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Participation of the Council of Europe in the World Refugee Year

Report[1]
Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population
Rapporteur: Mr Harry RANDALL, United Kingdom, Socialist Group

1. 1959 - 11th Session - First part

A. Draft Resolution

The Assembly,

Having regard to Resolution No. 1285 of 5th December 1958 of the General Assembly of the United Nations on the proposal to hold a World Refugee Year;

Noting that this proposal has two aims, namely :

a. to focus interest on the refugee problem and to encourage additional financial contributions from Governments, voluntary agencies and the general public for its solution;

b. to encourage additional opportunities for permanent refugee solutions on a purely humanitarian basis and in accordance with the freely expressed wishes of the refugees themselves;

Believing that European countries should seize this opportunity of giving renewed proof of their solidarity by associating themselves with this project and by a joint contribution to it,

Decides :

1. to hold a special debate during its 1959 autumn Session on the subject of World Refugee Year;
2. to invite its members :
    a. to sponsor similar debates in their national Parliaments;
    b. to assist in the work of national committees, and, where necessary, urge that they be set up;
    c. to attend public meetings in connection with World Refugee Year and, if need be, make proposals for holding such meetings;
    d. to support the campaign being carried on by the United Nations, national committees and specialised bodies to assist refugees.

B. Draft Recommendation

The Assembly,

Having regard to Resolution No. 1285 of 5th December 1958 of the General Assembly of the United Nations on the proposal to hold a World Refugee Year;

Noting that this proposal has two aims, namely :

a. to focus interest on the refugee problem and to encourage additional financial contributions from Governments, voluntary agencies and the general public for its solution;

b. to encourage additional opportunities for permanent refugee solutions on a purely humanitarian basis and in accordance with the freely expressed wishes of the refugees themselves;

Believing that European countries should seize this opportunity of giving renewed proof of their solidarity by associating themselves with this project and by a joint contribution to it,

Recommends that the Committee of Ministers :

1. invite the Governments of member countries to co-operate in arrangements for World Refugee Year, as suggested in the Resolution of the United Nations General Assembly;
2. open a Special Council of Europe Fund for World Refugee Year to receive special contributions to finance the Council's activities in this connection;
3. urge Governments of member countries, when paying their contributions, to ask national committees to pay in to the Special Council of Europe Fund a certain percentage of all amounts raised with the Council's assistance;
4. make a concerted approach to the most important immigrant-receiving countries overseas in the hope of securing larger immigration quotas and improved prospects of resettlement;
5. approve the following action programme which is to constitute the Council's contribution to World Refugee Year :

    propaganda through the media of press, radio and television;

    co-operation with national television stations in producing short films made of cuttings from existing reels;

    organisation, in conjunction with the Council of Europe Special Representative for National Refugees and Over-population, of a travelling exhibition, and subsequent sale by auction of original paintings on refugee themes produced by contemporary painters;

    creation of a symbolic drawing, to be reproduced in various forms, for sale in member countries;

    preparation of documentary material likely to arouse the interest of schools in World Refugee Year;

    sale of " first-day covers " on the day of issue of new Council of Europe stamps;

    possible preparation of several modest refugee re-classification schemes of interest to the member countries where this problem is most serious.

C. Draft Order

The Assembly,

Having regard to Resolution . .. and Recommendation on Council of Europe participation in World Refugee Year,

I. Instructs the President of the Assembly to ask the European Parliamentary Assem-bly :

1. to support plans for a World Refugee Year;

2. to endeavour to secure a special contribution from the executive organs of the European Communities to the Special Council of Europe Fund for World Refugee Year;

II. Instructs the Secretary-General to place the appropriate departments of the Secretariat at the disposal of the Assembly and, in particular, of its Committee on Population and Refugees in order to assist them in planning and implementing the programme which constitutes the Assembly's contribution to World Refugee Year;

III. Instructs its Committee on Population and Refugees :

1. to watch over the implementation fo the programme which is to constitute the Council's contribution to World Refugee Year;

2. to submit to the Assembly, if possible during its eleventh Session, proposals for several refugee re-classification schemes on a modest scale, of interest to the member countries where this problem is most serious.

D. Explanatory Memorandum

1. World Refugee Year : its origin and aims

Early in 1958 the idea of World Refugee Year was first put forward by three Englishmen writing in a British magazine. Subsequently a conference of voluntary agencies was called by the United Nations Association in London, resulting in an appeal being made in some of the leading British newspapers.

