

Speeches, statements and press conference by Dag Hammarskjöld concerning Mi...

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Dag Hammarskjöld's samt.

Middle East

8 March 57

Statement by D.H. before the General
Assembly, New York.

8 March 1957

Mr. President,

The General Assembly has before it a report on Israel withdrawal. I would like to supplement the report with the latest available information, received early this morning from General Burns.

The last Israel troops cleared Rafah Camp at 16:45 hours yesterday, 7 March. Thereafter, there are no Israel troops in the Gaza strip.

The Israel troops will leave the Sharm-el-Sheikh area at 3:00 o'clock tomorrow morning, 9 March, London time, which is at 10:00 o'clock tonight 8 March, New York time. As the withdrawal of Israel troops from Sharm-el-Sheikh over the road parallel to the Aqaba Gulf on its western shore would have taken several days, owing to the long stretch of high sand dunes to be passed, General Burns, with the consent of Egyptian Military Authorities, has arranged that the retiring Israel troops, under UNEF escort, will return to Israel through El Tor, along the Gulf of Suez, eastern shore, to El Sudr and from there northeast and eastwards over the Sinai Desert, to the Israel town of Elath in the northern end of the Gulf of Aqaba. The total detour is about 500 kms. In the view of my Military Adviser, this distance, if the march is made under good conditions, can be covered by the Israel convoy in about two days. At the departure of the Israelis, Sharm-el-Sheikh will be occupied by UNEF troops. However, a number of non-running Israel vehicles, with a small party of mechanics and dock personnel, will remain in Sharm-el-Sheikh until they can be evacuated by sea which will take a few days longer.

Having taken the floor for this addition to my report on the withdrawal, I would ask your permission, Mr. President, to elaborate on another point mentioned in the report to which I feel entitled to direct special attention for reasons which I hope will be fully appreciated by the Members.

In the report I have referred to the important role which will be played by the UNRWA in assisting the UNEF in its immediate task in the present phase of its operation. For the past several years, UNRWA has been charged by the General Assembly with the task of aiding the Palestine refugees in four different areas. In Gaza, the refugees number about 220,000, some two-thirds of the total population. UNRWA has fed them, provided shelter for those who needed it and, in cooperation with the civilian organization, provided or paid for their medical care and welfare. Of the balance of the population of about 100,000 people, about sixty per cent have required assistance, and this has normally been provided by the civilian administration. UNRWA will now, in this initial period, necessarily be called upon to extend its services to include the distribution of rations to the needy non-refugees in Gaza. I envisage a similar extension of its activities in respect of the operation of hospitals, schools and welfare activities for all of the population.

Although these extended responsibilities go beyond UNRWA's terms of reference, as these apply only to services to Palestine refugees, the Director of UNRWA, as indicated in the report, has agreed to assume these tasks within the limits of practical possibilities and within the framework set by the present obligations of the UNEF.

The Assembly certainly shares my view that UNRWA at this moment plays a role which is more important than ever. Short of UNRWA's contribution, the task of UNEF in this initial phase would have presented insuperable difficulties. Its position is considerably strengthened by the stocks, facilities and trained personnel that UNRWA has on the spot.

In the circumstances to which I referred, I feel entitled to draw the attention of the Assembly to the very grave and urgent problem of UNRWA's finances. The Director has already stressed and explained this situation in his annual and special reports and in his statements to the Special Political Committee. I have not gone into the financial problems arising at this stage of our work, but it should be obvious, in the light of what I have said and of the explanations given by the Director, that substantial payments are required immediately in support of UNRWA's activities. The Members of the Assembly will certainly appreciate that the United Nations cannot contemplate curtailing its operation for the Palestine refugees elsewhere while continuing or expanding its services in Gaza. If UNRWA's budgets were fully subscribed, this would provide, at least temporarily, reserves urgently needed for the increasing responsibilities in Gaza. It is, therefore, imperative that outstanding pledges are paid immediately and that pledges and payments be increased to the full extent of the capacity of Member Governments.

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Press Release SG/566
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STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
BEFORE THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY, 8 MARCH 1957

Mr. President,

The General Assembly has before it a report on Israel withdrawal. I would like to supplement the report with the latest available information.

The last Israel troops cleared Rafah Camp at 16:45 GMT hours yesterday, 7 March. Thereafter, there were no Israel troops in the Gaza Strip.

UNEF troops entered Sharm el-Sheikh at 16:00 GMT today, 8 March. The Israel withdrawal by sea is proceeding as planned. By now no Israel Forces remain in Sharm el-Sheikh, or on Tiran Island. However, a number of non-running Israel vehicles, with a small party of mechanics and dock personnel, will remain in Sharm el-Sheikh until they can be evacuated by sea, on 12 March.

Having taken the floor for this addition to my report on the withdrawal, I would ask your permission, Mr. President, to elaborate on another point mentioned in the report to which I feel entitled to direct special attention for reasons which I hope will be fully appreciated by the members.

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