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**Chairman: Mr. Thor THORS (Iceland).**

**AGENDA ITEM 18**

**Report of the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (A/2717, A/2717/Add.1, A/AC.76/L.15) (*continued*).**

1. Mr. COMAY (Israel) said that the Arab representatives had consistently exploited the item under discussion for propaganda warfare against Israel; nevertheless, in the interests of the refugees and of Arab-Israel relations, he would refrain from replying directly to a number of provocative statements made in the Committee. The historical record showed that the refugee problem was the bitter fruit of the war deliberately brought about by the Palestine Arab leaders and the Arab States; and those who had started the war could not now cast the blame on the United Nations, the great Powers or Israel. Had there been no war, there would not have been a single refugee, and Arabs and Jews could have worked out a common destiny in peace, as had been Israel's hope. Instead, the members of the international community had been burdened with the tragic aftermath of a war which was not their war.

2. Although Israel had not created the problem, it had done and would do what it could to alleviate the human suffering involved. By 1952, it had reduced the number of refugees in Israel territory on Agency relief rolls from 48,500 to 20,000, by a process of absorption. It had relieved the Agency of further financial or administrative responsibility for the remaining refugees, thereby taking upon itself a substantial additional burden, especially as almost half the remaining refugees were social cases and would become a permanent charge on the community. A total of nearly 50,000 refugees had thus been settled by reintegration in Israel, a figure which, while small, compared favourably with the total of 8,000 refugees taken off the relief rolls by other means. The Israel Government had then pledged that there would be no distinct category of Palestinian refugees with a status differing from that of other inhabitants. In addition, certain categories of relatives of Arabs living in Israel had been repatriated in order to reunite broken families, and a large number of refugees who had entered Israel illegally had been permitted to remain as legal residents. These two processes contributed to the increase of the Arab population of Israel from less than 100,000 in 1948 to over 180,000. Israel was proud of

the rapid progress being made by its Arab community; he regretted that the hostile frontier with the Arab States apparently acted as a distorting mirror. If the representative of Iraq visited Israel, as he was very welcome to do, he would be able to see for himself that its Arabs were first-class citizens, fully participating in the political life of the country and enjoying standards of well-being from which the corresponding classes of Arab society elsewhere were still remote. However, there was little prospect that Israel would be able to take in any more of the refugees now in the Arab countries.

3. The Director of the Agency had made a somewhat critical comment on the question of blocked accounts; but he appeared not to have been fully informed about its progress. In the first phase of the release of the blocked accounts which was still in progress, nearly \$2 million were being paid out to refugees in Arab countries. Arrangements had been concluded to pay out the balance, amounting to over \$8.5 million. To avoid the difficulties which had occurred during the first release, the Israel Government had asked the representatives of the account holders themselves to suggest improvements in the procedure. As a result, the procedure had been simplified and all requests concerning the conditions for the release of frozen bank accounts had been satisfied; a good example of a satisfactory agreement reached by sensible negotiation between Israel and the parties. The new release procedure had been announced by the Israel Government on 16 November 1954.

4. The Israel Government reaffirmed its willingness to consider a measure of compensation for abandoned Arab lands. Its original position, a quite logical one, was that this issue should be part of a general Israel-Arab settlement. It had subsequently been announced that the Government would be prepared to enter into discussions on compensation with any appropriate United Nations organ, in advance of a general settlement. However, there were two main difficulties to be surmounted. The first was money; for means had to be found to make the necessary sums available; and the second was the economic siege maintained by the surrounding Arab countries, which in the past six years had cost Israel an amount probably not less than that of the value of the abandoned Arab property estimated by an expert United Nations body at £100 million sterling. The economic boycott was poor psychology, for it spurred Israel on to ever greater efforts. And it was harmful to the Arabs as well, particularly Jordan, which was depriving itself of access to Israel's Mediterranean ports and markets; and the refugees were among those who suffered most. Moreover, it would make no sense for Israel to pump large sums of foreign currency into the economies of countries which were trying to ruin Israel's economy. It was to be hoped that the Arab countries would desist from their economic warfare, thus releasing the economic energies of the region for resettlement and compensation of the refugees.

