



SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 8th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. MATHIAS (Portugal)

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AGENDA ITEM 53: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE  
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The meeting was called to order at 10.50 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 53: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (continued) (A/35/13, A/35/438 and Corr.1, A/35/472, A/35/473, A/35/474 and A/35/526: A/SPC/35/L.3)

1. Mr. CANALES (Chile) said that until an over-all political solution had been found to the problem of the refugees and, broadly speaking, to the situation of the Palestinian people the international community would continue to witness the difficult conditions in which thousands of people were living in the region. An essential element was the implementation of General Assembly resolution 194 (III), which, inter alia, recognized the right of the Palestine refugees to return to their homes. His delegation attached importance to the achievement of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East and a solution of the refugee problem, on the basis of the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the establishment of guarantees for the security of all the States in the region. However the question, although political in character, had a humanitarian aspect, and in that respect the Chilean delegation associated itself with the urgent appeal made to the States which had not yet participated in the common efforts to help the Palestine refugees. The financial situation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) would be very different if every State Member of the United Nations participated in its financing.
2. He welcomed the efforts of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA, whose report stressed once again the seriousness of the Agency's financial situation. As the Commissioner-General had said, prospects for 1981 were not encouraging, since unless contributions to the Agency were considerably increased, UNRWA would have to make drastic reductions, particularly in the education services. In that connexion, he emphasized the importance of training and education for the refugees' complete development as individuals, and drew attention to the granting of study fellowships by some Member States.
3. Lastly, he expressed his confidence that due consideration of the serious problems encountered by the Agency in carrying out its functions, especially financial problems, would lead to a wider participation by the international community as a whole in the improvement of the living conditions of the Palestine refugee population in the Near East.
4. Mrs. NOWOTNY (Austria) said that in view of the close connexion between the mandate of UNRWA and the over-all political situation in the Middle East, it was imperative that the Agency should be allowed to continue its work without avoidable disruptions and disturbances until a just and lasting solution, acceptable to all the parties concerned, could be found. Several such disruptions and disturbances could be detected in the report of the Commissioner-General (A/35/13).

(Mrs. Nowotny, Austria)

5. Firstly, the budgetary situation gave rise to serious and justifiable concern. The report stated that inadequate income to maintain its services to the refugees would cause the Agency to collapse and it was also clear that the operation of UNRWA had reached a point where it was no longer possible for the financial burden to fall only on a limited group of countries. The preceding year, Austria had appealed to the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA, in co-operation with the Advisory Committee and the Commissioner-General, to elaborate specific recommendations as to how that problem could be solved. Since no such recommendations were contained in the Working Group's report, Austria reiterated that appeal. Her delegation felt that a more imaginative and innovative approach would be necessary, including some structural changes in the financial basis of the Agency.
6. In the meantime, however, ways and means would have to be found to permit the Agency to carry out its programmes without any major reductions. It was difficult to favour either of the alternatives for reducing expenditure on services to the refugees set forth in paragraph 7 of the report. In any case, if a cut-back had to be faced, it would be preferable to leave the educational system intact. By providing a solid education for the children, it would at least be possible to give a better start in life to the next generation.
7. With respect to paragraphs 163 to 166 of the report dealing with relations with other organs of the United Nations system, she wondered whether there might not be room for improvement. For instance, if UNRWA succeeded in establishing closer co-operation with the World Health Organization (WHO) in the field of health care or in involving the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) or the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) further in the education programme, that might temporarily relieve the financial crisis. Perhaps an interagency meeting to discuss possibilities for such closer co-operation might prove useful.
8. Information about another kind of disturbance was contained in the section of the report entitled "Legal matters". Her delegation considered it totally unacceptable that staff members of the Agency should be detained for a prolonged period without charge or trial, that travel restrictions should be imposed on them and that UNRWA schools in the West Bank should be adversely affected by the security measures of the occupying authorities. She expressed the hope that the negotiations which the Commissioner-General had undertaken would result in permitting the staff members of UNRWA to carry out their functions without any unnecessary hindrance.
9. Lastly, she referred to the immediate help which her Government had given UNRWA when, in the summer of 1978, the Agency had been obliged to relocate part of its headquarters. Such aid had been of assistance to many Palestine refugees who needed UNRWA's help and was an active expression of Austria's concern about the fate of the Palestinian people.
10. Mr. SHAIKHO (Bahrain) expressed his condolences to the delegation of Algeria for the recent disaster suffered by his country. Turning to the item under consideration, he expressed his concern at the deterioration of the situation of UNRWA and the possibility that the services it was providing for the Palestine

(Mr. Shaikho, Bahrain)

refugees might be curtailed. Those services were vital to them and Jordan and Syria alone could not shoulder all the responsibility for their training and education. That responsibility lay first of all with Israel and its allies and above all with the countries of the international community which had helped to cause the Palestinian tragedy. It was ironical that Israel should be receiving substantial financial and military aid to enable it to pursue its objectives and attack the Palestinian people.

