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Statement by Mr. Martial Asselin, M. P.,
Canadian Representative on the Fourth
Committee on Wednesday February 7, 1962

Report of the United Nations Commission for Ruanda-Urundi

I now wish Madam Chairman, to turn to the substantive problems before us. We are faced with a very difficult situation to which no easy or automatic response can be given. What we must do is to find the best solution possible in present circumstances -- that which is most likely to minimize the chance of fresh disturbances and renewed political unrest in the territory.

We cannot reverse the course of recent events in Ruanda-Urundi but there are some things that the United Nations can and should do in the time that remains which could have very beneficial results. This action must, however, be taken in cooperation with the autonomous governments of Ruanda and Burundi, and in collaboration with Belgium as the Administering Authority. The tripartite partnership still holds good, and is particularly necessary in the final phase preceding independence.

As members of the Assembly we must also be conscious of our responsibility to reach a decision, and to reach it together. This is a question which cannot be left in suspense until the Seventeenth Session. And lastly, we should make provision so that whatever consultative and advisory machinery is set up by the United Nations will be available to the governments of Ruanda and Burundi after independence, if they so desire.

I

The problems, then, as my Delegation sees it, are the following:

First, what action should the Assembly take on the report of the United Nations Commission?



Second, what can the United Nations do now to ensure that independence will come about in the best possible conditions? This involves the question of unity, of maintenance of law and order, national reconciliation, encouragement of close economic collaboration, technical assistance and re-settlement of the refugees.

Third, what machinery should be set up to undertake these tasks?

Fourth, should a date be fixed now for the independence of Ruanda-Urundi, and if so, when?

II

Validation of the Elections

The report of the United Nations Commission for Ruanda-Urundi pays a deserved tribute to the cooperative attitude shown by Belgium and the desire and determination of the new Belgian Government to do its utmost to implement Resolution 1605 (XV). As the report notes, the Belgian authorities displayed a general willingness to appreciate what was aimed at in that resolution, and to act in a spirit of comprehension and sincere cooperation which earned the Commission's gratitude.

I would like to assure the distinguished Foreign Minister of Belgium that we are grateful to the Administering Authority for what has been done to carry out loyally the Assembly's recommendations and we are deeply appreciative of his personal efforts.

There is no problem as regards the elections in Burundi. The United Nations Commission is of the view that whatever shortcomings existed in the electoral law, these did not have the effect of distorting the expressed will of the people who were able to express their opinion freely and calmly.

