



General Assembly

Fifty-sixth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
26 November 2002
English
Original: Russian

Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

Summary record of the 14th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 1 November 2001, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Hasmy (Malaysia)

Contents

Agenda item 87: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (*continued*)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 87: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

(A/56/13 and Add.1, A/56/375, A/56/382, A/56/420, A/56/421, A/56/430, A/56/290; A/55/1021-S/2001/735)
(continued)

1. **Mr. Osei** (Ghana) said that his delegation greatly appreciated the comprehensive report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) (A/56/13), which gave a complete picture of the work of the Agency in the provision of aid to Palestine refugees in order to promote their well-being and strengthen the self-reliance of their community. However, despite the Agency's unwavering devotion to the achievement of those goals and the positive effects of the services it provided, it was a matter of concern that its continuing budget deficit was eroding the quality of those services.

2. As a member of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA, Ghana greatly appreciated the vigorous efforts of the Commissioner-General to mobilize additional resources, particularly through emergency appeals. It was gratifying to acknowledge the positive response of the international community to those appeals, including the fact that the Agency's major donors had increased their annual contributions to its regular budget. He hoped that the Agency's efforts to improve the efficiency of operations and minimize costs would be complemented by increased resources, which were needed to meet all relevant costs and sustain the level of services available to the Palestine refugees. He welcomed the changes in the presentation and format of the 2001-2002 budget, which was based on a programme-based and results-oriented approach.

3. His delegation was pleased to observe that the Agency had been running some of its programmes, particularly in the health and education sectors, with other United Nations agencies and the League of Arab States. He urged the relevant agencies to identify avenues for embracing such cooperation beyond the funding of some international posts to allow coverage of recurrent programme costs.

4. Over the past 51 years of its existence, the Agency had demonstrated the capacity to cater for the humanitarian and other socio-economic needs of the

Palestine refugees. His delegation endorsed the conclusion contained in the report of the Commissioner-General that the maintenance of the quality and extent of the services of the Agency to the refugees was essential in the interest of the international community's humanitarian commitment and its interest in regional stability.

5. In conclusion, he stressed that until a final settlement of the Middle East problem had been achieved, the international community had an obligation to support UNRWA. His delegation therefore added its voice to the appeals for increased resources to be provided to the Agency.

6. **Mr. Requeijo Gual** (Cuba) said that, as a result of the complex situation currently existing in the Middle East and, in particular, the escalating violence in the occupied Palestinian territories, the hope of resolving the problems facing four million Palestine refugees was fading daily, becoming more and more like a pipe dream. In those conditions, the work of UNRWA was acquiring particular significance. The report before the Committee bore witness to that, reflecting the varied activities of the Agency in carrying out its humanitarian mission which included the task of improving the living conditions of the Palestine refugees.

7. At the same time, the Agency's budget deficit and the serious insufficiency of its resources, which in turn undermined its capacity to respond appropriately to the ever-increasing demand, were cause for concern.

8. His delegation was grateful to those States and agencies which were supporting UNRWA, and associated itself with the appeal for the volume of resources provided to the Agency to be maintained and increased, since those resources were essential for it to carry out the tasks before it.

9. It was regrettable that the provision of resources from the general budget to fund university scholarships and shelter rehabilitation had been discontinued and that the Government of Israel was maintaining the restrictions which made it difficult for the Agency to carry out its functions normally.

10. The financial situation of the Agency demanded that urgent measures should be taken by the entire international community, and above all by the developed countries. Cuba, for its part, would continue to provide political support to UNRWA. Despite the

economic difficulties it was experiencing it would continue to offer young Palestinians the opportunity to receive the education they needed in Cuba. In that connection, he emphasized that 346 Palestinians had been educated in Cuba between 1961 and 2000.

11. Cuba was more convinced than ever that UNRWA was a stabilizing factor in a volatile region and believed in the lasting importance of the Agency's work, which deserved universal support.

12. **Mr. Brattskar** (Norway) said that, during the past 12 months, the situation in the Palestinian territory had deteriorated dramatically. The confrontations had undermined the Middle East peace process, as well as the process of social and economic development in the region. The Palestine refugees were among those who had suffered most as a result. To them it was all a painful reminder of the past, making the prospect of a just and viable solution more distant.

13. At the present critical juncture, the role of UNRWA was no less indispensable than it had been in the past, and it was extremely important that it should be given the resources it needed to fulfil its mandate and maintain the level and quality of its services.

14. The conflict in the Middle East could not be resolved by military means. The only way for the Israelis and the Palestinians to ensure security was to embark on the road to peace; that could only be achieved on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) of 22 November 1967 and 338 (1973) of 22 October 1973.

15. Even when a peaceful solution was found however, there would be a need for the services of UNRWA for some considerable time. A healthy financial situation within UNRWA was therefore of vital interest to the refugees and their host countries. In that regard, Norway highly appreciated the efforts of UNRWA to meet the growing needs of the Palestine refugees in spite of the current financial crisis, and it was especially appreciative of the current reform process.

16. Norway remained committed to maintaining the level of its support and would contribute about \$11 million to the UNRWA General Fund for the year 2002. In 2001, as well as its annual contribution, the Norwegian Government had responded to the first and third emergency appeals by contributing approximately

\$1.3 million. In addition, it had provided \$700,000 for the reconstruction of refugee housing in Gaza.

17. He stressed the importance of donors honouring their pledges. It was the responsibility of the international community to enable UNRWA to carry out the tasks entrusted to it by the General Assembly.

