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on Thursday, 7 November 1957, at 3.15 p.m.

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United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (A/3669;  
A/C.3/L.638) (continued)

Chairman: Mrs. LIONAES Norway

Rapporteur: Mr. COX Peru

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REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES (A/3585/Rev.1 and Rev.1/Add.1; A/3613, Chapter VI, Section IV; A/C.3/L.639); REVIEW OF THE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES (A/3669; A/C.3/L.638) (continued)

Mr. SHAFQAT (Pakistan) said the High Commissioner had done splendid work and was, in particular, to be congratulated on his strictly humanitarian and social approach to the problem of the Hungarian refugees. The world-wide reaction of sympathy and solidarity on that occasion had been admirable; Austria and Yugoslavia especially deserved the highest praise. The progress made in dealing with the other refugees was satisfactory. Pakistan understood the problems and sufferings of refugees and hoped that the High Commissioner would receive whatever assistance he needed in order to be able to close all the camps between now and the end of 1960. The gesture of solidarity made by Norway, Denmark and Sweden in accepting sick refugees had been most impressive.

His delegation would vote for the draft resolution submitted by the Netherlands (A/C.3/L.638). The thirteen-Power draft resolution (A/C.3/L.639) made recommendations of great import. In the prevailing disturbed situation, political or economic crises could occur at any time, with the attendant danger of fresh refugee problems. The Office of the High Commissioner should of course be equipped to cope with those problems; at the same time it was necessary to make good the deficiencies which had in the past prevented the Office from helping all who needed help.

Mr. LIMA (Brazil) said that the steady expansion of the services performed by the Office of the High Commissioner proved that the United Nations was able to settle important problems affecting international life and relations between peoples. It had been reassuring to see how most Governments and many organizations had co-operated with the Office of the High Commissioner in coping with the distressing sequel of the Hungarian drama. In Brazil, the National Institute for Immigration and Settlement was dealing with the problem of the Hungarian refugees in collaboration with the Inter-Governmental Committee for European Migration. In 1957, \$25,000 had been allocated to the Institute for the transport of the 10,000 refugees whom Brazil had undertaken to admit. The Brazilian Government was now ready to receive 2,000 more refugees and to contribute \$40 per head towards the cost of transport. In addition, a number of refugees in Hong-Kong were receiving permanent visas authorizing them to settle in Brazil.

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(Mr. Lima, Brazil)

He announced that Brazil would very soon ratify the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. He added, lastly, that his delegation unreservedly approved the recommendation that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees should continue for a period of five years.

Mr. WALDHEIM (Austria) said he had carefully studied the reports of the High Commissioner to the General Assembly (A/3585/Rev.1 and Rev.1/Add.1) and noted with satisfaction the progress made during the past year. Thousands of refugees had been able to migrate from the country of first asylum and to start a new life overseas; others had been absorbed in the economy of the receiving country. In his own country new nationality laws had been enacted under which a large number of refugees had been able to acquire Austrian nationality. Nonetheless, in addition to the more than 20,000 Hungarian refugees, 33,000 refugees were still left in Austria, including about 20,000 living in camps. Meanwhile, the flow of refugees from neighbouring countries continued, representing a heavy financial liability for the Austrian Government. International aid would have to continue. Austria was not certain that by the end of 1958 it would be able to accept full responsibility for the refugees in the country and it hoped that fact would be taken into consideration in future programmes for aid to refugees. Austria would welcome any action to relocate the refugees still living in camps. The Austrian delegation believed that the High Commissioner should be given the financial resources which he needed; it would support any draft resolution to that effect. It was also in favour of the continuation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner.

He thanked all those who had assisted his country during the difficult times of 1956; and he hoped that Austria would continue to enjoy their support until the refugee problem was solved satisfactorily.

