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CONTENTS

Page

Agenda item 23:
Report of the Director of the United Nations Relief and
Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
(continued) 125

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. GOHAR (Egypt) drew the Special Political Committee's attention to paragraph 5 of the annual report of the Director of the Agency (A/3212), in which Mr. Labouisse referred to human suffering and to the memories and frustrations of hundreds of thousands of human beings. The Director had said, moreover, that an effective review could be made only if there was a clear understanding of the human factor which conditioned the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and he pointed out that the problem posed by the refugees was not simply an economic problem susceptible of economic solutions. The Egyptian delegation fully shared the Director's views. In that connexion it wished to make a brief review of the unhappy events which had created the refugee problem.

2. When Zionism had first come into being, its purpose had been to protect unfortunate and persecuted people and to establish an Israelite State. It was true that the Arabs, Moslems and Christians had been deeply moved by the atrocities committed against the Jews, but they had felt some anxiety at the idea of there being set up, among the Arab countries, a State which could be brought into being only at the cost of dismembering some Arab territories. The British Mandate over Palestine had been complicated by the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which all the Arab countries had regarded as the second stage in the plan of attack against the Arabs, the first stage having been the establishment of the Zionist movement. Shortly after the Balfour Declaration had been issued, one of the leaders of Zionism had made a strange statement to the effect that the Zionists were in Palestine to protect the Suez Canal. That had been the third stage in the plan of attack against the Arabs, their homes and their land.

3. The Palestine question had been a long sequence of conflict, tension and bloodshed ever since the United Kingdom Government had promised that a territory that did not belong to it should be made a Jewish

national State. All were aware of the events that had occurred between the Balfour Declaration of 2 November 1917 and the time when the General Assembly, in its resolution 181 (II) of 29 November 1947, had recommended the partition of Palestine. Many representatives who had voted in favour of that resolution had subsequently explained their votes in a manner which had shown their perplexity about the possible consequences of that decision.

4. Even before the expiry of the British Mandate, the Zionists, realizing that the country had a large Arab population, had begun to drive the Arabs out by intimidation. They had used a variety of tactics for the purpose: in the towns, for instance at Jerusalem and Jaffa, they had committed acts of terrorism which had claimed innocent victims; in the peaceful Arab villages they had terrorized inhabitants and spread panic among the defenceless population. They had also attacked the British; in the United Kingdom, the Press, statesmen and leading church dignitaries had raised an outcry against the atrocities committed.

5. As the day when the Mandate over Palestine was to expire had approached, the Zionists had intensified their efforts and had begun to occupy the towns of Palestine and to expel their inhabitants, both Christian and Arab. Those occupations and expulsions had taken place before the mandatory Power had left, i.e., before 15 May 1948, at a time when no Arab country had had a single soldier on Palestinian soil.

6. It had been only after 15 May 1948 that the Arab armies had entered Palestine, at the urgent request of the Arab population. They had entered Palestine not in order to launch a war of aggression against the Zionists, as Israel charged, but to protect the Christian and Moslem population. Had the Arab countries not intervened the Zionist forces would not have stopped at the armistice line; they would have occupied all Palestine and presented the world with a *fait accompli*.

7. He had dwelt upon that stage of the events because Zionist propaganda had sought to convince the world that it had been the Arab States which had disregarded the decisions of the United Nations and had launched a war against Israel, and that they should therefore bear full responsibility for everything that had happened to the Palestinian Arabs.

8. More than 900,000 Arabs had had to leave their homes and take refuge in neighbouring Arab countries, where they lived in deplorable conditions in overpopulated villages or camps. There was no question that they had both a moral and a legal right to return to their homes. Indeed, that right had been reaffirmed in every United Nations resolution on the subject. Furthermore the Director of the Agency had stressed once more, in paragraph 7 of his annual report, that the refugees' desire to return to their homeland continued unabated.

9. The Israel Government had done nothing to comply with the decisions of the United Nations. It had refused

to allow the refugees to choose between repatriation and compensation. It claimed that Israel was not responsible for the fate of the refugees, that their land and their houses were now occupied by Jewish immigrants and that there was room for the refugees in the Arab States.

