

PALESTINE REFUGEES TODAY

UNRWA Newsletter No. 66 January February March 1971





**UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY
FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST**

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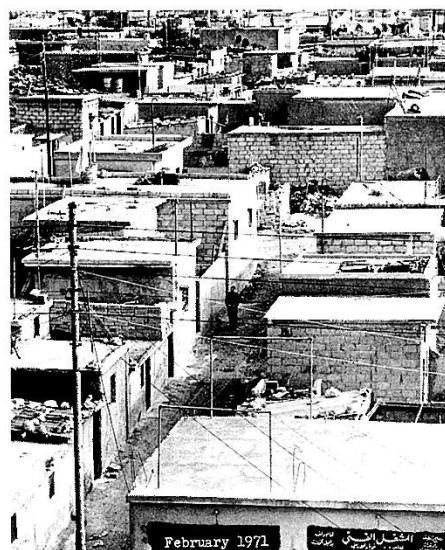
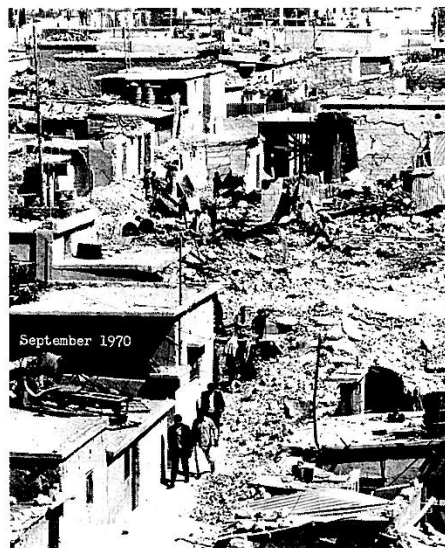
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Above: a street on the outskirts of Wahdat refugee community, Amman, is indicative of the area's recovery from destructive fighting between Jordan Government troops and Palestine fedayeen.

COVER PICTURE:

Teaching five-year-olds at an UNRWA/Quaker pre-school play centre in Rafah, the Gaza Strip.

Commentary

4 January - Payment was received from the Government of Norway of its 1971 contribution of \$307,692. This was the ninth successive year in which Norway has increased its aid to UNRWA. A Norwegian representative said that the Norwegian Government knew "from past experience that money contributed to UNRWA was carefully husbanded and put to the best possible use."

10 January - Ambassador Mansour Khalid, Special Consultant to the Director-General of Unesco, left Beirut at the beginning of a lengthy tour to discuss with nearly 30 governments the appeal by Unesco Director-General René Maheu for funds to maintain and improve the UNRWA/Unesco education programme.

During January and February, Dr. Khalid visited Kuwait, the Gulf States, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Italy, Spain, the Federal Republic of Germany, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

The response to Ambassador Khalid's mission was begun by Kuwait which pledged an additional \$180,000 in 1971 and 1972, thus increasing its contribution for these years from \$220,000 to \$400,000. Other formal pledges have come from Bahrain (\$10,000), Dubai (\$20,000), Qatar (\$20,000), Abu Dhabi (\$100,000) and Libya (\$250,000). Indications of financial support have come as well from a number of other governments.

15 January - UNRWA Commissioner-General Laurence Michelmore returned to Beirut after presenting his Annual Report to the General Assembly and having consultations with the Working Group for the Financing of UNRWA, established during the last days of the Assembly session.

February - By mid-February UNRWA's immediate cash crisis was averted by early payment on government pledges, in particular the contributions of the United States, Norway, France and the Federal Republic of Germany.

In addition to its "regular" contribution of \$546,488 for 1971, the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany has also announced that, subject to parliamentary approval, it will make available to UNRWA in 1971 a further amount of up to DM 10 million (\$2,732,240) from a special projects fund of DM 50 million. Since 1968 nearly \$6.5 million has been contributed to UNRWA from this fund, much of it for extra budgetary projects.

15 February - The Danish Board of Technical Cooperation with Developing Countries approved a grant of \$658,000 for 1971/72 to UNRWA's educational and training programmes, an increase of \$100,000 over its contribution of last year. The pledge is in addition to the Danish Government's regular contribution of \$120,000.

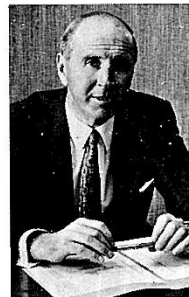
18 February - The French Government made an "exceptional" contribution of 4,435,000 French Francs (nearly \$800,000) to UNRWA for 1970. The contribution, which came in response to recent appeals for funds by the Secretary-General and the UNRWA Commissioner-General, is in addition to the French Government's regular cash contribution of \$121,622.

During 1970, the French Government also contributed 2,100 tons of flour, various services, and cash grants for teaching French, bringing the French Government's total contribution to UNRWA in 1970 to nearly \$1.4 million.

March - Ralph Frederik Owren took up part-time duties as



Ralph F. Owren



John W. Tanner

UNRWA Representative in Geneva. Mr. Owren, a Norwegian national, who has served with UNRWA since 1959, has been Director of UNRWA Affairs, Jordan, since October 1968. Prior to this, he was Chief of the Supply Division at Headquarters. He is succeeded by John W. Tanner, a British national. Mr. Tanner joined UNRWA in 1955, serving as Chief of the Technical Division, Headquarters. Recently he acted as the Commissioner-General's Chief de Cabinet.

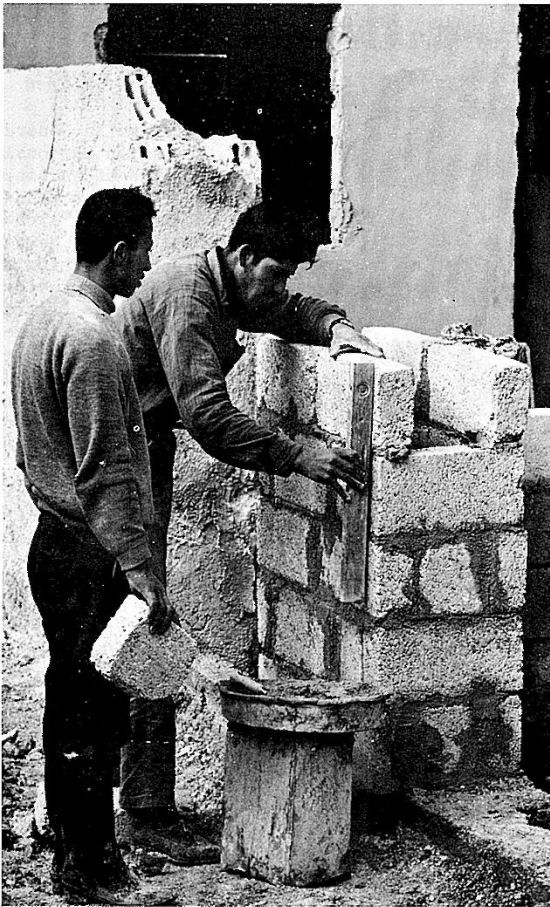
4 March - A special contribution of 200,000,000 Italian liras (\$321,285) for 1970 was received from the Government of Italy in response to an appeal by the Secretary-General for increased assistance to UNRWA.

14 March - Ambassador Nuri Eren, Turkey's Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations and Chairman of the United Nations Working Group for the Financing of UNRWA, arrived in Beirut for consultations with the Commissioner-General. Later in March he held discussions with United Nations Specialized Agencies in Rome and Geneva regarding the extent to which they could help relieve UNRWA's critical financial situation.

