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REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Assistance to the Palestinian people

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

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INFORMATION RECEIVED FROM ORGANS AND ORGANIZATIONS OF THE
UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES
IN THE NEAR EAST

1. Since May 1950, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has been providing education, health and relief services according to eligibility for Palestine refugees 1/ and their descendants registered for assistance, who numbered 1,863,162 at 31 December 1980.

2. Although there has been no census of Palestinians, the registered refugees are believed to be more than half the total Palestinian population living in Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, Jordan and the occupied territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which constitute the Agency's area of operations. Consequently, UNRWA is a major provider of education, health and welfare services to the Palestinian people. These services have evolved over the years in direct response to the needs of the refugees and the Agency's financial ability to meet them. By the end of 1980, more than \$1.8 billion had been expended by UNRWA on assistance to Palestine refugees. The education services were operated in co-operation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the health services in co-operation with the World Health Organization (WHO).

3. The regular programmes are fully described in the annual reports of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA. For an account of the programme in 1980, the reader is referred to the report covering the period from 1 July 1979 to 30 June 1980. 2/ In brief, in the 1979/80 school year, over 314,000 children received elementary and preparatory (lower secondary) education in 627 UNRWA schools; 8,467 pupils were assisted with their secondary education at local government or private schools; 3/ some 4,700 trainees followed vocational or teacher-training courses at eight UNRWA centres; 354 students were awarded scholarships for university study; modest programmes of pre-school, youth and women's activities and adult craft-training were conducted; and professional in-service training was provided for medical and education personnel. Medical

1/ Palestine refugees (by UNRWA definition for operations purposes) are persons whose normal residence was Palestine for a minimum of two years preceding the Arab-Israeli conflict in 1948 and who, as a result of this conflict, lost both their homes and their means of livelihood. To be eligible for UNRWA assistance, refugees (and their direct descendants) must be (a) registered with UNRWA; (b) living in the area of UNRWA operations; and (c) in need.

2/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 13 (A/35/13).

3/ In Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. Elsewhere all refugee pupils, enrolled in government secondary schools receive their education free of charge.

services were available to about 1.6 million refugees, and supplementary feeding for such vulnerable groups as young children and expectant and nursing mothers. In the camps, the Agency provided environmental sanitation and assistance with repairs to housing of families in special need. Monthly basic rations of flour, rice, sugar and oil were distributed to about 824,000 refugees; and special hardship assistance was given to indigent families. The total cost of financing the services in 1980 was \$183.7 million. The programmes were carried out by some 16,700 employees, mostly teachers, all but a handful of whom are themselves Palestine refugees, under the direction of 97 international staff. 4/

4. The prime determinant of the Agency's ability to meet the needs of the refugees is the level of its financial resources. Given the funds, there are many projects which the Agency would be keen to implement to enhance the opportunities for refugees to become self-supporting, to improve the quality of services and to cater for the special needs of those with particular handicaps. The sad truth is, as the Agency has pointed out repeatedly over the years, that income is insufficient to maintain even the minimum services at the established levels. In 1980, the Agency's income fell short by \$20.7 million of the budget of \$211.3 million. A related problem is that the level of income is not known sufficiently far in advance to permit smooth planning.

5. Nevertheless, within those constraints, a limited number of improvements were possible, of a nature to enhance the efficiency with which services met refugees' needs or to enrich an existing programme. The following paragraphs illustrate but are not exhaustive.

6. In 1980, expenditure on the education programme increased by 20 per cent over 1979, from \$83.4 million to \$100.1 million, accounting for 55 per cent of total expenditure. The major item of additional outlay was on the school education programme, which expends each year to cater for the growing school-age population. In 1979/80, the new intake included over 3,000 pupils more than in 1978/79 and some 252 additional teachers were appointed. Most UNRWA school buildings are operated on a double-shift basis to cope with the numbers of pupils. Some of the buildings urgently require replacement. During the year \$0.7 million were allocated to construct 60 additional class-rooms and specialist units to avoid the necessity of triple-shifting. In 1980 three particularly significant developments occurred in the education programme. The first was the production of a consolidated Biennial Work Plan for the school years 1980/81-1981/82. The second was the implementation of organizational changes in the Fields' and Headquarters' education offices, which included the strengthening of the professional aspects of the UNRWA education system by setting up Education Development Units in Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic and an Education Development Centre in the West Bank. The third was the Agency's take-over from the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) of the pre-school centres in the Gaza

4/ The total number of approved international staff posts is 120, of which 20 are loaned by UNESCO to provide technical guidance to the education programme, 5 by WHO to provide technical guidance to the health programme, 88 financed from the United Nations budget and 7 financed by UNRWA itself.

Strip, previously run by AFSC. In the vocational training programme, a contribution from the OPEC Fund enabled UNRWA to enlarge four vocational training centres and provide a wider range of courses.

7. Health services accounted for \$31.0 million of total expenditure or 16.9 per cent, an increase of 19.2 per cent over 1979. The quality of the medical services provided at the health centres is under continuing review. Specialist clinics treat tuberculosis, diabetes, cardiovascular disorders, dermatological and rheumatic complaints and eye diseases. An additional number of small clinical laboratories attached to health units were equipped to perform bio-chemical tests previously referred to central laboratories. Special attention was focused on the level of nutrition among infants and young children and their mothers. In response to the high prevalence of diarrhoeal diseases among small children, particularly in summer time, the Agency has, since March 1979, participated in the Gaza Strip in the development of a WHO-assisted project for the implementation of early oral rehydration therapy. In camp sanitation, the Agency participated to the extent of \$294,000 in self-help projects carried out by the refugees to construct drains and pathways in camps throughout the area of operations, to connect sewage systems to local networks, and to continue the provision of private water connexions and latrines to those families still without them. The schemes were undertaken with the co-operation of the local municipal and governmental authorities and, in Lebanon, the Palestine Liberation Organization.

8. The third category of service, the relief programme, involved expenditure in 1980 of \$44.1 million, compared with \$34.4 million in 1979, accounting for 24.0 per cent of the total expenditure. The assistance provided by the relief programme comprises essentially the basic ration, with very limited shelter and welfare assistance. In view of the Agency's scarce resources, the assistance is concentrated on the sector of the refugee population which is the most needy: widows, orphans, the aged, the physically and mentally handicapped, etc. This category of refugees, known as "special hardship cases", has been provided with extra basic rations in Jordan, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. By the end of 1980, some 36,000 persons were benefiting from the extra rations.

9. Again in 1980, Agency operations in Lebanon suffered extensively from local disturbances and Israeli military operations in southern Lebanon, which caused considerable damage to refugee shelters as well as some Agency installations.
