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Chairman: Mr. MATHIAS (Portugal)

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 53: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE
NEAR EAST (continued)

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 53: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (continued) (A/35/13, A/35/438 and Corr.1, A/35/472, A/35/473, A/35/474, A/35/526; A/SPC/35/L.3)

1. Mr. ABOUDI (United Arab Emirates) said that the question of the Palestine refugees was not only humanitarian, as some maintained, or confined to financial considerations connected with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The question was much broader and fundamentally concerned the inalienable rights of the Palestinians to return to their homes and receive compensation for their property, as stated in paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III). Those absolute rights could not be linked to other matters, as the Israeli representative had maintained. The resolutions of the General Assembly and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights referred to the right of everyone to leave his country and to return to it. The international community had recognized that the problem of the refugees could be solved only if they were allowed to return to their homes and recover their property; hence the functions performed by UNRWA were provisional, until the desired return of the refugees was achieved.

2. The problem of the Palestinians had existed for a long time without being solved, above all through the fault of Israel and the countries which supported it. As those countries had helped to create the refugee problem, it was their duty to finance the activities of the Agency and to cover its deficit. Yet for some years certain countries had taken no part in the financing of the Agency, continually refusing to support it and allowing the responsibility to fall on the Arab countries, especially the oil-producing countries. His delegation categorically refused to agree that the Arab countries should assume such a responsibility. Moreover, the Agency's problem was not only financial, nor could the work of UNRWA be judged by its resources. The Agency was an institution which reflected the political and moral responsibility of the United Nations with respect to the problem of the Palestine refugees as a result of the creation of Israel, which had led to their expulsion. To attempt to make only the Arab countries responsible for solving the problem of the Palestine refugees was a plot against the Palestinian cause, aimed at resettling the refugees in the Arab countries. The Palestinians themselves opposed that strategy and had stated that their problem could be solved only through the exercise of their inalienable rights, including the right to return, the right to self-determination and the right to create an independent State in the land of Palestine.

3. That did not mean that the UNRWA deficit referred to in the report of the Commissioner-General (A/35/13) should be forgotten. His delegation was fully aware of the serious consequences of that deficit, for example, the curtailing of some services. The best way of dealing with that deficit was to make an objective study of the financing of UNRWA in an international framework. Voluntary contributions could be supplemented with an allocation from the regular budget of the United Nations.

(Mr. Aboudi, United Arab Emirates)

4. The delegation of the United Arab Emirates wished to express its concern and distress at the report of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (A/35/474), from which it could be inferred that the Commission had encountered obstacles in fulfilling its mandate due to the intransigence and obstinacy of Israel.

5. Mr. NEVES (Portugal) said that the Portuguese delegation believed that the Palestine refugee problem could be solved only through a satisfactory political solution to the whole question of the Middle East. Only the comprehensive peaceful settlement of the Middle East problem and the recognition of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people would create the conditions for the refugees to return to their homes. UNRWA's activities were essential, not only to meet the needs of the Palestine refugees, which was a fundamental duty of the international community, but also to avoid the turmoil and instability that would further jeopardize a peaceful settlement in the area. For those reasons, Portugal fully supported the extension of UNRWA's mandate.

6. The perusal of the Commissioner-General's report (A/35/13) revealed the impressively wide range of services UNRWA was providing to the refugees in the spheres of relief, education and health. It was of the utmost importance to avoid any cut-backs in those activities, as that would have damaging effects on the conditions of life of a people that was already facing hardship and suffering. In the light of the critical financial situation faced by UNRWA, the Portuguese delegation appealed to Member States to provide it with the necessary financing. It would also be desirable to relocate UNRWA's headquarters within the area of its operation, as recommended in General Assembly resolution 34/52 A, paragraph 4. His delegation hoped that despite the financial and other obstacles that had impeded such a move, the Commissioner-General would continue his negotiations to achieve that purpose.

7. Mr. STARČEVIĆ (Yugoslavia) expressed regret that, as stated in the report, the financial resources of the Agency were insufficient for it to continue its activities during the coming year.

