



Monday, 26 November 1956,
at 3.15 p.m.

New York

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Chairman: Mr. Hermod LANNUNG (Denmark).

AGENDA ITEM 30

Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (A/3123/Rev.1, A/3123/Add.1 and 2, A/3154, chap. VI, section IV A/C.3/L.508 (*continued*))

GENERAL DEBATE (*continued*)

1. Mr. ALFONZO RAVARD (Venezuela) said that it was the destiny of mankind to learn through suffering. In the current crisis, the international structure had gained in strength and firmness. As the result of the strife in the Middle East, the United Nations was more vigorous than before and more than ever determined to preserve the principles of the Charter. The sacrifices of the heroic Hungarian people had not been entirely vain; they had aroused deep sympathy among many nations of the world, and many generous offers of assistance had been made to ease the burden that had fallen on Hungary's immediate neighbours. Venezuela was prepared to receive 1,500 Hungarian refugees and would contribute \$50,000 for their immediate needs in Austria. His delegation commended the High Commissioner's report. Venezuela would contribute \$20,000 to the United Nations Refugee Fund (UNREF).

2. Mr. PUDLAK (Czechoslovakia) drew attention to General Assembly resolution 8 (I), which stated that the United Nations' main task concerning refugees and displaced persons was to encourage and assist in every way possible their early return to their countries of origin. His delegation was concerned only with the humanitarian and practical aspects of the refugee problem; it had been struck by the Deputy High Commissioner's account of the deplorable conditions in which some of the refugees had been living for ten years, in particular, of the grim situation of the difficult cases, the sick and aged refugees. That unsolved problem placed a heavy burden on the countries of asylum; and the burden was not only a financial one, for some of the refugees in camps had become demoralized, and some of them were hardened criminals who had fled their countries to escape just punishment and were merely masquerading as refugees. Apart from the political *émigrés*, who had left their countries because their political views were unpopular there, and the criminals posing as refugees, the persons concerned were victims either of propaganda or of their own folly. They were neither political refugees,

since they were not interested in politics, nor victims of persecution, since no one was persecuted in their countries of origin. In some cases, the younger refugees had left their countries in a spirit of adventure and now regretted their rash action, for it was more difficult to return than to leave.

3. After having vegetated in camps for years, the refugees had lost their illusions about life abroad and wished to return home; however, they were confronted with innumerable financial, administrative and psychological obstacles, and were subjected by various organizations to a barrage of propaganda. The Czechoslovak delegation considered that repatriation was the most humane and suitable solution of the refugee problem. It felt that many refugees would opt for repatriation if they were aware of the legislative and practical measures that had been taken in their countries to facilitate their return and their reintegration in normal life. Many refugees were afraid of punishment for misdemeanours they had committed; it was most important that they should be informed in detail of the measures, such as amnesty and assistance in reintegration, that had been taken in their absence. On 9 May 1955, the President of the Czechoslovak Republic had proclaimed an amnesty under which all persons who had left the territory of the country illegally could return with impunity. Hundreds of Czechoslovaks had taken advantage of that measure.

4. The Statute of the High Commissioner's Office (General Assembly resolution 428 (V), annex) and General Assembly resolution 925 (X) specified voluntary repatriation as one of the solutions of the refugee problem. Yet, although the report stated that requests for repatriation had become more frequent, the High Commissioner's Office did not seem to devote nearly as much effort to furthering that solution as it did to promoting and financing resettlement and integration, although it was obvious that the possibilities of the latter measures were limited. Characteristically, the Deputy High Commissioner had not even mentioned voluntary repatriation in his statement. Clearly, the resolutions on the subject adopted at previous sessions had not laid enough stress on voluntary repatriation. Indeed, operative paragraph 1 of resolution 925 (X) had apparently served to divert the High Commissioner's attention from that solution. The Czechoslovak delegation had therefore prepared a draft resolution which would help to bring about an early solution of the refugee problem.¹

5. In conclusion, he thought that the Deputy High Commissioner's interpretation of the Statute as applying equally to refugees of ten years' and ten days' standing was dangerous, and showed a regrettable tendency to give urgent priority to the question of the "ten-day" refugees while relegating to the background the refugees in Europe and the Middle East who had

¹ Subsequently issued as document A/C.3/L.508.

28. Mr. READ (Deputy United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that he had been deeply touched by the tribute which had been paid to the memory of Mr. van Heuven Goedhart.

29. The Swedish representative's announcement of a donation of \$1,150,000 to the Refugee Fund was both generous and encouraging. It was particularly welcome, as his Office feared that it might be unable to carry out its plans for lack of funds. He wished to thank other Governments which also had made donations and he expressed the hope that still others would do likewise. Fund-raising drives, such as the one being made by Swiss newspapers, were being organized in different countries, but the proceeds did not necessarily go to the Refugee Fund; they would probably be used to cover the expenses relating to refugees in the countries concerned.

30. Some representatives had wondered whether all the solutions of the refugee problem were being borne in mind: the High Commissioner's Office was always on the alert for new solutions, and would leave no avenue unexplored. Furthermore it was no longer alone in seeking such solutions, for it now had the assistance of the UNREF Executive Committee, on which twenty States were represented, as a guide in its activities.

31. The Executive Committee had much wider powers than its predecessor, the Advisory Committee, but the General Assembly, which had laid down the mandate for the High Commissioner's Office, was still the supreme authority. It had attached equal importance to three different solutions of the refugee problem: resettlement, repatriation and integration. As had already been pointed out at previous sessions, efforts had been made under paragraph 8 (C) of the Statute of the Office to assist governmental and private efforts to promote voluntary repatriation or assimilation within new national communities, but none of the additional activities mentioned in paragraph 9 had yet been undertaken, as the General Assembly had given no instructions. The High Commissioner protected refugees by ensuring that they should be free to choose the solution they wished. Much of the UNREF programme was devoted to integration, for which the Office supplied expert advice and supplementary financing. Integration was an effective and relatively inexpensive solution, but if the refugee wished to be repatriated or to settle in another country, he was free to do so.