11. On the other hand, the Middle East question was not restricted to the refugee problem. There was also the question of the Holy Land, unjustly usurped with the aid of certain Powers. It was up to the Powers which had participated in the partition of Palestine and had helped the Zionists to build the State of Israel to find a solution to the Palestinian problem. He could not remain indifferent to the fact that those Powers were inciting Israel to commit injustices and acts of aggression with the aid they gave it while at the same time paying lip-service to the cause of the Palestinian people.

12. The right of the Palestinians to self-determination and to return to their homeland and recover their rights and property was an absolute right which could not be the subject of negotiations. As to the problem of support for UNRWA, ways must be found to overcome its financial difficulties and the international community must guarantee the humanitarian services of the Agency without the occupation authorities putting obstacles in their way. It would be inadmissible that the Agency's services should cease for lack of funds.

13. Mr. RAMIN (Israel) said that he regretted that the statements heard in the Committee from several delegations had shattered any hope that the Arab Governments would finally address the problem of the Middle East in a constructive frame of mind, and would stop exploiting the refugee problem as a weapon of belligerency, distortion of fact, and misquotation and abuse of the Jewish people and its national liberation movement, zionism.

14. The war unleashed against Israel in 1948 had given rise to two waves of refugees: Arabs leaving Israel territory, and an exodus of Jews from the Arab States. The latter had been forced to leave lands on which they and their ancestors had lived for hundreds, even thousands of years. It was in Israel that they had found refuge. But there had been no deliberations in the United Nations about their plight, nor had relief agencies been set up to help in their rehabilitation. Israel had had to take the responsibility for supplying them with food and clothing, medical assistance and educational services. By now, those Jewish refugees from Arab States and their children, totalling about a million persons, were fully fledged citizens of the State of Israel.

15. The outflow of the Arabs from Israel had taken place at the same time as the influx of Jewish refugees into the country. Most of the Arab refugees had departed at the urging of their own leaders. The great majority had never left Palestine and had simply moved from Jewish controlled areas to those under Arab control. And yet the treatment they had received had been entirely different from that given to Jewish refugees in Israel. The United Nations had set up the Relief and Works Agency to assist in their rehabilitation, and for years the General Assembly had held special debates on their situation and organized international pledging conferences at which member States were invited to contribute to their maintenance.

(Mr. Ramin, Israel)

16. However, the most striking difference had been in the attitude of the Arab Governments towards their own brethren. The refugees were to become instruments in the continued belligerency of the Arab States towards Israel. The fact that the Arab Governments had prevented a solution to the problem had been recognized 23 years before, in the January/March 1957 bulletin of the Research Group for European Migration, which stated that the refugees were seen as a political means of pressure to get the greatest possible number of concessions. The attitude of the Arab States towards the Arab refugees had differed drastically not only from the attitude of the Government of Israel towards Jewish refugees, but also from the policies of Governments all over the world in regard to refugees. In all ages, on all continents, wars had resulted in the uprooting of people. Yet all those problems had been solved by the integration of the refugees in the countries of refuge. The annual reports of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees showed that such problems could be solved in modern times, when there was a will to do so. The only exception in the entire world was the case of the Arab refugees from Palestine.

17. It was a well-known fact that if the Arab States had accepted the United Nations resolutions affirming the Jewish people's right to independence, and had refrained from invading Israel in defiance of the Charter of the United Nations, there would have been no Arab refugee problem. It was common knowledge that the Arab States had rejected General Assembly resolution 181 (II) of 29 November 1947. In its report to the Security Council, the United Nations Palestine Commission had stated that powerful Arab interests, both inside and outside Palestine, had adopted an attitude of defiance towards the General Assembly. In April 1948 Mr. Jamal al-Husseini, then representing the Palestinian Arabs, had told the Security Council that the Arabs had never denied that they had begun the fighting. On 21 May 1948 Mr. Andrei Gromyko, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union, had told the Security Council that the Soviet delegation must express its surprise at the position adopted by the Arab States on the Palestine question, and particularly at the fact that some of those States had carried out military operations aimed at the suppression of the national liberation movement in Palestine. That national liberation movement was Israel's: zionism.

