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Chairman: Mr. G. F. DAVIDSON (Canada).

### Work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (A/2430, chapter IV, section VI, A/C.3/L.357/Rev.1) (*continued*):

- (a) Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (A/2394);
- (b) International action on behalf of refugees: memorandum by the Secretary-General (A/2457);
- (c) Question of the continuation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (A/2449, A/C.3/L.355/Rev.2)

[Item 28]\*

### GENERAL DEBATE (*continued*)

1. Mrs. EMMET (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of an informal group of sponsors of draft resolutions and authors of amendments, stated that texts had been drawn up incorporating the views expressed in the amendments and were before the Committee in the form of joint draft resolutions (A/C.3/L.355/Rev.2 and A/C.3/L.357/Rev.1) which replaced the previous draft resolutions and the respective amendments thereto.
2. Mrs. NOVIKOVA (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) recalled that in the debates on the refugee problem two opposing points of view had been advanced ever since the General Assembly's first session. The first view, that held by the USSR and the peoples' democracies, was that refugees should be repatriated and should not be used as cheap labour, subjected to propaganda against their countries of origin, recruited into military organizations or forbidden to meet representatives of their countries. The second view, that of the Anglo-American bloc, was that repatriation should be "voluntary"; those States were pursuing a policy of preventing repatriation for their own ends and were thus deceiving the refugees.
3. The High Commissioner's work had been praised by certain representatives who proposed that his Office

should be continued for a further period of five years. The delegations of the USSR and the peoples' democracies, on the contrary, contended that the Office should be liquidated because of the High Commissioner's failure to deal properly with the basic aspect of the problem, repatriation. At the preceding meeting the High Commissioner had said that he was not responsible for any refugee who announced his wish to return to his country of origin and that he could not spare funds for repatriation. Moreover, with the support of certain governments he had shown his disregard for that solution by proposing the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, which was evidence of the intention to perpetuate what had begun as a temporary problem. If the United States and other countries had carried out their obligation to repatriate refugees, the question would have been settled long since.

4. Facts could be cited in support of the assertion that refugees were being used for materialistic ends by the countries opposing repatriation. The High Commissioner himself admitted in his report that refugees were being brought to Belgium to work in the mines and that in the Netherlands they had to give a written undertaking that they would stay at least for two years in the work assigned to them. Official United States documents confirmed that the living and working conditions of the refugees in that country were deplorable. The situation in South America also was lamentable. She quoted passages from the book *Latin America—Continent in Crisis* by Ray Josephs, and from a Venezuelan periodical, to show that most immigrants were disappointed and unhappy and felt they had been sold into bondage. It was essential for the United Nations to intervene on behalf of those refugees by promoting repatriation, which was the only correct solution of the artificial problem that had been created.

5. Furthermore, the United States of America made no secret of the fact that it was using refugees from Eastern European countries for espionage and diversionist activities. Large sums were being spent by the United States Government to recruit and train refugees who were subsequently sent to their own countries as spies and saboteurs. A special college for such traitors had been set up in Western Germany. Refugees were also recruited into the United States Army and other military organizations.

6. A particularly disgraceful aspect of the High Commissioner's activities was his failure to repatriate thousands of children coming from the USSR and the peoples' democracies. The United States had set up illegally a special court to decide on such cases, and the High Commissioner had not only not objected to that action, but was carrying out the Court's decisions. The United States was thus continuing the shameful nazi practice of the forcible separation of families. That was a crude violation of the elementary standards of international law.

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

7. The Office of the High Commissioner was not fulfilling the terms of the original General Assembly resolutions on refugees and his activities were incompatible with the purposes and principles of the United Nations. The Byelorussian delegation would therefore vote against both of the joint draft resolutions.

8. Mr. FOROUHAR (Iran) said that his country, which had always pursued a policy of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and consequently favoured voluntary repatriation, would lend its wholehearted support to the High Commissioner in his efforts to relieve the refugees' sufferings. His delegation had been impressed by the High Commissioner's report (A/2394) and would vote for the joint draft resolutions in the hope that the Office would in future receive increased material and moral support from governments.

