



SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 26th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. IRUMBA (Uganda)

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 60: 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 10.50 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 60: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (continued) (A/SPC/36/L.6, L.7, L.8, L.9, L.10, L.11)

- (a) REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONER-GENERAL (A/36/13)
- (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/36/615)
- (c) REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE (A/36/529)
- (d) REPORTS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/36/385 and Add.1 and 2, A/36/558, 559 and 593)

1. Mrs. IKRAMULLAH (Pakistan) introduced draft resolution A/SPC/36/L.6 and L.7, entitled respectively "Palestine refugees in the Gaza Strip" and "Population and refugees displaced since 1967". Bangladesh, Cuba, Cyprus and India had joined the sponsors of both draft resolutions. The first text (A/SPC/36/L.6) demanded that Israel should desist from the resettlement of Palestine refugees in the Gaza Strip against their will and away from their home and hearth, in violation of their inalienable right to return to their homeland, and that it should desist from demolishing refugee shelters on nominal punitive grounds. Draft resolution A/SPC/36/L.7 reaffirmed the inalienable rights of all displaced inhabitants to return to their homes in the territories occupied by Israel since 1967, declared once again that all agreements embodying any restriction on or condition for the return of the displaced inhabitants were null and void, and called upon Israel once more to take immediate steps for the return of the displaced inhabitants.

2. The sponsors of the two draft resolutions were not all Arabs or even Moslems. They were merely countries which wished to support the just cause of a wronged people. That was a good augury for the future; and she hoped that the two draft resolutions would be the last that it would be necessary to submit in order to right a grievous wrong which had caused much suffering. There would be no real peace until all the injustices which had arisen in the wake of the Second World War had been undone. Then the new world order, which all were awaiting, would come into being.

3. Mr. CHOWDHURY (Bangladesh) introduced draft resolution A/SPC/36/L.8, entitled "Revenues derived from Palestine refugee properties". The main purpose of the text was that the Secretary-General and the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine should be requested, on the basis of the identification and evaluation of Arab property completed several years previously by the Conciliation Commission and also of the schedule of Arab owners held by the Land Office, to take all appropriate steps for the protection and administration of Arab property — whose value was estimated at billions of dollars — and to establish a fund for the receipt of income derived therefrom, until the rightful owners could exercise their right to return in accordance with paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III). The establishment of such a fund would enable UNRWA to solve its present financial difficulties.

4. Mr. VAN HOUTUM (Netherlands) introduced draft resolution A/SPC/36/L.10, entitled "Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East". The purpose of the draft resolution was, basically, to have the Working Group continue its efforts for a further period of one year; and the Secretary-General was requested to provide the Group with the necessary services and assistance.

5. The Working Group had, in its report, drawn attention to the precariousness of the financial situation of the Agency on the eve of the 1982 financial year; it had given warning of the serious political and social consequences which would result from a cutback in the education programme, and it had recommended that the finances of the Agency should be established on a more solid basis as soon as possible and that consultations should be held on the apportionment of expenses. If it could continue its work for another year, it would be able to follow up its recommendations and, at the same time, help the Commissioner-General to collect funds. The sponsors of draft resolution A/SPC/36/L.10 hoped that the text would be adopted by consensus.

6. Mr. FUENTES (Spain) observed that UNRWA was now in a critical financial situation which might oblige it to discontinue its activities partially or completely. It was unthinkable that a deficit which had just doubled in four years should be allowed to go on increasing indefinitely; and it was equally unthinkable that the Agency should terminate its activities, since that would have extremely serious consequences for the region. UNRWA could not be allowed to terminate its activities until its raison d'être had ceased to exist — i.e. until the Palestinians had returned to their homes, recovered their property and freely exercised their rights as a nation.

7. For 32 years the Agency had been endeavouring to help displaced Palestinians to maintain their human dignity, by providing them with the basic necessities. Also, since a break in the continuity of their culture and education would have almost irreversible consequences, it had been helping them to maintain the continuity of their culture so that they could re-establish themselves as a State as soon as the political problem was solved. In the meantime, an entire people was living in deplorable conditions, in which it was surviving only because of its firm determination to maintain its national identity. But, in addition to that human dimension, there was also a much wider political dimension — in particular, the question of the exercise of the right of the Palestinians to self-determination. His delegation would revert to that question in due course.

8. What was important now was to rescue UNRWA from its financial difficulties. Spain regularly made a contribution which was one of the largest (about \$1 million per year, in the form of food products: the aggregate value of its contributions now exceeded \$10 million), and it was intending to maintain its contribution at the same level. The contributions it was making to UNRWA undoubtedly represented an economic sacrifice for Spain, and reflected the importance which it attached to the solution of the problem of Palestine and to the work of UNRWA. For financing the activities of UNRWA, the voluntary nature of the contributions should be maintained but the number and amounts of the contributions should be increased, so that inflows of funds would become more regular.

