
The Mandate of UNRWA at Sixty

Lance Bartholomeusz*

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA or "the Agency") was established as a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly in 1949 and commenced operations in 1950. The Agency's mandate has evolved since its establishment in response to the sometimes dramatic developments in the political, operational, and financial context. After considering the meaning of the term "mandate" and how UNRWA's mandate is derived, this article sets out the content of UNRWA's contemporary mandate by addressing the following questions: To whom does UNRWA's mandate extend? Where is UNRWA mandated to act? For which activities? Until when does UNRWA's mandate extend? Particular attention is devoted to the evolution of the protection and human development aspects of the Agency's mandate.

1. Introduction

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA or "the Agency") was established as a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly pursuant to General Assembly resolution 302 (IV) of 8 December 1949 and commenced operations on 1 May 1950. The Agency's mandate has evolved since its establishment in response to the sometimes dramatic developments in the political, operational, and financial context. What are the contours of UNRWA's mandate at sixty? And how have important parts of the mandate evolved?

After considering the meaning of the term "mandate" and how UNRWA's mandate is derived, the author addresses its content. Attention is devoted to the evolution of some aspects of the Agency's mandate, in particular human development and protection. The study does not examine the more technical aspects of the Agency's mandate, which are primarily of internal interest, for example, its power to issue financial rules and regulations or its place within the UN system. The article concludes with some remarks on the overall nature of UNRWA's mandate.

/...

Endnote

* Lance Bartholomeusz is Chief, International Law Division, Department of Legal Affairs, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The author gratefully acknowledges the comments of Claudie Barrat, Michael Kingsley-Nyindah, Anna Segall, Brenda Goddard, and Nicholas Morris. The views reflected in this draft paper are personal and do not necessarily reflect those of the United Nations, including UNRWA.

/.....