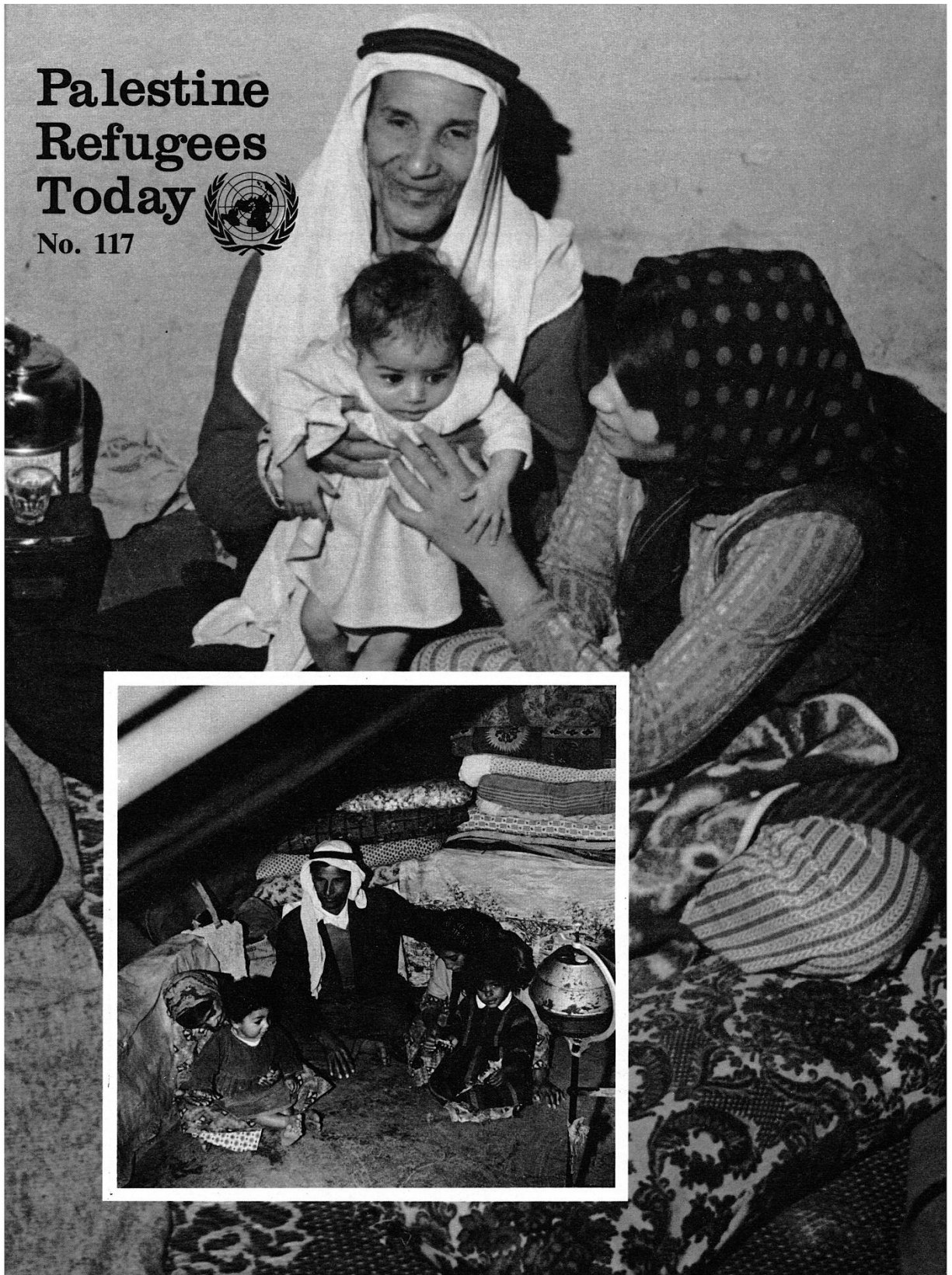
