

SUMMARY REPORT OF THE FIRST MEETING OF THE STATISTICAL COMMISSION

Held at Hunter College, New York on Wednesday,

1 May 1946, at 10:30 a.m.

Present: Mr. H. Campion (U.K.)  
Mr. P. C. Mahalonobis (India)  
Mr. Stuart A. Rice (U.S.A.)  
Mr. A. Sauvy (France)

The session was opened by the Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Affairs who welcomed the members of the Commission and called for nominations for the office of Chairman of the Commission. Mr. Stuart A. Rice was nominated as Chairman and the nomination was seconded. There being no further nominations forthcoming, Mr. Rice was declared elected.

The Chairman introduced the Provisional Agenda (E/STAT/1 - 26 April 1946) which was adopted after very brief discussion.

The Provisional Rules of Procedure proposed by the Secretariat for the First Sessions of the Commissions of the Economic and Social Council (E/COMMISSIONS/1 - 26 April 1946) were adopted as the Rules of Procedure for the Statistical Commission. It was agreed, however, that election of a vice-chairman would be deferred until later during the first session when other members of the Commission may arrive.

An understanding was reached also that any action taken by the Commission may be reviewed and reconsidered when other members arrive subsequently during the first session. In this connection it was noted that a communication had been received from Mr. Gunnar Jahn (Norway) indicating acceptance of his appointment to the Commission but stating that he would be unable to be present at the First Session.

It was noted also that Mr. D. K. Lieu (China) likewise has accepted appointment to the Commission and may arrive in this country in time for later meetings of the First Session. No nominations to the Commission have yet been received from USSR or Ukraine. Mr. Teixeira de Freitas (Brazil) has declined membership on the Commission.

A working paper prepared by Dr. D. W. Oberdorfer on "Terms of Reference of the Statistical Commission" (E/STAT/W.8 - 29 April 1946) was introduced and it was agreed that the content of the paper should be considered point by point. With reference to item 2 (a) of the Terms of Reference of the Statistical Commission (E/30 - 22 February 1946) the meaning of the phrase "co-ordination of national statistics" was questioned. After some discussion it was agreed that the Commission would recommend to the Economic and Social Council that this section of the Terms of Reference be revised so as to provide that:

"2. The Commission shall assist the Council:

(a) in promoting the development of national statistics and the improvement of their comparability;"

During the course of this discussion it was emphasized that the Commission should not attempt to perform functions which can be undertaken by the Secretariat on the one hand or by the specialized agencies on the other. Consideration was given to the extent to which the Commission should confine itself to general principles. It was pointed out that this question is related to the question of the organization of statistical services within the Secretariat, to be discussed subsequently.

Consideration was given also to the question of allocation of work between the Statistical Commission, committees, sub-commissions of experts with limited terms of reference, and the Secretariat. No decision was reached at this point on recommendations concerning such allocation.

Some discussion was devoted to general aspects of the relationships with specialized agencies, and it was agreed that discussion at this stage would be limited to a general plan which would recognize the

primary statistical interests of specialized agencies in their fields. A question was raised as to which agencies would be involved in such a plan. The agencies listed were: The Food and Agriculture Organization; The Provisional International Civil Aviation Organization; International Labour Organization; International Monetary Fund; International Bank for Reconstruction and Development; and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. It was indicated that this list includes only those agencies already in existence, and that similar problems will be considered with respect to many other agencies to be brought into relationship with the United Nations. It was pointed out that the Commission can only advise and make recommendations to the Economic and Social Council and the Secretariat on these questions. The point was made that although it must be recognized that the specialized agency has the primary interest in statistics in its fields, the United Nations Secretariat is not precluded from work in such fields.

A recess was taken at 12:20 p.m. until 2:00 p.m.

At 2:00 p.m. the meeting was reconvened by the Chairman and discussion was resumed of relationships with the Secretariat and specialized agencies. It was agreed that any decision reached by the Commission on recommendations concerning work of specialized agencies would not necessarily apply to functions of the United Nations Secretariat.

In connection with discussion of the development of statistical services of the Secretariat it was noted that the Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Affairs had reported that, by agreement with the Assistant Secretary-General for Social Affairs, the Department of Economic Affairs will be the locus of the statistical work of the Secretariat, serving all organs of United Nations.