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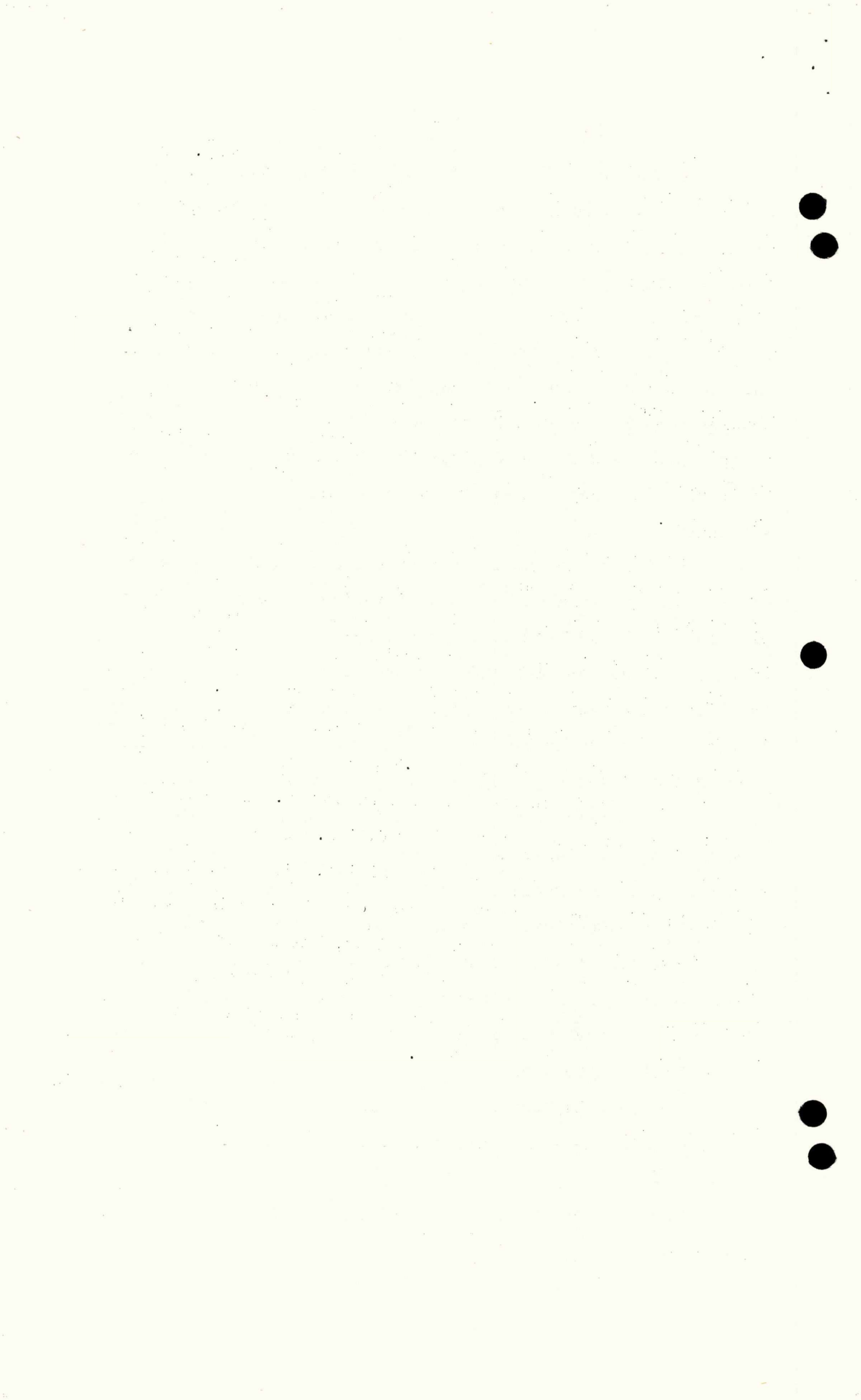
In Ruanda we have to face the problem squarely. The pre-conditions were not entirely satisfactory in the opinion of the three Commissioners but they are agreed that the organization of the actual voting operation was conducted in such a way as to enable the mass of voters, representing 95 percent of the electorate, to vote according to their lights. The Commission is thus in a position to affirm that the popular consultations in Ruanda were not falsified and that the people as a whole were given the opportunity to register their views as they wished with adequate material and legal safeguards.

My Delegation believes that the shortcomings were not of such a degree and nature as to invalidate the results of the elections in Ruanda and we think the Assembly should accept these elections, as Ambassador Dorsinville has recommended, in the higher interest of the peoples of Ruanda-Urundi. We would be dealing a crushing blow to the Government of Ruanda, which secured a decisive majority of 77.7 percent of the votes, if we refused to validate the election in Ruanda. We would almost certainly be inviting chaos and confusion. We would also be showing a poor understanding of realities, since Mr. Rahnema, the United Nations Commissioner who was most directly involved with the supervision of the Ruanda elections, has warned us that, given the existing circumstances, "it would be both absurd and dangerous to repeat the operation in the hope of a more successful outcome under better conditions".

The Assembly should accept the results of the elections in Burundi and Ruanda and turn its eyes to the future.

III

The next problem which confronts us is what the United Nations can do in the period preceding independence. In



Ambassador Dorsinville's opinion, this is the real issue -- not whether the elections of last September might have been held in more favourable circumstances, but what arrangements should be made by the United Nations and the Administering Authority to bring about an early termination of trusteeship in the best possible conditions.

IV

The Problem of Unity

Frankly, my Delegation would prefer to see this trust territory become independent as one state, rather than two. This would give them a better chance to attain economic viability and they would thereby also gain the benefits of common overhead administrative expenses. Moreover, outside financial and technical assistance, including United Nations assistance, could be more easily and efficiently provided to a single state.

In other parts of Africa efforts have been made to bring neighbouring states or territories together, by way of amalgamation, federation or "closer association", so as to establish a more economical and efficient administration, and to create political units strong and stable enough to stand on their own feet.

