

No. 53/64 REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Text of a statement made on October 30, 1953, by the Canadian Representative, Mrs. A.L. Caldwell, in the Third Committee of the eighth session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York. Agenda item 12.

This general debate which is now unfolding with respect to Chapters IV and V of the report of the Economic and Social Council provides an opportunity to comment on much of the constructive work that is being carried out in the social, humanitarian and cultural field by the United Nations, carried on without controversy, without fanfare and without discord.

One cannot fail to be impressed, on reviewing the relevant sections of Chapters IV and V of the ECOSOC report, by the quietly effective nature of the work of such bodies as the Social Commission, the Population Commission, the Commission on the Status of Women, the Narcotics Commission, and others. No one can deny that these Commissions are working industriously and zealously, and in most instances, effectively. Most members would, I am sure, agree that they are fulfilling with reasonable efficiency the functions and purposes for which they were established.

The very fact that these undertakings are being pursued so effectively, and so quietly, tends to condemn them to semi-oblivion: they pass almost unnoticed in the debates of the General Assembly and of the Third Committee. Few resolutions are brought forward concerning these matters: no controversy centres around them. They represent in fact the solid core of accomplishment on the part of the United Nations in the social, humanitarian and cultural fields. To such an extent is this the case that one is almost led to the conclusion that it is in those areas of United Nations activity where the General Assembly has passed the fewest resolutions - where it has contented itself instead with laying down broad policy directives in the early years, and has left future initiatives to the subordinate organs - Councils, Commissions, Sub-Commissions, and so on - established to deal with particular problems that the most real progress is being made.

In most instances these subordinate organs of the United Nations have succeeded when left to work out their problems themselves, and their reports come forward to the ECOSOC and to this Assembly in a form which makes it possible for their problems to be faced and dealt with on a reasonable basis of clarity, conciseness and despatch.

This was not always the case, . . . My delegation recalls for example the very considerable difficulties which certain of the Commissions, notably the Social



Commission and the Status of Women Commission, had in establishing their work programmes on a sound and practical basis.

The distinguished representative of France who sits in this committee, who is a veteran of seven years service with the Social Commission and who was Chairman of the Temporary Social Commission in 1946 before the Permanent Commission was established, will, I am sure, be able to corroborate what I have said from his own rich personal experience so far as the Social Commission is concerned. The early reports of the Social Commission and of the Commission on the Status of Women encountered much more difficulty, and stirred up much more controversial debate in the course of their passage through ECOSOC and the Assembly than they do now. Canada has been represented on the Social Commission for seven years ever since it was first established. Through your own personal service on that Commission over a four year period, and later through the service of our present representative, Mr. Curry, who this year presided as Chairman of the Commission, the Canadian Delegation has been able to follow at close range the evolution of the Social Commission from a loosely-knit, badly-organized, inefficiently -functioning unit, to a quietly effective organ, self-disciplined and in control of its work programme, whose operations now reflect considerable credit on the United Nations. As Canada comes to the end of its seventh year of service on the Commission, and retires temporarily from membership, the Canadian Delegation is glad to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the way in which the Social Commission has "come of age" and gained both maturity and prestige: at the same time, we would wish to include in this expression of appreciation the very effective work which has been carried on by the Secretariat under the capable direction of Miss Julia Henderson in support of the Commission's activities.

What I have said about the work of the Social Commission applies also with equal force to the Narcotics, the Population, and Status of Women Commissions. Mention has already been made in an earlier debate of the work of the Status of Women Commission: consequently I do not intend to discuss it again in any detail, and we shall have an opportunity to comment on the work of the Population Commission when the resolution put forward in the names of the delegations of Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico and Peru, contained in Document A/C.3/L.363/Rev. 1 is considered at a later stage in this debate.

I would, however, like to draw attention very briefly to the important work accomplished during this past year in the field of narcotics control. The successful outcome of the United Nations Opium Conference, held at the Headquarters here in May and June of this year, and attended by representatives of 41 States, marks a very important forward step in this field. The fact that 34 States signed the Final Act of the Conference, and that subsequently 20 States signed the Protocol adopted at the Conference, which limits and regulates the Cultivation of the Poppy Plant, and Production of The International and Wholesale Trade in, and the use of, Opium, constitutes the best possible proof of the progress that has been made. My own government hopes to establish its own position with respect to the ratification of this Protocol in the near future.



Attention should also be drawn to the new fields which the Narcotics Commission has begun to explore in recent years, by tackling the problem of drug addiction and the question of synthetic drugs. The problem of drug addiction is of course as old almost as humanity itself - but not until recently have the preventive and curative aspects of this problem begun to receive, on the part of governments generally, the serious consideration which they merit. It is heartening to note that the Commission has requested the Secretariat to give relatively high priority to the study of this problem.

