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Chairman: Mr. Alexis KYROU (Greece).

Annual Report of the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (A/2171 and Add.1, A/AC.61/L.1) (*continued*)

[Item 20]*

1. Mr. ANSARI (Afghanistan) stressed the wide implications of the Palestine refugee problem and the need for the United Nations to take concerted action in order to find a solution to it.
2. He welcomed the emphasis laid in the Report of the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (A/2171) on the possible disastrous effects of the mental attitude created in the refugees by continued dependence on relief, which must be regarded as a temporary measure at best. Attention should also be paid to the desire of the refugees. Mention of their rights to repatriation and compensation should be incorporated in the operative part of the joint draft resolution before the Committee (A/AC.61/L.1). The real hope for the refugees lay in their absorption into self-supporting employment through implementation of the new programme by constructive works. In the meantime, relief not only must continue but be provided on a larger scale. The Afghanistan representative expressed regrets that, owing to domestic conditions, his own country would be unable to make any substantial contribution to it.
3. Mr. ALGHOUSSEIN (Yemen) was unable to regard the problem as a purely humanitarian one. In such a case it would not have been submitted to the *Ad Hoc* Political Committee for its consideration. It would appear from a footnote in the report that Mr. Blandford considered Israel as a host country for Palestine refugees, an attitude which must inevitably

prevent the Yemen delegation from having full confidence in the report, since the refugees had been driven from their houses by Israeli terrorists. He would agree, however, with Mr. Blandford that the current year was decisive, and in view of that fact, his delegation wished to state three principles which it considered basic: first, that Yemen considered the efforts made to provide relief to the refugees as well worthy of praise; secondly, neither relief nor any other programme of resettlement other than repatriation could provide a final solution to the problem; thirdly, the refugees, while grateful for the efforts made to assist them, were unanimous and adamant in demanding repatriation to their homes as the only acceptable final solution. That had always been their attitude; it was also their right, which no one could waive on their behalf. The United Nations should endeavour to find some means of implementing that right, which had been enshrined in many resolutions of the General Assembly.

4. Mr. Alghoussein pointed out that a careful examination of the report revealed the admissions concerning the lack of adequate housing accommodation for the refugees, a need which had been recognized for several years. He agreed with the comments made on the subject by the representatives of Egypt and Lebanon (4th meeting). He did not find the Agency's action on that problem fully satisfactory, and appealed for definite measures.

5. In connexion with the refugees' health record, the Yemen representative reiterated his belief that the report was presenting an unduly rosy picture; information reaching his delegation revealed that 10 per cent of the refugees were suffering from tuberculosis. He then quoted a passage from the report concerning the clothing of the refugees, which seemed to indicate that the Agency had no definite plans to improve the current situation. He suggested that an expansion of the weaving and sewing centres mentioned in the report might be of assistance, and paid tribute to the aid received from private agencies in the United States.

* Indicates the item number on the agenda of the General Assembly.

6. Despite the praiseworthy efforts made by UNESCO and ILO to assist in the education of the refugees, he felt that further endeavour was required in that field. The funds allocated for education were inadequate.

7. Commenting briefly on the joint draft resolution before the Committee, Mr. Alghoussein agreed with the representative of Egypt that the draft resolution should contain a definite reference to the right of the refugees to return to their homes. He did not think that the proposed sum of \$23 million was adequate for relief purposes and felt that the increased amount of \$27 million, as proposed by the Lebanese representative, would be better calculated to meet the needs of the case. He appealed to the sponsors of the draft resolution to take his observations into account.

8. Mr. CASEY (Australia) said that his country had consistently endeavoured to give tangible proof of its sympathy for the plight of the Palestine refugees and had made voluntary contributions to the expenses of UNRWA which were not unsubstantial in relation to its resources.

9. The Australian Government had decided to make a further contribution of £A197,459, which was the equivalent of \$440,000 to UNRWA for the fiscal year 1952-1953, to be made available in Australian pounds for the purchase of Australian goods and services.

10. His country had been impressed by the United States contributions which amounted to something like 70 per cent of the entire programme. The Commonwealth countries' contribution had also been substantial and accounted for about 80 per cent of the total contributions of all countries other than the United States. Australia, as indeed the other Commonwealth countries, was most anxious to find a solution of the refugee problem because, while the refugees were allowed to remain in their present unfortunate situation, they would continue to be a potential source of unrest and disturbance in the Near East.

11. The Australian delegation had supported the recommendation for the three-year programme adopted at the General Assembly's last session by its resolution 513 (VI), as it had felt that the programme might lead to a final settlement of the problem. Such a settlement was particularly important as it might open the way to fruitful discussion on other differences between Israel and the Arab States.

