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at 10 a.m.  
New York

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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 6th MEETING

Chairman: MR. OUDOVENKO (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic)

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AGENDA ITEM 76: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE  
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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 76: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (continued) (A/44/13 and Corr.1 and Add.1, 431, 474 and Corr.1, 497, 505-508, 608 and 641)

1. Mr. FAHMY (Egypt) said that the fact that the discussion of the report of the Commissioner-General (A/44/13) coincided with the fortieth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was a source of both regret and pride. The problem which the Agency had been established "temporarily" to deal with had not been solved. Forty years later, the Agency continued to alleviate the suffering of growing numbers of Palestinian refugees, providing care to new generations who had known nothing but the life of refugee camps.
2. He drew attention to the deteriorating situation in occupied Palestine, and expressed his shock at the continued wounding of Palestinian civilians and the plundering of their homes. Egypt strongly condemned those Israeli practices, which violated the human rights of the Palestinians. He hoped that Israel would learn from bitter experience that its attempts to extinguish the flame of freedom which burned in all Palestinian hearts were doomed to failure. The Palestinian struggle for self-determination would continue unabated, as demonstrated by the intifadah.
3. However, one could take pride in the role played by UNRWA, which was proof of the international community's concern for the inhuman conditions still endured by the Palestinian people. He bore witness to the Agency's swift and successful response over the years to the worsening conditions in the region. He hoped that the international community would increase its support to enable the Agency to carry out its heavy duties and meet any unexpected needs in dealing with chronic problems.
4. He congratulated the Commissioner-General and his staff on their excellent performance in the face of numerous difficulties, such as attacks by Israeli forces against UNRWA supply warehouses in Gaza and the arrest of UNRWA staff. Egypt urged UNRWA to continue its efforts to alleviate the suffering of the refugees and meet their basic needs and to develop the economic capacity of the Palestinian people, in co-operation with other United Nations agencies. He welcomed the appointment by the Secretary-General of a Special Adviser on Economic Development in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.
5. The situation in the Middle East and the conditions endured by the refugees made it necessary for the Agency to continue and intensify its work. He therefore urged the General Assembly to renew the mandate of UNRWA until such time as the Palestinians achieved self-determination. He also urged the international community to increase its support for UNRWA.

6. Mr. OKUDA (Japan) said that UNRWA's efforts over the past four decades deserved profound admiration, especially in the light of the extremely difficult circumstances under which they had been carried out. Those efforts had continued for so long simply because the just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East which would have rendered them unnecessary had not been attained. Such a peace should be achieved through the early and complete implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and through recognition of and respect for the Palestinian people's legitimate rights.
7. Of paramount importance for attaining peace were Israel's withdrawal from all the territories it had occupied since 1967, the recognition of Israel's right to exist, and recognition of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination, including the right to establish an independent State. A settlement of the Lebanese problem was also indispensable. Efforts to resolve that problem as well as the Palestinian question were being actively pursued; his delegation highly appreciated those efforts and hoped that the parties concerned would persevere.
8. Nevertheless, UNRWA's activities would continue to be necessary as long as there were Palestine refugees, and the need remained to improve the economic and social conditions in which the people of the occupied territories lived. The donor countries in no way regarded the Agency as a mechanism for maintaining the political status quo; they supported it because they recognized its usefulness in providing humanitarian assistance and stabilizing the region. Circumstances required that it continue and even enhance its activities.
9. His delegation appreciated the comprehensive report submitted by the Commissioner-General of UNRWA (A/44/13) and recognized that recent events had further complicated the Agency's tasks and resulted in additional financial burdens. Accordingly, in addition to its regular contribution to UNRWA, Japan had recently made a special contribution of \$US 7 million for the Agency's emergency programmes in the occupied territory. Japan intended to continue its support of UNRWA's activities, but would urge more countries also to support the Agency, and it hoped that UNRWA would continue to appeal to countries that had not already done so to become donors.
10. It was clear from the report that UNRWA's operations in Lebanon and in the occupied territory had been disrupted by governmental authorities. His delegation called on Israel to desist, and urged all parties concerned to extend as much support as possible to the Agency.
11. The reopening of the schools managed by UNRWA in the West Bank was welcome and it was to be hoped that the training centres and schools still closed would also be reopened. Concerning the plan to extend compulsory education in the Jordanian school system from 9 to 10 years, Japan agreed with the Chairman of the Advisory Commission of UNRWA that the Agency should ensure that, after the expiration of the three-year transitional period, Palestine refugee children in UNRWA's schools in Jordan would continue their studies for a tenth year.
12. Japan was proud to be one of UNRWA's major supporters and determined to continue to extend its financial support and technical co-operation.

