

United Nations
**GENERAL
 ASSEMBLY**

FOURTEENTH SESSION
 Official Records

**SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE, 157th
 MEETING**

Tuesday, 24 November 1959,
 at 11 a.m.



NEW YORK

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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. NASIR (Jordan) said that, in establishing a relief programme for the Palestine refugees, the United Nations had envisaged that relief would eventually be brought to an end and had therefore adopted resolutions providing for the return of the refugees to their homes. Unfortunately, because of Israel's attitude, those resolutions had not been implemented. It was surprising that an attempt should now be made to reduce the problem of the Palestine refugees to differences in the interpretation of certain facts and resolutions. The problem was both deeper and simpler than that. A country sacred to three great faiths had been partitioned and turned into a land of strife and hatred. A million innocent people had been driven out of their homes. The problem became more acute as time passed. It had already threatened the peace of the world and might soon be beyond control. It was also a complex problem whose various aspects were inseparable.

2. Twelve years had elapsed since the adoption of the resolution on the partition of Palestine but no progress towards a solution had been made. The Arab refugees, living in indescribable misery, demanded the restoration of their rights. Their logic was simple and irrefutable: against their wishes the United Nations had adopted an unfair resolution depriving them of their elementary rights, their property and their homes. It was therefore the duty of the United Nations to take the necessary steps to enable them to return to their country and recover their property. The arguments adduced by Israel to abolish their rights carried no weight with them. Persons who in time of war had to leave a combat area were always allowed to return to their homes ultimately and to get back their property. The fact that the Jews had been perse-

cuted did not mean that they could in turn persecute the Arabs who had offered them shelter and asylum. The claim that there was no place now for the Arab refugees in Palestine was groundless, for Israel had already admitted more than a million Jewish immigrants. Moreover, a great part of the area to which the refugees would return had originally been assigned to the Arabs under the partition resolution (General Assembly resolution 181 (II)). That was how the Arab refugees felt, and the United Nations must take their views into consideration. The relief provided so far was merely a palliative and it would be unwise to rely upon its lasting effectiveness.

3. Jordan had special reasons to be concerned with the problem. It had given asylum to more than 560,000 refugees, who made up about 40 per cent of the country's total population. The Jordan Government had made a superhuman effort to maintain peace and security in the area and had so far been successful. However, it was its considered opinion that unless the Palestine problem generally was solved on the basis of justice and equity there could be no real stability in the Middle East. It was no doubt impossible to redress an injustice overnight, but the first step to be taken was at least to recognize that an injustice had been committed. The next step was to discover the origins of the injustice, to measure its extent and to understand its nature.

4. The origin of the problem was the Balfour Declaration of 1917 by which certain imperialistic Powers had, on the pretext of providing a "national home for the Jewish people", given Palestine to the Jews as a present without consulting the inhabitants of the country. At the time, the population of Palestine had consisted of 650,000 Arabs and 56,000 Jews. The illegality and injustice of the Balfour Declaration had been obvious from the first day, and it had not taken long for the Arabs of Palestine to discover that the policy adopted threatened their interests and their very existence. That was why they had resisted it throughout the British Mandate. They had also realized that the policy concealed certain imperialistic aims which it had been Israel's task to further. The concerted attack upon Suez in 1956 proved that that had been the case. Israel also stood for political Zionism, considered by many as an aggressive imperialistic movement, which had branches all over the world and was quite distinct from spiritual Zionism. The sustained effort to encourage the confusion between the two had resulted in the naive, but harmful, support of political Zionism by part of the Christian world. The choice of political Zionism by the Jews was indeed regrettable. Instead of accepting the responsibility of being the chosen people of God by adhering to the loftiest moral principles, they had become the people of a God who apparently, in their thinking, liked to see innocent women and children massacred in order that a political State might be built over their dead bodies. That was certainly not the Christian God, who

would never countenance a State founded under those conditions.

5. Mr. COMAY (Israel), speaking on a point of order, took exception to the statement by the representative of Jordan that the Jews worshipped a God who liked to see them massacre men, women and children. He asked the representative of Jordan to refrain from attacking the Jewish religion.

