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UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR
PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST

Population and refugees displaced since 1967

Report of the Secretary-General

1. The present report is submitted to the General Assembly in pursuance of paragraph 5 of its resolution 34/52 E of 23 November 1979 concerning population and refugees displaced since 1967, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General, after consulting with the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), to report to it at its thirty-fifth session on Israel's compliance with paragraph 4 of the resolution. In paragraph 4 of that resolution, the Assembly reiterated its call upon Israel (a) to take immediate steps for the return of all the displaced inhabitants and (b) to desist from all measures that obstructed the return of the displaced inhabitants, including measures affecting the physical and demographic structure of the occupied territories. In paragraphs 1 to 3 of the resolution, the Assembly reaffirmed the inalienable rights of all the displaced inhabitants to return to their homes or former places of residence in the territories occupied by Israel since 1967, and declared once more that any attempt to restrict, or to attach conditions to, the free exercise of the right of return by any displaced person was inconsistent with that inalienable right and inadmissible; considered any and all agreements embodying any restriction on or condition for the return of the displaced inhabitants as null and void; and deplored the continued refusal of the Israeli authorities to take steps for the return of the displaced inhabitants.

2. By a note verbale dated 21 February 1980 addressed to the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations, the Secretary-General drew attention to his reporting responsibility under paragraph 5 of General Assembly resolution 34/52 E and requested the Government of Israel to forward to him, as soon as possible, any relevant information on the implementation of the respective provisions of the resolution.

3. By a note verbale dated 2 September 1980, the Permanent Representative of Israel conveyed to the Secretary-General his Government's comments on resolution 34/52 E which, as in previous reports on this matter, are reproduced verbatim below:

"The resolution in question is unrealistic and obstructive. It serves the aims of those Arab States engaged in political warfare against Israel. That destructive intent was made all the more evident last year by the introduction of a new paragraph 2, which is aimed directly against the ongoing peace process in the Middle East. Israel therefore rejects that paragraph completely.

"This notwithstanding, Israel's humanitarian policy with regard to persons who left the area of hostilities as a result of the Six Day War of 1967, instigated by Arab Governments, remains unchanged. It has been set out in detail in the successive replies submitted on an annual basis by Israel to the Secretary-General since 1969. The last of those replies was contained in the report of the Secretary-General dated 16 October 1979 (A/34/518).

"The principles guiding Israel's policy in the present case are twofold.

"First, Israel has made special arrangements for the reunification of families and for the amelioration of hardship cases among residents and refugees alike in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza District. In parallel, Israel has maintained a liberal policy of 'open bridges' to facilitate the free movement of people, including refugees, in both directions across the River Jordan.

"Second, Israel has been, and still is, duty-bound to safeguard the lives and safety of its own citizens, as well as the lives and safety of the residents of the territories administered by it since 1967. Certain Arab States and the PLO terrorist organization have repeatedly attempted to exploit the freedom of movement into the areas concerned and into Israel proper in order to infiltrate their operatives, together with explosives, arms and sabotage matériel. As long as the declared aim of those Arab States and their instrument, the PLO, remains the destruction of the State of Israel, the security problems posed thereby will inevitably place constraints on the return of persons displaced in 1967.

"The aim of Yasser Arafat's al-Fatah and PLO to liquidate Israel was reaffirmed only this spring, in the 'political programme' adopted by al-Fatah at its fourth congress held in Damascus at the end of May (see the letters from the Permanent Representative of Israel of 4 and 6 June 1980 and of 14 August 1980, circulated as documents S/13985, A/35/282 and A/35/395 - S/14107 respectively).

"Despite the very real security risks involved, Israel remains committed to its humanitarian approach to the question which is the subject of this note."

4. In connexion with paragraph 4 (a) of General Assembly resolution 34/52 E the Secretary-General has obtained from the Commissioner-General of UNRWA the information available to him on the return of refugees registered with the Agency. As indicated in earlier reports, 1/ the Agency is not involved in any arrangements for the return of refugees; nor is it involved in any arrangements for the return of displaced persons, none of whom is registered as a refugee. Its information is based on requests by returning registered refugees for transfer of rations to the areas to which they have returned and subsequent correction of Agency records. The Agency would not necessarily be aware of the return of any registered refugees who did not request the provision of rations or services but believes they would be very few in number. So far as is known to the Agency, between 1 July 1979 and 30 June 1980, 146 displaced registered refugees returned from east Jordan to the West Bank, and 67 returned to the Gaza Strip, of whom 54 were from east Jordan and 13 from the West Bank. It should be noted that some of these may not be displaced registered refugees, but rather members of the family of a displaced registered refugee who accompanied him on his return or joined him there, but who were not themselves displaced in 1967. No reports were received by UNRWA of displaced registered refugees returning to the Gaza Strip from Egypt. Thus, taking into account the estimate given in paragraph 4 of last year's report, the number of displaced registered refugees who are known by the Agency to have returned to the occupied territories since June 1967 is about 9,600. The Agency is unable to estimate the total number of displaced inhabitants who have returned. It keeps records only of registered refugees and, as pointed out above, even those records, particularly with respect to location of registered refugees, may be incomplete.

1/ A/9156, para. 5; Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-ninth Session, Annexes, agenda item 38, document A/9740, para. 4; ibid., Thirtieth Session, Annexes, agenda item 54, document A/10253, para. 4; ibid., Thirty-first Session, Annexes, agenda item 53, document A/31/240, para. 4; ibid., Thirty-second Session, Annexes, agenda item 55, document A/32/263, para. 4; ibid., Thirty-third Session, Annexes, agenda item 54, document A/33/286, para. 4; and ibid., Thirty-fourth Session, Annexes, agenda item 50, document A/34/518, para. 4.