18. **Mr. Mekdad** (Syrian Arab Republic) expressed appreciation to the Commissioner-General of UNRWA and thousands of his colleagues for their efforts to relieve the sufferings of the Palestine refugees. The donor countries should also be thanked for their financial and material support for UNRWA.

19. Once more, the report of the Commissioner-General gave grounds for hope that there would be an improvement in the situation of UNRWA that would enable it to satisfy the needs of the Palestine refugees, even if only the most basic needs. It also reflected the suffering which had become the lot of the refugees, initially when they had been driven from their land and later when Israel had used aircraft and artillery in an attempt to destroy those in the refugee camps.

20. Israel's efforts to hinder UNRWA, and its Commissioner-General in particular, from carrying out the tasks entrusted to them by the General Assembly, drew special attention at a time when the Millennium Declaration and other core documents spoke of the need to help refugees and displaced persons and to work for their peaceful and successful return to their homes.

21. No one who followed the events taking place in the region could fail to notice that the governments of Israel, as they succeeded one another, were seeking to destroy the peace process and by their actions were causing an escalation in the violence.

22. Of special concern was the information in the report about the decrease that had been noted over the past five years in the amount of funding per refugee, while the number of refugees was increasing. At the World Conference on Human Rights and the Millennium Summit it had been emphasized that the international community must demonstrate solidarity to alleviate the lot of the Palestine refugees and improve their living conditions. The Syrian Arab Republic had provided a safe haven for some of the refugees and was offering them a number of services, entailing expenditure which greatly exceeded the amount of assistance provided by the donor countries. It was

gratifying that those facts were reflected in the report of the Commissioner-General.

23. It was the responsibility of the international community to resolve the problem of the Palestine refugees, and UNRWA must therefore continue its work until the problem was completely resolved, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948. The Syrian Arab Republic insisted on the need to maintain all UNRWA programmes in all five of the areas in which it operated. The funds in question must not be transferred either to the Palestinians or to the host countries.

24. In the view of the Syrian Arab Republic, which had paved the way to peace by taking part in the Madrid conference, the policy of provocation pursued by Israel was not promoting a comprehensive and lasting peace that would enable the Palestinians to return to their land.

25. **Mr. Kasoulides** (Cyprus) thanked the Commissioner-General of UNRWA for his thorough and comprehensive report and paid a tribute to his dedication and steadfastness, which had enabled the Agency to keep going in the current adverse conditions. He also expressed appreciation to UNRWA, which through its programmes of education, health and relief and social services was struggling to alleviate the hardship of 4 million Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, the West Bank and Gaza. As a European Union associated State, Cyprus aligned itself with the statement made by the representative of Belgium on behalf of the European Union, but wished to refer to the latest developments in the region, which had created a very dangerous situation and caused a sharp deterioration in the situation of the Palestine refugees, particularly in Gaza and the West Bank.

26. He was proud to note the generous assistance provided by the international community and the donors and noted in particular the self-sacrifice of the staff of UNRWA, who were providing relief to the most disadvantaged members of the Palestinian community — the Palestine refugees. That was the least that the international community could offer to the refugees, who had been displaced for over 50 years and were still living in conditions of overcrowding, deprivation and abject poverty.

27. Cyprus attached great importance to the enhancement of the economic and social conditions of

the Palestinian people and fervently hoped for lasting peace and security in the Middle East. Not only did its geographical situation bring Cyprus close to the Palestinian people; the Cypriots had also experienced deprivation connected with the displacement following the Turkish invasion in 1974. Although that human suffering had largely abated in Cyprus, the Cypriots still longed to return to their homes and properties and thus exercise their inalienable and fundamental rights inscribed in United Nations resolutions and in international law.

28. In connection with the activities of UNRWA, he expressed concern about the serious financial difficulties that the Agency was encountering and stressed the need for UNRWA operations to be placed on a secure financial footing. His delegation joined in the appeals for additional and increased contributions, with early payments, in order to assist the Agency to alleviate the situation of millions of Palestinians. Cyprus was assisting in its own way and had created its own programme of assistance, including technical assistance and training of Palestinian officials and civil servants in Cyprus.

29. The work of UNRWA should continue until the solution was found to the refugee issue, and even in the subsequent period. The UNRWA programmes helped the Palestinians to preserve their identity and culture and during those trying times would show them that they had not been forgotten and would provide for their vital needs. In conclusion, he expressed the hope that the situation would soon return to normal and that the peace process would be resumed and would ultimately succeed.

30. **Mr. Al-Otaibi** (Kuwait) thanked the Commissioner-General of UNRWA for his report, which gave a full account of the efforts of UNRWA staff to discharge their difficult responsibilities in extremely complicated conditions. The work of UNRWA concerning health, education and social services in five regions of the Agency's activity — the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic — was vital and should undoubtedly be continued until the problem of the Palestine refugees had been solved. It was to be hoped that, despite the Agency's financial difficulties, services to the Palestine refugees would not be halted. It was extremely important for the Agency to be active in all five areas without discrimination.

31. Kuwait had provided regular assistance to the Palestine refugees and made possible numerous infrastructure projects of the Palestinian Authority; it had also fulfilled its obligations under resolutions of the League of Arab States. Kuwait had contributed \$150 million to the Jerusalem Fund and other funds created to preserve the Palestinian and Arab character of East Jerusalem. In addition, since it was convinced that the cause of the Palestinian people was just, Kuwait was continuing to support UNRWA and was regularly meeting its financial obligations towards the Agency.