13. Mr. HUSSAIN (Iraq) said that the fortieth anniversary of the establishment of UNRWA was an occasion not for celebration but for renewing support to enable the Palestinian people to exercise its right to self-determination and independence under the leadership of its sole legitimate representative, the PLO. The Palestinian problem was not one of refugees but rather it was political: the great Powers and world Zionism had plotted to partition the Arab homeland and subject it to colonial domination.

14. The report of the Commissioner-General dealt only with the humanitarian aspect of the problem. In his country's view, the primary responsibility for alleviating the suffering of the Palestinian people fell upon the United Nations and especially the great Powers, which were the main cause of that tragedy. The report was, on the whole, positive and faithfully reflected events. He shared the Agency's anxiety concerning the provision of funds to continue its activities in the face of escalating Zionist repression. He urged the international community to impose sanctions on the Israeli aggressor for the collective punishments it meted out by closing schools.

15. In contrast to the inhuman practices of the Zionist occupation, the Arab host countries had provided services to Palestine refugees since 1948. The figures contained in table 12 annexed to the report were only a part of the story, and the comments in paragraphs 13 to 15 should be seen in that light.

16. Despite the claim in paragraph 12 that co-operation with the Israeli authorities at the higher levels had remained normal, Israeli settlers in the occupied territory continued to harass refugees and Agency staff alike. Of late, such harassment had taken the form of shooting at women and children, students and school buildings.

17. He urged the specialized agencies - particularly WHO and UNESCO - and UNICEF to increase co-operation with UNRWA in order to cope with the growing problems resulting from the intifadah, emergencies, overcrowding, lack of health facilities and the breakdown of educational programmes. He also appealed for the headquarters of UNRWA to be moved back to the region of its operations.

18. Israel had ignored all United Nations resolutions which upheld the right of return for all Palestine refugees. It should be condemned for its gross violations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international law. The Commissioner-General's report gave further proof of the Zionists' arbitrary domination and racism. The international community should put a stop to their hegemonistic policies.

19. Mr. BERNARDEZ (Philippines) expressed appreciation of the reports of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA (A/44/13) and the Working Group on the financing of UNRWA (A/44/641), and paid a tribute to the men and women of the Agency who had dedicated years of their lives to the Palestinian refugees. He was gratified to note that UNRWA had received sufficient funding to carry out its regular and emergency-related programmes for 1988 and 1989; however, the annual growth rate of 5 per cent which the Commissioner-General had said was needed to maintain the

(Mr. Bernardez, Philippines)

regular programmes at their current level would require a significant increase in contributions. His Government would contribute what it could as an expression of its commitment to UNRWA and urged all those in a position to do so to assist the Agency to achieve its goals.

20. Throughout the period under review, the emergencies in Lebanon and the occupied territory of the West Bank and Gaza Strip had seriously hampered the Agency's work. The escalating violence in the occupied territory was a matter of concern; his delegation urged the occupying Power to observe maximum restraint in dealing with the intifadah. UNRWA should also be allowed to carry out one of its fundamental tasks, that of providing education for young Palestinians. The reports of harassment of UNRWA's staff and of Palestine refugees by the occupying authorities and by Israeli settlers were also disturbing.

21. The question of Palestine refugees was inextricably linked to the question of Palestine. While the stabilizing role of UNRWA could not be denied, the international community must not accept it as a permanent fixture. A comprehensive settlement of the Middle East conflict could no longer be postponed. In his delegation's view, the convening of an international peace conference on the Middle East with the participation of all the parties concerned, including the PLO, and the five permanent members of the Security Council under the auspices of the United Nations would be a most appropriate means for the peaceful and just resolution of the conflict.

