

SUMMARY REPORT OF THE FOURTH MEETING OF THE STATISTICAL COMMISSION

Held at Hunter College, New York on Monday
6 May 1946, at 10:30 a.m.

Present: Mr. Rice (Chairman)
Mr. Campion
Mr. Mahalanobis
Mr. Souvy

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 10:30 a.m. and introduced Dr. Germano Jardim of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, who conveyed to the Commission the compliments of Dr. Teixeira de Freitas. Dr. Jardim reported that although Dr. Teixeira de Freitas had been compelled to decline appointment to the Commission, he will serve with the group in spirit and will be happy to co-operate in its work in every possible way.

A letter was introduced from Dr. D.K. Lieu, addressed to the Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Affairs under date of 17 April 1946, expressing regret that Dr. Lieu expected to be unavoidably detained and therefore would be "a little late in attending" the first session of the Commission.

The Commission then proceeded to consider further proposed recommendations concerning statistical activities formerly carried on by the League of Nations. Mr. Rosenberg was asked to resume presentation of his oral report. He made brief reference to some of the points covered in his "Working Paper on the Statistical and Research Activities of the League of Nations" (E/STAT/W.2 - 26 April 1946) and commented on the status of the activities described in paragraphs 6, 7, 8 and 9. He described as excellent the working relationships between the Committee of Statistical Experts and the Secretariat of the League of Nations, and outlined briefly the methods and procedures involved in these relationships.

Mr. Rosenberg discussed a number of points concerning studies prepared under the sponsorship of the Committee of Statistical Experts and its sub-committees. He pointed out the distinction between resolutions formally adopted by a committee or sub-committee and technical studies prepared by individual experts which are sometimes published as appendixes to the committee or sub-committee report. This point was illustrated by reference to the draft report on national income statistics and its appendixes, a copy of which, along with other reports, had been distributed to members of the Commission at its meeting 3 May 1946.

At this point Mr. Rosenberg was asked to comment on the relationship between the Committee of Statistical Experts and such extra-governmental or non-governmental groups as the Conference on Research in Income and Wealth in the United States. He replied that there was no collaboration as such with such organizations since the League was an inter-governmental body; the Sub-Committee on National Income Statistics, however, for example included in its membership individuals who were also members of the national income conference. This question was raised to illustrate one of the problems involved in formulating answers to the questions raised in paragraph 10 of Mr. Rosenberg's paper, to which discussion was then directed.

It was pointed out that the principal concern of the Statistical Commission in this connection is to insure that the important statistical publications and other work of the league which is now in progress be continued without any hiatus, and that the Commission at this point should defer passing judgement on the value of particular portions of the work; detailed appraisal should be left for consideration by the permanent Commission at a later session. It was suggested that for various reasons, it would be inappropriate for the Commission to undertake detailed consideration or commitments on these activities at the present session. It was indicated furthermore that in some respects the basis of relationships with non-governmental agencies, for example, may be different

for the United Nations than for the League and that the method of treatment of such problems, therefore, may be modified.

A distinction was made between provision for continuing the statistical work of the League of Nations and continuing the League's several committees and sub-committees in statistical fields as such. It was indicated that some adjustments will be needed to bring such groups as the Sub-Committee on Balance of Payments Statistics, for example, into relation with the International Monetary Fund and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

Some discussion was devoted at this point to the question whether the sub-committees of the League's Committee of Statistical Experts should continue their work and publication on the present basis -- i e , should publications appear as League of Nations publications or United Nations publications? Reference was made in this connection to the resolution adopted by the Assembly of the League of Nations at its Twenty-First Ordinary Session at Geneva on 18 April 1946 (A.32 (1), 1946, X.), which provides:

"4. (1) The officials of the Secretariat having received notice of termination of their engagements as from July 31st next, such staff shall be employed as may be required for the purpose of carrying out the liquidation and for maintaining in operation the departments and services of the Secretariat to whatever extent is necessary in order that the United Nations may, under the best possible conditions, assume those activities hitherto performed by the League which it decides to assume and take over the material assets which are to be transferred to it."

