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COMMUNICATION FROM MR. FLETCHER-COOKE CONCERNING THE ADVANCE PARTY AND AQIR

The following communication was received on 12 February 1948 from Mr. Fletcher-Cooke of the United Kingdom Delegation.

My dear Bunche,

As you will remember, Malania gave me advance information the other day that the Commission were proposing to send a party of four senior secretariat officers and two lady secretaries, who hoped to arrive in Palestine on or about 19th February. On receipt of this information, I sent a telegram to Jerusalem and have now received a reply which contains the following information.

The Government of Palestine had hoped to be able to put the advance party into the Y.M.C.A. building but it now transpires that all the Y.M.C.A. staff would leave at once if this was done. In these circumstances, the Government of Palestine have had to rule out this possibility. The Government of Palestine have also pointed out that if the advance party go into the Eden or any other Jewish hotel, they cannot be responsible for their security.

The Government of Palestine have, therefore, under consideration the possibility of, putting the advance party into Police Headquarters in Zone "C" but they have pointed out that this is bound to be rather uncomfortable. They have also pointed out that if the advance party go anywhere else, they will require their own domestic staff.

In these circumstances, which show the real if slightly fantastic difficulties with which the Government of Palestine are faced, it has been suggested that the best course would be for the Transport and Accommodation Officer to go to Palestine alone about a week in advance of the rest of the party so that the Government of Palestine can assist him to arrange whatever alternative he selects.

I have since received your official letter regarding the proposed plans of the advance party and have telegraphed these to Jerusalem but in view of the difficulties existing in Palestine, you will no doubt let me know as soon as possible the Commission's views in the light of the information given above.

As regards Aqir, the intention is that this should remain the property of the Air Ministry and it is hoped that His Majesty's Government will permit the Commission to use it free of charge.

I must, however, make it clear that on this latter point we have as yet received no instructions from London, and I cannot, therefore, give you a definite answer as regards the terms upon which the Commission will be permitted to occupy Aqir.

At the present time, there are only some eighty Royal Air Force personnel at Aqir who are due to leave there on 21st February. It is reported that the buildings have already been looted and that those which remain will require substantial redecoration, for which it is assumed the Commission would engage their own contractors after inspection by members of their staff.

Dr. Ralph J. Bunche,

Principal Secretary to the United Nations

Commission for Palestine,

United Nations, Lake Success.

I must also bring to the Commission's notice the fact that if they go to Aqir (or indeed anywhere else) they will require their own security force. The proposal that the Commission should go to Aqir was made on the basis that no British security force would be available to guard them there. It is, therefore, suggested that the Commission should take steps to provide themselves with their own guards in the same way as foreign consulates in Palestine are now doing. In the view of the General Officer Commanding, it would require not less than a battalion to provide adequate protection at Aqir.

/s/ J. Fletcher-Cooke

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