



Monday, 25 November 1957,  
 at 3 p.m.

**NEW YORK**

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**Chairman: Mr. Emilio ARENALES CATALAN**  
 (Guatemala).

**AGENDA ITEM 26**

**Report of the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (A/3686 and Corr.1, A/3735, A/SPC/20/Rev.1) (continued)**

1. Mr. DE GRIPENBERG (Finland) said that after the war Finland had had to deal single-handed with the problem of several hundred thousand refugees. He was therefore well able to appreciate the problem of the Palestine refugees, which he believed ought to be considered against the political background of the Palestine question. He also recognized that the question of the political rights and claims of the refugees had to be settled.

2. While he did not doubt that the Government of Israel was prepared to co-operate in reaching a settlement and that it would prove possible for it to agree to the return of a considerable, though not unlimited, number of refugees, it was clear that no settlement was likely to be reached for some time to come. In the meantime, relief work had to go on and the funds had to be made available for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to continue its task.

3. Since its first years as a Member of the United Nations, Finland had made a financial contribution towards the Agency's work and he anticipated that it would continue to provide similar assistance next year. He hoped that other countries would share the view that the most pressing problem at the present time and for some time to come was to ensure that the Agency received the finance necessary to carry out its task.

4. Mr. DAOUDY (Syria) pointed out that paragraph 6 of the annual report of the Director of UNRWA (A/3686 and Corr.1) confirmed that the great mass of the Arab refugees continued to believe that a grave injustice had been done them and to express a desire to return to their homeland. He felt that those States which supported Israel would be well advised to heed the warning given by the Director, both in the interests of the refugees and in the wider interests of peace and stability in the Middle East. The Director's report was not inspired by sentimental, ethnic or political considerations. In

describing the activities of the Agency and the plight of the refugees, the Director was merely acting in accordance with United Nations resolutions.

5. In paragraph 6 the Director had likewise pointed out that the refugees requested in particular the implementation of paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III). The passage in question should be read in conjunction with the preamble to the resolution, which referred to the efforts of the United Nations Mediator in promoting a peaceful adjustment of the future situation of Palestine. He wished to remind the Special Political Committee that the Mediator had categorically stated both before the Security Council on 14 July 1948<sup>1/</sup> and in his progress report 2/ that a just and complete settlement must provide for the return to their homeland of those refugees who wished to return.

6. The Mediator had also referred in his progress report 3/ to unjustifiable destruction of Arab property, and had stated that it was incumbent on the provisional Government of Israel to restore private property to Arab owners and to compensate them for the loss of property destroyed without military justification. It was therefore not surprising that Count Bernadotte had been assassinated by Zionists.

7. Mr. Ben-Gurion had himself admitted in an address to American Zionists in Jerusalem in September 1950 that that part of Palestine where the Haganah could operate had been almost clear of Arabs before the termination of the British Mandate. That was not the only evidence to refute the Israel Government's contention, maintained for the past ten years for propaganda purposes, that the problem of the Arab refugees had been created by the entry of Arab forces into Palestine. Mr. Begin, now a leader of an important parliamentary political party in Israel and formerly leader of the terrorist organization Irgun Zvai Leumi which had been responsible for the massacre of Arabs at Deir Yassin on 9 April 1948 while Palestine was still under British Mandate, stated in his book *The Revolt*<sup>4/</sup> that fear of Irgun was responsible for the mass flight of the Arabs which took place before the armed forces of neighbouring Arab States entered Palestine to save the remaining Arab population from destruction.

8. He felt it would be useful to recall the measures outlined in General Assembly resolution 194 (III) to bring about the repatriation of the Arab refugees. Paragraph 2 had established a Conciliation Commission, while paragraph 11 had instructed the Commission,

<sup>1/</sup> See *Official Records of the Security Council, Third year, No. 96, 335th meeting.*

<sup>2/</sup> See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Third Session, Supplement No. 11, part I, chap. V, para. 6.*

<sup>3/</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 7.

<sup>4/</sup> Begin, M.: *The Revolt*: Henry Schuman, New York, 1951.

among other things, to facilitate the repatriation and resettlement of the refugees. The Conciliation Commission, in accordance with its terms of reference, arranged a meeting between the four Arab host countries and Israel. The negotiations ended with the signature of the Protocol of Lausanne on 12 May 1949.<sup>5/</sup> It was mainly based on General Assembly resolution 194 (III), and at the time it appeared that Israel was prepared that Israel was prepared to implement the resolution and allow the refugees to return to their homes. But its apparent readiness to agree to their repatriation was nothing more than an expedient to ensure its admission to the United Nations, which took place on 11 May 1949. That had been revealed in The Israel Yearbook for 1950.

