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STATEMENT MADE BY MR. PHILIPPE DE SEYNES, UNDER-SECRETARY FOR ECONOMIC
AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS, DURING THE DISCUSSION OF THE DRAFT RESOLUTION
CONCERNING DECENTRALIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC
AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES AND STRENGTHENING OF THE REGIONAL
ECONOMIC COMMISSIONS

with a Note by the Secretariat

NOTE BY THE SECRETARIAT

The secretariat of the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) takes pleasure in transmitting herewith to the member Governments the text of the statement made by Mr. Philippe de Seynes, Under-Secretary for Economic and Social Affairs, on 21 November 1960, during the discussion in the Second Committee of the General Assembly of the draft resolution concerning decentralization of the United Nations economic and social activities and strengthening of the regional economic commissions (A/C.2/L.518). In expressing its gratitude to Mr. de Seynes for his references to the work undertaken in Latin America in connexion with economic integration, the secretariat draws the attention of the delegations attending the Commission's ninth session to these references and suggests that they should be taken into account in connexion with the discussion of item 15 (c) of the provisional agenda already distributed.

/REPORT OF

REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL, ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT OF UNDER-DEVELOPED COUNTRIES AND
LAND REFORM

Statement made by Mr. Philippe de Seynes, Under-Secretary for Economic and Social Affairs, during the discussion of the draft resolution (A/C.2/L.470/Rev.3) concerning decentralization of the United Nations economic and social activities and strengthening of the regional economic commissions, on Monday, 21 November 1960

Since there appears to be a momentary pause in the series of statements I might take this opportunity to make a few observations, since the draft resolution now under discussion requires the Secretary-General to take certain measures with regard to decentralization and to strengthening the activities of the regional economic commissions.

Mr. Chairman, one of the characteristics of the United Nations institutional system is, I think, its complexity. This complexity, at any rate in the economic and social field, is so great that the newcomers - the Members whose countries have just been admitted to the United Nations - must often, I feel, be disconcerted by it. This complexity also disconcerts most of the committees or study groups set up to review the activities of the United Nations and to propose changes in the organization of the secretariat or in the structure of the United Nations as a whole. To a certain extent, it is true, this complexity may perhaps be a sign of weakness, and no one could claim that the institutional system in which the activities of the United Nations have developed, at the whim of historical circumstances, is the best possible system. I think, however, that there might be some risk involved in seeking to over-simplify it. I make this preliminary observation because, so far as the regional commissions are concerned, we were more or less dominated, over a long period, by a way of thinking which doubtless originated in a desire to simplify and clarify matters.

/According to

According to that way of thinking, the regional economic commissions were organs which should devote themselves to research and study, and which should be barred from what are termed operational activities.

I am very happy to note, Mr. Chairman, that this way of thinking is no longer current; for its effect as I saw it, far from simplifying matters, was to make them singularly complicated. It prevented the regional economic commissions from gaining the full impetus and the full dynamism which they nevertheless seemed designed to possess in view of the terms of reference assigned to them by the Economic and Social Council and the confidence placed in them by Governments. Now that this doctrinal difficulty has been eliminated, now that it is recognized that most economic and social activities comprise an element of research and an element of operational activity - even, indeed, an element of negotiation or consultation - it is becoming much easier to cast the regional economic commissions in the role they seem marked out to perform.

This is particularly true of international aid. In my view, experience since the war teaches us very clearly how far the regional approach - the co-ordination of national efforts under regional arrangements - can encourage and stimulate the development of international aid. Reference has rightly been made here to the Colombo Plan, and the history of the Marshall Plan might be cited with equal justification. At a time when increasing efforts are being made to determine the conditions under which international aid, in its bilateral or multilateral forms, might be augmented and rationalized, it would seem highly desirable that, on the continents likely to benefit thereby, everything possible should be done to develop such efforts for the regional co-ordination of international aid, in all its forms, among the receiving countries. So far as the United Nations is concerned, of course, this relates at the moment essentially to technical assistance and the pre-investment activities pursued under the auspices of the Special Fund. For these activities too, however, the regional approach seems likely to prove very profitable, and for that reason we are very glad to see it so clearly recognized and advocated in the draft resolution before this Committee.

