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Chairman : Mrs. Ana FIGUEROA (Chile).

Report of the Economic and Social Council
(chapter IV) (A/1884)

[Item 11]*

GENERAL DEBATE

1. Mr. DEDIJER (Yugoslavia) welcomed the Committee's decision (347th meeting) to begin its work with a general debate on the social activities of the United Nations.

2. Almost a hundred items were on the agenda of the United Nations and the specialized agencies; that in itself was an important fact, regardless of the results. It proved that the Organization had not remained entirely passive with regard to the tasks it had assumed under the Charter.

3. The United Nations and its specialized agencies had studied and were trying to solve many social problems on an international level. That theoretical and scientific work was very useful, especially to the under-developed countries, which with their limited means could hardly undertake such comparative studies. Research work had thrown light on many social problems and presented them to the international public in their right perspective. The studies undertaken by the United Nations on social matters in recent years had illustrated the immense abyss separating the developed from the under-developed countries.

4. The recruitment and training of an international staff of men and women devoted to their calling and trying sincerely to help to solve social problems had enabled the Organization to achieve positive results in social work.

5. The Organization's programme of advisory social welfare services had been of great assistance to under-developed countries in organizing and administering their social services, and especially in training social workers.

6. The Yugoslav delegation therefore fully agreed with the contents of paragraph 627 of the report of

the Economic and Social Council (A/1884): the advisory programme, when it became a part of the Technical Assistance Administration, should retain its own characteristics and should remain within the regular budget of the United Nations.

7. The efforts made by the United Nations in the past year in the fields of child welfare, social services and rehabilitation had brought the United Nations nearer to hundreds of thousands of men and women, who judged the Organization by its results and by the help it gave them in their daily struggle for a better life.

8. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to assert that there were grounds for satisfaction. Unfortunately no real progress had been made in the social sphere during the past year. The Economic and Social Council itself, the chief organ responsible for solving social problems, had not, in the preceding twelve months, taken any important initiative or undertaken any action which would substantially promote social activities. On the contrary, in spite of the efforts of certain delegations, especially of under-developed countries, the Council had shown a tendency to deal with social problems in an automatic and routine manner.

9. For example, the Council, when considering the report of the Social Commission,¹ had not, as might have been expected, proceeded to a general analysis of the wide social problems and of measures whereby they might be solved, but had confined itself to a general discussion bearing mainly on the question whether or not the Social Commission should be abolished. It had merely taken note of the Commission's report and had not resolved to take any concrete action.

10. The passivity was probably due to the political atmosphere which prevailed in the Council. Indeed, certain members used the Council as a platform for their propaganda.

11. It was also due to the nature of the work of the functional commissions themselves. That work, espe-

* Indicates the item number on the General Assembly agenda.

¹ See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Thirteenth Session, Supplement No. 12.*

cially in the Social Commission had been too theoretical and directed towards study.

12. For example, there was surely no need for that Commission to make innumerable studies of migration. That subject might well be left to the International Labour Organization, which had been dealing with it for many years.

13. The Social Commission should concentrate its efforts on practical matters, such as child, family and home welfare, the organization and administration of social welfare services, housing, and town and country planning. It should adopt a practical as well as a theoretical outlook and try to solve problems through the Technical Assistance Administration, the United Nations Department of Social Affairs, or non-governmental organizations. It should seek in future to co-ordinate the social activities of the specialized agencies. Thus the Council would not merely "take note" of reports, but would be better able to act as a supreme international organ determining general policy for economic and social activities.

14. During the debates which had taken place during the year on the organization of the Council and the functional commissions, certain members had spoken in favour of abolishing the functional commissions. Those commissions, however, were the very organs through which direct action for the solution of social problems could be undertaken. Nevertheless, the fact that some question had been raised concerning the work of the Council and its functional commissions showed a desire to improve work in the economic and social fields. Although it regretted to say so, the Yugoslav delegation was of the opinion that the problem had been studied without sufficient care and in a purely administrative manner. His delegation did not underestimate the importance of a proper distribution of the work, but it considered that activity in economic and social matters would certainly not be improved merely by holding numerous meetings or allocating agenda items. Social progress could be promoted and the standard of living of populations could be raised only through increased activity on the part of the Council and all its members.