22. The proclamation by the PLO of an independent Palestinian State could be taken as an act of hope that ways to resolve the conflict would be found. While the Philippines recognized the State of Palestine, it firmly believed at the same time that the right of all States in the area, including Israel, to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries, free from threats or acts of force, must be upheld. The Member States concerned must exercise political will so that the Palestinian people would at long last live in freedom and Palestine would take its place as a member of the community of nations.

23. Mr. POLETTI (France), speaking on behalf of the European Community and its 12 member States, congratulated the Commissioner-General on his work and thanked him for his report. That report made it clear that the situation in the area had deteriorated still further in the period under review. The sufferings of the Palestine refugees, particularly since the beginning of the uprising, were well known; the Twelve would state their views on that subject later in the session. The fighting in Lebanon had also worsened the situation of the Palestine refugees. The Twelve wished to express their sympathy for the victims of the continuing violence in Lebanon and to reiterate their firm support of the sovereignty, unity, independence and integrity of the country.

24. The deterioration of the economic situation in the area had also contributed to making UNRWA's task more difficult. The Twelve wished to pay a tribute to the entire staff of the Agency and particularly to those of its staff members who had lost their lives or disappeared while carrying out their work. The aspects of that work which illustrated the effectiveness and devotion of the Agency staff with

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(Mr. Poletti, France)

particular vividness were its medical services, the reconstruction programmes it had undertaken in the Shatila and Burj el-Barajneh camps in Beirut, the relief services, including emergency relief, its efforts to protect the refugees and, above all, its activities in the essential field of education. It was regrettable that that work was often hindered by the arbitrary measures taken by the occupying Power and the often brutal attitude of the occupying forces. The arrests and harassment of the Agency's staff and the repeated invasion of its offices by Israeli soldiers were intolerable.

25. While welcoming the recent reopening of the primary and secondary schools in the West Bank, the Twelve wished to remind the occupying Power of its responsibility under the fourth Geneva Convention and customary international law for the normal functioning of the schools and universities.

26. The exemplary activity of UNRWA should not be crippled by a lack of financial resources. The strengthening of the Agency's financial position thanks to the Commissioner-General's strict administration was to be welcomed; however, the Twelve shared the concern expressed by the Commissioner-General regarding the continued financing of UNRWA and particularly of its emergency operations. They hoped that the number of countries contributing to UNRWA would continue to increase and wished also to express their appreciation of the assistance which the Governments of host countries continued to extend to Palestine refugees.

27. Under its current agreement with UNRWA, the Community had allocated 15.2 million ecus to UNRWA's food programme as well as an additional contribution of 4 million ecus for its operational costs under that programme. The Community was also contributing 20 million ecus annually to UNRWA's educational programmes. Its total aid to the Palestine refugees under the regular programme would therefore amount to 39.2 million ecus in 1989. That represented 20 per cent of the budget estimates of UNRWA for the year and put the Community second among its contributors. The Twelve also intended to strengthen their co-operation with the occupied territories and to develop assistance programmes for the Palestinian population. They regretted that those activities often met with obstacles, which were presented as being of a technical or administrative nature.

28. The need for UNRWA in the absence of a global settlement of the Middle East conflict was beyond question. Such a settlement was urgently required and the most appropriate way to achieve it remained the convening of an international peace conference, under United Nations auspices, which would provide an appropriate forum for direct negotiations between the parties concerned with a view to a comprehensive, just and lasting solution.

29. Mr. KHANI (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the humanitarian aspect of the problem of the Palestine refugees outweighed all the financial problems faced by the Agency. His country was deeply concerned by the continued lack of a solution. Israeli aggression and expansionism prevented the Palestinian people from exercising its inalienable right of return and self-determination and its right to establish an independent sovereign State on its native soil.

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(Mr. Khani, Syrian Arab Republic)

Responsibility for the problem of the Palestine refugees lay with the United Nations, whose duty it was to find a solution.

30. He reiterated his Government's rejection of the Commissioner-General's practice of showing the draft of his report to the Israeli occupation authorities to elicit their comments, as noted in the letter of transmittal. The Arab host countries had not been given the same consideration. Israeli comments could hardly serve the cause of the Palestine refugees, since Israel was the main reason for their continuing tragedy.

