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*Chairman:* Sir Douglas COPLAND (Australia).

*In the absence of the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman, Mr. Umari (Iraq), took the chair.*

**AGENDA ITEM 25**

**Economic development of under-developed countries (A/2686, A/2702) (continued)**

**(d) Land reform (A/C.2/L.234) (continued)**

1. Mr. KATZ-SUCHY (Poland) recalled that his delegation had always attached great importance to the question of land reform: it was the Polish delegation that had requested the inclusion of the item in the agenda of the fifth session of the General Assembly and had proposed draft resolution A/C.2/L.36 which the General Assembly had adopted unanimously.
2. His delegation had stated during the general debate on the economic development of under-developed countries (297th meeting) that in its opinion the countries which wished to develop their economies progressively should undertake a whole series of economic, social and political reforms and, in particular, they should carry through a land reform, for that was an essential element in the mobilization of national resources.
3. The under-developed countries were predominantly agricultural, and it was by developing their agriculture, whose productivity was as yet very low, that they would be able to secure at the national level the capital necessary to improve their economic position. The industrialization of those countries could not proceed unless there was a vast market for industrial products. Owing, however, to the defects of their agrarian structure, purchasing power was very low and their populations were unable to absorb the products of industry. That was a vicious circle, and none of those countries would be able to advance economically and socially unless a far-reaching land reform was implemented.
4. It was to the reform of its system of land tenure, among other reforms, that his country owed the substantial advances made by its economy and the higher standard of living of its people. Before the war, about 15 per cent of its arable land had been divided into small plots of less than five hectares, while 50 per cent had been held by large landowners. Rents and excessive dues had absorbed the greater part of the tenant farmers' incomes. Those farmers had been in debt; they had

not had any modern agricultural machinery and had not used selected seed or fertilizer. The yield of the land had been very low, and unemployment and under-employment had been widespread. In addition, housing and sanitary conditions had been deplorable. The farmers had had no prospects of improving their lot, and the pre-war Government had done nothing for them.

5. The land reform had completely changed the position. Six million hectares of land had been distributed to about one million landless and small farmers, and the exploitation of the rural population by the big landowners had ended. Under the new law, small and medium farmers were protected and entitled to credits for the purchase of machinery, fertilizer and livestock. Rural electrification projects had been put in hand. Vocational training had been expanded and the number of technical publications had greatly increased. Industry had absorbed a great deal of labour; consequently it had been possible to solve the problem of rural unemployment. Thanks to the assistance granted to farmers, and notwithstanding the damage sustained between 1939 and 1945, agricultural productivity had exceeded pre-war levels. The standard of living of the rural population had improved considerably, both materially and in respect of education; farmers were able to buy more food, building materials and manufactured goods; elementary education was being provided for all children in rural areas and the numbers of pupils from rural areas attending secondary and vocational schools and universities had grown considerably.

6. All the peoples' democracies, including the People's Republic of China, had likewise succeeded in increasing agricultural productivity and in raising their peoples' standard of living through land reform coupled with other political, social and economic measures.

7. While the programme of land reform put into effect in Poland had yielded excellent results, his delegation had no intention of proposing it as a model, for it was aware that the choice of the methods to be employed should allow for the particular position and needs of each country.

8. During the discussion the Committee was to examine the progress in land reform achieved by the under-developed countries. In that connexion the Secretary-General's report entitled *Progress in Land Reform (E/2526)*, which gave very full information about conditions in those countries, showed that while some progress had been achieved, the situation was still, on the whole, unsatisfactory. The report revealed in particular that a large number of countries had not taken any measures to provide wider opportunities of ownership, although their form of agrarian structure suggested that such wider provision would be beneficial. According to the report, shortage of credit was a major obstacle both to agricultural development and to the successful implementation of land reform. It seemed, moreover, that in many countries no legislative action had been taken to protect agricultural workers.