The aims of the sponsors of " World Refugee Year " were as follows :

> *to raise funds for assistance to refugees, through Governments, voluntary agencies and the general public;*
>
> *to encourage further opportunities for permanent solutions as defined in the UNHCR Statute.*

Political parties soon took an interest in the proposal and raised the matter in the House of Commons. The British Government took up the idea, and on 31st July 1958 the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs announced that Her Majesty's Government fully approved of the scheme and would certainly give it their support in the United Nations General Assembly.

On 26th September 1958, on the proposal of the British Representative, the UNREF Executive Committee adopted a Resolution on " World Refugee Year " which appeared in the Seventh Progress Report dated 30th September 1958, addressed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to the Council of Europe (Doc. 857).

On 7th November of the same year, after hearing a report by the High Commissioner, the Social Committee of the United Nations General Assembly approved the scheme.

The United Nations General Assembly finally decided, on 5th December 1958, by 59 votes to 9 and 7 abstentions, to recommend, in its Resolution No. 1285 (see Appendix), the organisation of World Refugee Year.

According to this Resolution, the aims of World Refugee Year are as follows :

a. to focus attention on the refugee problem and to encourage additional financial contribution from Governments, voluntary agencies and the general public for its solution;

b. to encourage additional opportunities for permanent refugee solutions, through voluntary repatriation, resettlement or integration, on a purely humanitarian basis and in accordance with the freely expressed wishes of the refugees themselves.

2. Practical arrangements

A. The United Nations authorities have laid down a certain number of principles for the practical organisation of World Refugee Year.

1. As suggested by the United Kingdom, World Refugee Year is planned to open in June 1959.

2. In its Resolution No. 1285 (XIII), the United Nations General Assembly requests the Secretary-General to take such steps as he may think fit to assist in the promotion of World Refugee Year. - The Secretary-General accordingly appointed a member of his Cabinet, M. Claude de Kemoularia (France), to be responsible for co-ordinating arrangements at the national and international levels. - M. de Kemoularia, who has been given the title of United Nations Special Representative for World Refugee Year, opened an office in Geneva in January 1959.

3. " Our office will serve as a coordination and information centre for the countries taking part in World Refugee Year. We shall thus be able to supply the information, advice and assistance which Governments and national committees may require, and we shall keep them informed of the action taken by the other States concerned ", said M. de Kemoularia on 8th February 1959, in his statement to the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's programme.

4. He also announced that " what is mainly proposed is a series of national efforts adapted to the needs of each country ". - It was agreed that funds collected within the framework of World Refugee Year should benefit all categories of refugees and that each participating country should be able to decide on the allocation of the funds it had raised. - It was also agreed that the plan must be sufficiently flexible to allow of adaptation to the particular condition in different countries and that the duration and timing of

activities during the Year should be fixed by each participating country. - It appears from discussion in United Nations circles that the support given need not necessarily be financial, important though this is. For instance, it might take the form of improved legal assistance for refugees or the admission of larger numbers of refugees to receiving countries.

5. " While it is, unfortunately, true ", added the United Nations Special Representative, " that there is no prospect of a final solution for all refugee problems emerging from World Refugee Year, it may make it possible to improve the lot of many of them and in some instances to find a lasting solution for their problems He recalled the statement by the High Commissioner for Refugees to the Third Committee last November, that " the problem of refugees within his mandate was not insoluble and that the camps could be cleared by the end of 1960 if sufficient funds were available ". The High Commissioner had also pointed out that only twenty-two Governments had so far ratified the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees. A joint effort should make it possible to show many refugees the " light at the end of the tunnel ".

6. M. de Kemoularia went on to say that there would be no central fund. " Each Government, each national committee and each private organisation will be completely free to decide to what use its contribution to World Refugee Year should be put ".

7. In the same statement to the Executive Committee which consists of representatives of Governments sharing in the programme of the High Commissioner for refugees, M. de Kemoularia also recalled that, as stated in the resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, World Refugee Year, inasmuch as it constitutes " a practical means of increasing assistance to refugees throughout the world ", should be of a purely humanitarian character.

B. In the light of these principles, what steps have been taken so far, at national level?

It is in Great Britain that plans have made most headway. The National Committee, under the presidency of Baroness Elliot of Harwood, has the patronage of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth. Mr. Harold Macmillan, Prime Minister, Mr. Hugh Gaitskell, Leader of the Opposition, and Mr. Grimond, leader of the Liberal Party, are also members of the Committee. The Advisory Council is made up of 50 distinguished persons from all walks of life and, in fact, there is no aspect of British life which is not represented.

