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LETTER DATED 13 JUNE 1967 FROM THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
OF THE UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS (A/6717)

Note by the Secretary-General submitting a report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

Because of the widespread interest in the humanitarian problems resulting from the recent hostilities in the Near East, the Secretary-General is submitting to the Members of the General Assembly and of the Security Council the following report from the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA):

"1. Following the request from the Israel Government that UNRWA should resume operations, and having notified the Arab host States of my intentions, I travelled to Jerusalem on 12 June. On 13 June I visited certain parts of the West Bank of the Jordan and on 14 and 15 June Gaza. During this time basic arrangements were agreed between the Agency and the Government of Israel to enable UNRWA to continue its vital humanitarian task. These arrangements imply no commitment or position by the Agency with regard to the status of the areas in question or any instrument relating to them and do not affect the Agency's subjection to resolutions or instructions emanating from the United Nations. In outlining below the present situation, as it affects that task, and the problems which now appear to face the Agency, I would emphasize that my personal knowledge of the present situation is necessarily limited, since the visit was brief and restricted in scope. I have also had the benefit of valuable reports on the local situation from my staff in the various areas, but limitations on the movement of my staff in these areas have meant, that it is too early to expect comprehensive and accurate reports from them.

"A. AREAS IN WHICH MAJOR HOSTILITIES OCCURRED

"(a) Gaza

"2. My impression is that casualties among the civilian population had been higher here than elsewhere, and damage to property and housing heavier. However, the Agency's camps and installations were all more or less intact, and it appeared that all needing medical attention were receiving it and that medical supplies were adequate for immediate needs. Public utility services were seriously disrupted and public transport unavailable. Movement was seriously restricted by curfews and by occasional sniping and mining of roads. The civilian population had virtually all remained in Gaza.

"(b) West Bank of the Jordan

"3. In the old city of Jerusalem the situation was much akin to Gaza. Damage was widespread but did not amount to devastation in any areas inspected by me or my staff. In other parts of the West Bank the situation varied considerably but on the whole the civilian casualties, damage and disruption of normal life appeared less, except for the exodus from the Jordan Valley mentioned below.

"(c) Southern Syria

"4. No Agency staff have been able to enter this area and I have no information other than press and radio reports.

"(d) Movement of civilian population

"5. This has been negligible in Gaza. In Southern Syria initial reports indicate that some 50,000 people have moved into the Damascus and Deraa areas out of which only 8,000 are UNRWA-registered refugees. Of these 8,000 approximately 6,000 are in the Damascus area and 2,000 near Deraa. Pending a survey now being made, a highly provisional figure of 100,000 having moved eastwards from the West Bank of the Jordan Valley is being used for working purposes. Of those, possibly 80,000 are already UNRWA-registered refugees. The evacuation is by no means uniform. In Jericho UNRWA camps are almost empty, and perhaps 45,000 have fled. The city of Jericho itself also seemed to me virtually empty. But in the Nablus and Hebron areas little movement had occurred and much was normal. From Amman it is reported that some few thousands of persons have arrived there from Hebron and the area of Tulkarm and Qualquilya. In the Nablus area there had also been an influx of the inhabitants of Tulkarm and Qualquilya, but I was told

that they had started to return. As of 13 June, it was estimated that 10,000 persons from those areas were still in and around Nablus. Many have left Jerusalem, although I saw evidence of some returning there, and there are doubtless many from Jerusalem and areas like Jericho who are in the surrounding countryside and have not left the West Bank. My reports indicate that movement across to the East Bank had virtually ceased by the middle of last week, and I received assurance from Ambassador Comay that his Government's policy was not to expel Arab inhabitants of the occupied areas.

