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Chairman: Mr. Thor THORS (Iceland).

AGENDA ITEM 18

Report of the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (A/2717, A/2717/Add.1) (*continued*)

1. Mr. CROSTHWAITE (United Kingdom) paid tribute to Mr. Carver, who had been Acting Director of the Agency for the greater part of the year 1953-1954, and congratulated Mr. Labouisse on his appointment as Director of the Agency.
2. He recalled that the Agency had been established in 1949, when it had become clear that there was no early prospect of the return of the refugees to their homes and the somewhat makeshift arrangements for dealing with the victims of the fighting in Palestine had had to be reorganized as a result.
3. General Assembly resolution 302 (IV), setting up the Agency, had laid down two basic principles: the prevention of starvation and distress among the refugees and the avoidance of any measure which might prejudice the provisions of paragraph 11 of resolution 194 (III). That paragraph had provided that those refugees wishing to return home should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date and that compensation for their property in Israel should be paid to the others.
4. A third principle—that of the reintegration of the refugees into the economic life of the Near East—had been subsequently adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 393 (V). Resolution 513 (VI) provided for the creation of a reintegration fund to carry out a three-year programme starting on 1 July 1951, without prejudice to the right of the refugees to repatriation and compensation.
5. He wished to mention also that since the sixth session of the Assembly, the Governments of the host countries, namely, Lebanon, Syria, the Hashemite Kingdom of the Jordan, and Egypt, had been represented on the Advisory Commission of the Agency. The representatives of all four Governments had taken an active part in the preparation of the special report (A/2717/Add.1), which had been signed unconditionally by two of them, while a third, Jordan, had just been authorized to sign it on certain conditions (A/AC.76/16).
6. The most important recommendation of the special report was that the mandate of the Agency should be

extended for five years. The programme which was to have been started in 1951 with the money from the reintegration fund had hardly begun. The reasons for the delay were many and complex, but the Assembly must draw the practical conclusions. As the refugee problem was of a long-term nature, long-term plans must be made to deal with it. The method of renewing the life of the Agency from year to year had many disadvantages.

7. If the life of the Agency was to be prolonged for five years, its budgeting procedure should be revised. The Agency's financial year ran from 1 July of one year to 30 June of the next. The General Assembly, which met in the autumn, approved the budget for that year almost halfway through the Agency's financial year, and laid down, far in advance, a highly provisional estimate for the following year. That complicated the task of the Negotiating Committee for Extra-Budgetary Funds. In making their contributions, Governments wanted to have a reasonably clear idea of what the Agency's total requirements would be. It was not easy to find the solution to the problem, but it should obviously give Governments a reasonably firm basis on which to estimate their contributions and should permit of the Assembly's exercising the right of having the final word with regard to the budget in any given year.

8. The United Kingdom delegation was intending, together with certain other delegations, to propose a draft resolution on the subject and he would ask permission to speak again when that text was presented to the Committee.

9. In conclusion, Mr. Crosthwaite drew the Committee's attention to the fact that nearly half the total refugee population was under fifteen years of age. A whole new generation was growing up in the limbo that was the fate of refugees everywhere. Every possible effort must be made to see that those children had a chance to lead a normal life.

10. Mr. WADSWORTH (United States of America) thought that the statement made by Mr. Labouisse, Director of the Agency (28th meeting), his annual report (A/2717) as Director, and the Special Report of the Director and the Advisory Commission (A/2717/Add.1) provided a sound basis for the work of the Committee.

11. The Palestine refugee problem was but one aspect of the whole Palestine question. There were many other aspects of it which called for a solution. But the question of refugees was in itself a formidable one. Not only did the Arab refugees have to be supported, but a future had to be established for them as well. It was imperative that the Assembly should take practical measures to solve the problem, particularly in view of the number of young refugees, to which the United Kingdom representative had drawn the attention of the Committee. The essential objective of the Agency must be rehabilitation, that is, enabling

refugees to become once more effective and self-supporting members of society.

