

UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

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SUMMARY RECORD OF A MEETING BETWEEN

THE CONCILIATION COMMISSION AND THE RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY

held at Government House, Jerusalem, on Tuesday,
6 February 1951, at 10.30 a.m.

Present:

Conciliation Commission for Palestine:

Mr. Claude de Boisanger	(France)	- Chairman
Mr. T. Rüstü Aras	(Turkey)	
Mr. Ely E. Palmer	(United States)	
Mr. Pablo de Azcarate		- Principal Secretary

Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East:

General Refet Bélé	(Turkey)	- Chairman of the Advisory Commission
Mr. Howard Kennedy		- Director
H.E. Mr. J. Tarbé de St. Hardouin	(France)	- Member of the Advisory Commission
Sir Henry Knight	(United Kingdom)	- Member of the Advisory Commission
Mr. John B. Blandford, Jr.	(United States)	- Member of the Advisory Commission

The meeting opened with an exchange of views, as a result of which it was decided to adopt as the agenda for the meeting, the memorandum which Mr. Blandford had communicated earlier to the members of the Advisory Commission and to the members of the Conciliation Commission. ⁽¹⁾

(1) Mr. Blandford's memorandum is annexed hereto.

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1. UNRWA Reintegration Plans

Sir Henry K'IGHT (United Kingdom) thought that the Conciliation Commission would probably wish to be enlightened on the following points:

- (a) What stage had the Agency's reintegration programmes reached?
- (b) How would the programmes be financed, and was it thought that the collaboration of the Arab Governments would be obtained?
- (c) Should the refugees be asked to adopt a position regarding the questions of repatriation and compensation?
- (d) What rights would be given by the Arab Governments to refugees resettled in their territory?

Mr. de BOIS'NGER (France), speaking on behalf of the Conciliation Commission, was in complete agreement with the opinion of the Relief and Works Agency, which viewed its task of reintegration as an operation which would have the effect of taking the refugees off the relief rolls and giving them the possibility of earning their living, thus restoring their self-respect. The Commission was glad to note that in this effort the Relief and Works Agency hoped to avoid raising basic political and economic issues either with respect to Israel or the Arab countries, and it shared the hope that the Agency's activity would not be the cause of enlarging the area of basic negotiation. It shared the Agency's view that such a position would improve the chances of obtaining the cooperation of the refugees and of the Arab countries.

With reference to the first point raised by the Chairman of the Advisory Commission, the Chairman of the Conciliation Commission asked whether a certain number of refugees had already been taken off the relief rolls, and Mr. PALMER (United States) wished to know whether, for example, the refugees who had started work in Jordan on their own initiative - as he had been informed - were still a charge on the international community.

Sir Henry KNIGHT (United Kingdom) stated that in fact the Agency had not yet achieved any results as regards reintegration. Mr. BLANDFORD (United States) explained that the General Assembly had instructed the Relief and Works Agency to undertake works programmes which would result in a more or less automatic

reintegration of the refugees. As funds were lacking, the task had been doomed in advance and the Relief and Works Agency, having decided to approach the question from another angle, was at present experiencing a period of transition devoted to the preparation of reintegration programmes which would be put into operation beginning early in July. The Relief and Works Agency would arrange its work in that way, in the first place in order not to encroach on the Conciliation Commission's sphere of activity, and secondly because it felt that the new procedure would lead to the best practical results.

The prospects in regard to reintegration were not bad; Jordan seemed ready to accept a certain number of refugees, Egypt had already proposed a programme of public works, which more or less constituted a commitment on her part, and Mr. Blandford expressed his satisfaction at learning that during a conversation which Mr. Aras (Turkey) had had in Beirut with Mr. Tacla, the latter had implied that Lebanon would accept for resettlement 20,000 to 25,000 refugees of Lebanese origin. The Relief and Works Agency could therefore proceed with its task with the help of the Conciliation Commission.

Sir Henry KNIGHT (United Kingdom) said that the refugees in Jordan to whom Mr. Palmer referred were probably not on the UNRWA relief rolls, or, if they were, they were working in addition to receiving relief.

Mr. KENNEDY (Director of the Relief and Works Agency) stated that up to the present not one family had been taken off the relief rolls, and that it was very difficult to ascertain the number of refugees who were working either in Jordan or elsewhere, because they worked in a more or less clandestine way and for low wages, which was, moreover, much to be regretted.

Mr. de SAINT-HARDOUIN (France) added that if the refugees were working in a clandestine way, it was because the governments forbade the employment of refugees. It was above all necessary to persuade the governments to authorize the employment of refugees; they were inclined to be reluctant to do that, as they were, in general, opposed to the refugees being withdrawn from the relief rolls.

