

UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE
GENERAL COMMITTEE

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SUMMARY RECORD OF A MEETING BETWEEN
THE GENERAL COMMITTEE AND THE
DELEGATIONS OF THE ARAB STATES

held in Lausanne on Wednesday,
18 May 1949, at 4:30 p.m.

Present: Mr. de la Tour du Pin (France) - Chairman
Mr. Yenisey (Turkey)
Mr. Wilkins (U.S.A)
Mr. Azcarate - Principal Secretary
Mr. Milner - Political Adviser
Mr. Abdel Chafi El Labbane - Representative of Egypt
Mr. Jamal Tugan) - Representatives of the
Mr. Edmond Roch) Hashemite Jordan Kingdom
Mr. Mohamed Ali Hamade - Representative of Lebanon
H.E. Dr. Farid Zeineddine) - Representatives
Mr. Ahmad Choukairi) of Syria

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The CHAIRMAN welcomed the representatives of the Arab States on behalf of the Committee. He explained that the procedure of meetings would be kept as flexible as possible; statements might be formal or informal, or if considered confidential, they might be omitted from the record. Meetings should be held as frequently as possible with all delegations, in order that the work might proceed rapidly. He informed the delegations that the Committee had received the Israeli representatives the preceding day; no press statement had as yet been issued.

Dr. ZEINEDDINE (Syria) thanked the Committee for its welcome; the Arab delegations would be glad to meet the Committee as often as desired and to cooperate to the fullest toward achievement of the common aim. He agreed that flexibility of procedure was desirable, but felt that in view of the number and variety of questions which might be discussed, it would be useful if an agenda for each meeting could be established and communicated to the delegations in advance.

The CHAIRMAN agreed to Mr. Zeineddine's proposal.

In reply to a question from Mr. Labbane (Egypt) regarding the exact competence of the Committee, the CHAIRMAN quoted the terms of reference, which he thought were quite clear. The Committee would discuss any question of which it might be seized by the

Commission, and would report on the discussion to the Commission either orally or in writing.

Mr. LABBANE (Egypt) could not agree that the order of questions to be discussed was purely an internal matter between the Committee and the Commission; the order of priority recommended by the delegations should also be taken into account. According to his understanding it had been agreed with the Commission that this first discussion with the Committee would concern the emergency measures to be taken on behalf of the refugees. He proposed that that discussion should now be opened.

Mr. WILKINS recalled that the Commission had had under consideration for some time certain emergency measures directed toward the immediate return of certain categories of refugees. He had listed the following categories: (a) refugees separated from their immediate families, (b) workers in orange groves, (c) workers in the ports of Haifa, Jaffa and Tel Aviv, and (d) workers at the airport of Lydda. The Arab representatives might perhaps wish to add other categories; and he asked whether they could furnish an estimate of the number of refugees in each category. Secondly, in order to show shifts in population, he requested general estimates of (a) the number of Arabs in Palestine, by districts, as of 29 November 1947, and (b) the number of Arabs in Palestine, by former districts, at the present time. Thirdly, he would like an estimate of the number of Arab refugees who had left homes in Israeli-occupied areas of Arab Palestine such as western Galilee, the Tulkarm area, the Jaffa region, Beersheba, the Ramle-Lydda district, and the area north of Gaza. Mr. Wilkins agreed to submit his questions in writing to the Arab delegations.

Dr. ZEINEDDINE (Syria) suggested that a further category might include the refugees coming from areas marked in blue on the Partition map.

Mr. HAMADE (Lebanon) said that the questions would be referred to their delegations by the representatives present. It was possible that a sub-committee of experts might be appointed to study the questions and submit a report.

Mr. Hamade then read a statement signed by the heads of the four Arab delegations, embodying in nine points the most urgent measures which they considered should be taken for the immediate relief of the refugee situation (document AR/8).

The CHAIRMAN thanked the Arab delegations for their statements, which would prove a useful contribution to the Commission's

work. It would become a working document of the Commission, which might wish to discuss it with the heads of the delegations. He noted that six of the points mentioned were already the subject of correspondence and discussion by the Commission with the Israeli delegation; on some points that delegation had requested instructions from Tel Aviv. The Arab delegations would be informed of the replies as soon as they were received.

The Chairman wished to draw the attention of the delegations to the fact that the Committee on Jerusalem was approaching the final stage of its work and desired urgently to receive the replies of the delegations to the questionnaires which had been distributed.

The Chairman then summarized briefly, for the information of the Arab delegations, the discussion which had taken place the preceding day between the Committee and the delegation of Israel.

The Israeli delegation had made a preliminary declaration stating that the attacks on Israel appearing in the Arab press were jeopardising the atmosphere of the Lausanne talks, and that if these attacks ceased Israel in its turn would give assurances that nothing of a similar tone would appear in the Israeli press. The Committee had agreed to study the matter; it had not stated that it would transmit the complaint to the Arab delegations. The Israeli delegation had registered an objection to an article in "EL ARAM" of 10 May 1949 reporting that the Partition Plan had been accepted by both sides as a basis for discussion. The Commission had not been aware of this article, the protocol having been signed only on 12 May, and a translation had been requested.

The Committee had raised the question of the appearance in the press of several confidential documents or statements which had not been released by the Commission's press officer. The Israeli delegation had admitted having released the "Preamble" and the Jerusalem questionnaire, for political purposes of its own; Mr. Sasson, however, had no knowledge of who had released the statement made by Dr. Eytan to the Commission. The Committee had stressed the necessity for an agreement under which no confidential material would be released by any delegation except with the consent of all interested parties and after liaison with the Commission's press officer. The Israeli delegation had agreed to take the suggestion under consideration.

