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Chairman: Mr. Eugeniusz KULAGA (Poland).

AGENDA ITEM 36

**United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine
Refugees in the Near East (*continued*) (A/7577, A/7614,
A/7665; A/SPC/133; A/SPC/L.175):**

- (a) Report of the Commissioner-General;
- (b) Report of the Secretary-General

1. Mr. EL-YAFI (Syria) paid a tribute to the personnel of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for their unceasing and compassionate efforts to help the refugees under very difficult circumstances. Before discussing the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA (A/7614) he wished to reply to the allegations made by the Israel representative at the Committee's 666th meeting by reviewing the circumstances in which the problem of the refugees had arisen.

2. The tragedy of the Palestine refugees had not begun with the Israel aggression of 1948, but fifty years earlier, at a time when neither fascism nor nazism had as yet appeared and when the Jews had been neither persecuted nor homeless. In 1897, the World Zionist Movement had decided, at its congress in Basle, Switzerland, to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine and, for that purpose, to encourage the settlement of Jewish agricultural and industrial workers in Palestine. One of the Zionist leaders at the time, Israel Zagsvill, had said that the Jews would have to make life difficult for the Arab inhabitants of Palestine in order to force them to flee. In 1907, the British Government had taken the decision to implant a foreign entity, the Jewish people, in the heartland of the Arab world in the proximity of the Suez Canal in order to ensure the survival of the British colonial empire and prevent the renaissance and unification of the Arabs. In 1917, in the famous Balfour Declaration, the British Government had decided to give favourable consideration to the establishment in Palestine of a Jewish national home and to do everything in its power to facilitate the achievement of that objective. By that Declaration, the United Kingdom had decided to hand over a country which had not at the time been under its domination to a third party, the Jewish people. At the same

time, however, the Balfour Declaration had stipulated that nothing should be done to infringe the civil and religious rights of non-Jewish communities living in Palestine. In 1919, the Zionist delegation to the Paris Peace Conference had circulated a plan for the future Zionist State which included the area of Palestine under the Mandate plus the south of Lebanon, the Golan Heights, the western part of Jordan, and the Gaza strip as far as the Gulf of Aqaba. At that time, according to official British statistics, the Arabs in Palestine had constituted 93 per cent of its total population and had possessed 97 per cent of its territory.

3. During the Second World War, the President of the United States had been informed by his Personal Representative in the Middle East that the Zionist organization in Palestine had expressed its determination to establish a sovereign State that would embrace Palestine and Trans-Jordan and eventually to transfer the Palestinian Arabs in order to ensure Jewish economic domination over the Middle East. That programme had been carried out: the Arabs had been transferred by force and terror, and Israel's aggressions and consequent expansions of 1948 and 1967 had been fully in conformity with Zionist territorial aspirations of 1897. But the Zionists had needed the help of the imperialist Powers. In April 1920, the Zionists had requested the Allies, at a meeting at San Remo, to place Palestine under British Mandate if the British undertook to carry out certain clauses of the Balfour Declaration, namely, those relating to the subsequent creation of a Jewish State containing only Jews. In 1922, the League of Nations approved the text of the Mandate which, in that respect, was an almost verbatim transcript of the memorandum the Zionists had submitted to the Peace Conference. According to an official census conducted in 1922, the population of Palestine had been at that time 757,182 of whom 663,014 had been Arabs and 83,794 Jews.

4. It was to be noted that before the Mandate, the Jews had not been persecuted anywhere in the Arab world; in fact when they had been persecuted, they had been given refuge in the Arab countries. After taking refuge in the hospitable Arab lands, they had expelled the original inhabitants. The persecuted had become the persecutors.

5. The United Kingdom had done everything in its power to give Palestine to the Zionists because it expected a sure profit: it would ensure the presence in the Middle East of a community which was devoted to it, which had designs not only on the Suez Canal but also on the oil and other resources of the region and which could be useful in putting an end to the reawakening of Arab nationalism, the first signs of which it had perceived in the Middle East. The Zionists were therefore to be the tool of British policy and imperialist strategy.

6. In carrying out their programme, the Zionists had first of all had to encourage Jewish immigration at any cost, to acquire Arab land in Palestine and to expel the Arab population. Zionists-imperialist co-operation soon bore fruit in the form of the establishment of Israel, the problem of the refugees and the aggressions of 1956 and 1967. Thus, the choice of Palestine as a national home for the Jews, the British desire to establish a Jewish State, the terrorism and violence practised by the Zionists and the aggressive wars waged by Israel were the direct causes of the problem of the Arab refugees.

