

UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

GENERAL COMMITTEE

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

held in Lausanne on Thursday,
26 May 1949, at 10:30 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
Mr. Zalman Lifshitz) of Israel
Mr. Gershon Hirsch)

The CHAIRMAN drew attention to the agenda for the meeting; it was understood that in accordance with the flexibility of procedure agreed upon, neither the Committee nor the delegation of Israel should consider itself limited to discussion of questions listed in the agenda.

Statistical information on refugees and population in Palestine
(questionnaire submitted by the United States member)

Mr. LIFS'HITZ explained that the information he was about to give was based upon the statistical abstracts of the Palestine Administration as of 1 April 1945, which were the only source available at the present time. He challenged those figures to a certain extent; a census of certain villages had indicated that in mid-1948 or early 1949 the real figures were about 10% less than those given in the abstracts for 1945. On the basis, therefore, of his assumption that the total population at the end of 1947 could be taken as 10 per cent less than the official figures for 1945, he gave the following estimates of population at the end of 1947, by former administrative districts which were included within the boundaries of Israel on 1 May 1949:

Acre, 58,000; Safad, 41,000; Tiberias, 23,000;
Nazareth, 34,000; Beisan, 14,500; Haifa, 108,000;
Jenin, 7,500; Tulkarm, 32,000; Jaffa, 100,000;
Ramle-Lydda, 80,000; Jerusalem, 50,000; Hebron,
17,000; Gaza, 60,000; Beersheba, 45,000.

Of the total, there were at present in Israel about 150,000 Arabs, either nomads or inhabitants of villages; it could therefore be assumed that the number of refugees from Israeli-controlled areas was approximately 520,000. Mr. Lifshitz would supply information at a later moment concerning the breakdown of the total figures between Moslems and Christians; at the request of Mr. Wilkins, he also promised to furnish information regarding the districts in which the 150,000 Arabs at present in Israeli territory were located.

In reply to a question from the Chairman, who asked whether the total figures should not be increased by 5 per cent to allow for the average population increase during the past two years, Mr. LIFSHITZ thought such an allowance was not indicated since there had actually been a decrease of population among the refugees during that period.

With regard to the citrus groves, Mr. Lifshitz said that the statistics for 1945 showed a total of 130,000 dunums belonging to Arab owners. On the basis of a census which had not as yet been entirely completed, he could state that that figure was somewhat exaggerated, and that the actual Arab-owned area planted in citrus at the end of the second world war was approximately 90,000 to 95,000 dunums. Owing to the fact that no citrus products could be exported during the war, a large number of the groves had been neglected or converted by their owners to the cultivation of vegetables and other produce. Moreover, during the world war a quota system had been introduced, under which a certain percentage of the product of each dunum was reserved for export and the total quantity for export was allocated at the rate of 50 per cent to Jewish-owned groves and 50 per cent to Arab-owned groves, each grove being assigned a particular exporter to handle its product. The result of this practice was that certain owners claimed a larger area than was actually theirs, such claims were further encouraged by the fact that no taxes were levied on the groves during the war.

As regards the number of Arab workers employed in the citrus industry, at the end of 1947, Mr. Lifshitz stated that during the summer season, which extended from May to September, about 4,000 hired workers were employed for extra cultivation and irrigation. During the winter season, extending from January to April, about 10,000 to 12,000 workers were employed in picking, packing, transportation and other work connected with the marketing and export of the product. Mr. Lifshitz pointed out that the workers were employed by the citrus industry during only eight months of the year; during the remaining four months they had worked in other agricultural enterprises, on public works, railways, etc.. It could therefore be considered, for practical purposes, that the citrus industry employed about 9,000 seasonal workers annually. He drew attention to the fact that the figures given applied only to hired labourers; they did not include small grove owners who cultivated their own groves without employing help.

In reply to a question from Mr. Wilkins, who asked whether the same workers were employed during both the summer and winter seasons, Mr. LIFSHITZ explained that during the winter season special categories of workers were engaged, such as pickers, packers, chauffeurs and others, many of whom worked only two months at a time.

Mr. WILKINS pointed out that in that case the total number of workers employed annually might rise as high as 14,000 to 16,000.

The CHAIRMAN observed that the figures given applied only to workers; the owners of the groves must also be taken into account.

Mr. LIFSHITZ replied that he could not give figures of the total number of grove owners at the moment; however, he thought that the figure would be approximately evenly divided between owners of large and of small groves.

Mr. WILKINS asked what was the total area of Jewish-owned groves, and whether any Arab workers were employed in them.

Mr. LIFSHITZ said that at the end of 1945 the area of such groves was about 135,000 dunums. Figures for the year 1943-1944 indicated that 2,500 to 3,000 Arabs had been employed in Jewish-owned groves.

Mr. YENISEY requested information concerning the total annual income derived from the citrus industry, and the proportion of citrus exports to the total exports of Palestine.

Mr. MERON replied that in 1938-39, which might be taken as a normal year, the total export from both Jewish-owned and Arab-owned groves had been 15.2 million boxes; the preceding year the figure had been 11.4 million boxes. The total income from Palestine exports in 1938 had been £5,683,000, of which £3,750,000 had come from the citrus industry; in 1939 the total figure had been £5,467,000 of which £3,769,000 had been derived from the citrus industry. The figures given did not include by-products of the industry. It seemed, therefore, that the statement of the Arab delegations that the citrus industry was the source of 80 per cent of Palestine exports was slightly exaggerated. Mr. Meron pointed out that in recent years the percentage had decreased slightly owing to the increase in other types of exports, such as diamonds.

