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Chairman: Mr. Abdulrahim Abby FARAH
(Somalia).

AGENDA ITEM 33

Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (*continued*) (A/7213, A/SPC/126, A/SPC/127, A/SPC/L.165)

1. Mr. VRATUSA (Yugoslavia) said the Organization bore a special responsibility for the fate and future of the Palestine refugees, as was shown by the fact that the question of the refugees had remained on the agenda of the General Assembly for the past twenty years. However, despite all its efforts, the refugees still had no homeland, no hope and no future. In considering the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA (A/7213), the Committee should not forget that what was at stake was the destiny of a whole people violently evicted from their land, only half of whom were being cared for by UNRWA, while the other half was dispersed in other countries or subjected to foreign occupation in their own land.

2. Twenty years before, the General Assembly, in paragraph 11 of resolution 194 (III), had laid down the principle of repatriation or compensation as the basis for a solution of the problem of the Palestine refugees. Yugoslavia strongly supported that principle and deeply regretted that it had never been implemented. In the circumstances, the United Nations had been able to do no more than assist the Agency to help one and a half million persons to maintain a bare existence under extremely difficult conditions far from their homes. Through the efforts of UNRWA, half of the refugees, who were under eighteen years of age, were receiving education and basic training, but such education would be to no avail if the gates to an independent and creative future remained closed to them. The longer such a situation persisted, the greater would be their misery and the more acute their resentment.

3. The hostilities of 1967 and the occupation of Arab territories by Israel armed forces had swelled the numbers of the refugees, had caused them greater misery and had seriously aggravated the general political situation in the region. Since the problem had now

become too complicated to be resolved at once, he agreed with those who had suggested that the Committee should concentrate on taking action within the reach of its possibilities, namely action to ease the suffering of the newly displaced persons who were approaching their second winter as refugees. Surely the Committee should be able to help at least those persons whose homes and camps still existed and who would be able to help themselves if they could return to the homes they had been compelled to leave the year before.

4. His delegation agreed that the only course of action that would really improve the situation of the newly displaced persons would be their immediate return to their homes or to the camps in which they had lived prior to June 1967, as suggested in the Commissioner-General's report. His delegation was ready to co-operate in all efforts that might achieve that aim, which it thought was a perfectly feasible one, provided there was sufficient political will. The United Nations should not allow the resolution it would adopt in the case of the persons displaced in June 1967 to remain without effect; it must take action to open the way towards ending the sufferings of a homeless people, for by so doing it would not only help the refugees, but would also bring about an improvement in the general atmosphere of the region.

5. With that aim in view and bearing in mind the statements made by the representatives of Israel, his delegation expected Israel to show greater willingness to co-operate with the United Nations on the question of the refugees. It would be illusory to think that security conditions in the region could be improved by further delaying a large-scale repatriation. In the presence of a homeless and despairing people, the situation could only become increasingly dangerous.

6. His delegation was convinced that the implementation of Security Council resolution 242 (1967) of 22 November 1967 was the best means of achieving a just solution to the crisis in the Middle East, including the complex problem of the refugees, and the only way of restoring peace to the region. His delegation supported all constructive efforts to that end. It would continue to support the work of the Agency and favoured the proposal to extend its mandate and the appeal for financial contributions made by its Commissioner-General.

7. Since the establishment of the Agency, Yugoslavia had been making an annual contribution of \$20,000 which had reached the total of \$600,000 in 1968. In addition, governmental and mass organizations of Yugoslavia had contributed assistance in the total amount of \$6,400,000 immediately after the outbreak of hostilities in 1967. It would continue to make contributions in the future.

8. Yugoslavia realized that humanitarian assistance could be only a temporary measure until the legitimate rights of the people of Palestine were recognized and restored. The main concern for the Committee in the future should be to create conditions in which every refugee would be able freely to decide his own fate and future. If the legitimate rights of the refugees, which had been grossly violated, were restored and their human dignity respected, they would be able to play a constructive part in eradicating the causes of the crisis in the Middle East.

9. Mr. LAMBERT (United Kingdom) recalled that his delegation had already appealed to the Israel Government to make the magnanimous gesture of permitting the return to their homes and camps of those who had crossed over to the East Bank of the River Jordan during and after the hostilities of June 1967. It had noted the statement made on the subject by the representative of Israel at the Committee's 622nd meeting.

