

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

THIRTEENTH SESSION

Official Records


 Tuesday, 4 November 1958,
at 10.45 a.m.

NEW YORK

CONTENTS

	Page
Agenda item 31:	
Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (continued)	179

Chairman: Mrs. Lina P. TSALDARIS (Greece).

AGENDA ITEM 31

Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (A/3828/Rev.1, A/3828/Rev.1/Add.1, A/3848, chap. VI, sect. II, A/C.3/L.694) (continued)

1. Mr. MASSOUD-ANSARI (Iran) paid a tribute to the High Commissioner and his staff for the efforts they had made to carry out their formidable task. Although much still remained to be done, great progress had been made during the past four years, during which time 440,000 refugees had found permanent homes, and the camp population had decreased by 45,000. His delegation had been happy to note that the High Commissioner had given priority to camp clearance in his 1959 programme. He hoped that all camps would be closed by 1960.

2. There were many more refugees outside than inside camps. The situation of such refugees was less unfortunate than that of the camp population, and the programme rightly gave priority to the difficult cases. Of the three solutions available for refugees outside the camps, voluntary repatriation was of particular importance. He was happy to note from paragraph 6 of the report (A/3828/Rev.1) that the High Commissioner would continue to facilitate the return of any refugees who freely expressed the desire to be repatriated. Nevertheless, voluntary repatriation was not a solution for all refugees; and of the two alternative solutions, integration in the country of asylum or resettlement, the first priority should be given to integration, which avoided travel and resettlement expenses and the difficulties outlined in paragraph 27 of the report. He was happy to see that the High Commissioner had extended assistance to refugees in the Middle East and Tunisia; in particular, he expressed the hope that international aid and assistance would be granted to those refugees in the same degree as it was at present granted to European refugees.

3. The international protection of refugees was a prerequisite of all permanent solutions. It was encouraging that the High Commissioner's efforts to improve the status of refugees had met with a considerable measure of success. In Iran, refugees were accorded the same status and had the same duties and obligations as all other foreigners. They were furnished with travel documents and received assistance from the national services. The Iranian social services had agreed to provide the land for a home for

sixty difficult cases at Teheran and to pay half the constructions costs. Unfortunately the project had not come to fruition because, although the United States and the High Commissioner's Office had agreed to supply the other half of the funds required, the refugees in question were to be resettled elsewhere.

4. He warmly supported the proposal to hold a world refugee year, which had been endorsed by the United Nations Refugee Fund (UNREF) Executive Committee. It would stimulate public interest in the refugee problem and could result in increased assistance for all refugees, not only those within the mandate of the High Commissioner.

5. Miss HORNSBY-SMITH (United Kingdom) congratulated the High Commissioner on his work and on his excellent report (A/3828/Rev.1 and A/3828/Rev.1/Add.1). The High Commissioner's efforts had reached a particularly important phase: in the next two years he was to attempt to clear the refugee camps completely. Her Government fully supported the camp-clearance programme, to which it had just announced a special contribution of \$280,000; it wished to state, however, that it regarded that programme as a final concentrated effort to resettle the refugees in question, and that if they had not left their host country by the time the programme was completed those refugees should then become that country's responsibility. The indefinite continuance of international aid was, in a sense, a disservice to the refugees, since it tended to put off the day when they were integrated into society and treated as normal human beings. It was therefore to be hoped that the camp-clearance programme would reduce the problem to dimensions such that the host countries themselves would be able to cope with it.

6. The United Kingdom practised what it preached; since before the Second World War it had accepted some 235,000 refugees from Europe on the basis of integration. Many had become naturalized, and all qualified for free education, national health service benefits and national assistance. She hoped that more and more countries would come to the assistance of the many thousands of refugees who still remained unplaced, and welcomed the fact that at the recent Pledging Conference several new countries had announced their intention of contributing to the High Commissioner's programme in 1959.^{1/}

7. Her Government had decided to give its support to the World Refugee Year. That project, which was being sponsored by private citizens and organizations in the United Kingdom, had also aroused public interest and support in other countries, and her delegation, jointly with others, would therefore shortly

^{1/} Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirteenth Session, Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole Assembly, 2nd meeting.