8. The problem of the Palestine refugees had existed for over 30 years. Throughout those years, an increasing number of Palestinians had been forced to flee their homeland as a result of Israel's policy of occupation of Arab territories, and find refuge in the neighbouring countries. That long history of human suffering was one of the tragedies of modern times which was continuing because the international community had not yet found a solution to the basic problem. The repressive measures imposed by Israel on the populations in the occupied Arab territories, which were compelling them to emigrate, were intended to make room for Israeli settlements. Moreover, Israel did not permit Palestinians to return to their homeland, relegating them to the status of permanent refugees. The problem of the Palestine refugees had been dealt with as a humanitarian problem, which it was, but it was above all a political problem that awaited solution. That problem was the core of the Middle East crisis. It would not be resolved until the legitimate national rights of the people of Palestine to self-determination, to return to their homeland, to independence and

(Mr. Starčević, Yugoslavia)

to a State of their own were recognized. That, together with Israel's withdrawal from the Arab territories occupied since 1967 were the sole possible basis for a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement which would ensure peace and security for all the countries of that area.

9. In the meantime, the basic needs of the Palestinian refugees had to be met, and UNRWA had performed that task admirably for 30 years. The Commissioner-General had said that in providing those relief services, the Agency had gradually come to perform quasi-governmental functions as an agent for change and stability in the Middle East. It would be hard to imagine what would have been the position of the refugees had it not been for the existence of UNRWA and the devoted efforts of its staff. It was therefore disturbing to hear once again that the Agency was still plagued by financial difficulties. The current budget deficit of \$37 million could lead to further reductions in the level of services provided to the refugees. It was regrettable that a reduction in UNRWA's education programme was contemplated owing to insufficient funds, above all in view of the importance of educating young Palestinians for the future roles they would one day have to play in an independent and sovereign Palestinian State. Any further reductions in UNRWA's services would not only seriously aggravate the situation of the refugees but also seriously reduce the prospects of finding a solution to the problem of the Middle East. His delegation hoped that contributions by Member States would enable the Agency to overcome its current difficulties. Yugoslavia would continue to give assistance to the Palestinian people, directly as well as through the Agency.

10. Mr. HUSSAIN (Iraq) said that the matter of UNRWA was one of the most important aspects of the Palestinian problem. His delegation had always paid particular attention to the question of the Palestinian people because of the political, economic and social considerations involved. During the recent visit of the Commissioner-General to Baghdad, Iraq had taken the opportunity to reiterate its desire to co-operate with the Agency in the fulfilment of its objectives.

11. The lies of the Zionist representative and his distortion of history obliged Iraq to reply and remind him that the entity he represented had exceeded all bounds and defied the resolutions of the United Nations. The presence of that delegation was a farce which must be ended, so that it met with the same fate as the representative of the racist entity of South Africa in 1974. The expulsion of the Palestinians from their own country was not a reaction to the Arabs antagonism to the Jews, as the Zionist representative claimed. It was a plan well established by the international Zionist movement since the nineteenth century, the execution of which had begun at the beginning of the twentieth century with the full support of the colonialist forces which had divided the Arab nation into zones of French and United Kingdom influence.

12. The occupation of the territory of Palestine had not been fortuitous and had not started with the proclamation of the Zionist entity in 1948; it had been the inspiration of the works of Hertzl, the spiritual father of zionism, before the establishment of the Zionist entity, which had led to the expropriation of the land of the occupants. The plan had not yet been completed as the Zionist

(Mr. Hussain, Iraq)

aggression was continuing through the unleashing of wars and the occupation of Palestinian and Arab territory; the Zionists had changed the cultural environment of Palestine and were attempting to change the present and future history of the Islamic Arab nation. The implementation of the occupation plan was continuing: the proclamation of the annexation of Jerusalem had represented a defiance of the whole world. The chief of the terrorist band which had carried out those plans was the same individual who had been responsible for the execution of the Zionist expansion plan; he had stated in his book that not only was massacre justified but that the State of Israel would not exist without the victory of Deir Yassin and that in Jerusalem, as elsewhere, the Jewish forces had been the first to proceed from a defensive position to the attacks. The Zionist position regarding the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people was well known. The United Nations had adopted more than 250 resolutions on the subject.

