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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON REFUGEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE EIGHTEENTH MEETING

Held at Church House, Dean's Yard, London
on 25 April 1946 at 10.15 a.m.

CHAIRMAN: Mr. H. MCNEIL (United Kingdom)

Continuation of discussion of paragraphs 6 and 7 of the Chairman's plan of work

Miss MCPHEE (New Zealand) expressed the view that the future refugee body must be a part of the United Nations Organization if it were to receive the full co-operation of Member States, and the maximum efficiency and economy of operation. The best means to this end would be for the Economic and Social Council to establish a Commission under the provisions of Article 68 of the Charter, at the same time ensuring that this Commission would have sufficiently wide powers to exercise its functions. A Commission set up in this manner would avoid the necessity for a special convention which would be required for the creation of the specialized agency.

If, however, it were decided to recommend the creation of a specialized agency, there should be the closest financial integration between the agency and the United Nations, possibly in the form of an agreement conferring on the General Assembly the responsibility of voting the agency's budget. This would permit members not represented on the Economic and Social Council to have an opportunity to discuss the progress of the work of the new organization, and would also accord the agency's programme the full publicity given to the meetings of a wider body - a factor which would go far in enlisting world support for and understanding of the refugee problem.

Since the spirit of the new organization would be truly international and humanitarian its staff must be recruited on this basis and should include the most experienced and highly qualified personnel available. It was evident of course that since the care of refugees was highly specialized work, the United Nations secretariat would have to be supplemented and would have to draw on the personnel of existing organizations such as the I.G.C. and UNRRA. However, it would obviously not be desirable that the staff of these organizations should be taken over wholesale. Miss McPHEE could not agree with the suggestion that the staff should be proportionally representative of the countries most directly concerned with the refugee problem, believing rather that it must be recruited on a broad international basis.

In outlining the structure and functions of the new refugee organization, Mr. RATOY (U.S.S.R.) emphasized the desirability of establishing an autonomous specialized agency rather than an organ of the United Nations. Immediate steps should be taken towards the repatriation, assistance and resettlement of the refugees and the work of the new organization would be delayed if it had to turn continuously to a superior body for decisions on practical questions. The organization should not only be autonomous but also of a temporary nature as when repatriation and resettlement had been concluded there would be no further reason for its existence.

As regards the personnel of the organization, the Soviet Delegate stressed the necessity of proportional representation of nationals of the countries most concerned with the problem of refugees, and as the creation of the new body would dispense with the need for parallel organizations, measures would have to be taken to undertake the activities hitherto dealt with by UNRRA and the I.G.C.

The financial resources of the new organization might be similar to those of UNRRA and the I.G.C., though this need not exclude the possibility of contributions from the countries most concerned. In any event, the organization should be free to utilize its resources as it considered appropriate.

Those genuine refugees who could not be repatriated must be permanently resettled in the shortest possible time. A decent standard of living should be ensured them in their new country and they should have every possible assistance from the United Nations to this end.

The relevant sub-committee should define the most sensible procedure with regard to the questions of repatriation and resettlement as well as laying down the duties and aims of the organization. The four primary functions of the new organization could be listed as follows:-

1. repatriation;
2. temporary assistance during the period before resettlement;
3. resettlement in accordance with the decisions taken by the Committee;
4. transfer of activities from UNRRA and the I.G.C. as might be necessary.

MR. GUIMARAES (Brazil) explained that while he accepted the suggestions for the establishment of a new refugee organization, one difficulty presented itself which very closely concerned his Government. He had received many letters and telegrams from refugees and displaced persons asking for information as to the immediate possibility of emigrating to Brazil. The Brazilian immigration authorities were naturally most anxious for detailed information as to the numbers and categories of these people and would be grateful if UNRRA and the I.G.C. could provide such information now rather than having to wait till the new organization was established.

The CHAIRMAN then called upon Sir Herbert Emerson, Director of the I.G.C., to make a statement. Sir Herbert pointed out that whatever form the new organization took, two features of it seemed to be generally accepted by the Committee:

1. There should be a plenary body comprizing a large number of Member Governments; and
2. An executive council or committee composed of a smaller number of Member Governments.

With regard to the executive and administrative machinery of the organization, he stressed the necessity for having a headquarters administrative staff organized into various departments in accordance with the importance and the volume of work to be done. The personnel of this headquarters organization should be recruited on an international basis representing the Member States of the plenary body. The administrative staff in the field should be responsible to the chief executive officer and through him to the executive council and to the plenary body. For sometime to come the staff of field workers would necessarily have to be large.

Sir Herbert recommended a policy of having residential representatives, particularly in countries where there were a large number of refugees. These residential representatives should be nationals of the countries in which they were stationed, which would make for the maximum amount of co-operation and efficiency.

Although it would be possible to make a rough estimate of the cost of the administrative machinery of the new organization, it would be almost impossible to approximate operational expenditure.

Sir Herbert advocated the use of the many voluntary agencies to help in the work on the refugee problem, but emphasised the necessity of the executive staff of the organization remaining outside any political aspects of the refugee situation with which the different agencies might be involved.

In connection with the subject of permanent resettlement, he outlined four methods by which this could be carried out:-

1. repatriation;
2. absorption in the country of temporary refuge;
3. individual emigration or infiltration;
4. mass settlement.

With regard to the remarks made by the Delegate for Brazil, he agreed with the urgent necessity for detailed information about numbers and categories of refugees. By the time the new organization was set up, it should have all the requisite material for the job of resettlement.

In conclusion, Sir Herbert stated that there were four essential points which must be taken into consideration if the new organization was to solve the problem of refugees:-

1. The organization must have a clear mandate which could be translated into practical action by the executive and administrative staff;
2. There must be an adequate system of finance on an international basis;
3. There must be a sufficient administrative and executive machine;
4. The organization must have the practical support and active goodwill of the receiving countries.

At the suggestion of the United Kingdom Delegate and with the approval of the Committee, it was decided to have the statements made at this meeting circulated as documents.

The meeting rose at 12.35 p.m.