Mr. RODRIGUEZ FABREGAT (Uruguay) said he was glad to see that the Committee was considering the really important aspect of the problem of refugees, the human aspect, and was relegating the economic and political aspects to their proper place. The High Commissioner had set the example; by calming emotions he had furthered the cause of human solidarity. It was interesting to note that

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(Mr. Rodriguez Fabregat, Uruguay)

in his statement to the Committee, the High Commissioner had stressed the need to preserve family unity. The family represented the future of society, and it was the General Assembly's duty to protect it in all ways.

In conformity with its Constitution and to the full extent of its ability, Uruguay would continue to give the problem of refugees all the attention it deserved. He had noted with pleasure the generous attitude of many countries which had made it possible to safeguard one of the most important values enshrined in the Charter, the dignity of the human person. The countries of America had a long tradition of welcoming men and women fleeing from political and religious persecution; those men and women, in their turn, had helped the American countries to consolidate their democratic system. Those countries were now prepared to do everything in their power to enable the refugees to begin a new life and their children to build the democracy of the future.

The Uruguayan delegation supported the proposal for the extension of the High Commissioner's term of office (A/C.3/L.638) and, in general, approved the provisions of the thirteen-Power draft (A/C.3/L.639).

Mr. BONDEVIK (Norway) associated himself with the tributes paid to the High Commissioner and his staff for their realistic and bold approach to their difficult task. Norway would continue to do its utmost to help the Office of the High Commissioner to accomplish its objects.

The most important object was surely the closing of all refugee camps in Europe. Much progress had been made, but the problem still remained the High Commissioner's principal concern. It was regrettable that government contributions to the United Nations Refugee Fund (UNREF) were not in keeping with the solicitude which Governments had expressed during debates in the General Assembly and in other United Nations bodies. The Office of the High Commissioner was a creature of the United Nations and its work deserved greater generosity on the part of Member States. The funds requested were not exorbitant, and if they were not collected, the UNREF Programme would be in jeopardy. Several public and private organizations were also doing work on behalf of refugees, but the problem could not be resolved properly unless there was a co-ordinating and planning body. It was therefore most necessary that Member

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(Mr. Bondevik, Norway)

States should support and finance the work of the Office of the High Commissioner. The way in which so many countries had responded to the appeal on behalf of the Hungarian refugees proved what could be done in an emergency. Surely, every effort should be made to show the "old refugees", those still living in camps, that they had not been forgotten and that their case was also considered urgent.

He commended all the organizations which had endeavoured and were still endeavouring to solve the various problems raised by the Hungarian crisis. The Norwegian Government had, to the extent of its ability, contributed towards solving those problems by furnishing financial aid and receiving Hungarian refugees from Austria and Yugoslavia, some of whom were ill or disabled. Fortunately, the problem had lost some of its urgency and he hoped that refugees still living in the country of first asylum would soon be able to emigrate and to settle in other countries. He emphasized, in that connexion, that when a country pledged itself to receive refugees it should not forget those classed as "difficult cases".

Norway supported unconditionally the Netherlands draft resolution (A/C.3/L.638) concerning the continuation of the Office of the High Commissioner. The world situation was such that the refugee problem could not be expected to disappear completely. Only an international body could guarantee to refugees the legal protection which they so sorely needed prior to becoming naturalized. The question of the status of refugees was extremely important; he hoped that all Governments would ratify the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees as soon as possible.

Mrs. MIRONOVA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said it was regrettable that the refugee problem, which had been on the General Assembly's agenda for eleven years, still remained unsettled. Thousands of unfortunate people were still accommodated in refugee camps, and scattered through many countries outside the camps were tens of thousands of men, women and children, still suffering grievous hardship.

