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UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS
AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES

Statement to be delivered by the Canadian Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Mr. Paul Beaulieu in the Special Political Committee on December 14, 1967

Mr. Chairman,

We have listened with careful attention to the statement of the Commissioner General introducing his annual report on the activities of UNRWA for the period from July 1966 to June 1967, which he has augmented with more recent information. At the outset I should like to commend Mr. Michelmore and his staff on the way in which they have handled unforeseen problems in the trying and often difficult circumstances which have confronted UNRWA since the outbreak of hostilities in the Middle East last June. It seems evident from the debate, Mr. Chairman, that members of this Committee share our hope that as a result of the unanimous action taken by the Security Council on November 22 progress will be made toward a just solution of the refugee problem.

For 18 years the existence of an ever-increasing number of Palestinian refugees has been a source of tension in the Middle East. The problem of Palestinian refugees has deep emotional, historical and juridical roots. Successive resolutions of the General Assembly calling for repatriation, resettlement and compensation have not thus far brought about a solution. Perhaps the hour is auspicious for a genuine effort toward a solution to the question of Palestine refugees within the context of a political settlement. We sincerely hope so.

In the interim we face the immediate problem of the welfare of individual refugees, over a million of whom require assistance. We have before us the report of the Commissioner General in Document A/6713. We note that the Commissioner General has established a revised budget of $47.5 million, of which $40.1 million are required to maintain the regular programme at the previous level, and 7.4 are required to meet new needs arising from the emergency. Of the total budget 41.6 million dollars must be obtained in the form of contributions from Governments. We have observed with regret that the amounts pledged at the pledging conference on December 6 would result in a serious shortfall if the proposed budget is maintained. We regret that the unfortunate trend of deficit financing established in previous years, which has forced UNRWA

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to draw on its working capital, appears to be continuing. The Commissioner General states in paragraph 64 of his report that it is more than ever essential that the Agency's requirements be adequately financed if it is to carry out its mandate. The Canadian delegation is convinced that at this time it is especially important that the Agency be enabled to carry out its responsibilities. The alternative of severely cutting UNRWA's expenditures would involve difficult decisions with grievous consequences at the very moment when UNRWA's responsibilities have increased as a result of the recent hostilities. In his summary and conclusions the Commissioner General lists some questions on which the General Assembly will have to take a decision. I should like to comment in turn on each of the questions raised by the Commissioner General in Paragraph 66 of the introduction to his Report.

My delegation believes that UNRWA must continue, so far as possible, its existing services to the registered refugees on the same basis as before the hostilities, in accordance with need, until a solution to the refugee problem is found. The concern of the Canadian Government for the welfare of these refugees has been manifest in its substantial contributions to UNRWA's budget since the creation of the agency, including its emergency contribution last summer. At that time my Government gave an additional $1 million in food aid and approximately $225,000 in cash to cover transportation costs. In addition $100,000 were given to the International Committee for the Red Cross to assist that organization in its invaluable emergency work in the Middle East. On December 6 my Government contributed $1.2 million in food aid and cash as our regular contribution to the Agency for 1968.

My delegation believes that we cannot refuse to the refugees created by the recent hostilities the assistance which they perhaps need more than any other group. In this context, the Commissioner General mentioned in his statement that, due to events not foreseen at the time his report was drafted, UNRWA's budget will likely fall some 1.5 million dollars short of the agency's requirement for 1968. Some way has to be found to provide funds to meet this need - whether through additional voluntary contributions or some other method.

With respect to the new refugees, my delegation notes that the steps envisaged in Resolution 2252 (ES-V), and Security Council resolution 237 - namely the return to the West Bank of those inhabitants who fled following the outbreak of hostilities - would greatly ease the problem and significantly lighten the burden borne by UNRWA. While we were heartened to see that certain arrangements were made pursuant to these resolutions to bring about a return of new and old refugees to the homes in which they lived prior to the hostilities in June, we have been very disappointed by the results. Paragraphs 185 to 199 of the Secretary-General's report in document A/6797 indicate that the arrangements made in August resulted in the return of only 14,000 individuals out of a total of some 200,000 who were reported to have crossed to the East Bank of Jordan. Moreover, it appears from the Commissioner General's Report that only 3,000 of these returnees were UNRWA-registered refugees. We sincerely hope, Mr. Chairman, that procedures will be instituted - starting either perhaps from the points enumerated at the conclusion of the Secretary'General's note of September 12 (A/6795), or from some

mutually agreable formula and carried forward, on a continuing basis, in a manner which will facilitate the return of both "new" and old refugees in accordance with General Assembly Resolution 2252.

The third question asked by the Commissioner General concerns the expansion of educational facitities for the refugees. My government appreciates that the expansion of educational facilities is desirable but it seems that this will be possible only if special contributions are made for the purpose as suggested in paragraph 60 of the introduction to the Commissioner General's report.