Reconstruction Nears Completion

in East Jordan

From the rubble of shattered masonry and twisted reinforcing rods, Palestine refugees in east Jordan have enacted a quiet drama of recovery following the September 1970 fighting between Government forces and Palestine guerillas. Badly damaged during the fighting were Wahdat and Jebel Hussein, the main refugee areas of Jordan's capital city Amman, which in 15



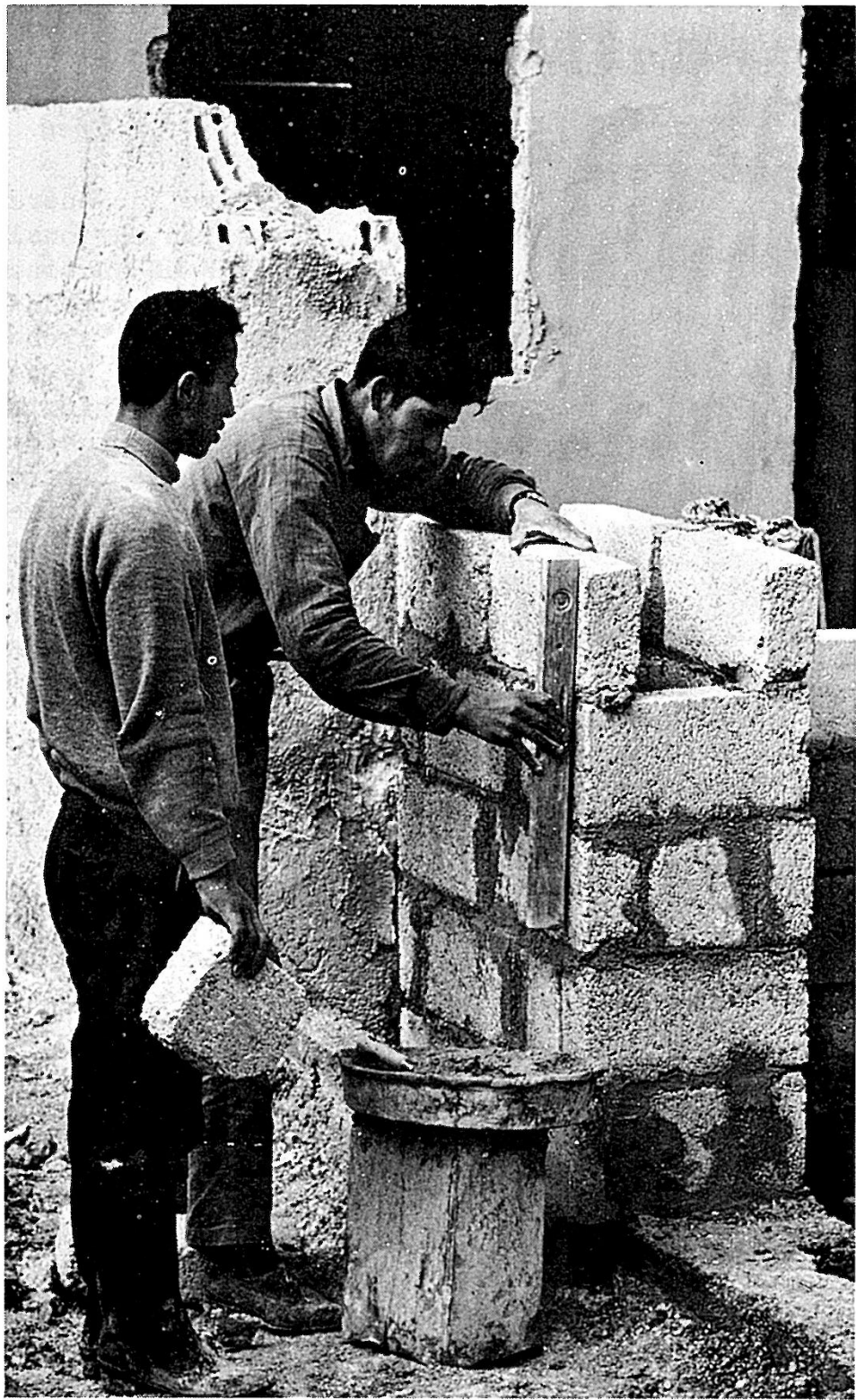
years have gradually merged into the growing city.

Assisted by the Jordan Government, several voluntary agencies and their own amazing capacity to endure and overcome hardship, the refugees have largely rebuilt their concrete-block shelters. In Wahdat the Lutheran World Federation set up machines for the manufacture of concrete blocks which were donated to needy families.

The Wahdat area, known also as New Amman Camp, sits under the thin February sunlight as a town resurrected. Five months ago 1,200 of the area's 6,650 UNRWA-built and privately built shelters were totally destroyed. Hundreds of others were seriously damaged. Some 6,250 families live in Wahdat and 3,000 of them lost everything through shellfire or looting. In the reconstructed shelters the scarcity of family possessions attests to this loss. The contents of an UNRWA "family emergency kit" (including a primus stove, a kerosene lamp and assorted cooking pots and utensils), used bedding donated by voluntary organizations, perhaps a few old or broken chairs and a damaged chest of drawers, are likely to constitute all the household furniture.

In some families a father, a cousin, a daughter is dead or missing. Scores were seriously wounded, other hundreds slightly hurt. According to UNRWA Services

By February, Wahdat's recovery was 80 percent complete.



Officer Yusef Dahoud, a higher death toll was avoided during the fighting only because many families fled and others took refuge in bomb shelters they had built under their houses. Mr. Dahoud's wife and seven children stayed for several days in such a shelter.

Dahoud, known as Abu Nabil ("the father of Nabil", his eldest son) to the over 40,000 residents of Wahdat, has been UNRWA's "man-on-the spot" since August 1962. He speaks ruefully of the fact that Wahdat was intended for 9,000 persons when it was constructed in 1955. The 100-square meter plot on which each refugee family shelter was built has since had to serve also for family members and friends attracted to the area by work opportunities in Amman and cheaper living in the refugee area. The original concrete block shelters with a 10-square meter floor area, constructed for each family, have been added to, so that while accommodation, sanitary facilities and health and educational services have been expanded to serve the increased population, Wahdat itself has not and the area is a warren of humanity.

In his bare new concrete block office (his old office as well as his home were completely destroyed last September) Abu Nabil still faces a constant flow of needy persons seeking welfare aid, but Wahdat's rebuilding is now 80 percent complete.

Damage in Jebel Hussein was not nearly so serious. Only 73 of 3,268 shelters were destroyed. However, nearly all the roofs have had to be replaced and, as at Wahdat, patched shell holes in buildings are evident everywhere. At Jebel Hussein the 10,000 squatters on the outskirts were the hardest hit. These 1967 displaced refugees from the West Bank receive UNRWA rations and services but live in makeshift tin huts they have constructed for themselves.

Faced already by a rapidly deteriorating financial situation which threatens even regular operations, UNRWA suffered over half a million dollars' damage during the east Jordan crisis.

The Jordan Government is in the process of providing compensation for refugee losses, amounting to \$385,868 for the three hardest hit areas: Wahdat, Jebel Hussein and Zerka, 20 kilometres east of Amman. Most of this amount, of which \$305,973 is for families in Wahdat, has already been paid.

While the exact total of damages to Wahdat's buildings, equipment, supplies and vehicles is still being assessed, repairs have been almost completed and double-shifting in the schools has made it possible to get the children out of tents in which many of them started the 1970-71 school year in Wahdat.

Reconstruction of schools has been partly financed by donations from NEED (\$50,000), and Radda Barnen, the Swedish Save the Children Federation (\$20,000). Without this generous and prompt support, reconstruction and repairs could not have been put in hand.

Still under repair are the Amman Training Centre and the Wadi Seer Vocational Training Centre, which jointly suffered over \$41,000 in damages. Elsewhere in Irbid, Joffeh, Madaba, Hneiken and the emergency camps of Jerash, Husson and Souf, repair of UNRWA installations and replacement of equipment has been necessary.

Cash contributions to enable UNRWA to meet the additional expenses of the emergency as well as to rebuild included \$13,348 from the Danish Government, \$192,000 from the United Kingdom Government, and \$24,000 from Oxfam.