In the case of Ruanda-Urundi more might have been done. The difficulty has always been that the people of Ruanda and Burundi have considered themselves as foreign to one another. They formed two separate kingdoms before the coming of the Europeans and in the period of colonization and trusteeship the sense of local nationalism has grown stronger. The emergence of nationalist movements and demands for self-government and independence have strengthened this separatism.

The Administering Authority, being aware of the feelings of the population on the question of unity, has refrained from

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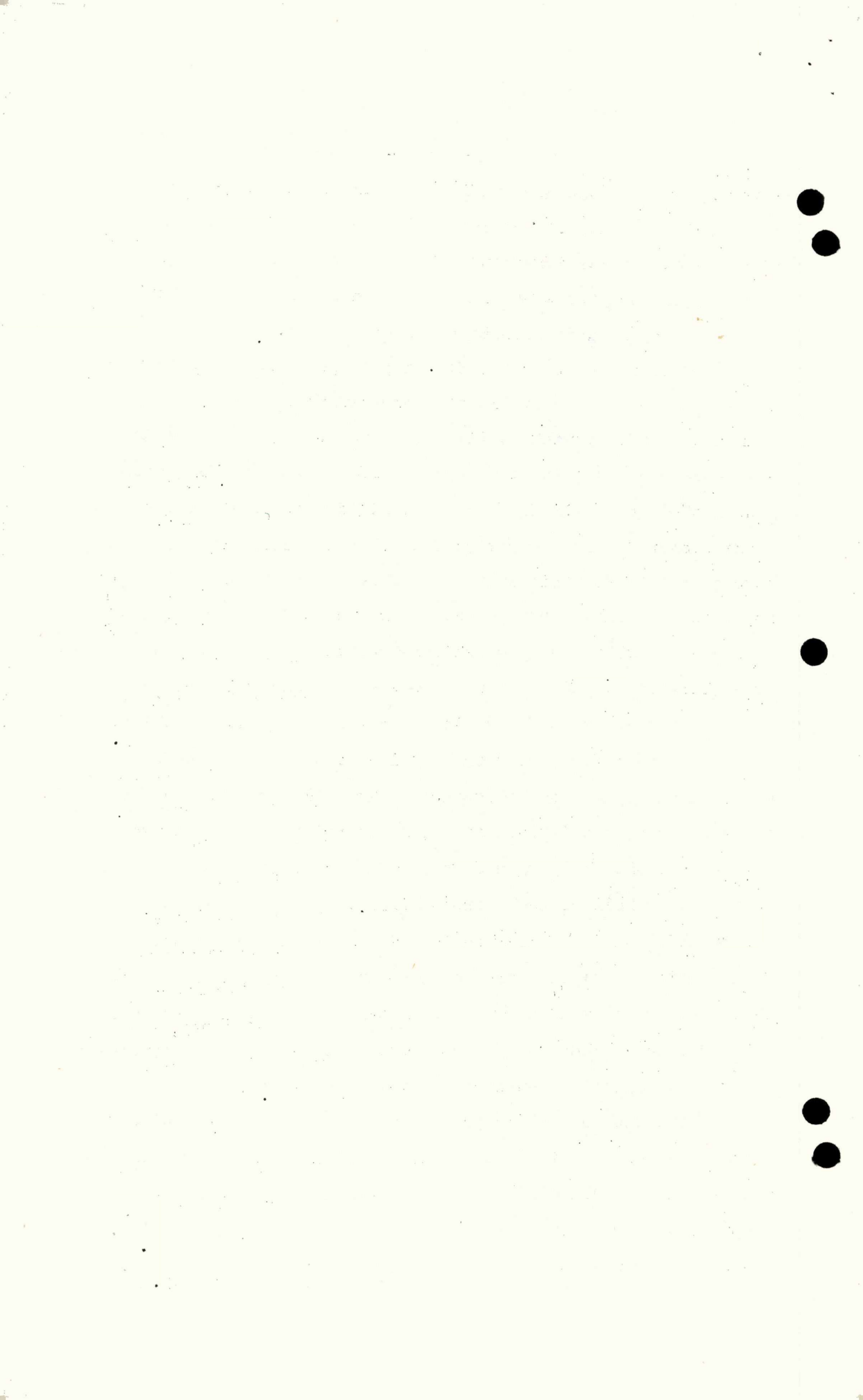


imposing any measure for unification, and even from suggesting any specific formula. The 1960 United Nations Visiting Mission also shared the Belgian view that the problem of relations between the two states should be settled by the representatives of Ruanda and Burundi without outside pressure.

