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PALAIS DES NATIONS, GENEVA

CONTENTS

Agenda item 23:

Report of the Committee on Housing, Building and Planning

General debate (*resumed from the 1337th meeting and concluded*)

Page

173

President: Sir Ronald WALKER (Australia)*Present:*

Representatives of the following States, members of the Council: Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Chile, Czechoslovakia, Ecuador, France, India, Iraq, Japan, Luxembourg, Senegal, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Yugoslavia.

Representatives of the following States, additional members of the sessional Committees: Cameroon, Ghana, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Madagascar, Mexico, United Arab Republic, United Republic of Tanganyika and Zanzibar.

Observers for the following Member States: Canada, Central African Republic, China, Cuba, Greece, Ireland, New Zealand, Romania.

Observer for the following non-member State: Federal Republic of Germany.

Representatives of the following specialized agencies: International Labour Organisation, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, World Health Organization.

AGENDA ITEM 23

Report of the Committee on Housing, Building and Planning (E/3858, E/3886 and Corr.1, E/3912, E/3918)

GENERAL DEBATE

(*resumed from the 1337th meeting and concluded*)

1. Mr. de SEYNES (Under-Secretary for Economic and Social Affairs) ¹ said he was happy to note the importance which the problem of housing was beginning to assume in the deliberations both of the Council and of the General Assembly. There seemed to be certain essential truths which one day became living truths, and that was perhaps

¹ The complete text of this statement has been issued as document E/L.1061.

what was happening at the international level with regard to the question of housing. For some time past, there had been talk in general terms about the importance of the problem, but it was now perhaps possible to translate ideas into a number of specific findings and into practical action. The pressing nature and true magnitude of the problem were only now beginning to be realized by nations and by the international community as was borne out by the shortage of competent staff. That shortage was felt by most Governments, and certainly also by the United Nations in the implementation of its programmes for practical action. An effort was being made in many countries, under-developed and advanced, often in conjunction with the development of planning techniques; in some cases the problem had assumed such importance that a certain priority was being given to the vocational training of staff in those subjects. But the world was still suffering from a shortage, and in the coming years, that situation was bound to handicap and slow down efforts.

2. Authorities were beginning to have a quantitative conception of the problem. Some statistics had been quoted in the Council. Representatives had referred to the target of 10 dwelling units per 1,000 inhabitants, pointing out that even in countries where building was most advanced, figures of only 5 or 6 per thousand had been achieved; that gave some idea of the work waiting to be done. In the under-developed countries, about 12 per cent to 25 per cent of all capital formation was currently allocated to residential building; that indicated the importance of the housing problem in economic and financial policy. Of course, the reliability of those figures depended on the accuracy of the relevant statistics; too much weight must not be attached to them, but they provided a starting point for assessing orders of magnitude.

3. In addition to that quantitative aspect, of which the international community seemed to be becoming aware, there was also some awakening to the drama of the population migration from the country to the towns. Some speakers had referred to that phenomenon, which so far had almost everywhere defied the planners' calculations and the measures taken by the authorities to check or control it. The phenomenon was occurring imperceptibly or surreptitiously from year to year, but viewed in its proper perspective, it was like a gigantic wave breaking and endangering the community's moral and social equilibrium. The problem was becoming more and more pronounced; and if progress in housing was only a small part of the solution, it was none the less an essential part.

4. Even where that phenomenon was not assuming spectacular proportions, there was an increasing awareness of certain qualitative aspects attaching to a housing policy. What had happened in other sectors such as education or health was now happening in the case of housing, i.e., an objective once regarded as purely social or humanitarian, was now viewed as a factor of productivity, of economic development, and that was encouraging.

5. Signs of the awakening of world conscience could be found in the policy adopted by the big international financing institutions such as the International Development Association and the Inter-American Development Bank, which had decided that they could legitimately earmark part of their resources for housing or land development projects. In international financing, that seemed quite a spectacular innovation, reflecting the importance given to the problem. He would also stress the importance which nearly all the regional commissions now attached to town planning and housing, and to the activities which they were seeking to expand, taking advantage of the very close contacts they could establish with local authorities. There was also a whole series of professional associations operating at the international level, such as the International Council for Building Research, Studies and Documentation (CIB), the International Union of Architects, the International Federation for Housing and Planning, etc. The United Nations should endeavour to participate in that movement and to exert the greatest possible impact and influence.

