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Chairman: Mr. DIALLO (Guinea)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 75: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (continued)

1. Mr. GONZALEZ (Chile) said that the outstanding work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was an example of what could be achieved by the United Nations to alleviate the suffering of mankind. That important Agency, however, was encountering serious financial difficulties. The General Assembly must therefore ensure a stable base for its financing. In the mean time, the possibility of covering part or all of its deficit from the regular budget of the United Nations should be considered.
2. Despite those difficulties, UNRWA was working indefatigably for the Palestine refugees. The principal programmes had been continued as far as possible despite continually rising costs. However, the true solution of the refugee problem was closely linked to the just and lasting solution of the question of Palestine, through Israel's withdrawal from all the territories occupied since 1967, respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all States in the region, especially Lebanon, and the exercise by the Palestinian people of their right to self-determination.
3. Chile had contributed and would continue to contribute to the financing of the Agency and appealed to the international community to give it full support, so that it could carry out its mandate, the aim of which was to protect the most basic human rights of the refugees. The urgent need to solve that serious problem made it imperative to avoid unnecessary politicization and delays and to adopt practical measures.
4. Mr. McGRADY (Ireland), speaking on behalf of the 10 States members of the European Community, expressed regret that the sensitive situation in Lebanon and the occupied territories presented obstacles to UNRWA's mission. He also noted the Commissioner-General's special concern for the personal safety of the Palestine refugees and supported his appeal to those who controlled the various areas of Lebanon to do everything in their power to protect the lives of civilians. The parties to the conflict should remember their responsibilities in that respect.
5. The Ten were deeply worried that the Israeli defence forces had detained members of the staff of UNRWA without charge and had demolished refugee shelters. They appealed to all parties not to take any action which would impede UNRWA's work and to refrain from infringing the inviolability of the Agency's installations and premises.
6. As they had indicated on various occasions, the Ten believed that the refugee problem could be solved only within the framework of a just and lasting settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict based on the principle of security for all States of the region, Israel's right to exist, the principle of justice for all peoples, the right of the Palestinians to self-determination, and the principle of mutual recognition by all the parties involved.

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(Mr. McGrady, Ireland)

7. The European Community considered that the Agency continued to play a vital role in the lives of the Palestinians, particularly in the fields of health, welfare and education, the achievements in the latter being especially satisfactory. That was why it had responded positively to the Commissioner-General's request for contributions in cash.

8. The Ten had studied and taken note of the report of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA (A/39/575). They agreed with the conclusions contained in paragraph 20 of the report and were concerned at the possibility that the Agency might experience a financial crisis in 1985 because of its precarious economic situation. In that connection, they considered that the current voluntary system of financing was appropriate. However, the international community's response so far had been insufficient; a small number of countries, including those of the European Community, which contributed approximately 22 per cent of the Agency's budget, continued to shoulder a major part of the Agency's financing, whereas countries with resources, which had expressed their concern about the problem, did not contribute. The Ten appealed to States Members of the United Nations to demonstrate their solidarity and respond to the urgent financial needs of UNRWA.

9. Mr. CHAMMAS (Lebanon) said that his delegation was very satisfied with the work done by the Commissioner-General and the staff of UNRWA, who had had to face difficulties of all kinds, especially financial. He therefore wished to reiterate his country's full confidence in the Agency.

10. In his report (A/39/13), the Commissioner-General made a clear analysis of UNRWA, which was the symbol of the international community's commitment to the welfare of the Palestine refugees and had an irreplaceable role. With respect to the parts of the report dealing with Lebanon and its relations with UNRWA, his country understood the Commissioner-General's serious concern at the unstable, insecure situation, which was no doubt affecting and hampering the Agency's work. However, what had affected the situation most seriously was the occupation of southern Lebanon, West Beqa'a and Rashaya by Israel.

