

UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINEEgyptian proposals regarding the return to their lands of certain refugees in the Gaza area

(Working Paper prepared by the Secretariat)

1. In a meeting held with the Arab delegation in New York on 24 October, the Egyptian delegate had informed the Commission of the following three proposals submitted by him to the Economic Survey Mission, with the understanding that they would be communicated to the Conciliation Commission:

"First, he had pointed out that some refugees coming from Gaza had lands in the hinterland, on the other side of the lines, which were at present unoccupied and deteriorating. If these refugees were allowed to traverse the lines and cultivate their lands, the burden upon the international community would be lightened.

Secondly, the Israeli-Egyptian Armistice Agreement provided for a no-man's land in the north of the Gaza region; the inhabitants of that region also should be allowed to return to their lands and cultivate them.

Thirdly, many of the refugees at present in the Gaza zone came from the Beersheba region, which was cultivable land, and those refugees should be allowed to establish themselves provisionally in that area, pending a final settlement".

These three proposals still remain on the agenda but might well be given over to the General Committee similar character have been in the past.

2. In such an eventuality the General Committee would have a considerable body of material on which to work, and it is quite possible that the parties would accept the creation of ad hoc, mixed committees * to study each of these questions on a more or less technical level, on the pattern of the Mixed Committee on blocked accounts.

3. Should the Commission approve the undertaking of such a procedure, it would seem advisable to await the first meeting of the Mixed Committee on blocked accounts, which would break the ice for other similar meetings.

4. A Mixed Committee to study the Egyptian proposals would seem to be the most promising with which to start. The request for action has come from the Egyptians themselves, and therefore they could not very well object to their being studied. All that the Committee would in fact be doing would be to propose a particular method of procedure. The problems in question are peculiar to the area under Egyptian control and cannot interest any other Arab State directly, so that participation of the Egyptians in discussion of these questions with the Israeli representative would have opened a breach for direct, separate negotiations between the two countries on a more general level and under the auspices of the Commission. This would be further assisted by the nature of the proposals, which contain elements both of the refugee and of the territorial questions. The fact that Mr. Labbane has already sat at the same table with an Israeli representative might further facilitate matters. Finally these proposals have not previously been discussed by the Commission and fall only in the very narrow military sense within the competence of the Mixed Armistice Commission. Although it is difficult to predict with any amount of assurance, it would seem safe to assume that the Israeli attitude would be much less rigid on this matter than on the question of lands around Tulkarm, where vital security considerations enter into the picture.

5. Transference of the Egyptian proposals from the Commission's Agenda to that of the General Committee would appear to be the first step to be taken, independently of the larger issue of whether the method of direct negotiations by means of mixed committees on specific subjects will be adopted or not.

* See Note on Direct Negotiations dated 9 February 1950.

