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MASTER

REPORT ON PROCEDURES OF VISITING MISSIONS

MAR 27 1953

Letter dated 5 March 1953 from the Chairman of
the Visiting Mission to the Secretary-
General

I have the honour to transmit to you herewith in accordance with rule 99 of the rules of procedure of the Trusteeship Council, a special report on procedures concerning Visiting Missions drawn up by the United Nations Visiting Mission to Trust Territories in West Africa, 1952.

I have pleasure in informing you that this report has been unanimously adopted by the members of the Visiting Mission.

(Signed) Roy A. Peachey

General

1. In addition to performing the tasks assigned to it by its terms of reference, the Visiting Mission has considered that it may make a further useful contribution to the future work of the Trusteeship Council by presenting, as did the Visiting Mission to Trust Territories in East Africa, 1951, some observations and suggestions of general application in respect of the organization and procedures of visiting missions in the field.
2. In doing so the Mission does not seek to re-examine in full the principles already established by the Council, as a result of its previous experience and of the work of the two Committees which it has established in the past for this purpose, but wishes rather to clarify, on the basis of its own experience, the practical application of some of these principles.

Programmes in the field

3. The need for a reasonable measure of flexibility in the itinerary and work programmes of visiting missions has been emphasized by the Council and its Committees in their discussions of the organization of Missions. The present Mission would like to illustrate the need for more flexibility in this respect. It is aware that for many reasons, notably the difficulties which often have to be overcome in accommodating, catering and providing local transport for the Mission, territorial authorities may normally find it convenient to lay down, in advance, relatively firm programmes for the Mission in each locality to be visited. Definite appointments will be made for interviews, visits to schools, hospitals etc. - as well as social events such as receptions and dinner parties - in such a manner as to commit not only the Mission, but also the local officials, organizations, hospital and school staffs and so forth, to a fairly rigid programme.
4. In the experience of the present Mission, this programme tends in fact to be not only rigid but crowded, since there is a natural desire that the Mission should see everything that can be fitted into its stay in the area. Thus, a normal working day for the greater part of the present Mission's visit was that, early in the morning, it would leave one centre for the next on its

scheduled trip. It would arrive there about noon, often later. After the usual greetings by the local authorities and chiefs, it would devote the afternoon or what remained of it to visiting the area, receiving communications and conducting oral hearings. When its programme of work was completed, it would be nearly if not completely dark, as darkness falls early in tropical Africa. The Mission would then be invited to attend a reception or a dinner party or both; and the party would end late at night. No time was therefore left for any adequate discussion, consideration or study of the Mission's work, which would in any case be difficult as in most places there was no electric light. The next morning, the Mission would leave again for a further leg of its journey. Sometimes, the programme would be slightly different. On other occasions, though not very often, the Mission would stay in the same place for more than one night, but its programme would be so heavy that little time would be left for meetings and discussions by the Mission itself, including the examination of communications received.

5. While emphasizing again that it appreciates the problems faced by the authorities in this respect, the present Mission feels that it would be to the ultimate advantage of all concerned if a greater degree of latitude could be permitted to a Mission by submitting to it, some days in advance, the programme proposed for a given locality. In this way it could, in the light of its experience, discuss and adjust its programme in such a manner as to avoid commitments which, because of its more important tasks, it might find desirable but difficult to decline. It would also be able, as will be suggested below, to set aside reasonable periods of time for meetings of the Mission for the purpose of examining communications and discussing its work.

6. The present Mission wishes to record in this connexion that such difficulties which arose in its own experience were lightened by the excellent working relationship which it enjoyed with the liaison officers assigned to it by the territorial administrations. They showed an appreciation of the problems which the Mission encountered in this respect, and co-operated in cancelling tactfully some engagement which the Mission found impossible to keep.

