

L.N. XII. 7 (12)

[Communicated to the
Assembly, the Council and
the Members of the League.]

Official No.: **A.27.** 1936. XII.

Geneva, September 7th, 1936.

NANSEN INTERNATIONAL OFFICE FOR REFUGEES

under the auspices of the League of Nations

SPECIAL REPORT

submitted to the Seventeenth Assembly of the League of Nations by

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<p>Series of League of Nations Publications</p> <p>XII.B. INTERNATIONAL BUREAUX</p> <p>1936. XII.B. 7.</p>
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1. The Council of the League of Nations was good enough, by its decision of January 24th, 1936, to appoint me Acting President of the Nansen International Office for Refugees as from February 1st. At the same time, it instructed me to initiate any reforms or adaptations which might be required in the internal management of the Office or its representation abroad, as also in connection with its general activities (relations with Governments, settlement, emigration and assistance, juridical status, etc.), and to submit a special report to the Assembly with a revised winding-up programme on constructive lines.

I need not enter into a detailed discussion of the refugee problem. I need only refer to the report of the Committee on International Assistance to Refugees, in which all the previous work on this subject is set out and to which is also annexed a special survey of the principal legal aspects of the question.¹

As regards the various details of the present position of the Nansen International Office, I would refer to the report of the Governing Body for the year ending June 30th, 1936.²

2. Without wishing to minimise in any way the immense importance of the League's activities in other fields, it is my duty to lay particular stress on *the humanitarian side of its work* as carried on, first by the High Commissioner, Dr. Fridtjof Nansen, and then by the Nansen International Office.

I cannot believe that the League of Nations will abandon this noble task before it is finally completed. If the Assembly were to entrust to me definitely the direction of the Office, I would endeavour loyally to carry out its wishes—namely, to wind up the Office by the end of 1938. Nevertheless, although I am sure that very appreciable progress can be made to improve the situation of the refugees from an economic and social point of view—provided the Governments concerned assist—it is certain that on the date in question much will still remain to be done, quite apart from the indispensable international protection of refugees, far beyond 1938. I will refer to this aspect of the question later.

3. Immediately on my arrival at Geneva at the beginning of February, I made it my duty to acquaint myself with the *working of the Nansen Office* and its activities, the progress of which I watched from day to day, though reserving the right to deal myself with questions of principle and questions involving correspondence with the authorities of the various countries with which the Office was in contact or when any personal representations had to be made to these countries.

I felt that it would be very desirable to establish personal contact, so far as possible, with Ministers for Foreign Affairs and their colleagues or collaborators in order to explain the Office's views and dispel all the misunderstandings and false ideas which had arisen with regard to an undertaking of which the situation is so delicate and the duties are so complex.

At the invitation of the League of Nations Union and the Save the Children Fund, I delivered in May a number of lectures in England on the refugee problem.

The results obtained to date are very satisfactory, and I am glad to have this opportunity to express my gratitude for the welcome accorded me by the high officials both of the Secretariat of the League of Nations and of the International Labour Office, and by the various authorities with whom I had to deal in Paris, London and Brussels. The French authorities' sympathy with the work of the Nansen Office was given practical expression by the grant of generous subsidies.

4. As regards the work of the *Central Office*, though I soon realised the commendable zeal shown by its staff, I have not yet been able, at the moment of writing, to come to any final decision on certain reforms and administrative adjustments which will be needed if the vast and complex duties which the Office has had to undertake are to be successfully discharged. This point must be fully reserved. It is, however, obvious, in my opinion, that to wind up the Office before the end of 1938 will involve an ever-increasing amount of work and, far from enabling expenditure to be cut down, will, on the contrary, probably lead to fresh demands.

As the general report of the Office to the Assembly shows, the credit granted for the present year to the Nansen Office by the League of Nations is 270,000 Swiss francs, including 20,000 Swiss francs for the Saar refugees. This sum is really very small in the light of the work accomplished and the special circumstances to which I have referred.

5. The Office operates abroad mainly through its *representatives and correspondents*, to the number of eighteen. Some of the representatives and their employees are remunerated; other representatives or correspondents act in what is really an honorary capacity and only receive an office allowance.

I do not think there could be any question at the present time of dispensing with the services of any of these persons, for the reason I have stated above—namely, that the decision to liquidate the Office makes their assistance more necessary than ever.

There can also be no doubt that certain representatives have rendered signal service to the Nansen Office and have greatly contributed to the happy solution of many difficulties. These representatives are valuable, not merely because they have, in the countries I have in mind, made it possible for us to overcome obstacles with comparative facility, but also because of their encouragement of the refugees' laudable efforts to repay regularly the advances granted to them. It would seem that a qualified representative is able to create among the refugees a spirit of loyalty and respect, which is in itself a precious achievement.

¹ See document C.2.M.2.1936.XII.

² See document A.23.1936.XII.

6. Still bearing in mind the question of rapid liquidation, and being convinced that the Nansen Office itself had too much work and was not equipped to be able to study all the problems in detail, I proposed to the Managing Committee and the Finance Committee, who were good enough to agree to my proposal, to appoint *three committees*—namely, a Legal Committee, an Emigration Committee and a Finance Committee. The Governing Body had also approved these measures, which might, if necessary, be applied in other cases.

