

UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-THIRD MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on  
Friday 3 February 1950 at 10.30 a.m.

Present:

Mr. PALMER (United States of America) Chairman

Mr. de Boisanger (France)

Mr. ERALP\* (Turkey)

Mr. de AZCARATE Principal Secretary

Mr. BARCO (United States of America) Chairman of the  
General Committee

Mr. READ, Director of the Society of )  
Friends for the Gaza area. ) During consideration

Mrs. READ ) of the question of

Mr. BELL, Representative of the ) the refugees of the

Society of Friends in ) Gaza area

Geneva. )

\* Alternate

Communication to the Arab and Israeli delegations respectively of the Summary Records of the First Meetings held at Geneva between the Commission and those delegations

The PRINCIPAL SECRETARY reported that following upon the Commission's decision, the Secretariat had communicated to the Arab delegations and to the Israeli delegation the Summary Records of the first meetings of the Commission in which those delegations had taken part. It had been made clear that the communication of the records resulted from a special decision by the Commission; it was not to be regarded as a precedent which would always be followed.

To a question from the representative of France, he replied that the records had been enclosed in envelopes and despatched to the delegations, who had been advised of the fact by telephone; they had not elicited any comment from the recipients.

Mr. de BOISANGER (France) noted that since the Trusteeship Council's meetings took place in the afternoon, joint meetings with the Arab and Israeli delegations could now be held in the morning.

Mr. BARCO (United States), Chairman of the General Committee, read his Committee's report on the cultivation of Arab lands in Israeli Territory (Document COM.GEN./13).

The PRINCIPAL SECRETARY, on the request of the representative of France, explained that the Secretariat had not discussed the question with the Israeli representative, at least not officially, and that the only measure so far taken had been the study carried out by the General Committee, the conclusions of which were contained in the report which had just been read out.

Mr. de BOISANGER (France), supported by the Chairman, thought the Chairman of the General Committee might discuss the question informally with the representative of Israel and with the representative of the Jordan Kingdom.

Mr. BARCO, Chairman of the General Committee, said the General Committee had thought that such a step should be taken by the Commission. Nevertheless, the General Committee could make preliminary contact with the delegations concerned and report back to the Commission.

The PRINCIPAL SECRETARY recalled that after the Lausanne meetings he had been instructed to take up the question in Jerusalem. His impression at the time had been that it was extremely complicated and that if the Commission attempted to tackle the matter itself, it might find itself bogged down in insuperable difficulties. Titles to property were among the questions involved. Moreover, the Israeli authorities maintained that the lands in question were already being cultivated very efficiently by Jewish immigrants, and pointed out the administrative difficulties that would be involved if several thousand persons daily were allowed to cross the lines. That was why

he had tried to persuade the representatives of the two Governments concerned to submit the question to the Special Mixed Committee.

He had learned from information reaching the Commission that the Mixed Committee's negotiations had broken down, precisely because of the complications to which he had just referred, and that the Mixed Committee had reached a deadlock on that point, as there had been reason to fear.

In reply to a question by the Chairman, he added that he thought it might be useful to urge upon the Israeli representative the desirability of a conciliatory attitude on the part of representatives of the Israeli Government in the Mixed Committee's discussions.

Mr. de BOISANGER (France) agreed that the Commission should not take up the question directly, and re-affirmed his support of an approach to the Israeli representative by the Chairman of the General Committee.

He read out a communication from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the effect that the Egyptian Government, in an official communiqué, had denied a report in the Tel-Aviv press announcing the resumption of direct negotiations between the Israeli Government and the Egyptian Government. The Cairo communiqué added that the Egyptian Government in accordance with the decisions taken by the United Nations, was co-operating with the Conciliation Commission.

Passing to another topic, he reminded the Commission that the Arab delegations were reluctant to discuss economic questions, for fear of being pressed to resume trade relations with the State of Israel. He thought that after about a week the Commission might suggest to the delegations representing it as a proposal made on its own initiative, the setting up of other mixed Committees, for instance, a Committee on frontier questions.

#### Gaza Area Question

On the arrival of the representatives of the Society of Friends, the Commission turned to the question of the conditions of refugees in the Gaza area.

Mr. READ, Director of the Society of Friends in the Gaza area, outlined the situation of the refugees. The area, which was mainly sandy and barren, with a normal population of 60,000 inhabitants living in a state of great poverty, had had to receive 200,000 refugees. Though the assistance given by the United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees was intended solely for refugees, it was unlikely that some of it would not extend, at least indirectly, to the resident population.

Owing to the Armistice Line many inhabitants on either side of it were separated from the land they worked. A solution of that problem could be provided only by rectification of the Line, and the Mixed Armistice Commission had before it a proposal to that effect.

There seemed no possibility of establishing economic equilibrium in the area. Egyptian imports, the amount of which had been large, were shrinking and were burdened by Egyptian and Palestinian customs duties; exports were practically nil, while the wages of unskilled workers had dropped from £12 to £2 per month and were continuing to fall owing to the superabundance of labour. The food relief supplied by the United Nations was the only thing that had enabled the population to survive, and it was impossible to foresee how, once such supplies had ceased, the existence of the inhabitants of the area could

be ensured unless their numbers decreased. His own view was that the solution of the problem should be sought in the resettlement of a large proportion of the refugees, failing their repatriation.

In that connection, the problem of obtaining travel documents appeared to be the main obstacle for those refugees who did not possess passports issued by the former mandatory authorities, or whose passports had expired. In such cases they had to obtain a Transjordanian passport in Cairo, but the monetary deposit required for entry into Egypt and the expense of staying in Cairo while the formalities for the issue of a passport were being carried out were far beyond the means of most. Only when they had secured such a document could they obtain the necessary visas for moving elsewhere. Personally he hoped that the refugees in question would be issued with I.R.O. Passes or Nansen passports which would enable those who wished to do so to accept certain offers of employment in Libya, Southern Arabia, etc.

To a question from Mr. de BOISANGHEE (France), he replied that it might be premature to set up a labour registry office in the Gaza area. It would only arouse hopes doomed to disappointment unless some procedure for the issue of travel documents had first been worked out.

He added that a census of the refugees in the area, giving detailed information, would facilitate the study and solution of the problem of their resettlement.

After replying to questions from Mr. ERALP (Turkey) and the CHAIRMAN on the morale of the refugees, and to questions from Mr. de BOISANGER (France) on their state of health, which he said, was quite satisfactory, and on the rations issued, Mr. READ pointed out that the work of the Society of Friends in Gaza and the distribution of food products it was undertaking as U.N.R.P.R. aid represented one of the largest economic activities in the area, both in respect

of the size of the staff employed (about 1,500 persons) and of the value and quantities of foodstuffs distributed, either for direct consumption or for trade transactions.

Mr. BELL, representative of the Society of Friends at Geneva, undertook to reply to any questions which the Commission might care to put to him at a later stage.

The CHAIRMAN thanked the representatives of the Society of Friends for the information they had given the Commission.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.