

United Nations
GENERAL
ASSEMBLY

TWENTY-SECOND SESSION

Official Records

SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE, 593rd
MEETING

Friday, 15 December 1967,
at 8.55 p.m.



NEW YORK

CONTENTS

	Page
<i>Agenda item 34:</i>	
<i>Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (continued)</i>	303

Chairman: Mr. Humberto LOPEZ VILLAMIL
(Honduras).

AGENDA ITEM 34

Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (continued) (A/6713, A/6723 and Corr.1, A/6723/Add.1 and Corr.1, A/6787 and Corr.1, A/SPC/L.155, A/SPC/L.156 and Add.1, A/SPC/L.157)

1. Mr. AMERASINGHE (Ceylon) said that the problem of the Palestine refugees was all the more painful for the United Nations because it had been responsible for creating the State of Israel which was the direct cause of the Palestinians' exodus from their ancestral homeland. The nations which had voted for its creation had a moral obligation to support all measures directed towards redressing the grievous wrong done to the Palestinians and in the meantime to contribute unstintingly to the relief of their distress.

2. The great merit of the United States draft resolution (A/SPC/L.155) was that it was based on the principle recognized in General Assembly resolution 194 (III), that the only just solution of the refugee problem consisted in the repatriation of those refugees who wished to return to their homes and in the payment of compensation to those who chose not to return or whose property had been destroyed or damaged.

3. A mass of humanity, as large as the population of many Member States and even larger than that of some, had been condemned to a life of decay and despair, dependent on precarious charity. They rightly demanded not compassion but justice. To argue that a lapse of nearly twenty years had altered the nature of the problem was to apply the rule of prescription to human suffering.

4. The list of resolutions contained in the first preambular paragraph of the United States draft resolution (A/SPC/L.155) showed the persistence with which the United Nations had sought a solution to the problem, though as yet in vain. His delegation would support that draft resolution.

5. It would also support draft resolutions A/SPC/L.156 and Add.1 and A/SPC/L.157. The latter was the logical complement of paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III). Rights of property must be identified and protected if the provisions of that paragraph were not to be a mere palliative for troubled consciences and that could only be done by an impartial custodian acting under the authority of the Secretary-General.

6. In conclusion, his delegation wished to pay a tribute to the Commissioner-General and his staff for the spirit of dedication in which they continued to discharge a great and humanitarian task.

7. Mr. BAROODY (Saudi Arabia) said that Saudi Arabia was seriously concerned about the refugee problem and would never become a party to any overt or covert political arrangement which was not fully approved by the indigenous people of Palestine, for no valid solution was possible without their consent. The Palestinian people could not be deprived of their sovereignty and their rights to their land and property, which had been usurped by foreign aggressors falsely contending that they had an ancestral right to the land of Palestine. In fact, the eastern European Zionists who had occupied Palestine were the descendants, not of the oriental Jews who had lived there in Biblical times, but of eastern Europeans who according to the Jewish Encyclopedia had been converted to Judaism at a much later date. Religion was not synonymous with nationality, and conversion could not confer the rights of national sovereignty. The Zionists were worse than the colonialists, for the latter had merely exploited the peoples they had colonized, whereas the Zionists had expelled the indigenous people of Palestine and expropriated their lands and assets.

8. The Palestinians had not forgotten their homeland, however, and the Zionists erred if they thought that the refugees could be made to forfeit their national identity and sovereign rights to the land of Palestine through dispersal or resettlement in other lands. The history of the Jews themselves bore witness to the tenacity with which a people could cling to their national identity. The refugees could not be resettled in Arab lands against their own will, and no Arab Government would attempt to impose such a solution, which would transform the refugees into a permanent source of discontent and unrest within its own frontiers.

9. The United Nations had no right to try to force the refugees to merge with their Arab neighbours and to forget that they were and always had been a separate people. The United Nations must act in accordance with the principles laid down in the Charter

and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Palestinian people must be allowed to exercise the right to self-determination, in accordance with Article 1, paragraph 2 of the Charter; the right to life, liberty and security of person, in accordance with article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the right to return to their country, in accordance with article 13, paragraph 2 of the Universal Declaration and the right not to be arbitrarily deprived of their property, in accordance with article 17, paragraph 2 of the Universal Declaration. If the United Nations failed to base its actions on the principles stated at the time of its establishment it might suffer the same fate as the League of Nations, which had foundered because it had proved ineffectual and had sacrificed justice to expediency.

