

GENERAL
ASSEMBLY

TWENTY-SEVENTH SESSION

Official Records

Wednesday, 8 November 1972,
at 11 a.m.

NEW YORK

Chairman: Mr. Hady TOURÉ (Guinea).

AGENDA ITEM 40

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (*continued*) (A/8672, A/SPC/154, A/SPC/155, A/SPC/L.247):

- (a) **Report of the Commissioner-General (A/8713);**
- (b) **Report of the Working Group on Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (A/8849);**
- (c) **Report of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (A/8830);**
- (d) **Reports of the Secretary-General (A/8786, A/8814)**

1. Mr. FRELLESVIG (Denmark) said that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which in a way personified the conscience of the community of nations, deserved all the support that Member States could possibly give, in particular in their endeavour to avoid the situation that had threatened to become a reality earlier in 1972 and would have led to a reduction in rations and services which was already at the minimum tolerable humanitarian level. It was gratifying to learn that the Agency's acute financial crisis had receded, even though the long-term problems would still have to be solved, since the financial difficulties would become acute again in 1973. It was heartening that voluntary contributions had enabled the Agency to tide over the 1972 crisis and that some had been made by States which were not even Members of the United Nations. On the other hand, it was disappointing that several Member States had not felt induced to participate in that humanitarian programme. The contributions of the Nordic countries amounted to almost 10 per cent of the Agency's total budget. For the coming financial year, the Danish Government had decided, subject to Parliamentary approval, to increase its own contribution from \$137,000 to about \$157,000 and to contribute \$785,000 to UNRWA's special educational programme, which it considered one of the Agency's most valuable activities. In recent years, Denmark's contribution to that programme had been almost entirely spent on the teacher training centres in Ramallah.

2. The report of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA (A/8849) was evidence of the valuable work done by the Group on the Agency's long-term financial problems. With regard to the ways of obtaining the necessary increased voluntary contributions

from Governments and other sources listed in paragraph 65 of the report, his delegation endorsed the view expressed by the United Kingdom representative at the 830th meeting that some permanent machinery was needed and that the Commissioner-General should be relieved of the burden of fund-raising, in order that he might concentrate on the essential aspect of his work. The Danish delegation would prefer some kind of intergovernmental group to be responsible for fund-raising, for example the existing Working Group if that were feasible.

3. It was important that all Member States should show a co-operative attitude to the Agency, especially those exerting power over the territory in which it had to perform its task. The Commissioner-General's report (see A/8713, paras.171-187) mentioned some examples of facilities that had been denied the Agency and of claims awaiting settlement. He hoped that the countries concerned would look into those problems once more. The Agency's work was purely humanitarian and its task was so immense that selfish interests should not be allowed to impede its activities.

4. Mr. BISHARA (Kuwait) quoted several statements by prominent Israelis, including Ben Gurion, on the human rights of the Palestine Arabs, and a letter published in *Yedioth Ahronoth* on 2 May 1972, allegedly from the Haganah officer who had made a surveillance tour in Deir-Yassin in 1948, describing the atrocities committed there. Brutal force and blood orgies had been instrumental in the eviction of the Palestinians from their homeland.

5. His delegation believed that the discussion on the work of UNRWA could not be set in its proper perspective unless the root of the tragedy was adequately discussed. The aspirations of the Palestinians, who had been living on charity under conditions unworthy of human dignity, were no different from that of any other nation: to live in freedom in their own land and to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination. They did not wish to annex the lands of others or to aggravate other people. On 21 October 1972 *The Guardian* had stated that the people primarily concerned, the Palestinians themselves, had never wanted to be integrated with the Arabs. They had refused to accept the Zionist doctrine or shoulder the responsibility for the Nazis' genocide of the Jews and had repeatedly proposed the establishment of a lay state in which Jews, Moslems and Christians would enjoy the same rights. The Israelis had blamed the first wave of Palestinian refugees on the instigation of Arab leaders, but the Palestinians themselves claimed that they had fled

their homes even before fighting had broken out, terrorized by such operations as the Deir-Yassin massacre. Erskine Childers, the Irish journalist who had investigated the allegations and had listened to all the tapes of Arab radio stations monitored during the 1948 war, had found that rather than urging a mass exodus the Arab radio stations had asked the Palestinians to stay where they were.