31. The report accorded no importance to the assistance provided by Arab host countries or the financial burdens they bore, which exceeded total contributions to UNRWA. Nor did it refer to the large numbers of inhabitants displaced after 1967.

32. The difficult conditions in the West Bank, Gaza and Lebanon made it imperative to restore full and rapid relief operations to Palestine refugees, not limiting such operations to the special hardship cases officially recognized. The criteria for special hardship should be eased. His Government was not against self-support projects, on condition that refugees were not thereby prevented from benefiting from the special hardship case programme. There should be a review of certain UNRWA policies which adversely affected large numbers of refugees. He reiterated his Government's annual call for an urgent return to full ration distribution.

33. The question of funding was the main problem of UNRWA and he shared the Commissioner-General's anxiety concerning the coming year. Iraq's contributions were for national and humanitarian reasons, but other countries could also contribute, given the necessary political will.

34. He appreciated the fact that rations were distributed by UNRWA to Palestine refugees in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and Lebanon, and hoped that the distribution would be expanded, although not at the expense of refugees in other areas.

35. He reiterated the need to raise the level of health services in all areas where the Agency operated.

36. The report noted the Israeli authorities' avoidance of their commitments and their arbitrary practices against UNRWA staff, acts committed by Israeli soldiers against UNRWA facilities, and the use of schools by Israeli forces as collective detention centres. The international community should force the Israeli authorities to refrain from such measures and to respect their commitments to UNRWA.

37. In conclusion, he pledged his country's full co-operation with the Commissioner-General to ensure that UNRWA continued its noble humanitarian task. He urged the international community to provide the resources necessary to that end.

38. Mr. BAMSEY (Australia) said that, 40 years after its establishment, UNRWA remained indispensable. It performed an essential humanitarian task which his country continued to support. The Agency was remarkable not only for its longevity and adaptability but for its effectiveness in implementing its programmes despite substantial obstacles. Its continuing success was due not only to the support of those countries which provided funding for it but to the singular dedication of its staff.

39. Among the substantial obstacles were the continued violence and disruption in Lebanon and the occupied territory. The detention of UNRWA staff and the raiding of food distribution centres in the Gaza Strip by the Israeli forces were particularly disturbing. His delegation called on Israel to respect UNRWA operations in the occupied territory.

40. Another regrettable development was the closure of schools in the occupied territory during the period under review, and the prevention of UNRWA's attempts to arrange for teachers to visit young children in their homes. Israel's decision to allow the reopening of UNRWA schools in the occupied territory was welcome, but more recently some schools had again been closed. The increasing incidence of violation and destruction of Agency property was also disturbing.

41. He called on all the parties to the conflicts that had kept UNRWA in existence to support the Agency and to facilitate its work, and urged them to respect its special status. The Agency's financial difficulties would be alleviated if more Member States supported it, and his delegation urged those Governments which did not contribute to it to consider doing so. For its part, Australia would again increase its annual contribution to the Agency. UNRWA would remain the primary focus of Australian humanitarian support for Palestinians, including refugees, although it also provided substantial support to non-governmental organizations operating in the occupied territory and to the programmes of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

42. The Commissioner-General's report gave evidence of large-scale deprivation and of intimidation, destruction and inhumanity. But it also gave evidence of dedication, courage, compassion and hope - hope that the misery of Palestine refugees could be attenuated until the causes of that misery were removed by a comprehensive settlement.

43. Mr. RASHDI (Pakistan) observed that UNRWA had carried out its operations in an exemplary manner, in the face of the serious deterioration of security conditions and the unprecedented demands for its services as a result of the Israeli repression in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. UNRWA staff were working courageously under extraordinarily dangerous conditions. Administratively, the introduction of refugee affairs officers who were in close contact with the refugees had served to protect the Palestinians from Israeli brutality and to improve UNRWA services to them.

44. The growing interference by the Israeli authorities in Agency operations in the occupied territory was a matter of serious concern. Such high-handed behaviour as the arrest and mistreatment of Agency staff, the interruption of medical



(Mr. Rashdi, Pakistan)

services, the forcible entry into UNRWA premises or the punitive demolition of camp shelters violated the fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.

