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CONTENTS

Page

Palestine : (b) Assistance to Palestine refugees : report of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (A/1905, A/1905/Add.1) (continued)	245
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Chairman : Mr. Selim SÄRPER (Turkey).

**Palestine : (b) Assistance to Palestine Refugees :
report of the Director of the United Nations Relief
and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the
Near East (A/1905, A/1905/Add.1) (continued)**

[Item 24]*

1. Mr. HELOU (Lebanon) said that he would not wish to express his delegation's view on the report of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency without paying a tribute to its Director and Advisory Commission. In all his relations with them he had been struck by their concern for the plight of the refugees and by their understanding of the difficult problem they were dealing with.

2. But despite United Nations assistance, the contributions of governments and the help of the Arab States, the refugees continued to suffer great hardships. There was no need for him to describe the refugees' situation, for it had been graphically illustrated by the Director of UNRWAPNE when he had referred (42nd meeting) to the effect which a single storm might have on their living accommodation. It was almost a matter for regret that the Committee could not see for itself how the refugees were living. Despite the goodwill of Committee members it was inevitable that their debates must remain abstract although they referred to the sufferings of human beings.

3. Mr. Helou meant to do something more useful than describe those sufferings ; he would offer some ideas which had occurred to him after a careful study of the documents. There were two reports before the Committee, the report of the Relief and Works Agency (A/1905) and the report of the Director and the Advisory Commission (A/1905/Add.1). The first dealt principally with past action, while the second referred to a proposed programme for the future. The outstanding features of that programme were the continuation of aid to the refugees, and temporary arrangements to improve their living conditions and situation without prejudice to their eventual repatriation. He was glad

to note that the Agency realized that the morale of the refugees was suffering owing to their situation, and that financial assistance alone was not all.

4. He would go further, and point out that even resettlement of refugees could only be a palliative—the only final solution of the problem would be to allow them to return to their homes. It was true that, according to the report, the Agency's programme would not affect the refugees' claims to repatriation and compensation. He would return later to that point, which was of particular interest to his delegation. The Lebanese representative had been particularly struck by point 12 of the Agency's findings (A/1905/Add.1), in which it was indicated that "the Agency should not be given assignments involving it with negotiations of issues pending between Arab States and Israel." It revealed not only the Agency's anxiety to assist the refugees without awaiting the solution of other problems, but also a certain scepticism as to the outcome of negotiations between the Arab States and Israel. It had always been his delegation's view, as explained in the earlier debate on the Conciliation Commission's report, that the United Nations should take steps to solve the problems arising out of the Palestine question outside the negotiations between the Arab States and Israel and in line with the resolutions of the General Assembly.

5. The views of the Lebanese delegation on the programme put forward in the report (A/1905/Add.1) were governed by two principles ; first, that no plan for financial aid or resettlement of refugees should be studied, and no resolution adopted, without the express reservation that the right of the refugees to repatriation must be fully safeguarded ; second, that the refugee problem, from the point of view both of financial aid and of the exercise of the refugees' right to return to their homes, was a problem for which not only the Arab States but also the United Nations were responsible.

6. Some might say that the technical and financial plans for assistance to Palestine refugees were not

* Indicates the item number on the General Assembly agenda.

part of the political problem and that the two issues were being separately dealt with under points (a) and (b) of the item under discussion. Yet the right of the refugees to return to their homes must not be compromised by any division of subject matter. If the question of Palestine refugees were allowed to become a purely humanitarian issue, and the refugees regarded as mere objects of charity, the problem would never be solved. The only final solution was to allow the refugees to return to their homes. That was their right, not only under General Assembly resolutions on the subject, but as human beings, not to be taken from them or replaced by financial aid.

7. Exile was a penalty almost as serious as death, and the exile of one man was a lesser tragedy than that of a whole people. It was alarming to find the State of Israel, whose citizens had suffered so much in the past, and had known exile and persecution, inflicting the same sufferings on the Arab refugees.