6. Mr. NASIR (Jordan) said that he had had no intention of attacking the Jewish religion. His attack had been directed against those who had deviated from that religion. The humanitarian arguments used to justify Zionism were merely a pretext for the cruelty and injustice to which the Arabs were subjected. The contention that the Jewish State had been created in Palestine as the result of a promise made to Abraham in the Bible had been disputed by many scholars. In any case, the Arabs, who also belonged to the seed of Abraham, did not believe in that promise. In fact, a religious war was being waged in the form of a real crusade against the Muslims, with Jews in the front line and Christians behind.

7. Israel's behaviour had given the Arabs an insight into the moral character of Zionism. Whereas the law of Moses called for "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth", Israel had substituted a new code which authorized the complete destruction of a village because one of its inhabitants had been suspected of killing a Jew. Atrocities such as those perpetrated at Qibya would not help to soften the feelings of the Arabs towards the Jews. Israel perhaps thought it necessary to maintain the tension deliberately in order to continue to exist.

8. By the date of the adoption by the United Nations of the partition resolution, the Jewish population of Palestine had risen, mainly through immigration, to 650,000, compared with an Arab population of 1,350,000, the respective proportion of the total population being 32.5 per cent Jews and 67.5 per cent Arabs. The Jews had then owned 5.6 per cent of the total land. Under the partition resolution the Jewish State had received 56 per cent of the total area, only 4½ per cent being assigned to the Arabs. Thus 497,000 Arabs, representing 37 per cent of the total Arab population, had been placed under the domination of the Jewish State. Those figures indicated the glaring injustice of the partition plan. The Committee had nevertheless been told that the Jews had accepted partition only as a compromise. They had wanted more, although in fact they had been entitled to only one-tenth of what they had received. It had also been said that if the Arabs had accepted the injustice committed against them there would never have been an Arab refugee problem. The truth was that if the Jews had not coveted Palestine and had not gone into the country against the wishes of the inhabitants and under the protection of foreign bayonets, there would have been no refugee or any other problem. At present there were one million Arab refugees, and 60 per cent of the land assigned to the Arab State was occupied by Israel. It could certainly not be claimed, in the circumstances, that the rights of the Arab inhabitants of Palestine had been protected, as stipulated in the Balfour Declaration and in the British Mandate. Surely no Government or people would have accepted such treatment.

9. With regard to the relief furnished to the refugees, he thanked the Governments, private organizations

and individuals who had contributed to the alleviation of the sufferings of the refugees. He also thanked the former Director of the Agency and the present Director, who had already distinguished himself as a first-rate administrator and as a human being.

10. He did not particularly like to have to ask for relief for the refugees, for nothing was more painful and frustrating than to have to depend on relief from others. The Arabs of Palestine had always eked out a simple but honourable living. Some people considered that the Arab Governments were not anxious to solve the refugee problem because they wished to make political capital out of it. Such assertions were false and could be criminally harmful. The refugees themselves refused settlement anywhere outside their own country, as could be ascertained from the reports of the Agency or by visiting the refugee camps. That was why the Government of Jordan had made every effort to provide the refugees with opportunities for work, even at the risk of creating unemployment among its own inhabitants. Recalling the origin of the word "Works" in the Agency's title, he said that when the Economic Survey Mission for the Middle East had visited Jordan in 1949, a works programme had been initiated with the participation of the refugees, not for the purpose of resettling them in other Arab countries, but in order to avoid the evils of relief for the host country as well as for the refugees. Unfortunately, those works—consisting mainly of road building—had had to be abandoned because they had proved to be more costly than straightforward assistance.

11. The resettlement of the refugees in the various Arab countries was neither practical nor acceptable. Sooner or later they would have to return to their own country, and the sooner the better. It was very necessary to continue assistance to the refugees and it would even be desirable to increase the amount of aid given—it amounted to the modest sum of 9 cents per person per day. Advantage should be taken of the extension of the Agency's mandate to find the best means of giving effect to the United Nations resolutions. The Saudi Arabian representative had put forward suggestions which were simple and could be applied immediately. Up till now, one of the two parties concerned had been unfavourably treated in every way and had been the only one to suffer. Surely the time had come to put an end to that unilateral policy. One step in the right direction would mean a victory for the United Nations and for justice.