(Mr. Fuentes, Spain)

9. Some countries took the view that the problem was of no concern to them. That short-sighted policy might have unfortunate effects for everyone. It was abnormal that UNRWA should hitherto have been financed entirely by a very small number of countries, which were not the countries directly responsible for the present situation.

10. The contents of the official communiqué published in September 1979, after an official visit by Mr. Yasser Arafat, were still valid. Spain wished to develop ties of friendship with the Arab world whose just causes it supported, since it believed that peace in the Middle East could be achieved only by a comprehensive and equitable settlement based on respect for United Nations resolutions and implementation of the inalienable rights of the Palestine nation.

11. Mr. LICHTENSTEIN (United States of America) observed that UNRWA was making virtually superhuman efforts with inadequate resources and in constant uncertainty regarding the future. It had been able to avoid a financial crisis in 1981 only as a result of the most stringent cost-cutting and the pledging of extra funds by a number of Member States; but the crisis had only been postponed. UNRWA could not continue simply to stumble from crisis to crisis, burdened by ever-increasing needs and ever-increasing deficits. Most Governments in the world had serious budgetary problems and were constrained to cut back on essential programmes of assistance even for their own citizens; and at the same time they were being called upon to contribute more and more funds to help people in desperate straits, particularly the millions of refugees in Africa and Asia. Since the creation of UNRWA, the United States Government had contributed nearly \$1 billion — almost one half of the Agency's total expenditures. It hoped once again to increase its contribution in 1982. But other nations also — especially those in the Middle East with the means to do so — must assume more of the burden of financing the Agency.

12. Nevertheless, the problems of the Agency would not be solved by providing it with more resources or giving it more emergency grants. A final resolution of the Palestine refugee problem could be achieved only within the context of a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East as a whole; and such a just and comprehensive peace could be achieved only by negotiations among all the parties in the region and not by wars or threats of war, or by acts of terrorism, or by inflammatory rhetoric. It was through negotiations between Israel and Egypt that the Sinai had been evacuated and Egyptian refugees had been able to return home. Those negotiations had been inspired by the wish to pave the way for a comprehensive peace and — most important of all — to eradicate the roots of the conflict. His Government was deeply committed to the ongoing Camp David process of negotiation, and to a comprehensive peace within which legitimate Palestinian rights could be realized and the Palestinian problem could be solved in all of its fundamental aspects.

13. Mr. AL-MUSAWI (Bahrain) said that the international Zionist movement threatened the security and stability of the peoples of the world because, as had been recognized by the General Assembly, it was a racist movement based on the conviction that the Jewish people was the chosen people and that there was a basic difference

(Mr. Al-Musawi, Bahrain)

between Jews and other peoples. The goal of zionism was to enslave the Palestinian people and the other Arab peoples. It was for that reason that the Arab peoples stood on the side of the Palestinian people in their struggle to prevent that danger from extending to other regions of the world.

14. He welcomed the fact that a large number of peoples recognized the validity of the struggle and aspirations of the Palestinian people but deplored the existence of forces which morally and materially supported Israeli aggression and occupation. At the head of those forces, which sometimes went too far in their zeal, stood the United States of America. Contrary to universal moral values and its own interests, that country continued to support the warlike aims of Israel.

15. The current debate provided a clear example of that collusion. Israel like its accomplices wished to see the Palestinian refugees decimated by hunger and disease so that they could no longer assert their rights. However, while Israel had been able to seize Palestine, it would never succeed in destroying the will of Palestinians.

16. The question of the Palestinian refugees was merely the consequence of the implementation of Zionist ideology. Indeed, as Mr. Weizman, the former President of Israel, had stated, the Zionists had collaborated with the British Government so that Palestine could be returned to the Jews after being cleared of its Arab inhabitants. It was the Balfour Declaration and the Zionist conspiracies devised to carry it out which were at the root of the tragedy of the Palestinian people. Israel could not therefore assert, as it had just done, that it was the Arab States, by refusing to recognize its existence, that were responsible for that tragedy.

17. Israel accused the Arab States which demanded implementation of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of disregarding the provisions of that resolution which dealt with negotiations. But Israel could not claim recognition by the Arab States while it had seized by force the entire fatherland of the Palestinian people. That would be equivalent to expecting Arabs to recognize organized terrorism, persecution and assassination. Furthermore, Israel did not really want to negotiate a peaceful and equitable settlement. If that was its real aim, it would begin talks with the Palestine Liberation Organization, the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. How, in any event, could Israel negotiate with the Palestinian people while they were shut out of their country? Finally, Israel did not respect the agreements which it signed. For example, on 10 March 1949, only two weeks after having signed the Rhodes Armistice Agreement, it had seized the Gulf of Aqaba. Israel knew no logic other than that of force and domination.

