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

Palestine refugees in the Palestinian territory  
occupied by Israel since 1967

Report of the Secretary-General

1. The present report is submitted to the General Assembly in pursuance of its resolution 43/57 E of 6 December 1988, the operative paragraphs of which read as follows:

"The General Assembly,

"...

"1. Reiterates strongly its demand that Israel desist from the removal and resettlement of Palestine refugees in the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel since 1967 and from the destruction of their shelters;

"2. Requests the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to address the acute situation of the Palestine refugees in the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel since 1967 and accordingly to extend all the services of the Agency to those refugees;

"3. Requests the Secretary-General, in co-operation with the Commissioner-General, to resume issuing identification cards to all Palestine refugees and their descendants in the occupied Palestinian territory, irrespective of whether or not they are recipients of rations and services of the Agency;

"4. Requests the Secretary-General, after consulting with the Commissioner-General, to report to the General Assembly, before the opening of

its forty-fourth session, on the implementation of the present resolution and in particular on Israel's compliance with paragraph 1 above."

2. On 28 February 1989, the Secretary-General addressed a note verbale to the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations, in which he drew attention to his reporting responsibility under the resolution and requested the Permanent Representative to inform him of any steps that his Government had taken or envisaged taking in implementation of the relevant provisions of the resolution.

3. In a note verbale dated 28 June 1989, the Permanent Representative of Israel replied as follows:

"Israel's position on this resolution has been set forth in successive annual replies submitted to the Secretary-General in recent years. The report of the Secretary-General (A/43/653) dated 30 September 1988 contained the latest of these replies. In addition, Israel's representative to the Special Political Committee reiterated Israel's position during his statement dated 15 November 1988 (A/SPC/43/SR.27).

"This resolution is unbalanced and distorted in that its sponsors intentionally ignore the improved living conditions in the Gaza District since 1967. Resolution 43/57 E does not mention the considerable increase of pupils attending school in the Gaza District since 1967, nor does it mention the significant drop in the illiteracy rate among inhabitants in the Gaza District since that year. Furthermore, it does not mention the extensive development of medical care or the improvement of environmental services - including water supply, sewage and refuse disposal. By conveniently omitting these facts, the sponsors of resolution 43/57 E continue in their approach to perpetuate the refugee problem and the refugees' living conditions in Gaza.

"Nothing can be more indicative of this approach than this resolution's condemnation of Refugee Rehabilitation Projects. Since 1967, Israel has initiated Community Development Projects in the Gaza District enabling almost 15,000 families, approximately 120,000 persons, to leave the refugee camps on a voluntary basis and relocate to nearby residential areas. This figure represents over one third of the total refugee population in Gaza. Israel's vital role in planning and implementing these housing projects has been recognized by both the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner of UNRWA in their respective reports (A/40/613 and A/40/13).

"Furthermore, the resolution's request of the Secretary-General to resume issuing identity cards irrespective of the refugees' need for them is yet another indication of the resolution's patent political bias.

"Notwithstanding subversive efforts to the contrary, Israel is determined to pursue the humanitarian task of improving the living conditions of the refugees through projects like its Refugee Housing Programs. Israel will welcome all assistance on behalf of the international community intended to improve the refugees' living conditions."

4. The following information concerning Israel's compliance with General Assembly resolution 43/57 E is based on reports from the Commissioner-General of UNRWA.

5. In the Gaza Strip as well as the West Bank, refugee shelters have been demolished and sealed on punitive grounds by the Israeli authorities. The matter is dealt with in detail in the Commissioner-General's annual reports to the General Assembly. 1/

6. The Agency is following up with the Israeli authorities the rehousing of refugees who remain affected by the demolitions in 1971 in the Gaza Strip. Paragraph 6 of the report submitted by the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on its forty-third session (A/43/653) referred to the status of 87 families categorized as living in hardship conditions. The situation on 30 June 1989 remains the same. Of these 87 families, 14 continue to live in conditions of hardship, 18 remain unsatisfactorily housed, 37 are satisfactorily housed, and 18 had previously purchased houses in projects sponsored by the Israeli authorities. The situation of the 14 families living in conditions of hardship has been checked several times during the reporting period. Despite repeated assurances by the Israeli authorities that they will be rehoused, very little progress has been made. The authorities have assured the Agency that a solution has been developed and would be implemented as soon as possible.

