

UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

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OBSERVATIONS ON SOME OF THE PROBLEMS
RELATING TO PALESTINE REFUGEES

I. Number of Refugees to be Repatriated or Resettled

After conferring with the three organizations which distribute United Nations relief (League of Red Cross Societies, which distributes in the Lebanon, Syria and Transjordan; International Committee of the Red Cross, which distributes in Palestine with the exception of the Gaza area; and the Quakers, who distribute in the Gaza area), Mr. Griffis, Director of the United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees, found that the probable figure for refugees receiving relief is 910,000. The distributing organizations stated that they had done their best to exclude "phony" refugees. This figure, which was established as a result of a count taken by the three organizations, does not include the refugees in Iraq (apparently 4,000), for whom the Government of Iraq takes sole responsibility.

The above figure can be broken down as follows:

Lebanon	130,000
Syria	85,000
Transjordan	100,000
Palestine (except the Gaza area)	385,000
Gaza area	<u>210,000</u>
Total:	910,000

The figure given by the Government of Israel, in its memorandum is 530,000. It is obvious, however, that it is in the interest of that Government to under-estimate the number of refugees.

Pending the possibility of undertaking a detailed and accurate inquiry, the Commission could safely assume that the number of refugees to be repatriated or resettled (in Palestine or elsewhere), amounts to approximately 650,000. In my view, it should be recognized that "refugees" considered as such by the relief organizations, include persons whose homes are in Arab areas occupied by the Arab forces and in particular in all the villages near the military lines.

Further, a certain number of refugees are already progressively filtering into the life and economy of the countries in which they are now living, and this tendency will certainly increase as time goes on.

I do not need to stress that this is only a rough and provisional estimate, but it will suffice to give the Commission a preliminary idea of the scope of the problems to be solved, and in particular of the amount of land and capital needed for the economic and social rehabilitation of the refugees, above all of the rural settlers.

It will be shown later in this paper that the Arab population of Palestine was divided as follows:

Urban	36%
Rural	64%

The 650,000 refugees to be repatriated or resettled would therefore fall into the following two groups:

/ Urban

Urban refugees	235,000
Rural refugees	<u>415,000</u>
Total number of refugees	<u>650,000</u>

It is interesting to compare these figures with the following estimates drawn up on 31 December 1946 and published in June 1947 by the Government of Palestine in the "Supplement to the Survey of Palestine."

Arab Population of Palestine

	<u>Moslems</u>	<u>Christians</u>	<u>Total</u>
Towns	329,000	116,000	445,000
Country	<u>748,000</u>	29,000	777,000
Total	1,077,000	145,000	1,222,000

(The 60,000 nomadic Arabs are not included in these figures)

The following figures, quoted from the same source, show the Arab population (Moslems and Christians) of the various sub-districts of Palestine.

1) Sub-districts occupied by Israel

Safad	48,940
Acre	62,930
Tiberias	26,410
Beisan	17,340
Nazareth	41,930
Haiifa	129,680
Jaffa	113,770
Beersheba	<u>7,210</u>
Total Arab population of these sub-districts	448,210

2) Sub-districts entirely occupied by the Arabs

Jenin	61,210
Nablus	94,370
Ramallah	<u>48,930</u>
Total Arab population of these sub-districts	204,510

3) Sub-districts occupied partly by Israel and partly by the Arabs

Tulkarm	77,020
Jerusalem	150,590
Hebron	92,810
Ramleh	113,770
Gaza	<u>147,000</u>
Total Arab population of these sub-districts	581,190

/ If

If one looks at the map showing the present military position, it will be seen that it is not considerably wrong to say that the population of these sub-districts is almost equally distributed between the areas occupied by Israel and the areas occupied by the Arabs. This being so, there would be approximately 290,000 Arabs whose homes are in Arab-occupied areas in these sub-districts.

Finally, there would be 448,000 plus 290,000 Arabs whose homes are in Israeli-occupied areas of Palestine, making a total of 738,000.

