

The United Nations and Palestinian Refugees



UNRWA

الأونروا

providing humanitarian assistance
to palestinian refugees since 1950



UNHCR

The UN
Refugee Agency



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In December 1949, the United Nations General Assembly established the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to provide humanitarian relief to the more than 700,000 refugees and displaced persons who had been forced to flee their homes in Palestine as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. Also in December 1949, the United Nations General Assembly decided to set up the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of 1 January 1951, with the principal aim of dealing with refugees in Europe left homeless by World War II. Nevertheless, since its inception, UNHCR has had the mandate to deal with refugees worldwide, and began to do so in earnest during the 1960s.

UNRWA was mandated to carry out “relief and works programmes” in support



UNRWA / 1950s

Suffering and fortitude of young and old in Jalazone refugee camp, West Bank

of *Palestine* refugees, that is, refugees from the territory that had been under the British Mandate for Palestine, regardless of nationality. Over time its operations have evolved to meet changing needs and circumstances. The Agency currently provides both basic humanitarian relief and human development services in its area of operations, namely Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and the occupied Palestinian territory.

UNHCR has a world-wide mandate to protect, assist, and seek durable solutions for refugees as well as for other people in need of international protection. UNHCR's mandate covers Palestinians who are refugees within the meaning of the 1951 Refugee Convention, which could include *Palestine* refugees as defined by UNRWA. UNHCR normally takes up the case of Palestinian refugees only when they are outside UNRWA's area of operations.

For the past 55 years, UNRWA and UNHCR have been cooperating, each within its mandate, and in close coordination with the host states, to support and protect Palestinian refugees. In recent years, the partnership between the two agencies has become closer, resulting in increased cooperation in a variety of areas, including in the exchange of information and joint efforts to resolve problems faced by Palestinian refugees.



UNRWA / July 2006

UNRWA and UNHCR officials conferring with Palestinian refugees from Iraq, at Al-Tanf tented site on the Syria – Iraq border

UNRWA

Mandate and Organisation

UNRWA was established by United Nations General Assembly resolution 302 (IV) of 8 December 1949. The Agency began operations in May 1950 and was originally expected to be short-lived. In the absence of a comprehensive solution to the Palestine refugee problem, however, the General Assembly has repeatedly renewed UNRWA's mandate, most recently extending it to 30 June 2008. Today, the Agency provides education, health care, social services, shelter, micro-credit loans and emergency aid to Palestine refugees in its five fields of operations: Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. UNRWA employs more than 28,000 staff, the vast majority themselves Palestine refugees, including 20,000 educational staff and 4,000 health care workers. The Agency's headquarters are in Gaza City and Amman.



UNRWA

A Palestine refugee girl in Qaber Essit refugee camp, Syria



UNRWA / 2003

Rafah refugee camp, Gaza strip

UNRWA's Protection Role

Through its core programmes of assistance and human development and its range of interventions with governmental authorities, UNRWA provides a measure of protection to Palestine refugees in its area of operations. The task of finding a comprehensive solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Palestine refugee problem, however, is not part of UNRWA's mandate but is rather the responsibility of the parties to the conflict and other political actors. UNRWA's role is to address the humanitarian and human development needs of Palestine refugees in the interim. In some instances, UNRWA

is able to intervene with the relevant authorities on behalf of both individuals and groups of Palestine refugees, many of whom live in difficult and often insecure circumstances. In the West Bank and Gaza Strip in particular, refugees frequently grapple with the effects of armed conflict, restrictions on freedom of movement, the separation barrier, land confiscations and house demolitions -- conditions that also affect UNRWA's ability to carry out its work.

Palestine Refugees as Defined by UNRWA

Anyone whose normal place of residence was in Mandate Palestine during the period from 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948 and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war qualifies as a *Palestine* refugee, as defined by UNRWA, and is eligible for UNRWA registration. Hence the reference to *Palestine* refugees, not *Palestinian* refugees, in UNRWA's name and official documents. The descendants of the original *Palestine* refugees are also eligible for registration, but only refugees living in one of UNRWA's five fields of operations receive Agency services.



