

United Nations
**GENERAL
ASSEMBLY**

FIFTEENTH SESSION

Official Records



**SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE, 203rd
MEETING**

Friday, 18 November 1960,
at 3.25 p.m.

NEW YORK

CONTENTS

	Page
<i>Agenda item 26:</i>	
<i>Report of the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (continued)</i>	131

Chairman: Mr. Carlet R. AUGUSTE (Haiti).

In the absence of the Chairman, Mr. Gamboa (Philippines), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

AGENDA ITEM 26

Report of the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (A/4478) (continued)

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. John H. Davis, Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, took a place at the Committee table.

1. Mr. HOOD (Australia) said that for the moment the Special Political Committee was called upon to consider only that aspect of the complex Palestine refugee question which was covered in the report (A/4478) of the Director of UNRWA. He would therefore confine his remarks to the report, although he was well aware of the wider implications of the Palestine refugee tragedy.

2. The report, as in previous years, left no doubt that on humanitarian grounds the United Nations must continue its programme of support for the refugees. It was evident that until a political solution was found, there could be no future for the more than 1 million refugees, who were increasing at the rate of 30,000 a year and becoming yearly more difficult to fit into any economy. Yet, without the services of UNRWA, the assistance of the host Governments and the efforts of private agencies, the plight of the refugees would have been even worse. The Agency could only continue its services if Governments supplied it with funds. Australia had contributed consistently to the Agency since the Agency's establishment in 1948, and despite the fact that it was not one of the world's richest or most populous countries, its contributions to date totalled nearly \$2.5 million. As announced at the recent pledging conference, its contribution for the year ending June 1961 would be \$201,000, an increase of \$11,000 over the previous year. A further \$60,480 would go to the Director of the Agency from funds raised in Australia in support of World Refugee Year.

3. The Director's decision to expand vocational training facilities seemed wise. The Australian delegation shared its concern for the young people growing up in the refugee camps. It was tragic that the Agency should have to concentrate its efforts on so

small a segment of the refugee population. If Governments would provide more funds, the Agency could do much more to fit the refugees for economic life. Although many were now beyond aid, he hoped that the Agency would be financially enabled to hold the process of human waste and frustration in check. He asked whether the sources of financial support could not be broadened now, particularly since the training programme recommended by the Director could not be fully successful if it had to be limited to a two- or three-year period.

4. Paragraphs 51 and 52 of the report indicated that the Agency had worked out a plan for a new approach to the long-standing problem of rectifying the ration rolls. He hoped that the host Governments concerned would co-operate. The outcome of the plan would be to the advantage of the refugees in general, and it was hard to see what objection there could be to carrying out what was a purely administrative reform.

5. A number of speakers had referred to the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine, and he would like to draw attention to its recent constructive work in connexion with the valuation of Arab properties in Israel (A/4573). Its failure to make progress on the political front was not attributable to its composition but to the fact that the parties concerned had not yet had the direct contact, with or without the Commission, which was essential to a solution of the problem on the lines laid down in resolution 194 (III). The implementation of that resolution needed the full co-operation of the Governments in the area, and such co-operation might in time be achieved. Meanwhile, the Director of UNRWA was entitled to ask for the support of all Member States to sustain the Agency in carrying out its present mandate.

6. Mr. ECONOMOU-GOURAS (Greece) said that his country, as a neighbour of the Middle Eastern States, had a special interest in the Arab refugee problem. His delegation had studied the report of the Director with care and wished to commend his vigorous and realistic approach to his great humanitarian task.

7. According to the report (A/4478), some of the basic elements of the problem remained unchanged from year to year. However, time was increasing the magnitude of the problem as a whole, as the refugees grew more numerous and their bitterness deepened. A realistic approach to a final settlement of the problem must take into account the wishes of the human beings involved. The refugees should be given a chance to return to their native land, if they so desired. That they did so desire was made clear by the Director in paragraph 4 of his report, in which he stated that the promise made in paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) continued to be the one acceptable long-term solution and that the refu-

gees were embittered that it still stood unfulfilled. It would be both unrealistic and unjust to disregard those feelings, although the Greek delegation was aware of the many difficulties which stood in the way of giving effect to the resolution.

