

UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

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COMMITTEE ON JERUSALEM

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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE THIRTY-EIGHTH MEETING

held in Lausanne on Wednesday, 13 July 1949  
at 3.30 p.m.

Present: Mr. Benoist (France) - Chairman  
Mr. Eralp (Turkey)  
Mr. Barco (U.S.A.)  
Dr. Azcárate - Principal Secretary  
Dr. Serup - Committee Secretary  
His Eminence Archbishop Germanos, Metropolitan of  
Thyatiera and Representative of the Orthodox  
Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople in  
Western Europe.

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His Eminence Archbishop GERMANOS recalled that he had been appointed some twenty-five years ago as the representative of the Patriarch of Constantinople in Western and Central Europe. He was therefore not only bishop of the diocese but the representative of the Greek Orthodox Ecclesiastical authorities for western Europe.

During a pastoral visit to his diocese, he was visiting Lausanne and had taken the opportunity of calling on the Committee to explain the views of the Greek Orthodox Church generally and of the Patriarch of Jerusalem in particular. There were several points he wished to stress on which the Greek Orthodox Church had taken up a special position.

Recalling the part played in history by the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, he said that for centuries the Patriarchate had been the guardian of Holy Places in Palestine. It had founded the Monastic Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre which had played a considerable part in the protection of Holy Places and in looking after the needs of pilgrims to the Holy Land. The Patriarchate of Jerusalem had therefore combined the duties of guarding Holy Places and of administering the ecclesiastical affairs of Christians in Palestine.

His Eminence referred to the Brotherhood's activities in

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erecting and supporting religious and even secular schools, hospitals and orphanages and to their work in succouring the poor and needy, and on the basis of history and the rights and privileges granted to the Greek Orthodox Church, the status quo of 1757 had been established and had been confirmed in 1852. The United Kingdom, as Mandatory Power, had continued to recognize the status quo, and he emphasized the fact that the Greek Orthodox Church, represented by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople and the Patriarch of Jerusalem, saw in the maintenance of the status quo and of the rights and privileges of the Church, as confirmed by international treaties or by practice, an essential guarantee for the future of continued friendly relations between the various religious denominations and for the avoidance of friction which had so often degenerated into political strife. He pointed out that that would prove to be in the interest of the present administration of Israel as well as in those of the religious communities.

In that connection, he thought that the suggestion for the appointment of a United Nations Administrator for the Holy Places was by no means a satisfactory or complete solution of the problem, especially in view of the difficulties which the Administrator would encounter in his relations with both parties.

With regard to the regime to be applied to Jerusalem, he wished to say, without prejudice to either the Israeli or Arab parties, that the Greek Orthodox Church regarded the decision taken by the United Nations in November 1947 as the only one corresponding to Christian opinion, and the internationalisation of Jerusalem and the surrounding areas and free access to all Holy Places as the only solution which would satisfy the religious conscience of the world. That view had also been expressed by His Holiness the Pope and by the Anglican Archbishops of Canterbury and York.

The Patriarch of Constantinople had also issued a statement, in which he had declared that the Greek Orthodox Church was interested, first, in the maintenance of the status quo as regards the Holy Places and free access thereto; second, in the maintenance of the rights and privileges of the Greek Orthodox Church, as confirmed by international treaties and by practice. The Patriarch had added that he

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would be satisfied if free access to the Holy Places were granted to all persons, as had been the case during the Mandate.

His Eminence wished to stress the fact that the internationalisation of Jerusalem should not be confined to the Old City but should be extended to both parts.

Such were the conditions under which the Orthodox Church and the whole Christian world thought peace and prosperity could exist in Palestine. In fulfilling their task of conciliation, the United Nations would win the gratitude and the blessing of all the faithful.

The CHAIRMAN expressed the Committee's appreciation of His Eminence's presence at the meeting and assured him that the United Nations was fully aware of the prestige and the role of the Greek Orthodox Church in Palestine.

With regard to the status quo, he wished to know whether, under a system of United Nations control, the Greek Orthodox Church would see any objection to the keys of the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre, now in the custody of a Moslem family, being entrusted to some party less directly concerned, such as, for instance, Scandinavians.

His Eminence Archbishop GERMANOS said that the Patriarch of Jerusalem would not object to such a procedure. He pointed out that the keeping of the keys was an old-established custom rather than a religious privilege and that no great importance would be attached to the matter. The question could be settled by the United Nations as they saw fit and the keys entrusted to Protestant authorities as they were less directly concerned with the Holy Places than the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic or Armenian Churches.

The CHAIRMAN, for information purposes, gave His Eminence copies of the statements made by representatives of the Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Armenian Churches in Jerusalem to the Committee, as well as two memoranda from the Russian Orthodox Societies in Palestine which had been transmitted to the Israeli delegation.

His Eminence Archbishop GERMANOS explained to the Committee that the Orthodox Palestinian Society and the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission had built on property in Palestine in order to accommodate pilgrims coming from Russia but that those buildings could not be said to have the character of

Holy Places. During the British Mandate, the Government of Palestine had been requested to cede the property to the clergy in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, but that request had not been complied with. It seemed however that some understanding existed between the Soviet authorities and the Israeli authorities with respect to their cession to the Soviet Church.