



UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC
AND
SOCIAL COUNCIL



GENERAL

E/CN.4/519
27 February 1951

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Seventh session
Item 11 of the provisional agenda

LOCAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEES OR INFORMATION GROUPS

Memorandum Submitted by the Secretary-General

Table of Contents

	<u>Paragraphs</u>
I. Economic and Social Council resolution 2-9 and analysis of the replies of Governments regarding that resolution	1-6
II. Establishment of national committees and working groups to deal with social questions within the fields covered by the Social Commission	7-8
III. Establishment of national commissions under the auspices of UNESCO	9
IV. Certain observations regarding functions which local human rights committees or information groups might perform.	10-19
	<u>Page</u>
ANNEX Extract of a letter from the Government of Brazil dated 28 February 1950	12

I. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL 2-9 AND ANALYSIS OF THE REPLIES
OF GOVERNMENTS REGARDING THAT RESOLUTION

1. On 26 June 1946 the Economic and Social Council, taking note of the recommendations of the Nuclear Commission on Human Rights, adopted resolution 2-9, by which:

"Members of the United Nations are invited to consider the desirability of establishing information groups or local human rights committees within their respective countries to collaborate with them in furthering the work of the Commission on Human Rights."

2. The Secretary-General drew the attention of all Member Governments to this resolution in a letter addressed to them on 30 September 1946, and in letters of 17 and 27 May 1948 concerning the implementation of recommendations on economic and social matters.

3. Twenty-seven governments have replied to these letters.^{1/} Local human rights committees have been established or existing organizations utilized for the purposes envisaged in the resolution in eleven countries: Brazil, Canada, Dominican Republic, France, Haiti, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Siam, Turkey and United States of America. Nine governments have noted the resolution and expressed their interest in it: Guatemala, Honduras, Liberia, Mexico, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Panama, Philippines and Venezuela. The Government of Venezuela stated also that it was considering the possibility of establishing local information groups in the near future. The government of El Salvador said that it would itself collaborate in furthering the activities of the Commission on Human Rights. Three governments, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom were of the opinion that the functions of such groups required clarification before taking any decision on their establishment. The Government of India stated that all fundamental human rights and fundamental freedoms had been incorporated in its draft constitution and that the question of establishing local committees should be pursued, if necessary, only after the constitution had been ratified. The government of Pakistan said that it had noted the resolution for future guidance. The Government of Greece drew attention to a note prepared by Professor Constantine F. Stathiades on human rights legislation in Greece in 1947.

4. The replies from governments give little information about the functions carried out by the local human rights committees or information groups where they

^{1/} E/CN.4/38, Add.1 and 2, E/CN.4/166, Annexes A and B, and Annex to this document.

/have been established.

have been established. The Government of Turkey which was the first country to set up a committee in October 1946, transmitted to the Secretary-General on 19 March 1947, the first two issues of a monthly review published by the United Nations Turkish Group for the Establishment and Protection of the Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. In a letter dated 23 June 1948 the Turkish Government informed the Secretary-General that this Group would act as the correspondents nominated by the Government to furnish information and documentation for the Yearbook on Human Rights.

The reply from the Dominican Republic of 28 October 1946 stated that an organization known as the Institute for Economic and Social Advancement and the Defence of Human Rights had been in existence for some time whose ends appeared to coincide with the purpose of the Council resolution. The Institute's principal aim is to take part in the world movement in favour of increased and more universal application of human rights.

On 21 May 1947 the Netherlands Government reported the establishment of an Advisory Commission on Human Rights. In a letter dated 9 April 1948 (E/CN.4/82/Rev.1) the government stated that it had submitted the report of the Commission on Human Rights to this Commission and, after taking cognizance of its observations, submitted its own comments on the draft International Bill of Human Rights.

In a letter dated 16 July 1947 the United States Government replied that it was inviting some two hundred non-governmental organizations interested in human rights to submit suggestions regarding the drafting of an international bill of human rights. It stated further that the State Department had established working relations with the President's Committee on Civil Rights to secure its advice on all matters relating to human rights. On 12 July 1948 the United States Government reaffirmed that it maintained close liaison with interested non-governmental organizations and that their comments and suggestions received careful study. Special meetings were held with representatives of these organizations prior to the second and third sessions of the Commission on Human Rights.