Damage was generally light in the six emergency camps (providing shelter mainly for refugees who had lived in UNRWA camps in the West Bank and who were displaced as a result of the 1967 hostilities). However, even here refugees were adversely affected by UNRWA's 10-day forced suspension of operations and the nation-wide disturbances. In the north Jordan area of Irbid, hostilities continued even longer and repercussions have been more severe.

(continued on page 8)



Hafiz Abusindian rebuilt his destroyed home (right) by himself. For several weeks, before new walls were up, he and some of his children slept outside on the rubble.





THE ABUSINDIAN FAMILY REBUILDS

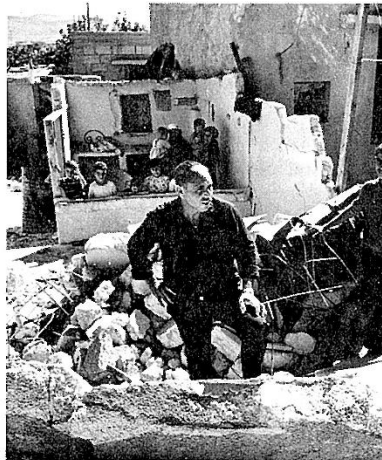
By early February the main rebuilding of the Abusindian home in Wahdat was completed and Mr. Abusindian was finishing work on the interior of one room. Scaffolding filled that room, but in another, his children crouched on the mat-covered cement floor near a kerosene burner where their mother made coffee.

The Abusindians' furniture consists of a kerosene space heater, a couple of chests of clothing, some stools, reed mats on the floor and bedding rolled against the wall. A few chairs are stacked in a corner. The family eats and sleeps in a 10 square meter space. On rainy days after school hours, Mrs. Abusindian admits, the children "drive me crazy". The Abusindian children have no toys and only a few tattered school books.

In early October when the fighting ended in Wahdat, only one room remained standing of the Abusindian family's three-room home. (Originally the house had been a single-room UNRWA shelter but careful saving through the years had allowed the family to add two rooms). Hafiz Muhammad Abusindian, 39, his wife Zakiyya, 35, and their 11 children spent 12 days in a bomb shelter with several other family members and neighbours before emerging into the rubble of their home.

Undaunted, Mr. Abusindian set to work to rebuild. At the taxi company in

Amman where he has been a driver since 1953, Mr. Abusindian is hired to drive every other day for a salary of 22 dinars monthly (\$62.80). Since October, Mr. Abusindian's days off have been spent rebuilding. As his four sons are too small to be of much help to him, he did all the rebuilding himself, financed by a grant of 125 dinars from the Jordan Government.



Winter was coming, but that was not the only cause of urgency. Mrs. Abusindian gave birth to her 12th child three weeks after the fighting ended and returned from the overcrowded UNRWA clinic the next day to her family. Some of the children were still sleeping outside on the rubble.

In the third room of the Abusindian house an old man of 90, Mr. Abusindian's father, listens as a loudly-tuned radio plays Arabic music. His wife, age 75, sits beside him on the bed pallet on the floor. Proudly, the Abusindians recount that Grandfather had been both a farmer near Ramleh in British Mandate Palestine and, as a young man under the Ottoman Empire, a bear wrestler.

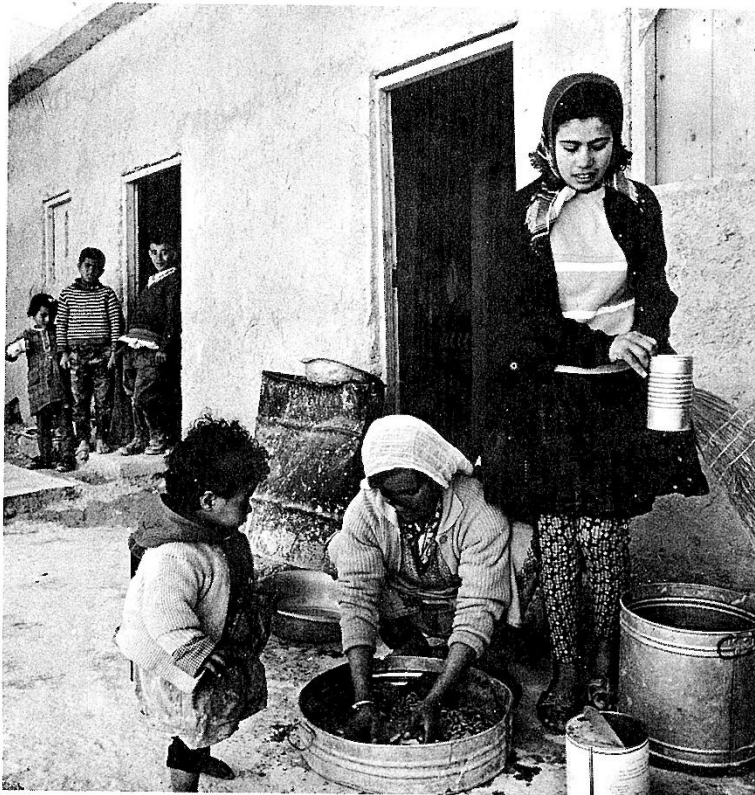
Hafiz and Zakiyya were married in 1950, two years after their families fled from Palestine. All their children, the oldest a girl of 19 who is now married, were born as refugees. The family places its hope in the children.

"I want my children to be on their own, well-educated and not depending on others for their welfare", Mrs. Abusindian says.



While Jordan's economy is recovering from the upheaval and destruction of September, and jobs for daily construction labourers are more readily available, this building activity and subsequent wage opportunity for the refugees is expected to last only through the summer. An uncertain economic future and the death or disability of some wage earners are causes of increased need for assistance among many refugee families in east Jordan.

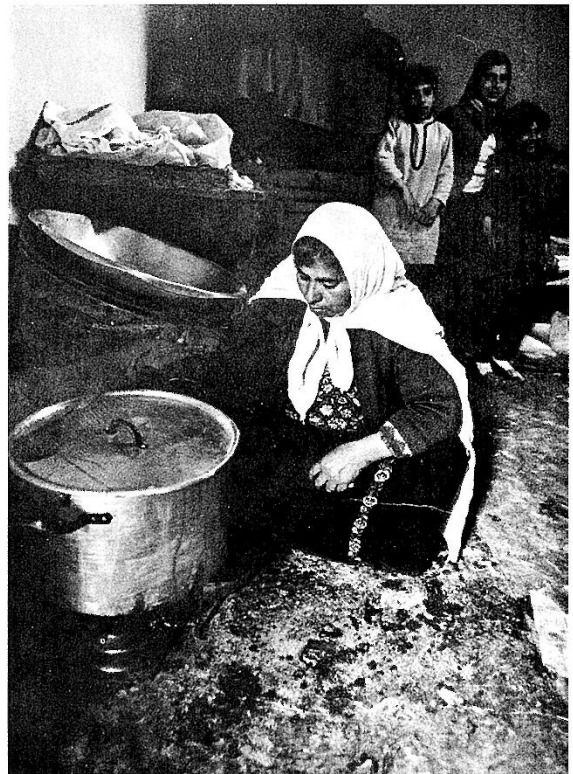
Fathi Said Shehadeh of Wahdat lost not only his house and most of his family's belongings, but his brother and his left arm as well. In mid-January his fifth daughter was born in the rebuilt shelter. Mr. Shehadeh is not sure when he will be able to return to his job in a hospital laundry in Amman as his shattered left leg is still in a cast.



The four-room shelter of Muhammad and Zenab Hajjar was completely destroyed. The Hajjars, their six children and Mr. Hajjar's mother now live in the three rooms which have been reconstructed. The family lost nearly all its personal possessions but Mr. Hajjar still has his job as a sanitation worker for the Amman municipality.



Rada and Nadia Yousef lost their six-year-old son, one of two sons and six daughters, during the fighting although the family spent most of its time in a bomb shelter Mr. Yousef had constructed with the help of his neighbours. Mr. and Mrs. Yousef, refugees from Haifa in 1948, live in Jebel Hussein refugee community where damage was not as extensive as it was in Wahdat. However, while the Yousef home was only damaged and some household possessions destroyed, their small grocery store was totally destroyed. Mr. Yousef has insufficient capital to begin the store again. His large family continues to live in one room plus a small kitchen.



