



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

AGENDA ITEMS 38 AND 12

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (A/8366, A/8383, A/8403, A/8413, A/8432, A/8476, 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)

1. Sir John RENNIE (Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) pointed out that his predecessor, Mr. Laurence Michelmore, had been in charge of the Agency's operations for most of the period covered by the current report of the Commissioner-General (A/8413), i.e. until the middle of May 1971. As the Committee knew, Mr. Michelmore had brought to the Agency long experience in the work of the United Nations, and that experience, together with his sense of duty and his deep humanitarianism, had enabled him to lead it through seven of the most difficult years of its history of service to the Palestine refugees.

2. The introduction and chapter I of the report described the Agency's operations up to the end of the period under review, and subsequent developments in Gaza were dealt with in a special report submitted separately (A/8383, annex). He would, of course, be prepared to provide any additional information the Committee might require.

3. The current report again fully demonstrated the need for UNRWA's services and their value to the Palestine refugees, and he drew the Committee's attention to paragraph 2 of the introduction, in which he had sought to dispel misconceptions about the Agency's responsibilities and tasks that might have inhibited contributions. In his introductory statement as a whole he had concentrated on the financial crisis that had, in effect, been postponed for a year by the decision of the General Assembly at its twenty-fifth session (resolution 2672 D (XXV)) to establish a Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, and would refer to the record of the past year primarily to illustrate some of the consequences of that crisis which might still be apprehended, since it had not receded and presented an immediate threat to the Agency's programmes and to the welfare of the refugees.

4. Since the fourteenth session the resolutions of the General Assembly had tended to take UNRWA's programmes for granted and had accordingly not deemed it necessary to offer guidance on their scope; the Commissioner-General and staff of UNRWA had been thanked for their services, and no direction had been given for the future. The General Assembly had on each occasion noted the annual report, and by implication the budget for the following year which it contained, and had also noted with concern that contributions continued to fall short of the funds needed to cover essential budget requirements. It had been assumed that, one way or another, it would prove possible to maintain the same programmes, despite higher costs and greater numbers of refugees. That had even been the case in the previous year when a resolution had also been adopted establishing the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA. He had felt it useful to recall the relationship between resolutions and the Agency's programmes because the Working Group's report must cast doubt on any such continuing assumption in regard to 1972.

5. The Agency's anxiety about the future of the United Nations programmes for the Palestine refugees—an anxiety shared by many Governments—was deepened by its awareness of the current impasse reached in the implementation of Security Council resolution 242 (1967). For so long as there was no peace settlement in the Middle East which included a just solution of the refugee problem, the need for UNRWA's services would continue, and yet, despite that need, there was still no guarantee that the necessary funds would be available.

6. The distribution of the refugee population made it obvious that UNRWA was dealing not simply with the consequences of the events of 1948 but with the consequences of those events compounded by the consequences of the events of 1967, and he sometimes had the impression that neither that fact nor the current task of UNRWA was everywhere understood.

7. As to the nature and scope of the programmes, he drew attention to annex III to the report of the Working Group (A/8476), which set out the activities that comprised UNRWA's programmes, their cost and some of the implications of reductions in them. He hoped that information would illuminate the Agency's problems and demonstrate just how painful the choices would be if, for lack of funds, the programmes could not be maintained at their current level. Many of the Agency's services were similar to those provided by Governments for their own people, frequently with the assistance of international agencies.

8. The Working Group had referred to the possibility of further assistance from the specialized agencies, noting,

however, that there were limitations on such assistance. It could, nevertheless, make a useful marginal contribution if sufficient flexibility was possible to take account of the special circumstances of the Palestine refugees and the staffing arrangements of UNRWA. He drew attention, for instance, to the supplementary feeding of children and other vulnerable groups and to the preventive and curative medicine carried out in the network of maternity and child-welfare clinics. There was also the programme of education and vocational training. His statement in annex III to the report of the Working Group that education was a major cause of the Agency's financial difficulties did not of course mean that the educational programme was to be criticized on that account but simply that its growth had made the financial problem more acute. On the contrary, it was the Agency's most constructive programme and there could be no doubt about the value the Palestine refugees attached to it.

9. Paragraph 22 of annex III showed how, under the joint pressures of the population growth and the greater demand for education, the number of children in UNRWA/UNESCO schools had almost doubled in the last decade. The importance of the programme to the Palestine refugees could not be exaggerated: it meant that, whatever the future held for them, they would not be handicapped in their individual efforts to become self-supporting for lack of educational opportunity in the present. In addition to the system of nine years of general education, there were also the training centres and scholarships which provided the means of education to several thousands of young Palestinians every year, enabling them eventually to help their families and to contribute to the further education of their brothers and sisters, while at the same time they supplied skills essential to the economic development being carried out by the host and other Governments. It would be tragic if that educational opportunity was to be denied to refugee children and if there was to be a retreat from the principle of equality of educational opportunity which the United Nations supported and which the UNRWA/UNESCO educational system had so far been able to practise. Chapter V of the Working Group's report and annex III to it showed that there was now an immediate threat of such a retreat.

10. As paragraphs 7 to 10 of the introduction to his report (A/8413) and chapter IV of the Working Group's report (A/8476) recorded, there had been a substantial improvement in the Agency's income in the current year. He thanked the Governments whose contributions had made that improvement possible and those who had launched or supported appeals for new or increased contributions. In that connexion, the efforts of the Chairman of the Working Group and the Director-General of UNESCO had been most helpful. The Agency had also done what it could, not without some success. He recalled, however, that his predecessor had said on more than one occasion that the duty of raising the funds required for the Agency's programmes was one that the General Assembly had never laid upon the Commissioner-General. The improvement he had referred to had justified deferment of further reductions during 1971 in order that the General Assembly might be able to reconsider the programme in the light of the report of the Working Group and provide some guidance on the policy it wished to see followed.