The number of *Palestine* refugees registered with UNRWA is now more than 4.3 million. UNRWA has also been encouraged by the General Assembly to provide humanitarian assistance on an emergency basis to persons in the area who do not meet UNRWA's definition of a Palestine refugee but who have been displaced as a result of the June 1967 war and subsequent hostilities.

Only one-third of the registered refugees still live in refugee camps. Most of the other two-thirds live in cities, towns and villages throughout UNRWA's area of operations, and some have moved outside the area and are living in other countries. UNRWA services are available to all registered refugees present in its area of operations whether they live in camps or not.



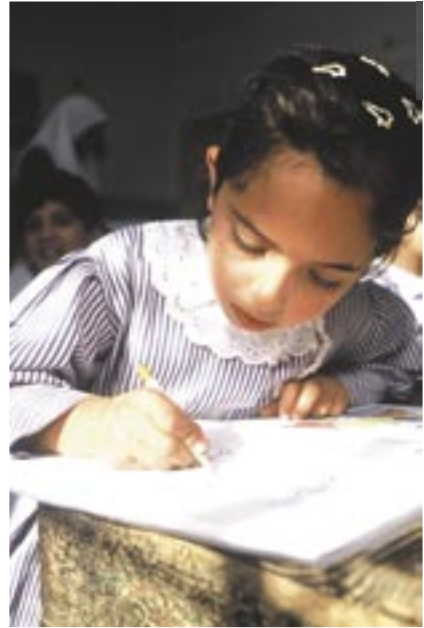
UNRWA / 2006

Shufat refugee camp, Jerusalem

Scope of UNRWA's Work

UNRWA provides services through its own staff and installations. In total, it operates 663 schools, 8 vocational training centres, 125 primary health care facilities, 65 women's programmes centres and 39 community-based rehabilitation centres. The Agency provides hardship assistance, such as food aid, to nearly 250,000 refugees, and since 1991 has issued more than 100,000 micro-credit loans worth more than US\$ 100 million. In response to the ongoing conflict in the occupied Palestinian territory since 2000, UNRWA has been providing additional emergency assistance to both registered refugees and others in need. UNRWA programmes make particular provision for the special needs of women, children and the elderly.

UNRWA is financed mainly by voluntary contributions from governments, which account for some ninety-five per cent of all income. Only 113 international staff posts are funded by the UN in New York, representing less than five per cent of UNRWA's regular budget. UNRWA has also begun to make progress with fundraising from non-governmental sources although this area remains relatively underdeveloped.



A Palestine refugee child in an UNRWA school

Almost all contributions are made in cash, but there are some in-kind contributions, such as food, basic commodities and medical supplies. UNRWA's total budget for 2006, not including its emergency programme, was US\$ 639 million. UNRWA's emergency programme, which runs only in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, was budgeted at US\$ 170.7 million and raised US \$145 million in 2006. Interventions under this programme are focused mainly on provision of food aid, temporary job creation and cash assistance.

UNHCR



UNHCR / A. Hollmann / 1998

A reception centre in Germany where -- as in many other countries outside the Middle East -- Palestinian asylum seekers are assessed individually under the 1951 UN refugee convention

Mandate and Organization

UNHCR was established, as of 1 January 1951, by United Nations General Assembly resolution 319 (IV) of 3 December 1949, and provided with its Statute by GA resolution 428 (V) of 14 December 1950. This represented one of several attempts by the international community during the 20th century to provide protection and assistance to refugees. UNHCR was initially given a limited three-year mandate with the principal aim of helping resettle 1.2 million European refugees left homeless by World War II. But with the increase and expansion of refugee crises, UNHCR's mandate was extended every five years up to 2004, when the temporal

limitation on the Office was lifted by the General Assembly.

Under relevant resolutions adopted by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, the scope of UNHCR's mandate has also expanded over the past decades beyond refugees and asylum-seekers to include stateless people, returnees and internally displaced persons. In five decades, UNHCR has helped more than 50 million refugees and other persons of concern restart their lives. Today, its staff of around 6,700 is working in 262 offices in 116 countries, mostly in crisis areas, and supports 20.8 million refugees and other persons of concern. UNHCR's budget for 2006 was US\$ 1.4 billion.

The cornerstone of UNHCR's work is international protection as set out in its Statute, adopted by the General Assembly in December 1950. In practice, protection means safeguarding the rights and well-being of refugees and ensuring that no person will be returned to a country where he or she has reason to fear persecution, a practice known as *refoulement*.

