

MORALITY OR MANDATE IN THE DISASTER RELIEF PROJECT: THE BEGINNING OF  
THE UNITED NATIONS' HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE TO THE PALESTINIAN  
REFUGEE CRISIS, 1948

by

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(Under the Direction of KEVIN JONES)

ABSTRACT

At the beginning of the United Nations' response to the Palestinian refugee crisis in 1948, UN field workers in Jordan and Palestine sought to implement and improve an aid distribution scheme marred by UN financial constraints and restrictive distribution policies. In doing so, field workers took actions that exceeded the legal mandate of the UN Disaster Relief Project, the temporary UN agency leading aid distribution efforts. Workers asserted that their positions required moral decision-making that could not be limited by UN distribution policies. They ultimately argued that the UN had the capacity and responsibility to take direct humanitarian actions in order to aid the growing number of Palestinian refugees. UN field workers' contestation of UN aid distribution policies demonstrates an early break in the UN's indirect approach to Palestinian refugee aid relief, and it highlights the role of localized humanitarian actors in shaping broader institutional humanitarian approaches to refugee crises.

INDEX WORDS:     Palestinian Refugees, Humanitarianism, Aid Distribution, United Nations,  
Disaster Relief Project, Jordan

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

“I hope all your efforts may be crowned with success so that anything in the way of a major disaster amongst the refugees will be averted,” Margaret Proctor remarked in her resignation letter to J.W. MacCabe, the local United Nations field worker overseeing aid transportation to refugees in Jordan.<sup>1</sup> For the last month, Proctor, a nurse previously working for a private hospital northwest of Amman, led aid distribution efforts to refugees around the city of Irbid. However, a recent illness had added to a list of issues plaguing her coordination of distribution. Likewise, MacCabe, the man she relied on to transport food, clothes, blankets, and medicine for her operation, was experiencing significant issues in meeting the needs of other local humanitarians who were also leading the charge in aid distribution. Proctor’s remark underscores an optimism held by many humanitarians and UN field workers to mitigate the sufferings of Palestinian refugees in the early months of the United Nations’s initial response to the crisis. However, the efforts of these local humanitarians and UN field workers faced almost unsurmountable odds in providing aid, from external events like increasing refugee populations to internal struggles like restrictive UN aid distribution policies, that limited their ability to effectively help refugees.

UN field workers contested UN leadership decisions on humanitarian aid relief in the early months of the UN’s humanitarian response to the Palestinian refugee crisis in 1948. In the process, they carried out efforts that exceeded the legal mandate of the United Nations Disaster

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<sup>1</sup> UN, NYC: AG-022:S-0626-0001-32, Letter from Proctor to MacCabe on Resignation, 1 December 1948.

Relief Project (UNDRP) established by UN leadership figures. UN field workers sought to facilitate the movement of relief aid throughout Palestine and Jordan as instructed by UNDRP, but UN financial constraints and restrictive policies on aid distribution limited their efforts. In response, UN field workers took more direct approaches to humanitarian aid relief that went against UNDRP policy, utilizing an argument of moral responsibility to justify their close advisement of local humanitarian distributors, their appeals to the Jordanian government on behalf of local humanitarians and refugees, and their subversion of inadequate UNDRP distribution policies. An analysis of correspondence between UNDRP officers and communications between UNDRP officers, local humanitarians, and Jordanian government officials demonstrates this point. In doing so, UN field workers contested an inadequate institutional UN policy of humanitarian aid relief that limited an effective response, demonstrating the role of localized UN workers in shaping the UN's early response to the refugee crisis.

Focusing on the efforts of localized UN workers highlights a limitation in the current historiography on the UN's early response to the crisis. Most scholarship asserts a consistency in the broader institutional UN policies that provided minimum levels of care to Palestinian refugees. However, this research shows that individuals and small groups of UN field workers subverted these restrictive UN policies in an attempt to provide better care for refugees, demonstrating an early temporary break in the UN's indirect approach to the Palestinian refugee crisis. Broader institutional UN policies certainly led the way in how the UN handled growing numbers of refugees. But in numerous cases, UN field workers implemented alternative, localized humanitarian methods, contradicting broader UN policies.

The Disaster Relief Project, first organized by UN Mediator Folke Bernadotte and headed by Sir Raphael Cilento, functioned to transport aid donated to the UN by respective countries and national and international organizations. Under the mandate, UNDRP officers facilitated the transportation of aid from Beirut to respective cities and supply centers in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Palestine. The mandate held that UN officers would not lead distribution efforts or overextend themselves in direct advisory roles to local humanitarians and refugee camps where humanitarians and government officials worked. However, UNDRP officers J.W. MacCabe and Pierre DePage placed themselves in positions where they routinely subverted the UNDRP mandate. In many cases, these officers allowed shipments of aid to pass into humanitarian and government officials' hands outside of the strict process of aid handover mandated by UNDRP. Likewise, officers also served as close advisors to local humanitarians, doing more than simply communicating on matters of aid. J.W. MacCabe appealed to governments and UNDRP higher-up officials on account of humanitarians, helping to secure funding or resources for humanitarians that fell outside the purview of their position. In other cases, Pierre DePage played more direct roles in advising refugee camp construction and service provision.

For the duration of UNDRP's mandate, from September 1948 to at least January 1949, John (or Joseph) W. MacCabe was stationed in Amman where he served as Field Liaison and Supply Officer. MacCabe had experience working within UN channels. In 1947, MacCabe worked as a Transportation and Accommodation Officer and a Security Officer under the UN Special Committee on Palestine, a committee established by the UN General Assembly to report on and organize plans for the viability of governments in post-Mandate Palestine.<sup>2</sup> Similarly,

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<sup>2</sup> UN, NYC: AG-021:S-1554-0000-0028-00001, 'Location Statement of Secretariat of United Nations Special Committee on Palestine', undated.

MacCabe's fellow officer Pierre DePage, stationed in Ramallah during UNDRP's mandate, had extensive experience working with UN representatives. A few years before UNDRP, DePage was serving as President of the General Council for the Belgian Red Cross, helping to facilitate aid to displaced civilians in post-World War II Germany.<sup>3</sup>

Raphael Cilento, the Director of the Disaster Relief Project, was well known in numerous fields before he took his formal position as Director of Social Works for the UN Mediator on Palestine office. He had previous experience working as a medical professional for the Australian government, and he later served under the UN in refugee communities in the Balkans after World War II, among other UN positions.<sup>4</sup> During UNDRP's mandate, Cilento moved between Beirut, where the location of UNDRP operations was located, and Paris, where the UN General Assembly was in session for the latter half of 1948. In his role as Director of the Disaster Relief Project, Cilento served to implement UN institutional distribution policies that prioritized meeting minimum standards for refugees in order to stretch limited aid resources as far as possible. Cilento later served in a similar role under UNDRP's immediate successor in the United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees (UNRPR). As such, both MacCabe and DePage, as UN field workers, and Cilento, as the UN leadership figure heading UNDRP, had extensive

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<sup>3</sup> UN, NYC: AG-018:S-1252-0000-0047-00001, 'Application and Plan of the Belgian Red Cross for Operations in Germany in Connection with Displaced Persons', undated.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Finnane, "Raphael Cilento in Medicine and Politics: Visions and Contradictions." *Queensland Review* 20, no. 1 (2013): 5-9. <https://doi.org/10.1017/qre.2013>

experience in working with displaced populations, experience that shaped their respective approaches to aid relief and refugee advisement.

In regard to geography and scale, UNDRP operations were relatively limited to Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Palestine, with the majority of aid being shipped to the latter two regions. UNDRP collected aid in Beirut's ports and relied on local private company trucks and railways to transport aid into respective regions. The majority of aid travelled by this method from Beirut to Amman, later entering Palestinian urban centers like Ramallah and Nablus. UNDRP officers coordinated the delivery of aid into the hands of local humanitarian organizations and respective government officials who carried out distribution efforts in refugee-dense areas. Aid varied from individual donations made by UN member states to aid organized by other UN agencies like the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), but all aid relied on the transportation network established by UNDRP.

UNDRP was the most important UN agency in regard to aid transportation in the latter half of 1948. Despite this, UNDRP seemingly did not employ many employee outside of the respective Field Liaison and Supply Officers and a few administrative officers and medical officers stationed in Beirut. In this way, UNDRP served as the key agency organizing aid transfer between four countries while employing very few employees. UN leaders relied on the efforts of private companies and individuals to carry out other efforts, but when UN financial constraints limited UNDRP operations, it threatened the entire aid transportation network.

