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ECONOMIC AND EMPLOYMENT COMMISSION

THIRD SESSION

REPORT OF MR. JOSE NUNES GUIMARAES, THE COMMISSION'S  
OBSERVER ON THE SOCIAL COMMISSION, ON THE QUESTION  
OF A CONFERENCE OF HOUSING EXPERTS

(Item 5 of the Agenda, Document E/CN.1/48/Rev.1)

In the absence of Mr. Guimaraes, Mr. Jose Garrido Torres, his  
alternate, made the following statement:

"The Social Commission at its second session, which took place  
between 28 August and 12 September 1947, gave consideration to the  
problems of housing and town and country planning arising out of  
resolutions of the General Assembly and of the Economic and Social  
Council.

"The Social Commission had before it an interim note prepared  
by the Secretariat (document E/CN.5/31) which summarized the action  
taken in effectuating the resolution on housing and town and country  
planning that was adopted by the Economic and Social Council on  
28 March 1948.

"The Social Commission also received statements from the Food  
and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Health  
Organization and the American Federation of Labor, regarding their  
interest in the matter and forms of possible inter-agency co-operation  
in this field.

"The Commission decided to refer the subject, without preliminary  
discussion, to a Special Committee on Housing and Town Planning,  
composed of representatives of Colombia, Ecuador, France, Greece,  
Iraq, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Yugoslavia.

"In the absence of Mr. Nunes Guimaraes, his alternate,  
Mr. Roberto de Oliveira Campos, replaced him as observer of the  
Economic and Employment Commission in meetings of the Social  
Commission dealing with problems of housing and town planning.

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"Owing to the lack of specific data and of more detailed studies, it did not prove possible for the Social Commission to examine the matter to any great extent, and the discussion centred mainly on the most suitable methods for further research and study of the problem. Emphasis was laid on the need for the dissemination of technical knowledge and information concerning social legislation on housing, and for the co-ordination of international activities in this field.

"Detailed attention was given to the proposal for calling an international conference of experts on housing and town planning. The majority of the Committee members were skeptical of the desirability and advantage of an international conference, either because it would involve considerable expenditure without certain prospect of tangible results, or because it was felt that the close link between housing problems and local climatic conditions renders this problem essentially a regional one, which can hardly be attacked on a broad international level. Greater sympathy was expressed by many members towards convening regional conferences to deal with typical problems in specific areas. It was, however, felt that more preparatory work would be needed before even regional gatherings were called.

"There was, on the other hand, a large measure of agreement on the desirability of arranging for small meetings of experts, either on particular types of problems or on problems of particular areas; these meetings to be devoted mainly to the exchange of information on housing standards, technical construction methods and the production of building materials. It was decided that the Secretary-General should be authorized to arrange for such meetings, within budgetary limitations.

"The resolution passed by the Social Commission (reproduced on page 21 of the report of the second session of the Social Commission, document E/578) endorses the proposal of the Secretary-General for continuing the study of problems of housing and town planning; stresses the importance of centralizing information on these questions in the Secretariat; requests the Secretary-General to proceed with the dissemination of the information collected, especially legislative texts; and recommends close co-operation with the specialized agencies and governmental and non-governmental organizations operating in related fields.

/"The resolution

"The resolution also endorses the suggestion of the Secretary-General that, in view of the wide scope of these questions and of regional and national differences in economic and social conditions, the United Nations approach the problem of housing from two viewpoints: that of a particular type of problem and of a particular type of area. The Social Commission further considered that the problem of housing standards falls within its special field of interest and that, among the several types, tropical areas, war-devastated areas and under-developed and rural areas should be given special attention.

"In paragraph 2 of the resolution referred to above, the Social Commission thanks the Chairman of the Economic and Employment Commission for having designated an observer to attend the second session of the Social Commission. Speaking for the Economic and Employment Commission, on behalf of Mr. Nunes Guimaraes, who was unable to leave Brazil for the meetings of the Social Commission, his alternate, Mr. Campos, reasserted the keen interest of the Economic and Employment Commission in the matter of town planning and housing, in view of the important bearing of the construction industry on both economic stability and economic development. He expressed the willingness of the Economic and Employment Commission to co-operate at all times with the Social Commission, although the overcrowding of its agenda had prevented the Economic and Employment Commission from giving detailed examination to the problem then confronting the Social Commission.

"Mr. Campos pointed out that allocation of functions and interests between the Social Commission and the Economic and Employment Commission was necessary before more concrete work is tackled. He called to the attention of the members of the Special Committee on Housing that a basis for this division of work had been established by an understanding between the Chairman of the Social Commission and the Chairman of the Economic and Employment Commission; according to this arrangement, the Social Commission would concentrate on the demand side of the housing problem, while the Economic and Employment Commission would later consider supply conditions. To be enabled to co-operate in future work, the Economic and Employment Commission should be provided by the Secretariat with data on the demand for housing and the distribution of demand among the several areas, so that a study of economic implications can be made.

/"Those views

"Those views seemed to coincide with those generally held by the members of the Social Commission.

"It can thus be seen that, during the discussion in the second session of the Social Commission, the methods of dealing with the problem, rather than the substance of the problem, were considered. It is expected that when more technical details are available, the Economic and Employment Commission will be called upon to give substantive consideration to this important question, for whose solution its constant co-operation is desired by the Social Commission."

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