

United Nations
**GENERAL
 ASSEMBLY**
 ELEVENTH SESSION
 Official Records



**SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE, 30th
 MEETING**

Wednesday, 20 February 1957,
 at 3.40 p.m.

New York

CONTENTS

	Page
Agenda item 23:	
Report of the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (<i>continued</i>)	139

Chairman: Mr. Selim SARPER (Turkey).

In the absence of the Chairman, Mr. Sudjarwo (Indonesia), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

AGENDA ITEM 23

Report of the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (A/3212, A/3212/Add.1, A/3498, A/SPC/9) (*continued*)

1. Mr. ABDOH (Iran) agreed with all the preceding speakers in emphasizing that it was essential, if the question of the Palestine refugees was to be settled, to lessen the prevailing tension in the Middle East. There had nevertheless been no relaxation of that tension, and this year the Special Political Committee's discussion of the Arab refugee problem was taking place in even less favourable conditions than in past years, as a result of Israel's attitude. That country, not content with having launched an attack, was paying no heed to the Assembly's resolutions. It accordingly seemed that a satisfactory solution was further away than ever. Nevertheless, it was important not to let despondency gain the upper hand; efforts must be redoubled to help the parties concerned solve the problem, the more so as it was primarily a humanitarian problem.

2. The United Nations bore the responsibility for the partitioning of Palestine and for all its inevitable consequences and was therefore bound, in the interests of peace, to care for the Arab refugees, who rightly regarded themselves as wards of the Organization and whose situation was steadily becoming more alarming. The United Nations must find an equitable and permanent solution of the refugee problem, for the settlement of that problem was the key to the entire Palestine question.

3. He paid a tribute to the Director and staff of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) who had shown the greatest devotion in the fulfilment of a delicate task. Although its funds were limited, UNRWA had in some respects achieved positive results. It had succeeded in feeding, clothing and sheltering the refugees, but much still remained to be done. The main objective in this regard was not merely to enable the refugees to survive, but also to end their status as refugees.

4. That was why several projects were afoot which would make it possible for them to acquire some degree of economic independence. Some good might come from persuading the refugees that it was in their own interest

to take part in large-scale economic development projects, on the understanding that their right to repatriation or compensation would not thereby be prejudiced. So far, however, the execution of projects of that kind had proved to be impossible for the simple reason that the refugees associated such plans with the prospect of permanent resettlement and the relinquishing of all hope of repatriation. As could be seen, however, from the Director's annual report (A/3212), they had renounced none of their rights, and those rights had, in addition, been recognized by the General Assembly, in particular in resolution 194 (III), paragraph 11. Moreover, it was easily understandable in the circumstances, that the Governments of the Arab States should hesitate to co-operate in giving effect to the plans, lest by such action they should set at naught the refugees' highest hopes.

5. A solution might perhaps have been reached if Israel, from 1948 onward, had taken the refugees' rights into consideration. Unfortunately, it had not done so. On the pretext that its security would thereby have been endangered, Israel had not honoured its proposal to repatriate a small number of refugees. If it was not prepared to receive all the Arab refugees, it might at least, on grounds of humanity, contemplate a partial and progressive repatriation. The question was an important one, because it affected peace and security in the Middle East.

6. Admittedly some of the refugees would prefer to remain in the host countries if they were offered fair compensation for the loss of their property. They ought still to have the opportunity of choosing between the two solutions envisaged in paragraph 11 of Assembly resolution 194 (III), namely repatriation or compensation. Only on those terms could the problem be realistically solved. Furthermore, the contention that the host countries could absorb nearly a million refugees overlooked the fact that the two large-scale undertakings which were planned—the Jordan Valley and Sinai Projects—would allow the resettlement of only some 200,000 persons.

7. The Iranian Government stood willing to make every effort towards a just solution of the refugee problem. It largely approved the Director's annual report and in that connexion hoped that the General Assembly would do everything in its power to help UNRWA over its present difficulties and that the Members of the United Nations would in due time contribute the necessary funds. It trusted that the Governments of the host countries would lend the Agency every aid. It hoped, moreover, that the Assembly would find the right formula for alleviating the victims' sufferings, for facilitating the task of the Agency and for fostering the economic independence of the refugees, without prejudice to their right to repatriation or compensation.

