



UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

REPORT OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE
ON REFUGEES
TO THE CONCILIATION COMMISSION

I. CREATION OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

The Technical Committee on Refugees was established by the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine on [14 June 1949](#) and given its [terms of reference](#) (Annex A). After preparatory work and preliminary contacts, the Technical Committee set up its headquarters and began its field work on 22 June 1949 in Jerusalem. After seven weeks in the field the Committee returned to Lausanne on 12 August to report to the Conciliation Commission.

II. OUTLINE OF WORKING PLAN FOLLOWED BY THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

A. Preliminary contacts were made with the Governments of Egypt, the Hashemite Jordan Kingdom, Lebanon, Syria and Israel, and with the authorities of these Governments charged with responsibility for refugees and their problems. Authorities concerned with public planning and public works were interviewed and requested to submit plans for work relief projects of an immediate and long-range nature which could give employment to refugees.

B. The Technical Committee established a close working relationship with the United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees (UNRPR) and this collaboration resulted in concrete proposals from the UNRPR with respect to financing and supervising a census of Arab refugees in the Middle East. The Technical Committee also had meetings with the Middle East representative of the United Nations Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and met with the representative of the World Health Organization (WHO).

C. Close and frequent contact was maintained with the three relief organizations: the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), the International Red Cross Committee (IRCC), the League of Red Cross Societies (LRCS), by means of formal conferences, informal visits and correspondence.

D. Refugee camps were examined, including Jericho, Hebron and Bethlehem in Arab Palestine; Homs in Syria; Gouraud, Wavell and Anjar in Lebanon and five camps in the Gaza area. Refugees living in towns were also visited. The Technical Committee spoke with refugees in various camps and with their Moukhtars and other spokesmen to secure a cross-section of refugee wishes and opinions.

E. Throughout the course of its work, the Committee was in close touch with the President and Faculty of the American University at Beirut who were helpful in referring the Committee to experts in some of the fields of work covered by its [terms of reference](#). Contact was also established with former responsible Arab officials of the Mandatory Government and with other outstanding personalities in the Middle East.

III. EXECUTION OF THE TERMS OF REFERENCE.

A. Item one of the [Terms of Reference](#) reads as follows:

“determine in accordance with studies already undertaken and in as precise a manner as possible the number of refugees, their place of origin, their previous occupation, their means of subsistence, etc..”

In conferences and discussions with the three relief organizations in charge of refugees, and by enquiries in camps the Technical Committee found that relief is presently distributed to refugees who come from territories occupied by Israel; and also to persons displaced from their homes and to destitute persons.

The AFSC estimates that in the area under its administration (Gaza), it is probably maintaining 5% more persons than are actually entitled to assistance; the IRCC estimates a 20% margin of error in the entirety of Arab Palestine and this margin of error exceeds 20% in certain areas (30% in Hebron and about 40% in Bethlehem); the LRCS estimates that possibly 30% of the “refugee population” now being fed in the Hashemite Jordan Kingdom are entitled to this relief as bona-fide refugees. The Technical Committee, in collaboration with the U.N.R.P.R., has considered the advisability of taking a census of refugees in Jordan and Arab Palestine where the percentage of error is highest. In this matter the Technical Committee had the advice of Mr. P.J. Loftus of the Statistical Office of the U.N., whose consultative services were made available to the Committee by the Secretary-General. Consideration was given to the purpose that would be served by such a census and to the expenditure that would be involved. The Jordan Government had offered to conduct such a census provided funds in the amount of \$40,000 were made available by the U.N.

It was clear to the Technical Committee and to the UNRPR that if a census were to be taken for the purpose of controlling allocations of rations and resettlement it would have to include a complete registration system for the identification of relief recipients. It was felt, too, that the registration records would have to be kept up to date subsequent to the census and would necessitate personnel for the operation of any checking system. A particular problem that was envisaged as likely to be encountered as a result of a census arose from the fact that at present an estimated 500,000 residents of the former mandatory areas are apparently self-supporting. It was feared that a census which sought to establish precise figures of relief recipients would attract at least a proportion of these individuals, with the result that even higher figures would be set for the number of persons claiming refugee status.

