

Palestine Refugees Today



No. 119

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

News about UNRWA

Equipment donated by Japan

The Government of Japan has contributed \$ 228,000 in training equipment including five vehicles to UNRWA's Wadi Seer Training Centre in Jordan. Japan has also provided three-month training scholarships in Japan for four instructors from the centre and has made available three specialists to upgrade the level of training at Wadi Seer.

Former director of UNRWA dies

Henry Labouisse, Director of UNRWA from 1954-58 died in New York on 25 March. Mr. Labouisse later went on to become head of UNICEF.

Refugee health improves

Some major communicable diseases among Palestine refugees have been almost wiped out in the past 20 years, according to statistics compiled by UNRWA's Health Department. During the same period, malnutrition among refugee children has been reduced by about three-quarters.

According to the figures, there were seven cases of poliomyelitis per 100,000 population in 1966, and none in 1985. Measles went down from 605 to 9 per 100,000, trachoma from 1,452 to 11 and tuber-

culosis from 40 to 5 per 100,000.

Malnutrition among infants aged up to one year fell from 16.9 per cent in 1966 to 4.5 per cent in 1985. The rate among children between 1 and 2 years went down from 33.3 per cent to 5.9 per cent during the same period.

UNRWA's health budget for 1987 is set at about \$ 25 million for the 1,878,000 Palestine refugees eligible to receive Agency health services.

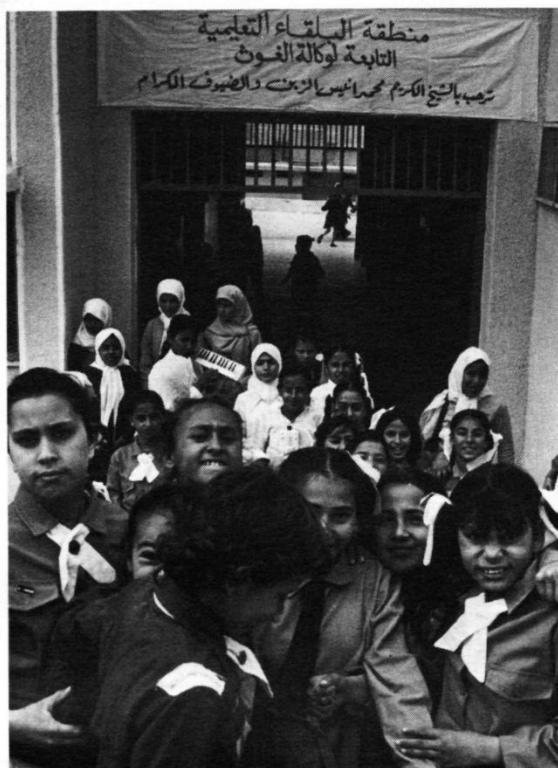
Over \$ 13 million pledged for Lebanon

Nearly \$ 11 million in cash and \$ 2.4 million in supplies has been pledged or paid to UNRWA's \$ 20.6 million Lebanon emergency fund. Governments contributing are: Australia, Austria, Canada, Finland, France, Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. The European Community plus a number of voluntary organisations and individuals have also made contributions or pledges.

OPEC Fund contributes

The OPEC Fund has announced a grant of \$ 250,000 to UNRWA for upgrading medical equipment at UNRWA health centres in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and for improving environmental health conditions in West Bank refugee camps. The OPEC Fund has contributed more than \$ 6 million to UNRWA since 1979. Most of the money has been donated for the expansion of training courses at UNRWA's vocational training centres.

Zaben brothers donate second Baqa'a school



A school for 2,136 children, the gift of Sheiks Ibrahim and Mohammad Zaben, was inaugurated at Baqa'a camp, Jordan in April. The \$ 500,000 building is the second school to be given to UNRWA by the Zaben brothers, who are Saudi Arabian businessmen of Palestinian origin.



UNRWA project for the elderly

UNRWA's Health Department is backing a plan to improve the quality of life for elderly Palestine refugees, one third of whom have spent nearly 40 years in camps, waiting for a solution to the Palestine issue.

Under the plan, refugees in Jordan will be helped and encouraged to remain active and healthy throughout old age. But the family will remain at the centre of all efforts to assist them.

A project to aid the growing number of older refugees has been drawn up by UNRWA with the backing of the World Health Organisation and Help Age International.

Dr. Fathi Mousa, Senior Medical Officer for Planning and Statistics at UNRWA, is 'very optimistic' that it will go ahead. He was part of a team of UNRWA and WHO officers and advisers who visited Jordan to investigate the needs of older refugees.

If the project gets under way and proves successful, it could be extended to the other fields in which UNRWA operates: Lebanon, Syrian Arab Republic, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

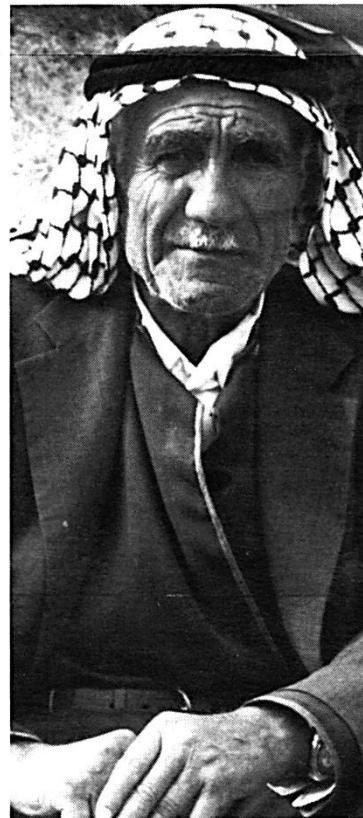
"The main emphasis is on the role of the family as the focal point of care for the elderly. The mission was completely against institutionalised care," said Dr. Mousa.

He explained that the mission found there was a need for programmes aimed at maintaining the well-being of physically active elderly refugees and at supporting family care given to the disabled elderly.

"We want to look after those elderly with serious health and social problems but who are mobile and can be helped with the assistance of others," he said.

UNRWA's health department already provides basic health care for all refugees, young and old. The project is designed to give extra attention to the elderly. It envisages special training for volunteers, family members and social workers in the care of the elderly and the setting up of a collection point for aids such as spectacles, hearing aids and wheel chairs.

Once funds have been raised, preliminary work can start – possibly this year, allowing the project to get under way properly in 1988.



Almost 8 per cent over 60

Statistics released by UNRWA show how much such a plan is needed: in 1986, 145,279 refugees or 7.7 per cent of the total Palestine refugee population of 2.1 million were aged over 60. In Jordan 8.1 per cent of refugees – 67,620 out of a population of 826,128 – were over 60.