12. The Director of the Agency had admitted in his report that the Agency's attempts to reduce the number of refugees on its ration rolls had not been particularly successful owing to circumstances outside its control. The report further mentioned that there was still some confusion among the refugees as to the purpose of the new programme and that the governments and Press of the host countries might well help in that direction. The report also stressed that the Agency was relying on increased co-operation with governments in facilitating administration, procurement and distribution. It was interesting to note the statement by the Minister for Construction and Development of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan who was reported to have said, on 7 October last, that the economic potential of Jordan should be exploited while providing work for refugees who would then become a source of power rather than of weakness.

13. Still greater efforts should be made by the governments concerned and by the refugees themselves to co-operate with the Agency in implementing the programme; without their co-operation the Agency's task would be made more difficult, if not actually impossible.

14. Australia had contributed to the scheme in the belief that it held out the possibility of a permanent solution within a measurable period of time. It was true that there were differing, and often strongly-held, views on what had caused the problem. The fact remained, however, that the problem existed whatever its causes, and that its solution must be related to the facts of the area. The existence of Israel was one of those facts, and the likelihood of all the refugees being repatriated was quite remote. That was a fact which had to be faced.

15. There was an apparent reluctance to press on with resettlement, in addition to an attitude which was likely to encourage relief provisions at the expense of a more permanent solution. Should that come about, Mr. Casey pointed out, it might well throw the whole programme out of balance and make it much more difficult for his country to continue to make contributions of any consequence, not because of any lack of sympathy with the plight of the refugees, but because the primary purpose would not be achieved and there would seem to be no end to the problem at all.

16. The Australian delegation hoped that the joint draft resolution, which had its support, would be adopted by the Committee. Mr. Casey observed that his delegation shared the concern of the Canadian delegation that the proposed budgets for the fiscal year 1953-1954 were higher than had been originally contemplated. The joint draft resolution allowed the Agency some flexibility and left it free to make any necessary adjustments, which seemed the only feasible course.

17. The desirability of reaching a permanent solution to the problem and the importance of adhering, as much as possible, to the time-table of relief and reintegration within the three-year programme, could not be too strongly stressed.

18. Mr. DAOUDI (Syria) said that he fully supported the views expressed by the representatives of Egypt, Lebanon and Yemen. He would accordingly confine himself to commenting on certain points in the Agency's report and on the joint draft resolution before the Committee.

19. The figures for the numbers of refugees given in the report were not complete, since they referred exclusively to those refugees actually receiving aid from the Agency. In Syria alone, 13,000 refugees not receiving any such aid, came to one-sixth of the total number of refugees. In Jordan, there were many refugees not receiving aid because they were not officially recognized as such. Some of them were living in their own homes, but, owing to the demarcation lines, were unable to reach their land in order to obtain food for themselves and their families.

20. Only one-third of the refugees lived in the camps provided by the Agency, and Mr. Daoudi wondered if the remaining two-thirds were considered as having solved their own problems. In Syria, many were renting rooms in private houses, while others occupied mosques, which could not therefore be put to their

proper use. Those refugees who were living on their own means were rapidly reaching the end of their resources, and nothing was being done by the Agency to assist them. They were daily applying for assistance to the local Syrian refugee office. The tents provided by the Agency were not sufficient in number to meet all the needs of the refugees and, in any case, tents were not the ideal accommodation for city-dwellers. The food rations supplied were inadequate, and if, as the report implied, refugees had been known to sell flour from their rations, it was only in order to purchase the necessary supplies of vegetables and other products with which they were not provided.

21. The report referred to the lorries used by the Agency for the local distribution of supplies, but it omitted to mention the fact that those lorries were provided by the Governments of the Arab States concerned under the terms of their Convention with the Agency.

22. He felt that the figures given on education in the report were misleading. In Syria, where the school attendance was high, the proportion of refugee children attending school certainly did not exceed that of the local children. Indeed the Government was providing education for a far larger number of refugee children than was the Agency.

23. The health situation of the refugees was in reality very critical and there again the report did not give a very accurate picture. Out of the twelve doctors reported to be attending to the needs of refugees in Syria, at least five were engaged in administrative work, which left exactly seven doctors to provide medical treatment. In some cases that meant that the doctors were examining patients at the rate of 150 in the six-hour working day. In one area, people had to walk several kilometres in order to obtain medical attention. The number of cases of tuberculosis among refugees reported by the Syrian Red Crescent far exceeded that given by the Agency, and those people who were recognized as suffering from the disease were unable to obtain medical supplies owing to shortages. The Syrian Government had provided what help it could from the limited resources at its disposal, but the fact remained that large numbers of tuberculosis patients were left free to spread the infection among their fellow-refugees.

24. In view of the undeniably desperate situation of the refugees, the Syrian representative felt that aid was urgently needed, and urged the sponsors of the joint draft resolution before the Committee to consider increasing the sum allocated for relief to the \$27 million proposed by Lebanon, Egypt and Yemen. Any surplus funds might with advantage be devoted to health purposes. He hoped that more concrete measures might shortly be taken in connexion with health and education.