The Committee was of the opinion that anything less than a detailed, well planned and necessarily expensive census would be unlikely to provide more accurate aggregate figures than are obtainable from the official population data published by the mandatory government. The Committee considered also that owing to the instability of the locations of the relief recipients, there was a danger that the census records of numbers in each locality were likely to be of little value for any extended period of time. The Committee therefore concluded that it is not advisable to conduct a census of the refugee population at the present time.

However, the need for improving the system of control of ration allocations felt by the UNRPR, and the need of the Committee for data in connection with repatriation and/or settlement led the Committee to conclude that a small special staff directed by the UNRPR could serve both needs. It is considered important that this staff secure the support and collaboration of responsible Arab persons in each locality.

The Committee reached the conclusion that the great variation in existing estimates on the number of refugees arises to a considerable extent from the different definitions that are in use. After examining the various estimates and making them available to Mr. Loftus, the committee asked him to prepare a new estimate of the refugee population which could serve as the basis for action.

The estimate of Mr. Loftus (Annex B), which the committee believes to be as accurate as circumstances permit, show that the refugees from Israeli-controlled territory amount to approximately 711,000. The fact that there is a higher number of relief recipients appears to be due among other things to duplication of ration cards, addition of persons who have been displaced from areas other than Israeli-held areas and of persons who, although not displaced, are destitute.

B. Item 2 of the Terms of Reference reads as follows :

“study and recommend to the Commission, a practicable method of determining at the appropriate time, which refugees desire to return to their former homes and which do not”.

The Technical Committee felt that it was premature to enter into a detailed study of the question of “which refugees wish to return to their former homes and which do not”, because this question involves ultimate political decisions. The Committee felt that, beyond the sampling of opinion in various camps, a detailed study of this question could not be made at present.

Nevertheless, refugee opinion as expressed from time to time to the Committee was overwhelmingly in favour of return to their homes. In those camps, the refugees when asked if they wished to express any thoughts to the Committee, invariably displayed an extremely emotional and deep seated desire to return to their former homes. Those opinions were gathered from the refugees themselves. The Moukhtars and other spokesmen also expressed the same opinion on behalf of the refugees.

C. Item 3 of the Terms of Reference reads as follows :

“examine all questions that the Commission will submit to it regarding preliminary measures to be taken for the protection of the rights, property and interests of the refugees”.

1. Broken families

The Commission asked the Technical Committee to contact the competent Israeli authorities relative to the question of dispersed families and practical methods of achieving effective reunion of these Arab families in Israel.

The Technical Committee was advised by the Israeli authorities that their present plan for allowing certain Arab refugee family members to come back to Israel is not to be considered as a plan for reunion of broken families but rather as permitting certain categories of Arab persons, namely legitimate wife or wives and minor unmarried children to join the head of the family in Israel.

6. This survey can, of course, offer no definite figures on the financial aspect of the scheme. Without a clear, especially an occupational, census of the present number of the refugees, and without comprehensive statistical studies of the economic planning possibilities in the neighbouring countries, no well-defined settlement budget can be set up. But it is obvious that a plan of such tremendous size requires vision and boldness and can only be financed on an international level. A clear indication in this direction can be seen in the Greek refugees' loan and in the way the Western Hemisphere tackled the development of certain areas in various countries of the world. If the Greek settlement problem, at that time of so overwhelming a size, could be solved 25 years ago, under much less favourable conditions, there would seem to be no reason why the same principle should not be successfully applied for a smaller, homogeneous group under much easier conditions.

