

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 24th MEETING

Chairman:

Mr. PIBULSONGGRAM

(Thailand)

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 72: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES
IN THE NEAR EAST (continued)

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned
within one week of the date of publication to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, Room DC 2/750,
2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

Distr. GENERAL
A/SPC/46/SR.24
22 November 1991

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 72: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (continued) (A/46/13 and Add.1, A/46/373, 399, 535-541, 622, A/SPC/46/L.12-22)

1. Mr. KHANI (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the humanitarian aspect of the problem of the Palestine refugees was graver than any financial difficulties which UNRWA might be facing. His delegation was greatly concerned at the continuing lack of a solution despite 43 years of United Nations resolutions, which had gone unheeded. It was the responsibility of the United Nations to find a solution to their problem. He reiterated his delegation's rejection of the practice of showing the draft report of the Commissioner-General to the Israeli authorities when Arab host countries were not given the same consideration. He suggested that the Commissioner-General should have contacts with the Arab host countries before preparing his report. Despite the change in Commissioner-General, the report (A/46/13) had been drawn up in the same manner as in previous years. It had neglected to refer to General Assembly resolution 194 (III), in particular paragraph 11 thereof, which provided for the right of return of Palestine refugees. The report could not be considered complete if it did not make sufficient reference to the relevant resolutions. The report did not draw attention to the financial sacrifices made by the Arab host countries regarding Palestine refugees, which were in excess of all annual contributions to the agency. Such financial burdens should be noted in the body of the report and not in an annex.

2. He reiterated the need to resume ration distribution to all needy refugees and not just to special hardship cases; the definition of special hardship should be reviewed so as to allow a greater number of refugees to benefit from UNRWA services. The true number of needy cases was much greater than those registered with the Agency. His delegation was not opposed to family self-reliance schemes provided that beneficiaries were not thereby prevented from enjoying other services of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). In particular, there should be no linkage between family self-reliance and programmes for special hardship cases. A review should be made of policies that were detrimental to large numbers of Palestine refugees, especially that of transferring refugees from category R, with restricted benefits, to category N, with no benefits, and that of cutting off relief benefits from any family one of whose male members had reached the age of 18 and was no longer a student or in military service. The maximum income level for ration distribution should be doubled. He reiterated his delegation's view that full ration distribution was a basic requirement, in accordance with United Nations recommendations. His delegation shared the concern of the Commissioner-General over funding and felt that the main problem was with contributions from the advanced industrial countries. Contributions both in cash and in kind should be increased. The Commissioner-General should hold consultations with members of the Advisory Commission of UNRWA and with the host countries before preparing the annual

(Mr. Khani, Syrian Arab Republic)

report and the budget, and the Advisory Commission should be granted more time for a detailed discussion of both the report and the budget. He stressed the need to reduce expenditure on operational services, general services and salaries, which accounted for over 80 per cent of the UNRWA budget, and to increase expenditure in order to develop education, health, relief and social services. The midday meal programme should not be abolished, as was envisaged.

3. The new stability in Lebanon should enable UNRWA headquarters to return to Beirut, a step which would allow it to oversee its operations more directly and which would entail considerable savings in operating costs. In view of the difficult circumstances obtaining in Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan, ration distribution should be continued there, but not at the expense of those services in the occupied Arab territories. The definition of a refugee should not be changed so as not to deprive anyone of the services of the Agency.

4. The international community should take steps to force the Israeli authorities to cease arresting and detaining UNRWA staff members and violating UNRWA premises. Despite numerous General Assembly resolutions, Israel persisted in refusing to allow refugees and forcibly displaced persons to return.

5. The intifadah expressed the Palestinians' rejection of the Israeli occupation and their desire for freedom and a life of dignity. His delegation rejected the wording of paragraph 7 of the Commissioner-General's report, which called the intifadah in question. That wording should be deleted. He assured the Commissioner-General of his country's continuing support and joined him in his appeal to the international community for the resources necessary for UNRWA to carry out its noble task.

6. Mr. AL-SUWAIDI (United Arab Emirates) said that UNRWA had been established in 1949 as a temporary measure to deal with what it had been thought would be a short-term problem. Over 40 years later, Israel bore the full responsibility for the problem of the Palestine refugees since it had refused to comply with General Assembly resolution 194 (III), which stipulated the right of the refugees to return or to receive compensation. It had also failed to comply with the fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 or with numerous Security Council resolutions. The inability of the international community to force Israel to abide by those resolutions and conventions was one of the main reasons for the continuing plight of the Palestine refugees.

