

It is not an easy problem to solve, and no good purpose is served by pretending that the solution is simple, that it would come about if only one or other of the parties concerned would take some uncomplicated step. Those of us who are far removed from the scene must resist the temptation to prescribe facile remedies. We must recognize that the passionate feelings and the intransigent positions are not merely evidence of wilfulness but the inevitable products of bitter experience and suffering by all the inhabitants of this deeply troubled area. Because these passions have been further inflamed in the past few months, there seems less chance than ever of a solution, and yet it is our hope that the crisis will bring us to realize that things must now be done which have been left too long undone.

In this spirit I would like to say that we are disappointed that the Government of Israel has not yet seen fit to advance some positive offer of repatriation for those refugees who desire it or of compensation for those who do not. We regret also that the governments of neighbouring countries have not seen fit either to give full support to schemes for rehabilitation and resettlement of those refugees who would prefer this course and to reassure the refugees that UNRWA's programmes of rehabilitation are designed for their benefit. We neither ignore nor scorn the arguments of all these governments as to why such courses are not possible and we appreciate the difficulties involved, but we recognize also that charity and relief are the most temporary of solutions and that something more decisive and more painful must be done soon if the refugees are to be delivered before it is too late.

It is understandable that the governments directly concerned with the refugee question should take the attitude that in advance of a satisfactory general political settlement, steps we have suggested cannot be taken. But, Mr. Chairman, we are all well aware that the refugee problem is a major cause of political tension in the Middle East and an obvious obstacle to progress towards a general political settlement in that area. Governments concerned have the responsibility of seeking at least some partial solution to the refugee question as a vital step towards the restoration of stability and peace in the Middle East. Governments concerned must also recognize that UNRWA's relief programme is an interim measure pending the formulation and implementation of plans for a final settlement. They should not expect that member governments of the United Nations will be able or willing to contribute indefinitely to a relief programme of undiminishing proportions. Above all, a start must be made in finding a solution to this problem for the sake of the hundreds of thousands of persons, including a high proportion of young people, who are living unproductive and miserable lives.