



Distr.  
GENERAL

A/2457

2 September 1953

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Eighth session

INTERNATIONAL ACTION ON BEHALF OF REFUGEES

Memorandum by the Secretary-General <sup>1/</sup>

I.

1. Since the General Assembly, at its eighth session, will be reviewing the arrangements for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Secretary-General considers that it would be appropriate for him to present some comments on the work of the United Nations on behalf of refugees.

2. When the Office of the High Commissioner was established by the General Assembly in 1950 (resolution 428 (V) of 14 December), the United Nations assumed certain direct responsibilities in regard to the refugees who had been the concern of previous international organizations such as the Inter-Governmental Committee on Refugees, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration and the International Refugee Organization, and for all genuine refugees who are outside their countries of nationality and are unable or unwilling, for reasons defined in the Statute, to avail themselves of the protection of their own governments. There are no territorial limitations to the mandate of the Office, but refugees who receive protection or assistance from other United Nations agencies such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East or the United Nations Korean Reconstruction Agency are specifically excluded from its competence as are also refugees who enjoy in their countries of residence the rights and privileges of citizens.

<sup>1/</sup> Item 28 (b) of the provisional agenda of the eighth session (A/2416).

3. Under the mandate of the Office, the task of the High Commissioner is to "assume the function of providing international protection under the auspices of the United Nations to refugees who fall within the scope of the present Statute and of seeking permanent solutions for the problem of refugees by assisting governments and, subject to the approval of the governments concerned, private organizations to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of such refugees or their assimilation within new national communities". The administrative expenses of the Office are borne on the regular budget of the United Nations. By resolution 538 B (VI) of 2 February 1952, the General Assembly authorized the High Commissioner to appeal for funds for the purpose of enabling emergency aid to be given to the most needy groups of refugees coming within the mandate of his Office. A United Nations Refugee Emergency Fund was accordingly established, with a target of \$3 million.

4. Other organs of the United Nations itself and certain specialized agencies, in particular the International Labour Organisation, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, collaborate with the Office of the High Commissioner and, furthermore, have contributed considerably to the improvement of the conditions of refugees in the execution of different economic and social programmes. The High Commissioner works in regular and close consultation with the Secretary-General. The work of his Office and that of all parts of the United Nations system is co-ordinated through the machinery of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination.

## II.

5. While inter-governmental action on behalf of refugees has thus been developed within the framework of the United Nations, governments have also sought to deal with the problem through national programmes or through inter-governmental organizations outside the United Nations, notably the Council of Europe, the Office of European Economic Co-operation and the Inter-Governmental Committee for European Migration.

6. In the proceedings of the Council of Europe, special attention has been paid to the refugee problem as an aspect of the problem of surplus population in Europe. For this reason, the Council's interest has not been confined to refugees who are outside their country of nationality but has been extended to all refugees residing within the territories of its member States whether they enjoy the rights of nationals or not. Particular attention has in fact been devoted to the problems of the Volksdeutsche and other German refugees in Germany and the under-employed population in Italy, two countries not members of the United Nations. The organs of the Council of Europe which have been studying the European refugee problem are the Committee on Population and Refugees established by the Consultative Assembly and a special liaison committee composed partly of members of the Committee on Population and Refugees and partly of representatives of the Committee of Ministers.
7. The Office of European Economic Co-operation is indirectly concerned with the refugee problem in its efforts to assist its member States to make the fullest use of their available manpower and in particular in its work to promote the progressive reduction of obstacles to the free movement of persons.
8. The Inter-Governmental Committee for European Migration has been established to promote the movement of migrants from Europe. It has also been entrusted by its members with the task of making arrangements for the migration of refugees with the governments of the countries of emigration and immigration. For the year 1953, the Committee has an operational budget of \$34,608,475 and for the movement of refugees provision was made in the budget of 1952 and 1953 for a special revolving fund of \$2 million in each of these years. The Committee's own funds can only be used to finance movements from Europe, but its members have authorized the use of other funds available to the Committee for the movement of refugees of European origin from areas outside Europe. From its inception in February 1952 to 31 July 1953, the Committee has assisted in the transportation of more than 119,000 migrants, approximately 35,000 of whom were refugees within the mandate of the Office of the High Commissioner.

III.

9. The report of the High Commissioner<sup>2/</sup> shows that despite the contribution made by many governments and agencies towards the solution of the refugee problem, there remains a need for a central international organization concerned with the problem. It provides striking evidence of what can be accomplished by the United Nations in this field through the medium of a small non-operational agency whose work is supported by, and closely co-ordinated with, that of other branches of the United Nations and the specialized agencies. It also points to certain difficulties and problems, to two of which the Secretary-General wishes to call especial attention.

10. The first arises from the fact that, despite the generosity of a number of governments, the total response to the High Commissioner's appeal for contributions to the Refugee Emergency Fund has been inadequate. There will continue to be a compelling need for emergency aid in several areas of the world in 1954, but the funds at present available to the High Commissioner for this purpose will be exhausted by the end of the present year.

11. The second problem, which is brought out in paragraph 346 of the High Commissioner's report, has also been stated in more general terms in the special report of 15 July 1953 submitted to the Economic and Social Council by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (E/2483):

"One other problem ... seems worthy of the Council's close attention: the danger of duplication and overlapping arising out of the growth of activities of non-United Nations organizations. Thus, the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination, when discussing the refugee problem, refers to possible confusion 'by the creation, outside the framework of the United Nations, of new machinery with overlapping functions'. The latter committee also refers to the effect on the work of the United Nations and the specialized agencies in the economic and social field of a tendency towards the development of regional and other organizations outside the United Nations framework with activities in the same field. The Advisory Committee takes note of this problem because of its budgetary consequences

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<sup>2/</sup> See Official Records of the General Assembly, Eighth Session, Supplement No. 11, document A/2394.



and because a potentially serious wastage of international funds may be involved."

12. As between the United Nations agencies on the one hand and the non-United Nations inter-governmental organizations on the other, close and fruitful working arrangements do exist at the staff level and are being further developed. There has been effective co-operation in many projects. But such contacts and co-operation cannot prevent difficulties and waste of effort arising from time to time as a result of the overlapping competencies assigned to certain of these agencies by their member governments. As a recent example of such difficulties, it may be noted that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, acting on the basis of a recommendation of the Consultative Assembly, decided in May 1953 to appoint for a period of one year an eminent European personality to act as the Council's special representative in respect of European refugee problems and the problem of surplus population. Such an appointment would create a situation in which it might prove difficult to avoid a confusion of responsibility and overlapping with existing international machinery.

13. It should further be noted that arrangements do not exist at the present time for the representation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other United Nations agencies contributing to the solution of the refugee problem in all of the policy-making organs of the non-United Nations agencies concerned.

#### IV.

14. The Economic and Social Council, by resolution 500 (XVI) of 7 July 1953, has recommended that the Office of the High Commissioner should be continued for a further period of five years. The Secretary-General ventures to suggest that, in its review of the arrangements for the Office in the light of this resolution and the High Commissioner's report, the General Assembly should give careful consideration to the problems referred to in section III above. It cannot be doubted that more could be done with available resources to promote permanent solutions to the refugee problem if there were a greater concentration of effort, if fuller use were made of existing United Nations machinery and if the co-ordinating role of the United Nations were more clearly defined.

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