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

Palestine refugees in the Gaza Strip

Report of the Secretary-General

1. The present report is submitted to the General Assembly in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 33/112 E of 18 December 1978, concerning Palestine refugees in the Gaza Strip, in which 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, to report to it at its thirty-fourth session on Israel's compliance with paragraph 1 of the resolution. In paragraph 1 of the resolution the Assembly called once more upon Israel (a) to take effective steps immediately for the return of the refugees concerned to the camps from which they were removed in the Gaza Strip and to provide adequate shelters for their accommodation and (b) to desist from further removal of refugees and destruction of their shelters.
2. By a note verbale dated 6 March 1979, addressed to the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations, the Secretary-General drew attention to his reporting responsibility under paragraph 2 of General Assembly resolution 33/112 E and requested the Government of Israel to forward to him, as soon as possible, any relevant information on the implementation of the respective provisions of the resolution.
3. By a note verbale dated 12 September 1979, the Permanent Representative of Israel conveyed to the Secretary-General his Government's comments on resolution 33/112 E, which, as in previous reports on this matter, are reproduced verbatim below:

"The Government of Israel wishes to draw attention to the stable situation prevailing in the Gaza District, and also to the vast amelioration in the economic and social condition of the refugees there.

"This situation continues to be a direct result of the measures taken

in 1971 by the Israel authorities against Arab terrorism, which had been rife in the Gaza District until then and which, for the most part, struck at and grievously harmed local residents, especially in the refugee camps.

"It is necessary to give some indication of the economic progress achieved since 1967 among refugees and non-refugees alike, since only against this background can the totally misguided nature of the resolution in question be fully evaluated.

"Since 1967, the Gaza District has experienced an unprecedented and continuous growth in GNP and a substantial rise in the standard of living of its inhabitants. The GNP increased almost 200 per cent between 1968 and 1977, while per capita income increased over 140 per cent during the same period. The benefits accruing from this advance have been widespread and considerable. There has been a building boom in both the private and public sectors. Ownership of consumer goods has sharply increased. For example, in 1967, only 3 per cent of households possessed refrigerators; in 1978, 41 per cent had them. In 1967, 3 per cent of households owned television sets; in 1978, the number had jumped to over 40 per cent. In 1967, few if any households possessed a modern cooking appliance; in 1978, more than half of them had them.

"Underpinning this encouraging economic climate is the fact that there continues to be virtually no unemployment in the Gaza District. Of the area's labour force, which numbers approximately 80,000, about one-third - both refugees and non-refugees - have sought and found work in Israel. The wages they earn, equal to those of Israeli workers, have consistently risen at a faster pace than the cost of living, enabling them to achieve a standard of living never enjoyed by them before.

"With the aim of alleviating the condition of the refugees, the Israel authorities have over the last few years completed a number of housing projects outside the camps. These allow refugees to move out of their unsatisfactory shelters in the camps into relatively spacious and well-appointed homes of their own (between 750 and 850 square feet of floor space), at modest cost and on favourable terms. More recently, the Israel authorities, in the light of their experience to date, have favoured projects designed to encourage the refugees to build their new homes by themselves. This is made possible by providing the refugees with plots of land prepared for building, together with a cash grant, so that the family can build a home to its own specifications.

"Having benefited from the economic progress described above, a significant number of refugees has chosen to take advantage of these opportunities. To date, just under 3,000 refugee families have found new homes in the housing projects sponsored and subsidized by the Israel authorities. As noted in the latest report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East for 1978-1979, those refugees who have purchased houses in projects developed by the Israel authorities or have purchased land and built their

own houses now have accommodation markedly superior to the shelters they formerly occupied.

"In other words, for the first time since 1948, refugees in the Gaza District have been given the possibility of moving out of the squalid conditions of the camps into decent housing, equipped with all the amenities normally available in modern dwellings. Indeed, Israel has been the first country in the Middle East to lend a real hand to the refugees and assist them, through land and monetary grants, in rehabilitation and the improvement of their social standards.

"Israel can have no part in any attempt to perpetuate the untold misery which has prevailed in the refugee camps. It will abide by its policy of offering the refugees houses outside the camps. Moreover, it will not adopt the frivolous course advocated in resolution 33/112 E, and will not evict any refugees living in new homes, which have been purchased with their own money and, in a growing number of cases, been built with their own hands.

"In the process of moving out of the camps, the formal status of the individuals concerned as refugees entitled to the services of UMRWA is not affected. Israel therefore rejects the mischievous suggestions reflected in the resolution in question, at a time when refugees are being enabled, without pressure or coercion, to move to far superior accommodation than they have ever known, and when the refugees themselves are eager to take advantage of this opportunity to better their lives.

"It is enough to see the economic and social progress attained by all the Arab population, including refugees, in the areas administered by Israel, in order to recognize resolution 33/112 E for what it is: namely, a hollow piece of Arab political warfare, stemming from a fear that Israel may go far towards solving the refugee problem in the Gaza District and in the other areas, and thus deprive the Arab States - which for thirty years have done little or nothing for the refugees - of a sordid propaganda tool to deploy against Israel."

