

Palestine Refugees Today



No. 120

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United Nations Relief and Works Agency
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UNRWA News

New MCH centres from Agfund

The Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations has approved a grant of \$ 269,000 for the construction of two new maternal and child health sub-centres in Marka and Baqa'a camps in Jordan. These should provide a better health service for refugee mothers and children closer to where they live. Established in 1981, Agfund disburses contributions from Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Its donations to UNRWA have included \$ 1.7 million for the building of four schools in the West Bank.

NECC gives dental unit

The Near East Council of Churches has donated \$ 5,834 to UNRWA to equip a dental unit in Amman. The amount is part of a \$ 33,904 donation which has been pledged by the Council (NECC) to equip and staff the unit for one year. Since 1985 the NECC has pledged \$ 518,088 to UNRWA - \$ 156,588 for health and sanitation projects in Jordan and \$ 361,500 for school toilet blocks, classrooms and a playground in Gaza.

Co-ordinator appointed

Robert M. Gallagher, Director of UNRWA's Liaison Office at United Nations Headquarters in New York, has been appointed

to the new post of Co-ordinator of Operations at Headquarters Vienna. While a new Director of the New York Liaison Office is recruited, Mr. John Miles, who held the job for nine years up to the end of 1986, has returned temporarily to the post. Mr. Gallagher is a former Director of three UNRWA fields - the Syrian Arab Republic, the West Bank and Lebanon - and has also served as Deputy Director in Jordan and as Lebanon Co-ordinator in Vienna.

Second donors' meeting held

UNRWA's "indispensable" humanitarian and political role in the Middle East has been reconfirmed by the Agency's main supporters, who met in Vienna in July to review financial plans and programmes for Palestine refugees.

The two-day gathering of UNRWA's main financial backers and countries playing host to Palestine refugees was characterised by its informality and constructive atmosphere, said Commissioner-General Giorgio Giacomelli.

"UNRWA needs funds to discharge its commitments and not to be obliged to implement programmes in a piecemeal manner as contributions come in," said Mr. Ahmed Qatanani, Undersecretary in Jordan's Ministry of Occupied Territories Affairs. Added Mr. Michael Goppel, head of the delegation of the Commission of the European Communities in Vienna: "UNRWA is indispensable until a solution is found to the problem" in the Middle East.

Parallel to the plenary meetings, three working groups examined UNRWA's nutrition and supplementary feeding programmes, vocational

and technical education programmes and construction needs.

Delegates who praised UNRWA's management and expressed satisfaction with the improved financial situation endorsed UNRWA's three-year financial planning process and expressed their willingness to provide continued support to the Agency.

UNRWA Comptroller Hans-Christian Cars outlined new initiatives in the 1988-90 financial plan which are designed to enhance UNRWA's education, health and relief programmes (see also page 2):

- Education: adding classrooms to keep up with population growth, lowering classroom occupancy levels and boosting vocational training;
- Health: instituting better nutritional practices, upgrading facilities and improving environmental health;
- Relief services: improving the productivity of welfare workers and starting self-support and income-generating

projects, especially in the Occupied Territories.

Delegates paid tribute to the work, professionalism and dedication of UNRWA's staff in Lebanon. It was repeatedly mentioned that, in Lebanon, as in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip and elsewhere in the region, UNRWA's humanitarian work provides a stabilizing force as the search for a just political settlement intensifies.

Danes to build health centre

The Danish Refugee Council has approved a grant of \$ 275,000 to UNRWA for the construction of the Jarash Camp Health Centre, Jordan. The centre will serve a group of particularly needy refugees who until now have had rather sub-standard facilities for health care. Head of UNRWA's technical department Mr. John Hughes said the project should get under way in 1988 and could be completed before the end of the year.



Giacomelli meets Pope

Commissioner-General Giorgio Giacomelli had a 20-minute audience with Pope John Paul II in the Vatican recently. He briefed the Pontiff on UNRWA's work with Palestine refugees.

Improvements in services keynote next 3-year plan

Improvements in health services, expansion of education programmes to keep up with population growth and a significant increase in the number of refugees benefiting from "special hardship" assistance are among the keynotes of UNRWA's next financial plan, covering the period 1988-90.

"Although the Agency's financial resources remain severely limited, the plan allows for the level and quality of services to be raised in carefully selected areas, particularly education and health," said Commissioner-General Giorgio Giacomelli. Donors are being invited to make special earmarked contributions to finance new construction and other vital improvements, in addition to their regular cash contributions to keep UNRWA's education, health and relief programmes going.

The average increase in spending in nominal terms over the next three years will be 4.5 per cent, with the Agency's regular budget growing from some \$177.7 million in 1987 to a projected \$201 million in 1990. The planned increase in spending in the next year will be about 6.1 per cent. As in the past two years, the general fund budget is kept separate from funding for projects such as supplementary feeding and for construction; new building and renovations are carried out only as specific funding is received.