10. Some representatives had advocated the resettlement of the refugees in Arab countries; but the refugees could surely not be expected to abandon the land of their forefathers. Other representatives had said that living conditions had changed in the areas the refugees had left and that they might perhaps prefer to be resettled where they now were; but the refugees had not been given the choice between return to their homes and resettlement.

11. Furthermore the Director of the Agency, who was in contact with the refugees, had said again and again that it was essential that they should be given a choice between repatriation and compensation, and that the refugees' desire to return to their former homes had prevented UNRWA from making any real progress in the performance of its long-term task.

12. It was, indeed, a highly complex problem: a whole nation had been forcibly expelled from its country. The United Nations should ensure that the rights of the refugees were observed. If Israel persisted in refusing to apply United Nations resolutions, it might well bring about a situation highly dangerous to peace and security throughout the region.

13. Israel was not merely refusing to recognize the rights of the refugees but was appealing to Jews throughout the world to come to Israel and fill the space which the refugees had left vacant. Israel had not sufficient resources to absorb millions of new immigrants. Sooner or later those immigrants would inevitably try to settle in neighbouring countries and would undertake military expeditions of the type with which the General Assembly was now contending. The Arabs had been told not to fear Israel's expansionist aims, but that country had just made an attack on Egypt's sovereignty and was persisting in its utter disregard of the General Assembly's decisions on the subject.

14. On 29 October 1956, Israel had perpetrated an act of armed aggression, one of the gravest it had committed since the conclusion of the General Armistice Agreement. That aggression had stirred deep feeling and aroused general indignation; unfortunately it had merely justified the apprehensions the Arabs had always felt with regard to Israel.

15. He read out a report from a Press correspondent who had made a dangerous journey to Rafah, Khan Yunis and El Arish during the last three months. That correspondent said that he had seen a whole people tortured and exterminated. He described the atrocities committed by Israel's troops, the summary sentences pronounced on Arabs; near Rafah, he had seen a place where men between the ages of fifteen and fifty had been burnt alive. At Rafah itself, 200 young people had been massacred in less than three hours. On entering Khan Yunis, the Zionists had killed more than 300 Arabs. At Gaza there had been many arrests, executions and house searches; the houses of officials and magistrates had been requisitioned for Israel's troops; all the money in the banks had been seized and the shops had been looted. The correspondent ended by saying that the brutalities to which the Arabs had been subjected in the Gaza Strip were the worst imaginable in

the annals of crime, torture and savagery. The *Jewish Newsletter* of 24 December 1956 reported the terrible massacre which had taken place at Kafr Qassam, where some of the inhabitants, whom it had been impossible to notify of the changed curfew hour because they had been working far from the village, had been slaughtered on their return. The number of victims had been forty-nine dead and thirteen wounded.

16. That was how Israel proposed to maintain friendly relations with the peoples of the Middle East. As the Belgian representative had said on 12 January 1956 at the 711th meeting of the Security Council, Israel was pursuing a policy of violence contrary to the basic principles of the Charter, the General Armistice Agreement and the moral principles accepted by all civilized peoples. In the circumstances, it was not surprising that Israel continued to disregard the decisions of the Assembly. In its *aide-mémoire* of 24 January 1957 (A/3511) Israel asserted that it was not seeking to annex the Gaza Strip and enumerated the measures it proposed to take for the benefit of the inhabitants of that area. Yet in paragraph 32 of his special report (A/3212/Add.1), the Director of the Agency spoke of the tension under which the refugees of the Gaza Strip were living and reported that several of them had asked him to convey to the General Assembly their urgent plea for security and for protection. In paragraph 33 of the same report he stated that there could be no real peace in the area unless and until a definitive solution of the Palestine problem, based on principles of equity and accepted by all concerned, was agreed upon and put into effect. Such solution was inconceivable without the liberation of the Gaza Strip from the occupation to which it had been subjected.

17. With regard to the situation of the refugees, it appeared from the Director's statement (A/SPC/9) that for more than eight years the refugees had been living on a food ration of 1,600 calories a day, which was the minimum required for survival, that there was not enough shelter for them, and that the clothing situation left much to be desired. In addition, the Director said in paragraphs 11 and 12 of his annual report that there were certain categories of applicants whom the Agency had been unable to assist owing to lack of funds. His delegation therefore appealed to the Members of the United Nations to provide the Agency with sufficient funds to enable it to cope with the increasingly grave situation of the refugees. Despite the heavy financial burden it entailed for the host countries, the Arab States had done their utmost to assist the Palestine refugees and to improve their situation.

