

UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINEGENERAL COMMITTEE

RESTRICTED
COM.GEN./SR.7
25 May 1949
ORIGINAL:ENGLISH

SUMMARY RECORD OF A MEETING BETWEEN

THE GENERAL COMMITTEE AND THE
DELEGATIONS OF THE ARAB STATES

held in Lausanne on Wednesday,
25 May 1949, at 11 a.m.

Present: Mr.de la Tour du Pin(France)	- Chairman
Mr.Yenisey (Turkey)	
Mr.Wilkins (U.S.A.)	
Dr.Azcarate	- Principal Secretary
Mr.Milner	- Committee Secretary
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
Mr.Farid Sad)	- Representatives of
Mr.Ahmad Choukairi)	Syria

Release of information to the press

Mr.LABBANE (Egypt), referring to the discussion in the General Committee of 18 May concerning a release in the Arab press, read the following letter which he had received from Mr.Albert Ammouy, correspondent for " AL-AHRAM":

"With reference to your enquiry on the source of my information published in Al-Ahram on contents of the protocol of the negotiations, I hereby state that this information was through a Jewish official source, but I am not in a position to disclose the name of the person concerned."

Mr.Labbane had no comment to add, but requested that the text should appear in the summary record..

The CHAIRMAN took note of the statement on behalf of the Committee.

Discussion of Arab Memorandum of 18 May on the refugee question (document AR/8)

Point 1.

Mr. CHOUKAIRI (Syria) pointed out that the return of the orange grove owners and workers was of great urgency not only for humanitarian reasons, but as a safeguard against the destruction of the groves. The groves, the extent of which was estimated at approximately 135,000 dunums, represented a major source of the wealth of the Arab population; it was essential that they should be preserved. Moreover, he pointed out that the Palestine Administration under the Mandate had issued loans on the citrus groves; the accumulated charges now amounted to £ 35 per dunum. The total number of Arabs required to operate the groves, including skilled labour, had been estimated at 35,000; he could see no just or valid reason why that number should not now be allowed to return.

Mr. WILKINS asked what was the total value of the groves and the average annual income from them.

Mr. CHOUKAIRI (Syria) replied that while the value of the groves varied in different regions, the approximate value was £ 200 sterling per dunum, or a total value of about 30 million pounds. The total income from them was about 2 million pounds annually. He reminded the Committee that 80 per cent of the total annual exports of Palestine came from the citrus industry, which was the country's main source of wealth. The Arab owners had now been deprived of that income for two seasons and the groves were in a serious state of deterioration.

The CHAIRMAN asked for an estimate of the number of refugees included in this category and the countries where they were now living.

Mr. CHOUKAIRI (Syria) replied that a large number of grove owners were now living in Lebanon, others in Egypt and the Hashemite Jordan Kingdom; the workers were equally scattered. He could not give exact figures of the total number, but would try to furnish them. There were about 7,000 owners of groves.

In reply to a question from Mr. Wilkins concerning the relative acreage of groves owned by Arabs and those owned by Jews, Mr. Choukairi said that Arabs owned about 55% of the groves in Palestine; the remaining 45%, amounting to about 130,000 dunums were owned by Jews.

As regards the figure of 35,000 Arabs needed to operate the groves, Mr. Wilkins asked whether any of those workers were employed in Jewish-owned groves.

Mr. CHOUKAIRI (Syria) said that the Jewish owners did employ some Arab labour, especially in the larger groves, since Jewish labour was more expensive; there had been some labour difficulties as a result of this policy.

Explaining how the figure of 35,000 workers had been reached, Mr. Choukairi pointed out that each grove of 100 dunums required 12 Arab workers per year, working all year round; in addition, about 20,000 seasonal workers were required during the harvest season.

The CHAIRMAN remarked that the Commission had been in touch with the Israeli delegation for several weeks on this question, and would communicate the information just received to that delegation. Members of the Commission had also had several interviews with the economic adviser of the Israeli delegation, who was ready to meet and talk with representatives of the grove owners.

Point 2

Mr. SAD (Syria) explained that it was very difficult to estimate the total amount of blocked Arab accounts in all banks. Judging from the Arab Bank only, however, he estimated that that total figure would be about 7 million pounds. He had information that the officials of the Ottoman Bank in London had obtained the agreement of the Government of Israel for the payment of allowances to the Bank's clients, in the amount of £ 50 to £ 100 per month, according to the needs of the individual. Mr. Sad pointed out that many Arabs who owned comfortable bank accounts were at present living on the verge of starvation; he could see no reason why Barclay's Bank and the Jewish banks could not arrange allowances similar to those arranged by the Ottoman Bank.