Improvements and growth are

planned for all three of UNRWA's main programme areas – education, health and relief services.

Education. This remains the biggest programme, accounting for 56 per cent of total expenditure in 1987, and it is due to grow by 7 per cent from this year to next. Delegates to the donors' meeting were told that this is mainly due to the need to educate an increasing number of schoolchildren, while reducing the size of school classes, which at present can mean as many as 50 children for one teacher.

Health. The increase in spending on health services (19 per cent of the total Agency budget) will be nearly 6 per cent in the first year of the plan. A key aim is reducing the workload of medical officers and their staff, giving them more time to attend to each patient. Dental clinics and other improved facilities are also being introduced in all fields, and there is to be a small increase in the number of hospital beds subsidised by UNRWA for refugee patients.

Relief services. This programme, accounting for 10 per cent of expenditure, is due for a 7.4 per cent budget increase from 1987 to 1988. The number of special hardship cases receiving rations and other assistance from UNRWA is expected to grow steadily, from some 129,200 at the end of 1987 to 139,300 by the end of 1988 and 156,800 by the end of the plan period in 1990. The

number is being increased because of poor economic conditions in the occupied territories and continuing disruption in Lebanon.

The 1988-90 medium-term plan spells out specific targets for growth in Agency services. In the biggest programme, education, it is expected that 167 additional elementary and preparatory teachers will need to be employed to keep pace with student population growth, and another 378 additional teachers employed to ensure that classroom occupancy rates are reduced, where possible, from the present level of up to 50 pupils in a class to 46 by the end of the plan period.

In vocational and technical education, the number of trainee places will be increased from the present 3,700 and new technical courses will be introduced at six of UNRWA's eight training centres. These are: computer sciences at Ramallah Men's Training Centre, auto electrician at Kalandia Vocational Training Centre, business and office practice at the Damascus and Gaza Vocational Training Centres, industrial electronics at Wadi Seer and Gaza VTCs, physiotherapy and medical machine technician courses at Gaza VTC and practical nursing at Ramallah Women's Training Centre. (See also p. O.)

New health units

The expansion of UNRWA health centres is already well under way. In the West Bank, for example, dental units have recently been added at Jenin and Tulkarm camps, and rooms are being added to accom-



Afgund school under construction at Roummaneh, West Bank



New dental clinic, Jordan

modate mother-and-child health (MCH) services at Arroub camp health centre and a radiology and dental unit at Am'ari camp clinic. Bids have been invited for construction of a surgical unit at UNRWA's 36-bed Qalqilia hospital (to be run with funding from the Jordanian government) and donations totalling \$ 580,000 from the Swedish government and the OPEC Fund are financing the purchase of advanced equipment for the Augusta Victoria Hospital in Jerusalem, which treats UNRWA-registered refugees.

In Jordan, two MCH sub-centres are to be built at Baqa'a and Marka camps with financing from Agfund (the Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations). New health centres are being built at Baqa'a and Marka camps with Canadian government funding and at Jarash camp with funds from the Danish Refugee Council.

Other improvements foreseen by UNRWA's Health Department include installing water and sewage systems in all camps and connecting every refugee shelter to them, and upgrading garbage collection and school sanitation arrangements. UNRWA's supplementary feeding programme, now serving some 30,000 pre-school children, 34,000 pregnant women and nursing mothers and 700 tuberculosis patients, is to be re-oriented. It will concentrate more on finding and reaching children who are undernourished. Pilot projects in the West Bank, Gaza and Jordan have already demonstrated the benefits of such an approach.

In addition to increasing the number of special hardship cases receiving regular assistance from UNRWA, Relief Services targets under the three-year plan call for improving the performance of welfare staff and enhancing the roles of camp services officers. Objectives for the special hardship programme include improving the quality of assistance given, carefully selecting those refugees in need and helping as many special hardship cases as possible to become self-supporting. The quality of welfare staff will be upgraded through in-service training and closer supervision and it will be ensured that their numbers are sufficient to deal with the case loads in each field.

Training for employment

The European Community, the OPEC Fund, Denmark, Federal Republic of Germany, Italy and Japan are helping to give young Palestine refugees in UNRWA training centres a better chance of finding work in a fast-changing world.

They have all made special contributions to UNRWA vocational and teacher training centres. The eight UNRWA centres provide more than 4,200 training places in 40 courses – with an output of more than 2,000 graduates a year.

Almost 50,000 refugees have graduated from the centres. Many of them have gone on to make a valuable contribution to the economies of the Middle East.

