly's agenda.

3. He reminded the Committee that draft resolutions relating to the draft international covenant on human rights should be submitted to the Secretariat before 6 p.m. on Wednesday, 2 January, and amendments before 2 p.m. on Saturday, 5 January.

4. He declared the general debate on items 30 and 31 open.

**GENERAL DEBATE**

5. Mr. VAN HEUVEN GOEDHART (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the Third Committee, whose main duty was to deal with social, humanitarian and cultural questions, was guided by the same principles as the Office of the United

Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which should not engage in any activities of a political nature.

6. The refugee problem continued, at the beginning of 1952, to be distressingly acute. If the fact was considered that a country like Austria, for example, still had 70,000 refugees, mostly living in camps, it was easy to understand the desire to see the general problem solved and the necessary protection granted to all refugees.

7. It was no secret that the refugee problem, with which several international organizations had been concerned since the end of the Second World War, was far from being solved. Everyone was also aware that the International Refugee Organization which, under the direction of Mr. Kingsley, had accomplished the remarkable task of resettling over one million refugees, was closing down. In spite of all that had been done, there would still remain, when IRO finally ceased to exist, a considerable number of refugees—about 400,000—for whom no provision had been made, and the General Council of IRO had itself stated that although, as a whole, the refugee problem throughout the world was not of sufficient magnitude to justify the maintenance of IRO, it was nevertheless so grave in terms of human suffering that it called for urgent consideration by the United Nations (A/1948, para. 19).

8. The High Commissioner associated himself wholeheartedly with that statement and added that the problem of the "hard core" of refugees was not the only one that he was called upon to solve; he also had to provide protection for over 300,000 Austrian *Volksdeutsche* and new refugees numbering 15,000 or 20,000 each year.

9. It was not possible to state the exact number of refugees. The Rockefeller Foundation, in April 1950, had decided to grant the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees a sum not exceeding \$US100,000 for the purpose of carrying out an objective analytical study of the refugee problem. A preliminary report

\* Indicates the item number on the General Assembly agenda.

had just been completed, and a final one would be submitted by the middle of 1952<sup>1</sup>. However, before the results of that investigation were known, it could be said with certainty that the number of refugees under the mandate of the High Commissioner amounted to at least 1,500,000, and probably considerably more.

10. The question was to see what could be done by the United Nations for those refugees in view of the closing down of IRO, and exactly what the task of the High Commissioner should be. Mr. van Heuven Goedhart announced that his report (A/2011) dealt only with the first five months of his term of office; he would not repeat what he had stated therein but would devote himself more particularly to recent events and to the question of field offices.

11. As regards the functions of the High Commissioner's Office, the most notable event which had occurred since June 1951 was the adoption of the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees<sup>2</sup>. The High Commissioner had submitted a report on that subject (A/2011, part II) published on 1 September 1951. The number of signatories on that date was fourteen, and since then the Federal Government of Germany had signed the convention, Italy had indicated its intention of doing so, and there was every reason to believe that Greece would also sign it. He was aware of the omissions in the convention, but he thought that, as a whole, it marked a real advance in the granting of human rights to refugees. He therefore hoped that the six ratifications required for its entry into force would soon be obtained and that a large number of States would accede to the convention, which would make it possible to improve the status of refugees in the countries which had ratified it.

12. The Statute of the High Commissioner's Office (General Assembly resolution 428 (V), annex) provides that the High Commissioner should keep in touch with the governments of the countries of residence of refugees, and consult them with regard to the need for appointing representatives. In any country recognizing that need, a representative approved by the government of that country might be appointed.

13. Bearing that need in mind, the High Commissioner's Office had established field offices in Bonn, Vienna and Washington to keep governments, refugees and the voluntary organizations responsible for providing assistance to refugees in touch with one another. Another field office was to be opened in Brussels on 15 January 1952. The High Commissioner had also had conversations with the Greek and Italian Governments, both of which had recognized the need to establish similar offices in their countries. He hoped to be able to set up other offices; that, however, would only be possible if the High Commissioner's Office were provided with sufficient funds.

<sup>1</sup> For further information on this subject, see document A/2011, para. 11.