12. Mr. COMAY (Israel) said that he did not propose to discuss with the Jordanian representative the historical, religious and spiritual roots of the Zionist movement, nor the advantages and disadvantages of the partition plan, nor the origin of the Palestine refugee problem. He would merely remind him that the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine set up by the General Assembly in 1947 by resolution 106 (S-1), consisting of representatives of eleven countries in all parts of the world, had found that Jewish national claims in Palestine were at least as valid as Arab ones and had rejected the Arab argument that Palestine was part of the Arab world and should become an Arab State. The conclusions of the majority report of that committee were the basis of the resolution concerning the partition plan.

13. Mr. NASIR (Jordan) said that he was well aware of the fact, but the resolution was nevertheless unjust.

14. Mr. LIU (China) said that UNRWA had carried out a great task in spite of tensions and obstacles. The Director and staff of the Agency deserved the deep gratitude of the United Nations. If a political settlement of the refugee problem seemed still further away today than when UNRWA was established, it was certainly not its fault.

15. In view of the circumstances, the United Nations must continue the programme of assistance which was being carried out so efficiently by UNRWA. It was true that China was among the many Member States which had not been able to contribute in recent years to the funds of the Agency, and it would be difficult for it to make an appreciable contribution in the near future. The reason was that the Chinese Government had to deal with a no less serious problem, namely, the refugees from the Communist-occupied mainland of China. Nevertheless, China was concerned with the situation of the Palestine refugees, not only on humanitarian grounds, but also because the very peace and stability of the Middle East were at stake.

16. During a previous session of the General Assembly his delegation had pointed out that relief arrangements could be only a palliative measure. It considered that the United Nations was committed to the principle of a choice between repatriation and compensation, a principle which the General Assembly had reaffirmed on many occasions. But his delegation thought, too, that after so many years of frustration, the refugees should be encouraged to plan for the future so that they could once again lead a dignified and fruitful life. The conscience of mankind called upon all Member States, and especially the Middle East countries directly concerned, to collaborate fully in the great humanitarian task which had still to be accomplished.

17. Mr. QUENTIN-BAXTER (New Zealand) said that, although the debate had laid emphasis on the tensions and animosities which had worked against progress towards any permanent solution to the refugee problem, the annual report on the activities of UNRWA was once again an inspiration to the Assembly. The key to a solution would not be revealed by constant preoccupation with arguments about the origins of the problem. The Committee's most challenging task was to set in motion the forces which could lead towards a final solution, and a debt was owed to the Secretary-General for a report which looked to the future and gave direction to the Committee's discussions. The Governments concerned still had the primary responsibility for reaching a settlement. The appeal to them which had been formulated by the General Assembly in resolution 512 (VI) maintained a judicious balance between continuing respect for the Assembly's own decisions and recognition that accommodation must be reached between Israel and the Arab States.

18. The New Zealand delegation expressed admiration for the work of the Agency, and thanked its Director and his staff. It was certainly necessary to extend the Agency's mandate; any other course seemed unthinkable at present. In fact, efforts should be made, as the Director of the Agency and the Secretary-General had rightly said, to develop vocational training and other programmes designed to increase self-support. As the number of States contributing to the Agency's funds had increased, he hoped that those programmes would never again have to be suspended

or their scope reduced. New Zealand had always contributed modestly, as far as its means allowed, to the Agency's finances, and on a *per caput* basis came third or fourth among contributing Members. Even a small contribution from each Member State would be a way of demonstrating the concern of the United Nations for the Palestine refugees. It was therefore to be hoped that the list of the countries contributing, which still embraced less than half the membership of the Organization, would be extended substantially. That was all the more necessary because the number of people needing help was constantly increasing, and changing trends in world markets might very well cause the cost of staple commodities to rise.

