

P1

UNITED NATIONS PALESTINE COMMISSION

PRESS CONFERENCE

Held at Lake Success, New York, on Friday 23 January 1948
at 3 p.m.

The Chairman welcomed the representatives of the Press, and asked them whether the arrangements for the giving out of information were satisfactory to them.

The reply was that they were good; they would be still better if the Public Relations Officer were given a freer hand.

The Chairman invited questions.

The matter of an international police force was raised; the Press understood that a general understanding had been reached, and asked whether the Commission was contemplating any specific request to the Security Council, either in its regular report, due February 1, or in a special report.

The Chairman replied that the matter was still in the preliminary stage. With reference to the last part of the question, it was not intended to include the matter of an international force in the regular report. The question was very important and must be treated very thoroughly and separately from the report on the Commission's current work. The special report would probably be presented later than the first regular report; he could not say how much later, but he believed the general feeling of the Commission was that the matter could not be long delayed.

In reply to a question whether the Commission was in touch with the Military Staff Committee, the Chairman replied that the Commission's task was to call the attention of the Security Council to the problem. The Security Council would then decide what steps should be taken. The Military Staff Committee was an organ of the Security Council.

A representative of the Press stated that the Jewish Agency for Palestine had announced that it had filed a memorandum with the Commission which made certain proposals with regard to United Nations action for organising a Jewish militia and an Arab militia; he asked whether the matter

would be mentioned either in the general report or a special report; also whether it was part of the whole security problem.

The Chairman replied that the Commission had just received the paper but had not had time to study it.

He was asked what were the Commission's tentative plans for departure.

He replied that the Commission was still in the early stages of its work; the problem was an enormous one and must be carefully and thoroughly studied in all its implications; it would be of no avail to leave Headquarters, where the Commission had all facilities at its disposal, before having completed the preliminary stage of the work. He added that the problem of enforcement was crucial and would have to be decided before the Commission considered a timetable for departure, either directly for Palestine or for London. Negotiations would have to be carried on with the representatives of the Mandatory Power. Everything would have to be settled in agreement with them and with the representatives of the interested parties -- the Arabs and the Jews. As was known, the Jewish Agency was co-operating with the Commission, but the Arab Higher Committee had refused any co-operation.

Asked whether it was possible to become acquainted with all the complications of the problem in the detached atmosphere of Headquarters, the Chairman said it was quite possible to do so by studying the material furnished by the Secretariat.

In reply to a question whether any further word had been received either from the Arab Higher Committee or any group connected therewith, or information of any kind as to the attitude of the Arabs, the Chairman replied in the negative.

The Chairman was then asked what steps the Commission was taking to bring together a group of experts to deal with all the various questions, e.g. communications, transportation, sewage, water, etc., etc.

He explained that this would be done by the Secretariat, but that the Commission had already started discussing the first point -- the creation of a Preparatory Economic Commission which would prepare the way for the Joint Economic Board provided as the definitive executive organ of the Economic Union.

Asked whether any replies had been received from individuals who had been asked to serve, the Chairman said none had been received except from one person who formed part of the Secretariat and was automatically available and one other person whose Government could not spare him.

The Chairman was then asked whether the Commission felt that up to date it was getting sufficient co-operation from the Mandatory Power within the spirit of the General Assembly's decision. He replied that the Commission's experience had been of so short a duration that it was impossible to draw any final conclusions.

The next question was whether the Commission had come to any decision as to what to do about the United Kingdom's intention not to fulfil the first date on the time schedule of the Assembly resolution - namely to open a port to immigration.

The Chairman said the matter would be reported to the Security Council in the Commission's first regular report.

The Chairman refused to commit himself on the question of whether there was any chance of Arab co-operation; also on whether it would continue to be the Commission's policy not to make recommendations to the Security Council.

To a question whether the Commission believed that it would be possible to set up a Provisional Government for the proposed Jewish State from New York, the Chairman replied that it was theoretically possible; he added that that did not mean that it would be done.

The Commission was asked whether in view of Arab lack of co-operation, it had decided what should be done about the Arab areas other than the recommendations made in the General Assembly resolution.

The Chairman replied that the Commission had come to no decision.

The question was asked whether it would be possible to set up the Jewish State without defining the boundaries more strictly than had been done so far.

The Chairman said that a boundary commission would be necessary, especially as only the general lines had been indicated. The boundary commission would have some latitude which could be exercised only on the spot as a result of study of all the circumstances.

On a question whether the Commission's report to the Security Council would be made available to the Press, the Chairman said that that would depend

on the Secretariat more than on the Commission and on the contents of the report; his own feeling, however, was that the first report would be available to the Press.

The Chairman declined to answer a question on how the Commission envisaged the bringing of the question of security to the Security Council's attention.

Mr. Federspiel (Denmark), in reply to a question put to him as to whether the Commission felt optimistic or otherwise about the general problem, said that it was too early to give general views - the Commission would form an opinion in accordance with the circumstances.

Mr. Medina (Bolivia) added that the members of the Commission had not reached agreement on all points among themselves. When pressed, he added that if the members of the Commission did not believe that their task was possible of accomplishment, they would not be there.

Mr. Morgan (Panama) agreed with all that the Chairman had said as to the past. With regard to the future, the Commission would do its utmost to fulfil the important task which had been entrusted to it by the General Assembly. The task was a delicate one; the members of the Commission were working as a group and no individual opinions could be expressed.

Mr. Francisco (Philippines) said in his own opinion, unless implementation were given by the Security Council, the partition of Palestine would be very difficult. The Security Council would decide how implementation could be effected. He held the view that the question of security should be pressed as an urgent matter.

With reference to the question of security, it was suggested that the Chairman had implied that the Commission would stay in New York until a decision had been reached. He replied that he had not said anything so definite; that was merely one possibility. The discussions in the Security Council might last for months. The Commission's duty must come before personal inclination.

The Chairman enquired whether the representatives of the Press thought it would be useful to have periodical meetings.

The suggestion was accepted with enthusiasm, with the rider that they should be held as often as was convenient to the Commission.

The meeting was concluded at 3:45 p.m.

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