5. The Israel Government had a very earnest and positive interest in the Jordan-Yarmuk development project, on which negotiations were in progress between Mr. Eric Johnston and the Governments concerned. However, as Mr. Sharett had said in an interview, the whole future of Israel depended on the possibilities of irrigation, and its position with respect to the project would depend primarily on the allocation of the waters. The negotiations were continuing and the distorted Arab accounts of Mr. Johnston's mediation effort could be discounted.

6. With regard to the "economic refugees", who had lost their livelihoods because the demarcation line fixed by the armistice agreements had deprived them of access to part of their former farmlands in Israel, it should be pointed out that the line could be altered only by mutual consent of the Governments which had signed the agreements, and that Israel had attempted, on several occasions, to arrange the necessary adjustments. In 1951, for example, it had proposed an exchange of land which would have improved the situation in the Qalqiliya area; but Jordan had rejected the proposal. In 1952, again, a provisional agreement for division of the Latrun no-man's land had been worked out in the Mixed Armistice Commission; but Jordan had later rejected the agreement. Later that year, a similar arrangement for the exchange of land in the Zeita area had been reached, only to be cancelled by Jordan's withdrawal from the agreement. Israel was prepared to reopen negotiations on the matter at any time, within the context of the armistice agreements.

7. It was clear that despite Israel's past efforts to contribute to a solution of the refugee problem — and it hoped to contribute in the future by way of compensation — Israel could not solve the problem. The basic solution lay in the permanent integration of the refugees among their own kin, in the Arab countries.

8. Like all countries, indeed more so in view of its geographical situation, Israel was compelled to consider the question of the repatriation of the refugees in terms of its national security. It was hardly probable that the refugees, who had never identified themselves with Israel and had left their former homes at their leader's behest during an armed struggle, the express object of which had been to prevent the establishment of the State of Israel, would re-enter that State with the intention of becoming loyal citizens. It was highly unlikely that they would be prepared to give their full allegiance to Israel's Government and laws, to defend it from attack and accept its national objectives, one of which was the fulfilment of the historic tasks of Zionism. From the recent actions and statements of the host Governments and from the words of Mr. Tannous, the representative of the refugees who had addressed the Committee (33rd meeting) it was clear that there had been no change in their conviction that Palestine was being illegally occupied by the Jews. The result of repatriation was likely to be internal subversion to add to the danger Israel already confronted from the hostile neighbours surrounding it. The security problem was further complicated by the fact that repatriated refugees could not be resettled in the interior, inasmuch as the whole country was no more than a border strip, with frontiers that could not be sealed off from infiltration and marauding. Thus, repatriation would render the country indefensible.

9. Israel had been accused of a "negative attitude" on the problem of repatriation; but the question was whe-

ther any Government or State could be required to do what was inconsistent with its own survival. It was the sovereign right of the Israel Government, as of any other Government, to determine whether the admission of any person or group of persons to its territory was conducive to its national security or welfare. Moreover, it was illusory to think of repatriation as a process whereby refugees would simply return to their former homes and pick up the threads of their former lives. Great changes had taken place during their absence, and the repatriates would really be new immigrants who would have to be settled in a country which bore little resemblance to the land they had once left. In practice, such repatriation would be not an alternative to resettlement but a much more difficult and costly form of resettlement.

10. Although the Israel Government continued to believe, despite every discouragement, that peace would eventually be achieved in the Near East, it was convinced that it could not be obtained by the repatriation of refugees and the creation in Israel of a large Arab *irredenta* maintaining close ties with the co-national neighbouring States. When the British Royal Commission had first proposed the partition of Palestine, almost twenty years ago, it had suggested an exchange of minorities. That exchange had in fact been brought about by the rough surgery of a war not of Israel's seeking. The *de facto* situation which had thus been created could not be erased; but a better future could be built on it.