9. Although the preamble to General Assembly resolution 273 (III) specifically linked admission to General Assembly resolutions 181 (II) of 29 November 1947 and 194 (III) 11 December 1948 on Palestine, Israel, once admitted, had made no attempt to implement those resolutions. It had also ignored its undertaking to the Conciliation Commission to reabsorb 100,000 Arab refugees within its existing boundaries.

10. In spite of Israel's defiant and negative attitude, every subsequent General Assembly resolution had confirmed the right of the refugees to repatriation; indeed, General Assembly resolution 302 (IV), which established UNRWA, had gone further in instructing the Agency to co-operate with the Conciliation Commission to that end.

11. Israel and its supporters maintained that its refusal to agree to the repatriation of the Arab refugees was due to its inability to absorb them, along with the present population, within its existing boundaries. That contention was belied by its campaign to admit a further 2 million Jews from all parts of the world in the near future. In support of his thesis, the representative of Syria cited excerpts from the declaration of independence of the State of Israel and from the Israeli "Law of the Return". It was natural that the Arab States should be concerned at the steady influx of Jews into Israel. Its population was now 2 million, and it had tripled in the past ten years. If the influx continued unabated, there was a very real danger that Israel would commit new acts of aggression to provide living space for its ever-growing population. Official statements such as those published in The Israel Yearbook for 1952, to the effect that Israel had been resuscitated only in the western sector and that independence had been gained in one part of the country, made it clear that Israel's rulers regarded its present territory merely as part of a large State which would extend in all directions, and particularly to the East—to Jordan.

12. There was no truth in the contention voiced on 17 November 1957 in a leading New York newspaper that hatred of Israel in the Arab world was kept alive by the feudal and semi-feudal ruling classes, which disliked Israel's democratic and economic system. The Arab masses looked on Israel as an aggressor, kept in existence by the support of Western colonialism. The refugees themselves would never acquiesce

in the conquest of their country by the fanatically aggressive and racist Zionist movement. The Western Powers, and particularly the United States, should remember that by the creation of the State of Israel they had created the Arab refugee problem and the present instability in the Near East. He recalled the tragic hours the United Nations had lived through during the debate and the vote on the partition of Palestine. He likewise recalled the part played in that connexion by Mr. Truman, former President of the United States, and cited his memoirs and other books published since that time which mentioned the pressure that had been brought to bear on several delegations at the time of the vote. In 1947, when Palestine was partitioned against the wishes of the vast majority of its inhabitants, the representative of the Philippines had courageously pointed out the danger inherent in the partition scheme, citing the case of his own country, which had been threatened with a similar fate.<sup>7/</sup>

13. It was interesting to note that the Westerners who most bitterly attacked feudalism in the Arab world were the self-same people who raised their voices against every progressive and democratic movement in the Arab countries and sought by every means in their power to destroy it, on the grounds that it was Communist-inspired.

14. It was not only the feudal groups in the Arab world which were opposed to Zionism—a spear head of Western colonialism, which sought to dominate the Arab countries through Palestine. To achieve its ends the West was supplying Israel with huge sums of money and vast quantities of arms. It was not surprising in the circumstances that the Arab peoples associated Israel with Western colonialism and were prepared to defend themselves by every means in their power against the threat it constituted.

15. If the Western Powers sincerely wished to establish friendly relations with the Arab peoples, they should remember that it could only be done on the basis of equality and mutual respect. Nor would anything constructive be accomplished until the problem of the Arab refugees had been settled in accordance with United Nations resolutions and the principles of justice and equity. In that connexion, he cited the words in which the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan, Sir Zafrullah Khan, had warned the Western Powers during the debate on Palestine in 1947 of the risk they ran of losing their friends and alienating the peoples of the Middle East if they persisted in their policy on Palestine.

16. Mr. ABDESSELAM (Tunisia) congratulated the Director of UNRWA and his staff on the way in which they had carried out their arduous task. In the past twelve months the Agency had had to face not only financial difficulties but the consequences of the recent political upheaval in the Near East.

17. No Member State could remain indifferent in the face of the Palestine refugee problem. At its eleventh session the General Assembly had taken vigorous action to alleviate the plight of the Hungarian refugees. The Palestine refugees, who had been suffering hardships for a long time, certainly deserved equal assis-

<sup>5/</sup>See Official Records of the General Assembly, Fourth Session, Special Political Committee, Annex, vol. II, document A/927, annexes A and B.

