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SOCIAL COUNCIL

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26 April 1948

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

STATISTICAL COMMISSION

THIRD SESSION

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE TWENTY-THIRD MEETING

Held at Lake Success, New York
Monday, 26 April 1948, at 11 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. H. MARSHALL (Canada)
Vice-Chairman: Mr. P.C. MAHALANOBIS (India)
Rapporteur: Mr. S.A. RICE (United States of America)
Members: Mr. D.K. LIEU (China)
Mr. G. DARMOIS (France)
*Mr. A. CASTRO VALLE (Mexico)
Mr. P.J. IDENBURG (Netherlands)
Mr. G. JAHN (Norway)
Mr. S. BILKUR (Turkey)
Mr. H. CAMPION (United Kingdom)

Representatives of Specialized Agencies:

Mr. R.M. WOODBURY (International Labour Organization)
Mr. C. TAEUBER (Food and Agriculture Organization)
Mr. R. HOFMAN (United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization)
Mr. A.M. LESTER (International Civil Aviation
Organization)
Mr. J.J. POLAK (International Monetary Fund)
Mr. K. STOWMAN (World Health Organization)

Representatives of Non-Governmental Organizations:

Mr. L. TEPER (American Federation of Labor)
Mr. G. RIDGEWAY (International Chamber of Commerce)

Secretariat:

Mr. W.R. LEONARD (Representing the Assistant
Secretary-General in Charge of
Economic Affairs)
Mr. W.J. BRUCE (Commission Secretary)

* Observer

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/Adoption

Adoption of the Agenda (Document E/CN.3/39)

Mr. RICE (United States of America) called attention to item 14 of the provisional agenda and stated that since the Rules of Procedure did not permit organizations with consultative status in category B to put items on the Commission agenda, he wished to introduce the item, with a relevant corrigendum, to the document on behalf of his Government. He also wished to propose a change in the order of agenda items so that item 8 would become item 3. At the request of Mr. CAMPION (United Kingdom) it was agreed that item 10 should be given early consideration. The agenda was adopted with those modifications.

Election of Officers

Mr. CAMPION (United Kingdom) favoured retention of the present officers of the Commission to ensure the continuity of its work.

Mr. IDENBURG (Netherlands), while he agreed with Mr. Campion that it might be desirable to retain the present officers for another year, did not wish such action to constitute a precedent. He pointed out, furthermore, that the present officers did not adequately provide a broad geographic representation and expressed himself in favour of the principle of rotation under which each country would share responsibility in this work.

Mr. JAHN (Norway) commented on the fact that although nearby countries had assisted in the statistical work of the Secretariat through a temporary detail of staff members, nevertheless this practice should not be encouraged. The Secretariat should be strengthened instead.

Mr. CAMPION (United Kingdom), seconded by Mr. JAHN (Norway) moved that the present officers of the Commission should be re-elected for another year.

The motion was adopted unanimously.

Election of a Member to Serve on the Population Commission

Mr. RICE (United States of America) who had served as the representative of the Statistical Commission on the Population Commission during the last two sessions presented his reasons for wishing to withdraw and nominated Mr. Mahalanobis for the position.

/Mr. MAHALANOBIS

Mr. MAHALANOBIS (India) was elected unanimously as the representative of the Statistical Commission on the Population Commission.

Regional Organizations for the Coordination of Statistics (document E/CN.3/47).

Mr. RICE (United States of America) expressed his Government's concern over all the current tendencies toward a breakdown of the kind of coordinated international statistical activity which was conceived when this Commission was established. He did not believe that it was possible to regionalize the responsibility for developing over-all standards in statistics and such a tendency towards regionalization seemed to be involved in the proposal under consideration and in the proposal placed upon the agenda for the Economic Commission for Europe. It was the view of his Government that there be one central responsibility for coordinating the separate efforts relating to statistics. The Statistical Commission of the United Nations and the Statistical Office of the United Nations were conceived to be the appropriate agencies to fill that central coordinating role.