11. He also noted the Commissioner-General's concern, expressed in paragraph 32 of the report, for the personal safety of the Palestinians in southern Lebanon, and supposed that if the Commissioner-General did not refer to the civilian population in general it was because he was keeping strictly to his terms of reference. However, it was important to point out that Israeli practices in southern Lebanon were violating all the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, which the Israeli Government had undertaken to respect; so much so that the Government of Lebanon had gone to the Security Council in August 1984 to denounce those practices and call for an end to the maltreatment of civilians.

12. Lebanon hoped that the Agency would be able to carry out its mandate effectively without violating the sovereign rights of the State in which its headquarters was situated. To that end, his delegation wished to propose a set of guidelines which UNRWA should take into account in its operations in Lebanon. First, UNRWA must consider, in conjunction with the Lebanese authorities, the advisability of rebuilding the camps; residence should be restricted to those refugees who were residing legally in Lebanon; the financing and rebuilding of the

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(Mr. Chammas, Lebanon)

camps should be co-ordinated with the Government of Lebanon and have its consent. Secondly, the Palestinians employed by UNRWA should be recruited from among those who were legally registered as refugees. Thirdly, the security of the camps was the responsibility of the Lebanese authorities, since questions relating to public order and national security were the sole responsibility of the State concerned as an attribute of its sovereignty. In any case, he reiterated his country's firm intention to co-operate with the Agency.

13. Although the situation in Lebanon was not an item on the agenda, it should be pointed out that the country was the zone of operations in which UNRWA had to perform its functions and that the conditions were by no means favourable. His Government would like the headquarters of UNRWA to remain in Lebanon, and endorsed the statement made by the Chairman of the Advisory Commission of UNRWA that the reunification of the headquarters in its former location in Beirut should be regarded as a matter of priority.

14. Mr. FISCHER (Austria) said that since so far there was no glimpse of a political solution to the refugee problem, UNRWA's services to the Palestine refugees were of paramount importance. In order for them to continue, and in order for the Agency to be able to operate with maximum efficiency, it needed the continued and generous financial support of the States Members of the United Nations.

15. His delegation had taken note with great interest of the annual report of the Commissioner-General (A/39/13) and his introductory statement. In order to alleviate the plight of the refugees in southern Lebanon, the parties directly involved should spare no effort to achieve a speedy solution to the problem. If the Israeli troops were withdrawn from Lebanon, arrangements should be made to ensure for all civilians and Palestine refugees the necessary protection and security.

16. With regard to the day-to-day conduct of the Agency's operations in Lebanon, especially in southern Lebanon, an appeal must be made to the authorities concerned to allow UNRWA to make full use of all the installations belonging to it, especially its schools and training centres. The principle of the immunity and inviolability of United Nations installations must always be respected. The local authorities should also enable the Agency to maintain the necessary lines of transport and communication. Austria would continue to give its full support to UNRWA.

17. Mr. Nisar Ali KHAN (Pakistan) said that since the Commissioner-General had submitted his latest report, the number of Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA had risen from 1,957,000 to 2,034,314. The situation was becoming worse every day. The continuous harassment of the Palestinian people by the Israeli aggressors gave cause for great concern, while the invasion of southern Lebanon had added a new dimension to the misfortunes and misery of the Palestinians.

18. Since the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, UNRWA had been forced to continue operating under beleaguered and adverse conditions. It had managed to survive and continue functioning owing to the ingenious improvisations and

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(Mr. Nisar Ali Khan, Pakistan)

determination of its selfless officials. The international community must, similarly, continue to demonstrate the political will to shoulder its responsibility towards the Palestine refugees.

19. With regard to UNRWA's serious financial situation, the international community must act positively upon the five-point plan outlined in paragraph 20 of the report of the Working Group on the financing of UNRWA in order to stave off financial disaster for the Agency.

20. UNRWA's crucial importance for the survival and welfare of Palestine refugees in all the areas of its operations in Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon, as well as in all the territories under Israeli occupation, could not be over-emphasized. Its role in the field of education was of paramount importance. Its school system was still functioning, despite the disruptions caused by the fighting and bombings, but capital expenditure for school construction had virtually come to a standstill. In order to resolve that problem, States Members of the United Nations should implement the Working Group's recommendations.