<sup>6/</sup>*Ibid.*, document A/992, para. 9.

<sup>7/</sup>See Official Records of the General Assembly, Second Session, Plenary meetings, vol. II, 124th meeting.

tance and attention. The United Nations had made available about 50 dollars a head for the Hungarian refugees; the Agency's relief and rehabilitation programmes together had only been able to call upon about 36 dollars a head for the Palestine refugees. The United Nations must beware of discrimination; all refugees deserved help and there should be the same response to distresses wherever it occurred.

18. A number of reference had been made to the "explosive" political situation in the Near East. If the Palestine refugees were to yield to understandable despair the situation might indeed become explosive, and it was therefore essential to study the problem as a whole and not merely its humanitarian aspects. In accordance with his terms of reference, however, the Director of UNRWA had confined his report to the humanitarian and technical aspects. There was little cause for satisfaction with what he had found it possible to achieve either in short-term relief or in the long-term programme of rehabilitation designed to enable the refugees to become self-supporting. Almost every field of activity had been affected by lack of funds; the refugees' diet was barely above subsistence level, and the programme to improve housing conditions had had to be interrupted. The Agency's training programme and educational services had been severely limited, and the programme of individual assistance had had to be suspended for lack of money just when it was beginning to give encouraging results and a large number of refugees had applied for benefits under it. The Director feared that unless the Assembly took proper action even the present inadequate standards would have to be reduced.

19. The Agency itself was not responsible for the decline. It was doing the best that could be done with the resources available. If the situation of the Palestine refugees was not to become truly catastrophic, the United Nations must make an additional effort to comply with the Director's pressing appeal. The Agency's mandate was due to expire in June 1960, but even if its life were extended the financial problem would continue unless decisive action was taken. The refugees themselves were tired of living on charity and, pending a final solution to their problem, they were anxious to become self-supporting. Many of them owned property in Palestine. Could not those now occupying the abandoned property pay the income from it, or appropriate compensation, to its real owners? If they did so, it would help to improve the financial position of the refugees and lessen the burden on the Agency considerably. It was a recognized principle in most legislative systems that the owner of property could claim the income derived from it so long as he retained his property rights.

20. However, the Palestine refugees problem could not be solved solely by financial means. It was claimed that unsettled conditions in the Middle East prevented its solution, but the existence of the problem was itself one of the very factors which contributed to the state of unrest. It had been suggested that the refugees should be resettled in neighbouring countries. It was doubtful whether those countries were in a position to absorb the refugees into their political, economic and social life. Moreover, to do so would be a tacit acceptance of all that had taken place. Human beings could not be shifted from place to place like objects.

21. Under General Assembly resolution 194 (III) the refugees had been offered a choice between returning to their homes or receiving compensation for their property. Unfortunately the resolution had remained a dead letter. It had been claimed that it presupposed political conditions which had never materialized. However, that was a vicious circle for if the resolution had been implemented it might have given rise to political conditions which would have contributed greatly to stability in the Middle East. It had also been said that the refugees could not return to Palestine because conditions there had changed so much since 1948. Yet Jewish immigration into Palestine continued and the newcomers adjusted perfectly well to local conditions. There was every likelihood, therefore, that the former inhabitants of Palestine would adjust to their environment if they were allowed to return to their homes. If their return was truly not possible, they should be compensated in accordance with the terms of General Assembly resolution 194 (III). The United Nations had recognized the right of the refugees to return and it was understandable that the latter should expect that the promise would be carried out. The United Nations must see that its promises were fulfilled in a spirit of justice and humanity.

22. Mr. CROSTHWAITE (United Kingdom) said he would confine himself to the annual report of the Director of UNRWA and to the problems facing the Agency in the following calendar year. His delegation had listened with close attention to the statements of other delegations on the background of the problem, and felt that the Committee as a whole must have benefited from them. The views of Israel and of the Arab countries, as the parties most directly concerned, should of course be pondered, and he hoped that they in their turn would reflect seriously on the views expressed by countries in other parts of the world which had no direct interest in the Middle East but nevertheless, for humanitarian reasons, contributed to the Agency's support.

23. He congratulated the Director of UNRWA and his staff on the efficient and imaginative manner in which they had overcome the difficulties encountered in the past year. Their devotion was beyond praise. The United Kingdom delegation was also gratified by the evidence of improved co-operation from the host Governments. The Director had given special mention in Annex C of his report to the assistance received from non-governmental and voluntary sources in the form of clothing and funds. Assistance of that kind was of great value to the refugees and should be encouraged by the United Nations.