12. The United States believed that that should continue to be the Agency's function and objective, and was prepared to support continuation of its mandate for five years. Efforts must be continued to find new homes and work for refugees choosing to settle in Arab countries, without prejudice to their rights to repatriation and compensation. But such programmes would take years to complete, and that was why the United States delegation supported the continued existence of the Agency. But that support must be subject to the condition that the extension of the Agency's mandate would be valid only if the Sinai and Jordan-Yarmuk projects were begun without delay. If prompt action was not forthcoming, the United States Government must inevitably reconsider its attitude, as it would continue to support the Agency only if there was tangible evidence of progress.

13. The extension of the UNWRA programme would give satisfactory results only if the host Governments co-operated effectively with the Director of the Agency in settling the issues remaining before it in connexion with the three projects in question and in finding new projects. He was sure that all the host Governments would recognize that such rehabilitation projects were in the best interests of their own people as well as of the refugees.

14. The United States Government was gratified to note that many responsible Arab leaders were beginning to take that view and he hoped that through the efforts of Mr. Eric Johnston, President Eisenhower's personal representative in the Near East, an agreement might soon be reached for the full utilization of the waters of the Jordan River Basin, which was of interest to the Hashemite Kingdom of the Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Israel. With the co-operation of those countries, that project and others could be realized well within the period of five years for which the Agency's mandate would be extended. By its very substantial financial contributions, and by such efforts as those of Ambassador Johnston, the United States would continue to work for the solution of the refugee problem through the Agency.

15. Obviously, the extension of the Agency's mandate must in no way prejudice the rights of the refugees to repatriation or compensation. Respect for those rights should be a matter of concern to all Members of the United Nations, and the United States would welcome prompt indications from the Government of Israel that it was taking concrete steps to settle those matters. His Government knew that Israel had indicated its willingness to discuss the settlement of the compensation question. Despite the difficulties which he knew confronted the Israel Government, he would welcome more specific proposals from it.

16. He drew attention to the United States reservation to the special report. It had stated that the United States was desirous of an expeditious and equitable settlement of all aspects of the refugee problem, but that so long as the rights of the refugees were fully protected, the failure to resolve the problems of repatriation or compensation must not be an obstacle to the Agency's efforts to rehabilitate refugees as promptly as possible.

17. With regard to the question of financing the relief and rehabilitation programmes, he believed that the

Committee should approve the budget recommended by the Director and the Advisory Commission for the current year. His delegation was prepared to discuss the United States share in that budget. The United States authorities had hoped that more employment opportunities might have made it possible to reduce the relief budget. His delegation hoped that the Director would spare no effort to economize. In signing the special report, the United States had made the second of its two reservations, stating its belief that any re-definition of a refugee eligible for relief should be contingent on the establishment of an effective system for determining the bona fides of relief recipients and the deletion from the rolls of persons not entitled to relief. The purpose of the Agency's function in the relief field would be defeated if these steps were not taken and every effort made not to exceed the present number of relief recipients. It was essential that contributions for relief should be used for the persons, particularly children, who were entitled to it.

18. In conclusion, he said that his Government was ready to consider the requirements of future years as and when they were presented by the Agency. The legislative bodies of contributing countries, and their peoples, wanted to see progress. The contribution of some Members was financial. Others could, and must, if the Agency was to succeed, help to carry out the programme. He hoped that the countries of the Near East would give the Agency the kind of co-operation which would make the programme a realistic means of dealing with the problem.

19. Mr. ORDONNEAU (France) said that the French delegation was in general agreement with the ideas expressed by the representatives of the United Kingdom and the United States. He reserved the right to state his views in detail at a later meeting.

20. Mr. DERINSU (Turkey) offered his congratulations and best wishes to Mr. Labouisse and Mr. Carver and to the Agency's staff.

21. He then reviewed the recommendations contained in the special report of the Director and the Advisory Commission.

22. The extension of the Agency's mandate for five years would enable the latter to organize its work better, but it must not prejudice the rights of the refugees.