8. It was with those reservations that the Lebanese delegation, in agreement with many other delegations, particularly those of the Arab States, would study the programme of the Relief and Works Agency. With those reservations, it might be possible to invite the Arab States to collaborate with the Agency. Without them, not even the \$250 million which it was proposed to spend could be considered as a basis for examining the Agency's programme or for co-operating with it.

9. The second principle to which his delegation attached a great deal of importance was that of United Nations responsibility for the refugees. The United Nations surely could not decline responsibility, nor could it relinquish it after a certain period of time had elapsed. The programme put forward by the Director and the Advisory Commission of the Relief and Works Agency provided for a three-year plan starting from July 1951. It might well be possible to carry out the plan in that time, and he wondered if the United Nations then intended to wash its hands of the whole matter and leave the refugees to solve their own problems with the assistance of the Arab Governments, referred to in certain documents as "the governments concerned". Those Governments were indeed concerned, but so were those of all States, Members of the United Nations, whose resolutions, authority and responsibility were at stake.

10. Mr. Helou did not wish to minimize the assistance already rendered by charitable organizations or by certain governments, among them those of France, the United Kingdom and the United States, and he appreciated that governments would be anxious to know how far and for how long they were committed to contribute. But there were more important considerations, among them the respect of the United Nations for its obligations.

11. His own country had done everything in its power for the refugees, and the fact was recognized in the Agency's report, though certain important details had been omitted. The efforts made had been great if compared with Lebanon's resources and

accordingly he felt entitled to refer to the responsibilities of other Member States.

12. That was why no programme throwing the sole responsibility for the refugees on certain governments could be acceptable to his delegation. Further, for budgetary reasons alone, he felt that the United Nations must continue to shoulder its responsibilities. The fulfilment of the Agency's programme might require expenditure greater than that estimated, and the estimates could be accepted without discussion only so long as it was certain that the United Nations was not going to disclaim responsibility.

13. There was yet another and most important reason why he wished to insist on that responsibility. At the opening of the debate on the item under discussion, the Arab delegations had pointed out that the Agency's programme referred to assistance to refugees and not to assistance to the Governments of the Arab States to enable them to assist and resettle the refugees. The wording of the Agency's recommendation in paragraph 1, Chapter II of the report raised a question not only of sovereignty but of responsibility. It implied that the so-called Near East Governments were exclusively responsible for solving the refugee problem, and were to be granted assistance to enable them to meet that responsibility. Obviously, the Director of the Agency and the Advisory Commission had no desire to infringe the sovereign rights of the Near East States, but were concerned only with carrying out their programme. That purpose would best be achieved by ensuring that the United Nations assumed permanent responsibility for the problem, in which case the Arab States would be prepared to co-operate.

14. Subject to the reservations he had made, the Lebanese delegation was prepared to vote for any programme which would improve the living conditions and raise the morale of the Arab refugees, if the programme were planned and carried out in keeping with the United Nations resolutions. Mr. Helou realized that the Agency's programme was still in the preliminary stage, and that much hard and patient work remained to be done in order to implement it. His delegation could not but subscribe to the Director's wish to see measures taken to improve the morale of the refugees. In conclusion, he thought he would be expressing the feelings of the refugees themselves in insisting once again on their right to eventual repatriation.

15. Mr. KYROU (Greece) paid tribute to the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency and his collaborators, as well as to the members of the Advisory Commission, for the ability and devotion with which they had performed their task.

16. The duty of the *Ad Hoc* Political Committee would not be discharged merely by approving the report; it was necessary also to support and second the Agency's programme. The United States representative had indicated at the 42nd meeting the course that the Committee should follow. The adoption of the new draft resolution setting forth the programme for

the coming year would be a positive step in the right direction.