24. The main problem confronting the Committee was the deteriorating financial position of UNRWA. The Agency's achievements with its limited funds had been remarkable; but nevertheless it had never been able to do all it would have wished, and in the past year it had been forced to cut some of the existing services. It had been estimated that a further 2 million dollars were needed for the relief programme alone, if the United States offer was to be matched in full. On the rehabilitation side the outlook was still worse. The Government of the United Kingdom had announced its intention of contributing 2.2 million dollars to the relief budget at the beginning of 1958 and 500,000 dollars to rehabilitation. \$/A further 200,000 dollars would be

<sup>8</sup>/See A/AC.90/PV.1.

made available, which the Director had requested should be turned over to the relief programme. In the second half of 1958, subject to parliamentary approval, the United Kingdom Government expected to contribute at least as much again. The United States had proposed to make a very generous contribution, and there were some thirty other contributing countries, all of which had many other calls on their resources. So had the non-contributing countries, no doubt; but without more funds even the present pitiable living conditions of the refugees could not be maintained for the Agency's reserves were almost exhausted.

25. The Director of UNRWA attached great importance to the establishment of a working capital fund. However, provided Governments intending to contribute could do so promptly, the establishment of a working capital fund seemed less urgent than an increase in total contributions. Such an increase could be brought about by larger contributions from the countries already contributing, or by contributions from those countries—the majority of Member States—which were not as yet contributors. In the meantime the Director should be asked to continue his programmes to the extent of the funds available. In his statement to the Committee at its 64th meeting, he had given his views on priorities among the rehabilitation services afforded by the Agency. The United Kingdom delegation sincerely hoped that further cuts would not be necessary but, if they did become necessary, it concurred with the system of priorities outlined. His delegation was sure that it could count on the Director to see that the available resources were used to the best advantage, for the greatest possible benefit of all the Palestine refugees.

26. Mr. DE THIER (Belgium) said that, since Belgium contributed to the budget of UNRWA, he had read the Director's annual report with special interest. He would like first to pay a tribute to the Director and his staff on the efficiency and devotion they had displayed in very difficult circumstances in carrying out their tremendous task of caring for nearly 1 million refugees. That task had been complicated both by lack of resources and by political impediments. Although the Agency's work had to be carried out within a political framework, and was inevitably affected by current events, it was nevertheless strictly humanitarian. The Agency itself had no political role. Its work of feeding, clothing, housing and caring for the refugees and helping them and their children to equip themselves to provide for their own needs was not dependent on a political settlement and could be carried on despite political difficulties. By accepting the assistance of the Agency, the refugees were not renouncing their rights or claims, and the Agency's activities could in no way prejudice a political settlement. The political and humanitarian aspects of the refugee problem were distinct; to combine them was to encourage the refugees to adopt a state of mind inimical to rehabilitation, and to discourage countries from contributing to the Agency, thus compromising its humanitarian work.

27. The Director of UNRWA had reported some improvement in the political climate in which the Agency operated. Without renouncing any of their rights, some of the refugees had changed their attitude to the training programmes designed to equip them for economic independence. Many of those who were still determined

to return to their homes were beginning to appreciate the advantages of self-support and were anxious to improve their prospects for the future. The Director had also reported improvements in the relations between the Agency and the host countries. The relations of the Agency with the Governments of Jordan and Lebanon had not raised any real problems, and the attitude of the Egyptian and Syrian Governments towards the employees of the Agency, which had formerly given grounds for anxiety, had now taken a turn for the better. Perhaps that encouraging sign heralded greater co-operation among all the parties concerned, which would help to solve the financial problems of the Agency and thus assist it to carry out its arduous task more promptly.

28. Mr. MAURTUA (Peru), after paying a tribute to the heroic work the Agency had done in spite of the serious financial difficulties it had had to cope with during the year under review, drew attention to what he considered significant parts of the Director's annual report.

29. Owing to adverse circumstances the functions of the Agency, which were to have been of a temporary nature, had become permanent, and therefore the funds on which the Agency relied had to be made available on a regular basis. Paragraph 96 of the annual report rightly pointed out that UNRWA had a continuous operating responsibility which could not readily be adjusted to suit financial circumstances. Most commitments were urgent and inescapable: hundreds and thousands of human beings depended upon UNRWA for the bulk of their daily food, for medical care and shelter.

