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AGENDA ITEM 27

**United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine
Refugees in the Near East (continued):**

- (a) Report of the Director of the Agency (A/4213);
(b) Proposals for the continuation of United Nations assist-
ance to Palestine refugees: document submitted by the
Secretary-General (A/4121)

1. Mr. CASSELL (Liberia) said that the persistence of the Palestine refugee problem was attributable not to any lack of effort on the part of the General Assembly to solve it, but to the uncompromising positions of the parties most directly concerned. The refugees themselves had been and were still led to believe that ultimately they would return to Palestine. The grounds for that belief were undoubtedly present in paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III), which provided for the repatriation of those wishing to return and for the compensation of those not wishing to avail themselves of that right, but neither of the other two parties to the problem—Israel and the Arab States—had made any realistic proposals for a solution on those lines. Thus, resentment had grown among the refugees, while their determination to return had been fostered and encouraged by their hosts. It had been made clear many times in the debate that the return of the refugees to their homes was a matter of right under international law. On the other hand, international law also recognized the duty of a State to preserve its national existence. Israel justifiably regarded its own security as a State as its most important consideration, and it was understandably convinced that that security would be threatened by the introduction of large hostile groups. At the same time, Israel had a duty to observe its international obligations and, given the brilliance of its leaders, it ought to have been able to put forward some proposal for the settlement of the Palestine refugee problem that was both realistic and just. The potential danger which the subsistence of the problem presented to the entire Middle East could not be ignored. Unfortunately, the hysteria that had been

systematically built up on both sides over the years placed their leaders in a position from which there was no retreat. Any attempt to soften the rigidity of their attitudes might well cause the fall of the Governments concerned, with all the attendant dangers and disruptions.

2. The challenge of the almost insoluble problem must call forth the best efforts of the General Assembly. His delegation had considered the matter with the greatest care and had listened with close attention to all the previous speakers in the debate. It endorsed the suggestions that had been made regarding the possible revival of the Conciliation Commission for Palestine to consider ways and means of arriving at an over-all solution. If the Commission was not regarded as sufficiently large or representative in its original form, it could be reconstituted on a new basis. If it was given sufficient scope and approached the matter with sufficient realism and determination, it ought to be able to arrive at the settlement which both sides must, in their heart of hearts, desire.

3. In the meantime, his delegation was in favour of the continuation of UNRWA at least to the end of 1960. It also felt that an expression of the General Assembly's gratitude was due to the Director and staff of the Agency and it intended to put forward a resolution to that effect. In conclusion, it would support any resolution designed to reactivate the Conciliation Commission for Palestine with a specific mandate to lay the foundation for an over-all settlement of the refugee problem in order to ensure peace in the Middle East.

4. Mr. HANCHER (United States of America) said that the present unhappy lot of the Palestine refugees and their prospects for the future should be uppermost in the minds of all participants in the debate. Some of the considerations advanced were of a kind to generate emotion rather than to stimulate reasoned responses. In the interest of the stability of the Near East, the Assembly should face the facts of the grave situation in a constructive spirit. His delegation was impressed by the relatively moderate tone of the debate so far.

5. The mandate of UNRWA was due to expire in June 1960. At the same time, there was a relentless annual rise in the number of refugees, and the Agency's costs and responsibilities must continue to rise with it unless prompt progress was made on the fundamental elements of the problem. The Committee had two documents before it: the Secretary-General's proposals for the continuation of assistance to the refugees (A/4121) and the annual report of the Director of UNRWA (A/4213). Both merited careful study. While the United States delegation did not subscribe to all the Secretary-General's recommendations, it felt that several, such as the proposed rectification of the relief rolls, were appropriate and would be of great benefit to the refugees. It was clear from those

documents and from a review of the history of the problem that no real progress had been made so far towards a fundamental solution. His delegation believed that the cause of the refugees themselves would be served best by looking to the future. The problem was undoubtedly complex, but given a rational approach and some degree of receptivity to constructive ideas, an advance could be made towards a solution.

