

UNITED NATIONS PALESTINE COMMISSION

PRESS CONFERENCE

Lake Success, New York
Monday, 2 February 1948, at 3.15 p.m.

The CHAIRMAN invited questions on the Commission's first monthly report to the Security Council.

With reference to the phrase under "Conclusion" on page 14: "...the full implementation of the Assembly's recommendations requires the presence of the Commission in Palestine considerably in advance of the transfer of authority..." the Chairman was asked to define what was meant by "considerably".

He replied that that would depend upon the progress of the negotiations with the Mandatory Power and upon a number of other factors -- for example, a satisfactory solution of the problem of the means of enforcing the resolution.

With reference to the statement in the report that the Commission was not satisfied with the United Kingdom Government's suggestion that the Commission should not go to Palestine until shortly before the expiration of the Mandate, it was asked whether the Commission had decided what steps to take.

It was explained that Sir Alexander Cadogan had been requested to point out to his Government the impossibility of taking all the preparatory steps for assuming responsibility after the termination of the Mandate in so short a time, and had promised to take the matter up with his Government.

In reply to a question whether the fact that all the members of the Commission had signed the report was to be interpreted as evidence of unanimous agreement on every part of the report, the Chairman confirmed that this was the case.

The Chairman stated that no special significance should be attached to the fact that the report ended with the words: "...the Commission attaches the greatest importance to the progress of its negotiations with the Mandatory Power".

Asked whether the Commission was satisfied with the replies Sir Alexander Cadogan had given to its questions on the previous Friday, the Chairman replied that the Commission had not yet had an opportunity of discussing them.

The question was asked on what paragraph 13(b) of the report was based.

The Chairman stated that it was based on statements which had been made to the Commission by Sir Alexander Cadogan and Mr. Shertok, the representative of the Jewish Agency; also on day to day news in the Press and from the Commission's other sources of information.

With regard to the date on which the special report on security matters would be submitted to the Security Council, the Chairman said this would probably be about the middle of February.

Referring to the statement that the Commission would set forth in a separate document its views with regard to the implications of the Arab Higher Committee's refusal to co-operate, the Chairman stated that the question had not been fully discussed, and that the matter might well be dealt with in the general report on security problems.

It was observed that the first date mentioned in the resolution had passed and that a seaport had not been evacuated, as called for in the resolution.

The Chairman pointed out that the resolution did not call for any intervention by the Commission in this case, but was an appeal directed to the Mandatory Power. He added that the Commission had, however, taken the matter up with the United Kingdom Government and submitted it to the Security Council.

With reference to the progressive taking over of the administration by the Commission, the Chairman agreed that the Commission had been inclined to interpret that provision of the resolution in another sense than the Mandatory Power.

The Chairman declined to predict whether the Commission would hold any open meetings.

In reply to an enquiry whether the Commission intended to move to London, the Chairman stated that that had always been on the programme; the move would take place as soon as the Commission was satisfied that everything that could be done in New York had been done to ensure that it would be able to perform its task in Palestine.

The Chairman referred to Mr. Francisco (Philippines) a question as to consultations with the Mandatory Power on the matter of the militia.

MR. FRANCISCO (Philippines) stated that negotiations had not yet begun.

Asked whether the Commission intended to send an advance party of the Secretariat to Palestine, the CHAIRMAN replied that some members of the staff would go there before the Commission in order to do necessary preparatory work.

The Chairman described as hypothetical a question whether, in the event of the Commission's labors proving unsuccessful, the moral responsibility would fall on the Mandatory Power.

The question was asked whether the Commission hoped that the Security Council might be able to help it to go to Palestine before 1 May.

The Chairman replied that it was the Commission's duty to help itself; only if it was unable to do so would it appeal to the Security Council.

He stated that he had no information as to when the Security Council would discuss the first monthly report.

It was pointed out that the report contained a warning given by the United Kingdom Government that it would not be safe for the Commission to go to Palestine under present conditions, and that nevertheless the report stressed the importance of going there. It was asked whether this was due to heroism or whether the Commission rejected the warning.

The Chairman declared that the members of the Commission had no ambition to be either heroes or martyrs, but that they were determined to do their duty when the necessary preliminaries had been accomplished.

Asked whether in the Commission's opinion the United Kingdom Government exaggerated the danger, the Chairman pointed out that the Mandatory Power was responsible for the maintenance of law and order until the termination of the Mandate and would thus be responsible for the Commission's safety in Palestine.

The statement in the report that 62 per cent of the present Government staff in Palestine were Arabs who would be willing to serve under the Commission was brought up, and the Chairman pointed out that this was the personal opinion of Mr. Fletcher-Cooke.

The Chairman was asked whether non-Jewish immigrants at present interned in Cyprus would be allowed by the Commission to enter Palestine.

He replied that the Commission had no information concerning those internees except what it had been told by Sir Alexander Cadogan; the Commission would negotiate with the British authorities for the transfer of immigrants to Palestine but it would be for the Jewish Agency to decide whether they were bona fide Jewish immigrants to Palestine or not.

In reply to the question whether the hope expressed in the report that it would still be possible to make certain contacts with the Arabs was based on anything specific, the Chairman said "Dum spiro, spero".

The meeting was concluded at 4 p.m.

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DAILY NEWS SUMMARY - 12

10 February 1948

(Sources: New York Times and New York Herald Tribune)

Jerusalem, Feb. 9 - British soldiers damaged a synagogue in the Jaffa - Tel Aviv border area today when they blew up an adjoining house suspected of being a snipers' nest. The Army subsequently announced that arms were discovered in the synagogue.

Scattered violence in various parts of Palestine increased to 1,103 the unofficial death toll since Nov. 29. (A.P, N.Y. HERALD TRIBUNE)

Jerusalem, Feb. 9 - Nearly 3,000 trained soldiers became potential recruits for Arab armies when the British today announced the disbandment of the Trans-Jordan Frontier Force. (Brewer, N.Y.TIMES)

Cairo, Feb. 9 - According to well informed sources, the Arab League has decided to delay any full-scale invasion of Palestine until the British withdraw.

The League's military and political committees were said to have recognized the fact that the Arab "Army of Liberation" cannot invade Palestine so long as British troops remain. It was said that a plan under consideration provides for Arab fighters to occupy Palestine towns and villages as the British withdraw. (U.P, N.Y.TIMES)

London, Feb. 10 - According to Lt. Gen. H. G. Martin, military correspondent of the Daily Telegraph, British forces will go mainly to Libya when they evacuate Palestine. (N.Y.TIMES)