



## General Assembly

Twelfth Session

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### Fourth Committee – Special Political and Decolonization Committee

This group works on special topics. It used to help colonies get independence. By 1990 most colonies were independent. For this reason, it added “Special Political” to its name and began to look at other issues not covered by other committees.

There are 17 non-self-governing-territories. These are areas of the world under the control of a state but not strictly part of that state. Some examples are Bermuda, Western Sahara, and Guam. Every year this group discusses what should happen with these areas.

The “Special Political” part of this group looks at other questions that do not fit in the other committees. They look at issues affecting Palestinian refugees, atomic radiation and how to use space for peace. Also, the discuss the topics of peacekeeping, landmines, and public information. The University for Peace is also on their agenda.

### Agenda Item 47 – United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

#### Background

The Ottoman Empire controlled a lot of the area in the Middle East before World War I. After the Ottoman Empire was abolished in 1922, however, France and Britain divided the Middle East into different areas which they controlled. One of these areas was called Mandatory Palestine.

Mandatory Palestine had many different groups living in it. The two biggest groups were Arab people (Palestinians) and Jewish people. Both groups wanted to have an independent country. However, neither group could figure out how they would live all together. Both sides wanted a country for their ethnic group. What they did agree on was they did not want Britain to control the area. Britain needed to keep 100 000 soldiers in Mandatory Palestine just to keep control. In 1947, Britain decided it did not want to be responsible for Mandatory Palestine anymore. It asked the United Nations to find a solution and said British troops would be leaving by 1948.

The question about what to do with Mandatory Palestine went to the United Nations. The UN decided the best thing to do was divide the land into two areas: one for Palestinians and one for Jewish people. Each could then become an independent country. This is Resolution 181. The Jewish Agency, which was the leadership of the Jewish people in Mandatory Palestine, accepted the decision. Arab leaders did not accept the decision. A civil war broke out between Jewish groups and Arab groups. The British did not try to stop the fighting. They announced they would be leaving Mandatory Palestine on 14 May 1948.

## Background

On 14 May 1948, the state of Israel was declared. On 15 May, Arab states around Israel declared war on Israel. They occupied the areas of Mandatory Palestine that were set aside for Palestinians. They attacked Israel and Israel fought back. After 10 months of fighting, Israel controlled 60% of the land that was supposed to be for an Arab state. The people who escaped the fighting became the first Palestinian refugees. They numbered about 750 000. In 1967, more fighting happened between Israel and its Arab neighbours. This created more refugees.

The United Nations created the *United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)* to help the refugees. There are refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Refugee camps are areas of land set aside by governments where refugees can live. They are supposed to be temporary but many of the refugee camps for Palestinians have existed for almost 70 years. Palestinian refugees registered by the UNRWA number 5 million people.

More than 2 million Palestinian refugees live in the West Bank or the Gaza Strip. These areas are next to the border with Israel. It is common for fighting between Israelis and Palestinians to occur. In the West Bank, Palestinian refugees have trouble finding work. 20% are unemployed. They also have trouble moving around freely because of restrictions by the Israeli government. In addition, 255 000 Palestinian refugees are food insecure. This means they have trouble getting enough food every day.

The situation in Gaza Strip is worse. The Israeli military controls what comes in and out of Gaza. This is called a blockade. It has been going on for 11 years. The Israeli authorities have also destroyed the homes of people involved in terrorist acts or suspected of terrorist acts. There are 6 750 Palestinian families who have had to move. In 2000 only 100 000 Palestinian refugees needed help with food, now 1 million people rely on food assistance. UNRWA needs US \$402 million to help the people of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

In 2011, a civil war broke out in Syria. The Palestinian refugees in Syrian camps soon were in danger. More than half of the 560 000 refugees had to escape the country or have been forced to move out of their homes. Thousands of refugees and 18 UNRWA workers have been killed. Another 25 workers are missing. This is a serious problem that is affecting the lives of thousands of people. UNRWA needs US \$414 million in order to help the people affected.

Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon are 10% of the population. There were 16 camps in Lebanon but 3 were destroyed during the Lebanese Civil War. Another had to be evacuated. The Syrian Civil War has increased the numbers in these camps because people come escaping the violence. Unfortunately, this puts a lot of pressure on the camps which already have a lot of problems. Poverty, over-crowdedness, poor housing and few jobs are all problems in these refugee camps.

