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**Chairman: Mr. Jiří NOSEK (Czechoslovakia).**

**AGENDA ITEM 27**

**Report of the United Nations High Commissioner  
for Refugees (A/2648 and Add.2, A/2686,  
chapter IV, section V)**

*At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. van Heuven  
Goedhart, United Nations High Commissioner for Ref-  
ugees, took a place at the Committee table.*

**STATEMENT BY THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMIS-  
SIONER FOR REFUGEES**

1. Mr. VAN HEUVEN GOEDHART (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) paid a tribute to the memory of Dr. Nansen, League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and announced that he had taken the initiative of instituting a Nansen medal for outstanding work on behalf of refugees. A committee had been established to make the annual award; it consisted of representatives of the Governments of Norway and Switzerland, the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe, the President of the Standing Conference of Voluntary Agencies working on behalf of Refugees, and himself. He had received full co-operation from the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The first award would be made in 1955.

2. The task of the High Commissioner's Office was fourfold: to seek a permanent solution of the refugee problem; to protect the refugees under its mandate; to co-ordinate the activities of the voluntary agencies concerned; and, under General Assembly resolution 538 B (VI), to assist the most needy groups.

3. There were some grounds for satisfaction with the action taken for the protection of refugees. The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (A/CONF.2/108) had come into force on 22 April 1954, having received the requisite number of ratifications; France and Israel had subsequently ratified it; and Ecuador, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland were in process of doing so. On 14 September 1954, the Austrian Government had officially stated that it would issue a decree within a few weeks placing alien refugees on an equal footing with nationals with regard to access to the labour market—a major step towards their integration.

4. The co-ordination between the High Commissioner's Office and the voluntary agencies, which had been very satisfactory in the past, had become even better in the year that had just elapsed. The activities of those agencies were indispensable, since his Office was wholly non-operational.

5. The situation and prospects with regard to the neediest refugees were, unfortunately, less satisfactory. His Office could provide limited assistance to a restricted number of such refugees, and some assistance in addition to what they were receiving from other sources.

6. The General Assembly at its eighth session had asked for further information on the refugees in camps. There were about 200 camps in Europe, with about 83,000 inmates. There had been some decrease in the number of inmates during the past two years, but the situation still required urgent action.

7. The camp-adoption scheme had been further developed. It had been thought preferable to give communities a personal interest in the camps rather than simply to send assistance in kind to the refugees. Twenty-two camps had been thus adopted. A further extension of the scheme would be desirable, although not all the camps were in need of it. His visits to Egypt, Greece, Iran, the Hashemite Kingdom of the Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey had convinced him that those countries faced such great difficulties of their own that it would not be possible for them to give much assistance to the refugees under the mandate of his Office. On the other hand, the situation of many refugees in those countries was so precarious that they would hardly be able to make ends meet without some assistance from the High Commissioner's Office.

8. The difficult cases presented the hardest problem. There was little hope that the aged, the blind, the paralytic and the tuberculous refugees would ever be integrated in the economy of their country of residence or of any other country. They would never again be able to fend for themselves, and would be dependent on charity for the rest of their lives. They were in some ways the most deserving category of refugees and their problem was urgent; but its solution would require a great deal of money. It might be said that the difficult cases had their price. A certain amount of cash—as much as \$US2,000 in some cases—would be needed if they were to end their days in decent conditions in hospitals or sanatoria. Some Governments, however—and they were to be commended highly—did not wish to charge for such assistance.

9. There were two possible solutions: placement in other countries or care in the country of residence. There was little doubt that the latter would become the more normal course. Unless adequate funds were forthcoming, however, nothing could be done along those lines. He hoped that the Third Committee would

discuss the best method of finding the requisite funds. It might consider his Advisory Committee's suggestion that the Negotiating Committee on Extra-Budgetary Funds should be approached in that connexion.

10. Although co-ordination, protection and assistance were indispensable, they would not in themselves solve the refugee problem. He himself was far more interested in solving that problem as a whole than in palliating the refugees' misery. He had hoped that the General Assembly, in adopting resolution 728 (VIII), shared his view not only that the High Commissioner should concern himself with the groups of refugees in need of emergency aid, those still living in camps and those requiring special care, but also that Members of the United Nations should intensify their efforts to promote, in co-operation with the High Commissioner, solutions for the problems of refugees. He had accordingly hoped that the Assembly would devote its chief attention to considering what was needed, and the extent of the contribution required for such a solution. He was no longer so optimistic; but he still believed that priority should be given to the question whether the United Nations ought to make any contribution to the solution of the problem, as it seemed that not all its Members agreed that the refugee problem was an international responsibility.

