

United Nations GENERAL ASSEMBLY

SEVENTEENTH SESSION

Official Records

SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE, 369th
MEETING



Thursday, 13 December 1962,
at 3.30 p.m.

NEW YORK

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Chairman: Mr. Leopoldo BENITES (Ecuador).

AGENDA ITEM 31

Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (A/5136, A/5214, A/5337; A/SPC/74, A/SPC/L.89 and Add.1, A/SPC/L.90) (continued)

1. Mr. BENHIMA (Morocco) recalled that in 1917 the Jews in Imperial Germany had occupied a position of privilege and influence second to none. Their situation had been similar in most of the great capitals of Europe at that time. Moreover, an extensive network of organizations and movements had provided a permanent and close link between all the Jews of the world. They had enjoyed freedom of religion in all countries, including those with a State religion. Jewish cultural values had been widely disseminated and no country had denied Jews their citizenship rights or discriminated against them on account of their faith.

2. Nevertheless it was precisely the year 1917 that had seen the Balfour Declaration^{1/} regarding the establishment of a Jewish National Home in Palestine. Without analysing the course of events in greater detail, it was quite clear that the purposes of Jewish emigration to Arab Palestine had had nothing to do with an Arab-Israel conflict or with the need to compensate the Jews for their sufferings under nazism, which had not yet come into being.

3. Ever since 1948, two arguments had been vigorously sustained as a justification for that policy. The first, which was compounded of romanticism and mysticism, rested on biblical texts which spoke of a "Promised Land". The flimsiness of that argument needed little demonstration for there was an abundance of such scriptural references which, if interpreted so literally, could be used to sweep away many frontiers. In any case, Israel's genesis was clearly to be found in the philosophy of the Zionists who, although they might have differed in their theories, had all dreamt of the establishment of a Jewish State and had been equally violent in their hatred of everything that was not Jewish. But a convenient silence was preserved by Israel's leaders on

that subject. The second argument—namely, that the establishment of Israel was justified by the persecutions suffered by the Jews—was exploited to the utmost. It was naturally painful to recall the horrors of nazism, which had been experienced by a number of countries including Holland, France, Norway and the Ukraine. But those States, and the Christian community which had accounted for so many victims, considered that military defeat and the Nürnberg trials had constituted due punishment.

4. Only Israel persisted in seeking to exploit humanitarian feelings in order to justify ambitions that had far antedated the phenomenon of nazism and to whitewash a conquest carried out by methods comparable to those of Hitler's régime. At the 364th meeting, the representative of Denmark had objected—no doubt in complete good faith—to such comparisons. But if he could hear the personal testimony of the refugees concerning the brutality of the Zionist terrorists, he might well reconsider his opinion. Unfortunately, it was just such good faith that Israel relied on to cover up its misdeeds in Palestine, confident that no one would believe the victims of nazism capable of employing the same methods. Zionism had thus not only perfected a doctrine but also an excellent propaganda weapon to enlist supporters for its cause. Israel had lost no opportunity to advertise Jewish sufferings under Hitler, staging the Eichmann trial in the most spectacular manner, and had had no hesitation in exacting large scale reparations from Germany for Jewish victims of other nationalities. Nevertheless, according to recent reports in the Press, Israel was now seeking to renew diplomatic relations with Germany in what it described as a spirit of forgiveness. Israel therefore had no moral scruples when it was convenient to forget those whom it so ostentatiously affected to mourn.

5. At the 362nd meeting, the representative of Israel had made a statement in which he had calmly branded the Arabs as aggressors responsible for the initiation of the hostilities that had ended in the present situation. He no doubt imagined that his audience was ignorant of the details of the Palestinian war and the premeditated action carried out by Zionists with the aid of their powerful allies. He had seemed not to realize that he was speaking to Members of an Organization which had repeatedly condemned Israel as an aggressor. But fortunately the representative of Iraq, at the same meeting, had placed matters in their true perspective by reading from official Israel documents which completely disproved allegations concerning Arab aggression against the Jewish minority. On the subject of minorities, it would be recalled that in 1917 the Jews in Palestine had numbered barely 50,000, whereas the Arab population had amounted to 700,000. Incidentally, the term "Jewish minority in Palestine" was extended to include Arabs of Jewish faith, since in Palestine as in other Arab countries, one could be termed an Arab without having

^{1/} See Official Records of the General Assembly, Second Session, Supplement No. 11, vol. II, annex 19.

to belong to a particular faith. It was therefore a complete distortion to present the problem in a religious rather than a political light, since the Arabs who had taken up arms against Israel had included both Moslems and Christians.