9. The United Nations should not remain indifferent to that state of affairs; on the contrary, it should give very high priority to that question and request the countries concerned to give effect to resolution 401 (V), which had been adopted unanimously by the General Assembly. If the major obstacle encountered by the under-developed countries was lack of capital, their best policy would be to mobilize their resources and to use them for their economic development and, more particularly, for carrying out land reform. It was known that certain elements were endeavouring to prevent that reform, which was an aspect of the peoples' struggle against exploitation. The United Nations should place itself on the side of those countries, and the object of any resolution or recommendation should be to help them to achieve full independence, both economically and politically.

10. Mr. BIGURIA (Guatemala) pointed out that the keen criticisms expressed by his Government with regard to decree No. 900 of 17 June 1952 concerning land reform, and more particularly with regard to its application, should not be construed to mean that there was no agrarian problem in Guatemala. On the contrary, President Carlos Castillo Armas had been the first to recognize its urgency, as was proved by the agrarian statute which he had promulgated on 26 July 1954 and by the speech which he had delivered to the Constituent Assembly on 29 October 1954.

11. Under the terms of decree No. 31, relating to that statute, every Guatemalan had the right to own the land necessary to supply his own needs and those of his family, and the existence of undeveloped land was declared to be inconsistent with the public interest. The President had stated in his speech of 29 October that the land legislation of 1952 was based on just principles and that if it were properly applied it would, with the necessary amendments, be capable of yielding satisfactory results.

12. His Government, aware of the economic, social and legal problems involved in land reform, was trying to solve them by taking the true interests of the country into account in a national programme for economic development. It took the view that land reform, if undertaken for demagogic purposes or for any reason other than its true object, could only produce negative results.

13. Before the agrarian structure of an under-developed country was altered, educational and technical assistance centres had to be organized to train the new landowners and to enable them to remedy the country's economic shortcomings. Production should be diversified and suitable credit facilities granted, and new methods of cultivation should be introduced to prevent soil erosion; in brief, what was needed was action of every type. That would lead to better land utilization and, consequently, to higher standards of living for all inhabitants.

14. In Guatemala the land reform under the decree of 14 June 1952 had been carried out in disregard of those fundamental considerations. The programme had apparently been largely inspired by political considerations and was designed to satisfy constantly increasing demands. In January 1953 an expert of a specialized agency had stated that a register of the land intended for gradual distribution should have been prepared by experts on the basis of criteria laid down by law, and that no privately owned land should have been distributed. The unregulated expropriation of land might lead to undesirable consequences. Land had actually

been distributed without regard to certain essential criteria such as the need to relieve the pressure on the land in over-populated areas, to keep sufficient manpower on the large agricultural undertakings, and to help small-holders by a redistribution of holdings. Furthermore, the technical aspects of the problem had been ignored: the first step should have been to set up a service for the popularization of farming methods to teach the farmers crop rotation and the use of fertilizer, insecticides and the like. Only then would it have been possible to proceed with land reform, to complete the work already accomplished in the rational use of the soil.

15. The Agrarian Bank had not accomplished its task; it had extended credit to unscrupulous undertakings which had used it only to further their own interests. The proper way to give farmers material assistance was to sell them everything they needed on easy terms. Bank loans could only be a supplementary measure in exceptional cases. Besides, there was no need for the Agrarian Bank; it would have sufficed to increase the number of existing institutions and to intensify the activity of the Institute for the Development of Production, an autonomous body that had been established some years ago.

16. The inherent defects of the provisions of the decree of 17 June 1952 had been aggravated by its discriminatory application in an atmosphere of disorder and hatred. A new arrangement based on and including the following principles was called for: the Government had to set up a service for the popularization of new farming methods, establish a schedule of successive stages of the reform, classify the lands available for distribution and determine the various categories of beneficiaries and their order of priority.

17. Referring to the previous Government's attitude towards the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, he said that in June 1952 the Bank had sent a mission to Guatemala to study the country's economic situation. After the study had been completed, however, the Government had declined to ask the Bank for a loan on the ground that to accept such a loan would be inconsistent with its political attitude.

18. Moreover, the Government in question had never replied to the Secretary-General's questionnaire on land reform or to the various notes that had been sent to it on that subject. That was why Guatemala's agricultural position had not been studied in the report on *Progress in Land Reform*.