6. The special responsibility of the United Nations in the matter, which had been admitted by all the Secretaries-General since 1948, showed the Palestinians that the highest authorities in the world recognized that their cause was well founded. Despite the passage of time, hardships and exile, the people of Palestine refused to abandon their identity and aspirations, even though the Israeli Prime Minister denied their existence. Israel's admission to the United Nations in 1949 had been conditional on its acceptance of the Organization's resolutions but, once admitted, it had consistently rejected all those resolutions.

7. As a result of the Israeli invasion of Arab territory in June 1967, the Palestinian refugees had experienced a second eviction. The problem of those refugees lay squarely on the shoulder of the Israeli authorities, whose refusal to implement the Security Council and General Assembly resolutions calling for the refugees' return home and persistent defiance of world public opinion had caused and perpetuated the tragedy. Even the Secretary of State of the United States of America had declared before the General Assembly on 25 September 1972 (2038th plenary meeting) that any solution must meet the legitimate aspirations and concerns of the Governments on both sides as well as of the Palestinian people.

8. Some Israelis of varying political beliefs already acknowledged the injustice inflicted on the Palestinians and realized that it would bring eventual ruin upon Israel. As *The Times* of London had recently pointed out, if Israel succeeded in holding elections in Gaza, it would jeopardize the status of the refugees by inviting them to accept their eviction as permanent. The protest by the Mayor of Gaza concerning any change in status of the camp or its relationship to UNRWA had resulted in his dismissal. Israel's current policy with regard to the refugees was one of liquidation, euphemistically called rehabilitation. Israel was hurrying to change the situation it had created 25 years before, not by compliance with the calls for repatriation and the resolutions of the United Nations but by measures designed to achieve a total fait accompli. In pursuance of its short-sighted policy, Israel thought that once the problem of the refugees was solved through settlement in Sinai or through deportation to the East Bank, the international community would renounce its adherence to the principle of the right of the Palestinians to return home. Israel was bound by international law, by the Charter of the United Nations and by all norms of international behaviour, morality and justice to bear its responsibility with regard to the Palestinian refugees. Their right to return home was unquestionable, their

determination to resist the temptation of assimilation unabating, and their will to recover their rights in their own country as strong as ever. Peace in the Middle East was inextricably interwoven with the implementation of the resolutions relating to the rights of Palestinians in their homeland, which any peaceful coexistence must allow for. It was absurd that any Jew from any part of the world could go to Israel and claim citizenship under the "law of return", while the indigenous people of Palestine, who had lived in their homeland for over 2,000 years, were confined to the squalor of camps, subsidized by niggardly calculating donors.

9. As the Commissioner-General had pointed out at the end of paragraph 2 of his report (A/8713), it was against the background of frustration at such arbitrary plans for their future and disillusionment at the failure by the international community to honour a commitment to justice that the refugees had been warned during the past year of an imminent reduction or even breakdown in the services provided by the United Nations, especially in the education services they valued so highly for their children's future. No effort should be spared to bring home to many countries economically able to pledge considerable contributions, which hitherto had not responded to the pleas of the Working Group, that the maintenance of UNRWA's activities was the responsibility of all States. His delegation believed that the sense of fairness had not yet perished and that with more tenacity and persistence, generosity would supersede reluctance and parsimony.

10. Mr. DORON (Israel), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that ever since it had begun its consideration of the agenda item under consideration, the Committee had been treated to a steady stream of distortions, falsifications and outright lies. While reserving a more detailed statement for a later date, he wished to rectify certain misconceptions at the current stage. As he had pointed out earlier, the movement of Arab refugees in 1948 had been caused by the Arab aggression against Israel, which had begun early in December 1948 and had turned into an outright invasion and war in the following months. That aggression had been accompanied by exhortations by Arab leaders to the Arabs of Palestine to leave their homes for a short time so as not to stand in the way of the victorious Arab armies; meanwhile, the Jewish authorities had entreated the Arabs not to heed those instructions, but to no avail. Similarly, no Arabs had been displaced or expelled by Israel in connexion with the hostilities in 1967. That displacement had originally been due to the panic created during the fighting by the Arab Governments, which had frightened the people into leaving their homes, usually to follow the retreating Arab forces before the arrival of the Israeli forces. Neither should it be ignored that the majority of those who had moved to the East Bank after the 1967 hostilities had done so of their own volition and in an orderly manner. That movement had been carried out pursuant to arrangements made in response to their applications, with the recommendation of local Arab authorities. Their primary motive had been their desire

to join relatives or to make sure that they would not be cut off from their sources of income in Arab countries.

