

Memorandum 3/97

UNRWA - Between Refugee Aid and Power Politics

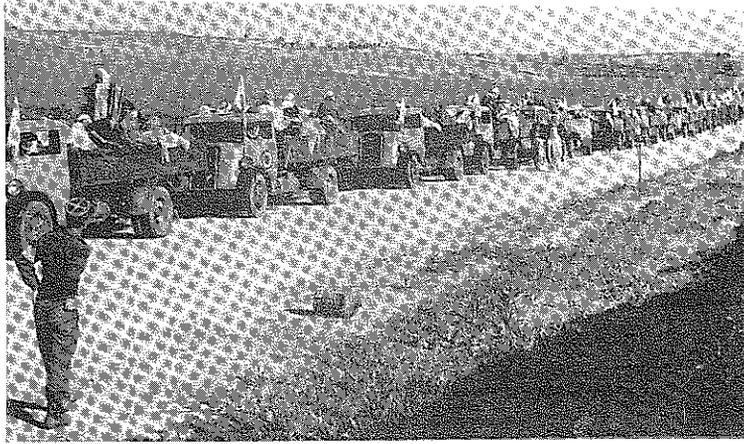
**A Memorandum Calling upon International
Responsibility for the Palestinian Refugee
Question**

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*Exodus
from
Northern
Palestine -
1948*

*(photo:
UNRWA)*



*1952: Nahr-el-Bared camp for Palestine refugees near Tripoli, Lebanon
(photo: UNRWA)*

Introduction

The *United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East* (UNRWA) is the UN organization established to provide assistance to Palestinian refugees. Through UNRWA the refugee issue is kept alive, as registration with the Agency conveys refugee status. If refugees lose their internationally recognized refugee status - while a political solution to the Palestinian refugee questions is not found - they will be regarded as having finally integrated in the countries of their temporary domicile. Integration in this case means the denial of refugees' rights, which include the right of return and compensation in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194 (III) Paragraph 11.

Between 1949 - 1993 UNRWA's mandate was unchallenged as a solution to the Palestinian refugee question was not in sight. However, the 1993 signing of the Oslo Accords between Israel and the PLO gave rise to expectations for a rapid solution of this fundamental issue of the Israeli-Palestinian-Arab conflict and opened the debate about the possible termination of UNRWA's services. The international community, eager to rid itself of the long-standing responsibility for Palestinian refugees, expected UNRWA to hand-over its functions to the new Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip within five years, i.e. by 1999.

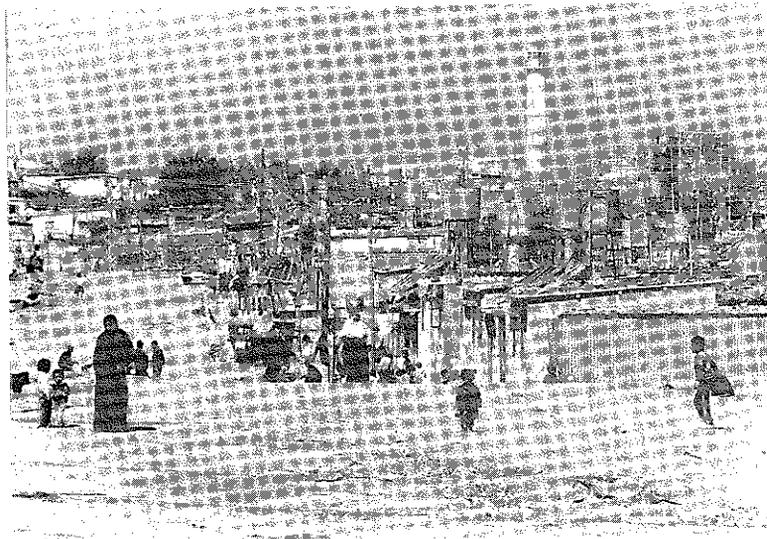
Palestinian refugees, on the other hand, are unwilling to relinquish their historical and internationally legitimized rights. Refugee communities in Palestine and in the diaspora have followed the new international debate with deep concern. Cut-backs in UNRWA's budget and the fear of the Agency's possible dissolution are major factors in the recent efforts for refugee mobilization. All statements issued so far by the refugee communities confirm the refugees' demand for the continuation of international responsibility and involvement in the Palestinian refugee question, and emphasize the need for the continuation of UNRWA services.



*The first
generation:
Jabalia
Camp,
Gaza Strip
1955*



*(photo:
UNRWA)*



*Jabalia Camp, Gaza Strip, 1995: Population 75,000 - the fourth generation
(Photo: UNRWA)*

Chapter I

UNRWA Reviewed

1. Brief History of UNRWA

The 1947 UN Partition Resolution 181 provided for the establishment of the state of Israel on part of the land of Palestine. In 1948, after the British mandate over Palestine had expired, the Arab leadership, not willing to accept the partition, declared war against the Zionist Jewish community. Consequently the Zionist armed forces succeeded not only in defending the territory allocated to the Jewish state by the UN Partition Resolution, but also in enlarging the territory of the new state by occupying additional Arab land. The war resulted in the expulsion and flight of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homeland to the neighboring Arab states. In the first year of its existence, UNRWA registered 914, 221 Palestinian refugees throughout the area of its operation (30th June 1950)¹. These refugees had lost all their property and thus depended upon basic goods, shelter, and services provided by UNRWA, so as to prevent starvation and epidemic diseases.

While organizations like the *International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)* and the *American Friends Service Committee* began their refugee aid programs already during the 1948 war, the UN responded with the establishment of the *United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees (UNRPR)* in November of that year. UNRPR was set up to coordinate the humanitarian and emergency aid programs conducted by the various voluntary agencies.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was established on 8 December 1949 to replace UNRPR, and began operations on 1 May 1950. The following definition served as the basis for UNRWA's operation among Palestinian refugees:

"A Palestine refugee is a person whose normal residence was in Palestine for a minimum of two years preceding the conflict in 1948, and who, as a result of this conflict, lost his home and his means of livelihood and took refuge in 1948 in one of the countries where UNRWA provides relief. Refugees within this definition and the direct descendants of such refugees are eligible for Agency assistance if they are registered with UNRWA; living in the area of UNRWA operations; and in need."

This definition was introduced as an *internal operating definition*; it was not intended for application in any political negotiations. It has never been modified and therefore does not relate to Palestinian refugees displaced as a result of the 1967 war ("1967 Displaced Persons"), except for those among them who are both refugees of 1948 and 1967.²

UNRWA was established by the General Assembly (GA) of the United Nations (Resolution 302 IV). Thus the Agency is formally responsible to the GA only. Unlike in the case of Security Council decisions, GA decisions are based on a majority vote; no member state has veto power, and decisions are not binding on the member states. In practice, the rich and powerful states, which also function as UNRWA's major donors, have been shaping UNRWA's policy throughout the decades. UNRWA's mandate is renewed periodically for a three-year period. The current mandate was issued in 1996 and will expire in 1999; the Agency is thus expected to continue its work at least until that date.

Frequent crises and wars in the Middle East have strongly effected UNRWA's operations. New waves of refugees resulted from the Arab-Israeli war of 1967 and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights: 335,000 Palestinians were displaced and forced to seek refuge, 200,000 of them fled for the second time to neighboring Arab countries, mainly to Jordan³. In 1970, Palestinian refugees in Jordan were caught up in the severe clashes between the PLO and the Hashemite troops. 1975 was the year when the clashes in Lebanon gradually turned into civil war, which peaked in the dramatic Israeli invasion in 1982. Palestinian refugees in Beirut were massacred, they suffered hunger and distress. As a result of the armed conflicts between Palestinian political factions and Lebanese militia, their suffering continued throughout the 1980s.⁴ Inside Palestine, the 1987 popular Palestinian uprising in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip created new and huge problems for UNRWA.