Mr. YENISEY considered the matter of the allowances to be of vital importance; he asked whether Mr. Sad's information had been confirmed.

Mr. SAD (Syria) was convinced that his information was correct; in any case he suggested that the question should be referred to the Israeli delegation for confirmation.

The CHAIRMAN drew attention to the reply received from the Israeli delegation on 6 May concerning the blocked accounts, as given in paragraph 3 of document AR/7; the reply stated that the funds would be returned to the owners on the conclusion of peace "subject to such general currency regulations as may be operative at that time". He wondered what such regulations might be expected to be.

Mr. HAMADE (Lebanon) thought it essential that the Israeli delegation should be asked to state what interpretation it placed on the phrase quoted. In any case, the Arab delegations requested that the accounts should be unblocked without reservations or conditions.

Point 5

Mr. CHOUKAIRI (Syria) maintained that the reuniting of refugees separated from their families was a matter of necessity, not merely of sentiment. The Arabs now living in Israeli-controlled areas numbered about 130,000; of these, about 35,000 were living as individuals separated from their families. Taking the modest estimate of 5 persons to each Arab family, the figure of separated families now outside Israeli territory would amount to about 140,000 individuals. Explaining how he had arrived at those figures, he pointed out that 40,000 unsettled Bedouins were living in the south; there were 70,000 ~~refugees~~ in Lydda, western and eastern Galilee, the Gaza area and the Haifa district, and 20,000 in the "Triangle" which was now in Israeli possession. It was believed that the groups of 40,000 and 20,000 respectively were living as families; about half the remaining 70,000 were estimated to be living in separation from their families.

Mr. Choukairi had several objections to the text of Dr. Eytan's letter to the Commission on this subject, as quoted in paragraph 7 (a) of document AR/7. He did not feel that any "plan" was required for the reunion of the families; the Arab delegations desired to simplify, rather than complicate the problem. Further, he did not think it would be possible to establish "bona fides" or the required "close degree" of relationship; there were no courts which could deal with such matters. The question must be decided by those relatives who were living outside Israeli territory; it must be they who furnished the information and requested the return of members

of their families. Mr. Choukairi felt that the Israeli delegation was attempting to create difficulties and complications; however, the measures proposed by the Arab delegations were so simple and so urgent that no reservations or conditions could be admitted.

Point 8.

Mr. CHOUKAIRI (Syria) explained that the term "Wakf property" applied to a certain type of Moslem or Christian immovable property : buildings, and vacant or planted lands. The Wakf system in Palestine was a very ancient one rooted in the religious belief that ownership of the property was vested in the Almighty, the God of Jews, Christians and Arabs alike; its possession was dedicated by the authors of the system to the maintenance of churches, mosques, orphanages, hospitals, and other religious and charitable institutions. Its preservation was therefore a matter of paramount importance to both Moslems and Christians in Palestine. Under no law could such property be confiscated or administered by unauthorised persons, even as a measure of war. Nevertheless, they were now controlled by the Israeli Government, and the ministers and authorised administrators were not in a position to carry on their duties. The Arab delegations held that the control must be lifted immediately and that no supervision whatever should be maintained over these properties. The protection of religious properties had been a primary provision of the Mandate; it was also one of the principles proclaimed by the United Nations. The institutions in question were of both local and foreign origin, and the interests of all must be preserved. The principle involved was more than a mere question of money or property; unless Palestine was to become a "Holy Jewish Land", in place of being the "Holy Land" of many religious faiths, these institutions must be freed from control and returned to the care of the proper religious officials.

The CHAIRMAN affirmed that the problem was one which would have the full attention of the Commission and the Committee. He asked whether the Arab delegations could furnish certain detailed information at a later meeting, regarding the location and nature of the properties in question, their capital value,

the annual revenue derived from them, and the approximate number of persons necessary to assure their administration. He also requested information as to the number of refugees who should be repatriated because of their connection with such administration, as mentioned in point 7 of the memorandum.

Mr. HAMADE (Lebanon) drew attention to the fact that points 6, 7 and 8 of the memorandum were closely allied in subject matter; he suggested that at the following meeting those three points should be studied together in order to obtain a general view of the whole question.