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Interview with Mr. Harry Labouisse

conducted by John Charnow

at UNICEF HQ. on 11 January 1984

Charnow: Harry, in our first interview we talked about a number of things -- your early family background and work experiences, your career as a lawyer and in international economic affairs, the beginnings of your experience with the workings of the US Government and Congress. Throughout all this I was struck by the evidences of a humanitarian outlook. No doubt as we go along today, more of your preparation of your role as UNICEF Executive Director will come out.

When we finished the tape, we were in the mid-1950's, when you were the head of UNRWA. You had talked about making contact with UNICEF to help the children who were not legal refugees and had said that you had first met Maurice Pate then. So perhaps we can go on from that point. I wonder if you'd like to talk a little bit about your UNRWA experience. I gather that this was your first major contact with conditions in developing countries and with poverty, with problems of children, with dealing with Governments, local agencies and so on.

Labouisse: The experience with the refugees which required me to live in the Middle East for those four years was really my first close

contact with, and understanding of, the problems of poverty and the problems of underdevelopment. I had had some experience, through the Marshall Plan, with the countries which were in those days dependent upon the European powers, but not first-hand experience as was the case with the refugees. The major issue was very much human in the Middle East; the refugees suffered great deprivations physically, morally and spiritually. The agency established by the United Nations to look after them, that is UNRWA, was concerned with their physical well-being, primarily. This is a question of food, shelter for a large number of them, and education. We were not involved in the political problems of the Middle East, whereas that was the main concern of a great many of the refugees, and particularly of their leaders.

Let me just mention the kinds of things that UNRWA did. We had on our rolls roughly 900,000 registered refugees. About 500,000 of those were in Jordan, about a little over 200,00 in the Gaza Strip (admitted by Lazaf), over 100,000 in Syria and over 100,000 in Lebanon. We provided rations for these refugees; they were mostly what we called 'dry rations', that is flour, some rice, beans, a small amount of butter, oil and things of that type. The refugees would take these rations and sometimes they would trade them; you would get people distributing a better grade of rice for some of the people in the area who were on their normal diet. They would trade this rice to get a lower

grade of rice, to get more of it and sell it. There was no way of controlling the ultimate use; this was up to the refugee himself; we just distributed. The total cost of the distribution of the food during those four years came to roughly $18 a person a year. That's a fantastic figure to think about at this time, but that was what we were able to spend. The diet was supposed to be based on 1,500 calories a day. They got a little more in the wintertime but not much more.

The next item of importance, obviously, was health. We ran clinics; we organized arrangements for the local hospitals in the various countries, largely through relations with church groups or governments. I only recall building one hospital, this was in Lebanon. We had, just outside of Sidon, a hospital for tubercular patients. It was a tent hospital and subject to the whims of the weather. Refugees survived or suffered. Sometimes in strong storms tents would be blown away. We therefore decided this must stop and made arrangements with a French order of Catholic sisters, who had a hospital for tubercular patients in the mountains of Lebanon. They agreed to let us build a hospital wing, which we did for our refugees. They were cared for by the sisters and doctors, which we financed. It probably was one of the best arrangements in the area for the care of people; refugees or not, it was a very good arrangement. We were helped in all this through WHO and through local organizations, Red Cross, Red Crescent Society, etc.

The next item of importance was education. We had provided throughout the area education for grammar-school age and some secondary schooling, but most of the secondary schooling, as Irecall, was done in schools of the host countries to which we paid stipends based on numbers. But the primary schools really were run by UNRWA with the help of UNESCO. I had on the staff, for example, a representative from UNESCO and a representative of WHO. Parenthetically, the WHO representative subsequently became very closely associated with UNICEF, and that was Stan Flache. He was my health adviser in UNRWA. But back to the point, we had teachers in this process, mostly from the Palestinian community itself. This was a rather tricky business because there were tendencies to include political indoctrination, which encouraged the little children to think of their homes and encouraged them never to forget their homes. I think we begin to see some of the results of the early days at the present time. But the total cost of running all of our operations - including shelter, which I'll come to in a moment - was, in those days, $27 a person a year - food, health, education, shelter. I don't know how we did it, but it was done in a reasonably satisfactory way.

