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Statement on Palestine Refugees by Mr. Arthur Smith, M.P., Canadian Representative on the Special Political Committee, on Friday, November 18, 1960

Mr. Chairman:

The Canadian Delegation wishes to congratulate the Director and his staff on a year's efficient and valuable work as reflected in this orderly and lucid report. It is apparent that the Agency has carried on its activities not only with diligence and conscientiousness but also on the basis of an intelligent and sympathetic appreciation of the many facets of the refugee problem.

It is clear that in the fulfillment ofits functions during the past year, as throughout the preceding years of its existence, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency has had to face formidable practical difficulties. Budgetary considerations have continued to restrict the standards of relief to a subsistence level; and it is a tribute to the efficiency of the organization that in these difficult circumstances progressive improvements have been made in housing facilities, and the health of the refugees has continued to be well maintained. It is a sobering reflection that even in the provision of these basic relief services, the Agency's efforts are so closely circumscribed by financial considerations.

There are disquieting features, too, when we come to examine again the problems faced by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency in the field of rehabilitation. The Director has sketched for us, in restrained but nevertheless explicit terms, the disturbing picture of many thousands of refugee youth approaching and reaching maturity each year, with very little opportunity to

develop their productive talents. Lacking any specialized training, they would be likely to prove unemployable in the labour markets of the region, even were thepolitical complications of the Palestine problem to be fully resolved. The Canadian Delegation, therefore, finds it particularly heartening that the Director has addressed himself with such zeal and realism to the educational aspect of the Agency's functions, and especially to the expansion of vocational training facilities. What Dr. Davis has proposed is an imaginative and balanced programme which should commend itself to the fullest support of this Committee. It represents a positive and forward-looking approach to a problem which affords few outlets for constructive enterprise.

The past record of the Agency's educational services to the refugees has been one ofthe more encouraging aspects of its work - one field in which it has been possible in some measure to look hopefully to the future rather than being confined (as, for example, in the provision of basic relief services) to a relentless struggle with the immediate demands of refugee subsistence. The proposals now made by the Director forexpanded vocational training facilities and more university scholarships are a logical extension of the well-established programme of universal elementary education and the expanding scale of secondary education which the Agency has been able to provide in the past. The Director has stressed the inter-relationship among the various levels of education provided; improved elementary and secondary education is an essential basis for a sound vocational training structure, which in turn provides the outlet needed to absorb at least a portion of the output of the more general educational programme. In addition, however, expanded facilities for vocational training will contribute toward meeting a continuing andgrowing need for trained personnel in a region where rapid technological progress is taking place. The intrinsic merit of

expanded educational opportunities and vocational training is in no way detracted from by the fact that these measures in themselves can haveonly a limited effect on the vast rehabilitation problems which are involved. Investment in training of refugee youth will continue to pay dividends in years ahead, in the form of enhanced human resources in the area, irrespective of the pattern of political developments which may determine the ultimate lines of a Palestine solution.

Recognizing the desirability of encouraging these eminently commendable extensions of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency's educational services, and with particular reference to the spirit of the World Refugee Year, the Canadian Government has advanced additional support to the Agency. I have already had the honour of explaining to the Contributions Committee that for the year 1960, the Canadian Government has recently been able to make a third contribution for the assistance of Palestine refugees. By a third contribution I mean one in addition to our normal cash gift for general purposes ($500,000) and in addition to our second contribution of wheat flour which was to the value of one and one-half million dollars. The third contribution is to the value of one million dollars and is again in the form OFflour. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency has accepted this gift, the proceeds of which the Agency has assigned to the development of vocational training. It will be by this much the less necessary for the Director to purchase flour for refugee rations and by this much the more possible for corresponding cash assets of the Agency to be applied to the type of training best fitted to the needs of the Agency and the objectives of the United Nations; nor will any equally essential aspect of the Organization's work suffer, since this contribution is in addition to those which we have customarily made. I hope this arrangement may be as welcome to the refugees and to the host countries as it is heartily approved by the Canadian people.

A few days ago the United Nations announced that the Canadian Committee for World Refugee Year had informed the United Nations Relief and Works Agency that about $220,000 would be made available to theAgency from voluntary sources. About $150,000 of this would come direct from the Committee, and about $70,000 from the Canadian Junior Red Cross Society. The Agency has decided that it will use this money for vocational training. I ask permission, Sir, to refer here as well to the various contributions received from the Canadian Red Cross Society, the Unitarian Service Committee, and the United Church of Canada. I believe that the expected total of non-governmental contributions from Canada is $241,000.

I would be remiss if I were to pass from this mention of Canadian contributions without expressing our unreserved recognition of the contributions which continue to be volunteered by other Governments and agencies who share Canada's appreciation of the humanitarian compulsion to maintain the United Nations Relief and Works Agency's services. Mention should be made, in this context, of the unique contributions of the host countries, both in providing physical services to the refugees and in facing the various other complications associated with accommodating these unfortunate people within their borders. In appealing to other members of the Assembly for broader and more generous support to meet the Agency's expanded budgetary requirements, we would commend to them the exemplary worthiness of the Agency's exclusively humanitarian functions, and urge the fullest possible support from all who can afford to shoulder a greater part of this international responsibility.

I should like to touch very briefly on one or two aspects of the Agency's work which have been discussed in past years, in respect of which progress or substantial hope of progress now is reported by the Director. It is a source of gratification to my Delegation that Dr. Davis has been able to describe relations

between the Agency and the host governments as "good and improving". The factors making for co-operation, he states, are becoming stronger. We sincerely hope that the host governments may find it possible to give constructive expression to this co-operative attitude, particularly in renewed efforts to remedy inaccuracies in the ration rolls. Aside from the obvious administrative advantages of clearing up long-standing problems in this regard, rectification of the ration rolls would have the mutually desirable result of making the Agency's services to the refugees more effective and comprehensive.

This Committee devoted a great deal of its time last session to considering the renewal of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency's mandate. It was renewed for the comparatively short period of three years. Next year, therefore, we shall be on the eve of the expiration of the new extension and during the Seventeenth Session of the United Nations General Assembly we shall again be under the same sense of urgency as we were last year. This Delegation, in its statement a year ago, recommended that at its Seventeenth Session the General Assembly, in considering the position of the Agency at that time, should have before it an up-to-date review - which might once again be prepared by the Secretary-General - taking into account the political, economic and psychological aspects of the refugee problem. In the event, the resolution of the 14th Session called for "a review at the end of two years". It may not be too soon to reiterate the Canadian view that an independent high-level survey of this nature will be of great assistance to the Assembly in its re-examination of the Agency's position and the refugee problem.

Nevertheless, we recognize that however helpful may be the proceeds of such informed studies of the refugee problem, and however gratifying the progress which the Agency may be able to record during the remainder of its current mandate, such developments in themselves are not likely to bring us significantly nearer to a comprehensive solution ofthe refugee problem. It is

rather in the broader context of the whole complex political picture in the Middle East that such a solution must be sought. The current extension of the Agency's mandate in itself cannot contribute to reducing the complexities of the refugee problem, which indeed may be even more frustrating two years hence than they were when the question was reviewed last year. We must, therefore, beware of accepting this extension as having in any sense placed a two or three-year moratorium on constructive consideration of the Palestine problem. Nor may we regard it as having excused any of us- and particularly the governments most directly concerned - from continuing earnestly to seek every opportunity, andto take advantage of every occasion, to improve the political atmosphere in the Middle East.