Dr. Mousa said the Agency would continue to give priority to the provision of primary health care – particularly for the high-risk groups comprising children, pregnant women and nursing mothers. But UNRWA was successfully controlling infectious diseases – and, if the money was made available, could afford to give more attention to non-communicable diseases.

These include heart disease, diabetes and conditions such as hypertension which are found among the elderly.

"What is needed is a combination of health care, social and recreational activities for the elderly so that they can be as productive as possible and not frustrated," said Dr. Mousa.

"One recommendation made by the team that went to Jordan is that old people could be producing something – such as traditional dresses – which could help preserve the local culture.

"The idea is to keep them mobile, productive and not feeling isolated or unwanted in the community or in their families."

Psychological strain

Dr. Mousa said the health problems of old people in the refugee community were similar to those suffered by old people worldwide. "But there is an extra psychological strain relating to their feeling that they were expelled from their homes. This feeling is very strong among the elderly because most of them used to work as farmers so they were very much tied to the land."

The older refugees do, however, have one advantage over many old people in the West: "Generally they are treated well because the social structure in the Arab community gives high respect to the elderly," said Dr. Mousa.

The investigation team sent to



Jordan highlighted the plight of older women refugees who, by tradition, are largely restricted to their homes. The mission called for a thorough investigation of this problem.

Other measures called for by the mission were:

More research into the situation of elderly refugees; the setting up of a Disabled Aids Bank for the elderly at Baqa'a Camp, Jordan; training of community nurses in subjects such as geriatric rehabilitation, incontinence and dementia; intensive training workshops for both professionals and volunteers who care for the elderly; and the establishment of a volunteer programme to help old people.

The mission recommended a long-term plan including recreational activities and more professional

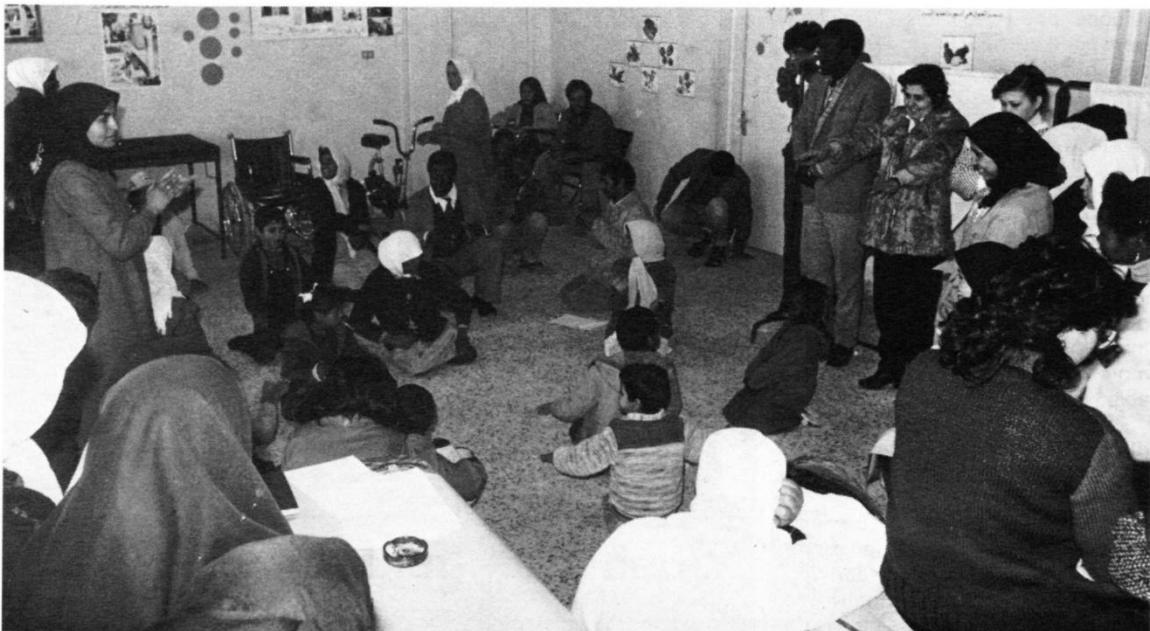
services for the elderly. It suggested that families caring for old people should be given a short break occasionally while their elderly relatives were looked after by other people.

Existing camp health centres could allocate properly trained staff at specific times to attend to the older generation. A programme to advise and support families caring for older people was recommended.

In the mission were:

Professor Gary Andrews, Flinders University of South Australia, consultant for the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office; Dr. Hana Hermanova, Regional Officer for Elderly, Disability and Rehabilitation, in the WHO Regional Office for Europe; Mr. Ken Tout, WHO temporary adviser, International Development Coordinator, Help Age International, London, and Dr. Mousa.

UNRWA Day Centres for the Disabled



Amongst visitors to the centres for the disabled was Britain's Princess Anne, pictured here with Project Co-ordinator Aziz Daoud.

A day centre due to open at Irbid, Jordan, this year will bring hope to children like Asmaa Abu Zerka who used to spend her days doubled up and screaming.

Asmaa is mentally retarded. She has attended a similar centre in Suf, 25 kilometres south of Irbid, since she was five. One year after first going there she had stopped screaming, learned to comb her hair, wash and dress herself and join in games.

She is one of the mentally or physically handicapped Palestine refugee children who are benefitting from a project run by UNRWA with financial help from the charity OXFAM.

The project is remarkable not only for such personal successes but also for the way in which other refugees and local communities have rallied round to help.

"The improvement in this one child alone has made it all worthwhile," said UNRWA Relief Services Director Peter Holdaway.

Credit for the success in Asmaa's case he gives to Aziz Daoud, the Palestine refugee who coordinates the project. "He has a fantastic way with children," said Mr. Holdaway.

It was the Relief Services Direc-

tor who first suggested that UNRWA should try to help disabled refugees in their communities instead of putting them into institutions away from home.

In March 1983 the centre opened at Suf. It was followed in April 1985 by a second one at Jerash Camp, two kilometres away. The Irbid centre – due to open about now – will be the third.

Project Coordinator Aziz Daoud says that he and his helpers make it easier for mentally handicapped children to learn by breaking themes down into sections small enough for the children to handle easily, in such subjects as reading, writing, geography and religion.

"We also try to teach them self-reliance – how to use a bus, how to go shopping and use money," he says.

The centres offer a programme of elementary education, largely through repetition, and helps the young refugees to get used to being with other people. Some of them have learned to read and write and have been taught skills to help them find work.

Setting up the project was not easy. Said Mr. Holdaway: "People

got tired of surveys on the incidence of disability. The other problem was overcoming the shame that Arab families feel about having disabled, and in particular, mentally retarded children.