32. Replying to the question asked by the Syrian representative at the previous meeting in connexion with paragraphs 55 and 83 of the report (A/3123/Rev.1), he said that the refugees who had left the camps in Germany had in many cases been naturalized, but there had been some emigration overseas. Most of those who had left the camps in Italy had emigrated overseas, many of them to the United States under the Refugee Relief Act.

33. With regard to the indemnification of refugees who had been victims of Nazi persecution (A/3123/Rev.1, para. 241), the German Federal Law of 18 September 1953 had been superseded by the Law of 29 June 1956, which had been enacted after the report had been drawn up. The High Commissioner's Office had made frequent representations to the German authorities, but had been unable to obtain complete equality for national and political victims of persecution. The German authorities had said that the Law rep-

resented their final settlement; it was now for the Allied Powers to act, under the Bonn Convention.

34. In connexion with paragraph 74 of the report of the second session of the UNREF Executive Committee (A/3123/Rev.1, annex I), he pointed out that it was the usual practice in United Nations bodies not to identify the exponents of the different views included in reports, but he would draw the Rapporteur's attention to the fact that certain delegations would prefer such identification.

35. The total number of Hungarian refugees who had fled to Austria was about 83,000, of whom 4,363 had arrived during the past twenty-four hours. A total of 16,313 had been re-located under various schemes, so that the number remaining was about 67,000. As the number of arrivals exceeded that of the departures, the situation was becoming more and more serious, and was imposing a very heavy burden on Austria, where one person in every hundred was now a refugee. That was a staggering figure, and it was urgent that other homes should be found for the refugees; but they were not being hurried into taking important decisions without due consideration. The Inter-Governmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM) had removed much anxiety by undertaking to pay the refugees' fares if they wished to return to Austria later or migrate overseas. Other countries, including Germany and Italy, had accepted refugees on an emergency basis, and Switzerland had agreed to take 6,000 refugees on that basis, over and above the 4,000 to whom it was offering permanent homes. The offers of resettlement were extremely welcome, but considerable organization was necessary to enable the refugees to take advantage of them. The ICEM was ensuring transport, and the High Commissioner's Office was drawing up plans in co-operation with it and other agencies and with interested Governments; but the plans could not be implemented without funds. He expressed the hope that Governments would respond quickly and generously to the appeal to be launched under the auspices of the General Assembly.

36. The representative of Chile had raised the question of financing refugee resettlement (691st meeting). It was obvious that a clear distinction must be maintained between the funds earmarked for emergency aid and those allocated to the permanent programmes. It might be necessary to establish a special section of the High Commissioner's Office to deal entirely with aid to Hungarian refugees. The staff of the Vienna office had been temporarily reinforced, but he intended to ask the Advisory Committee for additional funds, in order to engage more staff. It might be possible at a later stage to combine emergency aid with the permanent solutions programme, particularly in countries which provided opportunities for the employment of refugees in agriculture. However, the ICEM must first be consulted.

37. He wished to thank all Governments which had made generous offers of assistance. The situation was still very far from reassuring, but every effort was being made to find a solution. He expressed the hope that the Hungarian refugee problem would not impede the solution of the problems of the earlier refugees, but that the international community would fulfil its responsibilities to both groups.

38. Mr. MASSOUD-ANSARI (Iran) pointed out, in connexion with paragraph 74 of the report of the

second session of the UNREF Executive Committee (A/3123/Rev.1, annex I), that the refugees in Iran enjoyed the same legal rights as all other foreigners.

39. Mr. BAROODY (Saudi Arabia) asked whether there was any information available concerning the proportions of men, women and children among the refugees, and whether they comprised mainly family groups or women and children without the head of the family. If they were for the most part family units, the resettlement problem would not be difficult to solve, but if they were mainly women and children who had fled, leaving the head of the family behind, the problem was very different. A pause for reflexion would be very necessary, for it was probable that such persons would eventually wish to return, and money spent on settling them elsewhere would be wasted.

40. He asked whether the refugees arriving in Austria were being screened so as to ensure that their ideological background should be compatible with that of the country in which they were to resettle. Some screening of that kind was essential to ensure that they should not be misfits in their new community and that the funds spent on their resettlement were not spent in vain.

41. Finally, he wondered what would become of refugees who did not become naturalized citizens of the countries where they were now being welcomed because

of the shortage of labour. No refugee could, of course, be forcibly repatriated, but if employment opportunities decreased, they might in the future be less welcome than they were at present.

42. If there had been difficulty in finding permanent solutions for some of the earlier refugees, it might be because such questions had been neglected. It was important that they should receive due attention in connexion with the new refugees.

43. Mr. MUFTI (Syria) said that although the Advisory Committee was a most useful body, it should not be forgotten that the General Assembly, which had adopted the Statute of the High Commissioner's Office and given the High Commissioner his mandate, was the policy-making body. The value and effectiveness of the High Commissioner's integration programme was obvious, but greater stress should be laid on repatriation and an account of the efforts made in that direction should be included in the report. The report ought also to include more detailed statistics on the number of refugees emigrating from various countries, by country of destination. Finally, he would be grateful if the Deputy High Commissioner could supply further information concerning the position of refugees under the new German Federal Law for Indemnification of Nazi Victims.

The meeting rose at 5.25 p.m.