

UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

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SUMMARY RECORD OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE CONCILIATION
COMMISSION AND H.E. RIAD BEY EL SOLH, PRIME MINISTER
OF LEBANON

held at Beirut on 22 March 1949

Present:	Mr. de Boisanger	(France)	- Chairman
	Mr. Yalcin	(Turkey)	
	Mr. Ethridge	(U.S.A.)	
	Mr. Azcarate		- Principal Secretary
	H.E. Riad Bey el Solh		- Prime Minister of Lebanon
	H.E. Hamid Frangie		- Minister for Foreign Affairs of Lebanon

In his opening remarks the CHAIRMAN said the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the problem of refugees in accordance with the desire expressed by the Arab states. He had already told the Prime Minister of Syria that this Commission had tried in Tel Aviv to get a clear reply from the Israeli Government on the question of the return of the refugees to their homes. Unfortunately the reply had not been what the Commission expected. Israel was not against admitting a certain number of refugees but did not consider itself bound in principle by the resolution. He did not know whether the Commission would proceed in an effort to persuade Israel to accept the resolution or whether it would choose a more practical approach. Meanwhile the situation could not wait. A

rapid survey would be made of the refugee problem in this meeting with the Arab states and, if time permitted, other problems might be studied. At first, the Commission would like to hear the view of the Lebanese Government on the refugee problem.

The Chairman and Mr. Ethridge explained that, though the Commission was fully aware of the importance of the acceptance of the right in principle of the refugees to return to their homes and would press this point with the Government of Israel as much as possible, the refugee problem had a practical aspect which would exist whether the refugees returned to Israel or remained in the Arab countries. The present condition of the refugees is deteriorating and measures would have to be taken to avoid its further decline, especially as relief funds were rapidly being exhausted. This deterioration, if allowed to continue, would have undesirable political and social consequences. The Government of Israel had not flatly refused to admit any refugees but had limited the number that it would accept with the nature of the final peace settlement. To return the refugees under the present conditions was, in the Commission's opinion, against the interests of the refugees themselves. Intermediate relief would be necessary and it was hoped that while the Commission worked, the Arab governments would undertake measures either by making requests for assistance or by initiating projects of their own. The ideal solution would be one that would at the same time benefit the countries and give the refugees work.

The PRIME MINISTER replied that he did not wish to raise a legal argument, but that principle must be admitted. The Jews do not wish to admit the refugees in Palestine. They had received a part of Palestine. Should it be understood that the

Arabs cannot return because the Jews own the territory? Therefore it was necessary to admit the principle and then to undertake a practical implementation.

The CHAIRMAN and MR. ETHRIDGE said the Commission accepted the justice of the Arab position and had attempted to change the attitude of Israel but had to face a de facto situation. They thought a solution was possible along these lines: that the refugees might return if they so desired and, at the same time, to explain to the Jews that it was necessary to study the problem from the practical point of view. Certain refugees would not wish to return to a country which was no longer theirs and where conditions had changed. The Prime Minister did not reject a practical solution of the problem. The Committee had already established a Jerusalem Committee and now would establish a Committee on the refugee problem and would call in the necessary experts. Such a Committee would be able to deal with the practical aspect of the problem.

They pointed out that, in insisting on the acceptance of the principle and doing nothing to relieve the actual problem, the Arabs were prolonging a situation which was not only dangerous at present, but would become worse as time passed. The passage of time would also make its solution more difficult.

The PRIME MINISTER said he had expected this answer. He said he wondered why the United Nations had entrusted this problem to a Commission and not to an individual. For instance, to a second Bernadotte. However, the Commission was composed of representatives of France, Turkey and the United States. He had been present when the Commission had been appointed and knew that this choice was made to give the Commission authority,

and if the Commission would not use its authority it would find no solution. He knew that in a few months the Negev would be filled with settlers. On the other hand, the refugees would either die out or settle. He added that the Jews were doing everything possible to negotiate with the Arabs, as they were thinking not only of the present but also of the future. When the stage of direct negotiations was reached, the mission of the Commission would lose its purpose. The Jews were telling the Arabs that they would give them in direct negotiations what they were refusing through middlemen.

The CHAIRMAN said he was happy that the Prime Minister had invited the Commission to use its authority. The resolution did not precisely state that the Commission should use its authority as its task was to bring both parties closer, and if the Commission had started to use its authority at the outset, it would have created a bad impression on both sides. The fact that it is now invited to use its authority is a good sign, indicative that it enjoys the confidence of the Arabs, and it will consider how to use its authority.