8. Mr. DEJANY (Saudi Arabia) paid a tribute to UNRWA and to its Director for all they had done,

under trying conditions, for the refugees. As the Director had indicated, political and military developments in the Middle East had a direct bearing on the problem of the refugees and the Agency's work. The treatment meted out to the refugees living in the Gaza Strip was particularly shocking. Those unfortunate people had been brutally treated by Israel, which had not only confiscated their property and refused to allow them to return home; but had had to pursue them to the camps situated in the sand dunes of the Gaza Strip where over 450 of them had been slaughtered in the space of two days. Nevertheless, most delegations had not seen fit to condemn that act of genocide, a distressing fact if it was remembered that the refugee problem resulted from United Nations action in Palestine. On the other hand, expressions of sympathy towards Israel had not been lacking in connexion with the few alleged casualties it had suffered.

9. According to the Foreign Minister of Israel, the casualties that country had suffered over the past eight years, amounted to less than 200 killed mostly by refugees who had infiltrated into its territory from Gaza. Those relatively few losses had been advanced by Israel as a pretext for its attack on Egypt, and many representatives had cited the Israel casualties as an argument against a return to the *status quo* in the Gaza Strip. It was inconsistent to stress that while the murder in cold blood by Israel of 49 men, women and children at Kafr Kasem as the invasion had started was overlooked, beside the other acts of murder and torture to which the refugees had been subjected. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that if the refugees had committed the acts for which Israel blamed them, the reason in most cases was related to the fact that Israel had confiscated their properties and stripped them of their belongings.

10. In his special report (A/3212/Add.1), the Director of the Agency had said that relative calm had returned to Gaza, but the refugees appeared to be living under considerable tension and in fear of the future. However that might be, the General Assembly, as the body in charge of looking after the welfare of the refugees, was in duty bound to condemn the atrocities committed by Israel and to take every possible action to bring about the withdrawal of Israel forces from Gaza. The Saudi Arabian delegation was strongly opposed to any change of the régime which had existed in the Gaza Strip before 1 November 1956. It hoped that a settlement of the differences between the Agency and the representatives of the Egyptian Administration could be achieved.

11. Generally speaking there had been little change in the position of the Palestine refugees in the Middle East. In that connexion the Director of the Agency had seen fit in his annual report to stress once again certain points to which attention had already been drawn repeatedly. For instance, the refugees' desire to return to their homeland continued unabated. The great majority of the refugees maintained that a grave injustice had been done to them and that they were opposed to resettlement outside Palestine even in neighbouring Arab countries.

12. The stress laid by the Director on that aspiration of the refugees was passed over in silence by the General Assembly, which also emphasized the amazing difference in the reaction of so many delegations between the alleged grievances of Israel and the grievances of the refugees which had been created, aggravated and were perpetuated by Israel. Instead of striving to give

effect to the refugees, aspiration to return home which the Director emphasized every year, the Assembly bore with the existing situation as if there was nothing that it could do about it. In fact, the Assembly, by permitting the deplorable conditions to continue, was forcing the refugees to change their minds.

13. It should not be forgotten that the Agency had been directed to consult with the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine with regard to repatriation. Resolution 302 (IV), paragraph 20, provided for consultation between the Agency and the Conciliation Commission in the best interests of their respective tasks, with particular reference to paragraph 11 of resolution 194 (III). The latter paragraph provided that the refugees wishing to return to their homes should be permitted to do so. In paragraph 4 of resolution 393 (V), the General Assembly had emphasized that the reintegration of the refugees into the economic life of the Near East, either by repatriation or resettlement, was essential. In paragraph 5 of the same resolution it had instructed the Agency to establish a reintegration fund; in 1952 the Director of the Agency had said (A/2171, para. 34) that the fund was to be used to help refugees to repatriate or to resettle elsewhere if they should choose.