Mr. LABBANE (Egypt) considered the incident a further indication of Israel's refusal to accept its responsibilities. The case was important to him because the Egyptian press was involved; he remarked that although his Government respected the freedom of the press, Egyptian officials were conscious of their international responsibilities and acted accordingly. He wished to record his opinion that the Commission was responsible for the repetition of such leakage of information; it was the Commission's duty to bring such incidents to the attention of the Government involved and to take a firm stand on the matter.

Dr. ZEINEDDINE (Syria) felt that more than mere leakage of information was involved; the delegation of Israel was deliberately abusing the confidence of the Commission by using the proceedings of the Lausanne meetings to further its own political ends. With regard to the Israeli assurances that attacks in their own press would be controlled, he thought assurances should first be given that such attacks would not be the deliberate policy of Israeli authorities.

The CHAIRMAN remarked that the Commission recognized the importance of the question and hoped that future leakage of information would be avoided by an agreement such as he had mentioned. He asked whether the comments made during the present meeting might be communicated to the Israeli delegation.

Dr. ZEINEDDINE (Syria) replied that the comments of the Arab delegations were directed to the Commission, which should be seized of the question and take note of it.

The CHAIRMAN, continuing his report on the discussion with the Israeli delegation, explained that when the Committee had broached the refugee question, the Israeli representatives had agreed to furnish certain statistical information, but had reiterated their view that the problem was closely linked to other questions. They had then stated their position as regards the territorial question.

They had renewed their declaration that their attitude on the boundary question would depend on whether they were negotiating with an independent Palestine Arab state or with the neighbouring Arab States. On the basis of a juridical interpretation of the resolution of 29 November 1947, they felt that they could negotiate only with an independent Palestine Arab state. Nevertheless, they admitted two possible alternatives. If Arab troops were withdrawn from Palestine, a plebiscite held, and an Arab State constituted in Palestine, Israel would then negotiate frontiers with that State.

If such a state were not constituted, Israel was ready to propose to the Government of Lebanon negotiations on the basis of the international frontier; to Egypt it would propose negotiations on a similar basis, provided that conversations would also be opened on the subject of Gaza and the refugees in that area. A proposal would be made to Syria at such time as an armistice should have been signed. No mention had been made of an arrangement with the Hashemite Jordan Kingdom. The Chairman explained that the Israeli delegation had asked the Committee to communicate the proposals to the Arab delegations concerned.

Mr. LABBANE (Egypt) stated that his delegation would maintain the stand it had always taken: it refused to discuss the question of frontiers before the refugee question had been settled. The Arab delegations had presented a list of urgent measures to be taken for the refugees, which had no connection with the boundary settlement; the Israeli delegation could prove its good will and its desire to continue the conversations by the attitude it took toward those measures. The refugee question was exclusively a humanitarian one, and more urgent than any settlement of boundaries. The Arab delegations would await Israel's reply on their memorandum before discussing any other questions.

Dr. ZEINEDDINE (Syria) noted that the Arab delegations received the Chairman's report purely as information; his delegation had no comment to make.

Mr. YENISEY pointed out that the urgency and priority of the refugee question on humanitarian grounds was admitted by all. He reminded the delegations, however, that they had signed a Protocol under which they had agreed to discuss not only the refugee question but also relevant territorial arrangements and other matters. There was no reason why the status of the refugee problem should prevent discussion of other questions at the same time. The fundamental common aim was peace, but peace involved many problems which must be considered together; the settlement of the refugee question would not in itself bring about peace.

Mr. LABBANE (Egypt) declared that the Arab delegations, in signing the Protocol, had made the territorial question subordinate to the refugee problem, not vice versa.

Dr. ZEINEDDINE (Syria) emphasized the urgency of the Commission's responsibility as regards the refugee question. He felt that little concrete action had been taken on the matter in the course of the past months. He expressed surprise that the Technical Mission on refugees had not yet begun its work.

The CHAIRMAN explained that the constitution of the Mission had been delayed owing to factors beyond the Commission's control. It was expected, however, that the members of the Mission would arrive in Lausanne the following week; they would in all probability consult the members of the Arab delegations, for their own information, before proceeding to the Middle East.

As regards the Commission's work on the problem, he affirmed that from the beginning the Commission had been convinced that for moral, humanitarian and psychological reasons the refugee problem was inevitably closely linked to the territorial question; further the administration under which the refugees would be placed on their return was a factor which must be taken into account. The refugee problem was admittedly at the top of the "hierarchy" of questions to be solved; it was not, however, necessarily at the head of the "chronology". The failure of the Arab delegations to distinguish between "hierarchy" and "chronology" was one of the causes of the deadlock which threatened the negotiations at present and for which a solution must be found.

Mr. HAMADE (Lebanon) thanked the Chairman for the interesting information he had imparted, upon which the Arab delegations might comment fully in due time. He suggested that the following meeting with the Committee might be reserved for a discussion of the nine-point statement which had been presented.

The CHAIRMAN accepted the Lebanese representative's proposal. He noted the Syrian representative's comment that the statement had been presented for the use of the Commission and as an aid in its task.

It was agreed that for the time being no information would be released to the press regarding the Committee's discussions with the delegations.

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