Since the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian Accords in 1993, Palestinian refugees have experienced two major Israeli military operations in South Lebanon. Moreover, refugees are among the hardest hit by the ongoing Israeli closure of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The severe restrictions on the movement of persons and goods resulting from the closure have rendered impossible UNRWA's task - approved by the international community - of improving living conditions and making refugees benefit from the peace process.

2. PROGRAMS, FACTS & FIGURES

UNRWA operates in five Arab countries and regions which originally hosted the majority of the Palestinian refugees.

	<i>Registered Refugees (RR)</i>	<i>RR in camps</i>	<i>% of total RR</i>
Jordan	1,328,768	19.6% (10 camps)	40.9%
Gaza	700,789	55.6% (8 camps)	22.0%
West Bank	524,207	25.6% (19 camps)	17.0%
Lebanon	349,773	54% (12 camps)	10.1%
Syria	342,507	28.1% (10 camps)	10.0%
Total	3,246,044	32.7% (59 camps)	100%

[Source: 1996 UNRWA fact sheets]

As indicated by these figures, population density in the Gaza refugee camps is extremely high (close to 400,000 refugees in only 8 camps). Moreover, Gaza has the largest proportion of refugees as compared to the total population (80%).

The high percentage of refugees living in camps in Lebanon is a result of the severe restrictions on civil rights by the Lebanese government.

2.1 Regular UNRWA Programs

In the 1950s, when most of the emergency relief was completed and it had become clear that the refugee problem would not be solved within a short period, UNRWA was forced to shift its focus. Tents were replaced by concrete shelters, and new health, social, and educational service programs were introduced. As UNRWA progressed from an organization providing emergency aid to one dealing with development, long-term training and assistance, it established three major programs:

The educational program became UNRWA's single largest area of activity. In 1996 it accounted for more than 46% of the agency's regular budget and 70% of its staff; more than 14,000 educational staff were employed in 644 UNRWA

schools. Most of these schools run double shifts, in the Gaza Strip even triple shifts had to be introduced recently. In addition, the Agency operates professional training centers (e.g. teacher training, blacksmith, mechanics) and grants a limited number of academic scholarships.

Since the take-over of the former Israeli Civil Administration schools by the Palestinian Authority, coordination between the state school-system and UNRWA schools has increased.

Health care, mainly primary health care, is the second major activity. UNRWA provides health care services through a network of 123 health centers in all the five countries it operates in. Nevertheless, these services have remained insufficient; Jabalia Camp in the Gaza Strip (85,000 residents), for example, has only one UNRWA health center; in Rafah Camp (75 000 residents), also in the Gaza Strip, a second branch of the only health center has just been completed under the Peace Implementation Program⁵. Primary health care includes preventive and curative medical care, maternal and child health services, family planning services and projects to improve environmental health. Secondary health care for refugees is provided through UNRWA's own Qalqilia Hospital in the West Bank and through private and governmental hospitals on a contract basis. Access to hospitals, however, has remained difficult; in addition to the small UNRWA hospital in Qalqilia, there is only one contract hospital for the whole northern West Bank in Nablus; another UNRWA hospital located in Jerusalem (Augusta Victoria) is out of reach for the West Bank refugee population due to the military closure.

Relief and social services is the third major activity in UNRWA's regular program. By means of these services the agency provides help to the most needy refugees, the *Special Hardship Cases* (SHCs). Services include free medical care, food aid, shelter rehabilitation, and job creation. In the framework of its *Social Service Program*, UNRWA runs training centers, community centers, women's initiatives and income-generating projects. Severe financial shortages have led to the exclusion of many needy refugees from this program in the recent period. The budget proportion allocated to relief decreased from 69% in 1951 to 11% in 1990, a reflection of the Agency's shift from relief towards development programs.

UNRWA is currently employing 20,745 people, the large majority are Palestinian refugees, only 173 persons constitute the international staff. In terms of personnel, UNRWA is the largest UN agency and one of the major employers in the Middle East.

2.2 Special Programs - The Peace Implementation Program (PIP)

PIP is UNRWA's major extrabudgetary project. It aims to support the peace process by creating visible changes on-the-ground and - more importantly - by preparing the transfer of UNRWA services to the Palestinian Authority.

PIP formally replaces the EPA (Expanded Programme of Assistance) - a fund established for the Occupied Territories - and the EMLOT fund (Extraordinary Measures for Lebanon and the Occupied Territories). EMLOT had been designed to bring relief to Palestinian refugees in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip during the Intifada, and to refugees in Lebanon suffering from the permanent situation of war. Due to the financial crisis and the changing political situation in the 1990s, UNRWA drastically reduced its EMLOT program.

In September 1994 the first stage of PIP, PIP-I, was replaced by PIP-II. PIP projects are designed to develop infrastructure, improve living conditions, and create jobs in the refugee communities. The program was planned to build on existing UNRWA programs, i.e. educational, health, and relief/social services. It was formulated in close consultation with the PLO leadership. PIP includes the rehabilitation of shelters in refugee camps, construction and upgrading of classrooms, schools and health centers, and especially the construction and improvement of environmental health facilities (drainage and sewage systems, pumping stations, waste disposals, etc.). All projects are implemented by local staff and are thus intended to serve as an income-generating measure under the harsh political and economic environment of prolonged closure.

The new PIP program is characterized by its heavy focus on the West Bank and Gaza Strip (80% of PIP project expenses by 1997). The unequal and biased distribution of the PIP budget has given rise to frequent criticism: PIP programs are meant to benefit only the refugees in the Occupied Territories, subjects of the current peace process, while neglecting Palestinian refugees in other regions. Especially severe is the exclusion from UNRWA-PIP programs of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, where refugees are confronted with an extremely hostile environment and living conditions are deteriorating rapidly. "Refugees in Lebanon have always received less UNRWA aid than those in other areas, in spite of their greater need resulting from constraints on employment and their exclusion from government services."⁶

“Peace Implementation Projects”

● The new *Gaza General Hospital* financed by the European Union is currently UNRWA's largest special project. Construction of the new general hospital began in 1990, and was scheduled to be finished in early 1996. At first, construction work was obstructed by the Intifada and the Gulf War, when the total Israeli-imposed curfew prevented Palestinian workers from reaching the building site. The major delay, however, resulted from Israel's later policy of sealing-off the Occupied Territories, a measure which made import of building materials almost impossible. Delays were also caused by the need of additional funds for additional construction. When the project was not finished by January, the new date of July 1996 was set. By July 1996, construction of the two-story hospital complex was completed; hospital equipment, however, was still missing and the inside was unfinished. July past and once more the inauguration was postponed to September. Ayman Jum'a, a Quantity Surveyor working at the hospital, recently mentioned April 1997 as a realistic opening date. Although UNRWA has already employed the new hospital managers, the administrative future of the project is still unclear. It is uncertain whether the PA will take over the hospital and the staff, UNRWA, on the other hand, shows no interest in the administration of the hospital.

Although there is no doubt that the new general hospital will improve health services in the Gaza Strip, one additional hospital is still insufficient to solve the crisis. Since no new hospital was built by the Israeli occupation authorities in the Gaza Strip since 1967, two more new hospitals would be required to meet demand. Gaza health workers expect that the new 232-bed UNRWA hospital will soon become an overcrowded 500-bed hospital. Moreover, patients in need of special treatment will continue to depend on referrals to hospitals outside of the Gaza Strip.

The contribution of this large construction project to local employment is marginal: in summer 1996, UNRWA employed no more than several engineers and some 30 construction workers.

● Another PIP project is the construction of a *sewage system in the Beach Camp Gaza Strip*. In coordination with the Gaza Municipality, the Agency is constructing pumping stations to collect the sewage and to move it to the local municipality sewage plant, which is currently being upgraded. From the central plant it will flow directly through a 2km pipe into the sea. As the project is not finished yet, the old sewage "system" (also improved by UNRWA) is still visible. Its pipes end at the beach, where the broth then flows where children play - a cause of widespread diseases, according to an UNRWA physician.