11. The Committee should bear in mind that, in approving the constitution of the International Refugee Organization (General Assembly resolution 62 (I)) in 1946, the General Assembly had emphasized the international scope and character of the refugee problem. Although it had been maintained that since the dissolution of IRO the responsibility for refugees had been transferred to the authorities of the countries of residence, it should be remembered that, before the conclusion of its operations, IRO had made arrangements to transfer the responsibility for the refugees under its authority to certain countries but not to others. Thus, as IRO had pointed out to the General Assembly, there was every probability that a large number of refugees would not be automatically absorbed into their countries of residence and, in its final report, IRO had stated<sup>1</sup> that, although the numbers involved would not justify its continuation, the problems were so grave in terms of human suffering that they called for urgent consideration by the United Nations.

12. That continual emphasis on the international character of the refugee problem was in conformity with the practice of all States which were called upon, owing to their geographical position, to bear the brunt of every new influx of refugees. Although it should be recognized that the country of first asylum had to bear the main responsibility for the care and maintenance of refugees and for finding permanent solutions for them, all such countries had in practice insisted that, owing to the international character of the problem, other States professing to believe in the same principles should take some share of the burden. That principle lay at the basis of the Inter-Governmental Committee on Refugees set up by the United States Government for victims of Nazi oppression, of the Constitution of IRO and of the General Assembly decisions on the matter.

13. It would indeed be tragic if Governments which had distinguished themselves in the past by their

generosity to the cause of the refugees were to wash their hands of any responsibility with regard to finding permanent solutions for the unsolved problems of post-war refugees. That responsibility could not be lightly cast aside on the pretext that it had been transferred to the countries of residence. If that were true, none of the countries which kept their frontiers open to the victims of political, racial or religious persecution could hope for any assistance in finding solutions for refugees in their territories who were not their nationals. Moreover, such a principle would be inconsistent with the occupation control agreements for Germany and Austria, and also with the generous initiative of the United States of America in establishing the United States Escapee Programme, under which supplementary help was given on behalf of new refugees.

14. His responsibility under the Statute of his Office (General Assembly resolution 428 (V), annex) was to help Governments to find permanent solutions and to reduce the number of refugees requiring protection. The United Nations had to decide whether or not it was determined to deal effectively with the problem of permanent solutions. It could not be argued that all the necessary international assistance was being given through the Inter-Governmental Committee for European Migration, because that body only helped voluntary agencies to finance the movement of refugees, but did not itself obtain sponsorship, which was an essential factor of emigration as long as there were very few mass selection schemes in operation. In any case, resettlement could not provide a permanent solution for all the refugees who had not yet been integrated into their countries of residence. Every year spent in camps made the refugees less attractive to the countries of immigration and, unless those countries were prepared to reconsider their health criteria, there would be more and more family groups which could not be resettled because of one or more sick members.

15. The economic integration of refugees into their countries of residence was proceeding slowly and unevenly; it was a mistake to believe that improvement in the economic strength of a country had an automatic effect on its absorption of refugees while thousands of them still lived in camps far removed from centres of employment. Some supplementary assistance had to be given if integration was to be achieved.

16. It had also been argued that the countries of residence could, if they so wished, ask for help in the matter of permanent solutions on a bilateral basis. It was, however, hardly reasonable to expect such help from Governments which declared themselves unwilling to participate in international programmes for permanent solutions. Nor was it reasonable to expect that any country of residence which was unable to absorb the refugees under his mandate owing to its own refugee problems or to the pressure of surplus population would be in a political position to ask for help on a bilateral basis for a group of persons who were not its nationals. That political problem had prevented any countries of residence from asking for financial assistance on behalf of the refugees under his mandate. The economic problem involved might be summarized by saying that the countries of residence were for the most part burdened by over-population and national refugee problems and were therefore not generally in a position to absorb refugees within a reasonable period of

<sup>1</sup> See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixth Session, Annexes*, agenda items 30 and 31, A/1948, para. 19.

time. Special measures to accelerate such absorption had therefore proved necessary.

17. Additional assistance could be expected from international sources, but certain limiting factors had to be taken into account: the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was non-operational; the aid rendered should be supplementary and supplied on a project basis; certain countries should be given priority according to their needs, and there should be close co-operation with the Governments of the refugees' countries of residence.

18. The five-year programme he had in mind would require about twelve million dollars from international sources, but that was very little compared with some of the annual expenses of a town like New York, for instance. Fifty-five States should be able to contribute such a sum without difficulty over a period of five years.

19. That amount alone would not suffice: it would have to be matched with contributions from internal sources. The three-million-dollar grant from the Ford Foundation had been matched with \$7,800,000 from other sources, bringing the total available for refugee aid to \$10,800,000 over a period of 18 months.

20. Furthermore, a revolving scheme could be adopted for the utilization of the \$12 million, so that sums invested in initial projects could be recovered and used for other schemes after the lapse of from three to six years. There was no necessity for all contributions to be in the form of money.

