

UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

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SAMPLING SURVEY OF ABANDONED PROPERTY  
CLAIMED BY ARAB REFUGEES

(Working paper prepared by the Secretariat)

The following sampling survey has been prepared on the basis of a proposed procedure approved by the Commission at its meeting on 6 March 1951. It is based on questionnaires issued by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees to the 84,000 heads of refugee families (representing a total of 340,000 persons) in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

These questionnaires ("fact-sheets") solicited information on various data of interest to the Agency, such as family size, place of origin, religion, etc. One of the questions requested a general statement on the property allegedly abandoned by the refugees in Israel. No proof or documentation of the claims was required. Accordingly, many of the replies were vague and general. Refugees often did not specify the nature of land claimed, and more often only vaguely described it as "fruit-land" without saying whether it was citrus, olive or orchard land.

Claims to buildings were also in many cases vaguely expressed. "Houses" were claimed as property without any specification whether they were mud-huts, metal structures or stone buildings. However, in most cases the claimants gave the number of rooms of the buildings claimed.

Statistical Sheets

In order to elicit the maximum amount of information from these questionnaires, random samples totalling 8,400 (ten per cent of the entire aggregate) were established. The answers referring to abandoned property were transferred to "Statistical Sheets" (sample attached to this report). These "Statistical Sheets" list the claimant's place of origin, the number and type of buildings claimed and the area and type of land claimed. The claims to land property are listed in three different columns: "cultivated land", "arbor land" and "other land". The latter column lists urban or building land and land not specified. A separate column in the "Statistical

Sheets" lists the number of refugee families making no claim to abandoned property.

Summary Sheets

The data garnered in the "Statistical Sheets" were then transferred to "Summary Sheets", each of them comprising the claims made by 100 heads of families. (A sample of a "Summary Sheet" is attached to this report). In the Summary Sheets, the answers obtained were broken down into more specific data: one-room houses and shops were listed separately as well as the total number of room-units claimed. A column "Industrial Structures" lists buildings specified as non-residential, such as work-shops, mills, garages, manufacturing structures, etc. A sub-column under the heading of "Arbor land" lists the number of dunums specified as citrus land and another column lists the number of dunums specified as building land in the "Statistical Sheets".

Sampling

The samples of one hundred could not be regarded as representative, the maximum and minimum data differing as much as thirty-five per cent from the median. Random samples of two hundred were then compiled, with a better but still unsatisfactory result. The maximum-minimum deviations were still sixteen per cent. The next step - bringing the samples up to four hundred - brought a statistically satisfactory result: maximum and minimum data deviated no more than eight per cent from the median.

Results

On the basis of these representative samples the following results were obtained:

(a) Number of claims:

Thirty-four per cent of the 84,000 refugee families (28,600 families) claim no property whatsoever; the remaining sixty-six per cent (55,400 families) claim either buildings or land or both.

(b) Houses:

Ownership of houses is claimed by 49,500 families (fifty-nine per cent of the total 84,000 refugee families in Jordan).

Broken down into categories, these claims are as follows:

7,500 families claim	7,500 one-room houses	7,500 rooms
42,000 " " " " " "	40,000 houses (average	150,500 rooms
	3.8 rooms)	

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49,000 families	47,500 houses	158,000 rooms
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at the creation of the State". Here again the origin of the additional 1,550,000 dunums is not stated. However the statement that "most of" the two million dunums to be purchased under the new plan is "abandoned Arab property", permits the assumption that the Arab property not already disposed of, may still exceed two million dunums.

Another official Israeli statement, however, throws light on the origin of those one million and a half dunums. In addition this statement reveals that Israeli authorities estimate the total area of "abandoned" Arab land in Israel to be more than four million dunums, an order of magnitude quite comparable to the one indicated by the present survey. The statement referred to, was made by Mr. Joseph Weitz, member of the Board of Directors of the Jewish National Fund at a press conference in Jerusalem on 21 January 1951 and reported in the Jewish Agency Digest of 2 February. The relevant paragraph of the report reads:

"Mr. Weitz said that the J.N.F. had purchased about 1,100,000 out of a total of more than four million dunums of cultivable abandoned Arab land".

Another factor, on which an evaluation of the present survey may be based, is the average acreage owned by Arabs still in Israel. According to official Israeli statistics, the "rural Arab population" in Israel numbers 123,250. Of this number 19,000 are classified by the Israeli Ministry of Agriculture as "Arab refugees in Israel", 19,240 as "farmers lacking sufficient land who seek employment in the towns; 85,227 are classified as "earning their living by the cultivation of land". Also according to official Israeli statements, the "rural Arabs" in Israel own 1,300,000 dunums of land of which 500,000 dunums are considered "fit for cultivation". (Jewish Agency Digest No. 29, 1951).

The 85,277 Arabs in Israel "earning their living by the cultivation of land" correspond, according to the accepted ratio, to 21,330 families. On the basis of above figures, the average land-holding of such a family is 69 dunums, their average property of "land fit for cultivation" is 22 dunums. It will be noted that the figure for land (69 dunums) corresponds very closely to the average refugee claim (63 dunums). There is, however, a notable difference between the average refugee claim to arable land (44 dunums) and the average acreage of "land fit for cultivation" owned by Arabs now in Israel (22 dunums). This discrepancy may perhaps be partly explained by the fact that the claimant's definition of "cultivated land" and the Israeli Department of Agriculture definition of "land fit for cultivation" are at variance.

Housing Claims

According to the "Survey of Palestine", the average density of housing among Palestinian Arabs was three persons per room. This would amount to 113,000 rooms for the 340,000 refugees in Jordan as against 158,000 rooms claimed. Of course, not all the refugees have lived in self-owned or Arab-owned houses. But Arab living standards in the area which is now Israel, were higher than in the rest of Palestine and housing less congested there, which fact may partially account for the claim to a total of 158,000 room-units.

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