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CONTENTS

	Page
<i>Agenda Item 27:</i>	
<i>United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (continued):</i>	
(a) <i>Report of the Director of the Agency:</i>	
(b) <i>Proposals for the continuation of United Nations assistance to Palestine refugees: document submitted by the Secretary-General</i>	121

Chairman: Mr. Charles T. O. KING (Liberia).

AGENDA ITEM 27

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (*continued*):

- (a) Report of the Director of the Agency (A/4213);
- (b) Proposals for the continuation of United Nations assistance to Palestine refugees: document submitted by the Secretary-General (A/4121)

1. Mr. DIMECHKIE (Lebanon), exercising the right of reply to a statement by the representative of Israel (152nd meeting), pointed out that the question of responsibility for the Palestine war had been raised, not by him, but by the Israel representative. Furthermore the question before the Committee concerned the Palestine refugees, and his delegation refused to be drawn by the Israel representative into an irrelevant discussion.

2. Mr. JAMIL (Iraq) recalled that at the thirteenth session the Iraqi representative had drawn the Committee's attention (110th meeting) to the aims of the policy pursued in Palestine by the Zionists before and after the creation of Israel: namely, to expel the Arabs from Palestine; to throw Palestine open to Jewish immigration; to gain territory in Palestine and the other Arab States of the Middle East; and to collaborate closely with any colonial Power which sought to dominate, or to perpetuate its domination over, the Arab world. It was against that background that the Committee had to consider the question of the refugees and that of Palestine. The Arab countries were of one mind on both those issues, as the Saudi Arabian representative had rightly pointed out.

3. The Secretary-General, in the document he had submitted to the Assembly (A/4121), strongly and unreservedly recommended the continuance of the United Nations activities in support of the refugees, for all the time and to all the extent necessary. It was on that recommendation, as the Secretary-General had affirmed in his statement to the Committee (148th meeting), that the latter had to reach a decision. The Secretary-General had already indicated, in the introduction to his annual report on

the work of the Organization (A/4132/Add.1), that the reasoning of the report was based on the aim of the United Nations in that field, namely, the reintegration of the refugees into the economic life of the Near East, either by repatriation or resettlement, on the basis of choice by the refugees themselves in accordance with resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948. His delegation supported the Secretary-General's proposal that UNRWA should be kept in being pending the solution of the problem by the full implementation of the General Assembly's resolution on the refugees.

4. Before stating its position on that matter, and in order to place the refugee problem in its proper perspective, his delegation considered it necessary to recall the various aspects of the Palestine question. The refugee problem had been created by resolution 181 (II) of 29 November 1947, which was inconsistent with the principle of self-determination enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. In accordance with that principle and with the provisions of the British Mandate for Palestine, it had been the duty of the United Nations to give the Palestinian people, before the expiry of the Mandate, an opportunity to decide their future. Before the adoption of the 1947 resolution the representative of the Palestinian Arabs and the delegations of the Arab States had stressed time and time again the impossibility of creating a Jewish State without flagrantly violating the rights of the Arab majority of the population. The refugee problem was the inevitable result of the arbitrary decision to give vast Arab territories to the Zionists. That problem had not, as the Zionists claimed, been created by the intervention of the Arab armies in May 1948; nor was it correct to assert that it had been the Arab States which had prevented the partition plan from being carried out. Long before the Arab armies had entered Palestine, the Zionists had occupied territories allotted to the Arabs under the partition plan. In reality the problem of the Arab refugees was the problem of an entire people expelled from their homes; and the only acceptable solution to that problem—a solution which had been chosen by the General Assembly and reaffirmed in all the resolutions it had adopted on the subject—was the return of the refugees to their homeland. Israel had opposed that solution, and proposed that the problem should be solved by the forcible resettlement of the refugees in the Arab States. It was the duty of the United Nations to see that the General Assembly resolutions, including resolution 194 (III), were implemented. If it had failed in that duty, if it had failed to adopt the necessary measures to remove the obstacles which prevented the refugees from choosing freely between repatriation and compensation, it should at least continue to provide them with relief until the General Assembly resolutions were fully implemented. For those reasons his delegation supported the Secretary-General's proposal that UNRWA should be kept in being.

5. On the other hand, his delegation could not endorse the suggestion for the transfer of administrative responsibility for the education programme to the Governments of the host countries or the idea of integration of the refugees into the economic life of the area—which meant, in effect, the Arab countries currently sheltering them. That idea—implicit in the Secretary-General's report if his economic survey of the Middle Eastern countries (A/4121, annex) was considered a whole—ran counter to General Assembly resolution 194 (III). It might have been hoped that the Secretary-General would have accepted the limitations of the survey he had undertaken to make and would have confined himself to examining the question of extending UNRWA's mandate.

