



UNRWA AND THE REFUGEES: A DIFFICULT BUT LASTING MARRIAGE

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Over the last sixty years, UNRWA's relationship to the Palestinian refugees it serves has undergone profound changes. Faced with the difficult task of adapting a humanitarian regime to a highly politicized environment, the agency has had to thread its way through the diverse and sometimes conflicting expectations of the international donor states, the Arab host countries, and the refugees themselves, who from the start were deeply suspicious of UNRWA's mandate as inimical to the right of return. Against this background, the article traces the evolution of the agency's role from service and relief provider to virtual mouthpiece for the refugees on the international stage and, on an administrative level, from a disciplinary regime to emphasis on community participation and finally to the embrace of a developmental agenda. Although UNRWA's presence, originally seen as temporary, seems likely to endure, the article argues that financial and political constraints are likely to thwart its new agenda.

SINCE BEGINNING OPERATIONS in May 1950, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has emerged as the main stakeholder in the Palestinian refugee issue. The traditional provider of education, medical care, relief, and social services to the Palestine refugees (today numbering almost 5 million in UNRWA's five fields of operation¹), it has more recently assumed new responsibilities in infrastructure and camp improvement. As the only existing UN agency created to serve a single national refugee population, its main institutional specificity lies in its unparalleled exposure to that population, with the vast majority of its local staff being refugees themselves.²

UNRWA's close proximity to Palestinian refugee society has lent itself to controversial and contradictory assessments. On the one hand, it has enabled its staff to adapt efficiently to the refugees' evolving needs and made for impressive operational achievements, including the spread of literacy throughout the entire refugee population, the absence of epidemics, quick responses to emergency situations, and vocational and other training for tens of thousands of refugees. In so doing, it has actively helped "prevent conditions of starvation and distress among refugees and to further conditions of

peace and stability” in the Middle East.³ On the other hand, this very proximity has led to charges, especially in the United States and Israel, that the agency has become hostage to the refugees’ political claims, thus contributing to perpetuating the problem.

UNRWA’s constant efforts to guarantee the politically neutral nature of its activities while adjusting its mandate in keeping with the refugees’ changing needs and aspirations have been a defining characteristic of its sixty years in operation. Over the years, it has gradually endeavored to promote the refugees’ self-reliance either as actors integrated into the host economies or as partners in the delivery of various services, particularly in the refugee camps. More recently, expanding this participatory emphasis, it has started to apply a human development approach to the full range of its activities as a means of helping the refugees achieve their full potential. UNRWA’s programs, as well as the operational norms and regulations it has adopted in order to structure its working relations with the refugees, have been greatly affected by its evolving perceptions of them, as will be seen below.

THE POLITICAL LIMITATIONS OF ECONOMIC APPROACHES TO THE REFUGEE ISSUE

UNRWA’s approach to the Palestine refugees long bore the stamp of the first phase of its operations in the 1950s, when it endeavored to fulfill the goals ascribed to it by UN General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 302 (IV) of 8 December 1949. Article 7 states that UNRWA was to “carry out in collaboration with local governments the direct relief and works programs as recommended by the Economic Survey Mission (ESM).”⁴ The ESM’s recommendations involved giving the refugees, mostly unemployed farmers and unskilled workers, the opportunity to work “where they were” by involving them in a program of temporary small-scale public works (terracing, afforestation, road construction, irrigation works, and other engineering schemes) that would help them become self-reliant. This program, fully funded by UNWRA, was to constitute a first step toward their “reintegration” into the host state economies, according to the ESM; their longer-term integration required large-scale economic development schemes that could only be borne by the interested governments themselves. In the meantime, UNRWA was to consult with these governments “concerning measures to be taken by them preparatory to the time when international assistance for relief and works projects is no longer available.”⁵

As early as mid-1951, UNWRA had shifted to a new approach, emphasizing more ambitious development schemes designed in cooperation with the host governments to directly “resettle” or “re-establish” the refugees in those countries.⁶ This would be achieved by expanding the latter’s absorptive capacity through various medium- to large-scale housing, agricultural, and infrastructural projects; loans or grants for the establishment of small enterprises; training for occupations where there was a shortage of indigenous

trained workers; and assistance for migration abroad.⁷ By 1957, however, the failure of the approach was clear: the number of refugees who had become fully self-supportive since 1950 stood at a mere 24,000, whereas 933,000 persons were still dependent on UNRWA services.⁸

UNRWA accounts of the resettlement programs' failure highlight the insurmountable constraints it had faced from the outset. From an operational perspective, the physical and financial resources made available by the donor and host countries had been woefully inadequate.⁹ The main problems, however, were essentially political: first, the absence of a solution to the Palestine problem along the lines of UNGA resolutions on repatriation and compensation; second, the refugees' strong attachment to their homes and their determination to return to them.¹⁰ As UNRWA saw it, this attachment took the form of "hostility to all works undertaken by the Agency . . . based upon their conviction that to accept employment within the host countries would be tantamount to renouncing the right to return home, and perhaps even the right to compensation."¹¹ The refugees, for their part, skeptical of UNRWA's insistence that the works programs were politically innocuous,¹² engaged in various forms of resistance, including refusal to participate, attacks on UNRWA's local staff, and "anti-resettlement" demonstrations often staged by the opposition parties of the host countries.¹³ What allowed the refugees to sustain their resistance, however, was the direct linkage they established between their desire to return and UNGA Resolution 194 (III) of December 1948, recommending that they be given the choice between a (peaceful) return to their homes and compensated resettlement.¹⁴ According to a 1951 UNRWA report, the resolution turned the refugees' longing for return into a principle of absolute justice, a "right" in the fullest sense, irrespective of its feasibility: "[M]any refugees are ceasing to believe in a possible return, yet this does not prevent them from insisting on it, since they feel that to agree to consider any other solution would be to show their weakness and to relinquish their fundamental right, acknowledged even by the General Assembly."¹⁵ Moreover, the same sense of collective injustice and insistence on the implementation of a UN-proclaimed right of refugee return permeated the entire Arab world and explains to some extent the meager support offered by the host authorities for the resettlement programs on which they had initially agreed. By 1956, UNRWA had recognized that "the problem posed by the Palestine refugees is . . . not simply an economic problem susceptible of economic solutions," as the agency itself had tried to promote since 1950.¹⁶

The "right of return" politics also pervaded refugee perceptions of UNRWA's "short-term" basic educational, medical, and social welfare programs (including relief commodities and shelter construction). Even as these programs grew to keep pace with the growing numbers of registered refugees, they saw them as a right to which they were entitled pending their repatriation to their homes and as a debt owed them by the United Nations on account of its responsibility for their plight. This attitude undoubtedly contributed

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to the fact that their situation did not induce in them the mass psychological dependence on aid observed in other refugee cases in Asia and Africa, where refugees have been seen to develop behaviors they believed were expected of them in order to continue receiving aid,¹⁷ or turned into a depoliticized category living in ahistorical spaces (the camps).¹⁸ To the contrary, the Palestine refugees' interpretation of UNRWA's services as organically linked to their right of return has spawned autonomous, politically driven attitudes that have countered the agency's designs and regulations. In this sense, UNRWA recognized that its status as a UN body made it the perfect scapegoat through

which the refugees and their advocates could vent their frustrations and anger via constant accusations of pursuing policies inimical to their interests (e.g., inadequate relief rations and medical services, promotion of "resettlement" by replacing tents and makeshift amenities with more permanent housing and buildings).¹⁹ While UNRWA became relatively tolerant of these hostile stances, ascribing them partly to the actual inadequacy of the relief rations²⁰ and partly to the exploitation by "unscrupulous political agitators" of their "understandable bitterness,"²¹ it was more critical of the host countries that had done little to "explain the true nature of the Agency's responsibilities to the refugees."²²

