

UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE THIRTY-FOURTH MEETING

held in Beirut on 30 March 1949 at 4 p.m.

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

Mr. Azcarate - Principal Secretary

The Representative of the
League of Red Cross
Societies

The Representatives of the
Quakers

The CHAIRMAN summarized the activities of the Commission with regard to the refugees. Up to the present those activities had been largely limited to contacts with the Arab Governments directed toward studying the possibility of applying the terms of the General Assembly's resolution. In its contacts with the Government of Israel, the Commission had not met a favourable attitude on the question of repatriation of the refugees; however, the Commission was proceeding to Tel Aviv in the near future to discuss the question further. As regards the matter of resettlement of the Arab refugees, the Commission had not yet considered a practical plan for such resettlement, in view of the position taken by the various Arab States, which demanded full repatriation. The Commission had, however, pointed out with some emphasis to the

/Arab Governments...

Arab Governments that the funds at the disposal of Mr. Griffis' organisation were limited and that the situation of the refugees was likely to become extremely serious by the end of the year.

Mr. ETHRIDGE stressed the fact that the Commission had asked the States concerned to continue the conversations. It seemed to him that a territorial settlement which would fix the boundaries of Israel would permit a study of the problem on the basis of new data which might facilitate the finding of a solution.

The representative of the LEAGUE OF RED CROSS SOCIETIES observed that it was most important for the organisations at present working with the refugees to know whether they would be expected to continue their work after the month of August. If they were to continue caring for the refugees from August to December, it would then be necessary to know what would be the prospects for the future after the end of that period.

The CHAIRMAN thought that the new conversations which the Commission hoped to have with the Arab Governments would make it possible to find a solution. He added that although the Commission could exert pressure upon the Government of Israel to achieve its acceptance of the Assembly's resolution, it could hardly ask the Arab Governments to give up their insistence upon the application of that resolution. The Commission was at present considering the creation of a "technical mission" to study the problem along practical lines.

Mr. ETHRIDGE emphasized the fact that certain of the Arab States looked upon the refugee question as a political weapon with which to fight the admission of Israel to membership in the United Nations. It was probable that the Arabs

/would make use of.....

would make use of that weapon again during the April session of the General Assembly.

The representative of the QUAKERS suggested that the return of the refugees to Israel might begin with those whose families had remained in Israel; it was necessary, however, that their civil rights should be guaranteed them. He referred to an association in the United States for the preservation of civil liberties, which was to a large extent composed of Jews and which would certainly agree to send a delegation to Israel to take up the matter.

As regard the cost of resettlement, the representative of the Quakers explained that he had consulted the Ministry of Agriculture in Tel Aviv concerning its calculation of the cost of establishing Jewish families. According to the information he had obtained, the average cost per family would be \$10,000. That sum would cover the house, equipment, and upkeep until the first harvest; 60 to 80% of the sum was considered recoverable. Further, it was thought that villages of less than fifty families would not be economical; one hundred families was considered the most desirable number for a village from the economic point of view. He pointed out that since the standard of living of the Arabs was appreciably lower than that of the Jews, the figure could probably be reduced. Consideration must also be given to the fact that there existed among the Moslems many religious sects whose relations with each other were even more delicate than those between Moslems and Christians. Most of the refugees in the Gaza area belonged to sects similar to those of Syria and Transjordan, and entirely different from those predominating, for example, in Iraq. Theoretically, all the refugees wished to return to their own homes if a minimum of security could be guaranteed

/them.

them.

The CHAIRMAN made the comment that it would be paradoxical to resettle the Arab refugees by the same standard of living they had had previously. The Jews themselves claimed that one result of their presence in the Near East should be to raise the standard of living for the population as a whole.

The representative of the QUAKERS stated that the number of refugees at present in the Gaza area was 225,000, not counting those who had recently been refused admission to Egypt. Their morale was deteriorating rapidly; the longer the present situation was prolonged, the more difficult moral rehabilitation would become. Although their first choice would be to return to their homes, they would certainly accept resettlement elsewhere if repatriation proved impossible.