"At Suf it was touch and go at the beginning whether it would work. People just didn't turn up. We got half a dozen brave parents who did turn up with their children on the first day," he said.

Behaviour improves

Gradually they saw their children's behaviour improve and other parents became less shy about bringing their disabled youngsters along. Now both Suf and Jerash centres cater for about 30 to 40 disabled people – mainly children and young adults. Suf specialises in the mentally disabled while Jerash caters for both mentally and physically disabled.

The project has flourished thanks to the help given by other refugees and by local communities in Jordan.

Mr. Holdaway said: "The Suf centre was set up in an abandoned kindergarten. Everybody's rallied round and helped. Refugee youngsters from the youth activities centre next door have cleared the ground and made an area of garden, cleared the play area and built a boundary wall."

Local communities gave donations in cash and in kind. Three assistants were chosen from the camp itself and sent for training at a centre for the disabled near Amman.

Later a roster of volunteers from among the refugees was set up. About six helpers come to the centre each day to work with the paid staff. The local community, the diplomatic community in Jordan, international voluntary agencies and other organisations have assisted in improving facilities at the centre.

At Suf, local volunteer Fatima Ahdib (20) says she came to the centre purely by chance, but then: "I loved the children and the work. It seemed natural to offer my services: it's in my blood."

Lamia al-Azzi (22) adds: "The work needs more effort, more kindness than normal teaching. You have to be pleasant to be accepted. The work is tiring but you end the day with a great feeling of satisfaction."

At Jerash UNRWA met with the same generous response. The centre, which was partly destroyed in a fire in September 1985, was reopened with the financial aid of the British community in Jordan and with cash raised from a sponsored run organised by UNRWA staff.

Most remarkable at Jerash was the backing given by building contractor Fathi Rab'ah, a 43-year-old Palestine refugee who is partially paralysed in both legs. He made no profit on the contract, quoting a price for re-building the centre which was 28 per cent below UNRWA's estimate of \$ 50,000.

"I offered my services to UNRWA

UNRWA's Relief Services Department paid \$ 17,000 towards the re-building of the Jerash centre.

The project is still developing. An outreach programme has started at Suf where a volunteer, trained nurse visits the homes of the disabled and advises families on ways of making life easier for themselves and for their disabled family members.

Much interest has been shown in the Suf centre. It has been visited by members of the Jordanian royal family, government ministers and other distinguished persons including Princess Anne, President of Britain's Save the Children Fund.

An "Association of Friends of the



just for the sake of helping to alleviate some of the hardship experienced by the disabled. It will be sufficient reward for me to see the happiness in the eyes of the disabled children," said Mr. Rab'ah.

Third centre

Now the third centre is being established at Martyr Azmi el Mufti (Husn) camp near Irbid. The Central Committee of the Mennonites, has promised to meet the recurrent costs of some \$ 15,000 a year for three years. Camp inhabitants themselves have raised the cash for the centre and found a suitable building.

OXFAM pays the \$ 22,000 running costs for the other two centres. This includes payment for UNRWA's project coordinator Aziz Daoud.

"Disabled" is being formed by a group of local people who will eventually take over full responsibility for the Suf and Jerash centres, under UNRWA's guidance.

Eventually UNRWA's Relief Services Director hopes to see similar centres set up in other fields where UNRWA operates – Lebanon, the Gaza Strip, West Bank and Syria.

Meanwhile, in remote refugee camps in the Jordanian hills, handicapped children who would otherwise have been lifelong outcasts are gradually learning to take their place in the community; and there is no shortage of helpers like Fatima and Lamia. The Suf project has enriched the lives of people far beyond the immediate circle of the disabled children.

20th Anniversary of the Six Day War

Friday, 5 June marked the 20th anniversary of the Six Day War of 1967 between Israel and her Arab neighbours, Egypt, Jordan and Syria. It uprooted about 145,000 registered Palestine refugees for the second time in 19 years, and still affects many of their lives today.

UNRWA set up 10 emergency camps for the displaced refugees in Jordan and Syria and these shanty towns are now the most visible sign of the conflict, although time has aged them. Their inhabitants have rebuilt their lives in different surroundings, but they are still as uncertain of their future now as they were in 1967 – or in 1948, when the Arab-Israeli war erased Palestine from the map.

Fateful sequence

In 1966–67 a series of border incidents was followed by reports of troop movements and a rise in tension.

On 22 May 1967, Egypt declared that the Strait of Tiran, gateway to the Israeli port of Eilat, was closed to Israeli shipping. Israel's Premier Levi Eshkol said the next day that interference with Israeli shipping would be regarded as an act of war. U.N. Secretary-General U Thant flew to Cairo, first meeting U.N. representatives including the UNRWA Commissioner-General Laurence Michelmore. Then he had talks with Egypt's President Nasser. But U Thant's peace mission was doomed to failure.

A week later Jordan and Egypt signed a defence pact parallel to that which Egypt had concluded with Syria six months earlier. Moshe Dayan was appointed Israeli defence minister on 31 May, and on 4 June the Israeli cabinet adopted his proposal of armed action.

The outside world, unaware of this plan, thought that tension was easing. At UNRWA's field office in Jerusalem, there was a feeling that the emergency arrangements that had been made to maintain services to refugees would not be necessary after all. Nevertheless, three international staff members moved into a hotel to form the nucleus of an

emergency field office, and the UNRWA field director, Bob Fisher, decided to give his Amman representative a cheque for emergency funds "just in case they are needed".

UNRWA's area officer in the Jordanian capital of Amman at the time, Basil Ennab, recalls, "That was on the Friday. On the following Monday, 5 June, I was banking the cheque when I heard that the war had started". He was to need the money for relief and to pay salaries to stranded staff members who came in to the Amman office for help.

Another UNRWA staff member who had prepared for the worst was Kamal Habboub, now Deputy Relief Services Officer. On 5 June 1967 he was the Agency's Port Officer for Aqaba in the south of Jordan, with responsibility for handling incoming shipments of relief supplies. He had spent the preceding days moving stocks of food commodities out of the port to safer locations, and he set off for Jerusalem, then UNRWA's field office for Jordan, to see to the related paperwork. He never reached Jerusalem: it was cut off by fighting.

Reporting instead to UNRWA in Amman, Mr. Habboub was told to organise 200,000 cooked meals daily for the masses of displaced persons who were crowding in from the war zone on the other side of the River Jordan.

In Jerusalem on 5 June, UNRWA's Deputy Field Director Jeff Cassels learned from the radio at about 8.30 a.m. that Israeli aircraft had been bombing Egyptian airfields. From that moment, it became clear that full scale war had broken out, and that it would only be a question of time before Jordan became involved, he recalls.