18. He was grateful to the Director and his staff for their efforts and for the remarkable work they had done. He also wished to thank the countries which had contributed to the funds of UNRWA and the many organizations which had helped the refugees. He hoped that some Governments which has so far been unable to contribute to the Agency would do their utmost to provide assistance in some form or another. There should be no need for such an appeal, for the refugees possessed assets in Palestine which were worth millions of dollars and were theirs by right; in fact, they did not need charity. As the Director pointed out in paragraph 8 of his report, the refugees held the United Nations responsible for their plight and regarded UNRWA relief as a debt owed them by the world at large. The Egyptian delegation urged that the Arab population of Palestine should be allowed to enjoy their legitimate rights.

19. Sir Percy SPENDER (Australia) said that he wished to express the Australian Government's thanks to the Director of UNRWA and to his staff, who had been operating under trying conditions. The Director's annual report (A/3212) and his statement (A/SPC/9) had indicated what difficulties the Agency faced. Among the most serious questions was certainly that of finance. For 1955-56, there was a deficit both on relief and on rehabilitation accounts and it had been necessary to make up the deficit by drawing on working capital. That situation was due to the fact that during the last financial year contributions had been received from only twenty-three countries and of the total amount more than 90 per cent had been provided by the United States and the United Kingdom.

20. The various proposals made by the Director for relief, education and self-support projects were dependent on his obtaining an increase in funds. The Australian delegation therefore appealed to those Members of the United Nations which had not yet contributed to the Agency. Whatever the degree of responsibility which the United Nations bore in regard to the question: the Organization was confronted with a humanitarian problem, the alleviation of which required some positive effort from each of its Members. The Australian Minister of External Affairs had already announced that his Government was continuing its contribution to UNRWA for the present financial year. Australia considered it unfair, however, that the burden of sustaining the refugees should continue to fall on a small proportion of the total membership of the United Nations.

21. In paragraph 105 of his annual report the Director of the Agency had mentioned a number of questions on which he considered it essential to receive directives. The Australian delegation proposed to outline its attitude towards those which involved a matter of funds. Firstly, his Government supported the proposals made with regard to the standard to be set for relief services provided the necessary funds were available. Secondly, it was opposed to allowing a larger number of students to attend secondary school than contemplated under the present system; as the Director of the Agency had pointed out, there were no openings for the students in Gaza and an increase in their number would simply aggravate social unrest. As the resources available to the Agency were limited, they should be used to carry out programmes which would contribute directly to enabling the refugees to become self-supporting. Thirdly, in view of the shortage of funds the Agency could not be expected to finance the education of all refugee children. The United Nations could not therefore contemplate reimbursing the Governments of the host countries for the full cost of the education given in their schools to refugee pupils who could not be accommodated in Agency schools. The Government of the host countries, moreover, bore a certain responsibility for the welfare of the refugees. Finally, his delegation felt that humanitarian considerations required the Agency to extend its assistance to those refugees who had not been registered with the Agency in the past and were now destitute.

22. In his statement of 11 February 1957 (A/SPC/9) the Director had requested the Assembly to instruct him which services the Agency should discontinue in the event of its not receiving sufficient funds in time. The Australian Government hoped that such a situation would not arise; should it arise, however, his delegation considered that the basic ration and the provision of

shelter and medical care should not cease. Over and above that, only the Director of UNRWA was in a position to draw up an order of priority and undertake the necessary reductions.

23. The Director had repeatedly stressed that the refugee problem was essentially a political one. That being the case, it might well be asked whether the contributing Governments should go on indefinitely paying out money. The Governments of the Arab countries appeared to think that they should. The Australian delegation, however, did not think that the United Nations bore the full responsibility for the refugee problem. It admittedly had a part to play, for it was its duty to try to alleviate human suffering throughout the world. Those responsible for the situation, however, were, on the one hand, the Arab States, which by opposing the implementation of the General Assembly's resolution 181 (II) on the partition of Palestine had contributed to the creation of the refugee problem, and, on the other hand, the State of Israel, which had prevented the return of the refugees to their homes even though in many cases their villages and lands were still intact. It was therefore primarily the duty of those States to come to the aid of the refugees and to bring about a solution of the problem.