32. The problem of the Palestine refugees was not being solved because of Israel's actions and its refusal to implement the resolutions adopted by the international community. The sufferings of the Palestinian people had further intensified as a result of the repressive measures adopted by Israel on the pretext of ensuring its national security. However, security considerations could not justify Israel's policy of repression against the civilian population, which had resulted in the killing of a number of Palestinians, including children. The blockade of the territory, demolition of homes and confiscation of land to build settlements were contrary to the basic principles of international law and violated the provisions of the fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.

33. Justifying its actions against the Palestinians on grounds of national security, Israel was in fact trying to force the Palestinians to make additional concessions. Kuwait was concerned that, by trying to tighten the noose, Israel was obstructing the humanitarian activities of UNRWA, thereby violating the 1946 Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations and the 1967 Agreement between UNRWA and the Government of Israel. If deliveries of humanitarian supplies were halted, the humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories would deteriorate further.

34. Kuwait expressed full solidarity with the Palestinian people and supported its struggle for the exercise of all the rights guaranteed in the resolutions of the United Nations. It appealed to the Government of Israel to implement the resolutions underlying the peace process, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), to espouse the principle of "land for peace" and to implement all the agreements concluded with the Palestinian Authority in the context of the peace process.

35. In conclusion, he reiterated to the Commissioner-General and his staff that Kuwait would continue to support the Palestinian people and UNRWA.

36. **Mr. Johnson** (United States of America) said that his country had long supported the work of UNRWA and continued to be the largest single donor to the Agency. Given the difficult circumstances faced by the Palestine refugees, the work of UNRWA was as indispensable as it had ever been. His delegation commended the dedication of the staff of UNRWA and the measures that had been taken by UNRWA to enhance the efficiency of its operations.

37. Although his delegation would like to be in a position to support the entire package of resolutions on UNRWA in order to express a vote of confidence in the Agency and its staff, it could not support language which would prejudice the outcome of the final status negotiations between the parties. That would not serve the cause of assisting the Palestine refugees and would not bring the establishment of comprehensive peace in the Middle East any closer. In conclusion, he reaffirmed that it was his country's intention to continue to provide a high level of support for UNRWA.

38. **Mr. Karagöz** (Turkey) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made at the previous meeting by the representative of Belgium on behalf of the European Union, but that it wished to elaborate on its Government's point of view on certain issues, including the situation in the region.

39. The situation in the Middle East did not afford grounds to believe that a lasting peace, security and stability would be achieved in the near future. The vicious circle of violence had already claimed the lives of over 900 people, mostly Palestinians. Turkey deplored those tragic events. Both parties had a responsibility to curb the violence and de-escalate tension in the area.

40. It was now more evident than ever that the only way to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the Middle East problem was the resumption of negotiations between the parties. In that connection, he noted with satisfaction the support of the vast majority of the international community for the valuable work of the Sharm el-Sheikh Fact-finding Committee and said that the recommendations in its report, together with Mr. Tenet's understandings, constituted significant milestones towards the

resumption of the peace process. His delegation also added its voice to the many appeals to the two parties to exercise responsible leadership and maximum restraint. The instability in the region was depriving the people of the Middle East of the opportunity to achieve true prosperity and growth.

41. He was glad to note that, despite the tragic developments, UNRWA was continuing to play its crucial role in addressing the vital humanitarian needs of the Palestinian refugees. With its half a century of experience of humanitarian assistance, UNRWA was a key element in the solution of the problem of the Palestinian refugees. The comprehensive annual report of the Commissioner-General provided a clear picture of the achievements and the challenges in the work of UNRWA. He commended the Commissioner-General on his efforts and reiterated his Government's full confidence in him and his staff.

42. Turkey remained firmly committed to the goals and mandate of UNRWA and was convinced that the uninterrupted provision of its services in such difficult times was essential to the restoration of calm and stability. He regretted that the violence, closures and restraint on freedom of movement in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank were creating obstacles that impaired the Agency's ability to run its operations smoothly, and called for the easing of restrictions on the movement of staff and humanitarian supplies by UNRWA.

43. He referred to the dire socio-economic conditions faced by 4 million Palestinian refugees, who were most affected by the current tragic developments. As a result of the closure of the Palestinian territories and other Israeli measures, more than 76 per cent of the Palestinians living in the refugee camps had been pushed below the poverty line.

44. The current financial crisis of UNRWA continued to be a serious cause of concern. His delegation fully supported the emergency appeals launched by UNRWA in order to overcome existing difficulties, and welcomed the tireless efforts of the Commissioner-General to widen the spectrum of donors. A collective approach and pragmatic measures were needed to resolve such humanitarian problems. In that connection, his delegation fully supported the recommendations in the report of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA, of which it was Chairman. It welcomed the new policies and the

current phase in the reform process focusing on improving the effectiveness of resource management and the strengthening of planning capabilities.

45. His delegation had carefully examined the other reports of the Secretary-General on the agenda item under consideration and hoped that the problems referred to in those reports would be studied carefully by the parties concerned and that mutually beneficial solutions would be found.

46. He expressed his Government's readiness and sincere wish to revitalize the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine established under General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

47. In conclusion, he wished to register a protest in connection with the remarks of an earlier speaker concerning Turkey. It was completely irrelevant in the context of the agenda item under consideration and distorted the real situation in Cyprus. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus would give an appropriate reply to that statement.

