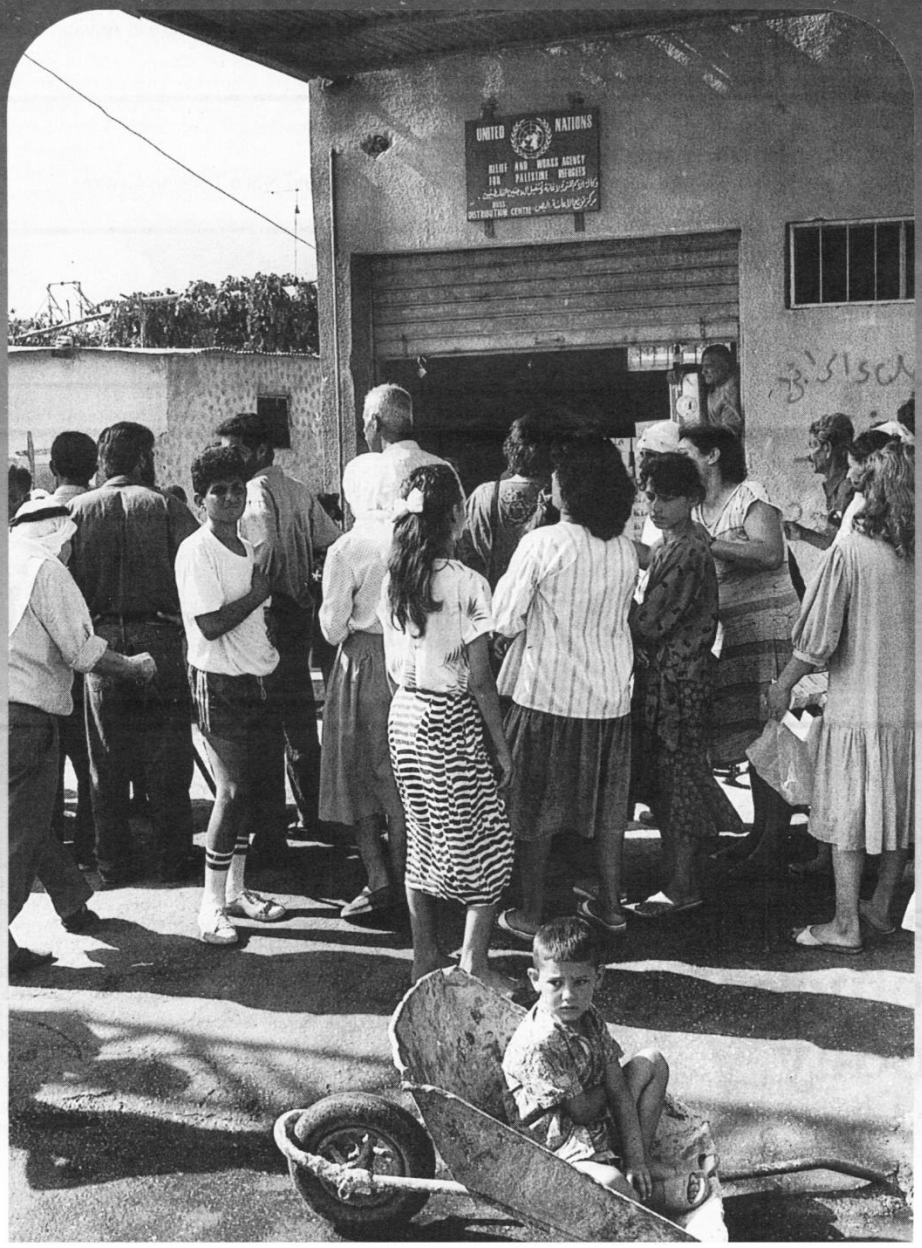
No. 128

Palestine Refugees Today

Scenes from south Lebanon



CONTENTS

Cover photos: Front: An UNRWA emergency ration distribution Centre in south Lebanon
Back: Two refugee students in Tyre area, south Lebanon.
Contributors to this issue: William Lee, George Nehmeh, Abdul-Rahman Itayem, Matar Saqer, Ismail Saleh, Claire Grimes
Photo credits: Photos on covers and pp 6–7 by Munir Nasr of UNRWA
Photos on pages 4, 5, 8 and 11 by George Nehmeh of UNRWA
Photo on page 3 by Myrtle Winter Chaumeny
Editor: William Lee

Palestine Refugees Today
No. 128

UNRWA Newsletter No. 128
November 1990

Published by UNRWA Headquarters
Vienna, Austria

Available in English, French, German, Spanish and Arabic

New uncertainties for Palestinians

THE CRISIS in the Gulf starting in August 1990 sent shock waves throughout the Palestinian community around the world. Since the 1950s, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have gone to Kuwait to live and work and raise their families. At the time of Iraq's move into Kuwait, more than 300,000 Palestinians were living in Kuwait—the largest Palestinian community anywhere in the world outside the Israeli-occupied areas and Jordan.

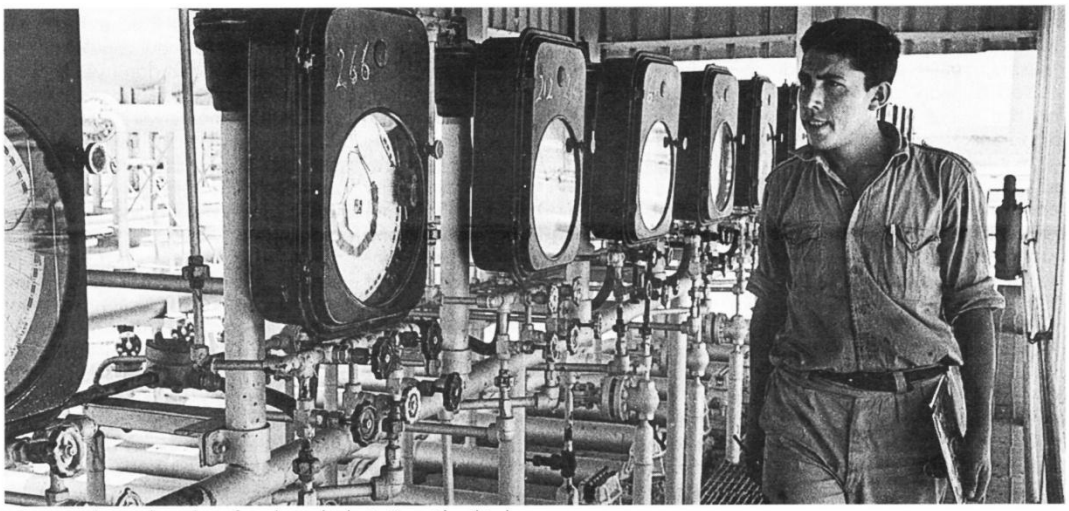
Many of these Palestinians were prominent in the Kuwaiti business community. Others—including UNRWA technical college graduates—worked at every level in the Kuwaiti oil industry. Many others worked as civil servants or teachers or doctors. For their children, born and brought up there, Kuwait was as much of a home as a Palestinian finds anywhere in the world.