21. In 1952, he had been authorized by the General Assembly, under resolution 638 (VII), to examine the situation in consultation with the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development with a view to exploring, with the Governments directly concerned, what sources of funds might be available and the most effective means for their utilization. Unfortunately, the Bank was precluded by its constitution from granting small credits for refugee self-support projects.

22. In consultation with six major voluntary agencies, he had approached the Ford Foundation, which had provided \$3 million for refugee settlement projects. That aid would not be continued, not because the Ford Foundation was dissatisfied with the results obtained, but because it had viewed the three million dollar programme as a pilot operation, aimed at demonstrating what could be done to solve the refugee problem.

23. Other possibilities having been exhausted, the question of finding further funds was before the United Nations. In March 1954, the Advisory Committee on Refugees had suggested that the High Commissioner should elaborate his programme further, in consultation with the specialized agencies and other intergovernmental organizations and also non-governmental organizations, and submit the detailed programme through the Economic and Social Council to the General Assembly.

24. In resolution 549 (XVIII), of 23 July 1954, the Economic and Social Council had expressed the opinion that the programme contained constructive elements for the solution of the refugee problem, and invited the High Commissioner to make available to the General Assembly such additional information as might facilitate its consideration of the proposals. The Economic and Social Council had suggested that if it approved the proposals the General Assembly should

ask the Negotiating Committee on Extra-Budgetary Funds to institute negotiations concerning contributions.

25. Support for the programme had also been expressed by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, which had urged Governments that were members of the Council of Europe and also of the United Nations to support the proposals when they came up for discussion in the General Assembly.

26. He hoped that after a full discussion, the General Assembly would approve the programme. Views might differ, however, as to the best method of obtaining the necessary funds, whether through the Negotiating Committee on Extra-Budgetary Funds or by widening the powers of the High Commissioner to issue appeals for funds as laid down in resolution 538 B (VI) of the General Assembly.

27. Dr. Nansen had said at the 16th plenary meeting of the League of Nations Fourth Assembly, on 27 September 1923, that refugee problems could only be dealt with by international action, and, without doubt, the only machinery for such international action was the League of Nations. The same thing could be said of the United Nations.

28. Dr. Nansen had felt that the plight of the refugees was such that he had no right to fail. If the General Assembly debated the question with the same devotion and courage in facing facts as he had shown, the refugees would be given fair treatment. There could be no better way of honouring Dr. Nansen.

29. Mr. HAMMARSKJÖLD (Secretary-General) said that, in setting up the High Commissioner's Office, the United Nations had expressed its willingness to accept responsibility for one of the most tragic of contemporary problems. The High Commissioner's Office was responsible not only for the protection of refugees but for finding permanent solutions for their problems. While many thousands of refugees remained in camps, the problem could not be regarded as solved, and it was obvious that the solution could not be achieved by the normal procedures of economic development. It had to be recognized therefore that the refugee question was a long-term problem.

30. In view of the responsibilities already undertaken by the United Nations, the question whether a lasting solution could be achieved within the existing framework of the Organization had required serious consideration. The conclusion reached had been that the responsibility for permanent solutions was fully in line with general United Nations policy and with the strict criteria for the tasks of the Secretariat which he had suggested. If the programme were kept within the framework of the United Nations, it would be easier to keep the administrative arrangements involved within modest limits. He therefore hoped that the decision of the Third Committee would give the United Nations an opportunity to make an effective contribution to the High Commissioner's work, bearing in mind the long-term character of his programme.

#### GENERAL DEBATE

31. Mr. NUÑEZ (Costa Rica) said that he had been greatly impressed by the High Commissioner's statement, which he regarded as a peremptory appeal to the conscience of the free world, calling for vigorous, intelligent and systematic action by the United Nations. He drew attention to paragraph 268 of the High Commissioner's report (A/2648), which stated

that the refugees had made a sacrifice for the sake of freedom and that the free world was under an obligation to see to it that their sacrifice had not been meaningless.

32. It was also essential to remember that refugees were human beings, and their pitiful plight could not be ignored. The Committee had every confidence in the High Commissioner's experience of the delicate and humanitarian problem at issue, and could therefore assure him, even at that stage of the debate, that the United Nations and its Member States would support his proposals. The funds he required would surely

not be denied him in any organ of the United Nations; all countries would undoubtedly discharge their humanitarian duty to the extent of making sacrifices for the cause of freedom and for suffering human beings.

33. He appealed to the representatives of Latin-American countries, which, for geographical reasons, were unable to offer asylum to refugees in all cases, to give what economic assistance they could to those who were suffering in the cause of freedom.

The meeting rose at 4.35 p.m.