

UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL
ASSEMBLY



Distr.
GENERAL

A/8814
15 September 1972

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Twenty-seventh session
Item 40 of the provisional agenda*

UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES
IN THE NEAR EAST

Report of the Secretary-General

1. The present report is submitted to the General Assembly in pursuance of its resolution 2792 C (XXVI) of 6 December 1971 concerning Palestine refugees in the Gaza Strip. In paragraph 3 of the resolution, the General Assembly called upon Israel "to desist from further destruction of refugee shelters and from further removal of refugees from their present places of residence", and in paragraph 4 it called upon Israel "to take immediate and effective steps for the return of the refugees concerned to the camps from which they were removed and to provide adequate shelters for their accommodation". In paragraph 5 of the resolution, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General, after consulting with the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), to report as soon as possible and whenever appropriate thereafter, but in any case not later than the opening date of the twenty-seventh session of the Assembly, on Israel's compliance with the provisions of paragraph 3 and on the implementation of the provisions of paragraph 4 of the resolution.

2. By a letter dated 23 December 1971, the Secretary-General transmitted the text of General Assembly resolution 2792 C (XXVI) to the Foreign Minister of Israel and drew attention to the request addressed by the Assembly to the Government of Israel in paragraphs 3 and 4 of the resolution and to the Secretary-General's reporting responsibility under paragraph 5. In a subsequent message dated 26 June 1972, addressed to the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations, the Secretary-General requested the Government of Israel to provide him with information on the steps it had taken to implement the resolution and on the results thus far achieved. In this connexion, the Secretary-General expressed the hope that the required information would be made available to him not later than 31 August 1972, as he planned to submit the report that had been requested of him before the opening of the twenty-seventh session of the Assembly.

* A/8760.

3. The reply of the Permanent Representative of Israel to this message was set forth in a note verbale dated 8 August 1972, which reads as follows:

"The Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations presents his compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and with reference to the Secretary-General's note of 26 June 1972 concerning General Assembly resolution 2792 C (XXVI) of 6 December 1971, has the honour, on instructions from his Government, to state the following:

"The extreme gravity of the security situation which prevailed in the Gaza area until the summer of 1971 is well known. Criminal terrorist organizations based in the Arab States and sustained and supported by these States, conducted a campaign of indiscriminate murder and sabotage; the main victims of which were the local Arab population, including refugees. Terrorist activities involved the throwing of bombs into crowded streets, the killing of innocent women and children, and even the murder in hospitals of Arabs injured in previous incidents. The purpose of this criminal activity was to create an atmosphere of violence and insecurity in the Gaza area; and to prevent, by intimidation and fear, all efforts to improve the situation, in order to perpetuate, for political ends, the human misery which was the legacy of the 19-year Egyptian occupation. In the period June 1967-August 1971, Arab terror organizations killed 239 residents of the Gaza area and wounded 1,362. Most of the victims were refugees.

"Such a situation could not be tolerated. The measures taken by the Israeli authorities in refugee camps were designed to put an end to the reign of terror and murder, in pursuance of their responsibility, as stipulated also in Security Council resolution 237 (1967) of 14 June 1967, to ensure the safety, welfare and security of all the inhabitants in the areas under their control.

"Because of overcrowding, the congested layout of houses and the large number of dilapidated structures, refugee camps offered especially convenient conditions for terror operations. It was necessary to construct access roads within the camps, involving in certain places the demolition of some shelters. All possible safeguards were taken to avoid undue hardship to the inhabitants of the affected shelters. In all cases alternative housing was offered; the offer was accepted by the majority and the housing provided. If a refugee expressed a preference for new housing of his own choice to that which was offered, he was free to avail himself of it. Evacuees received compensation for expenses incurred by them on the structures evacuated and a grant of cash to pay for the cost of moving into new housing. Arrangements were made to enable evacuees to continue in their old employment; whenever necessary, new employment was provided.

"It is noteworthy that the Israeli measures have met with considerable success, and the security situation in the Gaza area has greatly improved since the aforesaid steps were taken. Violence and terror, which had taken a

/...

heavy toll among the local population, have been virtually eliminated. During the period March-June 1972 three acts of terror took place, resulting in the wounding of one local Arab inhabitant. During the same period last year there were 119 terror attacks causing the death of 64 Arab inhabitants and injury to 217. In the final account the saving of lives and the general benefits of the present situation have outweighed by far the temporary inconveniences in the camps.

"Finally, it should be noted that the annual debates in the General Assembly on the reports of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA are exploited by Arab and several other delegations for political and propaganda purposes in a manner which complicates and confounds the issue and which intentionally hinders efforts to advance the true interest of the refugees and displaced persons. Part C of resolution 2792 (XXVI) did not take into account the actual conditions prevailing in the area, and the Israel delegation, for this reason, was among those voting against it.

"The Permanent Representative of Israel avails himself of this opportunity to renew to the Secretary-General the assurances of his highest consideration."

