

UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly



Distr.
RESTRICTED

A/AC.21/UK/55
3 March 1948



3 March 1948

UNITED NATIONS PALESTINE COMMISSION
Communication Received from United Kingdom
Delegation Concerning Rehovoth Train Outrage
in Palestine

The following communication, enclosing the text of a Question and Answer in the House of Commons on the Rehovoth Train outrage in Palestine on February 27, has been received from Mr. Trafford Smith of the United Kingdom Delegation.

UNITED KINGDOM COMMUNICATION TO THE UNITED NATIONS
Empire State Building
New York, 1 N.Y.

3rd March, 1948

My dear Bunche,

I received a copy of the text of a Question and Answer in the House of Commons of March 1st, dealing with the train outrage in Palestine on February 27th. You will see that in answering the Question, the Colonial Office spokesman made a number of quotations from the statement issued by the Government of Palestine of March 1st, of which I believe you have already received copies.

Yours sincerely,
/s/ Trafford Smith
(Trafford Smith)

Dr. Ralph Bunche,
Principal Secretary to the United Nations
Commission on Palestine
United Nations,
Lake Success

Following is text of question and answer in House of Commons to-day, 1st March.

BEGINS.

Mr. Eden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Colonies whether he has any statement to make on the mining of the Cairo-Haifa train yesterday?

Answer: It is with the deepest possible regret that His Majesty's Government announce that at approximately 8:40 in the morning of the 29th February the passenger train from Kantara to Haifa was blown up by unknown persons a short distance north of Rehovoth Railway Station. The train consisted of 13 coaches 5 of which were military and the last 3 coaches which contained military personnel only were completely wrecked. The following casualties, all British service personnel, were caused by the explosion. Dead 27, dangerously wounded 6, seriously wounded 9, slightly wounded 20. The casualties were cleared by 10.50 a.m. and were admitted to the British military hospital at Beer Yacov. On investigation it was found that 4 charges had been laid under sleepers approximately 10 yards apart. Three of these had been detonated and the fourth, which failed to explode, was found to contain 100 pounds of ammonal in sandbags. All four charges were wired to an ignition point in an orange grove 300 yards from the track. No assistance was given to military personnel who were carrying out investigations by persons in the locality. There is as yet no information available as to the identity of persons responsible for this outrage except for a report that the Stern Gang have claimed responsibility. I wish on behalf of His Majesty's Government and the Government of Palestine to express deep sympathy with the relatives of those who lost their lives as a result of this shocking outrage. A statement has been issued by the Government of Palestine in Jerusalem to-day recalling the catalogue of enormities perpetrated by Jewish terrorists in recent months and drawing attention to the failure of the Jewish Community to assist in bringing the guilty to Justice and in particular the refusal to give evidence in the official police inquiries into the Ben Yehuda Street explosion. "The Leaders of the Jewish Community" the statement declares, "have felt themselves unable for political reasons to take any steps to bring to justice persons responsible for these crimes and have thus facilitated the spread of lawlessness and disorder to a point at which the community itself is threatened with destruction by elements within itself. In this neglect of its responsibilities the Jewish Agency has attempted to excuse itself by resort to calculated innuendoes, falsehoods and propaganda directed against British members of the Security Forces who are, in fact, every day protecting Jewish property and saving hundreds of civilian lives even at the risk of their own". Referring to the Ben Yehuda Street outrage the statement points out that "in spite of official denials the Jewish Agency has repeated that it was a British Army Convoy that was responsible" and continues "nobody outside Jewish circles believes this and there can be no other purpose in repeating it than to stir up racial hatred. The fact is that the vehicles responsible for this outrage were no more a British Army Convoy than the vehicles stolen from time to time by Jews and used by them on numerous occasions for the murder of many more people than were killed in Ben Yehuda Street." The statement concludes "The Government, mindful of the duty of the Security Forces to maintain law and order and confronted with the deliberate policy of the Jewish Agency to render their task as difficult as possible, desires now to bring once more to the serious attention of the Jewish community in Palestine the fact that the continuance of indiscriminate murder and condoned terrorism can lead only to the forfeiture by the community of all right the of the world to be numbered among civilised peoples".