10. In his report (A/7213), the Commissioner-General of UNRWA had said that the Agency's financial situation continued to cause him serious concern. Although emergency aid from many quarters, including the United Kingdom, had been received immediately after the hostilities of June 1967, the Commissioner-General feared that with the passage of time interest in the refugees, and the scale of aid, would inevitably dwindle. His delegation felt reluctantly bound to agree with the Commissioner-General that a further increase in the Agency's expenditure appeared inevitable, that it would be neither feasible nor realistic to attempt to solve the anticipated deficit for 1969 by reducing services to the refugees, and that increased income was therefore essential. His delegation also agreed with the Commissioner-General that UNRWA's remaining working capital should not be used to cover any further deficit. In the interests of the refugees themselves, UNRWA's ability to help them must be planned within the limits of its income.

11. Additional voluntary contributions to the Agency's finances were therefore essential, and his delegation believed that UNRWA was entitled to look for such additional contributions from those countries that had so far contributed little or nothing towards its costs while at the same time publicly expressing great concern about the condition of the refugees. A brief glance at annex I, table I of the report, which listed contributors to UNRWA since 1950, revealed some notable gaps and showed that over 90 per cent of the voluntary contributions to the Agency's budget had come from a mere handful of countries. Although some countries, including his own, which would again make a substantial contribution in 1969, faced grave economic difficulties, they had nevertheless responded generously to appeals to continue to make voluntary contributions and to provide emergency contributions in special circumstances. His delegation felt that the actual time had come for UNRWA's traditional contributors to be joined by those countries, big and small, which for one reason or another had not recently responded to the Commissioner-General's appeals. Words of sympathy would not stave off a winter of hunger.

12. His delegation could not support the suggestion, made in paragraph 41 of the report, that the present basis of UNRWA's financing could be improved by

transferring its administrative expenses of some \$4 million a year to the assessed budget of the United Nations because it felt that such a step might adversely affect the flow of voluntary contributions to the Agency and thus be self-defeating.

13. It was to be hoped that substantial additional voluntary contributions would be forthcoming in 1969. There would then be no need to reduce the scale of UNRWA's educational and training services, which, in his view, made the greatest contribution towards integrating the refugees into the economic life of the region and gave them hope of a better life in the future and some comfort for the sadness of the past. Should such additional funds not be forthcoming, his delegation felt that educational and training services should be the last to be cut back by UNRWA. However, if in the next few months it became clear that new funds were not likely to be forthcoming, in spite of the appeals made by the Secretary-General and the General Assembly, the Agency's expenditure on administration and services should be immediately reviewed in order to see what operational economies could be made. Needless to say, the return of persons displaced by the war of June 1967 to their homes on the West Bank of the Jordan would considerably help the Agency's finances; furthermore, any progress towards completing rectification of the ration rolls would make funds available for use in other fields. His delegation particularly welcomed the fact that the ration rolls had recently been completely rectified in Lebanon.

14. His delegation warmly welcomed the co-operation and assistance that UNRWA had received since the June war from other international organizations, voluntary agencies and non-governmental sources, and hoped that that help and support would continue. It recognized that the continuation of the emergency aid provided by the World Food Programme might be necessary until such time as funds, for which the Secretary-General had recently made a special appeal (612th meeting), were available to replace its generous contributions.

15. It was quite clear that UNRWA's services must be extended beyond 30 June 1969. His delegation felt that an extension of its mandate for an indefinite period might be taken in some quarters to imply that it was the Committee's considered view that the Palestine refugee problem would remain unsolved forever. His delegation would have preferred the Agency's mandate to be renewed for a period of five years, subject to annual review by the General Assembly. Renewal in principle for five years should meet the Commissioner-General's concern that his mandate should be renewed for a sufficiently lengthy period to permit adequate forward budgetary planning. Whatever the duration of the renewal it should be subject to annual review so that, if promising developments occurred on the wider scene, the General Assembly would be in a position to vary or terminate the mandate at the appropriate time.