18. The Arabs could not accept the Camp David agreements. Those agreements in effect legitimized acquisition of territory by force and conferred on Israel a recognition which it had not been able to obtain by war over the past thirty years. Moreover, they did not recognize the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. In short, the Camp David agreements represented a veritable capitulation, and it would require more than the absence of other agreements to convince Arabs to accede to it.

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(Mr. Al-Musawi, Bahrain)

19. The unprecedented financial crisis currently threatening UNRWA endangered not only the fate of the Palestinian refugees but also security and peace in the region and in the world. All that because of a deficit which, in view of the \$500 billion which the world spent annually on weapons, was, in fact, absurd. Urgent measures were therefore needed to overcome that crisis.

20. His delegation believed that the question of Palestine must be resolved in two phases. The first would consist of establishing a system of financing UNRWA whereby the United Nations assumed responsibility for part or all of the costs so that the fate of the refugees would no longer depend on the whims of potential donors. The second phase would consist of permitting the return of the Palestinian refugees to their country, a return to which Israel was opposed and which it was therefore left to the Palestine Liberation Organization to organize successfully.

21. In conclusion, he expressed his gratitude to the Commissioner-General of UNRWA and to its staff for the tireless devotion with which they were carrying out their noble mission.

22. Mr. ABDUL MADI (Syrian Arab Republic) commended the Commissioner-General for the competence and wisdom with which he was directing the work of the Agency. He then drew attention to the scope of UNRWA's activities and the importance of contributions provided by his country.

23. He calculated that UNRWA, during the past year, had devoted to its activities in the fields of education, relief and health care some \$200 million, or a little less than \$100 per Palestinian refugee, while the United States, by itself, provided Israel with assistance of \$1,000 per inhabitant, assistance for which, far from being humanitarian as was that of UNRWA, the sole purpose was to permit Israel to carry out its policy of defiance of the United Nations.

24. If Syria was still suffering the consequences of the question of Palestine, it was because the United Nations had not been able to implement its resolutions, in particular, those which legitimized the right of the Palestinians to return to their homes.

25. His delegation believed that the current method of financing UNRWA did not permit the Agency to carry out its functions properly. The successive crises of UNRWA were invariably overcome at the expense of the Palestinian refugees and the Arab countries which accommodated them. As was indicated in the report of the Commissioner-General, it was not possible to reduce further the services provided to the refugees without causing the collapse of UNRWA and, in so doing, endangering international peace and security.

26. He therefore supported the view expressed by the Advisory Commission at its recent meeting in Vienna that a more solid and stable method of financing must be found for the Agency. In that connexion, he recalled that the General Assembly had already defrayed, for some years now, the costs of the Agency's international staff.

27. Mr. SHAHRYAR (Bangladesh) recalled that the General Assembly in establishing UNRWA had considered that assistance to Palestinian refugees was of primary importance in furthering conditions of peace. Not only could the problem of refugees, therefore, not be dissociated from the question of the Middle East, but, as had been said, the humanitarian activities and financial problems of the Agency had a basic political ingredient which could not be ignored. To resolve the question of Palestine, it must be recognized that the Palestinian people had the inalienable right to self-determination, including the right to establish a State of their own in their homeland. The United Nations must without any further delay act decisively to that end and save the Palestinian people from the ignominy of occupation. The main obstacle was the aggressive and expansionist policy of Israel, which was ruthlessly persecuting and plundering the Palestinians in the territories it occupied, creating thousands of homeless and displaced persons. The military and police actions of the Israelis did not spare even UNRWA personnel. It was dismaying to learn that the Israeli authorities were objecting to the establishment of a university in Jerusalem for the Palestine refugees, under the aegis of the United Nations, to cater to the needs of those oppressed people in search of intellectual nourishment.

28. Bangladesh had often stated its position on Palestine refugees displaced since 1967. As in previous years, it had co-sponsored draft resolutions on Palestine refugees in the Gaza Strip and on refugees displaced since 1967, because it wished to underscore its strong support for the principle and the free exercise of the right of return by any displaced person. It had also co-sponsored the draft resolution on revenues derived from Palestine refugee properties for the reasons he had outlined in introducing it, as well as draft resolution A/SPC/36/L.9 on assistance to persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 hostilities and draft resolution A/SPC/36/L.10 on the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA.