19. In view of the time-limit that he had imposed upon himself he would not dwell on the subversive infiltration into the agencies responsible for land reform, the squandering of public funds in connexion with the land reform programme, the ravaging of the forest reserves, the arbitrary expropriations and other irritating measures that had often led to bloodshed.

20. For the time being the Government would have to content itself with crystallizing, so to speak, the *status quo* until it became possible to study the question objectively and, with the help of the international specialized agencies, to give effect to the contemplated land reform which, carefully reviewed and modified, would raise the standard of living of Guatemala's rural population and promote the economic development of the entire country.

21. Mr. MORALES (Argentina) said that a country's system of land tenure was generally determined by its legal, social and economic structure and it was therefore not only difficult to evaluate it by comparison with

a model system but it was futile to try to formulate such a system. As a general principle, the soil should be used for two purposes: to enable farmers to earn a decent livelihood, and to supply the national economy with a production adequate for its needs.

22. The United Nations, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), in striving to attain those two objectives, had devoted particular attention to land reform. It was to be hoped that ever greater efforts would be made in that direction and that results would be attained in the very near future. It was in that spirit that his delegation had supported resolution 512 C (XVII), which the Economic and Social Council had adopted at its seventeenth session and which, in his opinion, contained valuable recommendations.

23. The Argentine Republic had long had experience in land reform. One of the principal lessons that it had learned from that experience was that the improvement of any agrarian structure required long and patient effort and that the difficulties encountered were not solely of an administrative nature, but often related to the existing social and legal order. Profiting from that experience, his Government had recently adopted a series of measures designed to ensure the harmonious development of the agricultural economy. In the matter of the distribution of State-owned lands, for example, it had based the relevant legislation on the principle of the economic unit, with the object of remedying the dual consequences of improper land distribution: excessively large estates (*latifundia*) and excessively fragmented holdings (*minifundia*). His Government had also endeavoured to raise the standard of living of the agricultural workers and to promote their social advancement in order to strengthen the stability of rural areas. It had stimulated farm credit by means of a very liberal policy to encourage investments likely to increase productivity; at the same time it had taken pains to channel production according to the needs of the national economy. It had also endeavoured, by means of legislative and practical measures, to protect the interests not only of land owners, but also of tenant farmers and share-croppers, and to facilitate the work of rural co-operatives and producers' associations. Possibly the most valuable result of his country's experience, however, had been the realization that rural and other sectors of the national economy were interdependent and that agrarian policy had to be co-ordinated with a general programme of economic development.

24. Land reform had so many and such varied implications that great caution was indicated. In the matter of land reform, results were uncertain and were often slow to materialize. For that reason the Argentine delegation considered that land reform should be undertaken as a part of the development of agriculture, which, itself, should be co-ordinated with general economic development.

25. FAO was already dealing directly with agricultural questions and the ILO was studying many of the problems raised by land reform. The task of the United Nations should be to emphasize the extent to which land reform was bound up with general economic development, to consider what methods were most likely to make the reform a success in the countries where it was needed and to co-ordinate the programmes of land reform with those of economic development.

26. Each country should carry out whatever land reform measures would improve the living conditions of its rural population. But if land reform were to bear

fruit, the rural population had to be active, enlightened, capable of making an effort and of taking advantage of the opportunities open to it. Social and educational measures were therefore essential to overcome the many obstacles and the resistance of vested interests.

27. As far as the financing of land reform was concerned, most of the under-developed countries could devote part of their resources to agricultural credit. But for certain types of rural equipment, especially in connexion with irrigation, power supply and the like, they would probably have to resort to international financing, possible sources being either existing institutions or, better still, the proposed Special United Nations Fund for Economic Development. With regard to technical assistance, Argentina thought that great progress could be achieved with modest means.

28. Lastly, the rural populations had to be assured a stable income by means of fair and reasonable prices; for that purpose effective international co-operation was indispensable.