11. Unfortunately, the outlook for 1972 was very discouraging. In order to maintain the Agency's existing programmes, with higher unit costs and more children and therefore more teachers in the schools, an expenditure of approximately \$51 million would be required; even if all Government contributions were maintained at the 1971 level, income would fall short of expenditure by about \$6 million. That would be more than the working capital remaining at the end of 1971, and the implication was clear: the Agency would not be able to maintain its programmes unless the forthcoming pledging conference ensured a substantially higher level of income. If it did not, preparatory action to curtail expenditure would, regrettably, have to be taken. Moreover, unless the Agency could obtain substantial immediate payments of 1972 contributions in January or could take advantage of short-term assistance from the United Nations, there would be a cash crisis as early as January.

12. He had tried to describe in annex III what the reduction of services would mean in practice but the Committee could readily imagine the impact on the refugees, on the host Governments and on UNRWA and the United Nations as a whole. He had also explained why the scope for effective savings on basic rations was so limited. As his predecessor had said at the twenty-fourth session (665th meeting) when introducing the report for 1968-1969, a ceiling had been put on the number of rations to be issued many years previously. It was still being observed, and as a result there were some 300,000 registered refugee children for whom no rations were being issued and who would be eligible for them if the ceiling was removed.

13. The one programme in relief services that offered scope for saving money which could be used to maintain other activities was supplementary feeding. That programme was described in paragraphs 47 to 54 of the report and in a more concise form in paragraphs 8 and 9 of annex III to the Working Group's report. It was a relatively costly programme, which would release over \$2 million if eliminated entirely, but it was also a discriminating programme, directed to the vulnerable groups, mainly young children, who most needed a supplement to their diet. His medical advisers foresaw an increase in the incidence of malnutrition if that programme was eliminated. It was not an easy option. It would also be appreciated that that was the kind of programme many Governments provided for their own children, with or without the help of international agencies. As in the case of much that UNRWA did, therefore, it could be regarded as part of a broader humanitarian programme which was not confined to refugee children, but in which UNRWA served as the international community's instrument in aiding a population for which the United Nations felt a special responsibility.

14. Before leaving the relief programme he wanted to point out that in the emergency camps established after June 1967 in east Jordan and Syria the replacement of tents by more substantial shelter would be completed from funds in the budget for 1971. The last phase of construction was under way in Syria and the task had already been completed in east Jordan. It had taken a long time because UNRWA's financial difficulties had made it dependent on the availability of special contributions.

15. The main emphasis of the health services provided for the refugees was on preventive medicine. The Agency was directly responsible for only one small hospital and, where hospital services were provided for the refugees by Governments, it had been obliged to withhold the payment of subsidies for lack of funds. That action had thrown an additional burden on the Governments concerned but he could at the current stage see no prospect that payments could be resumed. The preventive medicine carried out by UNRWA could take credit for the absence of epidemic disease among the refugee population, despite their dietary deficiencies and generally poor living conditions, for the low level of infant mortality and for some spectacular reductions in the incidence of individual diseases. The number of cases of trachoma, for example, had in the past ten years been cut from over 15,000 to under 1,200 in a larger population. Cholera had appeared for the first time in the area of operations in the second half of 1970 and had it not been for the network of UNRWA clinics, facilitating early detection and treatment and mass immunization, for the school and the health education services, and for the camp sanitation services, the number of cases and the number of deaths among the refugee population and among the general population of the host countries would undoubtedly have been much higher. UNRWA had retained responsibility for sanitation services since taking over the first camps established for the Palestine refugees. They cost over \$1 million a year, but if the responsibility was simply abandoned, there would be an unacceptable risk of disease. Unless more income could be found, however, a cruel choice would have to be made between terminating some sanitation services, closing some clinics, and declining to accept further responsibility for fees for refugee patients in private hospitals where there were no Government facilities.

16. He had already spoken of the education programme which UNRWA and UNESCO valued as highly as the refugees themselves. Its scope could be seen from paragraphs 100 to 156 of the Commissioner-General's report. It had also enabled refugee children in the occupied territories to follow the same curricula and sit for the same examinations as before 1967, and in that connexion the association of UNESCO with UNRWA had been invaluable: text-books had been delivered to schools on the West Bank area of Jordan, and in Gaza the secondary school-leaving-certificate examination of the United Arab Republic had been held for the second year running. The education programme for the refugees was a major undertaking, both in size and importance. It was, he believed, bigger than the education programmes of a significant number of Member States. For the refugees it had been called a lifeline to the future. That lifeline was in danger of being cut, since it consumed the major part of the Agency's cash expenditure and was bound to be threatened by a deficit of the size expected.

17. He did not think that anyone with more than a superficial knowledge of UNRWA had ever accused it of being an extravagant organization or even an inefficient or ineffective organization. He did not know of any other international organization that had succeeded, for instance, in cutting its international staff by about one third while its budget increased in the same proportion. In that connexion, he was disappointed that the Working Group had felt unable to recommend that the cost of UNRWA's small international staff should be a charge on the regular budget

of the United Nations, as was the case with the international staff of the High Commissioner for Refugees. It had not allowed its activities to proliferate and, with the exception of some extension of vocational training, an activity which all its contributors commended and which had been offset by special contributions towards the capital and operating cost, its increased expenditure had been the direct result of rising costs and population growth.