With help from donors, UNRWA has been able to update courses and introduce new courses to keep pace with changes in the labour market in the Arab world. Over the next three years, six new courses are being added which will have 208 students when fully under way.

In addition to assistance aimed at specific training centres, the OPEC Fund currently gives about \$ 500,000 a year for re-equipping new courses. The Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA) provides 15 scholarships annually, for training in Japan, to instructors from the various centres.

Constant monitoring is necessary to ensure that courses at UNRWA training centres are relevant to the needs of the region and therefore offer the best chances for employment. On the basis of market research in some of the main employing countries, the UNRWA Education Department visualized that, in

the foreseeable future, development in the training programme will concentrate mainly on the introduction of new courses at the semi-professional level. At the same time there will be a further reduction in the level of teacher training reflecting the current oversupply of teachers in some of the fields.

There will also be a further emphasis on expanding the level of training for women at UNRWA's centres. At present, apart from teacher training where more than half the trainees are women, men trainees exceed women in the ratio of four to one.

Amman Training Centre, Jordan (Coeducational).

Courses: commercial, para-medical and teacher training.

Funding: general funds.

Students 1986/87: 295 teacher training, 403 vocational.

Wadi Seer Training Centre, Jordan (Coeducational).

Courses: Metal trades, electricians, building trades, technicians, para-medical, commercial.

Funding: Federal Republic of Germany pays a portion of the recurrent costs.

The Japan International Co-operation Agency has provided new

TEACHER TRAINING

	Centres*	Capacity
Jordan	1	295
West Bank	2	551
Total	3	846

* These centres provide both teacher and vocational training.

VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

	Training centres	Graduates	
		Capacity	1955-1986
Jordan	2	1,124	9,004
West Bank	3	829	8,653
Gaza Strip	1	570	6,150
Lebanon	1	450*	4,594
Syria	1	744	5,861
Total	8	3,717	34,262

* Siblin Training Centre has been closed since 1982 although a few courses have been given in other locations. Plans are to re-open the centre for the 1987/88 school year.

equipment for some courses, three specialist instructors, scholarships for instructor training in Japan.

Students 1986/87: 721

New course planned: Industrial electronics.

Damascus Training Centre, Syrian Arab Republic (Coeducational).

Courses: Metal trades, electrical trades, building trades, technicians and para-medical.

Funding: general funds.

Students 1986/87: 744

New course planned: Business and office practice.

Kalandia Training Centre, West Bank.

Courses: Metal trades, electrical trades, technicians and commercial.

Funding: general funds.

Students 1986/87: 440

New course planned: Auto electrician.

Ramallah Women's Training Centre, West Bank.

Courses: Commercial, para-medical, vocational and teacher training.

Funding: The Danish Government pays the running costs.

Students 1986/87: 304 teacher training, 300 vocational.

New course planned: Practical nursing.

Ramallah Men's Training Centre, West Bank.

Courses: Vocational and teacher training.

Funding: The Danish Government pays the running costs.

Students 1986/87: 247 teacher training, 89 vocational.

New course planned: Computer science.

Gaza Training Centre.

Courses: Metal trades, electrical trades, building trades.

Funding: Italian Government pays the running costs and is planning to pay for the introduction of one new course. European Community has agreed to fund the capital costs of introducing two new courses as well as the running costs of the courses for three years.

Students 1986/87: 570

New courses planned: Business and office practice, physiotherapy, medical machine technicians, industrial electronics.

Siblin Training Centre, Lebanon.

For metal trades, electrical trades, building trades, technicians commercial, para-medical and teacher training.

UNRWA's retiring veterans recall the old days

Some 200 UNRWA employees retiring this year after more than 35 years of service to their fellow Palestine refugees are looking back with mixed feelings over their long careers with a "temporary" international relief agency.

These are the young refugees, 23 to 25 years old when UNRWA started operations in 1950, who virtually got the Agency off the ground amid the turmoil of the first refugee exodus after the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. Now they are reaching the mandatory UN retirement age of 60, and across the Agency's area of operations, colleagues are bidding farewell to UNRWA's pioneers.

Most of these veterans were already working in emergency refugee relief efforts for organizations such as the Red Cross or the American Friends Service Committee (the Quakers) when UNRWA was created.

Wherever they have worked, they have turned in records of dedicated and lengthy service perhaps unmatched elsewhere in the UN system.

Recently, a small group of imminent or recent retirees gathered at UNRWA's field office in the Gaza Strip and talked about their careers with the Agency. One thing on which all the people interviewed agreed: none had expected in the early days that UNRWA would still have to be in business 37 years hence.

"At the beginning, our work was a continuation of what we had been doing after 1948 for the Red Cross or the Quakers," recalled Mohammad Abdel-Raouf Al-Majdalawi, who retired earlier this year after an extended tour of duty as deputy field relief services officer in Gaza. "There was no break in the work. UNRWA just took over."