A further dimension of the politicization of UNRWA's relief assistance was the way in which the registration (or "ration") card distributed by the agency to registered refugees came to be seen as a highly symbolic document attesting to their link with Palestine and hence to their right of return. Accordingly, several refugee organizations suggested that these registration cards serve as official documents for *all* refugees (registered and nonregistered) to replace the documentation delivered by the Arab host countries.²³ The registration card also acquired a socioeconomic value as a kind of security—"so much a part of the life and economy of the refugees that it is not at all unusual for it to be used as a tangible asset upon the strength of which substantial sums can be borrowed."²⁴

ESTABLISHING A "REFUGEE REGIME"

Administering the relief program led UNRWA to develop a disciplinary-type "refugee regime." Consisting of norms and regulations designed to structure its relations with the refugees in areas such as registration and eligibility issues,²⁵ the use and expansion of the camp shelters,²⁶ and more generally the orderly provision of services, the refugee regime gave UNRWA a "functional sovereignty" over the refugee population. This was most visible in the magnitude of its core programs, which by the early 1970s had acquired what the UNRWA commissioner-general called "the character of quasi-governmental services."²⁷ The expanded role contrasts with its unchanging institutional

status, which has remained that of a temporary relief institution whose budget depends nearly entirely on the voluntary contributions of the international community.²⁸

Because the full range of UNRWA's schools, health clinics, relief distribution, and social centers are located in the camps—the “humanitarian spaces” established as of 1949 to house the refugees unable to secure decent lodging in the host country²⁹—its residents have been comparatively more dependent than the noncamp refugees on its humanitarian assistance and therefore more exposed to its regulations. The central pillar of the refugee regime has been the “camp services officer” (CSO or the camp director in Arabic), a local UNRWA employee tasked with supervising the daily implementation of the agency's programs and facilities. The power wielded by the CSO, often a community representative himself, was particularly important in the first two decades of the agency's mandate, when camp refugees were most dependent on its relief services. As the main observer of the camps' affairs, the CSO's input was of crucial importance to the inspectors in charge of verifying the ration rolls. The CSO's say over whether refugees could move into the camp or extend their housing units was key. Although the agency since the early 1970s has insisted that it does not administer the camps but rather provides services to their inhabitants, it has continued to maintain a CSO, whose influence remains significant.

UNRWA's refugee regime was put to the test almost immediately by the “rectification of the ration rolls” campaign, involving all registered refugees throughout the agency's operational areas but which was especially hard on the camps' dwellers. In late 1949, the ESM had gauged the number of needy refugees at 627,000 out of a total refugee population estimated at 774,000, but the number of persons registered with UNRWA in 1950 was 957,000.³⁰ This discrepancy, which strained the agency's relief budget and made the ESM's “reintegration” goals more difficult to reach, was the result both of weaknesses in the relief system and the unanticipated political and economic value of the UNRWA registration card. Relief-dependent families sought to increase their (inadequate) rations by failing to report family deaths, “borrowing” newborns from other refugee families, or duplicating refugee cards,³¹ which were sold on the black market by “card merchants.”³² It is also likely that needy nonrefugee residents of the host countries made their way into the agency's records.³³ UNRWA's efforts to rectify its ration rolls met with obstacles and yielded unsatisfactory results, necessitating additional “rectification” campaigns through the 1950s (in Jordan through the late 1960s), thereby casting a mutual veil of suspicion between its officials and the refugees.

UNRWA's grip on the camp refugees has been limited by two factors. First, the Palestinian refugee camps are not closed extraterritorial areas under UNRWA's jurisdiction: their inhabitants have always been “normally free to move in and out.”³⁴ Indeed, they were encouraged to be out and about as the camps were seen as having a “deteriorating influence” on their inhabitants by reinforcing among them a “professional refugee mentality.”³⁵

Second, the nature of its mandate has led the agency to encourage the camp refugees to lead “normal” lives in the host countries’ urban fabric. As early as 1952–53, it endeavored to empower refugees socially through such activities as sports events, public lectures, night classes, libraries, sewing and embroidery classes, play centers for children, and film projections, and to that end established youth and women’s activity centers. A “community development program” (as it was already called) was launched in the late 1950s that provided financial support for collective or individual self-help, including income-generating projects.³⁶ By the late 1960s, the refugees began to take over management of some of the centers, partly because of UNRWA funding cuts and partly because they saw them as a forum for political mobilization within the Palestinian national movement. By 1970 the youth centers were autonomous entities run by voluntary community members, with UNRWA assuming supervisory duties,³⁷ and in the 1990s the women’s centers followed suit. Also in the late 1950s, camp refugees began playing a role in the maintenance of their shelters, with UNRWA contributing cash grants or providing the roofing material. Progress was most visible in Jordan and the West Bank, where camp refugees had been granted formal citizenship and were therefore more in tune with the urban development taking place. In the 1970s, they started playing a bigger role in the maintenance of the camps’ public facilities in cooperation with UNRWA and the host authorities.³⁸ This did not lead, however, to a formal arrangement concerning the administration of the camps’ communal and social affairs, as UNRWA had envisaged in the mid-1960s.³⁹ Because of the political symbolism attached to the camps, the refugees insisted that the agency continue to maintain a high profile in camp management.

Another characteristic of UNRWA’s refugee regime is its “top-down,” paternalistic approach to management. Humanitarian programs are usually carried out *for* rather than *with* their beneficiaries because of the emergency contexts in which they generally operate.⁴⁰ In the case of UNRWA, its daily interactions with the camp communities have traditionally been through informal contacts with individuals or groups “who have some—but not necessarily a continuing—representative quality.”⁴¹ Perhaps because the emergency context could not be invoked indefinitely, UNRWA also justified its nonparticipatory approach by noting that while successive UNGA resolutions called for cooperation with the host countries, resulting in continuous formal consultations with them, there had been no reference to consultation with the refugee community.⁴² A more relevant but undeclared argument was the belief that the agency could not genuinely cooperate with a refugee community whose politically driven claims were irreconcilable with the humanitarian nature of its mandate and its strained budget. Indeed, one of UNRWA’s rare attempts to engage in formal consultation with refugees at the country level showed such concerns to be well founded. Thus, when UNRWA’s Jordan field director in July 1955 summoned refugee committees from all over the country to a meeting in Amman and asked the refugees “not to consider

UNRWA as an agency they felt obliged to fight but rather as one that strove to do all its efforts to improve their living conditions and help them lead a decent life,⁴³ the delegates responded by insisting on the improvement and expansion of the programs, called for the distribution of UNRWA registration cards to all refugees as a proof of their refugee status, and emphasized the UN's duty to repatriate them to their homes in Palestine.⁴⁴

UNRWA's top-down approach has also applied to its local staff. From its establishment, the agency's policy has been to hire Palestine refugees whenever possible to promote refugee employment.⁴⁵ The local staff has had to face two main challenges. The first pertains to improving their own status within the agency. Mostly confined to an implementation role with little or no say in policy issues, they have continuously aired grievances about the better rewarded "foreigners" who fail to appreciate their crucial input as key informants about the realities of the field.⁴⁶ The agency has partly responded to these criticisms by enhancing their status in terms of skills, professional responsibilities, and professional advancement. However, it has insisted that the international employees' superior status should be maintained since they "represent the minimum necessary to ensure the international character of the Agency and provide the direction, control and supervision for which the commissioner-general is responsible to the General Assembly."⁴⁷ The second difficulty concerns the local staff's vulnerable position between the agency they serve and the refugee communities where most of them originate. While UNRWA jobs are attractive for their prestige and generally higher pay, they are likely to expose their incumbents to criticism from the refugees for failing to convey their demands to headquarters or for serving the cause of "hostile foreign interests."