I said I'd come back to the question of shelter. Many people think of the refugees as living just in camps. My recollection is that less than 50% of the total 900,000 lived in UNRWA-supported camps. The balance lived with families,

relatives, in hovels in cities, throughout the area - some were Bedouin, etc. But the numbers in the camps were more or less the unsettled types. Those living in cities or near the cities usually would get some sort of work. This was the only way they could survive on the rations we gave them - by supplementing them with extra food.

The problems we had then were relatively simple compared to the problems which exist among the refugee population today. There was no PLO, there was no government in exile. I've often wondered why they did not establish a government in exile, and as a matter of fact, this has never been done even to this day. But we had many political problems, because all of the refugees considered that they had been driven from their homes and that they were entitled to return to their homes. They cited the UN resolutions to that effect. There was a very important resolution - Resolution 194, I think it was - that stated, among other things, that refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be entitled to do so, and those not wishing to return should be paid compensation for their property. This resolution was passed by the General Assembly, and to my recollection it has been referred to with approval in every resolution on the subject of UNRWA since that time. So the refugees constantly used to say, "When can we go back to our homes?" This is the sort of thing which we were faced with in those early days.

If we tried to improve the conditions in the camps which we ran - and there were 57 of them at that time - we had great difficulty because as you sought to replace a tent with a concrete block hut, this in the mind of the refugee indicated resettlement - a settlement away from their homes. And so for many years it was difficult to get rid of the tents and prepare a better life in the way of shelter. I don't know what the situation is today, but I think probably, with the exception ofsome of the recent dislocations, most of the refugees were in camps which had concrete block huts.

Charnow: Harry, you came in as an American, a UN official, in a way representing forces that from their point of view were responsible for driving them from their homes and for the establishment of Israel. Did you meet hostility, and how did you handle it?

Labouisse: I can answer that in part with a little story. I first went to Jordan from Beirut. And I should say, in passing, that my Headquarters was in Beirut in those days, although we had offices in Syria, Jordan, the Gaza Strip, and Cairo. But I went on my first trip to Jordan in the summer of 1954 and I was just learning my way. I met with a group of refugees in a tented camp south of Jerusalem, between Jerusalem and Jericho. They were refugees from an educated background, a very special lot, really. We were just talking one day about the problems of

raising money. I said I was going to go back to the General Assembly in the fall, and one of my problems would be to report to the General Assembly about the situation as I saw it, and try to raise sufficient funds. This led to a discussion of who contributed to UNRWA, and I said that 70% of our funds at that time came from the United States, 20% came from the United Kingdom and the other 10% came from all the rest of the world. They then seemed to have no particular surprise at the fact that two countries did practically all of the supporting, and for example, that the Soviet Union gave nothing. We discussed thisfor a while, and one of the refugee leaders then said, "The United States and the United Kingdom I hate because this is conscience money. They call it the trouble. There is no reason why the Soviets should pay anything. They have nothing to do with it." There was a constant condemnation in the minds of many of the refugees in those days, condemnation of the United Nations, the United States and the United Kingdom, and it was very difficult.

At some camps - there's one camp down on the east bank of the Jordan River, I've forgotton the name of it at the moment (Karami?) - that was quite a tough camp, and I could not get into it for quite a number of months. I finally insisted and I did go, and we became friends, but the atmosphere was such that no one from the United Nations or from the United States was wanted in some of the places.

On the question of how you dealt with it, it was a question of calling the terms as you saw them, trying to keep out of the political discussion, but being thoroughly aware of the political problems at the same time. I never took sides; I did show some sympathy for the situation in which the refugees found themselves, but I was never critical of any one country and I tried to maintain as much of a balance as I could. I don't think any of the refugees had any doubts that I sympathised with their plight, and I didn't try to hide that because I sympathised very much with them. But I tried to keep out of politics and tried to calm things down as much as I could, and to be honest with them, and I think finally they accepted me.