"We just moved from one organization to another and signed new contracts," added Muhammad Abed Khawaja, who retired at the end of May as a refugee services officer in Gaza. After being forced to flee with his young family from Hamama, in southern Palestine, to the Gaza Strip, he joined the Quakers in 1949 as a distribution clerk – previously, he had worked as a supply-checker

and storekeeper for the British Army – and he later became a warehouse stock clerk for UNRWA.

In those earliest days, UNRWA's principal role was distributing food rations to keep alive hundreds of thousands of mostly peasant Palestinians who had fled their villages with virtually nothing. Arriving exhausted after long treks – in this case behind Egyptian lines in what became the Gaza Strip – they were accommodated in tents erected hastily by voluntary organizations.

"At first, they had taken refuge in old buildings, mosques, wherever they could," recalled Mr. Majdalawi, who was a refugee from Zarnoqa, now part of the Israeli town of Rehovot. "Then we bought tents for them from the local market. After UNRWA succeeded the Quakers, the tents became mud houses with bamboo poles and palm branches, and, later, cement-block shelters with tile roofs."

The skilled young Palestinians hired first by the Quakers – like Mr. Majdalawi, a former head teacher in British Mandate schools, or Mohammad Uthman Sarraj, who had worked as an interpreter for the British Army – were often paid in kind for their efforts, receiving "salaries" of flour, beans, onions and smoked fish. This practice was later continued by UNRWA, which then, as now, often had insufficient funds for the huge task it was undertaking; many of the first crop of UNRWA workers remember receiving sacks of flour or bags of potatoes as their monthly wages.

"I was happy to find employment when others had nothing at all," said Mr. Sarraj, who retired at the end of March after his long career as a refugee services officer in Gaza (equivalent to camp services officer in other UNRWA fields).

UNRWA began building shelters for refugees in 1954 and Mr. Sarraj became "field accommodation officer". He recalled: "We had too many people with too few facilities, but we were able to manage, thank God" – a sentiment that still rings true today, as UNRWA struggles to keep up with fast refugee population growth and

rising housing pressures in the Gaza Strip.

By the end of 1951, UNRWA was beginning to offer basic education to refugees in whatever accommodation could be arranged. "The first schools were in tents," recalled Hamdi Othman El-Farra, who came to Khan Yunis from Beersheba with a seventh-grade education and started teaching with the Quakers. "We placed stones for the students to sit on—or else they sat in the sand or on sacks of straw. We wrote on the wall with charcoal and wiped it off with a wet cloth. After the morning shift, when the government schools closed for the day, we used their classrooms to teach an afternoon shift for the refugees."

Mr. El-Farra's own story illustrates how UNRWA developed the professional corps for which it is well known today: After joining the Agency on the first day of operations (1 May 1950), he taught for five years and improved his qualifications while in service, earning a secondary certificate. He did two years at a government teacher-training institute, he went to the Arab University of Beirut to earn a degree. He then worked for nine years as head teacher of an UNRWA boys' school in Amman New Camp (Wihdat) in Jordan, eventually returning to Gaza as head teacher of an elementary boys' school in Khan Yunis, from which he retired earlier this year.

A similar story is that of Zaki Sa'd Atallah, who started teaching with a secondary education in Rafah. After working for the Quakers, he joined UNRWA in 1950, took in-service training and after six years became a head teacher in Rafah, the position from which he retired at the end of June.

Four pounds a month

One of the first girls' teachers in Gaza was Itaf Masoud Hitta, a graduate of a women's training college in Jerusalem who had taught for a year in her native city of Jaffa before moving to Gaza, where she started as a volunteer teacher with the Quakers. "It was a very hard time in those days," she said. "We were paid four Egyptian pounds a month. But we would have gladly done the work for nothing just to serve our people." After three years as an elementary teacher, Mrs. Hitta became a head

teacher and then an UNRWA schools supervisor. But she preferred teaching, and returned to the Rimal girls' school as head teacher until her retirement last June.

When UNRWA began building its first schools in 1955, these pioneer staff members were delighted at the improvement in conditions. However, they say they were struck by the sense that the Agency's operations were taking on a less temporary character.

It was after the 1967 war, when Israel occupied the Gaza Strip, that long-serving UNRWA employees there began to feel that they were more than temporary participants in a short-term relief operation. "The first refugees had left their belongings at home, thinking they would be gone only a short while," said Mr. Sarraj. "After 1967, we felt this would be a longer-term proposition."

The 1967 war created new upheaval and distress in the Gaza Strip and UNRWA's relief role was once again paramount. The Agency's de-

cision in 1982 to suspend the basic ration except for the neediest refugees or special hardship cases caused further concern among some of the earlier pioneers at the UNRWA ration-distribution and feeding centres.

