Social Commission
Sixteenth session
Item 7 (a) of the provisional agenda

Assessment of arrangements for carrying out United Nations responsibilities in the field of the prevention of crime and the treatment of offenders

Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

1. The Economic and Social Council, at its twenty-eighth session, adopted resolution 731 F (XXVIII) which, inter alia, called upon the United Nations to retain leadership and responsibility in the matter of social defence, strengthen its technical assistance in this field particularly to the less developed countries, ensure the direction and co-ordination of the social defence programme at Headquarters, and enlarge the activities of the European Office of the United Nations in the field of social defence. To this effect, the Council agreed that "the Secretary-General, as a matter within his competence, should assign to the European Office such staff as may be necessary to carry out the activities entrusted to it". 1/

2. In pursuance of this resolution, the Secretary-General made new administrative and organizational arrangements which brought about a division of that part of the Secretariat entrusted with the implementation of the social defence programme: on 1 September 1960 a Social Defence Unit was set up within the Bureau of Social Affairs at Headquarters and a Social Defence Section was established within the European Office of the United Nations in Geneva.

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1/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Twenty-eighth session, Supplement No. 1, resolution 731 F (XXVIII), operative paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 4, p. 15.
3. The Social Commission, at its fifteenth session, included in its programme of work for 1963-1965 an assessment of these new arrangements, to be submitted to the Commission at its sixteenth session, and provided for the services of a consultant for this purpose. 2/ The Secretary-General designated as consultant Mr. Torsten Eriksson, Director General of the Swedish National Prison Board.

4. In view of the postponement of the sixteenth session of the Commission until 1965, the Economic and Social Council authorized the Secretary-General to send the consultant's report, together with proposals for the reorganization of the social defence programme, to the members of the Social Commission for their comments, and to present a report direct to the Council in 1964, together with the written comment of the members of the Commission. 3/

5. The consultant's report 4/ contains an account of the circumstances which led to the present arrangements. It also traces the evolution of United Nations activity in the field of the prevention of crime and the treatment of offenders, setting it in the context of present-day preoccupation with programmes and problems intimately associated with economic and social development. The solution envisaged by the consultant consists of creating, within the setting of the United Nations, an institute geared to receive and utilize extra-budgetary funds, whereby the leadership of the United Nations in the matter of social defence would be maintained and to which resources external to the United Nations could be directed so as to make possible a programme of appropriate dimensions.

6. In transmitting the report to the members of the Social Commission, the Secretary-General endorsed the consultant's findings that the organizational arrangements brought into being in September 1960 have not been satisfactory, and welcomed a solution which would make possible the development of a programme of the.

The programme of work as referred to the consultative committee by the consultant, and adopted at its first session, required until 1965 to send the necessary additional funds for social defence programmes, and to assure adequate support for the programme.

7. While agreement was expressed in the comments received from Social Commission members on the importance of the work of the United Nations in the field of social defence, a consensus was not reached as regards the method by which the United Nations might best advance its work in this field, and the particular solution outlined in the consultant's report did not meet with general support.6/ 8. The Economic and Social Council, in considering this question at its thirty-seventh session (3-15 August 1964), came to general agreement that the administrative arrangements which had been put into effect in 1960 had been less satisfactory and that a reunification of the two secretariat units concerned with social defence questions should be effected as soon as possible. Conflicting views were, however, expressed regarding the new machinery envisaged by the consultant for the carrying out of the responsibilities of the United Nations in the field of social defence. Considering the wide implications of the proposal put forward by the consultant and the fact that most of the members of the Social Commission had not transmitted their comments, the Council decided to defer action on the item until its thirty-ninth session so that it might have the benefit of the views of the Social Commission.7/

9. It has become apparent from the written comments of Social Commission members, as well as from the views expressed during the Council's debate, that the solution as put forward by the consultant does not enjoy sufficiently wide support for this purpose and intensity required for the United Nations to exercise its role of leadership. He also pointed out that machinery along the lines proposed by the consultant would offer possibilities of strengthening the social defence programme, but the feasibility of this system depended, in the first instance, on the availability of the necessary additional extra-budgetary funds. Therefore, while encouraged to foresee a satisfactory solution in the proposal put forward by the consultant, the Secretary-General reserved his final recommendations until such time as adequate support could be assured.5/
particular approach to be pursued further. It is evident that the administrative and policy-formulating machinery proposed by the consultant has been viewed with misgivings by a number of government representatives and that the required financial support for it has not materialized. The Secretary-General has no alternative, therefore, but to consider the establishment of the particular machinery envisaged by the consultant as being not feasible.

