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UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE  
REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST

Note by the Secretary-General

1. The Secretary-General has received from the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East a special report on the effect on Palestine refugees of recent operations carried out by the Israeli military authorities in the Gaza Strip.<sup>1/</sup> This special report is transmitted herewith to the members of the General Assembly.
2. As indicated in the special report, the Commissioner-General is greatly concerned about the effect on Palestine refugees of these operations, in which shelters in refugee camps were demolished and about 15,000 persons displaced, some of them to places outside the Gaza Strip. The Secretary-General shares the concern of the Commissioner-General. On 18 August 1971, he urgently requested the Government of Israel to undertake promptly all measures necessary to ensure the immediate cessation of the destruction of refugee homes in the Gaza Strip and halt the removal of the refugee occupants to places outside the Strip. He also requested the Government of Israel to proceed urgently with the provision of adequate housing within the Gaza Strip for all those displaced as a result of the measures already taken by the Israel authorities.

<sup>1/</sup> The annual report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East for the period 1 July 1970 to 30 June 1971 will be circulated shortly as Supplement No. 13 to the Official Records of the twenty-sixth session of the General Assembly.

Special report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East on the effect on Palestine refugees of recent operations carried out by the Israeli military authorities in the Gaza Strip.

1. The Commissioner-General submits the following special report on the effect on Palestine refugees of recent operations carried out by the Israeli military authorities in the Gaza Strip, in which shelters in refugee camps were demolished and about 15,000 persons displaced, some of them to places outside the Gaza Strip. This report is submitted in accordance with paragraph 21 of General Assembly resolution 302 (IV).
2. On 8 July 1971, while the Minister of Defence of the Government of Israel was in Gaza, he asked to see the Agency's Field Director for the Gaza Strip and told him that in view of the ineffectiveness of other measures in dealing with violence in Jabalia refugee camp, the Israeli authorities intended in the near future to move numbers of the inhabitants from the camp so that roads could be built or widened for security purposes. The Minister said it was not intended that the refugees should be left without shelter, but, because of the urgency of the measure, new housing outside Jabalia could not be provided in advance of demolition. Displaced persons would have to be accommodated in other camps or in Gaza town or in El Arish outside the Gaza Strip. The Minister also expressed the hope that the Agency would continue to provide services in these new locations to refugees who were moved.
3. United Nations Headquarters were informed by the Agency of this and other developments. There was no question of the Agency's being asked to agree to this measure, which was taken on the sole initiative and responsibility of the Occupying Power. Without further reference to the Agency, the demolition of shelters began on 20 July in Jabalia camp.
4. At a meeting in Gaza, on 28 July, at which the Commissioner-General expressed his concern and sought more information, the Military Governor of the Gaza Strip said that the operations were limited to Jabalia camp. that the numbers involved would not be out of proportion to the numbers involved in earlier road-widening in other camps (where housing had been provided in advance in the same camp);

that there were plans for new housing in the Strip, but action was urgent in view of the killing of 80 persons in a period of five months; that El Arish was being used only because alternative housing was not available in the Gaza Strip; and, further, that refugees who have moved to El Arish would be able to return when the new housing was available. On the basis of this information, it appeared that about 600 to 800 families, and in Jabalia only, would be affected by the operations. Without notification to the Agency, however, the operations were extended to Shati (Beach) camp on 2 August and to Rafah camp on or about 15 August.

5. On 6 August, the Commissioner-General drew the attention of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the extreme hardship being inflicted on the refugees by the sudden demolition of their homes and their forcible removal at short notice.

6. In a note verbale of 8 August, the Agency formally protested at the action being taken by the Israeli authorities, which appeared to be contrary to General Assembly resolution 2675 (XXV), which affirmed a number of basic principles for the protection of civilian populations in armed conflicts, and also to the provisions of articles 49 and 53 of the Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949 relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.

