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UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES
IN THE NEAR EAST

Population and refugees displaced since 1967

Report of the Secretary-General

1. The present report is submitted to the General Assembly in pursuance of paragraph 4 of its resolution 31/15 D of 23 November 1976, concerning population and refugees displaced since 1967, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General, after consulting with the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), to report to it at its thirty-second session on Israel's compliance with paragraph 3 of the resolution. In paragraph 3 of that resolution, the Assembly reiterated its call upon Israel (a) to take immediate steps for the return of the displaced inhabitants and (b) to desist from all measures that obstructed the return of the displaced inhabitants, including measures affecting the physical and demographic structure of the occupied territories. In paragraphs 1 and 2, the Assembly reaffirmed the right of the displaced inhabitants to return to their homes and camps in the territories occupied by Israel since 1967, and deplored the continued refusal of the Israeli authorities to take steps for the return of the displaced inhabitants.

2. By a note verbale dated 13 January 1977, addressed to the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations, the Secretary-General drew attention to his reporting responsibility under paragraph 4 of General Assembly resolution 31/15 D and requested the Government of Israel to forward to him, as soon as possible, any relevant information on the implementation of the respective provisions of the resolution.

3. By a note verbale dated 8 September 1977, the Permanent Representative of Israel conveyed to the Secretary-General his Government's comments on resolution 31/15 D, which, as in previous reports on this matter, are reproduced verbatim below:

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(3 p.)

"The Government of Israel has been, and remains, fully conscious of the humanitarian aspects of the problem of the displaced persons who, following the outbreak of the war instigated by Arab Governments in 1967, fled the area of hostilities. Consequently, it has over the last ten years taken significant steps to facilitate their reunion with their families in the territories administered by Israel since 1967 and to relieve hardship cases.

"It is common knowledge, however, that the Arab terrorists grouped together in the so-called PLO, in accordance with the 15-point programme adopted by the 'Palestinian National Council' in Cairo in March 1977, and reaffirmed by the 'Palestinian Central Council' in Damascus in August 1977, are committed to escalating the armed struggle in the territories concerned, with the declared objective of destroying the State of Israel.

"Moreover, certain Arab Governments are continuing to exploit for subversive purposes the facilities established by Israel for the orderly movement of people across the cease-fire lines, with a view to aiding and abetting the entry of Arab terrorists, arms and explosives into the territories. The policies of the PLO, coupled with the actions of these Arab Governments, have in the past gravely undermined all efforts to ameliorate the situation of persons displaced in 1967, and it is a matter for regret that they continue to do so, with the result that a large-scale return of displaced persons still cannot be permitted.

"In the circumstances, the Government of Israel has no alternative to reconciling its desire to assist in the return of the displaced persons with its clear responsibility for the safety, security and welfare of the population in the administered areas and in Israel, as well as for the security of the State itself. None the less, despite all the difficulties and risks involved, the Government of Israel has over the last year continued, as in previous years, to facilitate the return of persons displaced in 1967. The special arrangements for family reunion and hardship cases have been maintained, and co-operation with the local Arab authorities in this respect has continued."

4. In connexion with paragraph 3 (a) of General Assembly resolution 31/15 D, the Secretary-General has obtained from the Commissioner-General of UNRWA such information as is available to him on the return of refugees registered with the Agency. As indicated in earlier reports, 1/ the Agency is not involved in any arrangements for the return of refugees (nor is the Agency involved in any arrangements for the return of displaced persons who are not registered refugees). Its information is therefore mainly based on requests by returning refugees for transfer of rations to the areas to which they have returned and subsequent

1/ A/9156, para. 5; Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-ninth Session, Annexes, agenda item 38, document A/9740, para. 4; ibid., Thirtieth Session, Annexes, agenda item 54, document A/10253, para. 4; ibid., Thirty-first Session, agenda item 53, document A/31/240, para. 4.

correction of Agency records. The Agency would not necessarily be aware of the return of any refugees who did not ask for the provision of rations or services but believes they would be very few in number. So far as is known to the Agency, between 1 July 1976 and 30 June 1977 183 displaced refugees returned from east Jordan to the West Bank and 51 from east Jordan to the Gaza Strip. It should be noted that some of these may not be displaced refugees, but members of the family of a displaced refugee who have now accompanied him on his return, or joined him there, but who were not themselves displaced in 1967. In the same period, five displaced refugees returned to the Gaza Strip from Egypt. Thus, taking into account the estimate given in paragraph 4 of last year's report, the number of displaced refugees who, to the Agency's knowledge, have returned to the occupied territories since June 1967 is slightly over 9,000.

5. With regard to paragraph 3 (b) of the resolution, it is relevant to mention that decisions recently announced by the Government of Israel to legalize three existing settlements and to authorize the establishment of three new ones in the West Bank of Jordan have given rise to complaints that these decisions, among other things, would have the effect of changing the demographic structure of the occupied territories. This matter, which has been brought to the attention of the General Assembly and the Security Council in communications submitted by a number of Member States has been dealt with in the report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly under its resolution 31/61 concerning the situation in the Middle East (A/32/240, paras. 6 and 7).
