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Refugees in the Near East

Palestine refugees' properties and their revenues

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

On 17 May 2012, the Secretary-General sent notes verbales to Israel and all other Member States, drawing their attention to the relevant provisions of Assembly resolutions 66/72 to 66/75 and requesting information by 10 July 2012 concerning any action taken or envisaged in relation to their implementation. Replies dated 3 July, 23 July and 24 July 2012 were received from Denmark, Burkina Faso and Israel, responding among other things to the request contained in paragraph 4 of resolution 66/75. The full text of the replies is reproduced in the present report. No information has been received from other Member States regarding resolution 66/75.

* A/67/150.

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 6 of General Assembly resolution 66/75, on Palestine refugees' properties and their revenues.
2. On 17 May 2012, the Secretary-General drew the attention of the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations to resolutions 66/72 to 66/75, with the request that the Permanent Representative inform him by 10 July 2012 of any steps his Government had taken or envisaged taking in the implementation of the relevant provisions of the resolutions.
3. On 17 May 2012, the Secretary-General sent a note verbale to all other Member States, drawing their attention to the relevant provisions of resolutions 66/72 to 66/75 and requesting information by 10 July 2012 on any actions taken or envisaged in relation to their implementation.
4. A reply dated 3 July 2012 was received from Denmark, responding among other things to the request contained in paragraph 4 of resolution 66/75. The full text of the reply reads as follows:

[Original: English]

With regard to resolutions 66/72, 66/73 and 66/74, paragraph 24, Denmark has in 2011 supported the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) with a core contribution to the General Fund of DKr 70 million, as part of its continuous support to the Agency. In 2012, the yearly contribution was increased to DKr 90 million. Furthermore, in 2011 Denmark disbursed an additional DKr 10 million for UNRWA work in Gaza and Lebanon. Together these are expressions of support to the development mission of the Agency and represent a concrete investment in the future of Palestine refugees.

In addition, the Danish health-care company Novo Nordisk is working on diabetes in a joint partnership agreement with the Agency to improve the health systems and fight diabetes and its associated illnesses for the Palestinian refugees.

With specific regard to resolution 66/74, paragraph 23, regarding special allocations for grants and scholarships for higher education to Palestine refugees, Denmark has in 2011 supported three Palestinians, through the Danida Fellowship Centre.

Regarding resolution 66/75, which urges States to provide the Secretary-General with any pertinent information in their possession concerning Arab property, assets and property rights in Israel, Denmark contributes through the continuous reporting on the overall political and development situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Furthermore, Denmark contributes to information and monitoring of the issues through support to human rights organizations in the field.

5. A reply dated 23 July 2012 was received from Burkina Faso, responding among other things to the request contained in paragraph 4 of General Assembly

resolution 66/75. The text of the reply on the topic reads as follows:

[Original: French]

The specific question of Palestinian refugees has always been a major concern for Burkina Faso, given its deep commitment to the ideals of peace, justice and equity. These universal values should be shared and enjoyed by all peoples of the world, whatever their social status, race, religion or ideology.

For that reason, Burkina Faso has vigorously campaigned for the dignity and inalienable national rights of Palestinian refugees to be restored to them. Moreover, it has constantly reaffirmed its support for the Palestinian cause and, every year, on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, it has regularly stressed the need for the Palestinian people to live in peace and in a safe environment.

Today more than ever, the question of the property rights of Palestinian refugees has intensified and deserves a serious response from the international community. Aware that the living conditions of the Palestinian peoples in the Occupied Palestinian Territories are not conducive to the exercise of their inalienable rights, Burkina Faso has continually welcomed the activities undertaken by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

The Agency, through the humanitarian assistance it provides to the Palestinian peoples, makes a major contribution to improve the lives of many people in need. Unfortunately, many obstacles of all kinds prevent it from fully carrying out its humanitarian missions, thereby making the situation of refugees in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and camps established in Lebanon even more difficult.

Our country thus calls for all those obstacles to be removed and stresses once again that it is vital that UNRWA be able to continue its activities in all areas of operation. It therefore calls on the international community to increase the funding allocated to the UNRWA budget to enable the Agency to cope with the new realities in the intervention zones.

Burkina Faso also reaffirms that Palestinian refugees are entitled to their property and to the income derived therefrom, in conformity with the principles of equity and justice, and calls on all parties to make that right a reality.

Burkina Faso will continue to give the necessary political support to the Palestinian cause and the issue of Palestinian refugees by clearly supporting relevant United Nations resolutions concerning the Palestinian question and any other initiative to strengthen the UNRWA response capacity.

Reiterating its commitment, Burkina Faso will work along with the international community to find a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is a prerequisite for a final settlement of the Palestinian refugee question.

6. A reply dated 24 July 2012 was received from Israel, responding among other things to the request contained in paragraph 4 of General Assembly resolution 66/75. The full text of the reply reads as follows:

[Original: English]

Israel voted against this resolution, as it has done when similar resolutions were adopted by the General Assembly in the past because of its politicized and one-sided nature. The Permanent Mission of Israel wishes to reiterate its support for UNRWA humanitarian activities and restate its considerations guiding this voting practice.

Even in the face of continuous security challenges, Israel has gone to great lengths to improve conditions for Palestinian economic development. These activities have included liberalizing the system by which civilian goods enter Gaza, approving a substantial number of UNRWA projects and facilitating humanitarian assistance by UNRWA to the Palestinian population.