UN workers in the field contested UNDRP policies because they viewed them as restricting the UN's ability to meaningfully aid refugees. Many UNDRP officers believed their work as UN employees required a more direct approach to humanitarian aid relief, motivated by their daily view of the crisis and their close proximity compared to UN leaders. Therefore,

UNDRP officers routinely worked around inadequate UNDRP policies. In the process, they carried out more direct work in facilitating aid movement, secured resources for humanitarians outside the bounds of UNDRP, and played more direct roles in the lives of refugees.

## CHAPTER TWO

### HISTORIOGRAPHY

The goal of this research is to highlight the impact of localized humanitarian actors and their alternative humanitarian methods on the broader institutional UN policy. Scholars writing on the UN's early response to the crisis typically highlight the broader institutional UN policy that dictated various UN agencies' actions, noting both distribution's susceptibility to inadequate funding from the UN General Assembly as well as the restrictions that UN policies placed on refugees. UN leadership figures had practical reasonings for limiting early UN aid relief, from the lack of consistent funding to the expanding refugee crisis limiting the organization's ability to accurately assess the amount of aid required for refugees. Despite this, scholars generally agree that UN policies established poor living conditions for refugees, meeting a minimum standard of living on the part of food, materials, and medicine while also politically isolating refugees in the long term. This research furthers this argument. However, focusing on the efforts of local UN field workers highlights an early challenge to institutional UN policies that provided a minimum level of care to refugees. An analysis of UN field workers' contestation of UN policies enriches the current historiography by approaching the UN's early humanitarian scheme at a local level as opposed to the prevalent 'top-down' analysis of UN policy.

In an effort to improve aid relief delivery outcomes and create better living conditions for Palestinian refugees, UN field workers contested inadequate UN policies and sought to implement alternative humanitarian methods that provided more direct aid to Palestinian refugees than UN policies initially intended. In order to argue this point, this work relies on a

collection of correspondence letters and meetings between UNDRP field officers, written communications between field officers, private humanitarian organizations, and local and national Jordanian government officials, and detailed aid distribution reports. Together, these sources highlight the restrictive distribution policies headed by UN leadership figures, the UN's inadequate implementation of a distribution regime in UNDRP, and local UN field workers' efforts to correct UNDRP's inadequacies.

Jennifer Carr's PhD thesis argues that the United Nations took an 'adequacy-only' approach to the delivery of relief aid to Palestinian refugees, with Carr's focus centered on medical relief. In doing so, Carr argues the United Nations' early efforts forced Palestinian refugees into a state of "permitted endurance" where refugees received a minimum of necessary relief to survive but experienced a severe loss of political support from the international community.<sup>5</sup> Essentially, the UN prioritized meeting the minimum material needs of refugees while curtailing their political needs. This position of permitted endurance extended into the period where non-governmental organizations, or 'voluntary agencies', namely the International Red Cross, American Friends Service Committee, and the League of Red Cross Societies, guided the transnational network of relief distribution in the region. It ultimately continued into the first decades of the UNRWA era when the UN prioritized refugees' access to education and employment but directly limited their efforts to return to their former lands.

Carr focuses in part on the comments and decisions of Sir Raphael Cilento, Director of the Disaster Relief Project, to argue that UN officials envisioned the 'adequacy-only' approach as an ostensibly rational delivery of relief to refugees, with goods being distributed on the basis

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<sup>5</sup> Jennifer Carr, "A medical history of refugee camps: medical humanitarianism in Palestinian and Sahrawi refugee camps, 1948-1976" (PhD diss, University of Glasgow, 2023), 34. <https://theses.gla.ac.uk/84691/>.

of a ‘normal’ standard of life for the region.<sup>6</sup> To be sure, the UN’s philosophy of aid distribution had to combat significant logistical challenges, and there were practical means for providing a limited amount of aid to meet the ‘adequacy-only’ approach. Outside of precarious funding from the UN General Assembly and reliance on voluntary donations from UN member states, transportation from the UNDRP’s headquarters in Beirut required various trucks, cars, trains, and other vehicles to travel great distances through hostile terrain. These issues shaped the ‘adequacy-only’ approach.

However, Jennifer Carr also notes that leading figures like Cilento held deep racial prejudices that blurred this apparent rational delivery of aid. Mark Finnane’s brief biography of Cilento explores the UNDRP leader’s then-celebrated experience in medicine. His experience placed him in key roles in administering food and medical relief under several UN programs, including the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Association (or UNRRA) working in the post-WWII Balkans, in conditions similar to his later work in Palestine with dense refugee populations and potential for disease outbreak.<sup>7</sup> However, as Finnane notes, Cilento’s work before, during, and after his time with the UN rested on deep prejudices rooted in ideas of racial hierarchy.<sup>8</sup> As such, Carr’s examination of the UN and UNDRP’s ‘adequacy-only’ approach also highlights the colonial philosophies that shaped them, with her examination noting both the practical challenges that the project faced as well as the prejudices that legitimized leading figures’ decisions to allow a certain level of refugee suffering.

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<sup>6</sup> Carr, “A medical history of refugee camps,” 44-45.

<sup>7</sup> Mark Finnane, “Raphael Cilento in Medicine and Politics,” 7-9.

<sup>8</sup> Finnane, “Raphael Cilento in Medicine and Politics,” 6.

Jennifer Carr's designation of UN relief policy as "adequacy-only", leading to a "permitted endurance" for Palestinian refugees, is an apt description for the UN's top-down approach in providing for the growing refugee population. However, my research expands Carr's examination of UN relief aid philosophies by illuminating the tensions between leading UN officials and on-the-ground UNDRP workers. The latter group viewed refugee relief aid efforts through a different lens, shaped by constant communication with local government officials, distribution committees, and non-UN humanitarian workers operating near refugee populations. Such efforts from UNDRP officers placed them in close contact with both refugees and non-UN humanitarian figures. Over the project's lifespan, several key UNDRP officers realized that their positions within the UN distribution system afforded them an opportunity to conduct more aid and advisement than their legal mandate allowed, and these workers sought to exceed that mandate in a number of ways. Effectively, UNDRP's on-the-ground workers presented a challenge to UN officials' 'adequacy-only' approach.<sup>9</sup>

Analyzing the tension between UN officials and on-the-ground UNDRP workers also contributes to a further exploration of the 'humanitarian situation', the term Ilana Feldman uses to describe how governments, organizations, and individuals approach quickly emerging crises, how emerging crises become defined by both refugees and humanitarian actors, and how transformations in crises manifest specific responses from humanitarian actors. For Feldman, the 'humanitarian situation' fits within a larger cycle of "punctuated humanitarianism", a rhythm of humanitarian experience that involves the quick emergence of crises followed by protracted

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<sup>9</sup> Carr, "A medical history of refugee camps," 34.

periods of long-term need.<sup>10</sup> Each part of the cycle of punctuated humanitarianism shapes the experiences of humanitarians and refugees in particular ways, from the short-term need for basic living supplies spurred on by emerging crises (the humanitarian situation) to the long-term political atrophy experienced by refugees displaced across numerous states and in varying social and geographical conditions (the humanitarian condition).

As such, an analysis of UNDRP tensions among leaders and workers concerning the project's responsibilities toward Palestinian refugees sheds light on integral issues that influenced the UN's response to the emerging 'humanitarian situation' in Palestine in 1948. These include competing humanitarian visions between UN employees, issues in the implementation of relief aid between international, local governments, and humanitarian organizations, and UN bureaucratic inefficiencies that limited UNDRP and other UN agencies' ability to meet the demands of refugee populations. It also links the UN's early efforts in crisis mitigation in Palestine to the post-1950 period where the 'humanitarian condition', the term Feldman uses to describe the Palestinian experience of long-term displacement that persisted after the immediate events of the crisis, continued under UNRWA.<sup>11</sup>

UNDRP's actions sought to meet a minimum of refugees' needs in Palestine and surrounding countries. Before the ICRC, LRCS, and AFSC began leading the transnational distribution network for relief aid in January 1949, the UN Mediator tasked UNDRP with overseeing the distribution of the most vital resources in an effort to combat the evolving crisis. However, growing refugee numbers, a shortage of funding, personnel, and supplies, and

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<sup>10</sup> Ilana Feldman, *Life Lived in Relief: Humanitarian Predicaments and Palestinian Refugee Politics* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 15.

<sup>11</sup> Feldman, *Life Lived in Relief*, 3.

differences in the perceived responsibilities of the United Nations, respective national governments, and local humanitarians limited the project's ability to meet refugees' demands. In this context, UN leadership clashed with on-the-ground UNDRP workers on the responsibilities and capacities of the project to deliver meaningful aid to Palestinian refugees. Despite the project's short-lived experience, it demonstrated an early challenge to the United Nations' response to the Palestinian refugee crisis, arguing that the UN's indirect approach would not suffice if the goal was to aid refugees.