14. In those circumstances it was strange that the United Nations was concentrating on resettlement and taking no steps to ensure repatriation particularly since the refugees rejected resettlement and insisted on repatriation since the Agency had made no progress on any settlement projects. It should be noted that despite the General Assembly resolutions calling for repatriation, Israel had adamantly refused to permit the repatriation of the refugees, but the refugees were just as adamant in rejecting any other alternative. Obviously the attitude of the host Governments was influenced by the unanimous desire of the refugees.

15. Hence, to continue over-emphasizing reintegration as the only solution was hardly a realistic approach. Two factors confirmed that point of view. First, the Middle East had meagre physical resources, and the host Governments were responsible primarily for looking after the interests of their own people. Secondly, even if the proposed economic development plans were carried out, they would at best absorb 200,000 refugees after seven years, and the Director had indicated that there were no possibilities for other rehabilitation projects in the area. Therefore the major portion of the refugees would still remain in the camps.

16. It would be better to recognize immediately that the General Assembly by concentrating on resettlement had used the wrong approach. Since the United Nations had created the refugee problem, and had later laid down the basis for its settlement in the provision contained in paragraph 11 of resolution 194 (III), it would be unjust and unacceptable to speak of any political settlement which would not incorporate that cardinal principle. It was unbecoming of the Assembly to ignore the problem while giving priority of consideration to ensuring Israel navigation in the Gulf of Aqaba, and to preventing the refugee "infiltration" to their homes, particularly since the refugee problem had been created by the United Nations and involved the uprooting of almost the entire Arab inhabitants of Palestine. It would be tragic if the Assembly gave the impression that priority was being given to minor problems simply because Israel took the law into its own hands. Israel should be called upon to do justice to the refugees by recognizing their right to repatriation and

compensation, and by beginning to liquidate the problem on that basis.

17. That raised the matter of the choice provided for in paragraph 11 of resolution 194 (III). His delegation believed that a plebiscite should be organized to enable the refugees to declare their choice between repatriation and resettlement. There was no question of choosing only between repatriation and compensation, because even those refugees who were repatriated would be entitled to compensation in all cases involving loss of, or damage to, property.

18. A plebiscite would show the whole world the refugees' decision. The Agency would know exactly how many of the refugees did not choose to return home, and would thus have its work facilitated. The General Assembly would then have to use all its influence to give satisfaction to the wishes expressed by the refugees and to put an end to their intolerable fate. The fundamental principle without which no just and acceptable political settlement could be achieved would thus be.

19. In referring to the question of repatriation, some members of the Special Political Committee had tried to link it with the question of the responsibility for creating the Arab refugee problem. His delegation felt that the question of repatriation was essentially humanitarian and involved only the refugee's individual rights. The question of responsibility had no bearing on the right of the Arab refugees to return to their homes. When the Assembly had adopted resolution 1954 (III), it had been aware of all the factors which had contributed to the creation of the refugee problem, but it had not made repatriation dependent on any future adjudication and fixing of responsibility.

20. It had been said that paragraph 11 of that resolution dealing with repatriation and compensation, had no legal validity apart from the rest of the resolution and particularly the provisions concerning the internationalization of Jerusalem. There was, however, nothing in the resolution to indicate that the General Assembly had intended to link the repatriation of the refugees to the internationalization of Jerusalem, or to make either question dependent upon the other, or that either or both were dependent on the success of the efforts of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine. The instructions of the General Assembly to the Conciliation Commission on those two issues had been specific and unrelated to the other parts of the resolution.

21. An attempt had also been made to explain the lack of progress in resettlement by the reluctance of some of the host Governments to accept the long-range schemes worked out by the Agency. A careful examination of the reports and records dealing with the matter indicated that the direct cause of the lack of progress was the refugees' opposition to resettlement. The attitude of the host Governments was a response to the sentiments of the refugees and not its cause. The refugees insisted that the Arab Governments had no authority to represent them on any talks for resettlement, but could represent them only in regard to their desire to return to their homes.

22. Some representatives had likewise sought to draw a parallel between the emigration of Jews from Arab lands to Israel and that of the Palestine Arabs to the host countries, and had argued that the Governments of the host countries should be ready to accept Palestine refugees in place of the departing Jews. It should be pointed out, firstly, that the Palestine refugees did not

wish to settle outside their own country and, secondly, that they had been forced to leave their homes and were still being barred by Israel from returning. The Jews, on the other hand, had left the Arab countries not because they had been forced to do so but because the Zionists and Israelis wanted to uproot them in order to settle them in Palestine in the place of the Arab refugees, thus barring the return of the latter.