At 10 a.m. Director Fisher arrived by car from Amman, having seen many tanks on the road. In Jerusalem he set the emergency plan into operation under Jeff Cassels, and returned to the Jordanian capital in case the road should be cut off – which it was, in due course.

Key position

The UNRWA field office on Ammunition Hill had become a key pos-

ition in the battle for Jerusalem with its command of the northern approaches to the city, and the area was pounded by aircraft and artillery. When Tuesday, 5 June dawned there were 300 bodies in and around it. "Fierce fighting took place from room to room in the UNRWA offices," according to Agency staffer Mohammad Jarallah, who lived through the battle in his home nearby.

In the Jordan River Valley, near the biblical city of Jericho, more than 100,000 refugees of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war were living in camps. On 5 June 1967 they saw Arab troops moving westward on the Jerusalem road. By the evening of 6 June the troops were moving in the opposite direction, and rumours of massacres in the West Bank panicked the refugees.

They crowded toward the bridge in thousands, and the stream of eastbound fugitives turned into a flood.



UNRWA's field office in Jerusalem, a strategic position in the 1967 fighting.

In Jerusalem, UNRWA staff set to work to get the supply system working again, and within a few days they had moved about 200 tons of food from the battered field office to outlying distribution points, where it was desperately needed for an uprooted population. UNRWA mechanics worked wonders of ingenuity to get surviving vehicles back on the road, cannibalising some of them for missing parts.

Schools as shelter

Like his colleagues on the other side of the River Jordan, Basil Ennab in Amman was having to improvise to keep homeless Palestinian families sheltered and fed. "Luckily the schools were closed, because they were all occupied by refugees – 20 families had to squeeze into each classroom at Amman New Camp," he says.

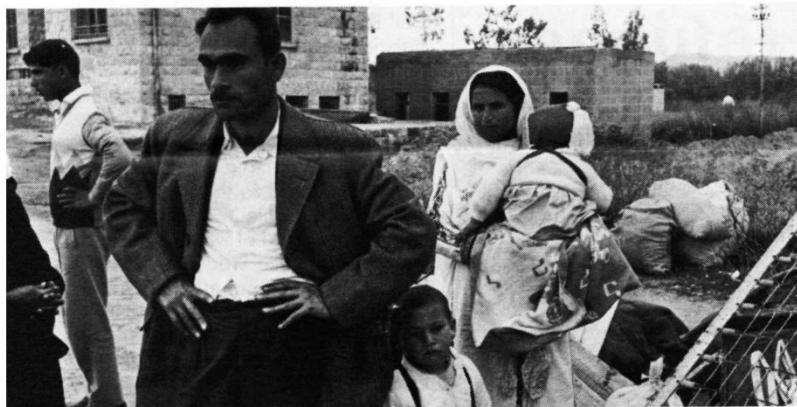
But schools were not nearly enough to shelter all the displaced. Many were sleeping rough in the countryside, and UNRWA scoured

the world for stocks of tents. It even got them from mail-order warehouses, Ennab recalls.

Jeff Cassels interceded with the Israeli authorities on behalf of the 15,000 people of Qalqilya near Nablus, who were all living in the open. They were allowed to return to their homes a few days later.

On 9 June ground fighting spread to Syria, but on the following day all parties heeded the U.N. Security Council's increasingly insistent demands for a ceasefire, and guns fell silent everywhere.

UNRWA started to take stock of the situation. Civilian casualties were fewer than had at first been feared, it reported to the General Assembly later; but at least 100,000 registered refugees had crossed the river into Jordan; 16,000 had fled from the war zone in Syria and thousands more went from Gaza and the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt. Only some 12 per cent were to return.



Rafah refugee Mustafa Abu Shinab and his family after crossing to Jordan.



The Abu Shinabs today.

Bewilderment, shock

In that year's annual report to the General Assembly, UNRWA Commissioner-General Michelmore spoke of "the overwhelming sense of bewilderment and shock felt by the inhabitants of the areas affected by the hostilities as the cataclysm swept over them. The disruption of the lives and careers of countless persons, the anxiety caused by the sudden loss of earnings and remittances from abroad, the personal tragedies resulting from the separation of husbands and wives, parents and children, are only some of the problems which confront so many of the former Arab inhabitants of Palestine."

UNRWA clinics had been working from dawn to dusk throughout the emergency, but could not always prevent the terrible living conditions of the displaced refugees from affecting their health: polio, dysentery and other infectious diseases increased. And for the first time in UNRWA's history, the number of children in the Agency's schools for Palestine refugees showed a decrease, from 187,000 to just under 180,000.

Because so many UNRWA staff displayed resilience and initiative, services were soon under way again. As early as 11 June, ration distribution was resumed in the West Bank.

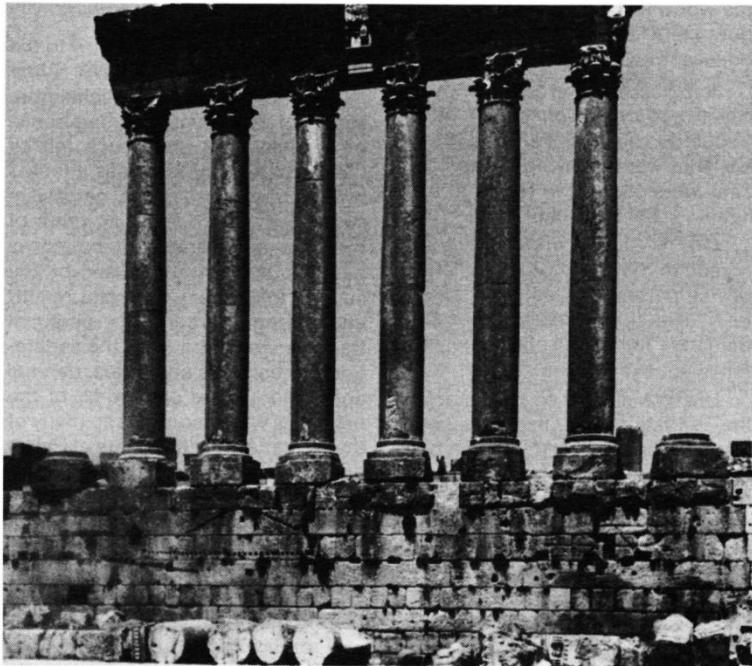
In Rafah, Mahmoud al Khatib had the word "UNRWA" cut from empty American flour sacks and used the scraps of sacking as UNRWA armbands to identify his labourers, so that they could move around freely despite general restrictions by the occupying Israeli forces.

