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**GENERAL
ASSEMBLY**

TWENTY-FIFTH SESSION

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**SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE, 732nd
MEETING**

Tuesday, 24 November 1970,
at 3.25 p.m.



NEW YORK

Chairman: Mr. Abdul Samad GHAUS
(Afghanistan).

AGENDA ITEM 35

**United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine
Refugees in the Near East: report of the Commissioner-
General (continued) (A/8013, A/8040, A/8048 and
Add.1, A/SPC/140, A/SPC/141)**

1. The CHAIRMAN drew the Committee's attention to a letter (A/SPC/141), dated 23 November 1970, addressed to him by the representatives of twenty-five Member States. At the 726th meeting, in connexion with another request for a hearing, he had outlined the practice which had been established at the twentieth session and followed ever since, namely, to authorize the persons constituting the delegation in question to address the Committee and to make such statements as they might deem necessary, without such authorization implying recognition of the organization concerned. He suggested that the Committee should agree to follow the same procedure as it had at the 726th meeting in connexion with the letter from the representatives of four Member States (A/SPC/140), and should decide that at the appropriate time the floor would be given to the spokesmen of the Palestine Liberation Organization mentioned in document A/SPC/141, without such authorization implying recognition of the organization in question. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee was in agreement with that procedure.

It was so decided.

2. Mr. CAHANA (Israel) said that he wished to place on record the fact that his delegation reserved its position regarding the procedure that the Committee had just adopted.

3. Mr. BACH BAOUAB (Tunisia) said that the Committee was considering the report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East under difficult, even tragic circumstances. In the twenty-fifth year of the United Nations, it was regrettable to note that a pre-eminently humanitarian organization was on the brink of bankruptcy. In paragraph 31 of his report (A/8013), the Commissioner-General had stressed that unless the General Assembly took adequate positive action at the current session, that report might be the last one. That was an unprecedented situation, and one for which the Agency's administration was in no way responsible.

4. All were agreed that the existing situation in the region, and particularly the Israeli aggression of 1967 and the

recent events in Jordan, had expanded the Agency's field of activity and called for increased financing. The Commissioner-General and his co-workers deserved the Committee's gratitude for the determined and efficient performance of their mission of assistance to the refugees despite the meagre resources at their disposal.

5. The Agency's deficit for the current year was \$5 million, and the estimates for 1971 indicated a probable deficit of \$6.5 million, unless additional income was received. In order to make up that deficit the Commissioner-General was advocating a substantial reduction in programmes; but that was an absurd solution which would only aggravate the hardships of the refugees.

6. The questions of nutrition and health, and the problems of inadequate rations and unbalanced diet leading to nutritional deficiency and disease, had been amply covered by previous speakers. The education programmes, however, deserved special attention, for they might be gravely threatened by the lack of funds. The Agency already devoted 45 per cent of its budget to the educational and vocational training of a school population of 300,000. That was the most positive aspect of its work, for soundly trained and certificated young Palestinians could view the future with hope and would no longer be a burden on the Agency. A reduction in funding in that area would restrict educational programmes and deprive the refugees of the most honourable means of facing life as free, self-sufficient people. His delegation was convinced that the international community, aware of its responsibilities, would not fail to give the Commissioner-General the means to continue his work.

7. The charitable aspect of the Agency's work was really a sop to the conscience of the international community, which had committed the greatest injustice in history by uprooting an entire people from their homeland and enclosing them in camps. In that way, a matter which had initially been purely political had been transformed into a human tragedy. But the problem remained, and the Agency's humanitarian assistance, which had been intended as a temporary measure, must not, no matter how necessary and effective it might be, obscure the substance of the problem, namely, the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people: the refugees' right to return to their homes, their right to repatriation and compensation and their right to determine their destiny as free men. That was the price of peace in the Middle East.

8. At every session, for more than twenty years, the General Assembly had been adopting resolutions recognizing and affirming those rights; but all efforts had been obstructed by Israel's determination to block any possibility of a solution and by its commitment to an irrational

policy of expansion. Disillusioned by the inaction of the international community, the Palestinian people had taken responsibility for their own struggle and had proclaimed their determination to exist as a nation. That new reality became clearer from day to day. It was not necessary to be a prophet to be convinced that any solution which did not take account of the new awareness of the Palestinian people was illusory and doomed to failure. The history of decolonization had demonstrated that a people aware of its identity and its rights and committed to the liberation of its homeland always saw its aspirations realized. The destiny of the Palestinian people would be no exception to that rule.

