

Address given by Herbert H. Lehman (Montreal, 18 September 1944)

Caption: On 18 September 1944, Herbert H. Lehman, former Governor of New York and Director-General of the Central Committee of UNRRA, presents the first activities report drawn up by UNRRA, the organisation for aid, mutual assistance and supplies in the United Nations.

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Address by the Director General to the Second Session of the Council, 18th September, 1944

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Council, I now wish to present to you this first report on the development and work of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration.

When last this Council assembled - in November, 1943 - we all cherished our hopes that the liberation of those countries which had been invaded and exploited by the enemy was near at hand. But at that time we had no more than our hopes. Yet, on the foundation of those hopes and our confident expectation of the ultimate victory of our cause, we proceeded to build this United Nations organization to help to grapple with the tremendous problems that would inevitably accompany our victory.

Now this Council has assembled once again to consider and discuss our progress to date and to lay the groundwork for the work that lies ahead. This time however our hopes and expectations have already begun to be fulfilled. We have all been uplifted by the inspiring events of the past few weeks, which have witnessed the liberation of so much of the occupied territory of Europe, and by the prospect that soon others of the European United Nations will also be freed from the stranglehold of the enemy. In the Far East, too, we rejoice to see the advance of the forces of the United Nations and to observe the quickening rate of this advance.

But if the ultimate victory of our arms is now in sight, the fight against the privation, disease and destruction which the enemy has wrought is only just beginning. We are indeed on the threshold of our relief and rehabilitation work. Let us therefore rejoice at liberation but let us do so with the sober realization that great efforts will be needed before the harm the enemy has done can be remedied. This should not lessen our certainty that these things can be achieved, but we cannot expect them to be achieved without steady toil and enduring determination. To this purpose we must all unreservedly dedicate ourselves.

Let the world not be deceived by reports from portions of the areas already liberated indicating that the suffering in a particular community or group of communities has not been so great as had been thought. These reports are far outweighed by others which indicate that the enemy has been even more ruthless in his treatment of the occupied countries and their peoples than had been known or anticipated. As liberation proceeds, the enemy's calculated schemes for directing all the resources, labour and skill of the occupied countries to the support of his war machine and its conquests have been replaced with equally calculated efforts to destroy those resources altogether and to inflict the most horrible punishments upon those daring to join in the fight against the common enemy. The information that is now coming out of the liberated countries gives full confirmation to our fears of last November as to the size and difficulty of the task of relief and rehabilitation. The need is tremendous; its urgency grows apace with the rising tide of liberation.

In some respects the difficulties may equal those which our armies have encountered during the years of war. To meet these difficulties the same great combination of resources which has so effectively beaten back the enemy on the fighting fronts is being called into play. The United Nations military authorities, as part of or in close relation to their military operations, are carrying the first relief and rehabilitation supplies to the peoples liberated by them. The importance of these first supplies cannot be too strongly emphasized, for by providing a stop-gap they make infinitely more attainable the broader relief and rehabilitation objectives of the civilian authorities that are to take over such activities in each liberated area as soon as military conditions permit.

The civilian authorities which will assume primary responsibility for those activities are the authorities of the national governments of the various liberated areas. The same indomitable courage and self-discipline which the liberated peoples have shown in contributing so much to the expulsion of the enemy from their soil will be directed, through their own national authorities and institutions, toward their own relief and rehabilitation. The resources which they so carefully husbanded for just this purpose during the dark years of enemy control, as well as those which can be recovered from enemy confiscation or destruction, will likewise be brought to bear. The United Nations world can well be inspired by the manner in which the liberated peoples and their governments have already set about preparing for and handling their relief and

rehabilitation responsibilities.

As Director General of UNRRA I speak with deep feeling when I say that I am heartened by the steps that they have taken and pledge myself to do all in my power to assist and hasten their work.

In many instances, however, limitations in finances, in skilled manpower or in supplies will make it necessary for the liberated countries to call on outside aid. The UNRRA Agreement is their assurance that such aid will be forthcoming from the other United and Associated Nations and that it will be furnished as quickly and in as co-ordinated a fashion as possible.