In Jordan, UNRWA staff working round the clock had given shelter to 50,000 people in new tented camps by mid-August.

Twenty years after

Today the 10 emergency camps built for displaced refugees in the post-1967 war period – six in Jordan and four in Syria – have grown into villages and towns of up to 70,000 people. UNRWA has split the former Jordan field into two, with a field office in Amman as well as in Jerusalem.

The total number of registered refugees has grown from 1.3 million to more than 2.1 million, because of natural population increase.



Ruins and refugees

The awesome Roman ruins of Baalbeck once played host to thousands of tourists from around the world and were the site of the Baalbeck Festival which attracted many of the world's greatest musicians.

Since 1974, there has been no festival and the gatekeeper is surprised but thrilled when a tourist finds his way to the ruins. Another victim of Lebanon's seemingly endless civil strife.

The only people Baalbeck hosts today are numerous military groups and displaced persons.

After the 1982 Israeli invasion, 4,100 displaced Palestine refugees flooded into the area. Since the summer of 1986, 47,000 Palestine refugees have been displaced by the fighting in Lebanon. Some 1,200 fled to the Baalbeck area.

In sight of the Baalbeck ruins is an UNRWA clinic serving the 6,000 residents of Wavell camp and surrounding area. Despite being under-equipped, the clinic is a friendly, happy place under the leadership of Dr. Ahmed Awwad, medical officer in Baalbeck for 14 years. Originally from Ein el-Hilweh camp in Saida, Dr. Awwad received his medical

training in India and post-graduate training in London.

Dr. Awwad explains that the clinic's work differs according to the season. In summer patients come with stomach and intestinal disorders, in winter with respiratory diseases and tonsillitis. The clinic receives up to 70 patients a day.

Wherever UNRWA operates, it subsidises beds in local hospitals for severe cases. "The Baalbeck hospital," complains Dr. Awwad, "has doubled its rates from LL 400 to LL 800 a day (\$ 8) and the Taalabaya hospital wants LL 1,200 a day". Can UNRWA afford to pay this amount? he asks.

Staff at the Baalbeck clinic also serve three days a week in the nearby Taalabaya UNRWA clinic.

The Baalbeck clinic has the services of a dentist a few days a week. But the dentist has to bring his own equipment, and patients sit on a hardbacked chair to undergo treatment.

At Wavell camp, which is on the outskirts of Baalbeck, the biggest problem is water distribution. Six hundred metres of 2-inch pipe are needed to get water from a reservoir to UNRWA-built water points in the

camp. The refugees also need fuel to power a pump which brings water from an artesian well to the water reservoir – 20,000 litres of fuel a month.

Economic hardship

Of the camp's 5,412 registered residents, one fifth are hardship cases under UNRWA's rules. In other areas where UNRWA operates in the Middle East, fewer than one twentieth of the refugees are considered as hardship cases, receiving food rations and other help.

"But we're all hardship cases here," says a representative of the camp committee. "There are no jobs and we can't move out of the camp. Some of us had jobs but we lost them. Local employers don't want to hire Palestinians."

Another 7,000 Palestine refugees are scattered in villages of the Beq'a Valley south of Baalbeck and UNRWA schools are provided in Bar Elias and Taalabaya. The largest group of displaced refugees live in Bar Elias, 250 of them in one unfinished building. A few of the families have sent their children to the UNRWA school but most think they'll soon be moving back to south Lebanon. UNRWA has given out food rations, blankets, mattresses and cooking kits to the displaced.

UNRWA's clinic in Taalabaya has a permanent staff of two, a clerk and a practical nurse who does everything, including acting as a midwife when the medical staff from Baalbeck is not in Taalabaya. Deliveries at the Taalabaya hospital cost LL 2,000 and there are as many pregnant women as in Baalbeck where there is a full-time UNRWA midwife – 25 pregnant women at the moment.

In the winter, the Beq'a Valley is isolated from the rest of the Lebanon field so some supplies come in from UNRWA's Damascus warehouse. There is no telephone link to Beirut and radio communication is difficult over a range of 2,000-metre high mountains. To make radio contact, the UNRWA staff sometimes have to travel 40 km out of Baalbeck. Even then they may only be able to reach UNRWA's Tyre office, which relays the message to UNRWA Beirut.

French connection

France was the mandated power in Lebanon and Syria up to the

1940s and scattered throughout Lebanon are vestiges of French influence. One is Wavell camp. It used to be a French army base; some of the barracks are home for refugees and one is used as an UNRWA school.

The camp has been leased to UNRWA by the French government since 1952. Last year a new 10-year lease was signed for a rent of LL 5. Christian Graeff, France's ambassador to Lebanon, said the token rent was "an example of France's commitment to helping Palestine refugees in Lebanon". UNRWA's central warehouse in Beirut is also leased from France.

"Path of Death"

The "Path of Death" is the name which Palestine refugees have given to the route from Burj el Barajneh camp in Lebanon. Twenty-six women were killed in March as they hurried along it to get food for their besieged families. Three other women died inside the camp, bringing the March total of women's deaths to 29. In the other five months of the camp siege, an average of about six women a month died.

Burj el Barajneh, on the outskirts of Beirut, had been under siege since last November. Up to the end of April, states a report from UNRWA in Beirut, a total of 154 refugees died during the siege of the camp: 57 females and 97 males. Of the 97 males, 63 per cent (61 persons) were in the prime working ages between 16 and 40. Twenty-seven families consisting of 94 persons lost their head of household during the siege.

Twenty persons over the age of 61 died during the six-month ordeal. Some of these would have died because of ill health but others were weakened and frightened by the siege conditions, which lowered their resistance and brought on an early death.

A preliminary study of the 812 wounded in Burj el-Barajneh shows that at least 27 persons have been permanently disabled because of the fighting around the camp. Of these, six have lost both legs.

Many families have moved five or six times during the recent fighting, and have lost all their possessions.

Patching things up

"In 1982 we felt a sense of accomplishment. This year it just seems we're patching things up. Then there was a feeling that things were getting better, now there is not the same hope, almost despair."

This is how Nancy O'Brien, former Chief of UNRWA's Nursing Division sees the current situation for Palestine refugees in Lebanon. Miss O'Brien is back with UNRWA on a five-month assignment to assist with Agency health services after the latest round of fighting. The U.K. Save the Children Fund is sponsoring Miss O'Brien's work.

Miss O'Brien worked in Lebanon during the summer and autumn of 1982 in the aftermath of the Israeli invasion. She was back again in 1985.

Refugee women are credited by Miss O'Brien with quickly picking up the pieces and trying to get life back to normal. "In the middle of the rubble just after an attack, I've seen

them washing clothes and scrubbing pots shiny enough to see your reflection."

