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REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

1. The following comments on the recommendations set forth in resolution 6 A (XVII) of the Commission on Human Rights, on the observations of a Freedom from Prejudice and Discrimination Year in the near future and of a Freedom from Prejudice and Discrimination Day^o every year thereafter, have been received from Governments:

CANADA

"..... Organizations in Canada, which have been concerned for some time with this problem, have made efforts to deal with it in positive terms. Brotherhood Week observances are promoted by the Council of Christians and Jews, and these have now become so well established that most voluntary groups involved in the promotion of better human relations have come to focus their educational efforts on these observances.

"It seems very doubtful that the organization of a year or a day dedicated to freedom from prejudice and discrimination would contribute to the efforts already being made by many people in Canada, who would continue to put their main efforts into Brotherhood Week. Most organizations in Canada might prefer to have their educational programmes built around the more positive theme of 'brotherhood' or 'human rights', rather than the somewhat recriminatory theme 'freedom from prejudice and discrimination'. In 1958 the Canadian agencies involved in sponsoring the observance of the Tenth Anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights were very conscious of this tactical problem, and quite convinced that real progress in human relations would not be achieved unless the programme rested on positive values.

"The number of such days, weeks, and months is itself tending to lessen the value of this way of promoting good causes. We have in this country a great number of special days and weeks, and we think that at this time any further additions to this list might well be affected by the law of diminishing returns. Canadians are very much aware of the significance of Human Rights Day. The Council may wish to consider the feasibility of linking the brotherhood theme, which is inherent in the idea of freedom from prejudice and discrimination, to the celebration of Human Rights Day, which has now become established in many parts of the world."

GHANA

"The Permanent Representative of Ghana to the United Nations presents his compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and has the honour to inform him that the Government of Ghana approves and accepts the resolution under reference."

INDIA^{1/}

"..... The Government of India supports the idea of these observances. The Indian delegation sponsored the resolution asking for these observances at the 17th Session of the Human Rights Commission. The views and comments of the Indian delegation expressed on this subject are contained fully in the records of the meetings of the Commission (E/CN.4/SR.685, 688, 690, 692)."

NORWAY

"..... The curricula for Norwegian educational institutions at all levels contain appropriate provisions with a view to ensuring their due conformity with said resolution of the Commission on Human Rights.

"Norway, consequently, fully supports and recognizes those principles of the Charter that have been reiterated in resolution 6 (XVII).

"The Norwegian authorities do, however, have some reservations as to the advisability and practical value of the concrete proposals recommended by the Commission on Human Rights as measures aimed at the elimination of racial prejudice and national and religious intolerance and discrimination.

"The Norwegian authorities are not able to concur with the Commission's recommendation to observe, as a means of promoting these aims, a Freedom from Prejudice and Discrimination Year in the near future, and thereafter to observe a Freedom from Prejudice and Discrimination Day every year, and find it consequently advisable that the Commission's proposal in this respect should not be implemented."

^{1/} The reply of the Government of India of 22 May 1961 (referred to in E/3491, para. 5) is reproduced in full here.

UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

"..... Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom are in full agreement with the purposes of this resolution and they endorse wholeheartedly the statement in it that constant efforts to eliminate racial prejudice and national and religious intolerance are needed to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.

"They cannot help doubting, however, whether the proposals in the resolution are best calculated to forward these aims or, indeed, likely to be effective. Their doubts arise from the following considerations:

"1. Hitherto the United Nations, and certain specialized agencies, have nominated a year for a particular purpose only where the aim is to achieve some target, or at least some tangible result (such as the raising of funds, as in the case of the World Refugee Year), against which the success of national efforts can be measured. Her Majesty's Government question whether it is desirable to recommend the institution of a 'year' for such a purpose as the changing of people's opinions, and it would not be possible to estimate in any way what, if any, results had stemmed from the institution of such a year. A year devoted to such a wide general purpose might well be the forerunner of an indefinite series of United Nations 'years' devoted to equally general, equally meritorious, and equally incommensurable objects.

