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SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE

10th meeting

held on

Monday, 20 October 1980

at 10.30 a.m.

New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 10th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. MATHIAS (Portugal)

later: Mrs. KEKEH (Togo)

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 53: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (continued)

- (a) REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONER-GENERAL
- (b) REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE FINANCING OF THE UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST
- (c) REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE
- (d) REPORTS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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The meeting was called to order at 10.45 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 53: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (continued) (A/SPC/35/L.3)

- (a) REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONER-GENERAL (A/35/13)
- (b) REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE FINANCING OF THE UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (A/35/526)
- (c) REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE (A/35/474)
- (d) REPORTS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/35/438 and Corr.1, 472, 473 and 474)

1. Mr. WAHBI (Saudi Arabia) said that the Agency's budget deficit was a constant threat to part or all of UPRWA programmes and activities. The reduction in educational programmes and the discharging of thousands of teachers would have a catastrophic effect on the future of the refugees and their children. The mandate of UPRWA must therefore be renewed and the Agency must be provided with sufficient financial resources to guarantee its future functioning.

2. Furthermore, Israel, which had provoked the diaspora of more than 2 million Palestinians and deprived them of their property, means of subsistence and basic rights, had further aggravated the situation and paralysed the normal activities of the Agency. Israeli authorities had expelled UNESCO officials who wished to study conditions in the field of secondary education, had closed down certain teaching and training centres and had committed acts of aggression in southern Lebanon. His delegation therefore expressed its grave concern at the deterioration of the over-all situation in the area. With certain reservations he supported the letter from the Chairman of the Advisory Commission addressed to the Commissioner-General concerning the serious consequences which would result from reductions in UPRWA services because of the budget deficit. His Government also agreed with the view that the entire international community should make a concerted effort to support the work of UPRWA and contribute in so far as possible to the effective and stable financing of the Agency until a just, permanent and comprehensive solution to the problem of Palestine was found.

3. Israel, supported by certain influential countries, especially the United States of America, continued to defy United Nations resolutions, in particular General Assembly resolution 194 (III). He reiterated the position of the Arab Group condemning certain States and circles which sought to lessen the responsibility of the international community for the problem of the Palestine refugees and to make out that it was a purely Arab question, thus ignoring the role played by Israel for the previous 32 years. The international community was in duty bound to support the Agency financially and should take the appropriate measures provided for in the Charter to secure the implementation of United Nations resolutions upholding the rights of the Palestinian people, especially its right to return to its homeland and its right to self-determination.

(Mr. Wahbi, Saudi Arabia)

4. Lastly, he expressed the condolences of his delegation to the Government and people of Algeria in connexion with the tragic event which had recently taken place in that country.

5. Mr. DIDIER (Luxembourg), speaking on behalf of the European Economic Community, stressed the humanitarian aspect of the problem of the Palestine refugees and said that only a comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict would bring about a definitive solution of that aspect of the problem. EEC was aware of the urgent need to satisfy the vital requirements of the Palestinian population. The Agency throughout its 30 years of existence had assumed a semi-governmental role in providing educational and health programmes for a population of almost 2 million persons. Since the Agency was dependent upon voluntary contributions, it would be forced to reduce or eliminate certain programmes unless additional contributions were forthcoming. Under those conditions only a large-scale increase in contributions could permit the Agency to maintain the services which it was mandated to provide. During the year under consideration, the countries of the European Economic Community had increased their contribution, which represented a third of the resources coming from Governments. It was gratifying to note that many other Governments had also increased their financial support but, unfortunately, the number of contributing countries was far too small. He expressed the hope that all Member States would respond to the appeal of the Agency by increasing their financial support as much as possible.

6. During the previous year the hostilities in Lebanon had continued to impede the programmes of the Agency and had forced many refugees to flee from the region. He urged all parties concerned to refrain from further aggravating the plight of the refugees. Furthermore, EEC deplored the lack of co-operation and the negative attitude of several parties with regard to the functioning of the Agency, which had been mandated by the United Nations to provide the refugees with humanitarian services. He stressed that the headquarters of the Agency should be located in the area of operations and expressed the hope that the Commissioner-General would give due consideration to that question. He reiterated the position of EEC that UNRWA operations were vital in guaranteeing decent living conditions for the Palestine refugees until a just and lasting solution to the situation in the Near East had been achieved; and lastly, he expressed support for the renewal of the mandate of the Agency.

7. Mrs. Kekeh (Togo) took the Chair.

8. Mr. BAH (Guinea) agreed with the Working Group that a reduction in the services of UNRWA would have serious social and political consequences, with implications for the refugees, for the host countries and for the prospects of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. The continuation of those services was an obligation of the entire world community acting through the United Nations. He expressed particular concern at the plight of young Palestinians who would suffer from the proposed reduction in educational programmes. His delegation supported any proposal designed to give the Agency the means to continue its services in the area.

