A valuable contribution of UNESCO to promotion of human rights has been the provision of education for the Palestine refugees. Since 1950 UNESCO in co-operation with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) provided education and training services for refugee children and youth in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, West Bank and Gaza. Under an agreement with UNRWA, the Organization has been responsible for the professional guidance and supervision of the UNRWA/UNESCO education programme, covering basic education (elementary and lower secondary), technical and vocational education, teacher training and a university scholarship programme. UNESCO has made available the services of the Director of Education and a number of professional staff for the Department of Education, which was based in Beirut until 1975 and was then moved to Amman for security reasons. UNRWA has been responsible for the administration and financing of the education operation.

The UNRWA/UNESCO education system serves a population of about 2.5 million Palestine refugees (1992 statistics). The school enrolment in 1960 was 123,800. In 1992 school year, 374,400 pupils representing 82% of 6-11 age group and 74% of 12-14 age group were attending elementary and preparatory (lower secondary) schools; and eight teacher training and vocational training centers with a capacity of about 5,000 provided training at post-secondary level for refugees. The education system had 11,270 teachers and supervisory staff, nearly all Palestinian refugees themselves. The Institute of Education and five Education Development Centres provided professional support to the education system.

UNESCO in co-operation with the educational authorities of the host governments (Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt) played an important role in ensuring the quality and standards of education for the refugees, who attended government secondary schools. The UNRWA/UNESCO schools followed the curricula of the host countries. The Organization’s task became particularly delicate and difficult after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, resulting in the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. UNESCO had the responsibility to ensure that the Jordanian and Egyptian curricula and textbooks are applied in the West Bank and Gaza UNRWA/UNESCO schools. This involved negotiation with the Israeli authorities who objected to some historical and political references in certain textbooks and consequently did not allow their importation in the occupied territories. Nevertheless, every effort was made through supplementary educational materials, to see that the education of refugee students attending schools in the occupied territories did not suffer.

Another consequence of the 1967 war was the fate of thousands of secondary school students in Gaza who had to take the Egyptian secondary school-leaving certificate examination (Tawjihi) in order to be able to join Egyptian universities for higher education. With the agreement of Egypt and Israel and in co-operation with the Gaza Department of Education, UNESCO organized and supervised the Tawjihi examinations in Gaza. This was a complex operation, involving the transport of sealed examination questions from Cairo to Gaza (via Cyprus), conducting the examinations in 25-30 centres, including 2 prison centres, supervised by a team of about 40 international personnel and hundreds of inspectors and teachers from the Gaza Department of Education. The sealed examination papers, accompanied by a UNESCO staff member, were returned to Cairo.
UNESCO conducted the Tawjihi examinations in Gaza from 1969 to 1979, until a Peace Treaty was signed between Egypt and Israel. Every year 6,000-7,000 male and female candidates took the examinations. The Egyptian universities offered places for the majority of successful graduates of Gaza secondary schools. For a decade the examinations, organized by UNESCO, were the only opportunity for the young people in Gaza to continue further education and prepare themselves for a constructive and active life. For those students in the prison who passed the examination, the opportunity was vital, because a few of them were allowed to leave the prison and continue higher education in Egypt.

The UNRWA/UNESCO education programme has been a unique and complex operation: Organizing basic education and training for several hundred thousand students in five different fields of operation; Co-operating with four ministries of education of the host governments to ensure the application of their norms, curricula and textbooks; Working with the Israeli authorities, since 1967, concerning the movement of personnel and materials including textbooks into the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza; Conducting the education operation sometimes in the situation of insecurity and internal and external conflicts; Financing the education operation entirely through voluntary contributions to UNRWA, which since late 1960s has had a chronic financial problem (in 1992 the education budget was 5,119 million, constituting more than 50% of the Agency's annual budget). Above all, the problem of Palestine refugees has been a major political issue, related to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the broader question of a Palestinian homeland, with its implications and limitations for long term educational planning.

For UNESCO it was a challenging task to ensure the right to education for the refugee children and maintain a reasonable standard and quality of education, in the context of Palestinian values and culture. The schools, which were often set up near or in the refugee camps, had generally the essential facilities, including laboratories, units for arts and handicrafts and home economics. However many schools had to operate on double-shift, due to lack of sufficient classrooms, in order to cope with the rapid expansion of the enrolment in both elementary and preparatory schools. There were also a large number of untrained teachers in the system, constituting about 90% of the teaching force in early 1960s. To remedy the situation, a major focus has been on teacher education.

The UNRWA/UNESCO Institute of Education, which was established in 1964, played a key role in the training of teachers. It developed an innovative multimedia approach which combined direct and indirect methods of instruction. It consisted of short intensive courses, coupled with educational materials for self-study and a decentralized tutorial system. The Institute offered two and three year courses of basic training for elementary teachers, one and two year courses of specialized training for preparatory teachers, a course in school administration and supervision and a variety of ad hoc courses to meet special needs. Through this programme, by the end of 1970s nearly all untrained teachers in the elementary schools were qualified.

The Institute's innovative training method and materials, which was a form of distance education and seemed particularly appropriate for large numbers of untrained teachers in service, were appreciated beyond the UNRWA/UNESCO education operation. In mid 1970s, in co-operation with UNICEF, the Institute provided extension services to a number of other countries in the region.

In addition to the Institute of Education, four pre-service teacher training centres were established – first, in 1956, two centres in the West Bank (one for men and one for women) then one at Siblin, Lebanon and one in Amman. The post-secondary teacher training offered at these centres was of two years duration and prepared the trainees to teach in the elementary cycle. In 1992, a total of 920 trainees including 520 female students were enrolled in the teacher training centres. The number of teachers who graduated from these centres up to
1992 was 14,800; a significant portion of these graduates were assigned to UNRWA/UNESCO schools. The teacher training centres in the West Bank and Amman have been upgraded in 1993 to Educational Sciences Faculty.