6. Lastly, the Secretary-General had not dealt in his report with the serious consequences of Jewish immigration into Israel, which was one of the obstacles to the implementation of resolution 194 (III) and a danger to such refugees as might choose to return to their homeland in accordance with paragraph 11 of that resolution.

7. His delegation reserved the right to intervene in the general debate again if it saw fit.

8. Mr. MALALASEKERA (Ceylon) described the unhappy position of the Palestine refugees and emphasized the responsibilities of the United Nations; because Palestine had been a mandated territory, the international community had a continuing responsibility for it until a final settlement was reached. The refugees therefore looked to the United Nations to find a just and lasting solution as soon as possible. Moreover, as the Director of UNRWA had indicated in his annual report (A/4213), the refugee problem poisoned every aspect of life in the Near East, and it had serious repercussions of all kinds throughout the world. Despite its complexity, however, the problem was not insoluble unless the parties concerned, regardless of consequences, were determined to make it so. The United Nations could not stand by and see matters go from bad to worse, for it was pledged to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.

9. The Agency had done much to alleviate the sufferings of the refugees; a warm tribute was due to its successive Directors and its staff, as well as to the Governments of the host countries, which had borne a heavy burden. However, the contributions received by the Agency had only been enough to provide the refugees with the barest necessities. At the present time some of the States which had made the largest contributions even appeared to feel that the time had come to withdraw their support. They believed that by so doing they might bring pressure to bear on those concerned and induce them to co-operate in finding a more satisfactory solution than that of continuing the Agency's relief operations indefinitely. In his delegation's view, however, that would be a serious mistake. Means must be found for UNRWA to continue to bring relief to the refugees until permanent homes and suitable employment had been found for them.

10. Nevertheless, UNRWA's support—while indispensable—could never be more than a palliative. Some

took the view that so long as the refugee problem remained unsolved there could be no peace in the Middle East; conversely, others thought that peace must be restored in the region before the problem could be solved. While it was incumbent on the United Nations and all men of goodwill to do their utmost to find a solution, it was primarily the duty of the countries directly concerned to find a way out of that vicious circle. The Arab spokesmen argued that there was only one solution possible—the political solution: repatriation of the refugees. They maintained that since the refugees had been driven from their homes against their will they should be allowed to return, in virtue of an inalienable right affirmed by history and justified by their national sentiment. The Israel spokesmen, on the other hand, insisted that unless the Arabs laid a foundation for peaceful coexistence by calling off the war against Israel, that country could not open its doors to an influx of refugees with avowedly hostile intentions. Israel's representatives contended that in view of their precarious strategic situation such a step would endanger their country's very existence. They added that the refugees would find themselves strangers in a country which had been completely transformed since they had left it.

11. The only way out of the impasse was to find a compromise without reviving old disputes as to which side was to blame. In its resolution 393 (V) the General Assembly had already expressed the view that the problem could be solved by the reintegration of the refugees into the economic life of the Near East, either by repatriation or resettlement. It was said that the choice between those two solutions lay with the refugees. At all events the significant fact was that the General Assembly had accepted an alternative solution as well as repatriation. Hence there was room for discussion and negotiation. The Israel Government had expressed its willingness to negotiate, while the Arab States demanded that Israel should first agree to implement fully the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly. His delegation refused to believe that any wise and peace-loving statesman would insist adamantly on one solution only. Resort to war, which some representatives had termed inevitable in the absence of a solution satisfactory to them, had never solved anything.

12. In order to avert such a catastrophe it had been proposed that, as a first step, the Conciliation Commission for Palestine should be revived. His delegation whole-heartedly supported that proposal. In its view, the Commission should be directed to concentrate henceforth on laying the foundations for an over-all settlement of the refugee problem. His delegation also welcomed the suggestion that the Commission should be enlarged and given a wider geographical distribution. It felt, however, that if the Commission was to function effectively it should be given some freedom of manoeuvre in order to facilitate compromise.

13. Solution of the refugee problem would greatly benefit the peoples of the Near East, the United Nations and all mankind. The World Refugee Year should create a favourable climate, for it would imbue the peoples of the world with the will to solve, once and for all, refugee problems wherever they arose.

The meeting rose at 4.20 p.m.