I had great difficulty, for example, in trying to resettle them. One of the jobs of UNRWA was to help resettle refugees. This was a political problem in the minds of most of their leaders. If we established a little village at which they could be self-sufficient, a farming village which provided the houses and huts and land, eventually there would be the statements; the political people would get in and say, "We've been resettled" and therefore they'd have to stop it. Any movement to have a mass resettlement programme was doomed to failure. The only thing we could do was to try to work out individual programmes, have the refugee think that he was making the decision, to offer him certain funds to buy a piece of land, to establish himself as a tailor, go into some sort of business, give them some

capital funds. And there were quite a number of people who would do this and give up their ration cards. But this was only if you did it on a personal basis, and when they began to realise that we weren't trying to force them to do things, to give up rights which they might have, if they accepted me as an objective member of local society. It was very, very difficult but we managed, Eve and I, to establish quite a lot of friendships among the refugees. And even when I went back in 1978 for UNICEF, many of the refugees that I'd known before came to see me. So it wasn't all bad. This is one of the fascinating parts of it, but it was a terrible situation, and I'm not going to have thoughts of what should have been done in the settlement. But I did have ideas then and I tried to pose them for action which I thought might lead to some amelioration. But the powers that be would never accept it. But that's another story.

Charnow: Does the handling of differences of view and conflict bother you personally? Do you brood about it or do you react instinctively? Do you stay awake nights?

Labouisse: Now? I hope not now. But you can't live and not see huge numbers of people undernourished, without homes, living a homeless life without being very deeply touched yourself. But the main thing was to try to do the best you could under the circumstances, and I've had the great good fortune of having a

marvellous staff of human beings working with me. They were of various nationalities: my Deputy was an Englishman, my general counsel was a Swiss, the head of Supplies was a Frenchman. I had a Dutchman for education, originally another Englishman for health, and then Stan Flache, a Frenchman, succeeded him. There was a whole variety of nationalities, and a wonderfully dedicated group. That and the fact that we got along very well together personally and shared the same views, made the job rather simple under the circumstances.

Charnow: These were people that were already there, or did you bring in some of your own people?

Labouisse: I brought in a few, but most of them were already there. Thinking back, most of them were there, but I brought in a handful, one of whom was Sherry Moe. But they were extremely able-bodied, and we were working under conditions which had no real precedent. The political connotation had been given to the refugees since time immemorial. But the refugee group had this very unique situation, the United Nations General Assembly Resolution, with claims of dispossession and so forth. It was a very special situation.

Charnow: You had a Board of some sort?

Labouisse: No, I had an Advisory Committee consisting of nine people. One was an American, one British, one French, one Belgian and then there was a Lebanese, a Syrian, an Egyptian and a Jordanian. It was a kind of simple: an even balance of the donor countries and the host countries, and the ninth one represented Turkey. They met and could give me advice on some things, but on many problems the advice was as you would expect. The refugee point of view was spoken for by the host countries, with the other countries seeking to solve the problem and hoping to solve it through resettlement.

Charnow: These individuals were representing their countries in official capacities?

Labouisse: Yes, some of them had special representatives. The Turkish representative was a former general who was the head of the Turkish Forces and had fought Allenby in the First World War. (Incidentally, when they had a meeting, General Bailiy would seem to go to sleep most of the time. He was a very, very old gentleman, a very nice one, but anytime Gaza was mentioned, he would come awake with great alacrity and start to tell you about how he fought Allenby in Gaza). But the French Representative was just in Lebanon for this particular purpose; the American Representative was with the US Embassy just for this job, but it was not a very useful thing. You had to do things as best you could. You had to develop the kind of programmes and the

actions which were considered desirable. It was a situation in which I felt I could get no affirmative action on programmes submitted to the General Assembly. You could never get agreement on any basic issues. Therefore I adopted a policy of reporting every year to the General Assembly, saying what had been done and what I intended to do. No one agreed to tell me not to do it. There was never an agreement of that type, and so you in a sense set forth and a lot of action you intended to take, you were able to take it, because no one could agree to stop it.

