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Chairman: Mr. Mihai MAGHERU (Romania).

AGENDA ITEM 26

**Report of the Director of the United Nations Relief and
Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near
East (A/3931, A/3948, A/SPC/29) (continued)**

1. Mr. KHAN (India) associated his delegation with the tributes already paid by other delegations to the Director and staff of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and the work it had carried out.
2. India, a country with a large and continuing refugee problem of its own, understood the magnitude of the problem in the Middle East and thought itself entitled to contribute to the discussion, despite the modesty of its contribution to the UNRWA budget. Its own difficulties had prevented it from making more than a token contribution in the past, but in view of the serious financial situation described by the Acting Director, it had decided to increase its support for 1959 to the value of Rs. 100,000 in Indian currency.
3. The refugee problem was only part of the political problem that existed in the area generally referred to as the Middle East. Until a political solution could be found, the United Nations would have to continue its aid to the refugees, for it must be recognized that it was largely responsible for their unfortunate situation. The Palestine refugee problem had arisen because a majority of the United Nations, India not included, had decided to partition the country, against the wishes of a large majority of the population. In doing so the United Nations automatically took responsibility for the future of those who were affected by the partition.
4. From its considerable experience of refugees, India was convinced that if any work of relief and rehabilitation was to have any meaning, it must concentrate on the needs and future of the younger generation of refugees. It had been happy to note the emphasis placed by the Acting Director of UNRWA, in his statements and in his report, on the importance of education and the acquisition of vocational skills.
5. Despite its sympathy with the sufferings endured by the Jewish people, India had not felt in 1947 and 1948, nor could it agree now, that the world should assuage its conscience in regard to those sufferings by partitioning the land of a people who had had no responsibility for the martyrdom of the Jews in Europe. Those Member States which had been mainly responsi-

ble for the partition of Palestine could not now ignore the consequences. To think of winding up the task of relief and rehabilitation at the present time, without a general political settlement, would be highly dangerous. Not only for the sake of the refugees themselves, but for the sake of peace in the Middle East and in the world at large, the work of UNRWA must be continued.

6. It was universally recognized that the extreme bitterness that had been caused by the partition of Palestine would take time to overcome. The United Nations must guard against imposing a solution on the refugees and thus repeating the mistake that had been committed when they were forced out of their homeland. It was essential to allow them a choice between repatriation and resettlement elsewhere on the understanding that wherever they went it would be as citizens. Under General Assembly resolution 194 (III), refugees who desired to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date. On the other hand, if they preferred to settle in other lands, they should have an opportunity to do so.

7. The question of compensation to the refugees should be dealt with quite apart from political considerations. It was surely not beyond the ability of the Arab States and of Israel to work out some arrangement whereby it would be possible for the refugees to be entitled to go back as citizens of Israel or to be compensated in order to begin their lives elsewhere. Obviously it would take time to work out such a solution, but in the meantime the United Nations must continue to assist in finding some such solution by refraining from taking any action which would make matters worse, such as the sudden winding-up of UNRWA or any attempt to impose a political solution on people who were not yet ready for it. India would therefore support the continuation of UNRWA's activities, with emphasis on vocational and educational needs, and would appeal to all Governments to contribute to the Agency's fund.

8. Mr. CRUISE O'BRIEN (Ireland) said that for many reasons his delegation had hitherto refrained from intervening in the debate on the Palestine refugees. Until the current year, when, for the first time, it had pledged itself to make a small contribution, Ireland's economic position had not permitted it to help. Nevertheless, it had gradually become aware, not only through the successive reports of the Agency and the debates in the United Nations, but also through events in the Middle East, that no Member State, however remote from the region or however free of responsibility for past events there, could avoid the present responsibility which membership in the United Nations imposed—a share in the responsibility for the fate of the Palestine refugees.

