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THE PROBLEM OF REFUGEES FROM ANGOLA IN THE CONGO
(LEOPOLDVILLE)

(Report submitted by the High Commissioner)

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THE PROBLEM OF REFUGEES FROM ANGOLA
IN THE CONGO (LEOPOLDVILLE)

Introduction

1. The High Commissioner has recently received disquieting information concerning the situation of refugees from Angola in the Congo (Leopoldville), particularly with regard to those who arrived in the southern part of that country in the second half of 1962.
2. The purpose of this document is to set out the action which the Office has taken in the matter, and to define the part which can be played by the Office in seeking appropriate solutions to the problem. The High Commissioner furthermore hopes that this analysis of the situation will help to arouse public interest in this problem which, by virtue of its nature and scope, requires a concerted effort from the international community going beyond the limits of the High Commissioner's terms of reference.

Terms of Reference and Initial Action

3. The High Commissioner was first requested by the Government of the Republic of the Congo (Leopoldville) to take an interest in the problem of refugees from Angola in that country in May 1961. The present Deputy High Commissioner and a senior staff member of the Office visited Leopoldville in October 1961 to discuss the problem with the Government.
4. In its Resolution 1671 (XVI), the General Assembly of the United Nations recommended that "the United Nations in the Congo, in close liaison with the UNHCR, the Government of the Republic of the Congo (Leopoldville), the League of Red Cross Societies and other voluntary agencies, should continue to provide emergency assistance for as long as is necessary and enable the refugees (from Angola) to become self-supporting as soon as possible." The General Assembly further requested the High Commissioner "to continue to lend his good offices in seeking appropriate solutions to the problems arising from the presence of Angolan refugees in the Republic of the Congo (Leopoldville), inter alia by facilitating,

in close collaboration with the authorities and organisations directly concerned, the voluntary repatriation of these refugees". Finally, the General Assembly urged States Members of the United Nations and members of the specialized agencies "to make available to the competent organs of the United Nations the means required for the measures of assistance mentioned above."

5. In the course of the general debate which preceded the adoption of this Resolution, the Representative of the Republic of the Congo (Leopoldville) expressed himself as follows:

"The problem now is how to enable these refugees to become self-supporting. That is a point which the delegation of the Republic of the Congo wished to stress in its draft resolution, for in our view it is essential, both as regards the physical and moral well-being of the refugees and from the standpoint of the reactions of the local population, which from the outset has so generously shared its own resources with them. As is stated in our aide-mémoire, the shelter which we offered to these refugees is of course only temporary, since my Government hopes that they will shortly be able to return to their homeland. But in the meantime it regards it as an imperative humanitarian duty to allow them to earn their living and take part in the economic life of the country so that they no longer have to rely solely on the charity of others. This, in our view, is the way to protect their dignity as human beings." (1)

6. In agreement with the Congolese Government, the High Commissioner appointed a Chargé de Mission in August 1961, whose task was to help in seeking and putting into effect appropriate solutions to the problem. Practical plans were drawn up in Leopoldville with the interested parties and were put into effect in accordance with the above concept.

(1) Unofficial translation from French.

7. In order to prevent the refugees from becoming permanently dependent on relief supplies, they were given land, tools and seeds with which to cultivate the soil and thus to become self-supporting as early as possible. The operation was carried out by the League of Red Cross Societies, Caritas Congo and the Congo Protestant Relief Agency (CPRA), in close co-operation with ONUC and UNHCR. It was decided to bring the relief measures to a close by the end of January 1962, by which time the refugees could expect their first harvest. Generally speaking, the first harvest did prove successful. The refugees were thus able to provide themselves with crops of beans, maize and peanuts. In addition, a large number of them began to cultivate manioc on their own initiative.

8. At that time they could also benefit from the general measures of assistance to the population in the area, and in particular from the distribution of milk under a joint UNICEF/League of Red Cross Societies programme. For those refugees who could not as yet fend for themselves, Caritas Congo and the Protestant Relief Agency (CPRA) continued to provide the basic necessities of life, as they had been doing before the co-ordinated resettlement operation started.

9. The measures envisaged were in no way meant to prejudice the right of any refugee to return to his homeland if he so wished. On the contrary, they were so conceived as to enable him to return to his country, if he so desired, in a better moral and physical condition.