What are the limitations on these sources concerning UN field workers' actions during the UNDRP mandate? This research largely relies on correspondence from J.W. MacCabe in Amman, the officer overseeing the transportation of aid throughout Jordan but who also served as an auxiliary officer to Pierre DePage in Palestine. MacCabe took very specific approaches in advising local humanitarians, but Pierre DePage was even more central to the construction and operation of certain refugee camps in Palestine. Additional research on DePage's efforts would further clarify how UNDRP officers exceeded the agency's legal mandate by taking leading advisory roles in the operation of refugee camps. Moreover, research also needs to be done on the limitations of funding in this early stage in the UN's humanitarian response to the crisis. Why was it that UNDRP experienced such significant financial constraints, especially as the UN had already been monitoring the refugee crisis for several months? Given the financial constraints and UN leaderships' expectation that voluntary agencies would lead operations in early 1949, was UNDRP explicitly designed to be inadequate? Additional research on these points will provide clarity on the UN's first humanitarian response to the Palestinian refugee crisis, helping to link UNDRP to the UN's later efforts in UNRPR and UNRWA.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### BEGINNINGS OF THE REFUGEE CRISIS

Britain's withdrawal from Palestine on May 15, 1948, signaled the end of the British Mandate in the region. The withdrawal was the culmination of years of increasing tension between Jewish and Palestinian political institutions over arguments on how to govern the region and its people. However, the arrival of the 1948 Palestine War was hardly the beginning of the conflict. Respective Jewish and Palestinian forces and militias carried out attacks on military and civilian targets decades before May 1948. Likewise, it was hardly the beginning of the Palestinian refugee crisis, a crisis occurring as a result of increasing levels of violence that threatened Palestinian lives in the region. Palestinian flights from certain urban centers in the region had begun months prior. The United Nations' involvement in both the conflict and the refugee crisis also predated the start of the war. On November 27, 1947, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 181, a plan drafted by the UN Special Committee on Palestine to propose the partition of Palestine into a respective Jewish and Arab state. Increasing violence, as well as the recent adoption of Resolution 181, motivated many middle-to-upper class Palestinians to flee to safety shortly after.

Palestinians began fleeing to areas viewed as safe from direct conflict as early as December 1947. These early refugee populations largely consisted of wealthier Palestinian families fleeing coastal urban centers that had been earmarked for a future Jewish state by UN Resolution 181, with many fleeing to inland urban centers.<sup>12</sup> However, rural Palestinian

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<sup>12</sup> Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 67.

populations also took part in this early flight from areas most prone to conflict. By March 1948, many areas in and around Jewish-majority urban centers like Tel-Aviv experienced an “exodus” of Palestinian civilians.<sup>13</sup>

A new period of conflict between respective Jewish forces and Palestinian militias began in March 1948. For instance, the Haganah, the leading Zionist paramilitary organization, developed Plan Dalet which sought to secure key settlements and territories before the British’s withdrawal. The plan utilized techniques from evacuating to levelling rural villages, leading hundreds of thousands of Palestinian civilians to flee to safety.<sup>14</sup> 250,000-300,000 Palestinian refugees fled in this expansion of conflict between April 1948 and June 1948, a period characterized by Jewish and Palestinian forces increasing hostilities as well as the British withdrawal giving way to Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria entering into the conflict.<sup>15</sup>

The United Nations was involved in monitoring hostilities during this period, but UN efforts did not include direct, on-the-ground action. On the other hand, organizations that did carry out on-the-ground efforts like the International Committee of the Red Cross kept in communication with UN representatives in Palestine. For instance, the ICRC, carrying out a request by the British government to oversee the operation of medical centers in Palestine during the British’s withdrawal, sent out appeals to Arab and Jewish representatives in March to respect international law standards for the protection of medical institutions and wounded combatants

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<sup>13</sup> Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, 125.

<sup>14</sup> Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, 163-165.

<sup>15</sup> Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, 262.

and non-combatants. UN representatives, according to an ICRC general report, “were kept informed of the proposed scheme, and approved wholeheartedly.”<sup>16</sup>

Efforts to aid Palestinian refugees expanded greatly over the summer of 1948, when the growth of the crisis had reached a breaking point for the UN and respective voluntary agencies. The ICRC met with other voluntary agencies in August 1948 at the Stockholm Conference to discuss a centralized approach to delivering aid for the refugee population, now estimated by the Conference to be over 400,000 people. The approach would divide various parts of the region, from Arab-majority Palestine and Israel to Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, to which large numbers of Palestinian refugees had fled, into zones of distribution headed by the respective voluntary agencies. League representatives designed the approach to work within the framework of the forthcoming plan by UN Mediator Folke Bernadotte, who was also present at the Stockholm Conference as Chairman of the Swedish Red Cross.<sup>17</sup>

Until the voluntary agencies were prepared to assume full control of the proposed aid distribution network, the UN would carry out transportation and delivery efforts, relying on local religious humanitarian organizations like the Church Mission Society and local and national government officials from Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria to distribute aid to refugees. An August 16 UN press release detailed the formation of such an effort under the UN Mediator office, noting that the Mediator would maintain liaisons in each of the countries the efforts would occur in, but local organizations would handle distribution responsibilities.<sup>18</sup> As such, Bernadotte

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<sup>16</sup> International Committee Of The Red Cross, *Report on General Activities (July 1, 1947-December 31, 1948)* (ICRC, 1949), 102-103. [https://library.icrc.org/library/docs/DOC/RA\\_1947\\_ENG.pdf](https://library.icrc.org/library/docs/DOC/RA_1947_ENG.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> ICRC, *Report on General Activities (July 1, 1947-December 31, 1948)*, 112-113.

<sup>18</sup> UNISPAL, PAL/247, “Palestine question – Mediator’s plan for aid to Palestine refugees – Press release,” 16 August 1948. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-195721/>.

and other UN leaders' efforts established a transitional UN organization in the Disaster Relief Project which would transport donated UN aid to respective sites in the region, holding the line until voluntary agencies could carry out the efforts in early 1949.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### UNDRP'S START IN JORDAN

From the perspective of the United Nations, Jordanian government cooperation was vital if they were to mitigate the refugee crisis. On September 21, 1948, four days after the assassination of UN Mediator Count Folke Bernadotte by Lehi, a Zionist paramilitary organization, the new UN Mediator Ralph Bunche issued an agreement with the Jordanian government outlining the parameters of UN-Jordanian aid relief. The agreement established Jordanian government provisions to UNDRP, providing access to storage facilities, military protection, labor, and the use of railways and other transportation networks. The agreement also provided the exemption of customs duties, allowing UN goods to flow in and out of Jordan as quickly and as cheaply as possible.<sup>19</sup>

Most important to the operation of UNDRP legal responsibilities, however, was Article IV of the agreement. Article IV expressly protected the property status of UN aid to UN distributors “until such time when the distribution of the above mentioned goods, necessities and supplies is completed to persons to whom they are intended.”<sup>20</sup> The article necessitated that a formal transfer of aid from UN distributors to Jordanian officials or other figures occur before the aid could be considered the property of the receiving party. Article IV became integral to UNDRP's transport and distribution system which relied on government official signatures,

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<sup>19</sup> UN, NYC: AG-022:S-0626-0001-04-00001, ‘Copy of Agreement signed by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Mediator of the United Nations for Palestine’, 21 September 1948.

<sup>20</sup> UN, ‘Copy of Agreement’, 21 September 1948.

receipts, and other documents to establish the formal separation of legal responsibilities between the UN and the Jordanian government. Thus, the primary UNDRP responsibilities began and ended at transporting and delivering aid, with non-UNDRP actors carrying out actual distribution.

Defining UNDRP's legal responsibilities in aid relief relied in part on a system of receipts that noted supplies' movement from one UNDRP position to another, as well as movement in and out of formal UNDRP control. UNDRP used receipts that required signatures from national government officials in Jordan or non-government distribution committee officials in Palestine. In theory, Liaison and Supply Officers J.W. MacCabe and Pierre DePage would receive signed receipts that denoted the formal transfer of aid into the hands of government or committee officials, who then delivered and distributed the aid to respective refugee camps. Receipts also required detailed plans from officials for distributing the aid, plans that were reviewed by local UNDRP officers and then reported to the UNDRP headquarters.<sup>21</sup>

In practice, UNDRP officers found difficulty in securing signed receipts in a number of regions, undermining the system that defined UNDRP legal responsibilities. MacCabe, for instance, routinely complained about national officials being unwilling to provide signatures to receipts, such as Falah Pasha Madadha, Chairman of Jordan's Central Committee of Palestine Refugees. In a letter on November 17, MacCabe noted that he had previously authorized the shipment of 500 tents to be distributed through the Committee, doing so "in good faith that the formalities would be completed in due course."<sup>22</sup> Madadha had refused to sign the receipt on

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<sup>21</sup> UN, NYC: AG-022:S-0626-0001-30, 'Meeting with the Field and Liaison and Supply Officers', 14 November 1948.

