



# PALESTINE REFUGEES TODAY

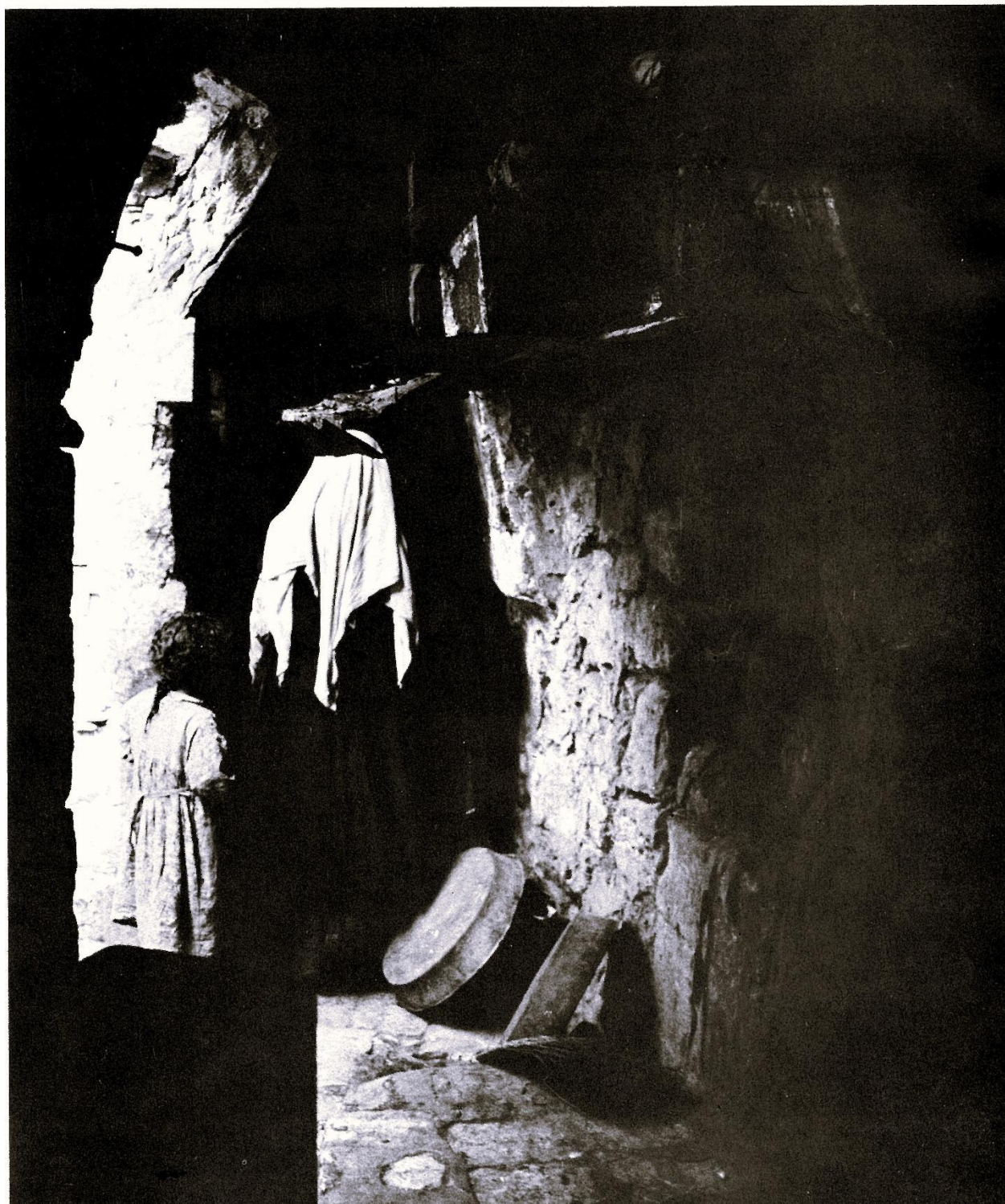
*An UNRWA Newsletter*

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BETHLEHEM

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## T H E   O T H E R   B E T H L E H E M

This Christmas time the thoughts of millions throughout the world will turn to Bethlehem, and on Christmas Eve thousands of pilgrims and tourists, from far and near, will flock there to celebrate Christmas in the place where Christ was born.

