

UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

RESTRICTED
SR/G/11
21 February 1949
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

SUMMARY RECORD OF A MEETING BETWEEN
THE CONCILIATION COMMISSION AND HIS
EXCELLENCY KALEL EL AZEM, PRIME MINISTER
AND MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF SYRIA

held at Damascus on 21 February, 1949.

- Present: H.E. Kaled El Azem - Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Syria
- Mr. Ethridge (U.S.A.) - Chairman
- Mr. de Boisanger (France)
- Mr. Yalchin (Turkey)
- Mr. Azcarate - Principal Secretary

In reply to a request by the Chairman of the Commission for a statement of the Syrian Government's position on all points of the General Assembly's resolution of 11 December 1948, the PRIME MINISTER stated the following:

With regard to the general question of a settlement of the Palestine problem, he could not see why the Arabs were being asked to propose a solution unless it was that they were expected in so doing to recognize the fact of the existence of the Jewish State which had been created against every law of justice. The Syrian Government did not accept this fact. If the Arabs were to propose a solution acceptable to the other side, what guarantees would there be of the good faith of the Jews? Their actions until the present moment had been based on force, acquired with the help of certain powers in spite of the arms embargo. The Jews had violated the truce repeatedly. They had convened the Constituent Assembly in Jerusalem, had proclaimed the Jewish Republic and had nominated a President. All these actions had been undertaken in spite of the expressed wishes of the United Nations.

The Prime Minister elucidated this by pointing out that the Arabs were being asked to recognize a de facto situation. This situation, however, had been continuously changing during the past months and was likely to change again in the future. What proof was there that the de facto situation which

the Arabs had been asked to recognise today would not change tomorrow? The Syrian Government had accepted the truce and would continue to abide by it even though it might not sign an armistice. When the Commission had assured itself that the other side would also respect the truce, it could study the situation in its finalised form and present its proposals to the General Assembly.

The CHAIRMAN and Mr. de BOISANGER pointed out that the Commission was not required to submit proposals to the General Assembly on other matters except Jerusalem and the refugees. As far as all other differences which were still outstanding between the parties to the conflict were concerned, it was the Commission's duty to bring the parties together as well as to submit periodic progress reports to the General Assembly. To this end it was necessary that the parties concerned should open their minds to the Commission on all these points.

With regard to Jerusalem, the PRIME MINISTER informed the Commission that the Syrian Government had protested that very day to the representatives of the Great Powers against the sessions of the Jewish Constituent Assembly in Jerusalem and the intention of the Jews to make Jerusalem the capital of their State.

The Prime Minister presented the above complaint to the Conciliation Commission and asked that it should take note of it. He expressed the opinion that internationalisation of Jerusalem could not be realised. Such attempts had failed in the past and the area in question could not be defended by a simple declaration of the United Nations. He doubted whether the Great Powers would be prepared to dispatch permanent forces for the protection of Jerusalem. In his opinion, Jerusalem ought to be retained by the Arabs in order to act as a link between the various Arab territories. Jerusalem had been well and justly governed by the Moslems in the past.

The CHAIRMAN reminded the Prime Minister that the Commission had received a specific mandate for the internationalisation of Jerusalem. The Commission had reacted very rapidly to the possibility of being presented with a fait accompli by the Jews, and had stated its position to Mr. Shertok in

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unequivocal terms. The Commission's attitude towards the question of Jerusalem was that set down by the General Assembly's resolution. However, the Commission wished to have the advice of all interested parties on the best method of internationalising the Jerusalem area and making it economically viable.

With regard to the refugee question, the PRIME MINISTER also registered a protest with the Commission against the ousting of the autochthonous population by an alien element. The refugee question would have to take priority over all other questions concerning Palestine. This problem could be solved in advance and before the final solution of the general problem had been found. This had been the case with the problem of Jewish immigration in the past. The Prime Minister required the Commission to proceed immediately with the implementation of paragraph 11 of the General Assembly's resolution of 11 December 1948, and to see to it that those refugees who did not wish to return to their homes should receive indemnities without delay. He re-affirmed the fact that the Arab States had entered Palestine for the sole purpose of protecting the Arab population in Palestine and had sought no territorial aggrandisements. Their intention had been to give the Arab population of Palestine the opportunity to express their desires. This purpose was still valid and the Commission would do well to consult the Arabs of Palestine, both in and out of Palestine, in order to reach an understanding of their wishes. The war was a war between the Arabs of Palestine and the Jews. The Arab Governments would accept an equitable and impartial decision of the General Assembly on this matter. The Syrian Government would do all within its power to facilitate the task of the Commission.

The CHAIRMAN assured the Prime Minister that the Commission was fully aware of the urgency of the refugee problem, not only from the humanitarian point of view but also from the political one created by the unrest that the misery of the refugees was bound to produce. He informed the Prime Minister that the Commission had already consulted Mr. Griffis, Director of United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees, on the humanitarian aspect of the problem. It had also asked for an expert to assist in the study of re-

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patriation, resettlement and economic rehabilitation of the refugees.

The Commission felt, however, that the problem could not be isolated from the general settlement. To send the refugees back under the present unstable conditions would be against their interests and politically dangerous. For the Arabs to make the solution of the refugee problem a condition sine qua non of the initiation of discussion of other aspects of the problem would involve great delay and exacerbate the situation. The Commission was prepared to place the refugee question first on its agenda.

In reply to a question by the Chairman regarding the Syrian Government's willingness to attend a conference of Arab States, for the purpose of discussing the practical solution of the refugee problem, the PRIME MINISTER replied that the Syrian Government would be prepared to attend such a meeting in an Arab capital.