3. The UNRWA Budget

Corresponding with its program structure, UNRWA's budget is divided into a budget for regular programs and special budgets. Funds cannot be shifted between the special and regular budgets. The current crisis in UNRWA's regular budget has triggered broad political debates, and fear among the refugee community.

The regular budget serves to finance the Agency's regular programs, i.e. educational, health, and social and relief programs, as well as operational services and administrative and management.⁷ The regular budget is designed in a biannual frame, the budget for 1996-7 amounts to US \$692 million. Voluntary contributions by the UN member states account for 97% of the Agency's funding. Major donors are the United States (contributing US \$ 142 million to the regular budget in the biennium 1994-95), followed by the European Community (US \$ 113 million in 1994-95), and Japan (US \$ 49 million). The 3.5% natural growth rate of the refugee population and inflation require an annual budget increase of 5% in order to maintain the status quo of UNRWA services.

Staff costs make up the largest part of UNRWA's budget. In 1994-95 the agency employed 20,555 persons; this number is scheduled to be increased to 21,718 posts in 1996-97, as new teaching posts are required for the growing population.

Donors, however, have not kept up with UNRWA's funding needs. Since 1992, regular deficits have consumed UNRWA's working capital which was completely used up by 1996. UNRWA's estimated budget deficit in 1996 amounts to US \$15.6 million. The major reason for the crisis in UNRWA's regular budget is the lack of donor willingness to raise their contributions in accordance with the annual 5% budget increase required to maintain the standard of UNRWA services.

While donors are slow to pay towards UNRWA's regular budget, they respond quite well to **extrabudgetary projects**, such as the *Peace Implementation Program (PIP)* introduced in 1993 to provide economic support to the peace process. By the end of 1996, UNRWA had received US \$192.6 million in contributions and pledges for PIP I and PIP II, and grants of US \$41.2 million for the Gaza General Hospital. Donor preference for the special UNRWA programs can be explained by the fact that it is believed that PIP is the last major financial effort in the preparation of the hand-over of UNRWA's tasks first to the PA and eventually to other Arab governments.

**Distribution of Regular Budget Expenditure:
Education, Health, Social/Relief Services (1996-97, in US \$)**

	<i>% of Budget</i>	<i>% of Refugees</i>	<i>% of Special Hardship Cases</i>
Gaza Strip	27.9 (145.747mil.)	22.0	8.7
Jordan	25.8 (134.685mil.)	40.9	2.6
Lebanon	12.7 (66.141 mil.)	10.1	10.5
West Bank	17.2 (89.515 mil.)	17.0	6.0
Syria	8.7 (45.604 mil.)	10.0	6.4
Headquarters	7.7 (40.365 mil.)		

Since UNRWA Headquarters were relocated to Gaza on 15 July 1996, the major part of funds allocated for headquarters will flow into the Gaza Strip. At the end of 1996, UNRWA still lacked US \$3.9 million to complete the financing of the relocation of its headquarters.

Funds received under PIP and other special projects cannot be used to balance the deficit in the regular budget, as those funds are earmarked for specific projects. The Agency's success in attracting funding for PIP in recent years thus coincides with shortfalls in its regular budget.

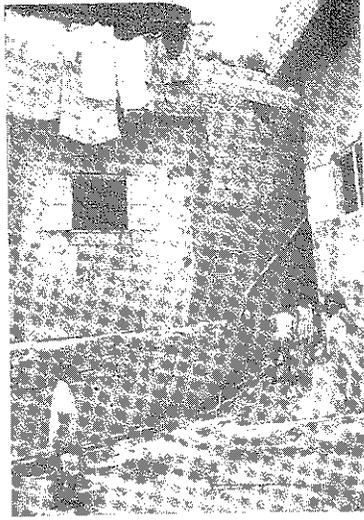
In response to the worsening financial situation, the Agency introduced austerity measures including a general salary freeze, cuts in the budget for additional teacher posts, hospitalization, medical supplies, etc. The result is an absurd situation in which public infrastructure in the camps is being improved in the framework of special projects, while needy refugees are deprived of basic services.

UN warehouses for emergency aid are more or less empty and the situation will become completely chaotic if the crisis between Israelis and Palestinians - as many people expect - will again escalate into armed conflict, said Peter Hansen, Chief of UNRWA: "We have not been able to supply the poorest of the poor, particularly widows and children without a man to support them, with the provisions they used to receive. So there is a danger of hunger and malnutrition"; said Peter Hansen at a crisis meeting held with donors on 23 September 1996.

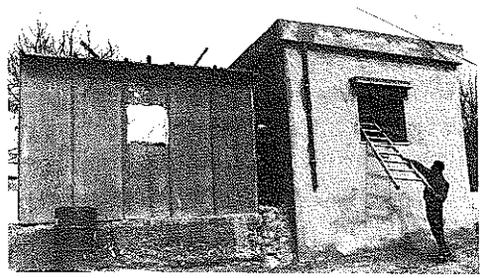
As UNRWA officials warn of the devastating effects of the breakdown of UNRWA's regular services, UNRWA donors have not yet responded sufficiently. This, although serious doubts have arisen also in regards to PIP's effectiveness in creating tangible benefits for the targeted refugee population. An UNRWA physician, for example, explained that the number of extrabudgetary environmental programs increased, while social programs were cut. Of course, sewage systems are important for the health situation in the camps, but, he explained, "there is a huge budget for buildings and no money for the regular services."

Refugees already feel the shortage and the decreasing amount of assistance. They find themselves in a situation where the effects of austerity measures weigh heavier on them than the benefit from the special projects introduced to support the peace process. As these special projects are mainly infrastructure programs, they do not affect the individual as immediately and as strongly as the individual relief services. Other special projects, such as shelter rehabilitation and job creation, simply cannot be implemented to the extent necessary to compensate for cuts in individual relief aid. So it is little wonder when refugees complain about their worsening situation and claim to see no advantage from the peace process, but on the contrary, even complain about the disadvantages in their daily and economic lives. The benefit from the special projects is hardly felt and leaves no trace in people's mind.

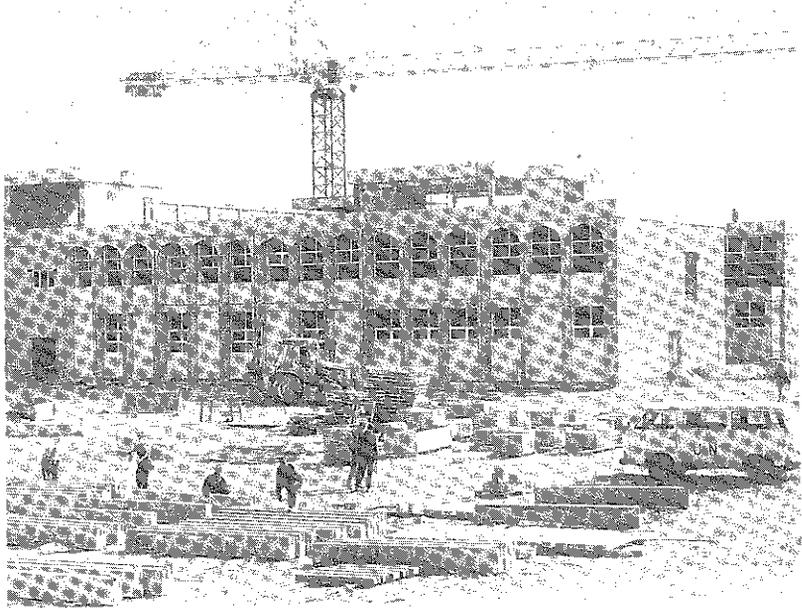
Protest Against Cuts in UNRWA Services - Palestinians, including PA Legislative Council member Jamal Shati, Head of the Refugee Affairs Committee in the PA Council, held a sit-in at Jenin Refugee Camp on 26 October 1996 to protest against the reduction of UNRWA services in the camp. The protesters said schools in the camp lack teachers and facilities, and the situation will deteriorate as UNRWA continues its systematic reduction of services. Eventually, UNRWA plans to end all its services, having them assumed by the PA. The protesters sent letters of protest to Palestinian President Arafat and various UNRWA officials.
[*Palestine Report*, 1-11-96]



