



Seventh session
Agenda item 23

REPATRIATION OF GREEK CHILDREN

Report of the Secretary-General

1. It will be recalled that, in resolution 517 (VI) of 2 February 1952, the General Assembly requested the International Red Cross organizations and the Secretary-General to submit reports on the progress achieved in the repatriation of Greek children. A general report on the question by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies is being circulated to the Members of the General Assembly as document A/2236. The present report is concerned with the efforts undertaken in this connexion by the Secretary-General and the Standing Committee on the Repatriation of Greek Children.

2. Shortly after its adoption, the text of General Assembly resolution 517 (VI) was transmitted by the Secretary-General to the governments concerned, particular attention being drawn to the provisions of paragraph 6, in which the Assembly urged "all countries harbouring Greek children to take steps to facilitate the early return of the children to their homes". The resolution was likewise transmitted to the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies.

3. In the past year, as in the previous year, no Greek children have been repatriated, except from Yugoslavia. During the Assembly's sixth session, with the exception of Czechoslovakia, none of the other harbouring States accepted the invitation of the President of the General Assembly, made at the request of the Ad Hoc Political Committee,^{1/} that they should designate representatives

1/ A/1984 (paragraph 6), Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixth Session, Annexes, agenda item 19.

to meet with the Standing Committee in Paris. Nor have any of them replied to the communication transmitting the Assembly's resolution of 2 February 1952.

4. The representative of the Czechoslovak Government met three times with the Standing Committee and, in the light of the statement made by him before that Committee, that "the Czechoslovak Government was ready to re-establish contact between the Czechoslovak Red Cross and the International Red Cross and to assist in the solution of the problem of the displaced Greek children",^{2/} the Ad Hoc Political Committee recommended that the General Assembly should express the hope "that it will be possible to make rapid progress with the repatriation of the Greek children in Czechoslovakia".^{3/} The developments which have taken place in this connexion are covered in the latest report of the International Red Cross organizations, as well as in paragraphs 5 to 9 below.

5. The Standing Committee, consisting of Mr. C. Holguin de Laval (Peru), Mr. S.P. Lopez (Philippines) and Mr. S. Grafström (Sweden), met at Headquarters on 8 May and reviewed the situation.^{4/} It took note of communications received from various organizations expressing their concern with the problem, some of which commended the repatriation of the Greek children from Yugoslavia. In connexion with the information provided by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies on the negotiations which had taken place in Prague between representatives of the International Red Cross organizations and the Czechoslovak Red Cross Society, and the breakdown of these negotiations in the latter part of April, the Committee agreed that its Chairman should send a letter to the Czechoslovak Representative to the United Nations, requesting him to use his good offices with his Government, with a view to a resumption of the negotiations between the International Red Cross organization and the Czechoslovak Red Cross Society.

^{2/} A/AC.53/L.44, paragraph 8, Ibid.

^{3/} This clause appears as paragraph 3 of the General Assembly resolution 517

^{4/} Wherever developments are covered in the report of the International Red Cross organizations (A/2236), they are not dealt with at length in the present report.

6. A letter was accordingly transmitted by the Chairman to the Acting Permanent Representative of Czechoslovakia to the United Nations, on 20 May 1952 (see annex I) and a reply was received from the Czechoslovak Representative, on 18 July, setting forth reasons why the negotiations in Prague had been interrupted, and why they could not be continued (see annex II).

7. On 6 August, the Standing Committee requested the Secretary-General to bring this exchange of letters to the attention of the Greek Delegation to the United Nations, it being felt that the Greek Government should have the opportunity of commenting on the questions raised therein.

8. On 12 August, the Acting Permanent Representative of Greece to the United Nations transmitted to the Acting Chairman of the Standing Committee the views of his Government (see annex III) on the letter from the Czechoslovak Representative of 18 July. At the Committee's request, copies of the three letters referred to above were transmitted, on 13 August, to the International Red Cross organizations, in order to elicit any comments which they might wish to submit. The International Red Cross organizations replied, on 16 September, that they had nothing new to add to the information previously provided by them on this question.

9. On 30 October, the Standing Committee noted with regret that, except in the case of the repatriation of Greek children from Yugoslavia, where positive results continued to be achieved, no progress had been made in the solution of the problem since the previous session of the General Assembly and requested the Secretary-General to make known to the Members of the Assembly the exchange of correspondence on the negotiations in Prague, which appears as annexes I, II and III to the present report.

ANNEX I

Letter dated 20 May 1952 from the Chairman of the
Standing Committee addressed to the Acting Permanent
Representative of Czechoslovakia to the United Nations

I have been requested by the Standing Committee on the Repatriation of Greek Children, as the Committee's Chairman, to write to you in connexion with the negotiations which took place recently in Prague between officials of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies on the one hand and officials of the Czechoslovak Red Cross Society on the other concerning the repatriation of 138 Greek children residing in Czechoslovakia.