<sup>22</sup> UN, NYC: AG-022:S-0626-0001-15, Letter from MacCabe to Madadha on Receipt Signature, 17 November 1948.

behalf of the national government because the Committee (and national government workers) did not physically handle the aid. Presumably, local city level officials had taken control of the goods for distribution, but UNDRP policy required approval from a national government official in order to formally transfer control of the aid.

MacCabe continued to have issues on this front. During a meeting between UNDRP Field Liaison and Supply Officers on November 14, MacCabe noted that he had no luck in procuring a signed receipt for UNICEF-supplied powdered milk from a national government official. Local organizations were in better conditions to distribute the powdered milk, so MacCabe approved the handover of aid to local officials. National government officials refused to provide a signature for the goods for the same reasoning: national government workers had not led distribution efforts for this specific shipment of aid.<sup>23</sup>

Jordanian national government officials' unwillingness to provide signatures for the certain transfers of aid spoke to tensions over perceived responsibilities between UNDRP and the Jordanian government. Jordan had already taken in significant numbers of refugees which had exhausted their financial ability to care for the growing refugee population. In the same November 1948 meeting with other UNDRP officers, MacCabe described the government's concerns with taking on additional liability for aid of UN origin. The number of refugees had risen to approximately 88,000, primarily located throughout the Jordan Valley and around Amman. The Jordanian administration, MacCabe noted, was small and unable to provide an accurate census of refugees, let alone provide effective relief to them.<sup>24</sup> Thus, Jordanian national

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<sup>23</sup> UN, 'Meeting with the Field and Liaison and Supply Officers', 14 November 1948.

<sup>24</sup> UN, 'Meeting with the Field and Liaison and Supply Officers', 14 November 1948.

officials denying formal liability for certain UNDRP aid functioned in some sense to shed the government of responsibility that it could not afford to carry.

On a number of occasions, Jordanian government officials exceeded their legal responsibilities, deploying UN aid to locations where the Jordanian government thought it was appropriate without the expressed approval of UNDRP. Soon after an instance in late October, MacCabe wrote to Falah Madadha to assert that the Jordanian government's actions threatened aid in other parts of the region. The majority of aid that passed through Amman, for example, was destined for the urban centers in Palestine. MacCabe noted that Jordanian government actions that reduced the availability of UNDRP stock without the approval of UNDRP placed this system of aid in danger, and the populations in most need of aid would not receive it.<sup>25</sup> The effort demonstrated a key point in the tension between the Jordanian government and the UN where Jordanian officials prioritized mitigating issues of aid in refugee-dense areas where they were the primary distributors and constructors of camps, leading them at times to confiscate UN aid and apply it where they saw fit.

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<sup>25</sup> UN, NYC: AG-022:S-0626-0001-15, Letter from MacCabe to Madadha, 25 October 1948.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CHALLENGES IN MAXIMIZING AID RELIEF

The tensions over responsibilities between the Jordanian government and the United Nations ultimately spoke to the constraints that both actors faced in facilitating an effective refugee relief system. Driven in part as a response to financial constraints, the UN Mediator office, and thus UNDRP leadership, relied on a philosophy of aid distribution that prioritized ‘vulnerable groups’, essentially those unable to provide for themselves. First outlined in a progress report from UN Mediator Bernadotte to the UN Secretary-General and published on September 16, 1948, a day before Bernadotte’s assassination, ‘vulnerable groups’ included mostly young children, nursing mothers, and pregnant women. According to the report which examined an August 1948 UN survey of 500 refugee sites across Palestine, infants from 0 to two years old made up 12 percent of the population, children three to five years old were 18 percent, children six to eighteen years old were 36 percent, pregnant women and nursing mothers made up 10 percent, and an additional 8 percent included elderly and sick refugees.<sup>26</sup> Together, Bernadotte estimated that ‘vulnerable groups’ made up 85 percent of the refugee population.<sup>27</sup>

This philosophy carried over weeks later into UNICEF’s first major Palestinian aid distribution in the form of powdered milk, making use of UNDRP transporting and planning. In

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<sup>26</sup> UNISPAL, A/648, “Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator on Palestine Submitted to the Secretary-General for Transmission to the Members of the United Nations”, 16 September 1948. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-198227/>.

<sup>27</sup> Carr, “A medical history of refugee camps,” 40-41.

an effort designed by Baron de Nieuwburgh, a UNICEF representative to UNDRP, and Dr. Arne Barkhuus, the UNDRP official overseeing medical efforts, UNICEF powdered milk reached numerous refugee populations in late September and October 1948. The first distribution of powdered milk would target “the most needy group”, including infants under 1 year old, pregnant women, and nursing mothers, aiding those most vulnerable before UNDRP and UNICEF could secure accurate population estimates for the amount of powdered milk needed for the next phase.<sup>28</sup>

The powdered milk scheme also established strict guidelines for the milk’s distribution, likely to prioritize health as well as to maintain proper stock at respective refugee sites, which generally held two weeks’ worth of powdered milk. While UNDRP and UNICEF leadership sought to enact the scheme everywhere with a notable refugee population, leadership’s prioritization of accurate population estimates and distribution plans limited the plan’s implementation. In the days before the scheme’s start, for example, only four refugee sites in Lebanon and two sites in Gaza met the criteria for milk delivery. An inability to estimate how many refugees required milk inevitably limited the UNDRP’s ability to provide the aid. The plan also placed restrictions on refugees themselves, whether to meet health standards or to limit the use of rations and maintain stock. The plan restricted distribution teams to not provide leftover reconstituted milk on the following day, and they were to not provide milk in powdered form to individual refugees. Instead, refugees were to receive only reconstituted milk to consume in drinking facilities, with exceptions for ill children and medical sites like hospitals.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> UN, NYC: AG-022:S-0626-0001-31, ‘Distribution Plan, Emergency Milk Programme’, 21 September 1948.

<sup>29</sup> UN, ‘Distribution Plan, Emergency Milk Programme’, 21 September 1948.

In a meeting with UNDRP officers in November 1948, Dr. Descoedures, a representative of UNICEF in Beirut, discussed caloric limitations in the distribution of food. Descoedures noted that these vulnerable groups in Jordan received 800 calories a day from UNICEF aid.<sup>30</sup> However, as UNDRP and other UN agencies continued to push for an accurate census of refugees, these caloric numbers were likely to change based on the agencies' estimations for how much aid should enter Jordan. Any attempt at increasing the amount of rations provided to refugees through UNICEF, thereby increasing daily calories for refugees, ran into this issue. Providing aid for additional refugees stretched available resources, reducing the amount of rations provided to the average refugee, an issue that persisted after the transition from UNDRP to the voluntary agencies.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> UN, 'Meeting with the Field and Liaison and Supply Officers', 14 November 1948.

<sup>31</sup> Carr, "A medical history of refugee camps," 61.

## CHAPTER SIX

### J.W. MACCABE'S WORK WITH LOCAL HUMANITARIANS

John W. MacCabe, the Field Liaison and Supply Officer in Amman, worked with Jordanian government officials and local humanitarians to meet the increasing needs of Palestinian refugees. MacCabe did this despite being affected by significant communication issues between UNDRP and Jordanian officials. A major aspect of his work included MacCabe advising local humanitarian committees who oversaw the implementation of distribution schemes. At times, MacCabe's advisory efforts implicitly and explicitly exceeded UNDRP's legal mandate.

For the UNICEF milk distribution scheme around Amman, UNDRP relied on the work of the Jordanian Ladies Committee, a group of Jordanian women voluntarily working to distribute aid at camp sites. Madame Sukker, the chairwoman of the committee, met with MacCabe on September 29, 1948, to discuss implementing the UNICEF scheme, as well as implementing non-UNICEF distribution efforts. Supply stores, Sukker stated, were no issue at this early stage. The issue was organizing groups of refugee women effectively to receive aid, ensuring that chaos did not break out in crowds, as approximately 1,000 women met the criteria to receive milk. The crowdedness of distribution attempts was limiting the number of refugees arriving to receive rations. Moreover, UNICEF and UNDRP's distribution restrictions limited efficient methods at delivering aid, for instance prohibiting the distribution of UNICEF-supplied milk

alongside Jordanian government-supplied bread rations, with UNDRP officials fearful that individuals “not entitled” to UNICEF aid would receive rations.<sup>32</sup>

Madame Sukker suggested to MacCabe that the committee should set up four marquees, “one on each hill” in Amman, supplied by a central milk mixing center, to lessen the load on distribution efforts.<sup>33</sup> Under Sukker’s plan, distribution teams would provide colored tickets to refugees to designate which tent one would go to for aid. Sukker noted that funds for necessary supplies were not currently available, and she called for MacCabe to secure additional funds from Walter Klein, a canon in St. George Cathedral in Jerusalem who was a consistent funder of UNDRP efforts in Palestine and Jordan. Sukker ended her meeting with MacCabe by noting the close relationship that the UNDRP officer held with members of the Ladies Committee, highlighting MacCabe’s reliance on the group for meeting relief goals. “The Committee,” she said, “is always ready to meet Mr. Mac Cabe [sic] whenever he has any work for them to undertake.”<sup>34</sup>

MacCabe also relied on the work of people like Winifred Coate, a relief worker and educator leading aid efforts in Jordan for the Church Mission Society, an Anglican mission society involved in Palestine dating back to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Initially educated at the University of London and experienced in teaching in England, Winifred Coate worked as Principal of the Jerusalem Girls’ College from 1928 to 1943.<sup>35</sup> Inger Marie Okkenhaug argues

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<sup>32</sup> UN, NYC: AG-022:S-0626-0001-31, ‘Milk Distribution Scheme for Amman’, 29 September 1948.

