

**SUMMARY REPORT OF THE FIFTH MEETING OF THE STATISTICAL COMMISSION**

Held at Hunter College, New York on Tuesday

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

Present: Mr. Rice (Chairman)  
Mr. Champion  
Mr. Mahalanobis  
Mr. Sauvy

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 10:30 a.m.

Consideration was resumed of the suggested draft recommendation on "General Provisions Respecting Statistics to be Incorporated in Agreements Between the United Nations and Specialized Agencies". It was agreed that the draft would be read and considered paragraph by paragraph. The first four paragraphs of the revised draft were agreed to with minor modifications.

A question was raised as to the interpretation of paragraph 5 of the draft, and in particular as to its application to classified information, for example. It appeared that the question revolved about terminology, and in particular the use of the phrase "freely available". After brief discussion, it was agreed that the Chairman would prepare a revised draft of this paragraph to meet the objections raised.

The sixth paragraph was agreed to with two modifications.

Considerable discussion was devoted to the text of paragraph 7 pertaining to arrangements for reciprocal representation of the United Nations and specialized agencies at sessions of the Statistical Commission and committees which the specialized agencies might establish. The Commission agreed in principle that such provisions should be made, although the precise details of the arrangement to be suggested were not agreed upon. It was pointed out that this problem is common to all Commissions of the Economic and Social Council and that any terms of agreement on this point

with specialized agencies will in all probability be uniform. In the light of this discussion, the Chairman was asked to prepare a revised draft for consideration by the Commission, recognizing that it may be necessary to yield in some particulars to conform to a common pattern. It was agreed likewise that the second sentence of the paragraph might be covered under paragraph 4, and that this possibility might be considered in the redrafting.

The text of paragraph 8 was agreed to, but the Commission concluded that this paragraph should precede the proposed paragraph 7.

It was agreed that further consideration of the text of this proposed recommendation would be deferred pending preparation of the revised draft.

The Commission thereupon proceeded to consideration of relationships with national and international non-governmental organizations in the field of statistics. Reference was made to the working papers which had been submitted to the Commission on the International Statistical Institute (E/STAT/W.7 - 26 April 1946) and on the Inter-American Statistical Institute (E/STAT/W.12 - 29 April 1946). The Chairman requested permission to invite Mr. Earl Latham to sit at the table to present additional information on the subject under discussion. The Commission agreed.

It was pointed out that when the International Statistical Institute was established it was the only agency in existence for co-ordination and promotion of development of world statistics. It was largely displaced by the League of Nations but retained a somewhat precarious foothold in the collection of statistics. As a result of the circumstances described in the working paper (E/STAT/W.7) the Institute is now faced with the question whether to seek to retain a role in the collection and analysis of world statistics, or to move toward a more strictly professional and promotive role.

Certain differences between the International Statistical Institute and the Inter-American Statistical Institute were pointed to as having

a bearing on consideration of this question. It was indicated, for example, that IASI has assumed and is proposing to assume some activities of an official or semi-official character which ISI has never undertaken. The proposal that IASI become the statistical arm of the Pan American Union was mentioned in this connection.

Mr. Latham was asked to comment on specific questions which might be considered as having a bearing on preparations for the meeting of the International Statistical Institute which it is planned to hold in Washington, D.C., in 1947. Mr. Latham remarked that the 1947 meeting provides an opportunity for expansion of the Institute through election of new members and for its revivification and a redefinition of its role in world statistics. He suggested, therefore, that the Commission might deem it important to devote some thought to the kind of role the Institute might play. He observed that although the possible role of the Institute might appear to be covered by the Statistical Commission and other organs of the United Nations, there are several possible activities which the Institute might logically undertake: (1) to serve as a "supreme court" of statistics, constituting a source of advice and appeal on statistical problems, in a role similar to that of the American Statistical Association with respect to agencies of the United States Government, as for example, in connection with a conflict of opinion on the validity of a cost of living index; (2) to function as a professional association in a role similar to that of professional associations in the United States in the improvement of standards and representation of the interests of statisticians as such; (3) to constitute a source of leadership in world statistical development, in a role similar in part to that of the Inter-American Statistical Institute, recognizing that the existence of well-developed statistical systems is essential to the objectives of the United Nations. It was pointed out that none of these three alternatives is exclusive of the others but that the Institute's role might be a combination of them.

The views of the President and the Secretary-General of the International Statistical Institute with respect to the role of the Institute, as well as views attributed to some British and United States members, were referred to in this connection as a basis for the suggestion that the Institute might function as an International Statistical Academy. It was pointed out that this idea would involve abandonment of the Institute's pretensions to an "official" role, and that opinion among Institute members is not unanimous on this point. At least one member of the Institute has expressed the hope that it will cling to its present functions in the field of demographic statistics.

It was pointed out that recommendations of the Statistical Commission on the role of the Institute or of the Inter-American Statistical Institute would have no legal effect. It appeared to be the consensus of the Commission, nevertheless, that it should consider the question as having a possible bearing on recommendations concerning statistical activities of the Secretariat. It was indicated further that the Commission hopes to utilize fully such world organizations as exist to promote improvement of world statistics. The point was made also that the International Statistical Institute may be said to have official status in one sense, since its permanent office was supported largely by government contributions, and further that there is a possibility that it may be brought into relationship with UNESCO.

The view was expressed that the Statistical Commission in any event is competent to seek improvement of world statistics, whether through official or unofficial sources. There was agreement on this point, but objection was raised to its application initially to a specific question of continuance or discontinuance of a particular activity.

Mr. Rosenberg was asked to comment on the relationships between the League of Nations and the International Statistical Institute. He replied that there were no formal relationships but continual personal and de facto relationships. The Institute was asked for data in the same

way that the League approached any other organization.

At this point the Commission decided to defer further discussion of this topic until the next meeting.

Thereupon the meeting was adjourned at 12:50 p.m. until 10:30 a.m. Wednesday, 8 May 1946.

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