23. Similarly, there was no parallel between the attitude of the Israel Government, which had cultivated the disloyalty of the Arab Jews to their mother countries for purely political and military considerations, and the attitude of the Arab Governments towards the Palestine refugees, which was strongly influenced and conditioned by the refugees' own views.

24. In regard to relief services, the Saudi Arabian representative pointed out that the Director of UNRWA had stated, in paragraph 50 of his annual report, that present standards were satisfactory neither to the Agency, nor to the refugees, nor to the host Governments. That regrettable state of affairs had been confirmed by the United States representative, who had said that she had seen refugees all over the world but that the refugee camps she had visited in the Middle East were the most depressing. At first sight, the situation might be attributed to the lack of funds at the Agency's disposal. That argument, however, which seemed so convincing, would hardly stand up to closer scrutiny.

25. Contributions of Member States were naturally not obligatory, and each Government gave according to its means and its particular circumstances. Saudi Arabia had been spending between \$300,000 and \$400,000 a year on the refugees, apart from its contributions to the Agency. The refugees, however, did not want charity. They could not ask for larger contributions from the contributing States, but they were entitled to expect the United Nations to ask Israel for payment of at least the income from the assets they had left behind in Israel. That income, according to official and unofficial Israel sources, amounted to about £42 million annually, or about \$1,000 million for the last eight years and was the source which should be tapped by the United Nations to meet the pressing needs of the Palestinian Arab refugees. It was immoral to maintain that mass of humanity at a bare existence level for lack of contributions, while Israel continued to misappropriate the yield of the refugees' property without accounting for it.

26. In view of the claims Israel was presently advancing in the General Assembly for such secondary matters as navigation in the Gulf of Aqaba, the Committee should refer to the fifteenth progress report of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (A/3199), which described Israel's new attitude to the compensation question as well as to the Commission itself, whose responsibilities for protecting the rights, property and interests of the refugees were being totally disregarded by Israel. The delegations sympathetic to Israel, in connexion with the problems of the Gulf of Aqaba and the Gaza Strip would, he opined, do well to examine that country's attitude on the pressing problems involving the very existence of almost a million Arab refugees.

27. It was high time for all Member States, and particularly those States which were according Israel aid in various forms, to call upon the Government of that country to remit to the refugees, as matter of urgency, the income from the property they had left

behind in Israel. It was high time also to call on those who afforded economic aid to Israel to set aside part of it at least, to make it possible for the refugees to secure the minimum needs of a decent existence pending their repatriation. It was unjust to permit Israel to misappropriate the proceeds of the refugees' properties in addition to receiving economic aid which assured them of a secure life of plenty, while the refugees were deprived of their homes by Israel, were half-starved, and were threatened every year that even the limited international charity they were waiving might suddenly be stopped.

28. His delegation sincerely hoped that the Agency would be able to meet the needs of other categories of claimants for relief, particularly children born in Jordan since 1951 of refugee parents, who were being made to suffer for the acts of others, and also the people of the frontier villages in Jordan, and the *bona fide* refugees who had not applied for assistance at the time when the Agency had been established because they had then possessed sufficient resources upon which to live. Many of those refugees had now used up their reserves and were without means of support.

29. A solution of the refugee problem was, as the Director had rightly emphasized, essential to the establishment of peace and security in the Middle East. The world should recognize the role of Israel in frustrating the solution of that problem. The United Nations should exert all its efforts in the direction of repatriation, since a substantial majority of the refugees continued to insist on their right to return to their homes.

30. Mr. RODRIGUEZ FABREGAT (Uruguay) congratulated the Director on the work accomplished during the period reviewed in his annual report (A/3212) and his special report (A/3212/Add.1). Owing to the grave events which had occurred in the Middle-East during that period, the Assembly's current debate on the problem of the Palestinian Arab refugees touched on political aspects of considerable importance. In his statement (A/SPC/9), the Director had said that UNRWA had been created to help care for the Palestine refugees and had no political mission. Inevitably, the refugees had felt the impact of the recent military and political events in the Middle East, but the Special Political Committee should carefully avoid the unjustifiable injection of a political element into its discussions. As his Government regarded the problem of the Palestine refugees solely from the viewpoint of human solidarity, it would studiously refrain from any political comment which could only lead to bitterness.