25. Mr. KINDYNIS (Greece), after complimenting the Director of UNRWA on the Agency's achievements during the past fiscal year, announced that his delegation would support, as far as possible, the Agency's recommendations and the joint draft resolution.

26. Mr. PANT (India) said that his country, which had had, during the past years, to look after and rehabilitate perhaps the largest refugee population in

modern history, had the most profound sympathy for the plight of the Palestine refugees. All its available resources, and more, had however been exhausted in dealing with its own difficulties. It had nevertheless made a token contribution to the refugee fund of 500,000 rupees' worth of textiles.

27. The relief measures needed by the plight of the Palestine refugees were not enough in themselves, and a great effort would have to be made to help the refugees to become self-supporting and productive members of society. Mr. Blandford and his team of workers should be complimented on the programme which the Agency had undertaken in co-operation with the countries concerned and which would provide employment for many and would help to remove the sense of frustration, despondency and uselessness which prevailed among the refugees. Relief was not an end in itself and more comprehensive measures would have to be sought. It was to be hoped that the contemplated expenditure would solve the more pressing problems and that it would lead to a final and comprehensive solution.

28. Mr. PARISIS (Belgium) paid a tribute to the governments which had helped to alleviate the sufferings of the Palestine refugees either by contributing to the Agency's funds or by offering the refugees temporary shelter in their countries. It was not the time to probe into the events leading to the unhappy situation which had affected the lives of some 800,000 persons. The political implications of the problem could be more properly considered under items 5 and 6 of the agenda.

29. As other delegations had most ably surveyed the situation, Mr. Parisis said he would merely add that a quantity of clothing, blankets and similar articles had been collected in Belgium by private organizations and had been dispatched to the Baalbeck refugee camp.

30. The Agency's primary aim should be to provide the refugees with adequate housing and clothing, after which it should help them to become self-supporting members of society, thus making any further relief unnecessary. That did not, however, imply the abandonment of the refugees' absolute right to ultimate repatriation or compensation.

31. It would be seen from previous General Assembly resolutions that the efforts of the United Nations in regard to the Palestine refugees were being directed towards a gradual reduction in relief budgets and a subsequent cessation of all relief as such. Governments were being urged to co-operate as fully as possible in large-scale resettlement plans which would gradually have to be introduced as relief came to an end. Mr. Blandford's report also emphasized that the basic object of the programme was to make the refugees self-supporting. The results attained so far were disappointing, but the Agency should not be blamed for that.

32. The joint draft resolution (A/AC.61/L.1), which called for an increase in the relief budget was a departure from the original programme approved by the General Assembly. That programme was designed to enlist the co-operation of the governments of the host countries in forming the refugees into self-supporting communities without prejudice to their right to repatriation or compensation. The Agency should direct its activities towards purchasing weaving equipment so

that refugees could be gainfully employed and the clothing shortage met on the spot. The Agency should also beware of glutting the labour market in host countries and should move groups of refugees to areas where they could be more easily absorbed.

33. Finally, since contributions were voluntary, no arbitrary sums could be specified. The Belgian Government would continue its contribution which it hoped to be able to increase in the future.

34. Mr. DAWIT (Ethiopia) said that his country had been among the first to contribute to the relief fund for Palestine refugees.

35. As Ethiopia had recently undertaken a number of reforms and construction works which required all its available resources, it would unhappily be unable to make any further contribution. He felt that the joint draft resolution was a reasonable one and would therefore support it.

36. Mr. MUNRO (New Zealand) expressed his Government's concern for the distress of the Palestine refugees and its appreciation of UNRWA's efforts to relieve it. Responsibility for the creation of the refugee problem could not be assessed with any certainty because it differed in degree and did not rest exclusively on any one party. A substantial measure, however, rested with the United Nations and it was therefore fitting that the Organization should try to co-ordinate the energies of the international community with a view to eliminating the problem.

37. New Zealand placed special emphasis on the principles which had guided the Assembly in elaborating the \$250 million relief and resettlement programme. They included the right, which had become absolute, of the refugees to repatriation or compensation; the recognition that their problem could have no permanent solution if it was isolated from the political issues outstanding between Israel and the Arab States; the further recognition that, pending settlement of those issues, the refugees could not be abandoned in want and wretchedness; finally, the acknowledgment that the political solution would be accelerated if the refugees were restored to self-respect through useful employment.

38. As the joint draft resolution before the Committee reflected those principles, New Zealand would support it. It reserved its position, however, on any future financial contributions to the relief and resettlement programme, although the matter would be given careful consideration. The Agency programme correctly aimed at progressive reduction in relief allocations as increasing numbers of refugees were absorbed into self-sustaining employment. The progress of that reintegration depended largely upon the action of the host countries. Mr. Munro appealed to the governments concerned to co-operate as fully as possible, for their actions would directly influence the willingness of New Zealand and many other countries to make further financial commitments to alleviate the refugees' plight.