Jamila Ali's husband, who worked as an usher in a cinema, was killed when a section of their shelter collapsed on him during the shelling of Wahdat. She is left with six children and her old mother-in-law.

The Refugees and UNRWA , Back in the Jordan Valley

This winter, three years after fighting emptied the historic east Jordan Valley and left it an abandoned, desolate no-man's land, the Jordanian farmers and Palestine refugees who used to live there are going back. In March the Jordan Government estimated that some 55% of the pre-1967 population of 350,000 had already returned to the Valley and 85% of the arable land was under cultivation again. UNRWA will follow, if finances permit.

After 1968 the Jordanian-held east bank of the Jordan River Valley became one of the saddest, most harrowed lines of the Arab/Israeli confrontation. The long and narrow Valley (the "Ghor") with the River Jordan entrenched at the bottom had attracted a growing population, including many Palestine refugees, as development projects exploited its agricultural potential. In the wake of the 1967 hostilities, the eastern side of the Valley had been a first haven for tens of thousands of displaced persons from the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Later it was a departure point for the small fraction of West Bankers who were able to cross back under Red Cross auspices in August 1967.

Bisected by the river, the Jordan Valley runs from the southern tip of the Sea of Galilee down to the Dead Sea. In the south, near the Amman/Jerusalem road, stand the ruins of Karameh, the refugee town whose main street, blasted in a raid in March 1968, has become a jagged icon of recent Arab history. Northward the Valley reaches the junction of the Jordan and Yarmouk Rivers, where the vital East Ghor Canal has been punctured by shells and bombs, drying the flow of

irrigation water.

Once the pride of Jordan's agriculture, the Valley became a battle-ground in the aftermath of the 1967 war. By 1968, repeated military actions had left the Valley desolate along its whole length. The rich fields lay fallow and the orange groves, untended and parched were dying.

Now people are returning. Tents are pitched in the shade of ruined dwellings. On the rocky hills overlooking the Valley, families are packing their few belongings, and themselves, into trucks and starting the hairpin descent through the green wadis to the fertile Valley floor. In the fields, men, women and children work side-by-side tilling the wheat, oranges, tomatoes, onions, beans, bananas and flowers which are ripening there. Classes have reopened in Government schools. The Valley is returning to life, and plans for further development are being revived.

The development of the Jordan Valley is an idea which has recurred in many Middle East peace plans. In its early days, UNRWA was one of the agencies involved in attempts to develop the potential of the sheltered Valley and feeder rivers. It was hoped that many refugees could become at least partially self-supporting there.

In 1949, the Clapp Mission surveyed economic and social conditions in the Middle East for the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine and described the Jordan Valley as by far the greatest land asset in Jordan for development under irrigation farming. The report mentioned that the Palestine Government had been formulating plans "for some years" for

using the combined waters of the Jordan and Yarmouk Rivers for this purpose. The Johnston plan in 1955 provided the basis for a tacit solution to the thorny question of how the rivers' waters were to be shared.

The master plan was finished in 1956: UNRWA participated in this venture because at that time the Agency expected to receive funds in big enough amounts to permit several large scale "works" projects.

Early in their investigations, the experts had decided that increased agricultural

1/ The Agency was at one time in the early 1950's the major foreign "investor" in Jordan, with programmes directed as much towards the economic development of the country as towards direct assistance to the refugees.

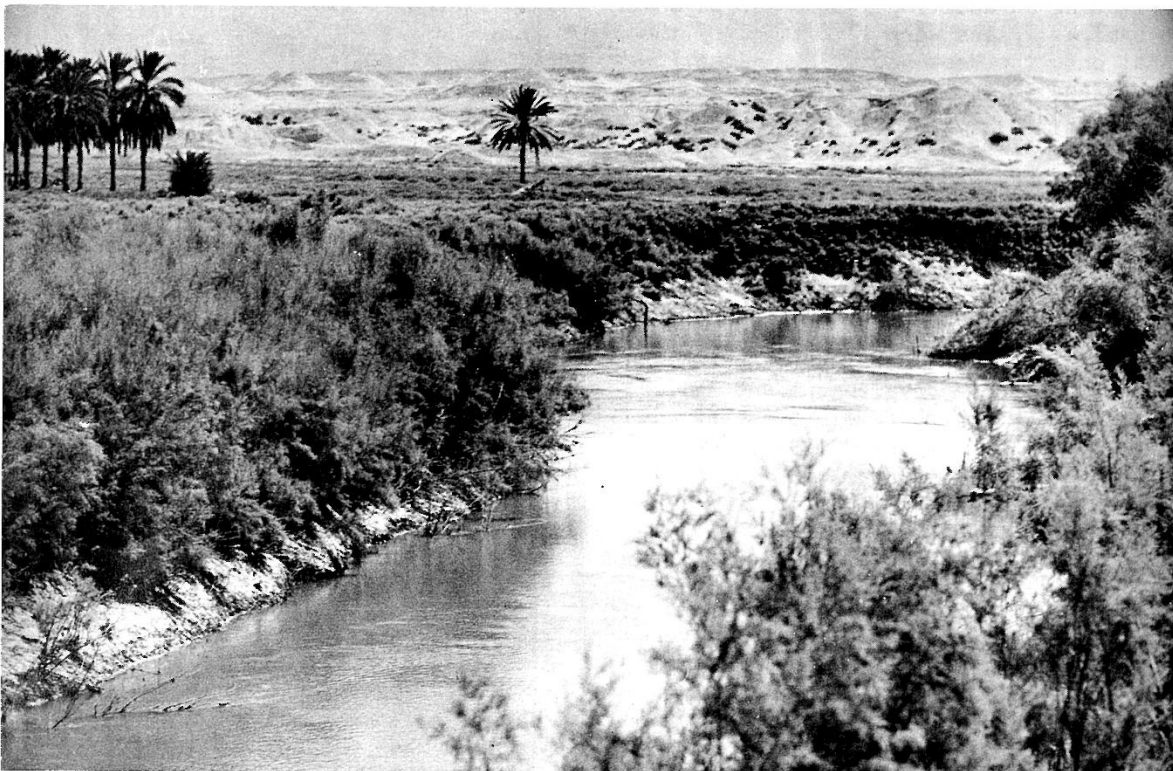
production was the best development goal for the Valley, and in 1958 construction began of the East Ghor Canal - a system of dams and canals that today irrigate more than 30,000 acres of land.

The flow of water downstream all year long was stabilised. A sizable additional flow was carried through the slightly raised main canal that curves gently down the length of the Valley, dividing and watering the land between the river and the eastern hills.

The scheme was generously supported by U.S. Aid. It was, in fact, the largest single U.S. contribution to the Jordanian development effort. The whole project was nearly completed by 1956, including auxiliary roads, produce processing plants, agricultural research stations and public health facilities.

This project was part of the overall

"Bisected by the river, the Jordan Valley runs from the southern tip of the Sea of Galilee down to the Dead Sea."



pattern of development in Jordan, which with continued rapidly expanding tourism to the Holy Places, promised full economic independence for Jordan by the early seventies.

U.S. Aid estimated that income in the Valley would reach \$20 million a year by 1970 - more than 16 times higher than in pre-project days. In the Jordan Valley, which is below sea-level and enjoys mild winter months and hot, dry summers, fruits and vegetables ripen six to eight weeks earlier than elsewhere in the area and so command high prices abroad. A natural green-house which has heat and water in winter, the Valley can produce cheaply off-season for sales as far away as Europe.