<sup>2</sup> 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).

14. In the second half of 1951, experience had shown how necessary it was to ensure close co-operation between the High Commissioner's Office and the voluntary organizations providing assistance to refugees. Those organizations were no longer able to rely on aid from IRO, and their resources were dwindling just at the time when their help was most urgently needed. Without the field offices, the work of the High Commissioner's Office could not be effective, and he hoped that the Third Committee which had, to a certain extent, supervised the activities of his office, would see its way to making the necessary decision. He added that the lessons of the past should not be forgotten, and recalled that the question of establishing offices to represent a high commissioner's office for refugees had already been considered by the League of Nations. On 28 September 1923, Dr. Nansen had emphasized the need for delegations of the High Commission instead of national commissions and had said that when an attempt had been made to save money by withdrawing the delegations of the High Commission the refugees had got into enormous difficulties and endured great sufferings, and some had even died<sup>3</sup>. Mr. van Heuven Goedhart thought that past experience should be borne in mind and that it must be recognized that the refugees could not be effectively protected by means of a single central office whose only means of action were the exchange of letters and the submission of reports.

15. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was not entrusted solely with the task of international protection, but had also to seek lasting solutions of the refugee problem by assisting governments which were at the time confronted by very considerable difficulties. In that connexion he stated that some weeks previously he had received a report to the effect that a large number of cases of tuberculosis had occurred among the refugees in the Trieste area. Upon receipt of the report, he had asked the World Health Organization whether it could send a specialist to the area in question in order to study the situation. The World Health Organization immediately responded by sending to Trieste Dr. Marc Daniel, who devoted two weeks to a thorough study of the situation and then submitted to the High Commissioner's Office an extremely disquieting account in which he stated that there were from 350 to 450 established cases of tuberculosis, 260 of them among the refugees living in the camps. The situation of the refugees in Trieste was, moreover, only one example. Aid had also to be given to the 2,000 refugees from Shanghai who had so far been receiving material assistance from IRO, but who were liable to find themselves in a very desperate situation when IRO ceased to exist. The 200 refugees from the island of Samar in the Philippines, at least 70 of whom were suffering from tuberculosis, also needed aid.

16. He stated that it was not possible to help all refugees. He considered, however, that every effort should be made to deal primarily with the needy cases or, in other words, those making what had so far been called the "hard-core cases", which was incidentally an

<sup>3</sup> See *League of Nations, Records of the fourth Assembly, Text of the debates*, 18th plenary meeting.

expression to be deplored when used in reference to human beings. For such purposes a minimum of \$US3 million must be available.

17. There was no disputing the fact that to afford a refugee the assistance necessary to prevent his dying of hunger did not constitute a solution, but it did make it possible to gain time. For his own part, he was convinced that the solution of so complex a problem as that of the refugees called for a combination of various measures. A fund must be created to ensure that aid could be granted in urgent cases to certain categories of refugees; the implementation of long-range programmes for assimilation in various receiving countries should be promoted, and the migration of refugees who fulfilled the conditions of resettlement stipulated by the receiving countries should be encouraged.

18. Under his terms of reference, the High Commissioner had no authority to establish of his own accord long-term programmes for the assimilation of refugees, and all he could do was to encourage the appropriate organizations to take action to facilitate that process.

19. It would be both incorrect and dangerous to assert that migration represented the only solution of the refugee problem, but it certainly helped to reduce the difficulties encountered in connexion with the solution of the problem. Migration could only afford a perfect solution if governments were prepared to receive refugees irrespective of their age, state of health and ability to work. Such was not the case, however. For quite understandable reasons, governments generally admitted to their territories only those persons whose presence would be economically advantageous. Restrictions on emigration were responsible for a large number of individuals belonging to the "hard core" of refugees being refused admission to certain countries; in the case of such refugees, therefore, their assimilation and absorption by the countries in which they were living represented the only possible remedy.

20. He hoped that a solution could be found for the urgent problems to which he had just referred.

21. He paid a tribute to the help he had received from the staff of the High Commissioner's Office during 1951, and expressed the hope that the Third Committee would study the problem of the refugees with the interest and attention it deserved. He felt certain that the recommendations approved by the Committee would enable the High Commissioner's Office to perform useful work in 1952.

