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CONTENTS

Page

Repatriation of Greek children: reports of the Secretary-General and of the international Red Cross organizations (A/2236 and Add.1, A/2241 and Corr.1, A/AC.61/L.18) (continued)	133
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Chairman: Mr. Alexis KYROU (Greece).

Repatriation of Greek children: reports of the Secretary-General and of the international Red Cross organizations (A/2236 and Add.1, A/2241 and Corr.1, A/AC.61/L.18) (continued)

[Item 23]*

During the discussion of agenda item 23, the Chairman was replaced by the Vice-Chairman, Mr. Clarence L. Simpson, (Liberia).

1. Mr. NUÑEZ PORTUONDO (Cuba) said that the people of the world followed with profound interest the debates on the repatriation of the Greek children and hoped that the United Nations would spare no effort and take all steps to find a solution to that serious problem. Detention of children in general, and of the Greek children in particular, was an act of open defiance of modern civilization and a disgrace to humanity.

2. Regrettable as it might be, it was conceivable that certain States, which claimed to be civilized, and which were always invoking international law on their own behalf though they never observed its principles themselves, should commit inhuman offences against able-bodied men; but to detain helpless children, to deprive them of the love and protection of their parents at an age at which they needed them most, was to commit an act of cruelty unworthy of mankind.

3. The shocking detention of the Greek children had called forth General Assembly resolution 517 (VI). As that resolution spoke for itself and did not require comment, he would merely read it out.

4. The Secretary-General, in his last annual report on the work of the Organization, had devoted to that resolution a passage entitled "Implementation of General Assembly resolution 517 (VI) concerning the repatriation of the Greek children". This also the Cuban representative read without comment.

5. The Secretary-General's note on the repatriation of the Greek children (A/2236) showed that the situation had remained unchanged and that the States which were harbouring the Greek children still refused to return them to their parents, notwithstanding the pain and suffering caused to their fathers and mothers by the loss of their dearest ones. Yet some of those States were Members of the United Nations and others had applied for admission to membership in the Organization, whose main purposes were the maintenance of peace and friendly relations between States and respect for the principles of modern civilization.

6. The Cuban delegation would fail in its duty if it kept silent on another situation like that of the Greek children, but unfortunately denied by the United Nations the attention it deserved: that of the Spanish children detained by the USSR for propaganda purposes. Cuba was directly concerned with the fate of the Spanish children in the USSR, one reason being that the relatives of some of them lived in Cuba. The matter had aroused protests in the Cuban Press, in particular in an article by Mr. Portell Vilá, professor of history at the University of Havana, who had echoed the public indignation at the action of the Soviet Union.

7. The Spanish children who had been removed to the USSR were mostly Basque and Asturian; they numbered over 3,000. Some of them had left Spain in 1937 and were already grown up. Their martyrdom must outrage every honest person. Fifteen hundred of them had arrived in Leningrad on the French ship *Sontay*, which had left Bilbao in 1937. It should be emphasized that of the 3,000 Spanish children who had boarded the ship *Habana* at Bilbao, some were bound for France and the others for the USSR, but nearly all had certainly gone on to the USSR.

8. In August 1941, the Spanish children had lived in some kind of concentration camp at Odessa. They had then been sent to Krasnodar, then to Saratov, and later to Tiflis. Many of them had died during the transfer. The sickly appearance of the survivors showed how much they had suffered. Tuberculosis was rife among

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

them, but worse still, the moral degradation to which they had been subjected had left deep scars. In order to survive, many of them had been reduced to theft and brigandage; some had banded together like wild animals. One of the teachers who had accompanied them to Odessa had written secretly that of those over fourteen, less than half could be re-educated as useful members of society in other countries. He had been even more pessimistic about the younger ones, unless they could soon be saved from the Soviet collective-school system and introduced to some form of family life.

9. The Spanish children detained in the USSR had been scattered throughout the country even before the USSR had entered the war; they had been scattered even more widely later. Some of them had been sent to Leningrad, others to Moscow or its outskirts. Ostensibly that had been done for two reasons: firstly, because the standard of living there was higher than elsewhere in the country; and secondly, because in Moscow alone could visas for abroad be obtained. Obviously that had been a false hope, as the Soviet authorities had never granted the children permits to leave the country. A few hundred of them were still in the Crimea. During the war, 76 disabled children out of a group of 200 had died of hunger and tuberculosis in Central Asia near Kagan. At present, some 1,200 children were still in the Moscow area, living wretchedly in unheated buildings.