9. Mr. SUMMERS (Canada) thought the High Commissioner had been particularly wise in including in the introduction to his report and the chapter on historical background a clear statement of how his Office had come into being and of the scope of his activities. There was perhaps some misapprehension in the minds of the public and of some government officials as to the possibility of solving the stupendous refugee problem by the appointment of a single individual with a small staff and limited resources, as a result of which needed and deserved support had perhaps not been so wide-spread as might be desired by many. The High Commissioner had made it clear that he was not directly engaged in resettlement operations involving millions of displaced persons.

10. The report showed how ably the High Commissioner was carrying out the different parts of his mandate. His activities for the international protection of refugees had been of the greatest importance and it was gratifying to note that he had the help and co-operation of many governments. His other broad task had been to seek permanent solutions for the refugee problem by assisting governments and private efforts. Permanent solutions—whether repatriation, integration in national communities, or migration—could be found only by governments. Repatriation was the ideal theoretical solution, but the views put forward by the representatives of certain European countries that there was no problem but to repatriate the refugees could not be accepted. Instead of blaming the High Commissioner because he did not force people to go home against their will, the governments concerned would do better to liberalize conditions in their countries so that refugees would not be afraid to return to them.

11. Much had been done to encourage resettlement and his country had played its part by receiving refugees, who had become good and happy Canadian citizens. The High Commissioner's contacts with governments with a view to promoting the admission of refugees were important, as was close liaison with organizations directly concerned with migration.

12. In reply to the USSR representative, who had cited figures showing that in Ontario the incidence of tuberculosis was 2.5 times higher among refugees than among the local population, he pointed out that that was not surprising in view of the conditions in which many refugees had lived before arriving in Canada, and of the hardships of war and the post-war years. Statistics showed that the tuberculosis death-rate in Ontario in the year in which the statement quoted by the USSR representative had been made was among

the lowest on record anywhere in the world, namely 8.4 in 100,000. The Ontario Department of Health was properly concerned with keeping that figure to a minimum.

13. The High Commissioner's most urgent task was to give emergency aid to the neediest groups of refugees, who were leading a precarious existence in camps. It was therefore gratifying to see that the prospects of resettling the European refugees in China, of whom a number were entirely dependent on the Refugee Emergency Fund, had improved since the previous year.

14. He agreed on the need for further co-ordination of efforts and stressed the importance of the Ford Foundation's contribution to the search for permanent solutions.

15. His delegation would vote for the two joint draft resolutions and hoped that contributions to the Refugee Emergency Fund, which were urgently required, would be quickly forthcoming.

16. Mr. CARBONELL (Colombia), supporting both draft resolutions, recognized that the utility of the High Commissioner's Office was proved by its work for the legal protection of refugees; that the Ford Foundation's contribution rendered very valuable assistance in the emigration and integration of refugees; and that co-ordination between the Office and the other agencies working on behalf of refugees was of great importance.

17. Colombia acknowledged the contribution which immigrant refugees could and did make to the development of the Latin-American countries; it had signed and would shortly ratify the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees,<sup>1</sup> and its policy was to increase the number of immigrants from Trieste and other cities in furtherance of its agricultural expansion programme.

18. Mrs. LIONAES (Norway) agreed with the High Commissioner that the refugee problem was typically a United Nations problem and a very urgent one. Norway had received some blind, aged and tubercular refugees from Germany and Austria and would renew its contribution to the United Nations Refugee Emergency Fund; it had already ratified the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

19. She congratulated the High Commissioner on his efforts for co-ordination with other agencies working on behalf of refugees and would vote for the two draft resolutions in the hope that in the next five years a solution would be found to the problem of providing satisfactory living conditions for the thousands of refugees whose needs still had to be met.

