

UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

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SUMMARY RECORD OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE CONCILIATION
COMMISSION AND HIS EXCELLENCY MR. MOSHE SHERTOK,
FOREIGN MINISTER OF ISRAEL,

held in Tel Aviv on 24 February 1949.

Present: H.E. Mr. Moshe Shertok - Foreign Minister of Israel
Mr. Ethridge (U.S.A.) - Chairman
Mr. de Boisanger (France)
Mr. Yalchin (Turkey)
Mr. Azcarate - Principal Secretary

After explaining the general nature of the Commission's task, the CHAIRMAN raised the question of the refugees. The Arab Governments, he said, were unwilling to discuss other problems until that one had been settled satisfactorily. He expressed the earnest wish of the Commission to see the Government of Israel maintain an open mind on the question, as a first step toward the establishment of peace.

The FOREIGN MINISTER informed the Commission that the readiness of his Government to readmit a certain number of refugees would depend on the nature of the peace settlement and could not be determined in advance. He pointed out that the State of Israel had changed its line of development as a result of the Arab exodus and there was now a completely different concept of the State than if a compact Arab minority had remained. The Foreign Minister declared that his Government could not accept the abstract principle of the right of individuals to return to their homes if they wished to do so,

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although it was prepared to accept the proprietary rights of the refugees. The problem, he maintained, could only be solved collectively. If Israel could feel convinced that the Arabs were genuinely willing to live in peace, it might be prepared to make concessions; but as long as that remained an unknown factor Israel could not commit itself.

The CHAIRMAN understood the reluctance of Israel to commit itself but pointed out that an acceptance in principle of the right of the refugees to return would be most helpful. The solution of the problem of the refugees, he said, might well be the key to the whole of the negotiations for peace.

The Chairman observed that the Arab Governments had shown a genuine desire for peace and that their apprehensions with regard to the intentions of Israel seemed greater than those of Israel towards the Arabs. The Chairman felt that an initial display of magnanimity on the part of Israel with regard to the refugees would establish a sound basis for negotiation.

The FOREIGN MINISTER replied that only by direct contact could such fears be dissipated. At Rhodes, for example, the Israeli delegation had convinced the Egyptians not only of Israel's sincere desire for peace and stability but also of its lack of any aggressive intentions towards Egypt. Such personal, direct contact had had the effect of dispelling apprehension and fear and had paved the way for peace negotiations. It was the sincere wish of the Foreign Minister that such a meeting should take place if the Arabs genuinely desired peace and if they were willing to treat with the Government of Israel on a basis of equality. If, on the other hand, the Arabs did not want peace, it would be impossible to speak of repatriation of the refugees.

The CHAIRMAN said that the refugees had become an internal problem for the Arab countries and a source of political unrest. He explained that the Commission was considering calling a meeting of the Arab countries to formulate a plan for the solution of the refugee problem, in the hope of breaking the

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existing deadlock. If the Government of Israel would be ready to make a gesture accepting in principle the right of the refugees to return to their homes, it would greatly facilitate such a meeting.

The FOREIGN MINISTER repeated that his Government was not prepared to proclaim formal acceptance of the principle of return of the refugees. He wondered whether by formulating at this stage a concrete view concerning the refugees, Israel would actually be helping the peace. He felt that the main factor in a solution of the problem would be resettlement of the refugees elsewhere, and repeated that the proportion of those who would be permitted to return would depend on the nature of the peace.

With regard to the proposed Arab conference, the Foreign Minister drew attention to the danger that the Arabs might take a strong line from which they would find it difficult to withdraw. The Foreign Minister said that he, on his part, would prefer to submit a practical plan to the individual Arab Governments.

With regard to Jerusalem, the CHAIRMAN informed the Foreign Minister of the Committee which had been established by the Commission to deal with the question, and expressed the hope that Israel would submit its full views on the matter or would appoint someone to collaborate with the Committee.

The FOREIGN MINISTER agreed to comply with this request and promised to inform the Commission within the next week of his Government's decision with regard to the possibility of its making a conciliatory statement on the question of the right of the refugees to return to their homes.
