

RESTRICTED

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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE EIGHTY-NINTH MEETING

held in Lausanne on Saturday,
13 August 1949, at 11 a.m.

Present: Mr. Yalcin (Turkey) - Chairman
Mr. de Boisanger (France)
*Mr. Rockwell (U.S.A.)
Dr. Azcárate - Principal Secretary
Mr. Lukas (France) - Members of the Technical
Mr. Zorlu (Turkey) Committee on Refugees
Mr. Kunde (U.S.A.)

* Alternate

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The CHAIRMAN welcomed the members of the Technical Committee, and expressed the hope that they would be able to complete and submit their report within a short time. The Commission invited any observations which the members of the Committee might wish to make at the present time.

Mr. ZORLU noted that discussion of the question of mixed Arab-Israeli working groups to estimate damage done to Arab property in Israel had been adjourned by the General Committee for the time being. He wished to stress the fact that this matter, which had been proposed by the Technical Committee in one of its preliminary reports (Com.Tech./2), was considered by the Committee as being of extreme urgency. It was also felt that measures of conservation regarding the orange groves should be taken without delay, and that such measures could only be arranged by a similar committee.

With regard to existing plans for public works which might provide employment for refugees, Mr. Zorlu mentioned the Mussa Alami scheme elaborated by the Arab Society, for the Jordan region; this plan was already under operation, but needed technical aid from the United Nations, as well as dollars for necessary equipment. Otherwise, the existing plans were merely vague sketches. In his opinion, the most urgent necessity was the sending of experts in irrigation, since the water problem was still of first importance, of agricultural experts, and of sanitary experts to combat malaria and other diseases.

Concerning the census mentioned in the Committee's terms of reference, the Committee had come to the conclusion that the census should be taken under the supervision of the United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees; Mr. Zorlu pointed out, however, that special funds would be required. Moreover, the Committee was not satisfied with the figure presently available, which differed greatly from one region to another. A certain margin of error must be counted upon; in the region of Gaza, under the supervision of the Quakers, the margin of error was probably very small, not more than 5%, whereas in Syria and Lebanon it might amount to 10-20% and in parts of Palestine to 30 or 40%.

Mr. LUCAS drew attention to the fact that according to figures supplied by the Red Cross, there were about 70,000 refugees whose lands were cut off by the existing front lines. Most of these were now living on the Arab side; if the Commission could get permission for them to cross the front lines freely in order to till their lands, approximately one-tenth of the refugees would no longer constitute a problem.

Mr. de BOISANGER asked whether the Technical Committee envisaged the creation of several mixed working groups, and if so, how many, and for what purposes.

Mr. KUNDE replied that in the Committee's view the mixed committee on property compensation questions would need to include several sub-committees: one to determine the ownership of real property where it was in dispute; a second to evaluate damage as against an agreed date; and a third to promote measures of conservation of existing property, such as citrus groves, buildings, etc. Further, there should be a committee under international supervision to deal with problems of repatriation and resettlement; this group might have two sub-committees, one to supervise repatriation and to guarantee certain rights to those returning, the second to handle the resettlement of those refugees who would not return to Israel.

Mr. de BOISANGER asked whether the various Governments with which the Committee had been in contact had expressed any views with regard to those refugees who might not return to Israel or suggested any plans for their possible resettlement.

Mr. ZORLU replied that the Hashemite Jordan Government had showed more interest in such resettlement than the other Governments of the Arab States; but although budgetary allocations had been made and plans had been promised, no scheme had as yet been forthcoming.

Mr. KUNDE added that although some plans of a technical character were known to be in existence, there had been considerable reluctance to make known those plans to the Technical Committee. The great need at present was for experts to go to the Governments and offer practical suggestions for putting such plans on an operating basis. There were two types of plans: those of a temporary and immediate nature, such as the construction of roads, buildings, etc., and those which would require more exhaustive and lengthy technical research, such as marsh-draining schemes. Such plans were not, however, open to the Technical Committee.

Mr. ROCKWELL asked whether the Committee had any information regarding the possible division of refugees, for purposes of resettlement, between Israel and the Arab States.

Mr. KUNDE pointed out that in view of the collective economy being established by the State of Israel, it was doubtful how many refugees would be allowed to return, and it was equally questionable whether any great number of the Arab refugees, accustomed to a very different sort of life, would be content to become part of such a society. The question to be determined, then, was the absorptive capacity of the Arab States, leaving out the Lebanon, which could absorb very few, if any. He did not believe that any of the Arab States were in a position at present to absorb any great number of refugees and make them self-supporting; even the Hashemite Jordan Kingdom would need outside help if any major movement were involved. The general tendency observed by the Committee had been to envisage resettlement on a small scale and on a unit basis, that is, the establishment of villages or smaller units according to the availability of funds.

Mr. ROCKWELL asked whether the Committee had received any impression of the wishes of the refugees themselves in the matter.

Mr. ZORLU replied that almost all the refugees appeared desirous of returning to their homes. The importance of the question, however, lay in the fact that the majority of the refugees in the camps were not informed concerning present conditions in Israel and the intentions of the Israeli Government with regard to returning refugees. The Israeli authorities had explained to the Committee that there would be no question of repatriating refugees to the homes they had left; they would be treated as if they were new immigrants and would be settled

according to the Government's economic plans. For that reason the Committee considered that an international committee would be necessary to defend the interests of the returning refugees and guarantee them certain rights.