10. The children were being given a completely communist education to fit them for use later in Spain and Latin America. At first they had been taught by Spanish and Soviet teachers; after 1941 the Spanish teachers, though communists, had represented only 10 per cent of the teaching staff. Information received through secret channels showed the nature of the instruction given to the children—at least to the 1,200 living near Moscow, for the other 1,800 had died of hunger, were ill or lived in inaccessible areas of the Soviet Union. The instruction was completely Soviet, though adapted in some details to the Spanish mentality. Unfortunately that “adaptation” only confused the children. Thus they were taught that if Cervantes had lived in modern times he would have been a communist, and that Don Quixote and Sancho Panza symbolized the struggle of the proletariat against the privileged classes. The older children were taught that the success of the Soviet system was due to the limited currency in circulation: demand was slight, prices remained low and workers could procure their everyday necessities cheaply. The young people, who were not totally ignorant, must have remembered during that instruction the relative abundance of their native country.

11. Practically none of those young Spaniards had been able to receive a higher education. Obviously they could not obtain government scholarships. Furthermore, since they lived in the suburbs of Moscow they would have to travel each day in unheated trains and walk over three miles to the station. Thus they were forced to work in factories and could not study. One of them, 16 years old, had decided to leave the secondary school because in spite of his age he had received only half rations as a member of the group of children to which he belonged. He had therefore preferred to work in a factory so as to get the housing and rations of a worker.

12. That, in general outline, was the gloomy picture of the conditions in which the young Spaniards held in

the USSR lived. It had to be set beside the picture of the Greek children who had been removed from their homes, so that both together might show the cruelty and barbarity of the governments who held the children for propaganda use.

13. The United Nations must make every effort to put an end to that situation. Those were helpless children and their fathers and mothers were legally and, what was more, morally entitled to ask for their return. The United Nations could not speak of maintaining peace and general well-being so long as it tolerated practices such as the detention of the Greek and Spanish children.

14. Cuba had the moral right to speak as it did because, as was well known, during its war of independence it had sent Spanish prisoners of war back to their lines when its forces had been unable to feed them. By virtue of that moral right Cuba denounced the detention of the children as an infamous crime and a disgrace to humanity.

15. Mr. BERNARDES (Brazil) recalled that the General Assembly had adopted resolution 193 C (III) in 1948, the first on the subject under discussion, which invited all States on whose territory Greek children away from their homes were to be found, to take the necessary measures for their return to Greece. As that resolution had been adopted unanimously, there had been every reason to hope that it would be carried into effect by the States it concerned. In spite, however, of the efforts of the international Red Cross organization and more recently of the Standing Committee on the Repatriation of Greek Children, only 469 Greek children had been repatriated. Of the seven States concerned only Yugoslavia had respected the recommendation adopted by the General Assembly at its third session.

16. It was evident that the United Nations, with the valuable collaboration of the Red Cross organization had done all in its power to reach a solution of the problem and that, unfortunately, no hope was left so long as the world situation remained unchanged. For that reason, and in view of the request of the Red Cross, which was well aware that it could no longer do anything which it had not already attempted to do, Brazil and New Zealand had submitted the joint draft resolution (A/AC.61/L.18) before the Committee.

17. The resolutions of the General Assembly had not been carried into effect because of the world's present political difficulties, although the first two, 193 C (II) and 288 B (IV), had been adopted unanimously. It was impossible to point to any one State. The seven States which held Greek children were the victims of the political ideology: they could not display humane feelings; they were forced scrupulously to observe the rule imposed upon them by their policy. Some of them were among the most civilized States in the world; some of them had recently fought against the aggression of totalitarian State. Now they were mere cogs in an enormous political machine with its own code of morality. Only Yugoslavia had co-operated with the International Red Cross and the Standing Committee on the Repatriation of Greek children. Its delegation had already informed that it would continue its efforts to arrange for the repatriation of all the Greek children still in Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia must be congratulated, for it provided the only ray of hope for Greek mothers. In spite of the present dead-lock it was to be hoped that the politi

situation would change and that one day, not too far off, it would be possible to resume discussion of the repatriation of all Greek children away from their homes.