Mr. Chairman, in question 4 the Commissioner General asks us to find a way of providing secure and adequate sources of funds so that UNRWA may carry out the tasks assigned to it by the UNGA. This question is, of course, of the utmost importance. We must realistically face the fact that UNRWA is an Agency which has existed for 18 years and which will have to continue its operations at least throughout the period in which the special representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Jarring, is carrying out his task.

In his introduction to the report, the Commissioner General recalls several ideas which have been put forward for stabilizing UNRWA's finances. The first suggestion cited is that some method be found by which refugees would be able to benefit from the property they abandoned in 1948.Efforts to approach the matter of compensation in isolation from the associated principles of repatriation and resettlement have proven unavailing in the past. Since the Special Representative of the Secretary-General has been authorized to look into the entire refugee question, my delegation thinks it would be inappropriate for the Assembly to pursue this matter at the present time.

The second and third ideas mentioned in the Commissioner General's report focus on the possibility of putting either all or part of the budget of UNRWA under the United Nations regular budget. In view of the political factors involved, we doubt that these proposals would command the necessary degree of support.

My Government believes, therefore, that to continue the present voluntary basis of financing for UNRWA is the only resort left to us, inadequate though it may be. There are, of course, ways of reducing the need for withdrawals of the agency's working capital. One which has been suggested and which my Government supports fully is that governments should give priority to the payment of contributions to UNRWA's budget so that the agency can get along on a reduced working capital. In essence, however, the financial problem will only be significantly reduced if the financial base of UNRWA is widened. In the past, the burden of financing UNRWA has been borne by a relatively small number of countries. We would urge, therefore, that those who have not yet contributed consider the possibility of doing so. In the last analysis, a widening of the agency's financial base is the only constructive solution to UNRWA's budgeting problem. It is all the more urgent in present circumstances where the mandate of the Agency is likely to be widened to include some 235,000 additional individuals as a result of the recent hostilities.

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Mr. Chairman, it is the hope of the Canadian delegation that question 5 in the summary and conclusions of the Commissioner General's report will not have to be answered. It would indeed be unfortunate if the activities of UNRWA had to cut back at this point in time when the refugee problem has become more acute than ever. If confronted with this dilemma, the Commissioner General will no doubt wish to consult the Advisory Committee. It would seem to us that the immediate needs of the refugees in terms of food, clothing and lodging inevitably demand high priority. But recourse to the expedient of restricting some part of the programme would reflect an abrogation of responsibility by the General Assembly as a whole.

We hope, therefore, that the Commissioner General's appeal for adequate funds will be met with an appropriate response by all members and particularly by those countries which are in a good position to assist the Agency but have not done so in the past. We hope even more that this entire question will, in the coming months, be case in a new form.

On November 22 of this year, the Security Council adopted an historic resolution. It established certain guidelines and authorized a Special Representative of the Secretary-General to make contact with the parties with the aim of promoting agreement and assisting efforts to achieve a peaceful and acceptable settlement in the area. Specific reference to the problem of the refugees is to be found in operative paragraph 2(b) of the resolution which reads as follows: "Affirms further the necessity for achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem". Without in any way wishing to prejudice the delicate task of the Secretary-General's Special Representative, I should like to recall that the Secretary of State for External Affairs, in his statement in the general debate on September 27, suggested that the solution to the tragedy of the Palestine refugees might be found in the context of a scheme for the economic development of the region. He said at that time:

> "The principles of compensation, repatriation and resettlement enunciated in previous resolutions of our Assembly provide the necessary guidelines for settling the refugees in permanent homes. The parties directly concerned have moral and historical obligations towards the refugees which must be recognized. But it would be unrealistic to expect that they could in present circumstances carry out alone an effective programme of this kind. I would therefore hope that this Organization might give serious study to the establishment of a coordinated plan of international action aimed at regional economic development on an ambitious scale. It would help provide a basis for a solution to the refugee problem and could lead to a new era of peace and prosperity in the area. It would require the full support of the members of this Organization as well as the cooperation of the countries of the Middle East. Such a plan might encompass agricultural and mineral development, a coordinated approach to the development and utilization of water resources, and, if feasible, projects for the desalination and production of electrical power. It would appear essential that an international programme along these lines be carried out in conjunction with the settlement of other outstanding questions if it is to have any prospect of success. Nevertheless, we should not delay, for this reason, an attempt to develop a practical programme and to establish appropriate machinery."

Mr. Chairman, through the efforts of the special representative, the cooperation of the parties in the area, the assistance of UNRWA and the generous support of all members of this Organization, we would hope that early progress might be made to give the refugees what they by right deserve - secure homes and a decent livelihood - not as wards of the United Nations, not as objects of charity, but as free individuals, living in dignity and contributing vitally to the economic growth and cultural enrichment of the Middle East.