

UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

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21 March 1949

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE TWENTY-SEVENTH MEETING

held in Beirut on 21 March 1949

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

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The CHAIRMAN asked Mr. Ethridge and Mr. Yalcin for their views as to how the discussions with the Arab States regarding the refugee question might be approached.

Mr. ETHRIDGE then outlined the position of his delegation with regard to the refugee problem and explained what he hoped would result from the meeting with the Arab States.

One of the Arab representatives he said had expressed concern that the word "repatriation" had been omitted from the English translation of the Chairman's opening speech. In Mr. Ethridge's opinion the Conciliation Commission must avoid any misunderstanding in this regard and must make clear that it accepted the principle laid down in the Assembly's resolution of 11 December, instructing the Commission to facilitate the repatriation, resettlement and economic and social rehabilitation of the refugees. The Commission could not say to the Arabs that it did not accept the resolution and that it would not do all it could to carry out the instructions given to it by the Assembly.

Mr. Ethridge felt, however, that certain practical considerations had to be taken into account. First of all, the Commission must admit the fact that Israel could accept only a certain number of the refugees. Secondly, the Commission should persuade the Arab States to attempt to resettle the refugees by providing them with

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work, rather than with direct relief.

Mr. Ethridge could not hold out too much hope of continued interim relief. The organizations now administering relief were running out of funds and there was not much chance of obtaining additional funds from the United States. The Congress would recess in July and would not reconvene until January. Present relief funds would be exhausted before then. In Mr. Ethridge's opinion the Commission must therefore impress upon the Arabs the need for practical measures to be taken by the governments concerned and the importance of the economic development of the Middle East.

The United States delegation felt that peace talks, including a territorial settlement, must begin as soon as possible after the conclusion of the Beirut meetings.

Mr. ETHRIDGE said that his delegation was preparing a memorandum for the Commission's consideration, setting forth these views, which would be ready in two or three days' time.

Mr. Ethridge was of the opinion that the Commission should report to the April session of the General Assembly that no settlement of the specific problems of the refugees was possible without the general economic development of the Middle East. The specialized agencies and technical organizations of the United Nations should be called upon to provide technical and financial assistance at the request of the governments and authorities concerned.

If the Commission could succeed in diverting the Arabs from their strong stand that all refugees must return to Israel and if they could be persuaded to consider development projects of their own and to ask for funds and technical assistance from the technical organs of the United Nations, these might then be substantial results from the forthcoming meetings.

Mr. ETHRIDGE suggested that a Commission of Experts, possibly designated by the Commission might be set up to render technical assistance and to survey the existing needs - again on the request

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of the Governments and authorities concerned.

Mr. Ethridge felt that the first step in the plan he was suggesting was to convince the Arabs that they must be prepared to take some initiative of their own in solving the problem of the refugees.

The CHAIRMAN agreed with the remarks of Mr. Ethridge and asked him to set forth his views in concrete form as soon as possible.

Mr. YALCIN observed that although the official Arab position was that all refugees must return to their homes it would not be difficult to convince them that they would have to keep a certain number. The need was to convince them that Israel on its part would be made to receive a certain number. In Mr. Yalcin's opinion the members of the Commission should agree among themselves on how many refugees Israel could and would take back.

Mr. ETHRIDGE agreed with Mr. Yalcin's suggestion and said that definite quotas should be fixed, based on economic factors and the absorptive capacities of the Arab countries.

Mr. YALCIN thought there was no need to arrive at definite figures immediately, but it was important to avoid being unrealistic. King Abdullah for instance had said that Transjordan would accept all the refugees. His Prime Minister had been more realistic, however; Transjordan would be willing to receive 200 - 250,000 of the refugees provided that outside financial help would be forthcoming. Mr. Yalcin pointed out that there was rivalry between Transjordan and Syria, and the latter, realising that the absorption of a number of refugees would fortify Transjordan's position, would probably accept the same number.

The CHAIRMAN wondered whether the Israeli memorandum regarding refugees should be shown to the Arab States.

Mr. YALCIN thought that a summary of it might be shown, but he could see no reason to show them the entire document.

/The CHAIRMAN

The CHAIRMAN agreed with Mr. Yalcin, adding that the document was the property of the Israeli Government and it was not up to the Commission to make it official by distributing it.

The Commission agreed that no communique would be issued to the press other than a statement that the Commission had met.