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SOCIAL COMMITTEE

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE FIVE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-FOURTH MEETING

held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 6 July 1966, at 3.25 p.m.

CONTENTS:

.. Organization of work

Slavery (item 25 of the Council agenda)

GE.66-17409

16P.

Present:

Chairman:

Members:

Algeria

Cameroon

Canada

Chile

Czechoslovakia

Ecuador

France

Gabon

Greece

India

Iran

Iraq

Luxembourg

Morocco

Pakistan

Panama

Peru

Philippines

Romania

Sweden

United Kingdom

United States

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Venezuela

Mr. FERNANDINI (Peru)

Mrs. SELLAMI

Mr. ETAME

Mr. DELISLE

Mr. CONTRERAS

Mr. JURZA

Mr. NAJERA

Mr. BOULLET

Mr. DAVIN

Mrs. MANTZOULINOS

Mr. CHAND

Mr. NABAVI

Mrs. AFNAN

Miss LUNSINGH-MEIJER

Mr. FILALI

Mr. NAIK

Mr. VARELA

Mr. SOLARI

Mr. UY

Mr. PREDESCO

(Mr. FORSHELL

(Mr. BERGQUIST

Sir Samuel HOARE

Mr. ELMENDORF

Mrs. KASTALSKAYA

Mr. RAPHAEL

Also present:

Mr. AWAD

Special Rapporteur on Slavery

Representatives of specialized agencies:

International Labour Organisation

Mrs. FARMAN-FARMAIAN

World Health Organization

Miss HOWELL

Representative of the
United Nations Children's Fund:

Sir Herbert BROADLEY

Secretariat:

Mr. SCHREIBER

Director, Division of Human Rights

Mr. KREPKOGORSKI

Secretary of the Committee

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

The CHAIRMAN welcomed the members of the Committee and the representatives of the Secretariat, especially Mr. Schreiber, the new Director of the Division of Human Rights. He stressed the very great importance of the Social Committee's work for the Council as a whole, the United Nations and world development. He spurned the widespread belief that the Social Committee devoted itself primarily to theoretical work and was of little practical importance; that failed to recognize its great humanitarian mission and the part it played in the struggle against all the evils born of injustice. In view of the urgency of the Committee's task and the short time it had in which to complete a very vast programme, he urged members to work efficiently and expeditiously.

The Committee had instructions to examine items 17, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24 and 25 of the Council's agenda. It was proposed that items 17, 21, 23 and 25 should be considered during the week from 5 to 8 July, items 17, 22 and 24 from 11 to 15 July, and items 17, 18 and 21 from 18 to 22 July.

It was so decided.

SLAVERY (item 25 of the Council agenda) (E/4168 and Add.1 - 5)

The CHAIRMAN asked the members of the Committee to consider the report prepared by Mr. Mohamed Awad, Special Rapporteur on Slavery (E/4168 and Add.1 - 5), in accordance with resolutions 960 (XXXVI) and 1077 (XXXIX). The report was based on a fifteen-point questionnaire which had been sent to all Member States, and the replies received were reproduced in it. In July 1965 the Special Rapporteur had submitted to the Council at its thirty-ninth session a report which it had not been possible to consider then for lack of time. He now asked Mr. Awad to introduce his report.

Mr. AWAD (Special Rapporteur) introduced his report on slavery^{1/} which, he hoped, was more complete than that submitted the previous year. The latter had suffered from two main defects: first, it had not been possible, in the time available, to have it circulated in all the working languages; and, secondly, less than half the States Members of the United Nations had answered the questionnaire on which the report was to be based. The present report had been circulated in good time in all the working languages and the number of States which had answered the questionnaire had risen from fifty-one to seventy-five. He would, of course, have liked to receive still more answers in order to have as much information as possible at his disposal.

^{1/} The text of Mr. Awad's statement was subsequently distributed under the symbol E/AC.7/L.485.