DEVELOPING HUMAN CAPACITY AS A CONSENSUAL LONG-TERM FOCUS

UNRWA's failure to bring about the socioeconomic integration of the refugees in the host countries did not lead to any questioning of its existence. Despite the shortcomings, it continued to satisfy the competing interests of its stakeholders. The United States, UNRWA's main donor, considered it a useful instrument of stability likely to stem the spread of communism in the region.⁴⁸ For the Arab host countries, UNRWA's services represented indispensable financial and socioeconomic support even while from a political perspective the agency served as a "useful whipping-boy" when complaints arose.⁴⁹ Finally, although the refugees were still heavily dependent on the agency's relief program, they saw it primarily as a sign of the international community's commitment to implementing UNGA Resolution 194 (III). Against this background, UNRWA's ongoing challenge has been to manage the evolving expectations of its various stakeholders while maintaining its status as a nonpolitical humanitarian institution.

In this perspective, UNRWA sought, as of the late 1950s, to improve relations with the host authorities by emphasizing the "heavy burden—heavier

than is generally realized” the host societies had borne in terms of provision of land, water, and police protection for camps, as well as material contributions toward the education of refugee youth.⁵⁰ In the same vein, UNRWA reinvigorated its calls for a political resolution of the refugee issue (though outside the scope of its mandate) in keeping with the relevant UNGA resolutions. In 1957, it even criticized Israel, a regular contributor to its budget, for having “taken no affirmative action in the matter of repatriation and compensation.”⁵¹ UNRWA continued to act as a mouthpiece for the refugees’ grievances and claims, especially with regard to their political interpretation of its mandate, and bore witness through its statements to their evolving self-perceptions following the creation of the PLO, when they saw themselves as a “nation that had been obliterated,”⁵² or when the UNGA recognized Palestinian entitlement to self-determination and declared “full respect for the inalienable rights of the people of Palestine.”⁵³ In the absence of a Palestinian state, UNRWA thus became, by default, the Palestine refugees’ quasi-representative on the international stage, both as a witness to their plight and as a reminder of their right of return.⁵⁴

A more important challenge for UNRWA was to craft a mid- to long-term alternative to the failed collective resettlement plan of the early mid-1950s. The new objective became enhancing the human capacity of the younger refugees. Already in 1955–56, the agency’s education program (including primary education and vocational/technical training) had been promoted—along with agricultural development and income-generating programs—as a tool for guiding the refugees toward self-reliance.⁵⁵ In 1958, the UNGA officially endorsed that trend by asking (in Resolution 1315 [XIII]) UNRWA’s director “without prejudice to paragraph 11 of GA resolution 194 (III), to plan and carry out projects capable of supporting substantial numbers of refugees and, in particular, programs relating to education and vocational training.” The new educational focus enjoyed the approval of all stakeholders, though not necessarily for the same reasons. The United States saw vocational training as a tool to “stimulate the resettlement in every way possible.”⁵⁶ The refugees, by contrast, saw education as a means of ensuring their *individual* rehabilitation (in contrast to *collective* development schemes) and upward social mobility without necessarily threatening their right of return.

For UNRWA, the “resettlement” bias of its education program had practical advantages stemming from its use (since 1953) of host country curricula, but it also recognized that education as a tool for socioeconomic reintegration had problems. Its focus on the younger generations sidelined de facto unemployable older refugees. Together with the aged and sick, this group would form the bulk of the refugees dependent on UNRWA’s relief programs.⁵⁷ Moreover, full coverage of the refugees’ education and training required financial and technical resources well beyond the agency’s education budget, with modest results. For instance, in 1958, UNRWA’s two vocational schools in the West Bank and Gaza graduated only 500 trainees annually, while “some 30,000

young reach[ed] maturity with little hope of earning a living or establishing homes in a normal way.”⁵⁸

Nonetheless, starting from 1960, UNWRA (with the help of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO]) prioritized its educational and vocational training by generalizing the preparatory cycle (sixth to ninth grade); establishing additional vocational schools and training facilities in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria; and providing university scholarships to the best students. Quality was ensured through the creation of teacher training schools and an Institute of Education.⁵⁹ Within a matter of years, the education program became the agency’s flagship under a new developmental creed: “Any expenditure for Education by UNRWA should not be regarded as relief . . . [but as] an investment for the purpose of developing the potential of a human being.”⁶⁰ By 1970, education surpassed relief as the agency’s main program in terms of expenditure, with achievements that include access to free elementary and preparatory education and the spread of literacy across almost the entire refugee population. Moreover, despite declining indicators for educational infrastructure, the refugee communities (except in Lebanon since the early 2000s) had better academic results than in government-run schools). Finally, there was a remarkable success rate in securing jobs for vocational and technical training graduates.⁶¹ Beyond, UNRWA’s educational policy has yielded significant socioeconomic results and profoundly transformed Palestinian refugee society at large. Given the shortage of jobs available in most host countries, emigration to the labor-demanding countries of the region—especially the Gulf states—constituted a professional outlet for many graduates as of the 1960s.⁶² In turn, this migratory trend spawned a remittance influx that benefited both the emigrants’ families and the host countries’ economies.⁶³ In 1971, the commissioner-general was able to report that the education and training programs “form the foundation for individual rehabilitation and contribute to the economic and social development in many Arab countries.”⁶⁴

Yet in public perceptions, UNRWA has continued to be seen as a humanitarian welfare agency catering to the basic needs of the poorest segments of Palestinian society, particularly in refugee camps. Easily recognizable by the UN flags that adorn the agency’s facilities, the narrowness of its alleyways, and the substandard quality of its housing, the camps have remained the most visible symbols of the Palestine refugee predicament and their perennial dependence on humanitarian aid. The impact on the camps of the many local or regional conflicts that have marked the Middle East, and the emergency programs UNRWA has been obliged to launch accordingly, have only reinforced that visibility.⁶⁵ At the same time, the image of education as a tool for individual rehabilitation and regional prosperity was tarnished in the wake of the 1991 Gulf war when some 280,000 Palestine refugees who had lived for decades in Kuwait and other Gulf states were expelled to their country of departure, mostly Jordan. UNRWA’s relief aid proved essential to restart a new life, often from scratch.⁶⁶

ADAPTING UNRWA'S "REFUGEE REGIME" TO THE POLITICIZATION OF ITS LOCAL ENVIRONMENT

The emergence of the Palestinian national movement in the mid to late 1960s, when PLO politico-military organizations controlled large chunks of Lebanon and Jordan, greatly complicated UNRWA's task of satisfying its various stakeholders. By 1970, the commissioner-general's report noted the "transformation in the political role of the Palestine refugee community . . . and the acceptance by the refugee community and the host Governments of a representative, negotiating role for the Palestine politico-military organizations."⁶⁷ For UNRWA, the problem was how to establish working relationships with a defiant nonstate actor not officially recognized by the UNGA, and how to reassure the United States that its assistance programs would not benefit the militant organizations it banned.⁶⁸ More important was the question of how the PLO's emergence would affect UNRWA's traditional top-down relations with the refugees at a time when, as the commissioner-general reported, "the enhanced political consciousness of the Palestine refugee community [raised] basic questions of authority and identification." In light of this situation, it was likely that the community would "increasingly expect to be consulted on Agency affairs in the same way that the Governments of host countries are consulted by the Agency," and that the attitude of the "13,000 Palestinians serving the Agency" toward the international staff would harden.⁶⁹