New Problems

10. Early in August 1962, the High Commissioner's Representative in the area reported that there had been a considerable influx of new refugees from Angola. After an on-the-spot investigation, their number was estimated at between 10 - and 20,000 persons.

11. At the same time reports from the area indicated that the conditions of life of the refugees, as well as those of part of the local population, were deteriorating alarmingly since there was a serious food shortage throughout the area. The Representative of the High Commissioner reported that the hospitals in the area were treating many refugees suffering from extreme malnutrition. For instance, of the 151 refugees treated in the Moerbeke Hospital in November, 15 died and many others were in a dangerously weak condition.

12. The attention of ONUC was immediately drawn to this situation by the High Commissioner's Representative in the Congo. It had also been reported by the Chief Delegate of the League of Red Cross Societies in Leopoldville. Food supplies were immediately made available by ONUC from the UN Famine Relief stock. The distribution of food, by Caritas Congo and CPRA, in particular of United States agricultural products, has also helped.

New action by UNHCR

13. In accordance with the wishes expressed by the Congolese Government and with the directives adopted by the General Assembly, referred to in paragraph 4 above, it is the High Commissioner's objective to enable the non-settled refugees to become self-supporting as speedily as possible.

14. In November 1962, the High Commissioner sent a senior staff member to Leopoldville to complete the plans made by his Representative, Caritas and CPRA to meet the new problems. These plans were discussed with the Acting Foreign Minister, Mr. Matiti, who endorsed them.

15. As a result of this mission, the High Commissioner approved the following two projects:

- (a) the provision of seeds and additional tools to some 7,500 refugees previously installed in the region south of Mberbeke. This group of refugees, having had an unsuccessful harvest, were unable to support themselves. The cost of this project, amounting to \$ 11,200, is to be shared equally between UNHCR and the World Council of Churches, of which CPRA is an affiliated organisation. CPRA has already purchased the seeds and tools and has distributed them to the refugees who are expected to become self-supporting by April 1963.
- (b) The settlement of 5,500 refugees, to be carried out by Caritas Congo. Under this project refugees at present in the Matadi and Sorngololo areas are to be given land in another region, as well as seeds and tools. The cost of the movement of these refugees, the building of accommodation

undertaken by the refugees themselves, and the provision of rations, seeds and tools has been estimated at \$ 300,000. Of this sum, Caritas Congo will provide \$ 48,000, UNHCR \$ 72,000 and Catholic Relief Services will supply food obtained from the United States under the Agricultural Assistance Act valued at \$ 180,000. The actual cost, however, will depend largely on the number of beneficiaries. If less than 5,500 refugees apply for assistance under this project the cost will be proportionally lower. If, on the other hand, it were found necessary to extend the project to a larger number of refugees, the Office of the High Commissioner will again request the assistance of Caritas and CPRA, or any other appropriate agency.

Present difficulties

16. The High Commissioner considers that by putting into effect these two projects he will have made an effective contribution to the solution of the problem of refugees from Angola which the Government of the Congo (Leopoldville) is at present facing.
17. However, many of the refugees, particularly in the Katadi area, do not feel encouraged to become re-settled elsewhere or even to accept employment. For example, the High Commissioner's Representative reported that a number of refugees working in the large sugar factory of Moerbeke abandoned this job after a few days. There are still some 500 jobs available in the factory.
18. It is a matter for the authorities of the country of asylum to examine this aspect of the situation and to consider such measures as might be required.
19. While the above-mentioned projects of the Office of the High Commissioner would contribute to the solution of an important part of the social problem resulting from the presence of these refugees, it is evident that they would not have an immediately alleviating effect on the plight of the population in the area where most of the refugees are living.

20. It seems necessary, therefore, to consider the situation of the refugees within the framework of the economic and social problem of the area as a whole, a problem which, as far as it is connected with the question of possible measures to be taken in the field of public order, comes within the competence of the Government of the country. As far as its other aspects are concerned the problem may also come within the sphere of ONUC, some of the specialised agencies of the UN and other public or private organisations. The High Commissioner feels, nevertheless, that it is his duty to draw the attention of the international community to a situation which affects the welfare of the refugees in this part of the Congo. In his opinion this is a burning question, which calls for immediate action.