

Palestine Refugees Today



Nr. 88



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Cover: Graduation Day for Noha Musa Othman.
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UNRWA at the UN

Each year an issue of *Palestine Refugees Today* covers the proceedings of the United Nations General Assembly session relating to the work of UNRWA and the living conditions of Palestine refugees. This issue looks at relevant meetings and resolutions with excerpts from statements by the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, Thomas W. McElhiney, to the Special Political Committee and the Pledging Conference during the 33rd session of the General Assembly.

Resolutions

At the 33rd session, seven resolutions relating to UNRWA were adopted.

The first of the resolutions drew attention to the Agency's continuing financial problems and called on Governments to make the most generous contributions possible. It also noted with regret that part of UNRWA headquarters had been relocated outside the area of its activities and requested that the headquarters be reconsolidated within the area of operations as soon as practicable.

Another resolution endorsed efforts of the Agency "to continue to provide humanitarian assistance, as far as practicable, on an emergency basis and as a temporary measure, to other persons in the area who are at present displaced and in serious need of continued assistance as a result of the June 1967 hostilities".

The Assembly renewed the mandate of its Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA for another year.

It also appealed to States to make special allocations, scholarships and grants to Palestinian refugee students. The Assembly appealed for contributions to "Palestinian universities in the territories occupied by Israel since 1967" as well as scholarships for the Palestinian refugee students in those universities.

In another resolution, the Assembly called once

more on Israel to take steps immediately for the return of refugees to the camps from which they had been removed in the Gaza Strip and to desist from further removal of refugees and destruction of their shelters.

Another resolution called again on Israel to take immediate steps for the return of the displaced inhabitants of the territories occupied by Israel since 1967, and to desist from all measures obstructing their return, "including measures affecting the physical and demographic structure of the occupied territories".

In the seventh resolution, the Assembly thanked the Secretary-General for his report on the health needs of Palestine refugee children, requested him to keep the situation under review and report back to the 34th Session. The resolution also asked the host countries, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Health Organization, and the United Nations Children's Fund to co-operate with UNRWA in taking action to remedy the health deficiencies identified in the report.

Commissioner-General in the Special Political Committee

UNRWA may be forced to dismantle some of its institutional structure and reduce other services to Palestine refugees if its budgetary problems continue, Commissioner-General Thomas W. McElhiney told the Special Political Committee of the General Assembly on 25 October 1978. Mr. McElhiney also stated that the flour ration would be cut again from the beginning of 1979 and that the preparatory (lower secondary) cycle of education would be threatened in the 1979/80 school year if special contributions were not forthcoming.

The following is taken from the Commissioner-General's remarks to the Committee:

UNRWA's three basic programmes are education and training services, health services and relief

UNRWA at the UN

services. The Agency exists only to provide these three basic social services to registered Palestine refugees. The General Assembly's periodic decisions to renew UNRWA's mandate are essentially decisions that the services should continue and that they should be provided by a United Nations agency.

The services provided are continuing and institutionalized. They are not the kind of services normally provided to refugees, that is, the services are not short-term emergency assistance or disaster relief. UNRWA operates very much as a government operates. It has quasi-governmental functions. It provides education, health care and relief directly to a refugee population now approaching 1.8 million, a larger population than that of many States of the United Nations.

While UNRWA's services to the Palestine refugees have the effect of assisting Governments in the Near East, the assistance takes the form of services rendered almost entirely directly to the refugees, not through Governments or government employees or institutions but by UNRWA and UNRWA employees and institutions, that is, the Agency's own schools and training centres, its own health centres and clinics, its own ration distribution centres.

Continuing need

Ultimately, the means of effecting economies if income were to be drastically insufficient would not be the temporary suspension of activities which could easily be resumed if money subsequently became available, but rather the dismantling of the institutional structure which provides the services. If a dismantling, a mass termination of staff and the closing of UNRWA installations were forced on the Agency by lack of funds, the structure could not be easily or quickly reconstituted.