The Secretariat had circulated Council resolution 1077 (XXXIX) to the States Members of the United Nations, emphasizing how important it was that all States should reply to the questionnaire as soon as possible. The Arabic translation he had had made for Arabic-speaking countries had proved useful. A breakdown, by continent, of the replies received revealed a considerable increase, in some continents, in the number of countries replying to the questionnaire.

In 1966 two Member States - the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics - had sent supplementary replies. The new answer from the United States referred to questions XII, XIII, XIV and XV, which were of special importance for the chapter on suggestions for possible action by the United Nations. Unfortunately, that answer had been received too late to be included in the relevant chapter. A special reference to it would therefore be made when that chapter was discussed.

The report was based entirely upon the answers received from States Members of the United Nations, members of the specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations in consultative status, the same questionnaire having been sent to all, despite the fact that some of the questions were perhaps irrelevant in so far as the specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations were concerned. Questions XII, XIII and XIV were of particular interest to those agencies and organizations whereas the whole questionnaire was of interest to all Member States even though some countries were not, and never had been, even remotely concerned with the question of slavery. Once the United Nations interested itself in a question, that question became a matter of direct concern to every Member of the Organization.

The number of replies received was not unsatisfactory; if 70 per cent of the States Members had sent complete answers, a useful report could have been prepared. But the quality of the answers varied very greatly and in many cases left much to be desired. At the thirty-ninth session he had complained that some of the answers were merely perfunctory. He hoped, however, to be able to make good use of the available material.

He again deplored the rather obvious lack of interest discernible in the answers of the specialized agencies. So many Member States referred in their answers to the importance of the role of those agencies that it was difficult not to conclude that their co-operation was indispensable. That co-operation might be achieved through the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) in which all agencies were represented and which met quite often.

The questionnaire sent to States Members comprised fifteen questions. The first question concerned the legislative, administrative or other measures States had taken to combat slavery and institutions or practices similar to slavery. That question was not concerned with the existence of slavery; it dealt with the legal position, and the administrative measures applied in the matter of slavery. It had been fully answered by many Member States, nearly all of which had given detailed descriptions of their legislative and administrative measures. In some cases, the prohibition of slavery was mentioned in the very Constitution of the State, as well as being the subject of legal and administrative measures. Many of those legal provisions dated back to the previous century and some had been repeatedly confirmed in subsequent legislation. In that connexion, he had just received a communication from the Austrian delegation requesting that paragraph 18 of the report (E/4168/Add.1) be amended to read: "The Court decree of 19 August 1826 specified that any slave becomes free as soon as he enters Austrian territory or boards an Austrian ship or is transferred, for whatever reason, as a slave to an Austrian national. The same provisions are also applicable in respect of prisoners of war who are treated as slaves by the belligerent by whom they are captured." More than one country had a provision in its legislation to the effect that a slave who set his foot upon the territory of that State automatically became a free man. He wondered whether such a provision could not be included in the legal system of every State Member of the United Nations.

Questions II and III dealt with the existence, or absence, of slavery or any institution or practice similar to slavery in the territory of the State. The slavery in question was that defined at the beginning of the questionnaire. Many answers had been received to those questions indicating, for the most part, the complete absence of slavery or similar practices. Careful perusal of the answers showed, however, that vestiges of slavery still existed and the fact that forty or fifty States Members of the United Nations had not replied meant that no definite opinion could be given on the matter.

Questions IV, V and VI concerned various aspects of the traffic in slaves or in persons of servile status and asked whether the laws - where they existed - prohibiting those practices were rigorously applied or whether, on the contrary, such practices existed in fact, being prohibited only in theory? Many States had replied, some in full detail, to those questions. Some said, however, that as slavery did not exist, no reply was necessary. In other words, crime was to be legally prohibited only if committed, a principle many legal authorities would hardly admit.

Question VII related to warships which, under the provisions of article 22 of the 1958 Convention on the High Seas, boarded on the high seas a merchant ship suspected of being engaged in the slave trade. According to the answers received, no naval Power, great or small, had had to apply that article.