18. Nevertheless, UNRWA's continuing programmes were now in jeopardy. The Palestine refugees, who had suffered so many misfortunes and whose fate had so often been in the hands of others, were now experiencing the agonizing threat of an even darker and more uncertain future, in which the help the United Nations had given them would dwindle by attrition and with it their hopes for their children. The Committee was faced with what might be the last chance of preserving intact the United Nations programme for the Palestine refugees and he asked members to consider most earnestly with their Governments the desirability of concerted action in which the total amount required would be insignificant in comparison with other expenditures.¹

19. Mr. ARNESEN (Norway), speaking as the Rapporteur of the Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, introduced the Working Group's report (A/8476). The Working Group, which had been established under General Assembly resolution 2656 (XXV), had submitted an interim report² to the General Assembly at its twenty-fifth session, in accordance with paragraph 3 of that resolution. On the basis of the interim report the General Assembly had unanimously adopted resolution 2728 (XXV), in which it had approved the report and endorsed the specific recommendations made in it. The current report was submitted in pursuance of paragraph 5 of the earlier of those resolutions. He did not intend to comment on chapters I and II of the report since they merely contained a factual description of what had taken place during the consideration of the item in the Special Political Committee and in the General Assembly at the previous session.

20. Some introductory remarks were necessary, however, with regard to chapter III, which dealt with the subsequent activities of the Working Group. The point of departure for the Working Group had been the gloomy fact that at the beginning of 1971 UNRWA had been faced with an estimated deficit for the current year of about \$5.5 to \$6 million. That was the situation following the pledging conference held on 1 December 1970. Chapter III of the report gave a factual account of the efforts which the Working Group and its Chairman had taken under resolution 2656 (XXV) in order to assist the Secretary-General and the Commissioner-General of UNRWA in reaching solutions to the problems posed by the Agency's financial crisis. During the year 1971, the Working Group had approached the various regional groups and had explained

¹ In accordance with a decision taken subsequently by the Committee (783rd meeting), the full text of the statement by the Commissioner-General was circulated in document A/SPC/PV.781.

² *Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-fifth Session, Annexes, agenda item 35, document A/8264.*

in detail the grave budgetary crisis facing UNRWA and the Agency's urgent need for additional contributions, in cash as well as in kind. The Organization of African Unity, the League of Arab States and the Organization of American States had also been approached in a similar way. Furthermore, consultations had been held with the Commissioner-General and the Governments of the host countries. Energetic approaches had also been made to various specialized agencies, such as FAO, the World Food Programme, the ILO and WHO with a view to obtaining such assistance as they might be in a position to provide in order to help the refugees, thus lessening the financial burden of UNRWA. Paragraphs 20 to 72 gave further information on approaches to other sources that the Working Group had made.

21. He drew attention to a communiqué, circulated to States Members of the United Nations and reproduced in paragraph 74 of the report, which stated, *inter alia*, that the Working Group had concentrated its efforts on intensifying collective support for the refugees through increasing the number of contributing countries and the amount of contributions and that the efforts deployed by the Working Group, by UNESCO, and by the Secretary-General and the Commissioner-General had borne fruit, decreasing the estimated deficit for 1971 from \$6.5 million to about \$2.6 million. That was the situation in May-June of the current year.

22. Chapter IV of the report dealt with the results of fund-raising activities on behalf of UNRWA during 1971, and in that connexion he drew particular attention to paragraph 84, which stated that the deficit for the current year was still some \$2 million. From paragraphs 80 and 81 it could be seen that the regular contributors to the Agency had continued to provide the bulk of the additional funds pledged and paid during 1971 and that new contributions had been obtained from a very limited number of Governments. The Working Group's efforts to bring about increased participation by United Nations organs had met with positive response on the part of some of them, in particular the World Food Programme.

23. The conclusions and recommendations outlined in chapter V of the report were endorsed by all nine members of the Working Group. As no solution of the whole Middle Eastern problem appeared likely in the immediate future, the Working Group believed that it would be necessary to maintain the activities of UNRWA in the immediate years to come. The main conclusion was that the cost of services to the Palestine refugees during the past two decades had been consistently borne by the same contributors, with a heavy imbalance among Member States in particular and various geographical regions in general. That conclusion was all the more important in the light of the further conclusion that the existing system of financing the Agency's activities by voluntary contributions should be continued, a conclusion which had been reached after careful consideration of suggestions that all or part of the expenses of the Agency should be transferred to the regular budget of the United Nations.

24. The Working Group had identified two main problems with regard to UNRWA's future activities: the financing of those activities in 1971 and 1972, and their financing

beyond 1972. It had concentrated on the short-term problem simply because the Agency's financial crisis was still acute. In addition to the current deficit of \$2 million for 1971, there was a new estimated deficit of some \$6 million for 1972, on the assumption that Government contributions in that year, including special contributions, would provide the same financial support as in 1971. Consequently, exceptional measures were required to secure the maintenance of UNRWA's activities at their current level. In view of the Commissioner-General's statement that, unless the necessary voluntary contributions were forthcoming, he would be compelled to reduce some of the Agency's activities during 1972, the relevant provisions of the Working Group's interim report as approved by the General Assembly in its resolution 2728 (XXV) would apply.

25. The Working Group had therefore made various recommendations with regard to the financing of UNRWA activities for 1972. In view of the fact that only 65 Governments were expected to make voluntary contributions for 1971 (see A/8476, annex II), an urgent appeal for contributions should be made to the non-contributing Governments, some of which had the financial capacity to make substantial contributions, and all Governments should be asked to pledge their voluntary contributions as a matter of the highest priority. Those Governments which in previous years had given substantial contributions should be requested to consider making an increased contribution for 1972. There had been a strong feeling in the Working Group that it should differentiate between contributing and non-contributing Governments. The Working Group also recommended that a general appeal should be made to Governments and other potential contributors to offer contributions in kind, especially flour, sugar—which was a surplus commodity in some countries—soup and tinned meat, particularly in view of the Commissioner-General's estimate that flour would cost \$1.1 million more in 1972 than in 1971.

