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NEW YORK

Chairman: Mrs. Helvi SIPILÄ (Finland).

**AGENDA ITEM 52**

**Question of the elderly and the aged (concluded)\***  
(A/8364, A/C.3/616, A/C.3/L.1907, A/C.3/L.1920)

1. Mr. LAHERA (Chile) said that the report by the Secretary-General on the question of the elderly and the aged (A/8364) pointed clearly to the importance of an item that concerned 200 million people throughout the world. The distinction which it drew between the aged in developed countries and those in under-developed countries corresponded to reality, and further study should be made of the role of the elderly and the aged in economically undeveloped societies. Inherent in the development of modern capitalism was the neglect of persons who, no longer able to compete in the constant self-seeking struggle for material goods, lost contact with the world around them and became alienated from their fellow man. That kind of destructive experience must not be allowed to recur. There was no place for the misfortune of such a large group of people in the socialist system that Chile was trying to build.

2. Research and statistics all indicated that the situation of the aged in most countries was scandalous. Worse still was the case of old workers who, in addition to the natural afflictions of old age, had to live with illnesses that they had contracted on their jobs. Socio-scientific research showed that manual workers were worn out at a relatively early age. Age then, more than a mere psychosomatic phenomenon, was a reflection on society, and particularly on capitalist society which was based on the exploitation of man. The very concept of old age therefore had to be revised; there was biological old age and social old age, and the world was now witnessing the spread of technocratic old age deriving from the demand for and the nature of certain kinds of work subject to an age limit that became increasingly low as unemployment increased.

3. Something more than well-intentioned measures was needed to solve the problem of old age, which was already becoming acute in contemporary society. The problem was far too vast: prejudices had to be overcome and current social policy changed so that the aged could see themselves not just as superfluous but as still having the possibility and the duty of once again playing a dignified role in society, in accordance with the principles of social justice. Acting on special instructions from its Government, the Chilean delegation had joined the sponsors of the draft resolution before the Committee (A/C.3/L.1907).

\* Resumed from the 1894th meeting.

4. Miss LAPOINTE (Canada) remarked that, while young people had no lack of defenders although they had sufficient dynamism to defend their own causes and look after their own interests, the situation was quite different with the aged. In an appalling paradox, modern society spent its energies in prolonging the life of old people while cutting them off, at times brutally, from the mainstream of life. The interesting preliminary report of the Secretary-General in document A/8364 revealed the vulnerability of such people and their inability to influence the policies that affected them. In industrialized countries, especially, new measures imposing premature retirement caused them increasingly to lose their social usefulness, which brought a corresponding loss of dignity. Developing countries, where elderly people were still held in some respect and possessed considerable authority, would not escape the trend. Hence all Governments should adopt long-term policies aimed at reformulating the social role and status of the aged under a comprehensive programme. The United Nations was quite right to make a survey in 12 different countries of the policies, practices and programmes affecting old people, in order to analyse their role and status and to study their requirements and the problems that came with urbanization and socio-economic evolution. The study would show to what extent countries with different political and social systems and levels of development concerned themselves with the fate of their elderly population and would no doubt be the starting point of further multinational research.

5. In Canada, the proportion of persons over 65 years of age was around 8 per cent. Over the past 20 years, the Government had devoted much greater attention to looking after the elderly than throughout the country's previous history. That was to be explained by the fact, first, that the country and its population were young and, secondly, that in Canada the process of urbanization had not gathered momentum until after the Second World War. Formerly, the needs of the young, particularly in regard to education, had absorbed the energies and resources of the community. Victims of inflation and the high cost of living, a large number of people who had been unable to save during the depression years of the 1930s were entirely dependent on social measures instituted by the Federal Government or provincial governments. Those measures comprised, *inter alia*, income maintenance programmes, guaranteed subsidies to people whose total income was below a certain level and a co-ordinated social security programme. Private pension schemes as yet only covered slightly more than 38 per cent of the working force.

6. Since no country could avoid its responsibility to come to the aid of the aged and as it would be to the advantage of all to participate in an exchange of views on the subject,

it would be advisable for the Secretary-General to continue the study of their changing socio-economic role and status in countries of different levels of development and, in co-operation with the interested specialized agencies, to prepare a report suggesting guidelines for national policies. The Canadian delegation was proud to be among the sponsors of draft resolution A/C.3/L.1907, which was drafted along those lines.

7. Mr. PAPADEMAS (Cyprus) said that the role of the aged in society and the care they received varied from country to country and sometimes from region to region. Having devoted its attention to youth, the United Nations should do as much for the aged. They were a group of people who had already fulfilled their responsibilities to society, and it was important that they should be cared for and assured of their material needs. In some societies, the family was primarily responsible for that; in others, especially in large cities, the aged lived alone and disconsolate and were even afraid of dying abandoned. Cyprus, a small country, had always looked after its aged and regarded the family as an important and significant institution. The aged were looked after by their families or, where they had none, by social welfare services.

8. He commended the sponsors of draft resolution A/C.3/L.1907 for submitting an interesting text. His delegation, however, felt that it was necessary that the aged should know of the United Nations concern for them and had accordingly submitted amendment A/C.3/L.1920 introducing an additional preambular paragraph to that effect.

