

UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

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SUMMARY RECORD OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE  
CONCILIATION COMMISSION AND HIS EXCELLENCY  
ABDULLAH HAFIDH, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN  
AFFAIRS OF IRAQ

held in Baghdad on 18 February 1949

Present: H.E. Abdullah Hafidh - Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq

Mr. Yalchin (Turkey) - Chairman

Mr. de Boisanger (France)

Mr. Ethridge (U.S.A.)

Mr. Azcarate - Principal Secretary

The greater part of the conversation was taken up by the question of whether the Conciliation Commission should undertake the specific task entrusted to it by the General Assembly with regard to refugees in advance of peace negotiations, or whether it should consider the refugee question as one of the problems that would be the subject of such negotiations.

The FOREIGN MINISTER insisted strongly on the necessity of considering and solving the refugee question, both for humanitarian and political reasons, without awaiting the peace negotiations as such. It would be impossible to make relief of the distress of the refugees conditional on such negotiations. Furthermore, the solution of this problem would contribute more than that of any other to the creation of an atmosphere among the Arabs favourable to peace negotiations. Finally, paragraph 11 of the General Assembly's resolution of 11 December 1948 was quite equivocal on this point. In the Foreign Minister's opinion, the Conciliation Commission should simply ask the Jews whether they intended to respect the resolution. If their answer were favourable it might be possible to convene a conference of all the Arab States and the Conciliation Commission to consider the method of implementation of the decision of the General Assembly.

The members of the Conciliation Commission, on the other hand, upheld the thesis that it would not only be impractical but even impossible to separate entirely the refugee question from general peace negotiations. It would

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be possible to envisage the return and settlement of the refugees in their homes only against a background of peace. Besides it was difficult to see how the refugees could decide whether to return or not without knowing whether their homes would be under Jewish or Arab domination. In this respect the refugee question was directly connected with the settlement of frontiers. Finally, if the Arab States were to make the solution of this problem a condition sine qua non of the study of other problems entrusted to the Conciliation Commission, the Commission would be compelled to report the matter to the General Assembly. Thus a very embarrassing situation would be created for everybody, and especially for the Arab States. The Conciliation Commission was prepared to suggest that the refugee question figure at the head of problems to be considered during the peace negotiations.

The FOREIGN MINISTER explained that it had not been his intention to present the study and solution of the refugee problem in advance as a condition sine qua non of the study of other questions outstanding between the Arab States and the Jews. What was important, in his opinion, was the acceptance of the principle of the decision contained in paragraph 11 of the General Assembly's resolution. Once this principle had been accepted, nothing would prevent discussing its application simultaneously with other questions during the peace negotiations.

In reply to a question by Mr. Ethridge concerning the attitude of Iraq with regard to the Rhodes negotiations, the Foreign Minister declared that Iraq would adopt the conditions which would be accepted by the Arab States adjacent to Palestine, i.e. Transjordan, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt. This decision had already been communicated to Dr. Bunche.