Question VIII enquired about the existence in the country of any particular authorities responsible for combating slavery, the slave trade, or practices similar to slavery. Nearly all answers to that question stated that there was no particular authority responsible for suppressing slavery, the ordinary police and legal authorities having jurisdiction in that matter as in the case of other crimes. It seemed, however, that some States considered that once slavery had been abolished and legally outlawed in a country, a special authority responsible for the repression of slavery should be established. The Sudan, for instance, mentioned (para. 1164) that a special department for the repression of slavery had functioned from 1898 until 1921, when slavery had been completely eliminated, after which date the question became the responsibility of the ordinary Sudanese police force. That example seemed to indicate that it was essential to establish such authorities after the legal abolition of slavery in order to ensure effective application of the law. Other countries had recently abolished slavery and might usefully have followed the example of the Sudan; unfortunately, none of them had answered that question.

Most of the answers to question IX, which asked whether there existed in the country economic, social, historical or other causes which might constitute an obstacle to the elimination of slavery, were in the negative.

Question X asked what educational or other measures had been, or were being, taken to stimulate public awareness of the necessity and importance of eliminating slavery and allied practices. The purpose of the question was to determine whether anything was being done to educate public opinion. The answers showed that very little was being done. Three of the more helpful answers might be mentioned: the United Kingdom's effort to educate public opinion dated back to the early nineteenth century and men like William Wilberforce; Mali's answer referred to the political action undertaken to inform and educate the masses; and Australia's answer stated that public awareness of slavery was maintained with the help of United Nations Publications, general education and some non-governmental organizations.

Question XI had supplied the opportunity of asking States Members whether their Governments had ratified the Geneva Convention of 1926 and the Supplementary Convention of 1956. Most of the States Members which had answered the questionnaire had also answered that question. The majority said that they had acceded to both Conventions, or that the process of ratification was almost complete. Some replies indicated, however, that the Government, which had recently gained independence had inherited from the colonial power many conventions, which had to be examined and studied before the process of ratification could take its course. Venezuela had said that it had not ratified either Convention because they did not go far enough in their condemnation of all aspects of slavery; national measures went far beyond both Conventions.

Questions XII, XIII and XIV were of considerable importance because they formed the basis of the suggestions for possible action by the United Nations contained in chapter III (E/4168/Add.3) of the report. In resolution 1077 (XXXIX) the Council had requested the Special Rapporteur to continue his work, to submit a final report to the Council at its forty-first session and to include in that report suggestions for possible United Nations action on the question of slavery. He had decided that, in carrying out his mandate, he should be guided by the opinions of States Members, as expressed in their answers to the questionnaire, as well as by any advice he might receive from non-governmental organizations in consultative status.

Question XII asked what measures could usefully be taken at the international level to combat slavery, the slave trade and institutions and practices similar to slavery, and question XIII asked what legal, technical, administrative, financial or other assistance or co-operation would be desirable in eliminating or reducing conditions conducive to slavery and whether such assistance or co-operation should be rendered under the auspices of the United Nations and the specialized agencies. Question XIV concerned international non-governmental organizations and the part they could play in combating and eliminating slavery, the slave trade and practices similar to slavery.

Since the suggestions in chapter III of the report were already in summary form, it was impossible to summarize them further. He would, therefore, merely urge members to study that part of the report with particular attention. In paragraph 78, he had submitted a draft resolution covering some of the main suggestions. He had done that in order to assist any drafting committee which the Council might appoint, which could accept, amend or reject the draft.

He thanked the Council for the trust it had placed in him and paid tribute to the members of the Division of Human Rights.

Question XV, which merely said any further information relating to slavery or practices similar to slavery would be gratefully received, had produced no remarks worth recording apart from the United States reply, which had been received too late to be included in chapter III and which merited special mention. In conclusion therefore, he wished to quote that reply (E/4168/Add.4).