In that connection, he thought it was very important to decide what was understood by reintegration, so that no confusion would arise between the case of a reintegrated refugee and the case of a refugee who obtained, in an irregular manner, certain work which enabled

him to improve his daily life. In his opinion, reintegration would have been achieved at the moment when assistance could be discontinued.

Mr. ARAS (Turkey) thought that it was probably on account of the temporary and irregular nature of the work done by the refugees that the governments were against removing their names from the relief rolls, as they could not be considered as resettled.

Replying to Mr. PALMER (United States), who had asked, in connection with point (c) above, whether a definite choice by the refugees regarding repatriation and compensation would influence the future work of the Relief and Works Agency, Sir Henry KNIGHT (United Kingdom) did not think it would facilitate the work of the Agency, whose immediate task was to help the refugees to resume a normal life. The question of repatriation might be considered later. With regard to compensation, it would be difficult for the refugees to make a choice until they knew how the indemnities would be paid.

Mr. KENNEDY (Director of the Relief and Works Agency) added that it was important that the activities of the Agency should not prejudice the future rights of the refugees, as laid down in the General Assembly resolution.

With regard to point (d) raised by Sir Henry Knight, concerning the rights to be granted to refugees by the governments who agreed to resettle them in their territory, that was a political question coming within the terms of reference of the Conciliation Commission.

2. CCO Approach to Repatriation

Sir Henry KNIGHT (United Kingdom) remarked that the efforts made by the Conciliation Commission in the field of repatriation would have an undoubted effect on the work of reintegration, and the members of the Relief and Works Agency wished to know whether the Conciliation Commission intended to inform the refugees of its efforts in that direction. Although it was advisable not to revive unduly the hopes of the refugees in that connection, as such a course would hinder the Agency's reintegration attempts, it would nevertheless be desirable for the Commission, in the near future, to inform the refugees of the results of its approaches to the Government of Israel, so that they would be able to form an opinion.

Mr. de BOISANGER (France) remarked that the negotiations with Israel concerning repatriation were going to be carried out in

difficult circumstances, and he feared that Israel might abide by her traditional attitude. However, if some results were achieved in the field of reintegration, Israel might be prompted to make an effort towards repatriation.

Mr. PALMER (United States) added that the Conciliation Commission was just as anxious as the Agency to find out the possibilities of repatriation, and he agreed that the refugees should not be given false hopes. With that in mind, all publicity concerning the Commission's talks with the Israel Government and the preliminary work of the Commission's new Refugee Office would be avoided.

Once the situation became clearer, the Commission would have to make known the results of its negotiations with the Israel Government, which for its part would probably not keep its decisions secret. The Commission, moreover, having seized the Israel Government of the General Assembly resolution instructing the Commission to facilitate the return of the refugees to their homes, would be entitled, if it met with a refusal, to ask the Israel Government the reasons for that refusal, of which it would then inform the refugees.

3. PCC Approach to Compensation

Sir Henry KNIGHT (United Kingdom) thought it would be advantageous to fix without delay the principles which would determine eligibility for compensation, so that the number of refugees entitled to compensation and the number of those not eligible could be ascertained as soon as possible. He felt that when the time came the cases of the refugees on the UNRWA relief rolls should be examined first. Would compensation apply only to immovable property, or would it apply to both immovable and movable property?

It would also be necessary to find out whether the Government of Israel could be convinced that it should pay an amount on account of compensation, in addition to the contribution it was considering making to the reintegration fund.

Mr. de BOISANGER (France) recalled that ever since the negotiations first started, the Government of Israel had stated that compensation was due only for cultivated land and had tried to have this view accepted. The Conciliation Commission had emphasized that, according to the provisions of the General Assembly resolution, compensation was due for movable and immovable property as well as for cultivated land and that it was unable to deviate from that position of principle. He added that when the Head of the

Commission's Refugee Office started work, assisted by the Committee of Experts on Compensation, definite information would soon be available regarding the property for which compensation was claimed: that information would at once be communicated to the Relief and Works Agency.

Mr. PALMER (United States) said that he had recently expressed to Mr. Sharett his regret that the Government of Israel had felt it necessary, when offering a contribution to the reintegration fund, to pose the condition that that contribution should be regarded as freeing Israel from her obligations concerning compensation. He had pointed out to Mr. Sharett that, as the amounts paid as compensation were to cover losses suffered individually, they should be paid to the refugees individually. A method of payments to individuals, however, would not necessarily be used; the payments might, for example, be made through a central fund. Mr. Sharett had stressed that the members of the Knesset felt that it was simpler to settle the question once and for all and to free Israel from all her obligations relating to compensation by paying a lump sum. Mr. Sharett had expressed doubt that the members of the Knesset could be persuaded to accept the Conciliation Commission's viewpoint. He had, however, stated that Israel was ready to assist the Commission's new Office in its task of assessing the property abandoned by the refugees.

