

UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

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LETTER DATED 2 AUGUST 1949  
FROM MR. R. SHILOAH TO THE PRINCIPAL SECRETARY  
OF THE CONCILIATION COMMISSION, ENCLOSING THE  
TEXT OF A STATEMENT MADE BY MR. MOSHE SHARETT,  
ON 1 AUGUST 1949

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Dear Dr. Azcárate:

I am enclosing herewith, for your information and for the information of the members of the Conciliation Commission, copy of the statement made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Moshe Sharett, in the Knesset on August 1, 1949.

Yours sincerely,

S/ R. Shiloah

STATEMENT MADE BY THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MR. MOSHE SHARETT

OPENING THE DEBATE IN THE KNESSET ON AUGUST 1, 1949

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The debate on the armistice agreement with Syria on the agenda for this session of the Knesset has twice been postponed. Meanwhile there has been a new development in the course of events at Lausanne, and I should like on this occasion to issue a statement concerning this development in order that members of the Knesset may have the opportunity, if they wish, to discuss both matters together.

The new development on which I should like to report concerns the question of the Arab refugees. Members of the Knesset are fully aware of the basic attitude of the Government on this problem, that in the main a solution must be sought, not through the return of the refugees to Israel, but through their resettlement in other states. There has been no change in this basic attitude. At the same time, the Government has repeatedly stated that, within the framework of an overall and all inclusive peace settlement, it is ready to contribute to the resettlement of the refugees by allowing the return to Israel of a limited number. This was stated by Israel's permanent representative at the United Nations at the session of the Ad Hoc Committee on May 5th, 1949. It was repeated by the Head of the Israeli Delegation at Lausanne to the Conciliation Commission during May and June. I myself made a similar statement before the Knesset in my address during the foreign affairs debate on June 15th. Hitherto, there has been no change in policy.

With the resumption of the Lausanne Conference, the Government decided to move a step forward in conformity with its declared attitude. It came to the conclusion that, if certain conditions materialized, it should be ready to define its future contribution to the solution of the refugee problem as part of the general peace settlement between the Arab nations and Israel and of the comprehensive solution of the refugee problem itself. The Government was actuated by a desire to speed up progress at Lausanne and bring nearer the prospects of peace. This step, in its view, follows logically from its declared stand.

Accordingly, instructions were issued to the Israeli Delegation at Lausanne to inform the Conciliation Commission that, if the Arab delegations were in fact ready to enter upon peace negotiations, our delegation would be ready to discuss the question of refugees first and, if the discussion of this issue was conducted as part of the overall peace negotiations, our delegation would define Israel's contribution to the solution of the refugee problem through resettlement, on the express and obvious condition that the implementation of this contribution would depend on the achievement of peace and would form part of the overall and final solution of the refugee problem in its entirety. Israel's contribution so defined would include those refugees who have already returned and resettled in Israel, a total of 25,000. It would also include the thousands who presumably will have returned in the meantime under the plan to reunite Arab families separated by the war.

Further to the above statement, our delegation was instructed to stress once again that the State of Israel cannot consider itself in any way responsible for the problem of the refugees. Israel places the responsibility for this problem and for the grim suffering it has caused fully and squarely on those who violated the U.N. decision on the solution of the Palestine problem, either through armed revolt inside the country to prevent the establishment of the State of Israel, or through invasion in order to stifle the State at birth. On the other hand, while disclaiming all responsibility for the problem, the State of Israel cannot remain indifferent to the suffering and distress by which the problem is surrounded. The State of Israel is vitally concerned with a solution of this problem and deems it its humanitarian duty to do what it can to bring it about.

The extent of Israel's contribution, however, cannot be determined by the dimensions of the problem. Its scale must be measured only in terms of the security and economic capacity of the State. From bitter experience, the Government of Israel is convinced that the return of Arab refugees in whatever number endangers the security of the State, and is also fully aware that the resettlement of any Arab refugees will involve serious economic difficulties. Nevertheless, the Government considers that the State must be prepared to face both the dangers and the difficulties if the definition of its contribution opens the way for negotiations and if the

implementation of its contribution is conditioned by a stable peace and the full participation of the Arab States in a total solution of the entire problem of the Arab refugees.

For there is this immutable condition. If peace is not achieved, if the Arab States refuse responsibility for the absorption of the great majority of the refugees, if an overall solution to the problem is not found, then the present fixing of Israel's contribution shall not be binding. This contribution is presented as a link in a chain. It does not exist on its own, but only as part of a whole. This is the attitude of Israel's Delegation at Lausanne, which now awaits the word of the Arab States.