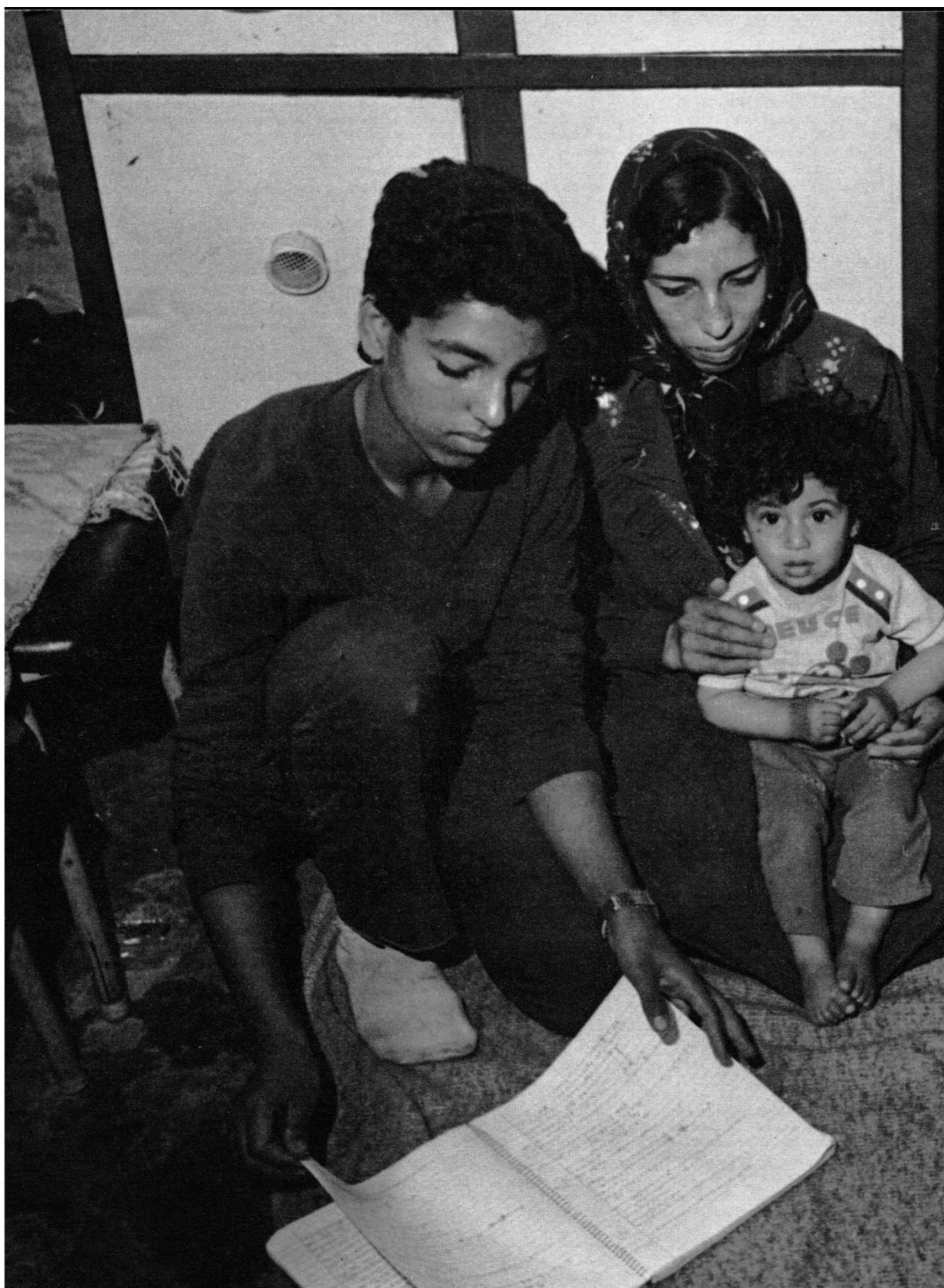


