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UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

RESTRICTED  
SR/BM/8  
26 March 1949  
Original: English

SUMMARY RECORD OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE CONCILIATION  
COMMISSION AND H.E. DR. FARID ZEIN ED DIN,  
REPRESENTATIVE OF SYRIA

held at Beirut on 26 March 1949

Present: Mr. de Boisanger (France) - Chairman  
Mr. Yalchin (Turkey)  
Mr. Ethridge (U.S.A.)  
Mr. Barnes - Deputy Principal Secretary  
  
H.E. Dr. Farid Zein ed Din - Representative of Syria

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The CHAIRMAN invited the Syrian Representative to continue the expose which he had begun at a previous meeting.

The PRIME MINISTER recalled that at the previous meeting at which he had been present his delegation had expressed the view that the Commission need not try to find a "solution" of the refugee problem, since its course of action was already clearly laid down in the General Assembly's resolution. The reply had been that such a view was not "realistic" since the action to be taken must be acceptable to both sides. The Syrian Representative considered this a wrong interpretation of the word "realistic". The Commission must follow the terms of the resolution, which clearly laid down for it two functions (beyond that of conciliation) -- first, to establish a regime for Jerusalem; second, to facilitate the repatriation, resettlement and economic and social rehabilitation of the refugees.

The view had been expressed that the refugee problem was closely connected with the territorial aspect of the Palestine problem, that is, the eventual establishment of Arab-Jewish boundary lines. But the

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establishment of such lines must be the result of a final peace settlement; he drew the conclusion, therefore, that the refugee problem was to be allowed to remain unsolved until such time as a final settlement was achieved. Such a course would be contrary to the statement of Count Bernadotte in his report, to the effect that there was nothing in the present situation to prevent the refugees from being allowed to return to their homes.

It had also been said that the Commission believed the refugee problem to be a part of the whole question on which conciliation was necessary. The Syrian Representative pointed out that the rights of the refugees were beyond question and that the Commission's clear task was to facilitate their resettlement. But the Commission appeared to hold the view that such resettlement would be dependent upon the agreement of the Jews, who had shown no desire for the repatriation of the refugees. This insistence upon Jewish agreement, added to the policy of delaying repatriation until after the final peace settlement, seemed to him calculated to impede, rather than to facilitate, the resettlement and rehabilitation of the refugees called for in the resolution.

The Syrian Representative mentioned a reference which had been made to the possibility of resettlement of some of the refugees elsewhere than in Palestine; he hoped such a course was not being seriously contemplated by the Commission. The terms of the resolution definitely envisaged repatriation of the refugees and their resettlement in their own homes; no mention was made of settling them elsewhere, and such a course of action would not be within the scope of the Commission's functions.

Almost four months had now elapsed since the adoption of the resolution; during that time no refugees had been returned to their homes, nor had any preparatory moves been made. The Commission should

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now devote itself to finding a practical means of implementing the terms of the resolution on this urgent humanitarian problem, utilizing the assistance of the interested Governments. The prestige of the United Nations and of the Commission was at stake in the matter.

The Syrian Representative recalled certain obstacles, to which he had referred previously, which must be removed before repatriation could be effected. There was at present no guarantee of security which could be given to Arab refugees wishing to return to homes in Jewish areas; sufficient international supervision and control must be set up to provide such guarantees. There was also the question of destruction of Arab refugees' property by the Jews, and the provisions of the absentee law, which allowed for disposal of Arab property by Jewish administrators; when the refugees returned there must be some guarantee that they would be able to exist and to make a living. Lastly, he mentioned the fact that Jewish settlements were being established in areas vacated by the refugees. All these obstacles must be removed before resettlement would become possible.

Positive measures must also be taken, however; the Syrian Representative pointed out that one important way of assisting the refugees immediately would be to effect the freeing of their blocked accounts, so that they might have money to live on during the interim period.

The Syrian Representative felt sure that the Commission was doing its best to achieve a solution of the problem. He emphasized his view, however, that that solution could only be attained by means of a firm stand on the part of the Commission, which should state exactly what should be done and fix responsibility upon any who refused to comply.

The CHAIRMAN, commenting briefly upon the Syrian Representative's  
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remarks, affirmed that the Commission was fully agreed upon the necessity of insisting that the Government of Israel should accept the return of the refugees and remove the obstacles to their return. He agreed that guarantees of security for the returning refugees must be assured; the Commission would do everything in its power to see that the Israeli Government respected the terms of the resolution,

He denied, however, that any member of the Commission had ever stated that a solution of the problem would be realistic only if acceptable to both sides. Nor did the Commission consider the refugee question as part of its general conciliation task; on the contrary, it considered it a most imperative and urgent problem. The desperate plight of the refugees was well known, and the Commission realized that assistance was needed urgently.

Concerning the connection between the refugee question and the settling of final boundary lines, he pointed out that before the refugees returned to their homes they would naturally wish to know whether they were returning to Arab or Jewish territory; that question could not be answered until the boundary lines were finalised.

As regards Count Bernadotte's report, which had formed the basis for the present resolution, the Chairman pointed out that while agreeing to the right of the refugees to return to their homes if they wished, the report had nevertheless contemplated possible resettlement of some of the refugees in certain Arab countries. The Commission considered, therefore, that it might at some future time have a task to fulfill in that field, on behalf of such refugees as might not wish to return to their homes.

The SYRIAN REPRESENTATIVE expressed the opinion that if a refugee chose of his own free will not to return to his home, the problem would then become a matter between the individual refugee and the Govern-

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ment of the country where he wished to settle; it would not be a matter for settlement by the Commission.

The Syrian Representative did not feel that the question of whether a refugee's home was now in Jewish or Arab territory was one which must be settled before the refugee returned home. The important point was that he must have guarantees of security; a system of international control must be set up, as the only possible guarantee of his safe return and resettlement.

The Syrian Representative considered it essential that the Commission should create a peaceful state of mind among the Arab States, as the only atmosphere in which its later work of conciliation could be carried out. A settlement of the refugee problem would achieve that purpose and would greatly increase the confidence of the Arab States in the United Nations.

The CHAIRMAN thanked the Syrian Representative for his remarks, and observed that the Commission was in agreement with the Syrian delegation on all points.

He asked him whether he could make any statement on behalf of his Government on the question of Jerusalem.

The SYRIAN REPRESENTATIVE felt that any discussion of the matter at the present time would be premature and hypothetical. At such time as the Commission should have evolved a proposed statute for Jerusalem, his Government would be glad to offer its opinions upon that statute.

The CHAIRMAN observed that the Commission was at present considering the question of a possible continuation of the present exchanges of views; no decision had been taken as yet, but the Commission would like to discuss the matter with the Syrian delegation in a few days, when its ideas would have taken more definite shape.

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The SYRIAN REPRESENTATIVE replied that he was now awaiting further instructions from his Government; as soon as he received those instructions he would be glad to meet the Commission again for further conversations.