



SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE
11th meeting
held on
Thursday, 29 October 1987
at 10 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 11th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. AL-KAWARI (Qatar)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 79: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (continued)

- (a) REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONER-GENERAL (continued) (A/42/13 and Add.1)
- (b) REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE FINANCING OF THE UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (continued) (A/42/633)
- (c) REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE (continued) (A/42/515)
- (d) REPORTS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (continued) (A/42/309, 445, 446, 480, 481, 482, 505, 507)

1. Mr. McLEAN (Canada) extended Canada's sympathy to the families of personnel of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) who had been killed, wounded or kidnapped while performing their duties.

2. The report of the Commissioner-General (A/42/13 and Add.1) did not permit complacency regarding the continuing plight of the Palestine refugees. Violence had increased in the occupied territories, reflecting a growing sense of frustration and desperation. The tragic consequences of the prolonged conflict in Lebanon, including the siege of refugee camps in 1986, had yet to be fully assessed. Canada had noted the Commissioner-General's appeal for the full recognition of the Agency's humanitarian mandate. It called upon all the parties concerned to co-operate with UNRWA, permitting it to meet the urgent needs of the Palestine refugees in Lebanon, particularly for shelter before the arrival of winter. It trusted that the Commissioner-General could count on a broader base of moral and material support in fulfilling the Agency's mandate.

3. Canada had traditionally been an active and strong supporter of UNRWA. It had previously called upon the Agency to strengthen its programme planning and management. He was pleased to report that a Canadian appraisal of administrative, programme and financial aspects of UNRWA had confirmed the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of its operations, including its overall constructive role in the region. However, it had also noted that the requirements in the projected budget related to basic services, not to construction needs, thus making it essential that pledged support should be paid in full.

4. Over the years, Canada had progressively increased its financial contributions to UNRWA. It intended to provide at least the same level of support in 1987 as in 1986. In 1987 Canada had provided a \$Can 8.75 million core grant to the Agency and planned to make additional contributions towards special projects in the occupied territories and in the health and education sectors. Although it recognized the construction needs outlined for 1987-1990, and was giving sympathetic consideration to the Commissioner-General's appeal, it was not yet in a

(Mr. McLean, Canada)

position to indicate the amount of its contribution. The self-help efforts of the Palestinian people and the Agency's efforts should be complemented by enhanced collective monetary and practical support.

5. The real interests of the Palestinians would only be served by the achievement of a just and comprehensive peace in the region. The escalation of conflict in Lebanon and the increased tensions in the occupied territories called for renewed determination and genuine and constructive political will on the part of the international community to resolve the tragic plight of that long-suffering people. The need for compromise and flexibility must be accepted by all parties concerned. Canada supported the pursuit of a settlement based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). It recognized the legitimate rights of the Palestinians, including their right to a homeland within a clearly defined territory, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. It gave full support to all constructive peace initiatives. It continued to believe that an international conference could lend impetus to the peace process in the region. Such a conference must be accepted by all parties to the dispute and must facilitate, not hinder, direct negotiations between them. The Commissioner-General could count on Canada's continued commitment to UNRWA and its essential humanitarian mandate.

6. Mr. ISLAM (Bangladesh) expressed his appreciation to the Commissioner-General for the dedicated manner in which he and his staff had carried out the Agency's mandate under difficult conditions and at the risk of their lives. Bangladesh wished to express its sympathy to the families of the seven staff members killed in the line of duty, and to pay special tribute to those who had zealously maintained the flow of services to the Palestine refugees. It welcomed the efforts made by the World Food Programme, the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator and the United Nations Children's Fund on behalf of the Palestine refugees.

7. Bangladesh was pleased to note that there had been a substantial improvement in the financial situation of UNRWA in 1986 without a reduction in basic services, owing largely to increased contributions from donors and stringent austerity measures taken by the Agency. He deeply appreciated the humanitarian gesture and financial support of the donor countries.

8. However, he was concerned about the deficit of over \$2 million in 1987 in the capital construction fund. UNRWA urgently required additional resources for the construction of schools, health clinics and other facilities, in order to provide an acceptable standard of service to the Palestine refugees. The need for continued fund-raising efforts and for a generous response by donor countries could not be over-emphasized.

