

UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE ONE HUNDRED AND FORTY-SECOND MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 17 April 1950, at 3 p.m.Present:

Mr. PALMER	(United States of America)	Chairman
Mr. de BOISANGER	(France)	
Mr. ERALP*	(Turkey)	
Mr. de AZCARATE		Principal Secretary

* Alternate

Also Present:

Major Gen. Kennedy	Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
Mr. Blandford (United States of America) - Chairman	} Members of the Advisory Commission
Mr. de Saint-Hardouin (France)	
Gen. Refet Bele (Turkey)	
Sir Henry Knight (United Kingdom)	

The CHAIRMAN stated that the Commission had been looking forward to meeting the Director and the members of the Advisory Commission of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East ever since it had learned that they would be visiting Geneva on their way to Beirut.

Having just resumed the Chairmanship of the Conciliation Commission, it was his privilege to express the pleasure of its members and to convey to the Advisory Commission their best wishes for a successful outcome to their visit to the Near East. Those wishes, which he was expressing not only for himself and on behalf of his colleagues but also on behalf of the members of their Secretariat, were not merely formal ones but a most cordial expression of goodwill towards each of the visitors and the members of their respective staffs.

The Conciliation Commission appreciated the importance of the Agency's mission and hoped for its accomplishment in the fullest possible measure. It realized that the success of that mission might be affected by the outcome of the Commission's continuing efforts to work out the broader aspects of the refugee problem and the overall Palestine problem with Israel and the Arab States concerned. The Commission also realized that its own efforts might be affected by the progress of the activities of the Agency in the Near East and by the relations it established with the Governments and peoples of those Arab States.

He hoped that if, at any time, the members of the Agency felt that the experience of the Commission might be of some help, they would not hesitate to consult it. At the same time, the Commission itself would like to feel free to turn to the Agency for counsel and assistance in those matters in which the latter might be of help.

The Secretariat of the Conciliation Commission had prepared some suggestions as to how effective liaison might be maintained between the two bodies. Copies would be distributed at the close of the meeting. He hoped that, before the members of the Agency left Geneva, an agreement would be reached on the appointment of a liaison officer.

In order to study that question and any other matter which the members of the Agency might like to take up, it would be desirable for another meeting to be held before they left Geneva.

The Secretariat of the Conciliation Commission had prepared a set of documents designed to bring out the relation of the Commission to the refugee problem and describe the action taken by it to date. The documents in question would likewise be distributed to the members of the Agency at the close of the meeting. Should any of them desire any further information or feel that the Secretariat of the Commission might be of assistance to him, he was requested to get in touch with the Principal Secretary.

The members of the Agency would no doubt be interested to hear a statement by Mr. de Boisanger, the retiring Chairman, on his recent visit to the various capitals of the Arab States and to the Gaza refugee camp. He would also give them his impressions of the feeling in those parts regarding the Agency and its mission. They were no doubt well aware of the unpopularity of any method or project that might appear to the refugees, or be interpreted by their spokesmen, as designed to encourage abandonment of their desire to return to their homes.

Mr. de BOISANGER said that although the main purpose of his visit to the Near East had been to conduct conversations of a political character with the Arab Governments and the Government of Israel, he had had the opportunity of visiting refugee camps, at Jericho, Nablus and Gaza. He had formed the opinion that the position in the camps had changed profoundly since his last visit in April 1949. The Red Cross and the American Friends' Service Committee in particular had performed admirable humanitarian work. The camps were clean, the refugees properly housed and given medical care, and the children went to school. The progress made might even, one might say, be described as too great; veritable Arab villages had been established and the population was increasing.

As for the state of mind of the refugees in the camps, the reception which he, as the Commission's representative, had been accorded in the Gaza area,

indicated that the work of the Agency might come up against certain difficulties. The general theme of the refugees' petitions which had been handed to him was: "We wish to return home. The democratic Powers are the cause of all our troubles!"

The chief aim of the tour he had just made had been to induce the parties concerned to accept a plan proposed by the Commission, which sought at one and the same time to take account of Israel's desire to open direct negotiations and of the desire of the Arab States that the Commission should mediate between the parties. To that end, the Commission had proposed that all the parties concerned should meet in committees, the bases for discussion being furnished by the Commission.

The State of Israel had not yet given any answer to those proposals and its reply would depend on its reaction to the statements of the Arab League. The view of the Arab Governments, as expressed by the Egyptian Minister for Foreign Affairs in the presence of the Secretary of the Arab League, was that the Arab Governments were not unfavourably disposed to the establishment of Mixed Technical Committees, provided that an agreement in principle, bearing primarily on the refugee question and recognizing the latter's right to return to their homes were first of all reached.

