

The United Nations and the Situation in Laos

AS THE result of an appeal early last September by the Government of Laos for United Nations assistance in halting an outbreak of fighting in that country between Government forces and forces of the Communist-orientated Pathet-Lao (supported, according to the appeal, by North Vietnamese troops), the Security Council agreed by a vote of 10-1 (the U.S.S.R. being opposed) to set up a sub-committee to inquire into the situation.* On September 15 this sub-committee arrived in Vientiane. Its Chairman was the former Japanese Ambassador to Thailand, S. Shibuzawa; the Tunisian Ambassador to France, H. Bourguiba, was named Vice-Chairman, and the other representatives were Brigadier General Ahrens, the Argentinian military adviser at the United Nations, and L. Barattieri of the Italian Foreign Ministry.

The Security Council resolution establishing the sub-committee had instructed it "to examine the statements made before the Security Council concerning Laos, to receive further statements and documents, and to conduct such inquiries as it may deem necessary and to report to the Security Council as soon as possible". From this the sub-committee interpreted its terms of reference as a mandate to "inquire" rather than to "investigate" and limited itself to fact-finding on the basis of information submitted to it. It was not considered within the competence of the sub-committee to concern itself with the substance of the issues involved in the situation that resulted in the appeal of the Laotian Government or to make recommendations on future courses of action. Its responsibility was to assist the Security Council in bringing together a factual account of events, using as sources of information statements made before the Security Council and the sub-committee in New York, documents provided there and information made available during the course of the visit to Laos.

Before leaving United Nations Headquarters for the Far East, the sub-committee studied the statements and documents already available, including a letter from the Prime Minister of North Vietnam denying the Laotian charges of Viet-minh interference on the side of the Pathet-Lao in the disturbances in Laos and accusing the United States of attempting to undermine the 1954 Geneva Agreements that had established the Cease-Fire in Indochina.

On its arrival in Laos, the sub-committee proceeded with a series of consultations with the Laotian liaison committee and received and studied various documents submitted to it. Members travelled to Sam Neua and Sam Teu in the northeastern section of the country, where fighting had first broken out between the Pathet-Lao and Royal Government forces. Here, as in Vientiane, they interviewed various witnesses. They also visited the royal capital of Luang Prabang. By mid-October, the committee considered that it had received the

*See "External Affairs", October 1959, p. 327, for report on Security Council Debate.