9. Mr. STILLMAN (United States of America) said that his delegation attached particular importance to the question of the elderly and the aged and that the Secretary-General's excellent report (A/8364) set forth in concise terms the essential nature of the subject and contained valuable conclusions and recommendations. He paid a special tribute to the Director of the Division of Social Development and his staff for the preliminary work they had undertaken.

10. Demographic factors, and primarily the dramatic reduction in mortality rates, had resulted in a significant increase in the older population in many countries. For example, the number of persons over 65 years of age had doubled in Japan in 30 years and in Belgium in just 20 years. The number of older people in the United States had increased from three million to 20 million in the twentieth century. As the number of older people had risen, there had been a corresponding acceleration of programmes and services for the aging and a growing awareness of their needs in terms of health care, employment, financial assistance, housing and social and community relationships. As those fundamental requirements were met, the quality of life of the elderly would be improved and their contribution to the economic and social life of the community enhanced.

11. Discussion of the item was especially timely for his delegation since a White House Conference on the Aging, convened at the invitation of President Nixon, had just been held. Almost two years of preparation had preceded the Conference, with the participation of more than a

million older citizens of the United States. The Conference, which sought to lay the foundation of a national policy on aging, had been attended by 3,400 delegates, many of them elderly, as well as by observers from 30 countries. It would soon be submitting a final report to the President containing its recommendations, on which the President had pledged to seek prompt and effective action. When the report was ready, his delegation would make it available to other delegations.

12. In the 35 years since the passing of the Social Security Act of 1935, the United States had developed a wide range of programmes for older people. More than 90 per cent of workers and their families were now protected against loss of income and the financial burden of illness in old age. The value of medical care benefits for the elderly had increased by over 50 per cent in just five years. The Older Americans Act of 1965 was a landmark piece of legislation. Its long-range objective was to provide income, medical care, housing, employment and other social benefits for senior citizens. A federal administration on aging had been created under the Act, charged with research and training programmes for older people, the administration of funds distributed to states and the financing of a wide variety of programmes for older people. President Nixon had named a cabinet-level committee on affairs of the aging and a Commissioner on Aging served as a special assistant to the President. In addition to those programmes at the federal level, there were a variety of state and local programmes.

13. His delegation was strongly in favour of an increased exchange of ideas and greater international co-operation in dealing with matters affecting the elderly and the aged. It was pleased that world attention would be devoted to those questions when the International Congress of Gerontology held its ninth triennial session in July at Kiev. While existing international co-operation in that field by countries already concerned with the problems of old age was to be commended, there should be greater sharing of experiences as a basis for more effective social policies. The concerted efforts of investigators from different disciplines in Denmark, the United Kingdom and the United States had resulted in the publication of a cross-national survey of the living conditions and behaviour of elderly people in those countries. While it was recognized that there might be certain universal phenomena associated with aging, such as declining physical capacity, it was assumed that the reactions of older people to their situations might vary because of cultural, social or economic differences in the countries concerned. The findings of those studies were of such great interest that organizations in other countries had undertaken similar studies, primarily financed through United States counterpart funds. Research conducted in Israel, Poland, Yugoslavia and India would provide new insight into the problems of growing old in contemporary societies at different levels of economic development.

14. The United States foresaw an important role for the United Nations in developing a co-ordinated plan for the study and review of projects which would test the effectiveness of services and programmes established in different countries. Studies might be conducted in the area of housing, health care, retirement preparations and programmes, income security, the use of leisure time, participation in community life and the utilization of skills and

abilities. The exploratory surveys now being conducted by the United Nations in 12 countries should be especially useful, and he congratulated the Secretary-General on that undertaking. A work programme had been launched which could be regarded as an excellent beginning, and his delegation urged the Secretary-General to continue his survey and develop recommendations in co-operation with the specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations.

15. His delegation was a sponsor of draft resolution A/C.3/L.1907, which had been eloquently introduced by the Maltese representative, and he commended it to the Committee for adoption.

16. Mr. BENITES (Ecuador) said that the problem of the elderly was one of the most painful from the human point of view and one of the most serious from the social and economic point of view. The problem lay essentially in the fact that there was at present an economically unproductive population of 200 million persons over 65 which would continue to increase as scientific progress, especially gerontology, increased the average life span. In the world population a great many of the young and the aged were economically inactive, while the productive population accounted for only a relatively small fraction of society.

17. He praised the Secretary-General's report (A/8364) and pointed out that the increase in the number of older people, referred to in the report, was not only greater in the more developed than in the less developed countries, owing to economic and health conditions, but constituted a more cruel problem in the industrialized countries, where family ties were breaking down, than in the developing countries, where the family had a feeling of unity where old people were concerned. Nevertheless, increasing industrialization was bringing with it the problem of the isolation of persons who were prevented by age, or by law, from remaining economically productive, and the problem of the breakdown of family ties, resulting in the isolation of the old, was also increasing.