24. The important thing was to determine how such a solution could be reached. Time had not proved a healing agent but it might have an effect in the long run if the parties concerned would allow it to do its work. At present the necessary conditions were lacking, for the refugee problem was only one particular aspect of the Palestine problem, which stirred up political passions. The Arab States refused to recognize even the existence of the State of Israel, which, for its part, was determined to survive and appeared to feel that it must adopt an unyielding attitude on certain issues if it was to continue to exist as a State. Nevertheless, the situation might be improved if it were possible to put an end to the border incidents which exacerbated feelings.

25. Israel's stand on the question of the repatriation of refugees had led to a hardening of the attitude of the Arab States, just as the conduct of the Arab States had resulted in a hardening of Israel's attitude. The Australian Government did not think it would be possible to repatriate all, or even a significant portion, of the 900,000 refugees. For one thing, it was doubtful whether many refugees would want to return to a country where living conditions had changed considerably in eight years. For another, the influx of a large number of repatriated Arabs would undermine economic stability in Israel and jeopardize the country's security.

26. Moreover, there had been a virtual exchange of populations since 1948. Hundreds of thousands of Jews had come to Israel from such countries as Iraq, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, so much so that the burden on the Arab States of absorbing the refugees had been considerably alleviated. Nevertheless, Israel could contribute to the solution of the refugee problem by accepting the principle of repatriation, even if only within narrow limits, for in making such a gesture it would demonstrate to the Arab States that it wished to reach a *modus vivendi* with them and was not a threat to their interests. Israel should also give proof of a more conciliatory attitude regarding the compensation of refugees and should not link the question of compensation indissolubly with that of the general settlement of the Palestine problem. The Governments of the host countries shared some of the responsibility, in that they had rejected programmes for integrating the

refugees into their societies and economic development projects from which they would have been the first to benefit. He wondered if they would persist in that attitude were Israel to admit the possibility of repatriation in principle.

27. It was apparent, however, that projects such as those relating to the Jordan Valley or to Sinai would not suffice to provide for the resettlement of all the refugees. For that reason it would be well to study with care the proposals offered by the Director of the Agency in his annual report, particularly in paragraph 73. The Director held that it would be desirable for the General Assembly to consider enlarging UNRWA's terms of reference so as to permit expenditure, by loans or grants, upon general development programmes which, even if not directly connected with the employment or self-support of refugees, would benefit the refugees in the long run by stimulating the economic activity of the regions concerned.

28. The Governments concerned would have to undertake to do nothing to prevent the refugees from working side by side with their own nationals. That brought up the important question of the mobility of refugee labour: it was to be hoped that the Governments of the Arab countries would allow the refugees to move freely and to acquire the nationality of one or another of the host countries. In any case, the Agency could not be authorized to undertake additional expenditure in the Arab countries until the latter had given some such assurances. The Director of the Agency might try to work out, together with the Governments concerned, some formula for putting the proposed programme into effect. He could then present to the twelfth session of the General Assembly a financial estimate of the cost of the programme.

29. A most serious state of affairs existed with regard to UNRWA's relations with the host Governments, and the Australian Government was greatly disturbed by that unsatisfactory relationship. The Director had stated that if UNRWA was to continue carry out its work, its operational responsibilities in the Near East would have to be agreed to explicitly by those Governments and the latter would have to respect the status of the Agency and its personnel. Should they fail to do so, the General Assembly would have to make other arrangements to help care for the refugees. The United Nations could not be expected to assume responsibility for the refugees while the host Governments continued to wash their hands of the problem and at the same time interfered in matters affecting UNRWA personnel and administrative questions. Clearly, if the Governments concerned persisted in their attitude, the only alternative might be to terminate UNRWA's activities in their territory. Since, however, the very lives of a large number of human beings were at stake, every effort should be made to reach a solution satisfactory to all parties. It might therefore be well for the Director of the Agency to report to the Assembly at the twelfth session on the result of his negotiations with the host Governments.