10. An appeal must be made to the conscience of the international community in general and to that of the Israel authorities in particular, in order to ensure that United Nations resolutions on the Palestine problem were implemented. Israel must be made to see where true justice lay and to understand that until justice was done there could be no peace in the Middle East.

11. Pending a just settlement, the Israel authorities should agree to the appointment of a custodian, so that the refugees could live with dignity on the income from their property, which had been estimated at \$170 million a year. The Commissioner-General and his staff were doing all they could to alleviate the refugees' suffering, but there was no need for the Palestinian people to live on international charity.

12. All avenues that might lead to a definitive solution of the Palestine problem should be explored. A referendum should be held to determine how many of the refugees wished to return to their homes in Palestine. Another referendum could be held among Jews throughout the world to ascertain how many of them wished to change their present nationality for Israel nationality, since the founders of Israel had envisaged it as a State where all Jews could gather together to avoid persecution. Lastly, a referendum could be held among the Jews living in Israel to find out whether if the Middle East remained in a state of perpetual turmoil they wished to continue living there.

13. Mr. MESTIRI (Tunisia) said that for the past eighteen years, during its debates on the Commissioner-General's reports, the General Assembly had discussed methods of financing UNRWA and had adopted resolutions inviting Member States to continue and increase their contributions to its work. But the fundamental cause of the refugee problem — the Middle Eastern situation in general — was never mentioned. The unresolved problem of the Palestine refugees was the Achilles' heel of the United Nations and the international community could not but deplore its inability to find a solution. UNRWA had originally been created as a temporary expedient to provide for the urgent daily needs of the refugees until the Palestine question was settled. The debate had shown that the essence of that question was its political, rather than its humanitarian aspect.

14. The conscience of the world had once more been stirred by the recent war in the Middle East and the

expedient that UNRWA represented was no longer adequate. The old refugees had had to leave their camps and had been joined by new refugees, made homeless by the events of June 1967. It was no longer possible for countries to salve their consciences by merely making financial contributions to the work of UNRWA. The Commissioner-General now required something more: answers to the very precise questions posed in paragraph 66 of his report (A/6713). For over one and a half million refugees, the answers to those questions would determine their national destiny. Unfortunately, the Commissioner-General's question in paragraph 58 of the report concerning authorization to help refugees other than those of 1948 anticipated the possibility that in 1968 the problems arising out of the recent war would still not have been solved.

15. Although he had approached the problem primarily from the humanitarian point of view, the Commissioner-General had not entirely ignored its political aspect. He had pointed out that the events of June 1967 had not only imperilled the slow but sure progress made, but had also raised other problems which made the task of UNRWA almost impossible. Two classic arguments used by Zionist propaganda had been refuted; that the Palestine refugees did no work and that their tragic situation was exploited by the Arab countries for political ends. With regard to the first, paragraph 31 of the report of the Secretary-General of 18 August 1967 (A/6787 and Corr.1) said that a fifth of the 1948 refugees had made a new life for themselves in the Arab world, without the help of UNRWA, and that many of the refugees had shown remarkable adaptability, despite the fact that most of them were of peasant stock. In that connexion the progress made over the years in the education and social advancement of the uprooted families should not be overlooked. The Commissioner-General had referred to the considerable progress made in the integration of the refugees in their Arab host countries, which, had it not been for Israel's aggression, might have led to greatly improved conditions for many of them. The description in the Commissioner-General's report (A/6713) of the growing economic development of the Middle Eastern and Arab Countries was a very different picture from the usual one of backward, socially decadent States painted by certain Western information media. With regard to the second dangerously false accusation made not only by the Israel representative and Zionist propagandists but also, perhaps without thinking, by other countries, it was clearly refuted in paragraph 53 of the Commissioner-General's report.

