

SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE 6th meeting held on Tuesday, 30 October 1990 at 10 a.m. New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 6th MEETING

Chairman:

Mr. KARUKUBIRO-KAMUNANWIRE

(Uganda)

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AGENDA ITEM 74: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (continued)

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## The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 74: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (continued) (A/45/13 and Add.1, 382, 429, 463-466, 530, 641, 645 and 646; A/SPC/45/L.5)

1. <u>Mr. HO000</u> (Afghanistan) said that Israel's policy of expansion had brought violence to Palestine and deprived the Palestinian people of their right to live at peace in their homeland. Hundreds had been left dead and thousands injured as a result of Israel's iron-fist policy. Efforts to settle Jewish immigrants in Palestinian territory, in violation of the Charter and other international instruments, were a grave source of tension and undermined peace endeavours.

2. A just and comprehensive solution to the question of Palestine was possible only on the basis of full realization of the right of the Palestinians to self-determination, including the establishment of their own State, and withdrawal by Israel from the occupied territories. The only constructive option lay in convening the International Peace Conference on the Middle East under United Nations auspices with the full participation of those concerned, including the Palestinians on an equal footing.

3. His delegation emphasized the importance of strengthening the education system in the occupied territories, and of establishing the University of Jerusalem "Al-Quds" for Palestine refugees. His Government supported increased contributions for UNRWA and urged the specialized agencies to provide greater assistance to it.

4. <u>Mr. NAIMI-ARFA</u> (Islamic Republic of Iran) stated his country's deep concern over the situation in occupied Palestine, where an atmosphere of fear and insecurity prevailed.

5. The report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA (A/45/13 and Add.1) detailed the disruption of education by Israeli forces, which had closed training centres and schools, imposed curfews and used force against students. In addition, health conditions left much to be desired in many refugee camps, where fewer families had been able to satisfy their basic needs, sometimes because of death, injury or detention of the breadwinner. Heavy demands had been placed on the Agency's social services during the reporting period.

6. The privileges and immunities of UNRWA staff continued to be violated by the occupying Power. Many had been intimidated and subjected to physical abuse while performing official duties. There had been many instances of intrusion into and occupation of Agency installations.

7. Although UNRWA had originally been established on a temporary basis, the continued occupation of Palestinian territory had necessitated the renewal of its mandate, and it seemed that the Zionist régime intended to continue its repressive policies, which would require further measures by UNRWA.

(<u>Mr. Naimi-Arfa, Islamic Republic</u> of Iran)

8. His Government would spare no efforts to assist the oppressed people of Palestine and restore their lost rights. The Islamic Republic of Iran had recently adopted legislation specifically intended to provide financial aid to Palestinians. His Government approved the extension of UNRWA's mandate so that it could continue to alleviate the plight of the Palestinians. Nevertheless, the international community must act to restore their legitimate rights, including the right to establish an independent State in Palestine.

9. <u>Mr. KHANI</u> (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his country continued to be deeply concerned that the Palestine refugee issue remained unresolved despite the adoption of numerous United Nations resolutions on the matter. Those resolutions remained unimplemented because of the hostile attitude adopted by Israel and because of its policies of expansion, building new settlements in the occupied Arab territories for the absorption of new Jewish immigrants and preventing the Palestinian people from exercising its inalienable rights, including its right to return, to exercise self-determination and to establish an independent, sovereign State on the soil of its homeland. It was the United Nations that was responsible for the plight of the refugees, and it was for the United Nations to devise a solution on the basis of the resolutions adopted since 1948.

10. The Syrian Arab Republic wished to reiterate its refusal to accept the Commissioner-General's practice of showing his report in draft form to the Israeli authorities and giving consideration to their comments, while no similar account was taken of the view of the Arab host countries. The Commissioner-General must maintain contacts with the Arab host countries in the preparation of his report, as had been the practice in the past.

11. The report made no mention of General Assembly resolutions 194 (III) and 513 (VI) or of other relevant United Nations resolutions and, in the view of his country, it remained incomplete without such references. The report also showed no interest in the financial sacrifices made by the Arab host countries, which amounted to sums that far exceeded all the annual contributions made to the Agency.

12. In view of the grave situation in the Agency's fields of operation, relief activities must be speedily resumed in response to the relevant General Assembly resolutions and should not be restricted to so-called special hardship cases. There was also a need to redefine special hardship cases so that a greater number of refugees could benefit from the basic services of the Agency.

13. His country did not oppose the provision of any services to refugees that might be of benefit to them provided that none were adversely affected by such services or deprived of the Agency's other services. It followed that, in the implementation of self-support projects, participants should not be deprived of relief or other services provided by UNRWA. Some of the principles on which the Agency based its policies were detrimental to large numbers of refugees and should be re-examined. They included the reassignment of refugees from a category in

## (Mr. Khani, Syrian Arabic Republic)

which they had access to all the services of the Agency to one in which they did not, the suspension of relief to families when one of their male members reached the age of 18, and the lowering of the income level established for entitlement to the ration distribution. The resumption of the general ration distribution continued to be a fundamental and urgent desideratum for his country which it continued to stress from year to year.