30. The occupation of the Gaza Strip by Israel troops had raised a number of problems. The Agency had acted properly in deciding to continue its work in that area in spite of the hostilities and in reaching an agreement with the Israel authorities, for its aims were not political but of a humanitarian character. In his statement, the Director had drawn attention to two important points: firstly, it was essential that law and order should be maintained in Gaza in order to protect the population and the Agency staff. Secondly, the Agency's operations

had a substantial effect on the economy of the Gaza Strip. The Director had therefore considered that in any discussions concerning the Gaza Strip consideration should be given to the role the General Assembly wished UNRWA to play in the future. It did not seem appropriate to discuss those points pending a determination by the General Assembly of the status of the Gaza Strip, although the Secretary-General might be able to put forward proposals on the matter.

31. In conclusion, he wished to make it clear that if he had criticized certain countries, it was only because he had the fate of the refugees at heart. The Australian Government, which had launched the idea of the Colombo Plan, believed that, by an effort of understanding and by applying the principle of mutual aid on which that Plan was based, the Arab States and Israel could restore peace and develop the economy of their region.

32. Mr. MIR KHAN (Pakistan) said that he had carefully studied the annual report of the Director of UNRWA who was performing his task under very difficult conditions. He agreed with the Director that the Agency's activities could not be considered outside the political framework of the Palestine question.

33. The refugee problem arose from the creation of the State of Israel. In that connexion, he recalled that the General Assembly had decided in resolution 194 (III) that the refugees wishing to return to their homes should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return. Unfortunately, Israel had not as yet seen fit to heed that General Assembly resolution. The position of the refugees had improved somewhat but an enormous amount remained to be done to improve their lot.

34. With regard to contributions, his delegation considered that the financial burden of caring for the refugees should be borne by the countries which had voted in favour of the establishment of the State of Israel. Pakistan had contributed towards UNRWA for purely humanitarian reasons. In any event, it was essential that a satisfactory solution should be found for the refugee problem. That would help to restore peace in the Near East.

35. Mr. COMAY (Israel) said that UNRWA had shown great skill in performing its task, particularly during the recent events, by continuing to feed, clothe and shelter the refugees. For that it merited wholehearted recognition. Yet the basic problem remained unsolved and the fate of the refugees was a matter for serious concern.

36. There was something unnatural in the spectacle of Arabs remaining for so long refugees in Arab lands. There had been many such refugee problems in both Europe and Asia in the present era, which had witnessed so many upheavals. The number of human beings who had left their homes since the last war was estimated to be over 35 million. Yet those problems had all been solved or were in the process of solution, for the refugees had streamed into countries with which they had affinities and had quickly struck new roots there. That had been the only possibility open to them. In no case would it have been practicable for them to return to the countries they had been forced to leave.

37. Experience indicated that resettlement, and not repatriation, was the answer to such problems. In such matters, international organizations could play only a limited role. They could help those concerned during the transition period but they could not be a substitute

for a host country. It should be noted that the Israel-Arab conflict had set in motion two great population movements. While the Palestinian Arabs had moved into surrounding States, 400,000 Jews who had lived in the Arab countries had emigrated to Israel. What had taken place had been a sort of exchange of ethnic minorities which might in the long run serve a useful purpose. Very recently, Israel had welcomed thousands of Jews who had been brutally expelled from Egypt.

38. It was therefore fair to ask why the problem of Arab refugees still remained unsolved. The ingredients for a solution existed. The States which surrounded Israel regarded the Palestinian Arabs as members of their own family, both by race and by religion. The oil-producing countries had immense resources and international aid had been offered them for refugees resettlement. There were several areas which could be developed for this purpose. In Iraq, for example, the chief factor limiting the economic development of the Tigris-Euphrates Valley was the lack of population. Irrigation of that Valley would permit the resettlement of 750,000 persons. Yet Iraq had scarcely opened its frontiers to the Arab refugees. In Syria, it had been established that the province of Jezira alone could absorb 200,000 farmers. Until 1949, the régime in power had been willing to accept a large number of refugees but in the summer of that year a new Government had assumed power and had refused to co-operate in settlement schemes. The Governments concerned had rejected the Jordan Valley Scheme and the Sinai Scheme, which could have absorbed 250,000 and 70,000 people respectively. It was therefore clear that the refugee problem remained unsolved for political reasons.