(a) The Legal Committee may be more or less permanent because, obviously, questions of a legal nature may arise at any time. I have been fortunate in securing the aid of two highly qualified experts: M. E. Giraud, member of the Legal Section of the Secretariat of the League of Nations, who sits on the Committee with the permission of the Secretary-General of the League, and Me. Rubinstein, Member of the Managing Committee.

(b) The Emigration Committee consists of Me. Rubinstein and M. Curcin, member of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office, who have special knowledge of the subject and has kindly agreed to assist us. All the data which the Office possesses on this subject has been communicated to the Committee. After hearing Mr. Childs, of the International Labour Office, former delegate of the High Commissioner for Refugees in South America, and after an exchange of views concerning the possibilities of emigration and the manner in which emigration on a certain scale might possibly be financed, the Committee has decided to await the return of M. Maurette and M. Siewers, who have been sent by the International Labour Office on a special mission to Brazil and to the Argentine, to study the general question of emigration possibilities.

(c) The main duty of the Finance Committee is to consider methods by which the Nansen Office may obtain the funds which it so badly needs and which are necessary, not merely for its current work of distributing advances and grants but, to an even greater extent, for important undertakings of various kinds with a view to solving the problem, such as transfer to other countries of Europe and overseas countries, naturalisation, etc. The difficulties in this direction seem at times to be insuperable, and I feel bound to say that the continued struggle which the Nansen Office has to make to meet the most pressing needs is peculiarly depressing.

Two members of the Governing Body, Mr. Golden and M. François, have been good enough to assist me. At its meeting in Brussels on July 18th, the Sub-Committee, after discussing numerous possibilities, decided to adopt certain methods by which it hopes to achieve its object. In particular, it was decided that the Assembly should be requested once more to urge the various Governments to follow the example of Norway and France and issue surcharged postage stamps for the benefit of the refugees. It was also decided to push forward energetically the negotiations I had already begun with a view to obtaining the assistance of the International Council of Women in collecting the sum necessary to ensure the transfer of the Armenian refugees to the Soviet Republic of Erivan—a sum which may be estimated at £120,000 sterling.

7. There is every reason to believe that the appointment of these three Committees will indirectly promote *more active co-operation* between the executive organ of the Nansen Office and the Governing Body, and the Secretariat of the League of Nations and the International Labour Office, particularly as the Committees in question have been assisted by certain officials of the two latter organisations.

I am also happy to note that, again with a view to closer co-operation with the Secretariat of the League of Nations and the International Labour Office, M. Avenol and Mr. Butler have been good enough to agree to the Office's suggestion that their representatives on the Governing Body of the Office *should be present in an advisory capacity* at the meetings of the Managing Committee and the Finance Committee.

8. Until quite recently, the Nansen Office had itself dealt to a considerable extent with *individual cases*. Experience has proved, however, that some refugees make an abusive use of this charitable side of the Office's work and of certain charitable institutions in Geneva. On many occasions it was noted that refugees who come to Geneva from other countries to seek the assistance of the Office are not always those who are most worthy of help.

It was therefore decided, as an experiment, that a special service for the reception of refugees acting in co-operation with the Information Office for Emigrés should be set up outside the Nansen Office and that the days and hours for interviews should gradually be reduced in number. The object of this decision was to make it less easy for certain undesirable elements to obtain access to the Office and thus convince them that greater strictness was being exercised. Our supposition has proved to be correct, because the number of refugees arriving in Geneva to seek the Office's aid has decreased in the last few months to an appreciable extent.

Of course, the Central Office could not refuse its help in certain extreme cases. In particular, it is obliged to take thought for those refugees who have been subjected to arbitrary measures and have been expelled without even being accorded the right to explain their case, and who have been unable to proceed to any country, thus causing considerable embarrassment both to the Office and to local authorities.

9. (a) *The administrative system of the Nansen Office* is most complicated. It consists of a Governing Body, a Managing Committee and a Finance Committee. There exist, moreover, the Inter-Governmental Advisory Commission for Refugees and the Advisory Committee of the Private Organisations for Refugees.

The Governing Body includes:

- A President appointed by the Assembly of the League of Nations;
- The Chairman and three representatives of the Inter-Governmental Advisory Commission for Refugees, appointed by that body;
- A member appointed by the Secretary-General of the League of Nations;
- A member appointed by the Director of the International Labour Office;
- Three members of the Advisory Committee of the Private Organisations for Refugees, appointed by that Committee;
- Two members belonging to the principal international relief organisations, appointed by a two-thirds majority of the other members of the Governing Body.

When at the opportune moment, either in 1938, or in 1937 at the earliest, proposals are submitted to the Assembly for the creation of an organ to replace the Nansen Office, I think there can be no doubt that an endeavour should be made to simplify this system.

On the other hand, I feel that, at the present time, any change in an administrative system which, on the whole, works satisfactorily is to be deprecated, since the experience now acquired as a result of several years' work is worth preserving.

Consequently, I would propose that the *status quo* be maintained, and that the term of office of the members of the Governing Body, the managing and the Finance Committee of the Office be prolonged until its liquidation. I would view with much anxiety any attempt to make changes during the liquidation, other than those necessitated by unforeseen circumstances.

(b) As regards the *Advisory Committee of the Private Organisations for Refugees*, there has of late been a distinct trend of opinion in favour of altering its composition and increasing the number of its members.

A sub-committee was appointed as far back as 1933 to examine the various questions which might arise in this connection, but the death of two of its members and other unforeseen circumstances have prevented its meeting up to now. I do not think it necessary to appoint a new committee at present.