These include men like Mohammad Mustafa Al-Hasani, a 1948 refugee from Hamama who distributed rations first for the Quakers and then for UNRWA, later becoming a milk clerk in UNRWA's supplementary feeding centres until his retirement in May as a supplementary feeding supervisor in Jabalia camp, and Jamil Abdel-Rahman Atallah, a refugee from Sawafir who was a supplementary feeding supervisor in Khan Yunis in the early days, and who retired at the end of June as a steward in the Gaza Vocational Training Centre.

The cloud of financial crisis always hanging over UNRWA, say some of these old-timers, drives home the "temporariness" of the Agency more than any political factors.



When the staff profiled in the accompanying article began work with UNRWA in Gaza, schools were housed in tents. So were thousands of refugees.



Former Gaza deputy relief services officer Mohammad Majdalawi (left) escorts Swedish Defence Minister Carlsson through Rafah camp.



Engineer Bassima Mousa Bashir goes over site plans with one of her construction team at Jalazone camp.

A woman's project in Jalazone camp

Like many young Palestinian graduates, Bassima Mousa Bashir had trouble finding work after receiving her civil engineering degree from Bir Zeit University in the West Bank last year.

The job that Ms. Bashir did eventually find took her straight from the world of theoretical classroom exercises and on-the-job training to the practical field work of a construction site. The setting was a bit unexpected, however: a West Bank refugee camp. And there was an added challenge: Ms. Bashir was to be the site engineer in charge of a team of workmen on a building project in Jalazone camp.

Jalazone (population about 5,000) lies across a valley of olive trees from the hilltop campus of Bir Zeit University. In fact, a newly asphalted road through the camp serves as a short cut to the university for some drivers coming from nearby Ramallah.

But Ms. Bashir had never been there until her company assigned her to oversee construction of the women's activities centre it had designed for the Jerusalem Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). As site engineer, she oversees six workers — three from the

camp and three from outside. "They have been very co-operative," the jeans-clad engineer said, taking time out from supervising work on the foundation of the building. "They don't have any problems at all about having a woman in charge."

The 25-by-20-metre women's centre will include a multi-purpose room, two classrooms and a kitchen. Built of reinforced concrete, it is designed to take a second storey if needed. It will replace a run-down 27-year-old building first made available to the YWCA by UNRWA and repaired several times over the years as a self-help project with Agency assistance.

In the new centre, the YWCA will be able to expand its programmes in the camp, which include a preschool centre for children between 4 and 6, a summer camp for girls and a vocational training centre where women and teenage girls take supervised courses in knitting, embroidery and dressmaking. Jalazone is one of three camps in the West Bank where the Jerusalem YWCA is active (see box).

Last summer, as construction of the new centre was getting under way, 52 girls from Jalazone were enrolled in the educational, recreation-

al and cultural activities of the summer camp. Outings which got the children away from the camp for a day were as educational as they were enjoyable: they included visits to factories in the Ramallah industrial zone, to the Hakawati theatre in East Jerusalem and to a school for the disabled.

While the summer-camp girls played noisily outside the building — wearing colourful T-shirts supplied by a Ramallah chocolate factory — older girls and young women worked inside on their knitting and needlework. The past year's enrolment of 25 in these courses will grow as more space becomes available in the new building, due for completion in October. The YWCA kindergarten will also be able to expand its enrolment from 55 in 1986/87 to 120 children, in four classes, in 1987/88.

"The new centre will help the whole community of the camp by putting its facilities at their disposal for cultural activities," said Doris Salah, general secretary of the Jerusalem YWCA. "As the old centre became inadequate, the YWCA put great effort into raising funds for the new building in Jalazone."

Volunteers from Georgetown

Ms. Bashir, the site engineer, was not the only young woman who encountered a new experience in Jalazone camp last summer. Helping out in the girls' summer camp were two young volunteers from the United States who were also seeing camp life up close for the first time.

Lina and Laika Dajani, twin sisters, are Palestinians born in Beirut, raised in London and about to enter their second year in the prestigious Foreign Service School of Georgetown University in Washington, D. C. They had inquired about opportunities for summer volunteer work in the West Bank and had been put in touch with Ms. Salah at the YWCA.

The Dajani sisters said they were "surprised and impressed" by the conditions they found in Jalazone. "It's extremely tidy and clean — much more organized than I'd expected," said Laika. Added Lina: "The people here really make the best they can with what they have."

YWCA Jerusalem

The Young Women's Christian Association of Jerusalem runs secretarial, dressmaking and home economics courses at its main building in East Jerusalem as well as extension services from centres in Ramallah and Jericho and programmes for women and girls in three West Bank Palestine refugee camps.