Charnow: In developing programmes, did you discuss them with large contributors or the Secretary-General? Was this related in part to fund-raising, which undoubtedly must have been a very big problem?

Labouisse: It was a very big problem. I don't think we had any meetings of donors in the way we have, for example, in UNICEF. But I obviously would talk to the representatives on the Advisory Committee, and two of them were the biggest contributors. I talked to Hammarskjöld from time to time about the problems as I saw it, but, again, it was a question for them in the field to decide what we were going to do. And we did not ask any one country for permission. Even though the United States were contributing 70% of the funds, we did not seek the opinion or the consent of the United States for everything we did. As a

matter of fact, we really maintained an independent agency. There was no question about that.

Charnow: On your fund-raising, did you engage in any fund-raising trips to the capitals? How did you try and get them to contribute?

Labouisse: I didn't take many fund-raising trips because there were so many problems in the area requiring my attention there. I would come back to the General Assembly every fall to report to the Special Political Committee; I would appeal for funds there. I would go to Washington and talk to the State Department, and try and get more money out of the United States. I would talk to representatives of other countries when I was back here. I did go to say England, I went to Scandinavian countries, I went to France and some of the European countries seeking funds, but not on the kind of basis that we have in UNICEF, because it was a limited audience that was concerned with supporting us. It wasn't like today with UNICEF, with a hundred and somewhat contributors.

Charnow: To get back to the programme, I read some place that, as part of your programme, you moved into vocational training, and that you also gave direct grants to people to set up little shops and farms. How did that work out?

Labouisse: Yes, we established some vocational training schools - I think there were three or four by them time I left in 1958. I recall one particularly, in a place called Kalandia, which is just outside of Jerusalem. We built and started a vocational training school for young men. The first year it was difficult to get students; many of the first year students were academically relatively low. The reason I felt for this was that the refugees considered this a possible plot on the part of the United States and United Nations to settle them. This was an idea to move them away from their homeland: educate them and send them away. That was the first year. By the time I left in 1958, there was something like six well-qualified applicants for every opening in the school; they all wanted to go. It was a very successful operation. It was one way of guaranteeing a relatively assured, successful life for the ones who went to it. They could get jobs in the rest of the Arab world; they went to oil States; they went to Egypt; they went to Pakistan; and spread out throughout the area.

The other school that we started when I was there was in Gaza; this was an agricultural training school that had more difficulty getting started. However, I think it was successful in the long run. I might just point out that the important thing for the refugee, that I mentioned a while ago, was that he was doing something on his own. Therefore, if a skilled worker, or even one unskilled in some cases, wanted to go from Jordan,

say, or Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, across the desert to Iraq, to work in the oil States, we encouraged this. But if we encouraged it too much, you were apt to stifle it because people became suspicious.

There was one thing which every refugee cherished, and that was his ration card. This was considered as an indication of a legal right to return to their homes, in addition to a legal right to receive rations. There was great pressure on me from time to time to take away ration cards from a refugee who was employed. We did that to the extent that we could in the area. But when a refugee went across the desert and came to Baghdad, for example (UNRWA had an office in Baghdad to help these young people or older people to get jobs in the oil States), and we started off trying to take their ration cards away if they had a job, we soon discovered this was drying up the flow. And so we stopped taking the ration card and tried to get them jobs, the feeling being that the important thing was the end result of work for these people, and if they got successful they would send for their families and in this way establish themselves somewhere else. But if it became part of a bureaucratic operation, giving up something to get a job, we would, I think, dampen the flow.

Charnow: It strikes me that much of this was really quite a good preparation for what you found in UNICEF. You had the

fund-raising, the programming, coming in and finding a staff already established. Did you do much field travelling and get around to where the refugees were and get to see them?