Mr. DELISLE (Canada) said he was glad to see the representative of Peru as Chairman of the Committee. He regarded that as a guarantee of success in its work. He was also pleased to welcome the new Director of the Division of Human Rights, Mr. Schreiber, whose competence and wide experience were well known. He paid a tribute to the work of Mr. Humphrey, the former Director of the Division, who in April had resumed his former university career after playing a distinguished role in the United Nations.

The Canadian delegation commended the honesty, impartiality and intelligence with which Mr. Mohamed Awaad had carried out the mission entrusted to him some years previously. He had spared neither his time nor his energy, and it could only be a matter for regret that he had not received all the co-operation he might have expected, since a large number of Governments had failed to reply to the questionnaire submitted to them.

The Committee thus had at its disposal a valuable catalogue of practices similar to slavery or connected with slavery in one way or another which still existed in certain parts of the world. Like the Special Rapporteur, he noted what the Government of Laos had to say about procuring - a particularly insidious and very widespread form of slavery which only international collaboration could in the long run eliminate. Noteworthy among the Special Rapporteur's recommendations was the point concerning the organization of regional seminars on slavery, which could lead to the establishment of a kind of regional criminal police whose task would be to combat the traffic in women for the purpose of prostitution. His delegation likewise endorsed the idea of setting up a committee of experts on slavery whose general function would be to assist the Council in its struggle to abolish slavery or practices similar to slavery. However, since that proposal had financial implications, the Secretary-General would have to submit an estimate of expenditure to the Committee.

Mrs. MANTZOULINOS (Greece) said she appreciated the privilege of working under the Chairman's able direction. She welcomed the new Director of the Division of Human Rights, whose competence in legal matters, culture and character the Greek delegation had frequently had occasion to appreciate. She also paid a tribute to his predecessor, who had retired after working devotedly and effectively for the cause of human rights.

The Special Rapporteur had provided the Council with an exhaustive study and very valuable recommendations. The Greek Government unreservedly associated itself with the international action undertaken to abolish slavery, which was a flagrant affront to human dignity. The League of Nations had taken the initiative in introducing steps designed to eliminate the scourge of slavery, and the United Nations, which was responsible for safeguarding and protecting fundamental freedoms, must do all in its power to eliminate slavery and similar practices still existing in certain parts of the world.

Having ratified the International Slavery Convention of 1926, the Greek Parliament had recently enacted a law ratifying the 1956 Supplementary Convention on Slavery. The abolition of slavery was fully in line with the provisions of the Greek Constitution and concept of public policy.

Chapter III of the report contained constructive suggestions from Governments and non-governmental organizations as well as the draft resolution submitted by the Special Rapporteur. In its operative part, the draft resolution proposed sound realistic action such as the establishment of a committee of experts on slavery, the organization of regional seminars on slavery, and the inclusion of the question of slavery in the agenda of the International Conference on Human Rights. The draft also proposed the widest possible distribution for the Special Rapporteur's report. The Greek delegation supported all those measures and would also support any amendments likely to strengthen and supplement the United Nations' efforts to abolish slavery.

At the same time, the Greek delegation would welcome the insertion in the preamble of an additional paragraph stressing the major contribution of the specialized agencies and the non-governmental organizations to the struggle against slavery. It would also like to have an additional paragraph inserted in the operative part whereby the Council would invite the specialized agencies, non-governmental organizations and inter-governmental organizations to continue their action for the abolition of slavery.

Mr. UY (Philippines) welcomed the new Director of the Division of Human Rights, who was now taking up the task begun by his predecessor, and wished him every success in his new duties.

He congratulated the Special Rapporteur on his excellent report. The Government of the Philippines had acceded to the 1962 Convention and the Supplementary Convention of 1956. Philippine legislation punished slavery and practices associated therewith. He reserved the right to submit more detailed comments at a later date on the report and the draft resolution it contained.

Miss LUNSINGH-MEIJER (Luxembourg) associated herself with the good wishes extended to the new Director of the Division of Human Rights: she was sure that the Committee's work would benefit greatly by his competence.

