

SUMMARY RECORD OF A MEETING BETWEEN
THE GENERAL COMMITTEE
AND THE DELEGATION OF ISRAEL

held in Lausanne on Friday,
3 June 1949, at 11 a.m.

Present: Mr. de la Tour du Pin (France) - Chairman
Mr. Yenisey (Turkey)
Mr. Wilkins (U.S.A.)

Mr. Azcarate - Principal Secretary
Mr. Milner - Committee Secretary

Mr. Elias Sasson }
Mr. Hershon Meron } - Representatives of
Mr. Gershon Hirsch } Israël

Mr. MERON, replying to Question 3 of the Questionnaire of 19 May, estimated the number of Arabs in territories under Israeli jurisdiction at 160,000 -- an estimate he considered more accurate than that given by Mr. Lifshitz who had calculated their number at 150,000.

It was difficult to make a reliable estimate of the number of bona fide refugees, most of whom might be assumed to be in the "Triangle" and the Gaza area. Israel could not wholly accept the findings of the official census and estimates made by the Mandatory Administration. Thus out of a total population of Palestine officially estimate in 1945 at 1,810,000, the British Administration had estimated the number of Jews at 554,000, whereas according to Israeli estimates their number was 592,000. Again, whereas the British Administration had assumed the number of Moslems to be 1,101,000, Israel considered that figure at least 10% too large and had always maintained that the Moslems in Palestine numbered under 1,000,000. He calculated the number of Christians at about 135,000 and that of members of other religions, Druzes etc., at about 14,500.

M. SASSON recalled that Mr. Lifshitz on 26 May had given the number of refugees from Israeli territory as some 520,000. Studies and investigations, including consultation of Arab sources of informations had resulted in the following estimates:

Refugees in Syria	:	80,000
" " Lebanon	:	100,000
" " Irak	:	5,000
" " Egypt	:	15,000
" " Transjordan:		0,000
" " in the Gaza region:		145,000
" in the "Triangle" up to Ramallah:		<u>180,000</u>
TOTAL	:	600,000

The total of 600,000 was composed of the 520,000 refugees from Israeli territory and 80,000 from territory in Arab hands (Jenin, Tulkarm, the Old City of Jerusalem, Hebron, etc.)

The number of Arabs at present in Israeli territory was round about 160,000; no figures were available as to their location, but they were mainly in Jaffa, Haifa, Nazareth, Acre, Galilee, Jerusalem and Abu Gosh.

He had been able to check the figures both for refugees in Arab countries and for Arabs in Israel with certain Arabs, by whom they had been confirmed.

The Arabs were now asserting that the refugees numbered 8-900,000. He gathered that they were including in that figure the number of Arabs now in Israel who were still considered refugees. It should be noted, moreover, that the total of 600,000 refugees from Israeli and Arab territories included some 100,000 nationals of Syria, the Lebanon, Egypt and other countries, who had left Palestine and returned to their own countries. Such foreign nationals should not be counted among refugees; at most, they might be entitled to advance claims in respect of property left behind.

With the deduction of such foreign nationals, the total of 600,000 became 500,000.

The CHAIRMAN informed the Israeli delegation that during the past few days some statistics had been received from the Arab delegations on the basis of the Questionnaire of 19 May; they would be transmitted to the Israeli delegation.

Mr. MERON observed that the 1945 figure of 1,810,000 given for the total population of Palestine included 80-100,000 nomads who were not Palestinian nationals but were from Egypt, Lebanon or Transjordan. The 139,000 Christians also included some Lebanese nationals. There was at the time a constant unauthorized immigration of Lebanese and Syrians, attracted by the better labor conditions prevailing in Palestine, especially in the North, around Haifa. Thus the figures he had given

including about 100,000 non-Palestinian nationals who could not legally be considered as Palestinian refugees. They remained citizens of their respective countries, from which they had immigrated, often illegally.

Mr. WILKINS questioned the existence of any connection between nationality and the quality of being a refugee. Would a Pole who had spent his life in Germany be considered a German or a Polish refugee?

Mr. MERON declared such an analogy could not apply. In Central Europe people had been victims of barbarous manipulations. The Lebanese immigrants had entered Palestine of their own free will, often illegally, looking for work. They had returned on their own free will to their native country, for they had not been expelled.

Mr. SASSON pointed out that, moreover, they were citizens of a country at war with Israel.

Mr. WILKINS said firstly, that the General Assembly Resolution of 11 December 1948 had given no definition of refugees, merely insisting that "the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so"; secondly, the legal argument could be advanced that Lebanon had never formally declared war on Israel or invaded Israeli territory.

Mr. SASSON said that Israel would be able to explain the case to the General Assembly. In regard to the Lebanon, since the country had signed an Armistice, it must have declared war. He could present the Declaration of all the Arab States, proving that all had declared war on what they called "Zionist bands", since they had consistently refused, and continued to refuse, to speak of the State of Israel. The Armistice, however, had been signed with that State.