10. It is apparent, however, from the views expressed thus far in the written comments of Social Commission members and the discussions in the Economic and Social Council at its thirty-seventh session, that there is a prevailing desire to find appropriate measures for strengthening the United Nations social defence programme. As the Secretary-General pointed out in his note to Social Commission members, the importance of vigorous international action to prevent and control adult criminality and juvenile delinquency is not in question, since the leadership assumed by the United Nations in this field has been consistently reaffirmed by the policy-making bodies of the Organization. In this connexion, he referred to the 1963 Report on the World Social Situation which indicated that adult crime and juvenile delinquency had remained a cause for concern in the economically developed countries for many years and that, in recent years, criminality has become a problem of increasing concern in the economically less developed areas. 2/ 11. The gravity of the problem of crime and delinquency in both the less and the more developed countries, and the importance of international action in the field of the prevention of crime and the treatment of offenders have been noted on many occasions in the conclusions reached earlier by the policy-making organs of the United Nations.10/ What is now at issue is how the Organization can strengthen its capacity to meet the demands for international action appropriate to the leadership which the United Nations is expected to maintain in the field of social defence.

2/ United Nations publication, Sales No.: 63.IV.4, pp. 114-121.
10/ See, for example, Five-Year Perspective, 1960-1964, United Nations publication, Sales No.: 60.IV.14, paras. 83 and 264; and General Assembly resolution 1394 (XIV) on juvenile delinquency.
12. As one of the steps in this connexion, the Secretary-General proposes to strengthen the Advisory Committee of Experts on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders. This body has already played an effective role in providing technical guidance to the Secretariat in this field, and it is evident that the Social Commission and other policy-making organs of the United Nations have welcomed and benefited from the contribution of this body to the United Nations social defence programme. Thus far, the Advisory Committee has been of an ad hoc character, having no continuity of function or membership. The Secretary-General considers it advisable for the technical expertise of this group to be available on a continuing basis. He foresees, moreover, that a strengthened group of this kind, in reporting regularly to the Social Commission on frequently highly technical aspects of the United Nations social defence programme, might relieve the Commission of detailed examination of social defence questions, thereby enabling it to concentrate more fully on broader questions of social policy. The membership of the Advisory Committee might appropriately be raised from seven to ten, thus allowing for broader geographical balance. Plans for convening meetings of the Advisory Committee will be made in the light of the Secretary-General's report on the Pattern of Conferences.11/

13. The Secretary-General finds considerable merit in the proposal made during the ECOSOC debate regarding the establishment of a funds-in-trust account to be administered by the United Nations for the purpose of strengthening the capacity of the Organization to carry forward its responsibilities in the field of the prevention of crime and the treatment of offenders.12/ It is his intention to pursue further this proposal which appears to be both feasible and welcome. He would hope that Governments interested in strengthening the United Nations social defence programme would contribute to this account. Extra-budgetary funds received under this arrangement from Governments or other sources would allow for the programme to be expanded in direct relation to the level of these funds. The

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Secretary-General would, of course, continue to provide, within the United Nations budget, for the appropriate level of staff and services for the social defence programme as now called for by the policy-making organs. It would not be practical or appropriate to subject the basic social defence programme to the uncertainty of extra-budgetary financing.

14. The Social Commission is aware that the decentralization of social defence activities has been reflected in several developments which have taken place since 1960. The Asia and the Far East Institute on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, which was established in 1961, is rendering significant service at the regional level. Other regional social defence activities have also increased considerably since 1960, as evidenced by the series of regional seminars and training courses in the field of social defence. The Secretary-General intends to continue the decentralization of social defence activities, particularly through training and research projects and the use of regional advisers. It would be his intention to explore the possibilities of an expansion along these lines. In this connexion, it may be noted that, with the exception of the direct services which the Asian Social Defence Institute is able to render in that region, there are no regional advisory services offered in the social defence field.

