



Tuesday, 26 November 1957,
at 3.5 p. m.

NEW YORK

CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Agenda item 26:	
Report of the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (continued)	121

Chairman: Mr. Emilio ARENALES CATALAN
(Guatemala).

AGENDA ITEM 26

Report of the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (A/3686 and Corr.1, A/3735, A/SPC/20/Rev.1) (continued)

1. Mr. EINAAR (Netherlands) said that, while the question of the Arab refugees was a humanitarian problem of the first magnitude, it was inextricably linked with the political background of the Palestine question, as the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) had pointed out in paragraph 6 of his annual report (A/3686 and Corr.1). The Netherlands delegation therefore regretted that the General Assembly had not been able in recent years, even at its first emergency special session, to give more positive consideration to the solution of the major problem of the Middle East.
2. However, the political impasse was no bar to progress with respect to the refugee problem. Real progress towards its liquidation might actually make the attainment of a political settlement in the Middle East easier in the long run. The question was whether real progress was being made.
3. After paying a tribute to the Director of UNRWA and his staff on their achievements under extremely difficult circumstances, he said that the facts reported by the Director were even more discouraging than those of previous years. Various rehabilitation projects had had to be curtailed, postponed or terminated, and there was the grave danger of reductions in relief projects which would imperil the very lives of the 900,000 refugees and would have grave political, social and economic consequences. In the circumstances a threefold appeal was in order.
4. First, the moral, material and, especially, the financial assistance of the United Nations was indispensable if UNRWA was to be equal to its task. The Director of UNRWA might have understated the case when he said, at the 64th meeting, that the failure of the Assembly to provide the necessary funds would be tantamount to a decision to bring whole sections of the Agency's activities to an end. It was not right that UNRWA should have to depend on financial support

from only one-third of the Members of the United Nations. In view of the present emergency his Government hoped that contributing Members would increase their contributions and that Members which had hitherto not contributed would do so as soon as possible. He was happy to announce that the Netherlands Government had decided, subject to parliamentary approval, to contribute 120,000 guilders to UNRWA in respect of 1957, over and above the Netherlands annual contribution of 125,000 guilders.

5. Second, his delegation would make an appeal to the host Governments. It had been heartened by the Director's observation in chapter IV of his annual report that relationships between the Agency and the host Governments had been either satisfactory or were distinctly better than the preceding year. His delegation urged the host Governments to intensify their co-operation with UNRWA with a view to encouraging more Member States to contribute to UNRWA's support and restoring the Agency's self-support projects, which were urgently needed to provide a firm and stable basis for the lives of the refugees without prejudice to their political rights and claims.

6. Third, his delegation would address itself to the Government of Israel. The fact that under a scheme for the reunification of broken families a certain number of Arab refugees had over the years been successfully integrated into the social and economic life of Israel ought to encourage the Israel Government to extend the benefits of that scheme to a larger number of refugees. A constructive move on the part of Israel to pay compensation for abandoned Arab property would also be welcome. While Israel's claim that it was not able to pay compensation owing to the economic boycott organized against it by the Arab States was understandable, his delegation appealed to the Israel Government to reconsider its position not only in the interests of the refugees but also in the interests of Israel itself.

7. Mr. Yusuf HAIKAL (Jordan) said that the Special Political Committee had a duty to inquire why, after ten years, the United Nations had not managed to find ways and means of implementing its resolutions designed to solve a problem which had resulted in a great tragedy involving 1 million human beings. In view of the Director's description in chapter V of his report of the present grave financial situation of the Agency, it was the common responsibility of the members of the Committee to foresee and so far as possible forestall future difficulties, and to examine whether Zionist expansionist policies, the stumbling-block in the way of a solution of the present problem, did not threaten to create further thousands upon thousands of Arab refugees.

8. He would present his delegation's views under three main headings: the financial aspects of the re-

port, the report and the solution of the refugee problem, and the refugee problem and Zionist policies. He would like first to express his Government's high appreciation of the way in which the Director of UNRWA was discharging the heavy responsibilities of his office, for his tireless efforts to obtain the needed funds for UNRWA programmes, and for his humanitarian and objective approach to the problems of the refugees.

9. In the year under review, UNRWA had expended only two dollars per month on each refugee: one dollar on administration, shelter and education, and one dollar—incredible as it might seem—on food. The Director had pointed out in paragraph 78 of his report that in order to protect the expenditure for relief, the Agency had had to halt most new construction and to refrain from introducing improvements in standards of relief proposed by him, endorsed by the Advisory Commission and accepted by the General Assembly. Furthermore, he had informed the Committee at its 64th meeting that insufficient financial support of UNRWA in the current year might necessitate the closing down of a large number of schools. That was a matter of deep concern to his country because more than half the population of the refugee camps in Jordan were under the age of fifteen. The closing of schools would deprive hundreds of thousands of children of the benefits of education in their formative years, and would have the most serious repercussions on the social and political life of the area.