16. However, his delegation realized that the mandate could be reviewed whenever the Committee so recommended to the General Assembly; for that reason, it was prepared to support the draft resolution submitted by the United States delegation (A/SPC/L.165) and reiterated its hope that any draft resolution

submitted on the subject of the persons displaced as a result of the 1967 hostilities would have impartial sponsorship and universal support, as its aim should be above all to serve the interests of the refugees themselves.

17. Mr. MESTIRI (Tunisia) said that the appeal made to the Committee by the Secretary-General (612th meeting) had drawn attention to the serious situation facing the Agency. His country considered it vitally necessary to extend UNRWA's mandate, and wished to assure the Commissioner-General of its total and constant support and its desire to contribute, as it had every year, to relieve the sufferings of innocent victims. It hoped that its brothers in Africa and Asia—and indeed all Members of the United Nations—would also heed the Secretary-General's appeal.

18. It was comforting to find in the Commissioner-General's report (A/7213), despite the events of June 1967, a positive record of assistance to refugees which had been made possible by the co-operation of the specialized agencies and other international organizations, donor countries, private persons and of course the host countries. But that crumb of comfort was small in comparison with the number of persons—many of them new refugees or persons displaced by the 1967 war—who were facing the rigours of winter under tents, very often with inadequate rations.

19. France, the United Kingdom and the United States which, with the Soviet Union, had contributed to the creation of Israel and had stated that they would not allow that State to disappear, had appealed to it to allow the new refugees to return to their homes, thus alleviating their sufferings and reducing the Agency's expenditure. The Israel representative had replied to none of those countries, perhaps, as the Secretary-General had said, because his country wished to occupy the territories seized during the war. Even newspapers usually favourable to Israel had criticized the controls and conditions imposed on returning refugees, but Israel was not concerned with the fate of the refugees or with peace. Its aim was political and there was every reason to suppose that the Zionist State would pursue its avowed design to extend from the Nile to the Euphrates. The problem of the 1948 and 1967 refugees was therefore primarily political.

20. The drama of the Middle East had three tragic aspects: first, that, ever since the Balfour Declaration in 1917, land belonging to another people had been offered to a persecuted people; secondly, that 1.3 million Palestinians had been driven from their homes and forced to live in tented camps maintained by international charity; thirdly, that in 1956 and in 1967 Israel had occupied further Arab territory by armed force and claimed to remain there or to appropriate some of it. The latter point was not on the Committee's agenda and was being dealt with by the Secretary-General's special representative, Mr. Jarring.

21. The occupation of Palestine was a colonial situation very little different from that which had existed in his own country. Palestine had for centuries been a Moslem country with a main Arab population. The world, horrified by the Jewish suffering before and during the Second World War, had not realized that they

were asking an innocent people to pay the cost. Theology and ancient memories could not be used as a temporal and neo-political argument. If it were necessary to overthrow a long-established country in the name of a prior right, no nation in the world would be safe.

22. The State of Israel had been installed and consolidated by a policy of aggression, even in disregard of the United Nations resolutions. Israel's existence which, from the outset, had been built on a negation that was unfair to the Arabs and unjustifiable from the point of view of international law, had been legitimized twice, first by the Supreme Council of the Allied Powers at the San Remo Conference in 1920 and secondly in 1947 when the United Nations by a large majority had sanctioned a state of fact. Because of that regrettable legitimization, two nationalisms existed in Palestine and their clash was the cause of the Middle Eastern tragedy.

23. There were two possible solutions. Either the two nationalisms could coexist on the same territory, which presupposed that Israel would separate the synagogue and the State and give up the Zionist dream and the religious and racist character of its legal structures. So long as Israel claimed to exercise jurisdiction over Jews throughout the world, it would dream of bringing them together in a territory which would constantly have to be extended and would constitute for its neighbours a permanent threat of aggression. The other and more realistic solution was to accept the partition of the territory. The Zionists had taken advantage of the Arab refusal to accept that solution in order to create a State with expandable frontiers. The Palestine Arab State foreseen by the United Nations, which could have enforced respect for the rights of the Palestine Arab nation had never been created.