18. Mr. LONDOÑO PALACIOS (Colombia) regretted that the efforts of the Standing Committee and the Red Cross organizations had remained fruitless, although their noble task should have been rapidly crowned with the fullest success. As the representative of Yugoslavia had so rightly pointed out (22nd meeting), the problem was a humanitarian one and should be dealt with as such. The *Ad Hoc* Political Committee should therefore not allow itself to become involved in political discussion or bitter wrangling. On the contrary, it should work in a spirit of goodwill and friendship and show itself determined to solve the problem.

19. The efforts of the Secretary-General, the Standing Committee and the Red Cross deserved the highest praise. The joint draft resolution also noted with proper satisfaction the co-operative spirit displayed by the Yugoslav Government, which had already repatriated several hundred children and was continuing to take the necessary steps to repatriate those who still remained on its territory. True, the success was only partial, but the United Nations and the international agencies should not allow themselves to become discouraged and should continue their efforts until all the Greek children had been returned to their homes. The problem of the Greek children was just as poignant as that of the racial conflict in the Union of South Africa, in connexion with which the Committee had been almost unanimous in its championship of human rights. In the same spirit the Colombian delegation would have desired a solution putting an end to the sufferings of the Greek mothers and assuaging their fears. If, however, no more effective proposal were submitted during the discussion, it would vote for the joint draft resolution before the Committee.

20. The Charter imposed the duty on all States and all men to respect the rights and freedoms of others, whether nations or persons. The family group, which had existed long before nations had been established or political or civil rights proclaimed, was the fundamental unit of the nation and human society. Any measure therefore calculated to safeguard the family and strengthen the links uniting its members must be regarded as most important. The right of the Greek children to return to their homes was of course not expressly proclaimed in any Article of the Charter; but that was surely because no one had imagined that such a situation could arise. The problem of the Greek children was one of the tragic consequences of the disasters precipitated by man's destructive instincts. The United Nations might have to deal with similar cases, and it was therefore wise to set up international agencies to prevent similar tragedies from occurring and, where necessary, to remedy them.

21. The maternal instinct was the most powerful of human instincts, and the sufferings of mothers were among the deepest of human feelings. The Greek children must be repatriated without delay, and the States that harboured them had no right to detain them. Colombia, a democratic country where respect for freedom, human rights and the family flowed from the Christian religion, was concerned that the years were passing and the Greek children had still not been returned to their

homes. It hoped that the solution of the problem would not be made dependent on political considerations and that such tragedies would never occur again. The efforts of the United Nations and the International Red Cross deserved the deepest respect, and the cause for which they were fighting was one of the noblest. The passions, ideological conflicts and selfish interests of men must give place before the ideal which all men of goodwill were striving to attain.

22. Mr. JORDAAN (Union of South Africa) expressed the view that one of the problem's most heart-breaking aspects was the cynicism with which the countries harbouring Greek children had defied the principles of common humanity to such a point that the Government of Greece had been obliged to bring the matter before the United Nations. During the last war the Greek Royal Family had lived for a time in the Union of South Africa, and the bond of friendship between the two countries had been strengthened. The Union of South Africa was deeply moved by the tragedy with which Greece was stricken, and, while glad to see that Yugoslavia had started, and was continuing, with the repatriation of the Greek children on its territory, deeply regretted to observe that the patient efforts of the Red Cross and the Standing Committee had remained fruitless. The attitude of the governments which had frustrated the humanitarian work of those agencies must be condemned. Mr. Jordaan was convinced that if, in a spirit of sincere co-operation, the USSR had exercised the influence which it indisputably enjoyed over the countries harbouring Greek children, those children would by now have been returned to their homes.

23. To a certain extent the joint draft resolution was a confession of failure. Nevertheless it had the merit of courageously recognizing the reality of the situation, and the Union of South Africa would therefore vote for it.

