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Chairman: Mr. Mihai MAGHERU (Romania).

AGENDA ITEM 26

**Report of the Director of the United Nations Relief and
Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near
East (A/3931, A/3948, A/SPC/29) (continued)**

1. Mr. SHUKAIRY (Saudi Arabia), in reply to the representative of Israel (106th meeting) said that, once again, the latter's statement had contributed nothing new. As at all the previous sessions of the Assembly, Israel assumed its usual attitude of defiance. His delegation proposed, at a later meeting, to refute one by one the arguments advanced by Israel, which were entirely without foundation. For the time being, he would confine himself to the question of compensation which had been raised by the Israel representative. Israel having made a declaration on compensation after eleven years of silence, some anxiety and curiosity was justified.
2. Paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) made a distinction between two groups of refugees: those wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours and those choosing not to return. Under the resolution, refugees in the first category should be permitted to return to their homes, while those in the second category should be paid compensation for their property. Replying to a comment made by the representative of Israel at a previous meeting (103rd meeting), he explained that his omission of the words "and live at peace with their neighbours" in his first statement had been unintentional. Furthermore, paragraph 11 had been quoted in full dozens of times and its text was well known.
3. It was clear from that resolution that the refugees were free to choose between the two courses of action. A refugee who decided not to exercise his right to repatriation acquired *ipso facto* a right to compensation, a right not subject to any prior condition such as the peaceful intentions of the refugee or the existence of peaceful conditions in the area. However ill-intentioned the refugees might be, they were nevertheless entitled to compensation for the loss of their property.
4. In his statement, however, the Israel representative had laid down three conditions for compensation: the refugee question had to be solved by integration, the international assistance offered in

1955 had to be available and the claims of Israel citizens who had left behind property in Arab lands had to be taken into account. Those conditions were not to be found either in resolution 194 (III) or in any of the other relevant resolutions adopted by the General Assembly since 1948. According to the Israel representative's latest statement (106th meeting), there was to be no repatriation for anyone, so that, in order to receive compensation, the refugees would have to forego repatriation and accept forced integration. The wishes of the individual were disregarded and the refugees were treated as a mass which did not need to be consulted. The Israel representative had refrained from detailed comment on the international assistance offered in 1955 and it was to be hoped that he would clarify his views on that point. The tactic was typical of Israel which believed itself entitled to take all it could and considered, moreover, that the international community had a duty to support it and to make good the damage it caused. The third condition, concerning Israel refugees from the Arab countries, required clarification. Were they really refugees? Why had they left their homes? What property had they lost? No such item had ever been placed on the General Assembly's agenda, no United Nations body had ever considered it, no resolution had mentioned it, and the Israel representative was the first to raise the question in the form of a claim. On the other hand, the question of compensation for Palestine refugees had been examined at length by the United Nations; it had been debated and decided. Israel had been judged the debtor by the United Nations and was required to repay its debts. The only conclusion to be drawn from the Israel representative's statement was that its sole purpose had been to obscure the issue and to increase the number of conditions for compensation, which Israel desired to avoid at all costs.

5. Meanwhile, time was passing, the Agency's mandate would soon end and the refugee problem remained unsolved. A number of representatives had emphasized the urgent need to take practical action to aid the refugees and some had said that relief should come to an end at the earliest possible date. The Arab countries would be pleased to see the international community relieved of the burden and the refugees would be the first to welcome the day when they would be freed from the moral shackles of relief. However, the discontinuation of the Agency would penalize the victims and not the wrongdoer.