As for the developments in the field of the production and use of synthetic drugs, they represent a new, and in many ways a revolutionary problem in this field. The countries which produce what might be termed the "natural" narcotics are relatively few in number: and international machinery for the control of production and distribution of narcotics has in the past been geared to that fact. But now, with the development of these "synthetic" drugs, the number of countries which are potential producers is considerably enlarged. New techniques of international rationing, allocation and control must now be developed: and in that connection, existing machinery may have to be remodelled or overhauled. My government will continue to follow with interest the work that is being undertaken in this connection, leading to the establishment of a single Consolidated Convention replacing the nine which are now in existence, as well as the consolidation, rationalization and more effective co-ordination of the work of such bodies as the Narcotics Commission itself, the Permanent Central Opium Board and the Drug Supervisory Body.

May I turn now to Chapter V of the Council's Report and to the important questions dealt with there. Before dealing with the questions of the human rights covenants, the U.S. proposals, or the problem of freedom of information, I should first like to say a word about the position of the Human Rights Commission itself. There have been a number of occasions in past years - and the present debate is another such occasion - when the Canadian Delegation has wished that both the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council would show a greater amount of consideration for the position of the Commission, and a greater amount of patience, tolerance and forbearance in regard to the progress of its work. Declarations of Human Rights for all mankind, and the covenants which are designed to give them substance and reality, cannot be drafted on the back of an envelope, or overnight. These things take time, and the final results when they emerge for the consideration of this Assembly will be all the better for the time and patient care that are lavished on them. Humanity has gone for thousands of years without capturing in words or legal formulations which can be binding on governments, all of the manifold aspirations of mankind which we are now seeking to embody in the Human Rights covenants. Can we not contain ourselves in patience just a little longer, and give to the Commission the time and unhurried calm needed to finish in orderly fashion the job handed to them back in 1945 and 1946? True, the Commission has now been at work on these covenants for several years. Is that too long a time to take in formulating what may come to be regarded as the Magna Carta for future generations of mankind, throughout the world? Yet throughout the last few years both the Assembly and Council



have seemed to be impatient with the progress of the Commission; have seemed at times to lack understanding of the genuine difficulties faced by the Commission in resolving some of its most perplexing dilemmas; and have consequently yielded altogether too often to the temptation to tug at the coat-tails of the Commission, to offer it advice on this or that particular aspect of its problem, to distract its attention from its main task by offering resolutions and directives urging this or that particular course of action. These initiatives have no doubt been taken with the best of intentions: but the net result, in view of the Canadian Delegation, has been to overload and distract the Human Rights Commission, and to prevent it from effectively keeping control over its own work programme and agenda, in a manner comparable to that made possible for other commissions. In consequence of this, the Canadian Delegation considers it preferable to avoid sending further directives at this time to the Human Rights Commission with respect to those sections or clauses of the covenants which have not yet been formulated by the Commission in final form. The main task of the Commission remains that of completing the drafting of the covenants in a form which will make it possible for them to be passed on for the consideration of ECOSOC and the Assembly.

Regarding the three United States proposals suggesting an action programme for promoting human rights, we are grateful to the representative of the United States for the explanation given a few days ago as to the spirit in which these proposals were put forward, and as to their scope. As you are aware the United States proposals were submitted to Member States and to the United Nations specialized agencies with the request that comments be forwarded by October 1, if possible. We understand that comments from four or five governments and one Specialized Agency have now been received by the Secretariat. Together with several other governments, the Canadian Government has not found it possible, in view of the short period of time allowed to study them with full attention. We are of the opinion that these proposals deserve serious consideration and, in order to be able to be in a position to formulate our views on their implications, the Canadian Delegation would suggest that a further period of time be given to governments for commenting. These comments, together with the views expressed by delegates in the Third Committee, should then be transmitted to the Commission on Human Rights for careful study, and for the preparation of recommendation on the three United States proposals for the later consideration of the General Assembly. Such a course of action would seem to us to be wise, and will offer full opportunity to Member States to judge the merits and the practicability of the United States proposals.

Before concluding my remarks, I would like to say a few words about the problem of Freedom of Information. This question is also one which deserves serious and careful consideration, because of its implications in the private and governmental fields. The Report prepared by Dr. Lopez, who was appointed last year by ECOSOC, is a document of too great import to be acted upon without thoughtful and complete examination. Dealing generally with the position of information media in different parts of the world and, more particularly, with the censorship of news; the status and movements of foreign correspondents; laws affecting the Press; monopolies; professional standards; production and distribution of newsprint;



and tariff and trade practices, such a document cannot be treated in any hasty manner.

The Canadian Delegation, conscious of the importance of the question of freedom of information, wishes to join with other delegations which have expressed the view that this question, together with the Report of the Rapporteur, should be given priority at the seventeenth session of ECOSOC and that the Council should formulate recommendations for the consideration of the General Assembly at its ninth session.

I do not propose at the present time to deal with the specific draft resolutions now before this Committee and I reserve my right to comment on them, if necessary, at a later stage.

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