7. Many statements by Zionist leaders clearly showed that they had come to an agreement with the United Kingdom so that it should deliver to them a Palestine from which all Arabs had been driven out before the end of the Mandate. For that purpose, the Jewish immigrants had set up terrorist bands to hasten the expulsion of the Arabs by massacres which were continuing even today. The Zionists had learned from Hitler how to usurp a country, massacre or expel the inhabitants, take their place and live in their homes. It should not be forgotten that in 1948 out of a population of 2,065,000 only 650,000 had been Jews, who had owned only 15 per cent of the cultivable land.

8. The Arabs had done everything in their power to draw the attention of the United Kingdom Government to the dangers of Jewish immigration. Arab opposition to the Mandate and to the policies laid down in the Balfour Declaration had been firm and resolute throughout the period of the Mandate. However, the appeals, protests, and arguments of the Arabs had not succeeded in persuading the British Government to respect Arab rights and to fulfil its commitments towards the Arab people. The only response of the British Government had been the use of methods similar to those now used in South Africa to crush any movement which might be detrimental to Zionist interests.

9. The United States had also played a significant role in the establishment of the State of Israel and in the development of the problem of the Arab refugees. It had been prompted to do so by the presence of millions of Zionists exercising considerable political, electoral and financial power and being very influential in the news media. There were now some signs that the United States was beginning to realize the extent of that influence. The Zionists had played upon American sentimentality by exploiting the horrors of the Nazi persecutions and glossing over the fact that the Arabs had fought on the side of the Allies against the Ottoman Empire and had had nothing whatever to do with the persecutions.

10. In an interview in the February 1969 issue of *Newsweek*, Levi Eshkol, the former Prime Minister of Israel, had described Palestine at the time of his arrival in 1913 as desert, peopled by only some 250,000 non-Jews. He had said that others had wanted it only after the Jews had peopled it and made it blossom. Yet according to the 1912 *Baedeker* for Syria and Palestine, Palestine had at that time been an agricultural country which exported its products and had well-constructed towns, prosperous villages and schools.

11. The result of the implantation of strangers in Palestine had been that 2 million Arabs were now living far from

their homes and were fighting for the recognition of their rights. Those rights had been recognized by all nations of the world in 1949, but nothing had been done to enforce them. Those responsible for the plight of more than 2 million refugees were the Zionists, worthy successors to the Nazis.

12. The Israel representative had claimed that the Arabs had left Palestine willingly. He would refer that representative to a book by Menahem Begin, the leader of the terrorist band the Irgun Zvai Leumi entitled *The Revolt; Story of the Irgun*,¹ in which he had said that it had been the Israelis who had first gone on the offensive and that the terrified Arabs had begun to flee in panic. Erskine B. Childers, a British author, had stated in 1961 that from the evidence of the appeals and orders to the civilian population of Palestine, that had been recorded by the BBC at the time, there had been no order for the evacuation of Palestine. Sir John Glubb's book *A Soldier with the Arabs*² and volume 3 of Arnold Toynbee's *A Study of History*³ also made it clear that the Palestinians had not fled willingly.

13. Israel, alone among the Member States of the United Nations, had been admitted to membership on the explicit condition that it would carry out the resolutions of the General Assembly, specifically resolution 181 (II) on partition and resolution 194 (III) on repatriation and compensation of the refugees. However, since 1947, Israel had not complied with any resolution by any international organization.

14. The right of the refugees to return to their homes had been recognized by everyone, except the Zionist authorities. It had been recognized in particular by the Commissioner-General of UNRWA as the abiding concern of all the refugees. While UNRWA was attempting to take care of the refugees, the scarcity of the funds made available to it prevented it from performing its mission satisfactorily. Those who had seen the encampments of the refugees could well realize the conditions in which they were living. The refugees received an inadequate food ration and many of them received none at all because UNRWA'S definition of a refugee was someone who had fled as a consequence of the 1948 aggression and who had been living in Palestine two years prior to his flight. That definition was now obsolete because it did not take account of the new refugees and those Palestinians who had been displaced as a result of the war of June 1967. The International Conference on Human Rights, held at Teheran in 1968, and the World Health Organization, among other bodies, had acknowledged the rights of the refugees, but Israel refused to accept their humanitarian resolutions.

15. With regard to the question of the property of the refugees left in Palestine after their enforced exodus, he recalled that the Tel Aviv Government had in 1950 promulgated the so-called "law of the absentees" the purpose of which was to expropriate the property of absent Arabs. Sequestered Arab property was taxed up to 90 per cent. In 1952 Israel had adopted a law on the expropriation

¹ New York, Schuman, 1951.

² London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1957.

³ London, Oxford University Press, 1954.

of land under which large expanses of land belonging to the Arabs had been expropriated under the pretext of public need, or defence or simply as reprisals. The Arab land and real estate so expropriated had been valued by experts at nearly £2,000 sterling. All the Jewish settlements in Palestine had been set up on the basis of confiscated Arab property; 47 per cent of the Jewish inhabitants of Palestine drew their income from Arab property and over 60,000 were living in Arab houses and towns.