The guiding principles for the realization of a resettlement scheme for all Arab refugees should be the following:-

- a) An international, autonomous resettlement body with wide powers should be set up under the auspices of the United Nations Organization.
 - b) A census should immediately be taken of the entire bona-fide refugee population, excluding internal migrants attracted by the prospect of free aid.
 - c) A precise survey should be made, of the occupational background, and consideration also be given, on the basis of the results of the census, to existing family, tribal and village groupings.
 - d) An international loan (at low interest, with a minimum life-time of 30 years, redemption to begin not earlier than after 10 years) should be floated by the appropriate bodies of the United Nations, especially by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Resettlement, but also by the other agencies such as the Export-Import Bank. The cooperation of the Middle Eastern countries in all operations of an economic character should be required, both by guarantees and by subscription to the loan.
 - e) Irrigation and electrification schemes as required by Iraq, Transjordan-Israel and Lebanon-Syria, should be financed separately by special bodies under active participation by Israel and the Arab Governments concerned.
 - f) The Resettlement Commission should be in charge of strictly supervising the use of the proceeds of the loan. As a matter of principle, only equipment, commodities and special services should be placed at the disposal of the beneficiaries in order to ensure proper channeling of means and adequate use of the equipment.
- expert concluded that if a complete examination of these groves within a relatively short time is desired, it would require the services of eight agricultural experts working for approximately two months.

Nevertheless, the expert's report on the five-day examination of orange groves permitted the drawing of certain general conclusions:

- a) an average of over 50% of the Arab orange plantations can be considered either as dried up or destroyed;
 - b) approximately 25% of the groves are receiving conservatory care or are being improved;
 - c) somewhat less than 25% could be saved for production if the necessary hydraulic and other machinery could be obtained and immediately put into operation.
- The Technical Committee wishes to point out that the problem of orange groves involves the element of compensation, as well as conservation, and feels that a mixed working group, the creation of which is recommended in paragraph F of this report, to examine the problem of compensation for damaged property should also be competent to supervise conservatory measures now in effect and to recommend additional measures if necessary.

D. Item 4 of the Terms of Reference reads as follows :

“study and recommend to the Commission practicable projects for providing immediate work relief for refugees under the auspices of the several states concerned.”

In course of the survey it was found that, with a few exceptions, it is difficult for the refugees to find steady employment because of the competition of local labour. The Committee concentrated its efforts on those regions which for economic and demographic reasons offered possibilities for substantial work relief and resettlement, namely Arab Palestine, the Hashemite Jordan Kingdom and Syria. No enquiry was made in Iraq.

The Committee feels that items 4 and 5 of the terms of reference are closely related and that immediate work relief for the refugees could be provided within the framework of the larger schemes for irrigation and/or agricultural development in the countries concerned.

The Committee wishes to point out that work relief projects can take place not only under the auspices of the several states concerned but could also be sponsored by: international organizations, for example, the UNRPR; by local non-profit organizations, such as the Society for the Arab Development Scheme.

1. Work in Camps

A certain amount of work in camps has already been made possible through the assistance of voluntary agencies such as the YWCA which has helped establish women's sewing projects in several camps; this sort of activity should be encouraged and developed as far as possible. As another example of the type of work which can develop if refugees are provided with facilities and expert guidance, the Committee would like to cite the camp near Bethlehem where, under the supervision of the IRCC, some refugees are spontaneously building stone houses on the hills nearby. They are in this way providing adequate shelter against the coming winter and at the same time freeing the cultivable land on which the tents of the camp were originally erected. This new village constructed at a very small cost is gradually replacing the former village of tents. From the results achieved here on a small scale with insufficient funds, it becomes apparent that substantial progress could be made with more adequate funds and full cooperation on the part of local governments.

Therefore, the Committee supports the proposal the UNRPR Middle East Field Director relative to the establishment of a “revolving fund” to finance certain semi-industrial projects and craftwork within the camps. This project would involve the provision of raw materials for refugees to make into finished articles such as rugs, woodwork of various kinds, embroidery, shoes, etc. (Annex C). It appears that if such a fund were created the refugees would be benefited in several ways: by being given work, by being able to utilize the articles which they produce; by being able to use their tools and machinery in connection with future repatriation or

resettlement. It is recognized that the setting-up of such a project would undoubtedly favourably influence morale in the camps and serve, under competent direction, as a kind of vocational training programme. It is understood that the articles made under this project would at present not be placed upon the open market but would be utilized only by the refugees themselves.