6. With regard to the steps to be taken, one thing was beyond doubt: every aspect of the refugee problem had already been studied and it was not the absence of information which stood in the way of its solution but inertia and a lack of courage. The Arab countries, too, were anxious to see a reduction in the number of refugees and in the amount of the relief budget; they wanted the refugees to become

self-supporting. In an effort to achieve that goal, he suggested tentatively that the United Nations should appoint Mr. Labouisse as a trustee for the property of the refugees; Mr. Labouisse was the former Director of the Agency and his integrity, wide experience and profound knowledge of the refugee problem were universally recognized. He would take over the property, administer it, take care of it, receive the revenues and pay them out to the refugees. Such a solution would enable thousands of refugees now receiving relief from the Agency to provide for themselves and live decently. Many projects could be undertaken with the revenues from refugee property and the refugees would become self-supporting. That was a constructive and realistic proposal with no conditions attached and without any ulterior political motive. It involved no change in the existing situation. If Mr. Labouisse refused to accept the post or if any objection was raised to his appointment, the Arab States would be ready to accept any person chosen by the Secretary-General. Such a decision represented the least that could be asked of the United Nations, and he would await with interest the reactions to his proposal.

7. Mr. PALAR (Indonesia) said that, in view of the importance of the proposal made by the Saudi Arabian representative, especially with regard to the question of compensation, it would be desirable for his statement to be circulated to members of the Committee.

8. Mr. SHUKAIRY (Saudi Arabia) thanked the Indonesian representative for the suggestion; he would be pleased to circulate copies of his statement to members of the Committee.

9. The CHAIRMAN noted that the Saudi Arabian delegation would arrange for distribution of the statement.

10. Mr. DE VAUCELLES (France) was pleased to note that the Agency had been able not only to continue to grant relief but also to restore certain cuts which it had had to make in the rehabilitation programme. He asked the Secretary-General to communicate an expression of the French delegation's profound gratitude to Mr. Labouisse, for the leading part he had played in redressing the balance. The French delegation deeply regretted Mr. Labouisse's departure, but experienced no misgivings, since the Agency now had at its head, in the person of Mr. Carver, a man with a sound knowledge of the Near Eastern refugees problem, who had already discharged similar duties. His experience and wisdom and the devotion of his staff had made it possible for the Agency to carry on with its work in the course of the previous months despite the unrest in the Near East. On behalf of his Government he sincerely thanked the Director and all his staff, and also the specialized agencies and the various philanthropic organizations which had once again given the Agency their disinterested help during the year.

11. His delegation welcomed the purely technical form of the Director's report (A/3931). It regretted that the discussion had occasionally ranged outside the subject of administration to include the consideration of an over-all solution to the problem of the Palestine refugees. There was no doubt that it was a tragic problem; everyone wished it to be settled in the shortest possible time and the United Nations

should be grateful to all those who would help it to achieve that goal. In that connexion, his delegation had listened with great interest to the remarks made at the previous meeting by the Israel representative at the end of his statement. It remained true, none the less, that any premature attempt to seek a settlement of the whole problem could only lead to new difficulties and compromise the humanitarian work accomplished so far.

12. Having reviewed the progress achieved in education and vocational training, and the efforts made by the social services of the Agency, particularly to provide craftsmen with tools and equipment, he suggested that grants should be replaced by loans on trust, which would encourage the recipients to work and would restore their faith in the dignity of labour.

13. He expressed the hope that the refugee co-operatives that had been set up in Jordan and in the Gaza Strip would also be developed in other host countries. In that connexion, the increase in the capital of the Jordan Development Bank was especially satisfactory.

14. He was glad that the Agency had succeeded in placing a large number of physically handicapped children in institutions in the host countries and thanked those countries for the assistance they had voluntarily provided for the Agency.

15. His delegation had noted with satisfaction that tents had been replaced by huts in most of the camps and that the refugees had thus been given an opportunity to do useful work for themselves and their families.

16. On behalf of his delegation, he extended his special thanks to Mr. de Kemoularia for his successful efforts, as special envoy of the Secretary-General, to secure an increase in the contributions of various Governments. In that connexion, he recalled that the French Government had made a considerable effort in 1957 and had contributed to the Agency a sum of 240 million francs, over and above its annual contribution of 70 million francs. That payment was an addition to the financial burden which France was already carrying in respect of the 600,000 persons who had taken refuge in its territory since the First World War and at least half of whom it had been obliged to integrate into its economy without any outside assistance. The French delegation was satisfied with the budget estimates for 1959, which provided for a reduction in administrative and maintenance expenditure and for an increase in assistance properly so called.