10. In the course of the work of the Committee appointed by the Assembly decision of September 28th, 1935, to study the refugee problem, one striking fact which emerged was the difficulty experienced in preparing accurate *statistics* regarding the number of refugees in the various countries. It would obviously be very useful, with a view to obtaining a correct idea of the present position of the problem and suggesting remedies, to ascertain as accurately as possible how many refugee there are in the various categories.

To this end, the Nansen Office has again strongly urged the various Governments to provide it with as detailed and precise statistics as possible. Once more, however, we have been forced to note the almost insuperable difficulties of the problem. Suffice it to say that, whereas certain Governments have themselves replied that their statistics do not show the number of refugees in their territory nor the economic and social status of these persons, other Governments have not appeared to be particularly willing to communicate the precise results of the censuses taken, and others have submitted statistics which vary so greatly from year to year that it is almost impossible to say what they represent.

Nevertheless, on the basis of the statistics available, and in the light of certain information supplied to the Office, mainly by its representatives abroad on the basis of the accounts for the Nansen stamps placed on passports and identity cards, it is possible to estimate the number of refugees approximately.

As it seems to me to be highly important to *limit* as far as possible the refugee problem, I have never agreed in doubtful cases to consider any other figures than the lowest. There is every reason to believe, moreover, that in certain countries the number of naturalisations is higher than the statistics shown, owing to the fact that the various Governments continue to register as refugees persons who have already obtained their naturalisation. In other countries, doubtless, children born of stateless persons have been regarded as foreigners, even though—as in France, for instance—there would seem to be no doubt that these children are nationals of the country.

On this point, I applied direct to the Secretariat of the League of Nations, whose Legal Section told me that, in its opinion, my view was correct both under Article 1 of the Law of August 10th, 1927, and on the basis of the combined provisions of Articles 2 and 4 of the same Law.

It is a known fact that, in England, the United States of America, etc., children born in the territory of these countries become automatically nationals of the said country. In other countries, where children born of stateless persons do not become nationals automatically, they can become so by option on attaining their majority.

In view of the long period which has elapsed since the date of emigration, it is perfectly clear that, mainly among the Russians, who form the vast majority of the refugees, the death rate has played an important part in decreasing the number of refugees as the Nansen Office understands the term, not only in the countries where the children of stateless persons become nationals, but in other countries as well, because, generally speaking, it can hardly be denied that the birth rate among refugees is far from counterbalancing the death rate.

In view of the foregoing considerations, I think that, without any exaggeration, the total number of refugees may be estimated at not less than 700,000. For details, I would refer to the General Report of the Office for the last year, adding only that the great decrease as compared

with the statistics of the previous year is ascribable mainly to the fact that the French Government, which so recently as last autumn still estimated the number of Russian refugees in its territory at 200,000 to 250,000 (see letter of the Minister for Foreign Affairs to the Secretary-General of the League of Nations, dated November 15th, 1935), now estimates their number at only 71,500, according to the information supplied to the Office by its Paris agent. I give the figure with all reservations, although it is that of the 1931 census.

Probably this figure does not include the children of refugees born in France, since they are of French nationality. It should, however, not be forgotten that, from an economic and social point of view, these children follow the destiny of their parents—*i.e.*, if the parents stand in need of the aid and protection of the Nansen Office, the children stand in even greater need thereof.

11. I thought it important to judge for myself, so far as possible, *of the conditions under which these refugees are living*. In this connection, I must say that the organisations most interested in the work of the Nansen Office for the Armenians in Syria, and my colleagues on the Governing Body and Finance Committee, strongly urged me to proceed to Syria and also visit Erivan and the capitals of the Balkan countries and Greece. Nevertheless, however useful a voyage of this kind may seem to be, I thought it my duty not to undertake it until I heard what the intentions of the Assembly were regarding the whole series of problems to be solved.

Having had to proceed several times to Paris on urgent business connected with the refugees, I availed myself of these opportunities to study at close hand the situation of the refugees there. These visits were very useful, as were also those I made to the colonies of Russian workmen at Rives and Riouperoux in the Dauphiné. Moreover, when the Finance Committee met at Brussels, I was able to form an opinion as to the situation of refugees in that city also.

Only by visiting their homes, observing their conditions of labour and conversing with them can one come to understand their needs, and in many cases probably the depth of their sufferings of various kinds. This is also the best way to discover what may be the best remedies for a final solution of the problem.

In this connection, I feel bound to point out that, although the number of refugees is fortunately not so great as was believed a few months ago, and although in certain of the more prosperous countries their situation has gradually but quite appreciably improved, there can be no doubt that in other countries the material situation of the refugees has become worse. In certain countries, not only is the economic crisis at its height, but the expenditure on national defence, which is everywhere increasing, has obliged certain Governments to limit considerably their assistance to the refugees.

12. In order to set down a precise statement of the *measures* which I would advise for the *liquidation of the refugee problem*, I think the most practical method would be to deal separately with the various groups of refugees that come within the purview of the Nansen Office. As will be observed, each category has different characteristics, so that the possible solutions for one group would not necessarily be the best for another.

The Nansen Office refugees consist of Russian, Armenian, Assyrian, Assyro-Chaldean, Turkish and Saar Territory refugees.

I need not consider the Assyrian (the Assyrians of Iraq are not under the ægis of the Nansen Office), Assyro-Chaldean or Turkish refugees, because their number is very small and they have not caused many difficulties.