6. Another encouraging sign was that some communities had gradually come to realize that house building might be an effective means of stimulating voluntary saving and diverting resources either from lavish spending or from hoarding, provided that the appropriate institutions played their part and were sufficiently supported and assisted by the public authorities. Where such conditions existed, they proved to be a very effective means of bringing to light increased savings and capital formation, by offering communities the opportunity of investing their money on reasonable and attractive terms.

7. In the light of the Council's debate and of the studies that had been undertaken, as well as of the conclusions of the Committee on Housing, Building and Planning, the guide lines for action were fairly clear and should not give rise to controversy. That was one of the sectors where the by now traditional forms of technical co-operation, which had been evolved over the past ten or fifteen years, should prove increasingly effective. Those traditional means consisted basically of technical assistance, and on that point he would stress that the funds allocated to housing and land development in United Nations programmes had almost doubled between 1961 and 1963. There were currently 130 experts operating in fifty countries, and the Governing Council of the Special Fund was giving favourable consideration to certain projects in those sectors. That expansion of resources and intensification of activities provided an illustration of what happened when a sector was more or less recognized as a spearhead by the policy-making bodies. Following on by the Council Committee, the Council itself, and the

General Assembly, housing had for almost three years been identified, like industrialization or planning, as a sector where United Nations activities should be considerably intensified; and the Secretariat had been able to begin to implement that policy by supplying more services through technical assistance.

8. Technical assistance was not, of course, everything. There was the possibility of benefiting from experience, of drawing conclusions from it, and reaching general findings which might be useful to all. There was the obligation to undertake searching studies on the general or technical aspects of problems. There was the possibility of pilot projects, either for the purpose of trying out new methods or of demonstrating them. Lastly, there was a vast ferment of both general and technical ideas emerging from the meetings organized either on a regional basis or under the auspices of the Council Committee, and from international conferences held under the auspices or with the collaboration of the United Nations.

9. As desired by the Australian representative (1337th meeting), the Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology to Development had itself dealt with housing questions. The subject had been discussed at its first session and was dealt with in one of the documents to be submitted at the next session. The building industry in general had nowhere been one of the most progressive industries, one of those which had made the most brilliant use of recent technological advances. Undoubtedly very great progress could be accomplished in that field, in developed and under-developed countries alike, if the resources of modern technology were applied more effectively.

10. As to organization within the Secretariat, it appeared that certain doubts had sometimes been expressed. The Committee's recommendation concerning the establishment of a centre for housing, building and planning (see E/3858, section XI, draft resolution III), should be considered in the light of the difficulty experienced in obtaining the services of competent staff in that field. Yet the idea of a centre had recently gained a measure of acceptance in the United Nations. As activities — and that was not paradoxical — were gradually decentralized, the policy-making bodies as well as the Secretariat had come to realize that, in order to ensure the maximum effectiveness of the decentralization process, Headquarters must at any time be in a position to draw upon the experience acquired in the various regions, so that activities being undertaken in any area would have a cumulative effect. That, he believed, was why a housing centre had been suggested, just as an industrial development centre had recently been spoken of. Of course, what he had just said also applied to the participation of the specialized agencies which had technical or general responsibilities in those fields. If, in a system as interconnected and decentralized as the United Nations system, each of the units involved was to be as efficient as possible, there must obviously be a co-ordinating brain, and that explained the choice of the term recommended by the Committee. To be sure, there was no magic power in that name and, once again, he would stress that the main difficulty lay in recruiting

qualified staff, and would appeal to Governments to help in overcoming that obstacle.