In fact, the PLO did soon request the formal "Palestinization" of the curricula used in the agency's schools and supported the refugees in their demands for improving the poorly equipped health clinics and increasing inadequate relief rations. In Jordan (1969-70) and in Lebanon (1969-82), the PLO organizations ran the camps' affairs and became UNRWA's de facto counterparts.⁷⁰ Still, except for a few localized incidents,⁷¹ UNRWA managed to preserve its integrity and autonomy, partly as a result of the PLO's structural weakness. Lacking formal territorial sovereignty (even in Lebanon where the factions' control over the camps was such that they did not need UNRWA's recognition to operate as host authority), lacking also a national social policy to replace that of the host countries, and weakened by military involvements in Jordan and Lebanon, the PLO was never able to impose structural reforms on UNRWA.⁷² The agency was also aided by its own ability to defuse tensions by making (mostly symbolic) concessions that assuaged Palestinian frustrations over UNRWA's functional sovereignty. In 1969-70, for example, UNRWA agreed to the teaching in its schools in Lebanon of the history and geography of Palestine taught in its schools in other host countries as part of the government curriculum.⁷³ But this was a far cry from the "Palestinization" of UNRWA's education program in its five fields of operations envisaged by the PLO at the height of its power.⁷⁴ By the early 1980s, the agency decided on its own to enrich the host country curricula applied in its schools with notions of Palestinian culture "in accordance with their educational needs, identity and cultural heritage."⁷⁵

UNRWA's skill in managing differences with the local environment was again put to the test in 1982, when it unilaterally decided to discontinue the general ration distribution program (GRD) and replace it with the more restrictive "special hardship cases."⁷⁶ Faced with mounting pressures from the Arab authorities, the refugees, and its local staff to rescind what the PLO called the "unfair measure announcing the start of the UN's abandonment of its moral and material obligations to the Palestinian people and their just national cause,"⁷⁷ UNRWA's commissioner-general reaffirmed that the reason for the move was to allocate more financial resources to the education program. At the same time, however, acknowledging the refugees' fears that such a decision "would somehow deprive them of their recognition by the international community as Palestine refugees" entitled to vested humanitarian and political rights, UNRWA decided to facilitate the access of all members of the refugee household by introducing *individual* registration cards for each registered refugee to replace the existing *family* card held by the head of the family alone.⁷⁸ Besides its operational aspect, the measure was intended to show that UNRWA understood the refugees' attachment to UNRWA "not only as an agency which provides valued services but, above all, the symbol of international commitment to their welfare and to a just resolution of their plight."⁷⁹ In recognition of the political value of the new cards as proxy Palestinian identity cards, the PLO welcomed UNRWA's step and encouraged it to implement it across its five fields.⁸⁰

By then, UNRWA and the PLO had already been enjoying diplomatic cooperative relations following the latter's 1974 recognition by the UNGA as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people (UNGA Resolution 3236). The PLO engaged in fundraising campaigns on behalf of UNRWA among the Arab states. More significantly, the PLO as of the early 1980s had come to see UNRWA as an objective prop in its state-building efforts in the occupied Palestinian territories. Before the 1990 Gulf crisis decimated its finances, it contributed funds to the agency for the implementation of specific camp rehabilitation projects in the Gaza Strip to counteract Israel's camp dismantlement policy (1981-84).⁸¹ Conversely, the developmental programs UNRWA launched during the first intifada (the Expanded Program of Assistance [EPA], 1988-93) and during the Oslo process (Peace Implementation Program [PIP], 1994-2000) constituted formal efforts to make, through upgrades of the camps' social and physical infrastructure and the expansion of income-generation opportunities, contributions in support of the Palestinian Authority. The transfer of the agency's headquarters from Vienna to Gaza in 1995 consecrated UNRWA's involvement in the creation of a Palestinian state.

THE DIFFICULT PATH TOWARD REFORM

UNRWA's objective rapprochement with the Palestinian leadership did not result in any fundamental change in its relations with the refugee communities. Generally speaking, the agency has clung to its top-down approach in

the management of its core programs. Although anchored in its local context, it has habitually kept its outreach to the refugees at a low level and has been little inclined to discuss its plans with the beneficiaries of its services; it was this attitude that led Palestinian refugee writer/journalist Fawaz Turki to describe the agency as “the contemptuous stepmother.”⁸² Nonetheless, UNRWA has made progress in involving the refugees in the “decision-making process” as of the 1980s in areas targeted as propitious to refugee self-reliance, notably its social development program and camp and infrastructure rehabilitation projects. Today, most of the activity centers UNRWA created in the camps in the 1950s to “empower” disadvantaged female, male, and disabled refugees have become community-based organizations operating autonomously. Meanwhile, UNRWA’s efforts to promote the empowerment of the most vulnerable refugee groups include offering courses relating to family planning, health education, legal counseling, and the launch, in 1986, of a microcredit community support program. Later, it started a larger scale microfinance and microenterprise program (open to refugees and nonrefugees) to help develop enterprise and create jobs at the host-country level. Launched in the Gaza Strip in 1991, it is now the leading microfinance institution and an important economic instrument in the occupied territories. The program has since been extended to all of UNRWA’s operational areas except Lebanon and, although more modest in scale than in the occupied territories, is steadily expanding.⁸³

In parallel, UNRWA has actively promoted community participation through consultations aimed at involving the refugees in the design, implementation, and monitoring of camp rehabilitation schemes in all five fields of operations: first in the occupied territories since the late 1980s (the peace process-linked EPA and PIP mentioned above), then in all fields since the early 2000s. Textbook examples include the rehabilitation of the overcrowded Neirab camp in Syria, which began in 2000, and the massive reconstruction of the destroyed (or partially destroyed) camps of Jenin in the West Bank (2003–05) and Nahr al-Barid in Lebanon (starting in 2007).⁸⁴ Predicated on the idea that since it is “the Palestinians themselves who will reap the benefit of the international community’s investment . . . they . . . can best tell us the benefit they desire,”⁸⁵ the interventions have ultimately been well received by the refugees (and the host authorities) concerned, but financial constraints and UNRWA’s traditional top-down approach to dialogue have at times frustrated refugee expectations.⁸⁶ Nonetheless, the rehabilitation projects have confirmed that, decades after the Nakba, the refugees no longer see the sustainable improvement of their living conditions as unalterably incompatible with the right of return.⁸⁷

UNRWA institutionalized this trend in 2006 by establishing the Infrastructure and Camp Improvement Program (CIP) as a new core program. The CIP has since been incorporating into its practices a holistic vision of camp management that fully acknowledges the complexity of overall camp structure and social dynamics. Working with limited funds but with

the active participation of the community, the CIP has been creating much needed recreational areas and public squares for residents, for example for use as safe playgrounds or for wedding celebrations.⁸⁸ Still, persisting fears among camp residents that UNRWA's developmental designs conceal dubious political motivations—namely the silent burying of the right of return—have necessitated in recent years repeated oral, and sometimes written, assurances as a sine qua non condition before any camp development project can go forward.⁸⁹