4. The following information concerning Israel's compliance with paragraph 1 of General Assembly resolution 33/112 E is based on reports received from the Commissioner-General of UNRWA.
5. In the year under review there were no cases of punitive demolition of refugee shelters in the Gaza Strip. The Agency has, however, not yet secured any settlement in respect of its claim for compensation for refugee shelters demolished on punitive grounds in former years. 1/

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-second Session, Annexes, agenda item 55, document A/32/264 and Corr.1 and Add.1, para. 5 and *ibid.*, Thirty-third Session, Annexes, agenda item 54, document A/33/285, para. 5.

6. It will be recalled that in 1973 a survey was conducted jointly by the Agency and the Israeli occupying authorities in order to establish the facts regarding the condition of those families affected by the July-August 1971 demolitions. 2/ The survey covered 942 families selected on the basis of preliminary surveys made by the Agency of the conditions at the time of the 2,554 families affected by the 1971 demolitions. The joint survey established that 706 of 942 families were inadequately housed; of those 706 families, 266 were considered to be serious hardship cases, leaving 440 families recorded as inadequately housed.

7. Reference was made in paragraph 7 of last year's report to the offer made by the Israeli authorities of free housing in the el Amal housing project near Khan Yunis to the balance of the 266 refugee families on the hardship list established by the joint survey of 1973 and not yet provided with free replacement housing. The final position with regard to the rehousing of these families was that 77 families were rehoused free of charge (one family being rehoused in a rebuilt Agency shelter), 114 families were rehoused at subsidized rates and refused to move again for other shelters in el Amal Project free of charge, 69 families refused the offer of free housing in el Amal, 4 families had left the area, and 2 3/ had died.

8. In paragraph 8 of last year's report, it was mentioned that the Israeli authorities had declined to participate in a joint survey proposed by the Agency of the 440 families referred to in paragraph 6. The Agency, therefore, carried out its own survey in April-May 1979 and the results showed that 94 families had to be categorized then as cases of serious hardship, 146 families as unsatisfactorily housed and 151 families as adequately housed; 21 families had purchased houses, 21 families had left the area and 7 4/ had died. The Agency intends to take up this matter again with the authorities.

2/ In July-August 1971, the Israeli occupying authorities demolished a number of shelters in the Jabalia, Beach and Rafah camps, the stated purpose being to construct access roads within the camps. These demolitions affected 2,554 refugee families comprising 15,855 persons; a total of 7,729 shelter rooms were demolished. The developments in regard to the rehousing of these families are referred to in the Commissioner-General's report to the Secretary-General, which was transmitted to the General Assembly at its twenty-sixth session (A/8383 and Add.1), and in the Secretary-General's reports to the Assembly at its twenty-seventh session (Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-seventh Session, Annexes, agenda item 40, document A/8814), its twenty-eighth session (A/9155), its twenty-ninth session (ibid., Twenty-ninth Session, Annexes, agenda item 38, document A/9740), its thirtieth session (ibid., Thirtieth Session, Annexes, agenda item 54, document A/10253), its thirty-first session (ibid., Thirty-first Session, Annexes, agenda item 53, document A/31/240), its thirty-second session (ibid., Thirty-second Session, Annexes, agenda item 55, documents A/32/264 and Corr.1 and Add.1) and its thirty-third session (ibid., Thirty-third Session, Annexes, agenda item 54, document A/33/285).

3/ These families had been composed of single persons.

4/ These families had been composed of single persons.

9. Generally, the Israeli occupying authorities require that refugees who decide to purchase new housing demolish their camp shelters. In all cases, the shelters were demolished by the refugee families.

10. In the period from 1 July 1978 to 30 June 1979, a total of 275 families, comprising 1,693 persons, moved from their shelters in the Rafah, Khan Yunis, Deir el Balah, Maghazi, Beach and Jabalia camps to new accommodation in the housing projects established by the Israeli authorities (they did so against payment, except for four families who were rehoused free of charge as they were on the hardship list mentioned in para. 7 above); 71 other refugee families, comprising 387 persons, purchased plots of land in housing projects on the terms that they would construct houses conforming to one of the several available standard designs. They have since constructed and moved into new housing. A total of about 531 plots of land have been purchased to date. A total of 676 shelter rooms were demolished in the camps in this connexion.

11. The two new housing projects in Beit Lahia (near Jabalia camp) and Tal El Sultan (near Rafah camp) are still under development. To date, 22 new houses have been constructed and occupied in Beit Lahia while construction of new houses is still under way in Tal El Sultan.

12. With reference to the comments of the Government of Israel as set out in paragraph 3 above, the Commissioner-General of UNRWA has noted that the references to "squalid conditions of the camps" and "the untold misery which has prevailed in the refugee camps" were also included in the comments made by the Government of Israel last year (A/33/285, para. 3). The Commissioner-General has reiterated the observation he made in that report (*ibid.*, para. 12) that such references are more generalized than is warranted by the facts.