# Palestine Refugees Today

No. 117





## West Bank volunteer



*Anton Khabbaz graduated last June with a degree in applied physics from Columbia University. At present he is a CASA scholar, studying Arabic for a year at the American University in Cairo.*

A young Palestinian-American, Anton Khabbaz, spent part of last summer working as a volunteer in Arroub camp, West Bank, tutoring refugee youths in English during daily classes at the Camp's Youth Activities Centre.

"Since last May, I had wanted to work in a Palestine refugee camp, as the best way of experiencing the refugees' harsh living conditions and exploring their opinions and thoughts," Khabbaz recalled. "After contacting the UNRWA West Bank Field Office in Jerusalem, where I was told the Agency does not have any formal way of placing volunteers, I went straight to Arroub, near Hebron, to see what there might be for me to do. My idea was to teach for their *tawjihi* (school leaving) examinations. I thought I might be able to help them with their spoken English."

Thus began an adventure for Khabbaz, who was born in the United States of Palestinian origin and who was spending a summer off from his post-graduate studies in Cairo visiting relatives near Bethlehem in the West Bank. He wrote this account of his experience for *Palestine Refugees Today*:

The discovery began the first day I entered the camp. From the moment I passed the sign saying "Arroub", silence accompanied me. As I entered the camp, little children stopped playing and chattering, and most stared at me. I continued walking until I reached virtually the end of the main street of the camp, trying to appear humble by not staring either to the right or left.

Near the end of the road, I introduced myself to a group of young men. I asked to see an official of the camp and explained that I would like to volunteer my time teaching English or helping in other ways. The men listened attentively and after I explained my intentions they greeted me warmly and welcomed me to the camp.

I was led through the camp to the office of the UNRWA camp

services officer, where (in addition to receiving a comment on my foreign accent in Arabic) I was told there was no work for me. As luck would have it, just as my hopes of working in the camp had vanished, I met Hosni Shahwan, the UNRWA official in charge of the Hebron area, who was accompanying a visiting delegation through the camp. While touring the camp with Hosni and his group, I met Majed Adawi, a student from the camp. We began speaking in Arabic after his initial struggle with English. After we made our introductions, he said: "You are a welcome guest among us. We will arrange your work." Later, he took me to his home, where I met his father and brother and Mohammad El-Haj, the director of the camp Youth Activities Centre. Majed, Mohammad and a third person, Khaled Abu Shama, were the people who brought me close to the residents of the camp and they became my friends.

Majed Adawi was my closest friend. He introduced me to many people and helped me set up the English class by recruiting students. We exchanged jokes and card tricks and got to know each other. After receiving numerous invitations to his home for meals and visits I began to feel that I might be imposing, but he was always insistent and hospitable. When I told him one time I could take care of my lunch myself he said, "If you continue speaking like this I will get angry." Apparently, I was to be considered as one of the family, "like my brother", as Majed said.

Another time Majed explained how his left arm became paralysed. He was hit by a car while riding a bicycle and was in a coma for two months. The nerves in his arm were severed. The doctors at the Jerusalem hospital where he was treated said that no operation was possible to repair the nerves. Since then, Majed has written to doctors in America and China requesting information on receiving further medical help.

Our friendship grew through our language-exchange sessions. From the first time we met, both Majed and I were eager to speak each other's language. He would hold conversations with me in English,



asking about certain words, expressions and pronunciation, but most of the time we would speak in Arabic.

Khaled Abu Shama became another good friend, and together with Majed, we spent time drinking coffee and tea in his home, taking long walks through the nearby countryside, and discussing our studies together. I had a chance to observe Khaled's values and life-style. At noon every day, when he heard the call to prayer, Khaled would excuse himself to pray. When he came back, he returned to his same quiet nature and we continued whatever we were doing. Khaled knew a lot of Arabic songs, some of which were familiar to me, so we sang them and he taught me a few others.

Khaled and his family are good examples of how a Palestine refugee family living in the West Bank can be successful. Two of his brothers worked in Saudi Arabia, one owns the camp bakery and Khaled is an electrical engineering student at Yarmouk University in Jordan. Khaled values education very much. He said, "I want to be a successful engineer so that I can educate my children".

Mohammad El-Haj provided constant support for me. He was the main spur for students to attend my class and he said, "We are very grateful for your help". He invited me home for lunch and made me feel that his home was my home.