11. As long ago as 1948, when the realities of the problem had been less distinct than at the present time, the General Assembly, in its resolution 194 (III), had qualified its affirmation of the right to repatriation by reference to the criteria of peace and practicability. Those two conditions did not exist at the present time and it did not help the refugees to keep the idea of repatriation alive in their minds.

12. The experience gained in dealing with refugee problems which had arisen as a result of post-war partitions and frontier changes in Austria, Finland, Germany, India and Pakistan, Indo-China and Korea, had been instructive. It had proved, first, that, in no case had repatriation been the answer; secondly, that in each case the problem had been solved through the willingness of a co-national or co-religious "host country" to assume responsibility; and thirdly, that although international organizations or private bodies could be of assistance, they could not be a substitute for a "host country".

13. Those conclusions had been borne out by Jewish experience since the advent to power of Hitler. There had been a community in Palestine which had had the international status of a Jewish National Home and had helped 200,000 Jews to enter the country. Similarly, the post-war problem of Jewish displaced persons in Europe had seemed insoluble until the birth of Israel. Jewish homelessness was no longer of international concern because there was a national State to take responsibility for it.

14. Thus the problem presented a major challenge to Arab statesmanship. Admittedly the task was difficult, particularly as most of the refugees had remained concentrated in the border areas, whereas the most promising resettlement regions lay in the hinterlands of the Arab countries; but it was by no means impossible, since there were eight Arab States with forty

million people, possessing the unexploited land, water, oil revenues, and the generous international assistance that would be made available. In the final analysis, however, the solution of the problem did not depend on physical resources but on the will to solve it and the courage of the "host countries" to tell their own people and the refugees that the task must be done.

15. Admiration for the excellent work done by the Agency and its Director was tempered with dismay at the lack of progress towards a solution after six years of international efforts. He hoped that the problem would be substantially settled during the next five years, but pointed out that a permanent solution would be possible only if the question was lifted out of the political and emotional bog in which it was embedded and was examined clearly and frankly.

16. Mr. JUNG (India) said that India, on the basis of its own experience with eight million refugees during the last seven years, was in a position to appreciate fully the difficulties involved in dealing with refugee problems. Faced with that situation at home, his Government had unfortunately been unable to make more than a token contribution to the relief fund; but it would nevertheless continue that contribution and associate itself with the work of relief.

17. The Indian delegation wished to express its appreciation of the work of the Agency and its Director. Relief was not an end in itself, however, and a more permanent solution, based on a political settlement, would have to be found if the problem was to be solved. Meanwhile, the United Nations was responsible for the provision of relief, particularly as the question of the Palestine refugees had arisen as a result of one of the major decisions of the United Nations. The Indian delegation still supported the principle of repatriation or compensation, and hoped that Arab and Israel statesmanship, together with the statesmanship of the other Members of the United Nations, would ultimately lead to a settlement of the problem and the establishment of peace in the Near East. As the refugee problem involved political issues, it could not be dealt with in isolation; the General Assembly should take all relevant facts into account in attempting to achieve a permanent solution. Previous General Assembly resolutions, to which his delegation was committed, but which had unfortunately remained dead letters, provided an ample basis for such a settlement.

18. Mr. HEYWOT (Ethiopia) contragulated the Agency on its achievements and its determination to meet its responsibilities with courage and foresight, and joined with the Agency in regretting the causes of its relative failure. It had accomplished a great deal with little resources in the face of great difficulties; but the waste of ability, skill, enthusiasm, and experience was pitiful.

19. While development programmes aimed at making the refugees self-supporting would partly alleviate their plight, a sound educational programme would be the best method of contributing to their overall welfare in the region as a whole. With those considerations in mind, the Ethiopian delegation would support the extension of the Agency's mandate for another five years, and hoped that the basis for a solution to the problem would be laid during that time.