18. As the Secretary-General's report pointed out, it was wrongly thought by some that old age was synonymous with deterioration and that old people could contribute little or nothing to advanced societies; it was also believed that old people were ideologically conservative and were therefore opposed to necessary economic and social change. The negative attitude of the elderly was due to their lack of contact with the outside world, which led them to a state of withdrawal and inward-turning, which in turn led to a negative state of mind. Study should be devoted to the psycho-sociological aspects of the complex problem of retirement, which often compelled the individual, while still productive, to become a marginal, unproductive and solitary figure subsisting in a negative way out of contact with society. Perhaps the individual should be taught from youth to plan his life in such a way as to achieve optimum productivity at every age. Although thanks to the progress of science people of advanced age could be kept physically and mentally productive, their productivity could be substantially increased in various ways, for example, through training to provide a second occupation for the older individual to fall back on when his physical powers were declining or his mind was beginning to fail.

19. There was a growing awareness of the problem in the United States. As pointed out in an editorial of *The New York Times* of 1 December 1971, the elderly now accounted for more than 20 per cent of the population and for more than 15 per cent of the total number of voters. It was believed that that percentage of the elderly among voters would increase rapidly, so that they would become a very important political force. The President of the United States had—though, of course, not because of that consideration—organized a special White House Conference, under the direction of Arthur S. Fleming, on the problems of retirement, tax exemption and the freezing of rents for the elderly. Concerted attention was being devoted to the problem at present, both by biologists and by political experts, and not only in the United States but also in many countries of Europe.

20. He hoped that the item would be kept on the agenda for the next session so that it could be discussed more fully, and proposed that objective data should be sought from Governments, to which the Secretary-General's report (A/8364) and the relevant summary records could be transmitted. At the same time, the Secretary-General should be asked to prepare a more complete study on the subject.

21. Mr. ROPOTAN (Romania) thanked the Director of the Social Development Division for his introduction (1894th meeting) to the item under consideration. The Secretary-General's report on the question of the elderly and the aged (A/8364) gave a clear idea of the importance and complexity of the problem. Since persons over 65 accounted for more than a quarter of the world's population and their social and economic status was expected to deteriorate both in the industrialized countries and in many developing areas, it was natural that mankind and the United Nations should be concerned with that problem and should participate in the search for solutions. The question was not only a humanitarian one; it had economic and social aspects which might have a serious impact on the normal evolution of nations. He was therefore grateful to the Maltese delegation for drawing the attention of the United Nations to that problem and for its being placed on the agenda of the last two sessions of the General Assembly.

22. Unquestionably, the complex problem of the elderly and the aged deserved thorough study based on a comprehensive approach. In that connexion he welcomed the request to the Secretary-General to continue the study of the changing socio-economic and cultural role and status of the aged in countries of different levels of development and to prepare a report suggesting guidelines for national policies and international action related to the needs and the role of the elderly and the aged, as was recommended in draft resolution A/C.3/L.1907, of which his delegation was a sponsor. His delegation also appreciated the fact that the draft resolution called for co-operation between the International Labour Organisation, the World Health Organization and other specialized agencies in the preparation of the report. That joint work would serve to evaluate the experience which all those organizations had acquired in the course of their work. He believed that the studies on the subject should devote increasing attention to scientific research in order to find further ways and means of improving the lives of the elderly and the aged.

23. The Romanian constitution guaranteed satisfaction of the material needs of retired persons, who were given free medical care in hospitals and sanatoriums and free medical and health supplies during illness. There were also numerous nursing homes to care for elderly persons who required permanent medical care. Likewise, special sections of various sectors of production were open to old people wishing to continue their productive activity. All those features helped to prevent and delay the aging process.

24. Mr. MANI (India) thanked the Secretary-General for his report (A/8364) and the Director of the Social Development Division for his introductory comments. At present over 200 million of the world's population were over 65, and their number was growing rapidly. Furthermore, the prestige of the old was in decline as widespread prejudice existed in most societies, where the old were viewed as useless, inflexible and non-productive. In some developing countries, as in India, for example, there was a desire to undertake measures for the welfare of the aged but they lacked the financial resources necessary to make them effective.

25. It had first to be determined whether it was desirable to adopt a social policy permitting the employment of persons beyond the minimum pensionable age, in view of the incidence of unemployment among youth and the large number of new entrants into the labour market whose prospects might be affected by measures geared to the welfare of the elderly and the aged. In India the urgent problems of children and youth had prevented attention being given to the welfare of the aged.

26. It was also essential to identify the measures necessary to make use of old people who had retained their physical and mental capacity. At the same time, minimum supportive welfare services of a non-institutional type should be established to assist the community and the family to perform their traditional function of supporting the old. It would also be helpful for experience to be shared among developing countries with regard to services for the care of the aged, and the medical, financial, social, psychological and housing aspects of that care.

27. The studies to be undertaken by the Secretary-General should take into account the relevant social and economic variables; they should also include an assessment of the relative effectiveness of measures taken in the past. The studies should focus on analysing the ways in which different social institutions were meeting their obligations towards the elderly and the aged and on suggesting measures whereby they could be strengthened.