Acceptance of UNRWA's new developmental approach in some of its fifty-eight refugee camps should not obscure the general deterioration of the agency's image among refugees under the impact of the continuous austerity measures enacted since the mid-1970s to compensate for chronic budget deficits. These measures have included the postponement of lower priority interventions (such as the construction and maintenance of refugee shelters, schools, and clinics), cuts in its relief program (e.g., the above-mentioned discontinuation of the GRD), the suspension of regular university scholarships and provision of school supplies, and the freezing of local staff salaries.⁹⁰ The refugees tend to interpret these measures, which they see as contradicting UNRWA's mandate, as indicative of an international conspiracy to do away with their internationally recognized right to return and compensation and to receive humanitarian aid in the meantime. The 1993 Oslo peace process, which anticipated the end of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by 1999/2000, only aggravated such concerns. The right of return, for example, was ignored or at most evoked as limited repatriation to the territories of the future Palestinian state. Meanwhile, the agency's budget continued to decrease sharply, from \$95–\$100 per refugee (1990 purchasing power parity U.S. dollars) in the early 1990s to an average of \$65 since 1993.⁹¹ However, instead of detaching the refugees from UNRWA, as most of the Western donors expected and perhaps intended, the decline in services has on the contrary increased the refugees' tendency to emphasize their political interpretation of the agency's mandate as the ultimate protector of their humanitarian and political rights.⁹²

To get out of its predicament, UNRWA embarked on a comprehensive reform process with the full support of (and indeed pressure from) the donor and host states in the mid-2000s. Redefining the terms of its relationship with the refugees figures high on the reform agenda and reflects awareness of the refugees' greater receptiveness to sustainable livelihoods approaches. In consequence, UNRWA's vision of this relationship is informed by the UN Development Program's (UNDP) "Human Development" (HD) paradigm, which promotes the realization of the refugees' full potential as individuals and members of the community, as well as the protection and preservation of

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their human rights.⁹³ In principle, the HD paradigm as defined by the UNDP should entail new responsibilities for the agency. Thus, in addition to ensuring for its refugee population “long and healthy life” and “acquired knowledge and skills” (the traditional terrain of its core educational and health programs), the agency is now also to secure for them “a decent standard of living” and “human rights enjoyed to the fullest extent possible.”⁹⁴

To do so, UNRWA has adopted modern management techniques, including program/project cycle mechanisms. Using various investigation methods (from comprehensive living condition surveys to participatory town hall meetings and workshops involving refugees and its local staff), it has also identified a series of crosscutting issues to be mainstreamed agency-wide to ensure social inclusion and reduce vulnerability, namely: gender equality; protection; environmental sustainability; the targeting of vulnerable groups; enhanced partnerships with local and international stakeholders; and refugee community participation as a means of ensuring operational efficiency, enhanced transparency and accountability, and program/project sustainability. The crosscutting issues have been steadily incorporated in various programs through newly appointed program support and protection officers at headquarters and field levels. Such activity has aroused favorable responses among the agency’s stakeholders. Although it is too early to assess its operational impact, it is already apparent that the reform has contributed to make the agency’s staff and refugees aware of the various international norms and conventions applicable to them. It has also highlighted how UNRWA, whose mandate does not cover the legal and passive protection mandate granted to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, could nevertheless endorse a protection role through the various services it delivers on a daily basis. By reporting regularly on the conditions and predicaments of the Palestine refugees, UNRWA also helps focus the international community’s attention on their human rights, sometimes leading to efforts to intervene or exert pressures.⁹⁵

At the same time, the agency’s chronic budget deficits have cast doubt on the donor countries’ ability (or desire) to commit themselves to the increased financial burden entailed in the implementation of the HD development paradigm.⁹⁶ Moreover, while some elements of the community participation theme, such as the establishment of schools parliaments, have been well accepted, other aspects particularly in relation to camp rehabilitation projects, have continued to raise concerns as to their long-term impacts. The issues inherent in this approach go well beyond the need for UNRWA’s staff (including local staff) to accept and master the participatory model and its associated usual challenges.⁹⁷ Indeed, community participation questions the very political bases on which the refugee issue has been managed at regional, national, and local levels since 1948.

A first set of issues relates to the linkage between the community participation approach and permanent status issues, which UNRWA has acknowledged. Thus, beyond advocating increased refugee involvement in the design and implementation of programs so as to maximize their success, UNRWA

has also recognized the link between mechanisms that build refugee capacity and self-reliance through greater participation on the one hand and preparing the refugees for future eventualities on the other.⁹⁸ On the refugee side, despite their genuine desire for a sustainable improvement in their living conditions, they continue, as noted earlier, to see the linkage as potentially paving the way for their uncompensated permanent resettlement in exile. In the current political context, marked by the absence of any prospect of progress in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, such a view may well gain currency, which in turn could reduce the chances of UNRWA's still top-down participatory schemes evolving into a genuine partnership of shared decisions and responsibilities between the refugees and the agency.

Another set of issues raised by the HD paradigm pertains to the long-term implications of the community approach to the refugees' status in the host countries. Since 1948, in accordance with relevant Arab League resolutions, Arab states (except Jordan) have kept the Palestinian refugees stateless and in some cases deprived them of virtually all rights in the ostensible aim of protecting their right of return to Palestine. Faced with growing pressures to reconcile the presence of the refugees (particularly the camp refugees) with the requirements of socioeconomic development, the host countries have responded by engaging in the rehabilitation of the refugee camps. They have stopped short, however, of consenting to any significant change in the refugees' legal status for fear that the normalization of the refugee presence on their soil will leave them to shoulder alone the burden of working out lasting solutions for the refugees.⁹⁹ Insiders' accounts of participatory camp rehabilitation schemes indicate that the host authorities systematically give priority to the physical and safety aspects of the interventions (sewerage, water, road systems, and shelters) at the expense of their social components (i.e., community participation).¹⁰⁰ In the absence of a genuine peace process, and given the donor community's shaky commitments, community participation seems bound to be strongly curtailed.

Because of their political sensitivity, these questions have remained unexplored at the official level. Yet they will continue to challenge the still tentative but genuine convergence of interests around "human development" and "community participation" that has been evolving between UNRWA and the refugees. The challenges ahead are all the more daunting as their resolution ultimately lies not with the latter but with the host countries and the policy-makers involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict/peace process. This does not mean that humanitarian actors are helpless. By setting up forums of discussion gathering together political, humanitarian, and academic actors, they may foster areas of common understanding likely to reinforce humanitarian/developmental agendas. In this regard, the meetings organized by UNRWA together with host countries and Palestinian institutions in 2010 on community participation and human development are welcome moves forward.¹⁰¹ They may usher in structural changes in the mutually suspicious "provider-recipient" pattern that has characterized the UNRWA-refugee relationships for so long.

ENDNOTES

1. Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank.

2. As of December 2009, 30,614 were serving the agency: 119 internationals and 30,495 locals; see UNRWA Public Information Office, *UNRWA in Figures—Figures as of 31 December 2009*, April 2010. Both local and international staff are to be found at headquarters (Gaza and Amman) and in field offices in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip.

3. In line with paragraph 5 of UNGA Resolution 302 (IV), 8 December 1949, that established UNRWA.

4. The ESM was established by the UN Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP) in August 1949 to investigate the means to solve the Palestinian refugee problem through socioeconomic measures. See UNCCP, *Final Report of the United Nations Economic Survey Mission for the Middle East*, UN Doc. A/AC.25/6 (28 December 1949), pp. 15–16, 30 ss.

5. UNGA Resolution 302 (IV), article 7.

6. See UNGA, Sixth Session, Supplement 16, *Report of the Director of UNRWA*, Doc. A/1905 (28 September 1951), para. 66.

7. UNGA Resolution 393 (V) of 2 December 1950, para. 4, which also instructed UNRWA to establish a reintegration fund (of \$30 million). UNGA Resolution 513 (VI) of 26 January 1952 increased that reintegration fund to \$50 million, the total budget for reintegration standing at \$200,000.

