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Chairman: Mr. Jiří NOSEK (Czechoslovakia).

AGENDA ITEM 27

Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (A/2648 and Add.2, A/2686, chapter IV, section V, A/C.3/L.402, A/C.3/L.403) (*continued*)

GENERAL DEBATE (*continued*)

1. Miss BERNARDINO (Dominican Republic) hoped that the High Commissioner would continue to promote the cause of the refugees until the problem had been solved. Year after year the Committee had listened to the High Commissioner's statements and had adopted resolutions to try to improve the lot of thousands of suffering human beings. It was to be hoped that the General Assembly would continue to support any practical programme for permanent solutions. The important part played by private organizations in trying to alleviate the desperate situation of the refugees should not be overlooked.
2. It was obvious that so long as a resolution adopted by the General Assembly whereby the High Commissioner was continued in office and vested with powers to promote solutions for the refugee problem remained in effect, the Assembly had no alternative but to act in accordance with its previous decisions and to seek a formula that would reconcile the interests of all those concerned with a permanent solution of one of the most serious problems that had confronted the United Nations since its establishment.
3. The Dominican Republic would pursue the same policy as it had adopted in 1937, when it had opened its doors to European refugees and had offered them the shelter and welcome that it always offered those who requested them.
4. Consistent with that humanitarian policy, the Dominican Republic in the past year had most warmly welcomed two refugees who had spent many months at sea without finding any other country willing to take them in. Thus two difficult cases, which had previously been a matter of concern to the High Commissioner's Office, had been settled.
5. As the refugee problem was essentially a humanitarian one, the Dominican delegation would be prepared to vote for any resolution that would help the

High Commissioner to carry out the arduous work for which he was responsible.

6. Mr. EL-FARRA (Syria), referring to paragraph 128 of the High Commissioner's report (A/2648), noted that no exact figures were given for the refugees settled in Israel during the year or during the High Commissioner's tenure of office. That information had been requested at the previous session; it was important to the Syrian delegation because it affected the future of the Palestine refugees and the security of the Middle East. Israel was refusing repatriation to the Arab refugees on the ground of lack of space, but continued to accept thousands of Zionists, thereby pursuing a policy designed to hinder the implementation of United Nations resolutions.

7. In paragraph 154 of the report the High Commissioner described the situation of the 500 war refugees in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan as "very difficult". In his statement, however, he had omitted to mention Syria among the countries which he had visited, although he had been convinced that those countries were faced with difficulties of their own which prevented them from giving much assistance to the refugees under the mandate of his Office. That omission had probably been involuntary, but the Syrian delegation wished to make it quite clear that, while it was certainly not lacking in sympathy for the small number of European refugees in its territory, they were few in comparison with the million Arab refugees in the Middle East. There was little that the Middle Eastern countries could do to alleviate the suffering of the homeless, exiled and destitute, irrespective of their origin. Moreover, the burden of the Middle Eastern countries was increasing as more Arabs were displaced from Israel. The atrocities committed at Qibya, Nahhalin, Budrus and Shuqba that year had swelled the number of refugees by thousands; Israel's responsibility for the aggravation of the problem had been recognized by the Security Council when it had censured Israel in connexion with the Qibya case.

8. Under several General Assembly resolutions, the High Commissioner had to consider the matters of repatriation, assimilation and resettlement. Repatriation was a God-given right, in conformity with the Principles laid down in the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The High Commissioner was undoubtedly aware that repatriation was a right and not a privilege to be bestowed by a State.

9. The refugee problem was the responsibility of all nations, large and small, and would be solved, despite its complexity, if human feelings and justice were allowed to prevail. It was unfortunate that some governments, instead of taking measures to remedy the evil, went so far as to aggravate it. The Syrian delegation believed that every refugee should be free to choose a place in which to settle and, if he wished to return

to his own country, should be helped to do so. Encouragement of repatriation was the most natural, simplest and least costly solution of every refugee problem.

10. Mrs. HARMAN (Israel) said that at a future meeting she would exercise the right of reply under rule 116 of the rules of procedure.