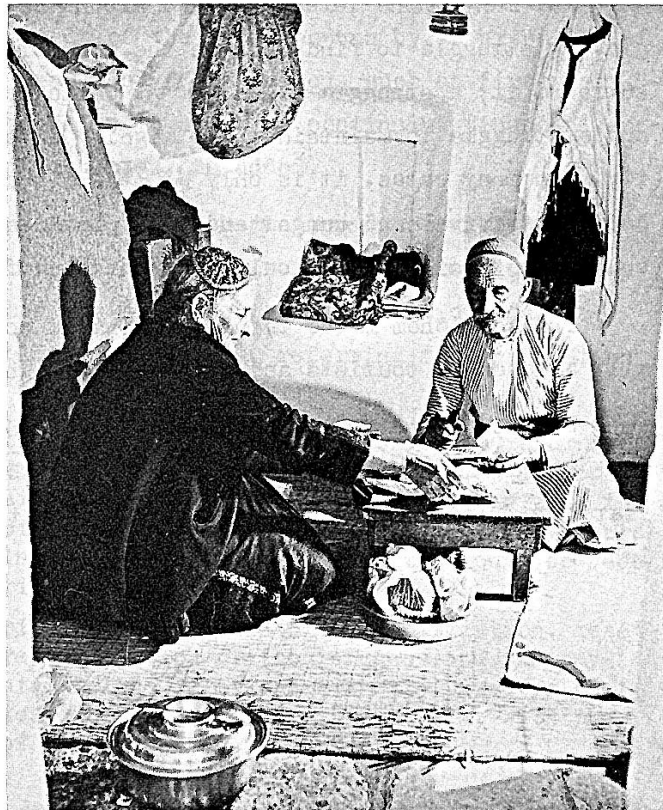
They will find Bethlehem in a gay, festive mood with the music of bands and the cries of vendors adding to the holiday atmosphere. Thousands will gather in the brightly illuminated Manger Square, the main square of Bethlehem, facing the Church of the Nativity, the vast, rambling structure that stands over the place where Jesus was born. A fortunate few will have tickets to gain admission to the Church - or perhaps to the Church of St. Catherine, from where each year the Christmas mass is broadcast around the world, together with the chimes of the Christmas bells from their square, stubby bell-tower (pictured on the cover, silhouetted against the evening sky).

Others will gather in the Field of the Shepherds to sing carols and to look across the valley at the little town, as shepherds did from that same spot almost 2,000 years before.

But there is another Bethlehem, one that few of the pilgrims or tourists will see.

A few steps from the Church of the Nativity, just a stone's throw from the joyous festivity of Manger Square, is the oldest quarter of Bethlehem. It is a

Right: Yacoub Sabat had saved all his life for a small home of his own. Now he and his wife live in this one tiny room in Bethlehem.





maze of narrow winding alleys, of dark, dank passageways and of masonry crumbling with age. This is the Bethlehem of the refugees.

Like most other towns and cities in Jordan, Bethlehem received an influx of refugees in 1948, following the flight of the Arabs from that part of Palestine that became Israel. Today, of Bethlehem's total population of 16,000, about one quarter are refugees. In addition, another 10,500 refugees are living in the three UNRWA camps near the town, making a total of almost 15,000 refugees living in and around Bethlehem.

A large number of those living within the town have found shelter in the old section near the Church of the Nativity, where many live in "homes" that are little better than holes in the wall. In many cases the accommodation provided in the nearby camps is better than that found by the refugees in the town, even though the average camp hut provides only one small room in which four or five people must live, eat and sleep.