This year Miss O'Brien has spent much of her time living in Saida, 30 km. south of Beirut. There she has been monitoring displaced refugees, at one time over 22,800 in the Saida area, helping organise sanitation facilities and co-ordinating UNRWA's work with international and local voluntary agencies.

So far Miss O'Brien has found that conditions have not caused an increase in births of underweight babies. But she has asked that births be carefully monitored over the next few months as such an increase may not appear immediately.

Some of her work this year has involved caring for what Miss O'Brien calls "temporary orphans". These are children cut off from their families who remain in besieged refugee camps. Kindergartens have been set up for them and help is



Nancy O'Brien (centre), Burj el-Barajneh camp, 1982.



Nancy O'Brien (centre), Burj el-Barajneh camp, 1982.

given to relatives who are looking after the children.

Clothing has been in great need this year as many refugees fled from the Tyre area with only the clothes on their backs. Miss O'Brien says that in addition to UNRWA, clothes have been provided by Oxfam and the Save the Children Fund in the Saida area.

Miss O'Brien reports serious problems with scabies and fungus diseases during the recent cold, rainy winter. This has been particularly true for hundreds of refugee men who had been held prisoner by local militias in the south. When they are released, the diseases are passed on to their families. In Tyre, UNRWA medical personnel have been going out to refugee homes to treat patients.

Community nursing

As she did in Jordan, Miss O'Brien is helping to introduce the concept of community health nursing to UNRWA's operations in Lebanon. Home visits have always been part of UNRWA's health care programme but the community concept goes further as nurses don't only visit the known sick.

Each nurse in a camp is assigned an area of the camp to cover and do a profile of families so that she can get to know their needs and uncover health problems or potential problems. In this way, refugees get to know "their" nurse and learn to relate to her.

The concept is being introduced at five camps in Lebanon and in June three of UNRWA's nursing staff in Lebanon will go to Jordan to see how the system works there, where it began in 1984.

As the community nursing concept matures, it is hoped that the nurses with the family profiles and regular contact with families will be able to pinpoint other problems such as sanitation needs. Then various UNRWA programmes could be co-ordinated to assist a family: medical help, supplementary feeding and sanitation services.

Miss O'Brien can't see immediate improvements for the lives of Palestine refugees in Lebanon but she remains amazed at their resilience after years of pressure. She again

credits much of this to the resolve of refugee women who keep life going on.

Physical rehabilitation is a big need in Lebanon, says Miss O'Brien. If she had the money, she would like to do a survey of the handicapped to see the extent to the problem and then look at what could be done.

She recounts the story of a young man in Ein el Hilweh camp who said he just wanted to go outside. Having a wheel chair would transform his life.

**200,000 kgs
of food**

UNRWA has been able to deliver more than 203,000 kilograms of foodstuffs to the besieged residents of Burj el Barajneh and Shatila camps in Beirut since the Agency was first given access to the camps in late February.

By early May, the Agency had also provided the camps with 6,600 kg of medical supplies and 3,800 litres of fuel along with cleaning supplies, clothing and disinfectants. Women are allowed to leave and re-enter the camps with food and UNRWA is supplying them with food parcels and bags of flour. About 3,000 refugees remain in Shatila and 13,000 in Burj el Barajneh.

Removal of rubble from the camps is underway with 20 labourers using shovels, picks and wheelbarrows. Main roads were cleared of debris and now workmen are clearing the narrow, winding alleyways of the camps.

Regular, secure access to the camps was still not allowed at the time of going to press and talks continue between UNRWA and local authorities. The presence of Syrian forces in Beirut, however, has greatly assisted the Agency's work.

UNRWA is also supplying emergency relief to some 47,000 Palestine refugees displaced by fighting around Beirut and Tyre. In addition to food, UNRWA has distributed 16,100 blankets, 2,400 mattresses, 2,200 kitchen kits plus Primus stoves, pots and towels to the displaced. In the Tyre area, mobile teams distribute food to refugees in three locations.

Relief for besieged camps

The accompanying photos show UNRWA convoys to Shatila and Burj el Barajneh camps in Beirut on 10 and 11 April. Teams of engineers, relief workers and medical personnel also went into the camps to assess needs and damage to buildings.

In Burj el Barajneh, the survey team estimated that 75 per cent of the buildings were severely damaged and almost 95 per cent in Shatila.

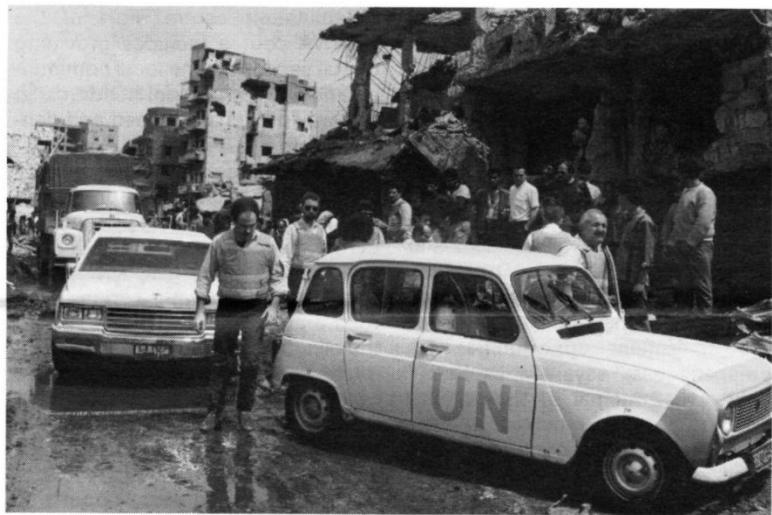
The convoys to Shatila and Burj el Barajneh carried food, medicines, sanitation supplies and clothing. Some of the supplies delivered to the camps were donated by the Government of Austria. Earlier convoys carried food donated by France and Italy. The convoy to Shatila on 10 April also carried 800 litres of fuel.



The ruins of Shatila camp.



An UNRWA truck sinks into the mud just after entering Shatila.



UNRWA convoy at the edge of Shatila.