This is the background. At present we have a situation where there are two duly elected governments both of which maintain that they wish to live separately. These governments now possess a very wide measure of self-government. We cannot ignore their wishes. Moreover the United Nations itself, as Commissioner Gassou has reminded us, bears a certain responsibility for this state of affairs. The General Assembly approved the holding of separate elections and the creation of separate assemblies and governments in the two parts of the Trust Territory. Although we endorsed the conception of a united Ruanda-Urundi we did little to foster a sense of unity.

It therefore seems to my Delegation that we cannot impose unity on these two states against their will. What we can do, however, even at this late stage, is to point out to the two governments the advantages of closer association in the political as well as the economic field. In the Canadian view the United Nations Commission for Ruanda-Urundi, which has the full confidence of the local governments and the Administering Authority, might well be asked to return to the territory, perhaps with additional members, where it would be available to advise on the various constitutional issues which may arise.

I sense that the representatives of the governments of Ruanda and Burundi distrust the idea of federal union because they are afraid it would diminish their recently acquired powers and suppress the free development of their respective communities. I assure them that this is not the intention of the Assembly.



Moreover the forms which union can take are many and various. A federal union is marked by a carefully worked out division of powers between the federal government and the governments of the member states. Each is completely sovereign in its own sphere. It may be that for Ruanda-Urundi a looser form of association, such as a confederation, would be preferable as a first step. In this case Ruanda and Urundi would remain sovereign states with separate governments but they would be linked together for the maintenance of their external independence by an agreement setting up a central organ for certain administrative purposes. History has shown that in time most unions of confederated states turn into federal states. Nor is association between a monarchy and a republic necessarily incompatible. Finally I see no reason why Ruanda and Burundi should not evolve, if they wish, a completely new form of political union, one which best suits their own situation.