45. The Commissioner-General's report detailed the grim chronology of the intifadah since 1987. Over 700 Palestinians had been killed and nearly 40,000 injured, an appalling 30 per cent of them under 15. Moreover, the prolonged closure since January 1989 of UNRWA schools and training centres in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, compounded by the Israeli refusal to allow even home study, was threatening the future of a whole generation. A further consequence of the uprising had been to compel UNRWA to expand its services to a refugee population sorely tried by increasingly repressive measures and dependent on the Agency for assistance. It was imperative that UNRWA should also provide humanitarian assistance to non-refugees and co-ordinate with other international organizations and voluntary agencies in monitoring the observance of basic civil and human rights in the occupied territory.

46. The crux of the problem was to find a just solution to the Middle East problem that would ensure the return of Palestine refugees to their homeland and restore the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to determine their fate and establish a state of their own. Until such time, the international community had the inescapable duty to meet the essential needs of the Palestinian people.

47. Mr. SHIHABI (Saudi Arabia) said that the report of the Commissioner-General (A/44/13) revealed the true nature of Israel's intentions towards UNRWA and its malevolence towards anything that might be considered a possible solution to the question of Palestine. The obstacles placed in the way of the Agency by the Zionist authorities in the occupied Palestinian territory were a true indication of Zionist thinking on the future of the country and its people and on peace in the region.

48. In the West Bank, schools had remained closed for most of the reporting period by order of the Israeli authorities, thus depriving children of their basic right to education. Israel was once again presenting evidence of its disdain for the relevant international conventions and the resolutions of the United Nations and other international organizations and of its short-sightedness in seeking to achieve rapid results through oppression and State terrorism without regard for long-term consequences.

49. The increased burdens placed on the Agency were a clear reflection of Zionist acts of terrorism against that part of the Palestinian people under the care of the United Nations. In his report, the Commissioner-General had exercised restraint in describing the heinous character of Zionist intimidation inside the refugee camps and in providing particulars of the harassment of Agency staff. He had done so in order to prevent reprisals against the Agency and avoid giving the authorities a pretext to persist in their obstruction. The truth had nevertheless emerged, and it could be seen that the authorities had jeopardized the security and safety of the Palestinian people and had closed its schools, deprived it of its sources of livelihood and demolished homes and shelters. Such wantonness had gone beyond all

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(Mr. Shihabi, Saudi Arabia)

measure in an attempt to deprive a people, in its own land, of an acceptable standard of human life. The Zionist authorities acted with the support of certain Member States, which were fully aware that it was their support that enabled those authorities to persist in their practices against the Palestinian people.

50. As indicated in the report of the Commissioner-General, the Israeli authorities had adopted harsh measures when faced with incidents and demonstrations. The use of conventional live ammunition and so-called plastic bullets had risen substantially, as detailed in paragraph 8. Between July 1988 and June 1989, some 300 Palestine refugees had been killed in the occupied territory.

51. Individual refugees had been arrested or detained without charge or trial, the treatment of prisoners or detainees had often been harsh and demeaning, and there had been indiscriminate beatings and deliberate damage to property, including Agency property (para. 9). Agency premises had been violated more often than before and used as detention centres, and there had been deliberate large-scale destruction of Agency property (para. 12).

52. In 1988/89, as indicated in section VII of the report, there had been a substantial increase in the number of staff arrested and detained without charge or trial in the occupied territory as compared with previous years. Many of the staff members arrested had complained of brutality during their detention. In addition, Agency staff, including international staff, had been subjected to physical abuse and undisciplined behaviour by Israel soldiers.

53. Since the establishment of the Agency, the Zionist authorities had been seeking its gradual abolition, just as they had been seeking to deny the existence of the Palestinian people itself. The propagation of the myth of the disappearance of the Palestinian people, in a Zionist attempt to deceive all the people all the time, had proved vain, and Zionism had thus lost one of its principal supports. The Agency's efforts to provide the means of survival to a part of the Palestinian people while awaiting a definitive solution to the problem must be highlighted. Without such humanitarian action, the revolt against the invasion and the invader would have been more severe and more violent than the Zionists could have dreamed. The uprising had given expression to the rejection of the occupiers and had placed on them present responsibility and future accountability.

54. On numerous occasions, tear-gas had been fired into schools, troops had entered individual schools, and pupils and teachers had been beaten (para 103). Between September 1988 and June 1989, two students had been killed inside Agency schools and hundreds had been injured (para. 104).