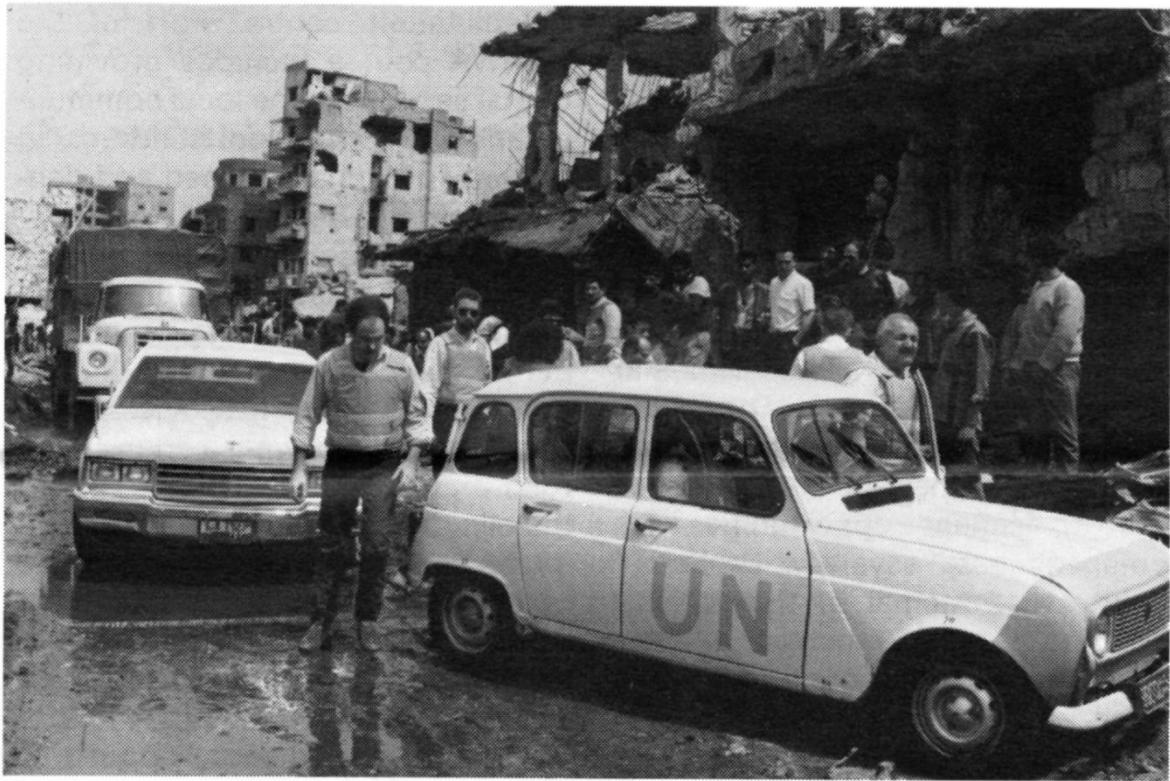
During the siege of Burj el Barajneh, 812 persons were wounded.



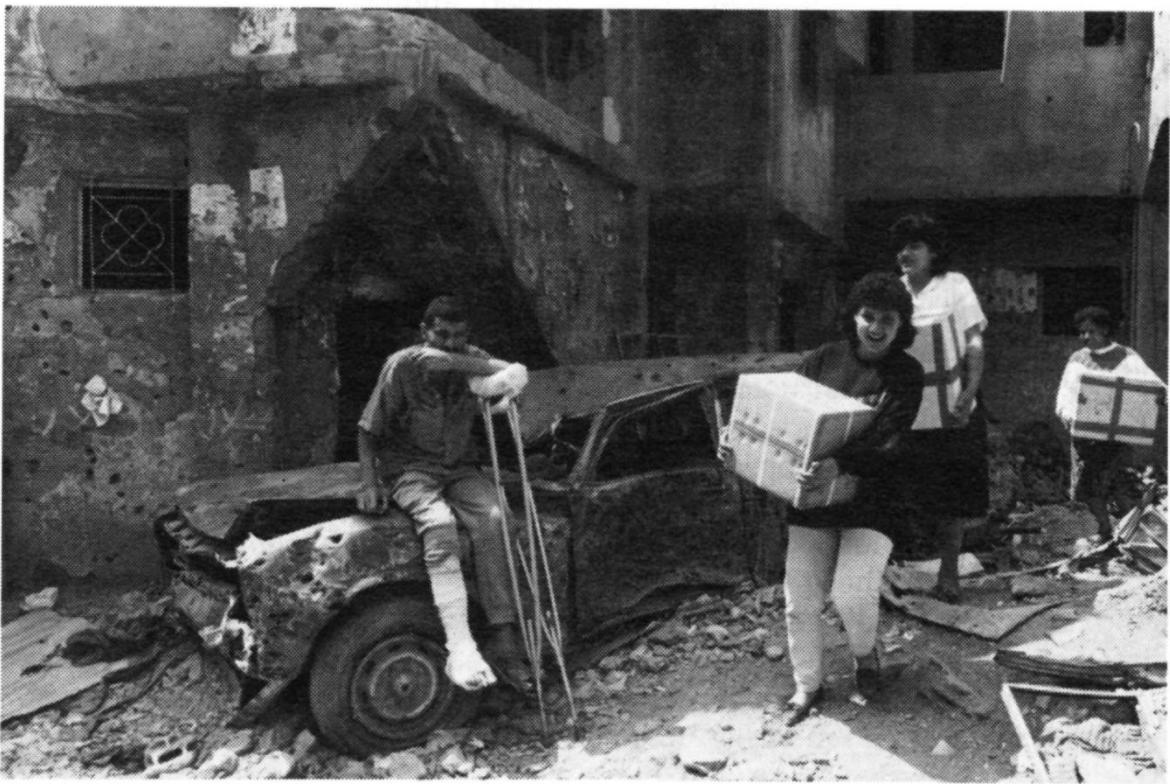
Bullet-spattered buildings and rubble strewn alleys in Burj el Barajneh camp.



All that is left of one family's home in Burj el Barajneh.