18. For many years, the Arab Governments had demanded that the refugees be allowed to return to their homes, basing their demand on paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948. By placing all the emphasis on that one paragraph, they distorted the central objective of the fifteen interrelated paragraphs comprising the resolution, which was to achieve a peaceful Arab-Israeli settlement. There was a lack of logic in the Middle East conflict, and the Arab attitude towards Israel was unjustified. In those circumstances, views and resolutions which disregarded the over-all picture and the right of one of the parties to security could only be harmful. It must be borne in mind at all times that the refugee problem was a consequence and a function of Arab aggression against Israel, and that Israel was trying to defend itself against that aggression. The problems of displacement in 1948 and 1967 had been caused by war stemming from Arab belligerence towards Israel, and they could only be fully resolved in the context of peace. Security Council resolution 242 (1967) of 22 November 1967 recognized that the refugee problem was one element in a comprehensive peace plan. The reference

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(Mr. Ramin, Israel)

to refugees in that resolution applied to both Jewish and Arab refugees. It would be unreasonable to believe that people could be repatriated without regard to the actual political or security circumstances, or to the progress achieved towards a peace settlement.

19. It must be kept in mind that the Government of Israel had taken several tangible steps even in the absence of peace. Over the years, Israel had offered to participate in any programme to assist in the resettlement of the refugees in the Arab world.

20. With regard to the current needs of the refugees, Israel's direct contribution for the year ending 30 June 1980 came to a total of \$19,345,200 for educational, medical, administrative and social welfare services, and for housing. In addition, Israel had been assisting the rehabilitation of the refugees by improving living conditions in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza District. In spite of the political obstacles, each year had seen a substantial economic assimilation of the refugees. Moreover, the refugees had merged with the local population. The camps themselves had evolved into villages and small townships. Thus, behind the smokescreen of political propaganda, progress had been achieved in the natural absorption of the Arab refugees into the local life and economy, despite the difficulties arising from the persistence of Arab warfare.

21. Accurate assessment of the degree of absorption was complicated by the fact that UNRWA's working rule had been "once a refugee, always a refugee". As his delegation had indicated in previous Assembly sessions, even those persons who had become self-supporting continued to be registered as refugees and were included in the refugee total. An adjustment of the UNRWA lists was essential, especially in view of the financial difficulties with which the Agency was currently burdened.

22. In carrying out that adjustment, account must also be taken of the situation which had developed in the UNRWA camps in Lebanon. The United Nations could not give assistance to persons engaged in warfare against a Member State. When it was clear that a refugee camp had passed under the control of terrorist organizations and had become a base for the mobilization, training or operation of terrorist squads, UNRWA was not obliged to continue administering the camp and supplying it with relief and services. It might also be necessary to make changes and improvements in other aspects of UNRWA's activities. Nevertheless, the Commissioner-General and his colleagues deserved sincere appreciation for the devotion they had shown in carrying out their difficult tasks.

23. In the framework of the Camp David Agreements, the prospects of achieving real progress towards peace in the Middle East were better than ever before. It was as part of that process that the refugee problem would find its proper and agreed solution. Those prospects should be encouraged and enhanced in every way possible. It was no time to allow narrow interests or wounded pride to take precedence over the immensely more important advantages and benefits of peace.

(Mr. Ramin, Israel)

24. Above all, Governments must understand that they could no longer impose their will by force of arms or by political pressure. The Charter stipulated that accommodations must be reached through negotiation and compromise. That was the essence of Security Council resolution 242 (1967). That was how progress had been made thus far, and that was how further progress would be made until the peace process was completed.

25. Mr. BASHIR (Sudan) expressed appreciation for the Agency's efforts to achieve its objectives under difficult circumstances. However, despite the detailed account of its activities provided in the report, some comments were in order. First, the report dealt with the purely humanitarian aspects of the Palestinian problem. That was important, but omission of the political aspects and failure to refer to the Security Council and General Assembly resolutions on the repatriation of the Palestinian refugees could have a negative consequence. The Palestinian people continued to be the victims of Zionist terrorism, which had caused untold suffering since 1948. In addition, Israeli acts of aggression in the occupied territories of south Lebanon were adversely affecting the Agency's ability to function properly.

26. Moreover, the Agency's current deficit of \$37 million reflected the ambiguous attitude of the international community, which had not taken decisive steps to ensure that UNRWA had an adequate budget. His delegation appealed to countries and to international organizations to contribute generously to the Agency. Sudan had always paid its contributions on time, because it believed that UNRWA should continue to pursue its efforts and programmes. It had also provided scholarships enabling Palestinian students to study at various universities and institutes. He expressed the hope that the United Nations would find satisfactory ways of improving the Agency's budgetary situation. The fact that part of the headquarters of UNRWA was still situated outside its area of operations hampered its activities and increased its costs. Accordingly, the headquarters should be consolidated in the area of operations as quickly as possible. Although the Agency had been established temporarily in 1950, his delegation was convinced of the need to extend its mandate until a just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian problem had been found.