Itinerary

7. The Council is also aware, particularly from the report of the second of its Committees on the organization of visiting missions, of the possibility that each subsequent mission to a Territory might use its time more fruitfully were it to avoid, as far as possible, retracing the paths of the missions which visited the Territory before it. The present Visiting Mission wishes to associate itself with this view. It recognizes that any such practice should not and cannot be arbitrarily followed; but at the other extreme there may be a tendency on the part of both the local administrations and the populations to expect a Mission to appear in all of the places visited by its predecessor as well as in places not previously visited. Both to ensure the most effective use of its time, and to avoid physical overstrain, a Visiting Mission must decide not to visit some areas which have been seen by earlier missions, and areas where no new major problems have arisen or important developments taken place. The present Mission felt that too much was expected of it in the time at its disposal, and it was unable to meet this problem adequately even by dividing into two groups on seven or eight occasions out of ten.

Communications

8. Since the present Visiting Mission was the first to visit Trust Territories after the revision of the rules of procedure of the Trusteeship Council relating to petitions, and since, in addition, its problems in handling communications have been more difficult than those of other missions because of the great number of communications which it received, it has been thought desirable to devote particular attention to this subject.

9. Under the new rules of procedure, the Visiting Mission was to decide which of the communications it received were intended for its own information, and which of them were to be considered as petitions and forwarded to the Trusteeship Council for examination. In addition, under its terms of reference, the Mission was directed by the Trusteeship Council to investigate on the spot, in consultation with the local representatives of the Administering Authority concerned, such petitions as, in its opinion, warranted special investigation.

10. This involved the Mission first of all in screening all communications in order to determine what course of action it would take in each case, in accordance with the rules of procedure and its terms of reference. The communications which it considered were intended for its own information had to be studied, so that any additional information required for the proper understanding of the problems raised in them could be obtained. Such information would then be finally taken into account in the writing of its reports. Secondly, the communications which it classified as petitions had to be transmitted to the Secretary-General and, at the same time the Mission had to decide whether any of them were of such importance as to warrant its special investigation.

11. Unfortunately, the large number of communications received made it extremely difficult for the Mission to examine all the communications received by it or to carry out investigations on the spot. Although the abnormally large number of communications was obviously due to the special terms of reference of the Mission, it is not impossible that some future visiting mission - especially those to West Africa and East Africa - will be faced with similar difficulties. The Mission therefore considers that it should fully set forth the conditions in which it had to work, so that the Trusteeship Council may be in a position to review the manner in which communications addressed to future visiting missions should be handled.

12. During its visit, the Mission received 4,235 separate communications from organizations and individuals, consisting of:

- 2,794 communications from Togoland under French administration;
- 728 communications from the Cameroons under French administration;
- 645 communications from Togoland under United Kingdom administration;
- 68 communications from the Cameroons under United Kingdom administration.

It is necessary, of course, to explain that a very large number of these communications concerned the Ewe and Togoland unification problem. The Mission's task in disposing of these was facilitated firstly by the facts that many of them were extremely brief, and that many of them expressed similar opinions. Nevertheless, it remains true that as soon as the Mission arrived in Africa, it was flooded with communications. During the

first four days, which it spent in Lomé, it received 425 communications. Later in both Togolands and also in the southern part of the Cameroons under French administration, communications continued to pour in at an unrelenting pace. On certain days, the Mission received more than 300 communications at a time.

13. To understand the formidable problems presented by this flood of communications, it is necessary to recall that the examination of such communications was not by any means the only task of the Mission. It had at the same time to accomplish its normal daily routine, which has been described earlier, of visiting as many establishments as possible and holding meetings with representatives of the Administering Authorities and with the people of the areas it visited, and its work schedules were therefore very crowded, leaving little time for the examination of these communications.

14. In these conditions - for the improvement of which the Mission has made some suggestions above - it was very difficult for the Mission to examine carefully on the spot the written communications which it had received. The Secretariat was instructed, and did its best, to summarize and classify these communications, but usually, by the time that summary and classification had been prepared, the Mission had left the place concerned far behind. In any case the Mission had little or no time to hold meetings. Thus, with the exception of those communications supported by oral hearings, the Mission could not, in spite of its earnest endeavour, study on the spot all the questions raised in the written communications which it had received, although in many cases it was able to secure written observations of the Administering Authorities subsequently.