17. Turning to paragraph 13 of the Director's report, he deplored the fact that the Agency had not yet obtained the agreement of certain States to initiating a system for determining the eligibility of the refugees for its services; thus, groups of very small children were often deprived of rations for several months, until a corresponding number of ration cards held by people no longer eligible were returned to the Agency. The French delegation also regretted the cases of interference by certain local authorities in UNRWA activities reported in paragraphs 62 and 63 and in annex H of the report. The Assembly should draw those shortcomings and abuses to the attention of the host countries and should ask them to secure

recognition of the international status of Agency staff by their local authorities.

18. The French delegation considered that the financial situation revealed at the most recent pledging conference^{1/} was disquieting. The fact that only thirty-four States Members of the United Nations and seven non-member States had found it possible to pay contributions in 1958, while forty-seven States had not made any gesture, was obviously prejudicial to the prestige of the Organization. Moreover, it was abnormal that two countries, for whose efforts the United Nations should be particularly grateful, were supplying nine tenths of the whole budget of the Agency. It might be suggested to Member States which were unable to make monetary contributions for lack of currency that they should make foodstuffs or textiles available to the Agency.

19. With reference to the idea expressed in paragraph 9 of the Director's report, the French delegation considered that the General Assembly should instruct the Secretary-General to prepare a report on all the elements of the problem and the possible solutions, to be circulated to Governments several weeks before the opening of the fourteenth session. The Assembly would thus be in a position to take a final decision in full knowledge of the facts.

20. Mr. LARKIN (New Zealand) expressed his delegation's regret at the resignation of the former Director of UNRWA, Mr. Labouisse, and associated himself with the tributes paid to him by the representatives of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Republic. His delegation was also grateful to Mr. Carver for the manner in which he had conducted the operations of the Agency since Mr. Labouisse's departure.

21. He referred to the financial crisis that the Agency had experienced in the spring of 1957 and expressed his satisfaction at the improvement in the situation. It was to be hoped that all countries would respond to Mr. Carver's appeal, so that the Agency would not again be forced to abandon its useful and constructive activities and have to limit itself to providing essential relief and educational assistance. The New Zealand Government had given the Agency about \$1,150,000, which was the third or fourth highest per caput contribution from a State Member of the United Nations. In addition, the New Zealand people had despatched directly, through non-governmental sources, clothing and equipment valued at about \$1 million. His country had thus given practical expression to its concern for and deep sympathy with the Palestine refugees.

22. The New Zealand delegation supported Mr. Carver's suggestion for an examination of the basis on which international aid to the refugees should be administered. Such a study, which had been endorsed by the UNRWA Advisory Commission, might establish whether the efficiency and achievements of the Agency might be enhanced. It might also be desirable to clarify the Agency's status as a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly, to examine the relief rolls and to conduct a survey of the refugee population. It was doubtful whether the study should extend to broader questions; but a study directed towards

specific and practical issues relating directly to the needs of the refugees could be of value in view of the impending expiry of the Agency's mandate on 30 June 1960.

23. Although in the past the New Zealand delegation had felt the General Assembly might initiate action to assist progress in the political field, it now believed that the responsibility for such action was best left to the parties concerned. It regretted, however, that during the past year those parties had not changed their earlier positions. It was aware of the tenacity with which those positions were maintained and of the doubts and fears evoked by suggestions for a reconciliation. Nevertheless, it was convinced that only by such a reconciliation could the lot of the refugees and the situation throughout the Middle East be improved. Ten years of participation in debates on the problem of the Palestine refugees had convinced the New Zealand delegation that arguments about the origin of the problem were fruitless. As the Saudi Arabian representative had pointed out (103rd meeting), the refugee problem was there, no matter who was innocent and who guilty.

