

External Affairs
Supplementary Paper

No. 53/75 Programme of Concerted Action in the Social
Field

Text of a statement made on October 8, 1953, by Mrs. A.L. Caldwell, Canadian representative, in the Third Committee of the eighth session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, on agenda item 66 - Programme of concerted practical action in the social field of the United Nations and the specialized agencies

Note - The text of the resolution adopted by the General Assembly and the results of the voting are included at the end of the statement.

I must confess at the outset that the Canadian Delegation shares the disappointment expressed by a number of other delegates, that the discussion on this item now before the Committee has until this morning dealt so little with substantive matters.

We recognize, of course, that the Social Commission at its meeting in the early part of this year; and the Economic and Social Council at its sixteenth session this past summer in Geneva, had an opportunity to consider in all its aspects the document prepared by the Secretary-General, in consultation with the executive heads of the specialized agencies concerned, and entitled "Programme of Concerted Practical Action in the Social Field of the United Nations and Specialized Agencies" [(E/CN.5/291 and addenda).] In the preparation of this important document, the Secretary-General had requested the observations of member governments: and the Government of Canada, in addition to giving its preliminary views on this question during the discussion of the Preliminary Report on the World Social Situation at the fourteenth session of the Council, had also submitted a more detailed elaboration of its views in response to the request of the Secretary-General. Further than that again, the Canadian representative on the Social Commission had an opportunity once again to offer certain observations on the best means of achieving a programme of concerted practical action in the social field, at the time when the Social Commission was considering this item at its session in the spring of this year.

It might indeed be said that in view of all these earlier opportunities to present the point of view of the government and people of Canada, a further debate on the substance of this matter at this time could only prove superfluous. This may be true, yet here, and here alone, in this Third Committee of the General Assembly, do all member states of the United Nations have the opportunity to exchange their points of view on these important social questions: and that is why the Canadian Delegation had rather hoped that this debate would provide an opportunity for the substantive discussion of this whole question on a level that would have done justice to the importance of the subject itself.

Since this is apparently not to be, - and the interventions made thus far by other delegates seem for the most part to concern themselves mainly with the form of the resolution to be adopted, and the procedure for disposing of the question - the Canadian Delegation would like to place on the record, in very brief fashion, its opinion on a number of points relating to this programme of concerted and practical action:

1. First, it considers, that one of the most valuable results, of the effort that has been made over the past year or more to formulate a programme of concerted practical action in the social field, has been the concentration of effort in certain clearly defined areas where there is some prospect of achieving practical and worthwhile results. In this respect, it cannot agree with the view expressed by the Delegation of the United Kingdom, that the result of this attempt to formulate a programme has been, or will be, to scatter and disperse, rather than to concentrate the efforts of the United Nations and its specialized agencies!

2. Then, it seems clear to the Canadian Delegation, that as a result of the process of stock-taking and of self-appraisal that was necessary in order to make it possible for the Secretary-General to come forward with a proposed programme of concerted practical action, the true role and function of the United Nations in the social field has emerged more clearly than ever before. That role is one of guidance, direction, stimulation, encouragement, and co-ordination of effort over a broad range of social action on the part of the various specialized agencies, non-governmental organizations, and private welfare institutions, as well as on the part of the Secretariat itself. If a social problem such as housing, care of the aged, (or whatever it may be), requires attention, it does not necessarily follow from that that the United Nations, through its Social Affairs Department, must undertake to enter that field directly and on its own account! Our experience in developing this plan for a concerted programme of practical action has taught us, I think, that it may be equally effective for the Secretary-General in his role of co-ordination and stimulation to ensure that the task in hand can be allocated to some appropriate specialized agency, or other organization with facilities and resources, to undertake the task in adequate fashion.

The result of this approach to the problem will, in the view of the Canadian Delegation, be an economy of effort, time and funds on the part of all concerned; our joint efforts will in fact be concerted efforts, with all agencies and organs working together in their appropriate fields, and on the tasks that have been assigned to them, and that they have agreed to take; and the results of such a concerted and concentrated approach to the social problems we must face are likely to be much more practical than if we disperse and dissipate our funds and energies, as we have been tempted to do in the past, over too wide a range of unrelated, and sometimes inconsequential, undertakings.