You may recall that, during the sixth session of the General Assembly, in Paris, Mr. F. Vavricka, who had been appointed by your Government as its representative before the Standing Committee, during a meeting held on 22 January 1952, assured the Committee that arrangements would be made for negotiations to take place in Prague between the International Red Cross organizations and the Czechoslovak Red Cross Society, which should open with the consideration of the repatriation of the 138 Greek children in Czechoslovakia who had been the subject of consultations between the International Red Cross organizations and the Czechoslovak Red Cross Society during the preceding two years. An International Red Cross delegation subsequently went to Prague, and negotiations with the representatives of the Czechoslovak Red Cross Society were begun on 9 April 1952.

According to a joint report by the League of Red Cross Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross recently received by the United Nations Secretariat and brought to the attention of the Standing Committee, the above negotiations broke down on 23 April and the International Red Cross delegation returned to Geneva. The report reveals that, after the adoption of the agenda for the discussions, the representative of the Czechoslovak Red Cross Society requested that certain questions bearing on the general conditions of children in Greece should be replied to by the representatives of the International Red Cross organizations prior to the examination of the cases of the 138 Greek children in Czechoslovakia. The representatives of the International Red Cross organizations indicated that these questions were outside their mandate and should

not, in any case, be linked with the consideration of the welfare of the repatriated Greek children. In this latter connexion, they wished to point out that, in conformity with the conditions formulated by the Czechoslovak Red Cross Society in March 1950, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies had obtained a renewal of the assurances given by the Greek Government that the Greek children repatriated to Greece would immediately be reunited with their parents, and that neither they nor their parents would be subject to any action or any political discrimination.

It further appears from the report that the representatives of the Czechoslovak Red Cross Society were not satisfied with this statement, and that the International Red Cross representatives thereupon referred the matter to their headquarters in Geneva. The headquarters of the two International Red Cross organizations gave full support to the views expressed by their representatives in Prague and requested that the main question to be negotiated should be broached immediately, namely, the examination of the cases of the 138 Greek children identified in Czechoslovakia.

This declaration appears to have been unsatisfactory to the representatives of the Czechoslovak Red Cross Society, who indicated that under the circumstances they would not be ready to take up the examination of the cases of the 138 children.

The Standing Committee has charged me to get in touch with you with the urgent request that you should use your good offices with your Government by enquiring whether it would not be possible to approach the Czechoslovak Red Cross Society with the suggestion that as soon as possible negotiations with the International Red Cross organizations should be renewed along the lines of the statement made by Mr. Vavricka before the Standing Committee as to the opening of discussions with the consideration of the question of the 138 Greek children:

My colleagues on the Committee and I earnestly hope that this matter of the Greek children in Czechoslovakia, which has shown such promising signs of a solution, will not result in failure because of the recent difficulties.

(Signed) Sven GRAFSTRÖM
Chairman,
Standing Committee on the
Repatriation of Greek Children

ANNEX II

Letter dated 18 July 1952 from the Acting Permanent Representative of Czechoslovakia to the United Nations, addressed to the Chairman of the Standing Committee

With reference to your letter of 20 May 1952, I have the honour, on instructions from my Government, to bring the following to your attention:

On the basis of a statement made on 22 January 1952 by the Czechoslovak representative before the Standing Committee on the Repatriation of Greek Children, to the effect that in the opinion of the Czechoslovak Government conversations relating to the repatriation of Greek children harboured in Czechoslovakia should be transferred to the Red Cross organizations in accordance with resolution 193 (III) adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 27 November 1948, a three-member delegation of the International Red Cross organizations arrived at Prague on 8 April 1952, for conversations with representatives of the Czechoslovak Red Cross.

These conversations had to be interrupted because the representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross and of the League of Red Cross Societies declined to answer the following question asked by the Czechoslovak Red Cross: "Are there not children in Greece who are imprisoned, in concentration camps or agricultural labour colonies and who die as a result of political discrimination?"

The representatives also did not reply to the following question: "Do or do not the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies know whether such conditions exist or do not exist in Greece?"

The representatives of the International Red Cross organizations maintained their negative attitude even after consulting their respective organizations at Geneva on this subject.

The Czechoslovak Red Cross, which in the matter of the repatriation of Greek children is guided by humanitarian motives, cannot help taking into account the conditions now prevailing in Greece, for on these depend not only the futures but also the lives of the children living in, or to be repatriated to, Greece in such circumstances.

Accordingly, owing to the attitude of the representatives of the International Red Cross organizations the conversations could not continue.

The Czechoslovak Red Cross fully respects and will continue in future to comply with the terms of the 1948 and 1949 resolutions of the General Assembly of the United Nations, concerning the repatriation of Greek children. However, if this humanitarian task entrusted to the Red Cross organizations is to be carried out successfully, it is indispensable that the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies should depart from the course followed by them in conflict with the principles laid down in the General Assembly's resolutions, and that they should be guided exclusively by humanitarian principles in the performance of their functions.