13. So long as the Palestinian people were not allowed to return to their homeland, to exercise their right to self-determination and to establish their own State, the United Nations must bear the responsibility and must establish a just basis on which to assure the financing of the Agency, whose financial difficulties were described in paragraphs 68-83, 120-132, 148 and 181 of the report. Since UNRWA was under the influence of those States which contributed to its financing, his Government considered that in order to improve the Agency's budget position, its budget should be integrated in the regular budget of the United Nations.

14. His Government had contributed \$5 million to UNRWA's finances, over and above its regular annual contributions. The Zionist entity was the root cause of the current situation, and those States which had helped the Zionist State should assume the main responsibility for it. It was unacceptable to his Government that, after the Palestinians had been deprived of all their rights, they should also be deprived of their right to education and health.

15. He supported paragraphs 18, 19, 21 and 22 of the report of the Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (A/35/526) and, on behalf of his Government, thanked those Governments which had responded to resolution 34/52 C regarding offers of grants and fellowships to Palestinians. He also welcomed the work of other organizations such as IMCO, FAO, the ILO and UNESCO, and fully supported the suggestions regarding closer co-operation between UNRWA and other United Nations agencies. He also considered it essential that the Secretariat should implement resolution 33/112.

16. Mr. AL QALAM (Oman) said that the catastrophe in Algeria had been a human tragedy and expressed the hope that it would be alleviated through the joint efforts of the international community. The fate of the Palestinian people was another tragedy of the twentieth century and no solution had yet been found. The problem was not one of refugees but of fundamental rights, and the solution lay in the return of the Palestinians to their homeland and in the building of their own State. At the moment, the most important consideration was to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people. His delegation urged that UNRWA should be relocated within

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(Mr. Al Qalam, Oman)

the area of its operations as soon as possible. In addition to being a political responsibility, covering the Agency's deficit was a human responsibility, and it was essential that contributions to UNRWA's budget should be increased.

17. The United Nations had created Israel and it was therefore responsible for those whom that country had expelled. Israel had opposed every effort to find a solution to the problem and the time had arrived for the international community to put an end to its handling of the matter.

18. Mr. BEESLEY (Canada) said that, since its establishment in 1949, UNRWA had played an essential role in alleviating the misfortunes of the Palestinian people caused by the wars of 1948 and 1967. In food aid, in medical care, in education and in social services, the Agency had enabled Palestinians to sustain themselves despite their tragedy.

19. Since the Agency's inception, Canada had consistently supported UNRWA's work through financial contributions and food aid. In 1979, Canada had contributed approximately \$5 million in assistance and would continue its support. Despite those efforts and the similar efforts of many others, UNRWA's financial situation remained precarious since the Agency had been able to cope with its recurring deficits only by postponing essential projects or by cutting back valuable programmes. UNRWA was a constant daily reminder of the concern of the international community for the refugees and the moral obligation to assist them was shared by all.

20. Canada hoped that the examples of Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Japan, which had recently announced pledges to UNRWA, would be followed by others. Although the view of Governments regarding the political conflicts in the Middle East might differ, all must agree that the plight of the Palestinians remained a humanitarian problem which no Government could ignore.

21. The fact that, after so many years, the problem of the Palestinians remained was the result of political failure by the international community, which had not been able to create the positive environment that would permit the solution of the Arab-Israeli dispute. All must support concrete steps to solve the problem, taking account of the legitimate concerns of all sides and the need to safeguard the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area, including Israel. At the same time, a means must be found to enable the Palestinians to express themselves politically within a defined territory.

22. In order to realize the goals of justice and peace, however, the parties concerned must be prepared to abandon extreme positions and to contribute to the achievement of a consensus on which an agreement, if it was to be lasting, must be based. Only through the establishment of a just peace could UNRWA's work be brought to a successful conclusion. To achieve that objective, there must be understanding and dialogue between the parties and it was the responsibility of every Government represented in the United Nations to work towards that goal.

23. Mr. SLOTTE (Finland) said that, for many years past, serious financial problems had faced UNRWA and had hampered its orderly functioning. He recalled that, during the previous year, the Commissioner-General had said that the magnitude of the deficit might prove fateful for the Agency's possibilities of fulfilling its mandate. He had been pleased to note that additional contributions had been found to ensure the implementation of the current programmes but the situation in the near future seemed to be even worse than during the previous year. Finland therefore wished to join previous speakers in calling upon all Member States to consider the possibility of making more substantial contributions to UNRWA.