8. UNRWA, “UNRWA Experience with Works Projects and Self-Support Programmes: An Historical Summary (1950–1962),” *UNRWA Reviews*, Information Paper no. 5, Beirut, September 1962, pp. 8, 11.

9. See for instance UNGA, Tenth Session, Supplement 15A, *Annual Report of the Director of UNRWA* (1 July 1954–30 June 1955), Doc. A/2978 (30 June 1955), para. 34. Only 20 percent of the pledged sums were contributed and less than 5 percent were actually spent on reintegration projects. See UNGA, Twelfth Session, Supplement 14, *Annual Report of the Director of UNRWA* (1 July 1956–30 June 1957), Doc. A/3686 (30 June 1957), para. 56.

10. *Annual Report of the Director of UNRWA* (1 July 1954–30 June 1955), paras. 34–35.

11. *Report of the Director of UNRWA*, Doc. A/1905, para. 44.

12. Relevant UNGA resolutions regularly used the phrase: “without prejudice to the provisions of paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948”; see for instance Resolution 393 (V) of 2 December 1950, para. 4.

13. UNGA, Fifth Session, Supplement 19, *Interim Report of the Director of UNRWA*, Doc. A/1451/Rev.1 (6 October 1951), para. 26. Throughout the 1950s, the “anti-UNRWA resettlement program” slogan became a rallying cry for most local opposition political groups (especially the Muslim Brotherhood and the communist and Baath parties) and proto-nationalist Palestinian factions to win the refugees to their ranks; for a detailed account of the trilateral relations between the state, the political parties, and the refugees in Jordan, see Avi Plascov, *The Palestinian Refugees in Jordan 1948–1957* (London: Frank Cass, 1981).

14. See text of this resolution, para. 11, at <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/C758572B78D1CD0085256BCF0077E51A>.

15. *Report of the Director of UNRWA*, Doc. A/1905, para. 37.

16. See UNGA, Eleventh Session, Supplement 14 and 14A, *Annual Report of the Director of UNRWA* (1 July 1955–30 June 1956), Docs. A/3212/ and A/3212/add.1 (30 June 1956), para. 5.

17. See Dorsh Marie De Voe, “Framing Refugees as Clients,” *International Migration Review* 15, no. 1 (Spring–Summer 1981), p. 89.

18. See Liisa H. Malkki, “Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization” in *Siting Culture: The Shifting Anthropological Object*, eds. Karen Fog Olwig and Kirsten Hastrup (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 224.

19. *Annual Report of the Director of UNRWA* (1 July 1955–30 June 1956), para. 8.

20. UNRWA recognized that its basic ration (1,500 calories per person per day in the summer and 1,600 in the winter) is

less than an adequate diet. It represented two-thirds of the average diet of the indigenous poor of the host countries. See for instance UNGA, Twenty-Fourth Session, Supplement 14, *Annual Report of the Commissioner-General [CG] of UNRWA* (1 July 1968–30 June 1969), Doc. A/7614 (30 June 1969), para. 25.

21. *Annual Report of the Director of UNRWA* (1 July 1955–30 June 1956), paras. 76, 82.

22. See for example *Annual Report of the Director of UNRWA* (1 July 1955–30 June 1956), para. 82.

23. See Plascov, *The Palestinian Refugees in Jordan*, pp. 49, 180.

24. UNGA, Ninth Session, Supplement 17, *Annual Report of the Director of UNRWA* (1 July 1953–30 June 1954), Doc. A/2717 (30 June 1954), para. 63.

25. Until 1952, when the agency stopped its registration of the “original” refugees, the definition of a Palestine refugee was a needy person, who, as a result of the war in Palestine, has lost his home and his means of livelihood. See *Interim Report of the Director of UNRWA*, Doc. A/1451/Rev.1, para. 15. Later, UNRWA differentiated between registered refugees eligible and not eligible for services on the basis of “need” (based on household incomes). In 1992, the criterion of “need” was dropped as an eligibility criteria for access to the education and health programs (see UNGA, Forty-Seventh Session, Supplement 13, *Annual Report of the CG* (1 July 1991–30 June 1992), Doc. A/47/13 (30 June 1992), para. 35.

26. For instance, the vertical expansion of the shelters was long prohibited and today is limited.

27. See UNGA, Twenty-Eighth Session, Supplement 13, *Annual Report of the CG* (1 July 1972–30 June 1973), Doc. A/9013, para. 3.

28. UNRWA repeatedly requested the UNGA to extend its mandate time span (from three to five years) and to stabilize its financial resources; see UNGA, Nineteenth Session, Supplement 13, *Annual Report of the CG* (1963–1964), Doc. A/5813, para. 36 and UNGA, Twenty-Third Session, Supplement 13, *Annual Report of the CG* (1967–1968), Doc. A/7213, paras. 13–14.

29. Overall, about a third of the Palestine refugees across UNRWA’s five

fields of operation live in camps, though there are large regional variations from a low of 17.2 percent in Jordan to a high of 53.2 percent in Lebanon. In absolute terms, the Gaza Strip claims the most refugees (502,747) followed by Jordan (341,494). See UNRWA, *UNRWA in Figures—Figures as of 31 December 2009*.

30. See UNCCP, *Final Report of the United Nations Economic Survey Mission for the Middle East*, p. 18.

31. See *Interim Report of the Director of UNRWA*, Doc. A/1451/Rev.1, para. 31 and *Annual Report of the CG* (1 July 1968–30 June 1969), para. 25.

32. See an account of this phenomenon in UNGA, Twenty-First Session, Supplement 13, *Annual Report of the CG* (1 July 1965–30 June 1966), Doc. A/6313, para. 22.

33. This may have included the “other claimants,” namely various categories of economic refugees. Despite UNRWA’s reluctance, they were integrated in its relief rolls. In 1955, UNRWA estimated them at over 65,000; see UNGA, Tenth Session, Supplement 15A, *Special Report of the Director Concerning Other Claimants for Relief*, Doc. A/2978/Add.1 (15 October 1955).

34. As explained by UNRWA in UNGA, Twenty-Sixth Session, Supplement 13, *Annual Report of the CG* (1 July 1970–30 June 1971), Doc. A/8413 (30 June 1971), para. 2.

35. See UNGA, Seventh Session, Supplements 13 and 13A, *Annual Report of the CG* (1 July 1951–30 June 1952), Docs. A/2171 and A/2171/add.1, para. 17.

36. UNGA, Eighth Session, Supplement 12, *Annual Report of the Director of UNRWA* (1 July 1952–30 June 1953), Doc. A/2470, para. 184 ss; and UNGA, Fourteenth Session, Supplement 14, *Annual Report of the Director of UNRWA* (1 July 1958–30 June 1959), Doc. A/4213, Annex C.

37. The exception was Jordan, where the state took a major role in camp management (perhaps because the refugees there were citizens). In 1975, they also took over the maintenance of the camps’ physical infrastructure; and in 1986, following disturbances after a football match involving the Wihdat camp football club, they asked UNRWA to hand over the supervision of the youth

activities centers in Jordan. See Laurie Brand, *Palestinians in the Arab World: Institution Building and the Search for State* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 182–83.

38. See for instance, *Annual Report of the CG* (1 July 1972–30 June 1973), para. 22 ss., and UNGA, Thirty-Seventh Session, Supplement 13, *Annual Report of the CG* (1 July 1981–30 June 1982), Doc. A/37/13 (30 June 1982), para. 61. The reports also emphasize the contribution of Jordan (since 1975) and that of the PLO (in the camps of Lebanon from 1969 to 1982) to the rehabilitation of the camps' infrastructure.

