

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

FIFTH SESSION

Official Records



Wednesday, 6 December 1950, at 3 p.m.

Lake Success, New York

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Chairman: Mr. G. J. VAN HEUVEN GOEDHART (Netherlands).

Refugees and stateless persons (A/1385, A/1396, A/C.3/528, A/C.3/538, A/C.3/540, A/C.3/547, A/C.3/551, E/1850, E/1850/Annex and A/C.3/L.141) (*continued*)

[Item 32]*

(c) PROBLEM OF ASSISTANCE TO REFUGEES: MEMORANDUM FROM THE GENERAL COUNCIL OF IRO OF 20 OCTOBER 1949 (A/1385, A/C.3/528, A/C.3/540 and A/C.3/L.141)

1. The CHAIRMAN announced that the final text of the draft resolution on the status of the High Commissioner's Office would not be ready for consideration until the end of the afternoon. He therefore proposed that the Committee should begin the discussion of subdivision (c) of item 32 of the General Assembly's agenda, which dealt with problems of assistance to refugees.
2. He recalled that the Committee had before it a memorandum addressed to the General Assembly by the General Council of the International Refugee Organization (A/C.3/540), as well as a joint draft resolution sponsored by the delegations of France, the United Kingdom and the United States (A/C.3/L.141).
3. He called on the representative of IRO to present the memorandum from the General Council of his organization.
4. Mr. BLANCHARD (International Refugee Organization) expressed regret that some members of the Committee seemed to have misunderstood the true significance of the memorandum, and that others had found in it a basis for serious accusations against IRO.
5. He recalled that the activities of IRO had been a continuation of those of the Inter-Governmental Com-

mittee on Refugees, of UNRRA, and of the Allied authorities, and represented only one stage in the great effort of the United Nations to solve the problem of the refugees and displaced persons. That common effort had brought about the repatriation of about seven million displaced persons and the resettlement of 800,000.

6. Mr. Blanchard stressed the fact that, contrary to certain statements which had been made, to the effect that the proportion of displaced persons repatriated had been 10 per cent and the proportion of those resettled had been 90 per cent of the total, the true percentage figures were exactly the reverse.

7. Contrary to the statements of certain representatives, IRO had not created the problem of the displaced persons entrusted to its care; it had done its best to solve that problem, and was on the point of succeeding. Over a period of thirty-eight months, from its establishment, on 1 July 1947, to 31 August 1950, the organization had assisted 1,500,000 persons, of whom 70,000 had been repatriated and 832,000 resettled. On 1 October 1950, there remained 293,000 refugees for whom a solution must still be found through repatriation, resettlement, or local settlement.

8. Mr. Blanchard then outlined the plans of IRO for the remaining ten months of its existence.

9. As regards repatriation, the organization would continue its work in that field, taking into consideration the wishes of the persons concerned and the principles laid down by the United Nations and the Constitution of IRO. Although its task had become more difficult as a result of the enforced withdrawal of its missions from the countries of origin, the organization would nevertheless continue to distribute, in the camps, information received from those countries. The International Refugee Organization had many times requested that such information should be of a type which would better

* Indicates the item number on the General Assembly agenda.

fulfil its primary purpose, namely, to furnish details concerning conditions in the countries of origin; but its appeal had brought virtually no results. During the general debate, some representatives had raised the question of unaccompanied children; Mr. Blanchard explained that the organization had repatriated 1,835 children and had resettled 3,315.

