

UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

COMMITTEE ON JERUSALEM

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Summary of the discussions in the ad hoc political  
Committee on the question of consultations with  
religious authorities concerning the protection  
of the Holy Places

Working Paper prepared by the Secretariat

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Paragraph 15 of the report of the ad hoc Political Committee on the application of Israel for admission to the United Nations states that the Argentine representative requested

"that the report of the ad hoc Political Committee to the General Assembly express the desire of the Committee that the United Nations Conciliation Commission should, when studying the question of the internationalization of Jerusalem and the problem of the protection of the Holy Places and free access there-to, along the lines of the resolutions of the General Assembly of 29 November 1947 and 11 December 1948, take into account the views of the Holy See and those other religious authorities who desired to present their position with regard to this matter to the Conciliation Commission within a reasonable time limit, in written or verbal form."

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The following is a summary note of the discussions in the ad hoc Political Committee which led to the above recommendation to the Conciliation Commission on the part of the Committee.

The question of possible consultations with religious authorities concerning the protection of the Holy Places was raised at the beginning of the ad hoc Committee debates on Israel's application for admission. At the 42nd meeting of the Committee the Argentine representative announced that his Government unreservedly favoured the admission of Israel, but that it felt particular concern about the future of the Holy Places, and considered that the Committee might appropriately hear the opinion of experts on the matter. He presented the following draft resolution (A/AC.24/61):

"Considering the fundamental interests of the Catholic Church with regard to the fate of the Holy Places in Palestine  
The Ad Hoc Committee  
Invites the Holy See to submit, as it sees fit, a verbal or written report on the guarantees which, in its exalted opinion, would be necessary for the protection of the Sacred Places in Palestine and for free access thereto."

The representative of Egypt observed that in proposing that the Holy See be asked to present its views, the Argentine delegate had presumably not intended to exclude the possibility of the Committee hearing the views of other religions and sects. Hundreds of millions of Moslems all over the world were interested in the Holy Places of Palestine. It was implicit in the terms of the resolution of 11 December 1948 that the General Assembly considered the Holy Places to be the concern of various religious bodies.

The representative of Greece circulated an amendment to the Argentine proposal (A/AC.24/63), suggesting that the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem should also be invited to report on guarantees necessary to protect the Holy Places. On the following day at the 44th meeting the Saudi Arabian representative introduced an amendment to the Greek amendment (A/AC.24/67) Rev 1), proposing that the invitation should be further extended to "the Moslem religious authority, namely the Supreme Moslem Council of the Ulema Al-Azhar."

General support for the Argentine resolution and for the amendments was expressed by the representatives of Belgium, Chile, Cuba, Egypt and the Lebanon. The delegate of Poland, however, complained that the draft resolution itself was not clear. Should the Holy See be invited to submit its opinion as a State, i.e., as the Vatican, or as the representative of the Catholic Church? In the latter case, other religious bodies had as great an interest as the Holy See in the protection of the Holy Places. The representative of the U.S.S.R. saw no reason to request a report from the Holy See. The Vatican had never taken part in international conferences in the capacity of a sovereign State. For obvious reasons, no representatives of religious groups had been present during any of the Assembly's deliberations on the Palestine case, including those on the internationalization of Jerusalem. The representative of Australia feared that consultation with religious authorities might lead to endless delay in the Committee's work.

At the 43rd meeting the representative of Guatemala suggested that the Argentine proposal and the Greek amendments thereto did not require action by the Committee at the present time and should be referred to the Conciliation Commission for Palestine. The United States representative also reminded the Committee that the question of the protection of and access to the Holy Places was not on the agenda of the General Assembly. The ad hoc Committee would not have time to examine the question with the care it deserved. Churches or other secular or religious groups could present proposals to the Conciliation Commission.

The United Kingdom representative stated that, while his Government fully appreciated the motives that had prompted the resolution, the list of interested authorities did not seem to it to be complete; further, his Government was not satisfied that the authorities mentioned would be either able or willing to make the reports suggested, which would result in any case in a very partial picture; finally, it was not suggested that the Committee's decision should be dependent on the reports made; it was therefore not clear what useful purpose would be served by the draft resolution. The representative of Poland stressed that in view of the relations between the various religions and sects in the Holy Land, the proposed procedure would place the Committee in the difficult position of an arbiter between quarrelling religious groups.

The representative of Denmark pointed out that the General Assembly had instructed the Conciliation Commission to study the question of Jerusalem and to present its recommendations to the Assembly. It was apparently proposed to interfere with that procedure. The ad hoc Committee was concerned exclusively with the admission of Israel, and it was questionable whether the Committee was competent to take up the matter of the Holy Places. Further, he was not convinced that the list of religious authorities to be consulted was complete. In the circumstances, he wished to make a formal proposal that discussion of the Argentine draft resolution should be adjourned until the representative of Israel had explained the attitude of his Government regarding the implementation of the General Assembly's resolutions of 29 November 1947 and 11 December 1948.

The Committee at its 44th meeting adopted the Danish motion for adjournment by 21 votes to 20 with 6 abstentions.

The Committee's ensuing meetings were taken up by a general statement by the representative of Israel on his Government's

attitude to all questions under discussion,\* and by observations made in amplification of this statement and in reply to questions put by members of the Committee.

During the 46th meeting the Polish representative put a number of questions to the representative of the Government of Israel concerning the religious authorities to be consulted by the Committee in the event that the Argentine proposal and its amendments were adopted. The representative of Israel stressed that in order to obtain an impression of religious opinion in Palestine, it would be necessary for the ad hoc Committee to consult authorities and representatives numbering a dozen or more people. In view of the great diversity of opinion regarding policies for the protection of the Holy Places, separate consultations would have to be conducted with, for example, representatives of the Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Coptic, Anglican and other Protestant Churches, and with representatives of the Jewish faith.

At the 51st meeting the Argentine representative declared that his delegation would have welcomed, before the opening of the general debate, the authoritative opinion of the Holy See on the guarantees necessary for the protection of the Holy Places in Jerusalem, but since he now felt that the Committee was in a position to take a decision on Israel's application, he would not press for a vote on his proposal and was prepared to withdraw it. He would however ask the Rapporteur to include in his report a reference to the effect that the Conciliation Commission, when studying the questions of Jerusalem and the Holy Places, should take into account the opinion of the Holy See and of other religious authorities.

The delegates of Greece and Saudi Arabia also withdrew their amendments, the representative of Saudi Arabia expressing regret that the draft resolution had been withdrawn.

The Norwegian representative, supported by the delegates of Denmark and Sweden, asked that the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs be included in the list of various religious groups from which the Conciliation Commission should seek an opinion. The Commission was an organization created by the World Council of Churches and the International Missionary Council, and represented, among other bodies, the Protestant Churches.

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\* Extract from this statement relating to Jerusalem and to the Holy Places were circulated as document Com.Jer/W.20.

The Argentine delegate emphasized that the reference he wished to have included in the report should appear there as the majority view of the Committee, and not as the observation of the Argentine delegation. He could not accept an alternative suggestion, put forward by the representative of Greece, that the report should merely state that the Committee requested the Conciliation Commission to ascertain the views of the representatives of all churches concerned in the matter.

The representative of Poland did not consider that the statement which the Argentine representative wished to have inserted in the report could be represented as the majority opinion of the Committee without a vote. The question was accordingly put to the vote and the Committee decided by 38 votes to 6, with 11 abstentions, to include the Argentine statement in its report to the General Assembly.

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