29. UNRWA had to continue its activities on behalf of close to 2 million Palestine refugees for three more years. But the Agency's financial crisis had attained alarming proportions. It was extremely disturbing to think that such a situation could entail the elimination of one of the most valued services provided by the Agency, its education programme. That could have serious political effects, since the Palestinian refugees considered such action as a denial of responsibility by the Agency and the international community, whom they suspected of wanting to bring about their integration into those countries, contrary to the commitments that had been made. It could also result in the collapse of UNRWA, which was bound to have a disastrous effect on the stability of the region. The estimated expenditure for 1982 was far in excess of the expected income from regular contributions. The Agency's health care programme had already been greatly curtailed; the relief programme now consisted simply of distribution of food-stuffs donated to UNRWA. The only further reduction the Agency could make would be in its education programme, either by abandoning it or curtailing it. At least \$34 million were necessary to maintain the education programme, or almost half of the Agency's deficit in 1982. UNRWA's ability to raise those funds would be facilitated if Governments making contributions in kind could convert some of those contributions into cash. As a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly, UNRWA needed to be given clear guidance regarding its future course of action, particularly any action for dealing with the financial emergency.

30. Mr. AL HASSANI (Kuwait) observed that because of the financial crisis of UNRWA, not only its educational facilities but the Agency itself were on the verge of collapse. That would have tremendous repercussions both for peace in the Middle East and for the conscience of the international community.

31. The problem was not a new one nor was it about to be solved. The Palestinian refugee problem had been created by the creation of Israel, even though Israel seized every opportunity to shift the responsibility to the Arab Governments, as it did in the case of a so-called Jewish refugee problem which it did not hesitate to claim was comparable to the Palestinian problem. That was an insult to the intelligence: the Jews who had emigrated to Israel had done so of their own volition to populate Palestine with the greatest possible number of Israeli citizens. Furthermore, if, as Israel maintained, all the Jews of the diaspora were by right Israeli citizens, it was hard to see how it could also allege that those of its "citizens" who had responded to the Zionist call had become refugees.

32. As for the theory that the 750,000 Arabs who had fled Palestine had left voluntarily or at the orders of the Arab authorities, a former UNRWA Commissioner-General had explained how implausible that was. The disorderly and precipitous nature of their flight in fact undercut the first assertion and there was not a shred of evidence for the second; quite to the contrary, the evidence was that the Arab countries had done everything to discourage the Palestinians from leaving. Count Bernadotte himself, the United Nations Mediator, had written that the Palestinians had fled out of fear of expulsion or terrorism, and that it would be an offence against the principles of elementary justice if these innocent victims of the conflict were denied the right to return to the land where they had had roots for centuries, while Jewish immigrants were flowing into Palestine and threatened to replace them permanently. Even some Jews recognized that the fact that the Arabs had fled to seek safety was no excuse for depriving them of everything.

33. The catastrophic irony of the situation was that, on the one hand, the Israeli aggressor was receiving from the Powers which had supported it from the start, particularly the United States, billions of dollars in all forms of economic and military assistance; while, on the other hand, the Palestinian victims were receiving the "absolute minimum" to educate their children. Had it not been for the Arab countries like Kuwait which were hosting hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees and providing them with the means to live decently, the refugee problem would have been still more catastrophic.

34. Israel could afford to defy the international community because it was still receiving a whole arsenal of war from certain Powers, particularly the United States, which had pledged to see to it that Israel maintained its military edge over the Arab States and was working towards a strategic United States-Israeli partnership. It was not surprising under the circumstances that the Israelis held stubbornly to a totally negative approach: a refusal to recognize the Palestine Liberation Organization and still less negotiate with it; a refusal to admit the existence of a Palestinian State; a refusal of any discussion of the future of Jerusalem and a refusal of any approach other than that of the Camp David accords (which meant autonomy to the people but not to the land, the aim being in effect to usurp and judaize the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza).

(Mr. Al Hassani, Kuwait)

35. So long as that state of affairs was condoned by the international community, the Palestine refugee problem would remain alive and the symbolic UNRWA services, no matter how inadequate, would have to be continued. The solution of the Agency's financial problem, which involved a deficit that was not after all so unmanageable, was the collective responsibility of the international community; the countries directly responsible for the existence and attitude of Israel should shoulder the largest share of the burden. A reliable mechanism should be found to guarantee a steady flow of funds and put an end to the deficit, even if that meant incorporating the UNRWA budget in the general United Nations budget. A mechanism should be devised to secure the revenues from the Palestinian properties in Israel under the guardianship of the United Nations, and then use those revenues as partial funding for UNRWA.

36. No matter how important the financial problem was, however, that was only part of the real issue, which was the return of the Palestinian refugees. The refugees indeed saw the Agency not only as the provider of services to which they were entitled but also as a symbol of their rights as recognized under General Assembly resolution 194 (III) and therefore of their identity as Palestinians. Any reduction in services aroused their suspicion that the international community was abandoning their cause and that would have dire consequences.

37. The CHAIRMAN announced that Madagascar had joined the sponsors of draft resolutions A/SPC/36/L.6 and L.7, and that Pakistan had joined the sponsors of draft resolution L.9.

The meeting rose at 12.15 p.m.