introduce a draft resolution designed to give the World Refugee Year international impetus. The basic object of the scheme, as envisaged in the United Kingdom, was to focus public attention on the plight of refugees throughout the world and to enlist both governmental and private support in solving the problem. Countries joining in the scheme would be able to participate in different ways. The United Kingdom would aim chiefly at financial assistance. Virtually all the voluntary and humanitarian organizations in the country had undertaken to support the project; they had promised to do their best to double their usual annual fund-raising targets and to devote the additional funds raised to four main categories of refugees: those who came under the UNREF mandate, the Arab refugees, the European refugees from China, and the Chinese refugees at Hong Kong. With a view to the co-ordination of their joint efforts, the organizations concerned had set up a national committee, on which the Government was not represented and over whose activities it would have no control. The UNREF Executive Committee had adopted a resolution on the project in September 1958, and had requested the High Commissioner to bring it to the attention of the General Assembly (A/3828/Rev.1/Add.1, annex II). The World Federation of United Nations Associations had also endorsed the project.

8. She stressed that all the participating countries would be free to choose their own methods of assistance. Countries which had given asylum to refugees might take advantage of the project to promote their integration into the national community. Assistance should also be given to those refugees who, for one reason or another, had never been internationally recognized. Another form of action which Governments could usefully take would be to extend greater legal aid to refugees and in particular to accede to the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

9. While the origins of refugee problems were frequently political, the purpose of the World Refugee Year was purely humanitarian. Essentially, the project would consist of a series of national campaigns, each fitted to the needs of the country concerned; she did not believe that it would be improved by any sort of international superstructure. However, some international clearing-house for information about the purposes and progress of the World Refugee Year would be useful. As the aims of the project considerably exceeded the scope of the High Commissioner's mandate, his Office could not very well be asked to act in that capacity; but if the Committee decided to recommend to the General Assembly a draft resolution designed to promote the project, it would be quite appropriate to ask the Secretary-General to undertake the work as he thought fit.

10. The plight of the Hungarian refugees had been remedied rapidly because of the remarkable upsurge of public sympathy for them that had taken place throughout the world. The older categories of refugees, who had had to endure their lot so much longer, were equally deserving of sympathy. She therefore hoped that the World Refugee Year would command general support.

11. Mr. SLIM (Tunisia) expressed his delegation's appreciation of the enormous efforts the High Commissioner's Office had made on behalf of all refugees. Thousands of destitute refugees had received assist-

ance in the countries of asylum; but the countries concerned were experiencing great financial difficulties, and would be unable to continue their assistance indefinitely. The High Commissioner's Office had helped them in their efforts, but that was not enough. Refugees were unfortunates who had been driven from their homes and could not be treated in the same way as migrant workers. Permanent remedies must be found.

12. The Tunisian delegation was happy to note that the High Commissioner had respected the principle laid down in paragraph 2 of the Statute of his Office (General Assembly resolution 428 (V), annex), that his work was to be entirely non-political in character. It did not wish to raise political questions connected with the problem of refugees, for which the Third Committee was not the appropriate forum; but it felt compelled to draw attention to the plight of the refugees from Algeria in Tunisia and Morocco. The utmost was being done to give them assistance. In Tunisia, the Government and the national humanitarian and social organizations were doing everything possible to provide them with food, clothing, housing and other necessities; but their efforts could not be continued indefinitely, and the Tunisian Government had therefore appealed to the High Commissioner. The latter had responded immediately and provided emergency aid, for which Tunisia was grateful. The Tunisian Government also wished to thank all those countries which had responded to the High Commissioner's appeal and to express its gratitude to the Red Cross for the assistance it had provided. However, more assistance was needed. There were large numbers of refugees from Algeria in Tunisia, including many infants and young children, a particularly vulnerable group among whom prolonged undernourishment might easily cause epidemic children's diseases and permanent damage to health. It was to be hoped that the war in Algeria would soon be ended and that the refugees would be able to return to their homes, but in the meantime, the High Commissioner's Office should continue its efforts. It was to emphasize the urgency of the problem that the Moroccan and Tunisian delegations had decided to submit their draft resolution (A/C.3/L.694). He hoped that the Committee would adopt it without any political discussion.