11. Mr. KOS (Yugoslavia) expressed appreciation of the High Commissioner's efforts, especially with regard to the legal protection of refugees. The very fact that the United Nations had established the High Commissioner's Office for the protection of refugees showed the Organization's awareness of the need for the problem to be considered within the framework of the United Nations. The Committee's duty, as a policy-making body, was to consider the High Commissioner's achievements, his proposals for future work and the question whether those proposals were in line with established United Nations practices. In that connexion, the political appraisal of the international situation which was being made in the General Assembly should be borne in mind.

12. The Yugoslav delegation had always considered that great care should be taken to prevent the refugee problem from being used for purposes which did not serve the cause of international co-operation. The majority of the refugees under the High Commissioner's mandate were people who had remained abroad after the Second World War, in the belief that their existence would be threatened in their countries of origin. That was a primarily humanitarian problem; all attempts to use such people as tools to disturb international relations should therefore be checked. In view of the new consolidation of the world situation, the refugees should not become an obstacle to the establishment of improved relations and closer co-operation among nations.

13. It was essential to differentiate between genuine refugees and those who arbitrarily claimed to be refugees for economic, adventurous or other reasons. With the adoption of the Geneva convention (A/CONF.2/108), the status of refugees had been established in most European countries. The High Commissioner's primary task under the convention and under his Statute (General Assembly resolution 428 (V), annex) was to give the refugees legal aid, protect their interests and provide them with assistance until some country was prepared to integrate them. Although it was true that it was the primary duty of a receiving country to provide for the refugees to whom it had granted asylum, the extension of large-scale international aid to the countries of first asylum might tend to stimulate an increase in the number of new refugees and to hamper relations between neighbouring countries.

14. Of the three possible solutions of the refugee problem, the High Commissioner had paid least attention to repatriation, on the ground that a small number of people was involved. The Yugoslav delegation believed that that solution deserved more consideration; the High Commissioner should have provided in his budget for the repatriation of old refugees who wished to return home. Instead of doing so, he had assigned additional amounts for anticipated refugees from Yugoslavia. The experience of various organizations, such as the International Red Cross, had shown that voluntary repatriation, sometimes effected on a bilateral basis, produced good results.

15. Resettlement would be more acceptable to under-developed countries if it were accompanied by international assistance, which would to some extent promote their development. Moreover, many of the programmes proposed by the High Commissioner could be carried out in countries of immigration, without causing the ill feeling which sometimes arose in countries with a surplus population.

16. The High Commissioner had laid emphasis on economic integration and proposed the establishment of a new fund for that purpose. In granting financial assistance in the past, the United Nations had always insisted that certain guiding principles should be followed. The first of those principles which was pertinent to granting assistance to refugees was that of matching contributions, under which the recipient country made an allocation at least equal to that of the international community. Secondly, international aid should be given to the largest possible number of those in need, if it could not be given to all. Thirdly, it should be understood that international assistance would cease after a certain time and would be continued by the national authorities, in order to ensure that the programmes should be continued. If the General Assembly decided to establish the fund, an inter-governmental executive body should implement those principles in examining and approving allocations.

17. Unfortunately, the principles were not closely followed in the proposals or in the arguments advanced for the establishment of the fund. Some of the programmes were not in accordance with the practices of the Economic and Social Council and the Social Commission and would lead to duplication. For example, in the matter of housing, the United Nations had never advocated that the cost of building should be borne by the international community. In so far as community centres were concerned, the United Nations had not concerned itself with setting up centres, but had merely studied how they should be integrated into community development. Moreover, it was not clear from the proposals whether centres were to be built for refugees only, or whether they would be used for assimilation and therefore for the nationals of the country as well. In the latter event, international resources could not be used for the purpose. Such ambiguities in the proposals led to the conclusion that greater co-operation with other United Nations organs was desirable.

18. The High Commissioner's sample programmes also differed greatly from those of other United Nations bodies. They seemed to have been planned superficially, on the basis of approximate estimates, and concerned a relatively small number of refugees. There was also no indication of the criteria to be used for selecting the refugees who would benefit from the programmes. It should be borne in mind that that assistance would be given to economically advanced countries, whereas the main attention of the United Nations was concentrated on assistance to under-developed areas.