The PRIME MINISTER reminded the Chairman of the part taken by the Arab countries in the election of the Commission and stressed that it had the confidence of the Arab States even at the time. He wished only to repeat that when the stage of direct negotiations between the Arabs and the Jews was reached, the Commission would have no purpose. He reiterated the respect of the Arab countries for all United Nations resolutions.

The CHAIRMAN asked whether the Lebanese Government could communicate its point of view on the solution of the refugee problem as far as the refugees in Lebanon and in other Arab countries were concerned. Certain Arab countries had

promised to submit a memorandum. If the Lebanese Government would like to submit a memorandum also, it could be considered as an unofficial document.

The PRIME MINISTER said his Government would study the question and give more details on its attitude. He asked the Commission to bear in mind the overpopulation of the Lebanon.

MR. ETHRIDGE asked whether the Prime Minister, when referring to negotiations, meant direct negotiations between Jews and Arabs.

The PRIME MINISTER said he did not mean actual negotiations, but stressed that the Jews were trying to negotiate with Arabs by all ways and means and that, when a psychological moment should arise, the Arabs could negotiate directly with the Jews.

The CHAIRMAN recalled that one should not forget that the Commission was entrusted to favor direct negotiations between both parties. However, it admitted that the time had not yet come for those negotiations and it could not wait for certain points, namely, the problem of refugees.

The PRIME MINISTER agreed that the time had not come.

The CHAIRMAN asked whether the Lebanese Government had envisaged an exchange of views not only with Arab States but also with Israel on the peace settlement. The exchange of views on that subject would be very cautious and the Commission would like to hear the view of the Lebanese Government if it was prepared to do so.

The PRIME MINISTER replied that he was not prepared to discuss other problems than the refugee problem.

The FOREIGN MINISTER stated that Israel was now seeking admission to the United Nations and raised the question whether the Security Council or the General Assembly could not be in-

formed by the Commission that Israel was refusing to admit the principle of the two resolutions, i.e., the one on refugees and the one on Jerusalem.

The CHAIRMAN recalled that the Commission had presented a first periodical report to the Secretary-General and added that a new report would be ready before the end of the month, including the results of the meeting in Beirut and those of a Committee on Jerusalem. However, this report would not be made in connection with the fact that the Assembly was considering the application of Israel. That was not a matter within the Commission's competence. The report would, of course, indicate that Israel did not accept the resolution. The Commission did not know what it would say about the attitude of the Arab States. It would, of course, wish to say that the Arab States accepted the resolution on Jerusalem. Unfortunately, their answer had not been clear enough.

Mr. ETHRIDGE considered that many answers of the Arabs on Jerusalem were as intransigent as those of the Jews. The Jerusalem Committee had heard it insisted many times that Jerusalem must be Arab and this should be stated in the report. Also it should be stated that the Jews refused to accept the principle of the resolution but the Arabs refused to go beyond this principle. Furthermore the Jews would say that the Arabs used the refugees as a political weapon.

The CHAIRMAN said that certain Arab refugees in Bethlehem had expressed their desire to see an international regime for Jerusalem. This would also be mentioned in the report. The regime envisaged by the Conciliation Commission would be permanent and would provide guarantees for its solidity and duration.

The FOREIGN MINISTER explained that he mentioned the possibility of reporting to the United Nations on the Jewish attitude

because other members of the United Nations organization had mentioned it. For instance, the United Kingdom delegate, a permanent member of the Security Council, was anxious to know whether the State of Israel, which was seeking admission, was respecting resolutions of the United Nations. He added that without bringing policy into this debate, the Commission which represents the United Nations should inform the Security Council of what was happening.

As to the argument of the Jews that the refugees were used by the Arabs as a political weapon, it could be returned against the Jews, as they would make concessions only if a general settlement were achieved. Fortunately, the Arab States had other means of action, namely, economic means, and they did not wish to exchange the settlement of the refugee problem for other advantages they would grant. The refugee problem was a problem in itself and must be solved as such. The Jews could not avoid a solution without being favored by the United Nations. This, however, he could not believe. As to the problem of Jerusalem, he considered that if the reactions of the Arabs were negative, this was entirely because of doubts concerning the duration and stability of the regime to be set up.

The CHAIRMAN concluded by stating that a further meeting would be necessary with the Lebanese Delegation, the date to be fixed later on.

The meeting was adjourned.