9. That responsibility of the Organization was both humanitarian and political. From a humanitarian point of view, it was responsibility for the maintenance and

rehabilitation of nearly one million refugees, many of them children. On the political side, it was the responsibility for dealing wisely with a situation that constituted a standing threat to the peace of the area and of the world. During the Third Emergency Special Session of the General Assembly, on 14 August 1958 the Chairman of the Irish delegation, Mr. Aiken, had referred to the deadlock between Israel and the Arab States over the refugee problem as perhaps the greatest single obstacle to the establishment of peace in the Middle East (735th meeting). He had suggested that the greatest hope of a solution might lie in guaranteeing the refugees full compensation by the United Nations. The Irish delegation still felt that the key to the problem lay in the principle of compensation, not by Israel alone, but by the United Nations. The refugees were entitled to look for compensation, in the form of rehabilitation, to the Organization which had taken the decisions that had so vitally affected them, not as charity but as justice. He urged delegations to consider the report before the Committee in the light of two principles, namely, the responsibility of the United Nations and the right of the refugees to compensation.

10. The report was an account of remarkable achievement on very slender means. It did great credit to the former Director, Mr. Labouisse, the Acting Director and their staff. It was clear that if it had the financial means, the Agency could achieve far more. From the comments of the Acting Director on the growing appreciation among the refugees of the desirability of self-support and rehabilitation, it was clear that there was scope for rehabilitation work of the utmost value. The report called that trend in the attitude of the refugees the "brightest hope" for their future. None of the Member States would wish to extinguish that hope, yet there was a danger that it might happen. Because of the underlying conflict, neither the political solution of full repatriation nor the economic solution of reintegration through resettlement projects seemed likely to be applied in the near future. Meanwhile, the mandate of UNRWA was due to expire in 1960. Unless a quick political solution was found, through a massive change of position on the part of one or other of the opposing parties, the work would have to continue, and the Agency itself was clearly the best instrument.

11. The United States representative had said that his country could not be in favour of perpetuating the dependent status of nearly one million refugees (102nd meeting). Such a statement made by the country which carried the greatest share of the cost of maintaining the refugees must command respect. The best immediate hope however of ending that status of dependence was to allow UNRWA to develop its schemes of vocational education and individual grants. Those schemes were also the best channel for that compensation from the Organization to which the refugees were entitled. They would not exclude a more massive and thorough compensation at a later stage, if political conditions permitted, nor would they hinder the coming or affect the nature of an eventual political settlement.

12. The Committee had the UNRWA report before it and was therefore discussing primarily the humanitarian aspects of the question. As far as the immediate future was concerned, the United Nations was unlikely to break the political deadlock, but the plight of the refugees continued. In urging the application of the principle of compensation, the Irish delegation was not

putting forward a substitute for a political settlement but was asking, in common with several other delegations, that pending a political solution the refugees should receive in justice and not in charity such forms of rehabilitation as UNRWA considered appropriate and practicable, and that UNRWA should receive the fullest possible co-operation from all Governments inside and outside the area. Even if that humanitarian effort had no effect on the political situation, and he earnestly hoped that it would, the refugees were entitled in justice to a measure of compensation through effective rehabilitation.

13. If all Governments accepted that principle as a responsibility of the United Nations, the rehabilitation programme could become part of the United Nations annual budget until rehabilitation was completed, or until an equitable settlement had been reached. Such an approach would be fairer to the refugees themselves, to the staff of UNRWA and to Member States, than the present system which precluded UNRWA from planning ahead. Failing an agreement to make the programme part of the annual budget, Ireland hoped that as many Members as possible would accept the principle that compensation was due to the refugees. It appealed to all States to separate the humanitarian from the political aspects of the situation, and not to deny the refugees that measure of justice which was immediately attainable.

14. Mr. PALAR (Indonesia) regretted the departure from the Agency of Mr. Labouisse, the former Director, who, for four years under the most trying conditions, had carried out his task most commendably. He congratulated Mr. Carver, the Acting Director, for the frank and forthright manner in which he had presented UNRWA's report, and wished him every success in his most difficult task. He also expressed his delegation's appreciation to the staffs of UNRWA, other United Nations organs and the specialized agencies, and the many voluntary agencies for their work in alleviating the misery of the refugees.