For many of the refugees in and around Bethlehem, life is a constant struggle: a struggle to find work in the town or in the barren, rocky hills which surround it; a struggle to take out the basic food rations distributed by UNRWA, and a struggle to maintain their dignity after 16 years of dependence on charity. In many cases, it is only UNRWA's assistance that makes the difference between survival and hunger and that provides, through its programmes of education and training, the only spark of hope for the future generation.

The Bethlehem of the refugee is a stark contrast to the gay Bethlehem that will be seen by tourists and pilgrims this Christmas.

When thoughts turn to Bethlehem during this Christmas season, it would be well to remember not only the joyous event that took place there almost 2,000 years ago but also the tragedy and the need that exist today in the other Bethlehem.

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CONTINUING NEEDS OF REFUGEES EMPHASIZED  
IN ANNUAL REPORT

The need of the Palestine refugees for continued assistance from the international community was emphasized by the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, Mr. Laurence Michelmore, in his annual report published in November.

The report, submitted to the United Nations General Assembly, reviewed UNRWA's activities during the period 1 July 1963 to 30 June 1964 and outlined the Commissioner-General's view that although some refugees were gradually re-establishing themselves, the problem of providing assistance to a large proportion was likely to be one of long-term duration. Mr. Michelmore observed that in the absence of a solution to the refugee problem, "relief will have to be provided for some large number of refugees by some method and from some source for many years to come."

At this session the General Assembly will consider the future of UNRWA, whose current mandate expires as of 30 June 1965. The Commissioner-General said in the report that if the General Assembly agreed that the appropriate method of continuing to meet the needs of the refugees was by an extension of the mandate, it should be "for a reasonably long period, such as five years." Short-term extensions were not conducive to securing continuing financial support and led to administrative difficulties, he added.

The Commissioner-General expressed the view that no discernible progress had been made towards a solution of the Palestine refugee problem during the past year and that another year had passed without implementation of paragraph 11\* of General Assembly resolution 194 (III), referring to repatriation

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\*The General Assembly . . . "Resolves that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live in peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible;

"Instructs the Conciliation Commission to facilitate the repatriation, resettlement and economic and social rehabilitation of the refugees and the payment of compensation, and to maintain close relations with the Director of the United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees and, through him, with the appropriate organs and agencies of the United Nations;"

or compensation for the refugees. He added that the refugees in general continued to insist strongly on the idea of returning to their own homes and on the need to implement paragraph 11.

"There has been no sign during the year that the emotions of the peoples directly concerned in the Palestine refugee problem were growing any less intense or that the problem itself was any less intractable or less dangerous to the peace and stability of the Middle East," observed Mr. Michelmore.

The situation of the refugees.

The Commissioner-General said that many refugees were still living "in dire poverty, often under pathetic and in some cases appalling conditions" and that many would face starvation or at least extreme privation if the relief dispensed by UNRWA ceased.

The Commissioner-General observed that different degrees and kinds of need had developed among the refugees and gave a conjectural estimate of the three categories of need among refugees receiving rations. The first category, representing some 40 to 50 per cent of the total, was destitute or almost destitute; the intermediate category, about 30 to 40 per cent, was partially self-supporting but still in need of aid from UNRWA; and the third category, some 10 to 20 per cent, appeared to be securely re-established.

Mr. Michelmore stated that if the deadlock over repatriation continued, a large "hard core" of refugees would continue to live in poverty and dependence on the charity of their fellow men for the indefinite future. This "hard core" would include most of the refugees in the Gaza Strip, a substantial part of those in Jordan and a significant number of those in the other "host" countries. In addition, other refugees would continue to need assistance of the kind provided by UNRWA until their self-support was securely established.

The past year reviewed.