At the time of the Iraqi takeover, many Palestinians were outside Kuwait on summer vacations, visiting their families in other Arab countries or in the Israeli-occupied territory. Some went back hoping to take up their old jobs under new circumstances. Others waited to see what would happen next. Some found themselves without jobs to go back to.

Many, if not most, of the employees who went back to Kuwait (exact details were hard to come by) left their families—or at least their older children—outside, with relatives, so that the younger generation might continue their studies and possibly find better future work opportunities.

This divided families, and created new uncertainties for Palestinians—especially for the Palestine refugees for whom uncertainty about the future has always been a fact of life.

The following stories tell of the experiences of some of these refugees, newly exiled from the only home they have ever really known.



Palestine refugees have long found good jobs in Kuwait's oil industry

Refugees once more

"LIFE seems to me now as it did in 1948," sighed the man in the plain white robe and headdress favoured by people from the Gulf.

Mohammad Mahmoud Hammad, aged 62, was one of many Palestine refugees who found their lives altered—perhaps forever—by the events in the Gulf in the summer of 1990.

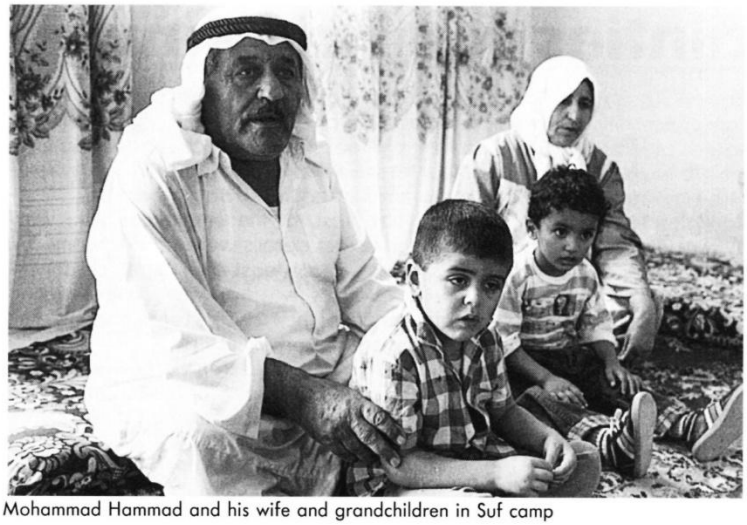
We found him sitting with his wife in a simple refugee shelter in Suf camp, Jordan, where they were visiting their daughter when Iraqi forces entered Kuwait. For the past 32 years, Mr. Hammad had lived and worked in Kuwait and he and his wife had reared 10 children there. Now they did not know what they would do next.

"I was 20 when I left Palestine," he recalled. "I left behind a flour mill and an oil press which belonged to me. We left everything behind and brought nothing with us."

Mr. Hammad's ancestors originally lived in southern Jordan. Generations ago they had crossed the Jordan river to settle in south-central Palestine, where they became farmers. The 1948 war and creation of the state of Israel found them forced to leave their land.

Part of the family went to Gaza, the other part to the West Bank of Jordan. As refugees from Palestine, they were looked after by UNRWA from 1950 on. By 1957, finding living conditions difficult in the aftermath of the Suez war, Mr. Hammad decided to leave for the Gulf to earn a better living.

Leaving his wife and two children behind in Jordan, he travelled



Mohammad Hammad and his wife and grandchildren in Suf camp

first to Iraq and then, in 1958, entered Kuwait on foot. "At the time I owned nothing other than a pair of trousers, a shirt and half a dinar. I started to work and later on sent for the wife and children who joined me there. At the beginning we had great expectations, but . . ." His voice trailed off as he recalled a time when, he said, Palestinians and Jordanians worked hard to help Kuwaitis build Kuwait.

Mr. Hammad's wife, sitting beside him on mattresses on the floor of the simple Suf camp shelter, pouring sweet tea for visitors, recalled that her husband made 30—40 dinars a month in those early years, working as a guard at a Kuwaiti ministry. "We lived in a one-room house for which we paid a high rent. Those were difficult times," she said.

Eight children, five boys and three girls, were born to the Hammads in Kuwait. They grew up and were educated and the sons worked to help their father. "Even though I have nothing at the moment, it's enough to say that I've got seven children who are university graduates," Mr. Hammad said proudly. "I provided for their education from my own pocket. I never asked for any help from any government or organization. I used to work two shifts a day—on a pick-up truck in the morning and a big truck in the afternoon—and that is how I managed to pay for their education."

Towards the end of June 1990, the elder Hammads left Kuwait by car—a dusty Chevrolet with Kuwaiti plates was parked outside the shelter as we spoke—to visit a grown-up daughter in Jordan, who was living in Suf refugee camp near the historic Roman ruins of Jerash.

The Gulf crisis found the family divided, with three grown sons remaining behind in Kuwait. One worked for a large trading company which had reportedly gone out of business after the invasion; another was studying medicine at Kuwait university and the third had just finished college in Jordan and had gone to Kuwait to look for work.