19. The Secretary-General had submitted a report (A/4121) which, despite some differences of opinion, did have the great merit of indicating new possibilities for the future. The Director of UNRWA had been forced to admit that the Agency had not been able to carry out the rehabilitation part of its mandate, which was not surprising, since the problem went beyond the powers of UNRWA. Nevertheless it would not be enough merely to relieve UNRWA of the responsibility which the Agency had never had the power to discharge. The prospect of a permanent solution had always been the hope which sustained and gave meaning to the Agency's efforts, and the foundation of morale among the refugees themselves.

20. In the circumstances progress could at best be gradual. There had, however, been some encouraging gestures and actions, and it was fitting that they should be acknowledged. The more satisfactory working relationships between UNRWA and the host countries were a source of encouragement. New Zealand also endorsed the Secretary-General's proposals relating to education and hoped for other similar arrangements which would help the refugees to lead normal lives in their countries of refuge.

21. New Zealand still believed that General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948 was the key declaration of principle in relation to the refugees. But it was not completely exclusive in its terms since it envisaged a choice between repatriation and compensation. New Zealand did not disregard the general security problem or the fact that the Arab-Israel frontier was no ordinary frontier; and account was also taken of the manifest impossibility of wholesale repatriation and the difficulties of repatriating after eleven years of absence. Yet it remained that Israel had much to gain from accepting the principle of choice for the refugees. Acceptance could at least clear the way for a consideration of practical possibilities. To earn the right to repatriation, the refugee would of course have to show that he was ready to live at peace with his neighbours and that proviso should not be forgotten; but it was not impossible that refugees would be able to adapt themselves to the way of life of a country that already contained a fairly large number of Arab citizens. It was quite clear that the General Assembly, in its resolution, did not contemplate any magical restoration of the refugees' homeland of 1948; but the Assembly had given them the assurance that they would be able to resume a normal life in their natural environment as it was today, and that they would be afforded all necessary assistance for that purpose, with due regard to the property they had left behind them.

22. He expressed the hope that other members of the Committee, who could speak with greater authority,

would delve more deeply into the problem of the refugees and see how a final solution could be hastened by applying the basic decision of the General Assembly.

23. Mr. PAPAGOS (Greece) said it was clear from the introduction to the annual report of the Director of UNRWA that, as in previous years, the Agency's tasks during the period covered by the report had mainly consisted in providing food, medical care, shelter, and education and vocational training for the refugees. The Director of UNRWA had, however, stated that relief, indispensable though it had been, could not be regarded as more than a palliative and that the refugees' lot continued to be one of hardship and disappointment.

24. The Greek delegation wished to thank the Director and staff of UNRWA for the dedicated spirit in which they had carried out an increasingly heavy task under trying circumstances. In annex II of his report, the Director of UNRWA mentioned difficulties arising out of certain unsolved problems affecting relations between UNRWA and the Governments of host countries. It was to be hoped that those problems would be satisfactorily solved in order to facilitate UNRWA's work.

25. The Assembly's discussion of the question of the Palestine refugees should be guided by the spirit of General Assembly resolution 1285 (XIII), instituting the World Refugee Year which had started on 1 July 1959. Greece, like many other countries in Europe, Asia and Africa, had been faced with the influx of a large number of refugees after the Second World War. At the beginning of the century it had already had to deal with the serious problem created by the presence of over a million refugees in its territory at a time when its population was only 7 million. It therefore had some experience in questions pertaining to refugees and sympathized sincerely with their hardships.

26. The Secretary-General had submitted to the General Assembly a document (A/4121) containing proposals which were now before the Committee. He recommended the continuation of UNRWA pending the reintegration of the refugees into the economic life of the Near East, either by repatriation or by resettlement. The Greek delegation unreservedly supported the continuation of United Nations assistance to the refugees by the United Nations and the continuation of UNRWA. To that end, the Greek Government intended to contribute to the UNRWA budget during the current year, as it had done in previous years.

