



Chairman: Mr. Abdul Samad GHAUS  
(Afghanistan).

**AGENDA ITEM 35**

**United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine  
Refugees in the Near East: report of the Commissioner-  
General (A/8013, A/8040, A/8084 and Add.1, A/  
SPC/140)**

1. Mr. MICHELMORE (Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) introduced his report (A/8013) for the period 1 July 1969 to 30 June 1970.
2. The Agency's problems during the past year, probably the most difficult in its history, were basically of two kinds: those relating to its financial situation and those concerning its operating environment. He would for the time being refer only to the financial problems.
3. The financial crisis had become so serious that the very continuance of UNRWA was threatened. He therefore hoped that the Committee would concentrate its attention on means of solving that problem. Unless there was a substantial increase in the amounts pledged to the Agency's funds at the conference to be held a few days later, a major crisis would be inescapable.
4. In recent years, attention had been drawn on many occasions to the growing financial crisis of UNRWA. In that connexion, he recalled the efforts made and warnings issued by the Secretary-General between the twenty-third session and the current session, and also the appeals made both by himself and by the UNRWA staff.
5. The Agency's costs would have increased in any event because of the natural increase in the refugee population and because of rising wages and costs of supplies, but they had moved up much more sharply after the 1967 hostilities which had left many persons in greater need. At the same time, the inflationary trend in operating costs had borne heavily on the UNRWA budget. Another cause of the Agency's rising expenditure was the increased cost of education, due largely to increased enrolment (60 per cent in 7 years). Total recurrent costs had increased by \$11 million, \$8.1 million of which was due to education, which in 1971 would account for 46 per cent of Agency expenditure.
6. Since the Agency's income had increased at only half the rate required, the deficit had become more serious every year. The Agency had examined the possibility of reducing expenditure many times. International staff had been replaced with local staff wherever possible, and savings from improved methods and procedures had been sought constantly. The Agency had reduced its relief programme and restricted its health and sanitation activities. In education, larger classes and double shifting had been imposed.
7. At the twenty-fourth session (683rd meeting), he had informed the Committee that drastic steps would have to be considered if the Agency's income continued to be insufficient. Some of those measures had been put into effect: for example, the number of persons receiving food rations had been reduced, as had supplementary feeding. Subsidy payments to certain Governments in the area for education, medical services and relief assistance had been withheld, and university scholarships had been reduced. Those measures had resulted in an annual saving of between \$1.8 million and \$2 million.
8. Other reductions had, however, been deferred, either in the hope that Governments would increase their contributions, or in the hope that other solutions, less expensive than existing arrangements, could be found or, again, because special contributions had kept activities going, at least temporarily. Moreover, since the Governments in the area had been opposed to further reductions and it had been feared that there would be strong reaction to them, it had been decided that such reductions should be deferred until the General Assembly had reconsidered the question.
9. He hoped, however, that no further reductions need be considered and that, indeed, some of the discontinued services, which were fully justified, could be restored. However, that would require an increase of more than \$5 million, or even between \$6.5 million and \$7 million, in the Agency's income for 1971. There was no doubt that that amount could be raised if each State paid a sum equal to its highest previous contribution, and if all States which did not currently contribute made contributions on a comparable level.
10. He drew attention to his note dated 21 November 1969,<sup>1</sup> which suggested for the consideration of the General Assembly several ways of relieving the financial situation of UNRWA.
11. Since 30 June 1970, the end of the period covered by the current report, there had been several developments which should be noted. The tragic events in Jordan during the last half of September 1970 and their effect on the refugees and on UNRWA were reported in documents

<sup>1</sup> See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-fourth Session, Annexes*, agenda item 36, document A/SPC/134.

A/8084 and Add.1. The Agency had provided emergency assistance, and regular UNRWA services had been restored as soon as circumstances had permitted. The Agency only regretted that its financial situation had not permitted it to give greater help. The cholera epidemic which had broken out in mid-August had also given rise to grave concern and, of the 67 cases of cholera reported among the refugees registered with UNRWA, 6 had been fatal.