When we met the Hammads, they were preparing to take their chances and go back to Kuwait—despite the threat of war—to be with their children. "If things work out all right and our children can get jobs we will stay there," said Mrs. Hammad. "What do we have here? Nothing. We've stayed there for about 30 years. Here we don't know anything. We just came for a visit. We left our house there and brought nothing with us here except for summer clothes."

One factor drawing back many of the Palestinians who left Kuwait before or during the Gulf crisis was the issue of "separation benefits"—the lump-sum payments with which expatriate employees working in Kuwait are rewarded for long service, in lieu of the pensions they would receive if they were citizens of the country.

A neighbour visiting the Hammads, also a Palestine refugee who had long worked in Kuwait as a teacher, pointed out the dilemma. "I cannot afford to leave Kuwait for good because of the separation benefit," he said. "If I quit my job, I lose everything under the law."

"After 30 or 40 years of service we have to wait for the separation benefit to come. Before that, we have to wait for new regulations to come out. And we don't yet know if the money set aside for this is safe, or if the payments will still be made.

"But they've told us teachers to go back to our jobs. And, if I come back to Jordan, will I be able to find a job? Who's going to feed my children?"

"Our brothers from Gaza are suffering greatly," he said. "They can't leave Kuwait, for no country will let them in . . . They can't go back to their homes in Palestine. They can't enter any Arab country without a visa. And to get a visa they would have to travel 750 kilometres by car or air to Baghdad to apply. They would sleep in hotels for two or three nights only to be told to come back after two weeks or a month."

"Now, the people from Gaza feel that they've lost their homes again. It's even more painful for them this time because they've lost

Refugees reminisce about their lives in Kuwait

everything: hope as well as money. They are under pressure from everyone in the outside world."

For some Palestine refugees, the choice in the summer of 1990 was whether to live under one occupation or another. Khaled Ahmad Hussein Hassan was an example.

His family had taken refuge in the West Bank in 1948 and had ended up in Dheisheh refugee camp near Bethlehem. In 1967, when Israel occupied the West Bank, he was pursuing a correspondence course with Beirut Arab University. When links were severed between the Israeli-occupied territory and Lebanon after 1967, he went to Kuwait, so that he could earn money to pay for and continue his studies. For the past 15 years, he has worked for the Kuwait Ministry of Health.

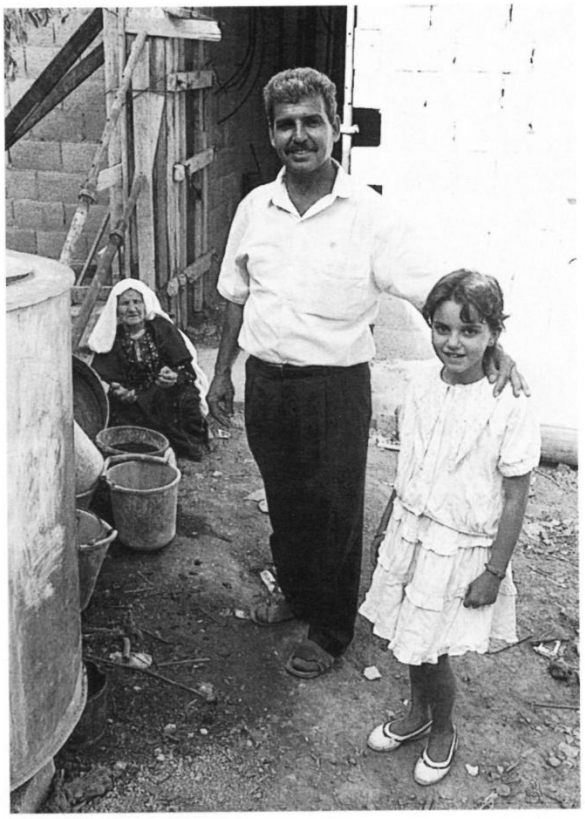
The summer of 1990 found him in Dheisheh camp, where his aged mother still lives. With him were his wife and six children—two sons aged 16 and 5 and four daughters aged 18, 14, 12 and 10. "We came to visit my mother. And my wife and children need to renew their (Israeli-issued travel) permits every three years," he explained.

Mr. Hassan himself cannot remain in the West Bank longer than three months at a time, so by September he was preparing to return to Kuwait. "Of course, I'll be going back. They've issued an order calling all employees to return to their jobs by the 23rd of October. I should go back to my work."

Mr. Hassan's wife and children would probably remain in the West Bank for the time being. The three younger girls had already enrolled in Dheisheh camp's UNRWA girls' schools. The contrast between the tightly disciplined schools in Kuwait and the rather chaotic conditions of the West Bank—where schools are often disrupted by intifada events, incursions by army patrols or closures enforced by the Israeli authorities—came as something of a shock to the Hassan girls.

"Here life is more difficult," said 12-year-old Neveen. "There are always problems in the schools. The girls don't listen to their teachers. There's no order at all. Everything is strange here."

Mr. Hassan's eldest son, Walid, managed to enrol in a secondary school in Bethlehem. The youngest, Mohammad, has yet to enter school. But the eldest daughter, Rula, was experiencing difficulty continuing her education.



Khaled Ahmad Hussein with his mother and youngest daughter, Dheisheh camp

She had finished her "tawjihi" (secondary school leaving exams) in Kuwait and had applied for admission to UNRWA's Ramallah Women's Training Centre, a junior college in the West Bank. But she had left her "tawjihi" certificate in Kuwait—expecting to go back there after the summer vacation. And that certificate was required for admission to college. The family appealed to UNRWA for help.

The presence of Mr. Hassan and his family in Dheisheh at least brought some comfort to his ageing mother. She normally lives in the camp alone and is registered by UNRWA as a "special hardship case", eligible for extra relief assistance, including food rations, because she does not have a male family member of working age living with her full-time.

The old woman's 2-by-2.5-metre shelter in Dheisheh had become inadequate and badly deteriorated. So UNRWA had built her a new room under its shelter rehabilitation programme, financed by a special contribution to the Agency from Kuwait.