Compared with this total, the figure of 650,000 Arab refugees to be repatriated to Israel or to be resettled elsewhere would seem to be a reasonable estimate.

Of these 650,000 refugees, 64%, that is 410,000, are in all probability rural settlers. The problem of land must therefore be solved (in Israel or elsewhere) in respect to approximately 400,000 rural settlers.

It is doubtless impossible at present to ask the refugees which of them wish and which do not wish to return home. Such a question would be superfluous as regards those coming from the parts of Palestine which will remain Arab, and therefore a "plebiscite" of this kind could only be thought of after the delimitation of frontiers, and the Commission cannot officially prejudge the frontiers. Furthermore, if one visits the refugee camps and interrogates the refugees, they all declare that they wish to return home, an attitude which can be explained by the following factors:-

- the innate feelings of every human being;
- the wretched position, both material and moral, of the refugees;

/ - the

- the moral and political pressure that is being put on them owing to their collective existence;
- their ignorance (or pretended ignorance) of the changes that have taken place in Israel since their departure;
- their conviction that they can always ultimately give up the idea of returning, when and if another solution is offered to them.

II Approximate Amount of Land and Capital Necessary for the Resettlement of 400,000 Rural Settlers

The study outlined below is made without prejudice to the question whether all or some of the 400,000 Arab refugee rural settlers coming from the parts of Palestine under Israeli occupation will or will not go home.

The purpose of this study is merely to calculate what the resettlement of 400,000 rural settlers in Middle Eastern countries means in terms of land and money. It need not be stressed that the estimates given are approximate ones.

In order to clarify the position, let us first take some statistics relating to Syria, a country whose agricultural conditions are obviously far inferior to those of Egypt but much superior to those of Transjordan: these statistics therefore give a sort of average picture of present conditions in the Arab Middle East:

Syria

Total population:	2,880,000 inhabitants
Agricultural population	2,000,000 " "
Cultivable area	53,000 square kilometres
Cultivated area	15,000 " "
Irrigable area	6,000 " "
Irrigated area	1,600 " "

/ Density

Density of population 17 inhabitants to the square kilometre.

These figures show that, for the rural population (2 million inhabitants) there are 15,000 square kilometres of cultivated land (only a quarter of which is irrigated) that is, about 7 dunums for each rural inhabitant.

It will be recalled that the programme of Kemal Ataturk's "People's Party" envisaged 1 dunum of irrigated land per family (i.e. for four or five inhabitants).

This being so, it will be admitted that, for the resettlement of the refugees, it will suffice to allow for one dunum of irrigated land for each individual, i.e., 40,000 hectares of irrigated land for 400,000 individuals.

It will be noted that 40,000 hectares merely represent a square, one side of which is 65 kilometres long. It is not an area of any considerable size.

Such an area of land can easily be found in any of the Arab countries of the Near East. In Egypt one would have a superfluity of possible choices. In Iraq the obvious selection would be the region of the Lake of Habanieh; in Palestine, the Jordan valley. In Syria, the choice would be between the Homs region, the Gharb region (the Oronte in the neighborhood of Masyaf) and the region of the Euphrates and its tributary, the Khabour.

Each of these areas could alone absorb 400,000 rural settlers, provided that the necessary irrigation is carried out, since a square area, one side of which is 65 kilometres long, would suffice, that is, a comparatively small area of land.

In Egypt (18 million inhabitants) no real technical problem would have to be solved, but it is probable that one would be confronted with unwavering government opposition on grounds of principle. The same would probably be the case in Iraq (which is not faced with any actual pressure since it only shelters 4,000 refugees).

The Lebanon must be excluded, since it sends a large number of emigrants overseas every year. Furthermore, the high density of population in the Lebanon is shown in the comparative table below:

Inhabitants to the Square Kilometre

Lebanon	103
Syria	17
Transjordan	4
Iraq	10

Political motives combined with economic considerations (according to which one should not put all one's eggs in the same basket, but at the same time not scatter the funds available over too large a number of projects) will no doubt lead to the adoption of the principle of carrying two projects into effect, one in the Jordan valley and the other in Syria. As regards Syria, after a study of the technical data and after hearing the views of the Government, one of the three above-mentioned areas would have to be selected (probably the Homs region, where the sugar beet culture and industry are in the process of being developed, with Government support).

