

PALESTINE REFUGEES

A statement by Mr. Arthur R. Smith,  
Canadian Representative on the Special  
Political Committee, on November 24, 1959

...Our thanks are due both to the Secretary-General and to the Director for the two reports which they have presented to us - documents at once succinct and comprehensive. It is not invidious to mention especially our debt to the Secretary-General, partly because his effort has been an added burden on top of his already heavy duties and partly because, or so it seems to us, his report has hitherto received insufficient acknowledgement. Every page in Part I of this document reflects the careful and indeed anxious thought he gave not merely to the future of UNRWA but to the whole tragic problem resulting from the state of Arab-Israel relations.

Mr. Hammarskjold himself reminded us in his short statement at the opening of this debate that it was not necessary for the Committee to assess the reasons which led him to his conclusions. My Delegation has no intention of departing from this advice, so timely and sensible under the circumstances. We shall go no further in this particular connection than to express the view that it is only through broad and imaginative, venturesome and, above all, generous measures that there is hope for an easing of the international situation in which the fate of these refugees seems at present to us inextricably locked. The eloquent statement given us a few days ago by the distinguished and learned representative of Ceylon has made it superfluous for me further to elaborate this point.

If this Assembly decides to extend the life of UNRWA, as the Secretary-General has recommended, we shall naturally be anxious to see the Agency function as effectively as possible. The two reports before us have pointed out specific areas where improvement can and should be made. I do not intend to discuss all the matters mentioned in the reports where progress is highly desirable. Without minimizing the importance of the other technical considerations, however, I think particular mention should be made of the need to rectify ration rolls and to increase programmes for self-support.

We strongly support the Director's intention to make a new attempt to clear up the situation which has existed for some years, whereby a number of persons have been receiving assistance from UNRWA to which they are not entitled and whereby, in consequence, over 100,000 children of registered refugees have had to be deprived of rations for which they are eligible. We urge the Director to give the solution of this problem a high priority and we have been encouraged by the references in his report to the co-operative attitude of the authorities most closely concerned.

Similarly we urge that every effort be made to ensure that the humanitarian work of UNRWA not be hampered by any host government's lack of full recognition of the Agency's status as a subsidiary organ of the United Nations.

We also place considerable importance on the need for self-support programmes and have been pleased to hear expressions in favour of such programmes. In our view the Agency should do all it can within the prevailing political and financial conditions to assist the refugees