The interesting report by the Special Rapporteur was a valuable source of information and provided an over-all picture of the position with regard to slavery, the traffic in human beings and similar institutions and practices throughout the world. Many Governments had replied to the very full questionnaire prepared by the Special Rapporteur, and had made suggestions concerning governmental or non-governmental action that might be taken at different levels to combat and eliminate slavery in its various forms. The suggestions made by non-governmental organizations competent in that field were likewise of interest.

The replies received showed that the de facto situation did not always reflect the de jure situation. Legislative and administrative action must be taken, but it was not enough; deeply-rooted practices had to be combated; and the economic and social structure of communities still afflicted by the evil of slavery had to be transformed radically. The important thing was to eliminate the conditions conducive to such practices. The development aid programmes implemented under United Nations auspices could make a valuable contribution towards that end. Nor should the part which non-governmental organizations might play be underestimated.

The Special Rapporteur had done useful work by gathering so much information and making suggestions concerning the action to be taken. She supported his proposal for the establishment of a committee of experts which would underline the Organizations's concern with the elimination of slavery. Such a committee should have not more than seven members and should be set up for two or three years only, on a trial basis. She supported the draft resolution in principle, subject to any other suggestions that might be forthcoming during the debate.

Mr. CHAND (India) joined in the congratulations offered to the Chairman and the new Director of the Division of Human Rights, and expressed appreciation of the immense amount of work which had gone into Mr. Mohamed Awad's report. India had been a party to the 1926 Convention and the Supplementary Convention of 1956, and had always taken part in any action designed to restore human dignity throughout the world. Article 23 of its Constitution denounced slavery in all its forms and the penal code severely punished similar practices. India had abolished the last vestiges of forced labour which had persisted in tribal areas. It was ready to co-operate in any action which the Committee might take along the lines indicated by the Special Rapporteur. He supported in principle the draft resolution contained in Addendum 3.

Mrs. KASTALSKAYA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said her delegation was convinced that under the chairmanship of Mr. Fernandini the Committee would carry out its work efficiently; she welcomed the appointment of Mr. Schreiber as Director of the Division of Human Rights. The delegation of the USSR likewise thanked the Special Rapporteur for his very full report, for it attached great importance to international co-operation with a view to abolishing slavery and all similar practices.

It should be remembered, however, that slavery was not limited exclusively to the facts mentioned in the report. Apartheid and certain forms of colonial exploitation still to be found in South Africa and in the territories administered by Portugal constituted perhaps one of the most insidious forms of slavery with which the United Nations had to contend.

The Soviet Union delegation supported in principle the conclusions and suggestions of the Special Rapporteur; but it had certain reservations to make as to the establishment of a committee of experts, for it feared that such a step, while contributing very little to the abolition of slavery, would mean an additional financial burden for the United Nations. The struggle against slavery and similar practices was part of the work programme of the Council and of the Commission on Human Rights, and it was hardly likely that a new committee of experts would be able to take really positive action in that field.

By the same token, the proposal to organize a series of regional seminars on slavery at the headquarters of each of the regional economic commissions did not seem very sensible, for slavery was not characteristic of all parts of the world. The regional commissions already had too many problems to solve to be able to give high priority to the slavery question. Moreover, as the resources available for organizing seminars were very limited, the financial implications should also be taken into consideration. In the opinion of her delegation it would suffice to organize a single seminar in the only part of the world where slavery could still be considered a real scourge. In any case, her delegation noted that there had already been many studies on slavery and it was time that concrete action was taken in the social, economic and legislative fields. Concrete action by each country, and the results of such action were more important than any purely theoretical international activity, including the organization of seminars or the establishment of groups of experts.

Sir Samuel HOARE (United Kingdom) congratulated the Chairman of the Committee and welcomed the new Director of the Division of Human Rights.