Mr. ROCKWELL asked whether under Israel's economic plan the repatriated refugees would benefit by a higher standard of life.

Mr. ZORLU pointed out that more was involved than a "standard of living" as such. The planned economic life of the State of Israel was far removed from the patriarchal life of the Arabs; it was likely that the Israeli settlements in which they might be located might seem to them more like concentration camps. He agreed with Mr. Rockwell that the result might be a violent protest from the Arab States that the refugees were being mistreated; but he felt that the matter must be discussed before the refugees returned, since once they were within the borders of Israel the Government of Israel would simply claim that they must naturally be subject to the same regime as all other Israeli citizens.

In reply to a question from Mr. ROCKWELL, who asked whether in that case resettlement rather than repatriation should be the Commission's aim, Mr. ZORLU said that if the mixed committees for measures of conservation of Arab property could be set up at once, it might be possible to repatriate some of the refugees in a satisfactory manner. If the matter dragged out over another year, however, all traces of the old Arab economy would disappear. For that reason he considered the constitution of the mixed committees to be of primary importance.

Mr. KUNDE stressed the fact that the Committee had been informed clearly by the Israeli authorities that "repatriation" was an incorrect description of the operation they intended to carry out, which would be, in effect, the admission of new immigrants. They considered "repatriation" as such to be impossible, since there was no Arab State to which the Arabs could return.

Mr. de BOISANGER asked whether, if the measures of conservation suggested were carried out, there was a possibility of an Arab economy being re-established in Israel.

Mr. ZORLU thought there would be such a possibility; in any case, there would be a basis for discussion.

In reply to a question from the CHAIRMAN concerning the orange groves, Mr. ZORLU said he was not sure whether the Israeli attitude stemmed from a further attempt to prevent Arabs from returning to Israel, or from a belief that the old groves

could and should be replaced by more modern ones.

The CHAIRMAN asked whether the "kibbutz" regime had become widespread throughout Israel.

Mr. ZORLU replied that it had been extended widely. He pointed out that the settlements, which were placed in general along the lines of the frontiers and were chiefly manned by enthusiastic young Zionists, were self-sufficient unities and could at the same time serve as advance posts in case of military necessity. Moreover, their agricultural production undoubtedly had an influence upon the economy of the country.

In reply to a question from Mr. ROCKWELL concerning the Committee's impressions of western Galilee, Mr. LUCAS said that the Committee had passed through that region and that it appeared to be one area in which there was still room to settle refugees; however, new immigrants were being installed there continually. With regard to eastern Galilee, it was a closed military area which the Committee had not been able to visit. In the fertile plains region north of Gaza, on the other hand, the Committee had observed virtually no Israeli settlements; it had appeared to be almost unoccupied. He wished to stress the fact, however, that regardless of plans, large or small in scope, resettlement could only take place little by little. Very few projects could absorb more than 5,000 labourers, and the entire task of resettlement might well cover a five-year period. The most urgent necessity, therefore, was to secure a continuation of funds for immediate relief to the refugees. It was also important, the Committee felt, to secure free passage across the front lines for the inhabitants of the Arab villages along those lines, to permit them to cultivate their lands.

In reply to a question from the CHAIRMAN concerning the Negev, Mr. ZORLU said that for the time being it was still a desert region. The Israeli Government, however, had high hopes regarding its possibilities of development, and intended eventually to settle one million Israeli citizens in the area.

Mr. KUNDE admitted that the situation in general was a discouraging one unless action was taken soon. If a few refugees could be resettled satisfactorily within a short time, the effect upon the morale of those remaining would be a salutary one. He therefore urged that no further time should be spent upon surveys, and that action of some sort, however limited, should be taken at the earliest possible moment.

In reply to Mr. de BOISANGER, who asked what sort of action could be taken toward immediate resettlement, Mr. KUNDE suggested that technicians, especially irrigation experts, should be assigned to assist with the project which was already in operation, the Arab Society scheme outside Jericho. A well had already been dug which could supply water to a refugee settlement of 2,000 people; however, some of the surrounding soil had been found to be salty, and the Committee had been asked to provide irrigation and agricultural experts to advise the engineers. The Committee considered that this would be excellent starting point for practical action; moreover, the experts assigned could also assist the Government of the Hashemite Jordan Kingdom with whatever plans it might have for resettlement.

Mr. de BOISANGER asked whether there were any possibilities within Israel which the Commission could suggest to the Israeli Government.

Mr. LUCAS replied that the still empty areas near Gaza and in western Galilee might be a subject for discussion. Near Gaza the Committee had observed ruined villages of a type which could be easily reconstructed. He pointed out, however, that the Committee's observations had been made two months previously, and that the situation in Israel changed from day to day.

Mr. de BOISANGER thought it might be desirable to publish the report of the Technical Committee as soon as it was ready. He suggested, therefore, that the Committee should draft its report in two parts, the first of which would be intended for publication, while the second would include matters intended only for the information of the Commission.

The CHAIRMAN and Mr. ROCKWELL agreed to Mr. de Boisanger's suggestion, on the condition that the entire report should be as full and frank as possible.

Mr. ZORLU replied that the Committee would endeavour to finish its report in the course of the coming week.

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