

United Nations  
**GENERAL  
ASSEMBLY**

TWENTY-SIXTH SESSION

Official Records

**SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE, 782nd  
MEETING**



Thursday, 18 November 1971,  
at 10.55 a.m.

NEW YORK

Chairman: Mr. Cornelius C. CREMIN (Ireland).

*Request for a hearing*

1. The CHAIRMAN drew the Committee's attention to the procedural matter of a letter dated 22 October 1971 (A/SPC/147) from the representatives of Afghanistan, Indonesia, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, addressed to the Chairman of the Committee, requesting that the Palestine Arab delegation should be heard by the Special Political Committee during its deliberation on the report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. The letter stated that the delegation would address the Committee and make such statements as might be required. At the twentieth session (435th meeting), the Committee had decided, in connexion with a similar request, to authorize the persons constituting the delegation concerned to address the Committee and to make such statements as they might deem necessary, without such authorization implying recognition of the organization concerned. The Committee had followed that procedure at each of the subsequent sessions.

2. In view of that practice, he suggested that the Committee should agree to grant a hearing, at an appropriate time, to the spokesmen named in the letter from the four delegations, on the same condition as it had stipulated previously. If there were no objections, he would take it that the Committee wished to adopt the procedure he had just outlined.

*It was so decided.*

3. Mr. CAHANA (Israel) asked that it should be stated in the summary record that, as in previous years, his delegation reserved its position with regard to the procedure adopted by the Committee.

**AGENDA ITEMS 38 AND 12**

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (*continued*) (A/8366, A/8383, A/8403, A/8413, A/8432, A/8476, A/8526; A/SPC/147):

- (a) Report of the Commissioner-General (A/8413);
- (b) Report of the Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (A/8476);
- (c) Report of the Secretary-General (A/8366);

(d) Report of the Economic and Social Council (chapter XVIII (section D)) (A/8403)

4. Mr. NUSEIBEH (Jordan) welcomed the delegation of the People's Republic of China, a country which had always been concerned with the fate of the Palestine refugees. It was gratifying that a joint appeal (A/8526) for assistance to the refugees had been submitted to the Committee at its preceding meeting on behalf of the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General and that another appeal had been made by the Princess Ashraf Pahlevi at that meeting. He hoped that those appeals would have a positive effect. He pointed out that the Iranian Government did not stop at words but, since 1967, had been responsible for operating one of the best equipped of the refugee camps, in the vicinity of Amman. He conveyed his best wishes to Mr. Michelmores, the former Commissioner-General, who had retired in May 1971.

5. He expressed his Government's appreciation to the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East for the dedicated and sustained efforts of UNRWA and other, related agencies, which were vital to the survival of the Palestine refugees. The mission of UNRWA was to ensure as decent a life as possible for close to one and a half million Palestine refugees, pending their repatriation in conformity with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). That resolution, in which the Assembly had taken the view that refugees wishing to do so should be permitted to return to their homes at the earliest practicable date and live at peace with their neighbours, referred to refugees from areas which had been specifically assigned to Israel by the United Nations under the partition plan of 1947 (see General Assembly resolution 181 (II)). The many resolutions calling for the immediate return of displaced persons, including refugees, to the territories occupied at the current time had been based on the assumption that refugees from areas assigned to the Palestinian Arabs which had been seized by Israel in 1948 or 1967 would return to their homes automatically when Israel withdrew from those territories. However, as the Commissioner-General's report (A/8413) indicated, apart from the fact that some Arabs from the east bank of the Jordan River had been permitted short visits after four years' separation from their families, there had been no change in the situation. For the victims of the 1948 catastrophe, that situation, and the inability of the United Nations to redress it, was tantamount to slow death.

6. While Israel had reduced the collective will of the international community—as expressed in many solemn Security Council and General Assembly resolutions—to a dialogue of the deaf, it was pursuing its efforts to induce Jewish nationals of other countries to immigrate to Israeli-controlled territories with a view to displacing their

Palestinian inhabitants. It was Israeli policy that every man, woman and child born of the Jewish faith was *ipso facto* entitled to abandon his or her country of birth and adopt Israeli nationality, and that he or she was to be assisted in doing so. It followed that every Palestinian refugee was *ipso facto* barred from returning to the homeland which until recently, had been his for thousands of years.