6. Hitherto, for lack of funds and for other reasons, the Agency's activities had been almost wholly confined to the relief part of its mandate. Very little had been done in regard to the extremely important works aspect. When the United Nations had decided five years before, by resolution 818 (IX), to extend the life of the Agency, it had expected that substantial progress would be made towards rehabilitation and self-support. The United States in particular had made clear its expectation of progress on large-scale projects to benefit the refugees and all the countries concerned. Unfortunately, there had been none. The few vocational training programmes in which the Agency had been able to engage had been most successful but their benefits had been limited to a small number of refugees. The United States had made great efforts to help all the parties concerned. In 1955, the then Secretary of State, Mr. Dulles, had proposed that the refugees should be enabled to resume a normal existence through repatriation or resettlement, and had pledged United States support for some form of international loan to facilitate the payment of compensation by Israel and United States participation in the carrying out of development projects. Those proposals had been reaffirmed by President Eisenhower in a message to Congress in January 1957. The interest of the Government and people of the United States in the care and the future of the Palestine refugees remained undiminished.

7. The problem was unlikely to be solved by June 1960 and international support for the refugees would undoubtedly have to continue. However, the United States did not consider that the mere extension of the Agency's mandate would be a satisfactory way of serving the long-term interests of the refugees. The present moment was a unique opportunity for a clear reaffirmation by the Governments directly concerned, and all other States moved by peaceful and humane considerations, of their determination to take constructive action. The United States delegation welcomed the constructive approach of Ceylon and India and would give sympathetic consideration to any suggestion, whether related to the Conciliation Commission for Palestine, a new commission or any other possibility, which would help to solve the problem. It also welcomed the Indian delegation's reminder (154th meeting) that the General Assembly had consistently held fast to the principle of repatriation or compensation. As one of the major contributors to the relief of the Palestine refugees so far, the United States was in favour of a fuller examination of the various proposals that had already been made and especially of the indications of growing willingness to make new attempts to solve some of the questions which divided the Near East. It hoped that still more specific recommendations would be made in the course of the debate. It would join wholeheartedly in any attempt by the United Nations to secure a brighter future for the Palestine refugees.

8. Mr. EINAAR (Netherlands) said that all delegations were agreed that the Palestine refugee problem was

essentially one of human tragedy. The continuation of that tragedy was a perpetual indictment of all who neglected to follow a policy aimed at ending it and it was clear that any such policy must be inspired by hope for the future rather than by resentment about the past.

9. The Director and staff of UNRWA had done the best they could with the funds available to them. The Netherlands was contributing to the Agency's budget to the fullest extent possible in the light of its other commitments. The great Powers which were chiefly responsible for the creation of Israel, and its sequel, the refugee problem, must also bear the brunt of the financial consequences—and the United States, the United Kingdom and France, at least, were doing so generously. Israel should similarly go as far as it could in admitting refugees for the purpose of family reunion and in negotiating compensation for the losses that had been incurred.

10. The Netherlands had long-standing ties of friendship with the Arab States and it hoped that in the near future they would enjoy to the full the benefits of economic development and social progress, so that the world could look once more to the Middle East for inspiration and enlightenment. Money was needed to solve the refugee problem: it had been calculated that the integration of the refugees into the economy of the area could be advanced decisively if between \$1,000 million and \$2,000 million were invested in the Middle East before 1965. However, it was quite unrealistic to imagine that such investments could be made if the Arab States persisted in their unwillingness to co-operate in finding a practical solution. The existence of Israel was a historical fact and it was useless to ignore it. The admiration of the people and Government of the Netherlands for the efforts of the people of Israel to create a viable and harmonious nation were shared by millions throughout the world.

11. Suggestions had been made that the General Assembly might impose a solution by establishing or reviving machinery for that purpose. It must be realized that no solution was possible as long as there was no inclination on either side to solve the problem. All that the Assembly could usefully do was place its views on record, thereby encouraging the parties to modify their attitude. If a genuine desire for a solution could be created, it would be a relatively small problem to help both sides to reach agreement on the means and methods to be employed.

