

LEAGUE OF NATIONS

**NANSEN INTERNATIONAL OFFICE
FOR REFUGEES**

(under the Authority of the League of Nations)

**REPORT BY M. MICHAEL HANSSON, FORMER PRESIDENT
OF THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE NANSEN INTERNATIONAL
OFFICE FOR REFUGEES, ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE OFFICE FROM
JULY 1ST TO DECEMBER 31ST, 1938**

By its resolution adopted on September 30th, 1938, the Assembly of the League of Nations, at its nineteenth session, noted that, in pursuance of former resolutions, the Nansen International Office for Refugees was to cease its activities on December 31st, 1938.

Numerous reports have been submitted on the work of the Nansen Office, and accordingly all that is needed now is to give some information as to the work done during the last six months of its existence. Besides the annual reports of the Governing Body, reference should be made to the special report which I submitted to the 1936 Assembly, giving as full and precise an account as possible of the refugee problem with which the Nansen Office had to deal then, and the report on the liquidation of the Office which I prepared and which was adopted by the Council of the League of Nations on May 25th, 1937.

I would add that the Nansen Office continued its activities to the last, in general conformity with the plan adopted by the Governing Body as set forth in the two special reports for 1936 and 1937.

(a) As a result of recent events in Central Europe, the refugee problem became even more complicated. After the incorporation of Austria in the German Reich, the representative in that country was obliged to terminate his activities. Similarly, work in Czecho-Slovakia was hindered by the annexation of the Sudeten territories. Lastly, the problems raised by refugees from Germany have had serious effects on the work undertaken on behalf of "Nansen" refugees.

(b) It was mentioned in the 1938 report that the work of settling Armenian refugees in Syria and the Lebanon had been completed, in so far as the Nansen Office was concerned, and that the National Armenian Relief Union, with financial assistance from the Office, had been instructed to build the last of the dwellings required for the most indigent families. This relief work has since been continued, and before the Office was closed, it was able to make a further grant of 21,000 Swiss francs.

It may also be hoped that the agreement recently concluded between France and Turkey on the subject of the Sanjak of Alexandretta will enable an equitable settlement to be reached in the question of the property, rights and interests of the Armenians domiciled in that area.

(c) The naturalisation of some 1,800 Russian refugees from Turkey who have been accepted by the Turkish Government has now been completed.

As regards the group of some 150 refugees who had to be evacuated from Istanbul as a preliminary condition for the naturalisation of their fellow-countrymen, the last Assembly was informed that, of upwards of eighty persons provisionally admitted to the Greek island of Syra (where they were wholly supported by the Office), there remained sixteen for whom no transfer had yet been arranged, because there was nowhere for them to go. As the result of a final approach by the Office to the Norwegian and Swedish Governments, each of these countries decided to accept five more refugees, on condition that the other six should be settled elsewhere. In view of this decision, the Greek Government — which had already permanently accepted a number of refugees from Turkey — generously consented to authorise these six persons to remain on its territory.

Thus a problem has been solved after three years of ceaseless effort on the part of the Nansen Office, and at a cost to the Office of more than 80,000 Swiss francs for maintenance and evacuation. On behalf of the Office, I desire once more to express my very sincere gratitude to the Greek Government, and to the other Governments which have kindly helped to solve this very thorny question.

(d) The work of constructing workers' dwellings at Athens, undertaken by the Nansen Office at the end of 1937 for the families of indigent Armenian refugees, has been completed, and the dwellings have been placed at the disposal of the central Armenian organisation for allocation. The eighty-four dwellings in question have now been completed, thanks to the contributions of the Armenian General Relief Union and other gifts from private sources, and the very large grants from the Office, which have amounted to 82,000 Swiss francs, derived mainly from the proceeds of the sale of the Nansen postage-stamp in Norway.

(e) There is no change to report as to the organisation for the settlement of refugees from the Saar in Paraguay. As explained in the last report, the Office, through its representatives in France, has successfully pursued its policy of promoting the vocational re-education of this category of refugees.

(f) On account of the events which are taking place in China, it is not possible to give any definite information as to the present condition of the Russian colony at Shanghai, for which the representative of the Office in that city remains responsible. Shortly before it was closed, the Nansen Office voted a grant of 4,000 Swiss francs to be divided between the Russian relief organisations in China for necessitous refugees.

(g) The Nansen Office has had the great honour of being awarded, by the Nobel Committee of the Norwegian Storting, the Nobel Peace Prize for 1938. During an official ceremony at the Nobel Institute at Oslo on December 10th, 1938, I received, on behalf of the Office, the insignia of the Peace Prize and the sum representing the prize, amounting to 155,077.20 kroner, from the hands of M. Fredrik Stang, President of the Nobel Committee, former Minister of Justice and former Rector of Oslo University. After an address by M. Stang, I spoke on the work of the Office and the refugee problem in general.

The Nansen Office noted with great satisfaction that the choice of the Nobel Committee was generally approved, not only by the public but also by Governments and institutions interested in refugee work, and that their congratulations were accompanied by expressions of appreciation and gratitude for the efforts made by the Office to bring its work to a successful conclusion.

The award of the Nobel Peace Prize to the Office led to a considerable increase in the sale of Nansen postage-stamps in Norway during the last weeks of the year.

The important contribution provided by the Nobel Prize enabled the Governing Body to proceed, before the end of the year, to an extraordinary distribution of grants, amounting to 77,925 Swiss francs. The balance, as will be explained later, has been paid into the Humanitarian Fund and placed at the disposal of the new High Commissioner. These grants have been made to the refugee organisations more particularly with a view to enable them to carry on their activities until the High Commissioner has been able to provide for a permanent organisation of the new system of financial assistance to refugees.

(h) During the last year of its work, the Nansen Office was able to provide a sum of 530,077.95 Swiss francs in the form of advances and grants, leaving a balance on December 31st, 1938, of 421,580.35 Swiss francs. This sum does not include the revenue for the fourth quarter of 1938 from the sale of French and Norwegian postage-stamps, nor the revenue for the same quarter from sales of the Nansen stamp on Nansen identity cards and passports in France. Indeed, several countries had not yet paid in the yield from that tax at the time when the accounts were closed. These additional sums have been or will be paid direct to the High Commissioner in London, so that the total amount placed by the Office at the disposal of the new organisation may be estimated at over 450,000 Swiss francs. This result is particularly satisfactory, because, on December 31st, 1936, the Humanitarian Fund amounted to only 190,866.55 Swiss francs.

(i) The accounts of the administrative budget of the Nansen Office were closed on December 31st, 1938, with assets amounting to 44,624.24 Swiss francs. It may be hoped that this sum will be sufficient to cover the expenditure involved by liquidation without any need to ask for a supplementary credit from the League of Nations.

(j) As regards the number of refugees being dealt with by the Nansen Office, the Governing Body, in its report to the 1938 Assembly, was of opinion that the figure stood at slightly over half a million. The detailed investigations which have been since carried out confirm the accuracy of this estimate. It should perhaps be pointed out, however, that, unfortunately, the number of refugees known as "Nansen" refugees to whom the League of Nations can to-day grant effective protection is much less than the total number of refugees.

(k) I think I need not give detailed statistics of the activities of the Office during the second half of 1938, but in concluding my report I feel I should point out — and it is a most eloquent fact — that during its existence, from April 1st, 1931, to December 31st, 1938, the Nansen Office has given material, legal and political assistance in upwards of 800,000 cases.