When her son and his family arrived, they started making further improvements by adding a couple more rooms to his mother's house. If nothing else, these extra rooms were needed to house the extended family as long as they remained in the West Bank.

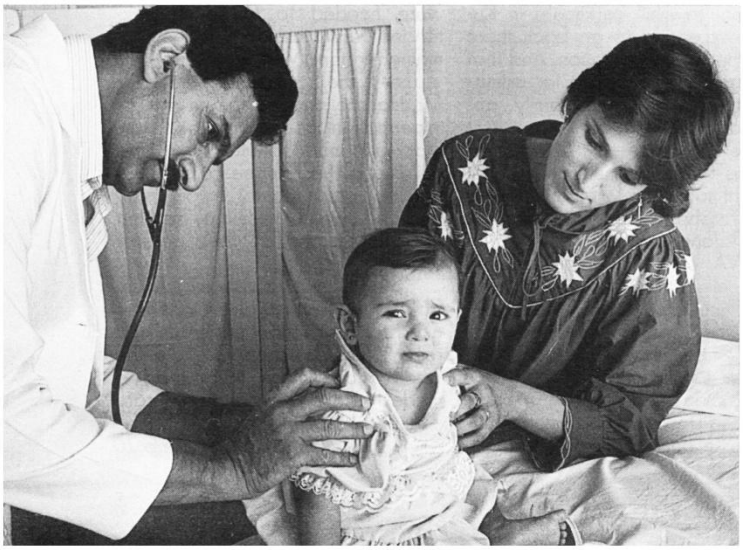
For the moment, life for Mr. Hassan and his family was as impermanent as the simple breeze-block-and-mortar shelter they were building in this refugee camp. They had not prepared for a long stay outside Kuwait, where they had left their house and all their possessions.

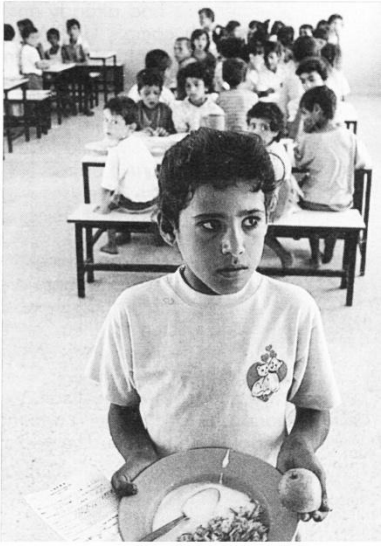
"Life in Kuwait is very expensive, particularly for the Palestinians who need to meet school expenses and rents," Mr. Hassan said. "On the whole, Palestinians there lead a modest life . . . What they care

Continued on page 10

Scenes from south Lebar

In addition to its regular education, health a
aid to registered Palestine refugees in Leba
tinuing economic difficulties. UNRWA's eme
and occasionally to Lebanese who are dis
The emergency aid in Lebanon includes hea
eral ration distributions of flour, sugar and ri
into the distribution of relief supplies and in
given to refugees to help them repair their sh
gency operations in Lebanon cost $ 10 mill
The emergency operations, particularly the
are carried out under very difficult circumst
the hardships of the refugees within the lim
emergency food distribution in Tyre, South L
gee life in south Lebanon.