26. The General Assembly should request the Secretary-General and the Chairman of the Working Group to consult with appropriate agencies early in 1972 to identify specific projects or areas of activity in which the other United Nations agencies could assist UNRWA to discharge its responsibilities, in accordance with their constitutional requirements. Special efforts should also be made to obtain voluntary contributions from non-governmental services. In particular, Governments could be urged to draw the attention of commercial enterprises, for example oil companies, and humanitarian institutions in their respective countries, particularly those with affiliations in the area, to the financial crisis of UNRWA. As the cash position of the Agency would be critical at the beginning of 1972, Governments and other contributors should be urged to pay their contributions in January. An appeal should also be made to Governments to indicate, if possible, their pledges to UNRWA beyond 1972 at the pledging conference for 1972. The General Assembly should request the Working Group, on the assumption that its mandate was extended, to follow up all those appeals with Governments and with regional and other organizations.

27. Concerning the longer-term problems, the Working Group recommended that a basic reappraisal of the

Agency's current operation should be undertaken, with a view to continuing the comprehensive study of its finances and to determining the extent to which additional assistance might be obtained from international agencies, in order to establish the operation on secure foundations. Finally, the Working Group recommended that its mandate should be extended for a further year.

28. The provision of relief, health services and educational facilities to the Palestine refugees in the Middle East was exclusively a humanitarian task, which should be the common responsibility of all Members of the United Nations. It was the Working Group's hope that every Member Government would respond spontaneously and generously to the appeals made in its recommendations.

29. Mr. GUYER (Under Secretary-General for Special Political Affairs) said that the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General had requested him to inform the Committee that, in view of the importance they attached to the work of UNRWA and the welfare of the Palestine refugees, they had decided to make an appeal³ for new contributions.

30. The CHAIRMAN reminded the Committee that at its 754th and 777th meetings, it had decided to discuss first the administrative and financial aspects of the question and that it might defer until a later stage statements of a general political nature. That should not be interpreted as limiting the freedom of any delegation to make an early general statement but he appealed to all to exercise moderation in their statements and to confine their remarks as much as possible to the item under discussion, since the broader aspects of the question might shortly be considered by the General Assembly.

31. Mr. GHORRA (Lebanon) expressed the deep appreciation of the Arab delegations to Mr. Michelmores, former Commissioner-General of UNRWA, for his diligent and humane attention to the essential needs of the Palestine refugees. He was confident that under the direction of Sir John Rennie, the Agency would maintain and further improve its humanitarian services.

32. Thanks to the efforts of the Working Group, the Agency's deficit for 1971 had been substantially lowered and a reduction in its services averted. The Group's task had been facilitated by the co-operation of some of the specialized agencies such as the World Food Programme and UNESCO, whose Director-General and his personal representative had conducted a successful campaign to maintain the educational programmes for the refugees. However, despite the efforts of the Working Group, the future operations of the Agency were far from assured. At the twenty-fifth session the Commissioner-General had told the Committee (726th meeting) that the very existence of the Agency was at stake unless contributions were made speedily and increased substantially to meet both the short-term cash crisis and the long-term deficit in the Agency's budget. It had been recognized that the collapse of operations or even reductions in the relief, health and educational services would have ominous effects on the refugees themselves and on the general situation in the

Middle East. Despite the partial success achieved in easing the strains on UNRWA's budget, the Agency's financial prospects for 1972 remained as precarious as ever. A deficit of \$6 million was anticipated and essential services to the refugees were threatened by serious reductions. In the current report (A/8413, para. 198), the Commissioner-General had referred to the possibility that the Agency would be insolvent at the end of 1971.

33. One serious aspect of the financial situation was the constant call made upon the working capital, which had decreased from \$48,620,000 in 1953 to an estimated figure of \$3,225,668 by the end of 1971. It was therefore impossible to rely upon that asset to cover any further deficit. The large annual deficits were due to the growing number of refugees and to the rise in prices of commodities and cost of operations, even when merely maintained at their current level—the bare minimum acceptable. If contributions remained constant, the annual deficit would continue to increase in proportion to the growing number of refugees, which had increased from 960,000 in 1950 to 1,468,000 in 1971, the increase over the past year being almost 43,000.

34. The Commissioner-General had submitted a paper (A/8476, annex III) to the Working Group in August 1971, analysing the types of services rendered and the areas where reductions might have to be introduced if sufficient funds were not available. The Governments of the host countries—Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon—again viewed that development with grave concern, because it might lead to greater hardships for the refugees, further frustration, and unsettled conditions in the camps and in the countries in which they lived. The Commissioner-General did not forecast any reduction in the basic ration distributed to some 825,000 recipients, which provided them with 1,500 calories per day—1,600 during the winter months—a minimal ration, enough for survival but not for satisfactory living. The *per capita* cost of the rations was less than five cents per day. Reductions might however affect the programmes (which consisted of hot meals and milk) for regular and supplementary feeding designed to protect the most vulnerable sectors of the population—infants, pre-school and school children, nursing mothers and selected medical cases.