27. In examining the political, psychological and economic aspects of the problem of refugees, the Secretary-General stressed the particular importance of economic considerations, which he believed provided a framework within which the political and psychological aspects could be viewed more constructively. Important as the economic aspects of the problem of refugees might be, the Greek delegation believed that it was the duty of the United Nations to tackle the political aspects of the problem and to find a just and equitable solution. It was high time to put an end to the refugees' long period of waiting and to give them an opportunity to make the choice provided for in General Assembly resolution 194 (II). The refugees had an inalienable right to return to their homes although they could not be compelled to leave a host country if they had successfully established themselves there. The Greek delegation was aware of the

difficulties arising out of the application of resolution 194 (II); the most important consideration, however, was the desire of the refugees: economic considerations and proposals must follow. In their comments (A/4236) on the Secretary-General's proposals, the Arab States had expressed anxiety that the economic measures suggested by the Secretary-General might lead to the permanent resettlement of the refugees outside their homeland. Economic measures of that kind, which should aim at the amelioration of the lot of the refugees, might in certain cases involve the economic development of the host countries, a given situation should be dealt with properly in order to improve the existing conditions. However, that was not a way of solving the refugee problem as a whole.

28. Mr. SMITH (Canada) thanked the Secretary-General and the Director of UNRWA for the succinct and comprehensive reports which they had put before the Committee. Special mention might well be made of the Committee's debt to the Secretary-General, partly because the preparation of the report had added to his already great burden of work and partly because his proposals had perhaps received insufficient acknowledgement. The Secretary-General had recalled in his short statement (148th meeting) that it was not necessary for the Committee to assess the reasons which had led him to make his proposals. His delegation would follow that advice and would confine itself to expressing the opinion that it was only through venturesome and generous measures that the international situation, to which the fate of the refugees was so intimately bound, could be improved.

29. If the General Assembly decided to extend the life of UNRWA, as the Secretary-General had recommended, the Agency must clearly function as effectively as possible. The Director of UNRWA and the Secretary-General had both indicated in their reports the specific areas where improvements could and should be made. Special mention should be made of the need to rectify ration rolls and to extend the self-support programmes. In connexion with the first point, he welcomed the co-operative attitude of the authorities most closely concerned with UNRWA in the host countries. It was to be hoped that that spirit would prevail in all spheres and that the Governments of all host countries would facilitate the Agency's task by officially recognizing its status as a subsidiary organ of the United Nations. As to the development of self-support programmes, UNRWA should do all it could, within the limits of its resources, to assist the refugees as individuals to establish themselves in the economic life of the area in which they lived. His delegation therefore urged the Director of UNRWA to explore fully the existing possibilities open to refugees for vocational and agricultural training.

30. Where the financial aspects of the problem were concerned, he was glad to note that the Agency's financial position had improved and that six additional countries had paid contributions to UNRWA in 1959. The situation was not, however, entirely satisfactory, if it was realized that only twenty-eight of the eighty-two States Members of the United Nations had contributed to UNRWA in 1958. The central question on which the General Assembly now had to take a decision was whether it should, in accordance with the Secretary-General's recommendation, extend the life of UNRWA pending the reintegration of the refugees into the economic life of the Near East, either by repatri-

ation or by resettlement. The question was one of great concern to the Canadian delegation. Year after year, the Assembly had prolonged the existence of what had originally been intended as a temporary organization. The Assembly had, however, taken no effective steps to solve the political issue underlying the whole problem of the refugees. Clearly, for humanitarian and practical reasons, the United Nations must continue to give aid to the refugees, and the Canadian delegation was prepared to consider supporting the continuation of the Agency. A decision of that kind would, however, be insufficient and any recommendation concerning the extension of UNRWA should be coupled with a request that the Secretary-General should keep the whole situation under review in order to determine whether, in the light of political, economic and psychological developments, it was necessary to maintain UNRWA in existence.

31. The Canadian delegation was fully aware of the human aspects of the problem, but was also convinced that the problem of the refugees was essentially linked to the broad political picture in the Middle East. The possibility of improving that situation should therefore be explored and, in that connexion, several delegations had made suggestions which deserved serious consideration, including proposals for the reactivation and expansion of the Conciliation Commission for Palestine and for the establishment of a special United Nations committee or organization in connexion with the Palestine problem. The Canadian delegation urged the Arab States and all States Members of the United Nations to redouble their efforts to solve the problem of the Palestine refugees and so earn the gratitude of succeeding generations.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.