It seems to be of interest to calculate the approximate amount of capital necessary for the resettlement of

/ 400,000

400,000 rural settlers, regardless of where they would actually settle.

This calculation will be made on a very modest basis, since there can be no question of installing the refugees in conditions much superior to those in which the average inhabitants of Arab countries live.

Irrigation necessitates, in these countries, about half a litre per second per hectare, i.e. 20,000 litres per second (or 20 cubic metres per second) for 40,000 hectares. The cost of the primary and secondary irrigation canals, on this basis, would amount to approximately 70 million Syrian pounds.

The cost of building homes can be calculated for either concrete houses or houses built of mud in the primitive local way.

For concrete houses, allowance must be made for 30 square metres per family (at 40 Syrian pounds per square metre, i.e. 1,200 pounds per family). This would represent 120 million Syrian pounds for 100,000 families, a figure which appears to be prohibitive.

For mud houses, allowance must be made for 50 square metres per family (at 10 Syrian pounds per square metre, i.e. 500 pounds per family and 50 million Syrian pounds for 100,000 families).

Finally, the families must be able to live during the period when the irrigation network is being developed. This process will be spread out over a period of two years. Accordingly, on the average, 100,000 families will have to be provided with the means of subsistence for one year which,

on the basis of 1500 Syrian pounds per family per year, would amount to the expenditure of 150 million Syrian pounds.

Summary

	<u>Syrian Pounds</u>
Cost of irrigation	70 million
Cost of housing	50 million
Subsistence of families	<u>150 million</u>
Total	270 million

To sum up, 80 million U.S. dollars must be collected (100 million if it is wished to be more generous). It would not appear to be impossible to collect this sum if the following sources are drawn on:-

- a payment by Israel in respect to the purchase of land abandoned by the refugee rural settlers;
- a contribution from the Arab States;
- a gift from the United Nations or from Member States (on the lines of the contribution provided for the E.R.P.);
- a loan from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

I stress once more that the above figures are calculated on the basis of 400,000 rural settlers to be resettled; they would therefore decrease in proportion to the measure in which Israel agrees (or is obliged to agree) to take back a larger or smaller number of refugees. The figures given above are maximum figures; they are calculated on the most unfavorable assumptions for the return of the refugees.

It should be noted that the categories of refugees other than rural settlers, namely owners of landed property, employees, civil servants, tradesmen, artisans, members of

liberal professions, do not raise the same problems as those discussed above. In their case, there is the problem of the purchase of their property by the Government of Israel, and the problem of the assistance that the local governments would have to furnish to needy persons during a short period and on a decreasing scale, in order that they speedily face the prospect of taking their place in the economic life, where necessary in positions inferior to those which they formerly enjoyed. This would entail a rigorous but inescapable reclassification (or rather demotion).

It need not be stressed that the carrying into effect of a mass return of refugees to their homes - an eventuality which is so much to be desired - would do away with or lessen all the difficulties discussed above.

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Table of Equivalents of Agrarian Measurements

A dunum: 919 square metres

A metric dunum: 1000 square metres

An are: 1 square dunum = 100 square metres

A hectare: 100 ares = 10,000 square metres = $2\frac{1}{2}$ acres =
10 dunums

An acre: 4,000 square metres = $\frac{2}{5}$ hectares = 4 dunums

A dunum: 1,000 square metres = $\frac{1}{10}$ hectares = $\frac{1}{4}$ acres

A square kilometre: 100 square hectares = 10,000 square
dunums = 1,000,000 square metres

A square kilometre: 100 hectares (hares) = 250 acres =
1,000 dunums

1 mile: 1.6 kilometres

1 square mile equals 2.5 square kilometres