3. This last observation brings me to the third and final observation which I wish to make before turning to the resolution itself, and the amendments relating to it. Now that we have developed a programme of concerted practical action, with an established and accepted set of principles and priorities, and with a new and constructive decision by the Economic and Social Council, (to concentrate on certain particular techniques and methods for assisting governments in carrying out their social programmes,) -- now that we have done all that, I trust that governments generally, the Canadian Government included, will now be ready for a reasonable period, at least, to give this programme a chance to evolve and develop along the lines laid down for it. We should not yield to the temptation to tinker or tamper too much with one particular aspect of the programme in which we happen to be particularly interested. Let us give the programme as a whole a reasonable time to work, undisturbed by changes in the rules, criteria, principles, priorities, and methods that we are now agreeing to. Let us not divert the attention of the Secretary-General, and the Specialized Agencies, from the concerted programme of practical action that we are now prescribing for them, by passing subsequently too many resolutions which would ask for special priority for this or that project which happens to be particularly dear to us. Only by exercising self-restraint ourselves in regard to changes and alterations in this programme, can we hope to achieve results that are truly practical from the concerted programme which we have now established. (IVX) 502 10150500

I turn now to the text of the resolution proposed by the Delegations of Ecuador, the Philippines, the United States of America and Yugoslavia; and to the amendments proposed by the Delegations of Egypt and of Saudi Arabia, and that of France.

In view of what I have already said in approval of the efforts of the Secretary-General, and the Economic and Social Council, surely no one will suggest that the Canadian Delegation is lacking in gratitude to the Council. For its part, the Canadian Delegation wholeheartedly appreciates and approves of the programme of action which has been developed by the Secretary-General in collaboration with the Directors General of the Specialized agencies, for the consideration of the Social Commission and the Economic and Social Council.

Despite this gratitude, however, despite this appreciation and approval, the Canadian Delegation has a good deal of sympathy with the point of view expressed in such moderate terms yesterday by the Egyptian representative, namely, that the paragraph in which we are asked to express our thanks to the Council might better be dropped from the resolution. The same applies in our view to the words "with appreciation" which appear in the second paragraph of the Four Powers resolution. We shall, therefore, support the first two amendments proposed by the Delegations of Egypt and Saudi Arabia, not because of any reluctance on our part to place our thanks and appreciation on the record, but because we believe that experience over the years has shown that it is preferable to take simple note of the Reports which come before our attention without selecting this or that Report for special praise or blame.



The Canadian Delegation, for its part, would be prepared to support an alternative form of wording in which the complementary references are laid aside, and outright approval is given to the programme adopted by the Council in its resolution 496 of the sixteenth session. In that spirit it will be glad to support the amendment placed before the committee this morning by the distinguished representative of France.

The following is the text of the resolution adopted by the Assembly on October 23, 1953 by a vote of 45 in favour (including Canada), none against, with 12 abstentions:

"The General Assembly,

Reaffirming the principles contained in its resolution 535 (VI) of 2 February 1952,

1. Takes note with appreciation of the efforts made to establish the programme of concerted practical action in the social field of the United Nations and the specialized agencies adopted in Economic and Social Council resolution 496 (XVI) of 31 July 1953;

2. Invites the Secretary-General and the specialized agencies to keep particularly in mind, in the implementation of the projects of the programme of practical action, the general principles methods and techniques defined in Economic and Social Council resolution 496 (XVI), special consideration being given to the needs of the under-developed countries;

3. Recommends that the Economic and Social Council should supplement the programme of concerted practical action in the social field of the United Nations and the specialized agencies as set forth in resolution 496 (XVI), by the insertion of a new paragraph 8 (i) reading as follows:

"Improve the situation with respect to health; education and social welfare in the Non-Self-Governing and Trust Territories";

4. Requests the Economic and Social Council:

(a) To keep the development of the programme under consideration with a view to its progressive improvement;

(b) To consider, as appropriate, further practical measures which may be undertaken in accordance with General Assembly resolution 535 (VI) and Economic and Social Council resolution 496 (XVI) with the addition thereto recommended to the Economic and Social Council by the General Assembly at its eighth session;

(c) To report to the General Assembly on the progress achieved."