

No. 53/34 THE REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER
FOR REFUGEES

Text of a statement made on October 19, 1953, in the Third Committee of the eighth session of the United Nations General Assembly, by the Canadian representative, Mr. G.B. Summers, on agenda item 28.

I should like to compliment the High Commissioner for Refugees on the report which he has presented for our consideration. I should like in addition to express the particular pleasure of the Canadian delegation for having had this opportunity to hear from the High Commissioner himself an account of the great and good work that he has been doing and to be able to offer to him our sincere appreciation of the ability and devotion which he accords to this humanitarian task, in which as a member of the United Nations we are so deeply interested.

Our compliments in respect of the report are due, not only because of the activities which it recounts, but as a document in itself. In the introduction to the report and the chapter of historical background, the High Commissioner, has, I think, been wise to set out in simple clarity just how his office came into being and what is the scope of his activities. This is to begin at the beginning and it was a wise approach for I believe it is not untrue to say that the public in many countries, and perhaps even many officials of government who are or should be interested in this work, which is so properly a United Nations activity and a world wide responsibility, have not always had too clear an idea of what the Office of the High Commissioner is intended to do and what he is in fact doing. This misapprehension, if such there has been, is perhaps due to a feeling that a problem of such vast dimensions, if not beyond solution, is at least beyond the capacity of one man with a small staff and small funds. Because of it, perhaps, there has not been such full and widespread support as many of us would like to see and which is so well deserved and so badly required.

The High Commissioner has made clear to us that while the problem is vast and the means are small, he is certainly not engaged in a one man effort to carry on where the IRO left off and directly engage in resettlement operations of some millions of displaced persons.

He does set out clearly how ably he is carrying out the different parts of his mandate.

In the first place, his activities for the international protection of refugees---in promoting national legislation, administrative measures to overcome legal disabilities of refugees---in securing travel documents---and in the other ways described,

have been of the greatest importance. He has had, it is most gratifying to note, the help and co-operation of many governments.

His other broad task has been to seek permanent solutions for the refugee problem by assisting governments and private efforts. Needless to say that permanent solutions - whether repatriation - or integration in national communities where the refugees are living - or migration abroad - can only be solved by governments. Repatriation, it must with sadness be said, is not a solution for many of these unfortunate people. Quite obviously - and we were glad to hear it stressed by the High Commissioner for Refugees - repatriation is the ideal theoretical solution. I do not think it appropriate now to go into the difficult question of the Palestine refugees which is a special problem and which will be the subject of discussion in another committee. With respect to the extreme views which have been put forward in this Committee and so often before by certain European countries that repatriation is the simple solution for this problem and indeed that there is no problem at all, I do not think that much comment is required. The vast problem with which we are faced is due to a fear of going home. Every man loves his country and would go home if he were sure of freedom there. Clearly what is required is not to attack the High Commissioner because he does not force people to go home against their will but rather for the governments concerned to create conditions which would ensure that their citizens may freely travel abroad and return freely home without fear.

Much has been done in the past to enable refugees to migrate and start a new life in new countries, and my own country has been privileged with others to play its part in helping to solve at least some part of the refugee problem in this way, and many former refugees are now good citizens and happy citizens of Canada. The High Commissioner's contacts with governments to promote the admission of refugees remain important as does the close liaison with organizations directly concerned with migration.

I must, I fear, divert a moment in dealing with this aspect of the High Commissioner's work, to comment briefly on the references made by the distinguished representative of the Soviet Union to refugees in Canada. I would like to thank the distinguished representative of the Soviet Union for his mention of Canada's part in receiving refugees. Perhaps his comments were not so kindly meant, but for our part we feel that any reference to Canada's acceptance of refugees merely serves to bring out the point that we have in fact in this field engaged in a work which is a good work and which the world will recognize as such. We have welcomed many to our shores and we will welcome many more who will find a happy and free life in our country. Some come from strange quarters to seek asylum as events in past years and recent events have shown. We doubt that those who criticised us can really believe what they say and we think that they would perhaps be sorry themselves to feel that if their fortunes should change at home the doors of free countries would be closed to them.