39. If, however, the spokesmen for the Arab countries were to be believed, the reason for the present situation was that Israel had not taken account of the provisions of paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) concerning the repatriation of the Arab refugees. In that connexion it should not be forgotten that when that resolution had been adopted the Assembly had hoped that peace could quickly be restored in the Near East. In those circumstances, it had thought that the refugees would be able to go back to the homes they had abandoned a few months earlier. For that, two conditions had been necessary, and paragraph 11 of the resolution had stated them: there should be peace and the return of the refugees should be practicable. Israel could not, indeed, be required to open its borders to an Arab influx while the war was still going on. In 1949, the Arab States having refused to make peace with Israel, the concept of a large-scale repatriation had been more or less abandoned and the integration of the refugees into their countries of residence had been contemplated.

40. It was not without interest to note that the advocates of the return of the refugees to their homes were precisely those who refused to recognize the State of Israel and who thirsted for its destruction. They had never claimed for the refugees the right of becoming loyal citizens of Israel. The representative of Iraq in the Special Political Committee had stated that the Jews of Israel were foreigners living on Palestinian territory and that the refugees should return not to the State of Israel but to an Arab Palestine. There was, however, no Arab Palestine and none could be created except by the elimination of Israel. Israel, however, had come to stay and would not be converted into an Arab homeland. It was by nourishing such illusions in the minds of the

refugees that they were instigated to resist their own resettlement in the Arab countries.

41. In any case, the Governments of those countries, whatever their views on the dispute between Israel and themselves, had no right to sacrifice the lives and future of the refugees to the attainment of their own political objectives. Yet that was what they had done, as was shown by their attitude towards the Johnston Plan. The object of that plan had been the development of the Jordan Basin and Israel had been ready to co-operate with its neighbours, particularly Jordan, in putting an irrigation programme into effect. After two years of study, Mr. Johnston had worked out a rational plan which was economically acceptable to both sides. The Arab States had rejected it for purely political reasons.

42. Fortunately, the problem was not as insoluble as it seemed. To begin with, there were far fewer refugees than the official statistics suggested. According to information collected by the Israel authorities, working from the population figures for Palestine at the end of the Mandate and allowing for the natural increase in the population, the number of refugees should be between 705,000 and 725,000. The official lists, hastily compiled in the first instance, had never been rectified, because the Governments of the host countries and the leaders of the refugees would not allow a new census to be taken. Secondly, the refugees had been assimilated into the economic life of the Arab countries to a considerably greater extent than the official documents showed. It was estimated that 200,000 of the refugees were employed in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. Thirdly, the refugees in Jordan had been politically integrated into the country by the Nationality Law of 1954 and had become citizens of Jordan. It could be said that, in the accepted sense of the term, there were now no refugees in Jordan. In Syria, too, the refugees had been given equality of status with Syrian nationals, except that they apparently did not exercise the right to vote.

43. The Israel Government had tried to contribute what it could to solving the problem of the Palestinian refugees and would continue to do so. Israel had already repatriated 33,000 Arab refugees, who enjoyed the same rights as the citizens of Israel. Furthermore, since 1952 the Agency had not been responsible for the 50,000 refugees in Israel territory. The Israel Government stood by its offer to pay compensation for abandoned Arab property, without waiting for a peace settlement. It had unfortunately not been possible to implement that offer because of the economic warfare carried on against Israel by the Arab countries in the form of boycotts, sea blockades, blacklisting and pressure against foreign firms doing business with Israel. It was the fault of the Governments of the host countries that the refugees there had not yet been compensated for the property they had abandoned. Nevertheless, the Israel Government had unblocked almost all the funds held by refugees in Israel banks, and had permitted the convertibility of a total amount of \$7 million into foreign currency.