It was clear from the report of the High Commissioner that an attempt had been made to solve the problem by means of the immigration and resettlement of refugees. That was not enough; arrangements should also, and most particularly

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(Mrs. Mironova, USSR)

be made for repatriation for there was no substitute for the mother country. The High Commissioner should make repatriation and friendly co-operation with all Governments, particularly those of the countries of origin, the guiding principles of his work. He had not done so as yet and, as UNREF funds had been applied principally to immigration and resettlement, thousands of human beings were still deprived of their most elementary rights. The presence of the refugees served the purposes of certain dubious organizations, which recruited from amongst them saboteurs and spies to be sent into Socialist countries like the Soviet Union. Occasionally, unfortunate refugees were even recruited for foreign armies. Such practices were intolerable, and both the Office of the High Commissioner and the Governments of the host countries should take action to prevent and punish the practices.

It was heartbreaking to see how certain Governments had used the problem of the Hungarian refugees for political purposes, particularly the case of children separated by events from their parents. The Office of the High Commissioner had tried to settle that problem by pressing once more for emigration; but in the particular case such efforts were contrary to international law and to the principles of the Charter. Her delegation hoped the necessary measures would be taken to ensure the repatriation of refugees, most particularly of the Hungarian children.

The UNREF Executive Committee in its report made a very disingenuous reference to the so-called problem of Chinese refugees in Hong Kong. That question was entirely unconnected with the refugee problem, and any move to identify the two was based on purely political considerations. The majority of the Chinese in Hong Kong were large land-owners, officers and officials of the Kuomintang, and common criminals. They could not be considered as political refugees and were not within the High Commissioner's terms of reference. Population movements in both directions between the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong had occurred long before the victory of the People's Republic of China; it was a very ancient migration, totally unrelated to the problems with which the Office of the High Commissioner was supposed to deal. If the General Assembly should discuss the question, it would be intervening in the affairs of the Chinese of Hong Kong and of the Government of the People's Republic of China.

Her delegation was unable to support the draft resolution contained in document A/C.3/L.639. If the functions of the High Commissioner were changed

(Mrs. Mironova, USSR)

in the manner proposed by the sponsors of the draft resolution, it would be easier than ever to use the refugee problem for political purposes.

Mr. ALDUNATE (Chile) said the excellent performance of the Office of the High Commissioner proved how effective United Nations action could be when divorced from all political considerations. The two reports before the Committee (A/3585/Rev.1 and Rev.1/Add.1) described the refugee problem in its full scope, and also the successes rendered possible by the speed with which assistance had been organized and by the generous contributions of Governments. The Chilean Government would do its best to provide assistance to the Hungarians who had taken refuge in its territory, but could not unfortunately pledge any contributions to the United Nations Refugee Fund; it would do so as soon as the country's economic situation took a favourable turn. It would endeavour to provide material assistance to refugees, in particular those of Hong Kong, whose situation was still tragic. He added that the Chilean Congress was considering the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees with a view to ratification.

His delegation had joined with several others in submitting a draft resolution (A/C.3/L.639) on which it would be glad to hear the views of members of the Committee. It would support the Netherlands proposal (A/C.3/L.638).

Mr. KRAJEWSKI (Poland) said that in Poland the refugee problem was no longer of any great importance. The Poles who had been scattered throughout the world during the war had been absorbed in the host countries or else had returned home. The opportunity to return home was still open to them, whatever their origin or their political and religious beliefs, and in certain cases the Government granted them financial assistance to facilitate repatriation. Since 1954, 103,000 refugees had returned to Poland. In addition, the Polish Government was trying to reunite families which had been separated by the war, even in cases where one of the spouses had found a better livelihood abroad and wished the other spouse and the children to join him.

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(Mr. Krajewski, Poland)

The refugee problem had long been used as a propaganda weapon. Many so-called "political" refugees were nothing more than people seeking better living conditions, young adventurers or even delinquents. If, immediately after the war, certain people had not, for political purposes, aggravated the tragic problem instead of working out an effective system of assistance and repatriation, thousands of unfortunate human beings would not now be wasting their lives in camps. The Polish Government had opposed the establishment of the Office of the High Commissioner, as it had not wished the tragic situation of persons uprooted by war to be used for political purposes. Nevertheless, it could not but approve the work done by the High Commissioner and his programme of action for the future.