12. The Netherlands delegation was in favour of the continuation of UNRWA but it felt that the major contributors should have a more important say in that matter. It also welcomed the Secretary-General's technical recommendations (A/4121, part II). The Netherlands would again contribute to the Agency's annual budget, in the conviction that it was not only an instrument for providing the refugees with the bare necessities of life but also a contributing factor towards a final solution. It might be useful, therefore, for the Assembly to review the situation from time to time, perhaps every two years, in order to take stock of the extent to which all those concerned were contributing towards the solution of the Palestine refugee problem.

13. Mr. ADAMIYAT (Iran) said that his delegation attached great importance to the problem of the Palestine refugees, both from the humanitarian point

of view and from the point of view of its political significance to the Middle East as a whole.

14. The Committee had before it the Secretary-General's proposals for the continuation of United Nations assistance to the refugees (A/4121) and the annual report of the Director of UNRWA (A/4213). The first of those documents dealt mainly with the long-range objectives and the second with UNRWA's activities for the past year and its immediate problems.

15. In view of the fact that UNRWA's mandate was to expire in June 1960, the refugee question had taken on a new urgency. In his admirable analysis of the situation, the Secretary-General suggested a formula for the economic integration of the refugees into the productive life of the Near East; he made it clear however that their de facto economic integration would not prejudice any rights established by General Assembly resolution 194 (III). The Secretary-General recommended the continuation of UNRWA pending, as expressed by the General Assembly in resolution 393 (V), the "reintegration of the refugees into the economic life of the Near East, either by repatriation or resettlement ...". In part II of his report he made a number of suggestions for improvements in the present arrangements for the Agency's work.

16. It was clear from the Secretary-General's report as well as from the annual report of the Agency's Director that the essentials of the refugee problem were unchanged. Repatriation or compensation of the refugees, as recognized in paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III), had not been effected, the rehabilitation projects had not been carried out, and the uncertain future of the refugees remained a source of concern and unrest. The Agency had been assigned two main tasks by the General Assembly: the temporary task of providing food, medical care, shelter and education for the refugees, and the continuing long-term task of helping them to become self-supporting. A survey of the Agency's activities during its ten years of operation showed that its work had been limited almost entirely to the provision of relief. Under the most adverse political and financial circumstances, it had rendered remarkable service,

feeding over 1 million homeless victims and providing housing for 400,000 and schooling for 190,000 persons. It was gratifying that the vocational training programmes which had been halted in 1957 had been resumed; it was to be hoped that they could be expanded. It was also encouraging that UNRWA had been able to give high priority to educational services for refugee children. Through no fault of its own, the Agency's work had been static and unable to contribute to a permanent solution of the refugee problem. Its long-term task of rehabilitation was unfulfilled, for the political climate necessary for carrying it out had not been created. Both the Secretary-General and the Director of UNRWA had emphasized that the Palestine refugee question could not be separated from its political aspects. Its core was a political dispute. The Agency's ultimate goal, the rehabilitation of the refugees, could not be achieved unless the present obstacles were removed and the refugees given the choice of repatriation or compensation recognized in so many resolutions of the General Assembly. He agreed with the Indian representative that the basic philosophy behind those resolutions was recognition of the right of the refugees to repatriation or compensation. It was regrettable that the Government of Israel had so far proved unresponsive to the General Assembly's recommendations and had failed completely to carry out its resolutions. It was to be hoped that its future attitude would be more positive.

17. The Iranian delegation shared the view that, pending a definite settlement of the refugee problem, the continuation of UNRWA was not only desirable but imperative. Otherwise the refugees would be left without hope, the Agency's work would be left unfinished, and the tension in the Middle East would undoubtedly be intensified. The Agency's mandate should therefore be extended for a period sufficiently long for the Agency to prepare and implement its long-range projects. The Iranian Government had always supported the Agency and its work, and would continue to do so. It was its earnest desire to see a just and equitable solution to the Palestine refugee problem.

The meeting rose at 11.35 a.m.