7. The report of the Commissioner-General contained a number of important facts and figures with regard to the operations and financial situation of UNRWA. First, annex I, table 3, showed a total of 1,468,161 registered refugees, as at the end of June 1971, or almost 60 per cent of the total population of Palestine. That figure disproved the allegations that there were only a few hundred thousand refugees. In fact, a comparison between that number and the 1966 figure showed that the only real change was due to a natural population increase. Secondly, table 1 disclosed that the number of ration recipients represented little more than half the total number of registered Palestine refugees. Because of ration ceilings, about 350,000 babies and children got no rations at all, and that number was increasing continually. Thirdly, it was stated in a foot-note to table 1 that 40,083 displaced children received rations donated by the Jordanian Government on a temporary basis. That referred to a massive relief operation undertaken by the Jordanian Government. The operation currently covered 260,000 displaced persons who came from areas occupied since 1967 and were therefore excluded from the mandate entrusted to UNRWA in 1950. They received flour, rice, oil and sugar, and blankets and clothing during the winter. In addition, the Government had taken on the administration of basic services for six emergency camps for displaced persons. Because of insufficient funds, 40,000 displaced persons were unregistered although they required urgent consideration.

8. Thanks to the generosity of Governments all over the world, particularly the Arab peoples and Governments, his Government had been able to give displaced persons systematic assistance on a greater scale, in *per capita* terms, than was permitted by UNRWA allocations. The daily ration amounted to at least 2,500 calories, whereas UNRWA could provide only 1,500 to 1,600 calories. In the year under consideration, about \$500,000 had been allocated for hardship cases alone. No distinction was made between refugees and displaced persons, since it was a question of one and the same people suffering from the same misfortune. However, the Jordanian Government was not in competition with UNRWA and had in fact made UNRWA responsible for the distribution of relief provided by Jordan.

9. He had laid emphasis on the Jordanian programme because, in his view, the tables annexed to the Commissioner-General's report did not sufficiently reflect the magnitude of the assistance given by the host Governments or the contributions made by the Arab States. During the period covered by the report, the Arab Governments and peoples had contributed \$12 million in special donations. As recorded in table 22 of annex I to the report, direct contributions from his own Government had amounted to \$11,270,352.

10. Since Israel adamantly refused to permit the displaced persons to return home, the world community would have

to shoulder its responsibilities and ensure the continuance of a vital assistance programme. Of course, the problem would have been resolved long since had the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions been implemented.

11. According to the Commissioner-General's report, over 47 per cent of the Agency's funds were allocated to education and training programmes rather than relief, a fact which said much about the basic resilience and dynamism of the Palestine refugees. It had been recognized only recently that, while the Palestinians were unswerving in their determination to return to their homeland, they were not idly awaiting deliverance from their refugee status. Many would have perished long ago had they been dependent solely on UNRWA relief. The Agency's highest budget in its 21 years of existence would be the budget for 1972, estimated at \$51 million, more than 47 per cent of which would be spent on education and training. After the costs of administration, construction, transport and the like were deducted, how much was left for relief? The refugees, having neither land nor property, had developed their only remaining means of survival in a merciless world, their access to education. His Government was therefore grateful to UNRWA and UNESCO, which had responded so favourably to the high priority for education by maintaining and expanding educational services for Palestine refugees. That, in the words of the Director-General of UNESCO, constituted, "the most ambitious educational undertaking under international administration".

