THE ELEANOR AND ANNA ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

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Description: In this segment, ER discusses the structure and function of the United Nations and its many committees.

Participants: ER

[ER:] Thank you, Anna. I’ve been asked so many questions so many times about the United Nations, its structure and how it works, that it occurs to me perhaps a great many of us don’t know as much about this tremendously important organization as we should. For instance, [ER clears throat] some of my friends, hearing that the United Nations was in session at Lake Success, supposed naturally that I would be in attendance. But you see, the committees meeting just now at Lake Success happen to be committees of which I am not a member. When the General Assembly meets, which is usually in the autumn, there’s an adjourned session which will meet this year on April the fifth again to finish the business they didn’t finish in Paris --but when the General Assembly um meets, then every country sends five delegates and five alternates, advisors, and uh political officers; a great many people are at that meeting. But I, for instance, when that’s over, uh have an appointment to the Human Rights Commission. Now, that has met about twice a year in the past. Uh if it had less work it would only meet once a year. And uh that means that I only go when I’m scheduled to meet with the Human Rights Commission.

Now the two councils that meet more often are the Security Council, which meets uh frequently because questions are brought up to it which may disturb the peace of the world, and uh the--we have a permanent member who represents us on that, Senator [Warren] Austin. And-- uh Ambassador Austin I should say. And uh he has a deputy who--because there are so many meetings of the Security Council. So if you go out to Lake Success you’re very apt to find the Security Council in session. Then there is the Economic and Social Council, which meets so far at least twice and sometimes three times a year. And we have a permanent member on the Economic and Social Council who also has the rank of Ambassador. Uh that uh does not uh include the innumerable committees and commissions on so many different subjects which uh meet once a year or twice a year and some of them are in session for long periods of time.

Now there is of course, at Lake Success, a great deal for a visitor to see which is carried on uh by the permanent organization there. For instance, there is a division of human rights in the secretariat which does all the preparatory, in between meetings, work. And all the other groups have permanent secretariat uh groups that do preparation uh for what is accomplished when the commissions or committees really meet, so that whenever you go out there you can find interesting things going on by contacting the secretariat members. And if you want to really know about the structure there’s a very good chart that you can get from the United Nations information service at Lake Success. That chart will show you what is being done by specialized agencies, for instance, which have their meetings at different times, like UNESCO, and FAO, and the World Health Organization. Now some of those meet in Geneva and not at Lake Success and sometimes people move around on their commissions and meet in different places. We met in Geneva once, UNESCO this year met in Beirut, and uh you’ll find yourself uh moving around the world a little [ER laughs] when you are on something that has to do with the United Nations. Which is a good thing because it makes you realize that this is not a United States organization, but an organization that affects fifty-eight nations and those nations have different backgrounds and different customs, different religions, different legal systems. And one of the first things we have to learn is that this is a United Nations.