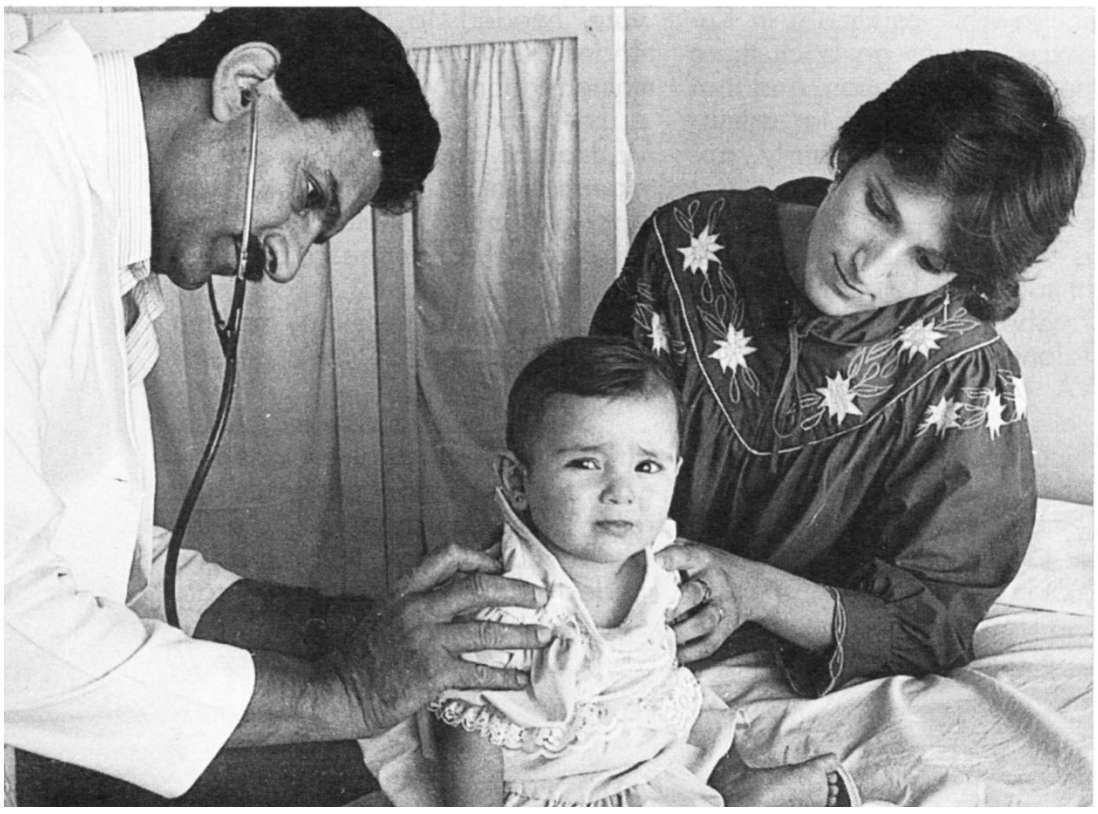


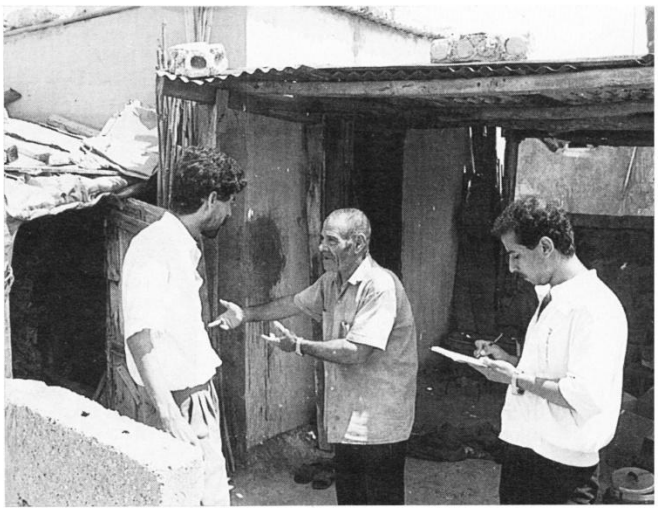
Scenes from south Lebanon

In addition to its regular education, health and social welfare services, UNRWA is providing emergency aid to registered Palestine refugees in Lebanon who are inevitably affected by the turmoil and the continuing economic difficulties. UNRWA's emergency assistance is also given to non-registered refugees and occasionally to Lebanese who are displaced by the hostilities.

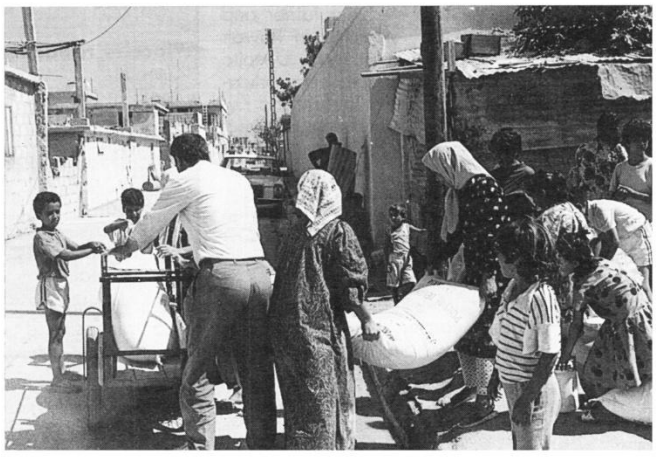
The emergency aid in Lebanon includes health assistance and supplementary feeding, as well as general ration distributions of flour, sugar and rice to some 230,000 beneficiaries. Emergency funds also go into the distribution of relief supplies and into medical treatment and hospitalization. Cash grants are given to refugees to help them repair their shelters and start small self-support projects. In all, the emergency operations in Lebanon cost $ 10 million in 1990 of which about $ 2 million went to food aid.

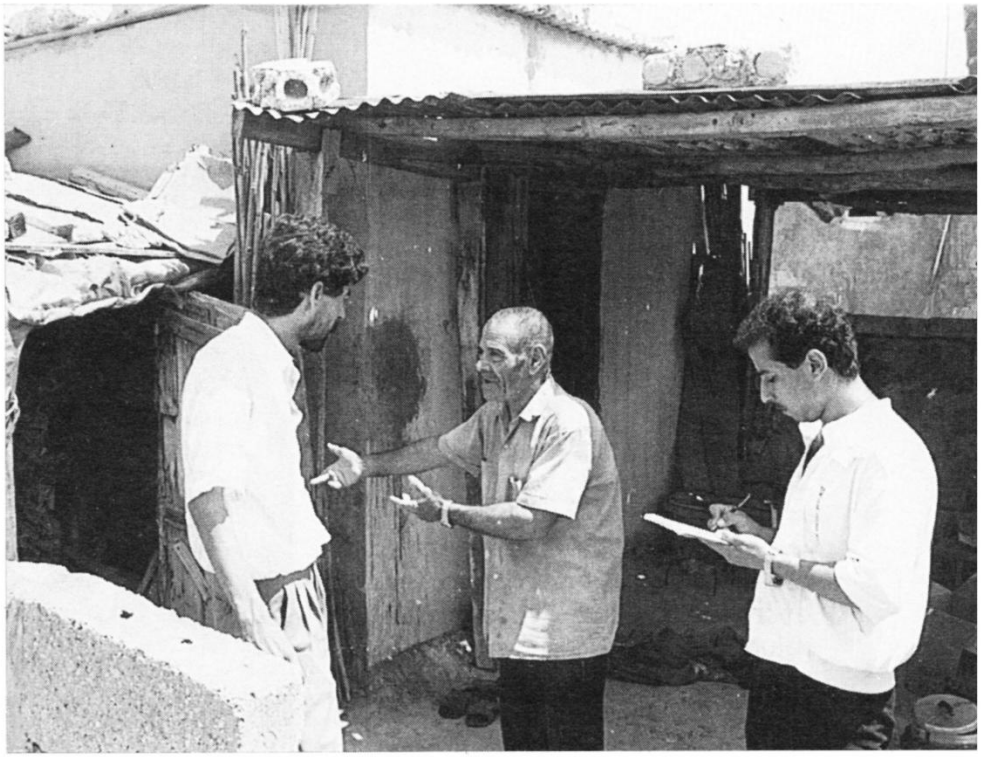
The emergency operations, particularly the distribution of food rations, and the regular programmes are carried out under very difficult circumstances. But the Agency continues to do its best to alleviate the hardships of the refugees within the limits of its financial resources. These pictures show a recent emergency food distribution in Tyre, South Lebanon, and other Agency activities and scenes from refugee life in south Lebanon.