48. **Mr. Takahashi** (Japan) said that his country's Government commended the Commissioner-General and his staff for their efficient work and for their efforts to improve the financial situation of the Agency. As one of the major donors, Japan attached great importance to the activities of UNRWA, which, by its efforts to improve the social and economic conditions of the Palestine refugees, was also contributing substantially to the stabilization of the situation in the region. Despite its own financial difficulties, Japan was determined to continue its humanitarian assistance through UNRWA and in so doing to provide support to the Middle East peace process. With regard to the serious financial difficulties experienced by UNRWA, he urged Member States, in particular the Arab States, to provide additional financial support to the Agency.

49. Japan was deeply concerned over the tense situation in the region and urged the Palestinians and the Israelis to do their utmost to put an end to the violence. In light of the situation in the Middle East, UNRWA was continuing to play a vital role in the region, and Japan therefore reiterated its resolute support for the Agency's activities.

50. **The Chairman** said that the meeting would be suspended for technical reasons.

The meeting was suspended at 11.05 a.m. and resumed at 11.10 a.m.

51. **Mr. Tekaya** (Tunisia) thanked the Commissioner-General and the staff of UNRWA for their tireless efforts to relieve the sufferings of the Palestine refugees, the countries which received refugees for their contribution to that endeavour, and donor countries for their support for the Agency. Since it had been in existence, UNRWA had demonstrated the important role it played in the lives of refugees and the firmness of its ties with them.

52. His delegation reaffirmed that UNRWA must continue its work in all areas of its activity and must maintain the extent and quality of its services, in accordance with the increasing needs of the Palestine refugees, until they were able to exercise their inalienable rights within the framework of a just and comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian question. It was a matter of concern that the Agency's financial difficulties were so great that the Commissioner-General had been forced to call for special intervention. His delegation therefore called on the international community, and first and foremost the donor countries, to make special efforts to help the Agency in this critical situation.

53. Apart from its financial difficulties, UNRWA was, on a daily basis, encountering a whole series of obstacles which were the result of the occupying Power resorting to closures in the occupied Palestinian territories, preventing goods and supplies from being delivered to their appointed destinations, setting up checkpoints and introducing restrictions on the freedom of movement of Agency staff. In addition, Israel was violating the rights of the Palestinians and stifling their economic livelihoods. The statistics produced by the Commissioner-General showed that the living conditions of the Palestine refugees had worsened significantly.

54. Since September 2000, an extremely serious situation had prevailed in the Middle East as a result of Israel's policy of occupation and persecution. That situation could be expected to persist until the prime cause of confrontation and tension, namely Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories, was overcome.

55. He reiterated his country's support for UNRWA and reaffirmed that, as a part of a just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian question, the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people must be taken into

account, including the right of the Palestine refugees to return or to receive compensation in accordance with United Nations resolutions, first and foremost General Assembly resolution 194 (III). That would enable security and stability to be achieved in the region.

56. **The Chairman** said that the meeting would be suspended for technical reasons.

The meeting was suspended at 11.20 a.m. and resumed at 11.30 a.m.

57. **Mr. Kaid** (Yemen) said that in the world today there was, on the one hand, continuing repression, oppression and tragedy and, on the other hand, louder and louder calls for "human rights", "freedom" and "democracy". Seemingly, those words were applicable only to certain selected countries. When one of them suffered, the whole world rushed to help, regardless of the possible consequences of its actions.

58. The sufferings of the Palestinian people as a result of Israel's policy and its manifest complete disregard for United Nations resolutions and the norms of international law were spelled out in detail in the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA. However, he wondered whether Israel would be able to continue its actions against defenceless people without encouragement and support from without, and why Israel was disregarding the privileges and immunities of the international staff. What about the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law? And what about the role of the international community, which was unanimous when it came to some issues, yet disregarded others?

59. He asked why the Palestinians were compelled to live in exile while the occupiers were freely exploiting their resources and why the Palestinians were still being called upon to exercise restraint when tanks, artillery and aircraft were being used against them. Was "restraint" to be understood as submissiveness in the face of total destruction?

60. Finally, his delegation wished to express its gratitude to that body which had not remained indifferent to the fate of the Palestine refugees and was increasing its financial assistance.

61. **Mr. Al-Harthy** (Saudi Arabia) thanked UNRWA and its Commissioner-General for the humanitarian and other assistance that they were providing to the Palestine refugees in all social and economic areas. In

the report, the Commissioner-General gave the international community a quite objective picture of the tragic situation of the Palestinian people and provided information on the Agency's serious financial problems and the difficulties encountered by it in its work because of obstacles created by the Israeli authorities.

62. Saudi Arabia had always assisted by making financial contributions in the interests of the Palestine refugees. Each year it gave US\$ 1.2 million, in addition to US\$ 2.4 million provided as emergency assistance. Because of its sizeable contribution, Saudi Arabia supported the recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions concerning the Agency's budget.

63. In conclusion, his delegation expressed confidence in UNRWA and support for its humanitarian activities in the interests of the Palestine refugees.

64. **Mr. Shinkaiye** (Nigeria) expressed appreciation to the Commissioner-General of UNRWA for his comprehensive report and praised the work of the Commissioner-General and his staff over the past year.

65. Nigeria was very concerned about the deteriorating political, social and economic situation in the region, which had created worse living conditions for the refugees and serious challenges to the Agency's work. Restrictive measures imposed by Israel on UNRWA activities were making it difficult for the Agency to deliver emergency relief and to repair shelters in the refugee camps; the Nigerian delegation therefore urged Israel to grant the Agency unrestricted access to refugees.