*Burj-el-Barajneh, Lebanon:
Poor refugee housing (1994)*



*UNRWA Shelter Rehabilitation (1993):
the new shelter (right) replaces the old one built
in 1968;
Suf Camp, Jordan (UNRWA photo)*



*The new Gaza General Hospital being built under PIP by the European Union and
UNRWA (1994); photo: UNRWA*

Chapter II

UNRWA in the Political Arena

1. Historical Roles of UNRWA

For almost 40 years, when no possibility for a solution of the refugee question was in sight, UNRWA's role and functioning were unquestioned by the international community. Renewals of its mandate by the UN General Assembly were a matter of routine, even for the Israeli representative to the UN. This despite the fact that the Agency's mandate recalls GA Resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948, "affirming in particular the provisions of paragraph 11 of the latter resolution" which strongly implies Israeli and international responsibility:

"The General Assembly, having considered the situation in Palestine, resolves that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live in peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible."

● **The Refugee Perspective - UNRWA, an expression of international responsibility for the solution of the refugee question:**

The linkage between UN Resolution 194 and UNRWA's mandate suggests that the Agency is more than an executive body, which has to remain neutral. UNRWA's mandate also has a political content, i.e. the facilitation of refugee repatriation and compensation based on the commitment by the international community. Until today, UNRWA public information officers confirm that, "UNRWA promotes return or compensation, we stick to the resolution" (Ron Wilkinson, PI Director, Gaza). This stand, as well as the fact that UNRWA services and employment are indispensable for the refugee communities, are the reasons why Palestinian refugees continue to call for the protection of UNRWA and insist on its functioning as a tool for the implementation of their internationally recognized rights. [See Chapter 4: Recommendations]

● **The International Perspective - UNRWA as a stabilizing force in the Middle East:** UNRWA's role was traditionally perceived by all politically influential governments and main UNRWA donors as that of a stabilizer in the Middle East

whose services to the scattered Palestinian refugee population - in absence of a solution - prevented social and political upheavals. UNRWA therefore has been expected to avoid political exposure. UNRWA's leading staff headed by the High Commissioner (currently Peter Hansen) have strived to remain on good terms with all authorities in the region, Arab and Israeli governments alike, thus maintaining a neutral image, which - it was perceived - would serve best UNRWA's ability to provide services to the refugee communities.

Since UNRWA cooperation with the PLO was expected to lead to political controversies, UNRWA abstained from overt cooperation, especially prior to 1974. UNRWA-PLO coordination improved in the later 1970s and 1980s, when the PLO had received international recognition and observer status at the United Nations.

This neutral image slightly changed in the late 1980s, during the Palestinian Intifada, when pressure on UNRWA for a more decisive pro-Palestinian stand emerged from two sides. On the one hand, there was UNRWA's Palestinian staff, the overwhelming majority of whom were immersed in the popular struggle against the Israeli occupation in the 1967 occupied territories. But still more important was the fact that, for the first time, some of the leading states represented in the United Nations (mainly the European states) seriously considered the possibility that a Palestinian state lead by the PLO might be established, first as a result of the uprising, later as the outcome of the Madrid peace process. It was also in this context that the notion of the termination of UNRWA's mandate appeared for the first time.

"We operate on the assumption, that there will be an independent Palestinian state by 1994. [...] We in the PLO would like to engage in joint planning with UNRWA when the decision on establishing the state is made. It is our view that UNRWA will have to continue its work for the first five years of our independence, maintaining the operation of its schools and hospitals. [...] Gradually its schools and hospitals will be turned over to the government, and UNRWA's operation will dissolve into the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Refugee Affairs, and the Ministry of Education."

[Nabil Sha'ath, then PNC chairman, in the late 1980s; quoted in: Milton Viorst, Reaching for the Olive Branch, UNRWA and Peace in the Middle East; Middle East Institute, Washington DC, 1989]

2. UNRWA in the Post-Oslo Era

Following the 1991 Gulf War, the 1993 signing of the Oslo Accords and the creation of the new Palestinian Authority alongside the seriously weakened PLO, UNRWA's mandate is questioned again. Although Paragraph 5 of UNRWA's mandate provides that:

"The General Assembly recognizes that, without prejudice to the provisions of paragraph 11 of General Assembly Resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948, continued assistance for the relief of the Palestine refugees is necessary to prevent conditions of starvation and distress among them and to further conditions of peace and stability, and that constructive measures should be undertaken at an early date with a view to the termination of international assistance for relief;" [emphasis added]

international commitment to a solution of the refugee problem based on Resolution 194 has faded away. In the post Oslo era, international efforts are aimed at exploring new ways for refugee resettlement, e.g. by means of data surveys and projects for the improvement of refugee living conditions inside and outside the camps.⁸

These projects and new discussion about the rapid termination of UNRWA services have proceeded, while reference to Resolution 194 is made only as occasional lip service. The right of Palestinian refugees to return and compensation - affirmed by the international community in the past - is now, in the post Oslo era, handled as a bilateral Israeli-Palestinian matter, i.e. "a possible result of the final status negotiations between Israel and the PLO"

2.1 Termination of UNRWA: No More Refugee Question, No More UNRWA - No More UNRWA, No More Refugee Question?

Formal Termination?

At the time of the signing of the Oslo Accords, it was widely believed that peace and stability were about to emerge in the Middle East, that Palestinians statehood would be inevitable, and that the refugee problem would cease to exist. No refugee problem - no UNRWA. There were indications that the western governments were determined to dissolve UNRWA at the earliest possible date: large scale projects for the improvement of living conditions in refugee camps, including resettlement schemes, were raised in the framework of the *Multilateral Working Group on*

Refugee Affairs, the European Community commissioned research which claimed that UNRWA aid was wasteful and not meeting the requirements of the new period,⁹ and western donors financed data and research projects aimed at exploring new options for the solution of the refugee problem, particularly compensation and refugee integration. Rumors had it that the donor countries would stop financing UNRWA and that the UN General Assembly would not renew the Agency's mandate.

The Peace Implementation Program (PIP), launched in October 1993, is an expression of the political optimism at that stage: "*UNRWA considers that PIP II will be the final investment initiative undertaken by the Agency.*"¹⁰ UNRWA proposed to its donors a five-year financial and planning horizon which was adopted in 1995. This five-year plan would guarantee services for the refugees until 1999, to be followed by the hand-over of services, mainly to the PA:

*"In UNRWA's view, the discontinuation of the Agency's role should occur within the next five years, that is no later than the successful completion of the political negotiations on the refugee problem."*¹¹

By 1996, however, this early optimism seemed to have vanished - especially within UNRWA. Thus Peter Hansen, UNRWA's Commissioner-General, emphasized at his press conference on the occasion of the inauguration of the new UNRWA Headquarters in Gaza on 15 July 1996, that "UNRWA will continue its work until the refugee problem is solved." Hardly anyone believes that a solution will be reached until 1999; even young UNRWA employees believe they will still retire from the Agency. In August 1996, UNRWA issued an official statement denying the persistent rumor of a 1999 UNRWA-shutdown. Everybody within the Agency seems to be convinced that UNRWA will not be formally dissolved unless a satisfactory solution of the refugee problem is found. And the prospects for a satisfactory solution of the refugee problem are slim: "I know that the people in Beach Camp will be there in 20 years from now," was stated by UNRWA personnel in Gaza.¹²

De-facto Termination?