ial welfare services, UNRWA is providing emergency
ıo are inevitably affected by the turmoil and the con-
/ assistance is also given to non-registered refugees
by the hostilities.
istance and supplementary feeding, as well as gen-
ome 230,000 beneficiaries. Emergency funds also go
dical treatment and hospitalization. Cash grants are
and start small self-support projects. In all, the emer-
1990 of which about $ 2 million went to food aid.
ıution of food rations, and the regular programmes
But the Agency continues to do its best to alleviate
ts financial resources. These pictures show a recent
ın, and other Agency activities and scenes from refu-

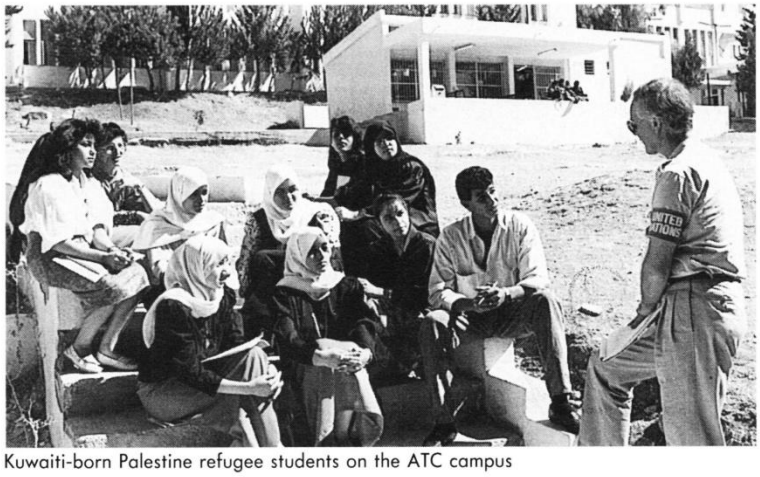





U N

Kuwaiti-born Palestine refugee students on the ATC campus

Learning to feel like refugees



Kuwaiti-born Palestine refugee students on the ATC campus

FAR FROM the turmoil and tension of the Gulf, eleven young Palestine refugees sat down together recently on the tranquil campus of UNRWA's Amman Training Centre just outside the Jordanian capital to talk about the concerns that were uppermost in their thoughts.

They had just begun their college studies—for some it was their first year of advanced education—but their minds for the moment were not on their books but on the looming crisis in the Gulf. For these students, Kuwait has always been "home". Since Iraqi forces had entered Kuwait on 2 August, seven weeks before this encounter, these young people had not known when—or whether—they would see their homes, and their families, again.

"We don't know what the future holds," said Huda, a student in the medical secretary course at ATC. "We don't know where we are going to study and work after this, in Kuwait or here in Jordan . . . we don't know."

Like the others, Huda was born and brought up in Kuwait. Her father worked for the Ministry of Education there and one of her two brothers (she also has four sisters) for the Kuwaiti Ministry of Information.

When we spoke to her in September, Huda said her father and brother were remaining in Kuwait and continuing their work. Despite the previously close communications links between Jordan and Kuwait, she had not been in direct contact with them. But she said her father was still going to his job three days a week.

Amani, a first-year student in physical education at ATC, was also born and brought up in Kuwait. She said her father had worked there for 23 years, as an English teacher. He had six children, of whom, in addition to Amani, two sons were also in college.

Amani hoped to find future work in Jordan, not only for herself but for her father as well. "If my father has no chance to work here, that will be a big problem," she said. "I don't want to spend all my life travelling here and there. I want to be in my country. And I wish to have a job here in Jordan, or in Palestine."

Abeer, a first-year student in business administration at ATC, said she had come to Jordan "before the troubles in Kuwait". She enrolled at ATC—where normally five per cent of the 700-plus places are reserved for Palestine refugee students from the Gulf states—after failing to find a place at university in Jordan.

Abeer's father, who did not finish his education, worked for the Ministry of Electricity and Water in Kuwait. He had only eight years to go before retirement and was hoping to stay on in his job there, she said.

Abeer is planning to go into business and was hoping also to work in Kuwait. "I prefer to work where my family is," she told us. "I don't want to be in one part of the world and my family in another. I want all of us to stay together."

A major concern to Abeer and other children of wage-earners remaining in Kuwait was the sharp decline—effectively a drop of about 60 per cent—in the value of their earnings after the Kuwaiti dinar was unified with the Iraqi dinar.

For decades, Palestinian families, in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, in Jordan and elsewhere, have depended on remittances from their relatives working in the Gulf as a major source of support. Now there is widespread concern that, even if these workers can stay at their jobs, they will be able to remit much less to their dependants outside. They may have difficulty getting access to their savings in Kuwait. Or they may lose their separation benefits—a kind of pension—or even their jobs.

"I have two brothers studying in Russian universities and they need money," Abeer told us. "I'm studying here and I need money to buy books and I have two sisters and a brother in school here and they also need money to continue their education. So it will be a big problem for my father to provide all this money for all of us."

Mohammad, a first-year student in the assistant pharmacist course

Expatriate students enrolled at Amman Training Centre (1990/91)

Place of residence	Number
Kuwait	10
Saudi Arabia	34
Bahrain	1
Qatar	2
United Arab Emirates	1
Syria	27
West Bank	19
Lebanon	3
Gaza Strip	1
Total	98

Total enrolment at the centre: 725 trainees

at ATC, came to Jordan with his father after the events in Kuwait. His father had been working in Kuwait for 23 years.

"After the incidents, he had no opportunity to work there because of the bad conditions," Mohammad said. "He wanted to come back to Jordan to start all over again. Life is difficult for him because he is 52 years old. I had no other choice but to join this college to study the specialization I have always dreamed of and to assist my father who has made many sacrifices in order to educate us, his children. Although living here is hardly better than in Kuwait, we will have to bear it."

Many of the students coming from Kuwait expressed some resentment at the widespread impression that they had lived better in the past than other Palestinians and therefore somehow "deserved" their present hardship.

Said Abeer: "Everyone thinks the life in Kuwait was very good, but it was also very hard . . . Had we been given the opportunity to work here, to study here, to start our lives here, we would not have left. Nobody wants to be far away from his people, from his homeland."