35. There was also a ceiling on the number of recipients of full rations, which affected a substantial proportion of children under the age of 15 years and forced them to share the meagre rations of their elders. The Commissioner-General had just said that 300,000 children would be eligible if the ceiling were raised. The protection of those vulnerable groups was all the more necessary because the regular rations contained no fresh food or animal protein. A Palestine refugee fortunate enough to be classified as a full-ration recipient would receive 333 grammes of flour per day, 20 grammes of pulses (or their approximate calorific value in flour or rice, as even the pulses often had to be eliminated), 20 grammes of sugar, 17 grammes of rice, 12.5 grammes of cooking oil per day and one or one-and-a-half litres of kerosene during the five winter months, depending on where his abode was. Inhabitants of emergency camps in East Jordan or Syria also received one cake of soap per month. It was therefore difficult to see where reductions could be made.

³ Subsequently circulated as document A/8526.

36. The areas for possible reductions in health and sanitation mentioned by the Commissioner-General were self-explanatory, but again it was difficult to see where reductions could be made. Since the Agency provided health services to only 40 per cent of the registered refugees, their *per capita* cost was about \$1.10 per year. Any attempt at reductions would greatly endanger the lives of the refugees and constitute a health hazard to the entire population of the area.

37. Possible reductions in education and vocational training had been considered, and the Commissioner-General had spoken frankly on the question. In his statement to the Working Group on 5 January 1971 the Secretary-General had said that curtailment of education for the refugee students would be particularly cruel for these young people and their families. They would suffer for at least a generation, and the whole Middle East would feel the consequences of losing the potential benefit of this human resource. The right to education had been universally accepted as a fundamental human right, and could help to restore the dignity and self-respect of the Palestinian refugees and to prepare them for service to their people, once their legitimate rights had been restored. Reductions in that field would be detrimental to the rebuilding of their social, economic and political structures and would lead to frustration, helplessness and unrest.

38. However, the financial crisis with which UNRWA was now faced was not the only obstacle involved. The report of the Commissioner-General referred to other obstacles. In the past, the Israeli military authorities had prevented the distribution of text-books among the students at schools run by UNRWA or private schools in the occupied territories, and the matter had still not been solved to the entire satisfaction of the Executive Board of UNESCO. Another recurrent problem was that of Israel's violation of the rights of United Nations staff members under the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations. As stated in paragraph 161 of the Commissioner-General's report (A/8413), there had been 36 cases of arrest and detention of the Agency's staff in Gaza without any criminal charges having been pressed. Two persons had finally been brought to trial and three were still detained as of 30 June 1971. Nineteen such detentions and arrests had occurred on the West Bank.

39. A still graver problem had developed in the summer of 1971 in the Gaza Strip, when Israeli military authorities had deliberately harassed the refugees. There had been mass-destruction of UNRWA camps and deportations of refugees to areas outside the Strip. They had also interfered in various installations of the Agency in Gaza, particularly its schools. The Commissioner-General, in his report (see A/8413, para. 171), and the Secretary-General, in the introduction (see A/8401/Add.1 and Corr.1, para. 226) to his report on the work of the Organization, had referred to the matter. Although the destruction and deportations had finally ceased, the Commissioner-General had concluded, in a special report on the matter (see A/8383, para. 13), that for many refugees their living conditions must have worsened, health hazards must be greater. Those Israeli actions had been a flagrant violation of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 for the protection of war victims and of United Nations resolutions. However, he would refer to

the matter in greater detail at a later stage, during the Committee's consideration of the question of Israeli practices in occupied territories, under agenda item 40.

40. The most serious problem was Israel's refusal to co-operate in the implementation of United Nations resolutions. Israel continued to disregard United Nations appeals and resolutions calling for the return of refugees who had fled to the East Bank of the Jordan after the June 1967 war. It had persistently ignored the annually reiterated General Assembly resolution 194 (III) calling for either repatriation or compensation of the refugees, and was thereby preventing a just solution to the refugee problem.

41. The Palestinian problem should not be viewed solely from the budgetary angle, but in all its dimensions. It should be remembered at all times that the refugees had been driven from their homeland, their properties usurped by foreign colonialist elements, and that they had lived in the squalor of the camps for 23 years. Only in that context could Members realize how pitiful was the attempt to raise \$50 million per year to ensure their survival. In contrast, the Israelis were enjoying the fruits of their usurpation and had been provided with massive military, economic and financial aid. He drew a contrast between the \$50 million needed by UNRWA to keep the Palestinian refugees at subsistence level and the most generous official and private aid that Israel had received from the United States of America.

42. It had been suggested that the Arab Governments should assume greater responsibility in caring for the refugees. Although they did not want the refugees to remain as wards of the United Nations indefinitely, they could not exonerate the Organization from its actions which had first led to the deprivation of the rights of the Arab people of Palestine. In reference to a point made by the Commissioner-General in his report (A/8413, paras. 199 and 200), concerning the withholding of subsidies for health services, he pointed out that although the Arab Governments were glad to assist in hospital services they could not accept financial responsibility for running hospitals, because they had difficulties in meeting the health requirements of their growing populations. They could not bear the burden of caring for the refugees alone because they were already burdened with the complex problems of development, which were constantly aggravated by Israeli aggression and expansionism.

43. Yet, despite their difficulties, the Arab countries had not failed to provide their Palestinian brothers with as much humanitarian assistance as possible. In most of the Arab countries Palestinians were to be found in many walks of life and Lebanon was proud of the scope that it offered them. Arab contributions to UNRWA's budget had increased every year. In 1970/71 they had contributed about \$23.5 million, mainly for educational, social welfare and medical services. It should be noted that 43.4 per cent of refugees were not dependent upon the UNRWA dole and 61 per cent lived in private dwellings, which was proof of the many opportunities extended to Palestinians by the Arab countries. UNRWA's expenses and activities constituted only the minimal expression of responsibility towards Palestinian refugees on the part of the international community. That was why his delegation, and other Arab

delegations, had opposed and would continue to oppose any attempt to reduce UNRWA services.

