



Wednesday, 16 January 1952, at 3 p.m.

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Chairman : Mr. Selim SARPER (Turkey).

Palestine : (b) Assistance to Palestine refugees : report of the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (A/1905, A/1905/Add.1, A/AC.53/L.34)

[Item 24]*

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. John Blandford, 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. BLANDFORD (Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) introduced the several reports prepared by the Agency, emphasizing that the welfare of approximately 900,000 refugees constituted the core of the Palestine problem and had been given the highest priority by common consent. There was an urgent need to implement additional measures of assistance to the refugees while avoiding as much as possible any unresolved political issues. Toward that end, the Agency was seeking General Assembly approval of a three-year programme requiring an expenditure of 250 million dollars for essential relief and constructive projects for the period ending 30 June 1954. It hoped to effect major improvements in the living conditions of the refugees and eventually, through large-scale economic investments, to lift the heavy financial burden borne by the international community.

2. Reviewing the conditions of the refugees, he stressed that their hopes had thus far been sustained largely through the generous contributions of religious and charitable groups and United Nations specialized agencies. They lacked any kind of security, however. Their temporary shelters were inadequate and extremely vulnerable, their family life had been weakened and their morale lowered by those who would exploit their misery. The small number of wage-earners among them were forced to compete with the nationals of the countries in which they had sought refuge.

3. To carry out its programme the Agency would have to make as large a number of refugees as possible self-supporting, provide them with adequate shelter which would facilitate the resumption of normal family life, find the right kind of employment for qualified persons and train the unskilled. It envisaged loans to those wishing to set up small business enterprises, urban housing for those settling in urban centres, irrigation and roads for rural areas, and the distribution of adequate economic investments the more rapidly to achieve those goals. The programme was based on the premise that it was to be carried out independently of any negotiations between Israel and the Arab States or between Israel and the refugees. Refugee participation in the Agency's projects, however, was not to prejudice their interests in respect of repatriation or of compensation for those choosing not to return to their homes. The Governments of the Near East should respond whole-heartedly to the Agency's appeal for liberal contributions for the initiation of projects.

4. Extended consultations with Near East Governments had formed a sound basis for the Agency's recommendations. The Agency was convinced that substantial improvement in the conditions of the refugees, pending the outcome of negotiations between the parties, would ultimately speed those negotiations and have a beneficial effect on the results. Reintegration of the refugees into the economy of the area depended wholly upon the consent of the governments concerned. Refugees were to enjoy freedom of movement wherever political conditions permitted and have the option of retaining the facilities provided them when they left a particular area or of leaving them to those remaining. Member States could rest assured that the funds contributed would be used exclusively for constructive investments.

5. The Agency appealed to the General Assembly to encourage it in its humanitarian work, to recognize its close co-operation with United Nations specialized agencies and to urge Member States to contribute generously and participate fully in implementing its three-year programme.

* Indicates the item number on the General Assembly agenda.

6. The CHAIRMAN, opening the debate on the item before the Committee, drew attention to the joint draft resolution circulated by France, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States (A/AC.53/L.34) and invited its sponsors to introduce it.

7. MOSTAFA Bey (Egypt), speaking on a point of order, observed that the joint draft resolution, instead of dealing exclusively with assistance to refugees, referred to plans for the development of the countries of the Near East, and thus encroached upon the sovereignty of those States. The item before the Committee concerned the plight of refugees pending the solution of outstanding problems in accordance with General Assembly resolutions. Inasmuch as the draft resolution went beyond that specific item, it could not be considered by the Egyptian delegation. Accordingly, Mostafa Bey asked the Chairman to settle the preliminary question of its receivability before opening the general debate.

8. Mr. AL-JAMALI (Iraq) and Mr. HELOU (Lebanon) supported the objection raised by the representative of Egypt. The Lebanese representative added that the draft resolution, and particularly its paragraph 2, actually represented the sponsors' interpretation of the UNRWA report.

9. The CHAIRMAN pointed out that all delegations had the right to submit draft resolutions. In the course of the discussion Member States were free to accept, reject or amend the joint draft as they saw fit.

10. Mr. BOKHARI (Pakistan) did not dispute the right of delegations to submit draft resolutions but emphasized that the language of the joint draft implied an infringement of the sovereign rights of the Near East Governments. It gave the impression that the Committee was in a position to offer financial assistance to those Governments, an assumption which they rejected. In view of the wording of the specific item under consideration, the joint draft resolution was out of order.

11. Mr. CHOUKAYRI (Syria) said that the joint draft was disqualified for consideration from the outset because, by its terms, it was not in all respects relevant to the item allocated to the Committee by the General Assembly, which dealt with the question of assistance to Palestine refugees. The Committee could not consider it receivable unless and until those phrases referring to questions exclusively within the domestic jurisdiction of Near East Governments were deleted.

12. Mr. KYROU (Greece) saw no need to settle the preliminary matter of whether the joint draft was receivable. The fact that certain delegations placed a different interpretation upon it from that of the sponsors indicated at the most the need to submit a revised draft at a later stage of the debate.

13. Mr. CHENG (China) said that an examination of the documents relating to the item revealed that paragraphs 2 to 12 inclusive of the draft resolution merely summarized the recommendations of the Director of UNRWA. In the course of discussion, those recommendations would necessarily be dealt with and the

countries directly affected would have full opportunity to express their views. Accordingly, it was unnecessary at the present stage to decide whether or not the joint draft was receivable.

14. Mr. COULSON (United Kingdom) said that the objections to the joint draft resolution arose from a serious misunderstanding of the motives of its sponsors. The proposal was in no way intended to instruct sovereign governments regarding methods of developing their own territories; on the contrary, however unfortunate the wording, it was designed to lay stress on their sovereignty and on UNRWA's recognition that its relief work must be carried out through the Near East Governments. As a co-sponsor, the United Kingdom delegation was prepared to consider a rewording of any passages that might seem offensive. He hoped that his explanation would dispel all doubts and enable the Committee to proceed with consideration of the question of assistance to refugees.

15. Mr. HOOD (Australia) pointed out that the general debate which had been opened should normally deal in general terms with the item before the Committee and not specifically with any draft resolution. At a later stage, the merits of all the proposals submitted would be discussed in turn.

16. Mr. BOKHARI (Pakistan) welcomed the assurances of the United Kingdom representative regarding the intention of the joint draft resolution as well as the Australian suggestion for a solution of the difficulty. If the sponsors of the proposal could be induced not to submit it until a later stage of the debate, the text might be revised in the interim with a view to removing the misunderstanding which had arisen.

17. Mr. AL-JAMALI (Iraq) said that his objections were based on the consistent position of his Government against linking the refugee problem with the internal policies of Near East Governments, or using it to bring pressure on them. So long as any such implication was contained in the text of the joint draft resolution, it was out of order. The offensive passages to be deleted were the last phrase of paragraph 1 and the first part of paragraph 2. The text should deal exclusively with assistance to refugees.

18. Mr. PATIJN (Netherlands) thought that a distinction should be made between the substance of the draft resolution, which was naturally subject to criticism, rejection, acceptance or amendment, and the procedure invoked by the delegations which demanded its withdrawal. Every delegation was free to adopt whatever wording it desired for proposals on any subject directly relevant to the agenda item. To request the withdrawal of the draft resolution because of disagreement on the substance was unprecedented in General Assembly practice.

19. Mr. JESSUP (United States of America) moved adjournment of the meeting under rule 117 of the rules of procedure.

The motion for adjournment was adopted by 40 votes to none, with 8 abstentions.

The meeting rose at 4.10 p.m.