

Palestine Refugees Today



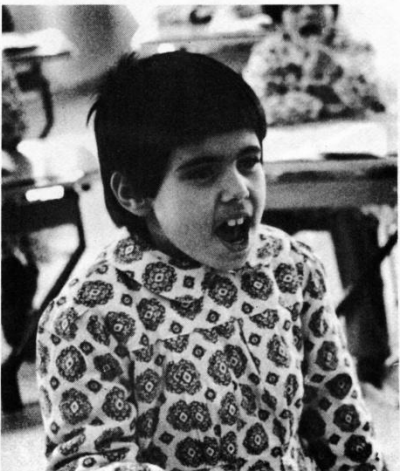
No.87



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Cover: Children of Sbeineh refugee camp, near
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic.

Focus on children

Most parts of the world are observing the International Year of the Child this year. In UNRWA's part of the world, it is always an international children's year. In the five fields of operation – Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and the occupied territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip – more than half of UNRWA's budget is devoted to Palestine refugee children . . .

To the 300,000-plus who attend the 617 UNRWA/Unesco elementary schools.

To all the others being helped with higher levels of education.

To the many whose parents take advantage of UNRWA/WHO health services.

And to those who receive food in one way or another.

But UNRWA can do only so much. Its basic services are very basic indeed, and even these were not fully covered in 1978 by the voluntary contributions on which UNRWA must depend.

So many a school is double-shifted and still overcrowded; few of their libraries are worthy of the name; it often falls to international voluntary organizations to provide humanitarian aid where official services cannot reach.

This issue of the UNRWA Newsletter salutes the men and women who help Palestine refugee children in many ways – and the children themselves, intent on making their way in an often discouraging world.



The United States Government made a special contribution of \$9 million to UNRWA in 1978, thus saving for a further school year the preparatory (junior secondary) cycle of the Agency's education programme, which was threatened with elimination because of UNRWA's 1978 budgetary deficit. Mrs. Angelique G. Stahl, Alternate Representative of the United States to the thirty-third session of the General Assembly, presented the \$9 million cheque in New York to Mr. Thomas W. McElhiney (centre), Commissioner-General of UNRWA, in the presence of Mr. Alan J. Brown (left), Deputy Commissioner-General. Earlier last year the United States Government pledged a regular contribution of \$42.5 million to UNRWA. Its total contribution for 1978 was therefore \$51.5 million. Thanks to this and other special contributions pledged, expected or received by 30 November, UNRWA's estimated income rose to \$131.7 million. Budgeted expenditures at that time were estimated at \$137.6 million, thus leaving a gap of some \$5.9 million for 1978.

U.S. Senate Staff Report

Staff investigators of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee have given UNRWA high marks for its work in providing education and health services for Palestine refugees, and recommended that the United States and other countries "consider sharp increases in support for the presently underfunded health and educational activities of UNRWA."

On the basis of the investigators' report on these and other UNRWA programmes, the committee decided to restore a multi-million dollar cut from the 1978 funding (see picture below left) and to authorize \$52 million for 1979. \$10 million of the 1979 figure, however, is contingent upon an equal amount being contributed by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries.

The committee representatives made their on-the-spot investigation last April. In addition to seeing operations for themselves, the investigators met local government officials and representatives of UNRWA, including Commissioner-General Thomas W. McElhiney.

After surveying facilities and programmes in the Syrian Arab Republic, Jordan, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the investigators reported that "while those in the (UNRWA) health services recognize the problems which cannot be overcome, we were uniformly impressed with the dedication and effectiveness of the staffs and with the willingness to keep going under very trying circumstances."


Of UNRWA's school programme, their report said, "Education . . . offers an immediate opportunity for refugees to better themselves. For many, it offers an eventual way out. Significantly, in all the host countries, the elementary and intermediate refugee children (in UNRWA schools) have consistently scored better on tests than other children in comparable government schools, despite the decidedly more spartan circumstances and the lack of advantages which are available to others."

"Graduates of the vocational training centers," the investigators said, "usually have firm job commitments before graduation – mostly in the Gulf states, where wages are substantially higher than in the host countries. A reported 80,000 Palestinians, including refugees, are currently in universities – a proportion well ahead of any other Middle Eastern nation."