Despite the growing consensus with regard to the unlikelihood of a rapid formal dissolution, debate about the termination of UNRWA services continues. Fears of a formal dissolution have been replaced by fears of a de-facto dismantling by the ongoing cuts of the Agency's regular programs. If the donor policy of responding generously to special UNRWA projects (e.g. PIP, *Camp Improvement Program*,

Job Creation Program) while neglecting the financial requirements of the Agency's regular programs continues, UNRWA will not be able to provide adequate services to the refugee population in the future. It will then be forced to relinquish responsibility for vital services, which then may - or may not - be provided by the various state authorities.

2.2 UNRWA as a Tool for Refugee Integration?

Among all states and members of the UN, Israel has always promoted UNRWA as a tool for the implementation of its strategy of gradually erasing the Palestinian refugee question. In the past, it was Israel's assumption,

*"that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), established in 1949 to alleviate the refugee crisis, would be able through economic assistance to integrate the refugees into the countries of first asylum and to provide [...] 'a long-term interim solution which would, in effect, be a durable solution, even if in many or most cases, political integration into the country of asylum cannot be achieved.'"*¹³

While the historical project of economic integration via UNRWA projects failed, the new, post-Oslo international policy trend offers new opportunities for the original Israeli idea. Israel is therefore eager to see UNRWA services transferred to the PA and Arab states at the earliest possible date so as to achieve the formal integration of a large portion of the Palestinian refugee population prior to the final status negotiations, when it may be forced to make concessions. While Israeli officials continue to bypass issues pertaining to the political dimension of the refugee question by pointing to the final status negotiations, refugee integration is presented as the ultimate result:

*"Until the host countries solve the problem, UNRWA's work is important ... The best way to solve the problem would be the absorption of the refugees in the host countries ... This was Israel's position in the past, now we will wait for a new position [of the new LIKUD government] ... UN Resolution 194, the right of return, and compensation is an old resolution and many things have changed in the Middle East."*¹⁴

Given the reluctance of the Arab states towards the integration of Palestinian refugees, Israel has a strong interest in weakening UNRWA, thereby forcing the Arab states to supply minimum services to the refugee communities, leading to their de-facto integration in the host countries. Even in the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel in 1967, Israel's attitude towards UNRWA is ambivalent. While

on the one hand, Israel was interested in UNRWA services for a refugee population which it would otherwise have been responsible for, the Israeli authorities have persistently obstructed the Agency's activities and humiliated UNRWA staff. During the Intifada, numerous Palestinian personnel were arrested and offices were raided, and Israel continues to disregard the Agency's special status: Since the military closure of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1993, Israel has not permitted the Palestinian UNRWA staff to move freely between their areas of operation, the Jerusalem Headquarters is isolated, and import of construction materials crucial for UNRWA projects is frequently delayed.

The United States are the major UNRWA donor and as such are a powerful policy maker. US policy towards the Agency must be viewed in the light of the US interest in a politically stable Middle East which secures a strong position for its major ally Israel. Thus the US was informed of, and provided support for, many of the historical Israeli refugee resettlement schemes, some of them involving UNRWA.¹⁵

Following the Oslo Accords, the US government refrained from exerting pressure for a more flexible Israeli position on the refugee question, and has supported the Israeli argument that international resolutions on Palestinian refugees - including Resolution 194 - were from now on subject to bilateral Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Moreover, since 1993, the US has abstained from voting for Resolution 194 in several UN bodies, most recently in May 1996 on the occasion of the renewal of UNRWA's mandate by the UN General Assembly.

Refugee and UNRWA sources frequently express their concern about what they believe is the current US-approach: "Of course the US and Israel would like to see UNRWA disappear." They describe the strategy as consisting of reducing US contributions to UNRWA's regular budget, thus working for the forcible transfer of Agency tasks to the PA and Arab host governments. Any such transfer will then diminish the scope of Israeli and international responsibility for the Palestinian refugee question. What remains will then be dealt with as national problems of the Arab countries.

Arab states have so far officially rejected all schemes of refugee integration, and continue to emphasize UNRWA responsibility for the refugee communities in their territory. The reasons for this seemingly united Arab position are diverse.

Jordan and Syria do not oppose refugee integration in principle. The large majority of Palestinian refugees in Jordan actually hold Jordanian citizenship; Jordan's major political concern is the double identity of its Palestinian citizens which, based on historical commitments, it must recognize. Jordan is interested in

retaining the economically powerful Palestinian strata, based on their own choice in favor of Jordanian as opposed to Palestinian identity. Since such a choice requires conditions in which Palestinian refugees can decide by themselves whether to remain in Jordan or to leave for a Palestinian entity, the question of refugee integration is unresolved in Jordanian terms as long as Israel refuses to permit refugee repatriation into the areas controlled by the PA. Syria, on the other hand, perceives the thorny issue of the Palestinian refugee question as a bargaining chip in the negotiations with Israel.

Lebanon does not wish to see the establishment of any new order in the Middle East which would increase the proportion of Palestinians in its fragile ethnic system. Official plans for national reconstruction provide an option for integration into the new Lebanese system for a very limited number of Palestinian refugees, mainly those living outside the camps and refugees married to Lebanese citizens. The rest are expected to leave the country. Therefore, the Lebanese government, suspicious of the current pressures towards integration, has rejected the implementation of large scale, foreign-funded infrastructure programs, even if conducted in the framework of UNRWA.

The rejection of all schemes for the integration of Palestinian refugees in the region was an essential component of the PLO's struggle for national liberation. Currently, the PLO's position is weakened not only by its lack of allies on the international arena, but also by the fact that the 1993 Oslo Accords do not include UN Resolution 194 as a term of reference. Moreover, the Oslo Accords have led to a practical merger between the old PLO and the new Palestinian Authority. Since the PA's priority is the political, economic, and social construction of the newly autonomous territories in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the PLO's ability to represent traditional refugee demands based on international resolutions has been severely hampered.

The merger results in an ambiguous PLO/PA position towards the refugee question in general, and UNRWA in particular. Thus PLO officials sometimes endorse radical refugee criticism and demands¹⁶, and PLO/PA planning schemes at times reflect the historical position against refugee integration, even in the territories of the PA.¹⁷

On other occasions, however, statements by PA officials leave no doubt of the priority of "state-building" in the areas administered by the PA, an aim which overrides the concern for refugees' right of return.¹⁸ Current PA objections to refugee integration in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are based on pragmatic reasons, i.e. the fact that the PA, given its economic crisis, is in the short term unable

to provide services to the refugees already present, and unable to absorb large numbers of incoming, resourceless refugees. PA objections are usually not based on the principled position that refugee immigration to the Palestinian self-rule areas in the 1967 occupied territories does not correspond to refugees' right of return as expressed in UN Resolution 194.

2.3 Hand-Over of UNRWA Services?

While UNRWA's budgetary crisis is preparing the foundations for the de-facto hand-over of UNRWA services, a rapid formal hand-over to the Arab host countries, i.e. Jordan, Lebanon, and the Syrian Arab Republic, remains unlikely for the political and reasons described above.

Prospects for the immediate hand-over of services exist thus only in the 1967 occupied territories controlled by the Palestinian Authority. Here, in fact, hand-over is already taking place in several joint UNRWA-PA projects, frequently disguised as "projects of cooperation". This applies to the new General Hospital near Rafah: while being built in the framework of a special UNRWA project financed by the European Community, UNRWA is negotiating with the PA to take over its administration. Large scale infrastructure projects, e.g. new sewage systems, financed by foreign donors through UNRWA or the PA, require the cooperation of the two bodies while the question of the political implications of such "joint ventures" on the local refugee population remains unsolved. Moreover, the declining standards of UNRWA's health and education services - a result of the crisis of UNRWA's regular budget - has caused an increasing number of refugees to seek government (PA) public services.

The West Bank and Gaza Strip under the Palestinian Authority have thus become a test case for the transfer of UNRWA services. If it will prove feasible - taking into account both economic costs and the level of political acceptance among the local refugee community - donor countries will likely take more active steps towards proceeding in a similar fashion in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

Just like in the case of refugee integration in general, public statements by PA and UNRWA officials with regard to the specific question of the hand-over of UNRWA services to the PA are ambiguous and sometimes even contradictory.