15. Three grave problems as yet unsolved emerged from the report and statement of the Acting Director: the financial difficulties confronting the Agency, the status of the refugees, and the political question. It was unfortunately possible that the previous year's financial crisis might recur. Finances were inextricably linked with political matters and only a political settlement could put an end to the need for financial assistance. His delegation fully appreciated UNRWA's success in providing its services without interruption during the recent crisis in Lebanon. As paragraph 61 of the report indicated, that was due in no small part to the co-operation of the host Governments, which were providing a very substantial assistance to the refugees. It was gratifying to note that the relations between the Agency and the host Governments during the period under review remained generally satisfactory and he hoped that the difficulties of the Agency in most host countries would be surmounted by further efforts at a greater understanding.

16. After ten years there had been no essential change in the status of the refugees. They were still living an insecure and unhappy life as a nation in exile, at the barest subsistence level. Under such deplorable conditions, time had not proved to be a healing agent. The great mass of refugees continued to believe that a grave injustice had been done to them and they had

never abandoned their hopes of returning to their former homes.

17. The intention of the General Assembly in setting up UNRWA had been to separate the humanitarian from the political aspects of the problem, but the experience of the past years had shown that the problem could not be solved merely by appealing for increased contributions to the Agency. The Agency itself had repeatedly emphasized in its reports that it was unrealistic to expect decisive progress in the reintegration of refugees into the economic life of the Near East unless they were given a choice between repatriation and compensation in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) or unless some political settlement could be found.

18. It was the considered opinion of his delegation that not only was that resolution still valid but that it was more urgent than ever to put it into effect. Any decision on the future fate of the refugees must take into account the wishes of those principally concerned, the refugees themselves. The General Assembly should concentrate its efforts on finding means of carrying out its decision concerning repatriation or compensation. The negative attitude of Israel towards the legitimate rights of the refugees was disappointing. So long as that question was not settled, it would continue to aggravate tensions and make a future settlement more difficult. The co-operation of all concerned was essential, and his delegation would welcome any practical action that would lead to a permanent settlement.

19. The Agency's mandate would expire on 30 June 1960. Even if a political solution could be found, it would take many years to wind up the Agency's operations. His delegation therefore endorsed the view that arrangements to meet the situation after 30 June must soon be worked out.

20. Mr. DIMECHKIE (Lebanon) also expressed his regret at the resignation of Mr. Labouisse as Director of the Agency. Mr. Labouisse had displayed the most commendable qualities of the international civil servant. At the same time, the delegation of Lebanon was gratified at the appointment of Mr. Carver to the post of Acting Director. Through his energetic efforts and objective judgement and administration since assuming office, Mr. Carver had maintained the high standards of dedication and efficiency which always characterized the work of the Agency. The delegation of Lebanon also wished to record its appreciation of the assistance rendered to the Palestine refugees by the Governments, institutions and individuals who had helped to alleviate their misery.

21. He was in full agreement with the statement that had been made by the representative of Saudi Arabia (103rd meeting) and, therefore, would only touch on certain aspects of the situation. In paragraph 4, and in other paragraphs of the report (A/3931), the Director indicated that there had been no new developments with respect to the attitude of the refugees, that there continued to be collective hostility towards projects which implied permanent resettlement away from their ancestral homes, and that there had been no affirmative action by the Government of Israel to facilitate carrying out General Assembly resolution 194 (III) on repatriation and compensation.

22. The stumbling-block in the way of a solution was as obvious as ever. The United Nations was still re-

sponsible for the consequences of its actions in 1947 and 1948 and could not now shun that responsibility merely because the lapse of time had not in itself produced a settlement. Moreover, the direct responsibility of Zionism and the Israel authorities was shown by their continued refusal to carry out the resolutions of the General Assembly on the question of Palestine refugees, in particular resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948 which, in paragraph 11, provided for repatriation or, at the option of the refugee, compensation.