44. His delegation had not intended to isolate the financial aspects of the question from the political aspects, but rather to co-operate with the Commissioner-General in explaining the Agency's financial crisis. He hoped that his delegation would be afforded a further opportunity to discuss the fundamentals of the entire Palestinian question. At the current stage the future of the Palestinians and a just settlement of their plight should be the sole object of concern and were more important than either the future of the Agency or that of the Working Group. Although the Working Group had shouldered its responsibility to the best of its ability and would do so again, should its mandate be renewed, it could not become a permanent institution of the General Assembly and only existed to help UNRWA raise sufficient funds to avert a deficit and to try to replenish its working capital. His delegation supported the conclusions and recommendations in the report of the Working Group (A/8476, chap. V) as the best means of remedying the current financial situation.

45. The Agency remained the best organ through which the international community could fulfil its humanitarian obligations towards the refugees, and was perhaps the only alternative to unrest. Since a final settlement of the Palestinian tragedy had not yet been achieved, UNRWA must continue its work and should be spared the annual agony of facing recurrent financial crises, which in turn raised an annual problem for the General Assembly.

46. The responsibility of the Organization was twofold. Its action should be based on all United Nations resolutions, recommendations and appeals for an increase in contributions to the financing of UNRWA. It was the long-term responsibility of the United Nations to accelerate its action to achieve peace with justice in the Middle East despite Israeli policies to undermine that peace. The General Assembly recognized in its resolution 2672 C (XXV) that the people of Palestine were entitled to equal rights and self-determination in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, and declared that full respect for the inalienable rights of the people of Palestine was an indispensable element in the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. The people of Palestine should not be condemned indefinitely to the lot they were enduring as wards of international charitable organizations. They were entitled to a fuller and more rewarding life and to the prospect of a more promising future.

47. Finally, in the light of the seriousness with which the Commissioner-General was considering reductions in the field of education, he must reiterate the final paragraph of the statement he had made on the question at the twenty-fifth session (see 739th meeting, para. 40). The United Nations and most particularly those States which had been and continued to be responsible for the plight of the Arab refugees must assume full responsibility for any disturbance, unsettling effect, or crisis that might develop as a result of a reduction in UNRWA services.

48. The Princess PAHLAVI (Iran) expressed her delegation's sincere appreciation of Mr. Michelmores' spirit of dedication, selflessness and efficiency under circumstances

of unusual hardship. She also pledged support to Sir John Rennie, the new Commissioner-General of UNRWA, and thanked him for his most comprehensive report.

49. Two persistently depressing pictures emerged from the Commissioner-General's report, one of continued human misfortune and misery, and the other of a frustrating sense of financial uncertainty. An ever-increasing number of refugees faced a precarious existence of great deprivation, not only in terms of physical hardship, but in the denial of the right of men to a home, a country and a land to which they could claim to belong. In such a situation, the Agency had been the sole provider of virtually the only means of survival for the refugees. Despite extremely meagre financial resources and the disruptive political crisis in the area, the Agency had successfully maintained the standard of its services, including constructive programmes of education and training which accounted for nearly 50 per cent of its expenditure in 1971.

50. The mandate of the Agency was now drawing to an end. It would be difficult to overemphasize the need for continuation of UNRWA's programmes, without which the survival of over one and a half million refugees would be greatly endangered. However, the renewal of the Agency's mandate, which was strongly supported by her delegation would serve little purpose, unless it also had the means to discharge its responsibilities. Her Government had always contributed to the UNRWA budget to the best of its ability, and had doubled its contribution in 1970. It was still possible to reverse, or at least arrest the impending financial disaster of the Agency's programmes. Other United Nations agencies, such as UNESCO and WHO, had contributed only 1 per cent of the budget of UNRWA. Perhaps those and other agencies could make a larger contribution. Moreover, 75 Member States had not yet joined the contributors to UNRWA. Even token contributions could make a significant difference to the life of the refugees. Contributions in kind should also be considered. Shipments of flour and rice would release funds for greatly needed services elsewhere.

51. The Chairman of the Working Group, and his colleagues had succeeded in improving the Agency's finances in 1970, and it was to be hoped that he and his colleagues would be authorized to continue their work. Nevertheless, as the Commissioner-General had said, the Agency's financial outlook for 1972 remained ominous and, unless there was a substantial increase in its income, reductions in UNRWA services would be inevitable. That was why she was making an appeal for help for the refugees of Palestine. She only asked that one and a half million fellow human beings, fated to live in intolerable conditions for reasons entirely beyond their control, should be given the means to exist. Her appeal was free from political aims and motivated by humanitarian considerations alone. She hoped that it would be heeded by all those who valued human life and upheld the right of the individual to existence. She called upon the international community to show that its collective will did not only produce words but truly collective action in which all could share proudly.

52. Mr. ACHILLE-FOULD (France) recalled that the Committee had been concerned with the fate of the Palestine refugees for many years. And yet, despite all its

efforts on their behalf, the practical results of its debates were rather disappointing owing to the lack of progress in the basic situation and the complications introduced by the events of June 1967, the increasingly permanent status of the 1,450,000 refugees, who were unable either to return to their lands or to be integrated into the host countries, and the growing financial difficulties encountered by UNRWA, which threatened not only the continuation of highly urgent programmes but the very existence of the Agency itself.

