

No. 54/44/UN.9/21

PALESTINE REFUGEES

Text of a statement on November 25, 1954, by Mr. G.D. Weaver, M.P., Canadian Representative in the Ad Hoc Committee of the ninth session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, on agenda item 18 - Report of the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

Note: The text of the resolution adopted by the Committee and the results of the voting are included at the end of the statement.

The Canadian Delegation has examined carefully the report of the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East as well as the special report issued by the Director and the Advisory Commission and we have now been able to study the draft resolution tabled by the delegations of France, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States.

I wish on behalf of my delegation to congratulate the Director and the staff of UNRWA on the way in which they have discharged their very difficult tasks resulting from this tragic problem. However, in expressing appreciation for the devoted efforts being made by UNRWA to alleviate the suffering and to bring about the rehabilitation of these unhappy refugees, we cannot fail to express our serious concern that little progress has been made towards "the re-integration of the refugees into the economic life of the Near East, either by repatriation or re-settlement" to use the words of the resolution on this subject passed at the fifth session of the General Assembly. Earlier hopes that there could be a steady decrease in the numbers of those requiring relief, as rehabilitation and re-settlement schemes progressed, are so far almost entirely unrealized, while, on the other hand, there is apparently no indication of progress with respect to repatriation of refugees to their homeland or compensation for their losses. The significance of this discouraging situation is not merely that high annual relief expenditures are still required; the failure to realize our hopes means that hundreds of thousands of persons, including a lamentably high proportion of young people, are still living unproductive and wretched lives.

Somehow and sometime a start must be made towards a real solution of this problem. It would certainly be useful if, for its part, the Government of Israel could advance some positive suggestions with a view to opening up opportunities for repatriation of those refugees who desire it, and if the Government of Israel could also make proposals regarding compensation for refugees. Such a move on the part of Israel would do much to create an atmosphere conducive to progress in this complex and difficult question.

On the other hand, it would be equally useful if the Arab Governments concerned could, for their part, give full support to schemes for rehabilitation and re-settlement of those refugees who prefer not to be repatriated. It is in our view both essential and urgent that the countries concerned should redouble their efforts to overcome any political and technical obstacles which impede the progress of plans for the eventual re-settlement and rehabilitation of the refugees. These plans are, of course, as essential to the economic interests of the host countries as they are to the welfare of the refugees themselves. Human beings are the most precious asset of any country, and we are certain that a great many of these unfortunate refugees, if enabled once more to live useful lives, would make an invaluable contribution to the countries which have given them refuge. In this connection we have noted carefully and with approval the comments made in paragraphs 10, 11, and 12 of the special report of the Director and the Advisory Commission. These paragraphs point out the extreme difficulty in existing economic and political circumstances in the Near East of rehabilitating Palestine refugees in the host countries, and stress that one of the difficulties is the attitude of the refugees themselves towards rehabilitation. We agree that new efforts must be made both by the governments concerned and by the Agency to make it clear to the refugees that the Agency's programme of rehabilitation is designed for their benefit. We also very strongly agree with the statement that it is desirable for the Agency to continue its efforts to reach agreement with governments in the area on new projects capable of supporting a substantial number of refugees, and we share the hope that the necessary agreements will be promptly forthcoming.

I have stressed the importance our delegation attaches to cooperation between the Agency and host governments in rehabilitation and re-settlement projects, since part of the solution must be found along these lines. I have also referred to the grave responsibilities of the Government of Israel, and have expressed the hope that Israel might be able to take some step now towards bringing the problem to an end. Whatever the outcome may be, I must emphasize our understanding that UNRWA's relief programme is to be only an interim measure pending the formulation and implementation of plans for a final settlement. It cannot be expected that member governments of the United Nations will be able or willing to contribute indefinitely to a relief programme of undiminishing proportions.

On the subject of contributions, we can perhaps note with some satisfaction the response from such a large and representative group of governments and private agencies, although further contributions are required if the Agency is to meet its commitments. The host countries themselves have, of course, borne a substantial share of the burden of caring for the refugees. Among countries from outside the area of the Near East, the United States has again, as on many occasions, made an outstanding contribution, while the United Kingdom and France have also taken on a large share of the financial responsibility. Canada has made the fourth largest total contribution to the various programmes for Palestine refugees and, with respect to the UNRWA budget now before us, I can state that the Canadian Government intends to seek parliamentary approval for a contribution of \$500,000 to the UNRWA relief programme for the financial year 1954-55.

I will now turn briefly to the detailed proposals contained in the Special Report of the Director and the Advisory Commission and in the draft resolution which is before the Committee. The Canadian Delegation will support the proposal that the mandate of the Agency be extended for five years. We recognize the difficulties faced by the Agency as the result of its year-to-year existence and we agree that a five-year period should allow the Director to plan the Agency's activities more satisfactorily. However, I must make it clear, in supporting this extension of the Agency's mandate, that the Canadian Government is unable to ask parliament to make any financial commitment for more than one year at a time. Our decision to make further contributions each year will be in future dependent largely on the extent to which progress is made each year in reducing UNRWA's relief commitment.