7. In the wake of the criminal Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, UNRWA had been called upon to provide assistance to people fleeing to Jordan, in addition to its regular work with refugees. After the liberation of Kuwait, UNRWA had had to deal with the rapidly deteriorating socio-economic situation of Palestinians, as the sharp fall in income and remittances and rise in unemployment hit the Palestinian economy in the occupied territories. The various medical services provided by UNRWA were well-known. Over the third

(Mr. Al-Suwaidi, United Arab Emirates)

year of the intifadah some 14,000 persons had received medical treatment from UNRWA for injuries arising from beatings, inhalation of tear-gas and shots from rubber bullets or live ammunition. Furthermore, hundreds had been martyred or imprisoned in Israel without being charged. In collaboration with the World Health Organization, UNRWA was helping to improve health conditions for Palestine refugees. UNRWA had devoted particular attention to general, vocational and technical education and teacher training, and had provided university grants to Palestine refugees. It continued to dispense relief and social services despite the increasing burdens being placed upon it by refugees. As conditions were reverting to normal in Lebanon, his delegation supported the request of the Government of Lebanon for the Agency's headquarters to return to Beirut.

8. His delegation was concerned that UNRWA officials had been detained or arrested without being charged and had been subjected to beating and physical torture by Israeli soldiers while performing their official duties. A matter of particular concern was the forced closure of certain health centres. Israeli insistence that UNRWA should conform to new building regulations had obstructed work on many urgently needed facilities. By such arbitrary actions Israel was not only contravening United Nations resolutions and international agreements, it was violating the universally recognized privileges and immunities of international civil servants. The problem of the Palestine refugees was not merely humanitarian. They had been forcibly displaced by the Israeli army in order to make room for new immigrants. All efforts towards a just solution must take into account the Palestinian people's right to self-determination. Despite the oppressive Israeli practices aimed at forcing Palestinians to emigrate, the continuing intifadah was clear proof of the Palestinian people's attachment to its homeland and its refusal to accept a fait accompli. Half measures could not provide a solution to the problem of the Palestinian people. He hoped that the Madrid peace conference would enable the Palestinians to regain their full rights, and until such time he urged the international community to support UNRWA.

9. Mr. YARDEN (Israel) expressed his delegation's appreciation of the dedication of the Commissioner-General and staff of UNRWA in handling the difficult issues confronting them. Those efforts were well reflected in the latest report on UNRWA's operations (A/46/13), which was an important record of a fraction of a concerted effort to promote the long-term welfare of the Palestinian refugees.

10. The situation the Committee was dealing with had been systematically and wildly distorted in some of the statements made since the beginning of the debate. The basic historic truth was that the Arab-Israeli conflict was unique in character and context, and the real issue was neither territory nor the denial of self-determination to the Palestinian Arabs but the refusal of the Arab regimes to accept the irreversible reality of Israel. Without the wars launched by Arab leaders in order to end Israel's existence, the problem of the refugees would not have been created. The suffering of the Palestinian

(Mr. Yarden, Israel)

Arabs was very real, but it had been cynically exploited by Arab regimes in an effort to facilitate their goal of the destruction of Israel, and they had done nothing to bring that suffering to an end. To blame the State of Israel for it was an Orwellian distortion of the truth.

11. Mr. KADRAT (Iraq), speaking on a point of order, said that the representative of the Zionist entity was attempting to confuse the issue. It was that entity alone that was responsible for the plight of the Palestinian people.

12. Mr. YARDEN (Israel) said that it would be useful for a list of the names of Member States to be distributed in the Committee so that members of the Committee could refer to them correctly.

13. Continuing his statement, he said that exception must be taken to the general tenor of the report (A/46/13), which was biased against the State of Israel. For example, paragraph 7 of the report referred to the killing of alleged collaborators in Gaza and West Bank without identifying the killers. The fact was that many more Arabs had been murdered by their brethren than had been killed in clashes with the security forces during the reporting period. Again, paragraph 83 of the report stated that curfews and restrictions on movement, especially of labourers who normally worked in Israel, coupled with strikes, led to a massive loss of earnings. Of some 60,000 Gaza labourers who previously relied on daily wages in Israel, only about 30,000 were believed to be travelling there by the end of the reporting period. The fact was that only 40,000 to 45,000 Arab labourers from Gaza had worked in Israel before the Gulf War, of whom 30,000 to 35,000 had been travelling to Israel at the end of the reporting period and no less than 40,000 now worked in Israel.

14. Paragraph 9 of the report expressed approval of the intention of the Israeli authorities to encourage economic activities in Judea, Samaria and Gaza. Israel had taken a series of steps for that purpose, including the reduction of the taxes imposed on lorries exporting agricultural produce to Jordan, encouragement of the export of agricultural products to Europe, the provision of financial assistance to those setting up greenhouses in Gaza, the removal of limitations on the import of capital to the region and a number of other steps intended to encourage capital investment in the region.

15. The report mentioned, in paragraph 105, the understanding between UNRWA and the Government of Israel concerning the reimbursement of clearance, warehousing and transport charges by the Government of Israel. Israel would begin those reimbursements as of 1 January 1992.

16. Table No. 13 of the report listed the contributions in cash and in kind by Governments. Israel was listed in that table as having contributed \$68,900; as a matter of fact, however, Israel as a host country had

(Mr. Yarden, Israel)

contributed an additional \$25.66 million in kind, in the form of educational and health services, relief and social services, housing and other aid.