<sup>33</sup> UN, ‘Milk Distribution Scheme for Amman’, 29 September 1948.

<sup>34</sup> UN, ‘Milk Distribution Scheme for Amman’, 29 September 1948.

<sup>35</sup> Inger Marie Okkenhaug, *The Quality of Heroic Living, of High Endeavour and Adventure: Anglican Mission, Women, and Education in Palestine, 1888-1948* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 218.

that Coate's early work in Palestine placed her at the "forefront of imperialist culture" during the British Mandate, leading secondary education programs for the children of elite Palestinian Arab families.<sup>36</sup> However, her work as an educator and humanitarian led her to criticize British Mandate policy that politically isolated Palestinian Arab populations during this period, criticisms influenced by the Anglican Church's relationship with the Christian Arab population in the region.<sup>37</sup>

In late 1948, Coate led education and humanitarian efforts for the Church Mission Society, moving between Amman, Zarqa, and Al-Husn. In these locations, she coordinated the distribution of UNICEF powdered milk, working closely with MacCabe to maximize the effect of the relief scheme. MacCabe wrote to Coate on October 10 noting changes in the distribution plan for UNICEF milk in Zarqa. New plans limited powdered milk rations to infants under 1 year old, while skimmed milk would arrive later for all other vulnerable groups. At the same time, nurse Jamileh Habeeb, a nurse working in Zarqa, worked to establish population estimates to help the future phases of aid allocation and distribution.<sup>38</sup>

Coate and a Mrs. M. Kendall delivered calls for donations to local donors for Zarqa's new refugee distribution center in late October to contend with the growing population, estimated at the time to be approximately 3,000 refugees, with at least 2,444 being children,

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<sup>36</sup> Okkenhaug, *The Quality of Heroic Living, of High Endeavor and Adventure*, xiv.

<sup>37</sup> Okkenhaug, *The Quality of Heroic Living, of High Endeavor and Adventure*, 173.

<sup>38</sup> UN, NYC: AG-022:S-0626-0001-32, Letter from MacCabe to Coate Concerning UNICEF Supplies, 10 October 1948.

nursing mothers, and pregnant women. Israeli forces had captured most of the women and children's male relatives, holding them as prisoners of war, all supposedly expelled from Lydda and Ramla. Now, the refugees were largely undernourished, having nothing in the way of adequate clothing and other materials to prepare for the coming winter. Moreover, the population in Zarqa had little support from local and national institutions, with only small Jordanian government bread rations complementing the forthcoming UNICEF aid.<sup>39</sup>

MacCabe worked to help Coate to improve refugee conditions in Zarqa on a number of occasions. In early November, for example, MacCabe accompanied Coate to a meeting with Fawaz Bey, a local Zarqa government official, as well as a later meeting with another city official. Coate had great interest in temporarily using a customs house in Zarqa as a distribution center. Coate and MacCabe first appealed to Fawaz Bey, who accepted Coate's use of the customs house on the condition that the other city official accepted. However, Coate and MacCabe were unsuccessful because of the building's use by the Arab Legion.<sup>40</sup>

Coate later appealed to Glubb Pasha, commanding general of the Arab Legion, for the building. Coate included notes of interviews she recently conducted of Zarqa refugees, seeking to convey the needs of the refugees in Zarqa, centering on food and medicine. Coate noted a tent housing a mother and two daughters. One of the daughters, an 18-year-old Palestinian, had just given birth to her first child. The child was healthy, but the new mother had developed an alarming cough after the birth. A mother in another tent, providing for three boys and a baby girl born two months prior, had also developed an illness. The children relied on milk from the local

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<sup>39</sup> UN, NYC: AG-022:S-0626-0001-32, 'Refugee Distribution Centre in Zerka', 31 October 1948.

<sup>40</sup> UN, NYC: AG-022:S-0626-0001-32, Letter from Coate to Glubb Pasha on Customs House, 3 November 1948.

distribution center. Children in another tent also suffered from illnesses; an 8-year-old boy had contracted typhoid, and his 5-year-old cousin “was puny and weak.”<sup>41</sup> Coate promised milk from the distribution center to the families of the boys, despite the two not necessarily meeting the UNICEF criteria to receive aid.

MacCabe continued to stay in contact with Coate throughout the remainder of UNDRP’s mandate, advising Coate on the organization and distribution of various aid in Zarqa. Coate responded to a letter from MacCabe on November 28 concerning the distribution of blankets among refugees for the coming winter. Despite facing numerous setbacks, from Coate contracting an illness to distribution teams being “mobbed” by crowds of refugees, the local committee successfully distributed blankets. In line with previous concerns of population estimates and ensuring that the most ‘deserving’ refugees received the aid, Coate and the committee provided tickets to individual refugees, “so that we know the really poor folk did get them.”<sup>42</sup> Coate noted that the committee found success in registering an additional 458 mothers for the milk scheme, expecting more refugees coming from the Negev.

UNDRP and UNICEF expanded the powdered milk scheme into other refugee-dense areas in Jordan in late October and early November 1948. Within these areas, UNDRP relied on formal plans of distribution signed by local committees like those found in Zarqa and Amman and approved by local Jordanian authorities. One such distribution plan confirmed the work of a committee in Irbid under matron nurse Margaret Proctor, who worked with the Gilead Mission

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<sup>41</sup> UN, NYC: AG-022:S-0626-0001-32, ‘Refugees visited in Zerka Tents by Miss Coate & Miss. Kendal’, 3 November 1948

<sup>42</sup> UN, NYC: AG-022:S-0626-0001-32, Letter from Coate to MacCabe, 28 November 1948.

Hospital, a hospital also rooted in missionary work carried out by the Church Mission Society and headed by Dr. Charles F. McLean.<sup>43</sup>

MacCabe communicated with McLean in October 1948, at least a month prior to receiving the distribution plan outlining Margaret Proctor's efforts in Irbid. MacCabe hoped that he could secure McLean's hospital staff for distribution and medical efforts in nearby refugee camps, an effort that McLean and his hospital staff were receptive to. McLean wrote to MacCabe on October 4, providing a proposal for the Gilead Mission Hospital staff's involvement. McLean had not known where the staff would be working, but he accepted that they would temporarily close the hospital in Ajloun to allow the staff to work in refugee sites around the Jordan Valley. McLean included a number of conditions concerning wages and accommodations for patients and staff, but he emphasized first that the hospital in Ajloun would remain in the hands of selected caretakers and second that his staff would be able to continue their evangelistic work in their new positions, highlighting the continuing role of evangelism in both their humanitarian philosophies and the funding of their work from missionary societies.<sup>44</sup>

McLean later advised MacCabe that UNDRP and UNICEF should work to establish milk clinics in other refugee-dense towns, and he questioned when UNDRP would supply powdered milk in Irbid.<sup>45</sup> However, based on UNDRP restrictions concerning accurate populations and

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<sup>43</sup> UN, NYC: AG-022:S-0626-0001-28, 'Extracts From the Annual Report for the Year Ended 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1947 of the Gilead Mission Hospital, Ajlun Transjordan', undated.

<sup>44</sup> UN, NYC: AG-022:S-0626-0001-28, 'Scheme Proposed for Utilising the Services of "the Gilead Mission Hospital," Ajloun', 4 October 1948.

<sup>45</sup> UN, NYC: AG-022:S-0626-0001-28, Letter from McLean to MacCabe Concerning Hospital Work, 7 October 1948

detailed distribution plans, MacCabe had little knowledge of when milk distribution could begin.<sup>46</sup> Also, as a result of UNDRP financial constraints, McLean and his staff faced significant challenges while attempting to implement their work in Irbid and surrounding areas.

