

UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

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Letter dated 29 May 1949 addressed by Mr. Walter Eytan, Head of the Delegation of Israel, to the Chairman of the Conciliation Commission.

Dear Monsieur de Boisanger,

I feel that at the present stage of our conversations it may be useful to enlarge upon the proposal which my delegation has made with regard to the future of Gaza and the adjoining area now under Egyptian military occupation.

We have repeatedly been given to understand that Egypt has no territorial claims or ambitions in Palestine, and in particular that she has no desire to retain control of the strip of coastal land in which Gaza and Rafa are situated. But there has all along been the problem of what is to be the fate of the Arab population, consisting both of original residents and of refugees, now compressed in that narrow zone.

It is a point of general agreement that the Gaza strip does not and cannot constitute an independent economic entity. To live, it must be attached to one of the larger economic and political units with which its borders run. These are Israel and Egypt.

The Gaza strip is separated from Egypt proper by the Sinai desert. In relation to the Nile Valley it is, as it were, an island separated from its mainland by a sea of sand, inadequately bridged by a vulnerable road and railway. The distance makes it impossible for Egypt to serve as a natural or economic market for the agricultural produce of the region. All Gaza's natural ties are with the territory that lies immediately to the north and east, in Israel.

My delegation in proposing that the Gaza area and its present Arab population be incorporated in Israel was well aware of the difficulties that this would entail for Israel, particularly in the social and economic spheres. It understood that Gaza would be an economic liability, certainly for many years to come, and that the social problems presented by the integration into Israel of so large a number

of Arabs must be very great. But it felt that it was here that it could make a really constructive large-scale contribution to the refugee problem and at the same time settle a frontier question that would otherwise remain a sore point.

Incorporation into Israel would do more than anything else to hold out to the people now herded in the Gaza strip a hope of rebuilding their lives. The proposal is an earnest of the great lengths to which the Government of Israel is prepared to go in helping to solve the problem that is central to all our discussions. It is certain that under no other scheme could Israel ever absorb so large a number of refugees. No alternative, even on a much smaller scale, readily presents itself to the mind. If my delegation's offer is rejected, we should be bound to ask ourselves whether the Egyptian and the other Arab delegations really mean what they say when they press Israel to "accept refugees".

I should be much obliged if you could inform me of the Egyptian delegation's reply to this proposal, which was handed to it formally the week before last. If the reply should be favourable, we should gladly assist in working out the necessary details. If it should be negative, we trust we shall be informed of the reasons which moved the Egyptian delegation to decide upon rejection.

Yours truly,

(S) Walter Eytan

Head of Israeli Delegation.