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11th meeting

held on

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at 10.30 a.m.

New York

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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 11th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. FIGUEROA (Argentina)

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AGENDA ITEM 50: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN  
THE NEAR EAST (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 11 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 50: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (continued) (A/34/13, A/34/480, A/34/517, A/34/518, A/34/549, A/34/567; A/SPC/34/L.3 to L.7)

1. Mr. GHAFORZAI (Afghanistan) introduced draft resolution A/SPC/34/L.7 and said that Indonesia had become a sponsor. He recalled that self-determination was the inalienable right of all peoples and thus a fortiori of the Palestinian people. Any attempt to limit their right to return was inadmissible, and any agreement embodying any restriction or condition on the exercise of that right betrayed the letter and spirit of the relevant resolutions of the United Nations. Paragraph 2, which said that any such agreement was "null and void", was the only one which distinguished the draft from the other resolutions adopted on the same matter.

2. Mr. CANALES MARQUEZ (Chile) was in complete agreement with the Commissioner-General on the fundamental role of the Agency, in view of the current situation of the Palestine refugees in the Middle East. The work of the Agency must be examined from a humanitarian rather than a political point of view. While the political dimension of the refugee question, as far as the exercise by the Palestinian people of its rights was concerned, must not be lost sight of, the Committee must also endeavour to find solutions for the Agency's difficult financial situation.

3. Educational work was of prime importance if the Palestine refugee population was to have a chance to acquire the necessary education for its individual and national development. That underlined the importance of the Agency's financial situation, which had grown worse because of an increase in the refugee population's requirements and the shortfall in voluntary contributions by Member States. Whatever solution was found must not involve any decrease in aid to the population. The Chilean people and Government felt a particular sympathy for the Palestinian people and shared the international community's concern with regard to that situation. Chile was contributing to the Agency's budget as far as its slender resources would permit and would continue to do so in future for reasons of solidarity. It hoped that the General Assembly's recommendations would spur all Member States to make larger contributions to the financing of the Agency. His delegation paid tribute to the work of the Commissioner-General, Mr. Rydbeck, and his predecessor, and the whole staff of the Agency.

4. Miss RAMLALL (Guyana) paid tribute to the Commissioner-General and staff of UNRWA and to Mr. McElhiney, and said that the Agency's financial situation was a fundamental problem which the international community must solve with generosity and realism if serious hardship was to be avoided for a people forced by Israeli expansionism and aggression to rely on the Agency's valuable humanitarian aid. It was tragic that the collective conscience of the international community had not been sufficiently aroused to provide the requisite funds to ensure the basic needs of a people deprived of everything, even the right to live in dignity.

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(Miss Ramlall, Guyana)

5. It was regrettable that part of the Agency's headquarters had been relocated outside of its area of operations, since that reduced its effectiveness. It was to be hoped that its staff would soon be brought together again in the region, where it could operate most effectively, as called for in General Assembly resolution 33/112.

6. Her delegation noted with concern that deplorable Israeli attacks on refugee camps had frequently disrupted the work which the Agency had been doing for the past 30 years. That made it all the more necessary for the international community to show solidarity and enable UNRWA to carry on its humanitarian task; it would be sad if through lack of funds its educational activities had to be cut back.

7. The survival and smooth running of the Agency were indeed of the utmost importance, but it must not be forgotten that the Agency had been intended to be only a temporary measure pending a political solution to the Palestine problem. That problem was not only the problem of the refugees, which could be solved by providing enough funds. The refugees belonged to a nation which had once lived in its own clearly defined national territory, of which it had been dispossessed; that was the whole problem. The solution was to allow the Palestinians to return to their homeland and live there as free individuals, as was their inalienable right. The international community must intensify its pressure on the usurpers of that homeland and restore to the Palestinians their inalienable national rights, including the right to a Palestinian State. Negotiations must of course include the full participation on an equal footing of the Palestine Liberation Organization, which was the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Until that problem was solved, there would be no peace in the Middle East.

8. Her delegation recognized that there was a necessary relationship between ability to contribute and preparedness to support the political action necessary to end the refugee status of the Palestinians. Her delegation rejected the accusations of States which contributed only modestly to the resources of UNRWA, as well as the devices of some major contributors which felt that they had discharged their obligations with the delivery of their cheque.

9. Mr. ELFAKI (Sudan) paid tribute to the Commissioner-General and his predecessor, and to the staff of UNRWA, who were performing a demanding task in difficult conditions. The Sudan was interested in the work of the Agency and hoped that it would continue its humanitarian work in the service of the Palestinian people, whose sufferings had been continuing since 1948. That interest was shown by the various kinds of aid which the Sudan gave to the refugees through the Agency or through the Palestine Liberation Organization, which was the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people; despite its economic difficulties compounded by the influx of refugees from neighbouring African countries, the Sudan would continue to contribute to the budget of the Agency.