The administrative organization of UNRRA has been established to perform the functions needed to achieve such co ordination and, where necessary, to furnish the assistance required. It is, as I have said many times, designed to help the liberated peoples to help themselves. For this reason, UNRRA's operations within the liberated countries will vary widely from area to area, depending upon the extent to which the government of each area requires such assistance. In some countries, UNRRA may have to furnish substantial amounts of many types of supplies and services. In others, the governments will have all or virtually all the financial resources necessary for the task ; consequently, even after the end of the period of military relief, UNRRA may be called on to provide only those medical or other specialized services which would not otherwise be available or which can best be obtained through some single recruiting organization. This approach to relief and rehabilitation operations is in accordance with the policies laid down in the Agreement and in the resolutions adopted by this Council at Atlantic City. It is indeed the only way in which UNRRA's resources can be utilized to meet the most urgent needs.

I need not here repeat the details of the preparations which have been made for the work that lies ahead nor describe UNRRA's development as an operating organization during the nine and a half months since last we met at Atlantic City. I do, however, want to mention briefly a few specific aspects of its present operations and of its plans for the immediate future.

First, as regards supplies, I can confidently assure the peoples of the occupied and liberated countries that when the need arises a substantial portion, though unfortunately less than all, of the supplies required will be forthcoming for relief and rehabilitation purposes. Arrangements have been completed which assure that supplies for such purposes will at the appropriate time be drawn from the moving stream of production and from the stocks which have been accumulated for general war purposes. The prospective needs of the liberated areas have already been taken into consideration in fixing the levels at which both the current production and the accumulated stocks are being maintained.

A general statement of the supply position in each category of the commodities that will be needed, is contained in Chapter 2 of my report and, I am informed, further information on these matters will be made available to the Council during this session by a number of the leading supplying countries. I will not review this material here other than to say that in certain categories it is probable that the supplies available for relief purposes will be seriously short. The areas of possible shortages are meats, fats and textiles, clothing and other articles which must be manufactured. For these categories relentless efforts must be made to tap every conceivable source of supply if the critical needs of the liberated peoples are to be met. In the case of textiles and clothing, the raw materials, cotton and wool are in ample supply and the needs may be fully met if European textile productive capacity can be promptly rehabilitated.

The procurement which has been undertaken thus far with UNRRA's funds is designed to obtain goods that would not otherwise be available from current production or general stocks. The purpose has been, in some instances, to achieve by this means a direct increase in production, in others, to take advantage of seasonal or non recurring surpluses, particularly in the way of foodstuffs, which might otherwise be dissipated. It is our intention to continue to advance this type of procurement as rapidly as possible and to encourage the governments of the liberated and occupied countries to do likewise.

Turning from these supply matters, let us consider for a moment UNRRA's preparations for the field operations that lie immediately ahead - in Western Europe, Eastern Europe and the Balkans.

With respect to the countries of Western Europe most of the member governments concerned have indicated that in their present view the principal assistance which they will require from UNRRA is aid in facilitating the allocation to and the purchase by those governments of the supplies needed. Assistance in the care and repatriation of displaced persons will also be required, as will some measure of aid with respect to health and welfare services and technical help in the fields of agricultural and industrial rehabilitation. UNRRA representatives are being appointed to serve with the appropriate authorities of those governments and with the military in developing during the period of military responsibility the arrangements for providing such assistance as may be required after the end of that period. Several UNRRA officers are already in the liberated areas of Western Europe, working with the military on the problem of displaced persons and making a first-hand survey of conditions. I sincerely trust that the present views of the Western European governments will prove to be correct and that they will be fully able to meet their relief problems with relatively little outside aid. At the same time I must emphasize, however, that should the local situation prove to be less favourable than is now anticipated by these governments it is most important for the Administration to be advised at the earliest possible moment of the nature and scale of assistance which may be required. The Administration cannot possibly be prepared to respond to requests for its assistance without reasonable notice and opportunity for preparation and the recruitment of necessary manpower.