19. It was doubtful whether a fund of \$12 million would be sufficient to provide a final solution of the problem, or would appreciably decrease the number of refugees. The only figures showing such a decrease were those of 19,711 refugees resettled in 1953 and 19,800 to be resettled in 1954 (A/2648, para. 169). In spite of the success of the pilot projects for inte-

gration financed by the Ford Foundation, those measures had not served to reduce the numbers of refugees. The proposed sample programmes would affect very small numbers of refugees and the multiplication of programmes which would be necessary to absorb them all would transform the High Commissioner's Office more and more into an operational organization. That would certainly be the case if the Office dealt with the new fund, because the inter-governmental control body would request more detailed draft programmes.

20. For those reasons, the Yugoslav delegation did not consider that the High Commissioner's proposals were likely to provide a final solution of the problem. The primary responsibility for the care of refugees rested with the countries of asylum and improvement in the economic conditions of a given country would be reflected in an improvement in the situation of the refugees. If the country of residence gave refugees equal treatment with its own nationals, the number of refugees would be greatly reduced.

21. The Yugoslav delegation agreed that humanitarian action should be extended to difficult cases and that the Refugee Emergency Fund should be used for their benefit.

22. Princess SULTAN (Pakistan) stated that Pakistan's first duty was to its own refugees: it was therefore not in a position to contribute to the Refugee Emergency Fund. However, it hoped that the High Commissioner and the governments concerned would continue to work towards a solution.

23. Many refugees were still awaiting resettlement. It had been suggested that, as there was little hope of reintegration for them, the refugees should be encouraged to return to their countries of origin. She was certain that they were anxious to return to their homes; if they did not do so, it was because there were strong reasons against it. They would need little persuasion to return if they were assured that they would be allowed to live as free people when they did so. Those who wished to return to their homes should be given every facility for doing so, but those who did not wish for repatriation should be assisted to live a normal life elsewhere.

24. Mr. HAMBRO (Norway) said that he had been happy to learn that Dr. Fridtjof Nansen was to be honoured by the annual award of a Nansen medal, which would be an encouragement to effort on behalf of the refugees.

25. Like the other Scandinavian countries, Norway took a great interest in refugee activities. It had made two contributions to the Refugee Emergency Fund and had accepted a number of tubercular refugees, who, after treatment and vocational training, had become working members of the community. The Norwegian Foreign Minister had already announced in the General Assembly that Norway would contribute to the fund for the programme of permanent solutions. He was confident that, with the co-operation of governments, permanent solutions would be found.

26. The programme could be financed on a voluntary or a compulsory basis. Norway was in sympathy with the suggestion in paragraph 2 of the draft resolution submitted by Sweden (A/C.3/L.402) that the funds should be appropriated by the United Nations, since that was the most equitable method of distributing the burden. He understood from the representative of Sweden that the Secretary-General was fav-

ourable to such a solution. It might not, however, meet the wishes of other delegations. If the Swedish draft resolution were not adopted, Norway would support the joint draft resolution (A/C.3/L.403), which contained three essential provisions for the success of the programme on a voluntary basis: a new target, a new programme with a definite time limit, and a broadening of the functions of the Advisory Committee on Refugees with a view to allowing fuller participation by governments.

27. Mr. PAZHWAQ (Afghanistan) said that, as an impartial observer, he felt that it would have been better to avoid speaking of persons and to deal only with the High Commissioner's work.

28. It was puzzling that the number of refugees requiring emergency aid was increasing. That fact had been invoked as a reason for continuing aid from the United Nations, but it raised the question how much had actually been done. He would have expected that, although the total number of refugees might have increased, the number of difficult cases would have decreased. That would have been proof that some had been helped to improve their conditions. However much the United Nations had done to alleviate the sufferings of refugees, little had been done to alter the conditions that had forced them to leave their homes. The non-observance of fundamental human rights, which was a matter of particular interest to the Third Committee, was at the basis of the refugee situation.