15. In the existing international situation the members of the Economic and Social Council were responsible for finding concrete measures whereby such results could be achieved. The Council was studying problems which caused suffering and privation to hundreds of millions of human beings. Negligence and bureaucratic decisions could only deepen the chasm separating the developed from the under-developed countries. The social organs of the United Nations should base their future work on a thorough annual survey of the world social situation. Such a survey would bring to light the problems which required direct and co-ordinated international action for their solution.

16. It was clearly wrong to retain illusions and to believe that the United Nations could fulfil all its obligations overnight. It was essential to be objective and to realize that the means at the Organization's disposal would be relatively modest. Nevertheless, the broad principles for the Organization to follow should be

sincere co-operation, a practical approach and a just distribution of investments. Respect for those principles would enlist international co-operation in solving social problems.

17. Miss HORSBRUGH (United Kingdom) found it a great pleasure to participate in the work of the Third Committee, since social affairs were fundamental to the work of the United Nations. That work should, in her opinion, be approached in a spirit of responsibility and sober optimism. The Committee should realize that its goal was neither short nor easy; it should not be deterred by checks but should also beware of excessive hopes which might lead to disappointment. The Committee's aim, in her opinion, should be to lay, with patience, the foundations for the building to come. She quoted the passage of Mr. Eden's speech to the General Assembly (339th plenary meeting) in which the Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of the United Kingdom had recommended that the United Nations grasp definite and limited problems and work from small issues to the great.

18. Chapter IV of the report of the Economic and Social Council did not deal with the United Nations technical assistance programmes nor with the three specialized agencies primarily interested in social matters: the International Labour Organization, the World Health Organization and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Yet any consideration of the United Nations social activities would not be complete without reference to the work of those agencies, particularly that of UNESCO, which, by combatting ignorance, would, in the long run, facilitate the solution of many problems.

19. She hoped that the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary organs would apply themselves to a two-fold task: first, to increase knowledge and encourage the interchange of ideas between one country and another—for example with regard to statistics and population; secondly, to concentrate upon those things which could be tackled with a reasonable prospect of result; as an example, she cited the Mission of Experts in Tropical Housing. The Third Committee must beware of two dangers: of dissipating resources over too wide a field and of permitting top-heavy administration.

20. She congratulated the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund on avoiding the latter danger and hoped that it would continue to keep down administrative expenditure in the future despite the tendency for emergency aid to give place to technical programmes. She stressed the importance of UNICEF: it not only brought assistance to peoples in need of it but also made the United Nations widely and favourably known to the millions who benefited from its assistance. She expressed gratitude to UNICEF for the health programme promoted in British territories and welcomed the proposed extension of its activities in Africa. She approved of the co-operation between UNICEF, WHO and the other agencies referred to in paragraphs 659-662 of the Economic and Social Council's report. She was also pleased at the inclusion in chapter IV, annex III, of the list of written and oral statements by non-governmental organizations,

which could often make a useful contribution to the work of the United Nations.

21. She concluded by repeating her previous recommendations: the Committee should show sober optimism, well seasoned with realism and indeed humility. The social activities of the United Nations were a work of continuity, carrying on those of the League of Nations. If the approach were made in the spirit that she had described, that work would move forward, with knowledge, resources and the help of modern techniques, and might be carried on, on a front far broader than in any previous age.

22. Mrs. ROOSEVELT (United States of America) said that other committees would soon be debating the great issues of collective action against aggression, for the maintenance of peace and for the limitation of armaments. The Third Committee was privileged to discuss the problem of collective action against poverty, hunger, disease and ignorance.

23. No one who followed the work of the United Nations in the social field could underestimate the place of that work within the general activities of the United Nations. No one could deny that social advancement contributed to political stability and that social stagnation soon made for international tension. International action in the social field was essential to peace.

24. The discussion of the work of the Social Commission, UNICEF, the Population Commission and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs was not a discussion of abstract and remote matters.

25. The main responsibility for raising social standards rested with the country itself, its citizens, its civic organizations and its government. The United Nations and the specialized agencies could only advise and assist.

