

UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE.

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Memorandum dated
23 November 1949

from the Conciliation Commission's Representative
in Jerusalem, transmitting a Request from the
Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem

His Beatitude Athenagoras, Archbishop of Sebastia, Representative of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, and Mr. George J. Said, Secretary of the Patriarchate, have visited this office and expressed the request which I convey to you below:

The Greek Orthodox Church - the oldest Christian institution established in the Holy Land, and which includes among its numerous churches and monasteries predominant positions in such Holy Places as the Holy Sepulchre and Bethlehem - is at present facing an extremely difficult financial situation derived from events in Palestine since the end of the Mandate. Long before, as a consequence of the Bolshevist revolution, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate had been deprived of considerable property holdings located in Russian territory, and had been obliged to assume financial obligations in order to carry on its activities. However, during the period of the Mandate, the Patriarchate had been able to settle all its debts amounting to some 600,000 Palestine Pounds, by means of mortgage operations undertaken with the technical assistance of the Mandatory Power. The recent hostilities in Palestine have resulted in a curtailment of the revenues of the Patriarchate to one fourth of its original amount. The greater part of this revenue was produced by properties of the Patriarchate at present in Jewish-controlled territory, notably real estate properties in the cities of Jerusalem, Jaffa and Haifa and rural properties in Brerg and Caesaria. As it is known, the Israeli Government, through its Custodian of Abandoned Property, has until now prevented the non-Jewish rightful owners to draw the revenues for their properties.

The above described situation has considerably limited the financial capacity of the Patriarchate to maintain its religious educational and philanthropic activities in Palestine and neighbouring territories. Moreover, the Patriarchate has had to extend its relief action to refugees from the Jewish controlled Palestine areas. Since last year a total of 3,000 refugees have been receiving aid from the Greek Orthodox Church of which 450 persons have been accommodated in the site of the Patriarchate and the Convent - within the Old City of Jerusalem and, in addition, over 300 children are given meals every day. Other means of relief to refugees include hospitalization and medicine.

In view of the delay in achieving any solution of this serious emergency the Patriarch addressed itself to the President of the United States, Mr. Harry S. Truman, requesting the financial assistance of the U.S. Government. By letter of 18 October 1949, President Truman acknowledged the letter of the Greek Patriarch and stated the impossibility of any direct aid because of U.S. legislation, but referred to the United Nations action - through its Palestine Conciliation Commission and the Economic Survey Mission for the Middle East - as a prospect for improvement of general conditions in Palestine which would have a favourable bearing on the particular situation of the Patriarchate.

It is following this line of thought that the Representative of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate has approached the Conciliation Commission representative in the Old City to request that in view of the above circumstances, immediate financial assistance be granted to the Patriarchate by the United Nations, through any of its subsidiary bodies operating in the Middle East.

The undersigned United Nations representative informed His Beatitude Archbishop Athenagoras that this direct financial aid was beyond the terms of reference of the Conciliation Commission and that indirectly, through the work projects for assisting Palestine refugees proposed by the E.S.M., the Patriarchate would no doubt be relieved from part of its responsibilities undertaken with respect to refugees. In addition, the proposals of the Commission for internationalization of Jerusalem and supervision of the Holy Places would probably - if approved by the General Assembly - have a favourable influence in solving the present difficulties.

However, none of these plans had been approved as yet, and the Patriarchate would therefore have to wait for the outcome of the debates on Palestine by the current Assembly.

The above information and the petition of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate is transmitted to you upon his special request, together with his suggestion that it be transmitted to the Conciliation Commission at Lake Success.