13. The refugees from the *Saar* are almost all in France. According to the statistics supplied to the Office, they number about 3,300, but I am bound to make reservations on this subject because, according to other information received, it is possible that a number of Saar refugees have been registered as Germans or have not made their presence known.

The Saar refugees were first concentrated in camps, but these camps were discontinued long ago and their inhabitants have scattered throughout the various Departments of France, where they are living in more or less precarious circumstances. The grants made by the French Government to the Saar refugees up to the present amount to 9 or 10 million French francs.

The Nansen Office, backed by the French authorities, believes that the best solution as regards those among this category of refugees who have not yet succeeded in finding employment and settling down would be to send them to some oversea country.

Following on a voyage by an official of the Nansen Office in Paraguay, an arrangement was concluded in 1935 with the Paraguayan Government and with an owner of private property, the conditions of which are held to be very favourable. In view of the numerous complaints received from former Saar inhabitants, the Office has decided to avail itself of this arrangement. In the absence of the necessary funds, it can only, however, organise the emigration of the refugees in small groups. A first group of twenty persons was despatched on July 5th, and a second group of twenty-two persons will follow on August 5th.

Nevertheless, according to the most recent information supplied by the French authorities, to whom the Nansen Office has repeatedly applied for an advance with a view to hastening emigration, the situation of the Saar refugees has appreciably improved during the last few months, and it is thought that, if two hundred families could be sent to Paraguay, the problem raised by this category of refugees would be totally solved. This solution would not be an expensive one, as settlement in Paraguay would cost only about 2,000 Swiss francs for each family consisting on an average of five persons.

As the League of Nations has granted for the Assyrians from Iraq a credit of over 1,300,000 Swiss francs (£86,000 sterling), I really do not see how it can refuse also to vote a credit—and a

much smaller credit—on behalf of the Saar refugees, whose situation is practically analogous to that of the Assyrians.

14. (a) I need not dwell on the undertaking given by distinguished statesmen and by the League of Nations to provide the *Armenians* with a final home—an undertaking which it has, unfortunately, been impossible to implement up to the present. To the Office which bears the name of one who so ardently pleaded the moral duty of humanity towards the Armenians, it is a question of honour to see that the situation be remedied.

A first step has, however, been taken, and the important work carried out by the Nansen Office in Syria, with the assistance of the Franco-Syrian authorities, certain private organisations—more particularly the Joint British Committee (Save the Children Fund, Armenian (Lord Mayor's) Fund, Friends of Armenia, Society of Friends), the Union Générale Arménienne de Bienfaisance, and Near East Association—and the Red Cross is well known. About 4,500 houses for 30,000 Armenian refugees have been built in Syria for the sum of approximately 11,500,000 French francs, in addition to certain contributions made by the refugees themselves. According to information in possession of the Nansen Office, this undertaking has given very good results; the Armenians settled in these houses are on the whole content, and have been able to begin paying back the advances accorded to them.

Nevertheless, there remain at Aleppo and Beirut more than 1,500 families who have, up to the present, been living in tumbledown hutments. The authorities have now begun to demolish these hutments on the grounds that their continued existence is a danger to public health. The Nansen Office is therefore bound to continue its hitherto very successful efforts in this direction. In answer to my appeal, the Union Générale Arménienne de Bienfaisance in Paris was good enough to place at the disposal of the Office a first instalment of 75,000 French francs, which has made it possible to begin immediately the building of houses for families who do not themselves possess the necessary means—that is, about 850 families in all. Moreover, an appeal to the organisations, the repayment of whose advances was already overdue, met with a ready response in that they agreed that these repayments should be used for the new undertaking, which would only involve an expenditure of about 400,000 French francs. Thus, when this has been done, the final liquidation of the Nansen Office's work in Syria will be assured.

(b) It is already known that 8,497 Armenian refugees, chosen mainly from among the poorest in Greece and Bulgaria, have been transferred to the *Republic of Erivan* with the consent of the Soviet authorities, who have constantly encouraged this undertaking.

The Nansen Office has continued its efforts in this direction, and, on May 9th of this year, 1,800 Armenian refugees were transferred from France to Erivan. The cost of this transfer, amounting in all to 675,000 French francs, was borne partly by the French Government—which in this connection guaranteed the Office a credit of 375,000 French francs—partly by the Office (140,000 French francs) and partly by the Armenian Refugee Organisations in France (160,000 French francs).

This initiative has met with such success that efforts should surely be concentrated on these transfers as being one means of reaching a final solution of the problem, particularly as, according to information received from numerous private and official sources, the Republic of Erivan is in full development and needs labour. On this point, it is interesting to note what the Armenian periodical *Massis*, published in London, writes concerning the first convoy of Armenian refugees transferred from Greece:

“ The children who five years ago were wandering neglected in the streets of the Piræus are now healthy schoolchildren, eager and willing both in the classroom and at their gymnastics. The parents work in industry and in various institutions.”

As regards the last group that was transferred this year, the periodical tells how the municipality organised their reception and settlement: houses and co-operative stores had been prepared during the last few years; local industries and large farms now in full activity are able to absorb the new arrivals.

Hundreds of dispersed families and parents will thus be reunited and centres of happiness and prosperity will be formed.

The correspondent of this periodical adds that this is the true path towards collective security, and that civilisation will benefit from these practical solutions.

