

MASTER

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SUMMARY RECORD OF A MEETING BETWEEN  
THE CONCILIATION COMMISSION AND  
THE DELEGATION OF ISRAEL

held in Lausanne on Wednesday,  
3 August 1949, at 10:15 a.m.

Present: Mr. Porter (U.S.A.) - Chairman  
Mr. de Boisanger (France)  
Mr. Yalcin (Turkey)  
Dr. Azcarate - Principal Secretary  
Mr. Reuven Shiloah }  
Mr. Elias Sasson } - Representatives of  
Mr. Tuvia Arazi } Israel

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The CHAIRMAN recalled that shortly after the resumption of talks the Israeli delegation had indicated that it had in mind certain specific proposals with regard to the refugee question. The Commission considered that willingness to discuss the refugee question as an indication that definite progress could be made. The Israeli delegation had, however, stated that it would advance those proposals provided it were agreed by the Arab delegations that the ensuing discussions would come within the framework of a general solution of the whole refugee problem and that they would constitute the first step in the conclusion of a general agreement on all outstanding questions. The Commission had transmitted the Israeli suggestions to the Arab delegations, and the latter had evidenced an attitude of cooperation and had agreed in substance to consider the Israeli proposals in the manner requested, while at the same time stressing to a certain extent the importance of the Protocol of 12 May. They had also expressed themselves as equally desirous of reaching a settlement of all outstanding questions.

In view, therefore, of the Arab acceptance of the conditions laid down, the Chairman now invited the Israeli delegation to present its concrete proposals.

Mr. SHILOAH recalled that he had the preceding day handed to the Principal Secretary a copy of Mr. Sharett's address to the Knesset on 1 August, which he hoped the Commission had had the opportunity to read (document IS/33).

In that statement, as well as in the letter he had sent to the Principal Secretary on 29 July, it had been made clear that only when the Arab delegations signified their readiness to enter upon general peace negotiations would Israel be prepared to discuss the refugee question as the first step in such negotiations and to state the contribution it would be prepared to make to the settlement of the refugee problem. The Israeli delegation felt that the most important consideration was not the exact figure of the number of refugees it would be able to accept, but rather the evolving of a method and a comprehensive scheme which would help to settle the entire problem. Mr. Shiloah welcomed the Chairman's statement that the Arabs had accepted his delegation's stipulations; but he wished it made perfectly clear that the Arabs must agree to enter into discussions directed toward a general settlement of all outstanding problems, and that only subject to such agreement would the Israeli delegation enter upon a specific discussion of the refugee problem as a first step toward such a general settlement. If that was indeed the understanding, he urged that the Commission should find a suitable manner of making the agreement public.

The CHAIRMAN reiterated his previous statement of the two conditions laid down by the Israeli delegation which had been transmitted to and accepted by the Arab delegations. He felt that the Arab delegations were in a conciliatory frame of mind and were ready, with the Commission, to evaluate the progress made toward a solution of the refugee problem. That problem had been thus placed at the head of the list of outstanding problems to be discussed. However, he hoped there would be no misunderstanding; the beginning of discussion of the refugee question did not automatically open up discussion of all other outstanding questions at the same time, nor did it oblige the Arab delegations to discuss other questions at the present moment. He did not feel that there was any substantial difference between Mr. Shiloah's formulation of the position and that understood by the Commission and the Arab delegations; it was merely a question of procedure which he desired to have clarified.

Mr. SHILOAH did not wish to spend too much time in a procedural discussion, but thought it necessary that the position should be made quite clear. His delegation had from the beginning endeavoured to take a practical view, not only of the refugee problem but of all the other pending questions as well.