10. His delegation wished to thank all who had contributed to the financing of UNRWA programmes. It urged the Committee to support the proposed 1958 UNRWA budget of 40.7 million dollars, and the request of the Director, in paragraph 91 of his report, that a paragraph should be included in the relevant resolution specifically approving the Agency's budget.

11. No agency could be expected to reach perfection, and there was one policy of UNRWA which was causing his Government great concern. Refugee children born after February 1951 were denied UNRWA assistance. Those children, already handicapped by being born into the misery of life in a refugee camp, should not be made to suffer even more. Whatever the difficulties relating to the problem of ineligible persons obtaining ration cards, his delegation earnestly requested the Director to see to it that the situation was corrected otherwise than at the expense of the children.

12. The United Nations would not be able to raise funds for the Palestine refugees indefinitely. It had already set 1960 as the time-limit. Unless the General Assembly now anticipated alternative methods of providing for the refugees, sooner or later it would be faced with a situation which would have extremely serious human and political repercussions. The public and private property of the refugees, who were the victims of the establishment of the Zionist State by the General Assembly by a margin of two votes, constituted approximately 90 per cent of the area of Israel, were valued at many thousands of millions of dollars and, in 1947, had yielded an annual revenue of approximately 150 million dollars.

13. There was no reason why the Arab properties in Israel should continue to be exploited by Israelis who were enjoying undisturbed the fruit of their aggression, terrorism and confiscation, while the owners

of the property were compelled to live on charity. It was most urgent that a commission should be established for the custodianship of Arab property in Israel. A United Nations custodianship commission should be given the responsibility of administering and supervising the maintenance of the property, collecting Arab revenue in Israel and distributing it for the benefit of the refugees until a definite settlement was reached on the Palestine question.

14. It might be objected that such a proposal was impracticable, but the proposal could be implemented if the international community refused to continue to submit to every selfish whim of the Zionists inside and outside Israel, and if some Member States decided to show firmness in the face of Zionist displeasure. Hundreds of millions of dollars poured into Israel every year. If Israel refused to co-operate with the custodianship commission, the Member States which so generously responded to Zionist appeals for funds could deduct 150 million dollars from such funds for the benefit of the Arab refugees.

15. Turning to the report and the refugee problem, he did not agree that if it should prove possible to settle the refugee problem through economic measures the Palestine question would to all intents and purposes be solved. As he had said earlier in the General Assembly (701st plenary meeting), the refugee problem was only a part of the Palestine question, which was political in nature and had to be considered in its three main aspects: the territorial aspect, the problem of the refugees and the problem of compensation.

16. In his view, it was because an attempt to settle the refugee problem had been made without first tackling the territorial aspect that no success had been achieved. Israel was occupying 60 per cent of that part of Palestine which the United Nations had decided should remain Arab (resolution 181 (II))—an area which could accommodate about half the Arab refugees. If that area of Palestine were returned to its rightful owners—and there were no legal grounds for its continued occupation by Israel—the remaining 500,000 Arab refugees could then be offered the alternatives of repatriation or individual compensation.

17. None of the arguments which the Zionist State of Israel had put forward to justify its denial of repatriation to Palestine refugees and their right to their property in Israel had any validity. Israel had been admitted to membership in the United Nations on condition that it respected the Charter of the United Nations and the United Nations decisions on Palestine, and its failure to do so raised doubts as to the desirability of its continued membership.

18. If necessary, he was prepared at a later stage to produce evidence to refute the argument advanced by the Zionists and their supporters that the Palestine refugees were not entitled to repatriation or compensation, on the grounds that they had abandoned their homeland and property at the instigation of their own leaders and the following aggression by the Arab States. Neither contention was true. Nor was there any truth in the Zionist argument that the Palestine refugees could not return to their homeland because Israel had not the space to absorb them. The Prime Minister of Israel, Mr. Ben-Gurion, had stated that there was room in Israel for 8 million additional Zionist immigrants.

19. The Palestine refugees were the victims of the policy which had created the State of Israel, a policy imposed on the Arab Near East without the Palestine Arabs being consulted. As might be inferred from the report of the Director of UNRWA, the refugees would never relinquish their right to repatriation and to their property in Israel.

20. The Government of Israel had failed to implement paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) in regard to repatriation and compensation, stating that it considered the United Nations decisions concerning Palestine as null and void. If that were true, the creation of the State of Israel and its recognition by other States would also have no legal basis. In fact, however, the validity of United Nations decisions was not affected by the refusal of any of the parties concerned to implement them. It should moreover be recognized that Israel's failure to implement the United Nations decisions on Palestine was responsible for the political tension in the Near East and for the difficulties which the West was experiencing in the area.

