

UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

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SUMMARY RECORD OF A MEETING
BETWEEN THE CONCILIATION
COMMISSION AND MR AWNI KHALIDY,
REPRESENTATIVE OF IRAQ

held in Beirut on 23 March 1949

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

Mr. Azcarate - Principal Secretary
Mr. Awni Khalidy - Representative of Iraq

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The CHAIRMAN explained that the Beirut meetings had been called for the purpose of an exchange of views on the refugee question with the representatives of the Arab States. He said that the Commission had not received a satisfactory answer from the Government of Israel in reply to the Commission's request for a statement concerning whether or not Israel would accept the principle of the return of the refugees to their homes.

The Chairman asked for the views, from both the practical and theoretical standpoints of the representative of Iraq, on the question of the refugees.

Mr. KHALIDY replied that in the few weeks that had passed since the Commission's tour of the Arab capitals, the Government of Iraq had not changed its position. The refugees had been driven from their homes illegally and unlawfully by forces beyond the control of the Arabs and they had every right to return. The resolution of the General Assembly had been perfectly clear on that point. There could be no two sides to the question as the Chairman had suggested, but only the problem itself.

Mr. ETHRIDGE asked how it was proposed to bring about the return of the refugees.

Mr. KHALIDY replied that it could not be a matter of opinion. The Commission was charged by the General Assembly with a definite task and it was not up to the Arabs to tell the Commission how to carry it out. Whenever there was a decision unfavorable to the Arabs they were told that that decision was binding upon them. If, however, the decision were favorable, they were told that there were obstacles in the way of its execution. Mr. Khalidy felt strongly that a decision of the General Assembly should be binding on both sides.

Mr. ETHRIDGE, in response to a request by the Chairman, expressed his views on the refugee question.

During its tour of Arab capitals, the Commission had found that the refugee problem was of primary concern to the Arab States. The Commission had accepted that point of view but had considered it unrealistic to make a solution of the refugee problem a condition for the solution of all other problems. The Commission had pressed the Israeli Government to accept the principle of the return of the refugees and had placed the refugee question first on the agenda, thereby demonstrating its good faith. It was not the resolution that was working against the Arabs but the Arabs who were working against themselves.

Meanwhile, the political and economic condition of the refugees was deteriorating seriously. In Tulkarm, for example, the arable land could not be cultivated as it lay either in no-man's land or in Israeli-occupied territory. The local population could not look after itself, much less bear the burden of the refugees in the area.

Mr. Ethridge thought that the Arabs and the Israelis must be persuaded to sit down together in the spirit of the Assembly's resolution and try to arrive at territorial settlements to determine where the refugees would go. Iraq, he thought, should be particularly

interested, since of all the Arab States it had the best potential for the use of manpower.

Mr. Ethridge hoped that the Government of Iraq would undertake measures to overcome the enforced idleness of the refugees by employing them in long range public works projects. He also pointed to the need for an economic rehabilitation of the whole area, as called for in paragraph 10 of the Assembly's resolution.

Mr. KHALIDY thought that by entering into negotiations the problem would be shifted from the urgent, practical side to the political side.

The CHAIRMAN said that the Commission would continue to press for Israeli acceptance of the principle of return of the refugees. He wondered however what would happen to the refugees if Israel continued to maintain its position.

Mr. KHALIDY replied that in that case the Commission should report to the General Assembly that the Jews had disobeyed orders.

Mr. ETHRIDGE said that the Commission could do this but added that the resolution called for the negotiation of all questions outstanding between the parties. He understood that Iraq refused to negotiate. Should the Commission report that too? It would be false to believe that the Assembly would reopen the whole question until the Commission had exhausted all possibilities of carrying out all of the instructions contained in the resolution.

Mr. KHALIDY said that as far as he knew his Government was not negotiating with the Zionists.

The CHAIRMAN raised the question of Jerusalem and explained that certain other Arab Governments had seemed ready to accept the principle of internationalization provided there were guarantees.

Mr. KHALIDY replied that his Government could not accept the principle of internationalization. There was no justification for any change in the status of the City, which had been Arab for centuries.

Mr. YALCHIN thought that it was illogical to accept one of the principles contained in the Assembly's resolution without accepting the other.

Mr. KAHLIDY said that the refugee question was of primary importance and the Commission should settle it first, without linking it up with any other problems. If that first point could be settled, the situation might change.

The CHAIRMAN said the Commission could only note with regret the position taken by Iraq in this matter.

Mr. YALCHIN was especially sorry to note this attitude in view of the fact that all the other Arab States had accepted the principle of internationalization provided there were guarantees.

Mr. KHALIDY was not aware that all the other Arab States had done so. He repeated that he was under instructions to say that Iraq could not accept the principle of the internationalization of Jerusalem.

The CHAIRMAN said that unless there were a change in this position the Commission would have to mention the Iraqi attitude in its report to the General Assembly.