

# The Middle East's Basic Problem

Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey, of Minnesota, who passed April and May visiting the Middle Eastern countries, has just made a report of his trip to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, of which he is a member. In it he suggests the creation of a Middle East development agency to help improve the area's standard of living and of a United Nations commission to solve the problem of the 900,000 Arab refugees who fled from Israel and now constitute one of the principal stumbling blocks to restoring peace in that troubled part of the world.

An agency comprising the countries of the Middle East and other nations which might contribute money to it does not seem to be a solution to the vexatious question of eliminating poverty and ignorance in the Middle East. International organizations already exist for the purpose of financing industrial and agricultural improvement programs. And if the various nations are to collaborate and co-operate in developing their resources, it is putting the cart before the horse to suggest such a plan before normal diplomatic relations have been resumed. One prerequisite to such a resumption is the settlement of the refugee problem.

As Sen. Humphrey pointed out in his re-

port, Iraq actually needs a minimum of 3,000,000 new inhabitants, almost three times the number of refugees waiting to be resettled, while Syria also is underpopulated. Development of the Jordan River Valley could accommodate 200,000 persons. Israel is willing to admit an unspecified number provided they are to become useful citizens and not subversives and to compensate the refugees for property they left there.

Given these facts, why are the refugees still being kept in camps in the Gaza Strip and elsewhere, with no hope for the future, subsisting on charity, not permitted to move out and establish homes and earn a living? The suspicion has often been voiced that it is in the propaganda interests of the Arab nations to do so. But here, as Sen. Humphrey emphasizes, is an opportunity for the UN to provide a solution to one of the problems which may be a key to peace in the Middle East. And if the various nations which can help in solving the problem refuse to do so on the basis of UN recommendations, it will demonstrate clearly who is interested in restoring peace to the area and who is interested in maintaining the troubled status quo.

—From the New York Edition.

New York Herald-Tribune  
13-14--7-1957