7. During the reporting period, the Commissioner-General received the following information relating to refugee shelters demolished by the Israeli authorities in the Gaza Strip on the grounds that they had been built without proper authority on state land outside camp boundaries:

(a) In paragraph 7 (a) of last year's report (A/43/653), it was stated that the Israeli authorities told several families living on the northern perimeter of Jabalia Camp to remove some of their shelter extensions and that these families had taken the matter to the High Court of Israel, which had ruled against them. No demolitions have taken place so far, although the shelters have been isolated by bulldozing of sand around their premises. The Israeli authorities are understood to have had discussions with some members of this group;

(b) Of the 35 families whose shelters on the perimeter of Beach Camp were demolished in 1983 (see A/41/564, para. 7 (b)), 17 families have received plots of land at the Sheikh Radwan or the Beit Lahiya housing projects; one family received a plot of land at the Sheikh Radwan housing project but the family still lives with relatives. One family bought a vacant shelter in Beach Camp; three families have moved in with relatives in Jabalia. The remaining 13 families are living in temporary shelters built by themselves on or near the same site. The Israeli authorities have stated that they would be willing to consider allocating land in a housing project for the families who have not been rehoused, but that it would not be at Sheikh Radwan, which is the project nearest the site.

8. Paragraph 8 of last year's report (A/43/653) referred to some refugee families in Block Q at the Rafah camp in the Gaza Strip who, at the instance of the Israeli

authorities, had agreed to relocate to the Tel-es-Sultan housing project. As at 30 June 1989, 41 families had moved to Tel-es-Sultan. Some families, however, still remain in their shelters, of which 17 are isolated by sand ramparts.

9. During the reporting period, no new plots of land in housing projects in the Gaza Strip were allocated by the Israeli authorities. However, in this period, 41 refugee families, comprising 214 persons, moved to 22 plots of land in housing projects, having accepted demolition of their shelters in the camps as a prior condition. During this period, a total of 62 shelter rooms were voluntarily demolished, of which 39 had been built by the Agency and 23 had been built privately.

10. As the figures in the previous paragraph show, although there have been a few exceptions, the practice of requiring refugee families to demolish their shelters as a pre-condition of moving to new housing has continued during the reporting period. The Agency has objected to this practice not only because of practical complications in cases of extended families who share the same shelter where one family wishes to move, but another, usually the older, wants to remain, but also because of the overcrowded conditions and urgent need of accommodation for refugee families.

11. The Israeli authorities, according to information available to the Commissioner-General, have to date allocated approximately 3,914 plots of land in the Gaza Strip for housing projects. A total of 2,605 plots have been built on by 3,714 refugee families comprising 22,946 persons, buildings on 236 plots are under construction, 936 plots are still vacant and 137 have been built on by non-refugee families. In addition, 3,034 refugee families, consisting of 18,823 persons have moved into 2,666 completed housing units, consisting of 5,893 rooms.

12. Refugee families are continuing to purchase plots of land at subsidized rates for the construction of houses in the projects developed by the Israeli authorities in the Beit Lahiya, Nazleh and Tel-es-Sultan areas. The construction of multi-storey apartment blocks in Sheikh Radwan, sponsored by the Israeli authorities and offered for sale upon completion, as reported last year (A/43/653, para. 12), continues, but the process has slowed down considerably due to the prevailing situation.

13. With regard to the request addressed to the Commissioner-General by the Assembly in paragraph 2 of resolution 43/57 E, the Commissioner-General advises that early in 1988 the Agency began providing emergency food, medical and other assistance to those in need in the occupied territory and it continues to do so. The Agency has also drawn up a longer-term programme to upgrade infrastructure, especially in the camps, and to improve economic and social conditions. These programmes are discussed in detail in the recent reports of the Commissioner-General. 1

14. The Secretary-General regrets that he is unable at present to comply with the request addressed to him in paragraph 3 of the resolution. Under an arrangement that has been followed for almost 40 years, all refugee families registered with UNRWA are in possession of registration cards issued by the Agency. While these

cards indicate the number of family members and whether they are eligible for services, they are not identification cards and have a much more limited purpose. The Commissioner-General of UNRWA has pointed out that the Agency issues a registration card reflecting data about the refugee family concerned, which is entered on the registration roll at the time of registration. While the need for documentation, such as is required in the resolution, is appreciated, the Commissioner-General does not have the means to issue identity cards as such. He will, however, keep the situation under review to see whether appropriate documentation regarding the registration status of individual members of refugee families could be issued.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-third Session, Supplement No. 13, (A/43/13), chap. II, sect. B, and *ibid.*, Forty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 13 (A/44/13), chap. VI, sects. B and C.

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