10. With respect to resettlement, contrary to the opinion expressed by certain members of the Committee, IRO had never exerted any pressure upon refugees to emigrate. The best proof of that fact was to be found in the existence of a fairly large number of displaced persons who, in preference to repatriation or resettlement, had elected to settle permanently in the countries where they were residing, in particular, in Germany. As in the past, the policy of IRO would be to increase the possibilities of resettlement, with the aid of governments and of the refugees themselves. The organization hoped in that way to resettle another 200,000 persons, mainly in the United States and Australia, before ceasing its activities. That figure included a large number of refugees rendered eligible for resettlement by a recent decision of IRO. In point of fact, in response to appeals from the refugees and the voluntary societies and the demands of public opinion, and taking into consideration its available resources, the General Council of IRO had decided, not long previously, to postpone from 15 October 1949 to 1 October 1950 the date limit for extension of IRO assistance to refugees. Thus, by 1 October 1951, the organization would have resettled over one million persons, thanks to the spirit of co-operation shown by certain governments and the invaluable aid of the voluntary societies. The International Refugee Organization estimated its success in that field less in terms of the number of refugees admitted than of the conditions laid down for admission and settlement. The requirements for admission had been relaxed, in accordance with the appeals of IRO, in order to permit the admission of families and individuals who, by reason of age or other considerations, did not fulfil the requirements originally laid down by some governments for the admission of migrant workers.

11. Mr. Blanchard then took up the sad and difficult problem of those refugees who had little or no chance of resettlement, owing to age, illness, or other considerations. The International Refugee Organization, far from ignoring the fate of the ill, the aged and invalids, in its desire to furnish cheap labour, as had been claimed, had achieved excellent results as regards the resettlement of refugees in the "hard-core" category. The General Council of the organization had made a special allocation of \$US 22 million for that purpose, and had made repeated appeals for the granting of shelter and care to such refugees. Mr. Blanchard recalled that 200 blind refugees had been admitted by Norway, and a number of aged persons by Belgium and the Netherlands; France, which already had received 1,000 aged persons into its territory, had admitted 1,000 more; Sweden had admitted several groups of tubercular refugees, with their families; 1,100 physically handicapped refugees would be admitted by the United States of America, and 3,500 ill or aged persons or invalids would be received by Israel. In that connexion he stressed the fact that those were only a few examples of the action taken by governments and welfare organizations to receive refugees belonging to the

hard-core group. Finally, IRO had established five re-education centres, equipped with prosthetic appliances for invalids, and five special centres for victims of tuberculosis. Nevertheless, there still remained about 9,000 ill and aged persons. The organization was increasing its appeals, but it could not guarantee that the tubercular refugees, in particular, could be placed in institutions outside Germany. It was seeking a solution of the problem within Germany, on the lines of the home for the aged which had been set up in Upper Bavaria.

12. Finally, Mr. Blanchard mentioned the case of those refugees who, although not in need of hospitalization or admission to a home for the aged, would not be able, by reason of poor health, age, or family situation, to leave Germany before the cessation of IRO's activities. The organization was endeavouring to make arrangements for their resettlement, or, if that proved impossible, for their settlement in Germany, in the best possible conditions of housing and employment. The Allied authorities, the Germany authorities and the voluntary societies were co-operating with IRO in those efforts. The Government of the Federal Republic of Germany had laid before the Parliament of Bonn a bill which, in the opinion of IRO, would establish a satisfactory legal status for the refugees in Germany. The International Refugee Organization, however, wished to emphasize that the process of integration into the German economy would be a long one and would call for sustained efforts, which would have to go on after the organization had ceased to exist. The same applied to Austria.

13. He referred to other problems which were outstanding in some areas, for example, in Shanghai where there were 4,000 refugees which IRO was helping under very difficult circumstances.

14. In conclusion, he emphasized that IRO's ability to carry out the complex tasks which would confront it in the last ten months of its existence would depend on the active support of governments. That was the significance of paragraph 15 of the memorandum (A/C.3/L.540) in which the General Council again invited the General Assembly to urge Member States to help IRO in carrying out its task. In speaking of active support, the members of IRO had in mind mainly offers of resettlement for all refugees, particularly for the most destitute. If its appeal was answered, IRO would be able, with the unfailing support of voluntary organizations, to carry out to the best of its ability and resources, the task entrusted to it, which was limited both as regards numbers and duration, by 1 October 1951. It could then leave it to the United Nations to complete that work.