53. For his delegation, what was at issue was the lack of results; for those of the host countries, it was the genuine will of the international community to provide effective assistance in alleviating the distress of the victims of a situation which was of too great a magnitude to be dealt with locally. For the refugees themselves, what was at stake for the immediate future was the fulfilment of their most basic requirements: food, health, education and training. In that context, particular consideration should be given to the youth of the refugee camps, who had never known a homeland, were often without employment opportunities and faced a doubtful future.

54. The Committee must react against the widespread feelings of disappointment and bitterness by concentrating on the most concrete problems to which it could find solutions through thorough consideration of the two reports before it. To broaden the discussions to include the political aspects of the situation would be not only untimely, for the General Assembly would soon consider those aspects, but prejudicial as well, since to do so would distract the Committee's attention from the search for practical solutions to the problems of UNRWA.

55. Recalling that the Commissioner-General had stressed in his report for the previous year that the continued existence of the Agency was at stake,⁴ he noted that UNRWA's deficit had risen from \$4.9 million in 1970 to an estimated \$5.5 million in 1971, although additional contributions and administrative measures introduced by the Commissioner-General were expected to reduce the latter figure to \$2.4 million by the end of the year. The deficit for 1972, however, was estimated to rise to \$6.5 million. The reasons for that situation, which cast doubt on the future of the Agency, were well known. Although the Commissioner-General and his staff had made a serious effort to stabilize expenditures, costs necessarily tended to increase as a result of the growing numbers of refugees and the rising costs of the goods and services provided to them; meanwhile, income from voluntary contributions did not necessarily increase at the same rate.

56. A financial catastrophe, with its obvious human, social and political implications, could be averted in either of two ways: cutting expenditures or increasing income. His delegation, as it had stated at the twenty-fifth session (732nd meeting), was extremely reluctant to accept the first solution, which unfortunately could not be completely ruled out. In any case, all possible savings should be considered in close co-operation with the host countries and should also receive the approval of the contributing

countries; that was a principle to which his delegation attached special importance.

57. The Commissioner-General, although he had expressed strong reservations with regard to the possibility of eliminating certain programmes without compromising the various missions of the Agency, had carried out a study (A/8476, annex III) on the areas in which savings could be made. The cuts he envisaged could take effect only over a period of time, amounting to a maximum of \$4 million in 1972, a figure which still would not entirely make up the deficit of \$6.5 million forecast for the end of the year. That fact was illustrative of the limitations on such action unless much more radical solutions, which would lead to a new definition of the Agency's mission, were considered, and his delegation strongly hoped that it would not be necessary to take such a course. It was for that reason that it participated in the work of the Working Group on the financing of UNRWA with a view to studying ways of increasing contributions. Under the active leadership of Mr. Nuri Eren, Deputy Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations, the Working Group had contacted various regional groups, specialized agencies and other potential contributors, both public and private, in an effort to bring about the international solidarity which alone could make it possible to overcome the Agency's difficulties. Some early encouraging results had been obtained in the form of additional contributions which had succeeded in greatly reducing the deficit for 1971; he expressed his gratitude to those who had made such contributions. If effective and lasting results were to be obtained, those efforts should be continued and expanded.

58. The Working Group therefore recommended that the General Assembly should issue an urgent appeal to all Governments for contributions, either in cash or in kind. It was necessary to spur the generosity of the international community by making it more fully aware of the gravity of a situation in which one and a half million human lives were at stake. That effort should be sustained through the regular exchange of information between the contributing States, on the one hand, and the staff of the Commissioner-General, as well as the Secretary-General of the United Nations, on the other. The Working Group itself, if its mandate was renewed, would join in that task, while continuing its consideration of the Agency's long-term financial problems.

59. For its part, his country had constantly provided the Agency with financial and material assistance ever since its creation and ranked fourth among the contributors for the period from 1 May 1950 to the present. It intended to pursue that effort in so far as it lay within its power. Each year, in addition to its financial contribution, it made contributions in kind, providing the Agency with buildings and an audio-visual centre, paying the salaries of teachers of French and organizing courses of further training in France for young Palestinians.

60. In conclusion, he stressed his country's awareness of the need for international solidarity with respect to the fate of the Palestine refugees. Until the advent of a political solution, which alone could restore their hopes, every available means should be used to provide them with acceptable living conditions and to enable their youth to prepare for their future.

⁴ See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 13*, para. 31.

61. Mr. OSMAN (Egypt) drew attention to a special report by the Commissioner-General (A/8383) on the effect on the Palestine refugees of recent Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip. In order to assist the Committee in its work, he requested the Commissioner-General, through the Chairman, to provide members with any new information on that situation which might have become available since the publication of that extremely important document.

62. Recalling the Commissioner-General's remarks on the critical financial situation of UNRWA, he emphasized the need for an adequate response to the appeals for additional contributions, without which the situation of the Palestine refugees would deteriorate yet further, and the heavy responsibility of the international community towards those unfortunate people who had so long been forced to live on charity.

63. In order to put the matter in proper perspective, he reminded members that the financial crisis of UNRWA could be remedied at once if a fraction of the revenue from the lands, properties and possessions of the Palestine refugees could be recovered from Israel. The greatest responsibility for the situation of the refugees fell upon those who deliberately and systematically deprived them of their rights and usurped their lands and property. If the international community succeeded in restoring the rights of the Palestinian people, there would be no need to speak of the financial crisis of UNRWA and issue special appeals for charity.

64. The CHAIRMAN said that the Commissioner-General would take note of the Egyptian representative's request.

65. Mr. BABAR (Pakistan) said that the statement made by the representative of Lebanon was actually in the nature of expert testimony. In view of the great importance of the item under consideration, he proposed that the text of that statement should be circulated in full.

