

UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

RESTRICTED
SR/BM/9
28 March 1949
Original: English

SUMMARY RECORD OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE CONCILIATION
COMMISSION AND HIS EXCELLENCY RIAD BEY EL SOLH, PRIME
MINISTER OF LEBANON

held at Beirut on 28 March 1949.

Present: Mr. de Boisanger (France) - Chairman
Mr. Yalchin (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.

The CHAIRMAN expressed the Commission's satisfaction at having the opportunity to continue its talks with the Lebanese representatives. Concerning the refugee question, it was now clear that the Arab Governments were unanimous in insisting that the Government of Israel must accept the principle of the resolution - that is, the right of the refugees to return to their homes - and that the conditions of their return must conform to those laid down in the partition plan, including full guarantees of security of life and property. The Commission considered it its duty to draw the attention of the Arab Governments to the lamentable plight of the refugees, which might be expected to deteriorate further if no positive results were achieved in further talks with the Government of Israel. The situation comprised both legal aspects and practical aspects, both of which the Commission wished to settle.

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The PRIME MINISTER expressed his full agreement and said he had nothing to add to his previous remarks on the refugee problem.

The CHAIRMAN affirmed the Commission's intention of going to Tel Aviv for the purpose of interviewing Mr. Ben Gurion on this question and of transmitting to him the views of the Arab Governments.

The Chairman then referred to the unofficial draft communiqué on the subject of a continuation of the present exchanges of views which had already been communicated to the Lebanese delegation. He explained that the Commission at present found itself in a situation which prevented it from carrying out one of the functions laid down for it in the resolution: the task of conciliation and rapprochement of the points of view of both sides. The Commission could not execute that task if it were forced constantly to move from the Arab side to the Jewish side and back; a way must be found by which the Commission could meet both sides and obtain their views more rapidly and conveniently. The Commission was therefore asking for the help of the Arab States in this problem, by requesting them to meet the Commission in an entirely neutral city where at the same time a Jewish delegation might also be readily available for consultation. He re-emphasized the fact that nothing in the nature of a peace conference was at present contemplated, but simply a continuation of the present exchanges of views.

The PRIME MINISTER could not agree that Geneva or another European city was preferable as a site for further talks; he considered that the present method was better, since the Arab Governments could easily assemble in Beirut and Israeli Government

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officials were located only a very short distance away. He pointed out that if representatives of both sides were forced to travel far from home, the matter of periodic reference to their Governments for instructions would greatly hamper the work of the Commission.

The CHAIRMAN agreed with the Prime Minister's last remark and stated that if a European city were chosen as a site for the meetings, the delegations attending must have full power and authority to carry on discussions.

The PRIME MINISTER observed that he could not give an answer on the question at present; he would reply as soon as he had had an opportunity to consult the other delegations. He asked for information regarding the proposed agenda.

The CHAIRMAN said that the Commission must necessarily await replies from all the Arab delegations before taking its decision; the Commission would appreciate receiving those replies as soon as possible so that it might complete its plans for visiting Tel Aviv. The Commission would also desire suggestions from the Arab Governments regarding an acceptable site for the talks. Concerning the probable agenda, priority must of course be given to the refugee question, but the Commission did not wish to exclude from consideration any other matter which the Arab delegations might wish to bring up at a later moment during the talks. He agreed with the Prime Minister that it would have been most desirable for the refugee question to be settled first, before further talks were undertaken in a different city; he regretted that such a settlement had not proved to be possible. He stressed the fact that the Commission found itself in a most difficult position, since it had not as yet been able to undertake its task of conciliation. The Commission would very shortly have to draft its report to the General Assembly, and it was essential that that report should state that exchanges of views were to continue; an unfortunate

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impression would be created if the Commission were forced to report a deadlock.

The MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS repeated the view that a settlement of the refugee question was a condition sine qua non of any final settlement of the Palestine question. The refugee problem remained an independent question, and any discussion of a final settlement before that problem had been solved would in his opinion be very dangerous.

The CHAIRMAN said that the Commission had by no means given up hope of persuading the Government of Israel to alter its stand on the question and to consider the refugee problem independently of the final settlement.

Mr. ETHRIDGE reiterated the seriousness with which the Commission regarded the refugee problem. If, however, the Israeli and Arab Governments insisted on maintaining their present positions in the matter, he, as an individual member of the Commission, would consider it the Commission's duty to invoke paragraphs 5 and 6 of the resolution and call for talks envisaging a settlement of all outstanding questions. If the Arab States held such talks to be impossible, the Commission could only report to the General Assembly that it had reached a deadlock and that positive achievement was impossible under the terms of the resolution. He was willing to continue discussion of the refugee question, but the Commission could not allow intransigence or over-insistence on either side to delay negotiations indefinitely on the other matters at issue.

In reply to an observation by the Prime Minister, the CHAIRMAN agreed that the Commission had a definite mandate from the General Assembly concerning the refugees; he pointed out, however, that it also had equally imperative mandates regarding Jerusalem and the general negotiations.

The PRIME MINISTER expressed the opinion that no deadlock existed and that definite progress had been made during the Beirut conversations. He promised to give his delegation's reply concerning the draft communique as soon as he had consulted the other Arab delegations.