In general, PA officials make clear that the PA does not wish to take over any tasks immediately. Thus Fathi Derwish, Director for Cooperation with NGOs in the

PA Ministry of Planning, emphasized that UNRWA should remain until a final solution of the refugee problem is achieved. He would even like to see UNRWA as an active participant in the search for a political solution, which must include all refugees, not only the ones in the occupied territories. But, at the same time, he pointed out, that an official PA position towards a hand-over of UNRWA tasks did not yet exist. The constraints are seen more in the PA's practical inability (lack of sovereignty, economic weakness, etc.), than in the principled political problematics of integrating the local refugee population into PA institutions and services. Thus, according to Walid Awad, Director for Foreign Relations in the *Ministry of Information*, the PA does not want to take over any UNRWA services until the whole refugee problem is solved, and as the political and economic situation remains uncertain, the PA simply lacks the ability to take over these responsibilities.

Statements by UNRWA officials reflect a similar ambiguity. On some occasions, UNRWA's political mandate is emphasized. Asked if UNRWA favored refugee integration by means of the hand-over of services, Gaza Public Information Director Ron Wilkinson replied that "the Agency promotes return or compensation. UNRWA wants to keep the refugee issue alive." Sandro Tucci, Head of Public Information, on the other hand, is cautious when asked whether the current decrease of UNRWA services will result in a de-facto hand-over: "This has to be discussed when the situation is clearer."¹⁹ And Commissioner-General Peter Hansen, announced at his press conference in Gaza on 15 July 1996: "We are searching for better ways to provide services through local authorities"

Economic ability and political consent by the host countries and the PA are frequently mentioned as conditions for an UNRWA approval of a hand-over of services: "The PNA is not yet ready to take over any responsibilities from UNRWA, as they have enough problems of their own;" "a hand-over will take place only when the host governments and the PNA can run the services." Also Sandro Tucci, Head of Public Information emphasizes that a hand-over will not take place as a unilateral act, but only in coordination with the host countries. Asked whether this was not just wishful thinking, as a voluntary take-over of UNRWA's services, at least in the Arab host countries, seems at the moment quite unlikely, he refers to the uncertain conditions, to the fact that the start of the final negotiations about the refugee issue remains to be seen, and that clear answers are lacking.

Only the refugee community, who daily experiences the reality of Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, expresses a clear and unambiguous stand in favor of the continuation of UNRWA services, rejecting firmly any hand-over of tasks to the PA.

Some of their statements among many include: "UNRWA is our father"; "if UNRWA finishes its work, the refugee problem will be finished"; "it is very easy, if UNRWA hands over we will die, because we will lose our identity". An UNRWA official, himself a refugee, said: "We need a Palestinian authority and not strangers to rule us, but I oppose any hand-over to the PNA. If this takes place I will retire from my job; the people will even start another Intifada against the PNA, if they take over the services." [see also: Chapter 4, Recommendations]

Several reasons are given for this firm opposition to the transfer of UNRWA tasks. First there is the fear of a decreasing standard of services if the PA should take over. Refugees doubt that PA would actually be granted the same amount of funds which UNRWA currently receives for the implementation of its projects.

Secondly, refugees say that they are aware of how the PA works, and of the corruption and nepotism prevailing in its institutions. They fear that political affiliation of the applicant might become a major criteria for access to services.

Finally, refugees fear that a hand-over of UNRWA responsibilities to the PA would result in the loss of their special, internationally protected refugee status. Their issue would be dropped from the agenda of the international community, and they would forfeit their chance to obtain the implementation of the UN resolutions on the Palestinian refugee question.

Awareness about the importance of refugee status as the key to continuing international responsibility is common among refugees, even among those with very strong, immediate material needs.

Mohammad Sa'id is a refugee from Rafah camp. As he is disabled and unable to work, and supporting a family, he meets the strict criteria for UNRWA aid in the Special Hardship Cases (SHC) Program, and he was lucky to obtain assistance under the Shelter Rehabilitation Program. The two monthly food rations, he says, vary from time to time; one time you get less and mainly fruits and bread, the other time they make up for it. Asked about whether he would accept services from the PA, he said: "If they offer the same services, why not," but - as a second thought immediately added - "this would not be good, because I will no longer be considered a refugee if UNRWA is canceled."

Chapter III

Problems On The Ground (West Bank and Gaza Strip)

The problems presented below serve to illustrate the financial crisis of UNRWA's regular programs and the effect on the refugee population. Moreover, they show the concrete human meaning of a political strategy aimed at weakening UNRWA so as to enforce a transfer of services to the host countries and to achieve refugee integration. The examples presented below are taken from the 1967 Occupied Palestinian Territories, although refugee experiences deriving from UNRWA budget cuts are similar in all areas of UNRWA operation, and are even more dramatic in Lebanon.

Refugees, including UNRWA Camp Administration Officers, are enraged about the situation following the Oslo Accords and the new donor- and UNRWA-emphasis on special projects, especially PIP. They all state that the peace process in general, and PIP projects in particular have brought no benefits to the refugees. It is true that new schools and health centers are being built and that this is quite important, but "while twenty out of a thousand houses are improved, many people are excluded from the Special Hardship Cases program," an UNRWA official explains.

UNRWA is evasive about the reduction of services already taking place. Sandro Tucci, Chief of Public Information, for example, refers to the budget cuts for regular activities as "implementing modifications to adapt to the changing circumstances." UNRWA officials are reluctant to admit that the Agency has set a ceiling to the SHC program, a vital program for needy refugees. Due to shortages in regular funding, UNRWA introduced new and tighter criteria for eligibility to SHC aid. Consequently many needy refugees were dropped from the program, and new cases cannot be admitted. The introduction of the new criteria coincided with the Israeli military closure, when large numbers of refugees lost their jobs and became even more dependent on UNRWA aid.

Service cuts have also affected the health sector. According to physicians at UNRWA health centers, the health budget - although limited to begin with - was further cut by 20% at the end of 1995. In the same year, UNRWA introduced a cost-sharing system at its contract hospitals which requires refugees to contribute 40% of the costs of their treatment (special hardship cases are excluded from this new

regulation). The UNRWA health care system can thus not keep step with the needs of the growing refugee population; overcrowded health care centers and impossible working conditions for their physicians are the result. These circumstances do not permit careful diagnosis, and treatment is reduced to the hand out of medicine. Frequently the required medicine is not available; shortages occur especially in expensive drugs, such as psycho-active medication and heart pills. The child nutrition program (for the age from 0-12) was reduced to include only children from 0-4 years; since the new and reduced nutrition program was shifted from special nutrition centers to the general UNRWA health clinics, it has become an additional task for the already overloaded physicians. In addition, family planning programs and the treatment of diabetes and hypertension have been added to the tasks of the general health centers.

Wajih al-Khalib, a refugee from Qalandia camp complains about the current deterioration of UNRWA health services. He underwent heart surgery in 1986 and has since then been in need of regular follow-up examinations. At first, UNRWA covered both these examinations and the medicine. Some years ago, however, UNRWA stopped his check-ups at the UNRWA hospital in Jerusalem both for financial reasons and due to the military closure. Now, UNRWA supplies only the medicine; his examinations take place at a rather expensive private hospital in Ramallah which he is obliged to pay for in full. Al-Khalib still considers himself lucky to manage to raise this money as many refugees are unable to do so.

Regular UNRWA services were not increased after the imposition of the military closure, not even emergency food distributions. Thus many refugees have begun to sell valuable property; even the sight of people sorting through garbage dumps is becoming increasingly common.

UNRWA made an effort to tackle the growing poverty by supporting the creation of new jobs by means of low interest loans granted to refugees who wish to start small enterprises. Refugees, however, have difficulty in qualifying for this loan program, one of the special projects launched after the Oslo Accords. According to unofficial information provided by UNRWA staff, the want-to-be businessmen/women must present feasibility studies, which many can only provide if they are able to pay expert services. If the loan application is denied, the investment into the feasibility study is in vain.