They added, however, that "of particular importance would be an affordable but critically important expansion of the vocational training programmes, which must now turn away perhaps four out of five qualified applicants."

Commenting on allegations that UNRWA relief rolls were swollen by fraudulent registrations, the investigators said that the United States and the United Nations should continue to seek rectification of the rolls.

But they added that the rations "probably go to the needy, if not the absolutely correct needy. In a large number of cases, rectifications would mean for the individual families that the names of the recipients would change, but the family would still get rations on the basis of need . . . It is not at all clear that a comprehensive rectification would save rations. It might cause more to be distributed."

Concluding their report, the investigators said there appears to be "no doubt that UNRWA fulfils genuine needs – and does so fairly economically." 

CHILDREN AT SCHOOL

Young readers seek community library

Amsheh el-Khatib loves books, but there is neither money nor space for books at her home or school: "My dream is to find myself sitting one day in a public library with enough space and many books so that I can read the books that I like."

Amsheh is a sixth-grader at one of 22 UNRWA schools in the Yarmouk area of Damascus.

She lives with her widowed mother and four brothers and sisters in a two-room refugee shelter in the settlement, which has the largest concentration of Palestine refugees in Syria.

Half a book per pupil

Like Amsheh, more than 15,000 UNRWA elementary and preparatory school pupils in the Yarmouk area suffer from a lack of library facilities.

At most, an UNRWA elementary school, which normally operates in two shifts, may have 400 library books at the disposal of a combined enrolment of 800 pupils. If a library exists – in some cases there is none – there is hardly space to accommodate the books, and definitely no reading room to allow children to browse or read during school hours or before going home.

The absence of adequate library books and reading facilities has prompted the head teachers and parents in the Yarmouk area to propose a community library for the children enrolled in the 22 schools. The

project is estimated to cost \$33,000. However, UNRWA funding is not available for school libraries, because the Agency's financial situation has put major educational programmes in jeopardy.

Parent's encouragement

The children's appreciation of books is shared by many Palestine refugee parents such as Mohammed Sharsharah, the father of eight children: "I am not a man of education and culture," said Mr. Sharsharah, who works as a driver, "yet I have always encouraged my children to read so that they can expand their horizons. I try to borrow books from my friends for them because as a refugee I cannot afford them. If we want to encourage the children, we should support a public library."

"Our school has 300 library books for 833 pupils," said Mr. Kassab Abbassi, a fourth-grade teacher at the Sarafand Elementary School which doubles as the Sakhnin School for Girls. "Among them, there are no scientific books and no stories and tales for the younger children."

For UNRWA Field Education Officer Mohammed Khalifeh, the shortage of library books and space stifles the potential of the Palestine refugee children in the school system. (a)

At school in five areas of the Middle East

UNRWA and Unesco work together to run 617 schools in the five fields of UNRWA operations for some 307,000 children. More than 78,000 others attend government or private schools. This is where they are:

	No. of UNRWA/ Unesco schools	No. of pupils in UNRWA/ Unesco schools	No. of refugee pupils in govt. and private schools	Total
East Jordan	195	119,683	24,455	144,138
West Bank	100	35,746	23,427	59,173
Gaza Strip	131	71,821	8,545	80,366
Lebanon	81	37,786	7,847	45,633
Syrian Arab Republic	110	41,932	13,893	55,825
Total	617	306,968	78,167	385,135



Library facilities are sometimes non-existent. Where there are library books, there is hardly space to accommodate them.

CHILDREN AT SCHOOL

Bethlehem school – A bright spot despite limited facilities

Beyond a walled-in courtyard off the main road from Jerusalem to Bethlehem a simple house serves as a school in two shifts for more than 550 Palestine refugee children.

Literally every bit of space is utilized in the 15-room two-storey house. One corridor is a teacher's room; another serves as the library; another nook is a laboratory.

Aida Girls' Preparatory School is just one of 41 UNRWA/Unesco schools on the West Bank which use rented houses as premises.

Some 10,000 of the 36,000 Palestine refugee children at UNRWA/Unesco schools in the West Bank attend such a rented schoolhouse.