For this younger generation born and brought up in Kuwait, there is a new sense of alienation felt by generations of Palestinians before them.

"Our parents left Palestine and we considered them refugees," Abeer said. "They used to tell us about their problem but we knew little about it. Now, when we left Kuwait, we also became refugees, like our parents. Now we feel the problem."

Spinning wool for self-reliance

UNRWA's relief and social services programme is increasingly geared towards making Palestine refugees self-sufficient—and towards giving disabled or particularly disadvantaged refugees added self-confidence. Some of the newer programmes seek to accomplish both goals at the same time. A unique programme in Jordan is an example.

IN a poor rural environment like Jerash camp for Palestine refugees in Jordan, a woman's income can well make the difference between her family going hungry or being fed. In this camp, remote from job-rich business centres, work opportunities are few and many refugees only just manage to eke out a living.

Kaydeh, a widow and mother of six, is the family breadwinner. Hanan, in her early twenties, strives to help her father support his 13-member family. Hiyam, 13 years old and blind, is learning a skill to fall back on if she is unable to continue her education.

Kaydeh, Hanan and Hiyam are three of a group of refugee women and girls who have turned a number of old prefabricated buildings which used to house an UNRWA clinic into a beehive-like workshop—the camp's wool spinning centre.

The wool-spinning centre at Jerash camp was opened in August 1990. It is a joint UNRWA-Catholic Relief Services project which aims to give refugee women in the camp the chance to learn a skill with which they can ensure a steady income for their families.

Until the opening of the centre—the first of its kind supervised by UNRWA—the Agency's women's activities programme in the camp had focused solely on providing women with skills enabling them to seek employment or run small businesses at home to earn some extra income.

UNRWA continues to offer these in sewing, embroidery, machine knitting, hairdressing, flower making and typing. The wool spinning centre not only trains women but also secures a fair return for their labour, whether they work at the centre or at home.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS), a U.S. charity organization, donated $ 14,564 to purchase spinning equipment and furniture and to establish a revolving fund for seasonal purchase of raw wool as well as teaching women to spin. CRS also helped the centre to set up accounts and marketing relationships. UNRWA provided the building and is committed to supporting the project on a long-term basis after CRS involvement ends.

"We hope that this centre becomes, through the active participation of camp women, a sort of club where they have the chance to meet, discuss their problems and share common experiences," said Inge Tanner, UNRWA's Field Relief and Social Services Officer in Jordan.

"In order for this project to succeed and continue to exist,"

A blind girl is one of the best wool-spinners at the Jerash centre

Some work is still done by hand . . .
. . . other work with machines

A blind girl is one of the best wool-spinners at the Jerash centre

Some work is still done by hand . . .
. . . other work with machines

Ms. Tanner told a group of fathers and notables present at the simple inauguration ceremony, "we need support from the male community of the camp, especially the notables and mukhtars to encourage women to join our centre and to take part in our activities."

Catholic Relief Services operates in 70 countries providing relief services to needy societies. "Needs in Jordan are different from those of other countries, and we have had to adapt our activities to suit those needs," said Ms. Rula Qmei', CRS's social specialist in charge of the Jerash project.

"Because Jordan emphasizes development, we have had to shift our services towards small enterprises and income-generating projects," she said. "Depending on initiatives and ideas from the local communities, we work through a team of consultants who work out an integrated plan for the project."

Before wool is spun, it undergoes two processes—cleaning and carding. Cleaning takes place in two rooms specially designed for this purpose and carding is done on a drum carder imported from the United States. The centre has two spinning wheels from Syria and hand spindles are also used.

The monthly output of the centre averages 230 kilogrammes of spun wool. In September 1990, however, the output exceeded the target by 100 per cent, with the centre producing 462.5 kgs of spun wool.

The production is then sold to the Jerash Ladies Society in the nearby town of Jerash, which runs a weaving project. A woman spinner earns an average of 36 Jordan dinars (about $ 52) a month which although meagre helps to stop several gaps in a refugee family's budget.

So far, 19 women are working at the centre—11 spinners, two carders, two supervisors and four cleaners—while 48 women work for the centre from their homes.

Women and girls come to the centre for a variety of reasons. Butheineh Hussein Ahmad Ibrahim, the supervisor, failed the high school general examination and wasn't interested in continuing on an academic path. Her father, and UNRWA teacher, encouraged her to learn whatever profession she could.

"Education is not only a question of reading and writing," her father told her. "Learning a skill will be of great help to you." Before joining the centre, Butheineh learned to type in Amman and completed an 11-month sewing course at UNRWA's sewing centre in the camp.

"Butheineh is my daughter, but all the other girls who are working at the centre are also like my daughters, because I taught them all at school," said Hussein Ahmad Ibrahim who has been a teacher since 1952. "Curriculum is not everything. We teach our children many additional things to be better equipped to face the difficulties of life."

Kaydeh Salman Al-Kurdi had a different reason for joining the centre. Since losing her husband in 1973, she has been working single-handedly to keep her family above the poverty line.

"Every day I used to leave at dawn to work in nearby farms and never had a whole day with my children at home—I couldn't afford that luxury. But what could I do? I had to earn enough to support my children. Nobody else would," she said.

When she heard of the establishment of the Jerash Ladies Society, she immediately signed up, convinced that this might be the chance for her to escape from the chronic cycle of economic hardship. Soon after that she joined the centre in the camp. "At last I have the security of a steady income for my family," Kaydeh said. "At the spinning centre I'm not far away from my children. I can go home and see them whenever I need to."

Umm Awwad learned to spin and weave in Beersheba, before the Arab-Israeli war of 1948 made her family refugees. She has been indispensable in passing on her skills to the trainees at the centre. "We would have had to bring in a spinning expert from abroad if it were not for Umm Awwad, said Ms. Qmei'. She has been instrumental in making this centre a success."

Hiyam Iyadeh Al-Dhaini, now 13, was born blind. In spite of her disability she has proved to be remarkably skilled with her hands and according to Ms. Qmei' is one of the best spinners in the centre and destined to become a great spinning supervisor.