UNHCR also seeks ways to help refugees restart their lives in a normal environment. There are three principal long-term or durable solutions:

1. Voluntary repatriation to and reintegration in their homeland in safety and dignity.
2. Integration in their countries of asylum.
3. Resettlement in third countries.

Generally, the two latter options do not prevent refugees from returning to their former country of origin if they so wish and conditions allow.

UNHCR provides international protection and assistance not only to refugees and asylum seekers but also to other categories of people in need of international protection, including internally displaced and stateless people.

On the ground, UNHCR cooperates with, supports and often funds national and international non-governmental agencies to implement its work.

Palestinians of Concern to UNHCR

The main legal instruments governing the legal status of refugees in international law are the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951 Convention) and its 1967 Protocol. Although the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol are applicable to States, people meeting the eligibility criteria set out in them are refugees of concern to UNHCR. UNHCR encourages States to accede to the Convention and its Protocol and supervises their implementation. As of September 2006, 146 states had signed up to the 1951 Convention or its Protocol, or – in the great majority of cases – both.

The 1951 Convention in Article 1A(2) defines refugees as people who are outside their countries because of a well-founded fear of persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group, and who, for persecution-related reasons, are unable or unwilling to return home.



Al-Tanf tented site on the Syria – Iraq border

Article 1D of the 1951 Convention states that the Convention “shall not apply to persons who are at present receiving from organs or agencies of the United Nations other than the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees protection or assistance. When such protection or assistance has ceased for any reason, without the position of such persons being

definitively settled in accordance with the relevant resolutions adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, these persons shall *ipso facto* be entitled to the benefits of the Convention”.

UNHCR considers that two groups of Palestinian refugees fall within the scope of Article 1D of the 1951 Convention:

- (i) Palestinians who are “Palestine refugees” within the sense of UN General Assembly Resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948 and other UN General Assembly Resolutions, who were displaced from that

part of Palestine which became Israel, and who have been unable to return there.

- (ii) Palestinians who are “displaced persons” within the sense of UN General Assembly Resolution 2252 (ES-V) of 4 June 1967 and subsequent UN General Assembly Resolutions, and who have been unable to return to the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967.

A third group of Palestinian refugees consists of individuals who are neither “Palestine refugees” nor “displaced persons” but who, owing



UNHCR / January 2007

A family of Palestinian refugees who fled to Jordan from Iraq and were subsequently resettled in Canada with the help of UNHCR in December 1996

to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for one or more of the 1951 Convention grounds, are outside the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967 and are unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return there. Such Palestinians can qualify as refugees under Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Convention.

Scope of UNHCR’s Work

The vast majority of Palestinian refugees fall under the UNRWA mandate, but there is still a large number living in other countries of the region, such as the Gulf States, Egypt, Iraq or Yemen, or further afield in Australia, Europe and America.



UNHCR advises States that are party to the 1951 Convention on the interpretation and application of the 1951 Convention. This would include advice on how the Convention affects Palestinian refugees. Other interventions relate to facilitating the renewal of travel documents and prevention of detention or imposed deportation of persons of concern contrary to the provisions of the 1951 Convention, international human rights law and customary international law. In various countries UNHCR also provides material assistance to needy refugees. UNHCR's international protection mandate is not limited to refugees in States parties to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol but is applicable world-wide on the basis of its Statute and subsequent General Assembly and ECOSOC resolutions.

Most recently, UNHCR has been providing assistance to Palestinian refugees in Iraq as well as, in coordination with UNRWA, to those who fled to Jordan and Syria, and is actively searching for solutions to their plight. It is also providing individual assistance to some destitute Palestinians in Egypt and Libya.



Al-Tanf tented site on the Syria – Iraq border



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Front cover:
Palestinians flee to Jordan, June 1967 / UNRWA

Back cover:
Tents had just been replaced by cement block
houses at Khan Younis refugee camp, Gaza Strip,
1951 / UNRWA

Inside cover:
Syrian refugee camp, Jordan, 1969 / UNRWA

Opposite:
A Palestinian refugee with her grandson in Be'er
Sheva refugee camp, Gaza Strip / UNRWA

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