15. With the launching of the Development Decade on 19 December 1961, the United Nations has taken a major step in concentrating its efforts in the economic and social fields in the developing countries on questions of development planning and financing, the mobilization of human resources, and on a limited number of particularly important sectors of economic and social development. Technical groups in the social defence field and policy-making bodies of the United Nations have advocated that the prevention and control of juvenile delinquency and adult criminality should be undertaken as part of comprehensive economic and social development plans. The case for this has been well stated in the consultant's report now before the Commission.13/ The emphasis placed in this report on the economic burden of criminality and the dissipation of gains from economic development is particularly pertinent in the light of the major objectives set for the

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Development Decade. Studies undertaken thus far of national development objectives indicate that the primary focus of United Nations assistance to developing countries in the social defence field should be on preventive measures in relation to crime and juvenile delinquency.

16. The integration of the various programmes of the Bureau of Social Affairs in the interests of the common goal of raising levels of living, and solving problems arising from social change accompanying economic development, has been intensified in recent years. The Secretary-General considers that these programmes, and particularly the research findings and resources of Headquarters, could be utilized advantageously to strengthen work in the field of social defence which often requires a multi-disciplinary approach.

17. As called for by Economic and Social Council resolution 731 F (XXVIII) of 30 July 1959, technical assistance in the social defence field, particularly to the developing countries, has been strengthened during recent years. It is both anticipated and intended that this trend will continue and, to this end, the Secretary-General proposes to make whatever administrative arrangements are most conducive to the effective implementation of Governments' requests for technical assistance in this field.

18. To attain the foregoing objectives, and especially those associated with the United Nations Development Decade, as well as the co-ordination of the social defence programme with the general research and policy-development work of the Bureau of Social Affairs and the strengthening of technical assistance, it would be necessary for the Section of Social Defence to be located in the Bureau of Social Affairs at Headquarters. The full participation of the social defence programme in these endeavours would be enhanced by having the Secretariat responsible for the implementation of this programme, and especially the Chief of the Section of Social Defence, participate directly in the planning and execution of basic social projects for which the Bureau as a whole is responsible. This consideration takes on added significance in view of the Secretary-General's intention shortly to integrate those units of the Bureau of Social Affairs concerned with over-all social policy, planning and research, with those dealing with community development, social welfare services and social defence. In this connexion, the consultant has rightly
observed in his report that the close collaboration of the Section of Social Defence in broad United Nations programmes has been impeded by the physical separation of the Section of Social Defence in Geneva from the rest of the Bureau of Social Affairs.

19. The reunification of the Social Defence Section at Headquarters would also facilitate the over-all direction and co-ordination of the social defence programme along with all other programmes for which the Director of the Bureau of Social Affairs is responsible. Moreover, since co-operation with the regional economic commissions for all social programmes pertaining to the Bureau of Social Affairs is maintained at Headquarters, it would be more effective both from the substantive and administrative standpoint, for the Section of Social Defence also to be at Headquarters.

20. In view of the foregoing considerations, and taking into account the administrative and management problems resulting from the separation of the Social Defence Section from the rest of the Bureau of Social Affairs, the Secretary-General proposes to effect the reunification as soon as administratively possible after the Third United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, which will be held in August 1965.

21. During the period since September 1960 when the Section of Social Defense has been in Geneva, links and practical arrangements for collaboration have been strengthened with the specialized agencies, the European Committee on Crime Problems of the Council of Europe, and other international organizations interested in the social defence field having their headquarters in Europe; given this established system of collaboration, it is the Secretary-General's opinion that the same effective co-operation will continue to function smoothly through a social defence officer stationed in Geneva. These arrangements, together with the quinquennial Congresses, the work of the United Nations Consultative Group, and the close relations established with international and national professional social defence organizations and regional bodies, will make it possible for the United Nations to strengthen further its role in facilitating co-operation among industrialized countries on questions of crime and delinquency, which are increasingly occupying the attention of many Governments, while at the same time continuing to give major attention to the problems of developing countries.