Under the impact of the programme, land-holding patterns were modernised, and UNRWA spent the bulk of \$3 million in grants in the area affected by the \$20 million canal, to enable refugees to acquire land and become self-supporting. The Jordan Government completed an eight-kilometre extension of the main canal, irrigating an additional 5,000 acres south to Damiya. Plans were laid to carry the canal onto the West Bank in a gigantic siphon, and on the East Bank to extend it further south, irrigating another 30,000 acres and making this desert bloom solidly down to Karameh, where a high-water-table makes artesian wells possible. Karameh itself was perhaps the outstanding refugee success story. Founded by refugees in 1948, it grew into a thriving town.

June 1967, the West Bank was occupied and lost to Jordanian development and agriculture. The east bank remained unharmed, the canal untouched. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians (refugees and other displaced persons) poured across the Allenby Bridge to the east bank. Disappointed in their hope of going back, as winter came on they moved down from the exposed hills to the sheltered Valley floor and were accommodated in hastily-erected emergency camps strung along the Valley: Karameh extension, Damiya, Wahadneh, Shuneh, Madi, Ghor Nimrin.

There was relatively little disruption of

agricultural production in the East Ghor at first. The cease-fire violations by one side or the other began in earnest in November; Karameh, Shuneh and Ghor Nimrin camps were shelled. By mid-February 1968 the population felt they had suffered enough and began a mass exodus from the Valley into the bleak hills.

With constant raids, shelling and sniping all along the Jordan River, the Jordanian farmers, Palestine refugees from 1948 and displaced Palestinians from Gaza and the West Bank who had moved into the Valley in 1967 decided to stay in relative safety in the rocky ridges to the east which separate the Valley from Amman. UNRWA moved its installations with the refugees, establishing six new emergency camps in higher lands away from the physical danger of the Jordan Valley. For many, it was their fourth move within a year. The new emergency camps were situated on barren hillsides or plains offering no amenity or job opportunities and little natural protection from heat and dust storms in summer and cold, rain, mud, wind and snow storms in the winter months.

Fall planting time in 1968 brought large numbers of farmers back down to the Valley but renewed military activities drove them off and damaged the canal. That summer, sections of the canal were demolished and, for weeks at a time, repairs were prevented, destroying crops and endangering the survival of the citrus and banana groves, which represent several years' investment.

The eastern Valley, which had become an even more precious Jordanian farming asset after the loss of the West Bank, was deteriorating to desert. A few farmers managed to come to their fields from the highland villages and refugee camps in shuttle taxis which left the hill villages at dawn and returned at dusk. But a few hours' hasty work in the shadow of the hills was not enough for them to tend the land properly. And they only farmed the land up to the canal. Between there and the river, no one dared venture.

The canal was cut again in January 1970 and not repaired. During that summer, as

people who used to live and work there became increasingly desperate elsewhere, the Valley lay scorched and empty.

No one knows who came back first. Perhaps it was a bedouin family, sensing a lessened danger, who rode in on camels to pitch their black tents and graze their flocks.

Perhaps it was a Jordanian farmer determined to go back to his land before it died and returned to desert.

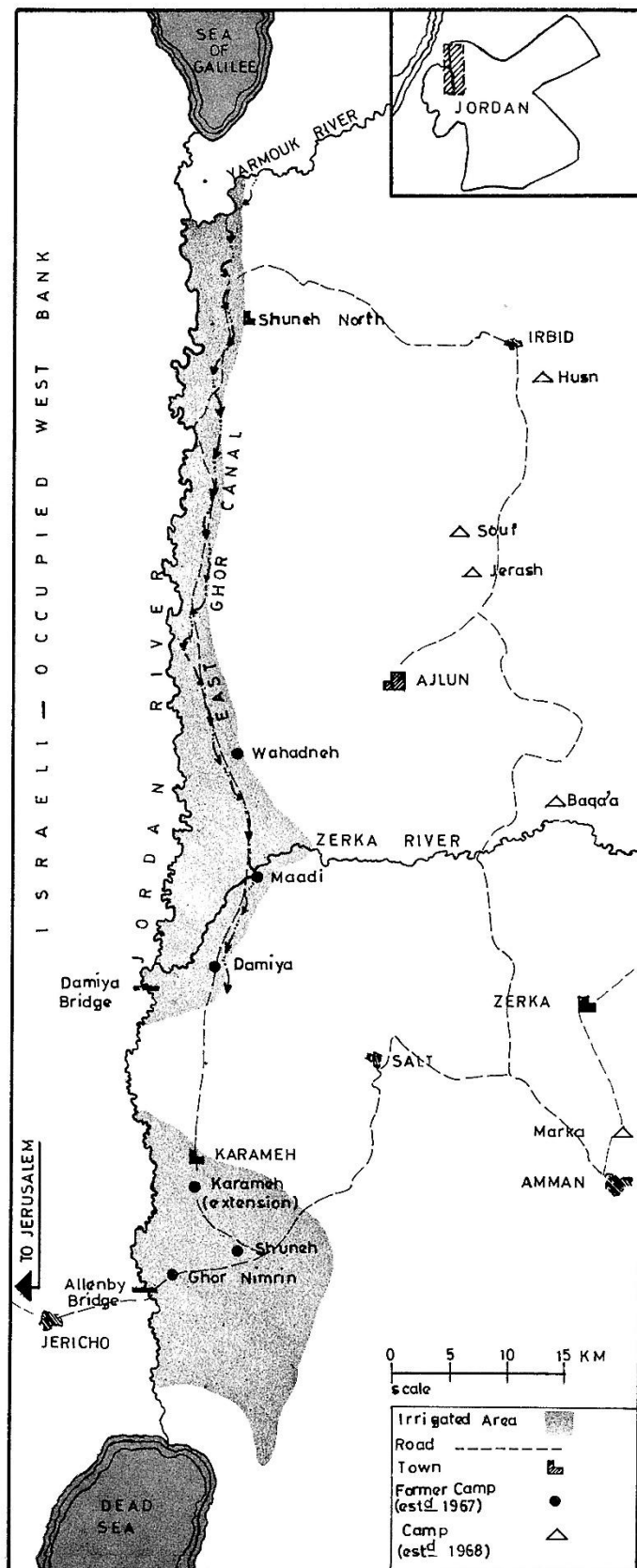
Perhaps it was a Palestine refugee who detested his cramped and miserable existence in a city and offered to go back and work someone else's land.