9. Bangladesh shared the concern expressed by the Commissioner-General that reduced employment opportunities for refugees in the occupied Arab territories had contributed to a deterioration in their economic situation. It was particularly preoccupied about the reports of extreme hardship, starvation, epidemics and the massacre of hundreds of innocent men, women and children during the air attack and

(Mr. Islam, Bangladesh)

siege of refugee camps in Lebanon by Israel. The refugees would face untold miseries at the onset of winter should they not have shelter. He strongly condemned the Zionist entity for not allowing UNRWA to repair Agency facilities or to help refugees to repair their homes. Moreover, his delegation was preoccupied about the precarious housing, sanitation and job situation in the occupied territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

10. Bangladesh took a serious view of the continued demolition of refugee camps, shelters and UNRWA premises in the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories and the forced relocation of the refugees under pressure and intimidation by the Israeli occupying authorities. It was also concerned about the Israeli authorities' continued obstruction of the Agency's work, the closure of youth centres, schools and training centres, the mass arrests, the curfew imposed on the camps, the arrest of UNRWA staff, the occupation of UNRWA facilities and the obstruction of food convoys to the camps. Israel had failed to provide safety and security and to grant legal and human rights to the Palestine refugees.

11. He deeply deplored Israel's refusal to allow a United Nations Expert to complete functional feasibility studies of the University of Jerusalem "Al-Quds". Israel's denial of the right to education in the occupied Arab and Palestinian territories was in line with its practice of taking measures to weaken the physical and demographic structure of the occupied territories.

12. Bangladesh greatly valued the useful role played by UNRWA in offering the much-needed education, health, hygiene, relief and rehabilitation services to the Palestine refugees in the occupied territories. UNRWA would continue to be an indispensable political and humanitarian agency pending a just and comprehensive solution of the question of Palestine. However, he reiterated that the question of the Palestine refugees was inextricably linked to the settlement of the question of Palestine. The refugee problem had arisen as a result of aggression by Zionist terrorists against Palestine and its people, leading to their forced expulsion and mass evacuation under the threat of extermination and genocide by the Israeli occupying Power. He had been amused to hear the new theory of the voluntary exile of the Palestinian people, propounded by the representative of Israel. That theory constituted another example of the Zionist entity's deceit and falsehood. Since its creation, Israel had been pursuing the path of relentless expansion and occupation directed against her Arab neighbours, with a view to changing the Arab and Palestinian character of the occupied territories.

13. His delegation wished to reiterate that any comprehensive settlement of the Palestine refugee question rested on the total and unconditional withdrawal of Israeli forces from all Palestinian and Arab territories occupied since 1967. The settlement must also permit the Palestinian people to exercise its inalienable and legitimate rights to return to its homeland and to establish a sovereign and independent State under the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), its sole legitimate representative. Bangladesh supported the early convening of an International Peace Conference on the Middle East in which the PLO could participate on an equal footing with all the parties directly concerned.

14. Mr. OKELY (Australia) said that Australia had been a solid and consistent supporter of the Agency's work, but would prefer to see the parties to the complex dispute in the region reach a political solution, thus eliminating the need for UNRWA. Australia shared the Commissioner-General's satisfaction that the Agency's financial situation had improved slightly. However, it was aware that UNRWA still had few resources for urgent construction work. Emergency programmes, requiring the generosity and concern of donor countries, were needed to provide basic humanitarian aid to the innocent victims of violent conflict. Australia had demonstrated its concern for the plight of the refugees through its contribution of \$A 250,000 to the Commissioner-General's recent emergency relief operation. Moreover, it planned to contribute a total of \$A 1.2 million to the Agency's regular budget for 1988, which was a significant increase over its 1987 contribution. Five hundred thousand Australian dollars had been designated for the Agency's West Bank operations. Australia's increased contribution had been decided upon, despite its own tight budgetary situation, in view of the important role played by UNRWA in improving regional stability and the living conditions of the Palestine refugees. Nevertheless, Australia regretted that, despite the Commissioner-General's appeal to the General Assembly in 1986, little progress had been made in broadening the base of the Agency's financial support and hoped that other countries might provide more than moral backing.

15. Australia had warmly welcomed the Commissioner-General's visit to Australia in April 1987, which had given him an opportunity to explain the Agency's work to senior ministers and government officials. It was clear from his statements that the Agency operated under extremely difficult and often dangerous conditions. Australia joined him in paying special tribute to his staff who, often at risk to themselves, had maintained the flow of services to refugees. It noted with concern that seven staff members had been killed, scores had been wounded and were missing and, in particular, that the fate of Alec Collette remained uncertain.

16. He understood the continuing necessity for the Agency to provide assistance to the most needy refugees, but was pleased to note that the bulk of its resources were channelled into productive developmental projects. His Government commended the Agency for its efforts in education, health care, welfare and advanced training. It agreed with the Commissioner-General that UNRWA should be better known for those efforts.

17. Although Australia had come to expect the capricious actions of authorities and of armed militias in preventing UNRWA from doing its work, the political demands made on the Agency that it clearly did not have the power to meet, and examples of unwarranted disruption and wanton destruction, that did not make it easier to accept that such actions were taken against an agency with purely humanitarian aims and activities. He called upon all parties to respect the special status of UNRWA and expressed the hope that the Agency could carry on its essential work safe from avoidable danger and with the full respect and co-operation of all sides.

The meeting rose at 11 a.m.