17. The question involved a humanitarian duty and should be considered dispassionately and independently of political considerations. The vote of the Committee, as well as the help which Member States would be able to give in proportion to their resources, would contribute to the success of one of the most noble tasks ever undertaken by the United Nations. The Lebanese representative had spoken of "charity"; Mr. Kyrrou would not have chosen that word. Elementary humanity required the United Nations to take an interest in the fate of the refugees.

18. MOSTAFA Bey (Egypt) also paid a tribute to the Director, the ex-Director and the staff of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, the Advisory Commission, the specialized agencies, the governments and the humanitarian and religious organizations which had helped to alleviate the sufferings of the Palestine refugees.

19. When it had been decided to set up a United Nations body with the object of finding work for the refugees pending their repatriation, there had been various rumours concerning the real purpose behind that plan. It had been said that the Western Powers wished to preserve the agricultural character of the Middle East countries and hamper their industrial development, and that they intended to turn the Middle East into a granary for the use of the western armies which were to be stationed in the area. Despite those rumours, however, the Egyptian Government had agreed to co-operate in the plan.

20. With reference to the report before the Committee, the Egyptian representative observed, in the first place, that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency had recognized in its report the co-operation it had received from the Arab countries bordering on Palestine.

21. Secondly, many people believed that the majority of the refugees were living in tents or camps, but that was not so. Two-thirds of them lived in shelters which should never have been anything more than purely temporary, but which were the only ones available.

22. Thirdly, there was reason to believe that a considerable number of persons were carrying on subversive activities among the refugees.

23. Fourthly, the refugees, individually and collectively, were tired of the present situation and wished above all to return to their homes and find a means of livelihood, and to receive compensation for the losses they had suffered. Most of them believed that they were in the present situation because of the intervention of the Western Powers in their affairs. They blamed the United Nations for the fact that they had spent more than two years in enforced idleness and in a state of wretchedness and insecurity.

24. Fifthly, the Agency had been able to do very little for the refugees at Gaza, a greatly over-populated area with few natural resources.

25. Sixthly, the scope of the Agency's efforts on behalf of the refugees in the other Arab countries had been small, work having been found for only some 15,000 out of a total of nearly a million.

26. The Egyptian representative summarized the recommendations contained in the Agency's report and referred to resolution 393 (V) adopted by the General Assembly on 2 December 1950.

27. The second annual report of the Agency, which was before the Committee, came to substantially the same conclusions as that for the first year (A/1451/Rev.1). In particular it made it clear that the situation of the refugees at Gaza was appalling and that of the local population, which received no help from the international community, even worse; that under the terms of the armistice agreements the line of demarcation between the areas occupied by Arabs and Jews had frequently been arbitrarily drawn without regard for practical necessities; that many people had been deprived of their means of livelihood through the separation of the Old City of Jerusalem from the New City; and that the position of the refugees had deteriorated since the end of 1950 owing to the increased cost of the relief programme.

28. Those conclusions strengthened the Egyptian delegation's view that the repatriation of the refugees was the only possible solution of the problem in keeping with justice and the terms of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948, which had been confirmed by a number of subsequent resolutions, and that it was the only solution that would contribute to the maintenance of peace and security in the Middle East.

29. With regard to the recommendations made by the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, in consultation with the Advisory Commission, the Egyptian delegation considered that the problem of the refugees should not be linked with the question of the economic development of the Middle East. The problem of the refugees was a direct consequence of the intervention of the United Nations in the Palestine question and would remain the responsibility of the Organization until a just and lasting solution had been found. The economic development of the Middle East, on the other hand, was entirely the affair of the States in the area, which should be left to work out their own plans without foreign interference.

30. His delegation regarded the recommendations of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency as a palliative and not as a solution of the problem of the refugees. However, subject to the reservation that those recommendations should not prejudice the right of the refugees to repatriation and compensation, he considered them a practical means of relieving the plight of the refugees pending a final solution.

The meeting rose at 12.5 p.m.