Mohammad would talk to me about the living conditions within the camp. "Some families of 24 persons make as little as 10 dollars a day. They eat only bread and rice with some tomato sauce. To give everyone an apple a day is just too expensive," he explained once. He said perhaps 80 per cent of the camp's 4,700 people lived this way.

I also learned a lot about the camp through my students. Despite their low level of proficiency in English, they were determined to learn. Their comprehension of spoken English was very low. Even after I repeated myself and illustrated what I was saying with gestures, one student still could not understand, and I had to explain myself in Arabic. And he could never respond with much more than a mumbled "yes, yes".

One time I read them a passage from their lessons. It began: "In 1951, a French scientist, Alain Bombard, put forward a remarkable theory . . ." After reading a few lines I asked the students what the main idea was. One responded: "In 1951 a French scientist, Alain . . .", repeating the lines verbatim!

Even though some of the students were weak in English, they were eager. When I asked them to introduce themselves, each was eager to speak. Some, like Atef, struggled through, "My name . . . is Atef . . . I live in . . . Arroub camp". Others had less trouble introducing themselves. Amer, who felt confident with English, began: "I would like to explain that we are all refugees who were driven out of our home in 1948 . . ." Each student wanted to say something.

After my first class, the students were very enthusiastic. They would huddle around me asking all sorts of questions on homework and how they could prepare for the next class. When I asked them what areas we should concentrate on, speaking or reading, each offered an opinion. "Speaking is more important, because we don't get to hear English often, but we can always read," said Mohammad. Another student suggested that tapes be made of my speech so they could listen and repeat the pronunciation. Some students requested extra time with me to speak in English, and another asked me to help him with some physics problems.

On the last day of class, we discussed New York, where I went to college. By that time, we were able to talk, and they asked a lot of questions. I felt their English had improved as this discussion went very well. Our first real attempt at using English together was successful.

By the end of my stay at Arroub, I felt I was well known in the camp. Little children knew my name and greeted me. When I was leaving the camp, Mohammad El-Haj told me that they considered me as one of the family, that they were my second family. As Majed, Khaled and Amer walked me to my taxi, we made plans to meet again next summer.

## Arroub YAC

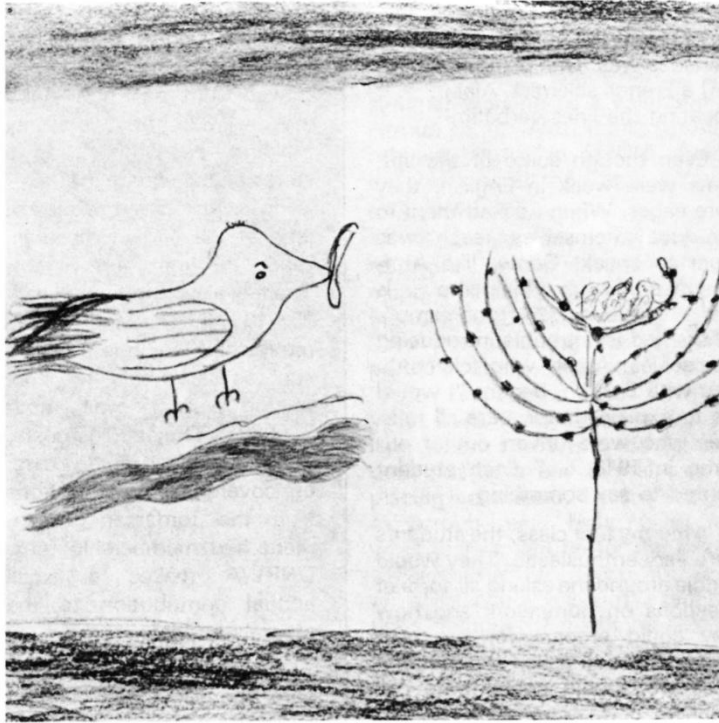
The Arroub Camp Youth Activities Centre, established in a rented building in 1964, moved to its own new building in 1982. The two-storey building—each floor has a space of 164 square metres—is on a 40 x 25 metre plot of land at the end of the main road through the camp. There is also an attached hall, 20 x 10 metres wide and 6 metres high, for indoor games such as basketball. The cost of the building was about \$100,000. The building costs, and the annual running costs, are covered by contributions from the Jordanian government and membership fees. UNRWA makes a small annual contribution to the centre's budget.