10. The financial difficulties mentioned in the report brought the international community face to face with its human, ethical, legal and political responsibilities. Humanity, as represented by the United Nations, had a responsibility for the problem of the Palestinian refugees and for the increase

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(Mr. Elfaki, Sudan)

in acts of aggression committed against the Palestinians in violation of all divine laws. That responsibility was not only financial, but also political. The refugee problem must be tackled at its roots by enabling the refugees to return to Palestine, their country of origin. The international community must enforce the United Nations resolutions enshrining the refugees' right to return unconditionally and without outside interference.

11. The responsibility of Israel and its allies in the tragedy of Palestine was clear. It was illogical for Israel to speak of the help which it claimed to be giving to the Palestine refugees, while it continued to occupy their lands and exploit their resources, and attacked refugee camps inside and outside Palestine in an attempt to stop the refugees from receiving the aid they needed. It was clear from paragraph 26 of the Commissioner-General's report that Israel wanted the Arab and Palestinian lands without the Arabs and Palestinians, whom it was seeking to destroy and eliminate. That was Israel's ambition, and its arguments fooled no one.

12. The Sudan was familiar with the refugee problem and aware of the sacrifices which the Arab States must make in the matter of food and housing. It also understood the reasons which induced some Arab States, which had the wherewithal, to provide direct assistance. That aid would be maintained until the Palestinian people had recovered their lands and their rights, and had set up an independent State in Palestine. The Sudan understood the reasons which had led the Agency to relocate its headquarters, but hoped that that was a temporary measure and that the headquarters would be relocated in Beirut.

13. As regards the last paragraph of the letter of transmittal from the Commissioner-General to the President of the General Assembly, the Sudan did not understand why the Commissioner-General had thought it appropriate to show a draft of his report, in whatever form, to the representatives of Israel, a State not a member of the Advisory Commission, or why he should take account of Israel's views on the matter. Israel's responsibility was recognized, and its activities condemned, by the United Nations and the international community; the Sudanese delegation called on the Commissioner-General to desist from the practice in future.

14. Mr. AKIMAN (Turkey) commended the Commissioner-General and his predecessor for the work they had carried out. The question of the Palestinian refugees was primarily a political problem and it would be a mistake to consider that problem only from the humanitarian point of view. Indeed, it would not be possible to end the sufferings of the Palestinian refugees until a just and lasting political solution had been found to the Middle East problem. Such a solution was possible only if Israel withdrew from all the occupied Arab territories and from the Arab sector of Jerusalem and if it recognized the legitimate and inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to self-determination and to the establishment of an independent State. Furthermore, it was essential that the Palestine Liberation Organization, the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, should participate in all negotiations on that question.

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(Mr. Akiman, Turkey)

15. The Agency's financial position, as described in the excellent report of the Commissioner-General, was distressing: it was anticipated that the budget for the current year would show a deficit of \$28 million and that the deficit for the following year would exceed \$50 million. Although the annual deficit had been reduced to \$23 million in October of the current year, with the aid of generous additional contributions from a number of Governments, the Agency would continue to experience serious difficulties in carrying out its most useful activities at the end of 1979 and in 1980.

16. The two alternatives that, according to the Commissioner-General, were open to the Agency in that very alarming situation would not make it possible genuinely to solve its financial problems. The first alternative, which would consist in substantially reducing expenditure on education, would result in the closure of a number of schools and would deprive tens of thousands of children of schooling; that would be particularly tragic in a year that had been proclaimed International Year of the Child. The second alternative would be even worse, as it anticipated the Agency's total collapse if the international community did not come to the rescue; that was inconceivable, because the political repercussions of such a collapse would be very serious not only for the refugees but also for peace prospects in the Middle East.

17. After quoting paragraphs 20 and 23 of the report of the Working Group on the Financing of the Agency, he stressed, as the representatives of other delegations had done before him, that it was the responsibility of all States to relieve the sufferings of the Palestinian people, irrespective of their geographic location or their political position regarding the question of the Middle East.

18. His delegation shared the view expressed by the representative of Austria that the time had come for a thorough change in the method of financing UNRWA. It also hoped that all the parties concerned would find a way of putting an end to unwanted detention of Agency staff members, as well as to the restrictions placed on their movements.

19. The relocation of the Agency's headquarters in its area of operation would make it possible to increase the effectiveness of its activities, and his delegation therefore hoped that the Commissioner-General would keep that possibility under close review.

