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Report of D.H. on arrangements for clearing
the Suez Canal.



Eleventh session
Agenda item 66

QUESTION CONSIDERED BY THE FIRST EMERGENCY SPECIAL SESSION OF
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FROM 1 TO 10 NOVEMBER 1956

Report of the Secretary-General on arrangements for clearing
the Suez Canal

In the course of the recent hostilities in Egypt great damage was done to the Suez Canal. The Canal is now out of function, and considerable efforts of a most urgent character are needed to clear it from obstructions.

In its resolution of 2 November 1956, the General Assembly urged that steps be taken to re-open the Suez Canal. Immediately upon the adoption of the resolution the Secretary-General proceeded to explore the technical possibilities of engaging the services of private firms for assistance in the clearing operation. For that purpose the Secretary-General addressed himself to the Governments of Denmark and of the Netherlands. On the basis of replies received, contacts were made with a number of private firms.

During the visit of the Secretary-General to Cairo, 16-18 November 1956, he had an opportunity to discuss the matter directly with the Government of Egypt. In view of the urgency of clearing the obstructions of the Suez Canal, and the scope of the task, the Government of Egypt addressed to him a request for assistance from the United Nations in arrangements for this purpose, as a matter of high priority. The Government of Egypt considered that the work should be started immediately upon withdrawal of non-Egyptian forces from Port Said and the Canal Area.

Under the authority given to the Secretary-General under the relevant resolutions adopted by the General Assembly, the Secretary-General gave his assurance, in principle, that the United Nations would seek to provide such

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assistance. In pursuance of this assurance, the Secretary-General now wishes to submit the question to the General Assembly.

The exploration undertaken has indicated that various private enterprises, with important resources, might agree to co-operate in the clearing of the Canal. The Secretary-General would propose that the General Assembly, confirming in this respect its previous decisions, should authorize the Secretary-General to proceed with his exploration of existing possibilities, and to negotiate agreements with such firms as might speedily and effectively undertake the clearing operations. As indicated above, he would, given the approval of the General Assembly to this proposal, intend to address himself to firms in countries outside the present conflict. In his contacts with the firms approached, he would try to clarify to what extent they, in turn, may need assistance from enterprises not directly approached by the United Nations.

At the present stage the Secretary-General is not prepared to indicate how the costs should be shared. He intends to revert to this question when the approximate costs have been estimated. He will at the proper stage of the negotiations request the necessary authority to conclude agreements concerning the operation.

In the course of the discussions between the Government of Egypt and the Secretary-General, the Government of Egypt expressed its wish to see the operation completed with the utmost speed. In view of the interest of the Government of Egypt, as well as of the interest of all the users of the Canal, the Secretary-General feels that the most expeditious procedure to achieve the desired results should be followed in connexion with the matter. That is why he suggests to the General Assembly to authorize him, in consultation with the Advisory Committee set up under the resolution of the General Assembly of 2 November 1956, to enter into the financial commitments that are unavoidable, although he is not now in a position to indicate the size of those initial commitments.

As a first result of the further exploration and negotiations the Secretary-General anticipates that experts would have to be sent in order to survey the work to be undertaken. It would be his intention to use experts now employed within the United Nations Technical Assistance Programme, assisted by representatives of the firms approached.

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Although the work is not proposed to begin until after the withdrawal of non-Egyptian forces from the Port Said and the Canal Area, the Secretary-General considers it possible to pursue negotiations and, in agreement with the Government of Egypt, to arrange for the necessary survey of the conditions in the Canal without delay.