44. The economic and political integration of the refugees in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon indicated a trend which might be intensified. In that connexion, great importance should be attached to the statement made at the 26th meeting by the United States representative, who had recalled that the Agency's mandate would expire in 1960 and had requested that proposals should be made to the twelfth session of the General Assembly. Perhaps it would now be possible to reach an agreement on certain profitable projects, particularly the

Johnston Plan, in which the Israel Government remained willing to participate. The Governments of the Arab countries could not, of course, be forced to co-operate in self-support programmes for the refugees, but it did seem paradoxical that those Governments should prevent the refugees from becoming self-supporting and at the same time demand that contributing States should go on supporting them indefinitely.

45. The Israel Government considered that the progressive transfer of the Agency's functions and responsibilities to the host Governments should be encouraged, for when the Agency's mandate expired there might be serious consequences if it discontinued its services too abruptly.

46. The problem of the refugees in the Gaza Strip was particularly serious because the 200,000 refugees in that area outnumbered the inhabitants by two to one and because the territory was too poor to allow of their absorption. Until 1948 the Gaza Strip had formed an integral part of Palestine. It had then been occupied by the Egyptian forces and had remained separated from the rest of Palestine for nine years, without being able to develop economic ties with Egypt, since the Nile valley was 200 miles away across the Sinai desert. In the special report concerning other claimants for relief (A/2978/Add.1) submitted to the General Assembly in 1955, the Director of the Agency had described the economic paralysis which had struck the area. The Egyptian occupation of the Gaza Strip had taken the form of a colonial régime. The territory was not Egyptian. The population was not Egyptian. The Egyptian Government had used the territory only as a military base, from which it had sent Egyptian guerrillas into Israel territory.

47. New possibilities had now opened for the Gaza Strip with regard to its security, the welfare of its inhabitants and the future of the refugees. It was true that the hostilities in the Gaza Strip in early November had hampered the Agency's activities in the area. It was also true that bloody incidents had occurred at Khan Yunis and at Rafah during the military operations. The investigation made by the Israel authorities, however, had shown that the actual number of casualties from the incidents was very much lower than the figure given in the special report of the Director (A/3212/Add.1). However that might be the Israel Government keenly regretted the civilian loss of life which had occurred during the military operations, which Israel had undertaken solely in order to put an end to the attacks on Israel territory launched from the Gaza Strip. When they had visited the Gaza Strip at the end of November, the Director of the Agency and Lieutenant-Colonel Nelson, the representative of the Secretary-General, had been able to confirm that order had been restored there. Since then, there had been peace in the area and no incidents had occurred.

48. The situation of the refugees would improve as living conditions became more stable and economic activity was restored in the area. The Government of Israel was prepared to participate in a United Nations programme for the resettlement of the refugees in the Gaza area. Israel's contribution would take the form of compensation and the settlement of some of the refugees. As the Director of the Agency had rightly pointed out, in paragraph 39 of his statement (A/SPC/9), the Gaza strip was not just a contested piece of territory, it was essentially a land over-crowded with people, whose interests should be regarded as paramount. Economic and geographical considerations required that there should

be close and peaceable association between the Gaza strip and Israel.

49. It was Israel's most cherished wish to be able to live and work in peace with its Arab neighbours. It was true that the dispute which had divided them had left deep scars, but Israel still hoped to be able to win the confidence of the Gaza Arabs and to help them to achieve a life of dignity and freedom. Surely it was not too much to hope that, after having been an obstacle to co-operation between Israel and the Arab States, Gaza might become the first example of it.

50. Much had been said about the importance of the attitudes taken by the parties to the dispute. It should be borne in mind, however, that attitudes were not unchangeable and that they might prove harmful if they were not sincere. When Israel said that it could not settle the problem of Arab refugees, that was not through lack of good will. Israel could not settle the problem of the Arab refugees for demographic, security, economic and social reasons which were of vital importance to it.

