

Atrocities Committed Against United Nations Prisoners of War in Korea

On October 30, 1953, the United States requested that there be included in the agenda of the eighth session of the General Assembly an additional item entitled "Question of Atrocities Committed by the North Korean and Chinese Forces against United Nations Prisoners of War in Korea". In explaining this item to the General Committee, the United States Representative drew attention to "the accumulation of evidence that atrocities had been committed by the aggressor forces in Korea against many of the captured military personnel of the United Nations Unified Command, representing several national contingents, as well as against the civilian population of Korea".

On November 11, the General Assembly accepted, by 53 votes to 5, with 2 abstentions, a recommendation of the General Committee to include the item in the agenda of the eighth session and to consider it directly in plenary without reference to a committee.

On November 26, the United States Representative submitted to the Secretary-General a report containing portions of the filed evidence of incidents of atrocities which occurred in the battle zone in Korea. This report was placed before the Assembly. On the same date a resolution was introduced by Australia, France, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States which recalled the legal requirements for humane treatment of prisoners of war and civilians in time of war set forth in the Geneva Conventions; referred to the desire of the General Assembly to secure full observance of the requirements of international law and of universal standards of human decency; expressed grave concern at the reports and information submitted to the Assembly; and condemned the commission by any governments or authorities of atrocious acts against captured military personnel or civilian populations.

Speaking in the debate which followed, the Canadian Representative said that it was appropriate "to draw attention to the legal requirements for humane treatment of prisoners of war and civilians in accordance with the conduct of hostilities as established by general international law". He said that the least that could be done was to call upon nations to give effect to the basic standards of conduct and morality, and to respect the dignity of the human person, and expressed the hope that after condemning the commission of such acts of atrocity as had been reported, members of the United Nations could turn their attention to the task of rehabilitation in Korea and the making of peace. The resolution was adopted by a vote of 42 in favour (including Canada) 5 against (the Soviet bloc) and 10 abstentions.

On December 23 the Secretary-General circulated to member states a telegram from the North Korean Foreign Minister repudiating and condemning the General Assembly resolution and reiterating the counter-charges of atrocities against the United States. In January and March 1954, at the request of the Communist Chinese and North Korean Governments respectively, the Secretary-General