2. Public Works and other projects.

While it is true that in some instances the immediate employment of refugees may be connected with the existence of detailed plans for the execution of public works and other similar projects, it should not be necessary to superimpose new plans upon those already existing in the files of local governments for such projects as road development, anti-malaria campaign, contouring, reforestation, etc. These local public work schemes, though incomplete as to detail could be used to provide work for a certain number of refugees within a relatively short time. The Technical Committee has made outlines and résumés of certain of these schemes. Some of the major schemes are as follows: -

a) Hashemite Jordan Kingdom

- 1) Internal plans for road development;
- 2) Anti-malaria campaign;
- 3) Drilling wells in region of Azrak, Chirakh and possible development of Mafrak;
- 4) Anti-erosion programme (contouring);
- 5) Hydraulic development of the left bank of the Jordan River, in process of survey.

b) Syria

- 1) Road-development (Gibbs Survey);
- 2) Railroad development — (Mandate and Gibbs Survey);
- 3) Port development at Lattaquia (Gibbs Survey);
- 4) Draining marshes of Gharb (Mandate);
- 5) Irrigation development of Djezireh, Khabbur and Euphrates valley (Gibbs Survey and Sir Herbert Stewart's estimates);
- 6) Rehabilitation of wells and ditches east of the Mohafazats of Homs and Hama.
- 7) Economic Survey of Syria by Gibbs, 1948.

E. Item 5 of the Terms of Reference reads as follows:

“assemble from all available sources technical information based on previous studies of the region which would be useful in determining the practical possibilities of repatriation, resettlement, and rehabilitation of the refugees”.

1. Repatriation

In conversations with the Israeli authorities, the Technical Committee was advised that there could be no repatriation in the sense that Arab refugees would be allowed or assisted to return to their former homes or villages.

The Israeli authorities stated that the former Arab economy of which the refugees were a part, has ceased to exist and there is now only one economy for all of Israel: “The economic planning system of the Israel government provides for the creation and expansion of a highly developed, modern and progressive economic entity, based, as in all Middle Eastern countries, on agriculture, but complemented by all attributes of modern economy, namely industrialization and increasingly growing building, commercial and financial activities. It is obvious that the economic success so far achieved is in no mean measure due to the homogeneity of the Jewish population which is responsible for a sociological structure quite unique in the Middle East, a structure entirely lacking the sharp contrast between the rich and the poor so usual in this part of the world.

The conclusions to be drawn from these facts for the methods of tackling the Arab refugee problem are obvious. The clock cannot be put back. Since the time when this problem arose, the Jewish population has increased by 50%. The question of housing the newcomers was partly solved by placing them into habitable houses in abandoned Arab towns and villages. Immigration continues at an average rate of 800 per day.

Those figures alone give clear indication that the individual return of Arab refugees to their former places of residence is an impossible thing. Not only can the whole Arab economic system not be simply restored because its basis has practically disappeared, but also the physical return of the Arab middle-class such as shopkeepers, tradesmen, free professions, has become a physical and geographical impossibility. Their houses have gone, their jobs have gone. Their previous means of livelihood have vanished with the disintegration of their economic organization. Instead, an entirely different kind of progressive agricultural as well as urban and industrial economy has made its appearance in the same area”.

(quoted from pages 1 – 2 of the memorandum on Principles guiding the resettlement of Arab refugees; July 28, 1949, by G. Meron for Israel Representatives to Technical Committee (Annex D))

The Technical Committee was advised that Arab refugees permitted to return to Israel as part of the peace settlement will thus be treated as new immigrants and as such will be integrated into the planned economy of Israel.

Refugees would accordingly be settled and employed in conformity with the economic needs of that country. The Israeli authorities affirmed that the problem of “resettling” the Arab refugees is a matter of group “reestablishment” and not a matter of individual or family repatriation. Since Israel does not envisage the possibility of individual repatriation but rather the reestablishment of groups of Arabs in the Israeli planned economy (so different from the traditional Arab way of life) it appears most important that an international organism be charged with the protection of the individual rights of these Arab refugees who will be admitted to Israel.

