

UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

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SUMMARY RECORD OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE
CONCILIATION COMMISSION AND HIS EXCELLENCY
YUSSEF YASSIN, DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER OF
SAUDI ARABIA

Held at Beirut on 23 March 1949

Present: Mr. de Boisanger (France) - Chairman
Mr. Yalchin (Turkey)
Mr. Ethridge (U.S.A.)
Mr. Azcarate - Principal Secretary
H.E. Yussef Yassin - Deputy Foreign Minister
of Saudi Arabia
H.E. Sheikh Abdul Aziz Ibn Zaid.

The CHAIRMAN welcomed the representatives of Saudi Arabia and explained the general purpose of the present meetings. He emphasized that the Commission had not so far obtained a clear or satisfactory reply from the Israeli Government regarding its acceptance of the principle of the right of the refugees to return to their homes. The Commission, however, was fully aware of the importance of compliance with this provision of the General Assembly's resolution, and intended to renew its efforts with a view to persuading the Israeli Government to accept it. The Commission meanwhile was deeply concerned about the present situation and future prospects of the refugees, and wished to discuss what measures could be taken to alleviate their plight.

The DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER expressed his appreciation of the Commission's efforts on behalf of the refugees and on behalf of peace in Palestine. The refugee problem, he emphasized, was the direct consequence of the conflict inherent in the Palestine question. The Arab Governments had tried to solve this problem

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through pacific means, but it should be remembered that even while the British Mandate was still in force, Jewish terrorist acts had led to the exodus of 200,000 Arabs from their homes. Would the Governments of France, Turkey and the United States, the speaker asked, have remained indifferent to such treatment of their nationals?

Turning to the question of the Assembly's resolution of 11 December 1948, he declared that the Arab States had accepted it because it was in conformity with their general objective - the restoration of peace and stability in Palestine and the Middle East. He called on the Commission to implement the resolution. In particular the provisions of the resolution relating to refugees could not be viewed as a subject for discussion; it was a categorical order that the Commission was bound to carry into effect. The Great Powers, he added, had the strength to implement the resolution regardless of whether it met with the approval of Arabs or Jews.

The CHAIRMAN drew attention to the fact that if a speedy affirmative reply from the Israeli Government regarding their acceptance of the question of principle were not forthcoming, the situation of the refugees would be extremely serious, and the Commission was deeply concerned with this aspect of the situation. Moreover, the Israeli Government had made it clear that in its view the refugee problem should be discussed within the general framework of peace negotiations.

The DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER stressed that not only were the Big Powers capable of enforcing the resolution, should they so desire, but under the Charter and under the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council, both Arabs and Jews were bound to respect the decisions of the United Nations. He quoted the terms of paragraph 11 of the Assembly's resolution

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relating to refugees, and declared that the United Nations could and must put the necessary means at the disposal of the Commission in order that it could implement this paragraph. Any attempt to defy this part of the resolution would result in a deterioration in the situation of the refugees and would prejudice the prospects of restoring peace in that part of the world. Furthermore, the ~~refugees~~^{Jews} would thereby be encouraged to act with impunity. The Deputy Foreign Minister was convinced that the Commission realized the importance of upholding the terms of the resolution, not only in the interests of general peace, but in order to maintain the prestige of the United Nations itself.

Mr. ETHRIDGE stressed that the Commission was interested not only in the spirit but in the letter of the provisions of the resolution relating to refugees. He added that, since some of the refugees would not wish to go back to their homes, a practical problem of resettlement would have to be solved. Meanwhile their situation grew steadily worse, and the political position of the Arab Governments deteriorated correspondingly. Mr. Ethridge re-emphasized that a speedy definition of permanent boundaries would in itself go a long way towards settling the refugee problem. He added that while the Commission deliberated on the refugee question, Israeli troops had gone to Akaba and proclaimed that the Negev was theirs. Finally, he stressed that as the representative of the United States, he felt that the Commission had not yet exhausted the possibilities of negotiation and that it should not, at this stage, ask the General Assembly for fresh instructions.

The DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER agreed that it was necessary to study the practical problems mentioned by Mr. Ethridge; his Government was prepared to examine any suggestions the Commission might care to make in this field, provided such suggestions were within the framework of the General Assembly's resolution. He conceded

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that some of the refugees might prefer not to return to their homes; that was their own affair. He wished once again to uphold the right of those who wished to return to do so; if they could be assured that on their return they would find security both for their lives and their property, much would have been accomplished.

The DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER added that the resolution of the General Assembly took no account of conditions such as those laid down by the Jews when they declared that they could only consider the refugee problem in conjunction with the general peace negotiations. If the Jews were allowed to make conditions, the Arabs would also feel free to do so. His considered view was that for reasons of justice, humanity and practical policy, the Commission and all who cooperated with it must pave the way for the application of the resolution.

The CHAIRMAN raised the question of Jerusalem, and explained what action the Commission and its Committee on Jerusalem had already taken in this matter. He asked the representative of Saudi Arabia whether the Arab States and Saudi Arabia in particular were ready to accept the idea of the internationalization of the Jerusalem area.

The DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER wished first to know for what purpose Jerusalem was to be internationalized. He asked whether the aim was to assure free access for all to the Holy Places, and pointed out that the Arabs had never impeded access to the shrines of Palestine. Their religious tolerance was well known, and he suggested that the international regime might well be entrusted to their care.

The CHAIRMAN replied that in his view the Commission was not competent to interpret the intentions of the General Assembly as regards Jerusalem; in addition to the question of free access to Holy Places, the Assembly had also apparently had in mind the

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question of general peace and stability in the Holy City. While he himself agreed that the care of the Holy Places could safely be entrusted to the Arabs, he reminded the Saudi Arabian delegation that the Commission had been given a specific mandate which was to prepare proposals for a permanent international regime for Jerusalem. The Commission's position would be extremely difficult if it had to face opposition in the matter from both Arabs and Jews, and he would be glad to know in what light the Saudi Arabian Government viewed the question of internationalization, and whether it would be prepared to facilitate the Commission's task.

The DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER replied that his Government followed the policy of the League of Arab States in all matters and above all in questions relating to Palestine and to Jerusalem. The policy of the Arab League as regards Jerusalem was clear and well known. It would be difficult for his Government to define its attitude to the question before knowing firstly, the exact nature of the proposed international regime, and, secondly, what guarantees would be given concerning the protection of the Arabs, free access to the Holy Places and the prohibition of Jewish immigration to the Holy City. Once the regime was clearly and fully defined, the Saudi Arabian Government would be perfectly willing to express its opinion on it.

The CHAIRMAN said that he completely understood the point of view of the Saudi Arabian Government. He considered that on the basis of the statement the Commission had just heard, it could assume that the Committee on Jerusalem should proceed with its task of elaborating proposals for an international regime of Jerusalem.

Mr. YALCHIN added that he regarded the statement of the Saudi Arabian representative as an acceptance of the principle of internationalization.

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The DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER explained that this was not an accurate interpretation of his statement. The Arab States and Saudi Arabia wished to ensure the protection of the Holy Places and free access to them, but they would have to wait until the Statute had been elaborated before they could pronounce on it. The Saudi Arabian Government wished to facilitate the task of the Commission and would be glad to study the proposals once they were elaborated; in the meantime it was impossible for his Government to say at this stage whether it would or would not accept the proposals as finally drafted. In conclusion, he wished to convey his good wishes to the Commission for the success of its work.

The CHAIRMAN thanked the Saudi Arabian representatives for their presence and for their expression of good wishes.