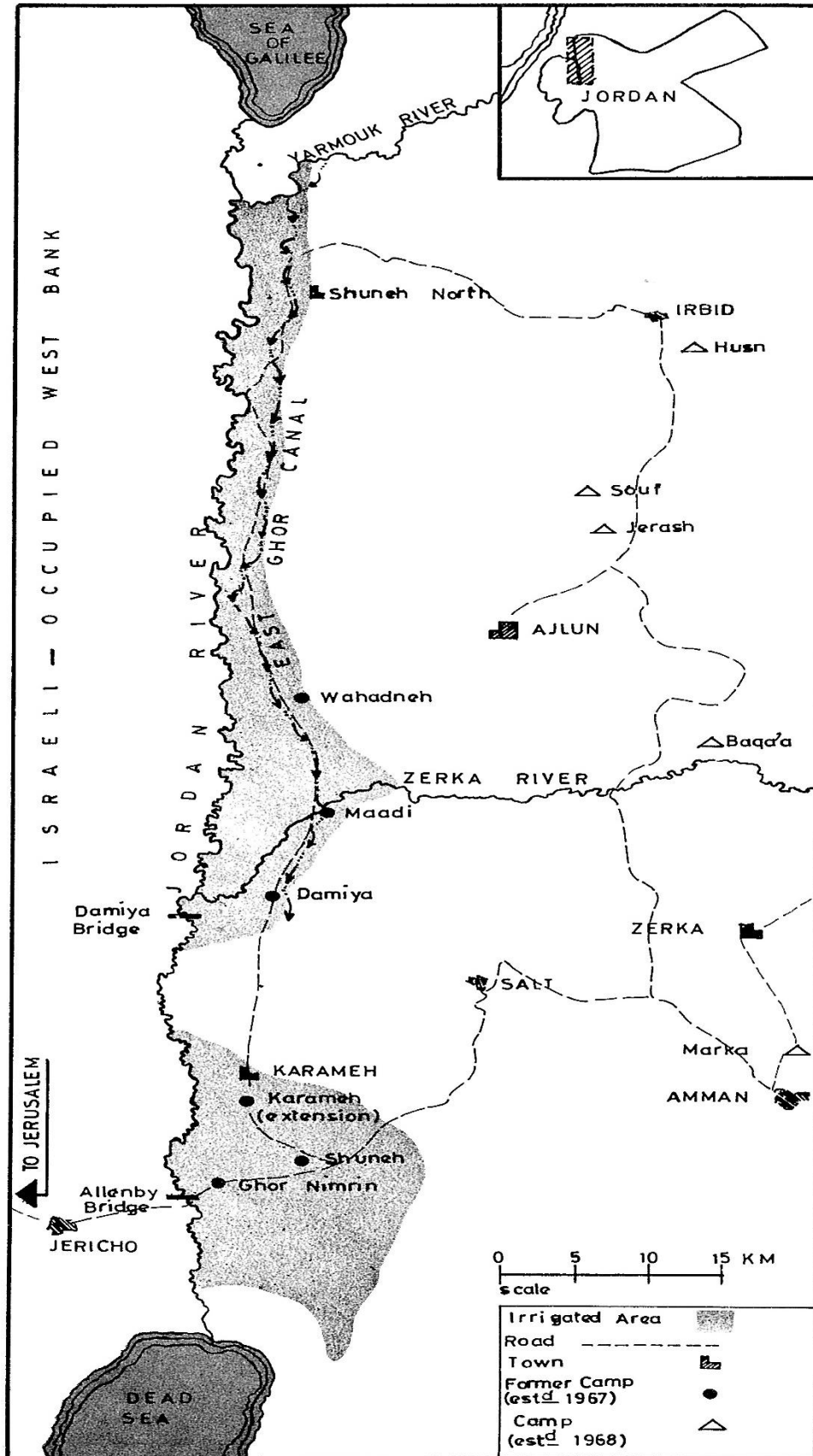
However it started, the move was unmistakable by November and, with Government encouragement, the trend has gained momentum.

Two factors are cited by people analysing their decision to return, both related to last September's clash in east Jordan between the army and the Palestinian fedayeen: a belief that security had improved in the Valley as a result of political changes and sharpened hardship as a result of economic disruption which made it increasingly unthinkable for people to go on any longer where they were.

By the time schools reopened in Jordan in November, it was clear that classes would be needed in the Valley, where there had been no pupils for nearly three years. Government schools were therefore reactivated, and other community services put in hand.

In December 1970 UNRWA made its first survey to determine the feasibility of returning services to the refugees in the Valley. The problem is mainly financial. Teachers can be spared for UNRWA schools in the Ghor only if an equivalent number of class formations elsewhere in the refugee communities can be done without. The position will be closely watched.





IN DESPERATION, DISPLACED REFUGEES RETURNING

Ahmad Ahmad Masha'al, 60, a refugee from Palestine in 1948, worked as a labourer in the Jordan Valley for eight years. He stopped receiving UNRWA rations in 1956 when he was given a small cash grant to buy a few sheep.

The sheep grazed the lower slopes of the Valley. The older Masha'al children worked as farm labourers in the rich bottom-land and the younger children went to school - government classes as there were not enough refugees in the vicinity to justify putting up an UNRWA building. Izmaliah, their riverside village in the green fields, benefited from the general prosperity in the Valley, particularly as water began flowing through the East Ghor Canal. Ahmad Masha'al's flock grew to 130 head.

In June 1967 the fighting halted short at the river on the Jordan's west bank - but not for long. From November onwards violence increased all along the Valley. With the river the frontline, claybuilt Izmaliah, only a stone's throw from the east bank, became a dangerous place. The inhabitants had to stay away from home, even sleeping rough, for longer and longer periods, and were forced to neglect their farms. The Masha'al family was no exception, and their flock was decimated by infection; the last of them died before the final mass exodus of people from the Jordanian side of the Valley in the spring of 1968.

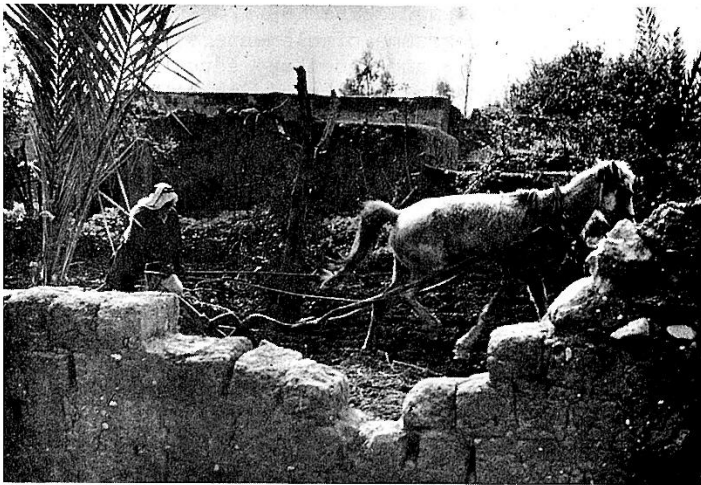
Izmaliah had nothing for the Masha'als. The brown barren hills to the east at least offered safety, and the family moved into a Jordanian village in the highlands where they finished that winter, scraped through another and then another, until this fall they found themselves facing a fourth winter. Without rations or steady work, the Masha'als decided to go back.

"We could not go on", Ahmad Masha'al explained in the Valley. "When the rains started, I had to come down". He rents a couple of acres, against half of any profit; one son and daughter have joined him. Since their old house was destroyed, the rest of the family must wait until some sort of dwelling can be fixed up by patching up a friend's house with mud bricks.

It is a familiar story here. Ahmad Masha'al speaks for many of them: "We were starving. But last year we couldn't walk on the road here, it was so dangerous all the time. So far it has been calm. It's still hard, not like before, but at least we can work again."



Also in December, the Lutheran World Federation decided to use the ruined village of Kraymeh as a pilot "return" project. The 100 men from Huson camp who attended a first meeting asked for three facilities before they would bring their families back to live in the Ghor: a school, health services and a post office. Shortly after, with an investment of \$30,000, the LWF put carpenters to work making doors and windows for the 450 homes in Kraymeh that must be rebuilt.



The LWF has also donated \$600 for half of the cost of repairing the UNRWA school at Kraymeh, the only UNRWA-built school in the Valley which was not severely damaged. Kraymeh school is now partly in service.

In early 1971 the Jordan Government issued an appeal to voluntary agencies to help restore life to the Ghor. The Government is studying plans for community development and also considering proposals for setting up rehabilitation centres to help refugees escape from urban slums and equip themselves for farm jobs in the Valley. As a further step in the direction of recovery, the Government announced that it will give financial assistance to people who wish to rebuild in the Jordan Valley. Farmers have planted crops right up to the edge of the river.



Recently in a village just north of Karameh, a traditional Palestinian wedding moved along the road. A procession of wedding dancers, perfumed with rose, orange and jasmin water, made its way to the house of the bride. It is a symbol of what is happening up and down the Jordan Valley.

"Headstart" Provided by Pre-School Playcentres in the Gaza Strip

In the crowded, economically depressed Gaza Strip, over 1,000 five-year-old refugee children are getting an educational "headstart". Under an old programme which has taken on new life, 12 play centres - at least one in each of the eight main refugee communities - teach children the excitement of learning. In a former UNRWA clinic, an old embroidery centre, a former carpentry workshop, even an old Egyptian police stable, infant leaders - most of them trained by UNRWA - provide the direction toward the type of curiosity which will in future make the children dissatisfied with simple rote learning.

Pre-school play centres, which are exerting a positive influence on morale as well as education, are operated in the Gaza Strip by the American Friends Service Committee - the Quakers - one of the first organizations to begin work in the Gaza Strip after the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict.