23. Any progress in the negotiations with the host countries concerning the gradual transfer to them of the administration of relief would greatly facilitate the solution of the general refugee problem.

24. Consultations between the Conciliation Commission and the Agency regarding repatriation and compensation were also of the greatest importance.

25. Where the search for new works projects was concerned, the interests of the host countries and of the refugees were closely interrelated. The aim was to make the refugees self-supporting. In pursuing that aim, the Agency had encountered many difficulties, but its work could be facilitated by a genuine collaboration among all concerned.

26. With reference to the budget estimates for the financial year 1954-1955, in spite of all the Agency's efforts, it had not been possible to reduce the number of refugees dependent on relief. In fact, the number of such refugees had slightly increased. Nearly 100,000 persons who had lost their homes and their means of

livelihood were now in need of relief. Owing to the generosity of the international community and of many voluntary agencies, they obtained the strict minimum necessary for subsistence. At a cost of nearly \$24 million, the Agency had been able to provide rations to 887,000 persons and shelter to 320,000 persons.

27. Mr. TAKIEDDINE (Lebanon) said that the General Assembly was discussing the problem of the Arab refugees from Palestine for the sixth time. In all likelihood, that essentially human problem, the consequence of one of the most flagrant injustices in the history of man, would continue from year to year until it was attacked at the root. The international community did not have the right to lose interest in it or to tire of it, but must endeavour to solve it in order to alleviate the sufferings of 900,000 human beings who were the innocent victims of a United Nations decision.

28. The refugees were living under such appalling conditions that it was a miracle that they had been able to survive for six years. The report of the Agency's Director was most eloquent on that score, as was his statement of 16 November. Relief expenditure amounted to barely two and a half dollars per refugee per month, and was intended to cover food, medical care, lodging. It was stated in the report of the Agency's Director that the available funds had never sufficed to supply clothing.

29. Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon, by accepting the invitation of the United Nations to sit on the Advisory Commission, established in 1949, had proved their desire to work closely with United Nations organs in the execution of their task. The collaboration of those four Arab States had removed many obstacles. Where Lebanon was concerned, the difficulties which had arisen in the past few years were being resolved.

30. Before commenting on the two reports before the Committee, he conveyed to Mr. Labouisse, the Agency's Director, the Lebanese delegation's best wishes for the success of his work. It hoped that in the years to come the Director would continue to give proof of the objectivity he had shown in the first few months of his activity. The Lebanese delegation also paid a tribute to the contributing States, the charitable organizations and everyone who had given assistance to the refugees and had thus co-operated with the Agency in the performance of its humanitarian task.

31. The refugee question had political, economic, social and legal aspects. He would attempt to outline the main ideas which should guide the United Nations toward a solution of that manifold problem.

32. When establishing the Relief and Works Agency, the General Assembly had given it a double mission: to carry out in collaboration with local governments a relief and works programme for the benefit of Palestine refugees in the Near East, and to consult with the Governments concerning measures to be taken by them preparatory to the time when international assistance for relief and work projects was no longer available. That double task was a difficult one. One million human beings had to be kept from dying of hunger, cold or disease. Furthermore, the number of needy refugees had to be gradually reduced by giving them opportunities to become self-supporting, so that they would no longer require international assistance. The Agency would never have been able to carry out its task with the funds at its disposal had it not been for the exten-

sive aid of the Arab countries, particularly the host countries. Nevertheless, the number of refugees had decreased only very slightly in six years. The natural rate of growth of the refugee population was from 20,000 to 25,000 persons a year. In addition, there were the so-called "economic refugees", who lived along the demarcation line and who, although they had kept their homes, had lost their property and had virtually no means of subsistence. They should be assimilated to the other refugees and should receive the same food rations.