20. Speaking on behalf of the Permanent Representative of Turkey, who was Chairman of the Working Group on the Financing of the Agency, he urgently appealed to all States to contribute to the financing of UNRWA and thus enable it to continue its activities. For his part, the Chairman of the Working Group was ready to assist the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Commissioner-General of UNRWA in considering ways of raising further contributions with a view to improving the Agency's financial situation.

21. Mr. MOHAJER (Iran) said that the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA evoked both admiration for the untiring and selfless efforts of the Commissioner-

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(Mr. Mohajer, Iran)

General and his staff and, at the same time, despair at the sufferings that the Palestinian refugees continued to endure while the Agency was encountering chronic difficulties and could provide them with only meagre services.

22. Over 1.8 million Palestinians were registered with the Agency and considered to be refugees. They were the first or second generations of native inhabitants of Palestine who had lost their homes and their means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 war. From that time on, Israel had consistently denied them the right to return to their homes and had reduced them to refugee status by denying them the possibility of earning a decent living from their own property. The same fate had befallen tens of thousands of persons displaced as a result of the Israeli aggression of June 1967.

23. Contrary to widespread belief, only 34.8 per cent of the registered refugees benefited from the services of UNRWA; the rest lived among the local population of the Arab host countries and the occupied territories. Thousands of Palestinians had also had to emigrate to distant countries. Owing to the insufficient availability of resources, not all refugees were eligible for UNRWA services and they might not be authorized to receive the food rations for which they were potentially eligible. In theory, the school-age population, which accounted for approximately one fifth of the total number of registered refugees, could receive all UNRWA services. However, since a substantial number of school children did not receive food rations because of certain restrictions in that regard, the proportion of registered refugees that had access to all services was considerably less than one fifth.

24. It was distressing to note that, as a result of UNRWA's lack of funds, hundreds of thousands of Palestinian children could not receive the food rations for which they were eligible and that the flour component of the basic ration had been reduced by over half. Moreover, the Agency's educational programme would be threatened if a solution to UNRWA's financial crisis was not found. In fact, it was only with the aid of additional contributions that the Agency had been able to finance its educational programme until the end of the current year. The prospects for 1980 were grim, because education was the only area where it was still possible to reduce the Agency's expenditure. Reduction of the educational programme and closure of the preparatory schools would be a clear indication to the refugees of the international community's inability to meet its moral and political obligations.

25. The probable reduction in a number of vital Agency services in the fields of education and training would not mean that the Agency's programmes would come to a total halt. However, it should be borne in mind that the other services provided were already below the minimal level. It would be extremely serious if, for financial reasons, the Agency were not in a position to continue its activities at least at the current level. It would also be unthinkable for the deficit in the Agency's budget to lead to the bankruptcy of that institution. Israel and the countries that had always supported its aggressive and expansionist policies must bear the responsibility for the current tragedy. They would be committing a new international crime in not permitting UNRWA to provide those minimal yet vital

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(Mr. Mohajer, Iran)

services to refugees. Moreover, the countries that had not already done so had a duty to contribute to the financing of the Agency. His delegation expressed its appreciation for the assistance provided by United Nations agencies such as UNESCO and WHO and called on the World Food Programme, the International Labour Organisation and FAO to increase their aid.

26. The plight of the Palestinian people was a multifaceted problem, which must be solved in its entirety. The Commissioner-General himself had noted its complexity and emphasized the political circumstances that had contributed to making the Agency's task more difficult. Paragraphs 26, 27, 40 and 48 of the report, which described in particular the military operations perpetrated by the Israeli occupying forces and the inhuman reprisals carried out by them, spoke volumes.

27. It must, however, be remembered that a far greater tragedy formed the backdrop to UNRWA activities. That tragedy, which had been brought about by zionism and its imperialist allies, had struck a historic and sacred land, uprooted the bulk of its native population and given rise to untold suffering for that traditionally peaceable people. That was not only a humanitarian question, and it would be hypocritical to deny that the Palestinian people also suffered from more agonizing deprivations: denial of the right to a home, to a country and to a land that belonged to them. The services provided by UNRWA were only a temporary palliative and could not be a substitute for the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, independence, freedom and dignity in their homeland.

28. In the meantime, it was the international community's responsibility to continue to provide UNRWA with the means to carry out its humanitarian mission. The Iranian people felt a deep solidarity with the Palestinians and their sole legitimate representative, the Palestine Liberation Organization. They would do their best to alleviate their suffering by providing assistance through appropriate channels, including UNRWA. The Islamic Republic of Iran would help them to obtain the freedoms for which it had itself fought.

29. The CHAIRMAN announced that Bahrain and Yugoslavia wished to join the list of sponsors of draft resolution A/SPC/34/L.5.

The meeting rose at 11.55 a.m.