21. His delegation wished to reiterate and re-emphasize that the primary obligation for ensuring UNRWA's financial solvency rested with those who had been instrumental in the creation of Israel. If the Agency's financial crisis could not be resolved through voluntary contributions, UNRWA might have to be funded from the regular budget of the United Nations until the Palestinian people were accorded their right to a homeland.

22. Pakistan had been extending all possible help to its Palestinian brethren through regular contributions to UNRWA and the provision of facilities for Palestinian students at its educational institutions. The establishment of an Arab university in Jerusalem was essential to give the Arabs in the occupied territories equal opportunities to increase their knowledge and contribute to economic development.

23. One of the major obstacles to world peace and security was the explosive situation in the Middle East, and especially the question of Palestine. The solution to the problem lay in Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories and the return of the Palestinians to their homes so that they could exercise their right to self-determination.

24. Mr. FARTAS (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that in order to solve UNRWA's financial problems, the comments previously made by the Arab countries, particularly the recommendation for reducing the size of the international staff and using more local staff, should be kept in mind, and UNRWA should be funded from the regular United Nations budget. If its headquarters were to be returned to the site of its operations, not only would expenditure be reduced, but its performance would improve.

25. The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya would continue, as in the past, to contribute to UNRWA's budget, and it called upon those countries which had not made pledges to do so, and on those which had done so to increase their contributions, in order to overcome the Agency's financial crisis.

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(Mr. Fartas, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)

26. In the light of the principle that the aggressor must face up to the consequences of his aggression, paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III), of 11 December 1948, should be put into effect. The Israeli régime which was solely responsible for the problem, should face up to the consequences of its aggression.

27. By virtue of the responsibility it bore for the birth of the Zionist entity, the United Nations had a clear obligation in respect of the Palestine refugees. It was not merely a problem of refugees but of an entire people which had been displaced and whose territories had been forcibly seized. The rights to self-determination and to establish an independent State should be recognized among the rights of the Palestinian people: any attempt to resolve the problem without taking that into account was doomed to failure.

28. With regard to the situation of refugees from Lebanon, he said that UNRWA's report (A/39/13) could hardly be called a biased source. Paragraphs 11, 30, 32, 139, 140 and 184 referred to deaths, kidnappings, disappearances, forced evictions, threats and the demolition of shelters in refugee camps. The Israeli occupation authorities promoted such acts - when they were not directly participating in them. Furthermore, as paragraphs 146, 165, 171 and 181 made clear, the Israeli authorities had closed down training and youth activities centres and detained the Agency's employees. It was also common knowledge that during the period under review, the authorities had forced their way into UNRWA's premises.

29. The Zionists had established 267 settlements in Jerusalem, Nablus, Hebron, the Gaza Strip, Golan and the West Bank, and intended to invest 14 billion shekels before the end of 1985 in the construction of 20 new settlements. Israelis controlled 88 per cent of the water supply. They had expelled more than 100,000 Palestinians and were denying them the right to return to their homes. It was Golda Meir herself who had said that the Palestinian people as such did not exist: was there any hope, then, that the Israelis would respond to an appeal for the return of the refugees as a first step towards resolving the Palestinian problem?

30. Mr. RADENKOVIC (Yugoslavia) said now that the United Nations was again considering the report of UNRWA (A/39/13), the question was whether it was not yet time to put an end to the use of force against an entire people. The Palestine refugees had been expelled from their territory, deprived of their homes and property, and denied even their most basic human rights.

31. The UNRWA report highlighted the brutality of the Israeli military and civilian authorities and the consequences thereof for the Palestine refugees. In many previous reports, the Agency had pointed to the grave nature of the situation, without any response having been given by the Israeli occupation authorities. On the contrary, the Agency's staff had been arrested, mistreated or murdered, in violation of the immunity of international organizations and of international law.