13. Mr. BOULOS (Lebanon) paid a tribute to the humanitarian work done by the High Commissioner's Office. The plight of the Arab refugees from Palestine had unfortunately made Lebanon only too familiar with the refugee problem, and it fully concurred with the views expressed by the Tunisian representative. It was imperative that the problem of the refugees from Algeria in Tunisia and Morocco should be rapidly solved. For that reason, he strongly supported the draft resolution (A/C.3/L.694).

14. Mr. BOUQUIN (France) expressed satisfaction at the fact that the problem of the Hungarian refugees in Yugoslavia had been entirely solved. The Yugoslav Government, the High Commissioner's Office, the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration and the Governments which had participated in the operation were to be warmly congratulated. The results achieved in Austria had been less satisfactory, but Austria had taken in about ten times as many refugees as Yugoslavia. Of the 180,000 Hungarian refugees who had fled to Austria, about 7,800 had been repatriated and 154,300 resettled. The Austrian Government

was to be congratulated on the success of its efforts; it was to be hoped that the High Commissioner's programme of permanent solutions would soon eliminate the problem altogether.

15. The problem of the international protection of the older categories of refugees was a matter of constant concern. The French Government had welcomed the measures which the High Commissioner's Office had taken to improve the status of refugees and ensure their complete integration in the communities in which they were living. It was happy to note that some countries had adapted their immigration regulations so as to admit some difficult cases and facilitate the reunion of families. In France, the Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides had granted refugee status to the spouses and minor children of refugees who subsequently entered France to join relatives.

16. The UNREF Working Party on future international assistance to refugees and the UNREF Executive Committee had decided to give priority in the 1959 programme to camp clearance. As camps could be closed down only when housing was available for the refugees, the problem was partly one of housing. Other difficulties of integration had been outlined by the Italian representative at the previous meeting. In point of fact, the situation of refugees outside the camps was sometimes more desperate than that of the camp population. The survey carried out in mid-1957 had revealed that only about one-third of the 178,000 non-settled refugees in the six countries covered had been in camps. In France there were now 275,000 refugees, of whom 36,700 could be regarded as non-settled; one-third of the latter were difficult cases and physically handicapped persons. Nevertheless, there were no camps in France, which proved that refugee problems could be solved without them.

17. As France was already endeavouring to help the refugees to whom it had given asylum, it would like to see more than token assistance granted to other refugees outside camps and to the European refugees from China. However, the French delegation fully realized how difficult it was for the High Commissioner to carry out his task with the limited resources at his

disposal. Accordingly, it welcomed the United Kingdom proposal for a world refugee year; it would support that proposal and would be happy to co-sponsor it. The proposed project should increase the funds available to UNREF and make possible more effective action on behalf of the refugees living outside camps.

18. France had made substantial contributions to UNREF in 1956 and 1957, and in 1958 had, exceptionally, increased its contribution to 108 million francs, an increase of 20 per cent. To indicate its unfailing support of the High Commissioner's Office, the French Government had decided, subject to respect for the legal procedures, to maintain its 1959 contribution at the 1958 level.

19. The French delegation would vote against the Tunisian-Moroccan draft resolution (A/C.3/L.694). Although it favoured all efforts on behalf of refugees and deplored the presence of refugees in Tunisia, it felt that such a draft resolution was unnecessary in view of the fact that the High Commissioner's Office was already providing assistance to supplement the efforts of the Red Cross, and following the situation closely.

20. Miss ADDISON (Ghana) associated her delegation with the congratulations extended to the High Commissioner and his staff on their admirable work. She noted with concern that it had not yet been possible to find final solutions to the problems of the refugees, mainly owing to lack of funds. A new refugee problem, perhaps limited in extent, but nevertheless vital to the people concerned, had recently arisen in Africa; it should be solved as rapidly as possible. The recent Pledging Conference—at which Ghana had pledged the sum of \$2,000—had failed to reach the High Commissioner's target; her delegation would therefore support any action designed to raise additional funds for the High Commissioner's Office.

21. Mr. EL-ARABI (Libya) commended the High Commissioner's Office for its work on behalf of the refugees, particularly those from Algeria in Tunisia and Morocco. He strongly supported the Moroccan-Tunisian draft resolution (A/C.3/L.694).

The meeting rose at 12 noon.