We have noted that one of the recommendations made in the Special Report of the Director and the Advisory Commission is that the Director, in consultation with the Advisory Commission, be authorized to employ some of the rehabilitation fund for participation in general economic development programmes of the governments of the area, provided that in each case arrangements can be made with the governments concerned to ensure that the number of refugees who will become self-supporting as a result of the total development programme in question will be broadly commensurate with the financial contribution of the Agency. This recommendation does not appear in the draft resolution, but I should like to make the comment on it that our delegation agree to the proposal with the hope that the money so spent will result in a proportionate reduction in the funds now required for the relief programme.

I now come to the resolution which is before the Committee. The Canadian Delegation will support this resolution, although I propose to comment on one or two points in it. The third paragraph of the preamble refers to paragraph 11 of resolution 194 and notes that repatriation or compensation of the refugees as provided for in this paragraph has not been effected and that the situation of the refugees continues to be a matter of grave concern. We think that the resolution would have better reflected the realities of this difficult situation if it had noted as well as the failure to make satisfactory progress toward rehabilitation and re-settlement in which we believe that an important part of the eventual solution must be found. In this connection, we have noted carefully the situation described in paragraph 35 of the Director's annual report in which he refers to some of the difficulties faced in undertaking rehabilitation projects.

We also have some doubts about operative paragraph 6 of the resolution. The present wording of this paragraph seems to assume that relief should be extended to additional claimants, while we should have preferred to leave open the question whether such extension is necessary pending the study of the situation and the report on it by the Director, as requested in this paragraph. If the draft resolution is put to the vote in its present form, we shall vote for the resolution as a whole but, if there should be a paragraph by paragraph vote, we shall abstain on operative paragraph 6.

Voting Results Following is the text of the resolution (U.N. Doc. A/RESOLUTION/232) which was adopted by the Ad Hoc Committee on November 30 by a vote of 41 in favour (including Canada), none against and 8 abstentions, and adopted by the General Assembly in plenary session on December 4 by a vote of 48 in favour, none against and 7 abstentions:

Text of Resolution

The General Assembly,

Recalling its resolutions 194 (III) of 11 December, 1948, 302 (IV) of 8 December 1949, 393 (V) of 2 December 1950, 513 (VI) of 26 January 1952, 614 (VII) of 6 November 1952 and 720 (VIII) of 27 November 1953,

Noting the annual report<sup>1/</sup> of the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, and the special report<sup>2/</sup> of the Director and the Advisory Commission of UNRWA,

Noting that repatriation or compensation of the refugees, as provided for in paragraph 11 of resolution 194 (III), has not been effected and that the situation of the refugees continues to be a matter of grave concern,

1. Decides, without prejudice to the rights of the refugees to repatriation or compensation, to extend the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East for five years ending 30 June 1960;

2. Requests the Agency to continue its consultation with the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine in the best interest of their respective tasks, with particular reference to paragraph 11 of resolution 194 (III);

3. Requests the Governments of the area to continue to co-operate with the Director of the Agency in seeking and carrying out projects capable of supporting substantial numbers of refugees;

4. Decides to maintain the rehabilitation fund of \$200 million, subject to reductions for expenditures already made;

5. Approves a relief budget of \$25,100,000 and a rehabilitation budget of \$36,200,000 for the fiscal year ending 30 June 1955;

1/ See Official Records of the General Assembly, Ninth Session, Supplement No. 17, (document A/2717).

2/ Document A/2717/Add.1.

6. Requests the Director, in consultation with the Advisory Commission of UNRWA, to study and report upon the problem of assistance which should be given to other claimants for relief, particularly children and needy inhabitants of villages along the demarcation lines;

7. Authorizes the Director to prepare, in consultation with the Advisory Commission, the budgets for relief and rehabilitation in advance of each fiscal year, which budgets he shall transmit to the Negotiating Committee for Extra-Budgetary Funds, without prejudice to review each year by the General Assembly;

8. Requests the Negotiating Committee for Extra-Budgetary Funds, after receipt of such budgets from the Director of UNRWA, to seek such funds as may be required by the Agency;

9. Appeals to the Governments of Member and non-Member States to make voluntary contributions to the extent necessary to carry through to fulfilment the Agency's programmes, and thanks the numerous religious, charitable and humanitarian organizations for their valuable and continuing work in assisting the refugees;

10. Requests the Director to continue to submit the reports referred to in paragraph 21 of resolution 302 (IV), as well as the annual budgets.

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6. Requests the Director, in consultation with the Advisory Commission of UNRWA, to study and report upon the problem of assistance which should be given to other claimants for relief, particularly children and needy inhabitants of villages along the demarcation lines;

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8. Requests the Negotiating Committee for Extra-Budgetary Funds, after receipt of such budgets from the Director of UNRWA, to seek such funds as may be required by the Agency;

9. Appeals to the Governments of Member and non-Member States to make voluntary contributions to the extent necessary to carry through to fulfillment the Agency's programmes, and thanks the numerous religious, charitable and humanitarian organizations for their valuable and continuing work in assisting the refugees;

10. Requests the Director to continue to submit the reports referred to in paragraph 21 of resolution 302 (IV), as well as the annual budgets.