31. In his annual report, the Director emphasized the gravity of the refugee situation, and in his statement he drew the Assembly's attention to the inadequacy of relief services, and particularly the food rations supplied to the refugees, half of whom were less than sixteen years of age. Such a critical situation could not but stir deep feeling, and the United Nations must seek a solution of that tragic problem without delay. In view of the sufferings of the refugees, the question inevitably arose how such a situation could have been allowed to arise and to develop. As soon as the State of Israel had been set up in 1947, its territory had been the scene of fighting and that in turn had given rise to the Arab refugee problem in Palestine. His delegation did not wish to stir up passions or exacerbate the claims that were being made, but merely wanted to express the hope of the Uruguayan people that lasting co-operation and peace would be established between the Jewish and Arab peoples and that one day the world would see a

new flowering of that Arab-Jewish culture which had once prospered on the Iberian Peninsula and had spread from there to the American continent. In view of that historical precedent, he refused to believe that peace could not be restored in the Middle East.

32. In his delegation's view, there were many varied aspects of the refugee problem that could not be ignored. The Arab refugees had been torn from their homes, but many Jewish refugees had come to Israel after escaping Nazi persecution. More recently, thousands of Jews had gone, or were going, to Israel from the Arab countries of North Africa. The refugee problem must be solved, whatever the cost, and it was therefore regrettable that some representatives were making statements which did not exactly promote a solution of the problem. The Committee had been told that if the financial situation of the Agency did not improve, the discontinuance of services essential for the Palestine refugees might have to be considered. That was a very grave warning.

33. The Uruguayan delegation considered that a new method should be found to solve the problem of the Palestine refugees, with which the Assembly had been concerned for eight years. Apparently, a real solution would not be reached by increasing contributions and improving services. The needs of the refugees were constantly growing, and the efforts to relieve their sufferings were not succeeding. The Arab States should view the problem in its humanitarian aspect, as the refugees were part of the Arab world. The important objective was their resettlement, and the expression "resettlement" should be interpreted in the widest sense. The question was not merely one of helping the refugees; they should be given an opportunity to work on the land or carry on an occupation. That action should be taken in the name of international peace and security, in accordance with the principles of the Charter.

34. The Israel delegation in its statement at the 28th meeting had not closed the door to all solutions, and thus the time seemed to have come to make proposals for a settlement of the problem. The question certainly had a political aspect, and the action recently taken by Israel had further aggravated the situation. Nevertheless, all the elements of the problem should be taken into account, and the imposition of obligations on Israel must be accompanied by the recognition of certain rights and guarantees, especially the right to live in peace and freedom of navigation. The Uruguay delegation considered that the refugee problem was merely part of the much larger problem of restoring peace in the Middle East, where truces and armistices had proved to be of no avail.

35. The general problem of refugees was becoming more and more serious, for the ranks of the earlier refugees had been swelled by the persons who had fled from Hungary to seek refuge in various countries. With regard to the Palestine refugees, all hope of a solution would not be abandoned on condition that everyone evinced goodwill and tried to help resettle the refugees. Plans had been drawn up which appeared feasible. Land could be cultivated and irrigation works could be undertaken. It was the duty of all countries to spare no effort to contribute their assistance.

36. The children among the refugee population deserved special attention; they should not only be provided with the necessary food and clothing, but should also be given an opportunity of learning a trade and being educated, for they represented the future

generation on which further progress in the common interest would depend. The Uruguayan delegation, speaking in a spirit of solidarity, hoped that the problem might be equitably solved in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter.