11. The French representative had criticized the intention he attributed to the Secretary-General of placing the activities of the housing centre, if that centre was established, and those of the Bureau of Social Affairs under a commissioner who would have the rank of under-secretary (1337th meeting). That idea, which in any event had not as yet been adopted by the Secretariat, had its origin in the management survey which the specialized services of the Secretariat had carried out during the past two years in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to determine what organizational and structural reforms were necessary to enable that Department to cope with a growing number of increasingly complex tasks. The report on survey had been submitted to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions. The principle by which the survey team had been guided was that the activities of the Department should in future be interrelated, so that daily briefing and representation at the appropriate level could be provided for each sector. It appeared that, in comparison with others, certain activities were being neglected from that point of view. Practical considerations of the kind as well as considerations of prestige, having regard to the importance attached to each sector, were what had led to that conclusion. However, the Secretary-General had not taken any decision, and he ventured to hope that delegations would not condemn the suggestion outright but would keep an open mind on the subject.

12. Sir Samuel HOARE (United Kingdom) said that, in view of the gravity of the housing problem, which had been described extremely well by the Under-Secretary, the task of the Committee on Housing, Building and Planning was to find means of increasing the effectiveness of the effort both at the national and the international level. It was, however, rather disappointing to note that, at its second session, the Committee had devoted a large part of its time to discussions of the procedures, resources and organization of the United Nations. It was to be hoped that in future the Committee would make better use of the knowledge and experience of the highly competent specialists of whom it was composed.

13. The Committee's report (E/3858) nevertheless showed that there had been useful discussion on a number of subjects, such as pilot projects, the industrialization of building, reconstruction following natural disasters and research and documentation on housing, building and planning. With respect to reconstruction, he pointed out that a body consisting of experts on various aspects of housing and building had been set up in the United Kingdom to study methods of assisting countries affected by natural disasters; the United Kingdom representative on the Committee on Housing, Building and Planning was a member of that body.

14. The CIB, to which research institutions in the United Kingdom were affiliated, played a very valuable part as a centre for the dissemination of information and documentation on all aspects of research relating to building. If an

international centre for documentation were to be established, it was essential that it should make full use of the services of CIB and similar bodies, and endeavour to avoid duplication of their work.

15. With regard to structural arrangements, his delegation had noted the Secretary-General's observations contained in paragraph 12 of his report (E/3918) and the Under-Secretary's remarks. It could accept the establishment of a centre for housing, building and planning in the United Nations Secretariat, as proposed in draft resolution III of the Committee. He would reserve comment on the other draft resolutions submitted by the Committee until their discussion in the Social Committee.

16. Mr. NOMIYAMA (Japan) said that, owing to destruction during World War II, the housing shortage in his country had amounted to about 4.5 million units in 1945. As a result of action by the Government (enactment of the Public-Operated National Housing Law in 1951 and establishment, in 1955, of the Japan Housing Corporation financed by the Government and local authorities) as well as by private enterprise (establishment of the Housing Loan Corporation in 1950), 9 million housing units had been built between 1945 and 1963. However, demand was still increasing, and the Ministry of Construction had drawn up a long-term programme under which housing was to be built for low-income groups and urban employees; and land developed and made available by the Government for private housing construction. That programme provided for a very large number of dwellings to be built during the 1964-1965 fiscal year; 40 per cent of the total were to be constructed by the public authorities or with their financial assistance.

17. His delegation was afraid that the Committee on Housing, Building and Planning had rather missed its real target at its second session. The highly qualified specialists who were members of the Committee should not be allowed to get discouraged by the apparently overriding importance of organizational problems.

18. His delegation supported draft resolution III of the Committee, proposing the establishment of a centre for housing, building and planning in the Secretariat. That centre could co-ordinate the multiplicity of activities in the field of housing and environmental development, and its establishment appeared to be more realistic and constructive as well as less costly than the creation of a new specialized agency.

19. Mr. HANDL (Czechoslovakia) expressed satisfaction with the work accomplished by the Committee on Housing, Building and Planning at its second session, particularly because of the priority it had given to industrialization and the speeding up of housing. The seminar on the building industry organized by ECE at Prague in April 1964 had been very valuable.