21. Passing on to a consideration of the relationship between the refugee problem and Zionist policies, he declared that the Arab countries were not hostile to the Jews as such, racial and religious prejudices being contrary to all their traditions; but they were bitterly opposed to international Zionism, which was a hostile political movement endangering their physical existence and all their interests.

22. The problem of the refugees was the direct consequence of the success of Zionist policies in Palestine. The nature of the Zionist movement explained not only what had happened in Palestine but what the future was likely to hold if that international political force was not checked. The movement had started in the nineteenth century with the expansion of European colonialism, which was then endeavouring to gain control over the Arab world from Morocco to Iraq. Its aim had been, and still was, to found an empire extending from the Nile to the Euphrates. He cited in support of his contention both the occupation by Israel of the Sinai Peninsula in 1956 and official Israel Government statements. The goal was not only the occupation and exploitation of the region but also the expulsion or extermination of the local population so that a foreign Zionist State could be established there. Political historians had pointed to a definite historical parallel between the consecutive stages of Zionist settlement in Palestine and European occupation of the Arab countries. It explained why the imperialist Powers had supported the Zionist movement from its initial stages. Even today they saw in it a tool to further their ambitions in the Arab world.

23. Immigration was the main tool of Zionist expansionist and imperialist policies. Between 1919 and 1947 the number of Jews in Palestine had increased from 56,000 to 700,000, including many illegal immigrants. That immigration, small as it might appear in absolute numbers, had resulted in the establishment of the State of Israel and the tragic problem of the refugees.

24. Arab fears had to be considered in the light of that historical development and in the context of Zionist aims, as defined by Zionist leaders. Mr. Ben-Gurion, had not only repeatedly declared that the

present boundaries of Israel included only a part of the contemplated greater Zionist State; he had also declared that the final goal could not be reached unless many millions of Zionists emigrated to Israel. In the summer of 1956 he had stated that Israel could absorb 8 million Jews and that he anticipated that 4 million would arrive in the near future. It was obvious that such numbers could not be absorbed within the existing boundaries of the State.

25. In the circumstances, his delegation requested the General Assembly to consider the questions raised by unrestricted Zionist immigration and, as a matter of urgency, to establish international control of such immigration. Israel had already indicated that it would oppose such a move on the ground of infringement of its sovereign rights. But today there were many universally-recognized limitations on the sovereign rights of States, and Israel itself had agreed to the limitation of those rights when it accepted the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

26. Israel also maintained that international control of Zionist immigration was not acceptable because it would constitute interference with Israel's national policies. It must however be remembered that Israel's leaders were not only servants of the State but also, in their capacity as Zionists, servants and tools of the Zionist movement, a supra-national institution. The policy of mass immigration of Zionists, which Israel supported, was at the root of the country's opposition to the repatriation of the Palestine refugees, and the continuance of that policy constituted a serious threat to world peace.

27. Summing up, he put forward the following points as essential to the solution of the refugee problem and the restoration of tranquillity in the area: first, the setting up of a United Nations commission for the custodianship of Arab property in Israel; second, the return to the Arabs of that part of Palestine which the United Nations had decided should remain Arab territory; third, the repatriation of those refugees who wished to return to their homes, in accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 194 (III); fourth, the payment of compensation to refugees choosing not to return, as provided for in the said resolution; and, fifth, the establishment of international control of Zionist immigration into Israel.

28. Mr. HAROMY (Austria) associated his delegation with the tribute paid to the Director and staff of UNRWA on their efficiency and their dedication to a task the difficulty of which Austria could appreciate, having itself given shelter to so many refugees during the past years.

29. Unfortunately, as the Director had stated in his report, the Agency had been prevented by lack of funds from carrying out certain of its plans. The Austrian delegation felt that it would be deplorable if the financial crisis threatening the Agency were to force it to make further curtailments in its activities. Already a number of educational and vocational programmes, which constituted the best means of equipping the refugees to support themselves, had had to be cut down. The children among the refugee population deserved special attention; they should be provided not only with food and clothing but also

with opportunities for education. The Austrian delegation believed that that could be done without prejudging the future. Encouraging and enabling the refugees to become economically independent did not mean urging them to renounce their rights.

30. Although the Palestine refugee problem was at present primarily a humanitarian task for the United Nations to which all Member States should give full moral and material support, it should not be forgotten that in the long run the problem as a whole could not be left without a solution. The restoration of a lasting peace in the Middle East depended to a large extent on a workable solution of the refugee question. Such a solution would help to create the co-operative spirit on which any general settlement of Arab-Israel difficulties depended. The Austrian delegation sincerely hoped that it would ultimately be possible to solve the problem equitably, in accordance with the principles of the Charter.