(c) Though the Armenian refugee problem is still a vast one, it is not such as need cause alarm. Experience has shown that these refugees, mainly labourers, artisans, etc., are, generally speaking, hard workers with modest requirements. In France, for instance, they have succeeded so well that, of the 60,000 to 70,000 who took refuge in that country, probably 50,000 will no longer desire to leave France, for which they in fact constitute a source of wealth. Consequently, the French authorities have not expressed any desire for the mass emigration of Armenian refugees.

In *Greece* and in *Bulgaria*, the situation is different, as the natural conditions of life are not so favourable as in France. It is therefore very likely that a considerable proportion of Armenians in these two countries, who, so far as can be estimated, number 40,000, will wish to go to Erivan.

The total number of Armenian refugees in Bulgaria, France, Greece and elsewhere who desire to settle in Erivan, subject of course to the consent of the Soviet authorities, cannot number more than about 30,000. There can be no question of carrying out this transfer immediately, because the whole of the plain of Sardarabad must first be brought under irrigation. In reply to my enquiry, the representative of the Republic of Erivan in France was good enough to inform me that the Republic can receive forthwith from 10,000 to 15,000 refugees, in addition to the 10,000 who have already been sent there. The Government of Erivan will not be able,

however, as has hitherto been the case, to provide dwellings for the new arrivals. Consequently, the necessary capital will have to be found for sending in the near future 10,000 to 15,000 of the most needy Armenian refugees, particularly from Greece and Bulgaria, and to build houses for them. The Government of Erivan would undertake to provide them with work.

A transfer of this kind will greatly ease the situation in these two countries and hasten the solution of the problem of the long-suffering Armenian refugees. I would add that, in spite of the very generous attitude adopted by Greece and Bulgaria towards their Armenian refugees, the latter are in need of social and humanitarian assistance, and radical measures ought to be adopted.

The Nansen Office's representative in Greece again reported quite recently with regard to the Armenians: "The state of these refugees is desperate".

15. (a) *Russian* emigration still continues to be the most difficult refugee problem, not only on account of the number of these refugees, but also because very many of them are intellectuals who cannot be absorbed in a new country as easily as labourers, artisans, etc.

I do not wish to expatiate on the degree of poverty and misery which I have seen with my own eyes, or the patient resignation I have found among refugees of every class, but I should at all events like to pay a tribute to the admirable endurance displayed by them in their continual struggle for existence. The whole lives of Russian *émigrés*, the hardships of some, the sacrifices of others, and the determination of them all to maintain their social standards and their own culture, and also their incessant struggle to secure for their children at any rate a tolerable future, are deserving of thorough study, and a whole book could be written on the subject.

In judging of the situation of Russian refugees to-day, it should, I think, be borne in mind that, in addition to the 7,000 war-disabled men (the figure given by their organisations) and the large number who are old or ill, having become enfeebled by privation and the unhealthy conditions under which they have been living for so long, the majority of the intellectuals among these refugees have gradually lost most of their capacity for work.

The first thought that naturally comes to one's mind is that large-scale emigration should be organised to oversea countries. This does not seem to me a practical scheme. Too much stress has perhaps been laid on the admirable example of Jewish emigration—from 50,000 to 60,000 German-Jewish refugees having been settled in less than three years.

But, apart from the fact that nearly all these refugees have gone to Palestine to their co-religionists and to land ready to receive them, the conditions of this emigration and that of Russian refugees differ in many other respects as well: in the first place, the German refugees are made of different stuff; secondly, far larger funds have been placed at their disposal than the Nansen Office has ever possessed, and they have been strongly supported by the big Jewish associations. It should also be added that it is easier to settle new refugees more or less directly in oversea countries, whereas Russian refugees have already lived for sixteen years or more in the countries in which they are at present residing. They have grown old and their children have founded families there. In any case, there can be no question of the emigration of old people, and it would, I think, be a very hazardous enterprise to uproot the others—most of whom have never done any manual work in their own country—and to send them overseas under more or less uncertain conditions.

At the same time, I must add that there remain thousands of Russian refugees, mainly Cossacks, who not only wish to be transferred overseas, but also possess all the qualities necessary for success in those countries. As regards this group of refugees, the Nansen Office should, without loss of time, try to find suitable means of complying with their desire. The *ad hoc* Committee will continue its efforts in this direction in co-operation with the League Secretariat and the International Labour Office, and, if necessary, with private organisations.

(b) As for the Russian refugees in *China* and "*Manchukuo*", the number of whom, according to the latest figures supplied by the Nansen Office's representative in Shanghai, is approximately 130,000, the Office is practically powerless to take any effective action, because its financial resources are not sufficient to enable it to have paid representatives in those two countries.

As is well known, the Committee on Traffic in Women and Children has on several occasions discussed the question whether delegates should not be sent to those countries to study the conditions under which the wives and children, in particular, of Russian refugees are living. The most heartrending reports reach the Committee from time to time regarding the number of women and girls in those countries who have been compelled to engage in prostitution as the only means of keeping themselves and their families alive. The League Assembly has agreed to the above-mentioned proposal in principle, but has not felt able to appropriate funds for this purpose. Unfortunately, the women's organisations, which are urging the necessity for action, have so far been unable to obtain the funds required to enable them to send out a delegate and pay her fare.