Many references had recently been made to the difficulties created for the authorities in Hong Kong by the influx of people from Chinese territory, and there seemed to be some move to exaggerate the political importance of that question. Hong Kong, whose population should not exceed 1,200,000, now had more than two and a half million inhabitants. The position raised serious problems for the administration of the Territory, similar to those facing the authorities of the large cities in other continents which were experiencing a steady influx of population from the rural areas. On previous occasions the Committee had discussed the question of urbanization and the migration of rural populations to the cities. That was an economic and social phenomenon outside the High Commissioner's terms of reference. It was true that Chinese peasants proceeding to Hong Kong had to cross a political frontier, and to that extent the movement was of an unusual kind. Yet their only intention was to earn a little money and return to their own villages, a circumstance which explained why they did not wish to leave Hong Kong for foreign destinations.

His delegation would like to congratulate the High Commissioner on his efforts to deal so promptly with the problem of Hungarian refugees, and hoped that those efforts would be successful. It had no doubt that he would do everything in his power to facilitate repatriation, particularly of children separated from their families.

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(Mr. Krajewski, Poland)

The problem of refugees was a temporary but profoundly human one. Repatriation remained the best solution. Where repatriation was impracticable, everything possible should be done to help the refugees to adjust to their new environment, in the interests both of those unfortunate people themselves and of the peaceful coexistence of nations.

Mr. ZEA HERNANDEZ (Colombia) said that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which was deserving of the highest praise, should be maintained at all costs. The problem of refugees would persist for so long as systems of government gave rise to differences of opinion, so long as the principles of democracy were not firmly established and so long as men could be exiled or persecuted. The Colombian delegation would therefore vote in favour of the draft resolution submitted by the Netherlands.

The problems dealt with by the Office of the High Commissioner were most important. The needs of refugees were often more pressing than those of States. It was the duty of each Government to make to UNREF the largest contribution it could afford.

In Colombia as elsewhere in Latin America the right of asylum had been recognized and observed at all times. The refugee problem was not unknown in Latin America and there, as in other countries, the refugees should be eligible for the assistance of the Office of the High Commissioner. In fact, the activities of the Office of the High Commissioner should be extended to all countries.

The Colombian Government regretted that owing to the country's economic situation it was unable to contribute funds to UNREF. However, it had made every effort to assist refugees by welcoming them to Colombia, giving them land and enabling them to find employment.

Mr. BAROODY (Saudi Arabia) said it was depressing to note that the refugee problem was still acute, disappointing the hopes entertained in the post-war years.

He thanked the High Commissioner for his lucid and objective report (A/C.3/SR.800) and observed that the debate was taking place in an atmosphere less charged with passion than at the previous session. At that time, the delegation of Saudi Arabia had tried to separate humanitarian considerations from political

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(Mr. Baroody, Saudi Arabia)

questions. Only in that way had it been possible to reach general agreement on the resolution providing for relief for the Hungarian refugees. The representative of Hungary should therefore be congratulated on the conciliatory tone and humanitarian character of his statement (A/C.3/SR.801). The problem of young Hungarian refugees, particularly children under fourteen years of age, should engage the Committee's full attention. The children should be asked whether they wished to return to their parents in Hungary; no effort should be spared to prevent them from becoming misfits or even delinquents. Austria and Yugoslavia had made praiseworthy arrangements for the repatriation of the refugees or, alternatively, for the emigration of the refugees and their resettlement in countries willing to receive them. Very significantly, a large proportion of the Hungarian citizens who had sought asylum in Yugoslavia had since returned to Hungary; the development proved that many obstacles could be overcome through co-operation between the country of origin and the host country.