39. See *Annual Report of the CG* (1 July 1963–30 June 1964), para. 31.

40. Yvan Von Kaenel, "Exil, restructuration et réseaux: les réfugiés palestiniens du Liban, de Syrie et de Jordanie, 1948–1991" (master's thesis, Institut universitaire d'études du développement [IUED], Geneva, 1995), p. 80.

41. Such as the *mukhtars* (community representatives) or, later, camp committees. See UNGA, Twenty-Fifth Session, Supplement 13, *Annual Report of the CG* (1 July 1969–30 June 1970), Doc. A/8013 (30 June 1970), para. 19.

42. *Annual Report of the CG* (1 July 1969–30 June 1970), para. 19.

43. See "The Refugee Delegations at Yesterday's Conference Refuse any Census. . . ." *al-Difa'* (Jordanian daily), 21 July 1955, p. 1.

44. See the list of refugee claims in "The Refugee Delegations," *al-Difa'*, pp. 1–2.

45. In *Report of the Director of UNRWA*, Doc. A/1905, para. 110. The number of UNRWA employees has increased fivefold, from 5,973 (133 internationals and 5,849 local recruits) in 1951 to 30,614 (119 internationals and 30,495) in 2010. See *Report of the Director of UNRWA*, Doc. A/1905 and *UNRWA in Figures—Figures as of 31 December 2009*. In comparison, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which does not implement its services itself but coordinates the activities of local implementing agencies, today employs about 6,600 employees to cater to the basic needs of some 34 million refugees (see www.unhcr.ch).

46. On the local/international staff chasm compared to "residual colonialism,"

see Benjamin N. Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation: UN Aid to Palestinians* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), pp. 138–81; and Randa Farah, "UNRWA through the Eyes of Its Employees in Jordan," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, no. 2–3 (2009), pp. 389–411.

47. See for instance, *Annual Report of the CG* (1 July 1968–30 June 1969), para. 32. As of the 1990s, several high-ranking local employees have been given the "international employee" status.

48. See for instance Memorandum by the Acting Secretary of State to the Executive Secretary of the National Security Council (Lay), 13 September 1950, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950: The Near East, South Asia and Africa*, vol. 5 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978), pp. 1002–1006. Israel also used this argument about the stabilizing impact of UNRWA's mandate at times when the United States' support for the agency seemed flinching; see Memorandum of a Conversation, Department of State, Washington, November 25, 1959, 5 p.m. in *Foreign Relations of the United States 1958–1960: Arab-Israeli Dispute; United Arab Republic; North Africa*, vol. 13 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1991), p. 235.

49. As mischievously stated by UNRWA's director in *Annual Report of the Director of UNRWA* (1 July 1952–30 June 1953), para. 18.

50. See for instance *Annual Report of the Director of UNRWA* (1 July 1958–30 June 1959), para. 8.

51. *Report of the Director of UNRWA* (1 July 1956–30 June 1957), para. 6.

52. UNGA, Twentieth Session, Supplement 13, *Annual Report of the CG* (1 July 1964–30 June 1965), Doc. A/6013, para. 6.

53. *Annual Report of the CG* (1 July 1970–30 June 1971), para. 4.

54. However, as Rosemary Sayigh puts it, although Palestinians speak through UNRWA, what they say is constrained by the agency's accountability to the UN secretary-general and major donors. Rosemary Sayigh "Dis/Solving the 'Refugee Problem'," *Mideast Report* 207 (Summer 1998), <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer207/dissolv.htm>.

55. UNRWA first turned (1956–58) to assistance for small-scale individual

economic enterprise but that approach to reintegration proved too costly and not very effective.

56. Memorandum of a Conversation, Department of State, Washington, October 5, 1960, Noon, in *Foreign Relations of the United States 1958-1960*, vol. 13, p. 378.

57. UNGA, Fourteenth Session, Supplement 14, *Annual Report of the Director of UNRWA* (1 July 1959-30 June 1960), Doc. A/4213 (30 June 1960), para. 10. According to UNRWA, in 1958 at least half of those Palestine refugees aged twenty-five and over were doomed to live on UNRWA relief for the rest of their lives. See Memorandum of a Conversation, Department of State, Washington, October 5, 1960, Noon, p. 378.

58. *Annual Report of the Director of UNRWA* (1 July 1958-30 June 1959), para. 5.

59. See for instance, *Annual Report of the Director of UNRWA* (1 July 1959-30 June 1960), paras. 20-24 and Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, p. 61.

60. *Annual Report of the Director of UNRWA* (1 July 1959-30 June 1960), para. 5.

61. See Jalal Al Hussein, Chiraz Skhiri, and Céline Calvé, *Education Profile of the Palestine Refugees in the Near East*, IUED/Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL)/UNRWA survey, Geneva and Amman, UNRWA document, p. 9.

62. Because it feared being accused of trying to "dissolve" the refugee issue, UNRWA denied any involvement in a large-scale emigration strategy (see for instance *Annual Report of the Director of UNRWA* [1 July 1959-30 June 1960], para. 95). It did, however, contribute to the emigration process (also involving governmental agencies) triggered by the individual refugees' will to emigrate through its placement offices.

63. In Jordan, such remittances comprised up to 25 percent of the GDP in the mid-1970s to mid-1980s, and in the year 2000 still constitute about one-fifth of the GDP. See M. I. T. El-Sakka, "Migrant Workers' Remittances and Macroeconomic Policy in Jordan" (Kuwait University), <http://www.cba.edu.kw/research%20serial/Migrant%20Remittances%20and%20>

[macroeconomic%20Policy%20in%20Jordan.pdf](http://www.cba.edu.kw/research%20serial/Migrant%20Remittances%20and%20).

64. *Annual Report of the CG* (1 July 1970-30 June 1971), para. 2.

65. Emergency relief projects were launched by UNRWA following the Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip (1956), the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, the Lebanese civil war (1975-1991), and, more recently, the two intifadas against the Israeli occupation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (1987-94; and since 2000).

66. "Finding Work for Palestine Refugees: A New Challenge for UNRWA," *Palestine Refugees Today*, no. 130 (July 1991), p. 3. The emigration tide toward the Gulf countries resumed (at a lesser pace) in the late 1990s.

67. *Annual Report of the CG* (1 July 1969-30 June 1970), para. 12.

68. Already in September 1966, the U.S. Congress had promulgated a law stipulating that U.S. contributions to UNRWA would stop if the agency did not take the measures required to prevent refugees enrolled in the PLO's Palestine Liberation Army from receiving assistance; see Foreign Policy Assistance Act of 1966, Public Law 89-583, 19 September 1966, AFPCD (1966):1051.

69. In *Annual Report of the CG* (1 July 1969-30 June 1970), paras. 12, 15, 19.

70. In Lebanon, the Cairo agreements of 1969 between Lebanon and the PLO gave to the latter full control over the refugee camps' affairs.

71. In 1982, UNRWA was accused by Israel of having allowed PLO factions to use its Siblil vocational training center in Lebanon for storing weapons and military training. See Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, pp. 105-109. More recently, UNRWA has repeatedly been accused by Israel and the United States of serving as a prop for Palestinian militant activities. In 2003, the U.S. Congress asked UNRWA to sever connections with Gaza Youth Activity Centers because of ties to Palestinian radicals. UNRWA responded that it would not collocate with the centers but would support specific projects; see Government Accountability Office, *Department of State and [UNRWA]—Actions to Implement Section 301(c) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961*, <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d04276r.pdf>.

72. UNRWA insisted that they would deal with the PLO organizations on the

instructions of the Lebanese authorities; see Jalal Al Hussein et al., *Education Profile of the Palestine Refugees*, pp. 54–64.