12. In the field of education, the news was somewhat better. In 1970, as in 1969, it had been possible for secondary school certificate examinations to be held in Gaza and 8,000 students had taken the examinations. There had also been some progress on the question of textbooks, detailed information on which was given in paragraphs 100-105 of the report (A/8013), and in the annexes thereto. In October 1970 the Director-General of UNESCO had reported that Israel had agreed to the importation of 55 textbooks into the West Bank and 48 such books into Gaza, but had opposed the importation of 8 Jordanian textbooks and 7 textbooks published in the United Arab Republic. Thus, as the Director-General of UNESCO had expressed it, it could be said that the problem was 85 per cent solved.

13. Another academic year had now started in the UNRWA/UNESCO schools and information available indicated that total attendance, which was still increasing, would be about 245,000.

14. Those new developments emphasized the need to find the funds required to maintain UNRWA's services for the Palestine refugees. The temporary interruption of the Agency's services in September 1970 had demonstrated how vital those services were to a large part of the people of Jordan. The cholera outbreak had underlined the vital importance—both for the refugees and for the community in which they lived—of the maintenance of sanitation services. Until some other body was prepared to take responsibility for those services, UNRWA must continue to provide them. Lastly, the increase in enrolment in UNRWA/UNESCO schools showed the importance that the refugees attached to education. However, the existence of those schools depended on UNRWA's income, since if that income was not increased, education was the only area in which further savings could be made. That was the tragedy threatening the Palestine refugees.

15. The CHAIRMAN thanked the Commissioner-General on behalf of the Special Political Committee for his statement and for the efforts he and his colleagues were making to help the refugees.

16. He recalled once again the request made by the President of the General Assembly to all Committees to avoid any waste of time and his suggestion that, when a new item was to be considered, representatives should be asked to inscribe their names on the list of speakers at the earliest possible time, that time-limits should be set for submission of draft proposals and amendments in writing and that delegations should endeavour to limit the length of their speeches, particularly for explanations of vote. He hoped that all members would keep that counsel in mind, that they would reserve statements in exercise of the right of reply to the close of each meeting and would confine

points of order to questions which lay within the competence of the Chairman or questions concerning the application of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly.

17. The Committee had before it a letter (A/SPC/140) in which the representatives of Afghanistan, Indonesia, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia requested that the Palestine Arab delegation be heard by the Special Political Committee during its deliberation on the report of the Commissioner-General. The Palestine Arab delegation wished to address the Committee and make such other statements as might be required. At the twentieth session, the Committee had decided, in connexion with a similar request, "to authorize the persons constituting the said delegation to speak in the Committee and to make such statements as they might deem necessary, without such authorization implying recognition of the above-mentioned Organization".<sup>2</sup> Since then, the Committee had followed the same procedure at each session of the General Assembly. In the light of that practice, he suggested that the Committee might decide at the appropriate time to hear the spokesmen mentioned in the letter from the four delegations, subject to the same reservation as it had made in previous years. If there was no objection, he would take it that the Committee was in agreement with the procedure he had just outlined.

*It was so decided.*

18. Mr. TEKOA (Israel) said that he wished once again, as in previous years, to express his delegation's reservations concerning the procedure which the Committee had just approved.

19. Mr. YAZID (Algeria) said that the problem of the colonization of Palestine, which lay at the root of the expansionist, imperialist-Zionist aggression in the Middle East, had been discussed at length during the debate on the question of the situation in the Middle East<sup>3</sup> in the General Assembly. The establishment by force in Palestine of elements alien to that region had driven the Palestine people from its homeland; but that people had since been fighting to assert its right to national existence, sovereignty and the integrity of its territory. Its heroic fight was part of the struggle of the colonized peoples and was making a decisive contribution to the strengthening of the anti-imperialist camp in the world.