29. One obstacle to solution of the refugee problem was that a fundamentally humanitarian problem was often treated as a political problem. Contributions to the refugee funds would not help to solve it if there was no change of attitude on the part of the governments concerned.

30. He agreed with the Belgian representative that it was most important for countries to be associated more closely with the High Commissioner's work. Little progress could be made if the countries of residence were among the opponents of any solution suggested.

31. He would be interested to have the answer to the question asked by the USSR representative at the 548th meeting with regard to paragraph 2 of the draft resolution submitted by Sweden (A/C.3/L.402).

32. Afghanistan fully understood the need to support the refugee programme and had great sympathy with its objectives. It was unfortunately unable to make any financial commitment in that connexion just then, but hoped to be able to make a contribution in the future.

33. Mr. VAN HEUVEN GOEDHART (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) emphasized that, in his view, repatriation was the most natural, and therefore the most desirable, solution of the refugee problem. Every refugee who wished to do so should be given the opportunity to return to his country of origin. He was always ready to intervene on behalf of any refugee under his mandate who found difficulty in obtaining repatriation.

34. If the USSR representative's statement at the 547th meeting that displaced persons had managed to return to their homes only at the risk of their lives was true, he would be glad to have proof of it. If the USSR had proof that refugees were being prevented from contacting their national authorities with a view to repatriation, it should make representations to the

government concerned through the usual diplomatic channels. The High Commissioner would be grateful if such cases could be reported to his Office; he would then intervene within the limits of his Statute.

35. Some representatives were under a misconception as to the High Commissioner's powers and responsibilities. He was not responsible for running camps in Europe, which were the responsibility of the governments of the countries concerned; his role was restricted to supervision and general protection under the terms of his Statute or of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (A/CONF.2/108). Nor was he responsible for repatriating refugees, since there had been no implementation of article 9 of the Statute of his Office. His powers with regard to repatriation were restricted to establishing contact between refugees desiring repatriation and the authorities of their countries of origin.

36. The Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Poland based their attitude to the refugee problem on the provisions for repatriation in resolution 8 (I) of 12 February 1946. But it was not reasonable to take only that resolution into account when the position had been profoundly modified by other resolutions, in particular by resolution 428 (V), under which the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees had been established.

37. He was sorry that the Soviet Union representative had somewhat misinterpreted the reference in paragraph 165 to lack of information about repatriation. What had been meant in that paragraph was the fact—which no one deplored more than he did—that the High Commissioner's Office received no co-operation whatever from the countries most interested in repatriation. In instance after instance the representatives of his Office had received no replies from the Soviet Union, Polish, Czechoslovak, Bulgarian and Romanian authorities when they had forwarded applications by refugees for repatriation. He cited particulars of individual cases. A reply had been received on one occasion only, the Hungarian authorities had refused an application by an aged Hungarian couple without giving any reason. It was hard to see what he could do under his mandate beyond asking the relevant authorities to facilitate repatriation when a refugee requested it. He would continue to forward all such requests, even though he had received almost no replies. The Soviet Union, Polish and Czechoslovak Governments could count on receiving the full co-operation that his Office had been instructed to give; their co-operation, too, would be desirable. Thirteen refugees—ten Poles, two Czechs and one Yugoslav—had been repatriated from China, but in that instance too there had been a complete lack of co-operation on the part of the authorities concerned. It was quite true, as the Australian representative had stated, that repatriation was no longer a feasible solution; the number of refugees willing to return to their countries of origin was infinitesimal.

38. The charge that the High Commissioner was a recruiter of spies, saboteurs and cheap labour was not worth a reply. If he were interested in supplying cheap labour, he would not be as deeply interested in the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees as he was, since its provisions placed refugees in the signatory countries practically on the same footing as nationals.

39. He was well aware of conditions in the three camps near Munich cited by the Polish representative (547th meeting) and fully agreed that they were appalling. He had personally visited two of them in April 1954 and had received an elaborate report on the other. The article in the *Manchester Guardian* had been more or less inspired by his Office, which had taken immediate steps to see that conditions were improved.