16. To seek to place the blame for starting the conflict and for its consequences on the Arab States was to put the problem back to front. The existence and the destitution of the refugees and the prolongation of their intolerable situation as a result of Israel's refusal to implement the United Nations resolutions served as a constant reminder to the Arab countries of the tragedy of Palestine and of the need to find a solution of it. His country therefore felt that the problem could be settled only through a political solution based not only on the United Nations resolutions dealing with the refugees, but also on those dealing with the problem of Palestine as a whole. As was

clear from the Arab Summit Conference held at Khar-toum in August and September 1967 and from the fact that a large majority of the Arab States had declared their willingness to consider favourably resolution 242 (1967) adopted by the Security Council, the Arab countries were seeking a peaceful solution of the problems of the Middle East.

17. Well before the latest Israel aggression, Tunisia had advocated a peaceful solution based on the greatest possible measure of realism and justice. The plan which President Bourguiba had outlined in 1965 in a statement to the refugees at Jericho had been designed primarily to deprive the militarist State of Israel of any pretext for a renewed aggression against the Arab countries. Unfortunately, the plan had met with opposition, in particular, from the Tel Aviv Government, which had perhaps already been planning its 1967 aggression.

18. His delegation would vote for each of the draft resolutions before the Committee. It welcomed the reiteration of the fundamental principles of repatriation and compensation contained in the draft resolution submitted by the United States (A/SPC/L.155). It also welcomed the attempt in the nineteen-Power draft resolution (A/SPC/L.156 and Add.1) to deal with the difficult questions raised by the Commissioner-General in his report. However, the five-Power draft resolution (A/SPC/L.157)—which proposed the appointment of a custodian to administer Arab property, assets and property rights in Israel—and the assumption by UNRWA of responsibility for those refugees who were excluded from the benefit of its provisions, were clearly the least unjust and most practical solution. The UNRWA budget could then be incorporated into the United Nations budget.

19. The attitude taken by the State of Israel afforded little ground for optimism. The Israel representative's embarrassed explanations at the 588th meeting and his sketchy description of a nebulous plan clearly showed that his Government's intentions were not as peaceful as it would wish others to believe.

20. Tunisia had always advocated a peaceful solution to the problem and the Arab States had shown that they were willing to go far to achieve a solution which, though political, would not disregard the most elementary considerations of justice. In the difficult circumstances now prevailing, it was more necessary than ever that the international community should bring its weight to bear in favour of a solution which would not merely ratify a state of affairs established through force, but would also actively promote peace.

21. Mr. LUKUMBUZYA (United Republic of Tanzania) said that neither the report of the Commissioner-General (A/6713), nor the moving petitions made by the representative of the Palestine refugees, which had been based on the situation before June 1967, could fully convey the horrifying conditions of life endured by the refugees as a result of the recent hostilities. Their testimony, however, and his own knowledge of the hardships and sufferings of refugees in the United Republic of Tanzania, made it easy for him to imagine the misery and hopelessness which must reign in the tents and open-air camps where

the refugees and other displaced persons were now concentrated. The General Assembly should not fail to act promptly and with sympathy and understanding.

22. The report of the Commissioner-General drew the Assembly's attention to a new crisis in the lives of the refugees due to the recent hostilities in the Middle East and the Commissioner-General had expressed the earnest hope that Security Council resolution 242 (1967) would be translated into action to facilitate a just settlement of the refugee problem. His delegation agreed with those representatives who had expressed the view that not only the fact that the refugees were living on charity but also practical politics demanded effective action to solve the problems of the refugees. The displacement of Arabs from Israel and other territories under Israel's occupation was the most serious aspect of the Middle East question as a whole, and no solution to that question could be complete without a just settlement of the refugee problem. Some had claimed that the refugee problem was merely a concomitant of the successive wars which had ravaged the area in the last two decades; if that were true, time would have helped to restore the situation to normal, but in fact the general refugee situation had worsened with the passage of time.