The U. K. Government have made a donation of £100,000, and the Committee hope to raise £2,000,000 to be used to assist the following categories of refugees : refugees in Europe, in and outside camps; European refugees from China, Chinese refugees in Hong Kong, Palestine refugees. The Committee have already made an offer of £60,000 to finance the transport and resettlement of European refugees from China.

More recently, a national committee for World Refugee Year was set up in France. It consists of two separate bodies : a small working committee and a larger honorary committee consisting of prominent figures in French public life.

National committees have also been set up in the United States, the Federal Republic of Germany, Belgium and Switzerland. In all, some 14 countries have announced their intentions of participating in World Refugee Year.

3. Participation of the Council of Europe in World Refugee Year

1. The Committee's terms of reference - In Order No. 127 of 15th October 1958 the Assembly instructed its Committee on Population and Refugees to submit proposals for the participation of the Council of Europe in the programme planned for the World Refugee Year. - In pursuance of this order the Committee on Population and Refugees has prepared a programme whereby the Council of Europe will support the world-wide campaign and also engage in various specific European activities. - When working out this programme, the Committee called upon the appropriate departments of the Council of Europe and the United Nations authorities for advice and suggestions. A Working Party was set up at the Council of Europe, comprising, in addition to the Committee's Chairman and Rapporteur, the following : the President of the Assembly, the Council of Europe Special Representative, the Secretary-General, the Clerk of the Assembly, the Political Director, the Director of Information and the Head of the Refugees and Over-population Division. This Working-Party twice gave careful consideration to the proposals submitted to it and finally approved them. - The Committee's Chairman and Rapporteur met M. de Kemoularia, Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for World Refugee Year and M. A. R. Lindt, High Commissioner for Refugees, in Geneva on 23rd January 1959, to acquaint them with the Committee's proposals. They were warmly welcomed and encouraged to go ahead with their plans. - Consequently, it may be said that the proposals the

Committee is to ask the Assembly to submit to the Committee of Ministers have already received the approval of the Secretary-General and the appropriate departments of the Council of Europe, as well as of the United Nations Special Representative and the High Commissioner for Refugees.

2. After discussion in the Committee, in the Working Party and in Geneva, it was agreed that Council of Europe action should he based on the following principles :

In accordance with the United Nations Resolution, the refugee problem must be considered solely from a humanitarian point of view;

The role of the Council of Europe, likewise in pursuance of the above Resolution, should consist in drawing the attention of Member Governments and public opinion to the refugee problem by appropriate means;

Council of Europe action should be co-ordinated with that of the United Nations;

Since the initiative is to be taken by Governments and ad hoc national committees in member countries, the task of the Council of Europe would be to encourage and support national action on behalf of refugees;

The action taken should consist in securing immigration facilities as well as in raising money;

While taking part in the world campaign in favour of refugees, the Council of Europe should pay special attention to the problems of refugees of European origin, irrespective of their status (international, national, deportees, escapees, etc.) and of their present place of residence. However, in the interests of world solidarity, the Council should not refuse moral and material assistance to other classes of refugees with problems directly affecting Europe (e.g. Arab refugees).

3. The Council of Europe programme. In the Committee's view, Council of Europe participation in World Refugee Year should have the following twofold aim :

to support the world-wide campaign sponsored by the United Nations; and

to make a special contribution of its own in the European field.

3.1. SUPPORT FOR THE UNITED NATIONS

Council of Europe support in this field will take the following form :

a. Governments will be urged :

1. to play their full part in World Refugee Year activités in pursuance of the Resolution of the United Nations General Assembly;
2. to make a concerted approach to the most important immigrant-receiving countries overseas in the hope of securing larger immigration quotas and improved prospects of resettlement ;

b. public interest will be aroused by means of :

1. a special debate during the 1959 autumn Session of the Assembly;
2. similar debates in national Parliaments;
3. participation in the work of national committees ;
4. public meetings attended by members of the Assembly (with exchanges of speakers between member countries) ;

c. other European institutions will be approached for assistance.

The Committee on Population and Refugees suggests that the European Parliamentary Assembly, and, through it, the executive organs of the six-Power Communities, be asked to support the World Refugee Year campaign.

