

United Nations Conference on the Elimination or Reduction of Future Statelessness

Geneva, 1959 and New York, 1961

Document:-
A/CONF.9/SR.1

Summary Records, 1st Plenary meeting

UNITED NATIONS

GENERAL
ASSEMBLY



Distr.
GENERAL

A/CONF.9/SR.1
24 April 1961

Original: ENGLISH



UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE
ELIMINATION OR REDUCTION OF FUTURE STATELESSNESS

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE FIRST PLENARY MEETING

held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 24 March 1959, at 3 p.m.

Acting President: Mr. LIANG
Later,
President: Mr. LARSEN (Denmark)
Executive Secretary: Mr. LIANG

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A list of government representatives and observers and of representatives of specialized agencies and of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations attending the Conference was issued as document A/CONF.9/9.

A list of documents pertaining to the Conference was issued as document A/CONF.9/L.79.

(4 p.)

GE.61-4487

61-11594

OPENING OF THE CONFERENCE (item 1 of the provisional agenda) (A/CONF.9/1)

The ACTING PRESIDENT, speaking as representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, declared open the United Nations Conference on the Elimination or Reduction of Future Statelessness. The Secretary-General, who regretted his inability to be present in person, attached the greatest importance to the work of the Conference, both as a contribution to the development of international law and as an effort to enable numerous persons, whether living or yet to be born, to overcome serious legal handicaps and to find a more secure place in society.

A person without a nationality was deprived not only of the rights of citizenship within any State, but also, in international relations, of the diplomatic protection which a State extended to its nationals. From the point of view of international law itself, statelessness was an anomaly, as had been recognized by the International Law Commission in the report on its fifth session (A/2456, paragraph 130). Both from the humanitarian and from the juridical points of view there were, therefore, strong reasons for eliminating statelessness or reducing it as much as possible.

Earlier attempts to reduce statelessness included the provisions of the Convention on Certain Questions relating to the Conflict of Nationality Laws adopted by the Conference for the Codification of International Law, The Hague, 1930, which were designed to reduce statelessness occurring at birth and to prevent loss of nationality without acquisition of another nationality. The same Conference had also adopted two protocols regarding statelessness.^{1/} Although those instruments had not been ratified by many States, they had probably exerted a powerful influence on State legislation and practice.

After the Second World War, statelessness had again become a pressing problem. In various parts of the world, large numbers of persons, because of their status as refugees or as stateless persons, or both, had not enjoyed the protection of any Government. To relieve the hardships of such persons, action taken under the auspices of the United Nations had resulted in the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951 and the Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons of 1954. In addition, efforts had been made to

^{1/} Protocol relating to a Certain Case of Statelessness. Signed at The Hague, April 12, 1930: League of Nations Treaty Series, vol CLXXIX, p.115; Special Protocol concerning Statelessness: League of Nations publication 1930 V.6

eliminate or at least to reduce as much as possible the occurrence of future statelessness. That was the specific purpose for which, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 896 (IX), the Conference had been convened.

The Conference had before it as a basis of discussion the two draft conventions prepared by the International Law Commission at its sixth session and reproduced in document A/CONF.9/L.1, which were the outcome of the discussion at successive sessions on the topic "nationality including statelessness" (A/2456, paras. 115 et seq.). The members of the International Law Commission were persons of recognized competence in international law and represented the principal legal systems of the world and in the drafting of the texts account had been taken of any comments submitted by Governments. The principles on which the Commission's work had been based had been endorsed by the Economic and Social Council at its seventeenth session in resolution 526 B (XVII). It still remained, however, to agree on a formulation of those principles for incorporation in one or more international instruments. For that purpose, the nationality laws of various countries based on different conceptions of national allegiance and citizenship would have to be reconciled as far as possible in the interests of the international community as a whole. It was hoped that, in a spirit of co-operation, the Conference would succeed in working out provisions which would meet the urgent need for eliminating or at least drastically reducing future statelessness.

ELECTION OF THE PRESIDENT (item 2 of the provisional agenda)

The ACTING PRESIDENT called for nominations for the office of President of the Conference.

Mr. ROSS (United Kingdom) proposed Mr. Larsen (Denmark).

Sir Claude COREA (Ceylon) seconded that proposal.

Mr. Larsen (Denmark) was elected President.

The PRESIDENT, thanking the Conference for the honour conferred on him, expressed the hope that the Conference would succeed in drafting a convention on the elimination or reduction of statelessness which would be acceptable to Governments and to parliaments and which would help those unfortunate people whose future well-being was dependent on the outcome of the Conference.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA (item 3 of the provisional agenda)

The PRESIDENT suggested that the provisional agenda be adopted on the understanding that the question of the elimination or reduction of future statelessness (item 7) might be taken before item 6 (organization of work).

The provisional agenda (A/CONF.9/1) was adopted on that understanding.
ADOPTION OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE (item 4 of the agenda) (A/CONF.9/2)

The PRESIDENT drew attention to the provisional rules of procedure prepared by the Secretariat (A/CONF.9/2).

The provisional rules of procedure (A/CONF.9/2) were adopted.
ELECTION OF VICE-PRESIDENTS (item 5 of the agenda)

The PRESIDENT called for nominations for the offices of the two Vice-Presidents of the Conference.

Mr. POPPER (United States of America) proposed Mr. Kawasaki (Japan).

Mr. SIVAN (Israel) seconded that proposal.

Mr. VIDAL (Brazil) proposed Mr. Calamari (Panama).

Mr. PARADAS (Dominican Republic) seconded that proposal.

Mr. Kawasaki (Japan) and Mr. Calamari (Panama) were elected Vice-Presidents of the Conference.

The meeting rose at 4.15 p.m.