At best, the rented premises offer up to nine years of schooling to the children of refugee communities dispersed throughout the West Bank.

However, the classrooms are substandard, often with two to three students sharing a desk; facilities such as laboratories, libraries, and playgrounds are non-existent or decidedly makeshift. Lighting, ventilation and sanitary facilities are usually poor.

Despite such odds, the staff and students at Aida School work hard to make the best of things. Under the dedicated leadership of Miss Sarah Salah, the head teacher at Aida for the past five years, and with community support, the school has maintained a good educational standard and an impressive record of extra-curricular activities.

Twenty classes of girls aged 6 to 15 years use the school daily. At the end of the recent school year, the students held an art and needlework exhibition, put on an original play and presented an exhibit on the Palestinian home.

All the same, the rooms cannot keep pace with the expanding school population and the activities that exist today may eventually be squeezed out to make room for desks. Already some rented schools have students using hallways for classrooms. Aida may be next. ☹

Too many experimenters chasing too few microscopes

Parents and teachers have been contributing science laboratory equipment themselves in an attempt to satisfy their children's thirst for scientific training in the Gaza Strip.

There are 342,000 Palestine refugees registered in the Strip, occupied by Israel since the 1967 war. They include some 20,000 preparatory (junior secondary) students. Science forms part of the curriculum, but it remains too theoretical for thousands of bright children whose schools lack the space and the equipment with which they can conduct their own experiments.

Swedish Free Church Aid has stepped in with funds to equip four schools in the Strip with laboratories. Some parents have clubbed together to buy telescopes and models of parts of the human body. Teachers and pupils set to work to make dynamometers and telegraph sets. But there are still 31 Gaza schools without the facilities to bring science to life for their students.

Shortage of the tools to do the job is not confined to the Gaza Strip. The picture below shows a boy at work on a scientific experiment at the North Shuneh Preparatory School for Boys near Irbid, in east Jordan. He is using a microscope in the school's multi-purpose room, which has to serve as a laboratory for 383 pupils for a few hours each week. ☹



CHILDREN AT SCHOOL

A headstart on schooling

Despite financial constraints, enthusiasm is boundless for the 12 kindergartens which cater for 1,800 Palestine pre-school age refugee children in east Jordan.

Run by voluntary agencies, foreign or local, in seven refugee camps, the kindergartens are a stimulating release from the hardships of refugee life and a headstart on the regular schooling provided by UNRWA. Unfortunately, only a fraction of the 35,000 pre-schoolers in east Jordan's refugee population have the opportunity to attend a kindergarten, and this is the case throughout UNRWA's areas of operation in the Near East.

The combined annual operational cost of all kindergartens in east Jordan is about \$180,000. With its perennial budget deficits, UNRWA has not been able to finance the pre-school programme, so it relies on the initiative of voluntary agencies in Jordan such as the Mennonite Central Committee, Catholic Relief Services, the YWCA, the Arab Friends of Jerusalem, the Islamic Society for the Care of Girls and the Beit Dajan Voluntary Society.

Meeting the challenge

The voluntary agencies have met the challenge and the results are remarkable, judging by the example of the kindergarten at Marka Camp, run by the Mennonite Central Committee in nearby Amman.

The kindergarten is perched above a grove of young trees between the pre-school centre and the refugee camp below. In its five small rooms, constructed of the same corrugated metal as the refugee shelters in the camp, the interior kaleidoscope of gay colours and young faces delight the eye.

Head teacher Siham Abu Rshaid comments: "The children are taught to work and play independently... they grow in ability to express their creative impulses. Our role is to help them develop self-identity and a view of themselves as having competence, worth and importance." For such children, this is no small accomplishment.

Started in tents

Two other kindergartens in east Jordan are run by the Mennonite Central Committee in Amman, which employs 13 Palestine refugee teachers.

The kindergarten programme was started in tents by the Mennonites in 1968. It now operates on double shifts in permanent buildings and provides places for 330 five-year-olds annually.



Activities at UNRWA playcentres are designed to stimulate the mental development and initiative of the pre-schoolers.

