

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA  
Expert Group Meeting on Social Defence  
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Mr. President, Your Excellencies, distinguished experts, Ladies and Gentlemen. It is a great honour and pleasure for me, on behalf of my colleagues at United Nations Headquarters, and in the name of the Secretary General, to associate myself with the expressions of appreciations just voiced by Mr. Riby-Williams for the great cordiality of the Government of Liberia in inviting this expert group on Social Defence to meet in Monrovia. My own observations here of the manifestations of generosity and thoughtfulness by our hosts have been further substantiated by the accounts received from my colleagues of the Economic Commission for Africa who, for months now, have carried the heavy and difficult burden of organizing the many phases of this UN meeting.

The cordiality of the Liberian Government is epitomized by the fact that you, Your Excellency, Mr. President, have honoured us by inaugurating the meeting yourself. This gesture, along with the profound wisdom you have expressed, will surely inspire the meeting to approach its task with

dedication and a determination to advance knowledge and policy concerning this baffling and distressing problem.

In a rapidly changing world in which new problems emerge, some to be solved by simple and rapid methods, others to grow in size and intensity, juvenile delinquency and adult criminality are almost universally recognized as harsh and burdensome problems, difficult of solution. It is also recognized that many of the benefits of economic development could be undermined to a significant degree by markedly increased rates of criminality since the evidence indicates that economic development will be accompanied by increased criminality unless effective measures are adopted at a sufficiently early stage.

Criminality can be an extremely costly burden upon any country, directly through the resources of the State that must be expended in maintaining a comprehensive programme for apprehending and dealing with offenders and indirectly, through the dissipation of resources, human and material, by criminal behaviour. No country ignores its criminality but many countries, by taking insufficient or inappropriate measures, compound their problems and thereby increase the burden upon the State stemming from criminality.

It can be demonstrated, historically, that in areas of rapid social change, the rate of social breakdown, markedly including criminality, has been almost invariably high. With countries to-day, especially the new emerging ones,

undergoing social change at an unprecedented rate, it is necessary to anticipate high rates of criminality unless sound measures of prevention and control are instituted in a timely manner.

Few countries, and least of all the newly emerging countries, can afford to tolerate a high rate of criminality along with the heavy social and economic burden they impose. It is now widely agreed that increased criminality need not be an inevitable consequence of social change accompanying economic development. Indeed, it is perceived that both social change and economic development, under proper circumstances and control, may even contribute to a decrease in criminality. However, this will not be achieved by an isolated and fragmentary approach to criminality and its control. Programmes for the prevention and control of criminality, based on scientific knowledge and drawn up by persons possessing special competence in this field, must form an integral point of a coordinated framework for national, social and economic planning.

Successful policies and programmes for the prevention of crime and the treatment of offenders are yet to be established with precision. Much more knowledge is required about the factors conducive to delinquency and the effective measures to prevent and control it. Even countries that have devoted themselves to such questions for many years are still far from having attained satisfactory solutions with respect to their own situations, and the success of

these improved methods may even be more limited when applied to other countries, particularly those with grossly different traditions, expectations and social outlooks.

Therefore, it is unsuitable and unwise for the newly developing countries to adopt unquestioningly the methods evolved in the economically developed countries.

It is in this context that the United Nations looks with so much hope to the work of this first United Nations African expert meeting in the Social Defence field. And it is proper too, that in this first meeting the focus should be on juvenile delinquency and its prevention since the roots of criminality are deep and the first line of defence against criminality is to be established in those broad areas which provide breeding ground for crime.

The work of the United Nations in the field of the prevention of crime and the treatment of offenders, which has formed part of the Organization's activities within social field ever since the creation of the United Nations, has increasingly concerned itself with prevention. Indeed "Prevention of Crime" will be the theme of a world wide Congress the United Nations will convene one year from now in Stockholm, Sweden, and the fruits of this meeting here will be utilized in focusing the discussions at that assembly of some 1200 specialists on the major issues to be faced to-day. A somewhat comparable meeting was sponsored by United Nations for Latin American experts last year, and, earlier this year, for Asian experts. A similar meeting for the Arab States will take place later this year.

Time does not permit me to describe fully the various approaches of the United Nations in assisting in the development of knowledge and practice in this field. In addition to specialized meetings such as just referred to, the Organization has issued a series of publications imparting information on trends and innovations for the possible guidance of Governments and individual specialists seeking it. It has elaborated Standard Minimum Rules. It provides direct technical assistance to requesting Governments in the form of fellowships and expert consultant services. Sometimes it is called upon to give guidance on particularly delicate questions, as was recently the case when the General Assembly of the United Nations called for a special report on the question of Capital Punishment in member States. May I say, as something of an aside, that the Secretary General convened a group of 8 internationally chosen experts to assess the basic survey prepared on this matter and that the distinguished rapporteur of that group was Mr. Edward Moore, then Assistant Attorney General and now Undersecretary of State of Liberia. We are very grateful to him and his Government for his services and for the report which has now been transmitted to all Governments for their guidance.

To revert particularly to the meeting inaugurated to-day, let us take courage from the fact that the hour is yet early, that severe and widespread problems of juvenile delinquency do not bedevil countries of Africa as they do in many other countries of the world. May this blessed fact not lead to complaisance! On the contrary, may it lead to concerted effort now to understand the situation fully and to adopt measures necessary to assure that this happy circumstance will continue to prevail.