The Committee feels, now that armistice treaties have been signed by the states bordering on Israel, that some efforts could probably be made to repatriate or reestablish displaced Arab refugees who fled the so-called threatened areas. No accurate estimate of the number of such displaced persons exists at the moment, but the counting of these persons should be given special attention.

2. Resettlement

The Committee would like to point out, that according to the IRCC, along the armistice lines in Arab Palestine — mainly in Samaria and Ramallah — there live a fairly large number of Arab farmers whose houses are located on the Arab side and whose fields are under Jewish control. If those farmers are not allowed free access to their lands, they may become destitute and in need of relief and eventual resettlement.

Another problem related to resettlement is that of refugee concentrations in congested areas such as Gaza and parts of Arab Palestine. The refugee concentrations in those poor agricultural areas has an adverse effect upon the economy of the regions concerned. This economic deterioration, together with the intermingling of the refugees and the local population, may lead to the necessity of providing relief not only to the refugees but to the local population as well. Therefore, in any plan of resettlement, priority should be given to a progressive displacement of refugee camps situated in the congested areas.

During its efforts to assemble technical data which could be useful in determining the practical possibilities of resettlement of the refugees, the Committee took particular note of certain plans and projects, as follows:

- a) Scheme A of “the Society of the Arab Development Scheme”*: Small scale, agricultural resettlement project for the area between Wadi Neweima and the Jericho-Allenby Bridge Road. Arab Palestine (Annex E)
- b) Scheme B of “The Society of the Arab Development Scheme”*: Larger scale, agricultural resettlement project for area between the Wadi Qilt and Jericho-Allenby Bridge Road. Arab Palestine (Annex E)
- c) Plan for the Hydraulic development of the left Bank of the Jordan River in process of survey. Hashemite Jordan Kingdom.
- d) Plan for the irrigation development of Djezireh, Khabbur and Euphrates valley (Gibbs Survey and Sir Herbert Stewart's estimates). Syria (Annex F and G).
- e) Plan for draining the marshes of Gharb (Mandate). Syria.
- f) Project for the rehabilitation of wells and ditches east of the Mohafazats of Hems and Hama — Syria.

A small resettlement scheme is already under way near Jericho, financed and under the direction of the Society of the Arab Development Scheme. The first water well has been drilled and refugees have applied in large numbers to be permitted to become members of this first, small resettlement project. However, the director of the project needs expert technical advice, well-drilling machinery and other support for the project. The Technical Committee recommends that irrigation, agricultural and sanitary experts be made available in the Middle East as soon as possible to examine and guide the efforts of this first concrete resettlement project. With the cooperation of the governments concerned, these experts would also examine and determine the value and feasibility of the various existing plans and projects; determine the availability of suitable lands and their capacity for absorbing settlers.

Whatever funds are made available for resettlement of refugees, and however large the plans are, it should be stressed that the process of resettling these persons

will of necessity be progressive. It will be necessary to direct most carefully the movement of the refugees to new places, taking into consideration their religion, health, occupation and previous way of life. It would also be advisable to resettle these refugees in a climate and milieu resembling their former one as closely as possible.

F. Item 6 of the Terms of Reference reads as follows :

“study the question and practicable methods, for the payment of compensation to refugees not choosing to return to their homes and for loss or damage to property which under principles of international law or in equity should be made good by the governments or authorities responsible”.

After full discussion with the interested governments, certain organizations and individuals, the Technical Committee has concluded that it is necessary to establish under the Conciliation Commission a mixed Arab-Israeli working group on property compensation supervised by a United Nations or neutral expert. This group could be authorized to set up sub-committees and work on (1) the supervision of conservation of existing properties including orange-groves; (2) the determination of ownership of property; (3) the evaluation of property damages including orange groves. This working group and its sub-committees would be assisted by a legal adviser. The Committee has available the names of certain Arab experts in the field of property compensation such as lawyers, land-evaluers, and economists, who could serve on a working group or its sub-committees.

