

UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

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Opening Remarks of the Chairman, Mr. Claude  
de Boisanger, at the meeting of the Conciliation  
Commission for Palestine with the Representatives  
of the Arab States, held in Beirut on 21 March  
1949.

Your Excellencies, Gentlemen,

Permit me, Your Excellency, in the first place, to express through you to the Lebanese Government the sincere gratitude of the Conciliation Commission for the willingness with which the Government of Lebanon has offered us its hospitality for the holding of our meetings. In expressing to you my warmest thanks I know that I am also interpreting the sentiments of all the Delegates present.

At the same time, I should like to stress the great satisfaction with which the Conciliation Commission has noted that its initiative in inviting the Arab countries to gather in Beirut has been received by their Governments with the good will so clearly manifested in the presence at this table of the many eminent personalities to whom I have the honour of addressing our most cordial welcome.

I would like at this time to take the opportunity offered by the cordial and intimate atmosphere in which the Conciliation Commission proposes to carry out its work to submit to you certain observations concerning both the substance and the procedure of our deliberations.

As regards the substance, I have only a few things to say today. You all know that the refugee question is the subject of our conversations. I am fully aware that this general subject  
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involves a great number of concrete problems, first as regards the relief which it will be necessary to give to the refugees for a certain period of time - a task for which the Organization directed by Mr. Griffis is responsible - second as regards an intermediate stage during which certain kinds of work would be provided for the refugees in order to end their present enforced idleness, and finally, as regards the last stage of resettlement and economic and social rehabilitation. We shall examine all these problems and as a result I hope that we shall be able to arrive at a more complete understanding of the point of view of the Arab Governments than we were able to obtain during our too brief visits of a month ago. If, following our deliberations, it should prove impossible to adopt definitive solutions for these various problems - for in undertaking the solution of problems as difficult and complex as those now before us, one should not be too ambitious - I am convinced that it will at least be possible for us to establish the general lines along which their solution may be found.

As regards the possibility of extending our exchanges of view to questions other than that of the refugees, I have only to repeat that which was said in the invitation addressed to your Governments. The Commission is always ready to extend the scope of our deliberations and even to take the initiative in examining certain problems should the course of our work make such action advisable.

And now I would like to say a few words about the method of our work. You remember, no doubt, that in the invitation addressed to your Governments by the Commission it was said that the Commission wished to have "preliminary exchanges of views" with the Representatives of the Arab Governments. It was not fortuitously that this wording was adopted. It expresses in a very precise way the character that the Commission wishes to give

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to these meetings. It is within the limits of preliminary exchanges of views that we propose to keep our deliberations. This involves a certain number of consequences, the first of which is the following: we do not see that any purpose would be served by engaging at present in a kind of general discussion which might tend to hamper our freedom of action. It is essential in our opinion to maintain as much fluidity and flexibility as possible in our discussions. It is for this purpose that we would wish to see the real work being done in the form of conversations with each delegation, after our formal meeting today. We propose, therefore, to begin these conversations tomorrow and perhaps to continue them, if necessary, until Wednesday or Thursday. Subsequently, we will agree on the future course of our deliberations. I believe that we are all staying at the St. George Hotel and that it will be easy for us to meet as well as to arrange and prepare our future meetings without loss of time. Furthermore, I would like to inform you that the Commission has decided to reserve the day of Thursday 24 March, for hearing the representatives of the non-governmental organizations that might wish to present themselves.

It is evident that the fact that we will limit ourselves here to a preliminary exchange of views should not prevent us from keeping the public informed as much as possible of the general progress of our work. The Commission will maintain contact with the press either by means of "communiqués" or by press conferences since we are well aware of the interest with which the meetings in Beirut will be followed in the whole world.

I believe that this is all that I have to say today. We hope to have the pleasure of seeing you all at tonight's reception at the Normandy Hotel. This will be an opportunity to establish contacts and personal relations between the delegations and the members and staff of the Commission; for such cordial relations, inspiring mutual confidence, are an important factor in all undertakings of conciliation and international peace.