"We started work in Aqabat Jabr camp with the help of the World YWCA in the early fifties," said General Secretary Doris Salah. "The services needed were immense. One of the urgent needs was to provide pre-school education for the many children and classes in vocational training for women and girls."

Until 1967, the YWCA had two centres in Aqabat Jabr, which then had a population of more than 40,000. Since 1967, when most people fled from the camp, it has been running one centre, offering sewing, knitting and home economics courses. In 1967, similar programmes were added for women and girls in Kalandia and Jalazone camps.

YWCA centres "are places where women from the camps can feel at home and be useful outside the environment of their own homes, helping them to feel less isolated," said Ms. Salah.

YWCA kindergartens had an enrolment of 220 in 1986/87 – 105 in Kalandia, 60 in Aqabat Jabr and 55 in Jalazone.

The YWCA summer camps have a total enrolment of 145 girls aged 7-15. A two-week "sleep-in" camp at the Ramallah YWCA brings together some 40 girls aged 7-15 from refugee camps and towns in the area. A summer day camp at the Jerusalem YWCA involves some 70 children, 30 from particularly deprived backgrounds.

The Jerusalem YWCA has an annual budget of \$ 80,000 and a staff of 20 for its work in camps in the West Bank.

Open day in Lebanon – the first in 20 years



An open day of sports and folkloric events was held in Nahr el Bared camp, Tripoli, in June, involving 400 pupils from UNRWA elementary and preparatory schools and watched by over 5,000 participants and camp residents. "It was the first event of its kind in Lebanon for 17 years and in the north for 20 years", said deputy field director John Fennessy, who attended the fête. The programme, organized by a group of 12 UNRWA teachers in the area, included a simulated Palestinian "wedding" featuring young children, traditional national songs and dances, acrobatic displays, field sports and games.



Refugees watch themselves in award-winning film

On a sweltering July evening, some 200 people jammed into a small hall near Jericho in the West Bank for a free film show. This was no ordinary summer cinema event, however. The film being shown was about the people watching it: the residents of Aqabat Jabr camp for Palestine refugees.

And this was no ordinary commercial film, either. **Aqabat Jabr: Vie de passage (Passing Through)** is an 86-minute French-made documentary which won this year's first prize at the prestigious Cinéma du Réel documentary film festival at the Pompidou Centre in Paris. The first film by 23-year-old director Eyal Sivan, it has just been screened twice at the Jerusalem Film Festival and, to show his appreciation to the camp residents, Mr. Sivan personally brought it to the Aqabat Jabr youth activities centre to show it to them under UNRWA's auspices.

The film show itself turned into something of a media event, as for-

ign journalists and television crews turned up to record the impressions of the crowd watching the film on two video screens.

The reaction was enthusiastic. The audience cheered and laughed at seeing themselves and their neighbours appear on screen. But the serious message of the film was not lost in the excitement. The theme of the film is that the 3,000 residents of Aqabat Jabr lead mostly unfulfilling lives in an inhospitable environment while waiting for a just solution of the problem that first brought some 35,000 Palestine refugees to this harsh patch of desert in the Jordan Valley some 38 years ago. In the 1967 occupation of the West Bank, thousands of refugees from the area fled across the river Jordan and only a few thousand now remain.

"This is an accurate representation of life in the camp," said 24-year-old Imad after watching the film. "It showed the hard situation we're living in."

In the film, the refugees of Aqabat Jabr, young and old, men and women, tell their own stories directly to the camera. From the few men who have work to the women filling out their days with household chores to the old men sitting in cafés, the story they tell is the same: Even after all these years life in the camp is viewed as a temporary phase pending their return to ancestral villages on the coastal plain.

"Back there, in my village, life was prosperous and abundant," says one man interviewed in the film. "I was happy. I worked my land... it was paradise."

In a review of the film, the renowned French photojournalist Henri Cartier-Bresson wrote: "This film goes beyond politics. It is about a country people confined for the past 38 years in refugee camps, about the humiliation of being severed from their land, their orchards, their villages. Nothing happens in the film because nothing happens in their lives. Endlessly waiting, some still cling to the hope of returning one day to their land. It is not a silent film. It cries out in its simplicity, wrenching the heart."

Eyal Sivan and his crew spent 12 days filming in Aqabat Jabr in November 1986. To get the full feel of life there, the crew lived in the camp, in the midst of a severely cold and wet winter. They filmed interviews with 28 camp residents, all of whom appear in the film (their names and those of their native villages appear in the titles at the end). Reviewers have remarked at the spontaneity and naturalness which the filmmakers succeeded in eliciting from subjects who could understandably have felt reluctant to expose their misery and distress to the world.