37. Mr. RAJAN (India) observed with regret that the problem which the Committee had been considering for several years had been further aggravated. The number of refugees had increased, and they continued to live on charity, with inadequate rations, and were huddled together in makeshift quarters with no hope for the future. It was a matter of particular concern that about one-half of the refugees were under sixteen years of age and that thousands of them thus had not even been born eight years ago, whereas the oldest of them had been barely seven years old when the exodus had begun. In a sense, they were the children of the United Nations. They were too young to be responsible for the events that had taken place; they had always lived the miserable life of the refugee. It was of no importance to them whether the problem was a political or a humanitarian one. They did not know what security was. They were not interested in the lessons of history. All they wanted was a home and a nationality; they wanted to become members of a community.

38. Despite the large sums spent by UNRWA, the refugees' position had not improved, but had deteriorated. The Agency had now exhausted most of its resources, and unless considerable funds were made available, it would be obliged to reduce its activities. As, however, the needs were greater than ever, it was to be hoped that Governments would be generous.

39. As the Director of the Agency had declared in paragraph 3 of his statement (A/SPC/9), time would not be a healing agent and the longer the problem of the Palestine refugees remained unsolved, the more dangerous the consequences would be for the countries of the Near East; there was bound to be tension in countries like Jordan, where the refugees constituted over one-third of the total population, or the Gaza Strip, two-thirds of whose inhabitants were refugees. The Director had also stated that the Agency had been meeting ever-increasing difficulties in carrying out the task of immediate relief for the refugees. Those difficulties had been especially serious during the recent hostilities.

40. One fact was certain; the refugees desire, as was stated in paragraph 7 of the annual report, to return to their homeland continued, and time and desperation had not abated that desire. The only possible solution therefore seemed to be to meet the refugees' wishes. The Indian delegation hoped that something could be done in that respect. Any initiative, however modest, that would produce some result would help to create an atmosphere of trust which in turn would gradually make possible the achievement of more significant results.

41. Mr. MASFAR (Indonesia) congratulated the Director of UNRWA on the frankness with which he had stated the position of the Palestine refugees and that of the Agency. The annual report described the

sad condition of the refugees, and the statement by Mr. Labouisse had further stressed the seriousness and complexity of the problem. He had referred to the difficulties, particularly the financial ones, with which the Agency was confronted. The effect of a reduction of relief services on the refugee population, which was already demoralized, could readily be imagined. The Indonesian delegation therefore hoped that Member States which had not yet made their contributions to UNRWA would make an effort to enable that body to continue its activities. The Indonesian Government, which had announced a contribution of \$30,000, had paid that contribution in full by September 1956.

42. The Director of UNRWA had, however, pointed out some improvements in the refugees' position. Considerable progress had been made with regard to health services; additional milk rations were being distributed to certain categories of refugees; some shelters had been improved; and clothing had been distributed to the children. The Director had also expressed his conviction that, with the assistance of a larger number of Governments, further improvements could be made without prejudice to the refugees' right to be repatriated or to receive compensation.

43. Apparently, as the Director had stated in paragraphs 8 and 101 of his report, the strongest feeling expressed by the great mass of the refugees was the desire to return to their old homes. That right was, moreover, recognized in General Assembly resolution 194 (III), according to which the refugees should be allowed to choose between repatriation and compensation.

44. Israel, however, had taken no action to give effect to that resolution. On the contrary, at the time of the attack on Egypt, the situation of the refugees had deteriorated, and some of them had been killed. In addition, UNRWA had been obliged to operate under very difficult conditions.

45. The fact that there had been no appreciable change in the position of the refugees was a cause of tension and difficulties in the Middle East. In the interests of peace and security, General Assembly resolution 194 (III) should, in the Indonesian delegation's opinion, be carried out as soon as possible. Steps to that end should be taken by UNRWA and the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine. Pending changes in the situation of the refugees, the Agency should also continue to provide relief. It was to be hoped that many Governments would be able to make contributions. The Indonesian Government, for its part, would contribute a further \$30,000 for the next financial year.

46. It was unfortunate that UNRWA had encountered difficulties in its relations with the Governments of the host countries, but it should be borne in mind that for those countries the refugees represented a very heavy burden. Those difficulties could undoubtedly be eliminated. In conclusion, he paid a tribute to the voluntary organizations which had given the refugees valuable assistance.

The meeting rose at 5.40 p.m.