23. His delegation was alarmed at the thought that the displacement of Arabs from their homes and lands in Israel and other territories under Israel's occupation was not merely a consequence of armed conflict but an objective pursued as an end in itself by the State of Israel and those who unquestionably championed its policies towards its Arab neighbours. Worse still, the territory from which the Arabs had to be displaced was continually being enlarged. But the displacement of Arabs from a continually expanding Israel was not an inherent feature of the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine. Justice for the refugees, as the United States representative had said, was clearly one of the essential elements of a lasting peace in the Middle East. It would have been a waste of time for the Committee to discuss the question of the Palestine refugees if it did not hope that they would cease to be refugees. That could only mean their repatriation to their homes and the full restoration of their human, social and political rights. That was why his delegation attached so much importance to General Assembly resolution 194 (III) and very much regretted that the Government of Israel, which bore the main responsibility for implementing that resolution, had not done so. Noting that the Commissioner-General reported that "After nineteen years the refugees have still had neither an opportunity of returning to their homes nor compensation for their property" (see A/6713, para. 52), his delegation wished to reaffirm the support of the people and Government of the United Republic of Tanzania for the legitimate rights of the Arab people of Palestine.

24. His country, which received and continued to need assistance in looking after thousands of refugees, was in a good position to appreciate the sacrifices which the Arab Governments were making to enable their brethren in distress to obtain the necessities of life. His delegation therefore wished to express

its gratitude to the Commissioner-General and the staff of UNRWA, as well as to private organizations, for their assistance and services, and to express its appreciation to the Governments of Jordan, Syria, the United Arab Republic and to other Arab Governments for their charitable assistance and hospitality to Palestine refugees and other displaced persons in the Middle East. However, it considered any assistance given by Governments or private organizations for the purpose of making possible the exclusion of Arabs from Israel and from territories occupied by Israel as non-humanitarian. Though it appeared from the statement of the Israel representative at the 588th meeting that his Government felt the financial burden of administering the 26,000 square miles of Arab territory now under its control, his own delegation did not consider the political assistance given to Israel by Governments or private organizations as the kind of humanitarian assistance to which he had just referred.

25. The report of the Commissioner-General forecast an uncertain future for the refugees. His delegation considered the Middle East question as a whole to be fraught with political implications and hard lessons for the United Nations, and more especially for the Third World, which had become a laboratory and testing ground for ghastly experiments; yet it was in the Third World that others deemed it possible to atone for the long history of Jewish suffering with the suffering and deprivation of Arabs. Therefore, in the opinion of his delegation, the Middle East question could not, in its wider international and political context, be considered in isolation from other acts committed against the Third World.

26. In his delegation's view, a just solution of the Middle East problem as a whole must include provision for the repatriation of the Palestine refugees to their homes and the full restoration of their human, political and social rights. It could hardly be the intention of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) to enable UNRWA to accelerate their resettlement and rehabilitation elsewhere.

27. With regard to the short-term problem, his delegation, like the United States delegation, considered it imperative that all refugees and persons who had been displaced from their homes by the conflict in June 1967 or who had left their places of residence since that conflict should be allowed and encouraged to return to their homes. However, the reports on which the Commissioner-General had based his annual report and the statement of the Israel representative indicated that the Government of Israel had not allowed the great majority to return to their original places of residence. His delegation joined others in calling upon the Government of Israel to facilitate the return of all those persons.

28. With regard to the draft resolutions before the Committee, his delegation, in supporting the first preambular paragraph of the draft resolution submitted by the United States (A/SPC/L.155), wished to reaffirm that all the resolutions referred to in that paragraph, and any other resolutions having a bearing on the problem, were not intended to question or qualify the right of the Palestine refugees to return to their homes and lands under the terms of General Assembly resolution 194 (III). Similarly, in supporting the nineteen-Power draft resolution (A/SPC/L.156 and Add.1), his delegation reaffirmed its position that it did not and could not recognize Israel's right over Arab territory occupied after the recent war. His delegation's position on a number of questions raised by the Commissioner-General in his report and on the answers to them proposed in the draft resolutions before the Committee would be reflected in its positive votes.

29. In conclusion, his delegation wished to acknowledge with special gratitude the humanitarian work which UNRWA was doing among the Arab refugees. It sincerely hoped that the day would come when it would be possible to say that in the Middle East Jews and Arabs lived together without strife. Such willingness to coexist, and not the numerical relationship between Jews and Arabs, would be the basis for confidence in the future of the refugees and the future of Israel-Arab relations in the Middle East.

The meeting rose at 10.20 p.m.