

United Nations
**GENERAL
ASSEMBLY**

FOURTEENTH SESSION
Official Records

**SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE, 156th
MEETING**

Monday, 23 November 1959,
at 3.15 p.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. ADEEL (Sudan) said that it was impossible to discuss the two documents before the Committee or the aims and achievements of UNRWA without referring to the circumstances which had led to its creation. There would be no UNRWA if there were no Arab refugees, and the problem of the refugees was a very special problem which the United Nations had itself created by deciding, in 1947, to partition Palestine. It was the tragedy of an entire nation uprooted from its homeland and now living in exile. In 1918, 93 per cent of the population of Palestine were Arabs, and even in 1947 the Arabs constituted two-thirds of the total population. Before the advent of Zionism the Arab inhabitants had always lived in peace and harmony with the Jewish inhabitants of the country. The resolution of 29 November 1947 providing for the partitioning of Palestine (General Assembly resolution 181 (II)) was an unconstitutional and illegal measure that ignored the principle of self-determination of peoples laid down in the United Nations Charter. Instead of being guided towards self-government and independence by the Mandates System under which they had previously been administered, the Palestine Arabs had suddenly had their fate decided for them by a resolution in which the United Nations recommended the creation of a State neither owned nor legally possessed. The Arab States had resisted the adoption of that resolution; however, the exodus of Arabs, terrorized by acts of violence on the part of the Zionists, had started long before the Arab forces entered Palestine. To contend that the refugee problem was the result of Arab intervention was a distortion of history.

2. Count Bernadotte, the United Nations Mediator, had appealed to Israel to readmit the refugees, who were being denied the right to return to their homes while Jewish immigrants flowing into Palestine threatened

to replace them as owners of the land. His report (A/648)^{1/}, which described the wanton destruction of Arab property and even of whole villages, had prompted the General Assembly to adopt resolution 194 (III), by which it resolved in clear terms that refugees wishing to return to their homes should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible. By the same resolution the Assembly had established the Conciliation Commission for Palestine, which was given the task of facilitating the repatriation, resettlement and economic and social rehabilitation of the refugees. Also at its third session, the Assembly had adopted resolution 212 (III) establishing a United Nations relief programme to relieve the plight of the Palestine refugees pending their repatriation. Thus the United Nations had formulated a definite policy based on the principle of the refugees' right to repatriation or compensation, and had set up the appropriate machinery for carrying it out. It might well be asked why, after eleven years, no progress had been made in the repatriation of the refugees, and why it was necessary for a relief agency intended to last for a few months to be continued, financed by contributing Governments. The answer was that Israel had never complied with the decisions of the United Nations, and was now implying that the real solution of the problem did not lie in the repatriation of the refugees but in their settlement into the economic life of the Arab States. That was not the view expressed in resolution 194 (III). Moreover, the Directors of UNRWA, who recognized that the problem was not an economic but a political one, had repeatedly told the Assembly that until the refugees were given the choice between repatriation and compensation no progress could be made towards the reintegration of the refugees into the economic life of the Near East either by repatriation or resettlement.

3. Israel's contention that the size of its territory made repatriation of the refugees impracticable was refuted by the unrestricted immigration of Jews from every corner of the globe; such a policy could not be regarded by the United Nations as a matter of purely domestic jurisdiction until the Arab refugees had been repatriated. The Secretary-General in his report (A/4121) had stressed the fact that the problem was basically a human problem, and his delegation believed that the refugees' yearning to return to their homeland was a psychological factor that had a direct bearing on the question of choice reserved for the refugees in resolution 194 (III). That choice belonged exclusively to the refugees and not to Israel or even to the Arab States, who were merely supporting their refugee

^{1/} *Official Records of the General Assembly, Third Session, Supplement No. 11.*

brothers in their efforts to secure their fundamental rights.

4. It was evident from many sources of information that the refugees would not voluntarily accept integration into productive life unless they had been given freedom of choice in accordance with the United Nations decision, and their choice would almost certainly be for return to their homeland, since their attitude in that matter had never changed. In the view of his delegation the choice between repatriation and compensation applied only to refugees who came from territory which, under the partition resolution, was to be included in the Jewish State. There was no choice in the case of refugees who came from that part of Palestine assigned to the Arabs under the partition resolution: it should be an easy matter to arrange for their repatriation. If that were done immediately, a great part of the problem would be solved. He pointed out that all the incidents and disorders in the Near East in recent years could be traced, directly or indirectly, to the persistence of the refugee problem: that was a consideration to be taken very seriously into account in dealing with the item under discussion.