55. His delegation shared the concern of the Commissioner-General and of the Advisory Commission of UNRWA that the emergency programmes for 1990 were still unfunded and that no orderly flow of resources had been established. In that connection, the expanded scope of the practices of the occupation authorities against Palestinian citizens since the beginning of the intifadah, now in its twenty-third month, was particularly notable. If the Agency did not receive the

(Mr. Shihabi, Saudi Arabia)

necessary assistance in carrying out its humanitarian tasks in the best possible manner, the arbitrary measures taken against the Palestine refugees would become even more vicious and the Agency would be unable to function. Support for the Agency was support for the only positive element making for the protection of the Palestine refugees from the oppressive measures of the Israeli authorities.

56. The Agency and its staff deserved gratitude for discharging such weighty responsibilities, just as zionism and Israel merited condemnation. Since Israel blocked every other road to peace, the uprising was the only way for the Palestinian people to secure its rights. It was the only way for that people to ensure for itself a life of dignity, and it would achieve that goal through its determination, faith and commitment to its cause. Israel and its supporters were responsible, first and last, for the displacement of those millions, for depriving them of their sources of livelihood and for the current deterioration of the Palestine problem. His delegation called upon the international community to support the Agency and to ensure that it was protected from Zionist aggression against its endeavours to provide the Palestinian people with basic humanitarian services until such time as it regained its right to its own land.

57. Mr. TANG Guangzhi (China) said that the dedicated UNRWA staff had, under very difficult and even dangerous conditions, continued providing the Palestine refugees with basic services, thus helping to alleviate their sufferings. The Agency was, however, short of funds and contributions to it must be increased.

58. Although other very fierce regional conflicts were on the way to being resolved, the Middle East conflict showed no sign of settlement and the Palestinian people in large numbers were still suffering from all kinds of human repression. Their just struggle had won them widespread sympathy and support around the world. The Israeli authorities, however, disregarding world opinion, had continued to reject their demands and to suppress the uprising with brutal force. Israeli atrocities had increased the sufferings of the Palestinians and at the same time made the work of UNRWA all the more difficult. In order to solve the Palestinian refugee problem once and for all, it was imperative to restore the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people.

59. China had always supported a just and comprehensive settlement of the Middle East question, and the Chinese Prime Minister had recently made a five-point proposal aimed at promoting peace in the Middle East: the Middle East question should be settled through political means and all parties should refrain from using force; the International Peace Conference on the Middle East should be convened under United Nations auspices, attended by the five permanent members of the Security Council and the various parties concerned; the parties must be urged to engage in various forms of dialogue as appropriate, including direct dialogue between the PLO and Israel; Israel must stop its repression of Palestinian residents in the occupied territories and must withdraw from them, and by the same token the security of Israel should also be guaranteed; the State of Palestine and the State of Israel should extend mutual recognition, and the Arab and Jewish peoples should coexist peacefully.

(Mr. Tang Guangzhi, China)

60. The PLO had, under the leadership of Yasser Arafat, taken a flexible and practical position on resolving the conflict, thus creating favourable conditions for peace in the Middle East. The opportunity must not be lost, and it was high time that the Israeli Government faced reality and followed the tide of history. It should immediately abandon its policy of military conquest and occupation and come to the negotiating table.

61. Mr. ACET (Turkey) underscored the scope of the work undertaken by UNRWA under conditions comparable to a state of war. Its record had been very impressive in providing education, relief and medical care to more than 2 million displaced Palestinians, despite the tragic events in Lebanon and the harsh response of Israel to the intifadah. It was an indispensable humanitarian agency and had to be supported both morally and financially. Turkey hoped that Governments would determine the level of their contributions on the basis of the Working Group's report (A/44/641).

62. The continued existence of UNRWA, however, symbolized the failure of the international community to bring about a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine. The Palestinians in the camps were being held hostage to the question of Palestine, and humanitarian concern for the refugees was unavoidably linked with the political aspect of the question. So long as the Palestinian homeland was not returned to its rightful owners, the international community would have to deal with the plight of the refugees and the Middle East would be deprived of peace.