12. With regard to co-operation between UNRWA and UNESCO, he praised the excellent work being done at the UNRWA/UNESCO Institute of Education at Beirut. In addition, he proposed that the annual appropriation for university scholarships should be increased to \$5 million; currently there were 872 such scholarships, of which 99 were new awards. The money would constitute a fund administered jointly by UNRWA and UNESCO and by the Arab organization modelled on UNESCO, with its headquarters at Cairo. The fund might be kept separate from UNRWA in order that all countries could contribute to it; in any case, the dislocation resulting from the 1967 war had made its establishment a matter of considerable urgency. Since 1967 the League of Arab States, Jordan and the Palestine Liberation Organization had made annual appeals for funds to the Arab States and emirates of the Gulf area and had obtained \$1.5 million each year, which was given to students who had no family or means of livelihood. The challenge was to maintain the momentum of higher education for the generations that had followed those enrolled before 1967. It was a big task, and his delegation hoped that it would receive the most serious consideration.

13. With regard to health and sanitation programmes, his delegation was deeply grateful for the efforts of UNRWA, which had maintained sanitation and health at an exemplary level.

14. One point that could not be over-emphasized was the need for maintaining and even expanding the supplementary feeding programme for children. There was reason to fear a recurrence among refugee children of the mysterious ailment, caused by malnutrition, which had afflicted many of them in 1965. UNRWA, with the

co-operation of the host Governments and the World Health Organization, would surely see that it did not recur.

15. The finances of UNRWA, although the corner-stone of aid to refugees, had always been in deficit. Over the years, the difficulties caused by delays in the payment of pledges had been overcome by reducing services or by drawing on the Working Capital Fund. Today, UNRWA had a reserve of only \$3 million, about half the amount needed to meet its obligations. The 1971 deficit was estimated at more than \$2.4 million and the 1972 budget would be \$51 million, only 2 per cent more than in 1971. Unless contributions to the Agency were increased, the deficit would be far greater in 1972 than in 1971. It was to find a way to meet that deficit that the General Assembly, by its resolution 2656 (XXV) of 7 December 1970, had established the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA, with a view to preventing any reduction of the Agency's services in 1971. The determined efforts of the Working Group deserved the gratitude of the Special Political Committee and the General Assembly, for it had succeeded in reducing the Agency's deficit in 1970-1971. Moreover, the Group had acted as a catalyst by creating a greater awareness of the problems of the Palestine refugees. It had also recommended that all States should make contributions to UNRWA, that pledges should be paid promptly and that the specialized agencies should play a greater role in UNRWA operations. His delegation hoped that the recommendations of the Working Group (see A/8476, chapter V) and the report of the Commissioner-General (A/8413) would receive the attention they deserved.

16. The Secretary-General had forwarded a report (see A/8383) received from the Commissioner-General on the effect produced on Palestine refugees by some recent operations of the Israeli military authorities in the Gaza Strip, including the transfer of substantial numbers of refugees to Sinai, the destruction of thousands of their homes and other malicious measures. Not content with driving the refugees from their homes in 1948, the Israelis now begrudged them their continued existence.

17. The UNRWA camps were not extraterritorial areas and the Agency had no weapons to prevent the forcible expulsion of the Palestine refugees from their camps. Yet UNRWA was not an isolated and powerless philanthropic agency. The refugees were entrusted to the United Nations and the Agency's mission was to represent and protect them. It was therefore incumbent on the United Nations to ensure that UNRWA was respected.

18. Since its inception, the United Nations had been combating imperialism, colonialism, racial discrimination, *apartheid* and genocide, just as it had defended the right of peoples to self-determination and their fundamental right to create a better world. Did not the problems of the Palestine refugees partake of all those other problems? That notion illustrated the full scope of the refugees' tragedy. The question was whether the world would allow them to remain a rootless and marginal people with no visible hope for salvation.

19. Mrs. O'DONNELL (United States of America) expressed her Government's gratitude to the Commissioner-General, whose efforts, together with those of his prede-

cessor, had enabled UNRWA to pursue its task. The full support which the United States of America had given and would continue to give the Agency was demonstrated, among other things, by the draft resolution it would submit to the Committee with a view to the renewal of UNRWA's mandate for three years.<sup>1</sup> The proposal was consistent with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) and subsequent resolutions on the matter, including Security Council resolution 242 (1967).