A second representative of the QUAKERS drew attention to the fact that since the signing of the armistices the refugees were pressing closer and closer upon the boundaries of no man's land. This situation gave rise to dangerous incidents and even to encounters with the Jews. That very morning, when they had boarded the plane at Gaza, the representatives of the Quakers had noted that during the past few days forty or fifty Bedouin tents had been pitched on the airfield itself. Before the plane could take off, it had been necessary for United Nations observers in a jeep to drive off the herds of camels which had strayed onto the runway.

The representative of the Quakers informed the Commission that his agency was about to examine the second census, and that in spite of the difficulties encountered they hoped that the figure arrived at would not be more than ten or fifteen per cent off the correct one.

/The representative...

The representative of the LEAGUE of RED CROSS SOCIETIES declared that he did not consider those arriving from the Arab countries to be bona fide refugees entitled to assistance. He felt that the movement of refugees among the Arab countries should be strictly forbidden.

The CHAIRMAN requested information concerning sanitary conditions in the camps.

The representative of the QUAKERS explained that the camp at Gaza was completely equipped. Medical assistance and hospitalisation were free; a doctor and two nurses visited the camp each day. Before ration cards were issued, certificates of inoculation against smallpox, typhoid and typhus were required. Medical visits were also made to the refugees in their own encampments. He himself had returned only that morning from visits in the Hebron area, where several cases of typhus had been reported, and had brought back several blood specimens to be analyzed in the Gaza laboratories.

The representative of the LEAGUE of RED CROSS SOCIETIES inquired whether the Commission had any information concerning the intention of Transjordan to resettle 400,000 refugees.

The CHAIRMAN replied that the question was a difficult one; at first Transjordan had given the impression that it was willing to grant substantial facilities for resettlement, but later the representatives of Transjordan had insisted upon acceptance of the principle that the refugees should be returned to their homes.

Mr. YALCIN observed that according to opinions expressed by competent persons in Transjordan, it would be impossible for that country to absorb more than 150,000 to 200,000 refugees.

/Replying to.....

Replying to an observation by the representative of the Quakers, who pointed out that the large-scale enterprises which could absorb large numbers of the Arab refugees would be a long-term operation requiring exhaustive preparatory work, Mr. ETHRIDGE explained that there must be an intermediate phase. Before undertaking these large-scale enterprises, the Arab States might be persuaded to undertake public works of a more immediate nature, which could absorb a considerable number of refugees. As regard financing, he pointed out that the United States would not be in a position to take steps towards extending further credit before February or March of the following year.

The representatives of the QUAKERS and of the LEAGUE asked what they could do to aid the Commission in its task.

The CHAIRMAN replied that doubtless the technical mission which the Commission intended to create would profit greatly from close contact with the agencies responsible for caring for the refugees.

One of the representatives of the QUAKERS stressed the non-political character of his organisation. He wondered whether the Quakers could not take certain measures to impress upon the Arab Governments the pre-eminently humanitarian nature of the refugee problem.

The CHAIRMAN pointed out that the Arab Governments did not feel they had any responsibility as regards the refugees. In their opinion, the existence of the refugees was the result of action taken by the State of Israel, and they did not consider themselves any more responsible for finding a solution than any other Member of the United Nations.

/Mr. YALCIN....

Mr. YALCIN believed that the key to a solution of the problem was in the hands of the Jews and asked whether the relief organisations had any means of forcing the Jews to accept and respect the terms of the Assembly's resolution with regard to the refugees. The reply being in the negative, Mr. Yalcin declared that in that case there did not seem to be too much hope of arriving at a satisfactory solution of the problem.

The CHAIRMAN pointed out that final determination of the Arab-Jewish boundaries would have a considerable influence upon the number of the refugees, first because certain lands now under the control of the Jewish authorities might become once more Arab territory, which would make possible the return of the refugees without difficulty, and secondly because the fixing of the boundaries would stabilise the situation in the border area and many refugees would be willing to return under such circumstances.