UNRWA can reduce some of its services in a limited way without dismantling the structure but it cannot turn whole programmes off and on at will, any more than a Government can, and this observation is especially relevant to the education and health programmes. Members of the Committee will appreciate that the services UNRWA now provides — certainly the education and health care and at least some part of the relief services — must continue to be provided even if the General Assembly were to decide to liquidate UNRWA. The services are not emergency assistance. They are the kind of basic services Governments routinely provide within the limits of their resources.

If UNRWA were unable to provide the services, the Governments in the Agency's area of operations would have to assume the responsibility. Over the longer term the Agency has always assumed that, at some point, in the context of a general settlement in the Middle East, its mandate would be cancelled and provision would be made by the General Assembly for the Agency to turn over its schools, health centres and other installations to whatever authorities were to become responsible for the education, health care and welfare of the population they serve. Moreover, it is assumed that most, if not all, of the Agency's teachers, medical personnel and other employees totalling about 16,600 would be continued in employment by those authorities. It is obvious that the Agency could not turn over a dismantled structure to any authority and that the authority's task would be vastly more complicated if it had to create the required structure.

The resources required to provide UNRWA services come almost entirely from voluntary contributions by Governments. Governments are free to contribute what they wish and they may or may not contribute enough to maintain the services. When Governments are unwilling to contribute enough, UNRWA must reduce or suspend its services.

Special problems

Let me turn now to certain special problems which confronted the Agency in 1978. The major one is finances, which I will talk about later.

The second is the situation in Lebanon which once again had a direct impact on the operations of the Agency. UNRWA's services to the Palestine refugees continue to be provided to the extent possible given the circumstances. But I think that the disruption of UNRWA's activities there is of little importance by comparison with the broader aspects of the appalling tragedy of Lebanon with which we are all too familiar.

I regret that this situation confronted the Agency with the third special problem which I mention in my annual report — the relocation of UNRWA Headquarters, partly to Vienna and partly to Amman. This was completed early in August. My preference would have been to keep all of Headquarters within the Agency's area of operations but for very practical reasons this was not feasible. The UNRWA Advisory Commission has requested me to keep the question of future consolidation of Headquarters in the area under study with a view to relocation to the area when feasible. Meanwhile, I should like to note the greatly increased effectiveness of Headquarters operations resulting from its relocation to Vienna and Amman.

The fourth special problem mentioned in my report



UNRWA Commissioner-General Thomas W. McElhinney to the Special Political Committee: "UNRWA is only your agent and can provide only such benefits to the refugee as you allow it to provide, within the limits of what you contribute." United Nations/Photo by Y. Nagata

is the continuing problem of interference with staff in the performance of their official duties and violation of Agency premises.

Finally, I would like to go back to the most difficult problem the Agency faces – its uncertain and inadequate financing.

Estimated expenditures for 1978 are now (October 1978) \$137.7 million, pledged or expected income is \$126.4 million, with a deficit of \$11.3 million. After receiving additional contributions, I have approved the continuance of the preparatory cycle of education to the end of 1978, after I had been forced to withhold approval of expenditure for this activity which the refugees consider to be of the highest importance. I have appealed again to contributors to make special contributions for 1978 to eliminate the deficit. To the extent that this appeal is unsuccessful, additional budget items will be eliminated and some draw down of working capital will be required.

Worse outlook

The situation for 1979 is expected to be worse, so much worse that the Agency may enter a basically different phase of its chronic financial crisis.

The history of budget reductions forced on the Agency by insufficient income can be traced back to the 1950s but in that period the problem was not acute because a large reserve in the form of working capital was available to cover any essential expenditures not covered by income of the current year. The establishment of ration ceilings in the 1960s also eased the problem. However, income has been enough to cover budgeted expenditures in only eight of the Agency's 28 years and it has been necessary to draw on working capital in each

of the other 20 years to cover at least some part of the deficit.