Hiyam's loss of sight did not deter her from getting an education. "As a Palestinian one must do all one can to get the best education possible," she said. Her parents were convinced that she should not sit at home, wasting her time. They explored all possibilities and Hiyam got a non-paying place at the Islamic School for Blind Girls in Amman.

Hiyam knew nothing about spinning before joining the centre but quickly mastered the skill and has since spent her summer holidays working there. Happy that she can make an independent contribution to the family income, her main hope now is that her sight will be restored, giving her the same chance as everyone else to witness the beauties of life.

Uncertainties . . .

Continued from page 5

most about is educating their children. All the schools are privately run and expensive. And rents are high. So people can save very little. And now no one knows what is going to happen to their savings."

Like his counterparts in Suf camp, Jordan, Mr. Hassan in Dheisheh saw in his current dilemma a crystallization of the Palestinian story.

"Since 1948 we have been feeling we are refugees," he said. "A person who has no homeland feels no stability. We struggle and work hard so that we can settle in our homeland. Several times I have tried to return and settle here with my wife and children, but the authorities forbid it.

"The ultimate good for us is to return to our homeland despite the successes we have achieved outside. We suffered in 1948 and in 1967 and we are suffering now after we have lost everything. We have worked hard for 20 or 25 years and still we don't know how things are going to turn out."

Jerash clinic addresses special needs

IT HAS been just a year since Jerash camp got its new UNRWA health centre, and a busy place it is.

The immaculate white concrete building, which replaced a worn-out 20-year-old prefabricated aluminium structure, caters to a population of more than 16,000 refugees drawn from the camp's own population of 9,000 plus refugees living in the surrounding area. Refugees from Suf camp—on the other side of the town of Jerash and its Roman ruins—also use some of the centre's facilities.

The services offered at Jerash are identical to those delivered by other UNRWA health centres: daily preventive and curative services, mother-and-child health care, vaccinations and dental care. The demand for them is very high, because the refugees of Jerash suffer from poorer living conditions than most Palestine refugees in Jordan.

Jerash is one of six "emergency" camps set up in Jordan after the 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which displaced some 300,000 Palestinians, including 200,000 refugees from pre-1948 Palestine. Most of those arriving in Jordan were refugees from the West Bank, where they had been living for nearly 20 years after their initial displacement.

But the refugees who came to this hillside near Jerash were displaced from the Gaza Strip. Even today, Jerash camp is known locally as "mukhayyam ghazzeh"—"Gaza camp". Before 1967, these refugees were ruled not by Jordan, like the West Bankers, but by Egypt.

While Jordan has dutifully played host to hundreds of thousands of refugees from Palestine since 1948, the status of these refugees from Gaza differs somewhat from the status of those who previously lived under Jordanian rule.

For the most part, the people of Jerash camp do not have Jordanian nationality. This limits their travel possibilities. And it also bars them from some jobs in the Jordanian public sector. Most of the employable males from the camp must seek casual work as day-labourers—including seasonal jobs in agriculture in the surrounding area which keep them away from home for much of the year. Many of the women are uneducated and cannot work.

A direct result of this, according to doctors at the UNRWA clinic, is that conditions are poorer in this camp than in other camps in Jordan. And that is reflected in the health conditions of these refugees.

"Because of the poverty, the major problem here is parasitic infestation," Dr. Shteiwi Abu Zayed, the UNRWA health centre's chief medical officer said. "The refugees here do not always have clean water or good food—they can't afford it. They keep food too long and it becomes spoiled or contaminated."

Doctor Abu Zayed treats a child at the Jerash maternity clinic

The UNRWA doctors in the camp have launched an effort to educate the community about general public health and about specific problems such as how to keep food from spoiling. They say it is aimed at the camp's shopkeepers and shoppers alike.

But some problems require more direct measures—such as improving the camp's water supply. A random sample taken by the medical staff in 1989—90 showed that Jerash camp residents suffer from some 150 cases a year of intestinal ailments such as giardiasis, internal hystolyteca and ascariasis.

The Jerash clinic's two doctors see an average of some 250 patients a day for curative services. They are assisted by two senior staff nurses, five staff nurses, two practical nurses, an assistant pharmacist and laboratory technician and a dentist and dental hygienist. The dental clinic, which also serves refugees from Suf camp (population 10,000), treats about 50 cases a day.

The centre's mother-and-child health (MCH) clinic registers about 15 new pregnancies a week and is seeing between 30 and 40 repeat visitors at any given time. There is also a diabetes clinic which operates on Mondays and sees a total of about 130 patients on a monthly basis—25-30 each time—by appointment.

On Tuesdays, the centre operates a hypertension clinic—also on an appointment basis—with about 150 patients on its rolls. The doctors say the harsh conditions in the camp—added to the strain of refugee life in a country not one's own—contribute to a high toll of hypertension and other "psychosomatic" diseases among the population.

In the first 20 years after the establishment of Jerash camp (where the refugees lived in tents for a year or so before getting the small prefab zinc shelters many of them still live in today), conditions in the old UNRWA clinic were spartan. Winters in these hills are harsh and the waiting areas in the old prefab clinic were bitterly cold.

Kerosene stoves used to heat the place only added to the discomfort—and even danger; indeed, one winter, part of the clinic, including the doctor's room, dispensary and laboratory, caught fire. It took great effort from UNRWA engineers to maintain the old structure—designed to last 10 to 12 years at most—for two decades.

A new clinic for Jerash was put high on UNRWA's list of priorities for the special funding on which the Agency depends in order to build new premises—schools, clinics or community centres. In response to a special appeal for contributions, the Danish Refugee Council in 1987 pledged $ 275,000 to build a new health centre for Jerash. The building was officially opened in October 1989.

Palestine Refugees Today

UNITED NATIONS NATIONS UNIES

UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS
AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES
VIENNA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE
P.O.BOX 700
A-1400 VIENNA, AUSTRIA

IMPRIME
A TAXE REDUITE

Printed by Stiepandruck Ges. m. b. H. + Co. KG, 2544 Leobersdorf