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UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

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SUMMARY RECORD OF A MEETING BETWEEN
THE CONCILIATION COMMISSION AND
REPRESENTATIVES OF RELIEF
ORGANIZATIONS IN GENEVA

held in Lausanne on Tuesday,
7 June 1949, at 11 a.m.

Present: Mr. Yalcin (Turkey) - Chairman
Mr. de Boisanger (France)
Mr. Ethridge (U.S.A.)
Dr. Azcárate - Principal Secretary
Brig. R.H.R. Parminter, Deputy Director } - United Nations Relief
Mr. Ballou, Press Officer } for Palestine Refugees
Mr. Booz, Record Officer)
Mr. Ruegger, President)
Mr. R. Gallopin, Director }
Delegate } - International Red Cross
Mr. P. Kuhne, Liaison Off. } Committee
with Commissariat for }
Palestine Refugees)
Mr. G. Milsom, Under Secretary General } - League of Red Cross
Mr. van Ketwich Verschuur } Societies
High Commissioner)
Mr. Howard Wriggins, - American Friends
Geneva Representative Service Committee

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The CHAIRMAN welcomed the representatives of the relief organizations and expressed the Commission's interest in any information they could give regarding the present status of their activities on behalf of the Palestine refugees.

Brig. PARMINTER (U.N.R.P.R.) said that he and his colleagues of the other agencies would be glad to give the Commission the benefit of their six-months' experience in caring for the refugees. He wished it understood, however, that his organization, while deeply interested in the work of the Commission, had always held itself apart from political considerations; it could not express opinions nor take part in any discussion; of the final settlement of the refugee question.

Mr. ETHRIDGE drew attention to a discrepancy between the figures for the total number of refugees recently given by the

Secretary-General and by Mr. Griffis; the former had quoted an estimate of 940,000, whereas Mr. Griffis had given the figure of 975,000.

Brig. PARMINTER explained the basis on which his agency's figures had been calculated. It had become clear early in the relief work that the number of people being cared for was growing steadily and that it could not be allowed to increase indefinitely. His agency, in agreement with the three operating relief organizations, had fixed 940,000 as the number which the organizations could be responsible for feeding, although they were in fact feeding a larger number. That figure included 395,000 cared for by the International Red Cross Committee, 300,000 by the League of Red Cross Societies, and 245,000 by the Friends' Service Committee. It was very doubtful whether the total number were all genuine refugees displaced from their homes; but the general disruption of economic life in Palestine had made it difficult to distinguish between refugees and local inhabitants who, being cut off from their farms or being otherwise unable to support themselves, were as greatly in need of food and care as the refugees. Mr. Griffis, when he had made the remarks referred to by Mr. Ethridge, had been in possession both of the figure agreed upon with the three agencies and of the number which the agencies estimated they were actually feeding; he had probably given a figure somewhere between the two.

Mr. ETHRIDGE explained that it was important for the Commission to know how many bona fide refugees would be affected by any repatriation or resettlement plans, since the Commission was trying to achieve a territorial settlement which would relieve the present difficult situation in areas such as Gaza and Tulkarm.

Brig. PARMINTER, while not wishing to be quoted officially, gave it as his personal estimate that about 650,000 of the 940,000 he had mentioned could be considered as true refugees entitled to repatriation or resettlement.

The CHAIRMAN asked whether the figure of 940,000 was obtained by reference to local authorities, or whether there existed any system of control in the camps which would make the estimated figures reliable.

Brig. PARMINTER replied that one of the most urgent needs, for the purposes both of the Commission and of the relief agencies, was for an accurate census of the refugees. Such a census would require a large and specially trained staff, which had never been available to the agencies. The latter had taken such counts as

were possible in the circumstances, but they had encountered many difficulties and were aware of the likelihood of duplication and error, even though the counts were constantly checked. Their figures amounted to a total considerably higher than 940,000; it was because of their awareness of the possibility of error that they agreed upon the lower estimate.

The CHAIRMAN pointed out that such a census would be one of the first responsibilities of the new Technical Committee on Refugees, which would start its work within a short time.

Brig. PARMINTER expressed his satisfaction with the Chairman's information. He hoped the Technical Committee's census would include full listings by age groups, occupation, etc., since such information would be of great value in the work of the relief organizations.