For the victims of war in the United Nations territories of Eastern Europe I have every hope and expectation that arrangements can soon be effectuated to provide the relief which is so urgently needed. Negotiations are in progress with the appropriate supplying and shipping authorities for the quick despatch of supplies to those areas as soon as the military situation permits. In addition, an invitation has recently been received from the Government of the Soviet Union for an UNRRA mission to be sent to Moscow to discuss matters of common interest to the Soviet Union and to UNRRA, and the necessary arrangements for the handling of such supplies will be among the most important of these matters. The mission will leave shortly after the close of this Council Session.

UNRRA's position in relation to the Balkans is somewhat different from that in other areas because of the fact that, during the initial period after liberation, UNRRA is to serve as the agent of the military authorities in carrying on relief work and in arranging for the distribution of supplies imported by the military into United Nations territories in those areas. It is contemplated therefore that UNRRA's operations in those territories will begin early in the post-liberation period. At this moment more than 600 UNRRA employees either are already in the Middle East or are being prepared for participation in those operations. Substantial numbers of additional personnel are being furnished by voluntary relief organizations from various parts of the world for co operation with UNRRA in this work.

Closely related to these Balkan preparations are UNRRA's present activities in caring for more than 50,000 displaced persons, mainly Greeks and Yugoslavs, now in the Middle East and the arrangements which are being made for UNRRA to provide similar care for additional numbers who are expected to arrive in Northern Africa and other Mediterranean areas in the near future. Many of these displaced persons have only recently been evacuated from their home countries, where their husbands and fathers are now so heroically carrying the fight to the enemy.

In view of all these pressing developments in the European region, it is my intention shortly again to leave for Europe. I am determined that to the fullest extent possible UNRRA's executive authority shall be immediately responsive to the needs of the liberated countries. I feel that this can be furthered by my own presence in Europe during the early stages of full-scale relief and rehabilitation operations.

During this period, I am equally determined that preparations for operations in the Far East shall not be neglected. After full consultation with the member governments concerned, and with their approval, I am proceeding to establish an UNRRA office in Chungking to carry on and develop the work that was begun by UNRRA's special mission to China earlier this year. The duties of this office will be to assist the appropriate authorities of the Chinese Government in preparing for the tremendous relief and rehabilitation problems which it faces. I am at the same time establishing a second office in Sydney to perform similar duties for those areas in the Far East which can best be served from that location.

Before concluding, I should like to acknowledge with appreciation the increasing co operation and support which the executive branch of UNRRA is receiving from the member governments and from the Council and its standing committees. Limited time prevents me from enumerating the many specific instances of co-operation. I must however warn that there can be no relaxation in the support of UNRRA, that the task ahead is large, that it has many uncertainties, and that the wounds of war cannot be bound up overnight.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Council, UNRRA is not a permanent institution and we do not foresee a long period over which we can perfect the Administration. All that we do, must - if it is to be of any value - be done with all speed. It must be done well from the beginning. That is my reason for stressing in my report our most urgent problems. If they are not solved promptly, they may never be solved. I therefore wish to put forward a positive conception of UNRRA's needs at this moment when it is on the threshold of its full responsibilities.

In the first place, UNRRA can receive from this great conference, and from the Council, what, I think, the world is looking for; namely, a reaffirmation of the United Nations belief in the high value of common effort for common needs which marked our first Council session. This is our declaration of united faith and common purpose. This reaffirmation has, however, a second aspect. It needs to be translated into action in the policies of each single member government towards the Administration. Each Council member has here an individual responsibility. The Administration can only function with your good will and your assistance. From some countries we need mainly advice and information: from others we need not only these but also supplies, finance and expert personnel - and we may have to make heavy demands. The individual governments and their Council members should see to it that the necessary action upon these demands follows in their national policies.

The Council has other responsibilities: it has to evolve new principles to meet unforeseen situations and to approve actions already taken. It would be foolish to ignore our difficulties and dangers. But, if from this Council and each member government there comes the support due to this undertaking, I have faith in our ability to perform our task.