UNDRP's own issues in funding distribution efforts threatened the viability of the entire Gilead Mission Hospital in Ajloun. MacCabe later wrote to Dr. Arne Barkhuus, the medical director for UNDRP, on November 18 to discuss McLean and the hospital's troubles. Gilead's intermittent work limited by UNDRP finances was now threatening McLean's ability to keep his staff. Other issues added up to threaten the viability of the entire operation. The hospital, after all, had relied on donations in order to operate, and MacCabe's letter to Barkhuus implied that the hospital was not receiving routine UNDRP funding for wages, food, and other expenses.<sup>47</sup> MacCabe asserted that Barkhuus should keep McLean in communication about the potential for UNDRP formally cutting support for their efforts in Irbid.

Distribution restrictions continued to limit the Gilead Mission's tumultuous work in Irbid, adding to other issues that threatened distribution leader Margaret Proctor's efforts. Proctor's early letters to MacCabe noted an optimism in the ability to spread out enough powdered milk to the number of registered refugees. Proctor wrote to MacCabe on November 22 noting that their received supplies were going to last longer than expected. The group had used up enough supplies for 2,264 rations, but Proctor estimated that the supplies held enough to provide 2,400 total rations. Proctor ended her letter hoping that MacCabe's efforts were "taking a more definite shape" and "causing less headaches", highlighting continuing tensions between MacCabe and

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<sup>46</sup> UN, NYC: AG-022:S-0626-0001-28, Letter from MacCabe to McLean on Powdered Milk, 9 October 1948.

<sup>47</sup> UN, NYC: AG-022:S-0626-0001-28, Letter from MacCabe to Barkhuus on McLean and Hospital, 18 November 1948

UNDRP leadership over the project's struggles to provide, in MacCabe's view, meaningful relief to refugees.<sup>48</sup>

Operations in Irbid quickly deteriorated. Proctor contracted an illness, and a member of the Gilead Mission wrote to MacCabe on November 24 noting that local mukhtars from villages outside of Irbid approached Proctor to set up milk centers in the respective villages. As a result of her illness, Proctor relied on other members of the team to coordinate distribution efforts.<sup>49</sup> However, by the beginning of December, Proctor resigned from her position. She wrote to MacCabe on December 1 noting that her illness had severely limited her ability to lead distribution efforts and that she was heading home to England. She continued, saying that Winifred Coate would be considering ways to continue operations in Irbid. Proctor concluded her note by wishing MacCabe well, hoping that his efforts "may be crowned with success."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> UN, NYC: AG-022:S-0626-0001-32, Letter from Proctor to MacCabe on UNICEF Supplies, 22 November 1948.

<sup>49</sup> UN, NYC: AG-022:S-0626-0001-32, Letter from Gilead Mission Member to MacCabe on Irbid, 24 November 1948.

<sup>50</sup> UN, NYC: AG-022:S-0626-0001-32, Letter from Proctor to MacCabe on Resignation, 1 December 1948.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### UNDRP'S INEFFICIENT HUMANITARIAN SCHEME

For the duration of his stay in Amman, J.W. MacCabe found numerous difficulties in meeting the demands of Palestinian refugee populations. However, the fundamental problem for MacCabe was working within the confines of his own organization. UNDRP leadership required formal distribution plans, accurate population estimates, and other reports that clearly defined how respective distribution committees were to use aid. UNDRP could not deliver without them. However, the fluidity of the crisis, including increases in refugee population numbers and other tensions with Jordanian military and national government institutions, limited MacCabe and other UNDRP officers' ability to procure these reports from local committees. UNDRP restrictions on aid delivery threatened the organization's core mission.

Local committees were eager to work. For example, C.F. McLean's appeal to MacCabe to immediately begin UNICEF milk shipments in and around Irbid highlighted the entire Gilead Mission's focus on Palestinian refugee aid. The hospital leaders decided to temporarily close their operation of the privately-funded hospital in Ajloun until at least March 1949 in order to meet the demands of the crisis, expecting UNDRP to be able to provide the necessary aid for refugees and fund livable wages for the staff.<sup>51</sup> But UNDRP bureaucratic and financial limitations dashed the Gilead Mission's plans.

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<sup>51</sup> UN, 'Scheme Proposed for Utilising the Services of "the Gilead Mission Hospital," Ajloun', 4 October 1948.

Likewise, Margaret Proctor worked until she couldn't work anymore, hampered by illness. And despite her report that noted a normal UNDRP delivery of aid in Irbid in mid-November, other distribution committee leaders described dire delivery issues which threatened distribution operations in respective refugee sites. For example, J.M. Morris, a Church Mission Society nurse leading distribution efforts in Al-Salt, wrote to MacCabe on November 9 noting that the two most recent barrels of UNICEF powdered milk had arrived "at the eleventh hour".<sup>52</sup> Morris's calls for help continued to arrive. On December 2, she wrote to MacCabe noting that her committee had completely exhausted their supply of sugar and was running low on meat, milk, and ingredients for soup. According to her calculations, approximately 6,000 children in the area depended on the milk deliveries.<sup>53</sup> MacCabe sympathized with Morris, responding that his "single handed" position limited his ability to meet her requests.<sup>54</sup>

To be sure, many of UNDRP's restrictions in aid transportation and delivery had very practical causes, connected to Cilento's philosophies on maximizing the number of people relieved with a limited amount of aid. UN General Assembly-designated funding, after all, was not consistent. Funding and physical aid relied on voluntary donations from states and organizations, and increasing numbers of refugees obscured the real scale of the crisis, making accurate estimates of needy populations hard to secure and hard to prepare for. However, UNDRP implemented policies as a result of these limitations that severely impacted the project's

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<sup>52</sup> UN, NYC: AG-022:S-0626-0001-32, Letter from Morris to MacCabe on Aid Delivery, 9 November 1948.

<sup>53</sup> UN, NYC: AG-022:S-0626-0001-32, Letter from Morris to MacCabe on Shortages, 2 December 1948.

<sup>54</sup> UN, NYC: AG-022:S-0626-0001-32, Letter from MacCabe to Morris Responding to Shortages, 2 December 1948.

ability to carry out its core purpose: to transport and deliver aid to humanitarian and government aid distributors. Whether due to financial constraints or policies on detailed distribution plans, UNDRP routinely stopped aid transportation. Doing so delayed the amount of aid that could reach refugees, leaving local UNDRP officers and humanitarians scrambling to secure funding or aid from private donors, the Jordanian government, or other parties.

At the same time, the UN's focus on establishing formal separations between its responsibilities in the region and those of the Jordanian government demonstrated another point of conflict that limited both parties' abilities to meet the needs of refugees. UNDRP policy consistently found itself at odds with national Jordanian institutions. At times, Arab Legion forces took control of UNDRP aid without the consent of figures like MacCabe, seeking to use it in refugee sites where Arab Legion leaders thought it was most appropriate. In other situations, like with Winifred Coate's need for an adequate distribution center, the Arab Legion's own work with refugees restricted UNDRP-local humanitarian work by limiting the local resources they had access to.

Jordanian national government officials' propensity to haggle over formal responsibilities between the Jordanian government and the UN created situations where figures like MacCabe struggled to get necessary information to UNDRP headquarters in order to quickly facilitate aid shipments. UNDRP concerns over formal signatures from Jordanian officials in order to obtain UNDRP aid created a barrier that, at times, unnecessarily inhibited the flow of aid. However, in both cases of tensions between the UN and the Jordanian government, the key issue centered on both parties' constraints limiting their ability to aid refugees. Their attempts to establish separations of responsibilities occurred because of the financial, political, and logistic difficulties the two parties faced in providing for refugees on such a significant scale.

As such, MacCabe routinely found local and provincial Jordanian government officials easier to work with in terms of facilitating humanitarian work. After all, local officials were in similar positions to both local UNDRP officers like MacCabe and local humanitarians like Coate, Sukker, and Proctor. They effectively functioned as the primary point of contact between refugees and their respective institutions. Refugee populations arrived in and around urban centers, relying in part on local government officials to use their capacities to transport aid, ease everyday issues for local humanitarian workers, and appeal to national Jordanian officials to coordinate strategies alongside UNDRP.<sup>55</sup> The level of proximity that UNDRP officers had to the crisis certainly motivated their alternative efforts to aid refugees, exceeding the UNDRP mandate in the process.