Mr. ETHERIDGE asked what consideration was being given by the relief agencies to the question of extension of financial aid and to the matter of interim aid.

Brig. PARMINTER recalled that the period of aid originally contemplated would end on 31 August. Funds had been promised which, according to the budget laid down by the Mediator and the Acting Mediator, would have supported the relief programme for nine months from the date of its commencement; however, one-third of the amount had not yet been received. Certain economies had partially offset the lack of funds: there had been a considerable drop in food prices, and no large food distribution had been made until February; also the agencies had done less with clothing distribution than had been expected, having concentrated on feeding, with a small medical programme, and being now chiefly concerned with provision of shelter for the coming winter. Conversations were now being held with a view to extending the programme, but it was difficult to estimate how long it could be continued. If the contributions still outstanding from various countries were received, the programme could be continued until the end of October in any case, and possibly throughout November; after that time, although some small contributions might still be received, relief could not be continued as an organized operation.

The CHAIRMAN hoped that the agencies would be able to make arrangements to continue the programme as long as possible, since present developments held forth little promise of an early peace.

Brig. PARMINTER said that the agencies had long been aware of the necessity for making further financial provision to continue relief after October or November; they could do no more than bring the matter urgently to the attention of the Secretary-General and trust that the General Assembly, at its next session, would take the necessary steps without delay.

He pointed out that the relief programme was costing two million dollars monthly and that a similar amount would have to be guaranteed for its continuation. Owing to various difficulties, however, the agencies had never been in a position to plan or purchase ahead; therefore, if the General Assembly should decide to extend the programme over another six months, he hoped that the entire twelve million dollars which would be necessary could be available immediately, in order to make adequate planning possible.

Mr. RUEGGER (International Red Cross Committee) wished to stress the fact that in embarking upon the present programme, the Red Cross had undertaken a very necessary but difficult and delicate mission; if it were forced to abandon that humanitarian mission, world public opinion would lay the blame upon the Red Cross, not on the United Nations. The figure of 395,000 being fed in the area covered by his agency was not exaggerated; he agreed with Brig. Parminter that many artisans and other workers now unable to support themselves, in areas such as Jerusalem and Hebron, must be helped in the same way as the refugees.

Regarding extension of the relief programme, he supported Brig. Parminter's view that such an extension could only be undertaken on a sound financial basis. Nevertheless, every effort must be made to avoid abandoning the programme, especially in mid-winter, when the rigorous climate of the mountainous regions would bring extreme suffering and sickness to those who were still without shelter.

Mr. Ruegger read the text of a telegram sent to the Secretary-General in April by his own organization and the League of Red Cross Societies, urging that the essential question of permanent resettlement of the refugees should be taken up immediately, since the provisional relief work now going on would be useless unless practical steps were taken toward that resettlement. Although a reply had been received from the Secretary-General, no action had been taken by the General Assembly during its April session. Mr. Ruegger therefore hoped that the Commission would make a strong appeal for the necessary action during the fall session.

Mr. MILSOM (League of Red Cross Societies) expressed his organization's heartfelt endorsement of Mr. Ruegger's remarks.

Mr. WRIGGINS (American Friends' Service Committee) affirmed that the possibility of cessation of the relief programme was a source of grave anxiety to his organization also.

Regarding the figures given, he gave it as his opinion that the number of repatriable refugees was close to 700,000 rather than

650,000. He suggested that it might be of assistance to the Technical Committee in its work to consult the records of the Food Ministry offices in towns and villages; those offices had statistics of the population of each town in 1947, which might be compared with the numbers of refugees claiming to originate in each town or village.

Mr. EHTRIDGE, agreeing that the questions of interim assistance and eventual resettlement were of primordial importance, outlined their political implications as falling within the specific province of the Commission. The Commission had been entrusted with four tasks: the establishment of an international regime for Jerusalem, a solution of the refugee problem, conciliation of territorial claims and the taking of certain economic measures. It had at once found that the refugee situation was the crucial problem, and that that problem was approached by Israel and the Arab States from diametrically opposed standpoints. Whereas Israel was insisting that territorial problems had to be solved before any commitment could be made in regard to resettlement of the refugees, the Arabs maintained that the Commission was bound by its terms of reference in the General Assembly's resolution of 11 December 1948 to solve the refugee problem, and only after such a solution had been found could territorial matters be discussed.

