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SUMMARY RECORD OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE
CONCILIATION COMMISSION AND HIS EXCELLENCY
IBRAHIM DESSOUKI ABAZA PASHA, MINISTER FOR
FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF EGYPT

held in Cairo on 13 February, 1949.

Present:	H.E. Ibrahim Dessouki Abaza Pasha	-	Minister for Foreign Affairs of Egypt
	H.E. Hassouna Pasha	-	Under Secretary of State.
	Mr. de Boisanger (France)	-	Chairman.
	Mr. Ethridge (U.S.A.)		
	Mr. Yalchin (Turkey)		
	Mr. Azcarate	-	Principal Secretary.

The CHAIRMAN informed the Foreign Minister that the Commission had received a mandate from the resolution of the General Assembly of 11 December 1948, instructing it to undertake conciliation for the purpose of settling outstanding differences among the countries party to the Palestine conflict, and especially to settle the problems of Jerusalem, the Holy Places, the refugees and certain economic questions.

The Commission had as yet taken no definite position with regard to the solution of these problems and had arrived in Cairo with an entirely open mind on the question. Its main guide would be a desire for peace and for this purpose it was establishing contact with the Government of Egypt in order to ascertain its attitude towards these problems.

The FOREIGN MINISTER welcomed the Commission and assured the Chairman that every effort would be made by the Egyptian Government to reach a peaceful settlement. He stated that he was aware that the Commission had no preconceived notions and declared that his Government was prepared to answer

/any questions

any questions that the Commission might choose to put to it.

The news reaching the Egyptian Government from Rhodes, however, showed that the Jews would still maintain their intransigent attitude, which was mainly due to the support they were receiving from certain other powers. That support had manifested itself even in the form of recognition of the State of Israel during the Rhodes negotiations, and had rendered the Jews even more intransigent.

Egypt had never approved the establishment of the State of Israel, which it considered the greatest historical injustice. The Commission had heard Egypt's point of view on the subject often repeated in the United Nations. The Egyptian Government was now awaiting the decision of the Commission on the matter.

The question of the refugees, however, was one of great importance and great urgency and had to be mentioned in advance. Approximately 500 refugees died every day. In order to save a few thousand Jewish displaced persons in Europe, almost 700,000 Arabs had been driven away from their homes, forced to live under miserable conditions in the deserts where they were dying, perhaps a few miles from their own homes. Such a state of affairs was against every human law and law of decency. Nevertheless, the Egyptian Government was prepared to answer any questions of the Commission.

The CHAIRMAN explained that under the General Assembly's mandate the Commission was set up not as a tribunal but in order to conciliate; the Commission had no solution to propose at the present moment. The solution would have to come from the interested parties themselves, and would have to be mutually acceptable to them. The Commission would act as a counsellor and a friend and an intermediary.

With regard to the question of refugees, the Chairman informed the Foreign Minister that the Commission had already visited the camps in Jericho and found the conditions there terrible; a state which would oblige the

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Commission and interested Governments to find a solution as soon as possible.

There was a concrete question that the Chairman would like to put to the Foreign Minister: was it the Minister's opinion that the refugees should return to their homes in Palestine, or should they be settled in Arab countries?

The FOREIGN MINISTER replied that the Commission's mandate, to his knowledge, was that it should find the best solution and make proposals to that end. The Egyptian Government could not see how it could find a solution itself, since the Jews had never accepted the United Nations directives. They had repeatedly violated the resolutions of the Security Council, both with regard to truce and armistice. They had even murdered the United Nations Mediator, Count Bernadotte; in Rhodes, they had defied and mocked Security Council decisions; they had been spoilt by a certain great power; they were being supplied with arms from countries under Russian influence, such as Czechoslovakia. The Arabs, on the other hand, were unable to receive arms in order to defend themselves. The population of Egypt, of the Arab League and of the Moslem world, in general, was infinitely greater than the limited number of Zionists, and yet they were being taken into consideration while the Arabs were being ignored.

Returning to the refugee question, he repeated that it was a very urgent matter since, according to Mr. Griffis' reports, it appeared that the refugees were living in misery and that 500 to 600 died every day. In his opinion, they should return to their homes as it was their right that they should. He stated that he had recently read a declaration of the Foreign Minister of the so-called State of Israel in which he said that the Arab refugees should stay where they were and presumably die there.

The CHAIRMAN stated that Dr. Bunche in Rhodes was working for an armistice according to the instructions of the Security Council and that there was every hope that he would succeed. Unfortunately, the conversations were prolonging themselves but that should not prevent the discussion of other urgent problems immediately.

