

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON REFUGEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE ELEVENTH MEETING

Held at Church House, Dean's Yard, London
on Tuesday, 16 April 1946, at 3 p.m.

CHAIRMAN: Mr. McNEIL (United Kingdom)

Continuation of the discussion on paragraphs 3 and 5 of the Chairman's
plan of Work (E/REF/9).

In answer to a question put by the Soviet Delegate at the end of the last meeting, the Chairman explained that he had expected the fact-finding sub-committee envisaged in paragraph 4, to collect facts and information from organizations such as UNRRA, the I.G.C. and the International Red Cross and also relevant data from Governments concerned. This sub-committee would be essentially a collating body and under the terms of paragraph 3 he had no intention of suggesting that the Committee should actually carry out field investigations.

He further pointed out that the chronological order of the general discussion had nothing to do with the priority importance of the subjects being discussed. It was clearly shown in paragraph 6 that the task of repatriation would have consideration to that of resettlement.

Mr. Lievano Aguirre (Colombia) formally proposed that the question of immigration should not be examined by the Committee until a definition of the terms "refugee" and "displaced person" had been agreed upon. His Government had no wish to receive undesirable refugees nor those who contemplated a purely temporary residence in the country. There was also the question of how to finance such a resettlement. His Government would be unable to bear the whole burden, though of course it would be prepared to help in financing the immigration of refugees into Colombia.

In connection with paragraph 3 of the Chairman's plan, Mrs. Verwey (Netherlands), considered that a sub-committee would not have sufficient time to collect the necessary data, nor would governments be in a position to supply the required information immediately. She therefore proposed that the Committee should recommend the Economic and Social Council immediately to:

- (a) invite governments, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations to supply relevant information as to numbers, location and circumstances of refugees and displaced persons which would help in their systematic classification;
- (b) to make enquiries from countries as to the possibilities of resettlement;
- (c) to entrust to a section of the Secretariat the collection and collation of the foregoing information.

With reference to paragraphs 3 and 5, Sir George Rendel (United Kingdom), considered that the Committee could get on with its work even if it did not possess as full and as accurate information as might later be required. It was unnecessary to start on an elaborate scheme of inquiry now as it would be sufficient to pass on a broad general picture to the Economic and Social Council. The Secretariat could gather together information from UNRRA, the IGC, the International Red Cross and so on; the sub-committee might recommend that each delegate request data from his government within a specified length of time. Already a valuable contribution had been made in respect of information about resettlement by the Delegates for Brazil, the Dominican Republic and Colombia. Heavily populated countries, as for example, the United Kingdom, would appreciate the generous spirit shown by the Latin American countries, while they, in their turn, would gain by the addition of new and useful citizens.

He was uncertain as to whether there should be one or two sub-committees to cover the questions of resettlement and of collecting data but this was a matter to be decided later.

Mr. Schneider (Belgium) agreed with the United Kingdom Delegate regarding the helpful attitude of the Latin American Delegates and also with regard to the lack of any necessity for insisting on absolutely detailed and perfect information. He considered that the Chairman's plan of work should be closely followed as it was the most practical basis for the work of the Committee.

The Chairman expressed the view that the proposals put forward by the Delegates for Colombia and the Netherlands would be useful as regards the work of the relevant sub-committees, and as there was no further discussion on these subjects, he passed on to the consideration of the next two items of his plan of work. Consideration of paragraphs 6 and 7 of the Chairman's plan of work. (E/REF/9).

Mr. Winiewicz (Poland) stated that as there were many Polish nationals among the refugees and displaced persons, his Government attached great importance to any international machinery which would lead to their repatriation. The present European refugee situation had been caused by mass deportations and by the mass exodus which was the result of war atrocities. The speedy return to normal conditions could be made possible by the return of these persons and by the reconstruction of those countries which had been devastated by the war.

The population of Poland had been decimated and the country needed the services of all her people who were still alive and capable of work. There were a number of Poles who did not wish to return to their country.

This was the result of lack of information as to the true situation at home and also because such information as was transmitted had been distorted by elements who refused to become reconciled to the new order in Europe. If it were possible, as was envisaged under paragraph C(11) of the General Assembly Resolution, for governments to provide their refugees with adequate information, many would quickly decide to return. In this connection UNHRA could be of great assistance.

The Polish Government believed that the refugee problem must be solved in a humanitarian fashion, conscience and a tradition of tolerance would not allow otherwise. But it would have to be realized that the majority of Polish refugees were not politically conscious people seeking refuge. The war, German terrorism and their uprooted position had demoralized many of these displaced persons.

Poland made no attempt to hide the enormous economic difficulties which would face these people in returning home, but for the very reason that their life at home would be a hard one, no preferential treatment must be given to those who refused to return.

In the name of his Government the Polish Delegate stated that no pressure would be put upon any genuine displaced persons who refused to come back, provided that such people found a new homeland and a new nationality.

There must be no question of a prolonged refugee problem or of a long term refugee organization; that would merely petrify a highly unsatisfactory situation.

Therefore in connection both with the work of the sub-committees and of the international refugee body to be created, he suggested three considerations which should be taken into account:

- (a) All humanitarian means must be used to persuade the refugees to return home;
- (b) Those who did not wish to return must be resettled quickly under the adequate protection of the state of their adoption;
- (c) Refugees and displaced persons should receive assistance only during a reasonable period for repatriation or resettlement.

He considered that the General Assembly Resolution should be interpreted in the narrower sense to avoid a repetition of what happened after the first world war. At that time there were many thousands of refugees, among them agitators and malcontents who provided a problem which lasted for many years.

Under the auspices of the United Nations it was to be hoped that a more workable solution could be found.

Mr. Malin, representative of the I.G.C. was then called upon to make a statement regarding the future organization. He pointed out that the first pertinent question to be dealt with was the exact relationship which would exist between any international refugee body and the General Assembly, or the Economic and Social Council. The new organization might be an integral part of the United Nations or it could be a specialized agency brought into relationship with it.

The sub-committee on future machinery should take into consideration the necessity for a clear mandate from the United Nations and for a clearly defined outline of the functions to be carried out. A decision would have to be taken as to the relationship between the organization in the field and headquarters.

The administrators would have to have direct access to the policy-making body when decisions at this level had to be taken. There would be need for flexibility with regard to finance and there should be no question of referring to governments regarding the daily application of financial policy.

Some system would have to be devised whereby national parliaments would give proper attention to the "refugee budget". In some cases it would be wiser to include refugee expenses under the United Nations item in the national budget, and in others a separate contribution would be practicable.

Within the new institution there would be many questions to decide: the framework of home and field organization; decisions with regard to its Secretariat; the need for local offices in different countries etc.

Provision would have to be made regarding the transfer of UNRRA and I.G.C. personnel to avoid discontinuity in the work on refugees.

Finances would not only come from initial funds; refugees themselves had contributed mightily in the past and could do so again; there would be contributions from the voluntary organizations -- particularly the Jewish agencies in the United States -- and also varying contributions from the governments of origin and of residence.

The new body would have to take care of problems of welfare and of repatriation, of arranging for reception facilities in the countries of temporary residence and of complicated problems of a juridical nature. The question of international protection of refugees would have to be the subject of discussion between the international body and governments.

The meeting rose at 5.05 p.m.