The Commission, after visiting the various capitals of the Arab States, had convened a conference of Arab delegations at Beirut, urging upon them the interconnection of the refugee and territorial problems; as a result the Arabs had agreed to come to Lausanne to discuss both problems simultaneously.

Immediately after the Beirut meetings, and after hearing the refugee organizations represented at the present meeting and seventeen other committees, the Commission had drawn up a seven-point Memorandum, calling upon the Israeli Government to take various "measures of conservation". The Government of Israel had agreed in principle to the return of members of separated families, but made all such concessions conditional on a general peace settlement. The Commission had urged without success that permission to return should be given to the orange growers, whose land was deteriorating through their absence. An attempt to obtain the unblocking of Arab banking accounts to the limited extent required for the purchase of food for refugee families also proved fruitless. In short, the Commission had obtained little even in the case of measures to which it had felt that the Government of Israel could subscribe without prejudicing its position in the final settlement. Israel had indeed

accepted the principle of paying compensation for refugee property, but subject to reservations which might prove unacceptable to the Arabs and perhaps to the Commission itself.

In Lausanne, the Arabs had added two further items to the seven conservatory measures proposed, concerning the return of holy men and the return of Wakf property; they had been communicated to the Israeli Government by Mr. Eytan, who might possibly bring a reply on his return from Tel Aviv the following day.

A serious problem lay in the contention of the Arabs that Israel's good faith and desire for peace was to be judged by its attitude to the proposed measures of conservation and by willingness to make a definite commitment on the number of refugees to be repatriated; without such a commitment, the Arabs did not wish to make any substantial territorial proposals. An indirect approach to a territorial proposal might indeed be found in the demand that all Arab refugees (from Israel-occupied areas beyond the partition boundaries) should be allowed to return to their homes immediately. The Israelis countered by insisting that even if political, economic and security conditions were such as to make a general repatriation possible, once it had been achieved the Arabs would have no further interest in a peace settlement -- a proposition which the Arabs for their part denied.

Israel, on the other hand, wished to solve the territorial problem piece-meal. The Commission had been urging both parties to present overall proposals for a general peace settlement. In regard to the refugees, the only commitment which the Israeli Government was prepared to make, was to the effect that it was ready to take over the Gaza strip with the 240,000 refugees now occupying it in addition to the normal population of 80,000, and would allow the return of members of separated families. The Arab population of Israel would then be around about 400,000. The number of 400,000 corresponded fairly closely to the provisions of the Partition Plan of 1947. By accepting such a number, the Israelis considered that they had fulfilled any obligations incumbent on them, except as regards compensation. The Arabs on the contrary maintained that since the resolution of 11 December 1947 made it obligatory to allow such refugees as wished to return to do so, Israel was making no concession and merely demanding more territory.

In such a position, it was plain that even if the negotiations in course were successful, they would be long drawn out; no agreement of principle had yet been reached on the refugee problem, and its details could be expected to occupy the Commission several

years, apart from other problems to be resolved. On the territorial issue, both sides were insisting that there could be no final agreement apart from an overall agreement complemented by separate agreements between Israel and the neighbouring Arab States. Certainly nothing would be settled before the General Assembly of the United Nations met in September. The Commission could not be expected to be in a position to take over the work of the refugee organizations when their funds were exhausted. Mr. de Boisanger had made a useful suggestion: that the refugee organizations should ask the General Assembly to put the question of the refugees as the first item on its agenda.

In regard to permanent resettlement, conversations in Washington between representatives of France, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States Governments had led to the adoption of the McGee Plan. As United States representative, he himself had been authorized to tell the Arabs and Israelis that the President of the United States was ready to recommend to Congress next January an appropriation for the repatriation and resettlement of the refugees, to be granted on condition (1) that Israel had satisfied the United States Government that it had discharged its obligations under the resolution of 11 December 1948; (2) that the Arab Governments had agreed in principle to accept excess refugees; (3) that a plan agreeable to the Governments which had been in consultation and to the United Nations had been worked out, and (4) that through the United Nations other governments should make financial contributions, including those of Israel and the Arab States. Since Israel had refused to make any commitment in regard to repatriation of refugees prior to a territorial settlement and the Arabs would advance no proposals till such a commitment had been made, conditions (1) and (2) remained unfulfilled and the position was that of a stalemate, largely because of the refugee issue. It was the Commission's view that though both sides claimed to desire peace, they were not ready to pay any price for it.