Mr. Eden: I am sure the whole House will endorse what the Honourable Gentleman said at the end of his statement. Does he recall that some little time ago I asked him

whether the Authorities on the spot had taken every step to put the Armed Forces on a war footing because it is clear that they are dealing with a completely ruthless enemy. May I ask him whether he is satisfied that that is now being done. For instance, were all the necessary precautions which would have been taken if the Armed Forces were on a war footing taken in this case. It seems to us that name further precautions will have to be taken especially about the movement of bodies of troops of any size by rail.

Mr. Rees Williams: All necessary precautions have been taken but the Right Honourable Gentleman will understand that the protection of a railway line is a very difficult operation. The Military Authorities in Palestine have full power to take whatever measures they felt necessary to protect the lives of the British troops in Palestine.

Mr. Wilson Harris: Can the Minister throw any light on the origin of the explosives? Is it of a type which could be obtained by looting in Palestine itself.

Mr. Rees Williams: Yes Sir.

Air Commodore Harvey: If these men were returning from leave why were they not flown direct from Egypt to Palestine to avoid the necessity of going by rail.

Mr. Rees Williams: I could not answer that question without notice.

Mr. Thomas Reid: Is it not the saving of lives in Palestine more important than winning or losing the next election in America.

Squadron Leader Fleming: Is it not a fact that in spite of these repeated outrages martial law has not yet been declared in Palestine.

Mr. Rees Williams: It is a technical point as to whether martial law would give any more protection but if the Military Authorities in Palestine desired to impose martial law His Majesty's Government would acquiesce.

Mr. Eden: This is as matter of far reaching importance and there have been many questions. The position is far from clear. May I ask the Honorable Gentleman and perhaps the Prime Minister too if they would look into this matter and assure us that if martial law would assist the protection of the lives of our troops then martial law will at once be declared.

Mr. Rees Williams: We have looked into this matter and the military authorities themselves have not up to now desired to have martial law imposed. It is their decision. The Colonial Office suggested the imposition of martial law and they did not want it.

Mr. Thurtle: In view of the fact that this outrage appears to have had its origin in the outrage in Jerusalem can my Honourable Friend say whether his attention has been drawn to an article in the Jewish Standard of last Saturday which contained all sorts of innuendoes against the British troops and will he take early steps to repudiate the suggestions in the article.

Mr. Rees Williams: I have not read the article but it is now quite clear that British troops were in no way responsible for these incidents and it a blatant lie to say that they were.

Mr. Eden: I agree but the Honourable Gentleman will recollect that in previous questions references were made to statements containing these innuendoes against the British troops and I think the Honourable Gentlemen undertook to consult the Attorney General in the matter. May we know the result of that consultation.

Mr. Rees Williams: The matter is still under consideration. We have not yet had any reply.

Vice Admiral Taylor: Is it not a fact that the Military Authorities have not imposed martial law in Palestine because they have not got sufficient troops to carry it out.

Sir Ralph Glyn: Has not the Higher Commissioner powers under special ordinance to put into force regulations equivalent to martial law.

Mr. Rees Williams: Yes he has and that is why up to now the military authorities have not decided to impose martial law.

Capt. Marsden: Have the Military Authorities powers within the Commander In Chief's own authority to impose martial law or do they have to get their authority from the High Commissioner or from the Secretary Of State?

Mr. Rees Williams: At the present moment the authority rests with the High Commissioner. If martial law were imposed the authority would derive from the Commander in Chief but that position has not been desired by the Military Authorities in Palestine. If the Commander in Chief desired to impose martial law we should agree to it but he has not yet desired it.

Capt. Marsden: Has not the High Commissioner expressed any views on the subject one way or the other?

Mr. Rees Williams: Yes he has. He has so far acquiesced in the views of the Military Authority.

Mr. A. Salter: In view of the Minister's statement on the attitude of the Jewish Agency will he say what steps are being taken in regard to that Agency?

Mr. Rees Williams: That is a matter now under consideration.

Mr. Follick: Can my Honourable Friend say whether a request has yet received from the Commander in Palestine taking for additional troops to be sent out there to meet the difficult position?

Mr. Rees Williams: No such request has been received.

Sir William Darling: Has the possibility been considered of placing on all trains on which British troops are traveling representatives of the Local Authority whether Jews or Arabs? In similar circumstances some years ago that practice was followed with great advantage.

Mr. Rees Williams: No.

Mr. Keenan: Could not the Government try and clarify the position so that martial law will be nearer than apparently it is?

ENDS.

[Document in PDF format](#)