26. The establishment of guides and standards which Member Governments might follow was one of the most useful forms of social assistance: on the basis of the information given to them, governments could profit from the experience of others, even from their mistakes, and decide on the approach which best suited their needs.

27. She cited in that connexion the work done in population statistics, the improvement of maternal and child welfare programmes and the training of social workers, besides the project under way to establish standard minimum rules for the treatment of prisoners. The governments had been able to make great strides forward on the basis of the principles laid down by the United Nations in those various fields.

28. She drew special attention to the work of the Social Commission. It was pioneer work; it was seeking to improve living standards in towns and villages, and to that end had set up local community welfare centres.

29. Only through local action could progress in a community be achieved. Greater emphasis should be laid on types of activity that would reach masses of people and help them to improve their own

productivity and living conditions. Greater priority should be given to educational projects designed for the people themselves, to the training of teachers and to the organization of communities and of local groups for self-help purposes.

30. It was possible that the Social Commission, like other commissions, had tried to do too much and that its work should be more concentrated. The Commission itself, however, was progressing in the direction of concentration, and she trusted that it would continue to do so.

31. The organization and supervision of the work of the Social Commission and of the other commissions was the responsibility of the Economic and Social Council. One of the Council's principal activities in the past year had been the reorganization of its work and of that of its commissions. That matter would be considered by the Joint Second and Third Committee.

32. Chapter IV of the Report of the Economic and Social Council was encouraging. It reported achievement and also gave some idea of what remained to be done in the social field.

33. Mr. CASEY (Australia) reminded the Committee of the leading part his country had played in the establishment of the Economic and Social Council at the San Francisco conference. It was highly satisfactory that the Council was handling with competence a large variety of matters, and that after five years of existence it had some tangible achievements to its credit.

34. With regard to chapter IV of the Council's report, good progress had been made in the social field. It was to be regretted, however, that the resources of the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, the humanitarian activities of which were known to all, had reached a very low level and that the fund had only \$US 51,000 in reserve. A draft resolution would probably be submitted to the Committee shortly asking governments to continue their generous support of such a worthy cause. The Australian delegation, although it fully appreciated the fact that all countries could not make a large contribution, thought that such an appeal should be made, as it was possible that some States were not fully aware of the needs of UNICEF.

35. Australia was the second largest contributor to UNICEF, after the United States of America; it had contributed \$US 13,195,000 during the period of the Fund's existence, of which \$US 11,000,000 had come from the Government and the remainder from private persons or organizations. The Australian Government had recently included in its budget estimates an amount of £A 250,000 (\$US 560,000) to complete its contribution to the Fund for 1951-1952. The appropriation had been approved. Such efforts showed the Australian Government's sustained interest in the economic and social work of the United Nations.

36. Mr. KAYSER (France) said that, like the representative of Yugoslavia, he was glad that the Third Committee had decided to start its work with a general debate on the social questions dealt with in

chapter IV of the report. Some members might have thought that that item, placed at the beginning of the agenda, was no more than a kind of curtain-raiser. The French delegation firmly believed it was important to study social questions; it hoped that by beginning its work with those questions, the Committee had meant to set an example, since those were questions upon which agreement within the United Nations was possible.

37. At the last few sessions of the Council and of the Social Commission, many draft resolutions on those questions had been adopted without opposition. In the Social Commission, for example, out of twelve resolutions eight had been adopted without opposition, and in the Council itself, when the report of the Social Commission had been discussed, seven out of eight draft resolutions had been adopted without opposition. There was reason to hope that the current discussion would result in similar votes.

38. The social and cultural questions examined in chapter IV of the report were among the most important concerns of the Economic and Social Council and, therefore, of the United Nations. As the result of a kind of snowball process, however, the tendency had recently been to let social questions be overshadowed by economic ones.

39. The more serious the international situation, the greater the need to intensify work in the social field and thus combat the permanent aggression of suffering and poverty. All the efforts made in the economic field would remain fruitless unless they were accompanied by parallel efforts in the social field.

40. The work undertaken under the technical assistance programme and that done by the regional economic commissions were also essential. The Social Commission had decided to inform the regional economic commissions of those items of its agenda which might have economic effects. That decision appeared to be a very useful one.

