

RESTRICTED
SR/26
20 March 1949

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE
TWENTYSIXTH MEETING

held at Beirut on 20 March 1949

Present: Mr. de Boisanger (France) - Chairman
Mr. Yalcin (Turkey)
Mr. Ethridge (U.S.A.)

Mr. Azcarate - Principal Secretary
Mr. Tallec - (United Nations Relief
for Palestine Refugees)

First Meeting with the Arab Delegations

The CHAIRMAN thought that no special communique should be issued to the Press but that the text of the Chairman's opening speech should be distributed at the beginning of the meeting.

It was agreed that the opening meeting would be at 4.30 in the afternoon of 21 March.

Memorandum of the Government of Israel on the Refugee Question

The CHAIRMAN asked whether the Commission wished to discuss the memorandum then or take it up later during the discussions with individual delegations.

Mr. ETHRIDGE observed that the paper did not call for much discussion since there seemed to be only one pertinent paragraph, namely, the one dealing with resettlement or repatriation of the refugees.

The CHAIRMAN expressed his concern that the memorandum contained no mention of Mr. Sharett's assurance, made previously to the Commission, that Israel was prepared to pay indemnities. He thought that the Commission might mention the statement in its conversations with the Arab representatives, even though it did not appear in the memorandum.

Mr. ETHRIDGE thought that the Commission should not go beyond the General Assembly's resolution as far as claims were concerned. He felt that it would be unwise to give the Arabs the impression that the Commission favored Mr. Sharett's position.

Mr. YALCIN pointed out that the Commission would explain its general attitude to the Arabs the following day. He wondered what the Commission would do if one of the Arab Governments should accuse the Commission of diverging from its attitude as laid down by the United Nations.

The CHAIRMAN replied that he did not think the question would arise the following day, since it was generally agreed among the Arabs that the opening meeting would be devoted to a general expose, without going into any details. There would be the speech of the Chairman and probably a speech of welcome by the Lebanese representatives. He thought, however, that in the discussion with individual states the Commission should note its dissatisfaction with the Israeli memorandum. There was some reassurance in the Israeli statement that the question could be examined when peace was reestablished. The situation would certainly be more favorable then for the return of the refugees.

Plan of Work of the Commission

Mr. ETHRIDGE stressed the need for a clear definition of what the Commission hoped would emerge from its work. With regard to the working paper on refugees, he thought that certain points should be established. The Arabs, for instance, should be urged to set up some form of temporary public works to care for the refugees when relief funds were exhausted. They should then ask for technical missions from the United Nations. Following the discussions regarding refugees, peace talks, possibly bilateral should be held under the auspices of the Conciliation Commission. Mr. Ethridge reiterated the need for careful planning on the part of the Commission before the meeting with the Arab governments began.

The CHAIRMAN agreed with Mr. Ethridge but pointed out that it would not be necessary to go into details at the opening meeting. The Arabs were expecting only a formal meeting in general terms.

On the suggestion of the Chairman the Commission agreed to meet immediately after the opening meeting on Monday afternoon.

First Meeting with the Arab Delegations: the Chairman's Opening Speech

The CHAIRMAN pointed out that the text of his opening remarks, which the Commission had before it, was entirely provisional. He asked the Commission for its comments.

The Commission approved the text of the Chairman's speech without change.

Report of Mr. Wilkins on his visit to Rhodes

Mr. WILKINS reported that he had gone to Rhodes at the invitation of Mr. Bunche and had spent four days there. The armistice negotiations seemed to be going very well indeed. He had received the impression that the agreements between Israel and the Governments of Transjordan, Lebanon and Syria would be concluded within a week or ten days. Dr. Bunche had informed Mr. Wilkins that he might visit Beirut to meet the Commission if it was still there at the conclusion of the armistice negotiations or during a break in the talks. Otherwise, he would meet the Commission in Jerusalem after the armistice talks and the Beirut meetings were concluded.

Mr. Wilkins said that the principal reason for his visit to Rhodes was the question of Jerusalem, which had arisen during the Israeli-Transjordanian negotiations. Both delegations had taken a very strong position in the matter and had asked Dr. Bunche to suggest a compromise proposal. Dr. Bunche had then proposed that a neutral zone be set up with the roads to Nablus, Bethlehem, Mount Scopus, Mount Zion and the King David-Y.M.C.A. area under the mixed control of the Israelis, the Transjordanians and the United Nations. The proposal was strongly rejected by the Israeli delegation; the

Transjordanian delegation said that it would accept it with minor reservations. It was finally agreed to accept the existing lines.

Report of the Jerusalem Committee

The CHAIRMAN was of the opinion that discussion of the Jerusalem Committee's report should be postponed; the subject of Jerusalem might arise during the meetings with the Arab Governments in which case the whole question would be reexamined.

Mr. ETHRIDGE thought that there was no reason to assume that the Committee had exhausted all possibilities of agreement. He felt very strongly that the Committee should continue its work, which it had only just begun.

The CHAIRMAN thanked the Committee for its work and expressed his agreement with Mr. Ethridge that the Committee should continue. The Commission might soon have a clear-cut expression of the Arab position which would enable it to give more definite instructions to the Committee.

Mr. YENISEY pointed out that the Committee did not consider its task ended but that owing to the intransigence of the Jews it could progress no further in conformity with the Assembly's resolution. In Mr. Yenisey's opinion further instructions from the Commission were necessary.

The CHAIRMAN agreed that new instructions would have to be given but said that he still hoped that there would be acceptance of the principle of internationalization by reasonable elements on both sides. He pointed out that during the course of the conversations with the Arab Governments, it might be possible for the Commission to view the problem in a new light and instruct the Committee accordingly.

Mr. Tallec's functions

The PRINCIPAL SECRETARY informed the Commission that Mr. Tallec had been put at its disposal and asked if the Commission wished to discuss what his functions would be.

The CHAIRMAN replied that Mr. Tallec should attend the Commission's meetings. It would then be possible to define his functions more precisely.

In response to a request by Mr. Ethridge for an estimate of the present number of refugees, Mr. TALLEC said that Mr. Griffis had wanted to have the figures estimated as low as possible and had set the number at 700,000. However, the number was now put at 910,000.

Mr. YALCIN observed that the number of refugees seemed to increase with the amount of relief provided. He wondered how the number of refugees from Palestine could be more than 500,000.

Mr. TALLEC said that the relief organizations had protested strongly over Mr. Griffis' original estimate of 700,000. They had conducted a survey which had produced the new higher number. According to this survey the distribution of the refugees was as follows:

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| Lebanon | 131,000 |
| Syria | 85,000 |
| Transjordan | 99,000 |
| Areas administered by the Red Cross | 375,000 |
| Areas administered by the Quakers | 225,000 |

Mr. Tallec said that the actual number of refugees was probably in the neighbourhood of 800,000.

Mr. ETHRIDGE observed that many of the refugees were from Arab Palestine and would return home as soon as the boundaries were fixed. It would be useful to know how many of these refugees there were.

The CHAIRMAN said that during his visit to Bethlehem he had been struck by the fact that part of the population had left but that other refugees had moved there. It was, therefore, essential to impress on the Arab States that the problem of the refugees was closely linked with the question of boundaries. The sooner it could be discussed the better.