6. By 1947 the Jewish population had increased to 600,000. Perhaps the United Kingdom could explain where the influx had come from, for the thirty years of the Mandate were in themselves the history of the policy of alien colonization of a land that had been Arab for thirteen centuries. Thus a foreign minority, recruited from all parts of the world and having in common only their religion, had taken over the territory with the complicity of those who were responsible for its well-being. It would be noted that similar methods had been employed with regard to other colonial territories, particularly in Africa. It was interesting, in that respect, to observe Israel's attitude towards the situation in South Africa and towards the questions of Algerian, Tunisian and Moroccan independence, even though thousands of Jews in those territories were to benefit from independence. Indeed, during the Algerian war, European terrorist organizations had received tangible support from Israel and there was now evidence of the existence of Israel military equipment in Angola. Israel's votes on the subjects of Southern Rhodesia and Angola were thus prompted by opportunism and could ill conceal Israel's history of hostility towards African nationalism.

7. That, in short, was the true nature of the State of Israel which sought to appear as the victim of the Palestine people. Members of the various Arab delegations as well as United Nations observers had testified to the fanatical cruelty of the Zionist terrorists and the Israel troops during the Palestine war.

8. There had been numerous accounts of the subtle pressure brought to bear on Arabs to leave their land and villages and make way for immigrants or the military. The miserable conditions in which the refugees were now living bore permanent witness to Zionist and Israel aggression. The very existence of a million Arab refugees, spanning at least three generations, was a standing accusation against the allies of the First and Second World Wars for their treachery. Yet Israel had the effrontery to complain about the international assistance which was provided to the refugees and the rudimentary education given to their children—which it described as an education in hatred. But those children were entitled to be taught the truth, which Israel would never succeed in suppressing, even though it had tried to prevent the Palestine Arab delegation from stating its views to the Committee. The Israel representative had also sought to cast aspersions on the representative of Saudi Arabia, who was eminently qualified to speak not only for the Palestinians but for all the Arabs and who was a vigorous champion of many worthy causes.

9. For a number of years, attempts had been made to reduce the question of Palestine to a mere problem of refugees, as if that were the only side of the question. The United Nations had shown commendable concern over the fate of those dispossessed individuals. But it should be borne in mind that the Palestine refugees had not fled from any natural disaster but had been forcibly driven from their homes by Israel with the connivance of certain great Powers. Thus, while the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refu-

gees in the Near East (UNRWA) was to be congratulated on the excellent work carried out by his agency, one could not but deplore the fact that assistance to the refugees, which was only one of the lesser aspects of the Organization's responsibility in the matter, had assumed the character of permanent charity. The Palestinians were a proud people, noted for their hospitality, who could not go on living at the expense of the international community. Their own property was far greater in value than the amount of assistance given to them. Therefore, the United Nations would be showing a far greater sense of responsibility if it were to appoint a custodian for the property of which the Arabs had been divested.

10. No matter how much the representative of Israel sought to misrepresent the issue and to confuse Judaism with Zionism, he would never succeed in undermining the tolerance of the Arabs in respect of religion, their sense of brotherhood and their determination to see their exiled brethren restored to their homes in Palestine.

11. Mr. STAMBOLIEV (Bulgaria) remarked that once again the Committee was obliged to note with regret and concern not only that a just solution to the question of the Palestine refugees had not been found, but also that no step had been taken in that direction. Indeed, with each passing year the problem grew more complicated and the hopes for its successful settlement receded. For fourteen years, more than a million Palestine refugees had been living in a state of incredible poverty and frustration, having been robbed of their homes and the right to live in their native land. Their plight was vividly depicted in paragraph 5 of the report submitted by the Commissioner-General of UNRWA (A/5214). The report also made it clear that the refugees continued to insist on their right of repatriation as stated in operative paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III). In the view of the Bulgarian delegation, the provisions of that resolution still constituted the proper means of settling the question of the Palestine refugees. The application of that resolution would serve the interests not only of the Palestine refugees and Israel, but also the cause of peace and stability in the Middle East. So far, however, no effect had been given to the decisions of the United Nations, and Israel still showed no signs of facilitating their execution. That attitude, which was supported by a number of Western countries, undermined the prestige of the United Nations and offered no hope of bringing the situation in the Middle East back to normal.