(Signed) Jiri NOSEK
Acting Permanent Representative of
Czechoslovakia to the United Nations

ANNEX III

Letter dated 12 August 1952 from the Permanent Representative of Greece to the United Nations, addressed to the Acting Chairman of the Standing Committee

I should be grateful to you if you would kindly acquaint the members of the Standing Committee with the following comments that the reply, dated 18 July 1952, of the Acting Permanent Representative of Czechoslovakia to Mr. Grafstrom's communication of 20 May 1952 elicited from my Government.

Mr. Nosek's reply is in itself characteristic of the utter ill-will and lack of sincerity with which the Czechoslovak Government has, from the very outset, approached the humanitarian question of the repatriation of the abducted Greek children. Recent events, moreover, amply proved that the Czechoslovak Government's promise in Paris to adhere to its moral and legal obligations toward the Greek children under its authority - a promise obtained under the moral pressure of the overwhelming majority of the General Assembly - was but a mere device for the purpose of gaining time. I, for one, in my intervention of 29 January 1952 in the Ad Hoc Political Committee, did not conceal my apprehensions in regard to the professed change of heart on the part of the Czechoslovak Delegation. It is a matter of regret to me that the warning which I then voiced, in the following excerpt from the French original of my speech, was dramatically borne out by subsequent developments: "Dans ces conditions" I said, "j'ai quelque difficulté à partager entièrement l'espoir exprimé dans le rapport de la Commission permanente et qui est basé sur le fait que le contact entre les deux Organisations internationales de la Croix-Rouge et de la Croix-Rouge Tchécoslovaque rompu depuis juin 1950, pourrait enfin se rétablir".

This contact, indeed, despite the urgency of the question, was re-established only in April 1952, as a result of pressure brought to bear from many quarters. Heedless of the object lessons of past experience we optimistically expected that something positive might come out of the Prague consultations but we were soon awakened to the dreary reality that the Czechoslovak Government had decided otherwise. For the latter was fully aware that the contentions which it set out were in complete contradiction to the assurances given in Paris by its Representative, Mr. Vavricka, and did not reflect in the least the actual truth.

In these circumstances, Mr. Grafström was very right in recalling in his letter of 20 May 1952, addressed to the Acting Permanent Representative of Czechoslovakia, that: "... in conformity with the conditions formulated by the Czechoslovak Red Cross Society in March 1950, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies had obtained a renewal of the assurances given by the Greek Government that the Greek children repatriated to Greece would immediately be reunited with their parents, and that neither they nor their parents would be subject to any action or any political discrimination".

The Czechoslovak Government was fully aware that these assurances were earnestly given. Nor had it escaped its attention that similar promises given by my Government with regard to five groups of Greek children already repatriated from Yugoslavia had been scrupulously observed. It is a matter of common knowledge that these children, upon their arrival in Greek territory, were turned over to their parents in the presence of accredited representatives of the two organizations of the International Red Cross.

Needless to add that the Greek Government will in the future and in all circumstances welcome any action on the part of representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross and of the League of Red Cross Societies with a view to ascertaining that the repatriated children are and remain reunited with their families. In these circumstances, it is to be hoped that the so-called "harbouring" countries will make it a point of honour to grant analogous facilities to the representatives of the two great humanitarian organizations.

The Czechoslovak Government is no less aware of the groundlessness of its imputation contained in Mr. Nosek's letter of 18 July, according to which "children are being detained in Greek prisons, concentration camps and agricultural colonies and some of them die as a result of political discrimination". The only cases of detention of children in Greece are the common law juvenile delinquents. The Czechoslovak Government has, nevertheless, wilfully attempted to create false impressions in this respect by sending, through the Czechoslovak Red Cross Society, relief parcels to young Greek convicts. This sardonic design does not lack a certain touch of irony when carried out by a Government whose prisons are teeming both with adult and juvenile offenders of a set of rules and practices which by no stretch of the imagination can be termed common law.

What is more, according to information which has just reached me, the Czechoslovak Red Cross has accused the Greek authorities of throwing infants under three years of age into prison. One can hardly find adequate words to describe such pernicious propaganda. If children of that age were ever seen in Greek prisons, this was due to the universally acknowledged humanitarian purpose of keeping them with their detained mothers. Moreover, in view of the measures of clemency recently adopted in favour of those who have actively plotted against their country's political independence it is certain that such instances will be very soon totally eliminated.

In conclusion, I have been instructed by my Government to deny in the most categorical way the Czechoslovak Government's slanderous imputations and to state that their only purpose is to provide the Czechoslovak authorities with thinly veiled pretexts for illegally detaining the hapless Greek children.

(Signed) Alexis KYROU
Permanent Representative of Greece
to the United Nations