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**Chairman: Mr. Miguel Rafael URQUIA (El Salvador).**

**Report of the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (A/2470, A/2470/Add.1, A/AC.72/L.12) (continued)**

[Item 19]\*

1. Mr. TAKIEDDINE (Lebanon) said that for over five years his country had been watching the Palestine drama develop along its frontier. Almost a million human beings were undergoing the direst suffering and subsisting on a *per capita* equivalent of \$30 a year. The reports submitted to the Committee cast a sufficiently vivid light on the tragedy taking place.
2. His delegation appreciated the work that had been done by the contributing States and the voluntary organizations; but their efforts could not expunge the injustice that had been done to the refugees. The people of Palestine were, in fact the victims of Israel, which was unable to agree to the return of the Arab refugees but which nevertheless had no difficulty in admitting to its territory between 200,000 and 300,000 Jewish immigrants each year.
3. The refugees, like the Arab countries, were asking nothing more than the implementation of General Assembly resolution 194 (III), which provided for the repatriation of the refugees and for the payment of equitable compensation to those who decided not to return to their homes. However effective they might be, relief measures were only a palliative; the permanent solution was repatriation. While he had no intention of going directly into the political aspect of the question—one on which the report (A/2470) of the Director of the Agency was sufficiently explicit—he proposed to attempt a brief analysis of the situation, commenting where necessary.
4. In paragraph 5 of the report it was noted that the number of refugees receiving assistance amounted to approximately 872,000; that figure, however, did not take into account either the refugees living on the demarcation line between the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and Israel or those living on the frontiers between Gaza and Israel. Those Arabs, 250,000 in number, were known by the strange name of "economic refugees", and did not benefit regularly from the as-

sistance described in the report since they had not been driven from their homes. They had, however, been deprived of their property and should be granted the same assistance as other refugees. The report also mentioned that Israel had assumed responsibility for approximately 19,000 refugees living in its territory. Those persons had never left Israel but had merely been moved from one place to another; Israel therefore deserved no credit for maintaining them. Moreover, Israel had profited from the deal by "negotiating" the fate of those 19,000 Arabs with the Agency.

5. It was also stated in paragraph 5 of the report that the refugee population was increasing by 25,000 every year. That fact further complicated the dual objective to be achieved: to secure a progressive reduction in the number of refugees and to enable them to support themselves.

6. In paragraph 11 it was pointed out that the time taken to negotiate agreements on the work programme had been far longer than had been expected and that it would be several years before the full benefits of the Yarmuk-Jordan Valley project could be achieved. In paragraph 24 it was concluded that even after projects had been drawn up and work on them started a large number of refugees would still be without means of self-support. In the circumstances the Lebanese delegation was convinced that the only possible solution was to repatriate the refugees in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

7. In paragraph 8 the enlargement of the Advisory Commission which now included representatives of three host countries was welcomed. In that connexion he pointed out that his country was not represented on the Advisory Commission despite the sacrifices it had made in order to assist some 100,000 refugees who had been living in its territory for five years. He wished however to thank the representatives of the United States, France, the United Kingdom and Turkey for their statements on that subject and hoped that the Advisory Commission would be able to accept his Government's candidacy.

8. Paragraph 16 of the report stated clearly that "The absorption, even temporarily, of one million persons into a community of five-and-a-half millions (excluding Egypt) required a digestive capacity far beyond the economic possibilities of the area as they exist today." Moreover, the refugees would not renounce their right to repatriation, which had been recognized by the United Nations and by the Arabs countries. That was a personal right, the exercise of which could not be subordinated to the desires of any government whatsoever, nor to concessions in other fields. Lastly, the unfavourable economic conditions obtaining in the host countries created an acute problem for them. For example, 127,000 refugees had been settled in Lebanon despite the poverty of its natural resources and the density of its population. He emphasized that his country,

\* Indicates the item number on the agenda of the General Assembly.

which had made a particularly significant contribution towards the education of refugee children, had provided assistance amounting now to \$9 million. The Committee should therefore not lose sight of the fact that the offer to resettle refugees in host countries could only be a temporary remedy.

9. In paragraphs 18, 19, 20 and 21 the question of the administration of the relief programme was considered. It was not the responsibility of the host countries to undertake that administration even if they were able to do so. The principle of United Nations responsibility for the refugees was very important. The relevant General Assembly resolution brought out the authority and responsibility of the United Nations as a whole and Member States could not slough off their undertakings. Israel had a very special responsibility in the matter, for not only was that nation the direct cause of the problem but in addition it despoiled the refugees of their property after having driven them out and persecuted them.

10. In paragraph 31 of the report it was stated that the suggestions it contained would enable the Agency to help in solving the refugee problem on the lines laid down by the General Assembly. His delegation noted with satisfaction that the report did not ignore the General Assembly's resolution. Subject to the express reservation that those resolutions would be implemented, the Arab states would always be ready to collaborate in solving the problem.