66. The services of UNRWA remained an important part of international efforts to assist the Palestinians to achieve self-determination and Nigeria therefore supported the extension of the Agency's mandate for another three years. It also appealed to the United Nations and international donors to increase their financial assistance to UNRWA to enable it to execute its mandate. In that connection, Nigeria expressed gratitude to Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic for hosting Palestine refugees, despite limited economic resources, and urged them to continue those efforts.

67. The Agency was to be commended for keeping donor countries permanently informed of its activities by issuing periodic reports. He urged UNRWA in future

to coordinate its efforts closely with those of other organizations whose activities were directly related to the work of the Agency. He welcomed the innovations introduced by the Agency to enhance its financial status and give some measure of independence to some refugees.

68. The ultimate solution to the refugee problem was a resolution of the whole Middle East problem. Nigeria, which was fully aware of the difficulties in that area, nevertheless urged all parties concerned to demonstrate the political will to restore peace in the region.

69. **Mr. Al-Hinai** (Oman) thanked the Commissioner-General for the work done and for the report submitted, which clarified many aspects of the Agency's work and described the difficulties it faced.

70. The Agency had been providing services to the Palestine refugees for over 50 years and those services had undoubtedly lightened the refugees' burden. It appeared from the report that the Agency was currently experiencing financial and technical difficulties that were complicating its work. There was not only the Israeli occupation and destruction of the Palestinian economic infrastructure but also the placement of obstacles in the way of the work of UNRWA staff and even of the Commissioner-General himself.

71. It was obvious that Israel was not implementing the agreements reached and was not respecting the rights of the Palestinians and other peoples of the region. In view of the seriousness of the matter and the difficult conditions in which the Agency was working, Oman wished once again to reaffirm: firstly, the Palestine refugees' right of return, proclaimed in General Assembly resolution 194 (III) and other relevant resolutions; secondly, the need for UNRWA to continue its work in the region; thirdly, the need for the international community to force Israel to end its inhuman actions in the occupied territories; and, fourthly, the importance of donor countries providing further financial support for the activities of UNRWA. He also noted the constructive role played by the countries hosting refugees and by all those who helped to relieve the Palestinians' burden inside and outside the territories.

72. **Mr. Pitso** (Botswana), observing that the Agency was working in difficult conditions, because of the new wave of violence in the Middle East, expressed appreciation to the Commissioner-General and his staff

for their perseverance in delivering assistance to needy Palestinians.

73. Botswana took a special interest in the activities of UNRWA because it believed that the Palestine refugees were a vulnerable group which experienced various forms of discrimination and would continue to need basic services in the areas of education, health and social assistance. The Agency continued to play an important role in that connection, and its mandate should therefore be extended again after June 2002.

74. The viability of the UNRWA programmes depended on an assured financial base, and the Agency had repeatedly pleaded to donor countries and agencies for additional financial resources. In that connection, he called on donors to provide adequate resources to enable the Agency to adapt its role to the changing political situation in the Middle East. He also urged the United Nations to allocate adequate funding to the Agency in its regular budget for 2002-2003.

75. Unfortunately, the environment in which UNRWA was working had undergone sudden changes for the worse, with serious implications for the work of the Agency. It was also regrettable that the occupying Power was placing obstacles in the way of the work of the Commissioner-General and his staff, particularly by imposing restraints on their movements. That was incompatible with the letter and spirit of the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations and the agreement between the Agency and the Government of Israel. In addition, the provisions of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, were not being observed.

76. The Agency's financial problems, the escalation of the Middle East crisis and the imposition of restrictions on the movement of Agency staff had resulted in an increase in unemployment among the Palestinians and had crushed the hopes placed in UNRWA. In that connection, his delegation again appealed to donors to pledge assistance to the work of the Agency, which was so important for the refugees.

77. **Mr. Al-Marri** (Qatar) thanked the Commissioner-General of UNRWA for having prepared the report on the Agency's work over the past year.

78. Since the beginning of the "Al-Aqsa intifada" in September 2000, UNRWA had had to work in extremely difficult conditions. Moreover, as the report

clearly showed, its resources had been substantially cut back. His country was seriously concerned about the situation of the Palestine refugees in the occupied territories and condemned the violence by the occupying forces, which had resulted in the deaths of over 800 people. Israel was isolating Palestinian towns and villages, and barring access to them for the staff of UNRWA. He called upon Israel to desist from that practice and to cease using force against peaceful inhabitants.

79. The United Nations bore a special responsibility for the fate of the refugees. By its actions against the Palestine refugees, Israel was throwing out a challenge to the international community and breaching international conventions and resolutions of the United Nations, as well as the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.

80. The Palestine refugees, dispersed throughout the region as a result of the conflicts of 1946 and 1948, had an inalienable right of return to their homes, as stated in General Assembly resolution 194 (III) and subsequent resolutions. Israel's obstinacy and its resort to crude force could not prevent the Palestinians from exercising that right, or indeed the right to recover their property and lands occupied by Israel in 1967. Israel should also not hinder the creation by the Palestinians of their own State with its capital in Jerusalem.

81. In that respect, it should be noted that over the previous 50 years, UNRWA had played a key role in assisting the Palestine refugees. As the report of the Commissioner-General plainly showed, the social and economic situation of the refugees was still unstable, despite the best endeavours of UNRWA. The Agency must offer its valuable services to refugees not only in the West Bank and Gaza, but also in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, especially now with the general worsening of the situation in the occupied territories, including Jerusalem.