20. With regard to draft resolution III submitted by the Committee, his delegation felt that although some co-ordination of United Nations activities was necessary, it should be ensured by existing bodies, and that any other solution, such as the establishment of an international

centre for housing, building and planning in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs was bound to have financial implications sooner or later. Despite approving the spirit of the draft resolution, therefore, it was reluctant to endorse the establishment of a body of that kind.

21. His delegation considered that the use of the services of CIB would be preferable to the establishment of a United Nations international centre for documentation on housing, building and planning. At the nineteenth session, of ECE his delegation had emphasized the importance of co-operation between the ECE Committee on Housing, Building and Planning and the corresponding Council committee. Such co-operation would facilitate the solution of problems encountered by the developing countries.

22. Miss MUTER (Indonesia) emphasized the importance of housing and environmental problems for all the countries in the world, and particularly for the developing countries which were undergoing rapid urbanization but often lacked industrialization equipment and technical knowledge. A solution of those problems required outside assistance, and that justified the existence of the Committee on Housing, Building and Planning. Her delegation supported the establishment of an international centre for housing, building and planning in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. It would vote for the three draft resolutions submitted by the Committee.

23. Mr. MIGONE (Argentina) recalled that he had already drawn attention to the disparity between population growth and housing, which was one of the most alarming symptoms of the situation in the developing countries. Twenty-five years ago, Argentina had convened the first inter-American conference on mass housing, whose valuable recommendations had not received the attention they deserved but which had led to the setting up of an Inter-American Housing and Planning Centre at Bogota. The Argentine delegation, therefore, was bound to approve any United Nations action calling attention to the question and, in particular, to the proposal for the establishment of a centre.

24. In Argentina, there was a shortfall of about 1.5 million dwellings. Government action and private enterprise could only meet a fraction of the needs; a financial policy to stimulate building had been initiated; and a pilot project was being carried out. In addition to the activities of public authorities and private enterprise, the trade unions and co-operatives could also play their part. House-building was one way of combating inflation since it diverted savings from the purchase of consumer goods.

25. The Argentine delegation would have some observations to make in the Social Committee on the draft resolutions of the Committee on Housing, Building and Planning.

26. Mr. FRANZI (Italy) said that the high quality of the experts sent by most of the countries concerned to take part in the second session of the Committee on Housing, Building and Planning was reflected in the well-thought-out report before the Council. There was need for care,

however, to ensure that the Committee was not moved by the experts' zeal to take up too many questions at a time.

27. The Italian delegation had no objection to the establishment of a centre for housing, building and planning, but would like to know how the project was to be carried out within the limits of the present United Nations budget, yet without prejudicing the centre's work.

28. An indication of excessive zeal on the part of the Committee was the proposal to hold an international conference on industrialization of building in 1966 or 1967. He shared the Indian representative's view (1337th meeting) that, to avoid the multiplication of meetings of that type, the conference should not be convened till 1968.

29. The vast range of housing problems made it necessary for the Committee to set an order of priorities in its work, without neglecting any aspect of the subject, that should be based primarily on the needs of the less advanced among the developing countries. One very important aspect, to which the Committee had seemingly given too little attention, was the collection of data.

30. The Under-Secretary's remarks concerning the possibility of channelling savings into building applied mainly to countries that had already reached a certain level of development.

31. In connexion with studies relating to reconstruction following natural disasters, he mentioned that Italy had had notable experience in that sphere; the Committee had appointed an Italian expert as one of the rapporteurs for that question.

32. His delegation was prepared to support the draft resolutions submitted by the Committee in principle, but would reserve the right to speak on points of drafting in the Social Committee.

33. Miss WOOD (Ghana) congratulated the Committee on Housing, Building and Planning on its report. Ghana was beginning to industrialize; towns had been growing very rapidly in the post-war period and at Accra, in particular, the position was critical. In spite of considerable financial efforts, progress remained slow. However, the Government had succeeded in creating the new town of Tema at a cost, so far, of £5 million (Ghanian). In the rural districts, the problem was less acute, and dwellings were often built by the inhabitants themselves. The seven-year building plan whose implementation had been started in 1963 was aimed almost exclusively at urban housing and envisaged the building of 60,000 dwellings. It contained no provisions for slum clearance, but efforts would be made to avoid increasing the number of unhealthy dwellings. The expected cost was £44.5 million (Ghanaian), half of which would be provided by the Government. So far, even the cheaper dwellings were too costly. The Government accordingly intended to resort to economic building methods — in particular, the use of local materials. Ghana had concluded an agreement with the USSR for the construction of a factory making units for prefabricated houses. It hoped that the

international organizations would grant it all possible financial and technical assistance.