14. As a host country, the Syrian Arab Republic shared the Commissioner-General's concern with regard to the mobilization of sufficient resources to fund the Agency's operations in the coming year. It had participated in assuming the burden out of national and humanitarian considerations, but the principle remained that a larger share of the costs should be borne by the industrially advanced countries.

15. His delegation would like to stress once again the need to improve the quality of the health services offered by the Agency and to extend them to all refugees in all its fields.

16. The report of the Commissioner-General (A/45/13 and Add.1) indicated that there had been an increase in violations by the Israeli authorities of the privileges and immunities of UNRWA and that they had attempted to evade their obligations, had taken arbitrary measures against staff members, had carried out an increased number of incursions into Agency premises, had occupied schools and had used tear-gas against women and children in a number of refuges camps. The international community must make every effort to adopt appropriate measures to compel the Israeli authorities to desist from such practices and to abide by their agreements with UNRWA and their obligations under the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 1949.

17. Israel continued to oppose the return of the population and refugees forcibly displaced by the aggression of 1967 in violation of the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.

18. <u>Mr. BUGTI</u> (Pakistan) said that UNRWA had conducted vital relief operations in an exemplary manner despite the deterioration in security conditions in the occupied territories. UNRWA staff worked in extraordinarily dangerous circumstances. The appointment by the Agency of refugee affairs officers had proved extremely beneficial in protecting Palestinians from the constant brutality of the Israeli forces and in helping to improve relief and health services.

19. His delegation deplored Israeli attempts to interfere with the Agency's humanitarian work. Israeli forces had violated UNRWA's privileges and immunities by entering its facilities and detaining and mistreating its staff members. In addition, UNRWA shelters had been demolished. His Government condemned those high-handed acts, which were incompatible with the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.

20. Repressive measures by the Israeli authorities over the years had caused some 850 deaths and almost 100,000 injuries. Some 70 per cent of those injured since

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### (Mr. Bugti, Pakistan)

the beginning of the <u>intifadah</u> were children, which demonstrated their vulnerability to the indiscriminate repression of the Israeli authorities. In addition, by closing UNRWA schools the Israeli authorities were denying Palestinian children their education, thereby threatening the future of a whole generation.

21. The <u>intifadah</u> had increased the need for assistance by UNRWA to help Palestinians cope with the repressive measures imposed by Israeli forces. The Agency, which provided albeit the barest of essential services, played an invaluable role in mitigating the misery of the grim situation in Palestine. It was imperative for the Agency to continue its assistance programme for refugees and monitor basic human rights in the occupied territories. The Commissioner-General's appeal for the Agency's assistance to be maintained as long as necessary must be heeded. Until a just and permanent solution to the tragedy was f/und, enabling Palestine refugees to return to their homeland and establish their own State, the international community had an inescapable duty to meet their essential needs.

22. <u>Ms. THOMSEN</u> (Canada) said that UNRWA was the most useful instrument available to the international community to express its commitment to the Palestinian people. Her Government was deeply concerned that a comprehensive peace settlement, recognizing the legitimate right of the Palestinians, had still not been reached. While the Agency's services to Palestine refugees mitigated their tragic circumstances, the underlying problems remained.

23. A combination of regular programmes and unanticipated emergency activities had affected the budget of the Agency, which had a fragile funding base. It would be tragic if the demands of emergency programmes in Lebanon and the occupied territories could not be met owing to the international community's lack of response. Canada, for its part, would continue to be a major donor, and had increased its regular core contribution to \$Can 10 million for 1990-1991, with additional contributions to specific programmes. Her Government urged other States to contribute to the Agency to enable it to continue its vital work.

24. UNRWA faced bleak circumstances in discharging its functions. Intercommunal violence in Lebanon had necessitated the curtailment of UNRWA operations. The continued threats against the Agency's staff by some groups were unacceptable. The uprising in the occupied territories had resulted in tragic loss of life, besides economic and social hardship. In the face of continuing human-rights violations, Canada called upon Israel to accept the applicability of the fourth Geneva Convention to the occupied territories. UNRWA's difficulties had been increased by Israeli disruption of its privileges and immunities, which were essential to its performance. Canada had expressed its concern to the Israeli authorities in that regard.

25. UNRWA had provided remarkable assistance in circumstances which were often desperate. The presence of international staff at tension points had been of critical importance in preventing violence and restoring calm. The Agency's role in Gaza in providing basic services, particularly in periods of prolonged curfews, was especially noteworthy.

