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REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION

Follow-up Action on the Implementation of the ECWA

Resolution 28 (III) on the Census of the Palestinian Arab People

Note by the Executive Secretary

1. The Economic Commission for Western Asia has taken a number of steps related to the census of the Palestinian Arab people since the adoption of the Commission's Resolution 28 (III) in May 1976, which reads:

"The Economic Commission for Western Asia,

Noting with appreciation the revised programme of work containing the Commission's projects in the field of population^{1/},

Taking into consideration the fact that among the urgent projects of far-reaching importance is the project for a population census of the Palestinian Arab people wherever they are found,

1. Urges the United Nations Fund for Population Activities to furnish the material support necessary for beginning implementation of this project before the end of 1976;

2. Calls upon the Executive Secretary to take all necessary steps, in close co-operation with the Palestine Liberation Organization, for beginning the population census operations as soon as possible after the meeting of the preparatory committee to be held in 1976".

Among the most important of the above-mentioned steps which have been taken are the following:

- (a) The Preparatory Meeting for the Census of the Palestinian Arab People, held in Damascus 6-9 June 1977;
- (b) The preparation of the project document, which was presented to the United Nations Fund for Population Activities;
- (c) The official launching of the implementation of the project and the appointment of a census expert as of 16/7/1979;
- (d) The formation of a census advisory commission;
- (e) The formation of a technical advisory committee;

1/ E/ECWA/31/Add.1

- (f) The preparation of the tables for the principal outputs of the census in the form of 14 population tables and six housing tables;
- (g) The specification and definition of " A Palestinian Arab" for census purposes;
- (h) The specification of concepts and methods proposed for the collection of census data;
- (i) Initiating contacts with the Arab countries which host significant numbers of Palestinians and which had announced the conducting of general population censuses.

2. In accordance with the above-mentioned resolution of the Commission, close co-operation was maintained from the very beginning with the Palestine Liberation Organization through the Palestine National Fund and the Palestinian Central Statistics Bureau. Agreement was reached with them during the period 13-15/10/1980 on the distribution of field operations as follows:

(a) The Palestinian Central Statistics Bureau would handle the subject of enumerating the Palestinians residing in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Lebanon and Palestine and in all countries outside the ECWA region;

(b) The ECWA secretariat would undertake to secure the required data from Jordan, Syria, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Bahrain, Democratic Yemen and the Yemen Arab Republic.

3. The ECWA secretariat, being an organ of the United Nations, has followed the established procedure stipulated in current agreements for contacting member States, i.e. through the Resident Representatives of the United Nations Development Programme in the countries involved. This procedure was observed both in contacts related to the preliminary visits of officials and in attempts to secure the required data. Unfortunately, in most cases this approach has not produced any tangible results.

4. In the light of the above, and following the depletion of the funds allocated by the United Nations Fund for Population Activities for the preliminary stage of the census of the Palestinian Arab people, a meeting was held on 19/10/1981 between the Executive Secretary, his deputy and the head of the Economic Bureau of the Palestine Liberation Organization, Mr. Mohamed Zahdi Al-Nashashibi. During the meeting views were exchanged on the future of the census. At the end of the meeting the Executive Secretary proposed the following alternative solutions, leaving to the Palestine Liberation Organization the choice of the solution that it would find most appropriate:

(a) The Economic Commission for Western Asia would continue to assume the responsibility for the census, and the Organization would help overcome the obstacles which so far had failed the attempts to secure information from those Arab countries which had conducted population censuses. Work would be carried out on the basis of one of the following two options:

- (i) The above-mentioned agreement on the distribution of work with the Palestinian Central Statistics Bureau would remain in force;
- (ii) The Economic Commission for Western Asia would collect information on Palestinians wherever they reside.

(b) The Organization would collect the statistical data on the basis of technical guidelines agreed upon with the Commission. This data would then be supplied to the Commission, which would be responsible for processing and for the preparation of the data in its final form.

(c) The Organization would assume responsibility for the implementation of the project and it would draw upon the assistance of technical expertise available in the Commission, in the same manner as is the case with technical assistance that is requested by any member State. In the event that this alternative were to be adopted, it was estimated that around 50,000 Dollars would be needed to cover the expenses of technical advice to be provided from outside the Commission, in addition to the technical services to be provided, free of charge, from within the Commission.

Mr. Al-Nashashibi stated at the close of the meeting that he would notify the Commission of the official position of the Organization as soon as the Organization had settled on the solution it had decided to adopt.

5. The secretariat of the Commission contacted the Organization on several occasions to find out what decision had been reached. Finally, a meeting was held in Damascus on 2/2/1982, which was attended by Mr. Mohamed Zahdi Al-Nashashibi, the Head of the P.L.O. Economic Bureau, representing the Organization, and by the Deputy Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Western Asia, Dr. Mohamed Zakariya Ismail, representing the Commission.

6. Mr. Al-Nashashibi notified Dr. Ismail in the above-mentioned meeting that the Organization, after careful consideration, had decided to adopt the third alternative which provided for the Organization (the Palestinian Central Statistics Bureau) to assume responsibility for the implementation of the census project. He attributed this decision to a number of specific political and non-political considerations related to the role of the Organization. Mr. Al-Nashashibi expressed the gratitude and appreciation of the Organization for the repeated efforts exerted by the Commission to secure the implementation of the census project. He also affirmed that the Palestinian Central Statistics Bureau would seek the assistance of technical expertise available with the Commission for all stages of the implementation of the census project, and would also seek the assistance of the Commission in securing technical expertise from outside, if and when the need arose.

Finally, Mr. Al-Nashashibi requested that the Executive Secretary of the Commission Dr. Mohamed Said Al-Attar use his good offices, during his forthcoming visit to New York, to persuade the Director General of the United Nations Population Activities Fund to extend to the Organization any assistance needed to enable it to implement the census project.