In the 1970s, the Agency has been sparing in its use of working capital but has drawn on it so that, by 1979, it will be at such a dangerously low level that it can no longer be counted on to supplement current income.

In this decade, the Agency has moved from budget reductions that had a long-term rather than an immediate effect on services to refugees – such as failure to replace unsatisfactory school premises – to actual reductions in what have become lower-priority services, such as cuts in the flour ration.

Structural cuts

So far we have not had to dismantle UNRWA's institutional structure. What we were forced to eliminate or reduce could still be restored later if money became available. But UNRWA is now at the point where these non-structural economies are unlikely to be enough and it is not only possible, but probable, that at least some part of the institutional structure will have to be dismantled to permit UNRWA to survive and to provide at least reduced services.

In 1979, it is virtually certain that the flour ration will have to be reduced still further to an average of 5 kg per recipient a month, in comparison with the normal 10 kg, or the 6.7 kg issued in 1978. And, unless income is substantially higher than projected, all or a major part of the preparatory – lower secondary – cycle of education for Palestine refugee children will have to be abandoned at the end of the current school year.

A ration reduction can be restored by buying more of the commodity – such an economy is non-

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structural. But if the Agency is forced to discharge the teachers who teach in the preparatory cycle, a part of the institutional structure will be destroyed and it cannot be re-established easily or quickly even if money became available to do so. The Agency has tried to avoid the reduction of services – and more importantly, the dismantling of the UNRWA structure – by every means available. Recently a new income solicitation procedure was introduced by which all non-contributing Member States are asked to consider contributing and all major contributors are requested to consider contributions of specified amounts which, when added together, would make the Agency financially viable. The response has been mixed, but sufficiently encouraging to warrant continuing the procedure with some modifications. However, no new contributors have been added so it is still the case that less than half of the Member States contribute.

Inequity resented

The main financial burden still falls on a few governments. Only 16 governments and the EEC make yearly contributions of \$1 million or more and only a few others make substantial contributions below that amount. The inequity of the system is resented by major contributors.

In particular, those whose contributions have generally kept pace with UNRWA's rising costs are increasingly reluctant to go on raising their contributions each year. They point out that the great majority of Member States who vote for General Assembly resolutions urging non-contributing Member States to contribute, and current contributors to increase their contributions, do not themselves do what they urge.

Whatever the attitudes that produce inadequate income year after year, the adverse consequences of those attitudes are borne by the refugees. They are the chief sufferers but the world is poorer for not providing what they need.

UNRWA is only your agent and can provide only such benefits to the refugees as you allow it to provide within the limits of what you contribute.

It is clear that the Palestinians, including the refugees, would rather provide themselves with such benefits. But in current circumstances they cannot provide themselves with all they need, nor can they alone change those circumstances. The international community decided that as long as these circumstances persist, it would contribute to their welfare and would maintain an agency through which to channel aid. UNRWA, the agency the community created and has maintained, cannot channel aid that it does not provide.

If this aid is not provided, as I say in my annual report, the time is rapidly approaching when the implications of that fact will have to be assessed

and the Agency be given guidance by the international community on the nature and level of services the community wishes to provide.

Pledging Conference

Representatives of 41 States pledged contributions to UNRWA or made statements at the 7 December 1978 pledging conference, chaired by Mansur Rashid Kikhia, Permanent Representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and Vice President of the General Assembly. UNRWA Commissioner-General Thomas W. McElhiney said that the pledges announced, plus pledges which he would expect some governments to make in the following few months, plus all other contributions which could be reasonably projected for 1979, total about \$126.6 million.

UNRWA's budgetary needs in 1979 are about \$154 million and when extra-budgetary needs of \$8.6 million are added, the Agency's total financial needs for the year are more than \$162 million. With a projected deficit of more than \$25 million and a total shortfall of nearly \$35 million, the Agency will be forced to reduce services to the refugees, the Commissioner-General stated. (Figures as of December 1978.)