Under a recent two-year agreement with UNRWA, the Quakers are financing the expansion and improvement of the centres as well as a large part of the operational expenses. UNRWA is continuing to solicit funds for operation of the centres as it did in the past, but the Quakers have agreed to make up all deficits up to \$17,848. Another contributor to the programme is the Unitarian Service Committee of Canada, which supplied nearly \$1,000 toward operating costs in 1970.

Children who attend pre-school centres are noticeably more advanced than their fellows when they enter elementary school. An additional advantage of the centres is that children who attend can be given regular medical checks and fed a hot meal every day.

UNRWA began pre-school play centres in the Gaza Strip in 1952 by simply gathering children in tents where, often crowded shoulder to shoulder, they sat cross-legged on straw mats and learned short recitations.

In its early years the programme did not greatly expand. The UNRWA/Unesco educational programme of elementary and, later, preparatory and secondary education, followed by vocational training or university scholarships for a selected few, grew dramatically. But UNRWA could not afford to administer another programme which, if operated by usual pre-school standards, should include all five-year-olds and cost \$1 to 1½ million a year. Thus pre-school education limped along with pencils, toys and cash donations collected from interested individuals and voluntary agencies. Between 1957 and 1967 United Nations Emergency Force troops stationed in the Gaza Strip took a particular interest in the welfare of the young children and contributed generously to the programme.

Several changes have taken place since the Quakers took over administrative control of the play centre programme in Gaza from UNRWA on 1 March 1970. Four new centres have opened, five centres have begun to operate double shifts, the programme has become more oriented to the needs of the child, and a larger number of qualified teachers have been hired as a result of a substantial increase in salaries (although they are still low in comparison to those received by elementary teachers).

Under the direction of Miss Priscilla Crossfield, who worked with the Quakers in Jordan before coming to the Gaza Strip, expansion will continue. At present only

1,470 of an estimated 10,432 five-year-olds in registered refugee families of the Gaza Strip can be accommodated in the 12 centres.

Expansion of the pre-school programme has been made possible through use of graduates of UNRWA's Ramallah Women's Training Centre. Before 1967, refugee girls from Lebanon, Syria and Jordan as well as those from the Gaza Strip trained at Ramallah in the West Bank. Today, because for all practical purposes the trainees can only be drawn from the Israeli-occupied territories, half of the 660 girls enrolled in Ramallah's two-year vocational and teacher training courses are from Gaza. Around 20 girls a year - about half from the Gaza Strip - graduate as infant leaders.

"We would die without work", remarked a 1969 business graduate who spent one year unemployed before being hired as a pre-school teacher. While formerly many refugee families were supported wholly or in part by trained young people who worked abroad and sent their wages home, since 1967 Gaza refugees have found it



Above - An UNRWA trained infant leader registers children at a pre-school play centre in Rafah, the Gaza Strip.

Right - The pre-school teachers use shells, scraps of material, cardboard boxes and other seemingly useless items in handicrafts which encourage a child's creativity. The play centres are decorated with the results.





Above - An UNRWA trained infant leader registers children at a pre-school play centre in Rafah, the Gaza Strip.



Right - The pre-school teachers use shells, scraps of material, cardboard boxes and other seemingly useless items in handicrafts which encourage a child's creativity. The play centres are decorated with the results.

SAFA ABU SAMAK

, a 1970 Infant Leader graduate of the UNRWA Women's Training Centre at Ramallah and now head teacher at one of the two pre-school play centres in the refugee community of Nuseiret in the Gaza Strip, is especially competent as a teacher and sympathetic toward children with any type of handicap: she has a younger brother born with no fingers.

Safa lives in the nearby Deir el Balah community in a four-room concrete shelter with the other nine members of her family. She is 20 and the oldest child. Unlike many of the other teachers who are the sole persons employed in families of up to 12 persons, Safa has a father who operates a small grocery.

At her play centre, which is a former clinic building, Safa has turned the examining rooms into a small library of home-made picture books and a playroom with a "shop" and a "home". A bowling set made from empty cleanser cartons, bean bags, a "TV" made from a cardboard box, a live turtle, two frogs and stuffed animals she made herself almost complete the equipment.

The children, dressed in blue pinafores, sit at small tables (before 1970 only large tables and chairs were available, sometimes with more than one child to a chair). Each child has a mug and a small towel and a special hook to hang them on. Safa teaches the children to keep their fingernails clean, to wash their hands and to comb their hair.

As a teacher, Safa tries through handicraft, stories and simple lessons in arithmetic and reading to make her small students realize that learning can be fun. Her desire is to give creative direction to the boundless enthusiasm and energy these five-year-olds display.

The Nuseiret "B" centre operates on a double shift - 7:30 - 10:30 and 11 - 2. Between shifts the children eat lunch at an UNRWA supplementary feeding centre across the dirt road from their small school.



Born a refugee, Safa has lived all her life in the Gaza Strip. After training by UNRWA, she now has a creative role as a pre-school teacher.



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difficult to seek positions in other Arab countries, thus increasing unemployment in the Strip.

However, 19 girls - all but one of the 1969 and 1970 Gaza graduates of the Infant Leader Course - now serve as infant leaders. Five other Ramallah graduates (business education and dressmaking courses) have also been hired by the Quakers. The pre-school programme has a teaching staff of 43, reducing the pre-1970 ratio of teachers to children from the incredible figure of one teacher for 70 to 100 boys and girls to approximately 1:30.

While an attempt is made to allow the girls to teach in their own refugee communities, Miss Crossfield has regrouped teachers so that all but one centre now has an infant leader graduate in it. Non-infant leader graduates, including the non-Ramallah teachers, were prepared for their jobs during a one-week "crash" course in pre-school education at the Ramallah centre in July 1970. A 10-day session held in Gaza in August provided further guidance in child psychology, art and practical education methods.

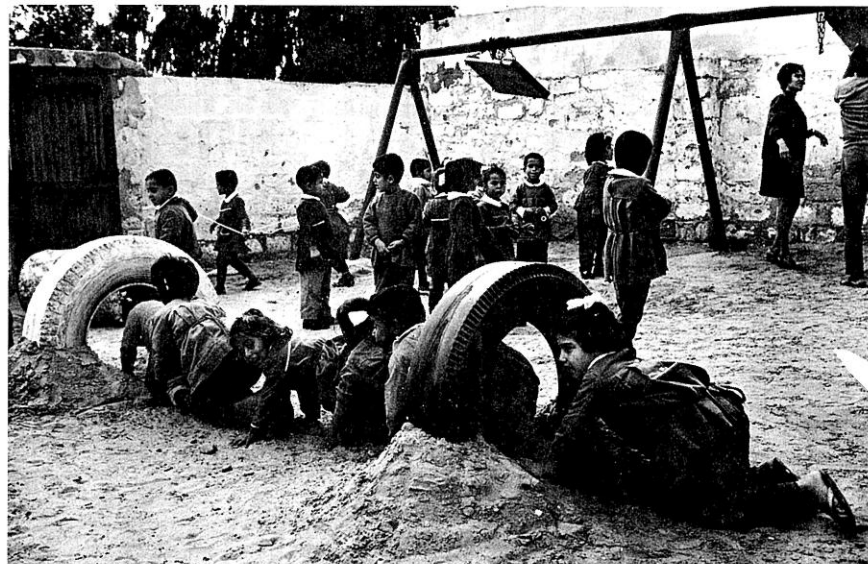
At the centre, instruction in the alphabet and numbers alternates with singing,

stories, free and directed play periods and handwork. There is emphasis on harvest, planting, the changing seasons, for "we were a farming people".

Lack of spontaneous creative expression among refugee children has sometimes come as a result of their harsh environment. However, a little sympathetic encouragement and creative, inexpensive play equipment are all they need. Many of the staff were astonished when Miss Crossfield brought old tires, oil drums with both ends cut out, wheels from old treadle sewing machines, heavy iron pipe elbows and finished boards to the playgrounds. But the children knew exactly what to do with them.