33. Finding itself faced with a hopeless situation, the General Assembly in resolution 393 (V) had entrusted the Agency in 1950 with another task: the reintegration of the refugees into the economic life of the Near East either by repatriation or resettlement, in preparation for the time when international assistance was no longer available, naturally without any prejudice to the refugees' rights to repatriation or compensation as recognized in the General Assembly resolutions. In order to accomplish that new task, the Agency had to launch a vast works programme enabling a large number of refugees to earn a livelihood. A fund of \$200 million had been set up for that purpose. Neither effort nor money had been spared and the countries concerned, particularly the Arab countries, had shown the greatest goodwill in working with the Agency. Numerous agreements for large and medium-scale projects had been concluded between the Agency and the host countries, which had placed all their material resources at the Agency's disposal. Two large projects had been envisaged: the Yarmuk-Jordan Valley project, and the project to use the waters of the Nile to irrigate the Sinai region to the east of the Suez Canal.

34. The Director of the Agency, in his annual report, indicated that the results obtained appeared negligible. The Advisory Commission, in its special report, stated that the situation was still substantially the same as it had been a year ago and that, even under the most favourable assumptions, it would be a matter of several years before the Sinai and Yarmuk-Jordan projects could be brought to such a state of completion as to render a substantial number of refugees self-supporting. The Director of the Agency, in his annual report, also pointed out that when the two projects in question were completed they would provide, as presently contemplated, a living for an estimated 150,000 to 200,000 persons only, and that it would be some years before that number could be considered fully self-supporting. Therefore, even if the two projects were completed, the number of refugees requiring assistance would be only slightly reduced.

35. The Agency had naturally attempted to find the causes of that situation. But who was responsible and who had turned that million of human beings into refugees? Israel propaganda tried to make the world believe that it was the Arab States which, by their intervention in Palestine, had brought about the exodus of a million Arab inhabitants. That contention, so often repeated by Israel representatives, was completely groundless. Long before the partition of Palestine, Zionist terrorism had been directed against the peaceful Arab inhabitants of the country. Trained and well-armed bands had already been causing them to flee their homes. After partition, Israel had tried to make room for Jewish immigrants coming from every corner of the world and Zionist terrorism had redoubled in its

intensity so that hundreds of thousands of Arabs had had to take refuge in neighbouring countries. Even after the conclusion of the armistice, the Israel authorities had persisted in aggression against the Arab population which had not left the territory of Palestine. Israel had occupied the Negev and had expelled thousands of Arabs. There was consequently no doubt that Israel was the party responsible.

36. The Director of the Agency had rightly stressed that international assistance would come to an end only when a solution of the refugee problem was found and that the clear way to such a solution was the implementation of General Assembly resolutions. The Director of the Agency in fact stated, in paragraph 32 of his annual report, that a very important obstacle encountered in the attainment of the goal was the absence of a solution along the lines of the Assembly's resolutions regarding repatriation and compensation. The Lebanese delegation was grateful to the Director of the Agency and to the members of the Advisory Commission for thus going to the heart of the matter. The appeal thus indirectly addressed to Israel was now being made by those who possessed the means to make themselves heard.

37. The problem of repatriation could not be solved by the permanent settlement of the refugees in the host countries where they had found provisional asylum. There were three main obstacles to such a solution.

38. First, it was certain that the territories where the refugees had provisionally settled could barely provide for their own population. In that connexion, Mr. Takieddine would give a brief outline of the situation in his own country. Since 1948, Lebanon had had to shelter and assist 130,000 refugees and a hundred thousand still lived there. Lebanon was not only a host country but also a contributing country. Despite its meagre resources and limited budget its contribution in cash, over six years, had exceeded 17.5 million Lebanese pounds. The Lebanese Government had placed public land at the disposal of the refugees, for use as refugee camps, and it had done a great deal to provide them with educational facilities. As far as Lebanon was concerned the refugee problem was deeply disturbing in two ways, for the Lebanese Government was highly concerned over the fate of the 100,000 refugees living in the country, and at the same time it realized that Lebanon could not absorb them.