Labouisse: Yes, I travelled very widely throughout the area. I visited every camp, every one of the 57 camps. I visited schools, hospitals and all other installations. You had to be very much a part of the problem in order to deal with it. Let me give you one example: at one point the Lebanese Government, in order to try to stop some of the difficulties along the southern Lebanese border - with refugees moving back and forth into Israel and causing trouble there - in order to bring an end to that, the President of Lebanon at that time, Mr. Chamoun, made a decree saying that any foreigner living within 10 kilometres of the southern border (this included a lot of semi-nomadic refugees who through the years had moved back and forth from northern Palestine into Lebanon) would be moved away out of that zone. And I was asked to create a camp for them. Just at that moment we were completing a good camp in a place called Nabatiyeh. It was to be used for villages for Palestinians living in Tyre and in Sidon, living in very difficult conditions in those two cities. As a temporary expedient, it was decided to use that camp, as yet not occupied, for these semi-nomads. It was very difficult to get them to move into this camp; it was the first time that they had even been to a place which was not a tent or even a goat tent. So I had to go and talk to them and explain

what this was all about. You had to explain the ABCs of life, that this was not a confined community; therefore the habits of the Bedouin were not necessarily those you could follow in these particular surroundings. We had built some latrines in a central part of the camp, and I went back in about two or three weeks to visit them again to see how things were going, and I wasmet by a young refugee, who took me to the latrines. And he said, "We have protected them." And I went and found that the latrines were surrounded by cactus bushes and barbed wire. This was the kind of thing that you had to be there with it, and sometimes you would deal with a problem by a joke or something. In that particular camp, when I went back the second time, an old man in a very loud voice camplained about something I did not understand; he was speaking Arabic. I asked what his problem was. He said he had two wives and there was only one door, and that was not the way he could live; he needed another door. I tried to point out that another door would leave very little left in this little hut. I asked how old he was, and he said he was ninety-four. I got up and walked over and congratulated him and he burst out laughing. That was the end of the demand for another door. You had to live with them and feel with them. This is why I feel it was very difficult to run UNRWA from a distance as you have to do now. One of my successors, because of the problems, moved to Vienna.

Charnow: You were there for four years. I have read some place in your biography that you left for personal reasons. Would you have wanted to stay on, or was that about it in any case?

Labouisse: No, I would not have wanted to stay on longer. When I went originally in 1954, Hammarskjöld had suggested that I go for a year, and I said I would do that. But when I tried to talk to him about leaving at the end of the year, he did not want to hear about it. I eventually stayed for the four years. I became more interested in it and Eve was very interested in it, and it was a fascinating experience, even though a very frustrating and difficult one. But I would not have wanted to stay very much longer. I guess about I was about 55 or years old at that time, and I thought I might come back and live in this country for a while.

Charnow: Then from your C.V. I notice you then went to the World Bank as a consultant and you went to Venezuela. There is no indication before that you had any Latin American connections.

Labouisse: I had none. I went to the World Bank in 1959 as a consultant. I had known Gene Black, the President of the Bank, for some years, and he and some of his senior associates urged me to come to work for the Bank. I don't think they had in mind any particular thing for me to do. It may have been that they thought I was too young to enjoy myself in Connecticut at the

time when I came back from the Middle East, and they felt sorry for me. Anyhow, I did go down and one of the things that needed to be done at that particular moment was to find someone to lead a team, to meet the request of the Venezuelan Government to make an economic survey of the country. And they asked me to head this team, which I did. I stayed on for about a year and a half. I guess it was during that particular period other things and the Venezuelan operation were rather a great mixture. One was the fact that Hammarskjöld ask me in the summer of 1960 to come up to help him with the Congo situation, which was just coming to a head at that time; that was for two, three months. Then Gene Black asked me to take on a job as special representative of the World Bank for Africa, another area with which I was not very familiar. And I was just about getting started in that new capacity when I was asked to come up and talk to the Kennedy team in Washington in November, 1960. So my career at the World Bank ended at the end of 1960 or early '61.

Charnow: In Venezuela you had an opportunity to see a developing country at a different stage. What were the sort of things that impressed you? I have the impression that as part of the survey, there was a lot of emphasis on education.