82. Qatar was especially concerned about the continuing financial difficulties of UNRWA, which must inevitably have an impact on the volume and quality of the services it provided. He called upon the donor institutions to increase their financial assistance to the Agency to enable it to increase its activities to keep up with the growing numbers of refugees. In that connection, he noted that Qatar had never stopped helping the refugees, both through UNRWA and in other ways.

83. In any event, assistance through UNRWA was merely a temporary measure and did not release the international community from its responsibility to exercise pressure on Israel to fulfil its obligations towards the Palestinians. The international community must also fulfil its own obligations to the Palestinians by helping them to create their own State with its capital in Jerusalem. His delegation called for the implementation of all United Nations resolutions on the question and emphasized that the Palestinians must exercise their inalienable right to self-determination. The task before the international community was to bring about a comprehensive settlement of the problem of the Palestine refugees, in accordance with Security Council resolution 242 (1967) and other Council resolutions, and General Assembly resolution 194 (III) and other Assembly resolutions. It should be pointed out in that connection that the fourth Geneva Convention extended to the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem. Israel must, in addition, comply with the provisions of Articles 104 and 105 of the Charter of the United Nations and the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations, which guaranteed the security of UNRWA personnel in the occupied territories.

84. **Mr. Al-Zayani** (Bahrain) said that the report of the Commissioner-General listed many difficulties encountered by UNRWA and its staff over the past year as a result of the restrictive measures adopted by the Israeli occupying forces and their flagrant breaches of the immunities and privileges of the Agency and its staff, including the Commissioner-General himself. The report contained a multitude of details which gave a vivid picture of the difficult circumstances in which the Agency was working.

85. The disastrous situation of the Palestine refugees had now persisted for over 50 years and their living conditions had deteriorated further as a consequence of the complete destabilization of economic life in the occupied territories resulting from the policy of the Israeli occupying forces to seal off areas inhabited by Palestinians and restrict their movements. As a result, the proportion of Palestinians living below the poverty threshold had reached 64 per cent, and in the Palestine refugee camps it had risen to 76 per cent.

86. As before, UNRWA was experiencing a financial shortfall and urgent measures were needed to overcome it. Such measures were being taken. He drew attention in that regard to the integrated comprehensive

approach, based on five-year development plans drawn up with the support of the donor countries.

87. His delegation shared the concern about the Agency's financial situation and was grateful to the donors, especially the key donors, who had responded generously to the emergency appeals. It was most appreciative of the efforts made by UNRWA to ensure maximum effectiveness in the use of existing resources and hoped that the financial difficulties would be overcome, that the measures to reduce costs would not have an adverse effect on its basic function of providing services to the Palestine refugees, and that it would ultimately succeed in not just maintaining but expanding them.

88. The problem of the Palestine refugees, despite the humanitarian component, remained essentially a political problem which underlay the Palestinian problem as a whole. The continuing need for the Agency's work was due to the fact that neither the repatriation of the refugees nor the payment of compensation to them, as provided in paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III), had yet taken place. The work of UNRWA would therefore continue to be needed and the demand for its services would not decrease until there was a final settlement of the Palestinian problem in accordance with the relevant General Assembly resolutions, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and the principle of "land for peace".

89. **Mr. Benzioni** (Israel) said that his country supported the humanitarian work of UNRWA on behalf of Arab refugees and appreciated the efforts of the Agency in providing important services, especially in the fields of health care and education.

90. The work of UNRWA had been particularly difficult during the past year during which the peace process had been replaced by waves of violence and terror launched against Israel. That violence and terrorism, together with the necessary defensive measures taken by Israel, had had a significant detrimental effect on the economy, human security and the living conditions of all peoples in the region, including the refugees, and had adversely affected the work of UNRWA.

91. In order fully to comprehend the scale of the crisis, one only had to compare the economic statistics with those for the previous year. The economic growth of earlier years had been based on optimism and hope

generated by the peace process. The Palestinian campaign of violence had driven out hope of cooperation and had had a calamitous effect on the regional economy. The achievements of the past had been undone and it was unfortunately unlikely that there would soon be a return to earlier levels of economic and social exchange and openness.

92. Within the framework of the peace process, beginning in 1993, Israel and the Palestinians had agreed that the subject of refugees would be one of the issues discussed during the final status negotiations. His delegation therefore could not accept efforts by third parties to predetermine the outcome of such future bilateral negotiations, as the resolutions considered by the Committee tended to do. That being so, Israel did not consider it appropriate to discuss the related issues in the Committee. However, since several delegations, in the context of the debate, had made unsubstantiated accusations against his country on that matter, his delegation was compelled to respond.

93. The refugee problem in the Middle East had been created by the rejection by the Arab side of General Assembly resolution 181 (II) of 29 November 1947. That had been followed by massive, unprovoked aggression against the Jewish community in an attempt to prevent the creation of the nascent State of Israel. Israel had managed to fend off the attacks of the local Palestinian Arab forces and of five invading Arab armies in the war of independence in 1948-1949. Not only has the long and bloody war given rise to the creation of Palestinian Arab refugees, but the Arab States had also driven out hundreds of thousands of innocent Jews from their territories. Most of the members of those Jewish communities had resettled in Israel where they were welcomed and absorbed into Israeli society, in sharp contrast to the generally hostile reception accorded to Palestine refugees by the Arab world.

94. It was inconceivable that for 50 years the Arabs had demanded that the rest of the world should pay for a problem for which, both historically and morally, they were responsible. The only notable exception was the example of Jordan which had sought to integrate Palestine refugees into Jordanian society. Nevertheless, all the Arab States combined contributed only 1.9 per cent of the budget of UNRWA.