The mission of the Agency being, to some extent, bound up with the outcome of the Conciliation Commission's work, any success the latter might have in gradually laying the foundations of a settlement would undoubtedly react favourably on the work of the Agency. For the moment, however, the Agency would be confronted with serious difficulties.

The members of the Agency, for their part, could render the Commission a service by pointing out, in the course of their conversations with the representatives of the Arab Governments, that the only possible solution of the refugee problem was to settle the largest possible number of them in areas not occupied by Israel. So far, the Arab States had been unwilling to recognize that fact, though it was self-evident.

Major-General KENNEDY, Director, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, speaking on behalf of the Agency, thanked the Commission for the welcome accorded it.

As the Commission was no doubt aware, the members of the Agency had so far held only one informal and, that very morning, one official meeting. Although he and his colleagues realised the difficulties that awaited them, the Commission's explanations had given them a deeper insight into the nature of those difficulties. They were likewise conscious of the fact that the functions of the Commission and the Agency were interlocked and that care would have to be taken to prevent any over-lapping or encroachment upon their respective fields and to ensure smooth collaboration. It was with that idea in mind that the members of the Agency would examine the proposal for establishing liaison shortly to be handed to them.

The Agency was anxious as far as possible to avoid touching on the political aspects of the Near East problem, its essential task being to effect the transition from a system of relief pure and simple to a mixed system of relief and works.

There were some questions which the members of the Agency wished to raise but they would prefer to study the documentation placed at their disposal by the Commission before doing so.

He wished once again to thank the Commission on behalf of the Agency for having given the latter the benefit of its own experience and hoped that, with time, the Agency, in its turn, would be able to render similar assistance to the Commission.

Mr. BLANDFORD (United States of America - Chairman of the Advisory Commission) said that in expressing his appreciation of the welcome given it by the Conciliation Commission, the Director of the Agency had faithfully interpreted the feelings of the Advisory Commission. The problem for the Agency was to integrate the refugees into the economy of the Arab States. With that end in view, it would be necessary for it to exchange information with the Conciliation Commission. It was not, however, its intention to complicate the Commission's task but rather to assist it as much as possible.

At the meeting that morning, the members of the Advisory Commission had concluded that it would be preferable not to give any publicity to the arrangements that might be made between the Agency and the Conciliation Commission, in order to avoid giving a false impression of the real nature of the Agency's work and to make it quite clear that it had nothing to do with the effort to promote conciliation.

Once the members of the Agency had met to study the documentation submitted by the Commission, it would be necessary for the two bodies to meet again to come to an agreement on the nature of their future relationship.

The Agency was anxious as far as possible to reduce the number of its "customers", and since the refugees of the Gaza area were one of the main problems, he was interested to note that the question of adjusting the boundary line in the area in which the Gaza refugees were living had been raised, and would be grateful if the Commission would explain the present position. He had also gathered that, at certain places, the refugees, being cut off from their lands by the boundary line, were unable to cultivate them. The Agency would be grateful for further details on that question also.

The CHAIRMAN thought it preferable for the replies to the various questions put to be given in writing, and supplemented by further documentation. The documents could be got ready very quickly by the Secretariat so that the members of the Agency could study them before the next meeting, which he suggested fixing for Wednesday, 12 April, at 11 a.m.

It was so agreed.

The CHAIRMAN added that he was fully conscious of the fact that the missions of the two bodies, though both were helping to foster economic stability and peace, were none the less different in character. The Commission which likewise had no desire to give publicity to the arrangements made between it and the Agency, would like to propose, for the consideration of the Agency, that such arrangements should consist in the appointment of a liaison officer.

Mr. BLANDFORD (United States of America - Chairman of the Advisory Commission) said that, without prejudice to the question of the political status of the 200,000 refugees in the Gaza area and the 270,000 refugees from Arab Palestine, the Agency was also anxious to know what the Commission's intentions were with regard to the question of the assets of those refugees.

Major-General KENNEDY, Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, was also anxious to know how the question of compensation stood, since a favourable settlement of that question, by making it possible to inform the Arabs that their losses would be made good, was bound to facilitate the work of the Agency.

The CHAIRMAN pointed out that the host countries would be more inclined to accept refugees once that question had been settled.

In the course of a discussion on the communiqué to be issued relating to the current meeting, Mr. de SAINT-HARDOUIN (France - Advisory Commission) expressed the view that it would be advisable to state that the two bodies had, that day at Geneva, consulted each other in pursuance of the directive given in General Assembly Resolution No. 302(IV) of 8 December 1949.

It was agreed that the Principal Secretary of the Commission should be requested to draft a communiqué to be submitted to the Director of the Relief and Works Agency and the Chairman of the Advisory Commission before being issued.

The meeting rose at 4.30 p.m.