12. It was therefore the duty of the United Nations at its present session to adopt effective measures for a speedy and just solution. A longer delay would inevitably lead to further complications which it would be in the interest of the Palestine refugees of Israel and the other countries in the area to avoid. Accordingly, the Bulgarian delegation would support any proposal in keeping with resolution 194 (III) that might contribute to such a solution.

13. The CHAIRMAN, in accordance with the decision taken by the Committee at its 358th meeting, in respect of the letter dated 2 November 1962 (A/SPC/74), invited Mr. Izzat Tannous to make a statement.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Izzat Tannous took a seat at the Committee table.

14. Mr. TANNOUS said that other speakers from his group had already made it very clear that the Arab people of Palestine were the principal party to the Palestine issue. That people had been uprooted from their homeland but they had not lost their faith in God, and they believed that one day they would regain their country.

15. The dispersion of their whole nation for fifteen long years had made the Palestine Arabs understandably rebellious, and every year that passed deepened the wound. Their bitterness was increased by the attitude of the Jewish invaders and of their supporters, who not only ignored the rights of the Arab people to their homeland but denied their very existence as a people. The sorrowful experiences of the Palestine Arabs during the last fifteen years, their unlimited patience and unyielding determination, should have proved to the world that they were not sheep to be driven hither and thither, but lions temporarily chained.

16. Zionist propaganda had done its utmost to make the world believe that the question of Palestine had already been solved, save for the resettlement of the Arab refugees who should be accommodated in the surrounding Arab countries in which they were now living. The Zionists claimed that there was room only for Jews in Palestine. That was the dream they had been hoping to realize since they first reached Palestine. After occupying the greater part of Palestine and expelling most of its Arab inhabitants, their main objective was to liquidate the Arab refugee issue. The usurpers believed that once that was accomplished, they would have nothing more to fear. They were deceiving themselves, however, and misleading the United Nations. The patience and obstinate determination of the Arabs would ultimately defeat all their enemies. The invading crusaders had tried for over 150 years to take possession of Palestine. They had occupied Arab territory far beyond the boundaries of Palestine, but finally the Arabs had driven them out and those who had remained had become Arabized and were now defenders of the Arab cause. The crusaders' invasion of 1,000 years ago had failed because it was dependent on the sword and the Zionist invasion would end in the same way.

17. The report of UNRWA (A/5214) was a striking and revealing document. Mr. Davis, the Commissioner-General, had been entrusted with a great responsibility and it was to the credit of the United Nations that he lived up to that responsibility to the full and sought to alleviate the sufferings of the refugees in every way. It was clear from the introduction to his report that Mr. Davis felt that his responsibility to the refugees did not end with providing food, shelter and physical care. He was also concerned for their spiritual and psychological well-being. In paragraph 5 of his report, the Commissioner-General described the physical privation and psychological damage inflicted on the refugees and expressed the view that, looked at from any standpoint, the lot of the Palestine refugees during the past fourteen years constituted a tragic page in human history. It was not the first time that Mr. Davis had given such a verdict. At the fifteenth session (199th meeting), he had expressed himself to the Committee in very much the same terms. That tragic page in history had been written by the United Nations itself. For the last fifteen years, those refugees had lived on charity, while their property together with the income from it

had been enjoyed by the invaders under the very nose of the United Nations. The Committee had simply waited for the refugees to surrender and relinquish their rights in their homeland.

18. The first seeds of the tragedy had been sown on 2 November 1917, when British colonialism and aggressive Zionism had collaborated in the issue of the Balfour Declaration. That Declaration had embodied a plan to invade Palestine; not merely to colonize and enslave it but to uproot its people and replace them by strangers to the land. The 1 million Arab refugees and all the people of Palestine, as well as the Arab people as a whole, believed that the Balfour Declaration was the main cause of the Palestine catastrophe. It had set off the Jewish invasion of Palestine that had ended in the tragedy of the refugees. Without the Declaration, the people of Palestine would now be enjoying freedom and independence like all the other peoples of the world. It was little wonder that in Arab history the name of Balfour ranked with the name of Judas Iscariot.

19. The Jews based their claim to Palestine on the rights given to them by the greatest colonial Power in history. Mr. Weizmann had said in 1946 that the Jews regarded the Balfour Declaration as a second Bible. The Declaration consisted of two main parts: approval for the establishment of a Jewish National Home in Palestine, and an undertaking that nothing was to be done which might prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine—who constituted 94 per cent of the population. That undertaking was both unethical and contradictory, for it was in fact impossible to establish a Jewish National Home without prejudicing the rights of the original inhabitants of Palestine.

