

External Affairs

Supplementary Paper

No. 53/56 AD HOC COMMISSION ON PRISONERS-OF-WAR

Text of statement made on December 2, 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, on agenda item 71 - Measures for the peaceful solution of the problem of prisoners-of-war.

Note: Voting results and the text of the resolution adopted are included at the end of the statement.

The importance which the Canadian Delegation attaches to this problem now under discussion arises solely from the fact that it affects intimately the happiness and well-being of thousands of men, women, and children, human beings like ourselves. For that reason, we will vote in favour of the draft resolution jointly sponsored by Australia, Brazil, Cuba, Mexico, Thailand, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

We sincerely regret that it has not been possible to avoid entirely, throughout this debate, the emphasis which has at times been laid on the political divergences, which unfortunately are found among the various nations of the world. For our part, the Canadian Delegation desires most earnestly to avoid any word of rancour or recrimination. We feel that the debate on the question of the prisoners-of-war offers to all members of the United Nations, notwithstanding their political ideologies, a unique occasion to testify before the world that no one will refuse to do whatever it is in his power to do, to alleviate human suffering, especially in this case where eight years after the end of the war, prisoners are still in prison camps, and wives, children, and families are still grieving, deeply apprehensive, and uncertain.

I do not intend to enter into details of the Report submitted by the Ad Hoc Commission. It is a moving document, impressive above all for its restraint and objectivity. It speaks for itself. I would merely like to say that, in our opinion, the efforts of the Ad Hoc Commission, set up by the United Nations in 1950, show signs in recent months of achieving at long last a modest but encouraging measure of success. The recent return from the U.S.S.R. of a number of German prisoners, and the working arrangements recently completed by the U.S.S.R. Red Crescent and Red Cross Societies, the Japanese Red Cross and other organizations clearly prove this assertion. For this we should all be grateful.

Mr. Chairman, in concluding my remarks, I would like to say that the Canadian Delegation joins most earnestly with other delegations in the appeal that political differences be laid aside, and this problem be looked at in its true aspect, which is the humanitarian aspect.

We all realize and sympathize with the suffering and devastation suffered by the U.S.S.R. during the course of the Second World War. All countries on the Allied side, and indeed on the side of our former enemies, suffered in greater or less degree. We can understand, too, the intensity of the feelings of the Russian people, on this score. However, we have too much faith in the fundamental decency of the great masses of the Russian people and in the humanitarian traditions which have inspired in the past the thinking of their great philosophers and writers, to believe that bitterness and resentment will forever animate their attitude towards their, and our, former enemies. We shall continue to hope that a satisfactory solution of this great problem, which has been entrusted to the United Nations, will soon be reached; and that in consequence we will, at long last, be able to close this very sad chapter in the history of mankind.

Voting Results

By a roll-call vote of 44 in favour (including Canada) to 5 against (Soviet bloc) with 5 abstentions, the Third Committee adopted on December 3, 1953 a five-power resolution under which the General Assembly reiterates its concern at the large number of prisoners of the Second World War who have not been repatriated or accounted for, and appeals to all governments to supply information to the Ad Hoc Commission on Prisoners-of-War. The resolution was sponsored by the Delegations of Australia, Brazil, Thailand, United Kingdom and United States.

The resolution was subsequently approved without change in a plenary session of the General Assembly on December 7, 1953 by a vote of 46 in favour (including Canada) to 5 against with 6 abstentions.

Text of Resolution

The full text of the resolution adopted reads as follows (Doc. A/C.3/L.397/Rev.1):

"The General Assembly

"Recalling its resolution 427 (V) of 14 December 1950 on measures for the peaceful solution of the problem of prisoners-of-war.

"Reaffirming its belief that all prisoners having originally come within the control of the Allied Powers as a consequence of the Second World War should either have been repatriated long since or have been otherwise accounted for as required both by recognized standards of international conduct and the Geneva Convention of 1949 for the treatment of prisoners-of-war, and by specific agreements between the Allied Powers,

"Having examined the Progress Report to the Secretary-General on the work of the Ad Hoc Commission on Prisoners-of-War,

"1. Notes with satisfaction that some progress has taken place in the repatriation of prisoners-of-war in the course of the last two years, and expresses the hope that those governments and Red Cross Societies which have contributed to that progress will continue their efforts;

"2. Reiterates its grave and continuing concern at the evidence that large numbers of prisoners taken in the course of the Second World War have not yet been repatriated or otherwise accounted for;

"3. Urgently appeals to all governments and authorities which continue to hold prisoners of the Second World War to act in conformity with the recognized standards of international conduct and with the above-mentioned cessation of active hostilities, all prisoners should, with the least possible delay, be given an unrestricted opportunity of repatriation;

"4. Expresses its sincere appreciation to the Ad Hoc Commission for its efforts to assist in a solution of the problem of prisoners-of-war; and requests the Commission to continue its efforts to assist in a solution of the problem of prisoners-of-war under the terms of reference contained in the General Assembly's resolution 427 (V) of 14 December 1950;

"5. Notes with satisfaction that a large amount of valuable information was made available to the Commission concerning prisoners-of-war; but notes with concern that certain governments and authorities mentioned in the Report of the Commission have so far refused to co-operate with the Commission, which refusal represents the main obstacle through which the best efforts of the Commission have been frustrated;

"6. Urgently appeals to all governments and authorities which have not already done so to give their full co-operation to the Commission to supply the information requested by it on all prisoners of the Second World War who are still under their control and on such prisoners who have died while under their control; and to grant the Commission access to areas in which such prisoners are detained;

"7. Requests the Secretary-General to continue to furnish the Commission with the staff and facilities necessary for the effective accomplishment of its task; and

"8. Requests the Commission to report as soon as practicable the results of its further work and possible suggestions to the Secretary-General for transmission to the Members of the United Nations."

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"2. Reiterates its grave and continuing concern at the evidence that large numbers of prisoners taken in the course of the Second World War have not yet been repatriated or otherwise accounted for;

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"4. Expresses its sincere appreciation to the Ad Hoc Commission for its efforts to assist in a solution of the problem of prisoners-of-war; and requests the Commission to continue its efforts to assist in a solution of the problem of prisoners-of-war under the terms of reference contained in the General Assembly's resolution #27 (V) of 14 December 1950;

"5. Notes with satisfaction that a large amount of valuable information was made available to the Commission concerning prisoners-of-war; but notes with concern that certain governments and authorities mentioned in the Report of the Commission have so far refused to co-operate with the Commission, which refusal represents the main obstacle through which the best efforts of the Commission have been frustrated;

"6. Urgently appeals to all governments and authorities which have not already done so to give their full co-operation to the Commission to supply the information requested by it on all prisoners of the Second World War who are still under their control and on such prisoners who have died while under their control; and to grant the Commission access to areas in which such prisoners are detained;

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"8. Requests the Commission to report as soon as practicable the results of its further work and possible suggestions to the Secretary-General for transmission to the Members of the United Nations."