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UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

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NOTE

On Tuesday, 3 May 1949, at 10 a.m., the Conciliation Commission held a private meeting with Dr. Eytan of the delegation of Israel. No summary record was issued.

NOTES ON A MEETING BETWEEN DR\* EYTAN AND THE  
CHAIRMAN OF THE CONCILIATION COMMISSION

3 May 1949

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Dr. EYTAN declared that although he would prefer to see the results of the Lausanne talks recorded in the form of treaties or agreements between all or some of the Arab States and the State of Israel, he was prepared to accept another form of record, for example a report which would contain the results of the meetings with the Commission and which would be presented by the Commission to the Assembly. Such a report, being accepted by the interested parties would probably also be accepted by the Assembly.

As regards the refugee question, Dr. Eytan recalled, in the first place, that the Government of Israel accepted no responsibility, direct or indirect, for the existence of the Palestine Arab refugees. The war was the reason why a part of the Arab population of Palestine had become refugees. The war had not been initiated by the State of Israel but by the Arab States. Nevertheless, the State of Israel was deeply concerned by the existence of this group of refugees, not only for the obvious humanitarian reasons, which it was not necessary to emphasize, but also for political reasons. These refugees constituted a source of unrest in the Middle East; as a Middle Eastern State, Israel could not remain indifferent. In the opinion of the Government of Israel, the number of the refugees, although difficult to determine exactly, was not more than 500,000. The solution of the refugee problem in a practical way could not be effected by one Government alone, whether it be the Israeli Government or an Arab Government. Only collective action, of an international nature, could make possible a real solution of the problem. It was out of the question for a state such as Israel to accept the mass return of all the refugees. This did not mean, however, that within the framework of an overall plan, of an international character, Israel would not be prepared to agree to the return of some of the refugees to their homes, under certain conditions.

At the time that the General Assembly voted the partition of Palestine, the Jewish Agency had been ready to organize a state in which a strong Arab minority would have lived. The

present situation was entirely different, and Dr. Eytan considered it necessary to make certain observations, on the (a) political, (b) economic, and (c) social aspects of the situation.

(a) First, one must consider the fact that owing to the flight of this part of the Arab population, the present State of Israel had a very different political character from that which it would have had if that group had remained in their homes. A mass return of the refugees would upset present conditions. (b) From the economic point of view, Israel's situation was characterized by the fact that the great majority of its population was Jewish, and that production methods had been "westernized" and oriented toward satisfying Jewish needs. If the Arabs returned now to Jewish territory, they would find a political, social and economic atmosphere radically different from that which existed before their departure. (c) From the social point of view, it must be remembered that the Jewish population would not easily forget the fact that the Arabs had begun the war by attacks against them.

The flight of this Arab group may be considered as a movement which was not carried out according to plans arranged in advance, but which was a result of war conditions. A situation was thus created which, in the long run, might be considered wholesome and beneficial. It was well known that the existence of strong minorities had always been a source of trouble and of weakness in a State. The example of Czechoslovakia before the last war was a typical one. The Government of Czechoslovakia had followed a reasonable and moderate policy, but that policy had not prevented the State from collapsing as a result of the Sudeten question.

The objective, after all, was the well-being of the refugees. They would be happier amongst an Arab population than if they returned to Israel to live in the midst of a Jewish population which would be strange to them from every point of view. In the connection Dr. Eytan mentioned the duty of military service. In his opinion it was probable that these Arabs would prefer that that service should be in the army of an Arab State rather than in the army of Israel. The number of Arabs at present living in Israel was, he thought, between 80,000 and 100,000. Mr. Eytan added that there was every reason to believe that the refugees would not desire to

return to their former homes. He cited the case of certain villages which, as a result of corrections of the frontier after the signing of the Israel-Transjordan armistice, were to pass from Arab control and become part of Israel territory. All possible safeguards had been provided so that the population of these villages might be protected from any danger or inconvenience resulting from the transfer of the territory from Arab to Israeli control, and all necessary steps had been taken so that the population should be informed, by the Governments of Transjordan and Israel, of these safeguards and of the wretched plight of the refugees in the Arab countries. In spite of all this, the inhabitants of the villages left their homes and land and fled as refugees to Arab territory. This instance showed to what extent the Arabs were averse to living or settling in Israeli-controlled territory.