20. Mr. CARSALES (Argentina) emphasized the obligation upon the United Nations to meet the refugees' urgent needs and to find permanent solutions to their problems. The proposed additional five-year period would enable the High Commissioner's Office to continue its useful work in conditions of stability; should the period prove more than was required, the High Commissioner would be the first to recommend that his Office be discontinued. Argentina would vote for the draft resolution to continue the Office.

21. Argentina had not established a special agency for the protection of refugees because, from the moment

<sup>1</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*, Geneva, 1951.

they arrived in the country, immigrants enjoyed the ample social benefits provided by the State. It had received about 50,000 persons officially classed as refugees and many more whose names did not appear on any official list, and they had been able to start a new life full of hope.

22. Mr. P. CHENG (China) said that the High Commissioner's task, which he clearly desired to perform as efficiently as possible within the narrow limits of his mandate, would be easier if he could receive more substantial support from States Members of the United Nations, specialized and inter-governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations. Western European countries whose post-war recovery had been rapid might have been able to assimilate more refugees without detriment to their economies, and more resettlement would have been possible had States been less rigid and race conscious in their selection of immigrants. Many refugees would have accepted repatriation had no ground existed for their fear of tyranny. The High Commissioner's warning concerning the failure to achieve the \$US3 million target for the Refugee Emergency Fund and the further warning contained in paragraph 346 of his report (A/2394) should not go unheeded.

23. The pace of rehabilitation set by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) had not been maintained. The International Refugee Organization had taken over the work of UNRRA with smaller resources. Its successor, the High Commissioner's Office, had come into being when the ranks of the existing refugees had been swollen by those escaping from communist tyranny and persecution; but the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees had been conceived on such narrow, regional lines that no Middle Eastern, Asian or African country had signed it, and no Latin-American country had ratified it.

24. The main needs were: first, that due regard should be paid to the conclusions of the High Commissioner's report; secondly, that his Office should be continued for a further five years; thirdly, that the unpaid balance of contributions to the Refugee Emergency Fund should be forthcoming; fourthly, that the other agencies and organizations working for refugees should co-operate with the High Commissioner and submit to some co-ordination by him; and fifthly, that his modest, indirect attempts to assist those who had escaped from tyranny should not be hampered. He hoped that the High Commissioner would continue as the embodiment of the United Nations consciousness of its responsibilities towards the refugees, strengthened in the knowledge of what he had already accomplished on their behalf.

25. Mrs. KHOKHOL (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic) said that in carrying out his task the High Commissioner was actuated, not by General Assembly resolution 8 (I) of 12 February 1946, but by the dictates of the United States of America and other countries. The only correct and effective solution of the refugee problem was repatriation, which certain Western countries systematically opposed. The High Commissioner's report showed that refugees and displaced persons were being drafted into the armed forces of the Western bloc or used as cheap man-power in the United States, Western Europe and Latin America. The bad living and working conditions of resettled refugees were brought out both in the report and, for

instance, in the United States and the Australian Press. There was little mention in the High Commissioner's report of the situation of refugees in Europe, but it could be inferred that it was critical, both inside and outside the camps.

26. As the High Commissioner was consistently pursuing a policy of expatriation and resettlement instead of repatriation, she would oppose both draft resolutions.

27. Miss BERNARDINO (Dominican Republic) said that the refugee problem deserved special attention from the United Nations inasmuch as international co-operation and aid were required to cope with it. She paid a special tribute to the devotion and enthusiasm brought to that task not only by the High Commissioner but also by his representative in Latin America, Mr. González Fernández. The Dominican Republic, true to its tradition of hospitality, had opened its doors to refugees of all categories since 1937. Once they had entered the country, they enjoyed the same rights and privileges as the nationals of the country. Many had risen high in the government service, trade, banking, business and agriculture.

