

UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

RESTRICTED

WC/11

26 March 1949

English

Original: French

Note dated 24 March 1949 from the Armenian Catholic Patriarchate, addressed to the Conciliation Commission, concerning the Holy Places and the Palestine Refugees

The Conciliation Commission has the great task - and we hope it will also have the great honour - of re-establishing peace in Palestine.

In order to achieve that noble goal, and especially in order that the peace may be a lasting one, it will be necessary to find a just and equitable solution of two questions which are closely bound up with the future of Palestine: first, the question of the Holy Places, which is one of international significance; and secondly, the problem of the Palestine refugees, which concerns all the Arab countries, including Lebanon.

I. The Holy Places of all Palestine are of interest to hundreds of millions of Christians. For that reason they have always been under a special regime, recognized by the Capitulations, from the time of the Ottoman Empire, and respected by the British Mandate itself for the past thirty years. What must be substituted for this regime, which no longer applies at present? We believe that internationalization of the Holy Places would be the best formula.

The Sovereign Pontiff Pius XII, supported by many religious leaders in Europe and in North and South America, proposed the following solution in the interests of peace: "To give to Jerusalem and its environs an international regime legally established and guaranteed, a regime which in the present circumstances would seem to ensure, in a more desirable and appropriate manner, the protection of the Sanctuaries. Similarly, it would be desirable to ensure, by means of international guarantees, freedom of access to the Holy Places, freedom of worship for the various Christian sects, and, finally, respect for the religious customs and traditions inherited from the past." (Encyclical: *In multiplicibus curis*, 24 October 1948).

This Patriarchate, which possesses at Jerusalem the Sanctuaries of the Third and Fourth Stations of the Cross, as

/well as

well as a Patriarchal Vicariat, respectfully endorses the proposals of the Sovereign Pontiff.

II. The hostilities in Palestine have given rise, during the past year, to the problem of the Palestine refugees. Hundreds of thousands of refugees, torn from their homes, are now in a deplorable situation, in spite of assistance given them by the Arab States, the United Nations, the Holy See, and many charitable institutions. Their future is still darker than the present.

Those refugees have been settled from time immemorial in Palestine; it is their homeland; all their property is there. Their only desire is to return to their homes.

A refusal by the Government of Israel to allow them to return and recover possession of their birthright would certainly not indicate a just and reasonable attitude, nor an absence of racial and religious prejudice, on the part of that Government.

If a solution of the problem by repatriation should ever be found to be impossible, the duty of resettling the refugees should certainly not be laid, even in part, upon the Lebanon, whose tiny area, with its limited means of production, is already over-populated. The country took upon itself a heavy burden when it extended a fraternal welcome to a large number of refugees. If it were obliged to prolong this emergency measure and make it a permanent one, its economy would be seriously unbalanced. The Arab States, which have at their disposal extensive lands and greater possibilities for production, are far more in a position to install these refugees within their borders, thereby relieving the Lebanon of serious difficulties.

In submitting these modest suggestions for the consideration of the Conciliation Commission, the Armenian Catholic Patriarchate hopes that those whose high mission is to re-establish peace in Palestine may present the problem to the United Nations in its true light, with the aim of ensuring peace in Palestine and thus eliminating a source of world disorder.

The Vicar General
of the Armenian Catholic Patriarchate

(signed) LOUIS BATANIAN
Archbishop