30. He could not entirely agree with the implication in the same paragraph that self-support projects could be postponed or stopped without grave consequences. Relief and rehabilitation, a form of relief that went to the heart of the problem, were parallel aspects of the same problem. If the United Nations had from the beginning pursued a policy of furnishing rehabilitation funds on a scale comparable with the funds expended on relief, the effects would in all probability have been greater. The annual report itself, in paragraphs 38 and 39, indicated the particularly unfortunate consequences of abandoning a number of rehabilitation projects at a time when there had been evidence of a slight shift in the attitude of refugees towards self-support.

31. While the Agency had succeeded in general in Meeting its responsibilities for fundamental education, it was clear from paragraphs 44 to 48 that the shortage of funds had forced it to curtail essential teacher-training, handicraft-training, vocational training and individual grants programmes. The termination of the last-named programme, which had proved most successful in view of the smaller per capita outlay involved, was most unfortunate in view of the fact that the programme had begun to overcome the tendency of refugees to consider self-support projects as prejudicial to their rights to repatriation.

32. Other points of significance in the report were the transfer of a number of refugees to other regions, referred to in paragraphs 50 and 51; the absence of funds to expand successful agricultural projects, in paragraph 52; and the total absence of any works projects and of participation in general economic

development projects of the kind envisaged in General Assembly resolution 1018 (XI) paragraph 5, to which reference was made in paragraphs 55 to 58.

33. Most important was the Director's statement in paragraph 92 that the work of UNRWA must be considered against the political background of the Palestine question, to which the refugee problem was inextricably linked. The Director reported in paragraph 6 that refugees collectively remained opposed to certain types of self-support projects which they considered would mean permanent resettlement and the abandonment of hope of repatriation—a stand in which they were in general supported by the Arab host Governments. The Director added that, in his opinion, unless the refugees were given the choice between repatriation and compensation provided for in resolution 194 (III), or unless some other solution acceptable to all parties was found, it would be unrealistic for the General Assembly to believe that decisive progress could be accomplished by UNRWA towards the reintegration of the refugees into the economic life of the Near East, either by repatriation or resettlement in line with General Assembly resolution 393 (V).

34. It was obvious that such an inflexible attitude, reflected also in the important speech of the representative of Saudi Arabia at the 66th meeting, would not help to solve the problem. Unilateral formulas were never helpful, particularly where many different interests were at stake. There had been many changes since the problem was first brought up in the United Nations. For example, as one of the previous speakers had pointed out, much of the abandoned property had been replaced by new property and the procedure of simply reinstalling the former owners might produce a problem as critical as that it was intended to solve.

35. In the view of his delegation, the present circumstances called for the submission of the whole of the problem to the parties concerned for negotiations completely divorced from political bias and guided only by the interests of the refugees themselves. Such negotiations would be in keeping with Article 33, paragraph 1, of the Charter of the United Nations. They could be conducted by the parties themselves or through third Powers. No progress could result from automatic lining-up in opposing political camps. Refusal to recognize the State of Israel on the one hand, and the prima facie rejection of the claims of the refugees

on the other, were bound to produce a hopeless deadlock. To rely on UNRWA to cope with the resulting situation was merely to postpone a solution. The agency was the expression of the devotion of the United Nations to humanitarian principles and was a credit to the staff which served it in a spirit of self-sacrifice. However, it could never solve the basic problem.

36. His delegation entertained the hope that the Government of Israel would modify its position of refusing to deal with the question of repatriation or compensation. Negotiations on those lines, while not solving all the problems connected with the so-called Palestine question, could have a most beneficial effect on the disturbed political situation in the Near East. Pending the outcome of such negotiations, UNRWA would continue with its present functions and, in addition, provide any assistance requested by the negotiating parties.

37. Accordingly, the Peruvian delegation ventured to suggest that direct or indirect negotiations between the parties might determine the natural boundaries of the problem considered as a whole—in other words, from the political, legal and economic points of view—and might work out formulas of settlement with a view to determining, among other things: first if possible, appropriate forms of repatriation; second, rules for compensation: whether compensation should accompany or supplement repatriation, or whether compensation should be substituted for repatriation and in what circumstances; third, the kind of international assistance required to finance the compensation of the refugees entitled to compensation and resettling in other countries; and fourth, the kind of international assistance required for the resettlement of a certain number of refugees in the host countries.

38. The CHAIRMAN announced that he had received a letter<sup>2</sup> from Mr. Jawad, Permanent Representative of Iraq to the United Nations, requesting a hearing by the Committee of Mr. Izzat Tannous, Director of the Palestine Arab Refugee Office. The Committee would consider the request after the letter had been circulated as a Committee document.

The meeting rose at 4.55 p.m.

<sup>2</sup>/Subsequently circulated as document A/SPC/21.