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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

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ELLSWORTH, KANSAS
AUGUST 5, 1967

FOR RELEASE SATURDAY AFTERNOON

Congressman Bob Dole, recently returned from a 9-day visit to the Mid-East, told those attending the Ellsworth Centennial "Good Neighbor Day" luncheon that the Arab refugee problem is perhaps the number one stumbling block to settling the Middle-East crisis. Dole pointed out that during the course of the Arab-Israeli War from 1948 approximately 700,000 Arabs fled from the area of Palestine, that is now Israel, into adjacent Arab countries. This problem has remained acute and stale since that time because of the Arab-Israeli political deadlock. The Israelis, on the one hand, have refused to permit the refugees repatriation, and the Arabs, on the other, have resisted all proposals for organized refugee resettlement within the asylum countries of Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and the Gaza Strip.

"In my opinion," Dole said, "the problem is much greater today than it was in 1948 because there are now nearly 1.4 million refugees. Their unfortunate plight has been perpetuated by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, charged with feeding and maintaining the refugees since 1950 by the United Nations. As might be expected, the United States has contributed the lion's share of UNRWA's budget; in fact, since 1950, we have contributed approximately 70 percent of the total UNRWA budget, or some \$387 million.

"The recent conflict between Israel and the Arab countries, which ended on June 11, 6 days after it erupted, has also compounded the refugee problem because Israel is in control of nearly one-half of the Palestine refugees -- some 400,000 in Gaza and over 450,000 in the West Bank, formerly Jordan. It appears obvious that there can be no settlement of the Mid-East crisis until the countries involved reach some agreement on permanent resettlement of the refugees. It would be folly, in my opinion, for the United States to spend additional millions of dollars to perpetuate and even expand this sad spectacle."

Dole said he visited 5 refugee camps. On a visit to one camp in the Gaza Strip, his group was accompanied by Israeli soldiers who feared possible trouble because of anti-American and anti-Israeli feeling among the refugees in that particular area.

Congressman Dole commented on other impressions he gained from his visit:

"1. The best possible way to solve the Mid-East crisis is through direct

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negotiations between leaders of the Arab countries and Israeli leaders. The United Nations appears unable to solve the problem, but if given time, there is a good possibility that the direct country-to-country negotiations might succeed.

"2. The Israelis will not agree to making Jerusalem an international city. Israeli leaders state flatly that putting Jerusalem under international control is non-negotiable; however, they might agree to allow international control of the holy places in Jerusalem.

"3. The Israelis are a tough, restless, and determined group who rightly believe welfare should be available only to the disabled, the very young, and the very old and that able-bodied men and women should not be welfare recipients. This commendable philosophy was evident in almost every contact we had with Israeli leaders. In my opinion, the Israelis can make a great contribution in settling the refugee problem if given the opportunity, as they will encourage the refugees to permanently resettle, will provide work, and will help refugees regain their dignity as men and women by encouraging them to work.

"4. Jordan may well be the first Arab country to directly negotiate with the Israeli government, and Lebanon perhaps the second Arab country to attempt to reach some satisfactory settlement with the Israelis. Without question, there is much conflict among the Arabs themselves, manifested by almost a complete lack of communication between the leaders and the people and a strong difference of opinion among the leaders themselves.

"5. A majority of the Arab refugees appear grateful for American aid over the years, but are of the opinion the Arab side of the story has never been objectively told in America."