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(Mr. Bah, Guinea)

9. The fundamental problem, however, was not financial, but political. In that connexion he agreed with the Working Group that as long as a just and lasting settlement of the problem of the Palestinian refugees had not been achieved, the Agency's humanitarian services in the form of relief assistance, health care and education would remain indispensable.

10. He stressed the need to bring about a political solution to the problem in the Middle East and to restore the rights of the Palestinian people. He expressed alarm at the refusal of Israel to comply with United Nations resolutions and at its repeated violations of the Geneva Convention which prohibited the annexation of territory by force, the transfer of populations and the occupation of their land. Lastly, he stressed that a just solution to all the problems in the Middle East must be based on peaceful coexistence within clearly defined boundaries.

11. Mr. SOHI (Liberia) said that in spite of its vital role, UNWRA was faced with imminent collapse because of its budget deficit. The Agency's financial crisis should not be allowed to disrupt its educational programme, on which the social and economic mobility and self-sufficiency of the Palestinian people depended. Every effort should therefore be made to ensure the right of the Palestinians to an adequate education. It was generally recognized that a political solution was the key to a final solution of the problem of the Palestinians, whose legitimate rights had been denied for too long. However, the failure to achieve a political settlement in the Middle East conflict should not obstruct the essential humanitarian work of UNWRA or influence the contributions of Member States to the Agency. An appeal must be made to all Member States and non-governmental organizations to contribute, to an extent commensurate with their financial abilities, to UNWRA's operational budget. The international community must carry out its responsibility to guarantee the proper functioning of the Agency and its financial viability. In spite of its meagre financial resources, his country had consistently contributed to the financing of UNWRA and would continue to lend support to humanitarian efforts to relieve the suffering of the Palestinian people.

12. Mr. ABDEL MEGUID (Egypt) said that the present debate was taking place at a time when the Middle East was witnessing dangerous events that threatened the peace and security of the world. The Committee must seek practical ways of enabling UNWRA to carry on with its task of providing assistance to the hundreds of thousands of refugees who had been driven from their homes. His delegation expressed its deep appreciation of the efforts made by UNWRA and its Commissioner-General to assist the Palestinian people; and it urged that the Agency's mandate, which was scheduled to expire on 30 June 1981, should be extended. The refugee problem could not, however, be solved by relief efforts, but only through a just and lasting peace which guaranteed the rights of Palestinians, particularly their inalienable right to self-determination and their right to return to their homes. In that connexion, he cited paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) which referred to compensation for the property of those refugees who chose not to return and for loss of or damage to property which should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible. Regrettably, neither that resolution nor the many others which had been adopted since 1948 had yet been implemented.

(Mr. Abdel Meguid, Egypt)

13. It was unfortunate that there had been no improvement in UNRWA's financial situation in the past year; in fact, the situation had deteriorated to such an extent that the Agency's very existence was now endangered. His delegation whole-heartedly endorsed the statement made by the Commissioner-General in paragraph 4 of his report (A/35/13) that UNRWA's sudden disappearance from the scene would cause severe problems both to the Palestine refugees and to the host Governments but that, unless the financial prospects of the Agency improved greatly in 1981, that grim prospect might become a reality. While emphasizing the need to maintain existing services in all five fields of operation, his delegation agreed that priority should be given to maintaining programmes in the West Bank and Gaza, where there was no Arab Government or administration which might be in a position to assume responsibility for the programmes. The international community could not allow 2 million refugees to be deprived of the services which helped to alleviate some of the sufferings unjustly imposed on them. It was essential that all States should help shoulder the cost of refugee services until a just and lasting solution was found to the Middle East problem. He appealed to those States which had not yet contributed to UNRWA to do so; and, at the same time, he paid a tribute to all those States which had increased their contributions in the previous year. As the United Nations had played a fundamental role in creating the Palestinian problem - of which the refugee problem was just one aspect - the international community must assume greater responsibility in solving it.

14. Despite its own economic problems Egypt had always helped - and always would help - the Palestinian people as much as possible, directly or through its contributions to the UNRWA budget. As could be seen from table 18 in the Commissioner-General's report (A/35/13), Egypt had contributed nearly \$99 million in direct assistance to the Palestine refugees in the past year; that was the largest amount contributed by any country. In addition, his Government also made a token contribution to the Agency's budget. It had every confidence in the Agency and urged others to contribute to it. In an effort to encourage others, in 1979, it had doubled its contribution. In addition, Egypt had opened its educational establishments, over the past three years, to the children of Palestinian refugees who must be provided with educational opportunities. In the 1979/1980 school year it had awarded 13,239 scholarships to Palestinian students at its universities, the largest number of places given to refugees by any single country. Egypt's educational and other institutions would continue to remain open to Palestinian refugees.