39. Mr. RODRIGUEZ FABREGAT (Uruguay) reiterated his Government's deep concern for the effective solution of a problem created by a war which had victimized thousands of human beings and, in particular, innocent women and children. The latter suffered most from the misery and want into which they had been cast and were in most urgent need of assistance.

Moreover, it was clear from the UNRWA Director's excellent report, that the refugee communities, like all other human agglomerations, were subject to the laws of social dynamics. Despite wretched living conditions and disease, the refugee population had increased by 22,000 persons in a single year.

40. The psychological factors of the refugee problem should also be borne in mind in evaluating the assistance to be given as an emergency measure and the need for a long-range rehabilitation programme. The statement of the United States representative (4th meeting) had emphasized that dual objective of UNRWA, and the joint draft resolution reaffirmed it. Uruguay whole-heartedly supported the draft resolution, particularly as it recognized that the refugees constituted a social problem which had to be dealt with with vision and understanding and that the ultimate objective of the Agency's programme must be to make possible the reintegration of the refugees through self-sustaining employment and, consequently, the restoration of their dignity as human beings. Uruguay's affirmative vote for the joint draft resolution was, of course, subject to the reservation arising from the need for constitutional ratification of any future financial commitment.

41. Mr. SOTO (Chile) said that his Government, like all others, was anxious to help in the solution of what was fundamentally a humanitarian problem and fully appreciated the co-operation of those countries which had contributed to the relief and resettlement funds. The private organizations which had voluntarily assisted the refugees and the United Nations Agency also deserved the highest commendation. Chile gave its unreserved moral support to the UNRWA programme. As it could not, however, make any material contribution, it would be forced to abstain on the joint draft resolution.

42. Mr. BELAUNDE (Peru) reaffirmed his Government's support for all measures designed to cope with and finally settle the refugee problem. Relief, however urgently required, was only a temporary, emergency solution; by providing it, the General Assembly would be fulfilling its obligation only in part. It must strive for comprehensive measures to implement a final, drastic and permanent solution which would restore to the refugees their dignity as human beings and their freedom to rebuild their lives with the aid of modern techniques. While he had been impressed by the argument of several Arab States regarding the inadequacy of the \$23 million provided for in the joint draft resolution, he was confident that the flexibility allowed for in the administration of that sum would ensure that the refugees' basic needs were met. Accordingly, he would commend the draft resolution to his Government, but his vote on it would be conditioned by parliamentary approval for a financial contribution by Peru to the relief and resettlement programme.

43. Mr. QUINTANILLA (Mexico) felt that financial contributions were more effective than words in assisting the Palestine refugees. While Mexico was prepared to support the joint draft resolution before the Committee, he could not commit his country to a financial contribution. Like many other Latin-American countries, Mexico's economic difficulties compelled it to make that reservation.

44. Mr. DURAN (Honduras) said that his Government was also prepared to endorse the joint draft resolution, subject to constitutional approval. Within the limits of its economic resources, Honduras would always be ready to co-operate in such humanitarian programmes as that of UNRWA.

45. Mr. HUDICOURT (Haiti) recalled that Haiti had consistently given moral support to the refugee cause even when internal economic conditions had prevented it from making any material contribution. It had already contributed the sum of \$6,000 to the Palestine refugee relief programme, but reserved its position with respect to any additional sum. He would, however, support the joint draft resolution and submit the question of additional contributions to the Haitian Government for consideration.

46. Mr. ABAL (Argentina) pointed out that his Government was eager for an effective solution of the complicated refugee problem as rapidly as possible, particularly in view of its humanitarian aspects and political repercussions. In seeking that solution, the General Assembly should take account of the recognized right of the refugees to repatriation or compensation and to ultimate social and economic rehabilita-

tion. The refugees were actually suffering the repercussion of questions of a political nature which were, in certain cases, superimposed on the humanitarian aspect of the problem. The joint draft resolution merely offered temporary relief and relief budgets could be expected to increase from year to year. The draft resolution settled only a small part of the over-all question, but Argentina would vote for it on the understanding that its vote should not be construed as a financial commitment.

47. Mr. CASTILLO ARRIOLA (Guatemala) observed that his Government also desired a comprehensive, positive solution of the refugee problem which would put an end to the need for relief. Nevertheless, as long as political issues prevented the reintegration of the refugees in productive communities and prolonged their distress, Guatemala favoured the continuation of emergency relief measures. He would therefore vote for the joint draft resolution, although the resources required for his country's current economic development programme would not permit it to make a financial contribution to the UNRWA programme.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.