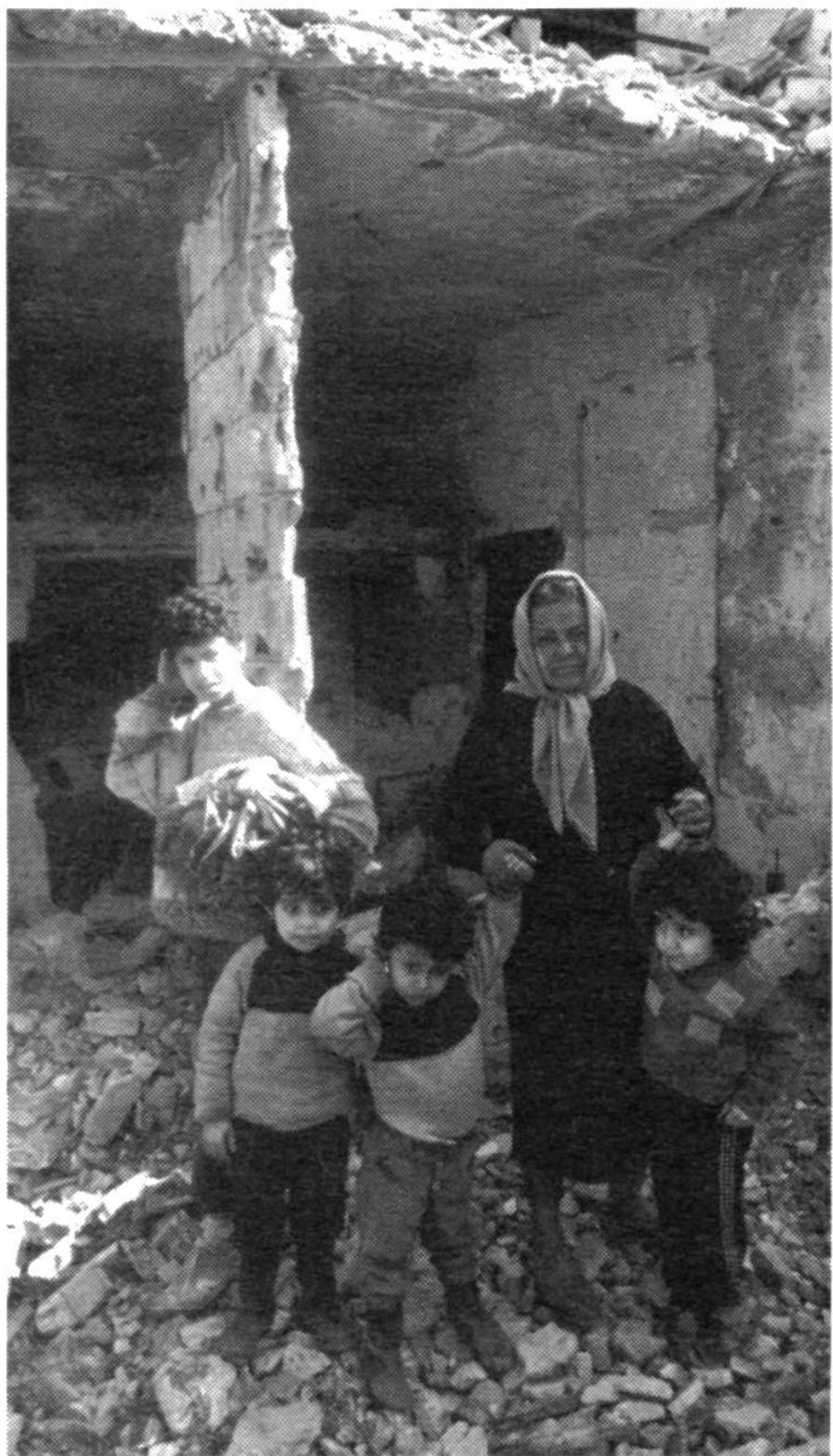
UNRWA convoy at the edge of Shatila.



During the siege of Burj el Barajneh, 812 persons were wounded.



Bullet-spattered buildings and rubble strewn alleys in Burj el Barajneh camp.



All that is left of one family's home
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Amman Training Centre.

Brighter job prospects

"We'll see what on earth you'll be able to do when you finish your course", my father said when I started my classes to become a medical secretary," recalls Intisar, a trainee at UNRWA's Amman Training Centre in Jordan.

Intisar's father had good reason to be sceptical of his daughter's employment prospects. Graduates from UNRWA's eight vocational and teacher training centres are no longer sure of getting jobs to suit their qualifications, as they were a few years ago.

Job opportunities have shrunk as the recession hits the economies of the Middle East and the demand for skilled labour decreases. In the Gulf countries, nationals are replacing expatriate workers.

UNRWA has for many years tried to provide Palestine refugee students with marketable skills and is constantly reshaping its training programme to keep up with the changing demands of the labour market. To meet new needs, UNRWA recently introduced courses in Jordan to train refugees as dental hygienists and medical secretaries.

Intisar Ahmad Shugeirat was one of 26 trainees (21 women and five men) who made up the first class in the medical secretary course at Amman Training Centre in 1985. The course provides training in normal secretarial work plus first aid, clinical procedures and the keeping of medical registers. They are also

taught the basics of community health and ethics of medicine.

"The course provides training something close to hospital administration, the subject originally wanted to study," says Wa'il Shurbaji. Wa'il, a second year trainee, did his on-the-job training at a hospital in Kuwait where his family lives. "The hospital staff were so pleased with my performance that they gave me a bonus of 100 Kuwaiti Dinars at the end of my assignment and expressed interest in recruiting me on graduation. They even offered to provide similar opportunities for other trainees," says Wa'il. Dr. Kamal Fahmawi, Principal of the Amman Training Centre, received a letter from the hospital confirming this offer.

Good prospects also exist for dental assistants who will graduate this year, says Dr. Fahmawi. This course, the first of its kind in Jordan, was introduced after a review of the local market needs. Instructors were recruited and training equipment purchased with a donation from the OPEC Fund. The \$ 125,000 worth of equipment includes a dental unit, an X-ray machine and a variety of instruments and auxiliary equipment.

According to instructor Awni Khair, the course includes training in dental treatment procedures, fluoride application, tooth polishing, lab tests and other dental office work. In addition, the trainees learn secretarial skills and how to prepare statistical data.

"With this range of skills, I am sure that I can get a job easily," said Ibtisam Abed Khaleel. She and her classmates were taking part in a

practical session involving a group of disabled children from a nearby rehabilitation centre. Part of the UNRWA course includes providing dental services to the local community and UNRWA school children. "In this way others are helped and dental training is reinforced," says instructor Khair.

Students also get on-the-job training at private and governmental dental clinics and hospitals in Jordan. One trainee, Muntaser Abdul Hameed, trained with a friend who runs a private clinic. He had visited the clinic frequently before his training began and developed an interest in dental hygiene as a career. "It worked well for both of us. The dentist improved his technical English as he had done his studies in Spanish, and I learned more about this job which will help me in more advanced studies," said Muntaser.

Prospects for jobs in this profession are promising. The Jordanian Ministry of Health recently conducted a survey which shows the need for 135 dental assistants by 1990 in government schools and clinics. By 1990, the Amman Training Centre will have turned out 68 qualified dental hygienists, and so there will be a need for a further 67. The survey report suggested that UNRWA should explore ways of taking more refugees on to the course.

Dr. Fahmawi commented that the survey "proves that we are on the right track. Introducing 'market-oriented' courses will remain one of our priorities." This can only happen if finances allow. UNRWA hopes to start a course in nursing in 1988 at the Amman centre.



Palestine Refugees Today

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