### (Ms. Thomsen, Canada)

26. The Agency had given due priority to education, notwithstanding severe disruption by the Israeli authorities. The denial of education was unacceptable to the Canadian Government. Access to education for Palestinian children remained the best hope for a better future for the region. The Agency's health programmes also deserved recognition. Refugee children received a level of basic health care of remarkable quality despite miserable conditions. Her Government remained committed to supporting UNRWA's invaluable humanitarian efforts to folleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people.

27. <u>Mr. JELBAN</u> (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that the report of the Commissioner-General illustrated the continuing plight of an entire people living at subsistence levels on paltry and unpredictable contributions. The financial basis of the Agency was fragile and it depended on a limited number of donors, so that the level of services it could provide was under threat. UNEWA had been established in order to meet the requirements of an emergency situation arising out of a conspiracy hatched against the Palestinian people, and it had been viewed as an interim means of providing assistance to that people. It was the responsibility of the international community to ensure the continuation of such assistance until such time as a just solution was found.

28. Consideration of the agenda item before the Committee represented only one aspect of the question of Palestine and should not distract attention from its other aspects, all of which must be addressed. The land and property of the Palestinian people had been taken from it and a life of dispersion imposed upon it by virtue of a conspiracy of the powers of evil, represented by Zionist groups scattered throughout the world and supported by the forces of colonialism. Those States that had assisted in the dispersal of the people of Palestine bore full responsibility for its plight. They persisted in their policy of seeking to liquidate the Palestinian people by providing full support to the Zionist entity, by supplying that entity with the most up-to-date weapons so as to keep the Palestinian people in a state of intimidation and by supporting the settlement of waves of immigrants in the occupied Palestinian territory.

29. His delegation felt that the Commissioner-General should have thrown more light on the plight of the Palestine refugees, on the increased number of killings, on the repressive measures adopted, on the intentional destruction of property and homes and on the campaigns of arrest carried out by the Zionist occupation authorities against the Palestinian people.

30. <u>Ms. RASMUSSEN</u> (Denmark), speaking on behalf of the Nordic countries, (Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Denmark) said that the task facing UNRWA was as difficult now as at the time of its establishment. There was an urgent need for a political solution of the Middle East question. The best way to reach a negotiated settlement would be to convene the International Peace Conference under United Nations auspices with the participation of all parties concerned.

31. The uprising continued in the occupied territories, where violence had reached a dangerous intensity in recent weeks. Over the period covered by the Commissioner-General's report (A/45/13). some 250 Palestinians had been killed and

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(<u>Ms. Rasmussen, Denmark</u>)

more than 20,000 wounded. The Nordic countries condemned the violence used by the Israeli forces. Israeli violations of UNRWA's privileges and immunities were also of concern. The Israeli Government must facilitate, not hinder, the Agency's valuable work.

32. The Nordic countries noted the reports of aggression against the Agency on the part of some Palestinians in Lebanon. Their Governments warned against such harassment and urged all parties in Lebanon to seek reconciliation.

33. UNRWA's education programme was of particular importance. Regrettably, all the Agency's programmes suffered from a lack of funding. The financial situation for the year ahead seemed very grim. Words were not enough; all countries, including the countries of the region, must make contributions to UNRWA. The Nordic countries had contributed some \$53 million in 1990, in addition to support for emergency and special activities.

34. <u>Mr. FREUDENSCHUSS</u> (Austria) said that as long as the Palestinian problem had not been solved within the framework of a comprehensive political solution, the role of UNRWA as the main provider of education, health and welfare services and emergency relief would remain indispensable. War inevitably generated disabilities, and it was tragic to note from the Commissioner-General's report  $(\lambda/45/13)$  that there were no UNRWA rehabilitation facilities in Lebanon or in Gaza despite the demand. Those disabled as a result of the violence must not be short-changed. The report highlighted the need for extraordinary measures of general assistance and protection in the occupied territories, which had included the assignment of international staff as refugee affairs officers. The increased mistreatment of UNRWA staff and unauthorized entry into Agency premises must be strongly condemned.

35. The Agency's funding base remained narrow, and broadening it became even more necessary in the light of recent events and additional demands for assistance. In addition to its regular contribution for 1990, Austria had made a special contribution towards the emergency programme in the occupied territories.

36. <u>Mr. JERKIC</u> (Yugoslavia) said that the Commissioner-General's report elicited mixed feelings. On one hand, his delegation was pleased to note that the Agency was carrying out its difficult assignments successfully. On the other hand, it was unacceptable that it had proved impossible to find solutions to those problems after so many years. The recent Israeli use of firearms was just one example of the brutal measures of the occupying authorities during the reporting period.