He was willing, and had been authorized, to preserve as much flexibility as possible in procedural matters; but he had certain instructions from his government beyond which he could not go; namely, that the beginning of discussions of the refugee question should be, by agreement with the opposing party, the commencement of general discussions of all problems involved in the final settlement. His delegation did not insist upon opening discussion of other questions at the present time, and agreed for the moment to confine itself to the refugee question; but the principle involved must be clearly understood and accepted. Even this conciliatory move had threatened to precipitate a crisis in the Knesset and in Israeli public opinion, in the face of which his Government had maintained its stand and its instructions to its delegation in Lausanne. The Arab delegations were free at any time to reject his delegation's suggestions; responsibility for any failure of the negotiations would then be clearly fixed. He did not feel, however, that he was in a position to present his specific proposals unless he had assurance of the agreement of the Arab delegations to regard the present discussions as the beginning of consideration of the overall problem.

The CHAIRMAN said that in his opinion the Arab representatives were as anxious for a solution of the general problem as was the Israeli delegation. The Commission had no desire to divide the problem into separate considerations; it considered the present question a purely procedural matter and merely wished to have the position of the Commission and of the Arab delegations clearly understood. It was true that the Arab delegations had laid certain stress upon the provisions of the resolution of 11 December 1948 and of the Protocol of 12 May 1949; but he pointed out that they had accepted the principles maintained by the Israeli delegation as laid down in the statement formulated by the Commission.

Mr. SHILOAH then asked the Commission's permission to publish his letter to the Principal Secretary, stating that he had been officially informed by the Commission that the Arabs had accepted the conditions laid down and that for that reason discussions were being opened on the refugee question. He would prefer that the Commission itself should release a statement to the press, in whatever form it deemed suitable. However, in view of the present situation in Israel and for the sake of clarity, he thought it necessary to inform the Israeli public that its delegation in Lausanne had agreed to advance proposals on the

refugee question only because it had been assured of Arab acceptance of the position that discussions on that question constituted the beginning of discussions on the overall final settlement.

The CHAIRMAN assured the Israeli delegation that the Commission understood its position and its desire for a public statement. The form which that statement would take was a matter which must be decided by the Commission in a private meeting. He promised to inform the Israeli delegation promptly of the decision taken.

Mr. SHILOAH wished to preface his proposals with certain general remarks. He pointed out that the refugee problem was not of Israel's making. Israel had never made it a policy to force the Arabs out of Palestine; on the contrary it had been ready to take into account, when shaping its economy, a large Arab population within its borders. The Arab States, however, had provoked a war in order to prevent implementation of a United Nations resolution; and the result of that war had been a widespread exodus of Arabs from Palestine, an exodus which Israel had been unable to stem. That fact had produced a major change in the structure of the State of Israel and in the pattern of its development. The period of the fighting, the truce and the armistice had been a period of development, of immigration, of shaping of the structure of the State, of its administration and of its economy. This process had taken place while only a small number of Arabs were resident within Israel's borders. Certain situations had been created which could not now be destroyed. Moreover, Israel had been made aware of the dangers to which it was exposed; it had become security-conscious. Although the people of Israel were far from indifferent to the sufferings of the refugees, they could not divorce the question itself from the vital security considerations involved. There were also practical considerations; it was recognized that the refugee problem must be solved before Israel and the Middle East could enter into a period of social and economic revival. Israel regarded the final peace with the Arab States, the settlement of the refugee problem, and the stability of the Middle East as three interlinked problems, which must be solved together.

In spite of the security factors involved, however, the Government of Israel was willing to make a reasonable contribution, through repatriation, to the solution of the refugee problem, provided that contribution constituted the beginning of

a comprehensive plan for a final settlement of the question. This contribution must, of course, be limited by the two vital considerations of national security and economic feasibility. After careful study of the possibilities, it had been decided that Israel could afford to increase by a considerable number, through repatriation, the number of refugees remaining in Israel at the end of hostilities. He did not wish to lay undue stress upon figures, although he would give approximate numbers if the Commission wished. The figure had been decided upon in spite of the fact that acceptance of such a number would tax the country's resources to the limit from an economic and security point of view.

It was the firm conviction of the Government of Israel that no lasting solution of the refugee problem could be found unless the Arab States agreed to share the responsibility for settlement. An effort must be made to study the question and to pool the local resources of Israel and of the Arab States; also the possibilities of international help and guidance in working out and implementing a plan of settlement must be investigated. Mr. Shiloah believed that if the problem was approached in the right spirit, it would afford an unprecedented opportunity for economic revival and new development for Israel and all the Middle East.