66. The CHAIRMAN recalled that at its 1937th plenary meeting, on 24 September 1971, the General Assembly had approved the General Committee's suggestion in paragraph 7 of its first report (A/8500) that the Special Political Committee might obtain, on specific request, transcriptions of the debates of some of its meetings, or portions thereof. If he heard no objection, therefore, he would take it that the Committee wished to make use of the authority granted to it and to approve the suggestion made by the representative of Pakistan.

*It was so decided.*⁵

67. Mr. WESTON (United Kingdom) recalled that his delegation had requested information concerning the cost of reproducing a particular statement *in extenso* and asked whether that information was now available.

68. The CHAIRMAN explained that he had made inquiries of the Secretariat following the Committee's discussion at its 768th and 769th meetings. He had been informed that in the light of the General Assembly decision he had

referred to, appropriate arrangements had been made by the Secretariat in order to implement such specific requests of the Committee when they arose. Those requests, consequently, were not expected to give rise to additional budgetary requirements, since they were processed through available resources. In the specific instance that had arisen in the Committee, at the current and the 768th meetings, a transcript of the statements could be obtained directly from sound recordings of the meeting, in the four working languages, and the costs of issuing those documents were estimated at approximately \$5 per page for each working language.

69. Mr. WESTON (United Kingdom) thanked the Chairman for his explanation and expressed relief at the fact that the cost was, comparatively speaking, so small. Nevertheless, the figure of \$5 per page per language did not represent the whole cost, since it did not take account of the cost of creating the infrastructure which was necessary to make it possible for such reproduction to be provided upon request.

70. While he did not wish to pursue the question further at the current stage, he noted that although, as he understood it, it was little, if at all, more expensive to provide verbatim records for a Committee than to provide summary records, to provide both, however, or even to create the infrastructure necessary to provide both, greatly increased the cost. That being so, before the time came to consider whether the option should be renewed for the twenty-seventh session, it might be useful to have available a note on the financial implications of providing verbatim records instead of summary records for all meetings of the Committee. That should prove considerably cheaper than the existing system.

71. The CHAIRMAN said that the Secretariat would take note of that suggestion.

72. Mr. CAHANA (Israel), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, recalled that the Chairman had requested members to confine their statements to the administrative and financial aspects of the work of UNRWA. Indeed, his own delegation had received appeals from various quarters to that effect and was prepared to heed them. At the current stage, therefore, he would refrain from replying to the allegations and accusations made by the representative of Lebanon. He wished to point out, however, that many of the matters referred to by the representative of Lebanon in connexion with the activities of the Government of Israel referred not to administrative or financial matters, but to security considerations. In that connexion, he drew attention to a letter (A/8432), dated 28 September 1971, from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General regarding the developments which had taken place in the Gaza Strip during the past summer.

73. Security matters were indeed of great importance in the context of the item under consideration. As indicated in paragraph 170 of the report of the Commissioner-General (A/8413), the Government of Lebanon persisted in failing to meet its obligation to take responsibility for the maintenance of public order in the refugee camps within its territory. Under an agreement with the Arab terrorist

⁵ The full text of the statement by the representative of Lebanon was subsequently circulated in document A/SPC/PV.781.

organizations, the Lebanese Government had given those organizations control over some 15 camps, inhabited by about 85,000 people, thus enabling the terrorists to use the camps as bases for their operations against his country. In that way, the Government of Lebanon was actually promoting continued hostility and violence. That could hardly be considered an effective way of convincing the international community to contribute to the humanitarian cause of the refugees. UNRWA needed all the assistance it could obtain in carrying out its difficult task, and the creation of further obstacles served no purpose at all.

74. Mr. GHORRA (Lebanon) assured members that he had no intention of initiating a political debate at the current stage. In his statement, he had referred only to matters which had been discussed in the reports of the Commissioner-General and the Secretary-General. In that connexion, he stressed that the financial difficulties of UNRWA were due in part to the destruction of houses and refugee camps in the Gaza strip. He wished, however, to reject the serious accusations made against his Government by the representative of Israel.

75. Mr. NUSEIBEH (Jordan) said that all members were agreed that the political aspects of the question should not be discussed at the current stage of the Committee's work. He failed to see on what grounds the representative of Israel had objected to the well-balanced statement made by the Lebanese representative. The references which had been made to the situation in Gaza, however, were of particular concern to his delegation, for his country was indirectly a victim of the activities of the Israeli military authorities in

that area, which the representative of Israel had attempted to justify on the grounds of security. He noted that as early as 1968, well before the events which had been referred to, his country's Ministry of Reconstruction, which provided assistance to Palestine refugees, had become aware of a sizable exodus of refugees from Gaza. Further inquiries had disclosed that the Israeli authorities had worked out a plan for the expulsion of 58,000 refugees from that area; that would have been a disaster not only for Gaza, but also for his country, which would have had to accommodate the refugees. Day after day, busloads of refugees had been herded to the banks of the Jordan and forced to cross the river into his country. The Jordanian army had eventually been compelled to fire on the convoys in order to put an end to that practice. It was clear that the Israeli authorities did not wish to allow the refugees to remain in Palestinian territory, for refugees from Gaza were now being expelled into the desert wilderness of Sinai. His delegation totally rejected the thesis that the tragic plight of the refugees in Gaza was the result of security considerations.

76. Mr. CAHANA (Israel) pointed out that he, too, had referred only to matters dealt with in the report of the Commissioner-General. If the Committee wished to enter into a detailed discussion of pertinent security matters, his delegation would be pleased to provide the necessary background information, but he suggested that those matters should be left for a later stage of the Committee's work.

The meeting rose at 5.45 p.m.