

RELIEF TO PALESTINE REFUGEES

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) is a special, temporary, non-political body established by the General Assembly of the United Nations in December 1949. In co-operation with the host governments it carries out its twofold task : first, to provide food, health and welfare services and shelter for the refugees ; second, to provide education and training to refugee children and young adults, including general education, vocational and teacher training, and university scholarships.

UNRWA began its work in May 1950. After fifteen years, on June 30, 1965, the number of refugees registered with the Agency was 1,280,823. In its publication An UNRWA Newsletter (July-August 1965) it gives details on the present situation of the Palestine refugees. The following article describes the circumstances of the refugees who have found shelter in Jordan.

When the winter rains come this year, 500 more refugee families in Jordan will have a solid roof over their heads—some of them for the first time in many years.

The refugees, numbering more than 2,500, have recently completed the move into new shelters built by UNRWA with funds donated by the New Zealand Council of Organizations for Relief Services Overseas. This contribution of £ 25,000 enabled UNRWA to undertake two rehousing projects, providing new accommodation for many refugees in a small village near Jerusalem, and extending a refugee camp near Nablus to shelter refugees who had been living in caves and squatters' settlements around the town.

The 125 refugee families who moved into new shelters in Ain Arik had been among the most poorly-housed refugees in Jordan, living in makeshift mud huts near the village. Most of the huts were less than six feet high, with no windows, and were in such bad condition that they afforded little shelter from rain or sun. The refugees assisted UNRWA by demolishing their old shelters, and then lived in tents supplied by the Agency while the new huts were being built.

MISCELLANEOUS

The second rehousing project is in the area of Nablus, the town that forms the centre of Biblical Samaria, 30 miles North of Jerusalem. Nablus, like most towns in Jordan, received a large influx of Arab refugees during and immediately following the 1948 conflict. As the years passed, most were able to find adequate shelter, either in refugee camps or in the town itself. But others remained in extremely bad living conditions. Many refugees lived until recently in squatters' settlements of makeshift shacks patched together from cardboard, flattened oil drums or whatever material they could find, and a number had lived for years in the caves in the rocky hills around Nablus.

The donation from the New Zealand Council enabled UNRWA to extend its Askar refugee camp near Nablus, providing concrete huts for 377 refugee families.

With only limited funds at its disposal for shelter construction, UNRWA tries to improve the living conditions of those in greatest need. However, the need is always greater than the available funds, so that all donations are the more gratefully received.