5. The Secretary-General's proposals for the continuation of assistance to the refugees (A/4121) had been studied by all the Arab Governments individually, including his own, then by a conference of experts meeting in Lebanon in August 1959, and finally by the Council of the Arab League at its meeting at Casablanca in September. Following that careful consideration, the Arab States had submitted their comments on the Secretary-General's proposals, in document A/4236 now before the Committee. In summarizing his own delegation's views on those proposals, he could say that it supported—pending the settlement of the problem through the implementation of the General Assembly resolution on refugees—the recommendation to continue UNRWA. However, there were other suggestions in the Secretary-General's report that required careful appraisal. His delegation could not agree with any attempt to seek an economic solution of the refugee problem, which had little to do with economics, or accept the suggestion that the area, including Israel, should be developed as one economic unit by imported capital and the oil revenues of the Arab countries. It found equally unacceptable the implication contained in the Secretary-General's report that integration of the refugees might take place in the Arab countries, which would mean the permanent settlement of the refugees outside their homeland; moreover the view that the unemployed refugee population might become a source of manpower for the economic development of the area ignored the real cause of such enforced idleness. He could assure the Secretary-General that whatever differences of opinion the Arab States might have, they were united in their views on the refugee problem and therefore could not be accused of hampering progress in the matter by their disunity. His delegation believed that the continuing Jewish immigration into Israel mentioned by the Secretary-General as a factor in the situation was bound to impede the implementation of the United Nations resolution relating to repatriation of the refugees.

6. His delegation wished to pay a tribute to the successive Directors of UNRWA and to the Agency's work, which had been carried out with enthusiasm and skill in trying conditions. He agreed with the present Director that the continuation of UNRWA was a means

to an end rather than an end in itself. In his annual report (A/4213) the Director had said that relief given to refugees could not be regarded as more than a palliative, and he had particularly stressed the fact that relief, while supplying the basic needs of the refugees, could do little to satisfy the aspirations of the adult mind, or of young people reaching maturity with no hope of earning a living or establishing homes. Yet the Sudanese delegation believed that UNRWA had also served psychologically as a stabilizing factor by reassuring the refugees that they had the United Nations in their midst.

7. If he were asked what suggestions he could offer for a solution, he would stress the fact—as the representative of Saudi Arabia had done in his statement at the 149th meeting—that the United Nations had decided on repatriation as a solution, with the Conciliation Commission for Palestine as the machinery to implement General Assembly resolution 194 (III). He would agree with the suggestion that the Conciliation Commission be revived with an enlarged membership, and that the Office established under resolution 394 (V) be reactivated to protect the rights, property and interests of the refugees pending their repatriation. He would propose that a ban be placed on Jewish immigration into Palestine until the refugees had made their choice of repatriation or compensation, and that the revenues from the refugees' property in Israel-controlled Palestine be applied for the benefit of the refugees. Finally he would appeal to every Member State to make a genuine effort to co-operate with the United Nations in carrying out its decisions. The only power of the United Nations lay in the willingness of Member States to make a reality of its decisions, and he would appeal particularly to those Member States responsible for the creation of Israel to make efforts to persuade that State to perform the duties of its membership and to discharge its obligations under the Charter.

8. Mr. BEELEY (United Kingdom) said he would confine his remarks to matters arising directly out of the two documents before the Committee. He reserved the right to comment at a later stage on any proposals that might be made in response to the appeal made by the representative of the United States for realistic suggestions for progress towards an ultimate solution.

9. Whether or not the Committee succeeded in reaching agreement on recommendations for a final solution, the need of the refugees for assistance would continue for a considerable time. The Director of the Agency and the Secretary-General had both proceeded on that assumption, and had made certain specific proposals. In commenting on those proposals, the United Kingdom delegation was in no way questioning the rights of the parties concerned, or the validity of the relevant General Assembly resolutions.

10. The United Kingdom delegation had again been impressed by the Agency's achievements and the efficiency of its methods. It offered its congratulations to the Director and his staff, and also expressed its appreciation of the contributions made by a number of specialized agencies and voluntary organizations. The debate on the work of the Agency was always significant, in view of the magnitude of its task, but it had been made doubly so by the approaching termination of the Agency's mandate. It was to assist the Assembly in considering that situation that the Secretary-General had submitted his proposals for the continuation of United Nations assistance to Palestine

refugees (A/4121). Those proposals were accompanied by an illuminating analysis of the problem as a whole.