The members of the two bodies agreed on the need for speeding up the negotiations concerning compensation, as it was felt that the sooner the refugees knew whether or not they could continue to hope for compensation, the sooner they would know whether or not to turn towards resettlement.

4. PCC and UNRWA working arrangements with Near East Governments

Sir Henry KNIGHT (United Kingdom) explained that the Relief and Works Agency was waiting to hear what decisions had been taken concerning refugees by the Political Committee of the Arab League before arranging its programme of official visits to the Arab Governments or of unofficial contacts with members of those governments. As soon as the Agency's programme was set up, the Conciliation Commission would be informed.

Mr. KENNEDY (Director of the Relief and Works Agency) stated that during those visits the Agency would discuss with the governments concerned the steps which could be taken immediately towards reintegration, and would explain what it understood by integration. Replying to Mr. de Boisanger, he said that he had addressed to the

members of the Advisory Commission a memorandum setting out his ideas as to the definition of reintegration. The Advisory Commission might perhaps think it useful to communicate that memorandum to the Conciliation Commission.

For the present, the Relief and Works Agency would study requests for works projects submitted by the Arab Governments, and would then discuss the projects with them. In that connection, he stated that the Agency would shortly be in touch with the Jordan Government, which was prepared to commence the resettlement of a certain number of families in its territory.

In reply to Mr. ARAS who understood reintegration to imply not only the resettlement of the refugees but also the granting to them of the nationality of the country in which they were resettled, he stated that that point would have to be taken up, in particular with the Syrian Government, which did not appear to be willing to accept the consequences of resettlement - that is to say, to grant Syrian nationality to resettled refugees.

Sir Henry KNIGHT (United Kingdom) felt that the question of reintegration was extremely complicated and would have to be taken up in stages with the governments concerned. For the present, efforts should be devoted to working out resettlement plans within the framework of the Agency's mission of relief and works. Then the stage of practical resettlement operations would be reached, and rather than try to enter into discussions of principle in an attempt to persuade the governments to agree with the Relief and Works Agency's viewpoint, it would appear preferable not to adopt too rigid a policy but rather to adapt the programmes to take into account the views of each government. The Relief and Works Agency would let the Conciliation Commission know, confidentially, of the reintegration plans to be worked out by the Advisory Commission.

Mr. ARAS (Turkey) felt in a position to say that the Commission fully agreed with the way in which the Relief and Works Agency intended to work, by finding the appropriate solution for each problem which arose. For its part, the Conciliation Commission would record the results of its experiences on the political level.

Mr. de BOISANGER (France) stated that for the present it had been decided that in principle the Commission in corpore would make no official visits to governments, but would restrict itself to individual contacts. He gave some information concerning the movements of the members of the Commission during the coming weeks.

5. Arrangements for consultations with refugees and refugee records

An exchange of views took place on this question, during which the members of the Relief and Works Agency and the members of the Conciliation Commission noted in turn the difficulty of finding committees which genuinely represented all the refugees. The Relief and Works Agency believed that the "Representatives of the Palestine Refugee Committees in Lebanon" was one of the most representative, and the Conciliation Commission indicated that in September 1950 it had received a delegation from the Ramallah Refugee Congress, which represented quite a large number of refugees. According to information collected from these bodies and information which the representatives of the Relief and Works Agency, who were directly in touch with the refugees, had gathered on the spot, it seemed that the unanimous desire of the refugees was to return to their homes in Israel.

Mr. de BOISANGER (France) felt that an effort should be made to bring about a change in the outlook of the refugees, but that this should be done by combined action of the two bodies.

He suggested that each body should give consideration to this question and that paragraphs 5 and 6 of the memorandum - paragraph 6 also requiring careful examination and preliminary study - should be placed on the agenda for the next meeting.

This was agreed.

7. Next meeting between the Relief and Works Agency and the Conciliation Commission

The members of the two bodies were unanimous in acknowledging that these meetings served to strengthen the collaboration between them, and decided to meet in Beirut on Thursday, 8 March.

It was further agreed that the members of the two bodies would take every opportunity to meet each other, during the course of their visits, in order to discuss the development of their respective tasks.

An exchange of views took place concerning the advisability of designating a representative of each body who would maintain current liaison between them.

It was decided that the Principal Secretary of the Conciliation Commission and the Director of the Relief and Works Agency would, in consultation, appoint the liaison officers.

It was also decided that the information officers of each body should remain in contact and communicate to each other the texts of press communiqués issued by each body after a joint meeting.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.