95. It was a striking fact that the same aggressors who, 53 years previously, had sought to deny by force the inalienable right of the Jewish people to self-determination were now demanding that their would-be victim should compensate them for the consequences of their own failed aggression. The effrontery of such demands was outrageous.

96. Israel, however, continued to support a solution to that difficult problem within the framework of permanent status negotiations which would respect the legitimate rights and needs of all peoples in the region.

97. Israel was genuinely sympathetic to the humanitarian plight of the refugees, wished the Palestinians well and hoped that they might turn their energies to productive economic and social development. In that context, Israel maintained its long-term policy and cooperated with UNRWA on a mutually agreed basis consistent with national legislative provisions.

98. Since 11 September 2001 it had become clear that effective measures against a terrorist threat often entailed inconvenience, delays and even financial cost to large numbers of innocent civilians. Under such emergency conditions in which the threat was clear and real, the majority of citizens accepted such costs as reasonable and necessary. Even in the United Nations, security considerations had resulted in considerable limitations being placed upon the diplomatic corps. In Israel, the past year had been a most difficult time. Almost every day there were further terrorist attacks the overwhelming majority of which originated in areas under the administration of the Palestinian Authority. Any fair-minded observer would agree that the measures taken by Israel were not only justified but that it was obliged to impose them in order to protect the lives of its citizens. By their nature, such measures were intrusive and in some cases inevitably applied to UNRWA personnel so as to ensure the security of all.

99. Unfortunately, the Commissioner-General had chosen to ignore the context of the security measures, which were meant to protect all civilians, including the employees of UNRWA. They were not arbitrary nor was their application to UNRWA without legal basis. On the contrary, the 1967 Comay-Michelmores agreement, which governed relations with UNRWA in areas administered by Israel, expressly and unequivocally allowed for the adoption of measures based on security requirements. On the other hand, it

seemed that a blanket assurance that no UNRWA employee posed a potential security threat was based either on wishful thinking or on a wilful refusal to admit that Israeli citizens faced a real and deadly threat. The security measures taken by Israel were thus based on a realistic assessment of the terrorist threat it faced. At the same time, the Government of Israel understood the difficulties that those measures created and was ready to be flexible in discussing with UNRWA any practical solutions to those problems, solutions that would facilitate the work of UNRWA but not to the detriment of Israel's interests. As long as UNRWA failed to recognize that a genuine security emergency did indeed exist and that it did of necessity affect everyone, it would be impossible to find reasonable and imaginative solutions.

100. UNRWA was deeply involved in the education of a large proportion of Palestinian children. It was therefore most disturbing that textbooks and curricula in UNRWA schools continued to propagate hatred of Israel rather than promote peace. The reference in paragraph 55 of the report of the Commissioner-General to "teaching tolerance" sadly lacked any genuine content. The existing programmes were not only severely limited, but did not even pretend to teach tolerance for Israel or the Israelis or peace. In that one significant area where UNRWA could make a real contribution to peace, it seemed to have avoided its responsibilities.

101. Israel continued to support the humanitarian mission of UNRWA, but it could not accept the one-sided and subjective treatment in the report of UNRWA of the political problems in the region. Both the report and the proposed annual resolutions were too politicized and biased and undermined the very aims that the sponsors of the resolutions claimed to hold dear.

102. His delegation could only hope that the many resolutions on UNRWA would soon be consolidated into one resolution that would be free of political posturing and would be truly directed towards alleviating the humanitarian plight of the refugees. Israel would not hesitate to support such a resolution.

103. **Mr. Wang Donghua** (China) said that his country had always actively supported all efforts aimed at establishing peace in the Middle East, including the positive efforts made by UNRWA. Since September 2000, the conflict between Israel and Palestine had not

ceased; it was aggravating the situation of the refugees in the Middle East and seriously complicating the work of UNRWA. During the past year, however, the Agency had managed to overcome various problems and to alleviate the difficulties faced by the Palestinians.

104. His country greatly appreciated the efforts of UNRWA and was prepared to do its utmost to assist the Palestine refugees. It called on the international community to pay greater attention to the problem of those refugees and actively to contribute resources to the budget of UNRWA in order to help it to carry out the work which had been postponed. It was to be hoped that the Israeli side would do everything possible to promote the work of UNRWA.

105. **Mr. Kanaan** (Observer for the Organization of the Islamic Conference) said that UNRWA had played, and was continuing to play, a crucial role in the lives of the Palestine refugees. Half a century earlier, when UNRWA had begun its work, there had been approximately 900,000 registered refugees; by 2001, the figure had increased to some 4 million.

106. The report of the Commissioner-General drew attention to some disturbing facts. The budget deficit and cash flow situation had forced the Agency to reduce its services and programmes. Moreover, the harsh closures, curfews and other restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupation forces were having a negative effect on the work of UNRWA. The Commissioner-General had stated recently that, as a result of the closures and other measures, more than 64 per cent of Palestinian households had been pushed below the poverty line. In the refugee camps, that figure was over 76 per cent and in the Gaza Strip it was almost 80 per cent.

107. The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) reaffirmed that a solution to the problem of the Palestine refugees was a prerequisite for the establishment of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region. Such a solution would be based on the total withdrawal by Israel from all the Palestinian and Arab territories it had occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, and the implementation of the relevant resolutions of the United Nations. In that connection, OIC reaffirmed that the United Nations had a continuing responsibility with regard to the question of Palestine. It reiterated its support for the proposal regarding the revitalization of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine. It should be

emphasized that the issue of compensation to refugees was considered an integral element of, but not a substitute for, their right of return.

