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12 April 1948

UNITED NATIONS PALESTINE COMMISSION

Communication from United Kingdom Delegation

Concerning Food Supplies for Jerusalem.

The following communication concerning the supply of food for the Jewish Population of Jerusalem by means of convoys, has been received from Mr. J. Fletcher-Cooke of the United Kingdom Delegation.

## UNITED KINGDOM DELEGATION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

Empire State Building, New York 1, N.Y.

12th April 1948

My dear Bunche,

I understand from reports which have appeared in the press that Mr. Moshe Shertok, on behalf of the Jewish Agency, has sent a letter to the Chairman of the Commission regarding the position of Jewish food supplies for Jerusalem.

I have now received a report from the Government of Palestine on this matter and should be grateful if you would bring the following information to the notice of the Commission:

- (1) The maintenance of food supplies for the Jewish population of Jerusalem is largely a matter of ensuring free passage of traffic on the thirty-seven kilometre stretch of the Jerusalem-Jaffa road between Latrun and Jerusalem.
- (2) Very early in the disturbances which have occurred in Palestine since 29th November, 1947, attacks on traffic using this road were made by both Jews and Arabs. It is difficult to say who initiated these attacks, but it is fairly certain that firing action was first taken by the Jews after their vehicles had been stoned by Arabs in Ramleh.
- (3) The situation then developed into a fight for control of the road. The Arabs, no doubt in order to facilitate action by their troops, withdrew all their own vehicles from the stretch of the road in question and were then secure in the knowledge that any civilian traffic which they cared to attack must be Jewish.
- (4) The Jews then appealed for assistance. During December certain escorts were provided by the Army and the Police; but it became the Jewish practice to produce at the convoy rendezvous more vehicles than had been arranged for, with the result that the escort provided was insufficient. The blame for this was laid by the Jews on the Government of Palestine.

- (5) It will be appreciated that to ensure absolute security on a stretch of road thirty-seven kilometres long winding through rough and hilly country with frequent steep gradients and deep narrow and tortuous defiles is a matter of extreme difficulty. It was quickly found (indeed the security forces had always known) that it was useless to rely on large cumbersome slow-moving convoys such as the Jews depended upon and to which they resorted against all the advice of the security authorities.
- (6) Instead a system of standing and also highly mobile military and police patrols was instituted with the object of keeping the whole road under constant surveyance. As a result of these measures the situation improved and traffic began to move more freely.
- (7) Such Jewish reversals as were then suffered were usually traceable to the employment by the Jews of long, slow columns of armoured and unarmoured vehicles similar to those referred to above.
- (8) Meanwhile, efforts were made by the Government of Palestine to persuade the Arabs to allow Jewish food convoys to pass unhindered, provided that nothing but food was carried; that Jewish accompanying personnel were reduced to a minimum; and that the convoys were subject to search at some selected point.
- (9) There were indications that the Arabs would be prepared to agree to some such arrangement, but suggested solution was rejected in advance by a Jewish Agency spokesman. Moreover, the situation had by this time developed into a fight for various vantage points dominating the road. The Arab attitude stiffened, and recently Jewish attacks on Qastel village further prejudiced the success of these negotiations.
- (10) It is emphasized that officials of the Jewish national organizations made no representations to the Government of Palestine that the Jews of Jerusalem are facing starvation. On the other hand, they have always alleged that they have plenty of stores and that the present

stringency in the Jewish areas of Jerusalem is due to careful and close control and not to real shortage. All indications, however, refute this allegation.

- (11) The Government of Palestine has made it clear that it will continue to do all in its power to keep the road open.

It is thus clear that the Jews, far from not being permitted to bring convoys through, are being given every possible assistance by the Government of Palestine and the security forces to do so. Such assistance cannot, however, be fully effective

- (a) without the cooperation of the Jewish authorities, who have made no approach themselves to the Government of Palestine in this matter and who appear to prefer to act independently;
- (b) so long as Jewish convoys carry stores other than food, thus inviting Arab attack;
- (c) in view of the vulnerability of the road to Arab tactics.

Two large convoys have come through during the past week, but the present situation looks like developing into a general battle between Jews and Arabs for the command of the road, with perhaps some thousands engaged on each side. It is reported that the Arabs are using artillery.

During the twenty-four hours 9th-10th April, the roads between Iatron and Ramleh, between Jenin and Haifa and between Jenin and Affula have been blown up at many points, so that the Jerusalem-Iatron road is by no means the only one involved in this general attack on road communications.

It should be emphasized again that the problem is not one of food shortage in Palestine as a whole. The Government of Palestine has reported that there is food available in Palestine to maintain the necessary supplies for Jerusalem. The problem is entirely one of the transport of this food from the ports to Jerusalem.

It may be added that transport by rail to Jerusalem is ruled out because, even if trains succeeded in escaping Arab attacks or sabotage en route, the railway station at Jerusalem is in a predominately Arab area, and the Arabs

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would not permit off-loading of food destined for the Jews. Any attempt to do this would result in a major engagement.

Every effort will be made by the Government of Palestine, by appeals to the interested parties and by all other possible means should those appeals subsequently fail, to ensure adequate supplies for Jerusalem until the termination of the Mandate.

Yours sincerely,

J. Fletcher-Cooke (signed)

Mr. Ralph J. Bunche,  
Principal Secretary to the United Nations  
Commission on Palestine,  
United Nations, Lake Success, I.I.