Under what seemed to be a tacit gentleman's agreement delegations were refraining from mentioning the plight of the Algerian refugees. While not intending to raise the question of Algeria's political future, he said that public opinion in Asian and African countries would find it difficult to understand why the Committee, after doing so much to arouse public interest in the problem of the Hungarian refugees, ignored the plight of the Algerian refugees. Such an attitude invited the criticism that the Committee was virtually discriminating between refugees of different origin.

He proceeded to make some preliminary comments on the two draft resolutions (A/C.3/L.638 and A/C.3/L.639). Action on behalf of the refugees was a standing need. The States Members of the United Nations had a duty to avoid any internal or international move which would create new refugees. He hoped that no one would attempt to make propaganda capital out of a decision to continue the Office of the High Commissioner. Secondly, he thought that the thirteen-Power draft resolution (A/C.3/L.639) should expressly state that repatriation was one of the best permanent solutions to the refugee problem. The thirteen-Power draft provided for the establishment of a committee to advise and give directives

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(Mr. Baroody, Saudi Arabia)

to the High Commissioner. That was not a desirable measure, for whereas the United Nations had the fullest confidence in the High Commissioner's unimpeachable objectivity, the members of the proposed committee might be tempted to succumb to the influence of political considerations.

Mrs. SHOHAM-SHARON (Israel) paid a tribute to the High Commissioner for the devotion and energy with which he had discharged his duties, particularly during the emergency created by the influx of Hungarian refugees. His prompt and effective action to succour those refugees was convincing proof - if any was needed - of the value of the Office of the High Commissioner. Inasmuch as the Office was essentially a co-ordinating organ, it was most gratifying that such good relations existed between the Office of the High Commissioner, the specialized agencies, and the voluntary or inter-governmental organizations.

The most pressing task was the closing of the camps still existing in a number of countries. The funds required for that action amounted to \$7.5 million, or \$4.8 million more than had originally been estimated. The Israel delegation was in favour of the further effects suggested with a view to closing the camps and solving the difficult cases by 1960. Subject to the approval of Parliament, the Israel Government had pledged a contribution of \$5,000 to UNREF for the financial year 1958-1959. It was unable to contribute more because of heavy expenditure on assistance to a large number of former refugees.

The Israel delegation hoped that the question of continuing the Office of the High Commissioner and the question of UNREF's future would be considered on their own merits. The international community could not disregard the fact that, in Europe alone, a million persons were eligible for the benefit of international protection and legal aid. Besides, it was not inconceivable that special situations, requiring the organization of emergency relief, would recur. In view of all those considerations, the Israel delegation would vote in favour of the Netherlands draft resolution (A/C.3/L.638).

She hoped that the problem of the Hong Kong refugees would be solved. She expressed to the High Commissioner her delegation's best wishes for the successful completion of his task and assured him of her Government's continued support.

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Mr. SANY (Egypt) said that, in spite of the efforts of the Office of the High Commissioner, the Executive Committee of UNREF and all the organizations concerned, the refugee problem still remained unsettled. He suggested that possibly the methods employed were not the most suitable. For its part, the Egyptian delegation considered that voluntary repatriation offered the best solution to the refugee problem. Countries of origin should encourage the return of their nationals who had sought refuge abroad by promising them amnesty, telling them about the conditions they would find upon their return and, in particular, advising them of prospects of employment. Emigration or permanent settlement of refugees in the host countries should only be considered as a last resort.

The High Commissioner's report (chapter II, paragraph 38) referred to the position of persons who had left Egypt in consequence of the events of the autumn of 1956. The persons in question, it should be emphasized, were not Egyptian nationals but stateless persons who, forgetting the hospitality which Egypt had granted to them, had engaged in activities affecting the security of the Egyptian State and who had chosen to leave the country after the failure of the tripartite attack of October 1956.

Mrs. SHOHAM-SHARON (Israel) reserved the right to speak again at the end of the general debate in reply to the Egyptian representative's remarks.

The meeting rose at 6.5 p.m.