/I have

I have already had occasion in an earlier statement to indicate the first steps taken by the Secretary-General in the direction of decentralizing technical assistance, in order to associate the Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions with the principal phases of technical assistance - i.e., the initiation and development of national, regional or semi-regional technical assistance programmes - and I can assure those representatives who have spoken in favour of such a policy here, especially the representative of Ghana, who introduced the draft resolution, that it is the Secretary-General's intention to persevere with such measures and to apply them on a much larger scale than hitherto. In the next few days we shall be able to take advantage of the presence of the Executive Secretaries of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Economic Commission for Africa in order to undertake with them a comprehensive review of the technical assistance programmes in their respective regions and to consider under what conditions their functions and their activity might be developed in the immediate future.

It is also true, Mr. Chairman, that our research activities in certain fields are increasingly guided by the needs of the regional commissions, as made known to us through their secretariats or through the commissions themselves. In the industrialization field in particular, an increasing number of the projects in hand are undertaken after consultations that we have been able to arrange with the Executive Secretaries, in order to satisfy needs which have been recognized and identified within the regional commissions - although, needless to say, the results of our studies may be valid for application beyond the limits of the region concerned. There again an interchange is taking place between Headquarters and the regions which, as I see it, is bound to develop further as time goes on.

Mr. Chairman, I have mentioned the importance of the regional approach in matters of international aid. I should now like to say a few words about the problems of economic integration referred to by several delegations, especially by that of Ghana as well as by that of Morocco, which had already made some very important points on this subject during the general debate. I should like to make two observations in this connexion.

/Regional integration

Regional integration projects can develop fruitfully and harmoniously within the regional economic commissions of the United Nations, and for me the best proof of this is the remarkable pioneer work done in Latin America, as referred to by the representative of Ghana in his introductory speech. It may be, of course, that for historical or political reasons, which it is not for me to judge, the countries of a region will be led to deal with these problems of economic integration, the formation of free trade areas or the establishment of common markets in bodies outside the United Nations, which may have existed before the setting up of our regional commissions or be newly established. What I wanted to say here was that except in such circumstances, the regional commissions are perfectly well qualified and equipped from the institutional and functional points of view to serve as a forum for activities of that kind. Their structures are not rigid; as experience shows, they can adapt themselves to different kinds of situations, create sub-regional organs, or decentralize themselves to serve the needs of a particular group of countries which may be more inclined or better equipped than others to embark upon integration. In particular, I think that before any new bodies are set up, it would be an excellent idea to study most carefully the facilities offered by the United Nations regional commissions for economic integration activities. That is the first thing I have to say concerning economic integration.

My second remark, which is closely related to the first, springs from certain apprehensions I felt a few days ago when I attended a debate in the Fifth Committee at which this problem of economic integration in Latin America was mentioned. Some of the delegations taking part in the deliberations of that Committee seemed to think that because seven Latin American Powers had signed a treaty for the formation of a free trade area, the problem of economic integration in Latin America was thereby well on the way to solution and that the task of the United Nations was completed; that the United Nations could now turn its attention away from that problem, that a new organization should come into being and, if I may use the term, follow its own orbit.

/Mr. Chairman,

Mr. Chairman, I should like to emphasize here that economic integration is a very difficult and, above all, a long drawn out process. The signing of a treaty by a number of Powers does not mean that efforts to secure integration should be relaxed. Treaties sometimes remain a dead letter for one reason or another. In the case in point, the treaty was essentially a framework, into which the contents must now be fitted. Moreover, in the case of economic integration programmes which involve only a small number of countries - and this again is inevitable, because not all countries have reached a stage of development at which they can without disadvantage embark upon a policy of this kind - it is extremely important that the interests of countries remaining outside should be constantly taken into account. This, I think, is an argument in favour of the United Nations organs playing some part in these integration programmes, since in the United Nations it is not possible to consider the exclusive interests of a small group of countries or to lose sight for an instant of the interests of other countries and of international trade in general.

I thought it my duty to make these remarks in view of the importance which some delegations seem to attach to this problem of economic integration and the formation of free trade areas and common markets, merely to emphasize the role which can be played by the United Nations through its regional commissions in activities of this kind, which, I believe, are entirely in conformity with the purposes and aims of the Charter, but which will be more certain of remaining in conformity with the purposes and aims of the Charter if they are kept within the framework of the United Nations or at any rate if they retain some sort of contact with the United Nations.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.