11. In addition, considerable juggling had been apparent in the figures presented. According to the report of the Commissioner-General (A/8713), there were 1,500,000 registered refugees, 40 per cent of whom lived in camps. However, the representative of India, seemingly by mistake, had stated at the previous meeting that that figure represented only 40 per cent of the total number of refugees. Yet even the figure of 1,500,000 registered refugees had very little to do with reality. According to statistics derived from documents of the authorities of the British Mandate it had been established that the total figure of refugees could not have been more than about 500,000. That total had immediately been inflated by the addition of at least another 400,000 residents of those parts of Palestine which had been occupied by Jordan and Egypt in 1948, and who had no right whatsoever to be recognized as refugees. Likewise, the number of persons displaced in 1967 had been greatly exaggerated by some for political reasons.

12. Other wild allegations had been made against his country, including crude atrocity propaganda which insulted the intelligence of the Committee members. One example was the outrageous fabrication concerning the alleged establishment of concentration camps in the Sinai, which was not new and had been completely refuted by Israel, in letters to the President of the Security Council, and elsewhere. No one had in fact been confined behind barbed wire or fences. The desert area in question had been used by the Egyptian army as training grounds and firing ranges and had been closed to local inhabitants and to the Bedouin. In recent years, a number of Bedouin had entered the grounds as squatters. Terror organizations had exploited their presence to establish arms caches and to utilize the grounds as a base for crimes of violence and a transit point for arms smuggling from Egypt to Gaza. Seven Israelis had been killed in that area, and tens of terrorist agents had been arrested in it. Consequently, the grounds had again been closed, although, for humanitarian reasons, the Bedouin were permitted to enter them and to work on cultivated lands. Moreover, compensation had been paid to those Bedouin that had invested in the land in question, for example, by building huts. Of course, the majority of the Bedouin continued to live in tents in accordance with their custom.

13. Mr. BISHARA (Kuwait), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that he had presented a factual, dispassionate statement, fully documented by Israeli sources. Now, however, the representative of Israel contended that the exodus of Palestinians had begun during the hostilities following 15 May 1948. In fact, bloody Jewish terrorist activities directed against Arabs had begun long before then. Such activities had started on 22 July 1946 with the bombing of the King David Hotel, in which 91 Britons, Jews and Arabs had been killed, and bombings and terrorist raids on villages

had reached a peak in a series of incidents during December 1947 and January and February 1948 in which scores of Arabs, including women and children, had died. Menachem Begin's book, *The Revolt; Story of the Irgun*,¹ provided ample evidence to refute the claim that the Palestine refugees had fled their homes on the instigation of Arab leaders after the initiation of hostilities on 15 May 1948.

14. Mr. ZAHAWIE (Iraq), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the Israeli representative's assertion that the Palestine refugees had left their homes as a result of an Arab invasion of Israel was an insult to the intelligence. It was a fact of history that, prior to the departure of the United Kingdom forces from Palestine and the entry of Arab forces, the Jews had occupied territories reserved for the Arab State and the international City of Jerusalem. Some 300,000 Palestinians had already sought refuge in adjoining Arab countries by that time. The Arab armies which had marched into Palestine in response to the appeals of the local Arab population had never entered the areas reserved for the Jewish State, while Jewish soldiers, during the six months preceding the termination of the United Kingdom's mandate, had occupied most of the cities, towns and villages in the Arab area, especially from mid-April to mid-May 1948. Israel refused to recognize that the Palestinian refugees had been driven from their homes by the acts of terror and massacres which had taken place at that time, casting the blame instead on broadcasts from Arab capitals encouraging the Palestinians to flee. However, the British Broadcasting Corporation had monitored those broadcasts and confirmed that the Palestinians had never been called on to leave, but had been asked to remain where they were.