24. For a long time the Palestine question had been cloaked by the ambitions of some and the blunders and intrigues of others. Recently, however, as President Bourguiba had said during his visit to the President of the United States, in May 1968, the Palestinians themselves had begun to assume the responsibility for the struggle to recover their rights in their own country and for finding a compromise which would put an end to the present situation. He had added that other Arab countries were no longer qualified to take part in that political and military combat but were in duty bound to support it and that out of that struggle would come mutual esteem and therefore the acceptance by each party of the other's right to existence and security. The resulting solution would be a valid one because it was accepted and not imposed, and peace and co-operation would follow.

25. The Palestine question was not, as Zionist propaganda maintained, a war of religion; it was a political problem which involved the dignity and the right of the Palestinians to exist. While the Arabs would not accept the expansionist, racist and arrogant character of the present State of Israel, they did not think of denying a Jewish presence in the area. Arabs and Jews had a common background in their sacred books as well as in their history. Far from encountering hostility in the East similar to European anti-semitism, the Jews, before the excesses of the Zionists, had been at home among the Arabs, Semites among Semites. They could

be accepted again if they agreed to a solution of the Palestine problem on the basis of the United Nations resolutions.

26. Mr. COMAY (Israel), speaking in exercise of his right of reply, said that the proposals about the Arab property abandoned in Israel twenty years before, which had been mentioned by the Pakistan representative at the preceding meeting, had been introduced into every annual UNRWA debate and had been rejected each time. The Pakistan representative had indicated that a similar draft resolution was at present being discussed.

27. Mr. TOMEH (Syria), speaking on a point of order, said that he considered it completely out of order to anticipate a draft resolution which had not yet been introduced and to refute it before it had been submitted.

28. Mr. COMAY (Israel) said that he had been speaking about a subject which had been raised in the general debate by several speakers, the last and most specific of whom had been the representative of Pakistan. He himself had not intervened. He was not discussing any draft resolution although, if one was submitted, his delegation would certainly wish to analyse and comment on it. He had however, understood from the Pakistan representative's statement that he and other delegations contemplated raising the matter of a proposed custodian of Arab property in Israel in a formal way at the current session.

29. There was even stronger reason to reject the proposal at the current session if it were made. It would seriously prejudice the peace-making efforts of the Secretary-General's special representative, since Security Council resolution 242 (1967) expressly included a reference to the refugee problem as one of the elements of a peace agreement. He urged the delegations which might contemplate taking such a step not to make such a proposal to the Committee because it would simply inject a fresh source of friction and complications into the conflict with which Mr. Jarring was dealing.

30. In previous years the property proposal had taken various forms, but it had always raised the same question whether the United Nations could directly inter-

vene with regard to private claims to property within the territory of a Member State. The answer was unequivocally in the negative. Various reasons, none of which had any legal or other foundation, had been suggested why Israel's sovereignty in the case of abandoned Arab properties in Israel was not the same as the sovereignty of other States. The abandoned property in question, which had remained agricultural land, had long become an indivisible part of the development of the country's economy. That had been done without prejudice to Israel's offer to pay compensation in the framework of a general and final settlement of the refugee problem. The fantastic figures quoted as income from those properties were purely imaginary. As his delegation had explained in a statement at the 622nd meeting, no compensation had ever been made by the Government of the Arab countries for the property of the half million Jewish refugees from those countries who had been resettled in Israel from public funds.

31. He therefore urged other members of the Committee to discourage any renewed initiative of that kind and, if a draft resolution was to be submitted, to refuse to sponsor it and to vote against it.

32. Mr. TOMEH (Syria), exercising his right of reply, said that although, according to the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, a person rising to a point of order was not supposed to speak on the substance of the matter under discussion, he considered it completely out of order for any delegation to ask that a draft resolution which had not yet been submitted should not be accepted. In any case, the references in various United Nations resolutions to safeguarding the legal rights of the Arabs in Palestine proved that the Israel representative's statement was nothing more than a declaration of the right of conquest. It was fallacious and malicious to claim that there had been an exchange of population between the Arabs of Palestine and the Arab-Jewish communities in the Arab countries. The difference was clear: the Palestine Arab refugees had been expelled from their country. Therefore, the United Nations resolutions concerning the legal rights of the Arab refugees were still valid and should not be allowed to fall into oblivion with the passage of time.

The meeting rose at 12.5 p.m.