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NOTE ON THE QUESTION OF ARAB OWNED ORANGE
GROVES IN ISRAELI TERRITORY

(Prepared by the Secretariat)

1. The question of orange groves was first raised by the Commission in its memorandum of 11 April (document IS/9) in which it suggested that the Government of Israel employ "a certain number of refugee workers in Israel, e.g., in the port of Haifa, the orange groves, etc."
2. On 18 May (document IS/16) the Commission, having received no reply from the Israeli delegation on this point, reiterated its request in a more concrete form, namely that the Government of Israel grant "permission to Arab owners of orange groves situated in Israel to cultivate these groves..." and to this end authorized them "to employ the required number of Arab workmen and technicians, the expense of such operations to be paid by Arab funds at present blocked in Israel banks which would be released for this purpose."
3. Simultaneously the Commission, basing itself on a suggestion made by the Arab refugee organizations, inquired of the Israeli delegation whether it "would be prepared to consider the participation of Israel in a mixed Arab-Israeli board under the auspices of the Commission to investigate the state of Arab property in Israel".
4. In a memorandum addressed to the General Committee on the same day (document AR/8) the Arab delegations requested inter alia "the return of their lands and homes of owners of orange or other fruit tree groves requiring urgent care, together with the necessary workmen and technicians". This request was transmitted to the Israeli delegation.
5. In two subsequent meetings held with the Arab delegations on 25 and 27 May (documents Com.Gen./SR.7 and 9), the General Committee was informed that 35,000 Arab workers, regular and seasonal, were employed on the 135,000 dunums of Arab-owned orange groves in Palestine, the whole of which, except for

3,000 dunums, was now under Israeli occupation. Of these 20,000 were seasonal workers employed on all groves, including Israeli-owned.

6. On 14 June (document Com.Gen./SR.15) the Israeli delegation stated that the question of Arab-owned orange groves as submitted by the General Committee had two aspects, the first being the question of urgent measures for the preservation of the groves and the second being the return of owners and workers. In connection with the former, the Government of Israel reserved the right to convert certain areas covered by orange groves, possibly as much as half, to other uses in accordance with economic plans of the State which were under study. Israel expected all its citizens to comply and would pay compensation for losses sustained. In connection with the return of owners and workers which involved a question of principle difficult to decide, the Israeli delegation pointed out that there was no lack of labourers and technicians, either Arab or Jewish, in Israel who could be used to work the orange groves. New workers could not be accepted before the unemployed refugees in Israel had been absorbed. The Israeli delegation, however, was prepared to deal more thoroughly with the matter if a refugee sub-committee were set up.

7. This point of view was confirmed by Dr. Eytan's letter of 27 June (document IS/31) and by the Israeli delegation in a meeting with the General Committee held on 29 June (document Com.Gen./Sr.18). The letter of 27 June went so far as to state that "no amount of personal care or fresh supply of labour would be of any avail as far as the groves for the most part ~~were~~ concerned, and that the cultivation of those groves which have been saved did not require the introduction of labour from outside". The Israeli delegation also stressed that its government's policy was "not to favour the readmission of Arab refugees unless it be in the context of a peace settlement. This policy applied to the owners of orange groves and their workmen and technicians..."

8. In this connection the General Committee urged the Israeli delegation to make an exception to the rule as in the case of members of separated families who would be allowed to return immediately. The Committee also repeated the suggestion that a mixed Arab-Israeli Commission under United Nations

chairmanship be set up to handle the return of workers and to make arrangements for the care of orange groves. In reply, the Israeli representative stated that there would be no need to import workers or technicians for the preservation of the orange groves since there were sufficient, both Arabs and Jews, in Israel itself.

9. On 5 July (document Com.Gen./SR. 20) the Arab delegations, blaming the Israeli custodian of enemy property for the dereliction of the orange groves, suggested that the representatives of the grove owners be allowed to accompany the Technical Committee on its survey of the orange groves in order to establish the extent of the damage sustained by them and see what measures could be taken for their preservation. These delegations also proposed the creation of a special sub-committee to study the question of the orange groves as a matter of urgency.

10. On 26 July (document Com.Gen./SR.25) the General Committee once more raised the question with the Israeli delegation of the creation of a mixed Arab-Israeli working group under the auspices of the Commission, to study the damages caused to Arab property in Israel including orange groves (document Com.Gen./W.5).

The Israeli delegation, having previously stated that every facility was being given to the Technical Committee to investigate damages sustained by Arab property in Israel, requested that discussion of this proposal be deferred for a brief period pending commencement of negotiations on the refugee problem.

11. From the expert report on the condition of orange groves (document Com.Tech./6) it emerges that the Israeli statement to the effect that all orange groves that could be saved have been saved by the efforts of the Israeli authorities, is inaccurate. In the expert's opinion, about 23% of the Arab plantations*, in addition to the 25% to which conservation measures have been applied by the Israelis, might still be saved if immediate maintenance measures were taken.** He also considers

* This percentage seems to refer to orange groves as units and should not be confused with the percentage of destruction caused to trees within the plantations.

** In apparent contradiction to this conclusion the expert states in the first paragraph of Chapter VI that the undertaking of regular watering which would revive those trees which could still be saved is impossible in practice.

that these uncared-for plantations will be entirely lost by the end of this or next year if they do not receive appropriate care shortly.

12. The expert believes that in many cases the instructions given by the Israeli authorities for the maintenance of Arab plantations are purely formal and inapplicable owing to the dependence of such measures on the restoration of hydraulic installations. The expert report is not entirely clear on the question of these hydraulic installations both as regards the causes of their destruction and as regards the possibilities of repairing them.

13. From the expert report it also appears that a shortage of skilled labour which was provided in the past by Arabs who have now fled the country is impeding the undertaking of effective conservatory measures.

14. The conservatory measures being taken by the Israeli authorities are concentrated on groves of fully grown trees and are selective on the basis of considerations that may or may not be in the interests of the Arab owners.

15. From all that has gone above, it would seem that there is a large number of urgent problems connected both with the most effective way of salvaging the moribund orange groves and with the accurate estimation of the damages sustained by these groves; problems which it would seem could best be dealt with by a mixed Arab-Israeli body including technical experts on both sides. Such a working group, under neutral chirmanship, having its headquarters in Jerusalem, could rapidly determine the measures that could be taken under the circumstances to save the greatest possible number of Arab orange and other fruit tree groves in Israel.