22. Mrs. ROOSEVELT (United States of America) and Mr. BAROODY (Saudi Arabia) wished the High Commissioner to state what he desired the Third Committee to do, in order to save members from embarking on too general a debate.

23. Mr. HARRY (Australia) associated himself with the wish expressed by the representatives of Saudi Arabia and the United States of America. The High Commissioner might go more thoroughly into the ques-

tion of field offices, indicate the needs which would be met by those whose establishment had been proposed, and explain why permanent representation in a country was preferable to a mission.

24. Mr. VAN HEUVEN GOEDHART (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the matters which the Third Committee must discuss before they could be considered by the Fifth Committee were clearly indicated in the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (A/1853, chapter III, part IV, section 20a).

25. In reply to the question asked by the Australian representative, he stated that the minimum number of field offices required at that time was eleven. He did not think the time ripe for giving the reasons for setting up particular offices. The advantages of permanent representation over a mission were in his opinion immense. The refugee problem in a given country had a variety of aspects and was constantly changing. Thus, refugees were frequently the victims of discrimination sanctioned by the law, had no facilities for obtaining information which would enable them to improve their lot, and were frequently unable to travel for lack of the necessary papers and permits. It was hard to see how they could be helped by someone sent to the country from time to time. The representative must, on the other hand, keep in daily touch with events and in close contact with the authorities of the country to help it solve the problem and to protect the refugees' interests. Moreover, it was accepted practice for nations to maintain permanent representatives with one another, and refugees were simply a people without a government. From a financial point of view, too, it was certainly preferable to have permanent representation in a country, by a very small staff, rather than to send out several successive missions with very heavy travelling expenses and allowances.

26. He indicated in that connexion what the staff of field offices should comprise. In his opinion, a field office ought to consist of at least six officials, and that number could not be reduced. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions believed that the High Commissioner's Office would be able to use the services of other United Nations organs. He paid a tribute to the co-operative spirit he had found in all the specialized agencies, but he did not believe it would be possible to employ as representatives of the High Commissioner's Office people without any knowledge of the refugee problem or for whom refugee work would only be a secondary activity. He was certain that such a practice would not result in economy, that it would in no way constitute an improved approach to the problem, and that the refugees would be the losers by it. He pointed out that the refugee problem was extremely complicated and required all the time and all the attention of qualified experts. The General Assembly had assumed grave responsibilities with respect to refugees and it must discharge them.

27. The Third Committee had to take a decision on refugee assistance funds. The High Commissioner's

terms of reference did not allow him to make appeals without the consent of the General Assembly. He formally asked the Assembly to authorize him to solicit contributions, without which he would be unable to help refugees in certain areas where their position was particularly critical.

28. Lastly, he thought that the Third Committee should make known its views on the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, and urgently requested States to accede to that convention; their accession would strengthen the position of the High Commissioner's Office.

29. Mr. FRIIS (Denmark) said that the Third Committee would without any doubt attach great importance to the reports of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and to his moving statement on behalf of the refugees, as well as to the facts and points of view given by the Director-General and the General Council of IRO. It was for the General Assembly to discharge its responsibilities. Although the problems to which the existing situation gave rise were not sufficiently vast to justify the maintenance of IRO, they were none the less so serious from a humanitarian point of view that the United Nations should immediately seek their solution.

30. In his view, the General Assembly should first pay a tribute to the International Refugee Organization, which had succeeded in repatriating and resettling over one million people in Europe and elsewhere. The fact remained, however, that of the refugees dealt with by IRO there were still large numbers that would need more or less substantial assistance for some time to come. The fact that the General Assembly was devoting special attention to such refugees would not mean that it was forgetting refugees in other parts of the world: its action in Palestine and Korea was sufficient proof of that.