The centre has 420 members and some 200 children from the camp also participate in its activities. Basketball, volleyball, table tennis and weight-lifting are among the sporting activities offered at the centre. The YAC also supervises competitions among seven football teams within Arroub camp. There are occasional lectures and other cultural activities at the centre, and the members conduct social services such as helping elderly and sick people in the camp.

The youth centre runs an annual summer camp for younger children. Last summer, 60 boys took part in the 18-day camp, which included sports and games, walks in the surrounding area and outings to the sea and to a zoo.

The centre is run by a committee of young men from the camp and operates independently, without direct supervision from UNRWA.

## Children "not aggressive"



The picture drawn by 13-year-old Kaher shows a big green and white bird flying home with food for three little red fledglings in a snug tree-top nest.

Below is the brown earth and above a blue sky. This was what Kaher, a Palestine refugee living in Jordan, drew when asked to portray his idea of "sky and earth".

It was one of many pictures which surprised Vienna paediatrician and child neuro-psychiatrist Dr. Ahmad Turk, who conducted psychological tests on Kaher and 254 other seven- to 14-year-olds at a joint YMCA-UNRWA camp for Palestine refugee orphans in Jordan in June and July 1986. Dr. Turk, himself a Palestinian by origin, set three tests for the 65 girls and 190 boys—picked for the camp at UNRWA's Amman Training Centre because they had lost one or both parents.

To the doctor, Kaher's picture and others like it were surprising for their colour, for the optimism, peace and harmony they portrayed.

"For the most part, the children—despite their difficulties—

were not aggressive but showed a positive attitude and were socially well-adjusted," he concludes from his study.

Dr. Turk was asked by Dr. John Hiddlestone, UNRWA's Director of Health, to attend the summer camp and report on the medical and psychological condition of the children there.

His study will be used to devise ways of helping care for orphans attending future summer camps. It will also contribute to another Agency project which aims to promote the healthy psychological and social development of Palestine refugee children caught up in the tensions of the Middle East conflict.

The summer camp has been held annually for 10 years. Camp leaders and their director helped Dr. Turk conduct his study. It involved a thorough medical check-up of each child and three psychological tests—drawing pictures of "sky and earth" and answering two sets of questions.

In one set of questions the children were asked what their favourite animals and favourite colours were,

what they most enjoyed playing, what career they would like when they grow up, which people played an important role in their lives and what they would like to change in their lives.

The second set of questions—40 in all—was designed to give clues as to the children's social conformity, personal feelings and temperament, psychosomatic tendencies, sociability and reactions to criticism and changes in other people's behaviour.

In this test they were given the choice of answering "yes" or "no" to statements such as: "I am nearly always afraid of something or someone" and "often I envy children whose parents are still alive." Dr. Turk said that some children answered "yes" and some "no" to the first question while only a small number answered "yes" to the second question.

"The tests enabled me to have a good idea about the psychological condition of the children," said Dr. Turk, who conducted his study over two-and-a-half weeks.

### Sociable but lacking confidence

In his report to the UNRWA Director of Health he says: "From the early stages of examining the children I could observe that most of them were shy and lacked self-confidence. However, they appeared to be sociable both among themselves and in their community, yet they were never aggressive. When conducting the tests and during conversations with the children they were usually relaxed and revealed a good standard of cooperation."

In general, the children seemed to be contented with their social situation because their family ties were still strong, despite the loss of one or both parents, said Dr. Turk.

They were not isolated, as was often the case with orphaned children in Europe. "Relatives, grandparents, uncles jump in to help or an older brother—even if he is only young—takes over the role of the father," he said.

According to the study, the children did, however, show signs of having been adversely affected by their situation as refugees and orphans.

"Most of the children had psy-

chosomatic symptoms which could be related to several emotional shocks (traumas) which could not be overcome by them—such as the loss of parents or relatives. The children revealed symptoms of sadness, anxiety and difficulties in their ability to concentrate,” the doctor reported.