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<sup>55</sup> UN, 'Meeting with the Field Liaison and Supply Officers', 14 November 1948.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### TRANSITION TO VOLUNTARY AGENCIES

On November 17, 1948, UNDRP leadership met in Beirut with representatives from numerous voluntary agencies to discuss the General Assembly's forthcoming Resolution 212 and its effects on the voluntary agencies' efforts in relief distribution. Based on research carried out by the UN's Third Committee, the committee overseeing international social and humanitarian matters, Resolution 212 tackled the question of how to aid the growing number of Palestinian refugees, now estimated by the Third Committee to be over 500,000 people. The resolution designated a sum of \$29,500,000 to cover supplies and distribution expenses and an additional \$2,500,000 to cover administrative expenses from December 1, 1948, to August 31, 1949. In addition, the resolution established the United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees (or UNRPR), the agency tasked with overseeing the distribution network that was soon to be led by the voluntary agencies.<sup>56</sup>

In the meeting with voluntary agency representatives, Raphael Cilento immediately questioned Resolution 212's potential effectiveness. Chief among Cilento's concerns was the resolution's silence on Palestinian repatriation to their former lands, a silence that surely limited the UN's ability to oversee any meaningful conclusion to the refugee crisis.<sup>57</sup> In addition, Cilento

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<sup>56</sup> UNISPAL, A/RES/212 (III), "Assistance to Palestine refugees/Establishing UNRPR, special fund – GA resolution 212 (III)," 19 November 1948. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-179872/>.

<sup>57</sup> UN, NYC: AG-022:S-0626-0001-19, 'Minutes of Fourth Meeting with Voluntary Agencies', United Nations Mediator on Palestine and Disaster Relief Project Meeting, 17 November 1948.

questioned the Resolution's allocation of funding for the relief effort. The Third Committee based the total sum of \$32,000,000 on the cost needed to meet refugees' minimum standards for diet, health, and living conditions for a 9 month period. However, the funding did not account for approximately 200,000 additional refugees fleeing from recent military actions in Beersheba and northern Galilee. Cilento's concerns with the adequate funding of UNDRP and its successors were one of the primary drivers in limiting UNDRP's distribution efforts, affecting everything from private transportation for officers like MacCabe to restricting the hiring of local secretaries and other workers to help officers' day-to-day work.

Raphael Cilento's concerns with Resolution 212 highlighted his growing disillusion with the United Nations as an effective body to deliver international aid. This disillusion, according to historian Mark Finnane, began as far back as October 1946 when Cilento worked for the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Association. To Cilento, the UN had failed to overcome its key problems, including the UN Charter's tacit promotion of bloc voting.<sup>58</sup> Cilento believed that extensive bureaucratic inefficiencies limited any ability for the United Nations to effect change on the part of refugee populations. In the case of the Palestinian refugee crisis, these political and administrative inefficiencies, especially the inability to determine the real costs of the program, cast doubt on the UN's capacity to provide significant aid to the rapidly growing number of refugees.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, Resolution 212's allotment of funds to relief operations rested on the ability of UN member states to make their voluntary contributions, calling into question whether UNDRP and its soon-to-be successors would actually see the funds in a timely manner.

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<sup>58</sup> Finnane, "Raphael Cilento in Medicine and Politics," 8-10.

<sup>59</sup> UN, 'Minutes of Fourth Meeting with Voluntary Agencies', 17 November 1948.

By late November, Cilento's main concern was the smooth transition of operations from UNDRP to the voluntary agencies. However, Cilento expressed serious doubts over the readiness of the voluntary agencies to meet the needs of the refugee population. His assistant director, H. Van Ketwich Verschuur, expressed similar doubts in a personal letter to UNDRP Officer Pierre DePage two days after the meeting with voluntary agency representatives. For Verschuur, the issue rested on the fact that the LRCS operations, which would span throughout Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, rested on a single advisor in W. de St. Aubin.<sup>60</sup> Cilento assured the agency representatives that UNDRP would "continue and extend" its operation of the distribution network until the voluntary agencies were prepared for the transition. Until then, UNDRP headquarters and regional officers would be in contact with voluntary agency representatives through Verschuur concerning general operations.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> UN, NYC: AG-022:S-0626-0001-19, 'Personal letter', Verschuur to DePage, 19 November 1948.

<sup>61</sup> UN, 'Personal letter', Verschuur to DePage, 19 November 1948.

## CHAPTER NINE

### UNDRP AND MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

In a confidential letter dated October 31, Assistant Director Verschuur wrote to J.W. MacCabe and Pierre DePage concerning a particularly critical letter Cilento had sent to A.H. Schickel, UNDRP's Administrative Officer. The letter evidently admonished efforts carried out by UNDRP headquarters figures and UNDRP officers in the field over general distribution, as well as decisions concerning constructing tent sites in refugee areas with tents provided by UNDRP. To Verschuur, the letter contained "statements of so highly offensive a nature" that multiple leading UNDRP administrators in Beirut, including Verschuur, Barkhuus, and Schickel, were threatening to resign unless Cilento apologized and retracted his offensive statements.<sup>62</sup>

Verschuur, Schickel, and the others demonstrated unity in their actions concerning aid distribution, and they offered their support to figures like MacCabe and DePage who carried out these efforts. And MacCabe returned their support. In his response to Verschuur, MacCabe noted, "the Cilento personality becomes more and more baffling to me."<sup>63</sup> MacCabe acknowledged that he had only met Cilento twice before because of the changing situation in the region, but that he believed Cilento exhibited two different personalities concerning his approach to the refugee crisis. On one hand, MacCabe commended Cilento's ability to defend UNDRP's actions against opposition by Israeli government representatives. On the other hand, MacCabe

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<sup>62</sup> UN, NYC: AG-022:S-0626-0001-14, Private Letter from Verschuur to MacCabe and DePage, 31 October 1948.

<sup>63</sup> UN, NYC: AG-022:S-0626-0001-14, Letter from MacCabe to Verschuur on Cilento Comments, 6 November 1948.

noted Cilento's bitter critiques of UNDRP staff, critiques that presumably were not new. In any case, MacCabe agreed with Verschuur, believing that his work in Jordan and DePage's work in Palestine had strengthened Cilento's arguments for additional UN funding.

This divide between Cilento and officers in UNDRP signaled a notable difference in how certain members of UNDRP perceived the UN and the project's responsibility in providing aid to Palestinian refugees. Cilento, operating as UNDRP's director and maintaining constant communication with leading UN officials about the organization's precarious funding during the early crisis, prioritized a system that limited project costs and spread aid as far as possible. Cilento's approach affected everything from MacCabe and other officers' inability to hire local staff members to the strict distribution system that limited certain shipments of aid based on inaccurate population estimates.

Significant financial constraints motivated Cilento's aid philosophy, but to certain officers like MacCabe, it also severely inhibited UNDRP from carrying out any meaningful aid work. In a letter to Suleiman Bey Sukker of the Central Committee for Palestine Refugees, MacCabe discussed the two key issues he saw in carrying out effective joint UN-Jordan relief schemes. The first was the Jordanian government's lack of action in attempting to accurately establish refugee population numbers, thereby not establishing accurate financial estimates for the government and UN. The second was the UN and UNDRP's own shortcomings:

On the side of my own organization, I regret to say, there has so far been no acceptance of responsibility, beyond attempting to 'channel' through to refugees in the various Arab states, including Transjordan, such material assistance as has been forthcoming as a result of the late Count Bernadotte's appeal. In this connection, I am at the moment unable to forecast, much less to promise, what [the] UN may do. All I can do just now is tell you what has so far been sent here for distribution, in order to enable your authorities [to] take this into consideration in their overall planning.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> UN, NYC: AG-022:S-0626-0001-15, Letter from MacCabe to Suleiman Bey Sukker on UN-Jordan Refugee Issues, 2 November 1948.

MacCabe viewed UNDRP's formal mandate as little more than a "channel" of aid to refugees in the region, impeded by UN leadership's distribution restrictions which directly limited the operation's effectiveness. The mandate and its implementation inhibited any worthwhile relief, from more direct UNDRP advisement of camps to proper UN funding for refugee needs.

MacCabe asserted his position in the first meeting between UNDRP officers on November 14, 1948, supporting Pierre DePage's argument that UNDRP officers were forced into situations where they had to exceed UNDRP's legal mandate in order to aid refugee populations. DePage noted that the UNDRP mandate expected officers in the field to "take no responsibility" with the distribution of food and other aid, instead relying on local committees to carry the burden.<sup>65</sup> This expectation, DePage said, was not possible. Relationships between local committees and UNDRP officers were integral to the success of the relief schemes, and officers would need to maintain contact with committees, placing officers in positions where they would necessarily take on close advising responsibilities.

DePage further argued that his position required his own direct decision-making in refugee sites despite UNDRP policy prohibiting him from taking direct camp advising roles, citing political disagreements limiting local committees from effectively doing the work. For example, DePage personally led efforts to construct tents in Jericho after a wave of refugees arrived in the city. Not doing so would have created "a considerable degree of confusion" that would have limited refugees' access to adequate shelter.<sup>66</sup> DePage's argument worked against

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<sup>65</sup> UN, 'Meeting with the Field Liaison and Supply Officers', 14 November 1948.