28. In almost all developing countries, the elderly and the aged constituted an important sector of the population which, depending on the circumstances, could be either an effective agent for development or a hindrance to change. Individually, the elderly and the aged were repositories of hereditary skills which should be used to bring about social change. Traditionally, in India responsibility for the care of the aged and the elderly rested with the family and the village community. Since the major portion of the sources of livelihood had been based on family enterprise, the transition from working life to retirement had been a gradual process. Moreover, because the rate of educational

development and technological change had been very slow, the experience acquired by the elderly had enabled them to continue performing socially useful functions. However, the situation was changing; the joint family system was breaking up and the support provided by kinship groups, caste institutions and the village community had considerably declined. Increasingly, people were becoming wage earners, and the pressure on them of dependent old parents and young children was substantial. Pensions and other retirement benefits were confined to a small sector consisting of government workers and some organized branches of industry. A few voluntary organizations were implementing schemes for the welfare of the aged and the infirm, and some of those persons were receiving some sort of government assistance. In general, the amount of assistance and its coverage were inadequate. According to the 1961 census, the total population over 60 years old numbered approximately 12.34 million men and 12.33 million women. Owing to the paucity of resources, no provision had been made at the national level for assistance to the aged in the Five Year Plan; priority had been given to family and child welfare.

29. With regard to employment, too, priority had been given to unemployed youth. The services of the aged were, however, being utilized by private and voluntary organizations. Research on the possible utilization of the services of the aged was not being encouraged, in view of the urgent problems of children and youth; however, certain studies on the problems of the elderly had received official support. In general, no detailed guidelines for government action on behalf of the aged had yet been prescribed. Article 41 of the Constitution of India provided that assistance for the aged was one of the guiding principles of state policy, but in practice the scheme of social assistance had been very limited in scope. Consideration was now being given to the possibility of constituting a small working group to examine the requirements of services for the aged in India and its study was likely to lay the foundation for the provision of services for the aged in the Fifth Five Year Plan.

30. With those observations, his delegation, as one of the sponsors, supported draft resolution A/C.3/L.1907 and hoped that the highest priority would be given to the item at the next session with a view to the consideration of a concrete action plan.

31. Mrs. JESPERSEN (Denmark) said that her delegation recognized the importance of the item under consideration and therefore wished to become a sponsor of draft resolution A/C.3/L.1907. In Denmark, the aged accounted for more than 11 per cent of the population, and up to 14 per cent in the larger cities, such as Copenhagen; Denmark had thus been faced for many years with the problems described in the report of the Secretary-General (A/8364).

32. After emphasizing the value of the recommendations in that document, she drew attention to the publications on the subject distributed by United Nations agencies such as WHO and the ILO. She also recalled part I, article 8, of the Declaration on Social Progress and Development which, like part II of the same document, emphasized the importance of improving the welfare of all sectors of society. Even so,

she considered it useful to draw the attention of the Committee to the need for planning in societies which expected to undergo social changes similar to those experienced by the industrialized countries, as well as the need for further investigations concerning the role of the elderly in industrialized countries other than those mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General. Although in recent decades many countries had adopted a more positive approach to the problems of the aged, the situation of a vast majority of old people still could not be considered satisfactory.

33. The foundation of the welfare of elderly retired persons was financial security. All Danes, regardless of their private means, were now covered by national old age pensions. In addition, Denmark had a scheme providing for compulsory labour market supplementary pensions which offered the aged basic financial security.

34. The housing problem was accorded next priority. The emphasis had been on enabling the elderly to remain in their own apartments or houses as long as possible. Accordingly, legislation had gradually been shifting the burden for the care of old people from institutions to accommodation within the ordinary community. As a result, special publicly subsidized pensioners' flats had been built in most cities and in some rural districts. The aim was to locate the aged in practical surroundings at low rents. However, there was still a shortage of many thousands of such apartments. Under a rent subsidy act, all tenants were entitled to financial help if their rent exceeded a specific proportion of their income, and that help was, of course, available also to the aged. During the past 10 to 15 years, a new type of service flat had become increasingly popular, especially among the aged. Such flats were built either by local governments or by special organizations, of a voluntary or other nature. Each flat was self-contained and the occupant was entitled to meals and various types of domestic service. Service flats were of such importance that they ought to be more integrated in the social security system. The integration of service flats with nursing homes made available a wide variety of services.

35. The assistance and care given to the aged or the disabled in their own homes were, of course, of the utmost importance. Since 1955, those services had been supplemented by home helper services provided free of charge to old age pensioners who had no considerable private income. Under Danish legislation, local authorities had the responsibility of providing the necessary number of nursing homes for the aged as well as old people's homes. The standards for those institutions were laid down by the Ministry of Social Affairs, and the trend was to provide single rooms with private bath in all modern nursing homes. Apart from the human element and the fact that most old people preferred to stay in their own homes, it was important from society's point of view that the cost of helping an old person in a modern service flat was lower than that of maintaining him in a modern nursing home. Furthermore, there was a shortage of trained nursing home personnel in Denmark. Nursing homes were administered by local governments or private organizations. Since 1964, only non-profit private organizations had been allowed to operate nursing homes having more than 8 to 12 patients. The expenses were covered entirely by central and local

governments and all nursing homes were subject to supervision by local health authorities.

36. The question of health care for the aged must be resolved in conjunction with the question of health care for the population as a whole, even if experience showed that the aged represented the largest group of consumers of health services. In Denmark, everyone was protected by a general health insurance system which covered all hospital expenses as well as primary health services and most of the costs of medicine.

