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Chairman: Mr. Emilio ARENALES CATALAN
(Guatemala).

In the absence of the Chairman, Ato Gebre-Meskel Kifle-Egzy (Ethiopia), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

AGENDA ITEM 26

Report of the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (A/3686 and Corr.1, A/3735, A/SPC/20/Rev.1) (continued)

1. Mr. GOHAR (Egypt) drew the attention of the Special Political Committee to paragraph 92 of the annual report of the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (A/3686 and Corr.1), in which it was stated that the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) must, in the very nature of things, be considered against the political background of the Palestine question, to which the refugee problem was inextricably linked. The Director had already stated in paragraph 5 of his preceding annual report covering period 1 July to 30 June 1956 (A/3212), that an effective review and appraisal of the Agency's work could only be made if there was a clear understanding of the human factor which conditioned it, and that the problem of the Palestine refugees was not simply an economic problem susceptible of economic solutions.

2. In the light of those pertinent comments, he wished briefly to review the background of the problem. It had been caused by Israel's repeated violations of the United Nations Charter and of the 1948 general armistice agreements, by its total disregard of human rights and by its persistent non-compliance with the decisions and resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council. Israel had not even observed resolution 181 (II) adopted by the General Assembly on 29 November 1947, which had outlined the boundaries of the future State of Israel. Using force, it had trespassed beyond those boundaries and had appropriated a large part of what should have become the Arab State of Palestine. In the same resolution, the General Assembly had stipulated the internationalization of the city of Jerusalem, which Israel, in defiance of world public opinion, had increasingly op-

posed. On several occasions, the Assembly had stated that the Arab refugees from Palestine should be repatriated and that those who decided not to return home should be compensated. Israel, however, had ignored all the resolutions which the General Assembly had adopted on that question, and not one refugee had yet been repatriated or compensated.

3. The acts of terrorism committed by the inhabitants of Israel against the Palestinian Arabs, which had cost the lives of hundreds of defenceless refugees, and the expulsion of over 10,000 Arabs who now swelled the numbers of refugees who had fled from Palestine at the time of the exodus, were further sorry features of the tragedy. Furthermore, the failure of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine to discharge its task could be attributed entirely to Israel, which had denounced, only one week after its signature, the 1949 Protocol of Lausanne that had laid the basis for future negotiations on the Palestine question.

4. The lot of the Arab refugees from Palestine was the concern of all mankind. The United Nations was admittedly making efforts, through UNRWA, to ease their suffering by providing relief, financed by contributions from certain Member States, to enable them to avert starvation. It should not be forgotten, however, that those refugees had abandoned in Israel property worth thousands of millions of dollars.

5. In that connexion, the Committee would remember the statement made several years ago by the Israel representative to the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine. that it was not realistic to speak of the return of the Arab refugees to their farms and homes because most of those had been destroyed and those which still remained had been occupied by Israelis. According to the representative of Israel, therefore, it would be useless to discuss the question of repatriation. He had added that the persons in question were a minority, and the events of the past twenty years had shown the necessity for eliminating problems caused by minorities, which were the principal cause of wars and internal discords. So far as Israel was concerned, the problem of minorities had been conveniently resolved by the exodus of the Arabs from Palestine. That was Israel's attitude to the entire question.

6. The root of the trouble was the boundless ambition of world political Zionism, of which Israel was the spearhead. Not content with its present occupation of a territory considerably greater than that allotted to it under the partition plan and with having increased that territory even further by the forcible seizure of demilitarized zones, Israel coveted yet more land. Had not the Prime Minister of Israel openly said that the 1949 General Armistice Agreement between Israel and Egypt was null and void? Further defying the United Nations, Israel was now refusing to comply with reso-

lution 1125 (XI) adopted by the General Assembly on 2 February 1957 and to agree to the stationing of the United Nations Emergency Force on the Israel side of the armistice demarcation line.

7. The main tool of political Zionism was Jewish immigration into Palestine, which continued to increase. The Prime Minister of Israel had declared recently that Israel would only be able to safeguard its survival and its security through the immigration in the near future of at least 2 million Jews. It need hardly be recalled that as early as 1948 Count Bernadotte had stated that Jewish immigration affected not only Israel and the Jewish people but also the Arab world. The large-scale immigration of Jews into Palestine seriously violated the rights of the Palestine Arabs, which the resolutions of the General Assembly had affirmed and recognized, and was also contrary to the provisions of the Charter concerning human rights and fundamental freedoms. Israel, however, was not yet satisfied with what it was doing in Palestine. It now wished to establish new rules of international law and, indeed, to dominate the whole world. The Israel Government had just enacted laws inspired by Zionism's "Jewish" nationalist ideology, which automatically bestowed upon Jews from other countries rights enjoyed by Israel citizens. Israel thus claimed to exercise control over all the Jews of the world and to establish ties between Israel and world Jewry to serve its own interests.