Mr. IDENBURG (Netherlands) explained that the proposal on the agenda of the Economic Commission for Europe, which was meeting in Geneva, was intended on the one hand, to meet the need for reliable comparable statistics in the war-ravaged countries of Europe, and on the other, to meet the needs of the Statistical Commission to implement its recommendations by immediate practical measures, particularly with respect to individual European countries. However, he considered the establishment of a European Statistical Committee superfluous because the work could be done under the auspices of the Statistical Commission. Mr. Idenburg emphasized that the Commission could extend its activities to meet existing needs by entering into consultations with government statistical experts in European countries. From discussions and consultations as are now proposed will arise the most valuable suggestions for their own work and for drafting our programme of future work. We will not have to depend on our own knowledge and experience but can take into account the opinions and experience of the very competent group of workers who have the responsibility for utilizing our recommendations

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in the statistical field. Finally, through such discussions, the officers of statistical agencies will feel more than they now do their responsibility in the work of the United Nations. They will become more diligent in supplying information requested by the Statistical Office and more eager to send their comments and suggestions to the United Nations. In view of this explanation, Mr. Idenburg requested the Statistical Commission to consider the following motion:

"That the Statistical Commission recommend to the Economic and Social Council:

That it request the Secretary-General to encourage and facilitate consultation among representatives of the statistical agencies of European Member Governments upon statistical questions."

Mr. RICE (United States of America) seconded the motion.

After the representative of the Netherlands had made clear that the Commission was not proposing to establish a new formal organization, Mr. MAHALANOBIS (India) expressed his full support of the motion.

Mr. CAMPION (United Kingdom) pointed out that the proposal to set up a European Statistical Commission raised the broader question of conflict between functionalism and regionalism in the organization of the United Nations. He assumed that the motion submitted by the Netherlands representative would not be taken as a precedent in dealing with other regional commissions and that the report would make clear that it applied only to Europe. He pointed out that there are two aspects to this question. On the one hand, the Member Governments do not want duplicating requests for statistics not only from the United Nations and the Specialized Agencies, but also from the regional Commissions. On this point, the Statistical Commission must assume the ultimate responsibility for coordination. This should be a point of general principle which we are establishing. On the other hand, we are saying that there is a special case here for implementing recommendations of the Statistical Commission which will give them reality and purpose looking toward a sounder work programme in future years.

/Mr. JAHN

Mr. JAHN (Norway) was not in favour of statistical work being done on a regional basis. It was a world question, which should not be dealt with by different geographical units.

Mr. MAHALANOBIS (India) agreed with the representative of Norway that world comparability and overall standardization were a fundamental requirement. Certain regional subsidiary implementation of the global standard however, might need to be established, since some problems were of special interest to certain countries. He would not oppose the establishment of such regional standards, provided that they did not hamper or conflict with global or overall coordination.

Mr. LIU (China) considered the idea of consultations excellent. He could not, however, commit his Government to any such suggestion, and hoped that for the time being it would be confined to Europe.

The Commission approved the Netherlands resolution with one dissenting vote.

Mr. LEONARD (Secretariat) informed the Commission that the Secretary of the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East had asked if he might have the informal views of the Statistical Commission on a paper to be presented at the next meeting of ECAGE.

The paper, which dealt with the general statistical work of ECAGE, would be circulated, and the comments of the Statistical Commission would be referred to ECAGE.

The CHAIRMAN proposed that, as the Commission had not yet had an opportunity to study the paper, it should be discussed at a later meeting.

Mr. RICE (United States of America) agreed with the United Kingdom representative that the item under consideration was the broad question of regional organizations, of which Europe was only one example. The ECAGE paper was another facet of the same question, and in his opinion the whole item should be discussed again at a later meeting. He shared the opinion of the Norwegian representative that the responsibility for coordination was more a matter for the Secretariat than for the Commission.

/Coordination

Coordination of Plans for 1950 Censuses of Population and Agriculture.

- (a) National and international activities for population censuses in 1950.

The CHAIRMAN invited comments on document E/CN.3/48.

Mr. MAHALANOBIS (India) drew attention to paragraph 15, which was related to certain recommendations of the Sub-Commission on Statistical Sampling. He suggested, therefore, that it might be better to deal with that matter when the report of the Sub-Commission, which figured later on the agenda, was under consideration.

- (b) Report on the work of the Committee on the 1950 Census of the Americas. E/CN.3/48

The CHAIRMAN introduced Mr. Dedrick, the Chairman of the Committee on the 1950 Census of the Americas.

Mr. DEDRICK (Chairman of the Committee on the 1950 Census of the Americas), after circulating copies of the resolutions passed by the Committee, proceeded to give a brief sketch of the organizational background of the Committee.