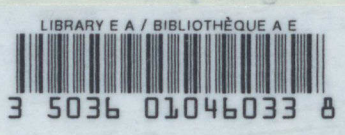
As to the reference to the high rate of tuberculosis amongst refugees quoted by the distinguished representative of the Soviet Union from an official source, I find nothing at all surprising in this statement. Canada has enjoyed for many years good social services and a high living standard. It is not at all surprising if persons who leave their own countries and come to our shores and who have lived for years under less satisfactory conditions, should include a number who are not physically strong and who may in time become ill. The statement to which the representative of the Soviet Union refers and which was to the effect that the incidence of tuberculosis amongst displaced persons is two and one half times greater than amongst Canadians, was made by the Ontario Minister of Health in 1952. In that year, the death rate from tuberculosis in Ontario, which has a population of over four million, was eight point four in one hundred thousand. If the representative of the Soviet Union or others here are interested in going into the matter and making a comparison of statistics in other countries of the world, they will find that this figure is in fact the very lowest at any time anywhere in the world. Even if among displaced persons who have come to our country from countries ravaged by years of war and who have been subject to other hardships, the tuberculosis rate in the early years after they arrive should be two and one half greater, the percentage in comparison to world figures remains low. The Ontario Department of Health is properly concerned with keeping this figure to a minimum.

In addition to activities in the nature of strictly legal protection or aid, and the seeking of permanent solutions, the High Commissioner has had the appallingly difficult task of attempting to provide sufficient emergency aid to the most needy groups of refugees coming within the mandate of his office. Surely the conscience of mankind must be moved by the desperate situation of many thousands of persons living a precarious existence in camps including sick, aged and infirm, and children. I have heard from Dr. Goedhart himself a simple moving story of a young boy from one such camp who knew no other life and who asked the question "Who are the people who live in houses?". We were indeed glad to note in the High Commissioner's statement that prospects for resettlement of the unfortunate European refugees in China, of whom a number are completely dependent on the Emergency Fund for a livelihood, are brighter than a year ago, and of the special efforts which are being made in regard to those in camps. It was most encouraging to read that the generous grant of the Ford Foundations has been of such importance in demonstrating that the social assimilation of refugees is a problem for which solutions can be found.

Permanent solutions and a final end to this appalling situation must remain our aim. In the meantime, emergency aid will be required and it is our earnest hope that the further governmental contributions to the fund which are so urgently required will be quickly forthcoming.

The Canadian delegation will therefore be happy to vote for the Resolution A/C.3/L.335/Rev.2 providing for the continuation of the office of the High

Commissioner. The Canadian delegation is also happy to vote for the Resolution A/C.3/L.357/Rev.1 and supports the appeal for an intensification of efforts for the solution of the problem of refugees. The Canadian delegation is also in full accord with the need for co-ordination in this field between the various organizations concerned in order that duplication may be avoided and the best results obtained. This resolution invites the High Commissioner to concern himself in particular with those whose situation is especially difficult and we hope that when the High Commissioner comes to report to us next year that progress will have been made towards a solution of this problem.



amongst displaced persons is two and one half times greater than amongst Canadians, was made by the Ontario Minister of Health in 1952. In that year, the death rate from tuberculosis in Ontario, which has a population of over four million, was eight point four in one hundred thousand. If the representation of the world is taken as a whole, the death rate from tuberculosis is only one point four in one hundred thousand. This is a very low rate, and it is a fact that the very lowest death rates from tuberculosis are to be found in the countries of the world. Even in the countries of the world where the death rate from tuberculosis is high, it is not as high as in the countries of the world where the death rate from tuberculosis is low. The Ontario Department of Health is properly concerned with keeping this figure to a minimum.

In addition to activities in the nature of strictly legal protection of aid, and the seeking of permanent solutions, the High Commissioner has had the apparently difficult task of attempting to provide sufficient emergency aid to the most needy groups of refugees coming within the mandate of his office. Surely the conscience of mankind must be moved by the desperate situation of many thousands of persons living a precarious existence in camps including sick, aged and infirm, and children. I have heard from Dr. Goodhart himself a simple moving story of a young boy from one such camp who knew no other life and who asked the question "who are the people who live in houses?". We were indeed glad to note in the High Commissioner's statement that prospects for resettlement of the unfortunate European refugees in China of whom a number are completely dependent on the Emergency Fund for a livelihood, are brighter than a year ago, and of the special efforts which are being made in regard to those in camps. It was most encouraging to read that the generous grant of the Ford Foundation has been of such importance in demonstrating that the social assimilation of refugees is a problem for which solutions can be found.

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The Canadian delegation will therefore be happy to vote for the Resolution A/C.3/L.357/Rev.1 providing for the continuation of the office of the High