37. Legislation adopted in 1968 provided furthermore for public subsidies for a variety of privately or publicly organized activities for old people. That legislation also emphasized the responsibility of the community to inform the aged and the elderly of their rights, which were in conformity with those laid down in part III, article 15 (d), of the Declaration on Social Progress and Development.

38. While it was often stated that the ties between generations and families were not very firm nowadays, and still less so in highly urbanized areas, a special study carried out a few years ago by the Social Research Institute of the Ministry of Social Welfare in Denmark had shown that the vast majority of the aged maintained excellent relations with their families. Denmark's problems with regard to the aged seemed to stem from the fact that although its social services covered a wide range of needs, it had so far proved difficult to co-ordinate them. A Social Reform Act had recently been adopted to provide for better organization of those services and easier communication between the various assistance bodies. It was essential to integrate medical and social services, especially in the case of the aged. It was also necessary to bring about a change in the mental attitude towards the older generation. Fortunately, some progress could be noted in that regard. Accordingly, she hoped that the next generation of older persons would enjoy complete respect, as was still the case in many non-industrialized countries. Similarly, the tendency to isolate the aged in large institutions or to concentrate them in flats or houses built especially for them should be eliminated. Such segregation—whatever the euphemistic name given to it—was simply another form of discrimination which everyone deplored when it was practised for reasons of race or sex.

39. Mr. EVDOKEEV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) observed that elderly persons who had already made their contribution to society merited its care and attention. Accordingly, the draft resolution introduced by Malta at the 1894th meeting (A/C.3/L.1907) deserved the attention of the Committee. The report by the Secretary-General (A/8364) contained a series of highly interesting observations concerning the problem of the elderly and the aged and rightly pointed out that the question should not be regarded as separate from that of society at large or outside the framework of national economic and social development policy: the situation of the aged in a given country was the result of the conditions prevailing in that country. Lack of concern for the living conditions of the aged was particularly obvious in countries without a planned economy, where man was exploited by man and there was no equitable distribution of the national income. To live longer signified nothing if the means were not available to



continue to live with dignity. The anti-humanitarian nature of certain societies condemned the aged to an environment which accentuated flagrant inequalities and injustices. The situation of women was especially difficult in such cases, for their income was usually still lower. The report of the Secretary-General remained silent on the subject of racial discrimination, but it should be emphasized that in most of the capitalist countries elderly persons in some ethnic groups experienced greater difficulties than the large majority of the population. Moreover, there was nothing in the report to suggest that the situation was likely to improve.

40. It would be very useful if, in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1581 A (L), all Governments were sent a questionnaire on their experience in achieving far-reaching social and economic changes for purposes of social progress. On the basis of the replies received, the report of the Secretary-General could be supplemented by a review of the measures adopted by Governments to improve the social conditions of the population in general, and of the aged in particular.

41. His country was able to state that it accorded the aged the respect they deserved for the work they had accomplished in the course of their productive life. In the USSR, workers, farmers, employees, etc. were covered by social insurance financed from the sources of production and not involving any expense for the workers. Retirement age was 60 for men and 55 for women. The Government subsidized rest homes and medical treatment for the aged. Retired persons (whose pensions had, incidentally, recently been doubled) could continue to work without losing their pension rights. In its wish to improve the employment opportunities for its citizens, the Government defrayed the cost of training the elderly so that, once they had retired, they could still perform useful tasks.

42. With regard to social services, which were an important part of the communal and political life of the country, the role of the workers in local soviets and other organizations had led to great progress which, in turn, had brought benefits for the aged. The trade unions controlled the funds for pensions, social services and general services for the aged. They also assisted social service organizations, and particular importance was attached to organizations which provided medical care for elderly persons and invalids. In 1967, his Government had embarked on the construction of new housing for elderly citizens who were unable to work. It should be stressed that in the Soviet Union the elderly could carry on working if they were fit; otherwise, they were supported entirely by the State. They received free medical care, including medical care at home, as did all other citizens, and the Government exercised control over their rents (which were in any case very low, varying in the Soviet Union between 3 and 4 per cent of a person's income).

43. The Twenty-Fourth Congress of the Communist Party had arranged for the latest Five-Year Plan to include plans to build rest homes for workers, old people and invalids and to increase services for the aged in such matters as transport, medical care, etc. The Congress had also established directives to promote an active life for retired

persons who were able to work. At the recent session of the Supreme Soviet, a five-year economic plan had been adopted to improve the level of living of the Soviet people as a whole, a plan which would of course also have a bearing on the living conditions of the aged. In that regard, the advantage of a socialist structure was obvious. Under the latest Five-Year Plan, the income of the population had risen and part of it would be used for higher pensions, wages and allowances.

44. His delegation had no objection to the fifth pre-ambular paragraph of draft resolution A/C.3/L.1907, inasmuch as the deterioration referred to in that paragraph did undoubtedly exist in many countries. However, the unfortunate picture drawn in that text was in no sense applicable to the Soviet Union, as his comments had demonstrated. The Soviet Union did not fear that type of situation because its plans provided for the needs of the aged and for their participation in social life. His delegation supported the draft resolution and was in no way opposed to the amendments submitted by the delegation of Cyprus.