27. In considering the report, the international community was examining only one of the symptoms of the problems that had resulted from failure to comply with resolutions concerning the situation in Palestine. There had been a lack of political will to solve that problem. The reasons why the Agency had originally been established continued to be valid and responsibility still rested with the United Nations. Resolutions alone would not resolve that conflict, which constituted a threat to international peace and security. His delegation could not agree to a freezing or a curtailment of the Agency's activities. It therefore appealed to the United Nations to assume full responsibility and to extend the Agency's mandate so that it could carry out its functions in the framework of the United Nations and the international community. It was the hope of his delegation that the reasons that had led to the establishment of the Agency would be eliminated in time, but until that happened the Agency should

(Mr. Bashir, Sudan)

continue to function. The Palestinian problem was an integral part of the Middle East problem, which could only be resolved by enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their right to sovereignty and to an independent homeland.

28. Mr. FAKHOURI (Lebanon) expressed his condolences to the delegation of Algeria for the ordeal that country had recently experienced, and his feelings of solidarity and sympathy to the Algerian people. He also expressed his sincere appreciation to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East for the work it had carried out on behalf of more than 1,800,000 Palestinian refugees representing about half of the total population of Palestine.

29. The refugee problem was only one of the results of Israel's usurpation of Palestinian territory over 30 years ago. The situation in that territory was becoming increasingly serious because of Israel's intransigence in refusing to comply with the relevant resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council.

30. Israel's armed aggression was continuing and was hindering the Agency's work in the occupied territories, in the Arab countries of asylum and especially in south Lebanon. Moreover, Israel's aggression increased the Agency's financial burden and exacerbated the situation of many innocent victims.

31. In his delegation's opinion, the financing of UNRWA was a responsibility which affected the international community as a whole and which the international community could not shirk, because the Agency was doing humanitarian work aimed at relieving the suffering of the refugees until a just, over-all solution could be found to the problems of the area. If the Agency was to fulfil its responsibilities, it must have sufficient funds. Every effort must be made to avoid cutbacks in its budget to the detriment of its health, education and training services, since that would have serious consequences for the refugees; they would be the first, though not the only ones to suffer. The Commissioner-General had explained that a reduction in the Agency's budget would not only have cruel consequences for the refugees, but would also intensify the threat to the security of the area. Those words should be interpreted as a warning to Member States to pool their efforts and to support the work of UNRWA by helping to ensure its stable and effective financing to the full extent of their means. His delegation hoped that all Member States would consider that appeal.

32. As to the question mentioned in the letter from the Advisory Commission concerning the Agency's temporary headquarters in Vienna, his delegation agreed that, in order to facilitate its field activities the Agency's operations should be centralized either in Beirut or elsewhere in the area, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 33/112. By right, its offices should be consolidated in Beirut, but if that was not possible, the headquarters should remain in Vienna, in view of its limited resources and the need to facilitate the Commissioner-General's difficult task.



33. Mr. JUWANA (Indonesia) said that his delegation had always been aware that, aside from its humanitarian aspects, the question of the Palestine refugees was a political problem, and felt that no peace settlement could be achieved unless the legitimate rights of the Palestinians were taken into account. A just and permanent solution of the Palestine refugees problem was inseparable from a political solution to the situation in the Middle East as a whole: the fulfilment of the right to self-determination and independence of the Palestinian State.

34. In the circumstances, Israel should end the suffering of the refugees by allowing them to return to their homes, thus not only demonstrating a desire to act in conformity with numerous relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council but acting in accordance with the precepts of the Charter and generally recognized principles of basic human rights. However, if the Government of Israel failed to adopt such humanitarian measures, it should at least refrain from interfering with UNRWA's operations. As the Commissioner-General pointed out in his report, Israel had disrupted school and relief programmes, had engaged in a policy of punitive demolition of refugee shelters in the occupied territories and, as everyone knew, had attacked refugee camps situated in Lebanon. Those actions together with so-called "security measures" and other collective measures, had not only impaired UNRWA's services but had also affected the refugee population.

35. UNRWA had provided valuable services designed to improve the living conditions of the refugee families. Its activities in the fields of housing, education, medical care and nutrition had prevented an already serious situation from becoming even worse. The Agency therefore deserved the gratitude of the international community, especially now that it was completing 30 years of meritorious service.