15. Mr. EL-FATTAL (Syrian Arab Republic), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that for the past 25 years, Israel had been showering the Committee with lies to the effect that the movement of the Palestine refugees had been instigated by the Arab Governments. In response to those allegations, he wished to add a number of facts to those already adduced by the representatives of Kuwait and Iraq. First of all, the British former commanding officer of the Arab Legion had stated that the majority of Palestine refugees had left their homes in panic to avoid being massacred and that Jewish terrorist squads had endeavoured to kill enough of them at each stage of their flight to keep them moving. Indeed, a former Commissioner-General of UNRWA had noted that the Arab authorities had continually exhorted the Palestinians not to leave. Broadcasts from Radio Damascus in March and April 1948 had urged all government employees and police to remain at their posts. The King of Transjordan had similarly appealed to the entire Arab population to remain in Palestine.

16. For their part, the Jewish authorities had driven the population to panic by spreading rumours of epidemics in February and March 1948. The Jewish

¹ New York, Schuman, 1951.

terrorist organization Haganah had advised Arabs to leave by 5 a.m. on 15 May 1948 to save their women and children from a blood-bath. Yigal Allon, now an Israeli cabinet minister, had admitted helping to spread rumours at that time to the effect that Jewish reinforcements would soon arrive to burn Arab villages and that Arabs should flee while they had the chance.

17. Mr. DORON (Israel), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that there was indeed a wealth of facts regarding the causes of the refugees' flight, but that the Arab representatives cited only fabrications. The rejection of General Assembly resolution 181 (II), of 29 November 1947, by the Arab States had been followed by murderous attacks by Arabs on Jews in the streets of Jaffa, Jerusalem and Haifa. At that time, many Arab infiltrators and irregulars, including a number under the command of the Iraqi regular army, had entered Palestine, and if they had failed to capture any territory, it had certainly not been for lack of effort, but because of the heroic self-defence of the Jewish people.

18. With particular reference to northern Palestine, he recalled the widely-broadcast speech by the Mayor of Haifa urging Arabs not to leave. Those who had remained continued to live in Israel in peace and friendship. Those who had left could blame only their own fears and the statements of the Arab leaders who had instructed them to leave for a while so that they could take possession of Jewish property on their return. On 23 April 1948 the United Kingdom representative in the Security Council,² referring to Arab infiltration in Haifa and Arab attacks on Jews during the preceding week, had stated that the Arabs had apparently been responsible for developments in Palestine and that the Jews had been forced to take action. Thus, it was clear that the departure of Arabs from Palestine had begun in December 1947, well before the establishment of the State of Israel.

19. Mr. AHMAD (India), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the statements made by the representative of Israel reminded him of a defence lawyer who told the court that his client had not committed murder, that, even if he had, he had not been on the scene of the crime, and that even if he was proved to have been there, he had not killed 10 people, but

only 4. According to the report of the Commissioner-General (A/8713, annex I, table 1), the total registered refugee population was currently over 1,506,000, a figure far larger than the population of many Member States. It could hardly be said that it was moral or proper for so many people to be deprived of the right to return to their homes.

20. Mr. ZAHAWIE (Iraq), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the representative of Israel seemed to have changed his position in his last statement, blaming the flight of the refugees not on an invasion by Arab armies, but on the rejection of the partition resolution by the Arab countries. Faced with the fact that the Arab armies had not entered Palestine until after 15 May 1948, he was now compelled to refer to alleged activities by infiltrators. As for the appeals issued by the Mayor of Haifa, it was easy to understand why they had had less effect on the Palestinian population than the terrorist activities of the Irgun and the Stern group.

21. Mr. EL-FATTAL (Syrian Arab Republic), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the Mayor of Haifa had requested Arabs to remain inside their homes temporarily to facilitate clean-up operations by the Haganah, but had never urged them not to leave the country.

22. Mr. DORON (Israel) said that he had hoped that the representative of India would admit his miscalculation regarding the number of refugees; instead, he had merely endeavoured to cover it with a joke.

23. Mr. TARCICI (Yemen), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said he wished to appeal to the common sense of representatives. Was it the Arabs who had caused the Palestine refugee problem? Was it the Arabs who had come from all parts of the world to occupy the lands and homes of the Palestinians? Who refused to implement United Nations resolutions calling for repatriation and self-determination for the Palestinian people? Who was trying to deceive whom by quoting history? The fact remained that the Palestinian refugees were not in their homeland, and it was not the Arabs who had driven them out. Historical references could never change the facts, which spoke for themselves.

² See *Official Records of the Security Council, Third Year, No. 62*, 287th meeting.

The meeting rose at 12.15 p.m.