20. When the United Kingdom issued the Balfour Declaration, it was not in occupation of Palestine, and Palestine had never belonged to it. Nevertheless, for material benefits, the United Kingdom had undertaken to establish a home for aliens in the homeland of another people. To dispose in that way of a country which did not belong to it was sheer robbery. In fact, the promise of a National Home had been given to the Zionists as a bribe for financial aid to the Allies in the First World War. The United Kingdom itself had finally been forced to admit its mistake. In 1939, during the London Conference on Palestine, the Maugham Committee appointed to consider the Palestine situation, had stated in its report that it was evident that the United Kingdom Government was not free to dispose of Palestine without regard for the wishes and interests of all its inhabitants.^{2/} On the basis of that report the Government had decided to abrogate the Balfour Declaration and to halt Jewish immigration into Palestine, but because of the Second World War the decision was never put into effect.

21. The British Mandate over Palestine—the blackest spot in its history—had ended in a welter of Jewish terrorism. After thirty years of rule by force, frustrated by the terrible results of its National Home policy and under constant pressure from the Zionists and the United States, the United Kingdom had decided to hand over the Mandate to the United Nations, on 15 May 1948. The *Ad Hoc* Committee on the Palestinian Question had been divided. A minority had warned against partitioning Palestine, but the majority had recommended a partition scheme as a

^{2/} *Ibid.*, page 25.

means of bringing peace to the Holy Land.^{3/} The scheme had favoured the interests of the Zionist minority over those of the Arab majority. It had given the newcomers the larger and more fertile part of Palestine, leaving the original inhabitants with the smaller and more arid portion. The partition plan had failed to bring peace to Palestine.

22. The partition plan had been adopted by the General Assembly largely owing to United States pressure. Former United States President Truman had referred in his memoirs to the Zionist pressure that had been brought to bear on him. Party politics had made him succumb to that pressure in order to win the Jewish vote.

23. On 3 March 1948 a statement signed by all the Christian churches in Jerusalem had been sent to every Member of the United Nations. It had been a warning against partition and its prophecy had been fulfilled. The message had denounced the Partition Plan on the grounds that it was a violation of the sacredness of the Holy Land which was, by its nature and its history, indivisible, and represented an encroachment on the natural rights of the Arabs, the people of the country. The message further declared that any attempt to enforce the erroneous policy would be doomed to failure, for right was stronger than might.

24. The Israelis had claimed persistently that the Arab refugee problem was the result of the war that had taken place in May 1948 between them and the armies of the Arab States. It was their only means of diverting the attention of the world from such atrocities as the Deir Yassin massacre. In fact, the Arab refugee problem was the result of a campaign of terror initiated by the Jewish Agency long before 1948. Most of the refugees had left Palestine before the Arab forces entered the country. The terror spread by the Stern gang and the Irgun Zvai Leumi compelled hundreds of thousands of peaceful citizens to flee for their lives. The Deir Yassin massacre had been deliberately committed more than one month before the entry of the Arab armies in order to frighten the Arab inhabitants into leaving their homes. Indeed, some of the murderers had boasted that what they had done constituted a masterpiece of military tactics. The authors of those crimes had been three terrorist bands organized by the Jewish Agency. A full account of their activities was to be found in British Command Paper 6873^{4/} of July 1946, which described them as illegal paramilitary organizations. The largest had been the Haganah, which had conscripted young Jews for a year's service at the age of seventeen. The Irgun Zvai Leumi had been formed by dissident members of the Haganah in 1935 and the Stern group, consisting of what the White Paper described as dangerous fanatics, had broken off from the Irgun when the latter had decided temporarily to suspend its operations in 1939. At the time of the publication of the White Paper the Irgun and the Stern gang had been co-operating fully with each other, for both had been committed to a policy of extremism.