Mrs. Suhad Budeiri of the Mennonite Central Committee in Amman says the voluntary agencies running the pre-school centres exchange views on how best to run them, and they arrange special courses for their teachers.

Search for materials

"You wouldn't believe how devoted our teachers are," she adds. "They work like junk collectors, searching everywhere and collecting things which can be used in the classrooms to create toys, pieces of art and teaching aids."

The demand for kindergartens is accelerating as more and more refugee parents start to appreciate the role of pre-schooling in preparing their children for school, according to Ahmad el-Is'is of the Arab Relief Fund in Amman. However, inadequate funding is the barrier to expansion. "We are financially limited and cannot expand. Unfortunately no funds can come from UNRWA's budget. Yet we are still looking forward to more pre-school centres here." (4)



Activities at UNRWA playcentres are designed to stimulate the mental development and initiative of the pre-schoolers.

HELP FOR THE HANDICAPPED

No longer a silent world of deafness

Waleed Hamdan, the fourth eldest of eleven children, lives with his family in a cramped two-room shelter in Baqa'a refugee camp north of the Jordanian capital of Amman.

Unless you stopped to talk with Waleed, you would never know that this handsome 13-year-old has a severe handicap. He is almost totally deaf.

Yet with UNRWA assistance for disabled Palestine refugee children, Waleed has just completed a seven-year academic programme and is set on becoming a teacher for the deaf.

International donors

He received his schooling at the Holy Land Institute for the Deaf, located on a hillside overlooking the town of Salt, 45 minutes away from his home.

This year, 60 of the 69 children boarding at the school, which is sponsored by the Arab Evangelical Church, were partly paid for by UNRWA.

Thanks to international donors, sponsors and friends, the 14-year-old Institute has developed a programme for deaf children from the Near East extending from kindergarten to the sixth grade.

Preparing for the outside world

The Reverend Andrew Carpenter, Dutch-born director of the Institute, works with a trained staff of five Arab teachers, who are joined from time to time by volunteers from abroad who have served as teachers, carpenters and helpers.

Brother Andrew, as he is known to the staff, explained that the aim of

the Institute is to prepare the children to move into an unprotected environment. Depending on the availability of funds, he hopes to expand the Institute's programme to include a one-year preliminary vocational training course in four trades – carpentry, car body repair, tailoring and shoemaking.

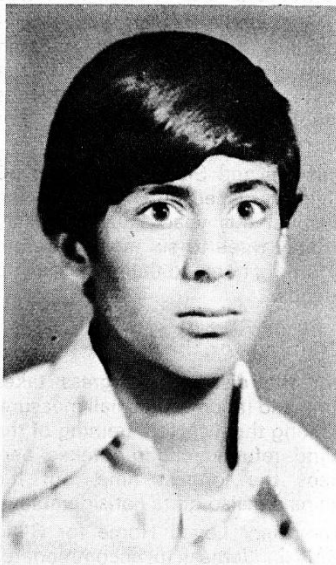
Waleed Hamdan, who successfully completed his studies last summer, will miss the vocational training opportunity. However, because of his academic aptitude, he has been nominated to attend an institute for higher education of the deaf in Lebanon.

Quick learner

Because his father is a day-labourer, the costs of training Waleed are beyond his ability; therefore, Brother Andrew is seeking scholarship funds on Waleed's behalf.

"He is very intelligent and very quick to learn," said Brother Andrew. "He has a broad range of interests, from acting to sports, and an aptitude for languages."

With a good start in life, despite his handicap, Waleed has high hopes for the future. With UNRWA support and the training offered at the Holy Land Institute for the Deaf, he has a good chance of attaining them. (2)



Despite his handicap, Waleed has high hopes for the future. He wants to be a teacher for deaf children.

HELP FOR THE HANDICAPPED

Modern miracles in the Holy Land

Miracles still happen in the Holy Land — modern miracles of courage and patience. One of the miracle-workers is Dr. George Farah, a hard-working optimist at 70 years of age, who for 15 years persisted in his ambition to establish a hospital for crippled children in Jerusalem.

With international funding and technical assistance from UNRWA, his patience bore fruit in 1963 with the establishment of the Crippled Children's Hospital of Jerusalem, which he now directs.