28. She would vote for both of the joint draft resolutions.

29. Mrs. AFNAN (Iraq) stated that her delegation, in keeping with its humanitarian tradition, would support the continuation of the High Commissioner's Office for a further period of five years, but could not give that support without some reservations. While hoping that the High Commissioner's Office might be able to mitigate some cases of human suffering by affording them international legal protection, she believed that it could not make any substantial contribution to the solution of the problem as a whole. Only a fraction of the millions of people displaced as a result of great upheavals came under the High Commissioner's mandate and that fraction fell into a distinct and specific category.

30. Although it was true that the solution of the problem would alleviate existing world tensions, without those tensions the refugee problem which came under the competence of the High Commissioner would itself be extremely limited. The problem was not purely humanitarian; it had inevitably its political aspects. The assumption that the required solution was co-ordinated co-operation between the countries of first and second asylum and those of resettlement ignored the basic nature of the problem, inasmuch as it led to a mechanical view of the proper solution. It was also dangerous because it generalized a solution applicable only to particular cases.

31. It was justifiable to give the highest priority to the refugees of European origin stranded in China, since they and the refugees of European origin not dealt with by the International Refugee Organization had become the responsibility of the High Commissioner. But the refugees to whom the High Commissioner had drawn the Committee's attention were in a different category. He had described them as "the men who had chosen the road to freedom". If total freedom existed anywhere, they would find refuge in the country of their choice without international intervention; since that was not to be, they should not be denied assistance. It was implied that the problem of that category of refugees was rooted in tyranny, persecution and discrimination and that they had made sacrifices for freedom of belief and speech and freedom from fear and want. Such refugees existed also

in Asia, Africa and the Americas, and millions of people denied political independence were being imprisoned and murdered for demanding those same freedoms. To limit the scope of international protection to the needy European refugees would be to distort the picture, for all those who had made the choice of freedom were not necessarily to be found among those who sought it in a foreign land. Thus she could not agree without reservations that the continuation of the High Commissioner's Office would be of great avail in eradicating that evil. Moreover, the picture given of that category of refugees was extremely vague. She did not know their past, current or future numbers, so she could not affirm that providing international protection would promote permanent solutions. She did not even have sufficient information to enable her to decide whether ninety-nine staff members and an administrative expenditure of \$US750,000 was too much or too little for that purpose. Half measures could not solve the problem, which could be settled only if the United Nations achieved political harmony; that end attained, there would be freedom for all and no more refugees.

32. Mr. KAHANY (Israel) had been amazed to hear the Syrian representative cast doubts upon the statement that Israel had been able to absorb Jewish refugees without any assistance whatever from the High Commissioner. He could only repeat that Israel, although perfectly entitled to do so, had never asked for help from the High Commissioner and that there was no group of refugees in Israel within his mandate, for the simple reason that a Jewish refugee ceased to be a refugee as soon as he set foot in Israel.

33. The Syrian representative had also uttered certain criticisms of Israel's immigration policy and legislation. They could easily be answered, but he flatly refused to discuss with that representative or in the Third Committee matters which pertained solely and exclusively to the most elementary domestic rights of a sovereign nation.

34. He could understand the deep interest taken by the Syrian and Saudi Arabian representatives in the problem of the Arab refugees, which was not on the Third Committee's agenda and which he had therefore refrained from mentioning. He could assure those representatives that Israel felt the deepest sympathy for the tragic lot of those innocent victims of the Arab countries' policies. It had given practical proofs of that sympathy, so far as its limited means allowed. He could not, however, understand their complete disdain for the no less tragic lot of the Jewish refugees and displaced persons. They seemed to think that only the tragedy of the Arab refugees merited that description, whereas that of the Jewish refugees and emigrants was merely a Zionist intrigue or menace. The Syrian representative was apparently ready to tolerate the State of Israel as a sort of hospital or old persons' home, but was filled with indignation at the idea of its development as a living State, well able to defend its independent existence against continual threats and acts of aggression. The Syrian representative had displayed a national susceptibility for which there was no justification; he ought to show consideration for the susceptibilities of other countries.