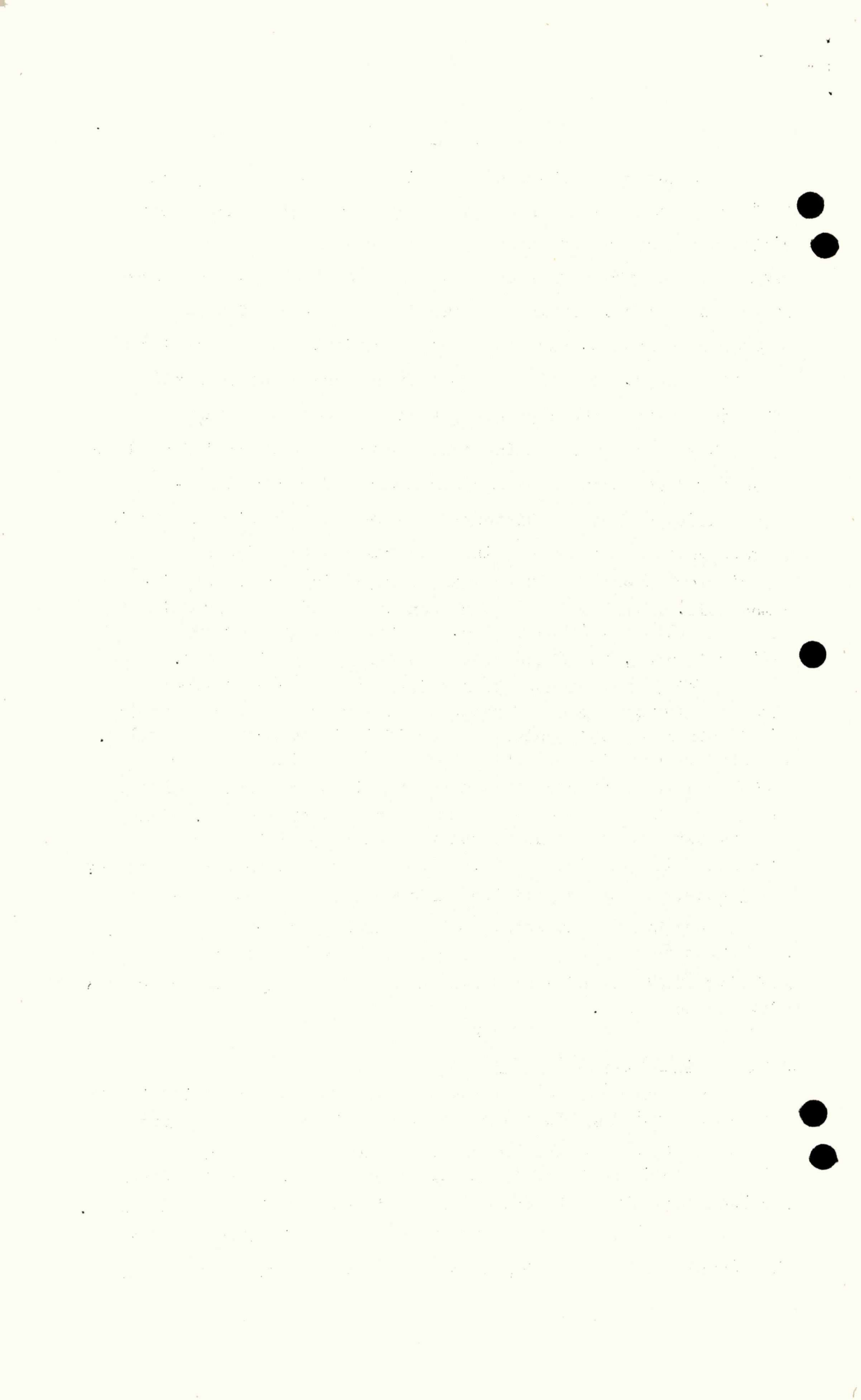
Unity must be more than skin-deep. It requires more than the average amount of patience, tolerance and understanding of the other person's point of view if it is to grow and develop. In Canada, which is an instance of a special kind of federal union, we have spent a century after attaining nationhood in the pursuit of the golden mean and still the search goes on. Can we honestly expect Ruanda-Urundi to achieve political and economic unity in five months, seven months or even eleven months? The answer, so far as political unity goes, is probably no but the United Nations should make a serious effort to help these two states to come together. At the least we can assist in planting the seeds of a possible solution that may come to fruition after independence.

V

Maintenance of Law and Order

One question which seriously concerns my Delegation is the problem of training local security forces in Ruanda and Burundi so that they will be able to ensure national security and the maintenance of law and order after independence. The Committee has received very little in the way of solid information on this score.

I realize that until independence this is a matter for the Administering Authority to work out in cooperation with the



governments of the two states. After independence it will be the sole responsibility of the local governments. But as the need is urgent and little time remains, I hope that the Administering Authority will do all it can to accelerate training programmes for such forces.

In the view of my Delegation the United Nations Commission could give special attention to this problem, working in consultation with the local governments and Belgian representatives. It could also consider whether a special United Nations technical assistance programme would help in solving the security problem.