"2. If a national drive towards improvement in such a wide field as this is to have an impact, it would seem desirable to confine it within the shortest possible period. A week or a day devoted to such a purpose might make an impression which efforts over the period of a year would be unable to sustain and might tend only to dissipate.

"3. It is to be borne in mind that many days, weeks and years, both national and international, are already observed, and caution in adding to their number seems desirable, since too many will merely result in the depreciation of the status of all. For this reason, it might well be considered whether the purposes of the proposed year or day could not be effected by arranging for the observance of an already recognised day, such as Human Rights Day, to be devoted in some particular year to the particular subject of combating discrimination.

"4. The expression 'Freedom from Prejudice and Discrimination' seems to Her Majesty's Government to be unfortunate. It is to be noted that the paragraph of the resolution mentioned at the beginning of these comments, while it refers to racial prejudice, uses the term national and religious intolerance. This distinction is important, because prejudice where religion and the nation are concerned may simply mean a strong conviction, as in the case of devotion to one's country or to a particular religion and does not necessarily connote intolerance of other religions or of other nations. It would be impossible to divest men's minds of prejudice in this sense, and it would be very undesirable that the United Nations should give the appearance of inviting States to do so. Moreover, the coupling of the terms 'prejudice and discrimination' is merely confusing, and is too vague to afford any guidance to governments.

"In Her Majesty's Government's view consideration should be given to the closer definition of the purposes of the proposed celebration, and the means by which it should be carried out, as well as to the question whether it is really practicable to devote a year to them, and whether it would not be more effective to concentrate the effort towards their advancement in a shorter period; consideration should also be given to the possibility of utilising for this purpose one of those anniversaries, such as Human Rights Day or United Nations Day, which are already internationally recognised and observed."

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

"Because prejudice and discrimination are in large measure reflections of individual attitudes and habits of mind, the United States has favored the education of public opinion through whatever means could be effective to overcome both prejudice and discriminatory practices. We have found that as understanding of these problems grows, there is increased respect for the equal dignity of all human beings and greater willingness to undertake changes which may be needed to give force to this principle. The United States therefore welcomes the opportunity to comment on the proposal of the Commission on Human Rights for observance of a special day or year in which attention can be directed particularly to the elimination of prejudice and discrimination.

"In considering the matter, we believe it would be useful for the Council to take account of experience developed thus far in the annual observance of December 10 as United Nations Human Rights Day. The General Assembly first called for the observance of this day in 1949. Reports indicate that while this day is being observed increasingly in many of the Member States of the United Nations, there are some areas in which few celebrations take place. Both the United Nations and UNESCO devote much thought and labor each year to the promotion of Human Rights Day and the preparation of materials through which people may learn more about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

"In view of this experience, and the close relationship between the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and freedom from prejudice and discrimination, the United States would favor some combination between the proposal of the Commission on Human Rights and the annual celebration of Human Rights Day already taking place. Specifically, we would suggest continuing the present annual celebration of December 10 as Human Rights Day and providing in addition for a year-long project beginning on Human Rights Day in 1962 or in 1963 as convenient, to be known preferably as Human Rights Year or Universal Human Rights Year. This year-long project would be an opportunity to highlight the concept of freedom from prejudice and discrimination, which is a basic element in both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Declaration of the Rights of the Child. Freedom from prejudice and discrimination could also be the underlying theme in new publications and programs developed for special observances throughout the year, and could be used thereafter on Human Rights Day.

"In addition to the advantages that would accrue from the use of established channels, we believe a title including 'Human Rights' would assure wider understanding of the positive nature of freedom from prejudice and discrimination. As was pointed out during the discussion of this subject in the Commission on Human Rights, the terms prejudice and discrimination may not be readily understood in some areas and would need explanation through descriptive material. A title based on 'Human Rights' would also emphasize the close relationship between the provisions of the United Nations Charter on human rights and the concept of freedom from prejudice and discrimination. A recommendation from the Council for a Human Rights Year emphasizing freedom from prejudice and discrimination would thus further the basic purpose of the United Nations to achieve universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion."