24. A comprehensive solution to the problems of the Palestinians - including the refugee problem - could only be reached within the framework of a just and lasting political settlement of the Middle East conflict on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions. The work of UNRWA could not replace such a settlement but his country hoped that UNRWA's activities could facilitate a peaceful solution. As long as the problems of the Palestinians were not solved within such a framework, UNRWA's humanitarian services in the form of relief assistance, health care and education remained indispensable. For that reason Finland supported the extension of UNRWA's mandate.

25. Finland's contribution for the coming fiscal year, subject to parliamentary approval, would total 1.2 million Finnish marks, representing an increase of approximately 13 per cent compared with the current year.

26. In conclusion, he expressed the condolences of his delegation to the delegation of Algeria for the catastrophe which had befallen the people of that country.

27. Mr. AL-ELFI (Democratic Yemen) stressed that the problem of the Palestinian refugees went beyond merely humanitarian considerations and that UNRWA should consider the political character of the problem. A number of United Nations resolutions had stipulated that the refugees should return to their homes and recover their property.

28. The objective that was being sought through reducing the activities of UNRWA while at the same time increasing the flow of the refugees, who had been forcibly expelled from their homeland, was to increase the pressure on the Palestinian people to accept compromise solutions, and which had been and would continue to be rejected by the whole Palestinian people. To cut back the activities of the Agency would be to abdicate responsibilities to an entire people, and the United States-Israeli plan for the liquidation of the Palestinian problem implied such a thrust.

29. Many realities had been distorted or forgotten during the evaluation of events in an effort to place aggressor and victim on an equal footing, thus frustrating UNRWA's operations. The only certain fact was that the Zionist occupation had obliged the Palestinian people to take up arms in defence of their legitimate rights.

(Mr. Al-Elfi, Democratic Yemen)

30. His delegation supported the suggestion that UNRWA headquarters should be relocated in Beirut or some other place in the area of operations in accordance with General Assembly resolution 33/112. He also requested the Agency to reconsider its decision to abandon its educational activities in Jordan and Syria, since that decision tended to further the imperialist plan to resettle the Palestinian people outside of their homeland. He also requested the Commissioner-General to provide information on measures taken by the Agency following the decision of the Israeli authorities to expel the UNESCO group which was supervising examinations in higher education.

31. There was a blatant contradiction between the statement in paragraph 31 of the report regarding the provision of accommodation in new housing projects and the reference in paragraph 39 to cases involving the demolition of refugee centres in the Gaza Strip.

32. The question of Palestine was the basic issue in the Middle East conflict. No attempts at a deal - such as that proposed by the United States - and no half-measures would lead to a just solution. The Palestinian people had lost everything and was seeking to recover its inalienable rights to freedom and independence under the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the sole representative of the Palestinian people.

33. Israel was still violating the provisions of the Charter, and was continuing its policy of colonization, expansion and the introduction of its own practices on Palestinian soil and in the occupied territories, as was clear from the recent annexation of Jerusalem, the establishment of further settlements on the West Bank, and the importation of foreigners to live in those settlements.

34. Israel could not indefinitely pursue that policy of aggression and expansion without the help of international imperialism led by the United States, which was providing a massive amount of economic, political and military aid for the continuation of a policy of destruction, genocide, colonialism and racism. Israel's alliance with the United States and the racist régime of South Africa was strengthening that policy.

35. Lastly, a just and lasting peace could be achieved only on the basis of the total and unconditional withdrawal of Israel from the occupied territories.

36. Mr. SMITH (Jamaica) said that the insufficiency of financial resources created great difficulties for the Agency, and the international community had the obligation to alleviate that injustice.

37. Jamaica had repeatedly stated that a genuine and comprehensive solution to the problem of the Middle East must be based on the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council. The crux of the problem was the tragedy of the Palestinians and the continued denial of their rights to self-determination, sovereignty and independence. He urged the international community to do all it could to increase the financial resources needed to maintain

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(Mr. Smith, Jamaica)

the services of the Agency at the requisite level, and to take the necessary political measures to solve the question of Palestine.