8. Turning to the annual report of the Director of UNRWA (A/3686 and Corr.1), he expressed his Government's appreciation for the untiring efforts made and the remarkable work done by the Director and staff of the Agency.

9. In paragraph 1 of his report the Director of UNRWA stated that the grave financial situation of the Agency was a cause for real alarm for everyone interested in the welfare of the Palestine refugees and in the stability of the Near East. In paragraph 2, he again emphasized that the financial position of the Agency required the most urgent consideration and positive action by the Members of the United Nations. It was a question of relieving human suffering and of providing for the support of 900,000 refugees, whom the United Nations had bound itself to protect under the resolutions it had adopted. The United Nations could not shirk its commitments.

10. The refugee problem had not been created by the Arab States but by world Zionism, supported by some countries. It was primarily the duty of the Member States which had voted for resolution 181 (II) in 1947 to contribute to the budget of the Agency. The Director of UNRWA had pointed out in paragraph 97 of the report that many lives were at stake, and that the humanitarian and political implications of stopping or cutting essential United Nations assistance to the Palestine refugees were clear, and he had accordingly addressed an urgent appeal to Member States to take the necessary decisions and actions. The Egyptian delegation earnestly hoped that Member States would respond to the appeal of the Director and would endorse the suggestions he had advanced in paragraph 95 of his report.

11. In spite of the heavy economic burden that the presence of numerous refugees in their territory involved, the host countries were doing their utmost to assist the refugees and improve their condition. The Egyptian Government was furnishing aid in the

form of health, education, transport, administrative and other services, amounting to about 3 million dollars a year. In addition, the Egyptian Government provided scholarships in the universities to a number of refugees; it was also assisting a number of Palestinian Arabs in the Gaza Strip who were not considered by the Agency as refugees, as well as thousands of Bedouins expelled from the Negev who were now living in the Sinai region. Some members of the Committee, and particularly the Australian representative, when they spoke of their contributions to UNRWA, should bear in mind the impact of the Palestine refugee problem on the economy and life of the Arab countries.

12. The only just and lasting solution of the refugee problem lay in repatriation, as the General Assembly had declared in its resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948. Repatriation was the absolute right of all the refugees, and the 1955 Bandung Conference, faced with the tension in the Middle East caused by the Palestine situation which threatened international peace, had affirmed the rights of the Palestine Arabs and had called for the implementation of the United Nations resolutions on Palestine and for a peaceful settlement of the Palestine question.

13. In conclusion, he expressed the thanks and gratitude of the Egyptian Government to the Governments of the Member States which were generously contributing to the Agency's budget, and to the charitable organizations which were aiding the refugees directly.

14. Mr. Yacoub OSMAN (Sudan) recalled that at its eleventh session the General Assembly had adopted resolution 1018 (XI) directing the Agency to pursue its programme for the relief and rehabilitation of refugees, bearing in mind the limitation imposed upon it by the extent of contributions. The resolution also requested the host Governments to co-operate in carrying out projects capable of supporting substantial numbers of refugees.

15. However, the annual report and the statements of the Director of UNRWA showed that, because of the scope of the Agency's operations and of financial difficulties, the situation was far from improving. The relief programme affected a refugee population spread over four countries or territories.

16. It was a fact that between the withdrawal of the United Kingdom forces from Palestine and the signing of the general armistice agreements more than 1 million Arabs had been expelled from their homes. At present, there were 500,000 refugees in Jordan, 220,000 in the Gaza Strip, 100,000 in Lebanon and 90,000 in Syria. Those were very large figures when compared with the total population of the host countries. In spite of their undoubted ties of fraternity with the host countries, the refugees had created difficulties for the latter, because those countries had not been prepared to face the grave situation now prevailing in Palestine from which thousands of Arabs had fled after losing their property and their homes, while hundreds of civilian Arabs had lost their lives in raids and massacres. It should not be forgotten that the refugees had been forced to leave their homes on account of military operations, and not because they had been told to do so by the Arab leaders.

17. No attempt had been made to solve the problem, and he wondered how long thousands of men, women and children would be left to live on the charity

furnished by UNRWA. The Government of Israel must face its responsibilities under the United Nations resolutions, and the United Nations must secure compliance with its decision.