The Israeli delegation therefore proposed that suitable machinery should be set up by the appropriate organs of the United Nations, to study urgently the economic potentialities of the Arab States, that the organ so created should be assisted by Israel and the Arab States, and that it should be charged with the preparation of a comprehensive plan and specific projects for resettlement. Within the framework of such a procedure, and subject to the provision of international assistance, Israel would make the contribution he had mentioned to the solution of the refugee problem.

The CHAIRMAN asked whether Mr. Shiloah could give a general estimate of the total Arab population which Israel envisaged within its borders, describing in general terms the distribution of that population.

Mr. SHILOAH replied that with the territory it possessed at present, Israel could contemplate increasing the Arab population, over the total existing at the end of hostilities, by about 100,000.

The CHAIRMAN asked for an estimate of the present Arab population in Israeli territory, and the total which that population would reach after the proposed repatriation was complete.

Mr. SHILOAH estimated that the present Arab population of Israel amounted to about 165,000 to 170,000. This number represented a definite increase over the number existing at the end of hostilities, since in spite of its insistence that it could not repatriate any refugees for the time being, the Israeli Government had repeatedly, for humanitarian reasons, allowed numbers of refugees to return. The total population envisaged by his Government, if its present territory remained the same, would be about 250,000. In fixing that figure, the Government was taking into account both security considerations and the considerable normal increase in the Arab population which might be expected to take place after resettlement had been accomplished and the standard of living had been raised.

The CHAIRMAN observed that the net figure of refugees to be repatriated would therefore be approximately 80,000.

Mr. SHILOAH wished to make it clear that his Government had reached the figure quoted only after exhaustive study. During the past year Israel could have adhered to the letter of its decision to allow no refugees to return; in that case the number it could now repatriate would be considerably more impressive. Instead, however, it had endeavoured to alleviate the distress of the refugees by allowing some to return during this interim period; consequently the total number that it could receive was proportionately lowered. He did not feel that Israel should be penalized for its humanitarian action by being told now that it must repatriate a certain number of refugees regardless of the number who had already returned.

Mr. de BOISANGER asked whether the Israeli delegation could, either now or at a later moment, furnish details of its Government's plan for the reinstallation and distribution of the Arab population to be repatriated.

Mr. SHILOAH said that he would need more time to prepare a detailed reply to Mr. de Boisanger's question. He could state, however, that Israel intended to retain its authority to direct the repatriated Arabs to specific localities and to influence their economic settlement. It was desired that they should fall in with the general pattern of Israel's economic development, including certain agricultural reforms which were already being put into operation. Resettlement of the Arabs would also be

influenced by questions of security; an effort would be made to locate them in areas where they would not be in contact with possible enemies of Israel. He re-affirmed, however, that no discrimination of any kind was intended.

Mr. YALCIN wished, at that juncture, to know what Mr. Shiloah understood by the term "discrimination".

Mr. SHILOAH said that his statement that no discrimination existed could not possibly lend itself to any interpretation other than that Israeli Arabs would enjoy the same rights and benefits in every field as all the inhabitants of Israel, so long as they did not appear to have any subversive intentions or to indulge in any subversive activities which would undermine the stability of the State.

In reply to a further comment from Mr. Yalcin who said that the Israeli authorities seemed to have attributed a subversive character to the refugees since Palestinian Arabs who returned would not be able to choose the locality where they would be resettled, Mr. Shiloah pointed out that a free choice in that connection did not exist for some other citizens, particularly immigrants. Israeli citizens were of course free to go where they wished but inasmuch as State assistance was being granted them, many factors such as the ability of the individual in question and considerations of security, had to be taken into account.