45. Mr. NENEMAN (Poland) observed that those who drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Declaration on Social Progress and Development had borne in mind the problem of the elderly and the aged, though only within the general context of human and social rights. The Committee, on the other hand, was now endeavouring to consider the question as a specific issue which concerned an ever-growing portion of the world population. The figures contained in the Secretary-General's report on the question of the elderly and the aged (A/8364), as the report itself pointed out, posed a new challenge which had social and economic implications.

46. The first aspect of the problem was the definition of old age. To regard those over 65 years of age as old would be arbitrary, since some people of that age were still actively engaged in their work and were full of vigour and creative ability, while others were inactive and helpless even before they reached 65 years of age. The word "old" was usually associated with a diminished ability to work, although it customarily referred solely to normal retirement age and was not necessarily linked to ill health or other disabilities. Accordingly, he preferred to use the term "retired people" or "people of post-productive age", instead of the word "old".

47. The question of the elderly and the aged was a grave social problem and the delegation of Malta was to be commended for bringing it to the attention of the Committee. Firstly, there were the material needs of retired people, and they should be met by the former employer. That could be done by means of a social security fund or the State tax machinery, on the understanding that retired people were entitled to social security according to the number of years they had worked. In that connexion, a great deal was being done in Poland, where the aim was to provide the whole of the population with social security coverage which would include the following benefits: medical care, sickness benefits, old-age pensions, compensation for occupational accidents or diseases, disability pensions, maternity and family allowances, and widows' and dependants' pensions.

48. Social insurance was closely connected with health protection, which older people needed more than the young. In the field of health protection for the aged, the following seemed to be of the utmost importance: early preventive treatment of disease, systematic health supervision, rehabilitation and revitalization, and health care at home and in hospital. The aging process started very early, but with the appropriate prophylaxis it could be slowed down and alleviated. Little had been done as yet in that field, although more prophylaxis meant less hospitalization and health care at home for the seriously ill. In Poland all kinds of medical services were provided free to all persons covered by social insurance, i.e., all employees and their dependants and, of course, retired persons. Furthermore, preventive care was also free and, in the case of persons suffering from tuberculosis or contagious diseases, medicines were also provided. Those forms of health protection for the aged should be taken into consideration in trying to establish guidelines for a social policy for the elderly and the aged.

49. Also to be considered was the problem of housing, since the construction of properly equipped units might enable many elderly persons to become self-sufficient. In Poland, institutions where retired people were previously employed were dealing with part of the problem. Retired people could have inexpensive meals in the canteen, could take part in excursions or cultural activities, spend holidays in factory rest homes, etc. At the same time, particular attention should also be given to family relationships.

50. In conclusion, he suggested that the role of the elderly and the aged in society should be defined, as well as their right to material security and health protection, and standards should be established. Further studies of the problem were of course needed, on the basis of which the Commission for Social Development could draw up a document which the Third Committee might subsequently adopt for the benefit of old people, and indeed for mankind as a whole.

51. Miss WILLIAMS (New Zealand) said that her Government was acutely aware of the problems faced by the elderly and the aged in present-day society and that considerable attention had been given to the question in New Zealand. Although the subject was not new to the United Nations, there had been no substantive discussion in the United Nations on the question of the elderly and the aged for the past 20 years. Consequently, there was reason to be grateful to the Secretariat and to the delegation of Malta for the initiative they had taken in that respect in recent sessions. Her Government supported the project on the elderly and the aged which had been included in the social development work programme for the current five-year period.

52. The draft resolution submitted by the delegation of Malta (A/C.3/L.1907) contained a new element: operative paragraph 1 requested the preparation of "a report suggesting guidelines for national policies and international action related to the needs and the role of the elderly and the aged". However, paragraph 69 of the report of the Secretary-General (A/8364), suggested that the United Nations should initiate concerted international action to devise a common strategy for helping countries at different

stages of development to formulate guiding principles for policies related to the elderly and the aged and to assist Governments in the formulation and implementation of those policies as part of their over-all development programmes. The difference between the two texts was clear. The draft resolution proposed a report which would suggest guidelines; the other text proposed that a common strategy should be devised to assist Governments in formulating guiding principles.

53. Her Government preferred the latter text, since the discussions had shown that there were no differences of opinion about the basic principle, namely, the right of old people to a full life, as stated in article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. One aspect of the problem had been covered by the ILO Convention concerning Invalidity, Old-age and Survivors' Benefits (No. 128), which laid down minimum standards applicable to invalidity, old age and survivors' benefits. However, in the light of the immense differences in the nature of the problem from country to country, it was difficult to see how the United Nations could formulate universally applicable guidelines for dealing with the other aspects of the problem. For example, in the developing countries, which were often faced with the problems of unemployment and underemployment, the question was essentially one of survival and proper medical care and attention. It would be absurd to re-employ the elderly in a country already experiencing unemployment.

54. Accordingly, her delegation had suggested to the delegation of Malta an amendment to operative paragraph 1, bringing it into line with the suggestion in the Secretariat document and with the realities of the situation by deleting the words after "a report" and substituting the following:

"suggesting ways in which the United Nations and other international organizations might co-operate in helping Governments at various stages of development in formulating guiding principles for policies related to the elderly and the aged and in formulating and implementing these policies as part of their over-all development programme".