7. On 14 August, the Commissioner-General pointed out to the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs that demolition appeared to be much in excess of the alternative accommodation available. He asked that a halt be called to the operations and action urgently taken to provide adequate shelter within the Gaza Strip for those who had lost their homes.

8. On 19 August, at a meeting in the Israeli Ministry of Defence, the Commissioner-General was informed that the operations had been completed in Jabalia and would be completed that day in Shati (Beach) camp, but that they were still in progress in Rafah and would continue as long as alternative accommodation in the Gaza Strip or in El Arish or, also, in the West Bank of Jordan was available. The Commissioner-General was informed that at that stage the homes of 1,515 families, comprising over 10,000 persons, had been demolished. He again called for a halt to the operations, but was told that they must go on. He was also informed that a second phase would take place after up to 800 new houses had been built in four separate areas in the Strip: Khan Younis, Rafah, Deirel-Balah and the area between Deir-el-Balah and Gaza town.

9. The operations continued in Rafah camp until 26 August. According to the best information at present available to the Agency, about 2,900 families, comprising some 15,000 persons, have been displaced from the three camps in these operations, of whom about 350 families have gone to El Arish, about 30 families to the West Bank, and the rest remain elsewhere in the Gaza Strip. For precise information checks must be made at all Agency distribution centres and this will take some time.

10. Despite assurances given by the Israeli military authorities in the course of the operations, by 14 August about 70 Agency staff members had had their shelters demolished, and some had been obliged to move to El Arish owing to the absence of readily available alternative accommodation in the vicinity.

11. The Agency was asked by the Israeli military authorities to continue to provide services to refugees who were moved. Refugees who are still resident in the Strip are eligible for the medical and educational services provided there and can ask to have their rations transferred to a nearer distribution centre in accordance with normal practice. This applies also to those who have had to move to the West Bank of Jordan. As regards El Arish, which is outside the area in which the Agency operates programmes, the Agency has been unable to agree to the request by the Israeli authorities that it should provide services there. A refugee family at El Arish may, however, still pick up its monthly rations at its former distribution centre or, if it so requests the Agency, have them temporarily transferred to a more convenient centre within the Strip. The Agency will also give whatever assistance it can to enable displaced refugees to re-establish themselves within the Gaza Strip.

12. According to reports received by the Agency from the refugees and from its staff, the Israeli military authorities carried out these security operations, in general, in the following way. Israeli soldiers arrived in the camp (on some occasions, at least, at night), marked shelters for demolition and gave the inhabitants notice ranging from two to forty-eight hours to leave with all their belongings. The identity cards of the heads of the families affected were taken away by the soldiers in exchange for receipts. The refugees were told that there was good accommodation for them in El Arish, but that, if they preferred, they

could go to the West Bank of Jordan, or remain in Gaza if they could find unoccupied accommodation there outside their camp and produce the owner's written agreement for its use. They were also told that free transport would be provided for those agreeing to go to El Arish or the West Bank of Jordan, that accommodation there would be rent-free for a period and employment was available, and that compensation would be paid for demolished additions they had made to Agency shelters and for privately-built shelters. The Agency understands that compensation was also paid for other private property belonging to refugees and affected by demolition, that food for several days was given to those who moved to El Arish, and that medical attention is available there.

13. The Agency has not yet had full information on the effects of the operations described above. It believes that about 4,360 rooms built by the Agency, or with its assistance, have been demolished, and the Government of Israel has been notified of a claim for compensation in respect of them. In addition, it is estimated that over 2,000 privately-built rooms have been demolished. There has been some dislocation of services, but the extent cannot yet be assessed. From such information as is available on the whereabouts of refugees displaced by the demolition of their shelters, about 2,500 families must have remained in the Strip, occupying such other empty housing or other permanent shelter as they could find, doubling-up with friends or relatives, or improvising make-shift shelter on vacant land. It is evident that for many their present living conditions must be worse than before and that the health hazard must be greater.

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