24. Mr. DONS (Norway) spoke of the deep interest with which the Government and people of Norway had followed the development of the problem of the Greek children. The Norwegian delegation must now regretfully recognize that the United Nations and the Red Cross had failed in their efforts, and it was obliged to admit that there was no other course to follow than that advocated by the joint draft resolution, which had been accepted by the Greek Government. While the Norwegian delegation would vote for that draft it attached particular importance to the last three lines of paragraph 5 of the operative part, and hoped that the situation would develop in such a way as to enable the Red Cross organizations usefully to resume their activities. Mr. Dons paid a tribute to the Red Cross organizations and the Standing Committee for their generous and patient efforts and to the Government of Yugoslavia for its co-operative spirit.

25. Mr. SALAZAR (Dominican Republic) found it distressing to have to note that the Standing Committee and the Red Cross organizations had failed in their tasks despite the persistent efforts of the past four years. At previous sessions the delegation of the Dominican Republic had joined in indignant protests against the attitude of those governments which had violated the most elementary standards of human rights and had condemned Greek children and their families to an inhuman separation. No technical reasons or temporary

difficulties could be pleaded in excuse of that stand. If those governments had respected the moral principles which alone should prevail, they would have done everything possible as soon as possible to repatriate the Greek children, who would by now have returned to normal family life.

26. The Dominican Republic delegation would vote for the joint draft resolution, which unhappily reflected the failure of the United Nations in its attempts to end the martyrdom of thousands of Greek families. It nevertheless hoped that the governments responsible for that situation would carry out the duty dictated by human brotherhood and meet the just requests of the Greek families.

27. Mr. LEWANDOWSKI (Poland) recalled that the Polish delegation had several times taken a clear stand on the question of the Greek children, as it had on other repatriation problems, declaring that the necessary steps should be taken to repatriate all those who, through war, had found themselves outside their native lands. When in 1948 the repatriation of Greek children had first come up for discussion,¹ the Polish delegation had helped to draft resolution 193 C (III) which was adopted by the General Assembly. At the same time the Polish delegation, supported by an overwhelming majority of the General Assembly, had emphasized that the resolution should not enable anyone to wrong the Greek children or their relatives in any way. At that time the situation in Greece had given grounds for fearing that the repatriated children and their families would become targets for reprisals by the Greek authorities. The Polish delegation had therefore stressed that the situation in Greece and the manner in which the requests for repatriation had been prepared by the Greek Red Cross did not offer safeguards for genuine repatriation, the real goal towards which Poland had always striven.

28. Since some delegations tried to exploit the question of the Greek children for propaganda purposes and the joint draft resolution, in its operative paragraph 4, slandered the countries which had fulfilled their humane duties towards the Greek children, Mr. Lewandowski felt bound to recall the circumstances which had led to the departure of those children from Greece. It was common knowledge that in 1948 certain areas of Greece had been the scene of a civil war. The lives of thousands of children had been constantly threatened by unmerciful bombardments and hunger blockades inflicted on those areas by the royalist forces. The bombs and other means of destruction used against the civilian population, against old people, women and children, had moreover come from United States arsenals. It was also common knowledge that United States military specialists had personally directed operations against the civilian population. The United States delegation was therefore the least qualified of all to preach morals and humanity to others, as it had tried to do at the previous meeting. In those tragic conditions, thousands of Greek families, anxious to save their children's lives, had had them evacuated and in many cases had gone with them to the harbouring countries, which had fulfilled a duty to humanity by according them treatment that had been praised by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies.

¹ See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Third Session, Part I, First Committee*, 168th and 169th meetings.

29. Furthermore, during previous General Assembly sessions, the Polish delegation had brought conclusive evidence that the requests for repatriation issuing from Greece were not made in good faith. They had been forcibly obtained from the families living in Greece or from persons interned there for their political convictions. Some of that evidence could be found in a work entitled *The Truth about the Children in Greece*, in which material gathered by the Greek Children's Aid Committee had been published. That Committee had confirmed that the requests for repatriation prepared by the International Committee of the Red Cross from information furnished by the Greek Red Cross could not be considered seriously. Investigations by the Committee for Aid to Greek Children had shown that of the 9,839 children whose repatriation had been requested, 552 had both parents, and 1,496 had one parent residing in one of the harbouring countries, and 2,223 were over eighteen years of age and it would be ridiculous to consider them as children. In addition, the names of 2,484 children listed by the International Committee of the Red Cross did not appear in the lists of the harbouring States; and lastly, 188 children had been listed twice. Obviously, requests prepared in such a manner could not be regarded as made in good faith.