<sup>66</sup> UN, 'Meeting with the Field Liaison and Supply Officers', 14 November 1948.

UNDRP's legal mandate, which limited officers' actions to coordinating aid shipments and deliveries to distribution committees. However, DePage saw UNDRP officers' positions as requiring more involved action in refugee camps, from the current efforts to provide immediate aid to future efforts that would provide social services like schools. "The concept of the Project," he asserted, "was to help the refugees, even if the committees could not do it."<sup>67</sup>

DePage's argument received pushback from F.G. Beard, another UNDRP Field Liaison and Supply Officer based in Cairo who handled UNDRP operations in Egypt and "Southern Palestine", including Gaza and the areas south of Jerusalem. Beard said that UNDRP officers did not hold the duty to supervise distributions, only to facilitate the movement of aid from Beirut to respective government officials and committees. The responsibilities of UNDRP, Beard argued, "ceased on obtaining the duly authorized receipt" from the respective government or humanitarian figure.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, he argued that UNDRP officers should not be involved in the running of refugee camps as DePage was doing in Palestine, asserting that local organizations and national governments were to carry out those roles. DePage, as Beard argued, was subverting UNDRP advising policy.

Verschuur agreed with DePage's argument. Verschuur acknowledged that Beard was correct to point out that DePage and MacCabe's actions exceeded UNDRP's legal mandate, but Verschuur said that DePage and MacCabe's actions in Palestine and Jordan were necessary in providing aid to refugees. If the two officers were to have only followed UNDRP's legal mandate in the areas, Verschuur said, "the prestige of the United Nations might have suffered

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<sup>67</sup> UN, 'Meeting with the Field Liaison and Supply Officers', 14 November 1948.

<sup>68</sup> UN, 'Meeting with the Field Liaison and Supply Officers', 14 November 1948.

very considerably.”<sup>69</sup> DePage concluded his argument, stating that the legal responsibilities of UNDRP only accomplished so much. What was left was the moral responsibility of the UNDRP officer to “ensure that the refugees received the best possible assistance.”<sup>70</sup> Close UNDRP coordination and advisement, DePage said, led to fifty percent more refugees receiving food in Palestine than in the beginning. And MacCabe supported DePage’s argument, stating that his actions occurred over “a question of feeling compelled to do more, and trying to assist in every possible way.”<sup>71</sup> Thus, Verschuur supported MacCabe and DePage’s attempts to provide more direct, comprehensive aid to refugees and humanitarian distributors, efforts that went beyond the scope of the mandate but which were necessary to meet UNDRP’s goal of crisis mitigation.

As MacCabe and DePage argued, UNDRP actions could not end at aid delivery when officers in the field had strong political influence, effective fundraising abilities, and intimate knowledge on which communities needed aid. Moreover, local humanitarians relied on UNDRP to do much more than coordinate aid shipments. UNDRP could instead serve as a unified apparatus to oversee the construction of safe and adequately-supplied refugee camps, supported by an auxiliary force of local humanitarian organizations and government committees. As such, MacCabe and DePage recognized the capabilities of their positions, and “in the face of overwhelming moral challenge, they felt compelled to go outside of the legal responsibilities” of UNDRP.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> UN, ‘Meeting with the Field Liaison and Supply Officers’, 14 November 1948.

<sup>70</sup> UN, ‘Meeting with the Field Liaison and Supply Officers’, 14 November 1948.

<sup>71</sup> UN, ‘Meeting with the Field Liaison and Supply Officers’, 14 November 1948.

<sup>72</sup> UN, ‘Meeting with the Field Liaison and Supply Officers’, 14 November 1948.

## CHAPTER TEN

### CONCLUSION

J.W. MacCabe's issues with UNDRP encapsulated the failure of the agency to live up to its original efforts in getting aid to refugees. The fundamental issue with UNDRP operations was that the transportation and delivery system did little to promote acceptable living conditions for refugees in the region. And for MacCabe, it had the capacity to effect more beneficial change for Palestinian refugee populations. MacCabe's concerns with UNDRP operations were not his alone, as demonstrated by various UNDRP officials' support for his and Pierre DePage's work in Jordan and Palestine, respectively. However, United Nations leadership, including UNDRP's director Raphael Cilento, drew the project's line of responsibility at a point where on-the-ground UN field workers believed they could not feasibly aid refugees. UNDRP's restrictive distribution policies, designed by UN leaders on the practical reasons of limited amounts of aid and an uncontrollable increase in Palestinian refugees, went beyond those core issues and restricted the agency's ability to effectively deliver aid. Moreover, it explicitly restricted UNDRP field workers' ability to take more direct approaches to the crisis.

MacCabe and other UNDRP field workers were compelled to step over that line, working in a more direct advisory role with local humanitarians and lessening UNDRP restrictions at times to allow necessary aid to reach the hands of humanitarian and Jordanian government distributors. Similarly, MacCabe demonstrated frustrations with UNDRP's performance in the areas where it did accept responsibility, mirroring the frustrations of the humanitarians that he

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worked with. His concerns over aid limitations displayed his view that UNDRP's implementation of their legal responsibilities was wholly inadequate. Instead of mandating a more direct approach to aid relief, United Nations leadership implemented a poorly funded and poorly resourced project that failed to achieve its most fundamental goal.

How might this discussion on contestations by UNDRP field workers on UN leadership decisions factor into the broader development of UN efforts in Palestinian refugee affairs? The UN, after all, ultimately took a more direct role in the lives of refugees in 1950 under UNRWA. UNRWA's function, as noted by Ilana Feldman, took a long-term approach to refugee provisions where refugees received "undercare". The UN agency, Feldman argued, provided for refugees in a number of ways, but the level of care was "systematically inadequate".<sup>73</sup> Continuing UN financial and bureaucratic issues lead to the continuation of policies from UNRWA employees centered around some level of mitigation as opposed to a cure for refugees' problems. The threads of 'undercare', as demonstrated in UNDRP officers' contestation of UN policy in 1948, did not begin with UNRWA. UNDRP's limited capacity to provide meaningful assistance to refugees in an immediate crisis lived on under UNRWA's inability to deliver for refugees during a protracted period of Palestinian displacement. In both situations, UN financial constraints and bureaucratic inefficiencies prevented the organization from providing effective aid to refugees.

UNDRP's inability to provide more direct aid to refugees also demonstrates the UN's hesitancy to approach the crisis centering in refugee repatriation, instead seeking to place the onus on respective states to negotiate Palestinian refugees' potential return to Palestine. Repatriation, after all, was still a strong motivator in late 1948 for figures like Cilento who saw the repatriation as necessary for solving the crisis. W. de St. Aubin, the LRCS's representative to

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<sup>73</sup> Feldman, *Life Lived in Relief*, 161.

UNDRP, demonstrated similar beliefs in an article published in July 1949, months after the LRCS had taken over distribution in Jordan, hoping that repatriation was still a viable solution alongside resettlement.<sup>74</sup> At that time, however, the warring states had already signed armistices, and the Israeli government was showing little interest in facilitating a return of Palestinian refugees. As such, the discussion of ‘temporary’ humanitarianism on the part of the United Nations and voluntary agencies increasingly became a position of “permanent” humanitarianism, where the limited capacity of UNDRP (and later UNRPR) to care for refugees carried over into UNRWA. As such, UNDRP efforts demonstrate an early thread in the UN’s approach to the Palestinian refugee crisis where persistent financial constraints continued under UNRWA, leading to a protracted, precarious experience for millions of Palestinian refugees.

The short-lived experience of the UN’s Disaster Relief Project demonstrates that the UN’s early efforts in refugee aid relief in Palestine experienced tensions between UN leadership figures and UN field workers which ultimately influenced the UN’s impact on Palestinian refugees. Many of those closest to the center of the refugee crisis, primarily on-the-ground UNDRP field workers, argued that their work required exceeding the project’s legal responsibilities to effect real change and to meet their goals. In contrast, UN leadership figures, who were both physically further away from the refugee crisis and further away from refugees and humanitarians, relied on humanitarian methods that sought to maximize aid relief and minimize costs. UN leadership decision-making during UNDRP’s mandate was influenced by the precarious funding from the General Assembly and the uncontrollable increase in refugee populations; as a result, UN leaders designed limited, strict aid distribution policies that prioritized the efficient use of available aid. However, the policies put in place as a result of

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<sup>74</sup> W. de St. Aubin, “Peace and Refugees in the Middle East,” *Middle East Journal* 3, no. 3 (July 1949): 258-259.

these financial and material limitations restricted the project's ability to help refugees. The result was a relief project that, in many ways, failed to meet the needs of Palestinian refugees as on-the-ground workers sought alternative paths of aid, contradicting the project's mandate in the process.

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