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**Chairman:** Mr. Max JAKOBSON (Finland).

**AGENDA ITEM 32**

Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (continued) (A/6313; A/SPC/111, A/SPC/112)

1. The CHAIRMAN informed the Committee that on 17 October 1966 the representatives of twelve Arab States had sent him a letter (A/SPC/111) requesting that the delegation of the Palestine Liberation Organization should be heard by the Committee during its deliberations on item 32 of the agenda. He recalled that at its 435th meeting the Committee had decided in response to a similar request "to authorize the persons constituting the said delegation to speak in the Committee and to make such statements as they might deem necessary, without such authorization implying recognition of that organization."<sup>1/</sup> He suggested that the Committee should adopt the same procedure in response to the request of 17 October 1966.

*It was so decided.*

2. The CHAIRMAN said that in a letter addressed to him on 18 October 1966 (A/SPC/112), the representatives of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan had requested that the Palestine Arab delegation should be heard by the Committee. He suggested that the Committee should comply with that request, on the same conditions as those just mentioned.

*It was so decided.*

3. The CHAIRMAN declared open the general debate on the report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) (A/6313).

4. Mr. SHAHINE (Lebanon) offered his sincere thanks to the Commissioner-General and his Deputy for the spirit of co-operation they had shown during their meetings with the representatives of the host countries on the Advisory Commission of UNRWA and for the understanding they had displayed in regard

<sup>1/</sup> See Official Records of the General Assembly, Twentieth Session, Annexes, agenda item 35, document A/6115, para. 5.

to the observations made on the report by members of the Advisory Commission, especially those made by the host countries. On the basis of the report itself, he reviewed the progress made in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 2052 (XX) of 15 December 1965, referring in particular to paragraphs 1, 5, 6 and 7.

5. With regard to the rectification of the ration rolls, the General Assembly in paragraph 6 of resolution 2052 (XX) had requested the Commissioner-General to take such measures as to assure, in co-operation with the Governments concerned, the most equitable distribution of relief based on need. In his view, the rectification of the ration rolls was not an insoluble problem as certain parties, inspired by political motives and anxious to cast doubt on the number of genuinely needy refugees, had tried to suggest. Assertions of that kind were mere propaganda by Israel and the Zionists to exaggerate the abuses committed in establishing the rolls and to convince contributing Governments that the funds obtained were being misapplied. In fact, the rectification of the ration rolls had never ceased. From the time of its establishment until 1962 the Agency had been able, with the co-operation of host Governments, to delete the names of some 457,000 refugees from the rolls and to insert an equivalent number of new names in their place. Rectification of the rolls had also continued under the present Commissioner-General, who stated in paragraph 19 of his report that "The Agency has sought means, in co-operation with Governments, of achieving some further progress in assuring that UNRWA's assistance reaches eligible, needy persons". In the circumstances, it did not seem that the rectification of ration rolls was any longer a matter of major concern to the United Nations. In his own country, the number of refugees on the ration lists was 105,000. With the co-operation of the Government, 70 per cent of the ration recipients had been re-investigated at their places of residence during the past three and a half years, and the remaining 30 per cent would be similarly checked during the next twelve months. In his capacity as Director-General of Palestinian Refugees Affairs, he had ordered his representatives in the camps to co-operate very closely in those inquiries with the UNRWA inspectors. Co-operation of the same kind existed in Syria and Jordan. Such examples were impressive enough to convince anyone of the sincerity and the spirit of co-operation which the host countries were displaying in carrying out their obligations under General Assembly resolution 2052 (XX). Israel, on the other hand, was continuing to disregard United Nations resolutions, and especially paragraph 11 of resolution 194 (III), of 11 December 1968, on the repatriation and compensation of refugees.

