



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

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PALESTINE REFUGEES

Statement by Mr. J.W. Holmes in the Special Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, on February 20, 1957.

We all regret, I am sure, that we must again consider the question of the Palestine refugees without finding ourselves closer to a solution of the problem. Perhaps, however, this discussion will serve one useful purpose if it directs our attention from the abstractions of international policy to the human problems of those who have suffered all too long. We have all, I know, been greatly impressed by the reports, both oral and written, of the Director of UNRWA. What impressed my Delegation most was the humanity and the compassion which were so evident in his statements to us. He and his colleagues have persevered throughout the most difficult and dangerous period yet experienced by this Agency because of their selfless devotion to the unfortunate people whom we have asked them to help. It is a record which has not been surpassed in the history of service by the United Nations to the unfortunate and the afflicted. It will be a source of satisfaction to the Agency and to all of us that recognition of their service has been gratefully accorded by speakers whose views on most problems of the situation on the Middle East vary widely. There rests a heavy responsibility on all of us to see that UNRWA is given the support it deserves and is enabled to carry out the work which is on the conscience of all members of the United Nations.

Because the Director's report is an honest report, it is neither comforting nor encouraging. This is the fact which we must face with equal honesty. It is clear that little progress has been made in reintegrating the refugees into the economic life of the Middle East. For reasons beyond his control, the Director has been unable to point to any indication of progress - of progress in securing the repatriation of the refugees or compensation for their losses, or fulfilment of our hopes that rehabilitation and resettlement schemes might steadily decrease the number of refugees requiring relief. The situation of the refugees continues to be a matter of grave humanitarian concern and a serious obstacle to the ultimate stability and peace of the Middle East. There can be no permanent settlement until the problem has been, if not solved, at least greatly alleviated.