Unfortunately, the sponsors had not felt able to accept that amendment, and her delegation had decided not to submit it formally in order to expedite the work of the Third Committee. However, it would like its views to be noted and taken into account by the Secretariat in its future work on the subject. Because of those reservations, her delegation had been unable to join in sponsoring the draft resolution, although it was prepared to vote in favour of it on the understanding that the request it had formulated would be acceptable.

55. Mr. KOEFFLER (Austria) said that the report by the Secretary-General (A/8364) referred to the trend towards segregating and isolating the aged; that was a socio-psychological problem which would diminish if a healthy natural relationship existed between the young and the less young. It was not enough to attend to the material needs of the aged. They should also be made to feel that they had a role to play in society.

56. Turning to the social requirements of the aged, he said that at the present time the aged constituted some 20 per cent of the population of Austria. Austrian social policy followed a path similar to that of Denmark. For example, in Vienna there were clubs for the elderly and the aged, and home nursing services by professionally trained nursing staff were provided for persons physically unable to leave their homes. There was also a service which provided meals for elderly persons unable to cook for themselves. Besides the private nursing homes which were being established, there was a post-hospital care service which had proved to be more valuable than hospital care itself. Offices for social counselling had been set up recently in Vienna and at the same time more housing had been constructed for the elderly.

57. His delegation wished to express its appreciation for the information contained in the report of the Secretary-General and in the introduction to the item by the Director of the Social Development Division. In conclusion, it felt that the draft resolution under consideration (A/C.3/L.1907) was a relevant measure and would be a further step towards ensuring a fuller life for all.

58. Mrs. GERÉB (Hungary) said that her country, which was a sponsor of the draft resolution on the elderly and the aged (A/C.3/L.1907), felt that the question was of concern to the peoples of the entire world, since it concerned those persons who had contributed by their work and activities to creating the conditions of contemporary life and educating and training the new generation. It was impossible to deal exhaustively with the problem during the current session, since it was highly complex and its economic, social, health, cultural, humanitarian and psychological aspects needed to be analysed.

59. In Hungary, the condition of the elderly had changed radically during the past 25 years. Under the capitalist system, only government and private employees had enjoyed retirement benefits; workers and peasants had been excluded from them. Under the socialist system of today, the problem had been solved. There were 1 million retired persons in a population of 10 million. Everyone who had worked received a pension at 60 years of age for men and 55 for women. After 25 years of work, they received a full pension, but after 10 years they had the right to a pension, which was naturally in proportion to their years of work. Bearing in mind that there was no unemployment in Hungary, that meant that the entire population was covered by the pension system. For the first time in the history of Hungary, workers and peasants on State farms and in agricultural co-operatives had the security of a peaceful old age. A woman who did not work received a pension on her husband's death, and the amount increased according to the number of children. The pension system was incorporated into the social security system. Retired persons and all workers enjoyed free medical services and free treatment in hospital.

60. Although substantial results had been achieved in that field, problems still existed, since there was a class of retired persons whose pensions were relatively low. The Government was aware of their difficulties and according to its economic possibilities was endeavouring to improve the pension system and the economic and social conditions of

retired persons. The low pensions had been increased substantially during the previous year. A new system had been introduced by which each retired person received an automatic increase of 2 per cent annually. Moreover, pensioners paid lower rents than workers. At the present time the network of recreation centres, primarily for retired persons without family, was being extended.

61. Nevertheless, in her delegation's view, economic and social security, although the most important element of the problem, represented only one aspect of it. Retired persons must be assured of a life of human dignity and activity in society. To attain that goal, society and the family must fulfil their obligations. It was important, from that point of view, that people who wanted to remain on the job after retirement age should be allowed to do so. Retired persons too should have an opportunity to work and to collect their pension at the same time.

62. Trade unions and other organizations provided retired persons in Hungary with an opportunity for useful activity in society. They held meetings with the workers of the retired persons' former place of employment and with young people, and they organized clubs to meet the cultural and informational needs of the elderly. In political and economic life, as in social and cultural life, there were retired persons performing important functions and playing an active role for the benefit of the community. Thus, society made use of the experience of the elderly, and at the same time they were not excluded but, on the contrary, felt themselves to be full members of society whose dignity and human worth were recognized. The position of retired persons in the family was also of fundamental importance. The problem was primarily one of education, and great importance was attached to it in Hungary.

63. It was well known that the situation of the aged in the capitalist countries and the developing countries was different. In many highly industrialized countries there was not even a pension system, or if there was one, it excluded important groups of industrial and agricultural workers. Everyone knew about the discrimination against the elderly in employment. Her delegation therefore believed that in the preparation of the report to be submitted to the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, it would be necessary to study the situation and acquired experience under different social systems and take account of all aspects of the problem—economic, social, health, psychological and humanitarian—in order to be able to analyse it thoroughly and suggest appropriate solutions.

64. With regard to draft resolution A/C.3/L.1907, two amendments had been submitted by the Cypriot delegation in document A/C.3/L.1920. The first was acceptable to her delegation. The second also posed no problems, but she believed that it would be more useful to take it up again at the next session.

