

UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

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Letter dated 10 September 1951 addressed to the
Chairman of the Conciliation Commission by
Mr. Maurice Fischer, transmitting a letter
from the Foreign Minister of Israel

Mr. President,

In accordance with instructions received from my Government I have the honour to convey to you herewith the following message from Mr. Moshe Sharett, Minister for Foreign Affairs:

" I have the honour to refer to your communication dated 10 August 1951 inviting the Government of Israel to discuss with the Conciliation Commission solutions to the problems outstanding between Israel and the Arab States. As I reaffirmed in my cable to you of 13 August 1951 my Government has consistently pursued a policy of cooperation with the Conciliation Commission and it has indeed always shown eagerness to respond to the Commission's invitations. In accord with this policy I have been authorised to convey to you the willingness of the Government of Israel to participate in the proposed talks.

2. In accepting the Commission's invitation to this conference the Government of Israel wishes to make certain preliminary observations on the conditions it considers requisite for its success.

In my Government's opinion any prospect of achieving tangible results will depend first and foremost on the spirit and intention with which the Parties enter the conference. It cannot be ignored that the genesis of the

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present conflict lies in the invasion of Israel by the armed forces of the Arab States in May 1948 in defiance of the United Nations and with the express purpose of crushing the new State of Israel out of existence at its very birth. The military phase of the conflict, which cost Israel vast material damage and heavy loss of life, was terminated by the Armistice Agreements, but as the Commission itself pointed out in its Supplementary Report to the General Assembly dated 23 October 1950, "the Armistice Agreements are of a purely military character, intended to provide a transitional stage between the truce and a final peace". The Commission then defined its aim as "a positive peace, founded on more or less normal relations". Unfortunately the Arab States have expressly repudiated this aim. They have continued to proclaim their implacable hostility towards Israel and have actively sought to injure Israel in every possible way including the imposition of an economic boycott and blockade and the obstruction of the regional activities of international organisations of which Israel is a member. Recent actions and decisions of the Arab Governments have shown an even more obdurate determination to conduct political, economical and even military warfare against Israel with the result that the whole system of Armistice Agreements is being jeopardised. Two such actions call for special mention - the armed Syrian attack upon Israel territory last May, and Egypt's claim that she is still in a state of war with Israel and is therefore entitled to impose restrictions on shipping passing through the Suez canal in the exercise of alleged belligerent rights. The latter claim was dismissed by the Security Council in its resolution of 1st September 1951 calling for the abolition of the restrictions on shipping, but there is no sign as yet that the Egyptian Government accepts this resolution or is willing to comply with its terms. As for the aftermath of the Syrian aggression, the Commission will be aware that

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in response to the Security Council's resolution of 18 May 1951, which reminded the parties of their obligations under the Charter of the United Nations to settle their international disputes by peaceful means, the Syrian Prime Minister stated publicly that his Government would never negotiate or even discuss peace with Israel.

3. This intransigent attitude on the part of the Arab States accounts for the lack of success which has attended the peace-making efforts so far pursued and today still constitutes the main challenge to the Commission's task of conciliation. Unless there exists on both sides a willingness to agree, it is difficult to see how any progress towards agreement can be made. My Government submits therefore that at the outset of the conference, the Commission should obtain from the Parties an assurance that they accept as its objective the final settlement of all questions outstanding between them. My Government for its own part is ready to give such an assurance.

4. Until the way has thus been paved for genuine negotiation as opposed to mere manoeuvres, my Government would not regard it as profitable to proceed with negotiations on specific points. Such issues cannot be treated in isolation from their general context and should form an integral part of a broad settlement.

5. The first test of a willingness to agree is a willingness to meet. My Government has repeatedly made it clear to the Commission that in its view a series of separate discussions between each Party and the Commission cannot be an effective substitute for direct negotiations between the Parties themselves, whether under the auspices of the Commission or not. My Government is convinced that past experience fully supports the validity of this view, which indeed the Commission itself expressed in its Supplementary Report of

23 October 1950, and that as long as the Arab States refuse to confer with the representatives of Israel, the Conference merely serves to obscure the fact that there has been no real change of their barren and negative attitude and to encourage them to persevere in that attitude.

6. Furthermore, my Government believes that lasting solutions can best be evolved by the process of free negotiation between the Parties and not by a third Party, in this case the Commission, injecting its own proposals, which are liable to become but a fresh focus of contention. My Government has in mind that it should be given the opportunity of discussing with each Arab State the matters which primarily concern the relations between Israel and that particular State. Past experience confirms the view that it would be unrealistic and unhelpful to regard all the Arab States collectively as forming a single entity for the purpose of these negotiations, since concrete issues pertaining to the relationship between Israel and one of its neighbours are irrelevant as far as its relations with other neighbours are concerned. As for matters of seemingly general scope, their interests so far from being identical in fact diverge widely in relation to the problems under discussion. My Government must fully reserve its position with regard to the suggested procedure whereby the Commission would take the initiative in formulating its own proposals. So long as the Arab States refuse to enter into direct negotiations, such a procedure is liable to be prejudicial, while if they agree to negotiate directly, it becomes superfluous. Both on the subject of this procedure and of direct negotiations between the Parties, my Government made its position clear in its letter addressed to the Chairman of the Commission on 28 October 1949, and I would invite the Commission's particular attention to paragraphs 9 and 10 of that letter which are as valid now as they were at the time.

7. The Government of Israel reserves its position at this stage on the merits of the various outstanding issues but has found itself obliged to make these frank observations on the character of the proposed Conference in the hope that the Conference may make a real advance towards liquidating the residue of the Palestine war, alleviating the plight of its victims, placing the relations between Israel and its neighbours on a stable and peaceful footing, and contributing towards that state of permanent security of which the region as a whole is in such sore need. The Israel delegation will be instructed to put forward broad constructive proposals for the attainment of these ends.

8. My Government has designated Mr. Maurice Fischer, its Minister in Paris, Mr. Emile Najar, Counsellor at its Legation in Paris, and Mr. Shmuel Divon of the Foreign Ministry as its representatives during the initial stages of the Conference. Changes in the composition of the delegation may occur as the discussions progress.

9. In expressing to you the assurance of my highest consideration, I desire to convey to you and your colleagues the best wishes of the Israel Government for the success of the Conference towards which our delegation will strive its utmost to contribute."

The text of this message is being released to-day in Israel.

One member of the delegation, Mr. Shmuel Divon, is expected to arrive in Paris at an early date.

I avail myself of this opportunity to express to you, Mr. President, the assurance of my highest consideration.

(signed) Maurice FISCHER

E.E. and Minister Plenipotentiary