23. It should be recalled that the sponsors of the creation of the State of Israel had made it quite plain that the establishment of that State by the General Assembly would not in any way prejudice the rights of the Arab population of Palestine, and it was only on that basis that the General Assembly had acted. Again, the preamble to resolution 273 (III) of 11 May 1949, accepting Israel as a Member of the United Nations, had imposed a condition upon the new State, namely that it should abide by resolution 181 (II) of 29 November 1947, regarding partition, and resolution 194 (III), regarding repatriation and compensation. It was on those grounds, and only on those grounds, that the General Assembly had decided to admit Israel into the United Nations. It was obvious that Israel had defied the Organization which had created it. Such defiance should raise the question of Israel's legality as a State. The intransigence of the Israel authorities continued to be a calculated measure designed to facilitate the execution of their predatory policies and unlimited ambitions with respect to immigration and territorial expansion.

24. Therefore, in the absence of any bold and constructive initiative on the part of the General Assembly and in the light of Israel's continued defiance of the United Nations, the fundamental problem that had been recurring since the creation of the Agency remained; namely, the availability of the necessary funds. That was the problem, and there was no need to create study groups or a new organ simply because some countries, for reasons not fully understood, were reluctant to pin the responsibility where it really belonged.

25. After drawing attention to the inadequacy of the food rations, shelter, clothing, and health and welfare services furnished by the Agency owing to the shortage of funds, the speaker expressed his delegation's gratification at the Agency's work in assisting the refugees towards self-support. His delegation was heartened by the success of every effort to enrich the life of the refugees through education, technical training or more direct means of rendering them self-supporting. It welcomed the statement of the Acting Director on 7 November (101st meeting) that while the refugees had rejected certain kinds of self-support projects because of their political implications, they were willing to accept other kinds, for example, individual grants and vocational training, and it was the Agency's inability to secure the necessary funds that had held up progress.

26. As one of the host countries, Lebanon was alarmed at the deteriorating financial position of the Agency. Whether under normal conditions or during times of crisis, Lebanon had never hesitated to do its utmost, within the limits of its resources, to facilitate the Agency's work. His Government wished unreservedly to associate itself with the Agency's request for continued financial assistance from the Governments of

States Members of the United Nations. Since it was the General Assembly that had contributed directly to the present plight of the refugees, it could not abdicate its responsibilities by withdrawing or diminishing its support of the Agency.

27. The financial problem facing UNRWA was not insurmountable if the United Nations was ready to act. All that was required was for the Palestine Conciliation Commission established by resolution 194 (III) to be made effective and to carry out its mandate for the protection of the rights, property and interests of the refugees by assuming the administration of Arab refugee property, investigating how such property had been used, examining the books of the Custodian of Absentee Property and requiring Israel to make payment of monies due to the refugees as rent for the past ten years. The rent due annually thereafter would be more than sufficient to provide the refugees with a better standard of living than they were enjoying at the present time. It was indeed ironical that the refugees had property and means to provide themselves with a decent standard of living, and the United Nations knew where that wealth was situated and by whom it was illegally being used, while the guilty party sat as a member of the General Assembly without remorse or regret.

28. In his statement of 7 November, the Acting Director had put forward a choice between three courses of action: extension of the Agency's mandate, replacement

of the Agency by other arrangements for meeting the needs of the refugees, and a study of the whole problem in order that a decision might be taken at the next session.

29. The delegation of Lebanon regarded the first suggestion as the only workable solution in the circumstances. The difficulties involved in the second suggestion would be colossal, and it would seem unwise to consider alternative arrangements when the existing Agency was adequately fulfilling its task. As to the third suggestion, his delegation took the view, without prejudice to the evident sincerity and genuine concern of the Acting Director, that he had acted beyond his mandate in recommending to the Members of the General Assembly a study of the whole problem. Such a recommendation was obviously not within the competence of the Agency. That was not to say that his delegation could approve such a proposal in other circumstances. So long as the attitude of the refugees remained what it was, based on their rightful desire to return to their homeland, his Government saw nothing in the situation to warrant a new study of the problem.

30. The only solution was to satisfy the wishes of the refugees by giving full effect to all the resolutions of the General Assembly on the matter. Pending that solution, the only logical course was to continue and to strengthen the work of the Agency.

The meeting rose at 4.30 p.m.