9. Mr. HABIB-DELONCLE (France) said that he wished first of all to associate himself with the words of sympathy which had been addressed to the representative of Pakistan following the disaster which had befallen his country. The message of solidarity addressed by President Pompidou to the President of the Republic of Pakistan had been reflected in France in various public and private initiatives which he hoped would make a useful contribution to the efforts being exerted by the Government of Pakistan to aid the victims of that catastrophe.

10. For several years, and especially since the events of June 1967, the Committee had given constant attention to the situation of the Palestine refugees. Far from being confined to purely humanitarian matters, its debates had afforded the countries directly concerned the opportunity to take up a number of the political aspects of the question and to make clear their position on the Middle East conflict. More than ever before, however, there were two good reasons why the debate should be restricted to the consideration of the Commissioner-General's report. A wide-ranging political debate on the situation in the Middle East had recently taken place in the General Assembly, resulting in the adoption of an important resolution (resolution 2628 (XXV)). At the present delicate stage, when everything had to be subordinated to the forthcoming negotiations, what could be said that had not already been said in the Assembly? It would be more reasonable to avoid any polemics, which could only envenom the situation. The second reason to which he had referred was apparent from the report itself. The Agency's financial situation was such that if effective measures were not taken immediately it might well have to declare bankruptcy in 1971. It was well known that the Agency had had increasing difficulties in balancing its budget over the past few years; but now its very survival was at stake. The implications of such a situation were too serious for the Committee merely to take note of it without attempting to find a solution.

11. As long ago as 11 February 1970, the Secretary-General had described the situation as desperate, and on 13 August he had forwarded to contributing Governments a statement by the Commissioner-General (see A/8040, annex) emphasizing the danger of further reductions in the services provided to refugees and expressing the hope that the General Assembly would adopt the measures necessary to ensure that the essential activities of the Agency could continue during the following year. After the events in Jordan in September, the Secretary-General had forwarded to Members of the General Assembly a special report (A/8084, annex), in which the Commissioner-General had

issued an urgent appeal to Governments to help the Agency meet the needs of refugees on the East Bank. Although significant reductions in material benefits had already been made, the estimated deficit for 1970 amounted to about \$5 million, and even that result had been achieved only at the price of a transfer of the same amount from the working capital fund, the balance of which was clearly insufficient to cover the Agency's normal operations. The deficit for 1971 would probably be in excess of \$6.5 million unless Government contributions were raised above their current levels.

12. He wished to convey his gratitude and congratulations to the Commissioner-General, his immediate colleagues and the Agency staff for their efforts and dedication in the face of tremendous difficulties.

13. The Agency had made serious efforts to stabilize expenditure, although the report showed that the total staff had increased slightly since the preceding year. Those efforts had been concerned primarily with material benefits, and had not yet been applied to educational expenditure, which accounted for an increasing share of the Agency's budget. That was not difficult to understand when it was realized that the number of refugee children attending school had practically quintupled in twenty years. Moreover, that category of expenses corresponded to a basic need of the refugees, who regarded themselves, in the Commissioner-General's words, as "temporary wards of the international community" (see A/8013, para. 2). One was hesitant to suggest reductions when the future of young Palestinians and their vocational and technical training was at stake. In that connexion, he paid a tribute to UNESCO's contribution to the Agency's education programme.

14. Another reason for the deficit lay in the fact that hundreds of thousands of persons displaced as a result of the events of 1967 had been unable, despite the repeated appeals of the General Assembly and the Security Council, to return to their previous places of residence. On the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip, several camps in operational condition remained partially or completely unused; the return of the refugees to those camps, or of the displaced persons to their homes, would remove a considerable burden from the Agency's budget and at the same time do much to reduce tension.

15. Even more than in preceding years, the report made it clear that the Agency now had to face difficulties which were not purely administrative and financial. The refugee community as a whole was increasingly affected by developments in the political situation. He wondered how it could be otherwise when for twenty years the refugee's life, as the Commissioner-General had said, had been one of "deepening frustration, uncertainty and fading hopes" (*ibid.*, para. 12). It was not surprising that men who had lost everything should try to influence the course of the events which determined their fate. How could they be refused that most basic of human rights, the right to dignity?