11. With regard to the special report (A/2470/Add.1) of the Director and the Advisory Commission of the Agency, he observed that the presence of Egypt, Jordan and Syria on the Commission had enabled many difficulties to be overcome. It was to be hoped that Lebanon would also be made a member, so that all the host countries without exception might be represented on it.

12. The Lebanese delegation supported the proposal that the mandate of the Agency should be extended until 30 June 1955. It also supported the conclusions and proposals contained in paragraphs 6 to 9 of the special report. In the main, it approved, with the reservations mentioned, the annual report and the special report.

13. The attitude of Lebanon to the refugee problem was determined by the following principles: first, however effective relief measures might be, they were only a palliative; second, the only possible solution was to repatriate the refugees or to give fair compensation to those who did not wish to return to their homes, in accordance with the General Assembly resolutions, particularly resolution 194 (III); third, the refugees' right to repatriation was a sacred one, deriving from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and from the Charter, and had been recognized by the United Nations; fourth, the refugees, together with the peoples of the Arab States, rejected any plan of resettlement for the refugees which would divert them from their permanent goal—repatriation—or cause them to be absorbed by the Arab countries. On account of its special position, Lebanon attached particular importance to the last-mentioned principle.

14. The United States representative had raised two important points in his statement at the 25th meeting that called for comment.

15. In the first place he had said that the United States was not prepared to bear indefinitely such a large

part of the burden when Israel and the Arab States showed so little initiative in settling the matter among themselves.

16. The Lebanese delegation was convinced that Israel alone had merited that reproach. During the past five years the Arab States had taken every possible initiative and done everything in their power to prevent the problem of the refugees from becoming explosive. They had received the refugees from Palestine; they had made every kind of concession and sacrifice in the hope that a solution of the problem would not be long delayed. They had co-operated sincerely with international bodies; they had signed agreements, to which reference was made throughout the Agency's report. The Arab States had on their own initiative done everything that lay in their power; the entire responsibility for the tragedy of the refugees lay with Israel.

17. What had Israel done? Having driven the Palestine Arabs from their homes, it had dispossessed them; it had seized their goods, which it was now disposing of as it liked. For five years Israel had displayed an attitude of complete indifference towards the refugees. What was more, it had opened its doors to more than a million Jewish immigrants so as to be able to claim that its territory was over-populated. The Agency and the Conciliation Commission did not interest Israel. Moreover, the Commission had never pressed Israel to apply the resolutions of the United Nations. The Agency, for its part, could have signed and still could sign an agreement with Israel, one that would be infinitely wider in scope than all the agreements signed with the host countries, by which Israel would agree to apply one of the numerous General Assembly resolutions and cede to the Agency the Arab territories conquered by force of arms for the Agency to resettle the refugees there. There was no point in seeking a solution through economic projects; the solution could only be a political one.

18. Secondly, the United States representative had appealed to the Arab States and Israel to settle the problem between them. Lebanon was prepared to respond to that appeal if Israel was prepared to give effect to the General Assembly's resolutions. As the United States representative had stated, Israel ought, without delay, to take new measures to discharge the responsibilities it had accepted: it ought to reconsider the possibilities of repatriating the refugees and pay compensation to those who did not wish to return to their homes. Israel should respond to that appeal; so long as it continued to defy the United Nations, which had created it, the problem of the refugees would remain untouched.

19. Mr. CHANDA (India) observed that the annual report, the special report of the Acting Director and the Advisory Commission of the Agency, and the statements that various representatives had made, clearly showed the urgent need for relief for the refugees from Palestine and subsequently to secure their repatriation. Mr. Blandford, former Director of the Agency, and Mr. Carver, Acting Director, deserved thanks for the work they had done to achieve that object; a tribute was also due to the various organizations and individuals which had co-operated with the Agency to provide the refugees with the necessities of life. Unfortunately, all those combined efforts had failed even to realize that objective. Suffice it to mention that since February 1952, refugee children between the ages of one and seven had, for reasons of economy, been receiving only half

rations. As stated in paragraph 55 of the report, the effects of that reduction on the health of the babies had become apparent. Signs of food deficiency were beginning to appear in the children and the possible effects of a prolonged period of under-nutrition on the younger generation of refugees gave cause for alarm. The Indian delegation hoped that it would be possible before long to restore full rations to children in the age group from one to seven.

20. It was also stated in paragraph 57 of the annual report, that large numbers of refugees who had so far provided their own accommodation had now exhausted their resources. He hoped that those refugees would be given room in the UNRWA camps and that they would be received there on a footing of equality with the other refugees.