32. Despite the permanent obstacles which it faced and its inadequate resources, UNRWA had been able to improve the situation of the Palestine refugees, particularly in respect of education, health, food supplements and housing. It must continue to provide that assistance, which was in many cases the only aid

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(Mr. Radenkovic, Yugoslavia)

received by the helpless refugee families. Furthermore, the Agency's activities contributed to stability in the region and were a symbol of the international community's solidarity with the suffering Palestinian people. The Agency must be given adequate material and financial resources so that it could continue to perform its humanitarian tasks. Yugoslavia contributed and would continue to contribute to the international community's efforts to assist the Palestine refugees.

33. No matter how important and essential the Agency's activities, they could not replace a just and lasting political solution to the Palestinian problem as a pre-condition for settling the Middle East conflict. A partial or limited settlement of the Arab-Israeli dispute was impossible: peace must be total and just, and could be secured only through complete Israeli withdrawal from all the Palestinian and Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem.

34. The Declaration adopted by the International Conference on the Question of Palestine confirmed the international consensus that peace in the Middle East could not be based on the denial of the Palestinian people's rights to freedom, self-determination, independence and national and social development. The Movement of Non-Aligned Countries supported the Palestinian people's legitimate aspirations and endorsed the struggle of the PLO. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, which had among its members eight non-aligned countries including Yugoslavia, was of the view that a peaceful solution must be found before it was too late. For that purpose, the international community must continue to support UNRWA and to work towards a political solution of the Palestinian problem.

35. Mr. BARROMI (Israel) said that the attempt by the High Commissioner of UNRWA to give an objective assessment of events (A/39/13) had not been fully successful. Moreover, the Israeli Government's Beit Lahiya rehabilitation project had a few days previously been mistakenly described as "coercive". Under the Beit Lahiya housing project, refugees whose applications were accepted were given a plot of land with the necessary infrastructure (roads, electricity, sewage and water supply) and also grants and cheap loans. No shelters had been demolished in order to make refugees move to the project. On the contrary, in the Jabaliya camp the authorities had cleared the streets and expanded public areas. The question of the detention of UNRWA officials raised by the representative of Ireland had also been misinterpreted. Israel guaranteed such officials freedom to fulfil their mandate and only took action when they engaged in activities which were against public order and contrary to that mandate.

36. Paragraph 8 of the report gave details only of losses attributable to Israeli attacks. When death and destruction were brought about by other parties, the report was ambiguous. For instance, there was no mention in paragraph 6 that casualties had numbered 438 dead and 2,100 injured. The same was true of paragraphs 7, 9 and 10, which did not give any actual facts and figures. Moreover, the description of the main developments did not include a mention of their causes and effects. For instance, the Baalbek air raid had been aimed at a group of terrorist forces. Nor did the report make it clear that the havoc in Beirut had been the consequence of the collapse of the authority of the Lebanese Government, brought about deliberately by the Syrian Arab Republic.

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(Mr. Barromi, Israel)

37. One of the striking features of the latest report was the absence of any substantial reference to Syria. Yet, as in the past, in the period 1983-1984 Syria had been the main actor on the Lebanese scene.

38. In preparing the report, the High Commissioner's office would have done better to have consulted the statement made to the Special Political Committee on 18 November 1983 by the representative of Lebanon, who had described in detail the situation in Lebanon and the threat posed to Israel by the military bases in the region.

39. UNRWA had been set up in 1949 to alleviate the hardships faced by the refugees and to ensure their swift absorption into the productive process. In 1952, a three-year UNRWA plan to promote the refugees' integration into the economies of the countries in which they were sheltered, thereby contributing also to the welfare of those countries, had been submitted to the General Assembly. The plan had been adopted despite the opposition of certain countries, and it had been the General Assembly's belief that international assistance to the refugees would be of only a temporary nature. It had not been envisaged that UNRWA would carve out a permanent political role for itself in the Middle East, in addition to its humanitarian role, and that it would acquire an ever-increasing network of offices and services. UNRWA spent 10 times more per refugee than did the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Arab delegations tried to justify that situation by claiming that the case of the Palestine refugees was unique and deserved privileged treatment; to that end, they invoked historic arguments which misrepresented the facts.