30. Moreover, the fears of the General Assembly that the Greek authorities would institute reprisals against repatriated children and their families seemed to be confirmed by the numerous trials of young democrats, the conditions in the special concentration camps where children were given "political re-education", and the persecution and terror which did not even spare minors. Mr. Lewandowski cited a number of examples drawn from documents published in London by the League for Democracy in Greece. A boy of fourteen had been arrested, tortured and sentenced to life imprisonment; girls aged fifteen and sixteen had been sentenced for minor offences to penalties of up to ten and twenty years' imprisonment; and ninety-eight young girls, three of whom had been condemned to death, were in prison at Kifisia. Some children living in Greece feared that they would be persecuted as political offenders. Tens of thousands of children had been orphaned by the war and were living in poverty and starvation. All those facts had to be taken into account in any consideration of the question of the Greek children.

31. Mr. Lewandowski said that his examples also showed that some delegations had tried to make political capital out of the tragedy of the Greek children during discussion in the Committee, in order to sow the seeds of hatred among nations. They had been little concerned with the fate of the Greek children killed in air raids. Now, despite the cruel sufferings inflicted upon those children in the prisons and concentration camps of Macronisos, Vidos, Leros, Kifisia, Yioura and others, the New Zealand, Turkish and United Kingdom delegations uttered no protest or expression of contempt for those responsible. They claimed to be deeply moved by the fate of the Greek children, but they had never condemned the treatment of the Polish, Soviet Union and Czechoslovak children who were forcibly detained in West Germany and were being sent against their will to the United States, Canada and other countries, thousands of miles away from their native lands and their relatives.

32. All those facts gave ground for stating that it would be dangerous to repatriate Greek children in the present conditions. The Greek Government had certainly, on several occasions, given assurances that all the repatriated Greek children would be returned to their families; but those assurances were open to question when it was recalled that, despite the promises of clemency made at the 351st plenary meeting by Mr. Politis, the representative of Greece, the Greek patriot Nikos Beloyannis, hero of the Greek resistance movement, had been executed two months later together with three of his comrades.

33. Mr. KINDYNIS (Greece) said, on a point of order, that the Polish representative was raising an issue irrelevant to the item under discussion. His delegation would reply at the proper time to the inappropriate remarks made by the Polish representative.

34. Mr. LEWANDOWSKI (Poland) thought the facts he had just cited were directly connected with the matter under discussion. Nevertheless, he would try to be as brief as possible. It was understandable that world public opinion, confronted with those facts, should feel some concern about the fate of the repatriated Greek children. There was no assurance that the children would be returned to their families and not sent to concentration camps or persecuted.

35. The Polish Government recognized that it was necessary to facilitate the repatriation of all persons who had been compelled by the war to flee their countries. For that reason it had consistently attempted to remove every obstacle to the repatriation of the Greek children. The Committee should not, however, permit certain delegations to use that question for political purposes. It should not forget that the interests of the Greek children should be the primary consideration. Only that approach to the problem could lead to a satisfactory solution.

36. Count D'ASPREMONT LYNDEN (Belgium) said that his delegation felt uneasy at participating in a debate on a problem which had appeared to have a natural and simple solution. The right of mothers to bring up their children and the right of children to live at home had been sacrificed to a political ideology. Everyone must judge severely an ideology which demonstrated complete disregard for the most natural rights of a human being. Eloquent speeches on human rights were useless if the United Nations had no power to ensure respect for those rights. The Belgian people extended its deepest sympathy to those Greek mothers, whose anguish it understood and shared. The Belgian delegation would vote sadly and resignedly for the joint draft resolution ending the work of the Standing Committee and thereby revealing the inability of the United Nations to impose a humane solution of the problem with which it had been faced.