"We are preparing them for life", Mrs. In'am Mufti, Principal of the Ramallah centre, remarks of the trainees there. In Gaza at the Quaker pre-school play centres, Ramallah graduates, and the other teachers who are learning from their example, are in their turn preparing small children for life. It is a satisfying daily task to create an atmosphere of peace and joy for these children in the Strip, in blessed contrast with the acts of violence, curfews and arrests which afflict their parents.

*Rafah play centre:
children need very
little to stimulate
creativity - only
the chance to begin
developing their
potential.*



Shelters Replace Tents

in Syrian Emergency Camps

After nearly four years under canvas, Palestine refugees displaced from the Ku-neitra area in 1967 to emergency camps in Syria are getting their first shelters. As construction started in Sbeineh camp outside Damascus in late February the first 40 families who struck their tents to make room for the building immediately pitched them beside the site to watch over the work until they can take possession. 375 families will be rehoused in Sbeineh at a cost of \$78,000.

Funds for the \$422,000 shelter building programme in Syria have come from the Anglican Community (\$58,000), the Canadian Save the Children Fund (\$5,000), Rad-da Barnen (\$50,000) and Mr. and Mrs. M.M. W. Aitkin of Cambridge, England, who gave

themselves three shelters for refugees as a silver wedding anniversary present (\$614). The next target for the shelter building programme is the deteriorating tents in the large Dera'a camp complex. In this forbidding southwest corner of Syria the refugees face increasingly acute hardship as tents and tempers fray.

The low cost of the shelters for Syria - \$209 for a concrete-block shelter with a pre-cast reinforced cement roof covering 16-square-meters' floor space - is made possible by two factors. One is the use of local materials and local workmen (two of the engineers on the project are Palestine refugees trained at the UNRWA/Unesco Vocational Training Centre in Damascus and many labourers are refugees from Sbeineh



High winds, extreme temperature changes and heavy rain-falls make living under canvas precarious. After three and a half years, nearly all the tents are in advanced disrepair.



Low concrete walls and floors, constructed to "winterize" the tents, now provide a base for construction of concrete block shelters.



camp itself). The other is the decision by the Agency and the Syria Government's Palestine Arab Refugee Institute to use the cement floors and low skirting walls which "winterized" the tents as the foundations of the new shelters, the largest single family units ever built by the Agency.

UNRWA has never before undertaken construction of solid refugee shelters in Syria. For the 1948 refugees, the Agency simply provided materials; the actual work was done by the refugees themselves. However, for the refugees displaced in 1967 temporary housing was needed but the topography in Dera'a and other areas poses difficult engineering problems, which have even taxed the Agency's Technical Division to solve.

By 1971 replacement of tents had become imperative. Despite intensive care including water and fire proofing, tents and tent covers were disintegrating. Some 640 tents were classified as ruined by December 1970 and the refugees were desperate. But UNRWA, already in the throes of an acute financial crisis was unable to find the money to invest in a building programme.

By this winter UNRWA officials in Syria estimated that 1,800 of the 2,000 tents in the emergency camps in Syria were in jeopardy. Now that construction has begun, it is hoped further funds will be

forthcoming to enable the project to be completed before another winter.

Although the shelters have improved life for the refugees in many ways, conditions in the emergency camps are still very harsh. In Sbeineh camp, for instance, there are still only 80 latrines and no private toilet facilities can be permitted in so congested an area. The camp's 2,000 inhabitants share their 16 faucets with the adjacent "old" camp for 1948 refugees.

Fortunately the 70-metre deep well drilled by UNRWA brings a steady flow of water from beneath the Damascus oasis. The Syrian Government has put electricity along the camp's main roads, and the authorities try to ease the refugees' plight in other ways by seeking employment for them in national enterprises.

Work as porters and farm labourers - at a wage of five Syrian pounds (less than \$1.50) per day - has enabled a few people in the emergency camps to purchase materials and hire labour and gradually erect mud-brick or concrete-block huts on their tent sites.

But these determined attempts on the part of the refugees to provide for themselves cannot alone meet the vast demand for renewal which now confronts all the emergency camps in Syria.

Facing El Tor



UNRWA health division personnel vaccinate now against a possible cholera outbreak this summer.

The ancient scourge, cholera, arrived once again in the Middle East in the summer of 1970. Confirmation on 11 August of the presence of cholera eltor cases within the area of UNRWA operations sent the UNRWA Health Department into quick action. Nonetheless, on 18 August a child in Ein El Hilweh refugee community in Lebanon fell ill with cholera.

Over 617,000 immunizations, countless man-hours and stringent precautionary measures later, the last case of cholera among the refugees was reported on 31 December in the Gaza Strip. The outbreak had been kept down to only 177 cases with seven deaths among the 1.4 million Palestine refugees in Lebanon, Syria, east Jordan, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The crowded, often unsanitary living conditions of the refugee communities make their inhabitants particularly vulnerable to gastro-intestinal infections such as cholera. Vigilance has prevented major epidemics among the refugees over the past 22 years, but the appearance of cholera symptoms - violent vomiting and diarrhoea - was a potential nightmare.

THE EL TOR PANDEMIC

UNRWA - and the Middle East in general - has braced itself for several summers for an outbreak of El Tor, a cholera strain very similar to the classical variety of the disease but considerably less violent. Since 1961 a cholera "pandemic" has been steadily marching westward from Indonesia. The disease reached Iran in 1964 and Iraq in 1966, and there it held until the summer of 1970. Then - despite strict precautions by governments and help and advice from the World Health Organization - the disease thrust forward on a broad front with renewed momentum. Whereas classical cholera moves swiftly and then dies out, El Tor is more hardy in environmental survival. Forty countries reported 42,900 cholera cases with 6,800 deaths in 1970.



UNRWA health division personnel vaccinate now against a possible cholera outbreak this summer.

El Tor's spread is basically quite simple: any means which allows the cholera "vibrios" from the faeces of one person to reach the digestive tract of another. This may be by direct spread of the vibrios by contaminated hands, food, water or flies. The vibrios are often ingested in fresh vegetables contaminated in the process of fertilizing or watering vegetable gardens. Healthy carriers may unknowingly spread infection for several weeks after being infected either from a cholera case or from another carrier.

VACCINATION, SANITATION, CO-OPERATION

As soon as the first cholera case appeared within the area of UNRWA operations, instructions were issued from UNRWA Headquarters to all Field Health Officers to intensify environmental sanitation measures. Special precautions to ensure safe water supplies, proper refuse and waste disposal and rigid fly control were put into effect. Extra care was taken to avoid food contamination in supplementary feeding and milk distribution centres. The normal health education programme dealing with food preparation and handling, environmental sanitation and personal hygiene was stepped up.

Although virtually all residents of refugee communities and many refugees living elsewhere in towns and villages were vaccinated, most by UNRWA personnel but some at Government centres, vaccination is not a panacea for cholera. UNRWA co-operated with local governments both in mass immunization campaigns and in environmental control.

Incidence of cholera among refugees in their crowded communities was on the whole lower than among the affected non-refugee populations: among the latter, there were 132 cases in the Gaza Strip, 204 in the West Bank, 41 in Lebanon and no cases in east Jordan (statistics not available from Syria). Since vaccination is likely to reduce the number of cases (not carriers) by no more than 50 percent, it would appear that personal hygiene and environmental sanitation were effective control measures.

CHOLERA DEATH RATE LOWERED

El Tor does not kill as often as its classical relative does, but in both types of cholera, untreated cases are liable to end in death by dehydration, as fluid loss from vomiting and diarrhoea may be as much as 20 litres a day. However, modern treatment by prompt restoration of fluids and mineral salts by saline infusions and the administration of antibiotics has lowered the death rate to 1-3 percent.

Yet, advance and retreat of cholera is unpredictable. From 164,000 deaths a year during the period 1945-49 the world toll dropped to 11,000 in 1960. Then the current El Tor pandemic began. The UNRWA Health Department faces the possibility of a second round with El Tor this summer.

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