The United Kingdom delegation thanked the Special Rapporteur for the immense task he had accomplished, to which the report before the Committee bore witness. The Council had already had the slavery question before it for several years. It had at first tried to obtain the co-operation of Member States by encouraging them to ratify the 1926 Convention on Slavery and the Supplementary Convention of 1956. The results had hardly been encouraging, and a second effort had not been appreciably more fruitful. That was why the Council had decided, at the proposal of the United Kingdom, to request that a Special Rapporteur on Slavery be designated. The report before the Committee proved how wise that decision had been, for it contained very full information on the institutions or practices similar to slavery still existing in the world.

As to the USSR delegation's remark concerning apartheid and racial discrimination, those questions could be discussed by the Council when items 21 and 24 of the agenda were dealt with. He considered, moreover, that the Commission on Human Rights, which was already overloaded with work, could not take up the question of slavery so as to make recommendations for action on the part of the Council at its forty-third session.

The United Kingdom delegation approved in principle the measures envisaged in the draft resolution proposed by the Rapporteur, and above all, the suggestion for the establishment of a committee of experts - which in its opinion should not number more than seven, as had been rightly urged by the delegation of Luxemburg. The Council was not equipped to follow closely the development of that problem, and the committee of experts would be able to fulfil that function as a consultative organ. There was no question of empowering the new body to institute inquiries in Member States or to bring charges against them. Its essential task would be that of reviewing all the information available to the United Nations and suggesting possible action by the Council. He had doubts, however, about the proposal that the committee of experts might itself appoint experts or set up sub-committees, and certain other proposals in the draft resolution might be examined more carefully, especially that on the organization of seminars. The Special Rapporteur had himself recognized that up to the present no Government had offered to be host to a seminar in its territory, and that raised doubt as to whether it would really be possible to act upon that proposal.

Mr. NABAVI (Iran) offered sincere congratulations to the Chairman and expressed satisfaction at the appointment of Mr. Schreiber as Director of the Human Rights Division.

The Iranian delegation approved in principle the suggestions and proposals submitted by the Special Rapporteur, especially that concerning the establishment of a committee of experts on slavery. But that question had already been studied repeatedly, and it was legitimate to ask whether the time had not come to take concrete action on the various proposals made on the subject. Thus, the Iranian delegation shared to some extent the opinion expressed by the representative of the Soviet Union, and would welcome further details from the Special Rapporteur concerning the terms of reference of the committee of experts. The committee would apparently have two separate tasks: to continue the studies on slavery, an operation which did not seem to call for the establishment of a new body; and, to propose various international measures. It was on the latter point that additional information would be useful.

His delegation approved of the Special Rapporteur's suggestion for the establishment of a drafting committee whose members would be appointed by the Chairman and whose task would be to prepare a draft resolution for submission to the Council. He might revert to that question at a later stage in the debate.

Mr. NAIK (Pakistan) joined in the tribute paid to the new Chairman of the Committee, who had rightly emphasized the importance of the Committee's work. He also welcomed the new Director of the Division of Human Rights.

The study submitted by the Special Rapporteur was an extremely valuable body of information. It seemed unnecessary to reiterate his Government's reply to the questionnaire: slavery had never existed in Pakistan, which had ratified the 1926 Convention and the Supplementary Convention of 1956, as well as the ILO Conventions on Forced Labour.

The Special Rapporteur attributed the fact that a number of countries had not replied to questions XII, XIII and XIV of the questionnaire to a misunderstanding. The reason why his country had not done so was because slavery had never existed in Pakistan and it would therefore be presumptuous to propose measures aimed at eliminating such practices in areas where it might still persist. That certainly did not mean that his country took no interest in the question; the Government of Pakistan would support any measure aimed at finally eradicating slavery.

Before making a final decision to support the Special Rapporteur's proposals, which were based for the most part on suggestions made by Governments in their replies, the Pakistan delegation wished to hear the explanations requested by several representatives, especially the representative of Iran, concerning the terms of reference of the proposed committee of experts. In his opinion, the committee of experts should have only consultative functions, as the United Kingdom representative had suggested.