/With regard

With regard to the refugees, he stated that the disturbing details on the rate of mortality which the Foreign Minister had just imparted would make it appear that if the situation continued there would, in a short time, be no refugees left. The Foreign Minister had said that their return to their homes was a logical solution but, unfortunately, difficulties would be encountered in its execution. Conditions in Palestine had changed, new Jewish immigrants were arriving continuously and settling in the lands and the houses of the Arabs. Should the Arab refugees return, they would be like islands among a hostile population and would have to face a hard struggle every day of their lives. He suggested that perhaps it would be easier to resettle them in Arab countries. Perhaps Egypt had no land to spare but Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Transjordan were rich in land and the loss to Palestine would be a profit to these states, for whom the refugees would work. What was the Foreign Minister's opinion on the question?

The FOREIGN MINISTER replied that this was not an equitable solution. The refugees, who constituted more than half the population of Palestine, had fled from the atrocities committed by the Jews. If Israel were a respectable state, it should be able to guarantee the rights and security of the minority within its borders; if they were an irresponsible band, he could see no reason for their existence. Under these circumstances, what would the Great Powers and the United Nations do to guarantee the security of these people? In the past, Christians and Jews had lived peacefully under Moslem authority. The solution proposed by the Chairman, by which the Arabs would be distributed among the various countries like inanimate chattels, was incomprehensible and unacceptable. The refugees had the right to return to their homes as refugees have had after every other war.

The Foreign Minister also asked the Chairman to explain how it is possible for the Arab States to enter into peace negotiations through the Conciliation Commission before the armistice terms had been accepted.

/The CHAIRMAN

The CHAIRMAN, in reply to this last question, stated that in his opinion there was no incompatibility between the two. Furthermore, the Rhodes talks would end shortly, either in success or failure. Advantage should be taken of the time afforded as well as the fact that an armistice was, in fact, to progress along with the study of other problems. The armistice negotiations were a means towards an end. All the interested parties should work for a permanent peace.

Returning to the question of refugees, the Chairman stated that he had perhaps not explained himself clearly enough. What he had intended to say was that Israel could certainly give the guarantees required from the legal point of view, but the letter of the law was not sufficient. Life could be made very uncomfortable for the returning refugees. Resettlement was a solution, as had been proved in the case of exchange of population between Greece and Turkey. The success of this undertaking was due to the fact that it had been worked out practically and not by adhering to rigid law and principle.

The Commission, he said, accepted the justice of the Foreign Minister's point of view, but the question was to find a practicable resolution, not to adhere strictly to principle, in which case no solution would be possible.

The Chairman then asked the Foreign Minister whether, if an Arab country were to agree to resettle the Palestine refugees within its territory, the Egyptian Government would oppose such a move.

The FOREIGN MINISTER replied that the example of Turkey was not valid, since the Arabs had been in Palestine for several centuries and it was inconceivable that they should be dislodged in favour of Jews from Poland, Germany, Russia etc. Perhaps, as it had been proposed, an exchange of Arab refugees for the Jews resident in Egypt and Iraq was a more strict equivalent.

The question, however, seemed to the Foreign Minister to be not so much to ask the Arab countries whether they would accept the refugees, but to ask the refugees whether they wished to return to their own homes.

/As regards

As regards the armistice, he pointed out that, if the Jews did not accept the armistice conditions in order to bring about conditions of peace, it would be impossible to discuss questions pertaining to the peace settlement.

The CHAIRMAN asked whether the Egyptian Government would be prepared to submit a document stating that it accepted the conditions of peace, thus proving to the world its own goodwill as well as the intransigence of Israel.

The FOREIGN MINISTER replied that there had been many documents and none had been accepted. There had also been many resolutions of the Security Council and these had been flouted by the Jews. What was the good of proving further Egypt's goodwill and Israel's bad faith?

The CHAIRMAN then asked the Foreign Minister whether he would wish to see the United Nations withdraw from its attempt to settle the Palestine conflict; whether Egypt would like to continue in the present state of conflict.

The FOREIGN MINISTER replied that he had not intended such an implication. The United Nations should intervene as it had intervened, but it should carry out its decisions and impose the sanctions that were just.

As far as the refugees were concerned, and in this matter he was not able to state the opinion of the other Arab States but only that of his own Government, the refugees themselves should be asked whether they wished to stay or return, since the decision was up to them.