Mr. RUEGGER thanked Mr. Ethridge for an illuminating outline of facts which could not be ignored even by those whose activity was confined to the humanitarian aspects of the problem. It had confirmed the conclusion that a blind alley had been reached. There was a risk of funds failing before the General Assembly met, and even if the Assembly were to propose a prolongation of relief, it could do so only by appealing to Member Governments, unless the Secretary-General were prepared to consider the possibility of establishing a pro rata contribution. If the Assembly contented

itself with a recommendation, it would be the end of the winter or the spring before the various Parliaments had voted funds. Since the Red Cross organizations had to take steps in time to determine whether relief should be prolonged or terminated, a dangerous interval would be left. He doubted whether Mr. de Boisanger's suggestion went far enough. His suggestion was that the Secretary-General might convene an ad hoc meeting of the General Assembly, limited in size, with perhaps only one delegate per country, to discuss exclusively questions of a humanitarian character with which the United Nations had been concerned; that of the repatriation of the Greek children, for instance, might be included. Such a step would be in conformity with the United Nations Charter and precedents for it existed in the League of Nations. The ad hoc Assembly could be convened at the end of July or the beginning of August, possibly in Europe. It might ease a solution of the problems facing the Commission, by inducing the contending parties to present definite proposals on the refugees. The suggestions would be explored by the Red Cross societies and should be referred to the Secretary-General for his consideration.

Mr. de BOISANGER feared that the Secretary-General would find it difficult to implement such a suggestion, since the Charter allowed him to convene special meetings of the Assembly only on the request of a certain number of countries. He felt that if the question figured first on the agenda in September, there might be a possibility of a solution. In the meantime, all that could be done would be to draw the attention of the Secretary-General to the great urgency of the problem which he was already following with great interest.

Mr. ETHRIDGE asked whether the Interim Committee of the General Assembly could be of assistance.

Brig. PARMINTER mentioned also the Refugee Advisory Committee.

The CHAIRMAN said that the Commission would study every possible angle of approach, and if it proved possible to make a proposal to the Secretary-General, would certainly do so.

Mr. ETHRIDGE recommended that the refugee organizations should pass on all possible information to the new Technical Committee, to enable it to make a very definite report to the Commission.

Brig. PARMINTER pointed out that even if the Secretary-General and General Assembly were to take definite steps at the earliest possible moment, there would still be the danger of a gap before monies which might be voted became available, a situation which had been experienced in the past. If, however, the Secretary-General were to authorize an advance of \$5,000,000 (the statutory

limitation) from the United Nations' Working Capital Fund, it would allow the relief work to continue for a further two months.

Mr. RUEGGER pointed out that there would be other claims, amounting to \$2,000,000, on the Working Capital Fund. An advance of only \$3,000,000 would be exhausted just as the danger-point of December-January was reached.

Mr. WRIGGINS inquired whether it had been in conformity with the Commission's wishes that the whole of the discussion had turned on the means of solving the grave financial problems with which the refugee organizations were faced.

Mr. de BOISANGER said that the analysis of those problems had been most useful, and would assist the Commission in pressing the Secretary-General for a decision. He regretted that the Technical Committee had not already begun operations and hoped it would be finally constituted by the end of the week, when the Commission would give it further instructions.

Brig. PARMINTER informed the Commission that Mr. Griffis would be arriving in Geneva the next Saturday, for a ten-day stay in which he would be at the disposal of the Commission should it wish for further information from him. During his two months in the United States, he had been in almost daily contact with the Secretary-General. He would be returning to the United States immediately.

The CHAIRMAN said that the Commission would certainly take advantage of his presence in Switzerland.

Mr. EHTRIDGE said that he too was on the eve of returning to the United States and would support Mr. de Boisanger's proposal. The United States had a responsibility towards the refugees and would do its best to discharge it.

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