In response to the total closure following the February 1996 bus-bombings in Israel, UNRWA launched a specially funded, short term job creation program. The basis of this program is a budget which allows UNRWA to employ 2,700 persons for a period of no more than five months - obviously far short of meeting the needs

of refugees in the Gaza Strip. Jobs created in this framework are mainly simple public services (especially street cleaning) with few alternatives for the qualified unemployed. The *Camp Improvement Program* was introduced both, in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank. It aims to combine job creation with long-term camp improvement, but also here, resources are limited (estimated budget of US \$ 13 million).

UN Report (Autumn 1996): Increasing rates of poverty in Gaza and West Bank, especially amongst refugee population

With poverty levels rising in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in light of continued closure imposed by Israel (unemployment reached 39% in Gaza in 1996, and 24% in the West Bank, with a corresponding fall in wages rates and living standards - household income and living standards fell some 19.3% for an average worker in WBGS in the first half of 1996), a recent UN report highlights the fact that the refugees are one of the sectors in Palestinian society hit hardest in times of closure, most especially in Gaza. With over three-quarters of its population refugees, Gaza's estimated poverty rate is over twice that of the West Bank - 20% versus 10% according to research conducted by *MAS* (Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute, 1995). This is due in large part to the fact that whereas agriculture still serves as a 'shock absorber' (providing employment, although often unpaid) in the West Bank, in Gaza, the opposite occurs: during tight closure the agricultural sector shrinks as export markets are completely cut off. In addition to lack of export markets, ownership of land is another distinguishing factor in Gaza; one study in 1996 showed that while nearly one-fifth of West Bankers had access to land or farm animals as a source of income, only one-tenth of Gazans had such access.

'Economic and Social Conditions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip', Quarterly Report, UNSCO, Autumn 1996

Refugee criticism is directed at the donor countries and at UNRWA, because the latter is expected to encounter donor strategies and to defend refugee rights by means of innovative ideas. Among the important issues raised is the question of how to obtain a re-shifting of special project funds to UNRWA's regular budget, which like the SHC program, provide immediate assistance to the growing number of needy refugees. How can UNRWA increase its flexibility so as to adapt better to the changing circumstances on the ground?

There is criticism 'on the ground' also regarding financial irregularities in the implementation of the PIP projects. Refugees and UNRWA officers in the camps complain about money disappearing in the process of implementation. Reasons

given are corruption (especially in projects carried out in cooperation with the PA), high administrative expenses, and mismanagement within UNRWA. Frequently, projects must be re-planned after it is discovered that the original plans do not meet the conditions found during implementation. This eats up large sums of money not visible in the final program result. UNRWA sources explain that aid is often re-programmed, delayed, or re-channeled for many reasons which frequently are to be found on the donor side. Donors delay and re-channel their funds, and have the habit of announcing one contribution on more than one occasion so as to make it sound larger. They create the impression that there are new contributions, but in fact the money is only paid once and often with long delays.

Chapter IV

Recommendations in Support of UNRWA and Refugee Rights

The need to protect UNRWA and to refuse any transfer of UNRWA services to state and PA institutions is crucial for the defense of Palestinian refugee rights in the current period. The call for the maintenance of UNRWA services is part of the consensus established in the debate among Palestinian refugees themselves.

Recommendations of the *First Popular Refugee Conference in the Bethlehem District, Deheishe Refugee Camp, 13 September 1996 (Excerpts)*

- The refugees in the Bethlehem district express their concern and a warning of the implications of the weakness of the Oslo Agreements on the refugee issue, and state their readiness to continue and to renew the struggle for the transfer of the negotiations on the refugee question from the current bi-lateral forum to the halls of the United Nations.
- Based on the above, we the participants in the Conference declare to the public and swear to our people and to our refugee brothers all over the diaspora, that we will continue the struggle for the implementation of UN Resolution 194 which affirms our right to return and to compensation.
- The participants warn of the dangers of UNRWA involvement in the current political process, which favors the opponent and liquidates UNRWA's original objectives. While we condemn strongly all approaches aimed at the liquidation of UNRWA, we demand Arab and international intervention in order to re-establish UNRWA's role based on its responsibilities and internationally legitimized decisions. We demand the activation of UNRWA's bodies and departments for the implementation of international decisions, particularly Resolution 194, and steps to oblige it to act - in the framework of the UN and outside it - in accordance with international decisions, and not by opposing or bypassing them.
- We demand that the PNA reject the policy of transfer of UNRWA tasks to the PNA, and oppose efforts to legally terminate UNRWA.
- We demand that the PNA reject the concept of "compensation" as an alternative to the right of return as a legal concept.

● We demand that the PNA refuse its support of all tendencies and efforts aimed at transforming UNRWA into a financing or development agency in accordance with US policy.

● Elected local refugee councils should establish centers for documentation and for the collection of data and information on refugees, which will - at a later stage - serve as the basis for a central refugee information center. This is because we cannot rely on data issued by UNRWA, whose figures are not always accurate.

[The full text of these recommendations in English and Arabic can be ordered from the AIC]

Suggestions for International Action Based on Refugee Demands

● Check if your government is regularly paying its contribution to UNRWA. Check the relation between contributions to UNRWA's regular budget and special projects (e.g. Peace Implementation Programs);

● Lobby politicians to pressure your government to fulfill its financial obligations to UNRWA;

● Address the media and brief journalists on the importance of UNRWA for Palestinian refugees, especially for the poorest among them in Lebanon.

● Establish contacts with refugee grass-roots initiatives; direct all possible assistance to their projects and priorities (e.g. service projects in camps, community based research centers, etc.)

● Remember that Palestinian refugees feel very much deserted by the international community in the current period. You can decrease frustration by promoting their agenda through media work, film presentations, lecture tours with refugee representatives, etc.

For assistance in your initiatives you may contact:

AIC-Project for Palestinian Residency & Refugee Rights: member in the *Local Coordinating Committee/Palestine for the Campaign for Refugee Rights and Development* conducted jointly with the Union of Youth Centers in the West Bank and the Jerusalem Open University/Refugee Study Center (address on cover)

Association France-Palestine/Platform of French NGOs on Palestine: supports projects in refugee camps, refugee advocacy in France; Isabelle Avron, PO Box 4255, 75162 Paris Cedex 04, tel. (0)1-46361841, fax. (0)1-43664227;

CEAD-Alternatives: Canadian NGO supporting projects in refugee camps and refugee advocacy in Canada and the US; Anne Latendresse, fax. 001-514-982-6122, email: d162744@er.uqam.ca

Ghassan Kanafani Cultural Association: kindergartens and kindergarten teacher training, member of the NGO Forum in Lebanon (below); Anni Kanafani (director), tel. 00961-1-345368, (0)3-230436, fax. 1212-4-782677 (att. Ghassan Salem)

Local Research Center: independent research project on refugees in Lebanon; Rosemary Sayigh, email: rsayigh@cyberia.net.lb

NACC-North American Coordinating Committee of NGOs on Palestine: Doris Warrell, Coordinator; 1747 Connecticut Ave NW, Washington DC 20009; tel. (202) 319-0757, fax. (202) 319-0746

Najdeh Association: Traditional embroidery, vocational training, member of the NGO Forum in Lebanon (below); Haifa Jamal (director); tel. (0)1-302079, fax. (0)1-703358, email: najd10@calvacom.fr

Palestinian NGO Forum in Lebanon: a network of 16 NGOs working in Palestinian refugee camps; Wafa Yassir (deputy director; director of the Norwegian People's Aid in Lebanon), email: npa10@calvacom.fr

UNRWA Public Information Offices:

West Bank: Jerusalem, tel. 00972-2-5890408, fax. 2-5322842

Gaza Strip: Gaza, tel/fax. 00972-7-6867044

Jordan: Amman, tel. 00962-6-683-363, fax. 00962-2-685-476

Lebanon: Beirut, tel. 00961-1-6034336/7/8-822926 (switchboard), 00357-9-514439 (via Cyprus); tel/fax (cellular via New York): 001-212--4781686

Syria: Damascus, tel. 00963-11-6624081-85, 6624565-66; fax. 00963-11-6615623

Footnotes and References

1) Figures from "UNRWA 1950 - 1990, Serving Palestine Refugees"; UNRWA Public Information Office, Austria; April 1990

2) 1967 Displaced Persons not refugees of 1948 are the subject of UN Security Council Resolution 237 (14 June 1967) stating, "[...] *The Security Council, considering the urgent need to spare the civil populations [...] additional sufferings [...], calls upon the Government of Israel to ensure the safety, welfare, and security of the inhabitants of the areas where military operations have taken place and to facilitate the return of those inhabitants who have fled the areas since the outbreak of the hostilities.*"

Despite its being an operational definition, UNRWA's refugee definition is the most frequently referred to also in the context of political negotiations (see also: IV Recommendations).