16. Only a total and definitive settlement of the conflict, leading to a just and lasting peace throughout the region, could make possible a satisfactory solution to the refugee

problem. Such a settlement must be based upon Security Council resolution 242 (1967). His country, for its part, had done everything possible, particularly in the context of the four-Power talks, to facilitate such a settlement. But so long as no solution had been found to the Middle East conflict, so long as the refugees had to live under the precarious conditions they had known for so long, UNRWA would continue to play an indispensable role. Even in the event of a settlement, the Agency would have to remain until the fate of the last refugee had been determined. If the Agency was to survive, its financial balance, now so precarious, would have to be re-established. There were two types of measures which could be taken for that purpose.

17. If the principle that expenditure must be adjusted to real income was accepted, it appeared essential that the Agency should make reductions, so far as possible, in the services currently provided and should undertake a careful review of the list of recipients of rations. His delegation, aware of its responsibilities in that connexion, was prepared in principle to give favourable consideration to any proposals for savings which might be put forward with a view to reducing the Agency's chronic deficit, even if they related to education programmes. Of course, his delegation would not accept the latter possibility with a light heart. Such savings would naturally have to be approved by the contributing countries as a whole. He hoped they would also be accepted by the host countries, so that the Agency would be able to continue carrying out its mission.

18. Since it was not at all certain that the reductions envisaged would be sufficient to make up the deficit and enable the Agency to reconstitute its working capital, it had to be recognized that only increased participation by the contributing States, and the participation of countries which had not yet made contributions, would make it possible to achieve the desired balance. Such an initiative would be in accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 302 (IV) on the establishment of the Agency, which provided for a system of solely voluntary contributions. His delegation hoped that that method of financing would be maintained, for it reflected the humanitarian nature of the Agency while avoiding any further increase in the United Nations budget.

19. Since the establishment of UNRWA France had provided the Agency with financial and material assistance which had earned it fourth place among contributing countries for the period 1 May 1950 to 31 December 1970. Following the events of June 1967, its total contribution had risen to 6 million francs in 1967 and 5.5 million francs in 1968. In 1969 it had been compelled by its own financial difficulties to limit its contribution to a normal figure of 1 million francs. During the current year, in response to the appeal issued by the Secretary-General and the Commissioner-General, the French Government was prepared to make available a substantial special credit in addition to its regular contribution. His delegation hoped to be able to announce a decision on that subject at the pledging conference. Speaking on his own behalf, and as a member of the French Parliament, he wished to state that he would give his full support to his Government's efforts in that connexion.

20. In addition to its cash payments, the French Government had made available to the Agency buildings and an

audio-visual centre at the normal school at Siblin, in Lebanon, had paid for teachers of French, had organized further training courses for young Palestinians in France and had supplied 3,200 metric tons of cereals.

21. In conclusion, he wished to stress the great responsibilities of the international community in the problem of the Palestine refugees. Above and beyond the financial problem, serious as it was, the fate of a vast community of men, women and children was at stake. The Committee might perhaps issue an additional appeal, as the representative of Turkey had proposed (728th meeting), on behalf of Governments themselves in support of the appeals made by the Commissioner-General and the Secretary-General. He hoped that the tremendous efforts which had been exerted for over twenty years would bear fruit so that, when peace had been achieved, the refugees could turn their backs on their miserable conditions and recover in full the enjoyment of their rights as human beings.

22. Mr. NORTH (Australia) said that UNRWA had just passed its most difficult year, and had done so with great distinction. His delegation wished to join with others in recording its appreciation and respect for the efforts of the Commissioner-General and his staff. He also wished to express his delegation's satisfaction with the high level of co-operation between UNRWA and its fellow agencies, UNESCO and WHO. Similarly, the generous assistance and support of private agencies and individuals warranted the highest commendation.

