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LETTER AND MEMORANDUM DATED 27 APRIL 1949
CONCERNING THE REFUGEE SITUATION IN WESTERN GALILEE AND GAZA
ADDRESSED TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE CONCILIATION COMMISSION BY
MR. DELBERT REPLOGLE, FIELD REPRESENTATIVE,
AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE

Attached is a memo on the information which we discussed in our meeting at Jerusalem. This information is factual, we believe although there is always the possibility that data can be biased or warped in ways that we do not know. In the main, however, I think that the information that we do have can be relied upon as typical, although it must be understood that such information is of necessity one-sided. It is based on the observations of our personnel in their work in these areas and we trust that it will be useful to you in the difficult task of repatriation or resettlement of these homeless Arab refugees.

Yours sincerely,

s/ Delbert Replogle

Delbert Replogle
Field Representative, Quakers

27 April
Gaza

I. The situation in Western Gallilee :

(From observations made in Western Gallilee over a period of time extending from December 1948 to May 1, 1949.)

We have noted in several villages the transfer by the Israeli Military of from 50 to 200 people from their homes in villages to Jenin, which is across the border in Arab-held Palestine. Many of these people have held Jewish identity cards, which means they were not refugees who had illegally returned home, as was sometimes claimed, in explaining these transfers. In other towns, Arabs have been put out of their homes, and all their possessions taken; the homes have been turned over to Jewish families, and their furniture and possessions have disappeared. Much of it, we understand, has been turned over to Jewish families or merchants, under conditions which are unknown to us. Protests from the Arabs have met with no respect at all. Arab Doctors have had their cars requisitioned and have had to continue on foot--doctors employed by the local Jewish Government. This has been true at Schifa Amr and Acre, to our definite knowledge. In the town of Tarshiya, which had an original population of 5000 people, 4,000 people left on foot with clothes only, prior to May 1, 1948. They left because they were ordered to by their own Arab leaders, and were told that they would be back shortly. The Jews occupied the town on October 3, and on the 16th of January, after governing the town with some 1500 people, they arrested 80 people, 30 Moslems and 50 Christians, and removed them across the border to Jenin. As of April 20, it was a definite policy which, we were informed, had been received by the governor in writing, but which was very apparent in their operations, to remove all Arabs from the village by any varied excuses. The Arabs were removed from their nice homes and segregated in very poor homes, often 22 people to a single house, and the Arab homes given to Jewish people. There has been considerable pressure to buy the Arab lands and to take advantage of the Arabs' distress. All the houses have been looted and contents removed by Jews. There are now 756 people left in the town, of which 650 people are Christians and 106 people are Moslems. All Moslems are very old women or old men. The need of these people is very great, and they have been fed, for without the UNRPR feeding, many of them would have perished from sickness and malnutrition. This was the one village in Western Gallilee where Moslems and Christians had lived together.

In the old city of Acre 3000 Arabs are now imprisoned. A few have been given permits to go outside to work. Others have not been able to secure any permits to even visit their vineyards and orchards which they can see from the tops of the buildings in Acre. These vineyards are, of course, ruined now because they were not able to irrigate them last summer. Many of these people had beautiful homes in New Acre, from which they were driven to the old city penniless, and much of their possessions taken from them. Only recently, without explanation, all the furniture in Old Acre that was not outright owned by the people living in the house was removed by the Jewish Military authorities--we understood for the use of incoming immigrants. In many places of Western Gallilee, where we have been, the people are confined to their villages and unable to leave to till the fields which they own immediately adjoining the village. Shafa Amr is one of these.

Probably the greatest need in this area is some sort of a tribunal to whom the Arab minorities who have been told they were citizens of Israel, and who have been given a vote in the recent elections can appeal with some hope of receiving a just and fair hearing. We have found none now existent except arbitrary military leaders who follow no consistent policy.

II. GAZA :

In the Gaza area, there is a strip of territory some 20 miles long and 5 to 8 miles wide, bordered on the West by the Mediterranean Sea, with no harbors, and a wide strip of sand dunes, good for no agricultural purposes along the shore; on the South by a well guarded barbed-wire boundary between Egyptian territory and Palestine; on the North and East by a 2-kilometer-wide strip of territory which is No-Man's land, and which was to have been occupied by neither side, and in it many of the fields of the original inhabitants of this area lie. In this area, now are crowded 245,000 refugees, in addition to some 80,000 original inhabitants of these areas. All industry in the area which formerly was active in rug-weaving and handwork has been at a standstill since the trouble started, and only small trading posts are in operation. What few fields and orchards were in the area are being intensively cultivated by the people, but the food production of the total area, with many of the fields originally supplying it in the hands