"(e) UNRWA's problems in these areas

"6. I am encouraged by the rapid recovery of UNRWA's organization and capacity to provide services in these areas, except for Southern Syria, into which our staff have not yet been able to move. Our immediate problems are dispersal of locally recruited staff, restrictions on freedom of movement, heavy loss of vehicles from hostilities, looting and requisitioning, some loss - although surprisingly light in total - from stocks and stores, difficulties of communication both within the fields and with headquarters in Beirut. My impression was that restrictions on freedom of movement and communications generally were attributable to genuine security difficulties or damage to facilities and were not being artificially imposed on the Agency. The authorities promised full co-operation in removing these difficulties and have in fact loaned us vehicles and fuel on the West Bank. With additional vehicles being donated to the Agency and taken over from UNEF, these particular problems should soon be surmounted. Supplies and food for UNRWA-registered refugees are generally good for one month. I have authorized distribution of some supplies to other Arab civilians on an emergency basis and subject to later replacement. Any indefinite increase of UNRWA's beneficiaries would require additional financial support and a change in the Agency's mandate. I have no immediate concern over the ability of our health services to cope with casualties and others requiring medical care, given the existing co-operation of the authorities. My main concern is that the Agency should continue to move supplies of food, etc. into these areas, and I see no alternative but to use the port of Ashdod, Worth of Gaza, from which the Agency could supply both Gaza and the West Bank. I would hope to receive the co-operation of all Governments in having this supply route, which appears to be the best available. It will have to be brought into use immediately if food is still to be provided beyond mid-July.

"7. One further matter concerns me, although this is not the Agency's direct responsibility, and that is to see refugees given the possibility of communicating with their families. I understand the International Red Cross is tackling this' problem.

"B. AREAS IN WHICH NO MAJOR HOSTILITIES OCCURRED

"(a) Jordan

"8. The major problem is to cope with the 100,000 or more newly displaced persons, of whom perhaps 80,000 are UNRWA-registered. Some have fled from the Karamen camp on the East Bank to Amman and are being persuaded to return to the West Bank. I have made the Agency's position clear, namely that we can best cope with the refugees' needs if they return to their previous camps and installations. Co-operation with the Jordanian Government is good, and the Agency has loaned 1,000 tons of flour as well as vehicles and is giving assistance in setting up emergency camps and conducting joint surveys of the number and locations of displaced persons. The results of this survey are expected to be available in two or three days. Facilities for first reception, blankets, cooking utensils, and emergency shelter are badly needed. Medical supplies and services seem to be adequate and the Agency's food stock are sufficient for its own registered refugees for three months. Since the rations contain little protein there is a need for additional foods rich in protein such as milk and canned meat for those displaced refugees who have lost their capacity to supplement their rations with food-stuffs purchased with their earnings. This need is probably also present among many of the non-refugee displaced persons both in East Jordan and Syria and among the population of Gaza, both refugee and local resident.

"(b) Syria

"9. Except for the South Western area, the Agency's normal services are operating effectively and in addition the Agency has made a blanket distribution and established additional medical services.

"(c) Lebanon

"10. The Agency's normal services are operating effectively.

"(d) UNRWA's problems in these areas

"11. The Agency has adequate personnel available. Communications are generally good, although movement of the personnel and vehicles through Syria is restricted. Our supplies can be maintained, although we may face difficulty in supplying the East Bank of the Jordan. If the Suez Canal is closed, most supplies may not be able to reach Aqaba. The Agency would then have to rely on transport through Syria. The Agency's overriding difficulty will be shortage of money. Its additional expenses cannot yet be assessed but they will be considerable. It is assuming heavy additional burdens when it is already operating on a budgetary deficit. The Agency is working in close liaison with Governments, the United Nations Children's Fund, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the League of Red Cross Societies and other non-governmental bodies and voluntary organizations.

"12. The Agency's longer-term problems I propose to postpone for subsequent report, but these I do not underestimate.

"15. In general and longer term, present circumstances clearly carry a grave threat of increased hardship for the population of Gaza and the East Bank of the Jordan. In the latter area the loss of the tourist trade, of remittances from abroad and of much of agricultural and home industrial production is bound to reverse hopeful trend towards economic independence, bringing in its train unemployment and increased pressure on available resources."

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