39. The second obstacle to the resettlement of refugees far from their homes was their absolute refusal to settle permanently in the host countries. Contrary to what was stated by the Director of the Agency in his report, the Governments of the host countries in no way influenced the attitude of the refugees concerning their right to repatriation. The example of the old man at Saïda who had demolished his roof so as not to lose his right of returning to the land of his fathers was highly significant in that connexion.

40. The third obstacle preventing the reintegration of the refugees in the economic and social systems of the host countries was that those countries refused to accept any solution of the problem other than repatriation and compensation. He wished to state the position of his delegation and of the Lebanese people on that issue. The Arab States opposed the permanent settlement of the refugees on their territories because the right to repatriation, recognized by the General Assembly, was vested in the refugees themselves and the Arab States

could not dispose of that right. The right of the refugees to return to their homes was a personal right, the exercise of which could not be subordinated to the wish of any Government or to the concessions it might make in other fields.

41. Turning to the question of the responsibility of the United Nations towards the refugees, he said that the Lebanese Government could not approve any plan for the gradual transfer of responsibility for the administration of relief to the host countries. It considered that the problem of refugees derived from a United Nations decision. The United Nations must therefore bear the responsibility until a solution was found. Consequently, the Lebanese delegation would oppose any draft resolution seeking to transfer any of the Agency's responsibilities to the host countries.

42. The solution of the refugee problem was naturally the objective towards which United Nations efforts should be directed, as it would reduce tension in the Near East. The contributing countries were themselves greatly interested in finding a solution, as it would relieve them of a financial burden. Relief, however necessary, was only a palliative and not a solution. The only solution remained the implementation of United Nations resolutions concerning repatriation and compensation. However, with regard to repatriation, as well as on all other questions concerning which the General Assembly had adopted resolutions, the Israel attitude remained negative. By its continued scorn of General Assembly resolutions on the refugees, Israel undermined the foundations of the United Nations. The Lebanese Government felt that no serious effort had been made by the great Powers to induce Israel to comply with United Nations decisions, concerning not merely the problem of the refugees but the whole Palestine question. The encouragement of Israel to persevere in its attitude might discredit the United Nations in the eyes of the Arab world.

43. As long as the territories belonging to the Arabs remained wrongfully occupied by Israel and were not placed at the disposal of the Agency, in order that it might resettle the 900,000 Arab refugees there, the problem of the refugees would remain unsolved and peace in the Near East would not be restored.

44. Mr. RIFA'I (Observer of the Hashemite Kingdom of the Jordan) thanked the Committee for allowing him to take part in its debate on the question of the Palestine refugees, and said that he merely wished to draw the Committee's attention to some aspects of the refugee problem in Jordan.

45. Jordan had received more than half the refugees, a number equivalent to more than one-third of its total population. The refugees were therefore a very heavy burden on the country. The Jordanian Government and people had done, and continued to do, everything they could within their limited means to alleviate the sufferings of the refugees. They hoped, however, that the international community would try to lighten their load and reduce the problems which the present living conditions of the refugees created for them. The Jordanian Government was deeply grateful to the States which had contributed to the relief programme and to the voluntary organizations which had cooperated in that work. He also wished to pay a tribute to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency and to the sincerity of the statement made by the Director of the Agency.

46. As defined, the term "refugee" referred to persons who had lived in Palestine for at least two years before the outbreak of the conflict in 1948 and had lost their homes and their livelihood as a result of that conflict, but it should be widened to include the inhabitants of the frontier villages. A thorough investigation recently carried out by the Jordanian Ministry of Development showed that while the population of the villages in question, which had been 116,512 before the outbreak of hostilities had risen to 132,678, the area of the land holdings of the villages had decreased from approximately 1,950,000 to about 828,000 dunums, and the number of livestock from approximately 324,000 to about 56,900, some inhabitants had had to sell their livestock because they needed money or had lost their grazing land; others because they were victims of pillage by the Israelis. Further, the inhabitants of those villages had lost the employment they had had when they worked as farmers or agricultural labourers on land which was now occupied by the Israelis. In the villages in question about 16,900 people were on half-rations and a little more than 10,000 on full rations. The remainder, numbering more than 105,000 persons, received no rations. As could be seen, the situation was very serious. The Jordanian Government could supply only limited aid which did not meet the needs of the refugees. It was for that reason that the Agency's budget for 1955 should be increased by \$1,266,096, which would enable it to supply the people concerned with half rations, the cost of other services being excluded. That would be equivalent to allocating \$12 a year *per capita*, or one dollar a month, in order to relieve temporarily the lot of the refugees concerned.