15. The serious situation facing UNRWA and the possible consequences of a continued deterioration in the Agency's financial situation had been clearly stated by the Commissioner-General in his report. It was high time that the eloquent statements delivered within the precincts of the United Nations, and the votes to extend the mandate of UNRWA, were matched by financial contributions so that the Agency could carry out its work. His delegation expressed deep concern at the comments made in paragraphs 82 and 76-79 of the report regarding the irregularity of education provided in some schools and institutions managed by UNRWA, owing to arbitrary decisions by the Israeli authorities, and the banning of textbooks sent by Egypt after those books had been approved by UNESCO. It vigorously condemned

(Mr. Abdel Meguid, Egypt)

Israel's continuation of its policy - which was condemned by all - of demolishing the houses of refugees as an arbitrary, punitive measure. Those measures merely increased the suffering of innocent people and were not conducive to stability or peace in the area. Similarly, his delegation condemned the arrest and detention of Agency staff without any charges being brought against them, and other restrictions placed on them in the performance of their work, as noted in paragraphs 171 to 179 of the report.

16. Finally, he reiterated that the only way to halt the fratricidal wars in the region was by achieving a just and lasting settlement which would enable the Palestinians to recover their inalienable and legitimate rights.

17. Mr. TOPCUOGLU (Turkey) said that the question of the Palestine refugees was primarily a political problem, and that unless and until a just and lasting comprehensive solution was found there would be no end to their suffering. Such a solution could be achieved only through the withdrawal of Israel from all Arab territories, including Jerusalem, occupied since 1967 and the recognition of the legitimate and inalienable rights of the Palestinians including their right to self-determination and to establish their own independent State. In the meantime, the international community was compelled to maintain UNRWA and its services.

18. The report of the Commissioner-General (A/35/13) and his recent statement in the Committee had drawn attention, once again, to the grave financial dilemma facing the Agency. His delegation noted with deep regret that the over-all financial situation of the Agency was more alarming than ever. Budget projections indicated that the deficit for the next year would be at least \$56 million. Both the alternatives outlined in paragraph 7 of the report - an even cut in programmes across the five fields of operation or curtailment or halting of the programmes selectively in one or more fields - would involve considerable reductions in the Agency's education programmes. Since there had been more than 300,000 students in UNRWA's elementary and preparatory schools in the previous year, the very serious consequences of closing schools and putting those children on the street were not difficult to imagine. Moreover, as the Commissioner-General had pointed out, the political repercussions of such action would be enormous, not only for the refugees but also for the host countries and for the peace prospects in the Middle East in general.

19. His delegation fully shared the view that developments over the last 30 years had made UNRWA a significant factor in the political equation in the area. With that in mind, the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA had stated that it continued to believe that as long as a just and lasting settlement of the problem of the Palestine refugees had not been achieved, the Agency's humanitarian services in the form of relief assistance, health care and education remained indispensable.

20. Referring to the pertinent remarks made by certain delegations to the effect that it was the responsibility of all States to provide relief for human suffering, irrespective of their geographic location or political attitude towards the Middle East question, he said that the Working Group had made every effort to solve the

(Mr. Toucuoglu, Turkey)

financial problem of UNRWA within that context. His delegation believed that the relocation of the Agency's headquarters into the area of operations would help to increase its effectiveness. Accordingly, he agreed with the views expressed by the Chairman of the Advisory Commission of UNRWA in his letter and welcomed the readiness of the Commissioner-General to consult with any of the host Governments on that subject.

21. Finally, on behalf of his Ambassador, the Chairman of the Working Group, he repeated the Working Group's urgent call to all Governments to contribute more generously to UNRWA to enable it to continue its activities in full.

22. Mr. SACHENKO (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) expressed his delegation's condolences to the Government and people of Algeria in connexion with the tragic event which had recently occurred in that country.

23. Developments in the Middle East had shown that the question of the Palestine refugees must be considered in the context of the Palestine problem as a whole. The denial of the legitimate rights of the Arab people of Palestine remained one of the basic causes of tension in the area. In spite of the long-standing recognition by the United Nations of the rights of the Palestinian people, and the position of the international community that a general and lasting peace in the Middle East must be based on a just solution to the Palestine problem, the Palestinian people was still a nation in exile, deprived of its homeland and its property. Israel and the States which supported it, had prolonged the suffering and privation of the Palestinian people for decades. The solution of the Palestine problem must be part of a comprehensive political settlement with the participation of all interested parties, including the Palestinian people represented by the Palestine Liberation Organization. That settlement must be based on the complete withdrawal of all Israeli forces from Arab territories occupied in 1967, including the eastern part of Jerusalem, on the implementation of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the creation of their own State, and on the safeguarding of the independence and development of all States in that area.

24. Tension in the Middle East continued to increase, because of Israeli aggression supported by States protecting their so-called "vital interests". It was clear to everyone that the Camp David Accords would not lead to a genuine settlement of the conflict; their aims were rather to consolidate the results of the aggression of 1967, to provide possibilities for annexing more Palestinian and other Arab land and to prevent the creation of a Palestinian State.

25. Lastly, his country reaffirmed its solidarity with the struggle of Arab Peoples to defend their legitimate rights and interests, and it expressed its confidence in the final victory of the long-suffering people of Palestine.

The meeting rose at 11.50 a.m.