Two million Palestinian refugees live in Jordan. They make up 20% of the population. The government of Jordan gave most of the refugees Jordanian citizenship. This is very positive because it means the refugees have a national identity. They can have a passport and have rights under the law. Many other countries do not give refugees citizenship because they are afraid that under the law they will have to do too much for them. Ten thousand Palestinian refugees from Syria came to Jordan for help. UNRWA is trying to help these people as well.

## Recent Developments



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## Guiding Questions

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1. UNRWA is mostly funded through voluntary contributions. Go to the UNRWA government page and find out if your country supports this organization: <https://www.unrwa.org/our-partners/government-partners> . Why do you think your country does or does not support this organization?
2. Research the problem of statelessness. This is a problem that many Palestinians have to deal with. How does it make life more difficult? What are the negative consequences of being a stateless person?
3. Look at the graphic on page 3. What other programs do you think could be started in order to help Palestinian people?
4. Why do you think “*enjoy human rights to the fullest possible extent*” is one of the goals of the UNRWA? What exactly does this mean in the context of Palestinian refugees? How might UNRWA support this goal?
5. Does your country have a large refugee population? How does this affect your country?
6. Refugees face a lot of discrimination because they often do not have a national identity. There is no official government willing to protect their rights. What can be done to reduce discrimination against refugees?
7. Marginalized groups are more at risk in refugee camps. Marginalized groups include women, children, youth, elderly, persons with disabilities, and people from the LGBTIQ community. How can these people be supported? Why might they need special supports in a refugee situation?
8. Does the problem exist in your community?
9. Who is working on it? NGOs, not for profits, other groups or individuals?
10. Knowing about this problem, how does it impact your world view?
11. How could you make an impact on this issue through your life choices?

## Resources

Title	Hyperlink	How is it helpful?
<b><i>United Nations Relief and Works Agency</i></b>	<a href="https://www.unrwa.org/">https://www.unrwa.org/</a>	Official website for the UNRWA
<b><i>Crisis Guide: The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict</i></b>	<a href="http://www.cfr.org/publication/13850">http://www.cfr.org/publication/13850</a>	Council on Foreign Relations website with a very good overview of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict
<b><i>Fact Sheet: Occupied Palestinian Territory Emergency Appeal 2017</i></b>	<a href="https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/2017_opt_ea_fact_sheet.pdf">https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/2017_opt_ea_fact_sheet.pdf</a>	A fact sheet from UNRWA about the problems facing Palestinian refugees in the Palestinian Territory.
<b><i>Fact Sheet: Syria Regional Crisis Response Emergency Appeal 2017</i></b>	<a href="https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/2017_syria_ea_fact_sheet.pdf">https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/2017_syria_ea_fact_sheet.pdf</a>	A fact sheet from UNRWA about the problems facing Palestinian refugees in Syria.
<b><i>Roads to Refuge</i></b>	<a href="http://www.roads-to-refuge.com.au/index.html">http://www.roads-to-refuge.com.au/index.html</a>	An Australian website that has a lot of general information about refugees.
<b><i>Against All Odds</i></b>	<a href="http://www.playagainstallodds.com/">http://www.playagainstallodds.com/</a>	A flash game where the player takes on the role of a refugee.
<b><i>The 7 Biggest Challenges Facing Refugees and Immigrants in the US</i></b>	<a href="https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/the-7-biggest-challenges-facing-refugees-and-immig/">https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/the-7-biggest-challenges-facing-refugees-and-immig/</a>	Article about some of the difficulties refugees face every day.
<b><i>Ending Statelessness</i></b>	<a href="http://www.unhcr.org/stateless-people.html">http://www.unhcr.org/stateless-people.html</a>	UNHCR website that discusses the problems of statelessness.
<b><i>Palestinian Syrians: Twice Refugees</i></b>	<a href="http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/03/palestinian-syrians-refugees-160321055107834.html">http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/03/palestinian-syrians-refugees-160321055107834.html</a>	Al Jazeera article about the difficulties of being a Palestinian Syrian refugee.