21. The Indian delegation welcomed the provision in paragraph 4 of the draft resolution submitted jointly by France, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States (A/AC.72/L.12), according to which the Assembly would request the Negotiating Committee for Extra Budgetary Funds to seek the funds required to meet the current needs of the relief programmes and to invite governments to take into account the need for the additional pledges which would be required to meet the total programme now established at \$292,800,000.

22. The execution of the relief programme, however, would not be enough to solve the problem which could be settled only at the political level. The Indian delegation hoped the solution would soon be found. Meanwhile, the most urgent need, that of providing for the subsistence of the refugees and their families, must be attended to. The rehabilitation of the refugees was still, however, the most important problem. In that connexion the Indian delegation was pleased to note that at the end of June 1953 the Agency had concluded with Jordan, Syria and Egypt, within the framework of the rehabilitation programme, four agreements involving a total sum of \$111 million and that furthermore a general agreement for an unspecified amount had been signed with the Government of Libya. The execution of the projects under consideration would enable the expenses of the relief programme to be reduced and would have a good effect on the morale of the refugees, for work would restore their self-respect.

23. India, which had itself experienced the serious problem of refugee movements in 1947, was aware of the distress and suffering which they caused. It was for that reason that it had been anxious to help the Agency to assist the Palestine refugees by offering a contribution in kind, in the form of cotton textiles to the value of \$104,000.

24. The Indian delegation noted with interest the suggestion in the annual report that the governments of the host countries should take over the administrative responsibility for relief, as also the direction of the programme for the education of the refugee children in their territories. That transfer of responsibilities, however, should only be made if the governments of the host countries were prepared to assume those responsibilities not later than 1 July 1954. Similarly, the transfer of responsibilities for the procurement and distribution of supplies needed by the refugees should be effected before 30 June 1955. On that point, the possibilities and views of the governments concerned should be ascertained.

25. The Indian delegation supported the proposal that the existence of the Agency should be prolonged for one year. It noted with satisfaction that three of the host countries were now members of the Advisory Commission and it hoped that the Advisory Commission would be authorized to admit Lebanon, too. It would therefore support part B of the joint draft resolution.

26. In conclusion, he reminded the Committee that the Palestine refugees, who were the victims of circumstances for which they were not responsible, were looking hopefully towards the United Nations. They must not be given the impression that the United Nations was abandoning them to their sad fate.

27. Mr. TZYRAS (Greece) said that his delegation had studied most carefully the two reports submitted for the Committee's consideration, as also the statement (23rd meeting) by the Acting Director of the Agency, from all of which a number of unsatisfactory points had emerged.

28. In the first place, with regard to the fund for direct relief, the sum of \$50 million, originally intended to cover three years, had been completely spent in two years. Furthermore, the number of refugees registered on the Agency's lists, far from decreasing, was increasing as a result of the natural growth of the refugee population. On the other hand, the contributing countries were displaying less and less eagerness to finance the relief fund. It must be recognized that it would be unreasonable to depend on the generosity of those countries indefinitely, especially if circumstances transformed the relief fund into a bottomless well.

29. The sum of \$200 million which should have been used for the implementation of a long-term programme had scarcely been touched; yet the execution of the part of the programme that concerned large-scale works was of capital importance for the success of the whole enterprise, for it would enable a large number of refugees to find employment and thus to provide for their own needs. So far, only \$111 million had been allocated; furthermore, the report of the Agency indicated that the projects being carried out were on a relatively small scale and that the preliminary studies of large projects had hardly begun. The report added that, even if large-scale projects were prepared and started during the year or in the near future in order to make use of the unassigned remainder of the \$200 million, the total number of refugees on the relief list would be 600,000 the following year and would still amount to about 500,000 in six years' time.

30. It was therefore no exaggeration to say that the problem of the Palestine refugees was as serious and complex as ever. Nevertheless, the Agency was not to be blamed. With the resources at its disposal and in the political and economic conditions in which it had had to carry out its task, it had done all that was humanly possible to improve the lot of almost 900,000 refugees. The disappointment that was now felt was due to the fact that too much had been expected of the three-year plan. More than ever, the success of the programme depended both on the generosity of the contributing countries and on the co-operation of all the governments concerned.

31. The Greek delegation was therefore particularly glad to note that Syria, Jordan and Egypt were already taking part in the work of the Advisory Commission and that Lebanon would soon be invited to do like-

wise; the expansion of the Advisory Commission would guarantee the Agency the full co-operation of the host countries, without whose support the Agency would be unable to overcome the numerous difficulties to which the Acting Director had drawn attention in his report.