In reply to a question from the Chairman, Mr. Meron stated that the source of his information was the "Statistical Handbook of Middle East Countries", published by the Jewish Agency, and was a reprint of the statistical abstracts of the Palestine Administration. The figures quoted were based on the port statistics of Haifa, Jaffa and Tel Aviv; the last year for which figures were available was 1944.

Mr. LIFSHITZ then took up the question of the number of Arab workers in the ports of Haifa, Jaffa and Tel Aviv. Virtually no Arabs were employed in the port of Tel Aviv. In Haifa, in 1946, there had been about 2,000; however, Mr. Lifshitz pointed out that 80 per cent to 90 per cent of these had been Syrians or Egyptians engaged on a seasonal basis owing to the shortage of labour and the fact that local Arab labour was engaged in work in the military camps. Operation of the port of Jaffa had been virtually at a standstill during the war, and the workers there had turned to other activities; the revival of the operation of the port had begun in 1945, and it was largely occupied with importation of goods for the Arab sector and exportation of Arab produce from the coastal plain. About 5,000 to 6,000 Arab workers had been employed in the port of Jaffa during recent years.

As regards the number of Arab workers employed at the airport of Lydda, Mr. Lifshitz explained that the entire technical and research staff of the airport were English or Jewish; not more than 50 Arabs were employed there.

Discussion of the territorial question

The CHAIRMAN explained that during its first meeting with the Arab delegations the Committee had transmitted the Israeli proposals regarding the frontiers with Lebanon and Egypt. The Arab delegations had taken note of those proposals, and had asked whether none had been made concerning the frontier with the Hashemite Jordan Kingdom. The Chairman now asked whether the Israeli delegation could make a further statement, in the light of the Arab delegations' memorandum of 21 May.

Mr. YENISEY observed that the two parties were approaching the Palestine problem along different lines, which thus far had run parallel without merging at any point. If the talks were not to continue indefinitely without possibility of achieving a settlement, a way must be found to make these separate lines of thinking converge. The best method was a full and precise statement by each party of its exact position on the entire question. The Committee therefore requested from the Israeli delegation a clear statement of its attitude on the matter of Israel's eastern boundary.

Mr. SASSON thanked the Committee for the opportunity to make such a statement, since his delegation's proposals, and the absence of a proposal concerning the "Triangle", had evidently been misunderstood by the Arab delegations. The Israeli delegation, in omitting mention of the frontier with the Hashemite Jordan Kingdom, had intended that the Arab delegations should have an opportunity to discuss and decide among themselves on the future status of the "Triangle", however, he was ready to put forward a proposal now.

Israel would accept, as a political frontier between itself and the Hashemite Jordan Kingdom the frontier which had existed between Transjordan and Palestine under the British Mandate, in the north from El Hamma to a point south of El Fatur, and in the south from a point towards the middle of the Dead Sea opposite Engedde to the Gulf of Aqaba. As regards the "Triangle" (including the Hebron region), namely, the whole

central area of Palestine under Jordanian military occupation, Israel would accept as its boundary the present armistice lines, with certain modifications, in the interests of both parties, to be discussed later. That proposal was made without entering into the question of the future political status of that area; if the "Triangle" later became part of the Hashemite Jordan Kingdom, the frontier between that State and Israel would then be a continuous one. Mr. Sasson emphasized the fact that the future of the Jerusalem area was a separate question and did not enter into the present proposal.

Mr. Sasson made it clear that the modifications he spoke of would be "adjustments" of a minor nature, to be agreed upon in the interests of both parties concerned. However, he reiterated his former statement that Israel would negotiate, regarding its separate frontiers, only with the State directly concerned; it was therefore impossible to discuss the nature of the modifications in the "Triangle" boundaries, until the future status of the territory had been decided. His delegation wished to make it clear that Israel had no ambitions as regards the "Triangle" and did not wish at present to put forward suggestions as to its disposition; Israel wished to give the Arab delegations an opportunity to state their own attitude regarding the future status of the territory.

In answer to a question from the CHAIRMAN, Mr. Sasson affirmed that in his delegation's opinion the disposition of the "Triangle" was a matter upon which a proposal agreed upon by the Arab delegations, the Arab inhabitants of the territory and the refugees should be put forward. He pointed out that until the question was settled, Israel would continue to recognize the Hashemite Jordan Kingdom as the de facto military occupying power; it was not impossible that negotiations should continue between ^{the} Israeli and Jordanian authorities through the Mixed Armistice Commission and the special committee, for the settlement of certain points such as the Latrun issue.

Mr. Sasson added that whilst Israel wished to give the Arab delegations an opportunity to make proposals concerning the future status of the "Triangle", Israel's attitude on the matter of its frontiers might change according to the authority which existed on the other side of those frontiers.

The CHAIRMAN recalled the statement made by Mr. Sharett during the Commission's first interview with him, a statement later confirmed by Mr. Ben Gurion; it had been said that Israel's attitude would be modified according to whether the "Triangle" became an integral part of Transjordan, whether it was controlled by Transjordan but demilitarized to a certain extent, by a special arrangement, or whether it was not connected in any way with Transjordan.

Mr. SASSON affirmed that that was Israel's present position in the matter.

In reply to a question from Mr. Yenisey concerning the Negev, Mr. Sasson said that according to his proposal the frontier in that area would be the frontier existing under the Mandate.

Mr. Sasson observed that he had certain explanations to make to the Committee concerning items 2 and 3 of the present agenda and Israel's attitude as regards the questions on which statistical information had been furnished; he would make those observations at the next meeting.