37. The <u>intifadah</u> of the Palestinian people had placed additional strain on UNRWA resources, but the Agency had proved its capacity to meet requirements often transcending its original mandate. The Gulf crisis had further increased tension and instability in the region as well as the flow of refugees. UNRWA activities had always been characterized by exemplary economy and rational use of resources. It was, therefore, very important that all countries fulfilled their financial obligations towards UNRWA and also endeavoured to contribute to the emergency fund.

(Mr. Jerkic, Yugoslavia)

38. In conclusion, he reiterated the urgent need to convene the International Peace Conference on the Middle East under United Nations auspices as called for in General Assembly resolution 44/42. Such action was the only way to bring about a lasting and just solution and an end to the long suffering of the Palestinian people.

39. <u>Mr. OTHMAN</u> (Malaysia) said that the question before the Committee was a stark reminder of the failure of the international community to resolve one of the most unsettling political and humanitarian issues of current times. Israel must face the reality that the inalienable right of the Palestinians to a homeland could not be ignored, and must take immediate steps to co-operate with the rest of the international community in seeking a just, comprehensive and lasting solution.

40. The repressive measures employed by the Israeli authorities were unacceptable by any norms of human behaviour. The brutal response to the <u>intifadah</u> had made the task of international relief agencies even more crucial. UNRWA in particular faced mounting pressure to provide vital services for Palestine refugees, many of whom had been uprocted again. His delegation was alarmed at the heavy toll of casualties during the reporting period, the result of excessive use of force by Israeli security forces. The report also had drawn attention to repeated violations of UNRWA premises and harassment of staff. Even ambulances carrying injured persons were interfered with. His delegation once again called upon Israel to fulfil its obligations under the fourth Geneva Convention to extend full co-operation to UNRWA and to respect its privileges and immunities.

41. Malaysia commended the selfless dedication of the Commissioner-General and his staff, despite the risks to their lives and safety. His delegation shared the concern about funding prospects for 1991, in particular the disturbing shortfall of funding for emergency programmes. Such programmes were vital, and their reduction could have disturbing consequences. Apart from its regular contributions to UNRWA, his Government had also made direct contributions to the Palestinians through the Palestine Liberation Organization, in the form of voluntary contributions for humanitarian purposes from Malaysians of all walks of life. His delegation supported the recommendations of the Working Group as contained in its report (A/45/645).

42. While UNRWA was doing all it could within its available resources, its role in the occupied territory could be further strengthened in order to enhance the safety of Palestinians there. His delegation called upon Israel to honour UNRWA's privileges and immunities, especially the freedom of movement of its personnel and the inviolability of its premises. Malaysia looked forward to the Secretary-General's report on the ways and means of ensuring the safety of Palestinian civilians under Israeli occupation, as recently requested by the Security Council in its resolution 673 (1990).

43. <u>Mr. 'NAN Jingzhang</u> (China) said that while his delegation fully supported the work of UNRWA, it noted with regret that the Agency still faced enormous difficulties. In the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the Agency's privileges and immunities had been increasingly disregarded by Israel, which must comply strictly with its obligations under the United Nations Charter and international law.

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44. In addition to continued support for the work of UNRWA, an early, fair and reasonable political settlement must be sought. The instability in the Middle East constituted a direct threat to world peace. China favoured a political settlement which would provide for Israel's withdrawal from all Arab territories under its occupation, mutual recognition between the State of Palestine and the State of Israel, and the harmonious co-existence of the Arab and Jewish peoples. His delegation supported the convening of an international conference on the Middle East under United Nations auspices.

45. <u>Mr. POSSO SERRANO</u> (Ecuador) said it was clear from the report of UNRWA that the situation in the occupied territories had worsened despite the dedication of the Commissioner-General and his staff. It appeared that the Israeli authorities were pursuing a policy of systematic aggression and interference with UNRWA workers and installations. A vicious circle had been established: Israeli officials tried to justify harsh repression because of the uprising, but such a reaction was understandable, since the Palestinian people were persecuted and their basic rights denied.

46. The Gulf crisis had been a severe blow to the Palestine refugees, since many of their host countries faced major problems in reintegrating their own nationals forced to return because of the conflict.

47. The situation of the refugees should be temporary; it was illogical that a human being could be considered a refugee for life, and even worse that he could be denied the chance to change those circumstances for his descendants. UNRWA should be strengthened so that it could continue to provide its humanitarian services without the limitations due to lack of funds. The United Nations should not forget the plight of those refugees and should maintain and increase its support for the Agency, which aided a group of human beings who had suffered through no fault of their own and continued to suffer because of lack of attention on the part of the United Nations.

48. His delegation placed special importance on humanitarian programmes and felt that their effectiveness should be a priority matter, not only because the prestige of the Organization was at stake but also because of its obligations of conscience. His delegation, while praising the sacrifices made by UNRWA, urged the continued search for a permanent and durable solution. The convening of the International Peace Conference on the Middle East under United Nations auspices would be a clear demonstration of the desire to resolve that chronic problem.