In 2011, Israel approved 76 UNRWA projects in Gaza. Sixteen additional projects were approved in March 2012, bringing the total number of projects already approved to 92. Nonetheless, UNRWA only commenced work on 46 of those projects, completing at least 10. For its own reasons, UNRWA has only moved forward with approximately half of the projects approved for construction in Gaza. Even though UNRWA has an enormous backlog of projects, Israel is in the process of approving additional projects at the request of the organization.

Although Hamas terrorist attacks continued during 2011, the Government of Israel took additional steps to liberalize the policies regulating the movement of both people and goods in and out of the Gaza strip. There has been a significant increase in the export of goods, including strawberries (436 tons), flowers (over 18 million), textile products and furniture. In March 2012, Israel also allowed exports from Gaza to the West Bank. A total of 18,356 patients and accompanying individuals were permitted to exit the Gaza Strip for medical care, a 5 per cent increase compared with 2010. Today, 93 per cent of all requests for medical care permits are granted.

In 2011, 53,875 trucks crossed into Gaza, an increase of 36 per cent compared with 2010. Of those, 2,670 trucks were UNRWA trucks. It is important to emphasize that the capacity of the Kerem Shalom Crossing exceeds current needs. It is not fully used by the international community. Israel invites UNRWA to make additional use of the crossing capacity and increase the volume of its truckloads coming into Gaza.

In light of the above, Gaza is showing encouraging indications of economic recovery. Gross domestic product (GDP) in Gaza increased in 2011 by 27 per cent — a significant improvement over the 15 per cent growth that occurred during 2010. GDP per capita increased by 23 per cent, and unemployment went down 7 per cent.

Over the past year, the Government of Israel authorized major steps to ease security-related restrictions in the West Bank. Roadblocks were removed throughout Judea and Samaria. There is a free flow of movement for Palestinians between all major cities in Judea and Samaria — from Jenin in the north to Hebron in the south. GDP growth in the West Bank for 2011 stands at 6 per cent and workforce participation has increased by 10 per cent.

The positive trend was maintained during the first quarter of 2012. GDP grew by 5.6 per cent compared with the first quarter of 2011.

Notwithstanding the above, terrorist organizations in the West Bank and Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip remain active in planning, preparing and executing terrorist attacks on Israeli civilians.

During 2011, 988 terrorist attacks emanated from or were carried out in the West Bank and Gaza, which resulted in 21 Israeli fatalities.

During the first half of 2011, we witnessed an alarming escalation in the nature of terrorist activity against Israeli targets in the West Bank and Jerusalem. During the first five months of 2011, 278 terrorist attacks were carried out in or emanated from the West Bank, resulting in the death of 11 Israeli citizens. These included the brutal murder of the Fogel Family in March 2011, in which five family members (father, mother and three children — 11 years old, 4 years old and a baby of three months) were murdered in their sleep by two terrorists who entered their home.

Incessant rocket fire continues to threaten the Israeli civilian population. In 2011, 680 rockets, mortar shells and other missiles were fired from Gaza. These horrific acts of terrorism included an attack on 7 April 2011, in which Hamas fired a Kornet anti-tank missile from Gaza at a yellow school bus, killing an Israeli teenager.

Although Israel supports UNRWA humanitarian activities, it remains concerned by the political motivation of the aforesaid resolutions and is disturbed by the fact that they present a one-sided narrative that fails to reflect the reality on the ground.

In this regard, public statements by UNRWA officials, carrying a strong political and one-sided message, are deeply troubling. For example, a senior UNRWA official posted the following remark on Twitter on 25 March 2012: “The Quartet deprived Palestinians of the right to use even legitimate violence so we must empower them with all non-violent means of change”. ¹ As a professional, humanitarian body, UNRWA must be vigilant in avoiding references to matters of a political nature, particularly those that encourage violence.

Israel supports a consolidation of UNRWA resolutions, removing all extraneous political language. Moreover, Israel urges the Secretary-General and UNRWA to consider, together with concerned parties, ways in which the United Nations can enhance the manner in which it advances the welfare of the Palestinian People.

In this respect, Israel strongly supports an application in the Palestinian context of the standard principles guiding the United Nations with respect to the treatment of refugees. Specifically, the UNRWA mandate should be consistent with the standard United Nations policy on refugees. Furthermore, the UNRWA mandate should include the active promotion in the Palestinian context of the broadly applied United Nations goals of resettlement and local integration of refugees.

While other refugee populations are not treated by UNRWA and therefore when their plights are resolved decrease in size and return to the general civilian life, the Palestinian refugee population is growing at an exponential rate, from 700,000 in 1949 to 4.2 million in 2005 and 4.9 million in 2012 and is due to reach 6.2 million in 2020. As the resolutions are of a political nature, UNRWA as an organization does not inspire to create a solution to the refugee problem and rehabilitate the refugees but only maintain their status. Those refugees are reliant on international aid and funds for their health, education and livelihood now into their fourth generation. The aspiration to maintain the political issue at the expense of the humanitarian needs of the refugees as reflected in the resolutions is also reflected on the ground as

even the Palestinian Authority would not take responsibility for providing services to the refugee population even in areas under its complete control and insists that only UNRWA provide services to the refugees.

The annual General Assembly resolutions on UNRWA and the mandate of the organization represent a politically motivated departure from the standard United Nations policy on refugee matters. This politicization of a strictly humanitarian issue has exacerbated the situation of the Palestinian refugees by preventing practical solutions to their needs, such as have been successfully implemented with respect to numerous groups of refugees around the world. Israel attaches importance to promoting such changes in these resolutions that will ensure that the mandate of UNRWA is consistent with the general principles guiding United Nations policy on refugees.

7. No information has been received from other Member States with regard to the request contained in paragraph 4 of General Assembly resolution 66/75.