On 7 July 1948 the Canadian Government reported to the Secretary-General that many active voluntary organizations existed in Canada which were concerned with the protection of human rights, and that the Canadian Government therefore had not considered it necessary to establish special groups other than the

/Special Joint

Special Joint Committee of the Senate and House of Commons on human rights and fundamental freedoms.

In a letter from the Government of France, dated 16 July 1948, it was stated that French experts had from the beginning participated in the work of the Commission on Human Rights and its two Sub-Commissions and that for some time there had existed in France national organizations interested in human rights, the principal one being the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme.

The Government of Poland, on 7 August 1948, stated that a section on human rights had been established in the Institute of International Affairs and that the Polish Association for the United Nations was giving the question of establishing local human rights committees and information groups most careful consideration.

On 13 August 1948 the Government of Siam reported that a committee had been appointed to examine the draft international declaration, covenant and measures of implementation, and had reported to the government that it approved in principle the drafts proposed by the Commission on Human Rights at that date.

On 28 February 1950 the Government of Brazil stated it had always requested and would request the collaboration of national scientific and cultural institutions, such as the Brazilian International Law Society, the Brazilian Institute for Education, Science and Culture and the government departments concerned.

The reply from Haiti of 12 November 1946 and from Norway of 24 October 1947 report the establishment of information groups, but say nothing of the functions performed by them and give only details of their membership and composition.

5. The Commission on Human Rights has not itself discussed the question of the establishment of human rights committees and information groups since the Council adopted its resolution on 21 June 1946. At its second session it decided that it would take up the functions of these groups at its third session (E/600, paragraph 49). At its third session it considered that the functions of these groups could not be defined unless the measures decided on by the Commission for implementing the Covenant on Human Rights were taken into consideration, and decided to postpone the study of this question until it had decided on these measures (E/800, paragraph 22). At its fifth session the Commission decided to postpone consideration of this matter until the measures of implementation had been drafted (E/1371, paragraph 30). At its sixth session it deferred

/consideration

consideration of the item to its seventh session (E/1681, paragraph 80).

6. No guidance has therefore been given by the Commission on the question of these committees or groups. It may also be noted that the replies of governments, with the exception of that from Brazil of 28 February 1950, bear the date of 1948 or earlier and no information is available on the present activities of committees, which have been set up, except the Turkish group, which supplies information for the Yearbook. The Commission may wish therefore to consider the desirability of addressing a further inquiry to governments. It may also wish to review the whole question of the organization of local human rights committees or information groups and the functions which they might perform.

II. ESTABLISHMENT OF NATIONAL COMMITTEES AND WORKING GROUPS TO DEAL
WITH SOCIAL QUESTIONS WITHIN THE FIELDS COVERED BY THE
SOCIAL COMMISSION

7. In this connexion the Commission may note that national committees and groups have been established in some countries to work in the social field. At its sixth session the Social Commission noted with satisfaction that several Governments had taken the initiative in setting up national committees, consisting of representatives of various ministries and, in some cases, of non-governmental organizations, in order to prepare the work of the Social Commission and bring it to the knowledge of public opinion. The Social Commission expressed the wish that such committees be set up in as many countries as possible, and especially in those which had representatives on the Commission. It drew the attention of the committees to the value of co-ordinating, at the national level, the work of States in the United Nations and in the specialized agencies. It stated its conviction that it is principally through Governments that the United Nations can bring its work to the knowledge of the large masses of the population in each country and asked the Secretary-General to report on the work of the committees "so as to enable all countries to benefit from the experience of a few, and so as to bring its work to the knowledge of an increasing number of men and women throughout the world" (E/1678, Annex IV, paragraph 32). In accordance with this recommendation, which was endorsed by the Economic and Social Council at its eleventh session as part of the Social Commission's work programme, the Secretary-General invited Member States to transmit to him a report on their experience with national committees, with special attention to their membership and organization, their financing and administration, the purposes for which they have been consulted, the extent to which their co-operation had been used, and ways in which they have co-ordinated the views of the various ministries and non-governmental organizations concerned in the work of the Social Commission. Replies were received from the Governments of Australia, Burma, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, France, Haiti, India, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Union of South Africa, United Kingdom and the United States, and are reproduced in document E/CN.5/243.