36. Unfortunately, the Agency was still on the brink of financial disaster. The figures given in the report of the Commissioner-General were alarming and the financial outlook was bleak, with a projected deficit for 1981 which was the highest in the Agency's history. His delegation agreed that the financing of UNRWA was the collective responsibility of the international community. It was clear that if the Agency was to maintain the high standards of service which had characterized its operations thus far, it must be assured sufficient funding to plan its activities properly and guarantee the continuity of its programmes. If all Member States made contributions to the Agency, however modest, as Indonesia had done over the years as a token of its comprehension of and interest in the problem of the Palestine refugees in the Middle East, the financial problems of the Agency would not be as serious as they were. The flood of refugees in South-East Asia was a poignant reminder of the sad plight of refugees elsewhere in the world, particularly in the Middle East, and Indonesia was therefore fully aware of the dimensions of their tragedy. The political positions of certain countries should not influence their decision to contribute to a cause which was primarily humanitarian. The needs of people in a desperate situation must take precedence over political considerations.

37. Over the years, UNRWA had provided valuable services and had become a stabilizing factor and an important element in the search for peace in the region.

(Mr. Juwana, Indonesia)

For that reason, his delegation appreciated the efforts of the States which were trying to save the Agency. In the meantime, a definitive solution to the Middle East crisis must be found, based on recognition of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and independence and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the occupied territories.

38. Mr. VLASCEANU (Romania) said that in view of the temporary character of UNRWA's humanitarian work and the usefulness of its activities in improving the situation of the Palestine refugees, his delegation had consistently supported the measures adopted by the Committee to promote the implementation of the relief programmes. Romania had made a material contribution to those programmes within the limits of its resources, including bilateral co-operation with the countries which had received Palestine refugees in their territory. The active support which Romania and its President had always given to the just cause of the Palestinian people and their struggle to achieve their legitimate rights was well known. It should be pointed out that PLO Chairman Arafat had recently recalled that President Ceausescu was the first statesman who had expressed support for the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and the establishment of their own independent State, who had recognized PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and who was promoting the cause of the Palestinian people in the world political arena and in international forums. His delegation had repeatedly stressed the complexity of the problem and had pointed out that the continued deterioration of the situation of the Palestinian refugees required a substantive political solution capable of eliminating the root causes, rather than palliative measures. The entire international community should be mobilized to achieve that objective and to adopt decisive measures for a just solution to the Palestine problem as an essential element in a viable and lasting settlement of the Middle East question.

39. Recent developments had shown that world public opinion was becoming increasingly aware of the need to put an end to the tragedy of the Palestinian people, who, like any other people, were fully entitled to exercise their legitimate rights, including the right to return to their homes, exercise self-determination and establish their own independent State. Continuation of the present situation represented not only an act of blatant injustice towards the Palestinian people, but a permanent source of tension and an ominous threat to peace in the area with implications well beyond the limits of the region. Without in any way underestimating the importance of UNRWA activities, his delegation felt that a just and lasting solution to the problem of the Palestine refugees could not be achieved until the Palestinian people attained their legitimate rights. That would require Israel's withdrawal from all Arab territories occupied in 1967, including Arab Jerusalem, solution of the problem of the Palestinians on the basis of their right to self-determination and to the establishment of a national independent State, and a guarantee of the independence and territorial integrity of all States in the area. In that context Romania considered that, after extensive consultations, an initiative must be taken in order to create a new framework and a new basis for negotiations in the form of a conference under the auspices of the United Nations and with its active

(Mr. Vlasceanu, Romania)

participation. Such a conference should provide for the participation of all parties concerned, including the Palestine Liberation Organization - which was the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people - the Soviet Union and the United States, as well as other States which could contribute to a peaceful comprehensive settlement of the Middle East situation.

40. The successful outcome of such an initiative would lead to a definitive solution to the problem of the Palestine refugees and would make an invaluable contribution to the establishment of peace and tranquillity in that part of the world, enabling the people in the area to enjoy favourable conditions and devote themselves to peaceful and constructive activities to further their economic and social progress. His delegation would co-operate with other delegations in adopting the most effective measures in support of initiatives for finding an urgent solution to the Palestine problem.

41. The CHAIRMAN reminded the members of the Committee that the list of speakers on the item would be closed at the end of that meeting. He also invited those who had expressed the wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply in accordance with General Assembly resolution 34/401 to inform the Secretary of the Committee so that they could take the floor at the end of the afternoon meeting. That list would be closed momentarily.

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.