The first reduction, said Mr. McElhiney, would be to cut the flour component of the basic ration to 5 kg per recipient a month starting January 1979. The normal ration was 10 kg, cut to 6.7 kg in 1978. Other budgetary items would also have to be cut, he said.

As had been done in 1978, a list of budget items in total equaling the deficit would be drawn up and disbursements to cover them would be suspended until more income was available. The three years of the preparatory (lower secondary) cycle of education after June 1979 would have to be put on the not-yet-approved list, said Mr. McElhiney. He hoped that there would be special contributions of at least \$10.5 million, the amount required to keep these schools functioning.

He thanked the governments that had responded to the virtually unanimous appeal of the international community to contribute to UNRWA, as contained in General Assembly resolutions. "I can only express my profound regret", he said, "that the sharing of the burden is so inequitable and the response inadequate."

Contributions were announced, or statements made, by the representatives of the following States at the pledging conference: Netherlands, Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, Sri Lanka, Australia, Iceland, Republic of Korea, Austria, Malaysia, Denmark, United Kingdom, Finland, Egypt, Ireland, France, Oman, Switzerland, Yugoslavia, Israel, Sweden, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Norway, Philippines, New Zealand, Iran, Morocco, Spain, Greece, Japan, Belgium, Chile, Ghana, Venezuela, Pakistan, Qatar, India, Canada, United States, Jordan, Brazil and Bahrain. (4)

One Girl's Great Day

Vivacious with sparkling dark eyes, Noha Musa Othman is now a successful career woman. A graduate of the UNRWA/Unesco Ramallah Women's Training Centre, near Jerusalem, her two-year secretarial course opened the door to opportunity for her.

But her success story had its beginnings in unhappiness and uncertainty. Her family are refugees of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. They left their family home in Beit Safa in Palestine at that time to settle near Bethlehem, where Noha was born some years later. Noha's life was not easy as the third youngest of 10 children.

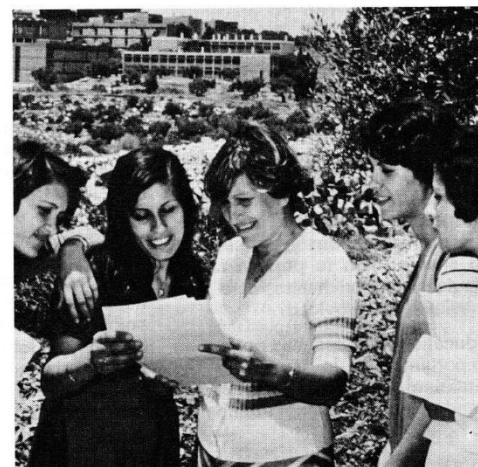
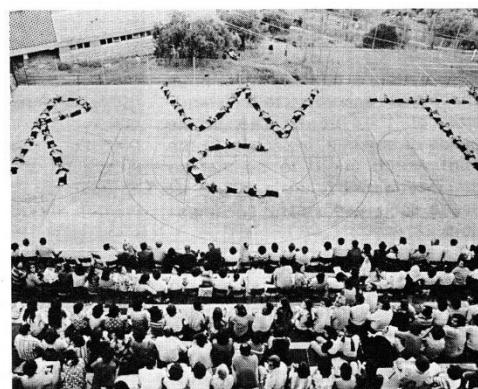
On graduation from Ramallah, she went to live with her brother who works in Abu Dhabi. There Noha settled down to her new secretarial job... another example of how young refugees are able to use UNRWA training as a springboard into working life.