8. Voluntary working groups of outstanding experts have also been established in several countries to consult with and advise the Secretariat, on an informal basis, on technical questions of social welfare. The Social Commission recommended, at its third session, that this be carried out, after considering the

results of an experimental attempt by the Secretariat to set up such groups. The principle of their establishment has not been disputed either by the Social Commission or by the Economic and Social Council, although the methods of organization and operation have given rise to some difficulty, and the Commission will consider at its next session a general policy regarding these groups. (See document E/CN.5/242).

III. ESTABLISHMENT OF NATIONAL COMMISSIONS UNDER THE AUSPICES OF UNESCO

9. The attention of the Commission on Human Rights is also drawn to Article VII of the Constitution of UNESCO, which provides for the establishment of national commissions or national co-operating bodies, as follows:

"1. Each Member State shall make such arrangements as suit its particular conditions for the purpose of associating its principal bodies interested in educational, scientific and cultural matters, with the work of the Organization, preferably by the formation of a National Commission broadly representative of the government and such bodies.

"2. National Commissions or National Co-operating Bodies, where they exist, shall act in an advisory capacity to their respective delegations to the General Conference and to their governments in matters relating to the Organization and shall function as agencies of liaison in all matters of interest to it.

"3. The Organization may, on the request of a Member State, delegate, either temporarily or permanently, a member of its Secretariat to serve on the National Commission of that State, in order to assist in the development of its work."

Such bodies have been set up in 45 out of 59 States Members of UNESCO, namely: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Burma, Ceylon, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, France, Greece, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, India, Iraq, Italy, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Panama, Persia, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Salvador, Syria, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey, Union of South Africa, United Kingdom, United States, Uruguay, Venezuela.

Provisional commissions or committees have been set up in Afghanistan, Israel and Sweden. It may also be noted that, among the proposals for the participation of these national commissions in the execution of UNESCO's programme for 1951 are

/certain

certain suggestions as to how they might be used to spread the concept of human rights and knowledge of the Universal Declaration through the press, radio, films and exhibitions.

At its General Conference, fifth session, 1950, UNESCO decided that the annual reports which Member States are required to submit in accordance with Article VIII of the constitution should include, inter alia, a statement on the measures taken to create, promote or assist a national commission or other co-operating bodies, and a statement on action taken by a national commission, both to give effect to the resolutions adopted by the General Conference and, in more general ways, to assist the development of education, science and culture in the furtherance of the aims of UNESCO.

IV. CERTAIN OBSERVATIONS REGARDING FUNCTIONS WHICH LOCAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEES OR INFORMATION GROUPS MIGHT PERFORM

10. The Commission may wish to recommend to the Economic and Social Council that it should indicate certain guiding principles regarding the functions of local human rights committees. It is reminded that three Governments stated in their replies concerning resolution 2-9 of the Council that the functions of such groups required clarification before they could decide on their establishment. The organization of these committees, whether on a semi-official or voluntary basis, is of necessity closely linked with the purpose and functions which may be assigned to them.

11. The Commission will recall that, in recommending that local human rights committees or information groups might be set up, the Nuclear Commission on Human Rights had in mind certain functions which they might perform. It was thought that they could act as centres of information within Member States, supplying relevant material which would serve as documentation in drawing up an international bill of human rights. In its report to the Council (E/38, page 161) the Nuclear Commission expressed its confidence that Member countries would make contributions for the information of the Commission regularly and on their own initiative, either themselves or by an organ entrusted with this task. It was also thought that local committees might periodically transmit information to the Commission on the observance of human rights in their countries, both in their legal systems and their jurisdictional and administrative practice.

12. Local human rights committees might act as centres for the supply of information both to their own Governments and to the Commission on Human Rights as recommended by the Nuclear Commission. They might be able to provide useful material which might serve as documentation in preparing future international instruments covering all fields of human rights. The Commission may also wish to consider whether such local groups could be used to collect information for the use of their respective governments, on the observance of human rights in their own countries, and to submit recommendations to their governments on ways in which existing laws and practices might be brought into conformity with the standards laid down in the Universal Declaration. In this way the Committees would study continuously, at the national level, the observance of human rights in practice and might be in a position to give useful assistance to Governments in preparing legislation.