65. Mr. ČALOVSKEI (Yugoslavia) said that in his view the draft resolution before the Committee (A/C.3/L.1907) deserved the approval of the members. He reminded the Committee, however, that regardless of its decision, what would really affect the situation of the aged would be the national policies of each country. The proposal was technical in nature and could not directly promote the



welfare of the aged. For that reason Yugoslavia had not become a sponsor of the draft resolution under consideration; although it would vote for the draft resolution, he repeated that it was merely a procedural one. He was confident that the Secretary-General would successfully complete the relevant studies on the question of the elderly and the aged and carry out the tasks stated in operative paragraph 1 of the draft resolution.

66. Mr. MOUSSA (Egypt) said that the situation of the elderly in the developing countries differed markedly from that in the developed countries. The situation of the aged in some areas of the developing world was considerably better than in many industrialized countries. It was therefore incorrect to assume that the problems of the developing and the developed countries in that regard were the same. He suggested to the sponsors of draft resolution A/C.3/L.1907 that the expression "reviews the major socio-economic problems" in the second preambular paragraph should be replaced with the expression "reviews the various socio-economic problems". He could not accept the statement in the fifth preambular paragraph to the effect that the position of the elderly and the aged in society was expected to deteriorate in the developing countries as well, since in Africa, the Arab world, Latin America and Asia, the aged enjoyed deep respect and their descendants took care of them to the end of their days. It would therefore be more appropriate to delete the expression "as well as in many developing countries" from that paragraph. Similarly, with regard to operative paragraph 1, which referred to a report suggesting guidelines, he believed that no one had the right to suggest guidelines to countries such as his, which knew very well what national policy should be pursued with regard to the elderly. Accordingly, he suggested that the expression "a report suggesting guidelines for national policies and international action related to the needs" should be replaced by the expression "a report on the needs".

67. Mrs. HAMM-RIJSDIJK (Netherlands) drew attention to four fundamental aspects of the question of the elderly and the aged: health care, housing, financing related to social security, and the loneliness in which the elderly found themselves. Those four aspects of the problem were of great importance in Netherlands society, since 10 per cent of the population of the Netherlands consisted of persons more than 64 years old. Health care in the Netherlands was, in general, very well organized, and therefore the standards of health in the country were very high. With respect to housing, 80 per cent of the elderly and the aged lived alone, by preference. Since such a preference was quite prevalent in the country, the Government had begun building special dwellings for the elderly and service flats. Every citizen of the Netherlands received a moderate pension on reaching the age of 65. The Government had recently announced that in the near future the amount of that pension would equal the legal minimum wage, which currently was the equivalent of \$230 a month.

68. The problem of loneliness was a truly severe one for the elderly and the aged, since as people grew old, they lost their social contacts and their former roles in society. That loss evidently created frustrations, and for that reason there were many State organizations for the aged and many other non-governmental organizations, such as the Red Cross,

voluntary organizations of a religious nature and women's and youth organizations, all of which did their best to establish the required contacts, stimulate all kinds of activities and provide suitable recreation facilities for the elderly. The Government was trying to help solve the problems of the aged by every means at its disposal: for example the national railways offered substantial discounts to the elderly. She felt that even if a perfect solution could be found to the first three aspects of the problem which she had mentioned, the aged would still be faced with the terrible problem of loneliness. It was therefore imperative that everyone, long before reaching the age of 65, should prepare himself well in advance by developing a hobby or other interest to occupy his free time. In the view of her delegation, private initiative had considerable responsibility in the task of promoting social and cultural participation by the elderly in the life of the rest of society. One of society's major tasks was to ensure the best possible integration of the aged with the rest of society.

69. Mr. MARMARA (Malta) said that the sponsors of draft resolution A/C.3/L.1907 had no objection to including in their draft resolution the amendments submitted by Cyprus in document A/C.3/L.1920. They wished, however, to make some minor changes in style in the new preambular paragraph. In the English text the word "significance" should be replaced by the word "importance". The expression "to know of the interest" should be replaced by the words "to be informed of the interest". He was confident that the representative of Cyprus would accept that minor change in wording.

70. He also announced that Ecuador, Guyana and Italy had become sponsors of the draft resolution.

71. Mr. PAPADEMAS (Cyprus) thanked the sponsors for accepting the amendments proposed by his delegation (A/C.3/L.1920) and announced that Cyprus had the honour of joining the list of sponsors. He further proposed that draft resolution A/C.3/L.1907 should be adopted by acclamation.

72. The CHAIRMAN said that if there was no objection, she would take it that draft resolution A/C.3/L.1907 was adopted by acclamation.

*Draft resolution A/C.3/L.1907 was adopted by acclamation.*

73. Mr. JANSSON (Director of the Social Development Division) congratulated the Committee on concerning itself substantively with the problem and said that all the comments made during the general debate would be duly taken into account by the Secretariat.

74. He thanked the representative of India for opening new areas of discussion by showing that the assumption that the aged in the developing countries were continuing to fill the same traditional role as in earlier times was open to doubt and that the situation in some of those countries had changed so much that that assumption could prove to be a fallacy. The study to be prepared on the item would include a thorough analysis of that question.

*The meeting rose at 11.15 p.m.*