During the past year, stated the Commissioner-General, the Agency had continued to give emphasis to its programmes to assist the young refugees. In the field of general education, UNRWA, in cooperation with UNESCO, had established an Institute of Education, which was to be the focal point of programmes of in-service teacher training designed to raise the standard of

teaching in the Agency's schools. The present expansion of UNRWA's vocational training programme had been completed with the opening in October 1963 of the Agency's tenth training centre. This had brought the total capacity of the UNRWA training programme to some 3,900 young refugees. The number of university scholarships awarded by UNRWA had once again been increased; 597 refugee students benefited during the 1963-64 academic year, compared with 532 the previous year.

UNRWA's provision of health services and relief to those in need had continued without major change, and the Agency had continued its efforts to rectify its registration rolls to ensure that only those in genuine need received assistance.

The report divided UNRWA's activities into three parts: relief, health and education and training. Some 45 per cent of the Agency's estimated expenditure was for relief, 13 per cent for health and 42 per cent for education and training. "It will be observed that more than half the UNRWA budget is now expended on communal or public services. Many of them partake of the character of a technical assistance programme. Indeed, in the specialised fields of vocational and teacher training, UNRWA has now become one of the most important instruments of technical assistance and channels of external aid now operating in the Middle East," pointed out Mr. Michelmore.

The future role of UNRWA.

The Commissioner-General said that for the remaining year of its present mandate and in the longer term if the mandate were renewed, the Agency proposed to continue its operations without major changes. He said that the Agency would hope to: employ greater flexibility in the provision of relief to adjust the assistance more closely to the needs of individual refugees and families; make further efforts to rectify its ration rolls; maintain the existing level of health services; explore the possibility of refugee participation in the administration of certain of the communal affairs of the camps; maintain existing communal welfare services, funds permitting, with increased participation by the refugees and by voluntary agencies; maintain existing services in the field of education and training, making improvements if funds were available; continue to advance Palestinian staff members to positions of



greater responsibility within the Agency and continue efforts to raise increased contributions from both governmental and nongovernmental sources.

Financial situation.

The Commissioner-General reported that UNRWA's financial position, "a chronic problem for the past several years," had become more difficult in 1964 and might continue to worsen in 1965, unless contributions were substantially increased. "The Agency faces a deficit of \$1.4 million in 1964 and the likelihood of a similar, or possibly even larger one in 1965," he said. The deficit in 1964 was largely due to a decline in income of about \$0.2 million and an increase in expenditure of about \$0.7 million, almost wholly on education services. The Agency had attempted to offset the deficit in 1964 by operational economies which, however, could not be expected in the longer run to meet the continuous rise in the cost of education and training.

For 1965 the Agency proposed a total budget of \$37 million, of which \$16.6 million would be spent on relief services, \$5 million on health services and \$15.4 million on education and training. It was believed that revision of the ration rolls would make it possible to reduce the cost of issuing basic rations by \$0.6 million "without detriment to the refugees in need," said the Commissioner-General.

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IN BRIEF

Commissioner-General Attends General Assembly

The Commissioner-General of UNRWA, Mr. Laurence Michelmore, left Beirut at the beginning of December for New York to attend the nineteenth session of the United Nations General Assembly.

En route to New York, Mr. Michelmore spent some days in Rome, Paris and London, where he held discussions with government officials and with others concerned with the work of UNRWA and the Palestine refugees.

Visitors

A delegation representing Entraide Socialiste Belge, a Belgian voluntary organization affiliated to the Socialist Party, spent a week in the Middle

East studying the situation of the Palestine refugees and UNRWA's programmes of assistance. The group comprised Mr. Jan Luytens (president of Entraide Socialiste), Mrs. Luytens, Mr. Adrian Geets (secretary-general), Mrs. Geets and Dr. Fernand Brunnelle. They visited all four "host" countries and discussed with senior UNRWA officials possible means of assisting the refugees, particularly in the field of vocational training.