23. There had been very few humanitarian operations to rival the work of UNRWA. Its achievements were the more remarkable because the refugees were the principal element in a political situation of great consequence to world peace and security. In its essentially humanitarian function, the Agency had brought vital relief services to nearly 1.5 million persons. In addition, by keeping alive the dignity and hope of those people, it had helped to minimize the dangers inherent in the desperation which displaced persons often suffered. It should therefore command the universal support of the membership of the United Nations. However, many Members who voted every year in favour of the renewal of the Agency's mandate did not contribute to its material support. The Commissioner-General's report (A/8013) gave cause for grave concern, particularly in view of the fact that the current financial crisis, unless resolved immediately, would lead inevitably to the disintegration of the Agency. It was already alarming that UNRWA could afford only very meagre issues of basic supplies by way of emergency relief, and that its education programme, the mainstay of hope for the refugee's future life, should stand first in line for reduction in expenditure. Those considerations served to underscore the urgent need for countries which had not made contributions to UNRWA to do so without delay.

24. The ultimate fate of the refugees, and indeed their immediate prospects, remained for the most part in the area of political decision. UNRWA was a humanitarian agency, but what it did might help to create a climate conducive to a settlement. It should receive the support of all who desired a lasting peace in the Middle East and should be given every encouragement by those who had it in their power physically to facilitate or hinder its daily operations.

He noted with regret that the Commissioner-General had had occasion to report some cases where the Agency's work had been obstructed or made more difficult by apparently unwarranted action by officials, or by lack of adequate protection, in the area of its operations (*ibid.*, chap. I, sect. E). Some of those cases had been the subject of formal protest by the Agency, and he drew attention in particular to apparent violations of the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations.

25. Although the supplementary report of the Commissioner-General (A/8084/Add.1, annex) indicated a remarkable recovery by UNRWA in the wake of recent hostilities in Jordan, his delegation was concerned that the Agency was not only burdened with additional expenses, but might also be susceptible to further disruptions of that kind. Whatever resources were made available to the Agency, their value could be reduced by a serious recurrence of fighting. His country, for its part, would maintain its level of contributions in the coming year. Its concern for the plight of the refugees was a paramount consideration, and in keeping with that concern for their welfare it would watch with interest, in the year to come, what the Commissioner-General had described as "the environment in which the Agency operates" (see A/8013, para 19).

26. Mr. TARCICI (Yemen) said that the origin of the question of the Palestine refugees, which had been on the General Assembly's agenda for over twenty years, lay in the fact that a whole people had been driven from its ancestral homeland and deprived of its fundamental rights, which were recognized by the Charter of the United Nations and by the conscience of mankind. The fact that the rights of that people, which, as the Secretary-General had said at the twenty-third session (612th meeting), considerably outnumbered the whole population of a number of States Members of the United Nations, had been constantly reaffirmed by the Organization, despite all the pressure brought to bear by influential Powers, showed that they were recognized by the whole world, except those parts which were under the influence of the Zionists. Dozens of United Nations resolutions had been flouted by the racist, expansionist and imperialistic Zionists, who had wiped Palestine from the map merely because its inhabitants had at some time in their history hearkened to the voice of Christ or of Islam. Those people included not only the former inhabitants of the Holy Land such as the Canaanites and the Philistines but also Hebrew descendents of Abraham. Zionism and its creation, Israel, were nothing more than an intensified anachronistic form of colonialism. World public opinion no longer accepted that a rich nation should install itself as master in a country of the third world and plan to dominate a whole region. South Africa and Southern Rhodesia had been isolated by the rest of the world, and the same was happening to Israel. Even the traditionally colonialist or neo-colonialist Powers sometimes tried to dissociate themselves, at least publicly, from the discriminatory and aggressive acts of their protégés. The new, more enlightened generation was protesting with increasing vehemence against such concepts, which were dangerous to peace, for peace could not be lasting unless it was based on justice and the right of self-determination of all peoples, including of course the Palestinians.

27. Of the 43 United Nations resolutions still ignored by Israel, 24 concerned the rights of the Palestinians, 4 con-

cerned displaced persons, 4 concerned Jerusalem and 11 invited Israel to respect human rights. The General Assembly had just adopted its forty-fourth resolution (resolution 2628 (XXV)) on the withdrawal of Israel troops from the occupied territories. The Israeli authorities' negative attitude to that resolution, announced even before its adoption, had led *The New York Times* correspondent in Jerusalem to say that Israel was once again acquiring the reputation of a haughty obstructionist to international peace-making efforts.