13. It might be found useful if such committees or groups were to collaborate with the correspondents appointed by Governments to supply information for the Yearbook on Human Rights or, as in the case of Turkey, to act as the correspondents themselves.

14. Such groups might also assist Governments in answering questionnaires on human rights which United Nations bodies might decide to circulate to Governments for reply. The question whether they could be used to assist in the preparation of studies on human rights might also be considered. An example of such a study would be that requested in resolution 242 B (IX) of the Council, where information on the actual conditions, as distinct from the legal position, of educational opportunities for women, is contemplated. As far as studies affecting the status of women are concerned, the Commission may wish to recommend to the Council that it should consult the Commission on the Status of Women.

15. Local committees might also be able to furnish current material for the bibliography on human rights which the Commission, at its sixth session, requested the Secretary-General to prepare. Information, especially regarding new works, would be more readily available to such national bodies than to the Secretary-General.

16. The Commission might also wish to consider how such groups could be used in disseminating the text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights under the terms of resolution 217 (III) of the General Assembly. Governments might be

invited to consider the value of committees whose members were chosen from the ranks of outstanding educational and professional leaders well qualified to advise them on means to "publicize the text of the Declaration and to cause it to be disseminated, displayed, read and expounded principally in schools and other educational institutions, without distinction based on the political status of countries or territories." The Commission might also consider whether the effectiveness of the work already enthusiastically undertaken by non-governmental organizations to bring the Declaration to the attention of its members might not be increased if it were co-ordinated in each country by a national human rights committee composed of outstanding individuals. The activities of the UNESCO national commissions in spreading knowledge of the Declaration would also need to be co-ordinated with those of the local human rights committees.

17. Such committees might play a useful part in bringing to the knowledge of the public in each country the work of their Governments regarding human rights both at the United Nations and in the specialized agencies. They might also be able to give useful advice and assistance to the United Nations itself in spreading knowledge of the work of the organization to promote respect for human rights. They would be in a position to know the varying attitudes and requirements of particular regions and countries. They could also prepare articles, books, and pamphlets designed to meet those particular needs, and contribute to the wider dissemination of material prepared by the United Nations.

18. The Commission may also wish to take into account the part which such committees could play in the implementation of the international bill of human rights. It has itself noted, at its third and fifth sessions, that the functions of the committees were linked with the general question of implementation.

19. The points which the Commission may wish to consider in connexion with local human rights committees or information groups may be summarized as follows:

(1) Whether some further enquiry might be addressed to governments regarding the establishment of such committees or groups, - particularly in the light of such recommendations as the Commission may wish to propose;

(2) What functions might be performed by these groups when established as, for example:

(a) acting as centres of information to furnish material to governments, the Commission or the Secretary-General relating to the international bill of human rights, the Yearbook on Human Rights, questionnaires

/on human rights

on human rights and on the status of women, the bibliography on human rights;

(b) acting as centres of information to bring to the knowledge of the general public the text of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the activities of the United Nations to promote respect for human rights, the actions of their governments in the United Nations and the specialized agencies, and assisting the United Nations (in its educational programme;

(c) observing the promotion of human rights in their respective territories in the light of the standards laid down in the Declaration with a view to making recommendations to Governments regarding existing legislation and practices.

(3) What part may be played by these groups in the implementation of instruments safeguarding human rights.

ANNEX

Extract from the letter of the Government of Brazil
of 28 February 1950

Translated from Portuguese

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
RIO DE JANEIRO

COI/9/602. (04)

The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Brazil has the honour, with reference to memorandum ECA/55/08(I) of 26 October 1949 regarding the implementation of recommendations concerning economic and social affairs, to communicate to the Secretary-General of the United Nations the replies of the Government of Brazil in response to the request in Annex II of that memorandum.

COI/9/602.(04)/1950/Annex.

Economic and Social Council - Resolution 9 (II) of 21 June 1946. In note DPO/SN/602.(04) of 26 December 1946 the Secretary-General of the United Nations was informed that the Government of Brazil took a favourable view of that decision of the Economic and Social Council. For the purposes mentioned in paragraph 5 of that resolution the Brazilian Government has always requested and will request the collaboration of national scientific and cultural institutions such as the Brazilian International Law Society, the Brazilian Institute for Education, Science and Culture and the governmental departments concerned.

Rio de Janeiro, 28 February 1950.