It was agreed that this question is not peculiar to the League activities coming within the competence of the Statistical Commission, and therefore that it would be appropriate only for the Commission to draw attention to the problem but leave its solution to be worked out by the Secretary-General. The same decision was reached with respect to a specific question raised by Mr. Rosenberg as to financial arrangements. Mr. Rosenberg indicated that the League budget provided for necessary activities during the remainder of 1946 but pointed out that activities

are being financed in part by funds from the Rockefeller Foundation under a grant which will expire on the date of expiration of the League of Nations. He also mentioned the difficulty of holding together a qualified staff during a period of uncertainty as to future prospects, and asked that the period of uncertainty be as short as possible.

The Commission expressed its desire to be as helpful as possible in expediting negotiations on these arrangements, but indicated its reluctance to formulate recommendations implying commitments which might not be acceptable to the Secretary-General.

Mr. Rosenberg expressed a belief that the Secretary-General of the League had contemplated a considerably shorter period than six to twelve months for completion of arrangements for liquidation or transfer of activities to the United Nations.

Following a brief discussion of specific aspects of financial arrangements and of the specific portions of the League's statistical activities which should be covered in the Commission's recommendation, the secretary was asked to prepare a draft recommendation incorporating the conclusions reached by the Commission. Subsequently such a draft was submitted and with some modifications was agreed to as follows:

The Statistical Commission considers it of the utmost importance to make immediate arrangements to maintain without interruption the valuable statistical work of the Economic, Financial and Transit Department of the League of Nations and other statistical activities carried on under the sponsorship of the League.

In order to insure continuity in this work the Statistical Commission recommends that existing arrangements, now effective until 31 July 1946, respecting the activities and staff of the Economic, Financial and Transit Department of the League of Nations, and such other arrangements as may be necessary with respect to other statistical activities of the League, be extended for a period of six months to one year, should this prove necessary, in order to provide time for the Secretary-General to examine this work, formulate plans, and make proposals for their future disposition for consideration by the Statistical Commission.

Mr. Rosenberg was then asked to describe the character of the organization, facilities, and personnel of the Economic, Financial and

Transit Department of the League. He referred to a memorandum prepared for the Assistant Secretary-General for Conferences and General Services of the United Nations for use in negotiations at Geneva, which contains detailed information on these points. He reported orally, however, on some of the main points such as personnel, library facilities, statistical archives, budget and the like.

A recess was taken at 12:35 p.m. until 2:00 p.m.

At 2:10 p.m. the meeting was reconvened by the Chairman.

Reference was made to a draft of a suggested recommendation on "General Provisions Respecting Statistics to be Incorporated in Agreements Between the United Nations and Specialized Agencies," and the Commission proceeded to consider this draft.

It was pointed out that agreements may have been entered into with some of the specialized agencies before the next session of the Statistical Commission, and that the Commission therefore should consider at least the general principles which it wishes to recommend with respect to treatment of statistical activities in such agreements.

It was re-emphasized at this point that it would be impossible for the Secretariat of the United Nations to undertake all statistical work for all specialized agencies which might be brought into relationship with the United Nations; some general statistical services can be provided by the Secretariat for all agencies; it is desirable to avoid unnecessary duplication, but not to compartmentalize statistical activities completely, or to exclude the United Nations altogether from any statistical activities in fields of competence of particular specialized agencies.

It was indicated that the suggested draft recommendation presented for consideration by the Commission had been prepared on the assumption that the Commission would favour establishment of an effective central statistical organization within the Secretariat of the United Nations which would have functions comparable in some respects to those of the British

Central Statistical Office and the Division of Statistical Standards in the U.S. Bureau of the Budget. Discussion of this concept disclosed that the Commission is in agreement with this general principle. Some questions were raised as to the relationships implied between the Statistical Commission and the Secretariat and the extent to which the Commission itself might be expected to perform executive functions. The Commission agreed that its role would be technical and advisory, and that it should not assume responsibility for executive tasks carried on by the Secretariat or the specialized agencies. The point was made, however, that this conclusion does not imply any abdication of responsibility or authority by the Commission for scrutinizing and making recommendations on any aspect of statistical matters in its competence.