16. How could the Zionists consider the Arab refugees as absent when in fact they were being prevented from returning to their homes? His delegation therefore felt that the property of the Arab refugees should be administered by a neutral, international custodian and that the income from them should be paid to their true owners until their return. Israel continued to reject that proposal on the pretext that its military occupation conferred upon it all property rights despite the principle of international law that an occupying Power in no way acquired any rights of sovereignty over occupied territories.

17. With regard to the problem of education, to which a large part of the budget of UNRWA was devoted, the report described how Israel was obstructing UNRWA's education programme. The Governments of the host countries were firmly convinced that UNESCO's humanitarian resolutions on the subject of the education of the refugees were being exploited by the Israelis with a view to attaining their own political objectives. Paragraph 7 of a recent resolution see A/7614, annex II adopted by the UNESCO Executive Board called upon the Government of Israel to permit without any restriction the import and use of the textbooks approved by the Director-General for UNRWA/UNESCO schools in the occupied territories. He had no doubt that Israel would refuse to comply with that resolution also.

18. With regard to the question of the financing of UNRWA and its budgetary deficit, he felt that contributions should be increased, but urged the Commissioner-General to practise a policy of austerity with regard to the expenses of Headquarters administration, information and official travel.

19. The Israel representative had spoken of Jews who were living in specially erected concentration camps in Syria. While rejecting the right of any person or country to interfere in the internal affairs of another country, he could state that the Jewish citizens of Syria, numbering about 4,000 were treated in exactly the same way as other Syrian citizens. The Jews enjoyed the same freedoms as the Syrians themselves and needed no outsider to defend them. There were no concentration camps, and he would challenge the Israel representative to prove that there were any. The Israelis had so many of them that they believed them to exist everywhere in the world.

20. The Secretary-General had stated in his report of 2 October 1967 that his Special Representative had visited several Jewish shops in Damascus and they were functioning normally.⁴ The shopping places of Damascus were not concentration camps. Jewish businessmen earned their

livelihood like others and paid their taxes like others. Who had spoken the truth, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General or the Israel authorities? It was not because the Israel representative represented a country of *apartheid* and aggression that he did not invite him to come and see the concentration camps in Syria, but because there were no concentration camps, either for Jews or gentiles. The Israel representative had only to refer to the reports of International Red Cross, an organization about which (according to the French weekly *Le Nouvel Observateur*) General Dayan's assistant, Colonel Gazit, had spoken contemptuously. It might be assumed that the Israel representative had not read the many reports and humanitarian resolutions on the Palestine refugees. Could that representative say how many Palestinians and Syrians had been arrested and imprisoned without trial? His delegation would shortly furnish the Secretary-General with a list of many hundreds of names of Syrian civilian prisoners.

21. Freedom of thought and expression was denied to the Arabs of occupied Palestine. The newspaper *Le Monde* of 6 November 1969 had stated that eight Israelis then living in Paris had published a communiqué protesting against the imprisonment without trial of an Israel Arab poet, Fawzi Asmar, under the 1945 emergency laws of the British Mandate. The same newspaper had also referred on 12 November 1969 to Israel's refusal to allow a former British Minister, Mr Anthony Nutting, to visit Jerusalem because Mr Nutting had made a statement a few days earlier about the impossibility of bringing about Arab-Israel co-existence by peaceful means in view of Israel's aggressive policy.

22. It was strange to hear Israel advocating peace while it went on occupying Arab territories, preventing the return of Palestine refugees, cruelly repressing Arab civilians, blowing up Arab buildings, inflicting collective punishment on innocent victims and daily flouting United Nations decisions. It could be certain that the Israelis, while speaking extravagantly of peace, were preparing for some new aggression.

23. The refugee problem could be considered only as part of the Palestine question as a whole. Every year the General Assembly adopted new resolutions, in similar terms to those of General Assembly resolution 194 (III), on the rights of refugees to repatriation and compensation. However, Israel had persistently refused to comply with them and to demand resettlement in Arab countries instead of repatriation. Steps should be taken to ensure respect for those decisions. The Commissioner-General had recognized that the refugees still believed that they had suffered a grave injustice and fervently desired to return to their native land.

24. With the perpetuation of the Palestine refugee problem, the Middle East situation created by Israel was a threat to peace and security. It would be unreasonable to expect the Palestinian Arabs to submit to being uprooted or under foreign occupation. Resistance to such occupation was a national right.

25. In spite of financial difficulties, the Agency had made great efforts to sustain the refugees. No fewer than 100,000 Syrian refugees had been made homeless by Israel aggression in June 1967. Syria was making tremendous efforts to

⁴ See *Official Records of the Security Council, Twenty-second Year, Supplement for October, November and December 1967*, document S/8158, para. 222.

alleviate their sufferings while not forgetting its duty towards their Palestinian brethren. It was devoting 11,708,800 Syrian pounds yearly to refugee services.