The fully-equipped hospital is today one of the many specialized facilities in the Near East which UNRWA uses for the rehabilitation and vocational training of disabled refugee children.

Each year UNRWA places about 200 disabled refugee children in such institutions. For the blind, deaf and physically disabled who come from the environment of a



At the Crippled Children's Hospital in Jerusalem, a team of specialists attends to the young patients. Susan Waller is one of four physio-therapists.

refugee camp, the opportunity for education and training provided by UNRWA is indeed a blessing.

Norwegian children's gift

At the Crippled Children's Hospital a team of specialists attends to the small patients, who range in age from one to 14 years. A favourite activity among the children is swimming in the hospital pool which was donated by the children of Norway.

Dr. Farah, himself a Palestinian, stresses that keeping children busy and interested is an important part of their medical treatment.

In the physio-therapy unit, eight-year-old Hussein, whose left arm was severely atrophied by polio-myelitis, does special exercises daily and pushes himself to do better each time.

"Last week I could do only six pull-ups, but now I'm up to 12," he boasted to Dr. Farah, who was making his rounds.

Similarly, little Sonia told Dr. Farah that after an operation on her ankle she is still going slow on a simplified bicycle, "but it does not hurt any more."

Hussein and Sonia are among 50 children placed by UNRWA in the hospital this year. They are likely to stay three to six months before returning home to their families and friends.

Training for the blind

For the disabled, progress takes time and it comes in small measure. Among the disabled, training of the blind refugee children takes perhaps the longest time, but the gains are also quite considerable.

The Mary Lovell Home for Blind Girls in Jerusalem accommodates 50 boarders between the ages of four and 19, some of them sponsored by UNRWA.



Blind girls are prepared for self-sufficient living along with their regular school curriculum at the Mary Lovell Home for Blind Girls in Jerusalem.

The Home prepares the girls for self-sufficient living as far as possible and offers a regular school curriculum for those who are six years and older. The only difference in their classrooms is that there are no blackboards, and the girls use a stylus instead of a pen or pencil.

A chance of life

The most academically promising girls go on to secondary school, and exceptional students have finished university courses in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, in east Jordan and in Lebanon.

One thing is certain: without the chance to learn and be productive, the refugee girls would be condemned to a life without hope.

But with schooling and training, blind Palestine refugee girls have become teachers, telex operators, housekeepers and machine knitters. (2)

HELP FOR THE HANDICAPPED

My Name is Fadwa

Every morning music resounds in the chapel of the Epheta Institute for the Deaf near Bethlehem. With hymn books open and clasped hands, the pupils begin their day with a prayer led by one of the older children.

It makes no difference that the pronunciation of the words is exaggerated, for if one has never actually heard another human voice, learning to speak is an achievement in itself.

Child's struggle

My Name is Fadwa, UNRWA's most recently produced 16 mm film, tells the story of Palestine refugee children struggling to overcome the handicap of deafness. The focal point is Fadwa Mohammad, deaf because of a high fever when she was five months old.

Built and operated by the Pontifical Mission for Palestine, the Epheta Institute with its ultra-modern facilities was opened in 1971 in response to a wish expressed by the late Pope Paul VI during his historic visit to the Holy Land in 1964. Epheta at present

serves 92 Arab children including Palestine refugees such as Fadwa, whose special schooling is being sponsored by UNRWA. Although many of the children, aged 3 to 14, are boarders at the Institute, Fadwa is brought daily by her father from the refugee camp where they live: Beit Jibrin, on the outskirts of Bethlehem.

Trained in Italy

The nuns who direct the Institute and teach many of its classes receive special training in Italy. They spend an additional two years learning Arabic before coming to Epheta. Their expertise and warmth are supported by a staff of specially-trained Arab teachers who also devote their lives to the hard work of teaching deaf children to speak and to understand the spoken word.

This 15-minute film, shot in 1978 on location in the Israeli-occupied West Bank of Jordan, is UNRWA's most recent addition to its film distribution library. Information about this and other UNRWA audio-visual materials is available on request. (See box.)

UNRWA Audio-Visual Presentations

16 mm film:

My Name is Fadwa, 15 minutes.