63. Turkey had a natural interest in the Middle East because of geographical and historical considerations. It held the view that the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people could not be dealt with by the use of force, which would lead only to further bloodshed and pain. The intifadah had proved that the Palestinians would not be intimidated. There could be no long-term solution that was not based on negotiations in which all the interested parties participated, particularly the PLO, to be conducted in good faith within the framework of the International Peace Conference on the Middle East. Israel should adjust its policies to conform with that reality.

64. The West Bank and the Gaza Strip were the scene of devastating conditions and growing Palestinian despair. The severe measures used by the Israeli authorities against the uprising could in no way be justified and their indiscriminate use of firearms against Palestinian demonstrators must be universally condemned, as must their violation of UNRWA's privileges, immunities and premises.

65. Mr. JERKIC (Yugoslavia) said that only the convening of the International Conference on the Middle East would resolve, in the proper political terms, the Middle East crisis that was at the root of the Palestine refugee problem. Until then, UNRWA would have to continue to play the humanitarian role it was performing so admirably, and it must be given full support.

(Mr. Jerkić, Yugoslavia)

66. UNRWA had encountered numerous problems in its endeavours to provide the Palestinian people with safe shelter, medical protection and education; the current report mentioned several cases of maltreatment and arrest of UNRWA staff aimed at preventing them from fulfilling their tasks. Such actions by the occupation authorities represented unacceptable violations of the immunity of an international organization and the norms of international law which the international community could not and would not condone.

67. As his delegation had noted in 1988, the intifadah had put an added strain on UNRWA's work; as the Commissioner-General's report said, temporary activities which had to be undertaken in response to emergencies were becoming ongoing features of the Agency's operations. It was therefore necessary to recognize that the current situation confronted the Agency not only with organizational difficulties but with considerable financial problems. It was important that all countries should fulfil their financial obligations towards UNRWA, and encouraging that there had been a number of first-time contributors during the year under review, and that donations in cash and in kind had somewhat increased.

68. The current situation in the occupied territories, caused by Israel's unacceptable practices, further aggravated UNRWA's work. He would therefore point out once again that it was urgently necessary to start the peace process in the region through the convening of an international conference on the Middle East under the Secretary-General's auspices and with the participation of the five permanent members of the Security Council and all directly interested parties, including the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, on the footing of equality which alone could lead to a lasting and satisfactory solution to and cessation of the sufferings of the Palestinian people.

69. Mr. MAKSOUD (Observer, League of Arab States) expressed the hope that the next report of the Commissioner-General would show that, as a result of the Taif agreements concluded two days earlier law and order had been re-established in Lebanon and a start had been made on negotiations and on national unity and reconstruction. Such salutary developments should proportionately improve the situation of the Palestine refugees in camps in Lebanon.

70. The current report of the Commissioner-General showed that there had been a qualitative change in the oppressive techniques and the nature and scope of the constraints imposed by the Israeli authorities in the occupied Arab territory. The deliberate Israeli escalation had been intended to undermine UNRWA's infrastructure, in order to prevent the Palestinian people from exercising their right to self-determination. As reported, raids on UNRWA premises had become a pattern.

71. The reply of the Israel authorities to an UNRWA protest on the matter was significant because it revealed the Israeli view of its legal obligations: justifying such raids on the grounds of Agency misuse of its premises for propaganda purposes, the Israelis had further stated that property rights within the borders of a sovereign State were subject to its domestic law. That was the

(Mr. Maksoud)

nub of the problem: in defiance of international law, Israel refused to recognize that in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip it was an occupying Power, and claimed instead to be a Power exercising sovereign legal prerogatives. Since UNRWA by its humanitarian assistance was emboldening the Palestinians to survive in their homeland, Israel hoped that by simultaneously attacking UNRWA and putting down the intifadah, it could irrevocably establish its hegemony over the annexed territories and pre-empt the establishment of a Palestinian State. The international community must instead force Israel to face the basic issue of the rights of the Palestinian people and acknowledge that it was an occupying Power.

72. After two years, the intifadah was showing the extent of its vitality and commitment to terminate all aspects of Israeli occupation. The Arab States hoped that, just as national reconciliation had come to Lebanon, there could be movement towards peacefully instituting an independent State in Palestine, through a United Nations conference, as part of the overall establishment of peace in the region.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.