24. Just as the New Zealand delegation considered argument over the question of responsibility to be irrelevant, so too it felt that less divergent interpretations of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) would be desirable. On the one hand, the obligations imposed by that resolution were denied and repudiated; on the other, its terms were given a limited and specialized construction. Resolution 194 (III) was the key declaration of principle in relation to the refugees. It should be neither repudiated nor diminished in scope. It was not completely exclusive in its terms. It envisaged a choice—repatriation for those who sought to return in peace to their homes, compensation for those who decided not to. The object of the resolution was not, as had been suggested, to help the refugees reconstitute their national community by returning to their ancient home. Such terms suggested aims unattainable by peaceful means. The objective sought by the United Nations was to restore to the refugees the means of leading normal and productive lives. That restitution should come from the right of choice guaranteed to the refugees by the General Assembly.

25. The New Zealand delegation had listened very carefully to the arguments advanced by the Israel representative in favour of resettling the refugees in the host countries (106th meeting). It felt that the Israel arguments too lightly set aside both the practical and the moral obligations imposed by paragraph 11 of resolution 194 (III) and, by so doing, made progress towards a reduction of political differences more difficult. While the New Zealand delegation did not disregard Israel's views concerning the impracticability of full repatriation, the security problem and the difficulties of refugee adjustment to life in modern Israel, it did not consider the arguments against any degree of repatriation as decisive. Israel's acceptance of the central principle of the paragraph in question, combined with an offer of compensation, would help considerably in solving the political problem. In stating his Government's attitude to compensation, the representative of Israel had pointed out the advantage, both moral and political, in a solution of the refugee problem independent of a

^{1/} See Official Records of the General Assembly, 13th Session, Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole Assembly, 1st meeting.

comprehensive peace settlement. The New Zealand delegation sincerely hoped that such a settlement would be achieved but it noted that the compensation proposed by Israel was conditional and that Israel made it contingent upon a solution by way of integration of the refugees. For obvious reasons, that condition seemed unlikely to enhance the prospects of solving the problem. Even in existing circumstances, the New Zealand delegation felt that certain things might be done in anticipation of the time when compensation could be paid, such as setting aside funds for the payment of compensation and determining the sums due to the refugees and the methods of payment.

26. In his statement to the Committee (101st meeting), the Acting Director of UNRWA, Mr. Carver, had said that the decision which the General Assembly was called upon to take concerning the future of the Agency was crucial, because it vitally concerned the refugees themselves, the host Governments, the contributing countries and the United Nations as a whole. However, the host Governments and the contributing countries were not essentially different from the other States Members of the United Nations. Like the latter, they must be governed by the Principles and Purposes of the United Nations and be concerned, like the United Nations as a whole, for the maintenance of peace and order in the Middle East. It had to be acknowledged, however, that the United Nations had been enabled to discharge its general responsibility in relation to the refugee problem only as the result of the activity of a relatively small number of Member States. It would have fulfilled that responsibility effectively only when all Member States had acknowledged their obligation to assist.

27. At the twelfth session of the General Assembly, Mr. Labouisse had emphasized that UNRWA could never be a substitute for the political decisions and action to be taken by all the Governments concerned with the refugee problem (78th meeting), and that the Agency, like the United Nations Emergency Force, was one of the prices—and perhaps the cheapest price—which the United Nations had to pay for its inability to solve the political problem (64th meeting). UNRWA was faced with many difficulties but it had nevertheless succeeded in keeping the refugees alive and healthy. If it could count on the support it needed, it could do still more and bring new hope to many refugees. The responsibilities which rested with the General Assembly were therefore clear.

28. Mr. LIU (China) paid a tribute to the excellent work done by Mr. Labouisse, the former Director of UNRWA, and by Mr. Carver, the Acting Director.