15. The CHAIRMAN invited the Committee to vote on the draft resolution submitted by France, the United Kingdom and the United States on problems of assistance to refugees (A/C.3/L.141).

16. Mr. ROCHEFORT (France) said that the communication from IRO bore out the need for the measures envisaged in the draft resolution. The question of assistance to refugees had been referred to the current session of the General Assembly from the previous session (General Assembly resolution 319 B (IV)), because it had then seemed probable that IRO would complete its task by 31 March 1951. Since that date

limit had been deferred to 30 September 1951,¹ it seemed necessary to postpone the problem to the next session of the Assembly. That was the purpose of paragraph 2 of the operative part of the draft resolution.

17. The CHAIRMAN put the draft resolution (A/C.3/L.141) to the vote.

The draft resolution was adopted by 32 votes to 5, with 6 abstentions.

18. Mr. WOULBROUN (Belgium) explained that his delegation had been obliged to abstain from voting because it had not received the instructions from its government for which it was waiting.

(d) DRAFT CONVENTION RELATING TO THE STATUS OF REFUGEES (A/C.3/551) (*concluded*)

19. The CHAIRMAN invited the Committee to consider the draft resolution submitted by Belgium and France regarding the meeting place of the conference of plenipotentiaries for the purpose of completing and adopting the convention relating to the status of refugees (A/C.3/L.143).

20. Mr. ROCHEFORT (France) reminded the Committee that the reasons which had led the General Assembly to decide in 1949² that the High Commissioner's Office for Refugees should have its headquarters in Geneva were now applicable in regard to the meeting place of the conference of plenipotentiaries.

21. A decision to hold that conference in Geneva would facilitate the work of the High Commissioner, since all the necessary documents would be available and since Europe was the area of the world where the largest number of refugees was concentrated.

22. For those reasons he hoped that the majority of the Committee would vote in favour of the draft resolution.

23. The CHAIRMAN put to the vote the joint draft resolution submitted by Belgium and France (A/C.3/L.143).

The draft resolution was adopted by 18 votes to 9, with 18 abstentions.

24. Mr. LEQUESNE (United Kingdom) said that his delegation had voted for the draft resolution in view

¹ See document E/1675, para. 5.

² See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fourth Session, Plenary Meetings*, 265th meeting.

of the convincing arguments put forward at the previous meeting by the representative of France.

25. Like the representative of Israel, however, it was surprised at the high estimate of the cost of the conference submitted by the Secretary-General: it might perhaps be obliged to withdraw its support, when the question was under discussion in the Fifth Committee, if that estimate was not reduced.

Complaint of failure on the part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to repatriate or otherwise account for prisoners of war detained in Soviet territory (A/1339, A/1339/Add.1 and A/C.3/L.145)

[Item 67]*

26. The CHAIRMAN invited the Committee to begin its consideration of the last item on its agenda.

27. He wondered whether it would not be advisable to fix a time limit for the submission of draft resolutions or amendments on that item: it seemed particularly necessary to do so in view of the fact that, if the decision taken by the Committee had financial implications, the item would have to be referred to the Fifth Committee.

28. He therefore asked whether members of the Committee could agree to submit the text of their proposals by noon on Thursday, 7 December.

29. Mr. LEQUESNE (United Kingdom) pointed out that the question had not been included on the agenda and the Committee should not therefore proceed to discuss it immediately.

30. He would accordingly move the adjournment of the meeting as soon as a decision had been taken on the time limit for submitting draft resolutions or amendments.

31. Mr. AZKOUL (Lebanon) thought that, since the Committee was not yet ready to consider the question, which was not included on its agenda, it would be preferable not to fix a time limit before hearing the general statements which some delegations would probably wish to make.

32. The CHAIRMAN put to the vote the United Kingdom representative's motion for adjournment.

The motion was adopted by 20 votes to none.

The meeting rose at 4.15 p.m.