20. His delegation wished to emphasize once more the gap which existed between United Nations action and historical realities. Over twenty years previously, the Palestine people had been the victims of arbitrariness and injustice on the part of the Organization; yet the latter was still persistently seeking a solution to the Middle East problem on the basis of a Security Council resolution which condemned the Palestine people to the fate of refugees. There could be no real solution to the Middle East crisis without the participation of the Palestine people and the recognition of its inalienable rights. At the twenty-fourth session, the Committee and the General Assembly had reaffirmed those rights and had recognized that the problem of the Palestine Arab refugees had arisen from the denial of their inalienable rights under the Charter of the United Nations and the

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Twentieth Session, Annexes, agenda item 35, document A/6115, para. 5.

<sup>3</sup> See agenda item 22.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (see resolution 2535 B (XXIV)). However, those principles had not yet been applied.

21. All the efforts made during the past year by international imperialism and Zionism to create conditions in which Palestinian resistance could be eliminated had been frustrated by the fighting spirit and unity of the Palestine people and its leaders. His delegation once again strongly condemned the continuing joint efforts of Washington, Tel Aviv and certain Arab reactionaries to destroy the Palestine people. It condemned in particular the criminal plot and cruel massacres in Jordan in September 1970. It was precisely those who supported aggression and attempts at genocide against the Palestine people—and were arming the aggressive colonialist and expansionist hordes of Tel Aviv—who tried to reduce the problem to so-called humanitarian dimensions.

22. His delegation would speak at greater length on the question when the Committee had heard the communication from the representative of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

23. Mr. CHEN (China) said that since the hostilities of June 1967, the question of the Palestine refugees had taken on a new dimension. The total number of refugees, which currently exceeded 1.42 million and had been augmented by those who had become refugees for the second time and by a new group of displaced persons from the occupied areas, was greatly increasing the difficulties of the operation of UNRWA. As the Commissioner-General had pointed out in his report, tension was still high in the area.

24. Jordan had borne the major burden of the problem of the Palestine refugees since before the 1967 hostilities. During those hostilities, some 200,000 persons were believed to have crossed the river Jordan. With the West Bank under military occupation, the Jordan had lost its most highly developed and richest territory. The recent confrontation between the Government of Jordan and the Palestine organizations had seriously aggravated the situa-

tion. The Government of Jordan had done everything possible, in extremely difficult circumstances, to deal with the situation and to establish fruitful co-operation with the Agency, thus facilitating the latter's operations in that area.

25. As in previous years, his delegation expressed the hope that those who had fled across the Jordan as a result of the hostilities would, in accordance with Security Council resolution 237 (1967), be enabled to return to their former place of residence on the West Bank. Their return was particularly urgent because of the overcrowding of the refugee camps in eastern Jordan, and would lessen the difficulties faced by the Agency.

26. With regard to the financial problem, unless the Agency received additional funds to cover a prospective deficit of \$6 million in its budget for 1971, it would have to make substantial cuts in its services to the refugees. Such a step, as the Commissioner-General had pointed out, could lead to the disintegration of the Agency, since relief and health expenditure could not be further reduced without endangering the refugees' well-being, and curtailment of the expenditure on education would deal a grievous blow to the most constructive sector of the Agency's work. Without additional income and with services at the current level, the Agency's funds would probably be exhausted by September 1971.

27. If the Agency's activities were to collapse, the consequences would be grave not only for the refugees and for the host countries, but also for the situation in the whole Middle Eastern region. The General Assembly ought therefore to do everything possible to provide the Agency with sufficient funds to enable it to continue its current services. His delegation hoped that the Governments of the rich countries would increase their contributions and that the others would do their best to support the continuance of the Agency's services. The Chinese Government intended to contribute the sum of \$30,000, as it had the previous year.

*The meeting rose at 11.35 a.m.*