

RESTRICTED
UK/47
1 March 1947

UNITED NATIONS PALESTINE COMMISSION

Communications Received from United Kingdom Delegation
Concerning the Ben Yehuda Street Explosion in Jerusalem

The following communication, concerning Questions and Answers in the House of Commons on the Ben Yehuda Street explosion has been received from Mr. Trafford Smith of the United Kingdom Delegation.

UNITED KINGDOM DELEGATION TO THE UNITED NATIONS
Empire State Building
New York 1, N.Y.

26th February, 1948

My Dear Bunche

I enclose, for the information of the Commission, copies of the text of further Questions and Answers in the House of Commons on the subject of the recent outrage in Jerusalem.

As you will of course know, a private notice Question is one permitted by the Speaker to be asked at very short notice on a matter of urgent national importance. The Member asking is, by this procedure, exempted from the normal provision of having to put the Question down on the Order Paper forty-eight hours in advance.

Yours sincerely,

Trafford Smith (signed)

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

Following is text of question and answer in House of Commons today
24th February.

BEGINS

Mr. Eden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Colonies whether he is now in a position to make a further statement on the outrages in Palestine last Sunday.

Mr. Rees Williams: The enquiries which are being made locally are not yet complete but it is clear that there is no ground for the suggestions that members of the British Security Forces were responsible for the outrage. The Zionists in response to the challenge to produce evidence in support of their allegation have produced none. Statements have been made on behalf of the Arabs admitting the responsibility. I deeply regret to inform the House that the number of British soldiers or policemen killed in the incidents immediately following the explosion was 9 and not 8 as stated by me yesterday. No further casualties have been reported.

ENDS.

2. Following were supplementary exchanges.

Mr. Eden: May I ask the Right Honourable Gentleman if he can now reply to the question asked yesterday by the Honourable Member for Shoreditch (Mr. Thurtle) as to whether it is true that two British soldiers or airmen who were murdered were undergoing hospital treatment.

Mr. Rees Williams: Yes that is so.

Earl Winterton: Is the Honourable Gentleman aware that statements supporting these monstrous charges against British troops have been made in certain quarters in this country and will communicate with the Attorney General with a view to an action for seditious libel against those people who accuse British soldiers of this crime when those soldiers have been murdered by treacherous and brutal people.

Mr. Rees Williams: I will consider the matter.

Mr. Thurtle: May I ask the Honourable Gentleman if he has any information from Jerusalem confirming the acceptance of responsibility for this outrage by the Arabs.

Mr. Rees Williams: Yes Arab pamphlets have appeared in Jerusalem to-day and I have a translation of one of these pamphlets which is to the effect that a group of Arab Commandos carried out the blowing up of buildings in the Ben Yehuda Street in Jerusalem as reprisals for the Jewish bomb in Ramleh (text given).

Mr. Gallacher: I wish to ask the Minister if it is not very desirable in view of the situation that exists in Palestine that hospital cases should be transferred immediately to this country and not kept there as a preliminary to the transfer of all the lads to this country.

Mr. Lipson: Now this foul calumny has been exposed may I ask if the Minister will convey to His Majesty's Forces in Palestine the admiration of this House for the restraint they have shown under great provocation.

Mr. Rees Williams: I shall be very glad and indeed proud to convey that message.

Sir Arthur Salter: Does the Minister intend to take appropriate action against the perpetrators of this outrage and also see that appropriate action is taken against those who as it now appears without any evidence broadcast this infamous slander which apparently has no foundation.

Mr. Cocks: In view of the statements the Minister has just made have any steps been taken to arrest Abdul Khader Huseini.

Mr. Rees Williams: Abdul Khader Huseini is very difficult to catch.

Lord John Hope: May I ask the Minister whether he would do his best to see that the original answer gets the widest possible circulation in the United States of America in some quarters of which there may be far more readiness to publish the sort of immendoes expressed in this House yesterday rather than his answer to-day.

Mr. Rees Williams: We will do all we can to meet the point.

Mr. Norman Smith: May I ask whether the British High Command in Palestine is acquainted with the identity of the murders of the nine British policemen and soldiers and if so whether steps are to be taken to bring them to justice.

Mr. Rees Williams: Investigations are still proceeding. As yet I have not any definite evidence on the point.

Mr. Wilson Harris: Has the Minister observed that a statement has been issued by Mr. Henry Wallace to the effect that Arabs have been supplied with arms from British sources on United States money and will he categorically repudiate that particular slander.

Mr. Rees Williams: I did notice the statement in the Press. If Mr. Wallace did make it then I regret it because it is not so at all.

Mr. Sidney Silverman: May I ask the Minister whether he is now in a position to amend the number of casualties which he gave as having occurred in the original outrage.

Major Tufton Beamish: Before the Minister replies may I ask whether he is not expecting an apology to the House from the Honourable Member for Nelson and Colne (Mr. S. Silverman) for his attitude yesterday.

Mr. Speaker: Personal Attacks are really quite out of place at the moment.

Mr. Henderson Stewart: May I ask --

Mr. S. Silverman: I asked a question and I have not had it answered.