The Head of the Economic, Financial and Transit Department of the League of Nations (who is serving as a technical consultant to the Commission) was asked to describe the experience of the League of Nations

particularly as to the relations between the Secretariat and the Committee of Statistical Experts. A working paper on this topic had been prepared for consideration of the Commission, and excerpts from this paper were presented. It was pointed out that the Committee of Statistical Experts relied on the Secretariat for reports on particular matters which were prepared in consultation with experts. International Labour Organization and other agencies were represented on the Committee of Statistical Experts.

Returning to its discussion of its own Terms of Reference, the Commission agreed to adopt as a working procedure a proposal that Dr. Oberdorfer's paper, as revised after discussion by the Commission, might serve as a part of or Appendix to the Commission's report to the Economic and Social Council, in order to give expression in extenso to the Commission's own interpretation of its Terms of Reference. A drafting committee was designated to prepare the revisions in the document indicated by further discussion at subsequent meetings. It was agreed subsequently that final formulation of the Commission's interpretation of its Terms of Reference should be deferred, inasmuch as discussion of substantive problems at later meetings might have a bearing on these interpretations.

A suggestion by the Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Affairs as to the definition of the Commission's task was presented as follows:

1. to formulate general principles which should govern the collection and presentation of national statistics
2. to lay down standards of
  - (a) adequacy
  - (b) comparability
3. to advise on the solution of specific statistical problems

Some discussion was devoted to the meaning of the phrase "interpretations and dissemination of statistical information" in item 2 (d) of the Terms of Reference (E/30 - 22 February 1946). It was agreed,

however, that clarification of this point should be deferred until there had been an opportunity to consult with other commissions. It was pointed out that no arbitrary compartmentalization is desirable and that all commissions must work together. It was pointed out further that the Commission only advises and recommends, and therefore that this question has less importance for the Commission than for the work of the Secretariat.

A question was raised whether the paragraph on "Promoting the Improvement of Statistics" in Dr. Oberdorfer's paper (E/STAT/W.8 - 29 April 1946 - page 4) is broad enough, particularly with reference to activities of the Secretariat. The question was referred to the drafting committee.

Some discussion was devoted to interpretation of the Terms of Reference applicable to appointment of sub-commissions and committees. It was indicated that the Commission understands that a distinction is intended between the terms "sub-commission" and "committee." This distinction appears to be based on two factors: the question of appointment of voting members of groups which are established to advise the Economic and Social Council, and budgetary considerations. The understanding of the Commission is that it may recommend to the Economic and Social Council the appointment of sub-commissions of experts, with their own limited Terms of Reference, to study particular problems; but that the Commission itself might appoint suitable ad hoc committees from among its own members. It was pointed out that Rule 8 of the Rules of Procedure suggested by the Secretariat (E/COMMISSIONS/1 - 26 April 1946) provides that "The Commission may make arrangements through the Secretariat for the presentation of information on subjects within the competence of the Commission by qualified persons." It is the Commission's understanding that this provision is applicable likewise to committees appointed by the Commission from among its own membership.

The question was raised whether methods of sampling come within the scope of the competence of the Commission. The question was answered affirmatively, by reference to item 2 (e) of the Terms of Reference (E/30 - 22 February 1946). It was agreed also that this item in the Terms of Reference should be interpreted to include the use of statistics. It was agreed further that these statements and others which may be agreed to subsequently by the Commission will be incorporated in formal recommendations or other documents interpreting the Commission's Terms of Reference, to be submitted to the Economic and Social Council.

There being no further discussion at this point of the Commission's Terms of Reference, it was proposed that item 6 of the Agenda (E/STAT/1 - 26 April 1946) be taken up. It was agreed, however, that consideration of this item should be deferred until members of the Commission had an opportunity to read the working paper which had been prepared on this topic. Accordingly this item will be the first order of business at the next meeting, at which consideration of recommendations concerning statistical organization and functions of the Secretariat will also be taken up.

Decision was reached that the Commission will meet regularly at 10:30 a.m., recess from approximately 12:15 p.m. to 2:00 p.m., and adjourn at approximately 5:00 p.m., except that there will be no meetings scheduled for Saturdays or Sundays.

Thereupon the Commission adjourned at 4:10 p.m.