Following this discussion of principles, the Commission proceeded to consider specific items in the suggested draft recommendation. The first three paragraphs of the draft were agreed to as modified.

With respect to the fourth paragraph of the draft some question was raised as to the degree of collaboration between the United Nations and the specialized agencies in the formulation of plans for "any new major statistical activity or research project involving the collection, analysis or dissemination of information." It was pointed out that certain practical difficulties might arise in implementing such a statement. The view was expressed, however, that even though perfection could not be attained, a beginning effort should be made in this direction, and that increasing effectiveness and accomplishment over a period might be hoped for. On this point the Commission was in agreement; it was the consensus that provision should be made for the machinery of co-operation, although the Commission should not try to phrase a "treaty" but should aim at the spirit and general principles which should govern in this field. The Chairman was asked to revise the text of this paragraph of the draft to give expression to this conclusion.

With reference to paragraphs 5 and 6 of the draft, pertaining to exchange of statistical information and provisions for simultaneous transmittal of data to the United Nations and specialized agencies, discussion disclosed that some difficulties might be anticipated with respect to certain types of data. It was agreed that the texts of these paragraphs should be revised to include a statement of the purpose intended, and to restrict the procedural arrangements proposed to types of statistical information with respect to which mutual agreement can be worked out between the Secretariat of United Nations and the specialized agencies. The Chairman was asked to submit a new draft incorporating these conclusions.

Some modification of the last paragraph of the draft was also agreed to, so as to provide for reciprocal representation of specialized agencies and the Statistical Commission in discussion of problems of mutual concern, and for continuing relationships between the proposed Statistical Co-ordinating Committee and the Statistical Commission. The Chairman was asked to include this point in his revised draft. A question was raised as to whether the Statistical Co-ordinating Committee would be concerned with definition of the fields of competence of the specialized agencies in statistical activities. It was agreed that this would not be a function of the Committee, but that the Committee is intended to serve rather as a working group to adjudicate differences within the framework provided by the Statistical Commission, and to some extent also to consider the relative intensity of work within particular fields.

Consideration was turned at this point to the question of disposition of working papers which had been submitted to the Commission but which had not been acted upon specifically. It was agreed that the members of the Commission should study the papers to determine whether any general questions of principle which should be considered at this session have been overlooked, but that detailed consideration should be deferred to a

later session of the permanent Commission. The point was made that the papers had been extremely helpful to the Commission in its consideration of broader questions of organization and policy, although resolution of the substantive problems dealt with in many of them could not be accomplished at this session. It was indicated further that when these problems are considered at subsequent sessions, the Commission will wish to have available not only this material but also similar material which would reflect later developments and formation of additional specialized agencies.

With reference to item 10 of the Agenda - preliminary consideration of relationships with statistical agencies of member states-the Commission considered the desirability of formulating a recommendation looking toward the establishment of focal points within national governments for co-ordination of statistical activities related to international organizations. The actions taken or planned by the United States and Great Britain along this line were mentioned in this connection. It was agreed, however, that no formal recommendation should be made on this point.

A suggestion was made that the Commission might wish to consider action also looking toward the establishment within the Secretariat of an inventory of statistical resources, including extra-governmental and non-governmental agencies as well as national statistical systems. Reference was made in this connection to the valuable work along this line of the Inter-American Statistical Institute. It was agreed that this point should be covered by appropriate language in the Commission's recommendations on the statistical functions of the Secretariat. .

The meeting was adjourned at 4:35 p.m. until 10:30 a.m., Tuesday,
7 May 1946.