11. The United Kingdom supported the Secretary-General's recommendation that UNRWA should continue. It was clear from the Director's annual report that the need for assistance still existed, and was even growing in magnitude. At the same time, the expenditure figure of \$33 a head was remarkable, and reflected much accumulated experience and a high degree of efficiency. It would be deplorable if the Assembly were to allow the Agency's staff to be dispersed and its administrative system disrupted by failing to reach agreement on the terms of its renewal. However, if the Assembly decided to extend the life of the Agency, it should at the same time take steps to remedy certain continuing defects in its operation, in particular the inaccuracy of the refugee rolls and the juridical basis of relations between the Agency and the host Governments. It was estimated by the Director (A/4213, para. 18) that in one of the host countries rations were being drawn in the name of some 150,000 persons who were either dead or ineligible to receive them. The Agency sought to balance that inaccurate registration by withholding rations from some 105,000 children of whose eligibility there was no doubt. Although the result was a kind of rough justice, it could not be regarded as administratively satisfactory. Those figures had recently been publicized in the Press as a revelation of corruption and inefficiency in the administration of Palestine refugee relief. There was no need to emphasize the damage which criticism of that kind could do to the Agency or the importance of removing the basis for it. In connexion with relations with the host Governments, the Director had drawn attention to difficulties over the recognition of the Agency's status, the acceptance in practice of the immunities required by its staff, and the settlement of outstanding financial claims of over \$1 million. At the same time, he had noted that working relations between the Agency and the Governments, particularly on a personal basis, had been good and in many ways represented an improvement over previous years. The United Kingdom delegation noted that fact with pleasure and hoped that the host Governments would be willing to join the Agency in an effort to clarify their relations on the lines suggested in paragraph 47 of the Director's report. In supporting those proposals, it welcomed the assurance given by the representative of the United Arab Republic that his Government was ready to consider with the Agency the best means of facilitating its work.

12. Part II of the Secretary-General's proposals contained a suggestion that had proved somewhat controversial, namely, that the host Governments should assume greater responsibility for general education. That would appear to be a suitable subject for further discussion between the Agency and the host Governments. It emerged from the statistics in the Director's report (A/4213, annex E, table 6) that 20 per cent of the total number of refugee children were in government schools. The percentage varied from country to country, and differing local conditions would no doubt be reflected in the Agency's discussions with individual Governments. It was to be hoped that progress could be made towards the system recommended by the Secretary-General (A/4121, part II, para. 12).

13. Both the documents before the Committee stressed the inability of the Agency so far to bring about any

large-scale rehabilitation of the refugees. The Director had pointed out in his statement to the Committee (148th meeting) that the number of persons rehabilitated had been more than offset by the margin of births over deaths. The Secretary-General's estimate of the investment that would be needed to bring about the integration of the refugees into the economic life of the area lent support to the view that the task was altogether beyond the Agency's resources. Nevertheless, one of the Agency's primary functions was, and should be, to give as many individuals as possible the opportunity of becoming self-supporting. That was the most important contribution it could make to the morale and dignity of the Palestine refugees. The Director's summary of progress in that field was the most encouraging part of his statement. UNRWA was providing university scholarships at the rate of 100 per year; 260 pupils would complete courses of vocational training during the current year and about 1,000 persons would benefit from the self-support programme. Those were small totals in relation to the mass of the refugees, but they represented an incalculable human value. The United Kingdom delegation had noted with satisfaction that the Director intended to apply the money which the Agency received from the World Refugee Year funds to the extension of those programmes. However, there was an underlying danger that in periods of financial difficulty the Agency, faced with the basic necessity of maintaining its relief programmes, would again have to cut down its expenditure on those services. In 1957, the shortfall in the Agency's income had forced it to curtail them drastically.

14. Various factors, which were analysed in the Director's report, had brought about an improved financial situation in the past year, but the margin remained precariously narrow. It was against that background that the United Kingdom delegation was obliged to dissent from the proposal to include within the scope of UNRWA's assistance the so-called economic refugees. The United Kingdom Government was not lacking in sympathy for them, as was shown by the fact that the Azazma Bedouin had benefited substantially from its contribution of £50,000 towards the relief of victims of the recent drought in Jordan. Nevertheless, it felt that UNRWA was not the appropriate instrument for assistance to the economic refugees. In the light of its precarious financial situation, it would be imprudent to add to its responsibilities another 317,000 persons involving an estimated additional expenditure of \$5 million a year. It would increase the danger that, failing a revolutionary improvement in the support given to it by Member States, the Agency would be driven back to its basic functions of relief and general education and would be obliged to abandon the forward-looking measures on which the Director had placed so much importance.