Monsignor Joseph T. Ryan, the president of the Pontifical Mission for Palestine, held discussions with senior UNRWA officials during a recent two-week stay in the Middle East en route to the Eucharistic Congress in India.

Mr. Paul Saulter visited many UNRWA installations and saw the plight of the Palestine refugees at first hand when he visited the area recently on a travelling scholarship awarded by the United Nations Association of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

The University of the Seven Seas, the floating American university, spent three days in Beirut port in November. Some 200 students attended a lecture given by the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, and a group of 30 students and faculty members visited refugee camps in the Beirut area and UNRWA's two training centres at Sibliin, Lebanon.

#### Donations

Since various Freedom From Hunger Campaign committees decided in early 1963 to support UNRWA's vocational training programme through the United Kingdom Freedom From Hunger Campaign, more than 23,600 pounds (approximately \$66,000) has been donated to UNRWA. Contributions are still being received, bringing the total to more than half of the 42,440 pounds (\$118,800) that was originally pledged. The funds are being used by UNRWA to provide vocational training scholarships for young refugees in the agricultural training and diesel plant site mechanics courses at UNRWA training centres. Both courses fall within the terms of the Freedom From Hunger Campaign, the agricultural course producing farmers trained in modern techniques and the diesel plant site mechanics course teaching young men to operate and maintain heavy diesel equipment, much of it used in irrigation, pumping and mechanized farming.

The Board of The British Bank of the Middle East has made a further donation of \$16,000 to provide vocational training for 16 young refugee men for

two years. The contribution was presented to the Commissioner-General of UNRWA in November by Sir Michael Turner, Chairman of the Board, during his visit to the Middle East. The British Bank made a similar donation last year.

A donation of \$15,540 has been received from the New Zealand Council of Organizations for Relief Services Overseas (CORSO). The contribution will provide vocational training scholarships for young refugees attending UNRWA training centres and will also provide funds for the operation of UNRWA carpentry and sewing centres and women's activities groups.

Contributions continue to be received from the International Federation of Business and Professional Women (IFBPW) and from various national federations. Donations totalling \$2,500 have come recently from the federations of Finland, Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States and from the International Federation. These contributions have enabled UNRWA to allocate five scholarships to refugee girls attending the Agency's girls training centre in Ramallah, Jordan.

A substantial amount of automotive training equipment, including motor engines and other auto components, has been received from American Motors, the Chrysler Corporation and General Motors. The equipment, valued at approximately \$25,000, will be used as training media in the auto mechanics courses at UNRWA training centres. This donation is particularly valuable because it will enable the trainees to practice on modern equipment; most of the practice vehicles are presently old cars donated to the centres. The donation was made through the United States Committee for Refugees, and the shipping was handled and financed by CARE.

Mr. Hermann Abs, director of the Deutschebank in Frankfurt, Federal Republic of Germany, has contributed \$1,000 to sponsor a trainee in the business and office practice course at UNRWA's Sibling Vocational Training Centre in Lebanon for two years. He had previously sponsored a trainee in Jordan.

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### HARBAB'S NEW LEGS

Harbah Abu Sabat came home again a few weeks ago -- on her own two legs.

Harbah is the 13-year-old refugee girl from Khan Younis camp in the Gaza Strip whose story was told in the October issue (No. 36) of the UNRWA Newsletter. She had lost both legs when she was hit by a train; she was sent, earlier this year, to Cairo to be fitted with a pair of artificial limbs. A Christmas donation from the civilian and military personnel of the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) paid for her rehabilitation.

She returned from Cairo in October and walked proudly into her family's shelter with the aid of crutches. She will need more treatment and training yet, and the men in blue berets are planning to devote part of their forthcoming Christmas collection to continue their aid of Harbah. In addition, this Newsletter story prompted a reader in the United States to offer a donation of clothing to Harbah.

Left: Before going to Cairo for rehabilitation, Harbah scarcely ventured outside the family shelter.

Right: With her new legs, Harbah is able to walk once more.