26. The catastrophe in which 2 million people had been forced to leave their homes and endure inhuman camp conditions for twenty-one years of their lives and in which the towns, villages and land which they had been developing for centuries had passed into the hands of Zionist usurpers, was a product of colonialist imperialism. Aid to refugees could not by itself remedy the tragic situation, for the Palestine refugees in their poverty and misery were determined to return to their country. There was no just legislation in the world which could deprive them of that sacred right. The solution lay not in settling them in the countries to which they had been forced to flee but in returning them to the country that had been seized from them. Israel, true to the characteristics of world Zionism and imperialism which had created it, persistently flouted and opposed the implementation of United Nations resolutions, resorting constantly to force, terrorism and violence to attain its ends. In perpetrating the most atrocious crimes against the Palestinians, the Israelis had shown themselves to be the successors of the Nazis under whom they themselves had suffered. The Second World War had been fought to put an end to fascist ideology and practices, but Zionism, with the same mentality as fascism, had come to succeed it.

27. No country in the world had been so frequently condemned by the United Nations as had Israel because of its violation of human rights, of the most elementary rules of human dignity and of the United Nations Charter. The resolutions calling on Israel to return the Palestine refugees to their homeland were a condemnation in themselves of Israel and the imperialist forces which supported it.

28. The Palestine refugee problem was not simply a regional problem: it was a tragedy for all peoples who aspired to peace and security. The United Nations had a duty to see that Palestine was restored to its rightful owners and that the aggressors were punished. The Palestine refugees were able to endure their life of misery and deprivation only because of their determination to regain the land and homes which were the fruit of their labours and those of their ancestors. They awaited the support of world public opinion for their rightful and just cause. Neither time, misery, nor imperialist or Zionist plots could legalize injustice and usurpation.

29. Twenty years of exile and humiliation, arbitrary occupation and destruction were sufficient to show the Palestinians that they could count on no one but themselves and to justify the struggle to regain their rights. The list of odious crimes, barbaric acts and illegal decisions was long and complete. Israel could be relied on to remain for ever in the vanguard of imperialism and neo-colonialism in the area. The United Nations Charter must be the torch to light the forward march of mankind, and freedom and justice must be made to triumph before it was too late.

30. The Committee had reaffirmed its recognition of the legitimacy of the people's struggle against *apartheid* in South Africa and had called for greater assistance to the national movement. What was to be done for the millions of Arabs who were suffering occupation and aggression under Zionist *apartheid* and colonialism? How could they believe in international justice when the aggressor was being helped to consolidate that occupation and aggression? The free peoples of the world should support the liberation movements through which the Palestinian Arabs sought only to free their usurped land. They had a right to international support, particularly when certain great Powers like the United States were furnishing Israel with men and arms to kill Arabs and destroy their homes.

31. Mr. TEKOAH (Israel), speaking in exercise of his right of reply, said that had the Syrian representative been speaking on behalf of a Government whose international conduct made its views on law and justice worthy of attention, he would have drawn the Committee's attention to the intransigence of his statement, its almost Hitlerian anti-Jewish tenor and its misrepresentations. He would also have pointed out that the Syrian inhabitants of the Golan Heights had not been driven out by Israel but had left with the retreating Syrian army before the arrival of the Israel forces because they were almost all dependents of the Syrian and military government officials in the area which, until June 1967, had served as a military base for constant attack against Israel; and that to establish the truth it was only necessary to refer to the introduction to the annual report of the Secretary-General⁵ in which he had referred to the Jews in the Arab countries as helpless persons and had stated that he shared the concern for their plight.

32. But by its policy and action Syria had placed itself beyond the pale of law-abiding humanity. That country, which had been an aggressor since 1948, had become even more defiant of United Nations resolutions during the past two years. Its rejection of Security Council resolution 242 (1967), its repudiation of United Nations peace-making efforts in general, its refusal to admit the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and its determination to pursue aggression against Israel were all a matter of record. The Syrian President himself had stated that Syria rejected the British proposals and the Security Council resolutions and refused to discuss them either directly or indirectly, that it would go on fighting and that victims would fall daily. Syria's most recent contravention had been its complicity in air piracy. It had, moreover, been notorious for persecuting all its minority communities, both Jewish and gentile. It was a travesty of law and justice to allow it to preach about compliance with international decisions, and Israel would not be a party to such a travesty.

33. Mr. EL-YAFI (Syria) said that his delegation reserved its right to reply to the Israel representative's statement at the Committee's next meeting.

The meeting rose at 4.30 p.m.

⁵ Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 1A.