6. With regard to increased contribution, the Arab countries had raised their contributions by about \$500,000. That was in addition to the extra expenses, amounting to several million dollars, which the host countries had incurred in providing various services. The expenses incurred by his own country, for one, had been considerable. Nevertheless, over a period of eighteen years, every time the General Assembly had been asked to express its opinion on the Commissioner-General's report, it had noted with deep regret that repatriation or compensation of the refugees had not been effected. The decision to be taken at the present session would probably not differ from those of earlier years; the General Assembly resolution might read "notes with very deep regret" instead of "notes with deep regret". But what was wanted rather was that the United Nations should enforce the implementation of a resolution adopted eighteen years earlier which Israel alone was refusing to put into effect. One of the major weaknesses of the League of Nations—one of the factors which had contributed to the outbreak of the Second World War—had been its inability to ensure the execution of its resolutions. He hoped the same would not prove true of the United Nations, otherwise mankind would be seriously in danger of a third world war.

7. With regard to the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine, he drew attention to paragraph 7 of resolution 2052 (XX), in which the General Assembly called upon the Conciliation Commission to intensify its efforts for the implementation of paragraph 11 of resolution 194 (III), and to paragraph 20 of resolution 302 (IV), of 8 December 1949, in which the Agency was directed to consult with the Conciliation Commission in the best interests of their respective tasks, with particular reference to paragraph 11 of resolution 194 (III). However, neither UNRWA nor the Conciliation Commission had made any effort in that direction, even though they were fully aware that the refugees had always maintained their right to repatriation and looked forward, with increasing determination, to returning to their homes. In paragraph 5 of his report for the current year, the Commissioner-General confirmed that the refugees continued to maintain what they considered to be their lawful right to return to their homes and to look to the assurances which the United Nations had given them regarding repatriation or compensation. Israel, however, continued to defy the United Nations and refused to carry out the provisions of resolution 194 (III). The refugees, like the host countries, rejected all projects for their resettlement outside their own country and were unanimous in declaring that there could be no solution to the problem other than repatriation and respect for their right to self-determination. It remained the duty of the United Nations, through UNRWA, to spare no effort to secure the implementation of paragraph 11 of resolution 194 (III).

8. Turning to the question of the budgetary deficit, he pointed out that UNRWA, since its establishment, had had to operate within the limits of a budget financed by voluntary contributions, which had obliged the Agency to set up its relief programmes at the bare subsistence level. During the current year,

UNRWA and the host countries had spared no effort to offset the 1966 deficit; but had it not been for more generous contributions made by a number of countries and private organizations than in the past, the services provided by the Agency would have had to be catastrophically reduced. In that connexion, the Swedish Government deserved the gratitude of all for the large contribution it had made. The prospects for the year 1967 were even more serious because the scope of the programme of activities would remain the same, while there would be a further increase in the school-age population. It might therefore be necessary for the Agency to contemplate a reduction in its services to the refugees, which would mean the elimination of soap rations, the restriction of basic rations of flour and fats and the discontinuance of any new construction or improvement of shelters. Yet the Agency's services were already at minimal standards and the food distributed to the refugees provided them with a daily ration of only 1,500 calories per person. Moreover, as the Commissioner-General confirmed in his report, it would be necessary to reduce the distribution of milk still further, or even to discontinue it altogether, since the United States had made no firm commitment on the quantity of skimmed milk powder to be made available in 1966-1967. It would also be necessary to cease providing hot meals for children and additional rations for nursing the pregnant women. In the matter of medical services, it would be necessary, if the budget remained in deficit, to eliminate health education services for the public, to eliminate school health programmes, to abandon any plans for the construction or improvement of medical centres, and to put a stop to the operation of sanitation services in the camps, with the exception of water supply. In that connexion, a letter from the Commissioner-General on the subject of medical services provided an example of what might be expected in the future. In the field of education, the Agency might also be forced to cease paying subsidies for pupils in the upper secondary cycle, or even for those in the preparatory cycle, to stop accepting new pupils in the preparatory cycle in UNRWA schools, and to abandon all thought of constructing new classrooms or awarding scholarships. In the field of vocational and teacher training, UNRWA might have to close its vocational training centres at Gaza, Siblin, Damascus, Wadi Seir and Kalandia and to close down the teacher-training centres at Ramallah, Homs and Siblin.