4. After consultation with the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, the Secretary-General wishes also to report the following to the General Assembly.
5. With regard to paragraph 3 of the resolution, it may be recalled that the Commissioner-General indicated in his special report of September 1971 (A/8383) that the large-scale demolitions which had begun on 20 July 1971 continued until 26 August of that year. No further demolitions of this nature with their attendant removal of refugees have taken place since then. However, there were until 11 January 1972, some demolitions of individual shelters as a punitive or deterrent measure.
6. With regard to paragraph 4 of the resolution, the figures given in the supplement to the Commissioner-General's special report (A/8383/Add.1) now stand revised on the basis of verifications carried out by the Agency subsequent to November 1971. The Agency's present understanding is that a total of 2,554 families, comprising 15,855 persons, were affected by the demolitions carried out in July and August 1971. Of these, 590 families (3,227 persons) are understood to be staying with relatives or friends, 514 families (3,245 persons) to be living in shelters or buildings which were vacant, 998 families (6,442 persons) in rented accommodation and 106 families (725 persons) in improvised accommodation. 1/ It is also understood that 251 families (1,671 persons) are in El Arish and 62 families (361 persons) on the West Bank. 2/ Over 900 of these families who are

1/ These figures comprise families now living inside as well as outside the camps.

2/ Thirty-three families (184 persons) are understood to have left either for east Jordan or other, unknown, destinations.

living in the Gaza Strip are regarded by the Agency as being unsatisfactorily accommodated even by a low standard. 3/ The table in the annex to this report shows the number of shelter rooms demolished and the position regarding the present housing of the refugee families affected by these demolitions.

7. Of these 2,554 families, 822 families have received assistance from the Israeli authorities in the form of payment of rent for alternative accommodation for a limited period and 1,443 families have received compensation for loss of private property as a result of the demolitions, e.g. for privately-built shelters or for additions to Agency-built shelters. In cases where compensation or assistance with rent was given, payment was not made through the Agency.

8. The Agency's claim for compensation for demolished shelters was rejected by the Israeli authorities on the grounds that the demolitions were necessary for security reasons and that the families concerned "were offered and given alternative accommodation of at least the same standard as their previous habitation". The Agency is pursuing the claim.

9. In the absence of any evidence of actual construction by the Israeli authorities to rehouse refugees whose shelters had been demolished and who were without adequate accommodation or had been obliged to leave the Gaza Strip, the Commissioner-General inquired of the Israeli authorities on 29 February 1972 what their plans in this regard were and also asked for confirmation that no impediment would be placed in the way of those displaced refugees who had not already returned from El Arish and wished to do so.

10. The Israeli authorities replied on 24 April 1972 to the effect that in all cases alternative housing had been offered to refugees whose shelters had been demolished and that the majority had accepted the offer; that if a refugee had expressed a preference for new housing of his own choice he had been free to avail himself of it; and that compensation had been paid for expenses incurred by refugees on demolished structures and a grant of cash made to pay for the cost of moving into new housing. The reply suggested that refugees who still required help with housing should approach the Israeli authorities in the area, who would do their best to assist them. As regards refugees in El Arish, an assurance was given that they might go back to the Gaza Strip if they wished and that no impediment would be placed in their way by the Israeli authorities. It will be noted that of the 400 families who are believed to have gone to El Arish only 251 remained there in June 1972, though, as those who returned to the Strip no longer have shelters there, they are not necessarily in their camps. The Agency understands that there is also no impediment to return from the West Bank.

11. Following this reply the Commissioner-General expressed reservations to the Israeli authorities at a meeting on 3 May 1972 about the statement that all refugees whose shelters had been demolished had been provided with adequate alternative accommodation, and pointed out that according to the Agency's information many were still living in unsatisfactory conditions. 4/ He also

3/ For example, one criterion was the accommodation of more than five persons in a room.

4/ The Israeli military authorities in Gaza have queried the Agency's information about the numbers, status and circumstances of those said to be living in unsatisfactory conditions and a joint check is being made.

referred to the assurance given at the time of the demolitions that new housing would be constructed, and he renewed his inquiry about the plans of the Israeli authorities in this respect. Subsequently, at a meeting in the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 27 August 1972, the Commissioner-General was told that no information could be given about Israel's plans for housing but that if refugees in difficulty approached the military authorities they would be helped. The Commissioner-General is pursuing the matter further with the Israeli authorities.

12. To the best of the Commissioner-General's knowledge the only housing for refugees constructed since the demolitions or now under construction in the Gaza Strip forms part of two programmes, neither of which is related to the needs of refugees whose shelters were demolished in July and August 1971. One programme consists of housing under construction by the Agency, at the expense of the Israeli authorities, for the accommodation of refugees whose shelters were demolished in connexion with the construction of security roads in other camps (see the Commissioner-General's report for 1969-1970 5/ and his report for 1970-1971. 6/ The other programme consists of housing under construction by the Israeli authorities which the Commissioner-General understands is being offered to residents or refugees for purchase on an instalment plan.

5/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 13 (A/8013), paras. 13 and 58.

6/ Ibid., Twenty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 13 (A/8413), para. 64.

ANNEX

Camp	Families	Persons	Agency rooms	Agency-assisted rooms	Private rooms	Present housing not satisfactory
Jabalia	1,173	7,217	1,902	319	1,395	459
Beach	804	4,836	854	354	1,055	326
Rafah	577	3,802	903	139	808	129
TOTAL	2,554	15,855	3,659	812	3,258	914