Mr. MERON quoted the parallel of Japan, which had also not declared war on the United States.

In answer to a question from Mr. Wilkins who asked whether returned Lebanese nationals were included in the figure of 100,000 refugees in the Lebanon, he replied in the affirmative, adding that all had not necessarily returned to the Lebanon.

The CHAIRMAN referred to the Israeli proposal concerning the Gaza refugees, and the possibility of their being absorbed by Israel and given Israeli citizenship. He wondered whether such a course of action would be a regular policy of the Israeli Government, to be applied in other areas to other groups of refugees who came within the meaning of the General Assembly's definition.

Mr. SASSON did not know whether or not the particular decision taken by his Government concerning the case of the Gaza refugees would give rise to an established policy; he would request information from his Government and reply to the question at a later moment.

The CHAIRMAN asked whether statistics could be given concerning the number of individuals separated from their families, as mentioned in point 1 (a) of the questionnaire, and, in the event that the separated families should be reunited, the number of refugees in that category who would be affected. The Arab delegations estimated that 35,000 refugees now in Israel were separated from their families; considering an average Arab family as numbering five persons and that four out of the five were living as refugees outside Israel. They estimated a total of 140,000 members of broken families to be repatriated.

Mr. SASSON recalled that his delegation had already submitted the question to the Government in Tel Aviv, which was proceeding with the taking of a census; Mr. Lifshitz, who had now returned to Tel Aviv, would follow up the matter. Mr. Sasson had no comment to make regarding the figures given by the Arab delegations. He thought the question was a very simple one which needed no discussion or accumulation of statistics. The Government of Israel had announced its agreement to allow the return of members of separated families, and it would do so, when the proper inquiries had been made, and regardless of the number of refugees involved. In that connection, Mr. Sasson pointed out that some families might include male members who were of an age to be self-supporting; such members could not be considered as dependent upon their families and would not fall within the category to be repatriated.

Mr. YENISEY drew attention to the fact that such repatriation would be governed by the interpretation placed upon the term "family".

With regard to the economic aspects of the refugee question, Dr. MERON gave a general statement of his Government's policy regarding resettlement of the refugees who might return to Israel within the framework of a final peace settlement.

The Government of Israel did not intend that these refugees should be scattered, but rather that they should be settled in such a way as to be able to rebuild their economic life in a constructive manner. Israel's plan would follow approximately the lines of the scheme adopted by the Greek and Turkish Governments in connection with the exchange of populations. In the latter case a special body had been set up under the auspices of the League of Nations, and resettlement had taken place on the basis of economic and sociological principles. New villages and settlements had been started; some of them had re-established previous family connections, others had been cooperative societies, while still others had been

created as economic units composed of groups including various types of producers, farmers, and artisans. The two Governments had succeeded in constructing self-supporting economic units, established not on a geographical basis but on the basis of the best possibilities for future development.

The Government of Israel had approximately the same purposes with regard to the future resettlement of refugees, as well as of other newcomers to the country. It was interested in transforming them into self-supporting units; it desired to avoid the creation of a "proletariat" such as existed in Europe, in which large numbers of people lived as landless tenants permanently burdened with debt. In order to bring the new settlements gradually to self-sufficiency, it was planned that a certain percentage of artisans should be added to each group. Settlements of factory workers would be established in regions which gave a certain guarantee of future steady employment. Groups which were accustomed to the higher standard of living near towns would be settled in that type of area. The Government planned to grant financial support at the beginning, to provide for irrigation where necessary, and to allow the maximum of autonomy to the groups to build their villages according to their own systems and their own tastes and desires. The plan was in the best interests of both the refugees and the country as a whole; the Government of Israel felt that it would succeed rapidly in raising the level of life of the inhabitants far beyond what it had been previously, and in making of them an asset rather than a liability.

Mr. YENISEY expressed his appreciation of Dr. Meron's interesting and enlightening exposé and asked that it should appear in detail in the records, as a statement of the official policy of the Government of Israel.

The CHAIRMAN asked whether the plan would apply also to those Arabs who had not left Israel.

Dr. MERON replied that in many towns and villages such as Abu Gosh and Nazareth, the Arab inhabitants had remained in their homes and were still carrying on their farming and other normal occupations in peace. In such cases the inhabitants would remain where they were and continue their life as in the past. As regards the small percentage who had left their homes and scattered to various parts of the country, the intention was to follow the plan he had outlined. He added that this relatively small group had so far presented no urgent problem, as they could easily find work on reconstruction projects of various types. The Government of Israel

did not anticipate that any problem would be raised by other refugees who might return to Israel; the Government's plan for re-settlement and redistribution of the population would be carried out scientifically, and the refugees would be placed where they might achieve the maximum of economic solvency.

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