20. Since its establishment in 1949, the Agency had had to face the difficult task of housing, feeding, educating and caring for people caught up in events beyond their control. The problem of the Palestine refugees was inextricably linked to the issues that divided Israel and the Arab States, and could be resolved only as part of an over-all Middle East settlement in accordance with Security Council resolution 242 (1967). Her Government was engaged, together with all the parties concerned, in a search for peace, which could be just and lasting only if it took into consideration the problem of the Palestinians; it was a matter of regret to her Government that more of them had not been able to return to their places of residence in the occupied areas.

21. The Agency's financial situation was disquieting. The efforts of the Commissioner-General, the Working Group and all who had participated in the UNRWA-UNESCO campaign had made it possible to increase the Agency's resources and reduce the 1971 deficit. Reductions in the Agency's essential services had been avoided thus far, but a substantial increase in contributions was indispensable. Her Government appealed urgently to all Governments, particularly those who had not contributed in the past, to assume their share of a task that was the responsibility of the entire international community. It also appealed to all private voluntary agencies and groups, and would stress that, if the Agency was forced to reduce its activities, the refugee problem—and consequently the already dangerous situation in the Middle East—would be aggravated. The United States of America had paid almost 70 per cent of the total contributions made to the Agency since its establishment, and the United States Government and private United States groups had always responded to special appeals for emergency assistance.

22. Should the Agency's financial difficulties make budget cuts inevitable, the education budget would be the first to suffer. Yet it was thanks to the education programmes that the refugees would be able to take their normal place in the economic life of the region, and curtailment could have repercussions for an entire generation of Palestinians. The Agency had managed to maintain its services in that field despite the steady increase in school enrolment, and even to expand them by adding vocational training and teacher training to its general education programme. In addition, new school facilities had been provided, so that that instruction could be given under better conditions. The fact that the Agency earmarked over half of its staff and its budget for education was sufficient evidence of the importance of that aspect of its work.

23. Faced with the alternative of increasing their contributions or seeing the Agency obliged to reduce its services, all

<sup>1</sup> The draft resolution was subsequently circulated as document A/SPC/L.225.

Governments, it was to be hoped, would give generously and so provide tangible proof of the sentiments expressed in their statements. The United States of America, for its part, would continue to support the mission conducted by the Secretary-General's Special Representative to the Middle East, Mr. Gunnar Jarring, with a view to reaching an agreement in keeping with the principles and provisions of Security Council resolution 242 (1967). It held firmly to the opinion that such was the only way of achieving an equitable solution of the refugee problem, and it would continue to assist UNRWA in providing essential services.

24. Mr. GROOS (Canada) commended the Commissioner-General on his report and noted that the UNRWA budget estimates for 1972 showed an increase, largely due to a rise in the cost of flour and a rise in the number of persons receiving relief services and education. He also thanked the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA for its report and paid tribute to the Group members, who had brought in contributions for UNRWA which had permitted a substantial reduction in the 1971 deficit. However, the deficit would increase considerably in 1972 if the level of contributions remained as in 1971, and those successive deficits would result in a shortage of working capital which would have serious repercussions.

25. In 1971 contributions were received from only 58 States Members of the United Nations, or fewer than half the total, together with contributions from seven non-Member States. Furthermore, 83 per cent of the contributions from Governments came from six countries only, including one non-Member State. His delegation regarded the Agency as a non-political body carrying out humanitarian work deserving the moral and financial backing of the entire world community. It was right and proper that all countries should contribute towards its budget in cash or in kind. Again, those contributions should be paid expeditiously enough to spare UNRWA the necessity of having to resort to loans, the interest charges on which would add to its already heavy burdens. Another regrettable consequence of that lack of funds was its demoralizing effect on the Agency staff.

26. His delegation was in favour of renewing the Agency's mandate for a three-year term, for even though the Middle East problems were solved in the near future certain services would still have to be provided. He hoped it would be possible to find sufficient funds to finance UNRWA's essential services during that period.

