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UNITED NATIONS PALESTINE COMMISSION

THIRD PRESS CONFERENCE

Held on 17 February, 1948, at 2 p.m.

The CHAIRMAN observed that it might perhaps be the last time that the Commission would hold a Press Conference in New York, and invited questions with regard to the Special Report to the Security Council.

He was asked whether the Commission had made any formal or informal estimate of the size of the force that would be necessary.

He replied that that was not the business of the Commission, who were not military experts. The Security Council would decide what measures should be taken, and it could call upon the Military Staff Committee for advice. The Commission could not foresee whether the Security Council would do so.

It was asked whether it would be fair to conclude from the report that the Commission would not go to Palestine unless backed by the kind of force it recommended, either before or after the termination of the Mandate.

The Chairman replied that he could see no such definite conclusion in the report, which simply stressed the necessity of an adequate armed force.

It was pointed out that the report implied that the Commission could not perform its task without an international force, and yet stated that the Commission would go on with its work.

The Chairman affirmed the Commission's faith in its work; the Commission had submitted a report explaining the situation quite clearly, which it believed would convince the Security Council. If it did not -- he would for once break his rule against answering hypothetical questions -- then the Commission would deliberate and decide what to do.

The Chairman confirmed that the Commission might appear before the Security Council when its report was discussed.

The question was put whether the Commission had discussed the question of the arms embargo, and whether it would be the subject of a subsequent report.

The answer was that it would be covered in the next regular report. The

consideration of the matter had been deferred because some questions had been put to the Mandatory Power in connection with it to which an answer had not yet been received.

In reply to a question whether the report should be understood as a declaration that partition could not be carried out without a United Nations military force, the Chairman replied that the implementation of the plan had been voted by the Assembly. The report explained why the plan could hardly be implemented without military force.

It was observed that according to one of the morning papers, a report from Jerusalem stated that the Mandatory Power would have difficulty in finding accommodation for the members of the advance party, and the Commission was asked whether it still intended to send an advance party.

The Chairman replied in the affirmative; the advance party might leave in a week or ten days; he could not disclose the exact date. He added that the party would consist of four senior officers and two secretaries. He thought that in the matter of accommodation the Palestine Administration was perhaps over-cautious because it felt responsible for the safety of the party.

He explained that the advance party would prepare for the arrival of the Commission, get in touch with the Palestinian Administration over a number of administrative questions, and keep the Commission informed as to the situation in Palestine, as to which it had so far been informed only indirectly.

With reference to the letter from the Arab Higher Committee published in the report, a correspondent wished to know: (1) whether the Commission considered that there was no hope of co-operation with that Committee; (2) if so, whether the Commission was prepared to enter into negotiations with any other representative groups in Arab territory.

He recalled that at the close of the last Press Conference he had quoted the words: "Dum spiro, spero".

In reply to a further question, the Chairman again stressed that if a situation should arise such that the Plan of partition and economic union was unworkable as a whole, it would be for the Security Council to consider the new situation.

Asked whether the Commission was optimistic that the Security Council would provide an international force, the Chairman replied that he could not venture to make any predictions about the Security Council, which was the guiding body of the Commission. The Powers were waiting to declare their position until the matter before the Security Council without losing precious time, and this it had done.

A correspondent pointed out that the resolution provided that in case of an attempt to alter by force the settlement envisaged, the Security Council should decide whether or not a threat to the peace existed, and that the report stated that such an attempt to alter by force did exist. The report did not, however, refer to the Council's taking action on the basis of a threat to the peace.

The Chairman replied that the Commission had had some discussion on the matter, and had come to the conclusion that it was exclusively for the Security Council to make that political judgment, and that the task of the Commission was simply to put the facts before the Council.

Referring to the fact that Mr. El Khouri, the Syrian representative on the Security Council, had raised the question of the Commission's legality, the Chairman was asked whether the Commission had consulted the legal authorities on the matter.

The Chairman replied that it was not for the Commission to consider the legitimacy of its birth. The States who would be represented on the Commission had been proposed by the President of the Assembly; no objection had been raised and the President had declared that the proposal was adopted. The members had been appointed by their Governments at the request of the Secretary-General.

The question was asked whether there was any reason for the care exercised by the Commission to make it evident that it was making no recommendation as to the type of armed force which should be set up.

The Chairman replied that to do so would be outside the Commission's competence.

Asked whether the Commission had taken steps to provide a port of entry for Jewish immigrants, the Chairman stated that the Commission had discussed the matter with the Mandatory Power, had obtained a final decision and had submitted the matter to the Security Council in the first regular report.

In reply to a question as to the present status of Jewish immigration, the Chairman said that it was the same as it had been a year ago, i.e. 1500 immigrants were permitted to enter Palestine each month, 750 of them from among those detained in Cyprus and 750 from the D.P. camps.

It was asked whether, in the event of an unfavourable response from the Security Council, it would be physically possible for the schedule to be maintained.

The Chairman recalled that, according to the Plan, the date fixed for the relinquishment of the Mandate and the evacuation of armed forces from Palestine was 1 August.

The Chairman confirmed, in reply to a question, that the Commission would travel to Jerusalem via London; adding that that was the most direct route.

A correspondent asked whether any tentative date for departure had been fixed.

The Chairman explained that he was not sure; the Commission had put before the Security Council the questions which it considered crucial, and many other things depended upon them. Another factor was the presence of the British Colonial Secretary in New York.

With reference to the negotiations Mr. Francisco was conducting with the United Kingdom delegation as to the creation of a Jewish militia, the Chairman stated that the Commission was waiting to hear the views of the Mandatory Government.

The Chairman was asked whether under the most favourable circumstances he considered that it would be possible to form an international army and get it into operation by 15 May.

He replied that that would depend upon the speed with which the matter was dealt with by the Security Council, and observed that during the war equally difficult feats had been accomplished in less time. It was a question really of the will to do it.

In reply to a question concerning the formation of organized militia, the Chairman explained that according to the Plan the militia were intended to maintain internal order in the two States. A further force might be needed to prevent a clash between the two militia.

Asked what was the procedure for forming an international force, the Chairman replied that that was a matter for the Security Council. The decision to create such a force might have to be ratified by the Member Governments; if so, that would be a further delaying factor. Time therefore was of the utmost importance. It had been virtually clear since the adoption of the Plan that the situation would develop as it had done; there was thus no reason for anyone to feel surprise.

The Chairman stated, in reply to a question, that Mr. Creech-Jones would probably appear before the Commission in the course of the week.

The meeting ended at 2.45 p.m.