35. The Saudi Arabian representative's analysis of the differences between the various groups and categories of refugees had been very interesting, and it was perfectly true that each group had its own special

problems. His classification, however, had been far from complete. There was a considerable difference between the moral distress of a refugee who had found asylum in a country which had a completely foreign language, religion, customs, climate and culture and one who found asylum in a country whose population belonged to his own ethnic group and reminded him of his home in all other ways. There was no doubt that the former category was the more unfortunate and should receive preferential attention from the High Commissioner.

36. Obviously, repatriation would be the ideal solution of the entire refugee problem and the High Commissioner himself had repeated once more that he would be only too glad to see such a solution adopted. But the facts were wholly against it, as everyone knew. Some countries said that they would be willing to readmit a large number of their refugees, whereas the latter were not at all eager to listen to their appeals; other refugees were only too willing to return to their countries, but the latter, for one reason or another, could not receive them. That situation, however regrettable, could not be altered by any United Nations resolution reaffirming certain generally accepted principles, which were explicitly reproduced in the Statute of the High Commissioner's Office (General Assembly resolution 428 (V), annex). It could not appease the conscience of those who had to ensure the effective protection of the refugees and those who claimed that they had the refugees' fate really at heart. The main thing was to avoid leaving the refugees in an agony of fear and homesickness, and to help them build a new life by saving them from the humiliation of permanent refugee status and restoring to them their dignity as free men. In that way it would be possible to save the most important thing, their lives, which was something far more important than the absolute but entirely academic preservation of a principle generally acknowledged as the ideal solution. Such action was not only not incompatible with the principle of repatriation but left the way entirely open to that solution, whenever it proved feasible.

37. He would vote for the two joint draft resolutions.

38. Mr. HUIZI AGUIAR (Venezuela) praised the High Commissioner's report (A/2394) and oral statement (497th meeting).

39. He would vote for the two joint draft resolutions.

40. With regard to the Byelorussian representative's statement about the bad conditions to which refugees were subjected, he pointed out that those conditions should be considered in the light of other circumstances. Conditions in Venezuela were not, of course, ideal, but they were precisely the same for foreigners and nationals. Refugees enjoyed all the government social services and they could become naturalized, and in fact did so, with a minimum of formality. Against the bad reports cited by the Byelorussian representative should be placed hundred of others giving a completely different picture. Refugees in Venezuela, with the few inevitable exceptions, were being integrated rapidly into the country's life and economy.

41. Mr. MAURTUA (Peru) said that his delegation was satisfied with the High Commissioner's report and agreed that his Office should be continued, since there was no prospect of a rapid solution of the refugee problem. Any attempt to alter his Statute would merely create confusion. The conclusion set out in paragraph 348 of the report was a wise one.

42. The Peruvian delegation would accordingly vote for the two joint draft resolutions, observing, however, that the third paragraph of the preamble to the seven-Power draft resolution (A/C.3/L.357/Rev.1) did not apply to Latin America, where there were no camps and where refugees enjoyed full legal equality with nationals.

43. Mr. PAZHWAK (Afghanistan) said that although there was no refugee problem in Afghanistan, his country, as a Member of the United Nations, took a deep interest in it. The problem should be regarded in its purely humanitarian aspects, but it had not always been approached in that spirit during the debate. His delegation, however, was actuated solely by humanitarian considerations and would vote for any resolution likely to help the High Commissioner in his

work, which had unfortunately been needlessly complicated by political considerations. His delegation's vote in favour of the two draft resolutions did not, however, commit his Government to making any financial contribution.

44. The High Commissioner would doubtless pay special attention to paragraph 1 of the operative part of the seven-Power draft resolution (A/C.3/L.357/Rev.1). In his report to the General Assembly at its ninth session he should explain the policy he had followed in differentiating between the groups mentioned therein. He felt some concern at the abrupt suspension of assistance to refugees who expressed a wish for repatriation; that might well encourage refugees to continue in their present status.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.