29. He had some hesitation in taking part in the discussion of the problem of the Arab refugees from Palestine. His Government was one of those which had not made a financial contribution to UNRWA in the past few years. The Chinese Government had been hard pressed by a problem no less in magnitude than that of the refugees from Palestine, namely the problem of the political refugees from the mainland of China, and would unfortunately be unable to make any appreciable financial contribution to UNRWA in the immediate future. That did not mean that his Government was not concerned about the situation of the Palestine refugees. On the contrary, for the reason he had explained, it was able to understand the refugees' needs, aspirations and hopes. It was

undeniable that the problem of the Arab refugees from Palestine had a political background, but it was also a humanitarian problem and for that reason the United Nations should not merely reaffirm year after year the refugees' right to repatriation or compensation but should also take concrete and effective steps to end their tribulations and give them a new lease of normal and productive life. The activities of UNRWA were only a palliative for the refugees and, unless the United Nations meant to continue the refugee relief programme indefinitely and perpetuate the present situation, it was imperative that steps should be taken to bring about an equitable and lasting solution of the refugee problem. That problem was closely related to the maintenance of peace and stability in the Middle East, and it was no exaggeration to say that peace in the area depended on such a solution, which called for the co-operation of all Member States, particularly the Middle East countries directly concerned.

30. Mr. PLAJA (Italy) said it was a blot on the civilization of our times that almost a million refugees should still be living in poverty in the Middle East. Italy had had many refugees from different European countries through its hands in the last ten years, and was in a very good position to understand the whole tragedy of the refugee situation. In spite of its own over-population problem, Italy had succeeded in integrating thousands of refugees into its economic life and in giving tens of thousands of others temporary asylum. It was because of the burden it had taken on by doing so that the Italian Government's contribution to UNRWA had not been as large as it would have liked it to be. However, it was doing its best and had been able to announce, at the recent pledging conference for voluntary contributions to UNRWA, a contribution for 1959 equivalent to \$120,000.

31. The Italian delegation regretted that the report of the Director of the Agency to the present session of the General Assembly gave a picture of the refugee situation which was not very different from that of the previous year. However, there were some parts which sounded a hopeful note. It was encouraging to read, for instance, that, thanks to an improved financial position, UNRWA had been able to resume some of the assistance programmes which had been curtailed the previous year for lack of adequate funds. The refugees' growing appreciation of the self-support and rehabilitation projects was also an encouraging sign. The refugee problem would be finally solved only when there was a general settlement in the Middle East, but it was also first and foremost a humanitarian problem which called for immediate provisional measures, particularly since the problem of aid to the refugees after 1960 had to be borne in mind. The Italian delegation felt that, in so far as the refugee situation remained unchanged, the United Nations must continue, as in the past, to discharge its humanitarian task on behalf of the refugees. However, the United Nations should not lose sight of the need to pave the way for a final solution of the refugee problem. That was the aim of the self-support activities, which in no way affected the possibility of a political solution of the problem. One of the most important of those activities was the education and vocational training of young refugees, which prepared them to be self-sufficient wherever

they might be living in the future. That programme was all the more important since almost half of the refugees were of school age, and it might well be viewed—in addition to its human aspect—as providing one of the most promising possibilities of solving the refugee problem. A type of assistance of a similar kind which had also been welcomed by the refugees was the individual grants programme. UNRWA had unfortunately been obliged to interrupt it in 1957 for lack of sufficient funds, but he was happy to note from the report that UNRWA was going to be able to resume the programme in 1959, provided that the required funds were available.

32. In conclusion, he expressed the deep appreciation of the Italian delegation to Mr. Carver, the Acting Director of UNRWA, and to his staff, for the way in which they were carrying out their task under difficult conditions. He also paid a tribute to the magnificent work done by Mr. Labouisse in the four years of his directorship.

33. The CHAIRMAN announced that, if there was no objection, the list of speakers would be closed on Tuesday, 19 November, at noon.

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 5.10 p.m.