15. Indeed, with the exception of the more important communications concerning the Ewe and Togoland migration problem, it was not until the Mission had arrived at Ngaoundéré in the Cameroons that it found time, from its busy schedule, to hold a meeting on the Togoland communications. As a result, it decided to transmit four communications which contained personal grievances from persons in Togoland under French administration, and three from persons

in Togoland under British administration, to the Secretary-General for treatment as petitions under rule 85, and provisionally to regard the remaining 3,432 communications as addressed to the Mission for its own information. The great majority of those relating solely to the unification problem were taken into consideration in its special report (T/1034) and the views of the principal organizations are summarized therein. The Mission decided to take the remaining communications into consideration in preparing its reports on the two Togolands, and it will be noted that the reports contain frequent references thereto. Finally, when the reports were adopted, the Mission carried out another review of the Togoland communications with a view to determining which communications raised questions of substance not adequately covered in the report. As a result, the Mission transmitted twenty-two further communications relating to Togoland under French administration and three relating to Togoland under British administration to the Secretary-General for treatment as petitions.

16. A similar procedure was followed in the case of communications concerning the two Cameroons. A total of seventy-seven petitions containing specific requests from persons in the Cameroons under French administration and eleven from persons in the Cameroons under British administration were transmitted to the Secretary-General.

17. In following this procedure, the Mission felt it necessary to weigh the advantages of devoting a long period to examining petitions at Headquarters against the advantages of transmitting them to the Secretary-General and thus to the Standing Committee on Petitions. It saw greater advantages in the former course; it was obvious that the same team of Mission members and Secretariat which had just come from the Territories with first-hand knowledge would be in a better position to dispose quickly and efficiently of a large number of petitions. It was also aware of the likelihood that a situation may arise where no members of a Mission may also be members of the Committee on Petitions - a situation which did, in fact, arise during the examination of the large number of petitions which the first Visiting Mission to West Africa transmitted to the Secretary-General in 1949 and 1950.

18. In this sense the Mission's experience showed that the changes made by the Council in its procedure in this regard were timely. The handling of all the communications received in West Africa would have been an almost impossible task for the Council itself under the old procedure, and it would have been difficult to give satisfaction to those who submitted them. On the other hand, a Visiting Mission does not have unlimited time to spend at Headquarters on this task; one of the reasons for the long time needed by the present Mission to complete its reports was its desire to ensure that all the communications should be adequately dealt with, but even so it was inevitable that a number of them should have had to be transmitted as petitions.

19. While thus confirming, from its own experience, the logic of the changes in the Council's procedure, the Mission believes that future missions - especially, at present, to the African territories - will wish to take steps to ensure that the new procedure is most effectively applied. The Mission considers that the itineraries and work programmes of future missions should be arranged so as to ensure that definite periods of time should be set aside for the screening of communications and the examination and investigation of communications. It would not be practicable merely to set aside a single period for this purpose either at the beginning or at the end of the visit to the Territory. It is true that, immediately upon arrival in a Territory, the Mission will often be presented with a large number of communications which have been accumulated or collected in advance. The submission of petitions in advance might well be encouraged, and in any event, it would be profitable if the Mission could immediately devote a day or two to screening these and deciding which should be investigated. Nevertheless, it is certain that the Mission will receive more petitions - and probably many more - as it proceeds through the Territory. Thus the Mission must be prepared to stop in the more important places long enough to be able to screen communications, examine and, if necessary, investigate petitions on the spot. Similarly, it would not be practicable to leave the disposal of communications and petitions until the very end of the visit.

20. The Mission therefore recommends that, in preparing the itinerary of future Visiting Missions, fixed periods should be set aside at regular intervals throughout the visit for the primary purpose of enabling each Mission to review the communications and other information it has received, and to formulate appropriate inquiries and carry out necessary investigations into the more important petitions. It suggests also that the local administrations might be invited, as some of them have already done in the past, to announce publicly a date, in advance of that of the Mission's arrival, by which persons should preferably send in their communications.