40. The Special Political Committee should concentrate on the essentials. Firstly, it should have a thorough understanding of the economic, social and demographic changes that had taken place among the populations of the Middle East. Migrations from one country to another in the region dated back to the beginning of the nineteenth century. For instance, during the British Mandate, in other words, up until 1948, the Arab population of Palestine had been largely the product of migratory currents attracted by the opportunities offered by the emerging economy of the Jewish areas. More recently, Arab migration had been directed mainly at the oil-rich countries of the Arabian Gulf, where the Palestinian population was now estimated at approximately 500,000. Refugees from the Arab-Israeli wars had also become part and parcel of that broad population movement, their overall number being one and a half million people, half of them Arab and the other half Jewish. Most recently, Lebanese citizens of different ethnic and religious affiliations had joined the migratory movement as a result of the war that had been ravaging their country since 1975.

41. Thus a new reality had emerged. The influx of foreign workers had invigorated the economies of sparsely populated countries. In the Arabian Gulf, the newly arrived had attained high standards of living as a result of the commercial, banking and industrial development that had followed the Middle East oil boom. In Israel, Jewish refugees had been welcomed as brothers and Arab refugees from Judea, Samaria and Gaza had benefited from the dramatic rise in living standards in the Israeli-administered areas, where the refugee problem was on a comparatively limited scale. It should be remembered that only 35.23 per cent of the refugee population registered by UNRWA actually lived in refugee camps.

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(Mr. Barromi, Israel)

42. Secondly, the Middle East was a realm of lost opportunities. Under the armistice signed in 1949 by Israel's Arab neighbours, with the exception of Iraq, it had been assumed that the Arab States would make an effort to integrate the Palestine refugees into their societies and economies on humanitarian grounds and in order to improve the overall political climate. The Arab Governments, however, had wilfully prevented the refugees' integration, spurned all plans of co-operation with the United Nations and even denied the refugees the rights of citizenship. They had also rejected all proposals relating to regional development and joint water resources management. Clearly, the Arab States had not had the situation of the refugees or even the welfare of their own peoples at heart. They had wanted first and foremost to blot out Israel from the map of the Middle East and, in their attempts to do so, had resorted to different means: diplomatic pressure, economic boycott and violence.

43. In the 1950s, they had recruited from among the refugees gangs of marauders, the so-called Fedayeen, who had infiltrated Israel in order to kill and loot. In 1964, the summit meeting of Arab Heads of States had set up the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and given it logistic and financial support in its murderous raids, the escalation of which had led to the 1967 war. In the 1970s, the PLO had grown into a major centre of international terrorism, supported by the Arab States which had supplied it with bases, weapons, money and false diplomatic identities and allowed it the use of the diplomatic pouch. With the blessing of various States Members of the United Nations, the refugee camps had once again become recruiting grounds.

44. Some Arab States had been only passive partners in the resultant terrorism, while others such as Libya, Syria and Iraq had actively directed and participated in terrorist operations. Nor had the Arab States been the only ones to engage in that senseless adventure. The Soviet Union and other communist countries had supplied the PLO with sophisticated weaponry, training, expertise and information. The victims of that continuing belligerence were the civilian population, particularly the dispossessed, many of whom were refugees. That dangerous situation had been aggravated by the emergence of a twin-headed alliance between aberrant religious fundamentalism and ruthless left-wing radicalism.

45. Against that uncertain background, the job done by UNRWA in carrying out its mandate had been a remarkable one, in particular in the areas of medical assistance, education and vocational training. Israel, for its part, would continue its efforts to improve the lot of the refugees, the difficulties caused by the present economic retrenchment notwithstanding, for instance through the settlement project in the Gaza district mentioned in paragraph 141 of the report. At the same time, Israel had not relinquished its hopes for peace and co-operation with its neighbours and had invited the King of Jordan to take part in negotiations with a view to embarking on a joint development plan that could eliminate pockets of poverty among the refugees and raise the overall standard of living of the entire population of the area.

The meeting rose at 5.10 p.m.