As to compensation for damaged property, this working group might find it useful to take preliminary steps towards gathering certain basic documents, for example, the microfilmed copies of property registrations now in the British Colonial Office in London.

Conclusions.

1. Number of refugees origin occupation etc.

The Committee feels that Mr. Loftus' estimate of the total number of refugees is the most accurate which can be made under present conditions.

Nevertheless the collection of precise data on place of origin, occupation, etc, of individuals and families remains essential for purposes of repatriation and/or resettlement.

To make more complete the information already existing in the files of the relief organizations and to obtain original data where non-existent, the Committee, after consultation with Mr. Loftus and the UNRPR felt it necessary that a small special staff be created for this purpose under the direction of the UNRPR. The Geneva Office of the UNRPR is taking the necessary steps to put this plan into operation.

2. Continuation of Direct Relief.

The Committee strongly recommends the continuation of the direct relief programme under the auspices of UNRPR, at the same time emphasizing the desirability of phasing out the direct relief programme in favour of work relief and self support at the earliest possible moment.

3. Condition of Refugees in Camps

In view of the relatively limited resources available to the organizations concerned with the relief of a vast number of needy persons, the food, shelter and sanitary conditions in the camps may be considered as tolerable. There is a need for more facilities for hospitalization and isolation of serious contagious diseases in most areas. The Technical Committee noted with interest the efforts already made in camps by the three relief organizations, and by other organizations to provide schooling for the refugee children, but they are handicapped by a lack of sufficient school materials.

It is apparent that the morale of the refugees in the camps suffers from lack of work and lack of future, and it therefore appears useful to give them every possibility to improve their morale and their material situation by giving them some kind of productive work. The Committee supports the principle of the UNRPR revolving fund mentioned on page 11, paragraph 2 of this report, which would provide the refugees with the necessary raw materials and tools to enable them to produce necessary articles.

4. Repatriation

The importance of creating an international body to supervise the protection of the rights of the individual refugees should be emphasized. This body could be a unit of a larger organism which would administer both repatriation and resettlement as shown in Annex H.

5. Resettlement

The Committee wishes to stress the fact that the resettlement of the refugees involves obtaining the approval of the governments concerned, the development of feasible plans, local contributions and international financial assistance, and other elements requiring careful preparation over a period of time. Therefore the Technical Committee is convinced that a double approach should be made to this problem — immediate action and a long range programme.

Under the heading of immediate action, the Committee recommends the despatching of a team including irrigation, agricultural and sanitary experts. The long range programme involves the creation of a department to administer the Arab resettlement programme in the Middle East.

6. Displaced Persons and persons living along the armistice lines

The Committee believes that the time has come to take all possible measures to reestablish the displaced persons who fled the so-called threatened areas.

For those persons living along the Armistice lines, the Committee recommends that all possible action be taken to give them free access to their lands to avoid their becoming destitute.

7. Compensation for Damaged Property

The survey of the Committee has indicated the advisability of establishing a mixed Arab-Israeli working group, under the direction of the United Nations and with the assistance of neutral experts, to supervise the conservatory measures being taken with respect to Arab orange groves and all other Arab properties in Israel and to deal with the problem of compensation as a whole.

8. Proposed organizational plan

In view of the intricate Arab refugee problems in the Middle East, and the certainty that these problems cannot be resolved in a period of months, the Technical Committee proposes a plan of an organization to deal with this problem in both its immediate and long range aspects (Annex H). The Committee in proposing this organization took into consideration the possibility of the resettlement of a large number of Arab refugees outside Israel. The Committee has seen for itself the great contributions which are being made in the Middle East by international and non-governmental organizations in helping the refugees.

It is extremely important from the point of view of efficiency and economy that this experience, knowledge, and existing administration be utilized as far as possible in the setting-up of new or additional services. The Committee wishes to stress the importance of coordinating the efforts of the various United Nations organizations now at work on the Arab refugee problem with those of any future services to be established.

Lausanne, 19th August 1949.

Endnote

*An Arab non-profit organization with Headquarters in Jerusalem which has for its object “raising the standard of living, of the fellaheen, economically, culturally and socially.”