Dr. Turk’s medical examinations revealed that some of the children had acute and chronic diseases but few were in really bad condition, although most had very bad teeth and many had abnormalities in their jaws. Some children may have been born with deformed jaws, others had not looked after their teeth or not been treated early enough, said Dr. Turk.

He found that more than 30 children had special medical problems, such as loss of hair, headaches, stomach ache, heart pains, dizziness, skin and eye diseases.

He recommended that a full-time doctor should be available during the three-week summer camp and that six people should be taken on to keep the washing and toilet areas clean so that the children got the feeling that personal hygiene was necessary for their health.

To help deal with some of the children’s psychological problems, he suggested special training for camp leaders and the services of a psycho-therapist, preferably from the same community as the orphans. He recommended that help should continue to be given to camp participants after the summer holiday was over.

“They need more attention and their school, family and financial situation needs to be improved,” he said.

In his report to UNRWA, the doctor points out that the children he tested could not be considered to be a representative sample of Palestinian orphaned refugees. The study was concerned simply with those children attending the summer camp.

Born in Jaffa as one of eight children, Dr. Turk, 47, has lived in Vienna since 1960 when he came to study at university. He worked for some 10 years at the psychosomatic out-patients’ departments at St. Anna children’s hospital, Vienna, and has run his own practice as a paediatrician, neurologist, psychiatrist and psychologist for four years.

## Fighting around south Lebanon camps

Fighting erupted in late September between local militias and Palestinians in the Tyre area of south Lebanon. As of going to press, Rashidieh camp was still besieged and had been cut off since 30 September. Thousands of refugees fled the area. Photos show damage to a shelter in Rashidieh (1), a woman who fled with two grandchildren to Tripoli (2), relief supplies being distributed by UNRWA in Saida (3) and a displaced family living in an UNRWA school in Saida (4).



1



2



4

3





1



2

4



3







# Mobile dental clinic for S.A.R.

Even after 36 years, it seems there is still room for invention and ingenuity in finding ways of delivering UNRWA health services to Palestine refugees.

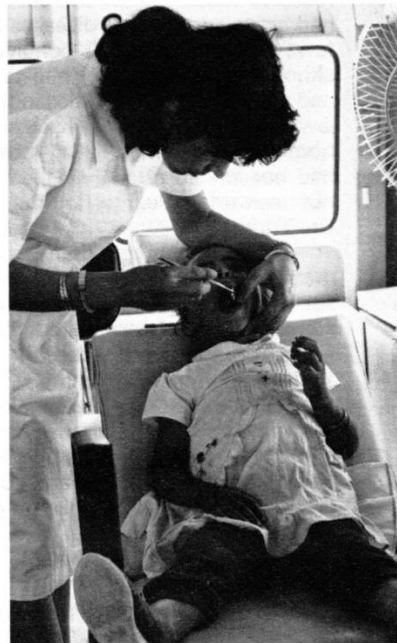
This was proved recently in the Syrian Arab Republic, where, in order to get dental health services to three locations in the Damascus area, UNRWA health and transport staff worked together to convert a passenger van for use as a mobile dental clinic.

The idea of a mobile unit had been in the air for some time, but there were no funds available to procure a ready-made one. An old vehicle, used to transport refugee patients to and from hospitals for treatment, had been "surveyed", or written off, and was offered to the Health Department, but there were no funds available to replace it and it couldn't be spared. Another option considered was to use a normal car to bring a dentist to the camps regularly, but this was impractical, as the heavy dental equipment would have had to be loaded and unloaded each time.

Recalls UNRWA's Field Health Officer in Syria, Dr. A. S. Toubah: "I found a mini-bus used to transport health staff in the Aleppo area, and a driver who was available after transporting staff to the Damascus Vocational Training Centre early each morning. With funds from the Field Director's reserve, the bus was converted by our own Agency workshop, under the supervision of Mr. Adib Hadba, the vehicle maintenance officer. They went to the

local market and purchased materials to make cupboards and install a water tank and basin. The chair and basic dental unit were bought with Agency funds. The steriliser and instruments came from the Health Department. The workshop took out the seats and put the unit together from scratch."