41. The United Nations Secretariat had done valuable work. Occasional restriction of its activities was not its fault, but was often due to budgetary decisions.

42. The Social Commission had been reproached by some because its action was too fragmentary and too diversified. If that was the case, it was because the specialized agencies themselves had very many items on their agenda and the Commission had attempted to fill the gaps left by the agencies and ensure that the whole field of social activities was effectively covered. In any case the Social Commission had made, at its seventh session, a valiant effort to introduce uniformity into its work. It had drawn up a work programme which was both useful and rational and which classified the various questions in order of priority. It contained eighty-six items grouped by chapters. Although it was well thought out, it was still inadequate and should be broadened, as envisaged in paragraph 644 of the report of the Economic and Social Council. The French delegation shared that view and hoped that the expansion contemplated could be brought about without upsetting the work already in progress.

43. At its next session the Social Commission would be examining the Secretary-General's paper on a "Survey of world social conditions". The survey had been made at the suggestion of the Lebanese delegation. After considering it, the Commission would submit a report to the Economic and Social Council for consideration at its fifteenth session. That procedure satisfied the wish expressed by the Yugoslav delegation at the beginning of the meeting. Mr. Kayser likewise thought that such a survey of social conditions could be made periodically, in the same way as the survey of the world economic situation.

44. In conclusion, he said he had desired to bring to the Council's attention the need to intensify the work in the social field and to request that it should be carried out by and through existing international organizations. The French delegation would in due course submit a draft resolution embodying the principles he had outlined verbally.

45. Mr. WAHLUND (Sweden) was especially interested in chapter IV, section III, of the report and desired to congratulate the Population Commission on its work. In his view, it was important to develop demographic technique, to collect facts about population trends, fertility, mortality and migration, to examine the interrelationships of demographic, economic and social factors, and to analyse population problems in different parts of the world. He thought that the work should be continued and intensified along those lines, but also transferred from registering and analysing figures and facts to positive action.

46. The death-rate was still very high in Asia, Africa and some parts of Latin America (despite great progress made in Ceylon and Puerto Rico, for example), although the latest discoveries in medicine and public health measures provided effective means of reducing that rate. Advances in medicine and hygiene, however, served no end unless they were accompanied by social and economic measures. In reality, a reduction in the death-rate in already overpopulated areas, like most of Asia, North Africa, the Caribbean and Southern Europe, resulted in an increase in the population, greater demand for foodstuffs, and an accentuation of malnutrition.

47. Some way had to be sought to solve the problem to reduce the death-rate without increasing the population too much. The possibilities of population transfer were limited. An attempt might also be made to increase the productivity of agricultural labour, but there was no certainty that the improvement of agricultural methods in densely populated areas would suffice to raise the standard of living if the population should grow rapidly. Nor was it sufficient to transfer surplus agricultural labour to other activities.

48. The only solution of the problem was to reduce the birth-rate. The problem was complex and many people, for ethical or religious reasons, recoiled at the thought of reducing the birth-rate and strongly objected to birth-control. He was none the less convinced that children should not be born unless the parents so desired, and he could not in all conscience agree that children should be doomed to a life of misery and starvation because they were too numerous.

49. Important problems outside the competence of the Third Committee required solution at the current time as a result of excessive population pressures within a very limited living space.

50. Mr. GARIBALDI (Uruguay) admitted that organs dealing with social affairs had a difficult task, a fact which should be borne in mind when their activities were criticized. He proposed to show, by a concrete example, that good intentions did not always produce the required result.

51. He therefore drew the Committee's attention to paragraphs 620 to 623 of the report, dealing with the rehabilitation of the physically handicapped and containing the recommendations of the Social Commission on the subject. He did not refute those recommendations, which were, he was sure, based on precise conclusions reached by the working group set up by the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination. But the United Nations had to pass beyond the stage of recommendations and embark on practical work.

