

LEGAL ASSISTANCE TO REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

The Secretary-General of the International Centre for the Co-ordination of Legal Assistance (CICAJ), Geneva, has drafted a report giving information concerning legal assistance to refugees, stateless persons and migrants. He submitted this report to the Secretary-General of the International Association of Lawyers whose last biennial Congress took place in Vienna (17-21 October, 1967). Extracts of the report are given below :

... One of the limited, but from a humanitarian point of view by no means unimportant, problems involved in providing legal assistance (free advice and counsel in civil and penal cases) concerns many thousands of refugees who had to flee from their own countries and who are scattered almost everywhere throughout the world. Many of them are unable to speak the language of the country of asylum, they are ignorant of its laws and customs, and they are no longer able to seek help from the consular representatives of their country of origin. They are therefore likely to become the victims of all sorts of administrative misunderstandings and vexations and even of exploitation. The same applies, albeit to a lesser degree, to some categories of migrant workers . . . How can these people be provided with the most effective assistance? On a national scale, of course. And this must be done in every country where free assistance is still unsatisfactory. That is the aim of the CICAJ's efforts. For instance, an attempt was made some years ago in Italy when the CICAJ was represented by one of its delegates, Mr. Luigi Arnaboldi, a member of the Rome Bar. His office undertakes many cases on behalf of refugees, in direct liaison with the Rome delegation of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees. It soon became a pole of attraction for, and co-operated with, the voluntary agencies which deal in Italy with refugees who have either settled in that country or are preparing for a second migration, generally towards another country overseas.

MISCELLANEOUS

The CICAJ would like this system to be extended to other countries, particularly to Latin America where the situation requires looking into, in such countries as Argentina (Buenos Aires), Brazil (Rio and Sao Paulo), Chile (Santiago), Colombia (Bogota), Peru (Lima) and Venezuela (Caracas). In the latter country a start has already been made by a group of legal experts sponsored by the Venezuelan Red Cross.

In each of these towns there is a voluntary agency, such as the International Social Service, the Red Cross, Caritas, International Catholic Migration Commission, the World Council of Churches, the American Joint Distribution Committee, and the United HIAS Service, to mention only the better known. These organizations record details on each refugee or migrant whose case they take in hand and they maintain close contacts with the local authorities and with the representative in Latin America of the UN High Commissioner.

Top priority must be given to forging stronger and more permanent links with members of the Bar in each town. As local circumstances and prevailing conditions differ from country to country, this might well be examined on the spot by representatives of the voluntary agencies, the International Association of Lawyers the International Bar Association and the delegate in Latin America of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.
