UN Resolution 242": "Just Settlement of the Refugee Problem"

At the United Nations, on November 22nd, 1967, the Security Council unanimously adopted, Resolution 242, laying down the principles for a peaceful settlement in the Middle East.

Still considered the primary vehicle for resolving the Arab-Israel conflict, Resolution 242, stipulates that a comprehensive peace settlement should necessarily include "*a just settlement of the refugee problem*". No distinction is made between Arab refugees and Jewish refugees. This was the intent of the Resolution's drafters and sponsors.

On Thursday, November 16, 1967 the United Kingdom submitted their draft of Resolution 242 [S/8247] to the UN Security Council. The UK version of 242 was not exclusive, and called for a just settlement of "the refugee problem." Just four days after the United Kingdom submission, the Soviet Union's U.N. delegation submitted their own draft Resolution 242 to the Security Council [S/8253] restricting the just settlement only to "Palestinian refugees" [Para. 3 (c)].

On Wednesday, November 22, 1967, the Security Council gathered for its 1382nd meeting in New York at which time, the United Kingdom's draft of Resolution 242 was voted on and unanimously approved.[1] Immediately after the UK's version of 242 was adopted, the Soviet delegation advised the Security Council, that "*it will not insist, at the present stage of our consideration of the situation in the Near East, on a vote on the draft Resolution submitted by the Soviet Union*" which would have limited 242 to Palestinian refugees only.[2] Even so, Ambassador Kuznetsov of the Soviet Union later stated: "The Soviet Government would have preferred the Security Council to adopt the Soviet draft Resolution…" [3]

Thus the attempt by the Soviets to restrict the "just settlement of the refugee problem" merely to "Palestinian refugees" was not successful. The international community adoption of the UK's inclusive version signaled a desire for 242 to seek a just solution for all – including Jewish refugees - arising from the Middle East conflict.

Moreover, Justice Arthur J. Goldberg, the US Ambassador to the United Nations who was seminally involved in drafting[4] the unanimously adopted Resolution, told The Chicago Tribune that the Soviet version of Resolution 242 was "not even-handed."[5]

He went further, in pointing out that:

> *"The Resolution addresses the objective of 'achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem.' This language presumably refers both to Arab and Jewish refugees, for about an equal number of each abandoned their homes as a result of the several wars…"*[6]

[1] Security Council Official Records - November 22, 1967 - S/PV.1382 - Paragraph 67
[2] Security Council Official Records - November 22, 1967 - S/PV.1382 - Paragraph 117
[3] Security Council Official Records - November 22, 1967 - S/PV.1382 - Paragraph 117
[4] Transcript, Arthur J. Goldberg Oral History Interview I, 3/23/83, by Ted Gittinger; Lyndon B. Johnson Library. March 23, 1983; Pg I-10
[5] "Russia stalls UN Action on Middle East." The Chicago Tribune. November 21, 1967 pg. B9
[6] Goldberg, Arthur J., "Resolution 242: After 20 Years." The Middle East: Islamic Law and Peace (U.S. Resolution 242: Origin, Meaning and Significance.) National Committee on American Foreign Policy; April 2002. (Originally written by Arthur J. Goldberg for the American Foreign Policy Interests on the occasion of its twentieth anniversary in 1988.)