The CHAIRMAN stated that the Commission agreed with the Foreign Minister in principle, since the part of the General Assembly's resolution dealing with refugees stated explicitly that those who wished to return should be accorded the right to return.

The FOREIGN MINISTER stated that he was in agreement with the Commission on this point.

The CHAIRMAN then turned to the question of Jerusalem and pointed out to the Foreign Minister that the United Nations had resolved to place the Jerusalem area under an international regime. He asked what the Foreign

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Minister's opinion was on the subject.

The FOREIGN MINISTER replied that he saw no reason why Jerusalem should not remain under Arab control as it had been for so many centuries.

The CHAIRMAN pointed out that, in his personal opinion, perhaps the reasons for the General Assembly's decision were de facto changes that had come about in the situation in Jerusalem. A great part of the city was under Jewish occupation. It had been rumoured that Israel intended to make Jerusalem its capital. The Conciliation Commission, however, had received assurances from the Provisional Government of Israel that there was no such intention. A settlement would have to be found which would take the actual situation into consideration and which would be a lasting solution.

The FOREIGN MINISTER stated that for his Government to approve such a measure, it would have to be convinced of its advisability unless the measure were to be carried out by superior force, in which case Egypt would have to acquiesce.

The CHAIRMAN then read paragraph 8 of the General Assembly's resolution of 11 December 1948, dealing with the internationalization of Jerusalem.

The FOREIGN MINISTER pointed out that, though there was a decision of the General Assembly on the subject, the Egyptian delegation, as well as the other Arab States, had voted against this resolution. In any case, this matter would have to be included in the terms of the final peace settlement and should be studied at the time when such general peace negotiations would be undertaken. The armistice, however, took place first, after which would come the question of the refugees. Jerusalem was a matter that concerned all the Arab States. It was not a matter in which one Arab State could make a pronouncement alone.

The CHAIRMAN pointed out that, although it was true that Egypt and the other Arab States had voted against the General Assembly's resolution, they had accepted the composition of the Conciliation Commission. The members of

/this Commission

this Commission had a specific task with regard to Jerusalem and would have to prepare a report for the General Assembly. The resolution of the General Assembly provided for internationalization of the city and, although the Government of Egypt and the other Arab States had not undertaken any obligations in this respect by approving the composition of the Conciliation Commission, it was the task of the Commission to discuss the subject at length with the Arab Governments.

Mr. ETHRIDGE thanked the Foreign Minister for the frankness with which he had explained the position of his Government and pointed out that the Conciliation Commission had a definite mandate not only for Jerusalem and the refugees, but for all problems outstanding among the countries party to the Palestine conflict. The Commission hoped, before leaving Cairo, to have concrete answers from the Egyptian Government on the following questions:

- Does Egypt prefer separate direct negotiations? Does it prefer collective negotiations together with the other Arab States, or does it wish to negotiate separately on certain points and collectively on others?

- With regard to territorial questions, what is Egypt's position regarding the Negev? Does it share this problem with other Arab States? What are the Egyptian Government's concrete views on Jerusalem?

- The Commission has been instructed to submit detailed proposals for an international regime for Jerusalem. It has no choice in the matter. For this purpose, it has set up a Committee to study the question and it would be helpful if the Egyptian Government would send its proposals to this Committee. It would be extremely unhelpful if, on the other hand, the Egyptian Government were not to recognize this part of the General Assembly's resolution.

The CHAIRMAN pointed out that this did not mean that the Commission wished to have Egypt's replies on these questions immediately.

The FOREIGN MINISTER repeated that, although the Commission was asking about direct talks with Israel, such talks were, in his opinion, impossible as long as the Jews did not accept Security Council decisions and had not agreed on an armistice. The Egyptian Government remained unconvinced of the good intentions of the Jews.

Returning to the question of Jerusalem, he stated that he was prepared to answer any questions, but suggested that, since the answers were not required immediately, it would be preferable to have these questions in writing. He repeated, however, that the refugee question was one of urgency and should not be delayed.

The CHAIRMAN pointed out that the Commission had decided to approach the matter orally since that would give greater elasticity to the Egyptian Government's replies, but he nevertheless agreed to submit the questions in writing in the form of an aide-memoire, on the understanding that this did not constitute an order but simply a helpful suggestion.

Mr. ETHRIDGE remarked, in conclusion, that the refugee problem was urgent not only because of its humanitarian aspect, but also because of the unrest it created. The question of Jerusalem was also urgent and the question of the general peace settlement was of greatest importance.