9. It would be useful if the Secretary-General could visit the host countries in order to see for himself how the refugees were living. The previous year, four Arab host countries had presented a memorandum in which they had stated that the Agency's budget was established on bases which made it impossible for it to carry out the tasks assigned to it.<sup>2/</sup> Whether in regard to rations, shelter, clothing, medical care, sanitation, social welfare, education or anything else, the budget was wholly inadequate to meet the needs of the refugees. The representatives of the host countries were therefore of the opinion that, instead of resorting to negative measures such as the curtailment of services which were already at a

<sup>2/</sup> *Ibid.*, document A/SPC/106, para. 33.

very low level, the Agency should endeavour to find new sources of income.

10. The host countries felt it their duty to point out, as the Commissioner-General had done in paragraph 4 of his report, that the General Assembly might consider the time had come to undertake a thorough review of the methods and procedures used to finance the services of UNRWA. The refugees, as a body, were already keenly sensitive to the humiliation and embarrassment of living on international charity; they would much prefer to live on the income of their property in occupied Palestine rather than to continue to be a burden on the Governments contributing to the Agency's budget. The annual income from the property of the refugees had been estimated for the previous year at some \$173 million, which corresponded to a total of \$2,500 million for the preceding seventeen years. In a series of articles published in *Le Monde* towards the beginning of 1966 a French journalist, Eric Rouleau, had given a detailed account of the legislative measures taken by the Israel authorities to seize the lands and property of Arabs who had taken refuge abroad. As a result of those measures, of some 110,000 hectares of land belonging to Arabs prior to the 1948 war, about 70,000 hectares had been expropriated for the benefit of the Jewish population. The compensation offered had frequently been calculated on the basis of extremely low prices. The prime concern seemed to be to "judaize" Galilee in order to prevent any territorial claim in the event of a settlement of the Arab-Jewish conflict. The United Nations might appoint a custodian to manage the property and remit the income therefrom to its rightful owners, or finance the Agency's budget adequately by making it a part of the United Nations budget. The Governments of the host countries considered the relief of Palestine refugees to be an obligation devolving upon the United Nations, which, by approving the partition of Palestine and the creation of Israel, had brought about the refugee problem. They could no longer clear the United Nations of that responsibility. If the Committee did not decide in favour of one of the two alternatives suggested, the Agency's services might break down through lack of funds, which would lead to the collapse of its operations and endanger the security of the entire Middle Eastern area as well as the future of the refugees.

11. Mr. HOVEYDA (Iran) found the report satisfactory and thanked the Commissioner-General and his staff for the spirit of sacrifice and devotion they had shown in carrying out the assistance work described therein. However, he could not suppress a deep feeling of sorrow in recalling the fate of over a million men and women, the innocent victims of circumstances, who continued to lead a tragic and precarious existence far from their original homes. That was a veritable human tragedy, which after eighteen years of effort had still not been remedied. Not only had there been no change in the basic circumstances which had produced the need for assistance to the refugees, but the refugees were constantly increasing in number and their morale was deteriorating, as indicated in paragraph 5 of the Commissioner-General's report, which stated:

"As year succeeds year, there is no sign that the refugees are becoming any less embittered by

their conviction that a grave injustice has been done to them through the loss of their homes and country and the continued deprivation of any benefit from the property they left behind."

12. During all those years, the numerous resolutions adopted had remained a dead letter. In the circumstances, pending a just and equitable solution in conformity with the General Assembly resolutions, it would be well to consider the humanitarian aspect of the question and to co-ordinate all available means in order to help improve the present situation of the refugees. Only through a tenacious daily effort to mobilize the aid and energy needed for the day-to-day solution of the refugees' problems could there be any hope of alleviating their suffering as they awaited the realization of their justifiable expectations.