38. Mrs. SCHNITLER (Norway) said that the reports before the Committee showed that the unpredictable and insufficient financing of UNRWA caused serious problems in assigning priorities to various activities. The educational programme accounted for more than half of the Agency's expenditures in the current year, and that proportion was to increase in the following year. Since the educational programme was of particular importance to the refugees, both to the 300,000 pupils and to the 10,000 Palestinian teachers, it was gratifying to note that cut-backs in the educational programme had been avoided during 1980.

39. He commended the efforts of the Commissioner-General to clearly pinpoint the priorities of the Agency by drawing up a list of items to be approved only upon receipt of additional contributions. Such a practice would make it quite clear to the international community which activities would have to be reduced or abandoned if additional funds were not available.

40. Because of inflation and the growth of the school population, the projected deficit for 1981 would be the largest in the history of the Agency, and the only means of reducing it would be to cut back on educational and health programmes; but that could lead to destabilization in the social, economic and political spheres.

41. Until a just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian question had been achieved, it remained the responsibility of the entire international community to enable UNRWA to continue its invaluable services. For that reason, the mandate of UNRWA, which was to expire on 30 June 1981, should be extended. The reduction or termination of services provided by the Agency could only be detrimental to the efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace in the area and would constitute a grave disservice to the Palestinian refugees. Norway would continue to shoulder its responsibilities and increase its contribution to UNRWA for 1981. The exact amount would be announced at the Pledging Conference later in 1980.

42. UNRWA's financial problems could be solved only if more countries shared in the financing of the Agency. His delegation hoped that the General Assembly decision to renew the mandate of UNRWA would be accompanied by a more active participation in its financing by those countries which had so far made only relatively small contributions or none at all.

43. Mr. TATAD (Philippines) said that for the last 30 years UNRWA had been providing essential services to the Palestinian refugees; but, while the number of refugees and the cost of the Agency's programmes had increased, continuous shortfalls in income had not been avoided.

44. A comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Palestinian question on the basis of the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination, including the right to national existence as a State in their homeland, was the best possible

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(Mr. Tatad, Philippines)

remedy to the refugee problem. The right of all States in the region to exist within secure and recognized boundaries, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), should also be recognized. Palestinian refugees wishing to return to their homes and to live in peace with their neighbours should be enabled to do so, and those choosing not to return should receive just compensation for their property as envisaged in General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948.

45. His delegation shared the concern expressed by the Commissioner-General and the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA that, unless it were accompanied and supported by measures to ensure adequate financing, an extension of UNRWA's mandate beyond 30 June 1981 would not ensure the survival of the Agency in its current form. Although the task of providing education and training for the refugees had the highest priority among UNRWA programmes, it was precisely that programme that had been threatened the most by the critical level of the Agency's finances. Unless the financial situation improved in 1980, the Agency would be forced to withdraw financial support for its schools in Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic. Moreover, a comparison of the budgets for 1980 and 1981 showed that the estimated income for 1981 was lower than that for 1980. During the last two years, the basic flour ration of 10 kilograms per person had been reduced by one half. In 1981, the estimated deficit of \$70.4 million would exclude altogether any provisions for flour. He wished to express his Government's appreciation of the work accomplished by the Commissioner-General and the staff of the Agency. His Government would continue to support UNRWA activities as it had done hitherto; and it urged non-contributing Governments to contribute to the financing of the Agency, and contributing Governments to increase their contributions.

46. Lastly, he expressed his delegation's concern at reports that an increasing number of Agency staff members had been subjected to arrest and detention and other forms of harassment. His delegation reiterated its view that the headquarters of UNRWA should be relocated within the area of operations in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 33/112.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

47. The CHAIRMAN informed the members of the Committee that four draft resolutions had been submitted and would be circulated on the morning of Tuesday, 21 October, under the symbols A/SPC/35/L.5, L.6, L.7 and L.8. He expressed the hope that the Committee would conclude the general debate on agenda item 53 at its next meeting.

The meeting rose at 4.55 p.m.