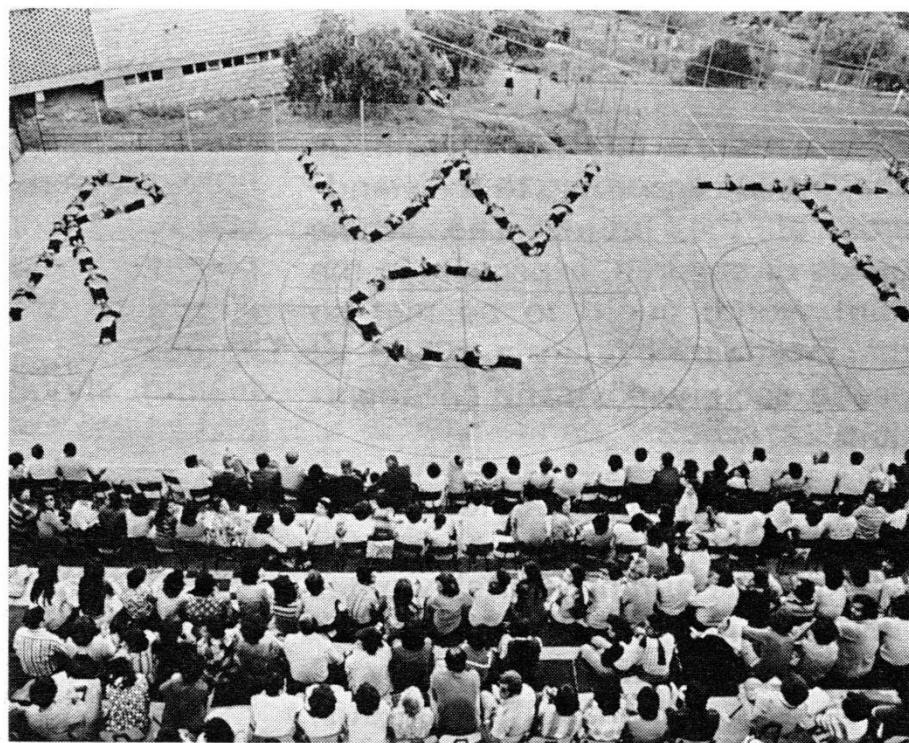
Every year some 2,000 young Palestine refugee men and women leave UNRWA's eight vocational and teacher training centres, equipped to play a part in the development of the Middle East.

Emphasis at the Ramallah Women's Training Centre is on a well-rounded education and the total development of the trainees who are secondary school graduates in their late teens and early 20s. The first of its kind and scope in the area, this centre has trained more than 3,000 women since it opened in 1962.

The two-year vocational training courses offered at the Centre are designed to prepare them for careers much needed in the fast-developing Arab world. Noha is the product of UNRWA education, having also attended UNRWA schools before gaining a place at the Ramallah Centre. Because of this, she is also the cover-subject of a colour folder poster illustrating UNRWA services to the Palestine refugees. This issue's cover shows her on graduation day: one girl's great day. (4)

Top: Noha on graduation day.
Centre: Graduation exercises at Ramallah.
Bottom: Noha, second from right.







Impressions and Ideas

Part 1: a selection of essays submitted by Palestine refugee children attending UNRWA preparatory (lower secondary) schools in the Gaza Strip. Next issue: essays from refugee children attending UNRWA schools in Jordan.

1. The International Year of the Child by Manal Mah'd Khair-Eddin, Gaza Preparatory Girls' school, Third Year Preparatory, age 14.

The fact that there are over 1,200,000,000 children in the world shows that everyone must pay attention to the basic needs and rights of the child. Today's child is tomorrow's adult who will be shaping life according to the standards of the future. The whole needs of children, especially in the third world, ought to be met so that we can live in a world of peace, security, love and co-operation.

In spite of the great strides made in the field of science and technology, the infant mortality rates are still high and need to be lowered to a minimum. Many of these deaths are due to malnutrition, communicable diseases, birth injuries and congenital malformation. These ills can be prevented and eliminated.

To overcome health problems, the establishment of more hospitals will not be the sole solution. Parents can play an important part in the process. They have less time for child raising because of their economic background. If they earn enough money and their working conditions are improved to enable them to provide family services, better health care will inevitably be provided.

Education, perhaps, has no less an important role in improving the situation of the child. We feel the need to improve school attendance

and combat the drop-out phenomenon. Otherwise, we shall be promoting juvenile crime which is spreading far and wide these days. Mass media, too, have a great effect on juvenile delinquency. So through more parent education and more father involvement in the family, these bad effects can be stamped out.