Mr. Rees Williams: The only alteration I have in the figures is the one I have given. I have had no alteration at all from Jerusalem with regard to the civilian casualties in the explosion.

Following is text of private notice question and answer with supplementaries Tuesday 24th February.

Begins : -

Mr. Eden (by private notice) asked the Minister of Defence whether he will inform the House what action has been taken with regard to British Service Personnel in Palestine in view of threats openly expressed against them. The Minister of Defence (Mr. A. V. Alexander): Immediate responsibility for the protection of the lives of British service ^{and} ~~gp omitted~~ personnel in Palestine rests with the local Commanding Officers. His Majesty's Government have no doubt that in the heightened tension in that country the officers concerned will have taken, and are taking, all appropriate measures to this end, consistent with their obligation to assist the civil authorities in the maintenance of law and order. The Government have complete confidence in the officers responsible on the spot and I can assure them and the House that they may rely on the support of the home Government in any further steps that appear necessary. I wish to repudiate entirely the unfounded aspersions upon our British forces in relation to the outrage in Jerusalem on Sunday. The patience and forbearance displayed in face of murderous attacks and the courage shown in defending both Jews and Arabs have been exemplary and worthy of our highest admiration.

Mr. Eden: While we associate ourselves with everything which the Right Honourable gentleman has said about the troops and the officers, may we take it from that answer, that in regard to any steps that the local authorities think it necessary to take -- for instance, the placing of the army on a war-time footing so that casualties do not occur in the way they recently occurred -- local commanders are free to take those steps.

Mr. Alexander: They have our full support.

Mr. Henderson Stewart: May I ask whether the Government in view of this recent outrage, following as it does so many others, have made any change in their general plans in order to avoid a repetition in the coming weeks of anything so dreadful.

Mr. Callacher: May I ask the Minister of Defence the same question that I asked the Under Secretary State of State for the Colonies. Will he in view of the situation see that hospital cases are taken out of Palestine. Cannot he understand what a terrible thing it is for the mothers of these lads if their lads are in hospital. It is bad enough when they are strong and healthy.

Mr. Alexander: So such action as the Honourable Member suggests would apparently have saved the lives of the two men just wounded and undergoing immediate treatment when they were foully murdered. We shall of course take all possible steps to bring home the men who are in hospital as soon as they are fit to be moved.

Sir G. Jeffreys: Will the Right Honourable gentleman say whether the hospitals are properly guarded by British troops and armed police and whether it will be possible on another occasion for murderers to enter another hospital and brutally murder men in bed.

Mr. Alexander: I should say that this was something which occurred very suddenly in that particular area. I must leave steps of that kind with the greatest confidence in the hands of the very efficient Commander-in-Chief.

Sir R. Glyn: May I ask whether, in regard to Jerusalem and that particular district, any restrictions have been placed on local commanders in regard to the imposition of martial law.

Mr. Alexander: I would like to have notice of that question.

Major Legge-Bourke: Would not the Right Honourable gentleman consider the possibility of evacuating all hospital patients into the Canal Zone and asking the Egyptian Government if they would help.

Mr. Alexander: I am sure that every possible step is being taken to evacuate hospital cases as early as possible but of course we cannot evacuate men who are not in a fit condition to be moved.

Squadron Leader Fleming: Is it not a fact that the local Commander-in-Chief in Palestine has no authority himself to declare martial law without the consent of the Palestinian Government and if he had, if martial law were declared, does the Right Honourable gentleman consider that there are sufficient troops and police in that country to maintain martial law.

Mr. Alexander: Certainly.

Earl Winterton: When will the Right Honourable gentleman be in a position to answer the question which is repeatedly put to him: Has the local Commander-in-Chief or has he not full permission to declare martial law that is to say, to shoot at sight these murderous ruffians who are murdering our people.

Mr. Alexander: I am sure that the powers which, of course, rest with the Palestinian Government and the High Commissioner, would be put into operation at any time it was really necessary. I am also sure that if the Commander-in-Chief was not satisfied on the point, he would make it known.

Mr. Henderson Stewart: In view of the questions which have been put in the last ten minutes and the obvious anxiety which everyone feels, would not the Right Honourable gentleman consider the issue by the Government of a statement, perhaps next week, indicating what major changes in policy, which obviously everyone desires, are likely to be made.

Mr. Alexander: I am not quite sure what the Honourable gentleman covers by the word "policy". If he is addressing to me a question with regard to the policy of evacuation and dates, I do not see any possibility of altering the policy already announced.

Following is text of question and answer in House of Commons today 25th February.

Question arises from press reports that A. H. C. from Cairo has denied authority of Arab pamphlet.

BEGINS.

Mr. Silverman by private notice to ask the S of S for the Colonies whether he has any further statement to make concerning the recent outrages in Jerusalem in view of the fact that Arab Higher Committee have repudiated, as false, the document taking responsibility for the outrages.

Mr. Rees Williams: I have seen a press report of the statement purporting to have been made by the Arab Higher Committee to which my Honourable Friend refers. It is, however, a fact that such a pamphlet was circulated in Jerusalem yesterday and I informed the House of the fact. Ends.

2. In answer to a supplementary question, I stated that I stood by yesterday's statement regarding implication of British Security Forces.