40. The Polish representative had drawn attention to the reference in paragraph 33 of the report to the United States Escapee Programme; his relations with that agency were indeed close, as they had to be, because, otherwise, there would be duplication or else a refugee might find himself under neither agency. He was most grateful for the help given under the Escapee Programme in connexion with difficult cases.

41. His Office was not called upon to operate repatriation, but to facilitate it. He would assure those delegations which doubted his interest in the matter that he would be ready and glad to do all that he could, within the narrow limits of his Statute, to co-operate in the repatriation of all refugees who desired it. It was not always borne in mind that the High Commissioner's Office differed from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, inasmuch as 90 per cent of the Palestine refugees wished to return home but could not, whereas 90 per cent of the refugees under his mandate did not wish to return, although they could.

42. He thanked the representatives of Afghanistan, Costa Rica, Iran, Israel, Greece, Uruguay, the United States of America, China, Australia, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Brazil, Turkey, Colombia, Egypt, France, Sweden, Belgium, New Zealand, Lebanon, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Syria, Yugoslavia, Pakistan and Norway for their commendations, which he took to refer also to his colleagues, to the voluntary agencies and to the refugees themselves who awaited assistance with such patience.

43. Replying to questions raised in the course of the debate, he said that he could not agree with the Saudi Arabian representative's statement (546th meeting) that reference should not be made to a divided world; if the world were not divided, there would be no refugee problem. His Office was concerned solely with refugees from racial or political persecution. To a certain extent he had to accept the refugee's own statement regarding the danger from which he had fled; it was extremely unlikely that any programme for refugees, however good, would act as an enticement to persons to leave their homes and families.

44. Mr. Hambro's survey of the refugee situation in Hong Kong, about which the Chinese representative had asked (547th meeting), would be ready about 1 November 1954.

45. The issue of a surcharged United Nations postage stamp for fund-raising was not possible under the agreement between the United Nations Postal Administration and the United States of America. Some countries had made plans to use Human Rights Day for a special fund-raising effort for refugees, but none of the plans would be put into effect in 1954.

46. He agreed with the United Kingdom representative (547th meeting) that there might be some difficulties about resettlement on agricultural holdings; but the projects had been carefully prepared in consultation with experts, and so far, in particular in

Austria and France, there had been no bad results. He was sorry that the United Kingdom representative had raised the fear that refugees might earn ill will by being placed in a favourable position as against the local population of the country of refuge. A refugee with no home, no ties and no family could hardly be regarded as favoured. Even if he were favoured somewhat, his previous sufferings entitled him to that.

47. The Brazilian representative had been in error in attributing operational functions to his Office. His Office was in no way responsible for fixing the number of refugees for admission to a country; in that area the local authorities exercised full sovereignty. He would make further contacts with the Brazilian Government about the possibility of opening a branch office at Rio de Janeiro. It was true that not all refugees were desirable citizens, but 98 per cent were perfectly normal persons; it would be a great mistake to judge all refugees on the basis of a few undesirables.

48. The Turkish representative appeared to have misunderstood the High Commissioner's Statute with regard to the limitation in time. Paragraph 6, A, did indeed refer to 1 January 1951, but paragraph 6, B, specified no date and accordingly covered any person who fulfilled the conditions in the definition.

49. He could not give the Syrian representative the additional information he had requested about refugees

resettled in Israel. The movement of refugees was not his concern, but that of the Inter-Governmental Committee for European Migration, with which his Office maintained liaison in Hong Kong. His Office was concerned exclusively with the care and maintenance of the refugees. Of 878 China refugees resettled in 1952, twenty-two had gone to Israel; between 1 January and 1 September 1954, the Inter-Governmental Committee for European Migration had moved twenty-nine refugees from China to Israel. He was aware that there were about 200 difficult cases in China, but he did not know when they would qualify for resettlement.

50. He regretted that he had omitted to mention his visit to Syria, which had enabled him to realize the burden of the Palestine refugee situation. He had never complained if the countries affected by that situation could not give more than a moral contribution to the work of his Office.

51. Mr. SAKSIN (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) suggested that the Committee should defer the completion of the High Commissioner's statement until 11 October 1954, particularly as several delegations, his own included, would probably wish to reply.

It was so agreed.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.