

THE FIRST STEP IN THE INTERNATIONAL APPROACH TO THE PROBLEMS OF UNDERDEVELOPED AREAS

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I THINK I owe the honour of being invited to take part in your Round Table to the fact that I am in charge of the United Nations' Department of Social Affairs. I thank you for your invitation and hope you will permit me to lay aside for a time some of the obligations which burden the shoulders of an international civil servant and speak to you as if I were still what I used to be, and what I sometimes regret I no longer am—a scientist, who had the formidable job of directing the National Research Centre in France.

I still think that human progress depends on the development and application to the greatest possible extent of scientific research. When there are regions and nations whose physical, intellectual, and moral development lags behind the general pace of civilization, immediate concrete measures can doubtless be taken to help them along the path of human progress. What are those concrete measures? The answer to this question requires study by specialists in international cooperation.

But if we try to look at the problem as a whole; if we try to examine plans for long-range international action to further the development of underdeveloped regions—here it seems to me is a fundamental point of permanent interest.

Permit me to point out some obvious facts. The development of a country depends primarily on a material factor: first, the *knowledge* and then the *exploitation*, of all its natural resources. Now, while the accuracy of our knowledge of the geography of the globe, though varying from region to region, is none the less fairly high, we may state that the survey of the world's zoological, botanical, and mineralogical resources is still extraordinarily imperfect. We can also say that the description of soils and their potentialities in the greater part of

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the inhabited areas has still to be compiled. We may therefore suppose that within the underdeveloped countries, in the strata of their mountains and their plains, there lie buried and dormant natural resources and riches of which the knowledge and exploitation are of paramount concern to those countries and to the whole of mankind. I am well aware that in all countries, even in those which are little developed, there exist more or less important governmental agencies which, with various and usually very insufficient means, pursue scientific research into these problems. But nobody can deny that in immense territories the results obtained are still mediocre, that research progresses extremely slowly, and that vigorous international action could be taken in this domain to very great advantage. It could consist either of helping national agencies and encouraging their activities, or in undertaking directly, after consultation and agreement with Governments, those indispensable studies and researches to which neither individual nor national interest has yet devoted as much attention as the scope of the problem demands.

This raises a special issue: the general problem, which has been laid before the United Nations, of creating international research laboratories. It is unfortunately true that the United Nations is more preoccupied with the immediate problems of peace, security, and reconstruction than with the problems of a more remote future. But it seems to me that no rash or visionary imagination is needed to picture humanity, assembled in the international body of the United Nations, making itself responsible, either alone or through one or more specialized agencies, for investigation on a world-wide scale, beginning with the underdeveloped regions and directed towards a survey of the botanical, zoological, and mineralogical resources and of the characteristics of soils in the various territories. I know there would have to be laboratories, a school of prospecting, and international teams of scientific prospectors. I know that it is a huge undertaking; but not, I think, an excessively large one if we reflect on the immense hopes which the peoples of

the world have placed in the United Nations, and on the rapid progress which the underdeveloped countries could make if the natural resources dormant in their territories were exploited.

You will perhaps be surprised that I have given this inventory of natural resources first place, seeing that the rise of the underdeveloped countries will depend in large part on the physical, intellectual, and moral resources which they possess and on the effort that is made to free all the potentialities of the human factor in those territories.

If I have spoken first of these material natural resources, and of the need for investigating and surveying them, it is because I see, in this realm of international action devoted to cooperation among nations, a real hiatus, whereas in the realm of the human factor the United Nations, through its specialized agencies, has already taken some action (albeit as yet modest) to which we must wish every success. In the fields of health, labour, nutrition, education, science, and culture the United Nations is endeavouring to raise the physical powers and intellectual resources of men everywhere in the world. Let us hope that all these efforts will be coordinated and organized in a powerful movement for the common good.

I should like to say one more word, in the hope that I shall not exceed the limits permitted to an international civil servant. In this field of activity the countries which by reason of geographical or historical circumstances have been able to make great progress and can show a prodigious record of development have a great responsibility to humanity. The power of the United Nations does not lie in its own strength; it derives from the strength of its Members; and it is to be hoped that this action undertaken by the highly-developed countries to help the less favoured countries will be carried out through the United Nations. The danger for international cooperation is not that the United Nations will encounter difficult problems such as that which you are discussing, but that these problems will be dealt with outside the United Nations as independent elements of national policy. What we

must hope is that the Member States will commit themselves to the United Nations, and that in all international action they will deploy their physical and moral efforts through the United Nations. This is the hope with which I conclude and I trust it will meet with your agreement.