52. Analysing the problem, he drew a distinction between congenital and acquired infirmity. The former produced neuropaths and paralytics, most of them idiots, whom medicine was powerless to help; they could only be cared for. That group also comprised the mentally retarded and the deaf-and-dumb, which society could help only by special education. Acquired infirmity was the result of injury or disease. In regard to injury, the Social Commission had recommended measures to improve and expedite preventive action; the Third Committee had to inquire what was meant by that recommendation. If it meant preventing war, one of the chief causes of injury, then the recommendation was unrealistic and, moreover, outside the Commission's mandate. It might mean avoiding road or occupational accidents, which was likewise outside the competence of the Commission.

53. For infirmity resulting from disease, which was the cause of a large number of paralytic conditions, he recognized the value of hygiene, vaccines and antibiotics. The chief of those diseases, infantile paralysis, was however still incurable; all society could do in such cases was to give the victim special education and train specialized staff. That group also included cardiac patients and recovered mental patients who were still susceptible to the slightest shock and could remain well only in a family or friendly atmosphere. The number of those cases also had been increased by the war, which had entailed the splitting-up of families and abrupt severance of emotional ties.

54. In the face of so complex a problem the recommendations of the Social Commission were entirely unrealistic. Infirmity existed when the resources of medicine were exhausted. There was little the United Nations could do in such cases. At the very most it could help to develop the technical training of special staff for rehabilitation of the physically handicapped, and act as an information centre to which countries could apply for such staff. He hoped he had made it clear that in such complex work the beginnings had to be on a modest scale.

55. Mr. DAVIN (New Zealand) endorsed the tributes already paid to the work performed by the United Nations in the social sphere, as described in chapter IV of the report.

56. Concerning section II he was pleased to be able to announce that the New Zealand Government had just stated that it was making a further contribution of £100,000 to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund. New Zealand considered that the Fund was doing magnificent work throughout the world in alleviating the sufferings and improving the welfare of children. It believed that every effort should be made to continue that fine international work. He felt, however, that the financial situation of the Fund was not as good as might be expected for such an institution. In paragraph 14 of the report of the Executive Board of UNICEF,² the Board declared that advantage should be taken of the sixth session of the General Assembly to draw the attention of Member States to the serious financial needs of the Fund.

57. He therefore hoped that an appeal addressed to governments for further help, especially to those governments which had not contributed recently, might not be fruitless. His delegation would support a draft resolution to that effect.

58. Mr. ULLRICH (Czechoslovakia) deplored the fact that the report of the Economic and Social Council ignored certain important problems, in particular the obstacle to social progress constituted by unproductive expenditure on preparation for war. In those countries which had signed the North Atlantic Treaty, rearmament had annihilated social welfare programmes, already inadequate through faulty economic organization. Moreover, the general survey of the economic situation of Europe during the first quarter of 1951 (*Economic Bulletin for Europe, First Quarter 1951*) published by the Economic Commission for Europe showed that inflation was rife in the Marshall Plan countries. Finally, official statements by the governments of those countries forecast striking reductions, especially in medical services, housing programmes and the production of consumer goods. He proposed to return to those points later.

59. With reference to section I, he emphasized that the training of staff for social work must be placed on a sound economic footing; and that, generally speaking, unless a country's social policy was an integral part of a general economic policy, it ran the risk of being merely a charity run by the State.

60. Regarding section III, he said he did not think it true that the economic resources of the world left no room for an increase of the world's population. He was particularly opposed to the idea that emigration was necessary, the basic idea of Hitler's and Mussolini's propaganda. He thought the population problem could be solved by efficient economic organization, as it had been, for example, in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and the German Democratic Republic, all of which had formerly been over-populated but which at the current time were actually short of labour. Mr. Ullrich

² Document E/ICEF/184.

regretted that some of the activities of the Social Commission had been inspired by the theories he had criticized.

61. Mr. DEDIJER (Yugoslavia) announced that a number of delegations, including those of Afghanistan, Australia, Brazil, New Zealand, Uruguay and Yugoslavia, had prepared a draft resolution (A/C.3/L.155) concerning section II.

62. The CHAIRMAN proposed that the general

debate should be concluded and that the Committee should proceed to examine that draft resolution.

63. Mr. KAYSER (France) submitted a draft resolution (A/C.3/L.154) relating to chapter IV as a whole.

64. The CHAIRMAN decided that, in view of the general character of the draft resolution, it should be discussed first.

The meeting rose at 5.10 p.m.