8. Another significant and fundamental point had been brought out in the Director's examination of the economic outlook for the refugees and the problem of their unemployment. He stated, in paragraph 8, that if the refugees were ever to find suitable employment, they would have to move across an international frontier in one direction or another. The logical consequences should be drawn from that statement.

9. The Director of UNRWA proposed to work towards a more hopeful future for the refugees by expanding vocational training facilities for the young people. While it should be clearly understood that such training would in no way prejudice the ultimate rights of the refugees under resolution 194 (III), it would certainly serve as an important contribution to the settlement of the problem. If the Director's initiative was properly endorsed and encouraged, it would yield humanitarian benefits and also provide better conditions for a political settlement through the fulfilment of the aspirations of an entire unhappy people.

10. Mr. SMITH (Canada) said that the ability of UNRWA, despite its budgetary limitations, to improve housing facilities for the refugees and to continue to provide for their health needs was indicative of its efficiency. One of the most disturbing features of the Agency's problem was the fact that many thousands of young people among the refugees were reaching maturity each year with no opportunity to develop their productive skills, so that even if the political aspects of the Palestine problem should eventually be solved, those persons would probably be unable to find employment on the labour markets of the region. His delegation was therefore encouraged to note that the Director was addressing himself with zeal and realism to the educational aspects of the Agency's functions, particularly the expansion of vocational training facilities. Expanded vocational training would not only make it easier for the refugees to find employment but would also help to meet the growing demand for trained personnel in a region where rapid technological progress was taking place. In view of the desirability of expanding the education programme, and in the spirit of World Refugee Year, his Government, which had already made its usual cash gift for general purposes and a second contribution of wheat flour, had recently made a third contribution in the form of flour to the value of \$1 million, on the understanding that the Agency would apply the corresponding cash saving to the development of vocational training. The Agency had also decided to use for vocational training the \$220,000 which would be made available to it from voluntary sources through the Canadian Committee for World Refugee Year and the Canadian Junior Red Cross Society. With the additional contributions received from the Canadian Red Cross Society, the Unitarian Service Committee and the United Church of Canada, the expected total of non-governmental Canadian contributions to UNRWA would be about \$241,000. He would like to express his appreciation of the efforts made by other Governments and agencies, and particularly of the unique contribution of the host coun-

tries, which had not only to provide facilities for the refugees but also to cope with the various complications arising from their presence. The Agency's functions were exclusively humanitarian and deserved the fullest support.

11. His delegation was glad to note the Director's statement that relations between the Agency and the host Governments were improving, and it hoped that the co-operative attitude of those Governments would find expression in renewed efforts to remedy inaccuracies in the ration rolls, thereby making the Agency's services more effective and comprehensive.

12. He recalled that when the Agency's mandate had been renewed for three years at the fourteenth session, his delegation had recommended [157th meeting] that an up-to-date review, which might be prepared by the Secretary-General and would take into account the political, economic and psychological aspects of the refugee problem, should be made available to the General Assembly by the expiration of that period. It was not too soon to reiterate that an independent high-level survey of that nature would be of great assistance to the Assembly in its re-examination of the Agency's position. Yet, however helpful such a study might be, and however encouraging the progress of the Agency during the remainder of its current mandate, a comprehensive solution of the refugee problem could not be found except in the broader context of the political picture in the Middle East. The extension of the Agency's mandate should not be interpreted as having placed a moratorium on constructive consideration of the Palestine problem in its broader aspects or as excusing Member States, particularly those most directly concerned, from continuing to make every effort to improve the political atmosphere in the Middle East.

Mr. Auguste (Haiti) took the Chair.

13. Mr. HSUEH (China), noting the statement made by the Director of UNRWA in his annual report that the situation of the refugees was not hopeless but was rather a challenge to be met, expressed the hope that those words would inspire a new approach not only to the refugee problem as such but also to the broader political problem of which it was a part. While the progress made by the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine had undoubtedly been slow, its reports showed that it had been doing its utmost under existing conditions and gave reason to hope that the work it had accomplished would eventually bear fruit when circumstances changed.