In these circumstances, and in view of the fact that various complaints regarding the situation of certain groups of Russian refugees in "*Manchukuo*" have reached the Office, the latter's Managing Committee, being greatly concerned at this state of affairs, decided at its last session, on July 1st, to approach the League with the request that a mission, consisting of two persons, should be sent to *China* and "*Manchukuo*" to examine the whole problem and suggest possible reforms. I would strongly recommend the League to vote the modest sum required for this purpose, since Russian refugees in the Far East have been waiting too long already for assistance from the League and the Nansen Office.

16. If in the matter of emigration the Office has found it necessary to exercise caution, such caution has seemed to it even more desirable in regard to another solution which might appear to be

the most natural one—namely, *repatriation*. The results of attempts to repatriate refugees, which were made when the work was first started and when Dr. Nansen was the League's High Commissioner, have not been encouraging, and in this connection also there is, to my mind, no doubt as to the attitude which the Nansen Office should adopt:

The Office should not object to the repatriation of Russian refugees desirous of returning to their own country, provided that in each individual case the necessary authorisation has been obtained; the Office should then assist them so far as its means permit. But, in the present situation, the Nansen Office cannot take any initiative in the matter, and still less urge refugees who are unwilling to do so to return to their own country.

17. It has often been argued that refugees should be *distributed among the different countries* in proportion to their population, etc. In view of the present tendency of all countries to restrict immigration more and more, I have never believed it to be possible to do much by this means. The very great difficulties encountered by the Nansen Office in placing in various countries a few dozen Russian refugees evacuated from Turkey—and this small problem has not yet been fully solved, in spite of the Office's repeated and persistent efforts—have strengthened my conviction. I should like to take this opportunity, however, of expressing the hope that those countries which suffered least in the war, and in which the refugee problem may also be least acute, will be good enough to lend their assistance with a view to the solution of this problem by some other means.

18. There is no doubt that, in several countries, the Russian refugee problem is on the point of solution by means of *naturalisation and absorption*.

In this connection, I would refer to the statements in the General Report of the Office concerning the Russian colony in Turkey, where the Government, in virtue of an agreement concluded with the Nansen Office, was good enough to consent to naturalise the remaining 1,800 Russian refugees after the Nansen Office had evacuated the 150 refugees whom Turkey did not wish to keep in her territory. The obligation undertaken by the Office has already been carried out by the complete evacuation of those refugees. It has been possible to settle the majority in Belgium, Greece, Norway and Yugoslavia, each of which has taken a certain number. The Swedish and Danish Government have each undertaken to ask Parliament to vote a credit of 20,000 crowns as a contribution towards the settlement of the refugees in question.

To give another example, in Estonia the naturalisation of refugees is taking place on such a large scale that there are now only a few thousands left, and the Estonian authorities state that the whole refugee problem in that country will be finally liquidated in two years time. The situation in the other Baltic States is very similar.

Generally speaking, the Nansen Office should, in my opinion, encourage this tendency to naturalise refugees, which is everywhere apparent and would seem to be the most natural solution when, as is here the case, the refugees have been living for many years in the respective countries. Nevertheless, in this case also, funds must be obtained for the assistance of indigent refugees. The naturalisation of the Russian refugees in Turkey mentioned above will alone cost about 100,000 Swiss francs, of which 75,000 Swiss francs will be paid by the Office, while it will be possible to cover the balance, thanks to an American donation.

As regards France, where the majority of Russian refugees in Europe are living, it has so far not been possible to ascertain, on the basis of official statistics, the exact number of naturalisations. I understand, however, that this number is considerable and, having regard to the fact already mentioned that refugees' children born in France are French and that a large number of refugees have died, there can be no doubt that the total number of refugees in this country also must have decreased considerably, as stated above.

19. If it were possible, within a comparatively short space of time, to liquidate completely the problem of Saar refugees and Armenian refugees—and, I repeat, unless any unforeseen circumstances arise, only a comparatively small sum is required for this purpose, especially if the immense advantages that would ensue are borne in mind—more intensive *assistance could be given to Russian refugees* in countries where they are suffering most and larger advances and grants could be made to them. There is no doubt that by this means, and with the help of the various educational and training organisations and establishments for Russian young people in various countries, a very appreciable improvement in the situation would be brought about in a few years' time.

I incline more and more to the belief that the most effective means of solving the Russian problem is, generally speaking, to assist young people and children in particular, so that, from a material and intellectual standpoint, they may as soon as possible become useful members of the community in which they have grown up. Needless to say, however, until it is closed, the Nansen Office should also continue to make advances to refugees for settlement purposes, as has hitherto been done on a large scale with great success.

20. While it is obvious that, even by the end of 1938, the economic situation of the refugees under the care of the Nansen Office will not be stable enough to enable mankind to leave them to their fate, it is even more obvious that for a long time to come they will continue to need *effective international protection*.

The more I study the refugee problem, the clearer it becomes to me that, at all events as regards the group of refugees entrusted to the Nansen Office, it is of vital interest to the refugees themselves, and of considerable importance both to the countries in which they are residing and from the point of view of public order in general, that they should know that international protection will be afforded them to ensure them the minimum rights provided for in the Convention relating to the International Status of Refugees of October 28th, 1933.

Whenever I have come into direct contact with refugees, I have been struck by the perpetual uneasiness which weighs on their minds for lack of a stable juridical status, their fear that they may be subjected to arbitrary administrative measures, their anxiety about their own future and still more about that of their children, etc.