Palestinian Arabs were not necessarily being singled out as subversive elements, indeed others might be involved, but until a general pacification had been achieved in the Middle East, a feeling existed within Israel that Israeli Arabs might be used for subversive purposes. His Government hoped to overcome that possibility by its fair treatment of the Arabs, who would receive the same full social benefits, with regard to education and medical care for instance, as all other citizens. For reasons of security, however, it would obviously be inadvisable to allow Arabs to resettle near the borders with the Arab States. Moreover, certain areas were more suitable for the type of training which the Arab fellahs had.

Mr. de BOISANGER said that he had expected the Israeli representative's reply to his question to take the form it had done. During the present meeting, Mr. Shiloah had informed the Commission that the State of Israel envisaged receiving international assistance. He wished to know whether it was the Israeli Government's view that such a scheme would not provide directly

for the resettlement of the refugees in certain zones, but would contribute to the general economic development of Israel, thus enabling the State of Israel itself to make provisions for resettling the refugees. Since that was a very specific point, he would not press for a reply at the present meeting if Mr. Shiloah did not think he was as yet in a position to answer.

Mr. SHILOAH said he would prefer to avail himself of the French representative's suggestion and answer at some later date.

The CHAIRMAN enquired whether, through its various ministries, the State of Israel was in possession of definitive estimates as to the number of Palestinian Arabs who fell under the category of refugees. It would be most helpful for the Commission to have that information.

Mr. SHILOAH said he could obtain that information for the Commission although he did not have it with him at present and did not wish to speculate on the numbers. Mr. Sasson had informed him that some data had already been submitted to the Commission and, in particular, a detailed analysis of the distribution of the refugees. He would try and make that information as complete as possible by adding any recent details available.

The CHAIRMAN asked Mr. Shiloah whether, since he had referred to the fact that the number of Arab refugees who would be allowed to return had been arrived at after definitive studies made by the Israeli Government, he could give the Commission some general survey of those studies.

Mr. SHILOAH said that he would prefer to postpone discussion of that question until the arrival in Lausanne in a few days of Mr. Lifshitz who had himself worked on that question.

The CHAIRMAN recalled that the Israeli representative had referred to the suggestion for an international group, working under United Nations supervision, who would make a study of the matter and prepare a comprehensive plan for the return of the refugees, taking into account the resources of the Middle East as a whole. The Commission had itself been considering such a plan, and he wished to ask the representative of Israel whether he was in a position to say what his Government's attitude would be in the event of such a body coming to the conclusion, after its studies of the potentialities of the various Middle East countries, that, with appropriate international assistance, the State of Israel could feasibly absorb a larger number of refugees than that which it had itself stated.



Mr. SHILOAH replied that, although he was obviously not in a position to make a definitive reply to that question, he would explain his own personal reactions to the Commission.

He had pointed out that his Government had arrived at a certain figure which was based on considerations of economic feasibility and national security, and he considered that, with regard to the latter, the Government of Israel itself was best qualified to judge. In the past, international assurances had also been given, but instinctive reactions and feeling of the situation within the country had proved to be more reliable.

However, if the Commission so desired, he could put that specific question to his Government in order to be able to supply the Commission with a fully authoritative reply. He agreed with the Chairman who said that he was sure that the Israeli Government would attach considerable weight to the views expressed by such an international group, but emphasized the fact that considerations of national security were given very great importance.

The CHAIRMAN said that he hoped he could construe the Israeli representative's general statement as indicating that the number he had mentioned of refugees who would be allowed to return was not absolute or inflexible.

Mr. SHILOAH accepted that interpretation of his remarks on the understanding that, to the best of his knowledge at the present time, that figure already very heavily taxed the country's possibilities of accepting repatriates. He wished to impress upon the Commission that the number arrived at represented an honest estimate of Israel's capacity to absorb returning refugees at great sacrifice and risk to itself, and that his Government had had no intention of proposing it as a basis for bargaining.

The CHAIRMAN wished to express his appreciation for the Israeli representative's constructive presentation of the situation in general terms. He considered it to be a recognition of the part to be played by the State of Israel with regard to the tragic human problem involved. He hoped that the Commission would soon have the opportunity to study the technical details of the scheme and, in the meantime, the Commission was grateful for the spirit in which the proposals had been offered.

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