32. The task which had still to be accomplished for the Palestine refugees was immense. The Greek delegation would support the joint draft resolution, for its adoption would offer prospects of better results. Unfortunately, Greece was not one of the countries which had been able to offer the Agency the practical assistance of generous financial support. Nevertheless, despite a difficult economic situation and limited resources, his country had thought it its duty to respond immediately to the appeal of the United Nations and to offer its contribution to the humanitarian work of relieving the sufferings of the Palestine refugees. That modest contribution by Greece was but a slender testimony of the spirit of solidarity which bound it to the refugees and the traditional friendship it cherished for the host countries. Those feelings were all the stronger in that Greece itself had, thirty years earlier, been faced with a similar problem, equally grave and tragic, which it had been able to solve only with the help of the League of Nations and the assistance of international loans, and after ten years of effort and sacrifice. He referred to that experience in order to extol the virtue of perseverance; if there were any other lesson to be drawn from it he would leave it to his colleagues especially to those whose governments were more particularly concerned in the solution of the refugee problem.

33. Mr. WILSON (New Zealand) expressed his appreciation of the achievements of UNRWA as recorded in the annual report. Though rehabilitation rather than relief was the chief aim of the United Nations in that field, it remained a fact of considerable importance that in the past year relief had been afforded by the Agency to over 800,000 refugees. There was also ground for satisfaction in the progress achieved in the matter of health and of primary educational facilities for the children of refugees. Praiseworthy efforts had also been made towards the provision of productive employment for the refugees to enable them to become self-supporting. The results of those efforts had unfortunately been disappointing.

34. Paragraph 9 of the annual report indicated that a major cause of that slow progress was the opposition of the refugees themselves, with which the indigenous population of the host countries tended to sympathize. That opposition constituted a formidable obstacle which must be overcome if tangible progress were to be achieved in implementing the provisions of the three-year plan. Paragraph 4 of the special report of the Acting Director and the Advisory Commission pointed out that that attitude might be modified if the refugees could be made fully to understand that those projects in no way affected their rights to repatriation or compensation as recognized in paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III). According to the same report, it was now clear that the rehabilitation of all the Arab refugees, in existing economic circumstances in the Near East, was for all practical purposes impossible. Thus, as Mr. Carver had stated, the solution of the problem did not lie wholly with the Agency, but must be sought in part at least in some other direction.

35. Paragraph 13 of the annual report stated that signs were not lacking that contributions for relief would not continue indefinitely, or at least not on the same scale, and that the contributors insisted that expenditure on relief should be reduced. New Zealand had for the last three years contributed towards the Agency. While it was perhaps significant that that contribution had been 50 per cent higher for the first period than for the second and third periods of the programme, that fact did not reflect any decrease in the sympathy of the New Zealand Government for the plight of the Palestine refugees. New Zealand had hoped, however, that relief funds would be reduced as rehabilitation and settlement progressed. The reports before the Committee did not afford evidence to that effect. For those reasons, any support which the New Zealand delegation might feel able to give to proposals for the prolongation of the Agency's mandate, renewed appeals for relief funds or any of the other proposals embodied in the draft resolution, must not be taken as implying an undertaking by New Zealand to make a further contribution. The New Zealand Government would examine the question carefully and make its decision known in due course.

36. It should be noted that the annual report and the special report made no mention of the political problems involved in the question of the Palestine refugees. The caution of the authors of the report was undoubtedly commendable but it should not be forgotten that the members of the *Ad Hoc* Political Committee could not ignore those problems. The statements made by the representatives of the members of the Advisory Commission gave certain encouraging signs of future co-operation between the Agency and the governments of the host countries. Those governments did not, however, appear to have done all they could to facilitate the work of the Agency. It was evident that for many refugees the only hope lay in the creation in the Arab States of opportunities to become self-supporting. The governments of the Arab States did not, however, seem prepared to co-operate fully to that end with the Agency or to resume normal relations with the Israel Government, which alone could provide a basis on which a serious contribution by Israel to the solution of the Palestine refugee problem could be expected.

37. That contribution should include the two following measures: first, the return of a significant number of refugees to Israel; secondly, the payment of compensation to those refugees who decided not to return to Israel. New Zealand was of course aware of the Israel Government's objections to such measures but it was nevertheless incumbent upon Israel to offer that contribution to the solution of the Palestine refugee problem.

38. Subject to the above considerations the New Zealand delegation was in general agreement with the provisions of the joint draft resolution.

39. In conclusion he suggested, while admitting that there was no exact analogy, that something might be learnt from the experience of Greece in dealing with a great flood of refugees thirty years ago. Similarly he wondered whether the return to Israel of some of the refugees driven from their homes would be as great an embarrassment as the Israel Government claimed. During the discussions which had preceded the adoption of the 1947 resolutions, it had been emphasized that the Palestinian Jews were of the same race as the Arab

inhabitants of that region and that the two peoples should therefore be able to live in peace in the new State of Israel. In spite of all that had happened since, it was permissible to recall those observations which had

been among the arguments that had persuaded New Zealand to support the 1947 resolutions.

The meeting rose at 4.30 p.m.