51. As to the attitude of the refugees themselves, the Israel Government did not think that their best interests would be served by declaring them free to choose to return to their homes. On the contrary, it aroused in them hopes which could not be realized. The refugees must be told the truth, however bitter it might be for them. The Director's annual report (A/3212, para. 8) spoke of unscrupulous political agitators who had consistently exploited the understandable bitterness of the refugees, and the Director had drawn attention to the detrimental influence that the Governments of the host countries were exercising on the refugees. The Governments of those countries were using the refugees as a weapon in their hostilities against Israel and as a means of bringing about a change in the political *status quo*. They should rather regard the refugees as their own kinsmen and welcome them into the Arab community. If the Governments of the Arab countries were to adopt that attitude, the refugee problem would immediately assume a new aspect. The most effective contribution which the Governments of the countries concerned could make to the solution of the refugee problem would be to restore peace amongst them and to put an end to their sterile bickering, in the interests of that area of the world to which they all belonged.

52. Mr. PLAJA (Italy) said that the annual report of the Director of the Agency and the other documents before the Committee revealed the problem of the Palestinian Arab refugees in all its gravity. No one could fail to be moved by the tragic situation of those refugees, who after nine years' waiting had given up hope. It was the imperative duty of the United Nations to re-awaken their hopes and to transform them into reality. Lasting peace could not be restored in the Near East so long as the problem of the Palestinian Arab refugees, a source of instability, uncertainty and tension in the area, had not been finally settled.

53. Pending that permanent settlement, the Governments of the countries concerned should support the Agency's efforts to make the refugees economically independent. The Director of the Agency had indicated in his report that the progress made in that field had been slow and incomplete. The Agency should continue its efforts in that field and not allow itself to be discouraged, for the psychological factor played a very important part in the success of the mission entrusted to it. For the rest, it was not in the interests of the host countries that the present situation should be prolonged

further, for the presence in their territory of masses of unemployed refugees was an alarming source of instability. The self-support programmes described in annex D of the Director's annual report, particularly the development of the Yarmuk and Jordan valleys in Jordan and the Sinai project in Egypt, provided excellent examples of what could be done in that direction. Unfortunately, political considerations were hampering the implementation of those projects and it could only be hoped that political considerations would yield to humanitarian considerations and encourage the Governments of the countries concerned to co-operate more substantially with the Agency.

54. The Agency's activities in the field of education and training, set forth in annex E of the Director's report, were a particularly important long-term undertaking, for they were designed to provide the refugees with skills which would enable them to find employment. In no case should the Agency's programme in that field be cut down.

55. The Agency's implementation of the relief programme for refugees had been admirable. The modified system put into effect in Lebanon, whereby assistance was progressively reduced in proportion to the family income, had produced good results, being regarded as more equitable both by the refugees and the Agency. The Director and the staff of the Agency, as also the voluntary organizations co-operating with them, were to be congratulated on their relief work. On the other hand, it was a pity that the Director of the Agency had been obliged to report certain incidents which had occurred and certain difficulties encountered by the Agency as a result of the work of agitators who were encouraging the refugees to adopt a hostile attitude towards the Agency. It was to be hoped that the Governments of the host countries would take the necessary measures to prevent the recurrence of such incidents.

56. The Agency's financial position seemed to be such as to threaten its very existence. The resources of the Agency were inadequate and did not allow it to perform its task as efficiently as it would wish. The hope of a permanent settlement of the Middle Eastern situation would doubtless encourage Member States to contribute more generously to the Agency's budget, for they might be persuaded that their contributions were an investment in lasting peace. However that might be, it was essential that the General Assembly should take steps to provide the Agency with enough funds to enable it to fulfil its task.

57. Mr. BEN ABOUD (Morocco) thought that the problem of the Palestine Arab refugees was a moral and humanitarian problem and that it was the duty of the United Nations to find a solution to it. Morocco's attitude towards the Jewish people was well known. It was based on the principle that there should be no confusion between Zionism, which was a political system, and the Jewish faith, which was a religion. A large number of Jews had settled in Morocco and were living there in peace. Some of them held important posts in the Moroccan Government service. The Moroccan Government therefore felt free to state that, although the partition of Palestine had been prompted solely by humanitarian considerations on behalf of the persecuted Jews but to the detriment of the Arabs of Palestine, it had been a mistake, all the more serious in that it had led to a war and had created problems for which no settlement had yet been found.

58. He agreed with the representative of Pakistan that the Governments of the countries which had been responsible for the partition of Palestine should now bear the responsibility for the refugee problem. His delegation was convinced that the only solution to the problem would be to allow the refugees to return to their homes.

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.