of the Jews, would not be enough for the normal inhabitants, so that the refugees who are housed in the villages and camps in this area are wholly dependent upon outside sources for every mouthful of food consumed. Prior to January 1, much of the food was brought in by the Egyptian Government. Since that time, the food has been supplied through the Quakers by the UNRPR. Sanitary conditions in these camps have been very difficult with too little water, no latrines, and gradually these conditions have been brought under control, and medical conditions established which previously were hopelessly inadequate. Some 12 feeding stations have been set up, from which a ration of food is given to each of these people every two weeks, large enough to last for another two weeks. This feeding program was undertaken on an emergency basis and was supposed to have ended August 31. The conditions during the fighting were appalling among the refugees, as there was much suffering from bombs and shellfire. After the truce of January 7, however, until the armistice of March 24, there has been no suffering from military action, but there has been quite a battle against diseases such as measles, typhus, and the like. After that time, the people who had fields in No-Man's Land could not be restrained and they have from sheer desperation, plowed up those fields just as close to the Jewish lines as it was possible to go, and have planted them for this summer's crops. This area is small enough anyway, but it meant very much to them. In doing so, they braved the very determined efforts of the Jews at first, to keep that land clear as provided in the armistice. In the efforts, the Jews have shot and killed the various men, women, cows, sheep, camels, donkeys, and so forth, as is recorded by names in the attached list,* which is complete up until April 25. We suspect that these refugees have also been raiding Jewish territory, and the count is not entirely complete as it now stands. From the 18 to the 21 of April there was a series of riots in the camps among the refugees and one-day strikes, as a protest against accepting food from UN in lieu of the possibility of returning to their homes. In numerous conferences with the responsible Arabs in these camps, there has continually been the request to return to Israel and a willingness expressed to live with the Jews if only their lives and their property would be safe. Some 40 percent of these refugees in the Gaza area are tradespeople, and skilled

* Not reproduced - available from the Secretariat on request.

workers, many of them previously very successful. The other 60 percent are farmers, very closely and passionately attached to the piece of land that they have owned or worked. As the summer progresses, and they know that their own lands and orchards are ruining for lack of care, and their physical discomfort increases with the summer heat, much more dissatisfaction and disturbances are likely to ensue. The spectacle of an active people cooped up in a small area like this with no opportunity for energetic outlet is a heart-rending one, particularly when it is very definitely apparent that their mental and moral condition is deteriorating to that of charity-fed beggars instead of self-respecting and self-supporting citizens.

There is one aspect of the resettlement problem which we are inclined to overlook, which has been brought rather forcefully to our attention by some of the Bedoin Sheiks. These people are extremely bitter and have the feeling that the Jewish-Arab affair is a personal feud which will be handed down from father to son. These people will only go back to their land when they control the Government, and they also state equally firmly that they do not want to settle anywhere but on their own lands. We find this view held very strongly by the leaders and it is a question how influential these leaders would be in the event of opportunities for repatriation or resettlement in other areas.

Hopeful Suggestions:

- A. That as many Arabs as possible be given a chance to return home under safeguards of a Civil Government Regime - not under military rule. The first step of this could be the return of broken families on which there seems to be general agreement in Israel.
 1. The return and unfreezing of bank accounts held by Arabs in Israel.
 2. The opening and setting aside of land for Arabs. This would be particularly easy in many villages which were partially destroyed and around which the land is wholly uncultivated. Many of these villages are ones which our personnel has seen and we know these conditions to exist.
 3. The return of skilled and professional people by a percentage of categories (As a certain percentage of carpenters, a certain percentage of tradesmen, etc.).
- B. That adequate measures be taken to safeguard the rights of these citizens by proper observation and agreements of any that return to Israel. For this purpose, political organizations might be very helpful.
- C. Help should be given through honest and concerned agencies for the economic rehabilitation of either repatriation or resettlement Arabs.
- D. Arable land could be provided in other Arab areas and made available to resettle refugees on an easy-term-payment

basis with outside help to enable them to become economically self-sufficient.

- E. Work projects should be started in repatriated or resettled areas to give refugees an immediately available opportunity to earn a livelihood.
- F. If possible, all plans could be aimed toward an elevation of the living standards in all the Middle Eastern area - in other words, these projects could be planned so that they would not only resettle refugees, but be a lasting benefit in raising living standards throughout the Middle East. If such a program carefully worked out in detail could be agreed upon and thoroughly sold to all interested parties, it will, in our opinion, break down much of the bitterness and will divert the thoughts of a desperate people from revonge to more constructive efforts in bettering their own conditions.

The above suggestions are very sketchy, and it is very essential that integrity, tact and goodsalesmanship, patience and much understanding must be exercised in the preparation and implementation of any such plan. Undoubtedly, any plan, no matter how good, will be severely criticized from somewhere, but we have noted that even under the worst conditions there has been an irrepressible buoyancy in these people among whom we have been working, that can be relied upon to assist in their rehabilitation if it is allowed to have full play. From the description of situation of the refugees in Gaza, it is obvious to all that there is no chance of resettlement of refugees in this area as there may be in others. These people must actually be moved either home or into new areas - which complicates the situation here somewhat more.

We are also sure that the difficulties of resettlement will vary almost geometrically with the distance from their homes, and that there will be as great a problem in human engineering as in material engineering.

There are too many indications that the refugees' plight has been used as a political football and it should be stressed as strongly as possible that this is unfair, uncivilized, and

even unwise, if peace is to be hoped for in the Middle East. The Quakers have been quite concerned that, because the refugees are being fed, the consciences of the world are being salved, which should be even more fully aroused to the need for solving the problem, not prolonging it.

The costs of solving the problem might become an excellent investment. The cost of prolonging the problem is like throwing money and resources down a rat hole.