28. As so many Heads of States and Governments, including the Emperor of Ethiopia, had said during the commemorative session, Israel's persistent contempt of United Nations resolutions was undermining the Organization's authority and might cause it to suffer the same fate as that of the League of Nations. He therefore agreed with the recent statement by the representative of the United States of America that if the United Nations produced nothing but sweeping, empty declarations, no one should be surprised if the average man lost confidence and hope in the Organization. Empty declarations should be replaced by positive acts. If the United Nations was to be respected and survive, it was imperative that it should act. It was high time, therefore, that the United Nations should consider taking the steps outlined in the Charter to ensure that its resolutions were implemented. To begin with, those steps might be based on those already taken against South Africa.

29. General Eisenhower had said that if the United Nations once admitted that international disputes could be settled by using force, it would have destroyed the very foundation of the Organization and the best hope of establishing a world order. If it accepted the ignoring of its repeated resolutions calling for the withdrawal of invading forces, it would have admitted failure, which would be a blow to its authority in the world and the hopes which humanity had placed in it as a means of achieving peace with justice. General de Gaulle had been more specific in condemning Israel's action in its occupied territories, which led to resistance which it called terrorism. General Assembly resolution 2535 B (XXIV), after reaffirming, in its paragraph 1, the inalienable rights of the people of Palestine had indicated in paragraphs 2 and 3 the steps the Organization should take to preserve its authority and prestige and to prevent the average man from losing trust in it.

30. The various aspects of the problem were intimately linked and could not be dissociated. There was the matter of the inalienable rights of the people of Palestine. There was that of the consequences of the last Israeli aggression against three Member States and its continued occupation of their territory. There was Israel's expansionism, which consisted in occupying new territories in order to create an empire stretching from the Nile to the Euphrates at the expense of all the countries and peoples in the region. There was Israel's discriminatory policy, according to which any inhabitant of an occupied country or one likely to be occupied, if he was a Christian or a Moslem, must leave his country or be treated as a second-class citizen. There was the religious question of the city of Jerusalem, which was equally holy for the 1,000 million Christians and the 600 million Moslems and which had been the subject of several resolutions. There was Israel's colonialist and imperialist

policy, the aim of which was the economic and political domination of all countries in the region, including those of East Africa, western Asia and Asia Minor. That aim had been outlined by the Israeli Foreign Minister at the 1686th meeting of the General Assembly, when he said that the peace discussion should include an examination of a common approach to some of the resources and means of communication in the region in an effort to lay the foundation of a Middle Eastern community of sovereign States. On the instructions of the millionaires who had met several times in Israel, the Zionist authorities had already worked out plans covering the rest of the twentieth century to ensure their supremacy over the whole of the Middle East, plans which were reminiscent of those drawn up by the Nazis for the control of all Europe and Africa.

31. There was also the matter of the infringement of human rights, which had resulted in the adoption by the International Conference on Human Rights held at Teheran in 1968, of several resolutions condemning Israel. Above all, there was the humanitarian problem which had led to the establishment of UNRWA to help the Palestine refugees, who were condemned to living in tents, dependent on international charity until they could regain their homeland and their inalienable rights. The Agency was continuing to carry out its humanitarian mission and to overcome the

difficulties which confronted it. His delegation considered that UNRWA's mission should also include, in a more specific way, the responsibility of preparing the Palestinians in its care for the part they would have to play when the inevitable day came for them to recover their inalienable rights. The teaching of civics would be one way of doing so.

32. His delegation agreed with the Secretary-General that the United Nations was responsible for the refugees. It was therefore deeply concerned at the alarming financial situation outlined by the Commissioner-General, which meant that despite his and his staff's untiring efforts and dedicated work, the Agency was threatened with disaster. It was to be hoped that the international community would not renounce its responsibility to the people of Palestine until they had regained their inalienable rights. It was difficult to understand that it had been necessary to make a moving appeal for funds to cover UNRWA's \$5 million deficit, which went to meet humanitarian needs, when a country which had already provided the aggressor with thousands of millions of dollars had just given the invader of Palestine and the occupier of the lands of three countries a further sum of five hundred million dollars.

The meeting rose at 4.40 p.m.