31. Mr. BENGTTSSON (Sweden) said that his delegation had studied the annual report of the Director of UNRWA with interest, and had been much impressed by the excellent work that had been done under very adverse conditions. Without the Agency's efforts, more than 900,000 refugees, many of them children, would be in a truly desperate situation. Unfortunately the Agency was suffering from a lack of funds which had forced it to curtail a number of activities intended to help the refugees to become self-supporting.

32. The problem was a serious one, and the United Nations must ask itself why many contributing Governments were reluctant to increase or in some cases even to continue their support. The reason seemed to be that the future of the Palestine refugees was as uncertain as ever and that little had been done to reintegrate them into the economic life of the Near East, as advocated in paragraph 4 of General Assembly resolution 393 (V). That reluctance was unlikely to be overcome unless the Assembly could count on constructive solutions. The Swedish delegation in particular was anxious to see some evidence of willingness to try to solve the problem, although it realized that there could be no quick or easy solution. It would deplore any tendency to seek to perpetuate the problem for political reasons.

33. In connexion with contributions to the Agency, the table of contributing countries given in annex F of the annual report of the Director of UNRWA deserved careful study, as showing which countries financially able to do so were willing to work for the welfare of the Arab refugees and the stability of the Near East. However, the problem could only be solved in part by financial contributions from Governments, since its underlying causes were political in nature. It was of the utmost importance to create an atmosphere of peace, co-operation and goodwill throughout the area in which the repercussions of the refugee problem were felt. It was in the interests of the countries in that area that the refugees should return to normal life. Hence they would be the first to suffer from the cuts in the current programme, which was vital to political stability in the Near East. There should be active co-operation in the search for real solutions between the host countries and the country from which the refugees had come.

34. From the political point of view, the basic question was whether the refugees were to go back to their country of origin or to settle down and begin to support themselves in new surroundings. The Swedish delegation believed that provision should be made for both alternatives, in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 818 (IX) and 393 (V), under which the Director of UNRWA was authorized to carry out projects capable of supporting substantial numbers of refugees. It was hardly realistic to envisage the repatriation to Israel of nearly 1 million probably hostile refugees. Moreover, a large number of refugees from other countries, including Arab countries, had moved to Israel in the meantime and been integrated there. However, a certain number of refugees could be allowed to return, perhaps gradually, without threatening the State of Israel too seriously. In any event, the question of compensation for refugee property could not be ignored. The refugees were undoubtedly entitled to some compensation, although the details could not fail to give rise to controversy. It might be of use, therefore, to consider at the appropriate time the possibility of setting up an impartial body to assist the parties concerned in finding an equitable solution.

35. Since the problem could not be solved completely by repatriation and compensation, other means of rehabilitation must be found. Praiseworthy efforts had been made in that direction. The Swedish delegation attached great importance to the Director's remarks at the 64th meeting regarding the slight change in the attitude of the refugees towards the self-support projects, which they had formerly associated with permanent resettlement and the abandonment of their hopes for repatriation. The Director had concluded that there was now an increasing realization on the part of the refugees and of Governments that self-support was in the long-term interests of both. All delegations would agree, regardless of their views on where the responsibility for the Palestine refugee problem lay, that whenever possible the refugees should be given an opportunity to prepare themselves for more constructive and happier lives. The more the refugees adopted that attitude and translated it into positive action, the greater would be the willingness of the international community to give them the necessary support and facilities.

36. In conclusion he stressed that progress towards creating the political conditions which were a prerequisite for the final solution of the refugee problem could only be achieved through the efforts of the countries in the area. It would be gratifying to learn of their determination to work in that direction.

37. Mr. LOIZIDES (Greece) thanked the Director of UNRWA for his frank and enlightening report on the Palestine refugee problem. He also congratulated the Agency in general on its excellent humanitarian work. He felt that its achievements in relief and rehabilitation were to the credit of the United Nations and a heartening phenomenon at a time of great political stress. However, the Director of UNRWA had sounded a serious warning regarding the suffering that would ensue, and its political repercussions, if the Members of the United Nations failed to supply funds to continue the Agency's work. Greece's contribution was small, though there were many larger and richer countries which contributed less or nothing at all. He intended

to suggest to his Government that it should maintain and if possible increase its contribution.

38. It was unrealistic to expect any definitive solution of the refugee problem without at least a beginning of repatriation or compensation, but nothing had been done in that direction so far. When the Agency was so pressed for funds, it was legitimate to ask why the present possessors of the property left behind by the refugees did not contribute at least a part of the revenue from it towards their mainte-

nance. He reserved the right to speak again when that question had been answered.

39. The CHAIRMAN said that, as the end of the Assembly was approaching fast, he would henceforward be obliged to enforce strictly the provisions of rule 111 of the rules of procedure, in order to speed up the general debate. He would also be obliged to take action to prevent the reopening of the general debate when any draft resolutions on the item came up for study.

The meeting rose at 4.50 p.m.