VI

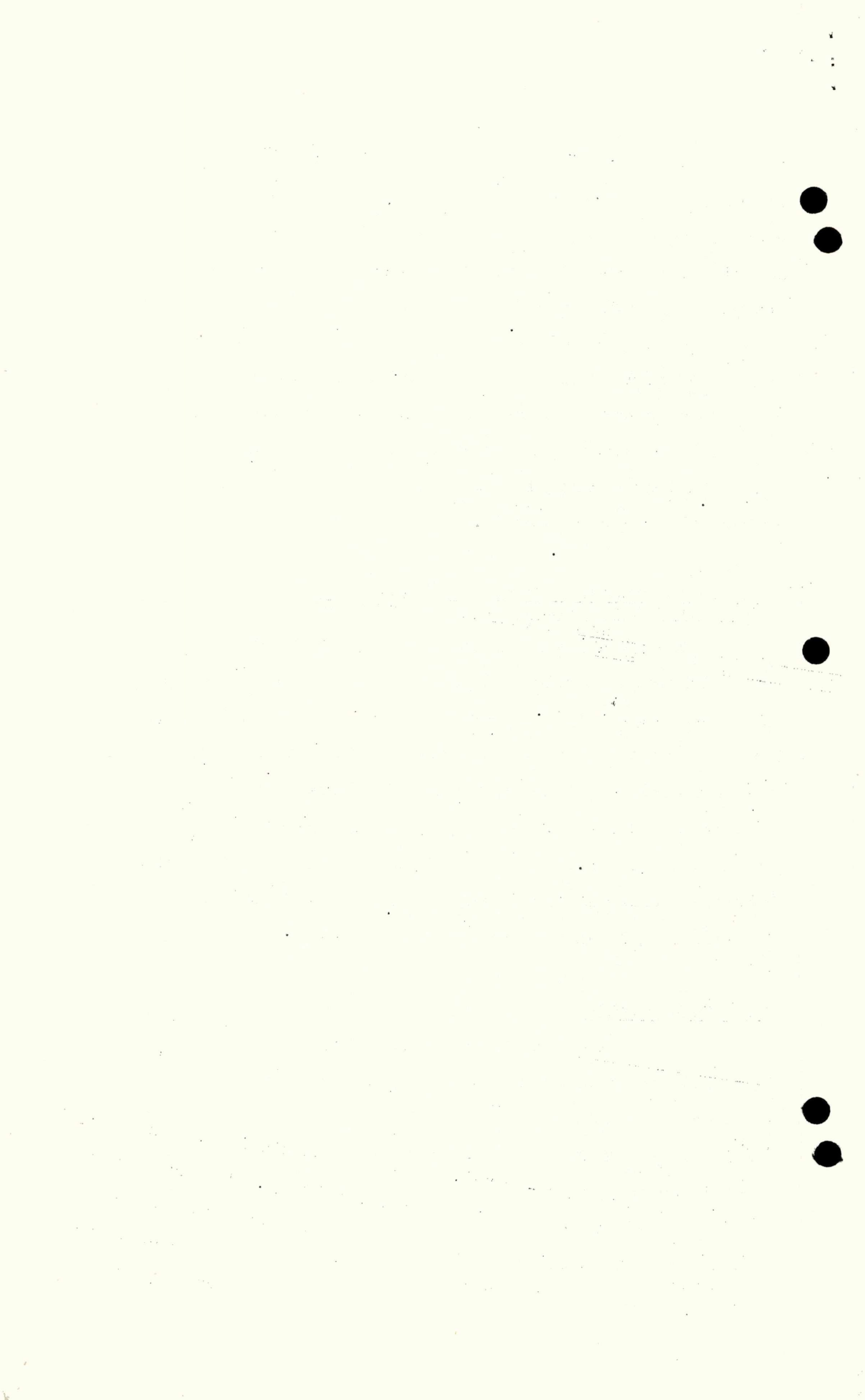
Technical Assistance, Economic Collaboration and National Reconciliation

There are other important functions which could be entrusted to the Commission. I have in mind the encouragement of reconciliation among the political parties in Ruanda and Burundi, and assistance to the two governments in working out the economic collaboration envisaged in the protocols signed in Belgium last December. Every participant in this debate has recognized the need for a special United Nations Technical Assistance Programme for Ruanda-Urundi. The Commission should be asked to help in drawing up such a programme.

VII

The Refugee Problem

Finally the Commission could use its good offices to facilitate the resettlement of the refugees. In his opening statement the distinguished Chairman of the United Nations Commission for Ruanda-Urundi, Ambassador Dorsinville, laid special emphasis on the problem of the Ruanda refugees. He warned us that a vigorous and continuous effort will be needed for some time to come in order to reintegrate and rehabilitate the refugees, and to enable them to become useful members of the community once



again. International assistance might be enlisted to help solve the refugee problem, and supplement efforts already being made by the Administering Authority, the Government of Ruanda and religious missions.

VIII

The Date of Independence

The last major question is the timing of independence. My Delegation has no rigid views on what the appropriate date should be but the Assembly, in our opinion, should be guided by these considerations:

- (1) A firm date for independence should be set, not later than the end of this year. We must not leave the people of Ruanda-Urundi in a state of uncertainty regarding their future;
- (2) this date should probably be earlier rather than later, to avoid the danger of unrest and violence in the territory; and
- (3) it must be a date which is acceptable to the governments of Ruanda and Burundi and to the Administering Authority.