108. On behalf of the General Secretariat of OIC, he commended the Agency for discharging its mandate in difficult circumstances, expressed profound gratitude to those countries which for decades had hosted Palestine refugees and displaced persons, and thanked donor countries which, it was to be hoped, would increase their contributions to the budget of UNRWA. He once again called on the international community to give all possible political and financial support to the Agency to enable it to discharge its mandate until the Palestine refugees were able to return to their homes and property.

109. **Mr. Kasoulides** (Cyprus), speaking on a point of order in response to the statement made by the representative of Turkey, pointed out that almost 40 per cent of the territory of Cyprus was occupied by Turkish forces. With regard to the reference that had been made to the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus", he said that, according to all the resolutions of any organ of the United Nations and all other international organizations, there was only one State in Cyprus — the Republic of Cyprus.

110. **Mr. Jilani** (Observer for Palestine), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that he could not listen with equanimity to the same old assertions by the representative of Israel that the whole world was wrong and only Israel was right. The representative of Israel had even lacked the courage to give the Palestine refugees their proper title: he had called them "Arab" refugees. He had spoken as though the State of Israel had existed before 1948 and the Arab countries had invaded it. Yet the State of Israel had not existed before 1948; there had only been groups which had terrorized the Palestinian population, under the command of people on the wanted lists of many other countries.

111. Such flights of pseudo-history were regrettable at a time when there were still hopes of reviving the peace process and negotiations to achieve a lasting and comprehensive settlement of the Middle East question. The roots of the conflict, as the international community unanimously agreed, lay in the continuing Israeli occupation. Israel was the only State in the world that was named in over 25 United Nations resolutions as an occupying Power.

112. Israel bore the primary responsibility for the existence of a Palestine refugee problem. It terrorized the Palestinians, forcing them to leave their land and homes. A campaign was currently being waged in Israel against "revisionists" who could not support attempts to distort the historical truth and cover up the violence perpetrated by terrorist groups whose leaders currently held senior posts in the Israeli Government.

113. The assertion that the obstacles placed in the way of UNRWA by the Israeli security forces were necessary for security reasons was laughable. The Commissioner-General of UNRWA and his staff hardly represented a threat to Israel's security. As for the resounding remarks in the Israeli statement about school programmes, he pointed out that the Agency did not run its own school programmes but used those operating in the receiving countries.

114. A solution to the refugee problem required a change of approach. If Israel maintained its current attitude, there would unfortunately be no chance of achieving such a solution or attaining a comprehensive settlement. A settlement meant that Israel should not only refrain from blatantly false statements of the kind that the Committee had just heard but should also acknowledge its moral and material responsibility for the very existence of the problem of the Palestine refugees.

115. **Mr. Zaki** (Egypt), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that he had thought that nothing could surprise him, but the outrageous statement by the representative of Israel was astounding. When people had no sense of shame, they started to falsify historical facts and to think that only they were right and the rest of the world was wrong. That entirely summed up the state of mind of the Government of Israel and its representative.

116. It was true that the Arab States had rejected General Assembly resolution 181 (II): they considered it unreasonable, inasmuch as it provided that 50 per cent of the historical land of Palestine should be made over to under 25 per cent of its then population. The Arab States had completely underestimated the "nascent State of Israel", which by 1967 had managed to occupy another 22 per cent of the land and subsequently the whole of it.

117. In response to the question of who was responsible for the existence of refugees, the representative of Israel needed only to listen attentively

to the voices making themselves heard in his own country, seeking to tell the truth about what had happened in 1947 and 1948, or even earlier, for example in the 1930s.

118. As for the allegation about the expulsion of the Jewish population from Arab countries, he said that Arabs were not anti-Semitic. The Jews had lived in Egypt for hundreds of years and no one had expelled them. When the “nascent State of Israel” had emerged, they had continued to live in Egypt, but some of them had embarked on terrorist activity against their fellow citizens. They had therefore been expelled from Egypt.

119. If Israel did not acknowledge its appalling, bloody past, not to mention its bloody present, there would be no peace in the region in the future, either.

120. **Mr. Hansen** (Commissioner-General of UNRWA) thanked the Committee for its careful consideration of his report and its virtually unanimous support for the staff of UNRWA and the work carried out by the Agency under financially and technically difficult conditions. Over the past year, there had been a growing understanding of the continuing need for UNRWA and there was increasing cooperation with donors. At least the minimum budgetary requirements for UNRWA were in place for the following year, which would be a great relief to the refugees who depended on the Agency for help.

121. The statement by the representative of Israel had contained numerous references to the state of affairs in the Agency’s area of activity. Other speakers, however, who had direct knowledge of the situation there, had formulated the same opinion of that situation as appeared in the UNRWA report. The discussion as to who was objective and who one-sided in their assessment was therefore irrelevant. The statements by those who knew the situation on the ground spoke for themselves.

122. There had also been talk of what UNRWA was required to teach children in the schools. Two years earlier, the representative of Israel had spoken in commendatory terms about the Agency’s work in educating children in the spirit of peace, democracy, tolerance and the settlement of conflict situations. The change in his views was therefore bewildering, since UNRWA was merely continuing and building on the same work. The speaker had referred to the comparative research of Israeli and Arab textbooks in the region carried out by a professor at the Hebrew

University. The professor had, however, noted that, in a comparison of Israeli textbooks used during the first years of the existence of the State of Israel with new Palestinian textbooks, the Israeli books would come off worse, as far as the dissemination of discriminatory views was concerned.

The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.