Moreover, we should not forget how much love and play affect and shape a child's personality. So, parents, people in education and all others who, in one way or another, are concerned with child-rearing, should act in the light of these facts.

Handicapped children should also have their place in society. Special schools provided with highly qualified personnel and up-to-date equipment should be opened to help the handicapped regain their self confidence and to share in the building of their country as a normal person does.

2. A Pupil's Expectations on the Occasion of the IYC by Magdy Mohammed Ashour, El Falah Elementary 'A' Boys' School, 5th Elementary 'A', age 10.

On the screens of both television and cinema, I watch films with fat, happy and healthy children either enjoying joyful and cheerful times on journeys to the hills, to the seaside or playing with unbelievable magic toys, or walking with their generous and kind parents.

Puzzled and perplexed with what I see, I ask myself, "Are these flesh and blood children? Are they really real?"

Yes, in fact, they are. They are the children of the so-called civilized and developed countries, the countries that pretend to raise and defend the banners of justice, equality and prosperity for all.

But on the dark side of the picture stand the children of Gaza, with their pale and thin faces, with their weak and skinny bodies challenging the enemies of existence: the life of a vagabond, grinding poverty and disease.

3. Life for a child in the city and a camp by Sahar Moh'd A/Ra'ouf Majdalawi, Rimal Preparatory Girls' School, Third Preparatory, age 13.

This life is strange ... fate plays its part in the life of an individual and the lives of peoples and nations. Fate has ruled that some of our brother citizens should live a life of indignity in refugee camps where they depend on alms granted by people with consciences to save them from starvation.

People who live in camps began their life in tents or caves under very bad social conditions where they were prey to disease, cold in winter and heat in summer. They lived on very small amounts of food and stayed in tents in the dark, always with the threat of being flooded out by rain or their tents blown away by strong winds.

Nevertheless, they decided to continue their struggle in life despite the unfavourable conditions. They



LIFE IN A REFUGEE CAMP . . . from a series of paintings by
Palestine refugee children.

were deprived of every luxury in city life such as good clean houses, electricity, water for all purposes, an abundance of food, medical treatment and favourable educational facilities which offer the opportunity of well-being and a peaceful life.

The camp resident lacked all of these things in the beginning, but he struggled until he achieved a considerable part of his necessities of life although he has not yet reached the normal standard. We have known a lot of children living in camps who pass long nights studying their lessons by candlelight, the light of kerosene lamps or even by moonlight in the summer. It is from among these who live in the dark camps that

come a large number of doctors, chemists, engineers and teachers who are fulfilling their duty to spread knowledge and share in the world's educational and economic progress.

A child who is born in a simple shelter in a camp and who lives under unfavourable and cruel conditions contrary to the conditions in which a city child lives can achieve progress in his life and reach the highest social ranks. This child is worthy of respect and care. It is the duty of every one of us to do his best to help those children and protect them from poverty, disease and malnutrition to enable them to become good citizens in a future society: the society of hope and happiness. (2)

UNRWA Facts and Figures

UNRWA's expenditure has risen in most years since the Agency started work in 1950. Total expenditure in 1978 at \$131.3 million was more than three times the level of that first year (May 1950 – June 1951), when the total was \$35.8 million.

In 1979, health services are scheduled to receive 27 times more, in dollar terms, than in 1950–51. Educational expenditure is planned to be about 116 times greater. Plans for provision of direct services to Palestine refugees this year, compared with 1950 to 1951, are as follows (in millions of US dollars):

	1950– 1951	1979
	(actual)	(planned)
Education	0.7	81.7
Health	0.9	24.3
Relief	24.6	41.5

SUPPLY DIVISION

Invitations to tender

UNRWA purchases a wide range of supplies for its programmes. The following tenders are to be issued before 30 June 1979:

Medical drugs and chemicals	April 1979
Medical ointments	April 1979
X-Ray films	May 1979
Corned beef*	May 1979
Tyres and tubes	May 1979
Continuous paper	June 1979

For further information please contact:

Chief, Supply Division
UNRWA HQ, Immowest Building
Storchengasse 1
1150 Vienna, Austria

* Originating from EEC countries.