27. Sir Colin CROWE (United Kingdom) thanked the previous Commissioner-General of UNRWA, Mr. Laurence Michelmore, and his successor, Sir John Rennie, and the UNRWA staff, for the way they had carried out their work.

28. Until a settlement of the Middle East problem was achieved, UNRWA's work would continue to be of supreme importance, both from the humanitarian standpoint, in alleviating the suffering of the refugees, and from the political standpoint, in contributing to the stability of the region. The Agency would continue to have his Government's wholehearted support.

29. Once again, the Agency's financial problems were casting a shadow over the debate. His delegation had taken

careful note of the Agency's revised budget for 1971, of its budget for 1972, and of the Commissioner-General's assessment that the deficit incurred in 1971 would become even more serious in 1972. Thanks to the efforts of the Commissioner-General and others, including the Chairman of the Working Group set up by the General Assembly in 1970, it had been possible to postpone the reduction in services to the refugees. However, reductions would be inevitable in the event of failure to find the Agency new sources of income. According to the Working Group's report (A/8476), only by increasing the number of contributing Governments could the Agency's services be maintained at the current level. For its part, the United Kingdom had contributed nearly \$120 million to the Agency since its establishment. His Government would no doubt be pledging a substantial sum in 1971 also. However, there were still too few States which were shouldering the burden of the refugees.

30. He was glad to note that the Agency had contrived to increase the proportion of its total budget spent on education, which was the refugees' lifeline to the future. However, as the Commissioner-General had pointed out in his report, education was the only one of the Agency's activities in which economies could be made. Those States which were making no contribution to UNRWA should therefore appreciate the consequences of their attitude. The delegations which were in favour of renewing the Agency's mandate should realize that their votes were empty gestures unless backed by contributions. In 1971 fewer than half the United Nations Member States had contributed to the Agency. His delegation hoped that the other half would reconsider their position. If only the 73 Member States who did not at the current time contribute would pay an average of \$100,000 each the UNRWA programme would be saved. He hoped, in particular, that the eastern European countries would feel that the time had come for them to start contributing to UNRWA, and that the oil-producing countries, which had received massive increases in revenue over the past year, would see their way to increasing their UNRWA contributions. Only in that way could UNRWA's education programme be saved. The United Kingdom Government, would not only make a substantial contribution, as he had said, but would consider the possibility of increasing the amount if the generosity of other countries encouraged it to do so.

31. Mr. NAYERI (Iran) thanked the Jordanian representative on behalf of his delegation, and earnestly hoped that the appeal by Princess Ashraf Pahlevi of Iran would be heeded.

32. Mr. CAHANA (Israel), speaking in exercise of the right to reply, said that he had listened to the representative of Jordan with the utmost interest, but regretted the fact that the latter had twisted the facts and had concluded his statement with insulting remarks to which he had no option but to reply. There would have been no refugee problem had not the Arab countries tried to deprive Israel of its right to exist, first in 1948 and more recently during the last war. The problem was the direct result of the policy of aggression systematically and persistently conducted by the Arabs in defiance of the United Nations resolutions, and it could only be solved within the context of a lasting peace.

33. Mr. SAYEGH (Kuwait), speaking in exercise of the right to reply, submitted that the Israeli representative had transposed the terms of the problem. It was untrue to say that there would at present be no refugee problem but for the war in 1948. It was truer to say that there would have been no war in 1948 had there not already been refugees. The Israeli representative had also said that any solution of the problem should be sought within the context of peace. However, Israel also declared that peace would provide no guarantee of the refugees' return, and was thus impeding, by its intransigence, a peaceful settlement which could only take place once the human and national problems of the Palestinians had been solved.

34. Mr. KANE (Mauritania), also speaking in exercise of the right of reply, drew attention to the previous day's decision that the general debate would be confined to the financial aspect of the refugee problem, and urged all delegations to abide by that decision.

35. The CHAIRMAN announced that the United States of America had submitted a draft resolution which would be distributed the following day.<sup>2</sup>

*The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.*

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<sup>2</sup> Idem.