



Statement

by

Lebanon

**at the
Fourth Committee**

**“United Nations Relief and Works Agency
for Palestine Refugees in the Near East”**

Tuesday, November 7, 2012

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*Permanent Mission of Lebanon to the United Nations
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Mr. President,

At the outset, allow me to congratulate you and thank you for your chairmanship of the Fourth Committee throughout this 67th session. Lebanon also expresses its appreciation to Commissioner-General Mr. Fillipe Grandi for his report to the General Assembly, and his briefing to the Committee regarding UNRWA's work over the past year.

Mr. President,

All of us know that on a cold Thursday afternoon, 8 December 1949, the UN General Assembly established the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, pursuant to Resolution 302 (IV).

However, many among us may not know that 10 months earlier on another **[and I quote]** "cold Wednesday afternoon, 10 March 1948, a group of eleven men, veteran Zionist leaders together with young military Jewish officers, put the final touches on a plan for the ethnic cleansing of Palestine. That same evening, military orders were dispatched to units on the ground to prepare for the systematic expulsion of Palestinians from vast areas of the country. The orders came with a detailed description of the methods to be used to forcibly evict the people: [these methods clearly called for] large-scale intimidation; laying siege to and bombarding villages and population centers; setting fire to homes, properties, and goods; expelling residents; demolishing homes; and, finally, planting mines in the rubble to prevent the expelled inhabitants from returning." Mr. President, the quote is from Professor Ilan Pappé the renowned Israeli historian.

The Plan was a means for depopulating the Palestinian territories. It was highly effective to the point that at the end of the British Mandate, in May 1948, when **[and I quote]** "during the period from April until June, the main wave of Arab exodus took place, in which 200,000 to 300,000 Arabs left Palestine" **[end of quote]**; And, in the period following, between July 1948 and January 1949, **[I quote]** "an additional 300,000 Palestinians became refugees". These figures are from another Israeli historian, Benny Morris. By the end of the war writes Pappé, "out of the 850,000 Palestinians, who were living in the territories designated to the Jewish state by the UN, only about 160,000 remained there".

Mr. President,

Before the establishment of UNRWA, General Assembly resolution 194 (III) responded directly to Israel's ethnic cleansing policy and in paragraph 11 clearly stated **[I quote]** "that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at 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 or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the governments or authorities responsible" **[end of quote]**. If international law, international humanitarian law, and United Nations resolutions seem to be inconvenient for Israel to implement, then we say that acting according to law and morality is not a matter subject to considerations of convenience. And, while many issues could be up for negotiations in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, International law is NOT.

Mr. President,

Consider the following: if the right of Palestinians to have their own state was left for negotiations between the two parties "then Israel, the occupying power, would be granted a right of veto over the right of self-determination of the Palestinian people – a right which has been recognized as "inalienable" by the General Assembly since 1974". Likewise, if the right of return, a right acknowledged since the Magna Carta in the year 1215, and codified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, was left then to Israel's convenience, then again, Israel, would be granted a right of veto over the right of people to return to their very homes, from which Israel itself expelled the Palestinians from 64 years ago.

In this context Mr. President, Lebanon reiterates its call on the international community, state by state, to compel Israel to abide by the norms of International law, International Humanitarian law, and United Nations resolutions just like every other state is required to do, and is held accountable for, when it fails to do so.

Mr. President,

The refugee problem is not an uncorrelated and outlier event from the space of the Arab-Israeli conflict; but in fact it is a key element in any successful formula that leads to a political solution. A just settlement of the refugee question is in direct correlation to the success or failure of any peace process. The refugees continue to live in never-ending uncertainty. The barrier and obstacle is one Mr. President. It is the government of Israel who does not wish to establish peace. The proof is its continuing settlement policies and the expropriation of Palestinian land thinking that somehow not only the Palestinian refugees will vanish into thin air but also Palestinians living within Israel and in the West Bank and Gaza.

Mr. President, the refugees from Palestine will not just disappear into thin air, neither will the Palestinians living in Israel or in the West Bank or in Gaza, nor will the people supporting their just cause worldwide.

Mr. President,

The Lebanese Government within its limited resources spares no effort, and is actively working to improve the living conditions of the refugees from Palestine with its partner UNRWA in 12 camps and 16 gatherings throughout Lebanon. To that fact, Lebanon has eased restrictions on the refugees to enter the labor markets, the Parliament passed amendments to the employment legislation to allow for more employment rights, and the government has revitalized the Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee.

Mr. President,

Lebanon extends its highest gratitude to UNRWA for the continuous reconstruction of Nahr el Bared Camp specifically, and for its steadfast work in providing for the refugees from Palestine throughout Lebanon and elsewhere.

UNRWA remains the principle source of basic services for the refugees, since Israel refuses to implement international law and allow them to return to their homes.

And pending this implementation, the financial commitment of the international community to the refugees through UNRWA is critical.

We appreciate the long-term support by major donors, and urge the donor community to mobilize the needed resources to ensure the uninterrupted financing of the Agency.

Mr. President,

The Agency when it was first established responded to the needs of about 750,000 refugees from Palestine. Numerous wars, victims and years later, over 5 million Palestine refugees today fall under UNRWA's mandate. How many more million refugees will UNRWA have to relentlessly aim to help? And how many more million refugees will be exposed to poverty and humiliation, before Israel accepts that every man and woman have the right to return to their homes and live their lives and raise their children in dignity, free from hunger and from the fear of violence, oppression or injustice"?