The Committee had been created by the Inter-American Statistical Institute in 1946, in accordance with a resolution passed by the First Inter-American Demographical Congress in 1943 recommending that the Institute should undertake the coordination of the programme for the provision of population censuses for the American nations in or around the year 1950.

The first session of the Committee, at which all twenty-two American nations had been represented, had taken place a week in advance of the World Statistical Congress in September 1947. It had been realized during the course of the session that without further studies of national needs, it would be impossible to establish a complete Inter-American statistical programme of population censuses. A coordinating Board had therefore been created to perform certain studies and report to later meetings of the Committee. It was hoped that the Coordinating Board would meet again in June, and the Committee would meet for the second time in October or November.

/With regard

With regard to agricultural censuses, an Agricultural Census Sub-Committee had been established. Staff members of the FAO had participated in the work of the Sub-Committee with regard to the taking of an agricultural census in 1950.

Mr. Dedrick drew attention to resolution No. 2 on the minimum Inter-American population census programme. That resolution did not provide a definite or exact procedure, but contained ten items in addition to the usual questions of name and address. Other items which had been considered for inclusion, but upon which the Committee had taken no definite decision, were also listed in the resolution.

Each step in the programme would require the consent of all the countries concerned. The Committee had taken the view that the 1950 census would not be a truly international census unless the twenty-two national censuses were successful. There was much work to be done, but the Committee would move forward by means of research, technical studies, and clearance back to each country. It was hoped that when the Committee held its next session, it would be able to reach general definitions for the Inter-American Census.

Each of the twenty-two American countries would take a census sometime between July 1949 and July 1951; in the case of Ecuador, Paraguay and Haiti, it would be the first time a full census had been taken.

In conclusion, Mr. Dedrick expressed the willingness of his Committee to place any of its documents at the disposal of the Statistical Commission and to give any assistance the Commission might desire.

Mr. IDENBURG (Netherlands) asked Mr. Dedrick if he could give the Commission any information with regard to the coordination of programmes and definitions used for the American census, with those of other censuses.

Further, he wished to point out that when he had been in Curaçao recently, responsible officials had not appeared to know anything about the programme.

Mr. DEDRICK (Chairman of the Committee on the 1950 Census of the Americas) replied, in regard to the first point, that officers of the
/Committee

Committee had been in close touch with United Nations Secretariat. There had been no final decision with regard to definitions, as that matter would have to be worked out over a period of time with the agreement of each country. It was considered premature to take too rigid a stand at the present moment.

It was true that the Caribbean Commission was not yet adequately informed with regard to the programme; that situation would, however, be rectified within the next few days.

Mr. JAHN (Norway) stated that the Inter-American Statistical Institute was to be congratulated on having been able to induce all the American countries to take a census.

He did not intend to comment on the items listed for the minimum programme, beyond the fact that he considered it very courageous to include the item of income from wages and salaries.

Mr. MAHALANOBIS (India) congratulated Mr. Pedrick on the work of the Committee which represented a big step forward.

With regard to the technical side of the work, he drew attention to the recommendations of the Sub-Commission on Statistical Sampling contained in document E/CN.3/37, with particular reference to those in paragraphs 14, 26, 43, 45 and 46. It was important that those recommendations should be taken into consideration.

Paragraph IV of resolution No. 2 of the Committee on the 1950 Census of the Americas stated that it would be desirable to obtain figures for the total de facto population. In that connection, he wished to point out that India had experimented in seven censuses with the de facto principle, and had reached the conclusion that it was not feasible, at least under Indian conditions.

The CHAIRMAN declared that it was not only a question of Indian conditions; Canada, too, had found it could not use the de facto principle.

Mr. RICE (United States of America) asked Mr. Dedrick whether the Committee on the 1950 Census of the Americas had taken steps to adjust its minimum proposals to those contained in document E/CN.3/W.9.

/Mr. MAHALANOBIS

Mr. MAHALANOBIS (India) observed that the minimum list could be interpreted in two different ways: either every individual would be required to give information according to the list, or certain items on the list could be estimated on the basis of sampling.

The CHAIRMAN said that the points raised by the representatives of the United States and India could be answered when the item came up for general discussion.

The meeting rose at 12:50 p.m.