3) From: "Palestine Refugees and UNRWA - 45th Year"; UNRWA Headquarters, Vienna; 1995. The number of 1967 Displaced Persons used by Palestinian negotiators is higher (412,000), because it includes also persons staying abroad at the time of war, and persons evicted by the Israeli occupation between 1967 and 1991 (deportees, "lost Ids").

4) See for example: Rosemary Sayigh, Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries, Zed Books, 1979; Too Many Enemies: The Palestinian Experience in Lebanon, Zed Books, 1994.

5) from "UNRWA Fact Sheets - Gaza", March 1996.

6) from "Palestinians in Lebanon: (dis)solution of the refugee problem", Rosemary Sayigh, appeared in *Race & Class*; February 1995. In regards to current preference given to the West Bank and Gaza Strip, see the distribution of PIP funding (released by UNRWA Public Information Office-Jerusalem, January 1997):

Gaza	\$ 116.8 mil.
West Bank	\$ 42.6 mil.
Lebanon	\$ 17.1 mil.
Jordan	\$ 8.8 mil.
Syria	\$ 7.195 mil.
Total	\$ 192.6 mil.

By the end of June 1996, UNRWA was seeking additional special contributions to PIP projects with a value of US \$ 150.7 million.

7) Refugee, budget and staff figures taken from "The Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East" to the Fiftieth Session of the General Assembly in 1995; UNRWA Public Information Office-Jerusalem, January 1997.

8) See for example: *Refugee Working Group: Projects*, in: Palestinian Refugee Research Net: <http://www.arts.mcgill.ca/MEPP/PRRN/prmepp.html>

9) *Assistance to Refugees in the Middle East: Draft Final Report (Bristol Report)*, prepared by the Office for International Policy Services (IPS) and the Refugee Studies Programme at Oxford University, July 1994.

10) From "UNRWA and the transitional period: a five-year perspective on the role of the Agency and its financial requirements"; UNRWA Headquarters, Vienna: 31 January 1995.

11) as above

12) Interviews conducted by G. Pulfer, July 1996.

13) From "Residency Status and Civil Rights of Palestinian Refugees in Arab Countries"; by Abbas Shiblak; *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Nr. 199, 1996.

Abbas Shiblak is quoting H. Adelman, "Palestine Refugees, Economic Integration and Durable Solutions" in Anna C. Bramwell, ed., *Refugees in the Age of Total War* (n.p.: Unwin Hyman Ltd. for the Refugee Studies Programme, University of Oxford, 1988).

14) From an interview with Aryeh Zur, Israeli Foreign Ministry/Division for Political Affairs at the UN.

15) Nur Masalha, *Israeli Plans to Resettle the Palestinian Refugees 1948-1972; Palestinian Diaspora and Refugee Center (SHAML)*, 1996.

16) Thus As'ad Abdelrahman, Head of the PLO Expatriates Committee and responsible of the PLO refugee portfolio, supported the recommendations of the first popular refugee conference in the Bethlehem District (13 September 1996); see also *ARTICLE 74 Bulletin*, No 17, Alternative Information Center, September 1996.

17) The PLO's "Programme for Development of the Palestinian Economy for the Years 1994 - 2,000 (Tunis, 1993) assumed the return of 500,000 Palestinians by the year 2,000 (executive summary, p.20). It should be noted that these figures were for Displaced Persons only, and that the document assumes no return of 1948 refugees during this period.

18) See for example, "Independent State is a Substitute for UNRWA": statement by Nabil Sha'ath, PA Minister of Planning and International Cooperation to UNRWA Commissioner General Peter Hansen, 6-9-1996: "We want UNRWA to continue its work here in Palestine and in Palestinian refugee areas until their problem is completely solved. The PA at present is not a substitute for the agency. The only substitute for UNRWA is the independent Palestinian state. When it is established, the solution of the refugees' problem will end the agency's work."

19) This and all following quotes are based on an interview with Sandro Tucci in summer 1996.

Additional References:

"Economic and Social Conditions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip", Quarterly Report, UNSCO, Autumn 1996.

Palestine Report issued by the JMCC, Jerusalem.

Milton Viorst: *Reaching for the Olive Branch: UNRWA and Peace in the Middle East*, Middle East Institute, Washington DC, 1989.

Publications issued by the AIC Project for Palestinian Residency & Refugee Rights

ARTICLE 74 Bulletin for the Promotion of Palestinian Residency & Refugee Rights: quarterly, English, 8 pages (current issues: #18/December 1996, #19 forthcoming March 1997); US \$15 for 10 issues.

Memorandum 1/96: *The Trap Is Closing on Palestinian Jerusalemites: Israel's Demographic Policies in Occupied East Jerusalem, 1967 - 1996;* English and Arabic, 24 pages, February 1996 (second reprint: January 1997); US \$5.

Memorandum 2/97: *Palestinian Deportees: The Leaders Returned - The Soldiers Remaining in Exile?;* Arabic, 50 pages, January 1997 (English edition forthcoming); US \$7.

Memorandum 3/97: *UNRWA - Between Refugee Aid and Power Politics: A Call Upon International Responsibility for the Palestinian Refugee Question;* English, 40 pages, January 1997 (Arabic edition forthcoming), US \$7.

Palestinian Refugees and the Dream of Return to the Land of the Sad Orange: A reader compiled by Salah Abed Rabbe, a central activist of the al Far'ah Refugee Campaign and spokesperson of the Union of Youth Centers in the Palestinian refugee camps in the West Bank; presents a variety of positions towards the refugee question, an account of the al Far'ah refugee initiative, and a clear answer to all those pragmatists who argue that a solution to the refugee question must be found within the narrow parameters of the Oslo Agreement; Arabic, 150 pages, July 1996; US \$10.

Recommendations of the First Popular Refugee Conference in the Bethlehem District, Deheishe, 13 September 1996; Arabic and English, US \$3.

Also Available:

Living in Jerusalem: An Assessment of Planning Policy, Housing and Living Conditions in the Light of the Palestinians' Right to Adequate Housing; a report by the Palestine Housing Rights Movement to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; English, May 1996, 60 pages; US \$10.

Please order by sending a cheque in your local currency made out to the Alternative Information Center ; mail to PO Box 31417, Jerusalem.

Internet Web-Pages on Palestinian Refugees

Alternative Information Center:

Palestinian Residency & Refugee Rights Web-Page: <http://www.aic.org/refugees/index.htm>

McGill University:

Palestinian Refugee Research Net: <http://www.arts.mcgill.ca/MEPP/PRRN/prmepp.html>

Oxford University - Refugee Studies Program:

<http://info.ox.ac.uk/~rspnet>

UNRWA:

<http://www.un.org>

UNHCR-UN High Commissioner for Refugees:

<http://www.unhcr.ch>

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