The Government of Israel was prepared, under certain conditions, to allow the return of a certain number of Arab refugees. Dr. Eytan, however, stressed the duties and responsibilities which would then fall upon these refugees, who would become "citizens of Israel". Moreover, it would be impossible for the time being to determine what number of refugees could be allowed to return. The problem could not be solved in an arithmetical fashion, for even in Israel the refugees would have to be re-settled in certain localities. This resettlement could not be achieved without international assistance of an economic and technical nature.

Dr. Eytan once more stressed the fact that Israel had never declared that it would accept no refugees. He stated that his delegation was authorized to discuss the question of the refugees within the framework of a general plan, of an international character. He added the following three specific points:

First, the Government of Israel was prepared to consider the principle of reuniting refugee families, within the limits of close relationship, on the basis of bona fides.

Secondly, the Government of Israel was prepared to pay indemnities for land abandoned by the refugees which was under cultivation. In that Government's view, it was preferable that such indemnities (after appraisal of the land by a technical body) should, rather than being paid to each family individually, be paid into a "fund" for the resettlement and rehabilitation of the refugees in the Arab countries. This would prevent wastage of the indemnities paid as compensation by the Israeli Government.

Thirdly, the Government of Israel was prepared, within the framework of a general overall plan of an international character, and in so far as practicable, to place technicians who were available in Israel at the disposal of the body which would be responsible for drawing up such a general plan.

As regards Jerusalem, Dr. Eytan agreed that the question should be dealt with directly between his delegation and the Jerusalem Committee. He then spoke of the territorial question. The Government of Israel was ready to negotiate, regarding the settlement of boundaries, with whatever State or States had a direct and legitimate interest in those boundaries. For example, it would negotiate with Lebanon concerning the boundary between Israel and Lebanon; with Egypt and Transjordan on the question of Gaza; but it would not agree to intervention by Transjordan in the discussion of the Israeli-Lebanese frontier, etc.

Moreover, Dr. Eytan declared, it was not necessary, in order to establish peace, to take decisions on the details of all questions affecting the settlement of boundaries. Once peace was established, the States concerned could, at any convenient time, engage in direct negotiations for the final settlement of these questions.

At the conclusion of his statement, Dr. Eytan alluded to the fact that the Israeli delegation had been subjected to pressure by the Commission on the basis of an opinion that Israel should be considered responsible for the present situation in Palestine. Dr. Eytan sharply rejected this suggestion and stated categorically that Israel disclaimed any responsibility, direct or indirect, for the Palestine conflict. In his opinion, that responsibility devolved solely upon the Arab States.

Finally, Dr. Eytan suggested that the Commission should ask the Arab States for a declaration of principle, to the effect that their purpose in taking part in the Lausanne conversations was to achieve peace with Israel. Dr. Eytan saw no reason why such a declaration should not be made by the Arab Governments, and he was convinced that it would be greatly appreciated by public opinion in Israel and would contribute in a large measure to the creation of a favorable atmosphere for the Lausanne negotiations.

Mr. Ethridge explained that the members of the Commission would have an opportunity to ask questions or request clarifications at a further meeting with Dr. Eytan. That meeting was later set for Thursday, 5 May, at 10 a.m. Mr. Ethridge referred to Dr. Eytan's remark that pressure had been exerted by the Commission on the Israeli delegation, and affirmed his belief that no such pressure had been exerted by the Commission beyond reasonable limits. Besides, it must be expected that in the course of the negotiations the Commission would feel it necessary to exert pressure on one side or the other. As regards the last point raised by Dr. Eytan, Mr. Ethridge declared that as a result of his interviews with the Arab delegations he could affirm that those delegations were animated by the same spirit as the delegation of Israel, the desire to see peace established in Palestine.

Dr. Eytan thanked the Chairman for his remarks and expressed his entire satisfaction.