The story of Fadwa Mohammad, deaf since infancy, now learning to speak at the Epheta Institute, near Bethlehem. (Available in English, French, German, Italian.)

Slide/cassette programme:

UNRWA, 7 minutes.

The story of the Palestine refugees and UNRWA's assistance to them. (English, Arabic, French, German)

16 mm film:

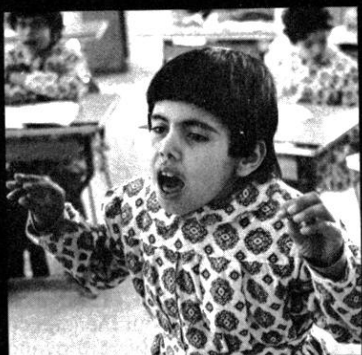
Some of the Palestinians, 56 minutes.

A film that enters into the daily lives of some of the Palestinians, their efforts, their moments of despair, and their deep longing for a better future. (English, Arabic, German)

Prices available on request

Contact: Public Information Division
UNRWA Headquarters (Vienna)
Storchengasse 1, 1150 Vienna
Austria





A glimpse of better things

The view from a refugee hut is not very broad. It's not very cheering either: especially when you are just starting out in life. That is why one man decided to do something about it.

The man was Tony Bakerjian and the time was 1969. Thousands of Palestine refugees were living in the aftermath of war.

Impact of environment

"I talked with Paul Johnson, an American Quaker who had given 30 years of his life to the problems of the Middle East. It was a period of fatalism, of numbness after the stunning shock of war. We were concerned about the impact on the children who were growing up in a demoralised atmosphere. We thought it would be good if we could take the kids out of that environment for a while, give them a chance to form friendships in camp, show them there is a brighter side to life. And so the American Friends' Service Committee and the World Alliance of YMCAs provided funds for the first summer camp."

Tony Bakerjian speaking. The time now is 1978. More than 1,400 boys and girls have passed through the summer camp in Deir Ammar, northwest of Jerusalem, that grew out of those talks. Bakerjian is relaxing under shady trees that the young campers have helped to plant over the intervening years.

During duty hours he is UNRWA's Area Officer in Jerusalem. Off duty, he plans and works for the camp, conjuring up contributions out of nowhere for a project that had no official origin. UNRWA provides basic support – the camp is held in and around the UNRWA school at Deir Ammar Palestine refugee camp – but it is Bakerjian and volunteer helpers who have brought

the scheme, and hundreds of young refugees, to life.

Helper from Pennsylvania

Volunteers are such as 26-year-old Scott Lecrone of Lewisberry, Pennsylvania, USA, who found his way to Deir Ammar last year through the Church of the Brethren. The Church, with the Holy Land Christian Mission and the Universities' Fund for the Education of Palestinian Refugees (Cambridge, UK), is one of the major sponsors of the camp. In addition there are several other organizations and individual donors who help in cash or in kind. The budget for the 1978 summer camp was \$8,000.

Each year UNRWA area officers select 80 boys and 80 girls aged 14 to 16. The youngsters come from all parts of the occupied West Bank and a few from the Gaza

Strip: from towns and villages, dusty refugee camps, crowded orphanages.

Last year's girls' camp, directed as in the past by Miss Leila Tarazi of the UNRWA/Unesco Institute of Education, had a special workshop on the motives and meaning of the International Year of the Child, 1979 – a topic they will all be able to follow up with understanding this year when IYC is in full swing.

Three weeks of imaginatively organised work and play on the sunny hillsides of Deir Ammar sent the campers back to their homes with a new outlook on life. In the words of Ibrahim Ziq, who until last summer had spent all his 15 years in refugee camps: "I'm learning to be self-reliant and making a lot of friends. I'm getting a lot out of this camp." (a)



More than 1,400 boys and girls have passed through the summer camp programme in Deir Ammar. Its activities include workshops, swimming and dancing.



More than 1,400 boys and girls have passed through the summer camp programme in Deir Ammar. Its activities include workshops, swimming and dancing.



Maysa . . . 2 years old



Zeine . . . 14 years old



Jalal . . . 6 years old

Palestine Refugees Today

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Back cover: Refugee children coming to life at the Deir
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