In 1973 two Education Development Centres were established as a pilot project, one in Amman and the other in Gaza. The objectives of these centres were: a) to ensure the continuous improvement and development of the education programme through experimental activities in educational methods, materials and evaluation and provision of facilities such as professional support by UNESCO experts, modern teaching aids and library services for teachers and supervisors; b) to co-ordinate and maximize the utilization of international and other available private and governmental resources for the development of education for refugees in each Field of Operation. These pilot centres, which gave special attention to the teaching of science, mathematics and technology in schools, were later expanded to include one centre in each of the five Fields of Operation. In the area of vocational education, a programme was developed to provide training for a number of trades and technical occupations. The first vocational training centre was established in Kalandia (West Bank) in 1953; six more vocational training centres were later established – one in Damascus, one in Gaza, one at Wadi-Seer in Jordan, a combined vocational and teacher training centre at Ramallah (West Bank), one in Amman and one at Siblin (Lebanon). During 1960s and 1970s these centres offered two year secondary level trade courses and post-secondary courses for technical occupations. In 1980s the trade courses have been gradually upgraded to post-secondary level. In 1992 these centres offered about 40 different post-secondary vocational and technical courses to a student population of 4,400 of whom 980 were girls. From 1955 to 1992 about 44,500 trainees have been graduated from these vocational centres.

The vocational education programme has been developed, as far as possible, in relation to the manpower requirements and development of industry and services in the region. A team of international vocational training specialists (about 45 in 1960s and 1970s), who were recruited from leading industrial countries, prepared the syllabuses and training manuals, established the required equipment and workshop facilities and conducted the training. In co-operation with several European countries, notably the Federal Republic of Germany and Sweden, a training-in-industry scheme was organised in 1960s. A number of selected graduates from the vocational training centres were placed for one to three years of industrial training in these countries. A total of 1,500 Palestinian refugees benefited from this scheme. On their return, some of them followed a one year technical instructor’s course at one of the UNRWA/UNESCO centres and about 200 completed the course. Many of the graduates of this course were employed as instructors in the training centres; some of them with further training and experience eventually replaced the international specialists; others were employed in the vocational training centres in the Arab world.

A significant number of refugee students completing secondary education pursued higher education at universities in Jordan, Syria, Egypt and Lebanon. UNESCO provided fellowships for key education personnel. Between 1962 to 1992 about 500 fellowships were granted to Palestinians, who assumed administrative, supervisory and teaching responsibilities in the education system. Furthermore a limited number of scholarships were provided by UNRWA for especially able and talented refugee students to follow higher education in the Arab universities. Beginning in 1955, the Department of Education awarded annually about 100 scholarships to secondary school graduates, most of whom chose scientific and technological fields including medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, science, engineering and agriculture. Between 1955 and 1992, a total of 3,584 refugee students, who benefited from these scholarships, graduated from universities and institutes of higher learning in the region.
For more than four decades, the UNRWA/UNESCO education programme helped to maintain the right to education for hundreds of thousands of refugee children and youth, pending a political settlement of the Palestinian problem. The refugee population as a whole became literate. Many thousands received professional and technical training and contributed not only in the development of their own people as teachers, technicians, doctors, administrators, etc., but also contributed in the social and economic progress of the region. Thousands of Palestinian refugees graduating from the vocational and teacher training centres worked as teachers and technicians in the Arab countries particularly in the Arab Gulf region.

The international operation helped the refugee population to live with dignity and maintain their cultural identity. This was particularly important for the refugees in the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza. The continuation of the education programme in the occupied territories and UNESCO's intervention and help on their behalf, for example in the case of the Gaza examinations as mentioned, were vital for peace and security in the area. The contact and interaction of the UNESCO experts with the Palestinian education community, not only contributed in the improvement of the education of refugees, but also it provided an outlet and an antenna for the hopes and aspirations of the Palestinian people. The international staff were able to communicate with the education authorities and universities in the region and outside to seek additional support for the education and training of Palestinians.

In addition to UNRWA/UNESCO education programme, the Organization has contributed to the promotion of the rights of Palestinians in other ways. Based on the decisions of the General Conference, the Secretariat has monitored the functioning of educational and cultural institutions in the occupied Arab territories during 1970s and 1980s and reported regularly to the governing bodies of the Organization. Since 1987 the Director-General has launched appeals to the international community for voluntary contributions to a special fellowship fund and for supporting Palestinian universities. In 1992, under UNITWIN project, arrangements were made to link several Palestinian universities to European universities. A study, undertaken by UNESCO, was published in 1990 on the needs of Palestinian people in the field of education and training.

The contribution of UNESCO to the education and training of refugees has been significant for the development of the Palestinian homeland. Now that a Peace Agreement has been signed between the Government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and that a Palestinian Authority has been established in the occupied territories of the West Bank, and Gaza, the educated Palestinian refugees can play an important role in the development of their homeland. The schools, vocational and teacher training centres, development centres and their professional staff in the West Bank and Gaza can be part of an educational infrastructure, which can be further developed in the future for nation building.
5.

**BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR**

**SAIF R. SAMADY**

(Afghanistan)

1958-1961  Professor, Faculty of Science, Kabul University.

1962-1966  President, Department of Vocational and Teacher Education, Kabul University.

1967-1968  Education Advisor, UNESCO Regional Office for Education in Asia, Bangkok.