It should be borne in mind that, as regards the refugees under the care of the Nansen Office, the vast majority take no active part in politics—all they ask is to be allowed to lead a peaceful existence. As a rule, no complaint is made by the authorities about their conduct, for, with a few exceptions, the only ambition of these refugees is to earn a modest livelihood for themselves and their children, who often grow up under inhuman conditions likely to impede their normal physical, intellectual and moral development.

No one can fail to realise that, while the refugees are grateful for any material assistance afforded them, they appreciate still more highly any act the object of which is to watch over and safeguard their juridical status. For that reason, in my opinion, be an unpardonable error, not only from the humanitarian and social standpoint, but also from the point of view of simple justice, to leave this group of former unfortunate refugees, who are deprived of any national protection, without some form of international organisation which would to some extent replace the national authorities that have always been recognised as essential in any community—unless the Governments, in order to settle the matter once and for all, are good enough, from 1939 onwards, to recognise as their respective *protégés* all refugees who have resided in their territory for a certain length of time.

21. In view of the foregoing considerations, I was obliged to turn my attention, as soon as I took up my post, to the question of the *ratification of the 1933 Convention*. It seemed to me essential to arrive at a final solution of the problem of the form of international protection to be afforded to the refugees in the care of the Nansen Office.

At that time, the Convention had been ratified by five Governments—namely, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Norway, Denmark and Italy. It had also been signed by Egypt.

I at once wrote, in some cases repeatedly, to all the other Governments concerned, pointing out the reasons in favour of a general accession on the part of the Powers. I also took advantage of the presence at Geneva of the Foreign Ministers of several countries to discuss this question with them orally, and I likewise made personal representations to the competent authorities in Paris, London and Brussels with regard to this matter.

Appreciable progress has been made in the direction of the ratification of the Convention since the French Chamber of Deputies and Senate have voted a law authorising France's accession, and the Belgian Government has informed the League Secretariat that it has decided to submit to Parliament a draft law of ratification. I have good reason to believe that the ratification of other countries will follow shortly, including that of Spain, whose Government has already, in a letter dated June 10th, 1935, authorised its Minister at Berne to signify its formal accession.

Moreover, certain Governments which have not felt able to ratify an international undertaking have nevertheless explicitly stated that the treatment provided for under the 1933 Convention is, in practice, applied to refugees in their respective countries, generally speaking on the same bases and in accordance with the same principles. This applies to the Governments of Estonia, Finland, Greece, Iraq, Sweden, Switzerland and Yugoslavia.

All the Governments which have so far acceded to the Convention have done so with reservations which, in certain cases, appreciably restrict its value, particularly as regards the refugees' right to work. It is the duty of the Nansen Office to continue its efforts to remedy this situation. It must be admitted that, especially in the matter of the right to work, the situation of stateless persons is particularly difficult. Unlike other foreigners, they cannot return to their own country or go elsewhere in search of work: they do not benefit by the reciprocity clause and are deprived of all national protection. If it is admitted that, at all events in principle, the right of asylum should, *ipso facto*, involve the right to work, this right should *a fortiori* be granted without any restriction to the Nansen Office refugees who entered their country of refuge so long ago—many of them in response to an invitation given at a time when there was a shortage of labour. And it is particularly unfair to refuse this elementary right even to parents whose children are national subjects owing to the fact that they were born in the territory of the country of refuge.

22. By an *Agreement of June 30th, 1928*, the French and Belgian Governments undertook to allow the representatives appointed by the League of Nations' High Commissioner to perform certain services: to certify the identity and position of refugees, their family position and civil status: to testify to the regularity, validity, and conformity with the previous law of their country of origin of documents issued in that country, etc. Such documents are essential to enable the refugees to perform various acts of civil life.

The usefulness of the system introduced in virtue of the Franco-Belgian Agreement of June 30th, 1928, and the Arrangement of the same date can be gauged by the increasing number of documents issued by the representatives of the Nansen Office who perform the services provided for in the Agreement, in virtue of a delegation of powers by the Secretary-General of the League: in 1932, the number of documents issued was 3,790; in 1933, 4,452; in 1934, 8,729; and in 1935, 10,963. We would therefore urge other countries to accede to this Agreement.

23. I should like to say a few words regarding the *expulsion of refugees*, a matter which for some time past has been attracting the increasing attention of public opinion, which is rightly

indignant. In my opinion, ratification of the 1933 Convention is the only means of arriving at what may be regarded as a comparatively satisfactory situation, since, under Article 3 of that Convention, Governments agree not to expel refugees except for reasons of national security or public order—a term which unfortunately lacks precision. It should also be remembered that the Convention may be denounced on giving one year's notice.

During the year 1935/36 alone, the representatives of the Nansen Office were obliged to intervene in some 1,779 cases of expulsion which seemed to them unwarranted.

It should be noted that various Governments have informed the League and the Nansen Office that, in principle, they do not expel refugees who are without a visa entitling them to enter another country. In England, the courts absolutely refuse to order the expulsion of Russian refugees, for instance, as is shown by various decisions of the county courts to that effect. Moreover, a few months ago, the London Court of Criminal Appeal, while confirming the conviction of a Russian refugee to four years' imprisonment for larceny (of which he had been previously convicted), also decided that the judges who first tried the case were right in refusing to issue the expulsion order asked for by the police because it was obvious that the refugee had nowhere to go—although the Public Prosecutor's representative had stated that he only wished to make use of this order so that he could keep a strict supervision over the refugee.