NEWS FROM THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC

KEEPING BUSY

"What are you doing Wednesday evening?"

Mahmoud Tayyem, a spirited 60-year-old, invites the writer — not without a touch of pride — to a show organised by students of the UNRWA/Unesco Vocational Training Centre he has directed for the past 13 years.

You can tell that Mahmoud Tayyem puts everything he has into the Centre at Damascus. But is that kind of dedication enough to make such an institution work? Tayyem is guided by a principle that he sums up as "freedom with discipline", and all the signs are that it does work.

First, all students without exception find a job when they leave the Centre, and not just any job. "One very ordinary student who had trouble getting through his course two years ago paid me a visit recently", Tayyem said. "He found work that he loves in the Gulf — and he's earning twice as much as I do! Another former student I met by chance in the street in Saudi Arabia is heading a team of 12 engineers. He trained here as an industrial draughtsman."

The reaction of vocational trainers from 17 Arab countries who met recently in Damascus should convince sceptics of the merits of Tayyem's guiding principle. After visiting the Centre, one of them described it as "more of an engineering school than a vocational training centre, an example to us all."

Another unusual feature of the Damascus Centre is that it is one of only two mixed institutions in the UNRWA educational and training system. There are 21 women taking courses to become assistant pharmacists, lab assistants, industrial draughtsmen or building technicians. "Twenty-one out of 484 may not be many", Tayyem admits, "but it's a good start."

What is the secret of this man? "Keeping the students busy", he confides, with a reflective stroke of his white moustache and the

hint of a smile. And how does he do this? "By means of student committees supervised by the staff and myself. Thanks to them, the Centre is busy right around the clock."

To associate the students with the life of the centre, encourage them to initiate cultural and sports activities, develop solidarity with the underprivileged and to forestall any problem that could impair the smooth running of the centre, Mahmoud Tayyem had the idea of creating five committees: welfare, sports, entertainment, culture and press, and discipline.

Each committee consists of five to nine students, elected by the students themselves.

A higher committee, composed of one member each from the basic committees, is the administration's negotiating partner on everything to do with the life of the centre.

The welfare committee, for example, collects 10 per cent of the profit on goods made by the students and sold outside. If a student breaks one of the disciplinary rules, he knows he will have to pay five Syrian pounds (about \$1.28) to the committee's fund.

A daily radio news bulletin and a monthly magazine come from the culture and press committee, providing news for centre students.

Every two weeks the entertainment committee organises an evening's amusement to which parents and UNRWA staff are invited.

The biggest committee of all is the one responsible for sports events.

Some of its members have done well at the Pan-Arab Games.

All committee members spend some three hours a day on spare-time committee activity in addition to their school work. Their unanimous verdict: the centre has a good atmosphere. Everything is discussed, explained; everyone takes his responsibilities seriously; a solution to problems is always found.

