

Statement by Herbert H. Lehman (31 January 1945)

Caption: On 31 January 1945, Herbert H. Lehman, former Governor of the State of New York and Director-General of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), clarifies UNRRA's missions in Europe and lists the main beneficiaries of emergency aid.

Source: Archives Nationales du Luxembourg, Luxembourg. Ministère des Affaires étrangères. Instituts internationaux - Institutions spécialisées - Organisations internationales. Unité Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. UNRRA - Correspondance classée chronologiquement 1945, AE 8088.

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Statement by the Director General to the Committee of the Council for Europe (31 January 1945)

I am concerned over the misunderstandings which appear to have arisen with respect to UNRRA's role in the supply of certain of the liberated areas of Western Europe, and I believe it advisable to clarify the situation by setting forth the facts in this matter.

Since the liberation of substantial parts of Western Europe, the combined military authorities and the governments of those areas have found enormous difficulty in shipping, or arranging for the shipment, of any substantial quantity of supplies. The result, as is generally recognized, has been great distress in certain of the liberated areas.

It has been strongly urged by people in and out of governments, that UNRRA should relieve this distress and that it should arrange to bring in certain types of emergency welfare supplies to the liberated areas of Western Europe. Formal expression of this sentiment has been given in a resolution of the Technical Subcommittee on Welfare on January 10.

The answer to these questions is clear. The UNRRA Council, whose servant I am, has directed me to extend relief to countries which request it and are not in a position to pay in foreign exchange. The UNRRA Council at Atlantic City provided in Resolution 14 that, "It shall be the policy of the administration not to deplete its available resources for the relief and rehabilitation of any area whose government is in a position to pay with suitable means of foreign exchange". The Council further provided a detailed procedure for determining whether a government is or is not in a position to pay. In Resolution 17 the Council provided that the Director General may present to the inter-governmental allocating agencies the particular requirements of any country for which the assistance of the administration has been requested. This Resolution envisaged that other governments would present their requirements directly to the allocating agencies, keeping the Director General appropriately informed.

To date, only the following European governments have informed the Director General that they are not in a position to pay with suitable means of foreign exchange and have requested the assistance of UNRRA: Greece, Poland, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. Although the prescribed procedure has not been concluded in the case of each of these countries, UNRRA has actively proceeded to secure allocations, procure supplies and shipping and negotiate arrangements for the dispatch of supplies to these areas.

The Governments of the Western European countries have not as yet asked for assistance; they have not stated that they are unable to pay; they have direct and unobstructed access to the agencies which allocate and procure supplies and shipping; and they are vigorously engaged in arranging for the provisioning of the needs of their people to the fullest extent compatible with world wide shortages of supplies and shipping.

UNRRA can and does assist these countries to procure supplies in various ways. In numerous instances we have offered to release to particular countries supplies which we have acquired, and in many instances the countries have taken advantage of this offer. In a memorandum dated 18 September 1944 between UNRRA and the Provisional Government of the French Republic it is provided that "Insofar as practicable, UNRRA will furnish to the French Government emergency supplies from UNRRA stockpiles, on request, under terms of payment to be arranged." This principle is applicable to any of the so-called paying countries.

The situation in respect of displaced persons found in these liberated areas is, of course, different, and other rules are applicable to UNRRA assistance for the care and repatriation of these persons.

If the Committee of the Council for Europe believes that UNRRA's authority with respect to this matter should be altered, it is open to it to make appropriate recommendations to the Council or the Central Committee.