47. Turning to the question of clothing for the refugees, he recalled the conclusions reached in paragraph 24 of the annual report of the Director of the Agency and said that the plight of the refugees could hardly be described. Their need for clothing was as great as their need for food. It was for that reason that the Jordanian Government were asking for an allocation of \$1 million which for the time being would be used to buy cotton garments for the children and for those refugees who were in greatest need.

48. The Jordanian Government asked that the thousands of children who had received no rations for the last three years should be given relief. The human conscience could not endure that those unfortunate children, whose number was appreciably increasing, should continue to go hungry. If no one came to their aid they would later form a weak and sickly generation, reared in poverty and despair. Nothing could be more dangerous for the future.

49. Commenting on the information given in the Director's report, to which the United States representative had drawn attention, regarding the deletion from the ration lists of persons who were not entitled to rations or to other assistance from the Agency, he emphasized that his Government did not in any way object to a new registration of refugees. The lists had been drawn hastily and the staff to which that work had been entrusted had not always done it efficiently. A large number of persons had not been included in the lists and their resentment had placed the Jordanian Government in a difficult situation. If a new registration was carried out the details of such an operation

must be drawn up with the greatest care. An agreement must be reached between the Agency and the Jordanian Government on the methods to be followed in order to avoid anything which might excite the refugees, and on the question whether new lists should be drawn up periodically, as the Government of Jordan hoped, or whether only one census should be taken.

50. The granting of assistance to the children was a distinct problem which should not be linked to that of preparing new lists. The children's needs had been recognized: they could not wait until new lists had been prepared, and it would be unjust to delay granting assistance until a decision had been reached on the second problem.

51. Furthermore, the Jordanian Government asked that the food ration, which was approximately 1,600 calories in winter and 1,500 calories in summer should be raised to 2,000 calories in the basic ration and that supplementary feeding should be increased.

52. A similar improvement was needed in the health services. Lastly, the Government of Jordan was constantly faced with the problem of refugees who had been deleted from the lists because they had obtained work which enabled them to provide for themselves, and who had soon after lost their employment so that they were again faced with destitution. They encountered untold difficulties in having their names put back on the list of persons entitled to assistance. The Jordanian Government considered that such refugees should receive assistance and that the Agency should take the necessary steps to meet such a situation.

53. The Arab refugee problem was a fundamental aspect of the Palestine question which was a serious international problem and should be solved in an equitable manner. The cause of the difficulties encountered in connexion with the refugee question, and the reason for the failure of the efforts made to solve that problem, lay in Israel's refusal to comply with United Nations resolutions.

54. Whatever might be their position at the present time, the passionate wish of the refugees to return to their own country was a factor whose importance could not be over-emphasized. The Director of the Agency in his annual report had drawn attention to the fact that the bitterness of their exile had not been softened by the passing years. Their feelings were sincere and natural and it would be wrong to see in them the result of pressure applied for political motives. That feeling played a very important part in the general outlook of the peoples of Arab countries. It was for that reason that, as long as the Arab refugees from Palestine had not been repatriated or, if they so preferred, had not received compensation, and as long as the resolutions adopted by the United Nations had not been carried out, the international community must continue to come to their aid. If it did not do so their tragedy would become a disaster, the consequences of which might be very serious.

55. Lastly, he expressed the hope that his Government's requests would be studied in a compassionate spirit and that the necessary additional funds would be allocated to the Agency's budget.

The meeting rose at 5.05 p.m.