13. Now that the Agency's mandate had been extended for three years by General Assembly resolution 2052 (XX), its critical financial position was a primary source of concern. It was true that paragraph 3 of the Commissioner-General's report showed that there had been a marked improvement and a notable reduction in the deficit. However, as the Commissioner-General himself pointed out, there was no guarantee that the necessary resources could be found in the coming years, especially since provision must be made for an inevitable increase in expenditure in the three main sections of the Agency's programme—relief, health and education. With regard to relief, while agreeing that the ration rolls should be rectified, he felt that the desire to cut costs must not be allowed to endanger the refugees' interests and that no attempt should be made to economize on the minimum amount of food needed by those unfortunate people. In any case, if there was to be rectification of that kind, it should be carried out with the assent of the host countries. With regard to health services, he paid a tribute to the work of the Agency and the host countries; but he was concerned by the Commissioner-General's statement in paragraph 12 of his report that "A stage has now been reached, however, when any further limitation of expenditure, or failure to provide adequate service for the increasing population, may entail serious risks for the health of the refugee community." Everything possible should be done in that direction, and his delegation fully supported the main lines of the programme described by the Commissioner-General in paragraphs 12 and 13 of the report. Furthermore, the refugees' state of mind could influence their physical health so long as no just and lasting solution to their problems had been found. With regard to education, his delegation felt that that was one of the most effective ways of helping the refugees and in the long term lightening the Agency's task. It approved the proposed primary education programme, but felt that secondary and higher education still left much to be desired. In the modern era, primary education no longer provided young people with sufficient knowledge to attain an adequate standard of living in a world where science and technology were constantly progressing. The United Nations could not permit generations of "intellectually under-privileged" human beings to be born under its auspices. The refugees must be given equal access to higher education. His delegation therefore approved the Commissioner-General's proposals to improve the

quality of primary education (see para. 8), to continue financial assistance for upper secondary and higher education (see para. 10) and to strengthen the adult education programme (see para. 11). The delegation of Iran was particularly gratified by the co-operation between the Agency and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). His Government had given the latter organization one day of its military budget for the campaign against illiteracy throughout the world and appealed to all States to contribute to that campaign. By taking over some of the programmes dealt with in paragraphs 7-11 of the report, UNESCO could help in solving a number of problems concerning the Palestine refugees. The funds thus made available could be used to develop the higher education programme.

14. If, as seemed likely, the Agency's expenditure in those three fields continued to increase during the coming years, one question arose of how to find the necessary resources. In his view, the problem could be tackled in two ways: first, by continuing to reduce administrative expenses, without reducing allocations to the refugees, and secondly, by increasing income through an appeal to Governments and private organizations. In that connexion, his delegation wished to thank all the countries contributing to the financing of the Agency's operations, particularly the host countries, which were making a special contribution. The supplementary contributions referred to in para-

graph 18 of the report likewise raised high hopes. As in the past, his country would contribute to the Agency's programme, and he hoped that the appeal made by the Commissioner-General in his report would be heeded by Governments, particularly those of the more prosperous countries. His delegation also supported the Commissioner-General's proposal to call upon the resources of the United Nations Development Programme and envisage the joint establishment of a special fund (see para. 18). Furthermore, the role of the specialized agencies, particularly UNESCO and the World Health Organization (WHO), which had greatly aided the Agency, should not be underestimated. In that connexion, his delegation was happy to note what was said in paragraphs 35 and 36 of the report concerning the Agency's relationship with United Nations bodies and voluntary agencies. It was essential that the Agency should co-ordinate its efforts with those of other international bodies active in the humanitarian, economic and social fields, and it should be encouraged to do so.

15. In conclusion, he stressed the need for Governments to give the Agency their full support, no matter what material difficulties were involved; for the problem was a tragic one of concern to all mankind. As in the past, his country was prepared to continue giving the Agency moral and material support in its efforts to improve the refugees' lot until a just solution was found.

*The meeting rose at 12.5 p.m.*