18. To begin with, those refugees wishing to return to their homes should be permitted to do so, and the others should, in conformity with the principles of international law, receive compensation for the property they had lost. In the name of justice and human rights, the delegation of Sudan appealed to the great Powers to continue to assist the Arab refugees until such time as their legitimate demands had been satisfied. The great Powers could not leave the Arab refugees to their fate, and it was the duty of the United Nations to live up to its responsibilities.

19. Mr. NOURY-ESFANDIARY (Iran) congratulated the Director and staff of UNRWA on the devotion they had shown in carrying out their difficult task. The objective report of the Director reflected the tragic situation of the Arab refugees. Some aspects of that problem deserved serious consideration.

20. It was true that UNRWA had no specific political function but, as the Director had pointed out, its activities had to be considered against the background of the entire Palestine situation.

21. The United Nations bore the responsibility for the partition of Palestine and its consequences, and was therefore morally bound to care for the refugees who rightly regarded themselves as wards of the United Nations. Despite the considerable help provided by the Agency, the condition of those refugees remained in every way tragic. The activities of the Agency were not in themselves sufficient to bring about an improvement in that condition. The United Nations must seek an equitable and permanent solution to the problem which would at the same time make a major contribution to the final settlement of the entire Palestine question.

22. A clear indication of the only practicable and just solution was given in paragraph 6 of the report of the Director, which stated that no decisive progress could be expected unless the refugees were given the choice between repatriation and compensation or unless some other solution acceptable to all parties was found. It could also be seen from the report that the refugees had renounced none of their rights which had been recognized by the General Assembly in its resolution 194 (III). The refugees ought still to have the opportunity of choosing between the two proposed solutions.

23. Had the Government of Israel shown sincere respect for the rights of the refugees, some progress might perhaps have been possible; unfortunately Israel had not even acted on its own proposal for the repatriation of a small number of refugees. In the opinion of the Iranian delegation the problem could be solved only on the basis of the gradual repatriation of the refugees. His delegation attached great importance to that question because if it remained unsolved there could be no lasting peace in the Middle East.

24. Despite unprecedented difficulties the Agency had succeeded in feeding, clothing and sheltering the refugees. But much still remained to be done. Self-support projects could contribute considerably to the improvement of the refugees' economic condition. It was therefore necessary to remove the financial obstacles which had halted the carrying out of those projects.

25. The Iranian Government approved the annual report of the Director of UNRWA and hoped that the Assembly would do everything in its power to help the Agency to overcome its present difficulties; it trusted that Member States would be willing to contribute the necessary funds, and that the Governments of the host countries would assist the Agency in its task. It hoped further that the Assembly would fully support the Agency's projects aimed at alleviating the refugees' sufferings and promoting their economic independence, without of course in any way prejudicing their right to repatriation or compensation.

26. Mr. MACHOWSKI (Poland) said that his delegation's attitude to the refugee problem had not changed, for the situation of the refugees themselves had unfortunately not improved substantially. Indeed, their number had recently increased alarmingly. While acknowledging the humanitarian achievements of the Agency, he considered that the assistance and relief it furnished were only a temporary remedy and did not of themselves constitute a solution of the problem. The only way to solve the problem would be to implement the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly, and in particular resolution 194 (III) which envisaged the repatriation of the refugees and the payment of compensation to them.

27. Of course any decision as to the future fate of the refugees must take into account the wishes of those principally concerned, namely the refugees themselves, who had had to leave their homeland against their will. The Director of UNRWA had stated in paragraph 6 of his report that the great mass of the refugees continued to express a desire to return to their homeland and requested the implementation of paragraph 11 of resolution 194 (III). It was not the first time that the Director had pointed out that the refugees did not wish to settle permanently in the countries now extending hospitality to them, nor did they show any interest in emigrating to other regions.

28. In the Polish delegation's view, every refugee had the inalienable right to be repatriated. In the case of the Palestine Arab refugees, that right had been guaranteed to them by the General Assembly resolutions. The Polish delegation accordingly considered that the United Nations and the Agency should direct their efforts primarily towards finding ways and means of implementing the General Assembly resolutions and safeguarding the legitimate rights of the refugees. There was nothing to justify any change in the attitude of the Assembly as expressed at its third and ninth sessions.

Organization of work

29. Mr. McCORDICK (Canada) supported by Mr. MITRA (India), asked that the meeting scheduled for Friday, 22 November, should be cancelled in order to enable members of the Committee to attend the plenary meeting of the General Assembly on the question of the United Nations Emergency Force.

It was so decided.

30. Mr. MOSCOSO (Ecuador) and Mr. MAURTUA (Peru) proposed that in the circumstances the list of speakers should be closed at the meeting on Monday, 25 November.

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 4.4 p.m.