In Belgium, a Commission has been set up by Royal Decree of February 20th, 1936. Refugees ordered to be expelled now have the right to come before this Commission for the purpose of explaining their circumstances and defending themselves—a right which has hitherto been refused them nearly everywhere. This Commission, over which a magistrate of the Court of Appeal presides, consists of a representative of three Ministries and a representative of the refugee organisations. We would strongly recommend the establishment of such commissions or the adoption of some similar measure in all countries where the question of the expulsion of refugees arises.

24. Before concluding, I am strongly tempted to go more closely into the statistics furnished by the representatives of the Office, in order to show *the importance of its work*, which is so clearly brought out by them. It is not to be wondered at that refugees often speak of the agencies of the Office abroad as "our Consulate". They consult them about everything.

Nevertheless, as I do not wish to make this report too long, I will merely say that, during the year July 1st, 1935, to June 30th, 1936, the Office's representatives were obliged to take action in 113,839 cases (not including the figures for China), apart from the issue or renewal of identity certificates or Nansen passports and Nansen stamps. In France alone, the number of such operations amounted for this year to approximately 60,000. In dispensaries, sanatoria, etc., 171,000 cases have been treated. Traddition there are schools, orphanages, crèches, kindergartens, holiday colonies, homes for the sick and aged, meals distributed either free of charge or at a very low price (0.50 to 1 French franc); this amounts without any exaggeration to hundreds of thousands each year. Mention should also be made of the advances granted, the legal assistance afforded, etc.

Notwithstanding all that is being done for these unfortunate people, either through the Office and its representatives or by private organisations and individuals, and also by Governments, conditions are still so unfavourable that quite recently one of the Office's representatives in a country in which the public authorities have done most for refugees, told me that he often heard them say—particularly the old people: "Our only hope is death!"

To sum up, as regards the administration of the Nansen Office:

1. I consider that the agencies of the Office should be wound up last of all, as it is essential that they should remain in operation until the last moment.

2. Although the importance of the Advisory Committee of Private Organisations for Refugees has been reduced considerably since the establishment of the Nansen Office and its Governing Body, I propose that its composition should remain unchanged during this liquidation period.

3. In order to ensure, during the remaining two years, the continuity and maintenance of existing forms of co-operation, I propose that the persons who are at present assisting the Nansen Office by serving as members of the Governing Body, the Managing Committee and the Finance Committee should continue to serve in that capacity until the Office is finally wound up.

4. I consider that it is to the interest of the Nansen International Office to promote co-operation between the Office of the one part and the League of Nations and International Labour Office of the other, and so far as possible to obtain the assistance of the experts attached to those two institutions.

As regards the liquidation of the refugee problem:

1. Endeavour to settle the Armenian and Saar refugees mainly in the manner indicated above—that is to say, in the case of the former, by transferring those who desire to go there to the Republic of Erivan; in the case of the latter, by arranging for the emigration to Paraguay of those who have not yet been finally settled in France or elsewhere by the grant of a credit of 400,000 Swiss francs;

2. As the solution of the problem of Armenian and Saar refugees draws nearer, efforts should be concentrated more especially on assistance to Russian refugees, many of whom

are suffering from the hardships inherent in their status of intellectuals and have been particularly hard hit by the economic depression;

3. At the same time, continue to study the possibility of arranging for the emigration of Russian refugees desirous of settling in other countries, mainly oversea countries, and who possess the necessary qualifications;

4. Encourage, so far as its means permit, the naturalisation and absorption of refugees in countries in which they have been resident for many years;

5. Urge the League of Nations to grant a credit of 15,000 Swiss francs to enable a mission to be sent to China and "Manchukuo" to examine the refugee problems arising there, and suggest possible reforms;

6. Request the League of Nations to urge Governments to assist the Nansen Office in its work, particularly, at the present time, by issuing surcharged postage-stamps;

7. Urge the general adoption of the Franco-Belgian Agreement of June 30th, 1928;

8. Most important of all, I consider the ratification of the 1933 Convention and the general question of the international protection of refugees, which should be provided for so that the problem can be finally solved by means of their gradual and complete absorption, as mentioned above. This protection will continue to be necessary even if the material conditions of the refugees should have become normal.

I would repeat and emphasise that, in the absence of such protection, no matter how much goodwill Governments may display, the refugees will be reduced to a condition incompatible with the principles governing every civilised community.

Only an international organisation can afford the thousands of refugees scattered throughout a large number of countries the necessary protection, and make up for the absence of protection on the part of their countries of origin.

To attempt to find a solution by entrusting the task of protection to individual Governments would be to ignore the international character of the problem and to risk meeting with insurmountable obstacles.

In the present state of the problem, when hundreds of thousands of human beings have no fixed home and no definite status, to dispense with a centre for their assistance and protection would mean the creation of a state of confusion and misery hardly less acute than that which prevailed at the time of the exodus of the refugees, and, in addition, the destruction of the whole of the work so far accomplished at the cost of great sacrifices and great efforts, which does honour to the League and the countries that have lent it their assistance.

It is too soon to suggest what form the international centre for the assistance and protection of refugees should take, after the Nansen Office has been dissolved.

For the time being, all that need be said is that, to enable it to afford effective protection and to enjoy the necessary authority, this centre should not be detached from the League. The question calls for careful reflection and thorough investigation. It can best be settled at a time when the winding-up of the Nansen Office draws nearer and final stock can be taken of the position.