31. In 1951 the refugee problem had been studied not only by IRO and the High Commissioner's Office, but also by several intergovernmental organizations. He recalled particularly the work of the Council of Europe, where consideration of the refugee problem, taken up on 8 August 1950, had soon been linked with consideration of the more general problem of surplus population in Europe. The Council of Europe's committee of experts had studied the various aspects of that vast problem and made suggestions with regard to the methods to be employed simultaneously for its definitive solution. In October 1951, IRO had held a conference at Naples to study the problem of migration of refugees and of surplus populations in general. The Brussels Conference held in November and December 1951 had considered the question of the establishment of a migration organization. It should not be forgotten, however, that the problem of the "hard core" remaining after IRO closed down and that of the new refugees who continued to arrive in Western Europe were not the main concern of such organizations and conferences.

32. He agreed with the High Commissioner that any efforts to solve the general problems of migration should include special measures to prevent the abandonment of those refugees that stood in the greatest need of relief, while young and able-bodied refugees were given an opportunity to establish their lives in new countries that were willing to receive them. It was therefore essential that, after IRO had closed down, the refugees who had no government backing should have a representative who was in a position to defend their interests. That had been expressly recognized by the General Assembly in 1949 (resolution 319 (IV)) and 1950 (resolution 428 (V)).

33. The High Commissioner had described the immediate problems that he would have to try to solve. It was for the General Assembly to give him some guidance and above all, to provide him with the means of carrying out his task. It would also have to consider whether the existing situation justified an extension of his mandate to include the collection of funds, which he himself would not administer, but which he would distribute over the various voluntary agencies concerned with refugees.

34. With regard to the first point, the methods to be employed by the High Commissioner had already been laid down in the Statute of his Office. In that connexion, the problem before the General Assembly was essentially budgetary in character and a matter for the Fifth Committee. It was none the less appropriate that the Third Committee should first express its opinion on the subject. The General Assembly would be displaying its confidence in the High Commissioner by not denying him the necessary funds, and the High Commissioner, in the knowledge that his task was only one aspect of the activities of the United Nations, would not be unreasonable.

35. As the question of branch offices had given rise to some misunderstanding, he thought that the Third Committee might well give some thought to the problem. It seemed clear that such functions could not be entrusted, in whole or in part, either to United Nations Information Centres or to subsidiary offices of specialized agencies, whose competence was entirely different.

36. On the question of material aid to refugees, which formed the subject of item 31 of the agenda, he wished, while reserving his right to speak on the point at a later stage, to comment on the three main questions raised by the High Commissioner: the empowering of the High Commissioner to collect certain funds; long-term plans for the assimilation of the "hard core" of refugees remaining after IRO had closed down; special efforts to be made on behalf of refugees, on international lines, for the promotion of migration.

37. As to the first of those points, there was no question of entrusting the administration of relief funds to the High Commissioner or of making provision to that end in the budget of the Office of the High Commissioner. It was merely a matter of authorizing the High Commissioner to collect funds by way of voluntary contributions and to distribute them over the various

<sup>4</sup> See documents E/2050 and Add.1.

private organizations specializing in aid to refugees. That action would not require additional staff. It would certainly be in the interest of greater efficiency and coordination.

38. The Danish delegation had no objection to the necessary authorization being given to the High Commissioner. As regards the possibility of a contribution from the Government of Denmark, that matter must be reserved for further consideration, account being taken both of the general economic situation of the countries and of other appeals for voluntary contributions to various activities of the United Nations.

39. As to the assimilation of the "hard core" of refugees remaining after IRO had closed down, there should be no question of conferring functions in the economic and social field upon the High Commissioner and thereby increasing the risk of overlapping: it would be merely a matter of his endeavouring through existing organizations to awaken interest and

encourage initiative with a view to ensuring a better use of the productive potential of the refugees.

40. The third point was above all a question of liaison. The High Commissioner had the advantage of being able to co-operate actively with non-member States particularly interested in the fate of refugees as well as with non-governmental organizations. It was also highly important that he should be in a position to collaborate closely with all intergovernmental organizations that were called upon to deal with migration and resettlement problems.

41. In his view, the governments that had voted in the General Assembly for the establishment of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner should also ensure that, in the other international organs, the interests of the refugees represented by the High Commissioner would receive all the attention they deserved.

The meeting rose at 12.35 p.m.