20. After the last session of the General Assembly, he had personally visited some refugee camps along the Jordan River; he felt that they offered a sad commen-

tary on the failure of the three great religions centred in ancient Palestine to bring about a settlement of the refugee problem. The Emperor of Ethiopia and the Ethiopian Government had from the outset shown their sympathy by providing assistance in cash and in kind, and had taken unfailing interest in the efforts made to alleviate the plight of the refugees.

21. The Ethiopian delegation again associated itself with those who were urging that the Governments directly concerned should live up to their national traditions and co-operate to eliminate a situation that had become an international and religious disgrace. His Government would continue to maintain its close interest and support in any proposal aimed at discharging this international responsibility.

22. Mr. AL-JAMALI (Iraq) assured the Israel representative that he was anxious to visit Palestine, but not until peace and justice had been restored to the Holy Land.

23. He regretted that the Israel representative had evaded the issues and had been completely negative in his statement. The causes of the war in Palestine and the exodus of the Arab refugees were well established. The responsibility for those deplorable events was a secondary question; the issue was one of human rights and of the Arabs' undoubted right to their homes and property.

24. The Israel Government's unwillingness to accept the return of any refugees was a denial of fundamental human rights. The Israel Government asserted that it was willing to pay compensation, out of trade with the Arab countries, but could not do so as long as there was a blockade. The blockade had been imposed because the Israel Government denied Arab rights; if those rights were restored, it would be removed. The Israel representative's statement had shown a lack of any spirit of conciliation and co-operation and had ignored the fact that all aggression had come from the Israel side. Mr. Al-Jamali deprecated any attempt to correct the armistice lines by taking further land from the Arabs; nor could he accept the theory that the existence of a Jewish State should preclude the Arabs from returning to their lands.

25. Mr. RIFA'I (Observer for the Hashemite Kingdom of the Jordan) said that the refugees' situation was so distressing that the improvement of their living standards was a matter of imperative necessity. More than half the total number of refugees were living in Jordan, a country of extremely slender resources; consequently, any deterioration in their living conditions was bound to affect their host country's economic stability and endanger public security. His purpose in apprising the Committee of the situation was to remind representatives of the grave responsibility which they bore.

26. The refugees themselves felt that the matter was one of life and death. If they were reduced to complete despair they would bring destruction to others as well as to themselves, and his own country and people would be the first to suffer.

27. It had been suggested that resettlement of the refugees in the Arab countries was the most practicable solution; moreover, it had been hinted not only that such resettlement had been prevented by the Arab Governments but that the refugees' feelings had been stirred up for political reasons. No action based on such premises could bear fruit. The refugees were sincere in their desire to return to their native land, and no-

thing his Government could do would influence that determination.

28. His Government had accepted the Yarmuk River rehabilitation project, and regretted that attempts were being made to obstruct its execution by linking it with other projects in which the interests of Israel superseded those of the refugees. In any case, the project would absorb only a small percentage of the refugees; he wondered how it was proposed to deal with the problem of the remainder, taking into account their natural increase and the lack of other opportunities for major projects in Jordan.

29. It was thus clear that the only solution of the problem was to return the refugees to their native countries. Until that could be done, they must be given sufficient relief to raise their living conditions to a satisfactory standard.

30. He felt that the budget proposed in operative paragraph 5 of the joint draft resolution (A/AC.76/L.15) would not meet the requirements of the refugees

and that additional funds must be allocated. Paragraph 6 requested the Director to report upon the problem of assistance to other claimants for relief. The Director had in fact brought that matter to the Committee's attention, whilst the Jordan Government had prepared detailed reports on other needy categories. It was therefore incumbent on the Agency to submit to the Committee its recommendations for positive action. He hoped that the Committee would take such action as soon as possible. Meanwhile, it was within the powers of the Director to extend various other kinds of relief and services to refugees, if the necessary funds were available.

#### *Order of discussion of agenda items*

31. Mr. VAVRICKA (Czechoslovakia) proposed that the Committee should take up next the item entitled "Prohibition of propaganda in favour of a new war".

*It was so decided.*

The meeting rose at 5.25 p. m.