17. The opening of the peace conference in Madrid in October 1991 would, his delegation hoped, mark the beginning of a new chapter in the history of the Middle East in which hostility, violence and war would be replaced by dialogue, accommodation and peace. The Special Political Committee should look towards the future and refrain from repeating the language of past resolutions on the item, which had for the most part been unacceptable to his delegation. Instead, it should appeal to all the parties concerned to seek the road that would lead to peace and set a tone which would create a climate of mutual trust, tolerance and respect.

18. Mr. AL-KHATER (Qatar) said that the Agency, which had begun its activities on an interim basis, was today confronted with the task of providing educational, health, welfare and social services to refugees to some 1.5 million refugees. Despite the assistance provided by UNRWA, the Palestinian people had continued to suffer from its original plight, namely the loss of its homeland. The tyrannical and arbitrary laws and regulations imposed on Palestinians by the occupation authorities continued to oppress and complicate their lives, and aggressive practices continued to undermine their security.

19. The positive developments within the international community in recent years had brought no appreciable mitigation of the plight of the Palestinian people. After more than 40 years, it had to be said that the international community had fallen short in its attempts to address the problem while it had managed to achieve success in the solution of other international problems.

20. The report of the Commissioner-General dealt in detail with the conditions in which the refugees lived and the difficulties and obstacles encountered by the Agency. The Agency had had to cope not only with the arbitrary conduct of the occupation authorities but with the tragic circumstances in which the Palestinian people lived both because of its lack of a normal economic and social life and because of the impact of recent events in the region. Perhaps the most grievous aspect of the situation of the Palestinians was their subjection to the tyranny and violence of the occupation forces, which had cost many of them their lives. During the reporting period, the Israeli security forces had taken increasingly severe measures, human rights violations had increased, and some 160 Palestinians had been killed and, by the middle of the year, some 14,000 arrested.

21. A large number of Agency officials had been arrested and subjected to harsh treatment. New restrictions had been imposed on movement, and East Jerusalem had been isolated. The difficulties encountered by UNRWA in carrying out its tasks had included the arrest of local staff and their detention without charge or trial and continued encroachments by Israeli security forces on Agency facilities. Despite the difficulties, it was clear

(Mr. Al-Khater, Qatar)

from the report of the Commissioner-General that the Agency had made every effort to perform its humanitarian functions to the full.

22. Mr. MARTINO (Observer for the Holy See) said that the concern of the Holy See for the peace of Jerusalem and the entire Holy Land ran very deep, and it had long been its policy to defend consistently and equally the rights of both Jews and Palestinians to a homeland. The Gulf crisis earlier in the current year had tragically affected the people of the land: the State of Israel, though not a participant in the conflict, had been subjected to missile attacks, while for the Palestinian people the Gulf crisis had created a disastrous new burden. In a statement released by the newly formed Council of Catholic Patriarchs, it had been noted that the political instabilities in the region were having a devastating impact on the Christian presence there and in January 1991, Pope John Paul II had established a Committee of the Holy See for humanitarian aid to the victims of the war in the Gulf and Middle East.

23. In his address to the diplomatic corps on 12 January 1991, the Pope had highlighted four areas of concern: first, the peace and security of Lebanon; second, recognition of the rights of the Palestinian people; third, the status of the city of Jerusalem, and fourth, the Gulf crisis. There was hope that Lebanon would gain political stability through negotiations, while the Conference on the Middle East which had opened in Madrid had brought both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian issue to the negotiating table. The Holy See regarded the peace initiatives in the Middle East with great interest and had a special interest in the situation of the Holy City of Jerusalem and of the Holy Places. Jerusalem must be preserved as a unified historical and cultural entity; its Holy Places, knitted as they were throughout the entire fabric of the Old City, could not be separated from it. The present situation of Jerusalem was that of an occupied territory and, as such, its status must not be changed before a negotiated settlement was reached. In the general spirit of the earliest United Nations decisions regarding the internationalization of Jerusalem - decisions that had never been implemented or officially rescinded - the Holy See maintained that the city must enjoy a special, privileged status with international guarantees, including guarantees of equality of rights and treatment for the three monotheistic religious communities, including freedom of worship, access to the Holy Places and protection of the rights and privileges already won by those communities, and guarantees that the three communities could continue to exist and live in peace, pursuing their religious, cultural, civic and economic activities. The problem of sovereignty, which was certainly an important and delicate one, should be given subordinate consideration. Whatever solution was found for that issue would have to be in conformity with the principles of justice and brought about by a peaceful agreement ensuring that the guarantees referred to would be safeguarded.

24. Mr. MANSOUR (Observer for Palestine), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the representative of Israel's appeal for the use of the correct names of delegations in the Committee could be taken more seriously if

(Mr. Mansour, Observer, Palestine)

Israel itself were to use the correct names for the occupied territories. The representative of Israel had also said that the question of self-determination was not the real issue in the Arab-Israeli conflict. If that meant that Israel now accepted the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination he should say so clearly to the Committee. He had also suggested that the Committee should cease to use the terms usually employed in previous resolutions on the agenda item, but that request would be justified only when Israel ceased to engage in all the practices the Committee deplored and began to abide by all the resolutions the United Nations had adopted on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11.50 a.m.