Mr. ELMENDORF (United States of America) welcomed the prospect of working in close co-operation with the Chairman and with the new Director of the Division of Human Rights. He was pleased to have the final report of the Special Rapporteur and he noted with satisfaction that Mr. Awad would continue to take part in the United Nations work on human rights, since he had just been elected a member of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities.

The quality of the replies to the questionnaire varied greatly from one country to another. However, they had increased enough in number to enable the Committee to complete action on the item at the present session.

The United States delegation was grateful to the 'Special' Rapporteur for having drawn the Committee's attention to the suggestions made by its Government in reply to question XV. He had in mind, above all, the remark that it would be useful for the Secretary-General to consider certain spheres where Member States might be provided with aid. Non-governmental organizations should be able to collaborate in the activities undertaken by the Secretary-General.

With regard to the proposal to establish a committee of experts on slavery, the United States delegation thought that the Council was not in a position to undertake a further task in that field. A number of subsidiary organs were already concerned with questions relating to the protection of human rights and the work programme of the Council was already heavy. It was in that connexion that the Costa Rican proposal for the appointment of a High Commissioner for Human Rights took on its full significance: rather than multiply the procedures and difficulties, it would be desirable to bring the different questions connected with the practice of slavery before bodies already in existence or whose establishment had been proposed.

It was important to keep very clearly in mind the fact that total eradication of slavery could only be achieved through the economic and social development of the countries in which it persisted. Law and law-enforcement organs could only hope to eliminate that evil if the over-all development of the country made its eradication possible.

The idea of organizing seminars was sound, but only to the extent that such a step could be taken within the framework of the programme of advisory services in the field of human rights. In any case, a decision on that matter would be premature as long as no country had offered to be host.

Mr. BOULLET (France) associated himself with the congratulations to the Chairman and the new Director of the Division of Human Rights.

The French delegation was grateful to the Special Rapporteur, and to the members of the Secretariat who had helped him, for the document before the Committee, which contained valuable information on the legislation of numerous countries on slavery and similar practices.

At the thirty-ninth session the French delegation had abstained from participating in the discussion on that item of the agenda because the French version of the report had been issued too late. It was pleased to note that the delay had enabled the Special Rapporteur to produce additional documents and to compile a list of the measures which the United Nations might be called upon to take in that field.

The proposal on seminars was sound, provided that a single experimental seminar was organized in the first instance and that the costs involved were charged to the funds normally provided under the heading of advisory services in the field of human rights. The French delegation favoured in principle the establishment of a committee of experts, but like the Canadian delegation it would like to know the financial implications. In any case, the new body should be kept within reasonable limits, and the proposal to limit the number of members to seven seemed sensible. As United Kingdom representative had said, the committee of experts should only be a consultative body. Its task should be to furnish information to the Council and help Governments which so desired to solve any problems which arose in their countries in connexion, for example, with certain forms of slavery which it was not always easy to eradicate, because they were so closely interwoven with the existing social and economic structures. Thus it would be a long-term effort to be carried out above all in the social and economic sectors. A committee of experts could not initiate such action directly: its role should be that of an intermediary between the Governments concerned and the United Nations technical assistance bodies with a view to determining the special needs which had to be met in that field.

Mr. SCHREIBER (Director, Division of Human Rights) thanked the various speakers for their congratulations. He knew that the Secretary-General had entrusted him with a task which was both heavy and especially challenging. He would try to carry it out to the best of his ability, and with the utmost objectivity. Those who had paid tributes to the activities of his predecessor might be interested to know that the latter was determined to continue his activities in the field of the protection of human rights.

In the speech he had just delivered in the Council (1421st meeting) the Secretary-General had stressed the part which the Organization should play in the field of human rights and which would take on a special significance in 1968, the year designated by the General Assembly as the International Year for Human Rights.

He wished to assure the members of the Committee that they could count on the co-operation of his Division, which would try to apply faithfully any decisions the Committee might make.

The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.