73. Such an innovation was introduced with the agreement of the Lebanese government and the director-general of UNESCO; see *Annual Report of the CG* (1 July 1969–30 June 1970), paras. 19, 109 and following sections on “Education: Lebanon.”

74. This is notwithstanding the PLO organizations’ informal educational influence over the refugees through the military education provided outside school hours.

75. A motto institutionalized in UNGA, Forty-First Session, Supplement 13, *Annual Report of the CG* (1 July 1985–30 June 1986), Doc. 41/13 (23 September 1986), para. 53.

76. While all registered refugees had until then been eligible for rations except those whose income was over a certain level (about 43 percent of the registered population in 1983), from 1982 on, only “special hardship cases”—individuals whose income is below a poverty line and who fit in a predefined vulnerable category (about 6 percent in 2009)—were entitled to such assistance. The refugees of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip were the most affected since many male breadwinners were in Israeli prisons for their involvement in resistance activities.

77. See the PLO declaration in “The PLO Voices Its Concern Regarding the Interruption of Relief to 400,000 Palestinians,” *al-Dustur* (Jordan), 16 October 1982.

78. UNGA, Thirty-Eighth Session, Supplement 13, *Annual Report of the CG* (1 July 1982–30 June 1983), Doc. A/38/313, para. 9.

79. UNGA, Thirty-Ninth Session, Supplement 13, *Annual Report of the CG* (1 July 1983–30 June 1984), Doc. A/39/13, para. 4.

80. See UNGA, Thirty-Ninth Session, Summary Record of the Special Political Committee, A/SPC/39/SR.12 (23 October 1984), para. 14. The host countries, Jordan especially, rejected UNRWA’s step as an intrusion in their internal affairs, and the system could not be applied. But the message to the Palestinians was not lost.

81. See Jalal Al Hussein et al., *Education Profile of the Palestine Refugees*, pp. 57–59.

82. Fawaz Turki, *The Disinherited: Journal of a Palestinian in Exile* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), p. 58.

83. See *Annual Report of the CG* (1 July 1982–30 June 1983), paras. 70–77.

84. Information about these interventions is available in various UNRWA documents; see UNRWA, “Infrastructure and Camp Improvement,” <http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=31>. In Jordan, the authorities have unilaterally rehabilitated the shelter and physical infrastructure of nearly all of the thirteen camps of the country since 2001.

85. As stated by Angela Williams, “UNRWA and the Occupied Territories,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 2, no. 1 (1989), pp. 159–61.

86. For the uneasiness of UNRWA social workers when faced with the participatory methodology in the Neirab camp rehabilitation project, see L. Al Amine, “Quelle voix pour les bénéficiaires de l’approche participative? Le cas d’un projet de développement de l’UNRWA dans les camps de réfugiés palestiniens de Neirab et Ein el-Tal (Syrie)” (thesis, DESS Mondes arabes et mondes musulmans contemporains, Universities of Geneva and Lausanne), pp. 64–68.

87. For more on the camp rehabilitation dynamics among Palestinian refugees, see Philipp Misselwitz and Sari Hanafi, “Testing a New Paradigm: UNRWA’s Camp Improvement Program,” *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, nos. 2–3 (2009), pp. 360–88.

88. At present, the al-Fawwar and Dahaysha camps (West Bank) and the Talbiyeh camp (Jordan) have been concerned by such interactive interventions. See UNRWA, “Infrastructure and Camp Improvement.”

89. As formulated by the UN secretary-general before EPA implementation began in 1988, the assurances state that the planned interventions are neither temporary measures pending a comprehensive political settlement nor a substitute for such a settlement; see Security Council, *Report Submitted to the Security Council by the Secretary-General in Accordance with Resolution 605*, Doc. S/19443 (21 January 1988),

para. 47. For the Neirab camp rehabilitation, a clause explicitly stating that the project in no way affected refugees' right of return had to be added to the proposal put forward by UNRWA and foreign donors to be accepted by the Syrian authorities. The Syrian government formally welcomed the project and is now a major donor along with Canada, the United States, and Switzerland. See Aisling Byrne, "Some of the Challenges Facing UNRWA Engaging Neirab's Refugees in Camp Development," *al-Majdal* (Winter 2005), pp. 47-51.

90. On UNRWA's declining indicators, see UNRWA, *UNRWA Medium Term Plan 2005-2009*, pp. 7-8, <http://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/2010011812234.pdf>.

91. See UNRWA, *Medium Term Strategy 2010-2015*, www.unrwa.org/userfiles/201003317746.pdf, p. 15.

92. According to a survey carried out by the University of Geneva and UCL in the agency's five areas of operations in 2005, a large majority of refugees claimed that they first saw in their registration with the agency a proof of their refugee status, largely ahead of access to services; see Jalal Al Hussein and Riccardo Bocco, "The Status of the Palestinian Refugees in the Near East: The Right of Return and UNRWA," in *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, nos. 2-3 (2009), pp. 275-80.

93. UNRWA, *Medium Term Strategy 2010-2015*, p. 9.

94. UNRWA, *Medium Term Strategy 2010-2015*, p. 15.

95. This (indirect) protection aspect of UNRWA's mandate has been (and still is) tested in the occupied territories in the context of the second intifada that began in 2000. The pressures exerted by the international community on the Lebanese government to alleviate the highly discriminatory socioeconomic status imposed on the Palestinian refugees there is another case in point. However, this does not make up for the protection gap stemming from the Palestine refugees' (temporary) exclusion from the 1951 UNHCR statute and the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. These universal protection instruments exclude "any refugee receiving from organs or agencies of the UN other than the UNHCR protection and assistance." At the time, the Arab states promoted that exclusion

to highlight the political specificity of the Palestinian refugees vis-à-vis the UN compared to other purely humanitarian refugee cases. See Michael Kagan, "Is There Really a Protection Gap? UNRWA's Role vis-à-vis Palestinian Refugees," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, nos. 2-3 (2009), pp. 511-31; and Nicholas Morris, "Towards a Protection Policy for UNRWA," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, nos. 2-3 (2009), pp. 550-60.

96. In 2009 and 2010, UNRWA announced budget deficits in excess of \$80 million, spawning rumors that it would soon terminate programs in one or more operational areas. See "UNRWA's Mission Is in Financial Jeopardy," *The National*, 30 August 2010, <http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=3D/20100831/OPINION/708>.

97. The usual challenges posed by participatory approaches include increased costs, time-consuming processes, ensuring a balanced representation of the population, and the management of community expectations in keeping with available resources. For UNRWA's technical approach to community participation, see UNRWA, *Programme/Project Cycle Management Handbook*, internal working document, June 2008, section 4.

98. See UNRWA, *Medium Term Strategy 2010-2015*, p. 25.

99. In 2005, the host states rejected the Palestinian president's suggestion that the refugees be granted a temporary "functional" citizenship in the Arab host countries to facilitate their daily lives there.

100. See the Neirab camp rehabilitation project in Al Amine, "Quelle voix pour les bénéficiaires de l'approche participative?" pp. 68-75.

101. These two meetings are "Palestinian Refugees: Building and Strengthening Modalities of Community Participation Experiences of UNRWA, UN Agencies and NGOs in Lebanon," a workshop organized by the Center for Refugee Rights/Aidoun in cooperation with Norwegian People's Aid and UNRWA in February 2010; and "From Relief and Works to Human Development: UNRWA and Palestinian Refugees after 60 Years," a conference organized in Beirut in October 2010 by UNRWA and the Issam Fares Institute (AUB).