Labouisse: There was some emphasis on education, but I don't recall that as being a significantly important aspect. The kinds of things which interested me in that mission were the matters of

priorities in the use of funds. Venezuela was a relatively rich country. With its oil resources, there was a tendency to spend that money on some showplaces. For example, one of their programmes in the health field called for the construction of one or more new sophisticated hospitals. We felt that this was an unnecessary use of funds, that it was much better to build small clinics up in the rural areas available to people far removed from the city areas, and not to build hospitals because there were already hospitals that were not fully utilized. It was that kind of thing, the emphasis on getting services available to the people. And this is partly what we have felt that UNICEF has being doing. In those days, the late fifties a and early sixties, it is my recollection that the World Bank never lent money for health programmes. I am not sure how much they did in the field of education. If so, I am sure it was on a very high level - technical, graduate - and so forth. It was our feeling on that team - and one of the things I have tried to stress - was the importance of health, the importance of education, these kinds of things. It was not just the building of steel mills and new roads, the industrial development. It's a philosophy which I always had. As a matter of fact I tried to talk about it in 1965, when UNICEF was given the Nobel Peace Prize; it was part of the acceptance speech. I would think that this range of things was the most important aspect of my experience in Venezuela.

Charnow: A little earlier you mentioned your talking with Kennedy. Do you want to pursue that?

Labouisse: I had received a call from Dean Rusk, who was designated to be the Secretary of State under Kennedy. I went to see him, and he said that the new President would like me to become the head of the International Cooperation Administration when he became President. There were at that time several parts of the aid complex: there was the ICA, there was the Development Loan Fund, the Commerce Department was interested, the Agricultural Department was interested in foreign aid of some kind, foreign corporations. I was asked to be head of ICA, which was the main cog in this wheel. I accepted it.

In the course of the conversation with Dean Rusk, he asked about other possible interests I might have, and I said, "Well, it might be interesting to be Ambassador to India." He said that would be interesting, but unfortunately this had been promised to Ken Galbraith. So I did go to be head of ICA, and then the Kennedy Administration decided that they wanted the whole foreign aid part of the United States reorganized, and I was asked to head a task force to do this.

The original plan that President Kennedy had in mind was to have all U.S. foreign aid encompassed in one agency, including economic and the military. This was the way our task force

started. As a matter of fact, the legislation which we had actually drafted for presentation to the Congress forsaw a single agency. But just before we were ready to go to the Congress, the White House contact with the Hill came back with the word that the programmes would not get through the Congress if they were merged. Therefore, the economic side was separated, or rather the military was separated out, and the new agency which we had proposed is at present the U.S. Agency for International Development. USAID did not have military in it. I had worked on that at the same time, trying to head ICA, and this was almost an impossible task because some of the representatives in the White House wanted me at the same time to shake up ICA and get rid of many of the people working over the years. This I was not prepared to do. For example, Vice-President Johnson said to me one day, as we were getting ready to go over to see the President, that he thought that it would be desirable to have the President call the top hundred international corperations in this country, asking each to give one of their top executives to the aid cooperation. The Vice-President thought that this would be a very good move. I was very much opposed to it because I pointed out that these people might come down for one or two years; they wouldn't really be interested in this work except as an experience, but they would be all thinking of going back to their regular jobs. Whereas there were some very dedicated and very able and competent civil servants who had been working for the aid

programme over the years, who needed and who had every right to be retained. This is one conflict I had with one of the White House Staff at that time. But Doug Dillon, who was the Secretary of the Treasury, was in President Kennedy's Office the day that Kennedy asked me to head this task force. I pointed out that I would try, but that I would not be able to give full attention to running ICA and would have to leave most of the responsibility to one of the deputies, who was, incidentally, one of the people that the underlings in the White House wanted me to fire. Dillon said to the President, "It won't be the first time that Mr.____ would be running the aid organization." Those were interesting times. The Congress accepted the proposals and they created USAID.

Charnow: Did you know Senator Kennedy personally? Did you campaign for him?

Labouisse: No.

Charnow: Obviously somebody recommended you?