25. Every year the spokesman for the Palestine Arabs stood on the roof of a house on the Arab side of the barbed wire dividing Jerusalem in two and looked at the house which belonged to him but which

was now occupied by an alien family. That family was being allowed to occupy his home because it was Jewish, while he was being barred from it because he was Christian. The sight aroused in him a feeling of anger not only against Zionism as a symbol of prejudice, not only against the United Nations which allowed the situation to continue, but against a faith which seemed to sanction such a crime. At those moments he could not help feeling that if the Jewish faith permitted such injustices against those who were of another faith it should be abolished. Yet it was not the Jewish faith itself which was at fault, for the Tenth Commandment prohibited usurpation of the property of others. Thus it was clear that the blame lay with Zionism, which was something altogether different. Chaim Weizmann himself had warned that the world would judge the Jewish State by what it did to the Arabs. What judgement, indeed, could the world pass on Israel now that nearly fifteen years had passed and the Arab inhabitants of Palestine were still in exile? After five years Israel had made what it had termed a "generous offer" to unfreeze the savings of Arabs in banks situated within Israel-occupied territory, but it had said nothing about paying the millions of dollars in rentals which it owed for the Arab property which the Jews had seized. It claimed that it was a bulwark of democracy in the Middle East, yet it treated the Arabs who now formed a minority in the country as second-class citizens.

26. The Zionists, in seeking to distract attention from the crimes they had committed against the Palestinian Arabs, had made a practice of denouncing such Arab leaders as the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, who had led his people in the struggle against the Mandate authorities and the establishment of a Jewish National Home because he had been convinced that the ambitions of the Zionists would not be satisfied until they had occupied the whole of Palestine. Contrary to the picture painted of him by the Israelis, the Mufti was a tolerant, unprejudiced man who had no malice towards the Jews.

27. In conclusion, he wished to emphasize once more that the refugee problem was only a part of the whole Palestine situation, the tragedy of a nation temporarily displaced and determined to regain its full rights in its homeland. That nation was the principal party in the issue and no other party had the right to negotiate peace in disregard of that fact. He wondered what the inhabitants of any of the countries represented in the Committee would do if their homelands were invaded and usurped. He was sure that they would not allow themselves to be bullied into submission and driven into exile. If his assumption was correct, he could only ask why they expected the Palestine Arabs to agree to something which they themselves would never accept. There could be no peace in the Middle East which was not founded on justice, and justice demanded that the Arabs of Palestine should be enabled to live in freedom and independence in the country which had been theirs for thousands of years.

28. Mr. KREACIC (Yugoslavia) said that from the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, as also the statements of the representatives of the Arab countries and of the Palestine refugees, it was to be concluded that the conditions in which the refugees were living had not improved but were, on the contrary, deteriorating. The Agency, with the limited means at its disposal, had done as much as it could

^{3/} *Ibid.*, vol. I, chapter VI.

^{4/} London, His Majesty's Stationery Office, p. 2.

to alleviate those conditions and he wished to associate himself with the speakers who had paid a tribute to its work and particularly to the efforts of the Commissioner-General. He hoped that the Committee would express its appreciation of the Agency's endeavours and would support its further activities.

29. His delegation, as in the past, was in favour of the proposal to establish machinery for the administration of the abandoned properties of the refugees and the income accruing from such properties. That step, which would be in line with the decisions already taken, would contribute to the solution of the entire issue and would at the same time provide additional funds for the support of the refugees.

30. The statements made in the Committee reflected the serious concern of Members that the fundamental question remained unsolved. There could be no solution until the provisions of paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) on the right of repatriation or compensation were carried out. Some speakers had supported the idea of an appeal to the Arab countries and Israel to seek a solution by negotiation and a draft resolution to that effect (A/SPC/L.89 and Add.1) had been submitted. It might indeed appear at first glance that the proposal was in keeping with the United Nations principle that all international disputes should be settled by negotiation, yet a closer examination of the text showed that it was inadequate, for it did not consider the whole scope of Arab-Israel relations, but merely the ques-

tion of the refugees, on which a number of decisions, not yet applied, had been made in the past. No proposal which failed to take into account those earlier decisions could lead to a genuine solution of the issue. If carried out, on the other hand, then the way could be open to such a solution, and prospects for co-operation in the area would be improved.

31. His delegation's position on any draft resolution put before the Committee would be dictated by those considerations.

32. Mr. TARAZI (Syria), speaking on a point of order, recalled that at the 367th meeting he had made a protest with regard to a United Nations press release dealing with the work of the Committee during the week ending 7 December because it had mentioned Israel by name but had not mentioned the names of the Arab delegations that had participated in the debate. As no reply had so far been forthcoming he requested the Secretariat to take note of that protest and of the fact that his delegation was making a formal inquiry into the matter.

33. Mr. CHAI (Secretary of the Committee) explained that the Syrian representative's protest had been brought immediately to the attention of the Secretary-General and that as soon as there was a reply it would be communicated to the Committee.

The meeting rose at 5.15 p.m.