15. He had dwelt at the thirteenth session (110th meeting) on the urgent need for new contributors as well as the continued support of countries which had contributed to the work of the Agency in the past. The figures given in schedule C of document A/4117^{2/} showed that in 1958 no less than forty-eight Member States had made no pledge or contribution of any kind to the work

^{2/} United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East: Accounts for the year ended 31 December 1958 and report of the Board of Auditors (Official Records of the General Assembly, Fourteenth Session, Supplement No. 6B).

of UNRWA. He endorsed the Director's appeal for an improvement in that situation.

16. Mr. HONG (Cambodia) said that his country was guided chiefly by humanitarian considerations in its approach to the highly complex question before the Committee. Although Cambodia had a refugee problem of its own, it had for several years contributed to the fullest extent possible to the upkeep of the Agency, as well as to the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, and was also participating in the World Refugee Year.

17. The Cambodian delegation had studied very closely the Director's report (A/4213) and the Secretary-General's proposals (A/4121). The Agency's achievements, as described by the Director, were most praiseworthy, particularly in view of the administrative and financial difficulties under which it had laboured. He paid a tribute to the Agency's success in carrying out the relief part of its mandate and to the co-operation it had received from the host Governments. Unfortunately, the Agency had not been equally successful in regard to rehabilitation, which was a long-term programme subject to a number of pre-conditions, some of them political. It was unrealistic to cling to plans which were obviously unrealistic because of the confirmed opposition of one side or the other. At the same time, it was even less realistic to try to assign responsibility for what was now a "fait accompli", and it could only exacerbate relations still further.

18. The Palestine refugee problem had undoubtedly originated in a political conflict. However, in the light of the events which had taken place since the creation of the State of Israel, the Cambodian delegation felt that the best solution was to be sought in the economic stabilization of the region. Clearly, that process would be a lengthy one and no speedy solution was possible. In that connexion, the Cambodian delegation shared the views expressed by the Secretary-General (A/4121, part I, para. 18). In the meantime, United Nations assistance to the refugees must be continued "for all the time and to all the extent necessary, pending the reintegration of the refugee population into the productive life of the area" (*ibid.*, para. 12).

19. The Agency's long-term task of rehabilitation must be carried on without interruption, for the problem was growing rather than diminishing as the number of refugees increased. The Director of the Agency described the present lack of opportunity as even more tragic than the need for relief.

20. The Cambodian delegation earnestly hoped that Israel and the Arab States would agree to forget the past and to face the situation as it stood. It endorsed the appeal of the delegation of Ceylon (153rd meeting) to both sides to promote a speedy settlement of the Palestine refugee problem by means of peaceful negotiations. It would support any initiative to that effect, as being not only in the interest of the refugees themselves but also of the maintenance of peace in the Middle East.

21. Mr. DJIKIC (Yugoslavia) said that his delegation regarded it as absolutely essential to prolong the life of UNRWA, whose long experience made it the best instrument through which to provide relief for the Palestine refugees pending a complete solution of the problem. The Director of the Agency had painted a striking picture of the refugees' situation in paragraph 9 of his annual report. It was clear that, despite their unhappy lot, the refugees continued to believe that the solution to their problem lay in the full implementation of paragraph 11 of the General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

22. Apart from the gravity of the political aspects of the Palestine refugee problem, the United Nations faced an extremely difficult task in providing relief for more than 1 million refugees. It was therefore exceedingly important to ensure that the necessary financial means were available for the continuation of the Agency's activities. It was the duty of the United Nations to provide the most generous assistance possible. The sum of \$33 a year per refugee was barely enough to provide for their basic physical needs. The basic ration of 1,500 calories a day was a minimum which must not be reduced; yet UNRWA had experienced difficulty in maintaining even those minimum standards because of the uncertainty of its financial situation. The contributors to the Agency could facilitate its task and help it to draw up appropriate plans for the best use of its resources by sending in their contributions in good time.

23. Over the last ten years, the Agency had demonstrated that it was fully capable of discharging its duties, even in the most difficult circumstances. It had played an essential part in the relief of the refugees. The complexity and the humanitarian nature of the problem, and the absence of an appropriate political solution, were the chief reasons for extending the Agency's mandate and providing it with moral and material assistance. Yugoslavia would continue to contribute to the Agency's finances to the best of its ability.

The meeting rose at 4.45 p.m.