3.2. SPECIAL COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONTRIBUTION

The Council might confine its participation to supporting the campaign sponsored by the United Nations, national committees and voluntary refugee organisations. The Committee feels, however, that in view of the Council's interest in the problem and the proportions it has assumed in certain member countries, a venture of this kind merits a more active and positive contribution on the part of the Council.

This special contribution might take the following form :

a. Propaganda :

1. Press, radio and television campaign. The Council of Europe might supply articles and reports to newspapers and appropriate periodicals and prepare a " Eurovision " programme in the form of a live documentary on some subject such as preparations for Christmas in a refugee camp, or else a variety programme interspersed with brief commentaries in several languages, in which prominent European variety artistes would be invited to appear free of charge.
2. The production of a short film composed of cuttings from existing reels, with a suitable commentary. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner has already offered to place its film library at the Council's disposal.
3. A travelling exhibition of original paintings on the theme of refugees, produced by contemporary painters, and a subsequent sale of the works by auction in the capital of a Member State. - The Special Representative, who is responsible for this project, has already made contacts in the appropriate quarters.
4. A poster, to be reproduced in post-card form for wide distribution in member countries.
5. A programme designed to arouse the interest of schools in World Refugee Year.
6. Issue of envelopes to be used as " First-day covers " on the day of issue of new Council of Europe stamps. - Some of these plans could advantageously be carried out in conjunction with appropriate European organisations such as the European Conference of Local Authorities, the Council of European Municipalities, the European Teachers' Association etc.

b. Practical Action :

1. The preparation by the Committee on Population and Refugees, in conjunction with the Council of Europe Special Representative and the High Commissioner of the United Nations, of several refugee resettlement schemes, on a modest scale, of interest to member countries such as Greece, Austria or the Federal Republic of Germany where this problem is most serious.
2. Participation in the welfare work of the Reverend Father Pire (e.g. the " Anne Frank village ").

3.3. TECHNICAL AND FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS

The preparation and execution of these various projects raise technical and financial problems.

3.3.1. Technical assistance

In the course of the preliminary discussions in the Committee and the Working Party, the appropriate departments of the Secretariat have been asked to assist—and have undertaken to do so.

The Special Representative and the United Nations High Commissioner have also offered to co-operate.

Technically speaking, therefore, it should be possible to carry out the above programme. There remains the question of finance.

3.3.2. Finance

Although the Committee has been careful, in the course of discussion, to reject any schemes that appeared too costly, it has been found impossible to present a programme worthy of the Council without asking for some slight financial assistance.

The Committee therefore intends asking the Assembly to open a special Council of Europe Fund for World Refugee Year, to finance the programme, and proposes that the money be raised as follows :

1. a special contribution from the Committee of Ministers;
2. the allocation to the Fund by national committees of a certain percentage of the proceeds of the appeal in member countries, in which the Council of Europe will assist;
3. proceeds from such sources as : the auctioning of paintings, sale of post-cards, sale of first-day envelopes to philatelic societies, collections in schools, etc. ;

4. possible contributions from other European organisations such as E. C. S. C, the Common Market, Euratom, etc.

The draft Recommendation, Resolution and Order submitted by the Committee on Population and Refugees are designed to ensure participation by the Council of Europe in World Refugee Year on the lines indicated above.

Appendix Resolution No. 1285 (XIII) adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 5th December 1958

The General Assembly,

Having considered the Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, together with the Resolution adopted by the Executive Committee of the United Nations Refugee Fund at its ninth (special) session of 26th September 1958;

Convinced of the need to make a further world-wide effort to help resolve the world refugee problem;

Having considered the proposal for a World Refugee Year to begin in June 1959;

Noting that this proposal has two aims, namely :

a. to focus interest on the refugee problem and to encourage additional financial contributions from Governments, voluntary agencies and the general public for its solution;

b. to encourage additional opportunities for permanent refugee solutions, through voluntary repatriation, resettlement or integration, on a purely humanitarian basis and in accordance with the freely expressed wishes of the refugees themselves,

1. Urges States members of the United Nations and members of the specialised agencies to co-operate, in accordance with the national wishes and needs of each country and from a humanitarian point of view, in promoting a World Refugee Year as a practical means of securing increased assistance for refugees throughout the world;

2. Requests the Secretary-General to take such steps as he may think fit to assist in the promotion of a World Refugee Year in accordance with the present Resolution.