34. The Ghanaian delegation noted the high priority accorded to industrialization by the Committee and supported the establishment of a centre for housing, building and planning in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. It did not share the viewpoint of the ECE Committee on Housing, Building and Planning concerning the need for prudence in intensifying the activities of the specialized agencies and thought it was more especially important that the objectives of the United Nations Development Decade should be attained in the field of housing.

35. Mr. UMRATH (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions), speaking at the invitation of the President, said that all countries, even the most advanced ones, recognized how far achievements in the matter of housing and building fell short of requirements. United Nations action in that field was also insufficient, both absolutely and in comparison with its other spheres of activity. There was neither a specialized agency nor a centre dealing with the problem, and the lack of staff and co-ordination was strongly felt at United Nations Headquarters.

36. Most of the documents laid the greatest stress on the training of the higher grades of staff and failed to take sufficient account of the building industry's basic needs.

37. It was becoming more and more obvious that the building industry's capacity was far too low. In those circumstances, the Secretary-General's proposal (E/3918, para. 10) to establish a post of commissioner for social development and housing did not seem very appropriate. All efforts should be directed towards the creation of an industry capable of meeting increasing needs. That should be the first task of the centre for housing, building and planning, which it was proposed to set up within the United Nations Secretariat.

38. The industrialization of building was only part of the solution. In the developing countries, where unemployment and under-employment were endemic, it would be more effective to organize a traditional building industry which could absorb surplus labour and train skilled workers. That was what had been done, for example, in Israel where the level of housing construction was highest. To set up factories making prefabricated units, which required considerable capital outlay and imports, was more appropriate for industrialized than for developing countries.

39. It was also necessary to organize the building materials industry.

40. In October 1964, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions was to hold a housing conference in conjunction with the International Federation of Building and Woodworkers at which the problems of new building techniques would be examined.

41. Mr. BARBULESCO (Observer for Romania), speaking at the invitation of the President, said that it was no use speaking of social progress or of raising living standards while millions of human beings were living in improvised or unhealthy dwellings. The importance attached to the question by the United Nations had been clearly shown through the establishment by the Council of the Committee on Housing, Building and Planning, which provided a valuable opportunity for the different countries to exchange their experience.

42. One of the Committee's resolutions (resolution 2 (II)), which the Romanian delegation had largely helped to draft, recommended the Council, when examining the question of conversion of the resources released by disarmament to peaceful uses, to consider the necessity of allocating an appropriate share to housing, building and planning. In another (resolution 4 (II)), originally proposed by the Soviet Union and Romania, the Committee recommended that the Council request the Secretary-General to undertake a study on, *inter alia*, achievements in the field of industrialization of housing in developing countries. Romania's experience showed that the industrialization of building was the only means of reducing costs and shortening building times. The meetings, seminars and exhibitions, held in conjunction with the proposed study, would enable the various countries to exchange their experiences and would promote international co-operation. Bilateral and multilateral arrangements, respecting the independence and national sovereignty of the parties concerned, would play a decisive role. In the light of the findings of the proposed study, recommendations could be made concerning the necessary technical and financial assistance and the improved co-ordination of United Nations activities.

43. Between 1960 and 1963, 545,000 dwellings had been built in Romania, of which 162,000 were financed exclusively from public funds. In 1964, the building of a further 54,000 dwellings would be financed by the State. The Romanian People's Republic was always ready to share its technical knowledge and at the same time, to learn from the experience of others.

44. The PRESIDENT declared the general debate on item 23 closed, and proposed that the item be referred to the Social Committee.

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.