37. Mr. SCHELTEMA (Netherlands) also extended his sympathy to the thousands of Greek mothers and children who were the victims of a cynical policy. His delegation noted with regret that the Standing Committee had been unsuccessful in persuading countries harbouring Greek children, except for Yugoslavia, to repatriate them. It deplored a state of affairs which deprived the Greek children of the joys of a home. World public opinion knew who were responsible for

a situation which rendered any fresh effort to solve the problem useless. In the circumstances, the Netherlands delegation was not opposed to the proposal to discontinue the Standing Committee, but it did not agree that the joint draft resolution provided a final solution to the problem. The Greek children belonged to their parents and nothing could impair that principle. The way should therefore be left open for any future opportunity of ultimately finding a satisfactory solution to the problem. Meanwhile the United Nations should censure those States which had not co-operated in the efforts to solve it. The Netherlands delegation would accordingly vote in favour of the joint draft resolution.

38. Mrs. SAMPSON (United States of America), commenting on the debate at the previous meeting, said that the representatives of the United Kingdom and New Zealand had expressed regret that the Soviet Union had not prevailed upon the authorities in Eastern Europe to comply with the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly on the repatriation of the Greek children. The Soviet Union representative had replied very vehemently that his Government had no means of exercising control over the governments of Eastern Europe, and that the representatives of the United Kingdom, New Zealand and the United States had an entirely "distorted conception" of the relationship among the Cominform countries. The United States representative said, however, that she had not referred to that relationship. But since the Soviet representative raised the matter in so angry a fashion and in view of the Soviet representative's own role in the events which led to the destruction of the Democratic Republic of Benes and Masaryk, she would like to remind Mr. Zorin of Shakespeare's words: "Methinks he doth protest too much".

39. The USSR representative had alleged that the United States Government had refused to return to their country eleven Soviet children in the Western Zone of Germany, and that no answer had been given to a letter sent in October by the Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet forces in Germany, to Mr. Donnelly, United States High Commissioner in West Germany.

40. It was not the first time that the Soviet Government had made such charges against the United States Government. Whenever they had been made, thorough investigations conducted by the United States authorities in West Germany had shown those accusations to be completely unfounded. The Soviet Union Government had never been able to produce evidence to support its claims. The special courts which dealt with the fate of Soviet children in West Germany were modelled upon the juvenile courts in the United States, and existed in order to reach just and humane decisions. The United States authorities in West Germany had repeatedly invited the Soviet authorities to attend hearings of those courts, but on the only occasion when a representative of the Soviet authorities had responded to that invitation, he had left the courtroom during the hearing. The Soviet Union representative had mentioned eleven individual cases which were being investigated by the United States authorities. The office of the United States High Commissioner in West Germany would not fail to inform the Soviet authorities in the near future of the results of that inquiry. The tactics of the Soviet representative were typical of the evasive and

obstructive methods employed by the Cominform countries throughout the history of the case.

41. The USSR representative had not contradicted the damning facts revealed in the fourth general report on the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross and of the League of Red Cross Societies, nor succeeded in diverting the Committee's attention from the tragic fate of the displaced Greek children. The issues in the case were: Cominform failure to comply with the recommendations adopted by the General Assembly in the matter; the return to their families of thousands of Greek children; and basic human decency. No evasions could conceal those issues. The attitude of the Cominform countries condemned them in the eyes of decent human beings.

42. Mr. DURON (Honduras) noted with regret that some delegations, despite the tragedy of the problem before the Committee, felt compelled to employ sar-

casm and to bring up matters entirely foreign to the issue. His delegation would vote for the joint draft resolution, which was based on humane sentiments and was also perfectly reasonable.

43. Mr. SIRI (El Salvador) frankly regretted that the United Nations was powerless to ensure respect for the most elementary human rights and to put an end to the suffering caused by the tragic situation of the displaced Greek children. His country whole-heartedly agreed with the Greek position and his Government offered the Greek people its sympathy and support. Words could not assuage the suffering of Greek mothers separated from their children, but one day Divine Providence would answer their prayers and put an end to their anguish. With regret, for lack of a better proposal, his delegation would vote for the joint draft resolution.

The meeting rose at 12.10 p.m.