Mr. Sivan said the positive reaction of the camp residents to the film delighted him as much as winning the grand prize in Paris. Returning to the camp, he was greeted as a friend. After the showing, he stayed on to chat with people about their reactions, and was then invited to spend the night in the camp, which he did.

Arrangements are now being pursued for showing a shortened television version of the film in a number of countries.



It was a packed house at the Aqabat Jabr camp youth activities centre in the West Bank as residents gathered to watch a prize-winning film about life in the camp. The French-made documentary, **Aqabat Jabr: Vie de passage (Passing Through)**, won first prize in the Cinéma du Réel international film festival in Paris earlier this year. Its director, Eyal Sivan, showed the film at the Jerusalem Film Festival and then took it to Aqabat Jabr to screen it for some 200 enthusiastic camp residents. Sivan and his crew spent two weeks filming in the camp in November 1986, and he was anxious to repay his hosts for their hospitality. A number of foreign journalists also attended the showing in the camp.

HOW TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT UNRWA . . .

BELOW, AN ABRIDGED CATALOGUE OF UNRWA PRINTED AND AUDIO-VISUAL MATERIALS. PRINTED PUBLICATIONS ARE AVAILABLE FREE OF CHARGE; FILMS, SLIDE/CASSETTE PROGRAMMES AND SLIDE SETS MAY BE BORROWED OR PURCHASED (PRICES AND FURTHER INFORMATION ARE IN THE COMPLETE CATALOGUE). SEND ORDERS (OR REQUESTS FOR DETAILS) TO: **UNRWA PUBLIC INFORMATION DIVISION, P. O. BOX 700, VIENNA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE, A-1400 VIENNA, AUSTRIA.**

Languages used are Arabic (A), English (E), French (F), German (G), Italian (I), Norwegian (N), Spanish (Sp), and Swedish (Sw).

Regular Publications

Palestine Refugees Today

Quarterly newsletter covering news and human-interest stories of UNRWA operations, with occasional photo essays. E, A, F, G, Sp.

UNRWA News

Fortnightly bulletin on current events in the area of operations. E, A.

UNRWA Report

Quarterly briefing paper for governments, legislators and NGOs. E, A, F.

Occasional Publications

Survey

Describes UNRWA operations with black and white photographs and brief historical background. Reprinted 1986. E, A, F, G, Sp.

UNRWA 1987

Edited and illustrated version of the UNRWA Commissioner-General's Annual Report to the United Nations General Assembly 1986-87. E, F.

Brief History: 1950-1982

292-page narrative of UNRWA history and its change of emphasis over 32 years from relief to education. Includes resolutions on UNRWA's mandate adopted by the UN General Assembly. 1982. E.

PB 9 UNRWA: Past, Present and Future

A paperback narrative published in May 1986, based on a briefing document prepared for a conference of major donors, bringing the **Brief History** up to date. Deals also with historical background to the founding of UNRWA and its development over 36 years. E, F, A.

Leaflets

PL 12: UNRWA - What is it?

Basic facts about UNRWA. Two-colour with black and white illustrations. E, A, F, G, I, Sp.
Palestine Refugees in Jordan, West Bank, Gaza Strip, Lebanon (mimeographed) and the Syrian Arab Republic. A series of leaflets covering UNRWA's fields of operation. E, A.

Posters, Wallsheets

PX 27: UNRWA. Full-color wallsheet with photos showing UNRWA's education and health services and the relief/welfare aid that it has been rendering to refugees in hardship and those displaced by fighting in Lebanon. Includes a map of UNRWA's area of operations, and 1986 statistics. E only.

PX 28: Shelter. Colour poster marking the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. E, A, F, G, Sp.

PX 29: Education. Colour poster on UNRWA's education programme. E, A, F, G, Sp.

PX 30: Vocational Training for Refugee Women. Colour poster on vocational training courses for young refugee women. E, A, F, G, Sp.

Map of UNRWA's Area of Operations. Includes statistics on refugee locations. E, A.

Films

Palestine Refugees Today E, A, F, G; 16 mm, 14 min, colour
Introduction to UNRWA's services to the Palestine refugees. The film shows UNRWA relief, education and health programmes at work in all five fields, and surveys the life of Palestine refugees in today's Middle East.

Caring E, A, F, G, J, N; 16 mm, 16 min, colour

The story of an underprivileged Palestine refugee who put himself through school and is now helping orphaned refugees as a service to the community. 1985.

Long Journey E, A, F, G; 16 mm, 14 min, colour

This film highlights UNRWA's work in providing medical services to the Palestine refugees from their first exodus until the present time.

Education for Palestine Refugee Women E, A, F, G; 16 mm, 8½ min, colour

An example of the impact of education on Palestine refugee women, Maha, a girl of 20, is seen studying to become an architectural draughtsman (traditionally an occupation for men in the Middle East) at UNRWA's Wadi Seer Vocational Training Centre in Jordan.

