



UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE
COMMITTEE ON JERUSALEM

Memorandum on the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission
and its Properties in Palestine

The following memorandum, which was addressed on 16 May 1949 to the French Representative on the Conciliation Commission by Archimandrite Antony, Chief of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in the Holy Land, is circulated by the Secretariat for the information of the Members of the Committee on Jerusalem.

1. The Russian Ecclesiastical Mission came to Palestine from Russia in the year 1858. From that time it was officially recognized by the Turkish Government which gave it the right of an independent activity on the ground of equality and independence from the Greek Patriarch of Jerusalem.
 2. The purpose of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Palestine was to carry on a religious life and to perform religious services for pilgrims. To achieve this purpose churches were built in various places in Palestine which were looked after by the Mission staff, i.e. monks and nuns.
 3. Until the Russian Revolution the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission was under the jurisdiction of the Holy Synod in Russia. When the first Revolution broke out in 1917 a law was passed whereby the church was separated from the State. The Russian Church thereupon elected the Patriarch as the Head of the Church. When the Soviet Revolution took place the severance of the Church from the State was reiterated and anti-church propaganda recognized by the Government: The Russian Patriarch Tihon, foreseeing the difficulties which might arise as the result of the Revolution issued in Holy Synod a Decree dated the 7/20th of November 1920, whereby he provided for the organization of local church administration in the event of the impossibility of free communication with the Church in Russia, or in the event of the supreme authority of the Church being unable to act freely. Consequently, the Russian clergy abroad acting on the Decree of Tihon organized themselves independently under the guidance of Metropolitan Antony of Kiev with its headquarters in Yugoslavia. After the death of Metropolitan Antony the Russian Church Abroad was headed by Metropolitan Anastassy with its headquarters in Munich, to which authority the Russian Mission in Jerusalem adheres, along with many Russians abroad. This Russian Church Abroad continues to act independently of the Soviet Church, which is now headed by Patriarch Alexis on the ground of reasons given by the above Decree of 7/20th of November 1920, which still exist and also on the ground of the election of Patriarch Alexis which took place against the rules and laws of the Russian Church:
 4. During about a century of its existence in Palestine the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission acquired immovable properties by voluntary donations from God-loving people and with the funds of the Mission itself, but not with funds of the Russian Government.
- The following is the list of Russian Ecclesiastical Mission properties:

Jerusalem

- (1) Russian Mission Building and Cathedral with surrounding plot of land.
- (2) Four-story building, Jaffa Road.
- (3) House in Jaffa Road (in joint possession with the Orthodox Palestine Society).
- (4) Milovodova House in Prophets Street.
- (5) Silaeva House, Prophets Street.

Mount of Olives

- (1) A Convent with 2 churches, Bell Tower and 25 Buildings.
- (2) A plot of land with ancient "Prophets' Tombs."
- (3) A plot of land:

Silwan

- (1) Land.
- (2) Two ancient caves.

Kedron Valley near Jerusalem

A plot of land with ancient tombs.

Bethany

Four buildings and a chapel.

Ain Karim

- (1) A large plot of land with Convent and Church and 50 buildings.
- (2) A plot of land and one building.

Anata

- (1) Land:
- (2) Land and Guardroom

Beit Jala

Land with five small houses.

Belt Sa'hur

Land

Beit Sha'ar

Land.

Jaffa

Church, 9 buildings, St. Tabitha's Tomb and Orange Grove.

Hebron

- (1) Abraham's Oak, Church, 3 buildings, Land.
- (2) Land planted with olives.

Jericho

Garden and 3 buildings.

Kilo. 14, Jericho-Jerusalem Road.

Land and Cistem.

Haifa

Two buildings and Land.

Mt. Carmel

A church, 3 buildings, Land.

Nazareth

Land planted with olive trees and Building.

Kafir Kanaa (Galilee)

Garden.

Lubia Village (Galilee)

Land.

Tiberias

1 Building.

Magdala, near Tiberias

Garden and 3 cottages:

Bank of River Jordan

Land with Chapel and Garden.

Jenin

Garden

5. Originally, owing to the Turkish laws the Mission properties were registered in the names of nominees who were mostly employees or members of the Mission. In the year 1899 three properties were transferred nominally to the name of the Russian Government and six others to the name of the Grand Duke Serge. After the British occupation the Mission succeeded in transferring 15 of its properties into its own name. Therefore, 3 properties are registered in the name of the Government; 6 properties in the name of the Grand Duke; 15 in the name of the Mission; 9 (out of which 5 are dedicated to the Mission by Wakfieh) remain registered in the name of private individuals.

6. During a period of about a century the Russian Mission has possessed all its above properties, administered them, used them exclusively for the objects to which they were dedicated, enjoyed the income and benefits thereof; erected buildings thereon and otherwise improved and ameliorated the properties, defrayed all expenses, payed all payable taxes and other outgoings and generally exercised in respect of these properties full rights of ownership without any objection or hindrance on the part of the Russian Government, the Grand Duke Serge, or any of the other nominees or their respective heirs. No account in regard to the administration of its properties was ever given by the Russian Mission to any of the nominees. The same situation remained during the British occupation when administration of the Russian properties was introduced by the Mandatory Government.

7. Shortly before the expiration of the Mandate a new law was issued under the name of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission (Administration of Properties) Order 1948, whereby a special body was instituted under which the Administration of all the above properties is exercised by the Board of Administrators: Archimandrite Antony, Abbot Lazarus Hieromonk Raphael.

Conclusion.

From all the above information and facts it can be observed:

- (a) that the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission is a religious institution which, by ecclesiastical and civil laws, is an independent body from the Soviet Church.
- (b) that the position which existed for 90 years in Palestine cannot be changed without prejudice to the lawful rights of the Mission.

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