Labouisse: When I came back from the Middle East, there had been some publicity about this ICA operation. The publicity was that I had been recommended by the Eisenhower Administration to become the head of ICA. An objection was raised to my appointment by the Chairman of the Republican National Committee, a man named

Meade Alcan. Alcan was a resident of the state of Connecticut, and I was resident of that same state. Alcan, exercising his perogatives, objected to a Democrat being given this job. This was taken up by the press and ?? also wrote an article on it. Because of this my name was in people's minds.

Charnow: Were you in favour of combining economic and military aid?

Labouisse: I was in favour of it as a means of having more control over the military aid. When we prepared the legislation for the Congress in 1961, we had very much in mind that a certain amount of aid would have to be provided on political grounds. It was not just a question of development aid. For example, there were countries which were considered vitally important to the United States' security, which couldn't use the economic development aid in a satisfactory manner that would meet the criteria which we thought were desirable. These were countries which needed consumer goods, needed some supplies to maintain order. We called that, as I recall, "supporting assistance" as distinct from "economic assistance". That was contained in the legislation, and we did give a certain amount of supporting assistance to countries in that way. But now, unfortunately, this has grown out of all sense of proportion, with a huge amount now for so-called supporting assistance.

Charnow: In drafting this legislation, did your legal background come into good stead?

Labouisse: Well, the main thing was, you had a very good team of people. I didn't draft the legislation. I was responsible for it in the final analysis, but the actual drafting would have been done by the person on the team who was the legal adviser.

Charnow: That period lasted for a year or so, and at that point, you left?

Labouisse: At that point ICA went out of business, and the new agency USAID came into being in early 1962. And then I was asked by Rusk at first whether or not I wanted the Assistant Secretary of State job. Of course, I was not particularly interested in it. Then came the question of whether I was interested in going overseas. The major reason for this was that when it came down to the question of selecting the head of AID, the boys in the White House who had wanted me to do certain things that I didn't want to do, wanted someone else. It was quite satisfactory to me. I had no problem at all.

Charnow: Did you have some options and then select Greece out of the various options?

Labouisse: No. They asked me, first of all, if I would go to the Argentine. I said no I didn't want to go to the Argentine. They said, "Why?" I said I didn't speak Spanish and I felt that was important. They then asked me to go to the Philippines. I said I didn't want to go to the Philippines; I was not interested in that. Then they said, "Where would you like to go?" I had known the Ambassador to Greece and he was getting ready to retire, so I said, "Well, Greece might be interesting." I was asked whether I spoke Greek, and I said no, I did not speak Greek. Then it was agreed that I would go to Greece. I went away and took a little leave. And I was called up and they said there was an opening in Spain; they would like me to go to Spain as Ambassador instead of Greece. I said I didn't want to go to Spain, and so I instead went to Greece.

Charnow: Well, from everything that I have observed, that was a happy choice. You and Eve seem to go to Greece often. You seem to have many friends there.

Labouisse: It was a very lucky decision.

Charnow: It was a good period, I gather, in Greece.

Labouisse: It was, again, in a very interesting time because there was in Greece an administration for several years which was relatively conservative and had a closer working relationship with the

United States. After I was there for about a year, there were elections. The Opposition won the election, so there was this change after a long, long period of time and a lot of readjustments. It was an interesting time. When I first when to Greece, I was told by the thenn Deputy in the Embassy that the Embassy people weren't seeing the Opposition and that was kind of a silly piece of business. I thought they were totally wrong, and I said, well, I thought it was part of my job to know the Opposition. So I did get to know them. So that there was that kind of change, and then the King died and there was changes because of that. So it was an interesting period. Then we have the Greeks who are a very interesting people. Every Greek has his own ideas of what is good for Greece; there is not just two parties but about eight million parties.

Charnow: Well, Harry, we have covered quite a bit of ground. Next time we can move into UNICEF. I am happy to get on the record this kind of rich background of yours prior to coming to UNICEF. Not much of it has been known by the people who work for UNICEF, I remember when I first heard your name as Maurice's successor, I said, "Who is Harry Labouisse?" And somebody said, "He is an ambassador." And I felt, why on earth does UNICEF need an ambassador type? That is not the kind of organization we are . So you started off with that kind of reputation . Maybe you should have done this story for us on tape before you came.