Slide/Tape Programmes

ST 3: Through the Eyes of Ibrahim E, F, G, Sw; 80 35 mm slides, cassette (10 min), teaching notes, maps and poster.
The programme follows a typical refugee schoolboy in class and in his family's modest house at Marka, Jordan. Accompanying notes provide a geographical and historical perspective.

ST 4: The Palestinian Odyssey E, A, F, G; 65 35 mm slides, cassette (8 min)

Traces the Arab-Israeli conflict in Palestine from 1897 to the present. The programme documents United Nations involvement and its efforts to solve the conflict as well as its services to Palestine refugees.

THE ABOVE PROGRAMMES ARE SUITABLE FOR AUTOMATIC SOUND/SLIDE PROJECTOR OR FOR ANY MANUAL PROJECTOR AND A NORMAL CASSETTE PLAYER.

Slide Sets

Palestine Dresses

27 35 mm slides of Palestine dresses from various districts. Descriptive notes in E, A, F, G.

Palestine Refugees

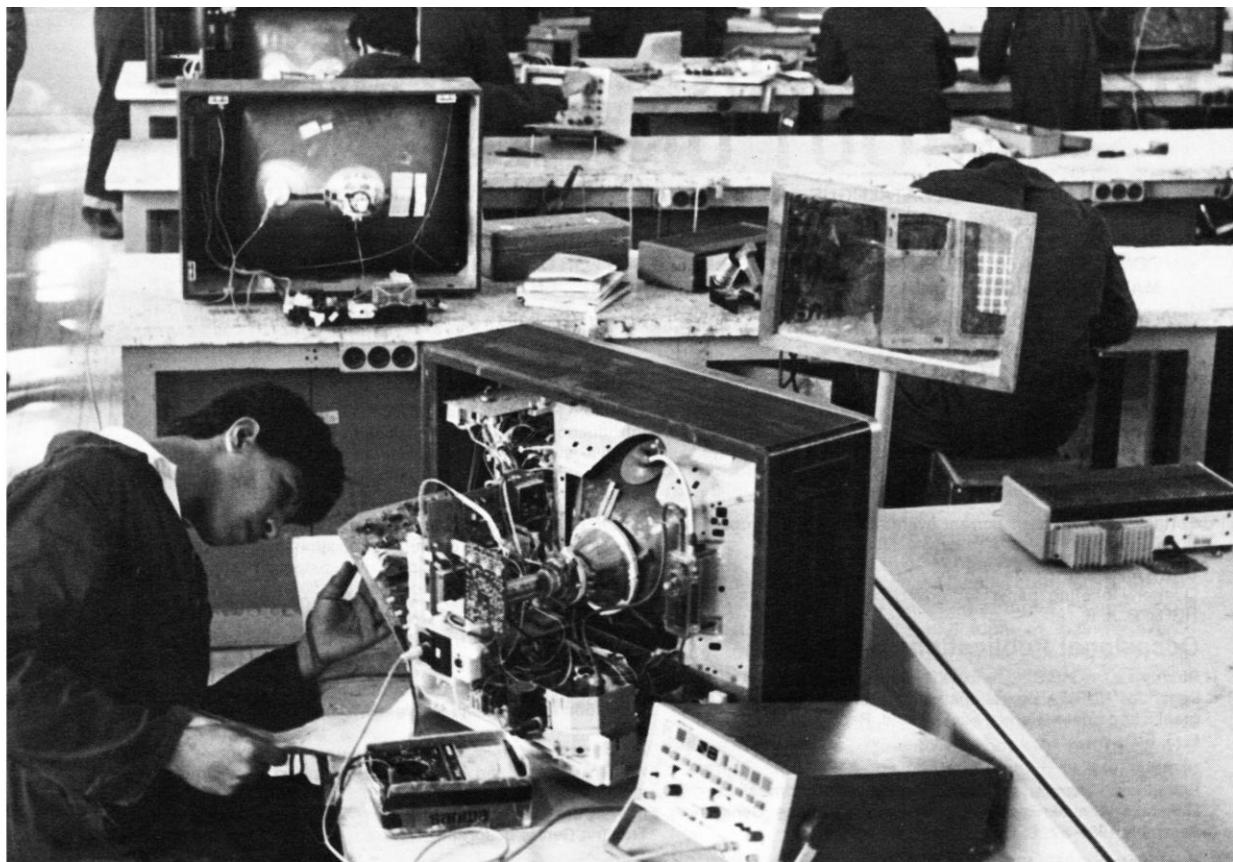
20 35 mm slides covering UNRWA services provided to Palestine refugees. Descriptive notes in English.

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Palestine Refugees Today

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