29. In conclusion he said that the United Nations should closely follow the progress made in the matter of land reform, collect relevant documentary material and communicate it to the countries concerned.

30. Mr. VILLAMIZAR (Colombia) said that in any endeavour to improve the economic structure of the under-developed countries, to strengthen their purchasing power with a view to promoting international trade and to finance their development by the employment of both public and private capital, the first requisite was to set the targets and to ensure the efficient use of available means. At the same time, however, every effort should be made to preserve the sound features of the economic systems which had proven their worth and whose defects were attributable to the persons responsible for their practical operation rather than to the underlying principles.

31. One of the main problems which called for an immediate solution was that of an increase in agricultural production by a sensible combination of capital, labour and modern techniques, which would also have to take into account future applications of nuclear energy and their financial and economic repercussions both on countries which were producers of raw materials and on industrial countries.

32. With regard to the immediate future, the Colombian Government was less concerned with carrying out a land reform than, more modestly, with developing stock breeding, agriculture and industry. Indeed, the word "reform" implied a thorough modification and apparent condemnation of the existing order; in that sense, with its political overtones, the term was not fully in keeping with the aims of the United Nations.

33. In Colombia land was regarded as the property of the community, and it contributed to national production in the same way as did the other sectors of the economy. The State did not impose any form of land ownership: it merely required that the land be placed at the service of the individual and the community. As long as that condition was fulfilled, the State merely exercised passive supervision: it only intervened when private enterprise was in difficulties, and even then only in order to give temporary assistance. The main functions of the State were to detect shortcomings, determine their causes, and replace measures which had been proved inadequate by new measures which would make it possible to attain the proposed goals. In that way free enterprise was safeguarded under the protection of the State.

34. In all land reform, as in measures relating to any other sector of the economy, priority should be given to the needs of the individual and, therefore, of the community. That was why the Colombian Government was giving special attention to the education of the farmers and to improving their technical knowledge, so that, firstly, they should realize their place in the nation, and, secondly, play a more useful part in the country's economy.

35. The various studies published under the auspices of the United Nations or of individual Governments definitely confirmed the fact that the aspirations of rural populations could only be satisfied through education and technological knowledge. He wished to make a number of observations on those studies. In the first place, he noted the importance of the housing problem: the State should solve that problem with the help of the specialized agencies. The State should also develop public health services in the rural regions. Vocational training was of no value unless it prepared the trainee directly for the occupation selected, and he wished the United Nations to recommend that Governments correct the serious flaws which still existed in that field. The State should also endeavour to protect agricultural workers against the risks of climatic vicissitudes and uncertain harvests. Lastly, in view of the serious problem of population growth and a corresponding reduction in the *per capita* supply of foodstuffs, it was essential that an information organ be established which, through the specialized agencies, would communicate to the farmers information on all experiments and new methods which might help them to increase production, in terms simple enough for them to derive the maximum

benefit. In his opinion, the only way to fill the gaps which still existed in those fields would be to rely on technical research organs, assisted not only by representatives of the Governments and the United Nations, but also by private persons, though, of course, public or private initiative at the national level should not suffer as a consequence.

36. Furthermore, the question of land reform was connected with the various problems arising in the industrial and other sectors of the national economy. If piecemeal measures, whose consequences would, in the last analysis, inevitably be harmful to mankind, were to be avoided, such solutions as might be entertained had to be co-ordinated.

37. He mentioned that a number of official bodies were contributing to the agricultural development of Colombia; among them were the Instituto de Parcelaciones y Colonización, the Instituto de Aprovechamiento de Aguas y Fomento Eléctrico, the Caja de Crédito Agrícola y Pecuario, the Federación Nacional de Cafeteros, the Banco Cafetero, and the Rockefeller agricultural mission. He also mentioned that a fertilizer plant had been established.

38. Mr. Villamizar stated in conclusion that the Colombian Government attached great importance to the international exchange of documentation; it would therefore be glad to receive any information which the other States Members might see fit to communicate to it and was ready to answer any questions they might wish to ask.

The meeting rose at 5.15 p.m.