14. His Government and the Chinese people were particularly well able to appreciate the plight of the Palestinian refugees because they had a similar problem of their own in providing for the refugees who had fled from Communism on the Chinese mainland, a responsibility which had prevented them from making financial contributions to the UNRWA programme. The Palestine refugees' situation, bad as it was, would be even worse had it not been for the assistance provided by the Agency and the host countries. The Assembly in its resolution 1456 (XIV) had wisely stressed the need to expand the Agency's programme of self-support and vocational training. In that programme the emphasis would be on refugee youth, and in his delegation's opinion that emphasis was correct for the following reasons. First, the young refugees had from the beginning been deprived

of the opportunity to learn the skills which would enable them to lead more fruitful and meaningful lives; second, as the Director had pointed out, if they did not receive specialized training at the time when they were ready for it, they would probably have missed the opportunity for life; third, while the programme could not cover more than a fraction of the youth who reached maturity each year, that fraction, when trained, could be expected to provide much-needed leadership in the refugee community; and fourth, the vocational training programme had been planned in such a way that it would not result in a decrease in the assistance made available to meet immediate relief needs.

15. Of the many praiseworthy activities undertaken by the Agency during the past year, special mention might be made of the operations relating to community development, the small grants made to individuals, the establishment of sewing centres for girls and of carpentry courses for men, and the youth activities programme, all of which contributed at low cost to improving the living conditions of the refugees. He was glad to note that certain long-standing problems, such as that of rectifying the ration rolls and the question of the Agency's relations with the host Governments, now appeared to be in the process of solution.

16. It was also to be noted that in planning the Agency's programme the Director had not lost sight of the needs of the countries in the area once a definitive solution of the refugee problem was reached and that the implementation of the proposed programme would in no way prejudice the rights of the refugees. The Director's recommendations were practical and far-sighted and deserved the Assembly's full support.

Mr. Gamboa (Philippines), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

17. Mr. MASSOUD-ANSARI (Iran) declared that the problem of the Palestine refugees continued to be of concern to his Government, both from the political as well as from the humanitarian point of view. Apart from humanitarian considerations his delegation was particularly anxious to see the refugee problem settled because the continued existence of that problem endangered the peace and stability of the whole Middle East. In 1949, when the General Assembly had, by its resolution 302 (IV) initiated relief opera-

tions among the refugees, it envisaged such international assistance for a rather short period of time in order to permit the realization of the principle objective, a lasting solution to the problem. As, however, political considerations had stood in the way of such a solution, the necessity for relief operations continued from year to year. The Agency had left no stone unturned in its efforts to solve the refugee problem as such but, for the reasons stated by the Director in the introduction to his annual report, neither emigration nor integration into the economic life of the host countries had proved feasible, and hence an alternative solution must be sought. Although it appeared from the report that for a variety of reasons the solution favoured by a large number of the refugees was to return to their original homes, the political situation had so far made it impossible for them to do so. Pending a final settlement of the whole problem, the United Nations was faced with a twofold task: first, to protect the property which the refugees had left behind in Israel and, second, to continue relief operations. The United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine was in charge of the first-mentioned activity and had stated in its eighteenth progress report (A/4573) that the identification of refugee property was nearly completed, that the process of valuation had been initiated and that the problem of releasing Arab refugee bank accounts blocked in Israel was being solved. He hoped that the Commission acting in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 1456 (XIV), would reach positive conclusions regarding the steps to be taken to give effect to the many resolutions which had been adopted with a view to the ultimate solution of the problem.

18. With regard to the second aspect of the task incumbent upon the United Nations, his Government fully supported the steps taken by the Director to meet the refugees' most urgent needs. It was continuing to contribute to the Agency and in addition had put at the latter's disposal a considerable part of the funds raised in Iran under the World Refugee Year campaign. It likewise supported the Agency's three-year programme as set forth in part III of the report (A/4478).

19. In conclusion he wished to express his appreciation of the work done by the Director and his staff and of their devotion to the refugees' cause.

The meeting rose at 4.40 p.m.