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Left: Before going to Cairo for rehabilitation, Harbah scarcely ventured outside the family shelter.

Right: With her new legs, Harbah is able to walk once more.









KNITTING NEW LIVES

Gloria Burbara is a refugee who has knitted a new life for herself and her family.

Three years ago, Gloria and her family were in a desperate situation. Her husband, who formerly had a small shoe repair shop, was chronically sick and unable to work. They had no source of income with which to supplement the minimum level assistance provided by UNRWA.

Gloria, her invalid husband and her six children were underfed, poorly clothed and in despair. The plight of the family came to the attention of the UNRWA welfare case worker in Bethlehem, Jordan, where the family lived.

As a result, Gloria was given a small knitting machine by UNRWA, under the Agency's programme of assistance to cases of extreme hardship. During the past three years, Gloria's knit-work has become well known around Bethlehem, and she always has enough orders to keep her busy. For Gloria, the knitting machine has meant a new purpose to life. For her family, it has meant enough food, warm clothes and adequate shelter.

Gloria was so grateful for her good fortune that she willingly volunteered recently to teach other refugee girls how to use similar knitting machines.

The girls are the members of the UNRWA Women's Activities Centre in Hebron, 15 miles south of Bethlehem. The pride and joy of the Hebron centre are three new knitting machines, which were bought recently with funds raised at a theatrical performance staged by the 45 members earlier this year. More than 400 guests attended the performance, which included a play, folk-dancing and singing.

The enthusiasm of the members of the Hebron centre is typical of the way in which refugee women and girls in all four "host" countries have responded to UNRWA's Women's Activities Programme, which was started on an experimental basis in 1962. Now there are 14 programmes in operation, with a total membership of more than 1,000. The refugee women and girls meet each afternoon, usually in the premises used in the mornings as UNRWA sewing centres, to take

part in recreational, social and educational programmes designed to broaden their horizons and to help them to be good wives and mothers.

The range of activities undertaken by these women's groups is evident from the programme during one typical afternoon at the Hebron centre, a modest two-story building that begins to bustle with activity when most people in Hebron are settling down for their afternoon siestas. Two girls were downstairs learning to use the knitting machines; a group of 14 was upstairs attending a lecture on child care given by the UNRWA area nurse; another group was in the kitchen learning to bake a cake and other girls were reading magazines and books from the small library and playing table tennis. Immediately after the health lecture, an English lesson began, taught by the UNRWA area

Below: Gloria Burbara (right) teaches a refugee girl to use a knitting machine at the Hebron Women's Activities Centre.



Below: Gloria Burbara (right) teaches a refugee girl to use a knitting machine at the Hebron Women's Activities Centre.





welfare officer, who regularly volunteers his afternoons to teach at the centre. In addition, sewing is taught, and Arabic lessons are given for those who cannot read or write.

With the knitting machines, the members will be able to provide some clothes for their families and hope to earn a little money to finance a wider range of activities.

Having knit a new life for herself and her family, Gloria Burbara is now helping other refugees to knit brighter futures.

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All photographs in the Newsletter and other pictures of Arab refugees and of UNRWA's work may be obtained from the UNRWA Public Information Office, Museitbeh Quarter, Beirut, Lebanon.

The text of all articles in this Newsletter may be reproduced without acknowledgment.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is a special, temporary, nonpolitical body established by the General Assembly of the United Nations in December 1949.

In cooperation with the "host" governments (Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and the United Arab Republic, it carries out its two-fold task: first, to provide food, health and welfare services and shelter for the refugees; second, to provide education and training to refugee children and young adults, including general education, vocational and teacher training and university scholarships.

UNRWA began work in May 1950; its current mandate expires on 30 June 1965.

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Further information may be obtained from  
UNRWA Liaison Office  
United Nations  
New York

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In the United States, the United States Committee for Refugees and American Middle East Rehabilitation, Inc., are organizations cooperating with UNRWA

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