The unit is now in regular use in three camps in the Damascus area with a total population of 24,000 refugees. People from these camps who needed dental treatment previously had to go on their own to public clinics in Damascus. The UNRWA mobile unit spends two days a week each in Khan Eshieh



and Sbeineh camps and one day in Khan Dannoun. Once a week, it goes to schools in the Yarmouk refugee quarter of Damascus to give UNRWA students dental examinations.

The dentist attached to the unit, Dr. Su'ad Qasem, is a graduate of Damascus University and previously served for a year at the UNRWA dental clinic in Dera'a camp. Other permanent UNRWA dental units in the Syrian Arab Republic are at the Polyclinic in Damascus (which also serves Jaramana camp), in Yarmouk (also serving) Qabr Essit camps at Neirab camp, Aleppo (also serving Ein Tal and Aleppo town) and Dera'a serving southern Syria.

In the three camps now served by the mobile unit, Dr. Qasem does more than the routine treatment—fillings, extractions and cleaning—for which the mobile unit is equipped. Much of her time is spent on instructing refugee mothers and children in basic dental hygiene. "I ask them to bring their own toothbrushes to the clinic and, with the aid of a mirror, I show them how best to use them," she says.

When she carried out a dental-health survey of students at the UNRWA Vocational Training Centre (VTC) in Damascus, Dr. Qasem found that 47 per cent of them needed dental treatment. The VTC community numbers some 1,000 people (trainees and staff), and Dr. Toubeh says a way is being sought to get them regular dental attention.

When it is in the camps, the mobile unit parks outside the UNRWA health centre, where it attracts patients on their way to and from the daily mother-and-child health care clinics. The response has been encouraging, said Dr. Qasem on one busy day recently at Khan Eshieh camp (population 11,000). A queue of mothers and children waited outside the open side door of the converted car while the dentist examined a young girl and carefully filled in her dental chart. After the girl was finished, her mother climbed into the chair for what Dr. Qasem said may have been her first-ever dental examination. "Many of my patients have never been to a dentist before," said the doctor. "At least now we can come to them."

## The average Palestine refugee

Age: 27.6. Comes from a family of three children. Religion: Moslem. He or she is the average Palestine refugee, according to data compiled by UNRWA. The figures are as of August 1986.

Mr. Average's status as a refugee arose from the 1948 war when his parents lost their home and livelihood and fled to Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic or the then Arab-held parts of Palestine. So he has been a refugee all his life—was born a refugee. He is one of 2.1 mil-

lion Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA.

Now there is a third generation of Palestine refugees—over 300,000 of them—representing 15% of the population. And there are already some members of a fourth generation of refugees. Those refugees born before 1948 represent only 29% of today's registered refugee population, or 616,000, while more than 1.5 million were born after the original exodus.

Today, more than one-third of the refugees—about 724,000—are under 15 years of age, including 218,000 who are five or younger. And there are over 36,000 refugees who are over 80.

### Nationality

Although virtually all the refugees had their origins in Palestine, some have taken out citizenship in other countries, and those living in Jordan and the Israeli-occupied West Bank are eligible for Jordanian passports. About 30,000 have Lebanese nationality and 3,500 have Syrian nationality. A small number have the citizenship of other countries. (The qualification for status as a refugee when UNRWA began in 1950 was at least two years' prior residence in Palestine and the loss of both home and livelihood.)

### Children per family

In the five areas where UNRWA operates (Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, the West Bank and Gaza Strip), the average number of children per family is 3.4—2.1 sons and 1.6 daughters. The lowest number is in the West Bank where the average family has 2.6 chil-

### Number of registered refugees

(August 1986)		In camps
Jordan	826,128	24.8%
West Bank	366,764	25.3%
Gaza Strip	436,693	55.1%
Lebanon	272,400	51.6%
Syrian Arab Republic	252,055	28.9%
Total	2,154,040	34.9%

Number of households/families:	397,330
Households headed by women:	24%
Average age of head of household:	57.1 years
Average age of refugees:	27.6 years