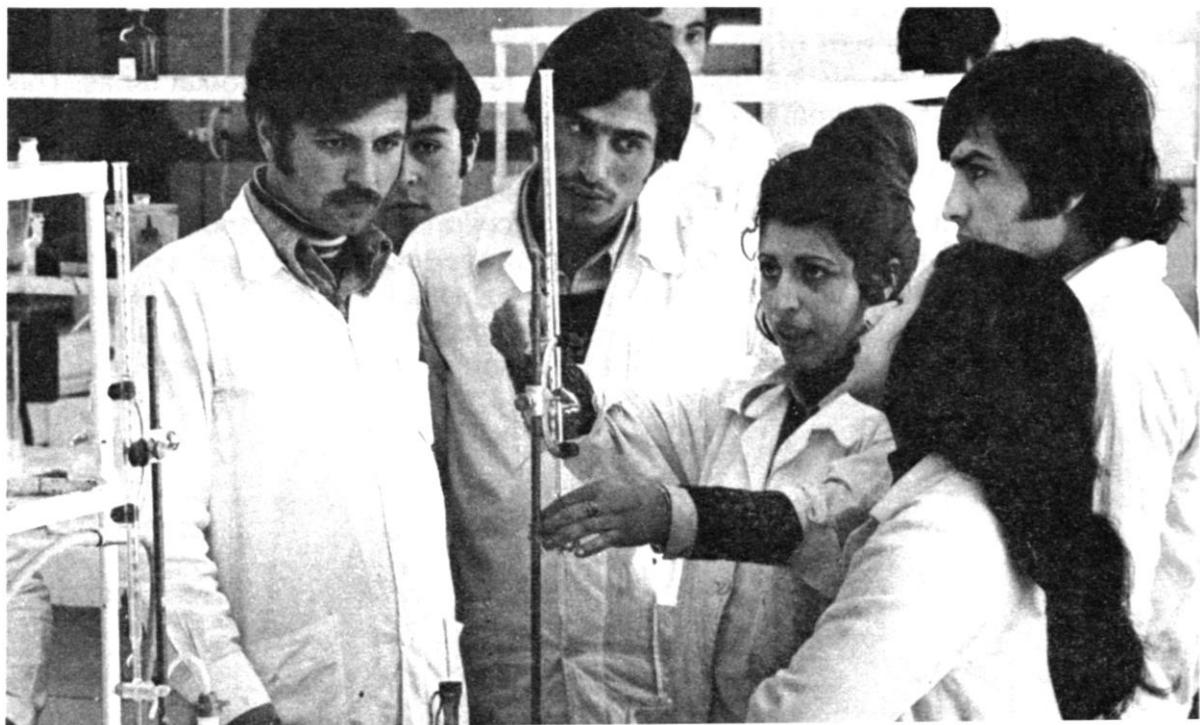
And of course problems do arise. Food, for example. Mahmoud Tayyem has found a formula to prevent adverse reactions by delicate stomachs. Yes, it is a committee. This one is responsible for taking delivery of food supplies at the centre, and one of its members is a student. When he thinks a dish might not be too well received, Tayyem dines with his students to study their reaction at first hand.

Walking down the centre's spotless corridors, he returns his students' greetings with good humour. Does he still have an unsatisfied ambition, or has he done everything he set out to do?

"I've achieved about 70 per cent", he replies. "The other 30 per cent is mainly concerned with enlarging the centre. My dearest wish is to be able to admit the young people who are capable of taking our courses each year, and whom we cannot now accept because there is not enough room."

There are plans to increase the Centre's capacity from 484 places to 720 by the start of the 1982-83 school year. This will require the physical expansion of the school and the acquisition of more equipment. Total cost for the expansion will be a little over \$2 million, but no contributor has yet been found.







Palestine Refugees Today

UNRWA Publications Available

- UNRWA Basic Facts (PL1002)
printed leaflet (English, French, German)
- UNRWA and the International Year of the Child (PL1003)
printed leaflet (English, French, German)
- UNRWA Services (PB1001)
illustrated colour folder/poster (English and German)
- Survey 1978 (PB1002)
printed brochure of facts and figures (English, French and German)
- Definitions and Statistics
mimeographed summary of UNRWA data
- Map of UNRWA'S area of operations
with refugee location data (English and Arabic)

Reader:

- Have you changed address?
- Would you like to be added to the UNRWA Newsletter mailing list?
- Would you like to receive further information about UNRWA, publications, photographs and audio-visual material?

Photos

Left: Damascus Vocational Training Centre was opened in 1961 with a capacity of 400 trainees. Today, 484 young men and women are attending two-year training courses in 15 vocations.

Back cover: The market place of Baq'a refugee camp (population 58,000), Jordan, which is virtually a town within itself.

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