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SUPPORTING UNRWA'S SELF-SUPPORT PROGRAM
A Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends:

At the last session of the U.N. General Assembly the UNRWA program for the Arab refugees was once again extended, in this case for a three year period (to June, 1963). But, before that expiration date, the mandate is scheduled to come up for review by the Assembly -- in October of 1961. That leaves less than a year and a half in which to untangle some of the knots in this excruciating problem. I know how interested you all are in doing everything possible to work toward even a partial solution of this problem.

The margin of grace is an extremely narrow one. At the last General Assembly session the Arab states repeated their familiar opposition to any resettlement of the Palestinian population. In the debate over the Hammarskjold report (ACPC Newsletter, September, 1959) the Secretary-General's proposals for the "integration of the refugees in the productive life of the Middle East" were denounced as threatening the repatriation rights of the refugees. In the U.N., and on other international platforms, the Arab states gave little hope of moderating their traditional intransigence.

Yet an opportunity for some change, some lightening of the refugee burden, does exist. This is to be found in the undramatic -- and grossly underrated -- self-support work of UNRWA. Aside from relief measures, the agency has a program of vocational training projects and individual financial grants; and this is not so susceptible to Arab interference. An on-going, formally constituted phase of UNRWA, it does not present such a bold target as the large-scale Hammarskjold or earlier Johnston development plans.

With little fanfare, and after many painful delays, UNRWA's self-support activities have already contributed toward the resettlement and rehabilitation of the camp populations. It has the backing, even enthusiasm, of many of the refugees themselves, and, surprisingly enough, the acquiescence of the Arab governments. Jobs have been found rapidly for UNRWA vocational training graduates