



General Assembly

Distr.
UNRESTRICTED

A/819
15 March 1949

Original: ENGLISH

UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

FIRST PROGRESS REPORT

Note by the Secretary-General: The Secretary-General has the honour to communicate to the Members of the United Nations, in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 13 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948, the first progress report of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine.

Jerusalem, 1 March 1949.

1. In accordance with paragraph 12 of the General Assembly resolution of 11 December 1948, the Conciliation Commission set up its official headquarters in Jerusalem on 24 January 1949. After examining the situation on the spot, the Commission decided to establish its headquarters and its offices at "Government House" which, as it is well known, is situated in a zone, neutralized and demilitarized by an agreement between the Israeli, Transjordanian and Egyptian forces of occupation and the United Nations. The Commission considers it unnecessary to set forth in detail all the questions which it has been necessary to discuss with the Arab and Israeli authorities in order to create suitable conditions for the performance of its work.
2. The Commission believes that, in order to accomplish the general task of conciliation which has been entrusted to it by the General Assembly, it should, for the present, concentrate on an effort to bring about a rapprochement between the parties concerned. Its most pressing task should be to use its good offices for the purpose of enabling the Governments concerned to meet and enter into negotiations - if possible direct ones - and to collaborate with them in order that these conversations may result in a "final settlement of all questions outstanding between them".
3. With regard to the negotiations currently taking place on Rhodes, in accordance with the resolution* adopted by the Security Council on 16 November 1948, the Conciliation Commission considers that it would be advisable for the Acting United Nations Mediator to continue directing the negotiations on the military plane with a view to arriving at armistice agreements between Israel and the Arab countries party to the Palestine conflict. The Conciliation Commission feels that the success of the armistice negotiations might be jeopardized if their direction were to be transferred by the Security Council from the Acting Mediator to the Conciliation Commission before their conclusion. The success of armistice negotiations, in the Commission's opinion, will greatly calm the atmosphere and facilitate its own task considerably.
4. In addition to its general function of conciliation, the Commission was charged by the General Assembly with specific and clearly defined directives as regards Jerusalem, the Holy Places and refugees.**

With regard to Jerusalem, the Assembly resolved that:

"in view of its association with three world religions, the Jerusalem area, including the present municipality of Jerusalem plus the surrounding villages and towns, the most eastern of which shall be Abu Dis; the most southern, Bethlehem; the most western, Ein Karim (including also the built-up area of Motsa); and the most northern, Shu'fat, should be accorded special and separate treatment from the rest of Palestine and should be placed under effective United Nations control;"

The Assembly further instructed the Commission:

"to present to the fourth regular session of the General Assembly detailed proposals for permanent international regime for the Jerusalem area which will provide for the maximum local autonomy for distinctive groups consistent with the special international status of the Jerusalem area;"

As regards the Holy Places, the Assembly resolved:

"that the Holy Places - including Nazareth - religious buildings and sites in Palestine should be protected and free access to them assured, in accordance with existing rights and historical practice; that arrangements to this end should be under effective United Nations supervision; that the United Nations Conciliation Commission, in presenting to the fourth regular session of the General Assembly its detailed proposals for a permanent international regime for the territory of Jerusalem, should include recommendations concerning the Holy Places in that territory; that with regard to the Holy Places in the rest of Palestine the Commission should call upon the political authorities of the areas concerned to give appropriate formal guarantees as to the protection of the Holy Places and access to them; and that these undertakings should be presented to the General Assembly for approval;"

Furthermore, concerning refugees, the Assembly resolved:

"that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible;"

The Assembly further instructed the Commission:

"to facilitate the repatriation, resettlement and economic and social rehabilitation of the refugees and the payment of compensation, and to maintain close relations with the Director of the United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees and, through him, with the appropriate organs and agencies of the United Nations;"

5. Before establishing contact with the Governments concerned, the Commission took a certain number of steps in relation to these three questions.

It set up a special Committee on Jerusalem and its Holy Places, charged with the task of undertaking without delay the preparatory work necessary for the elaboration of the proposals and recommendations to be submitted to the Assembly. This Committee consists of three of the advisers to the three members of the Commission and one member of the Secretariat and is authorized to establish contact with the interested authorities with a view to obtaining the detailed information which it will need to perform its functions.

With reference to the Holy Places situated outside the Jerusalem area, the Commission has not considered it necessary to take any special measures for the time being; but it received the impression, during its tour of the various capitals which will be mentioned later, that the political authorities concerned would undoubtedly be ready to give the guarantees required by the resolution of the General Assembly.

With regard to refugees, the Commission has had two lengthy discussions with Mr. Griffis, Director of the United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees, with a view to establishing close relations between the two bodies. Moreover, the Commission has already taken steps to secure the services of an expert who would be qualified immediately not only to undertake the necessary preparatory work and studies and to maintain liaison with Mr. Griffis, but also to assume, if necessary, the direction of the repatriation, resettlement and social and economic rehabilitation operations for which the Commission is responsible according to the terms of the Assembly's resolution.

6. The Commission felt that it should begin its work by establishing contact with the Governments concerned. To this end, it made a series of official visits, between 12 and 25 February, to the Governments of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Transjordan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Israel. Before starting this tour of official visits, the Commission had had the opportunity of meeting informally, at Jerusalem and Jericho, respectively, the Foreign Ministers of Israel and Transjordan. The Commission received a friendly welcome at all the places it visited. It was able to hold long discussions with the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister of each country visited and to meet many political personalities at the various receptions held in its honour. It was also received by most of the Heads of State.

During the preliminary contact with the Governments concerned, the Commission had no intention of entering into detailed and thorough discussions on all the questions which will have to be solved before a stable peace can be concluded. Although many of these questions were discussed in a preliminary way during the conversations, the Commission does not feel it should reproduce in the present report the indications which it received from the various Governments.

In the course of these preliminary talks, the Commission's primary object was to canvass the parties concerned on their views as to the way in which contact could be established and negotiations begun with a view to the final settlement of all questions outstanding between them.

7. In this connection, the Commission would like to state that, in the first place, it found the Governments of the Arab States and the Government of Israel to be in an attitude of mind definitely favourable to peace. However, this favourable atmosphere should not lead to the belief that the establishment of peace will be an easy task to be accomplished quickly. The desire, and even the need for peace, do not prevent the parties concerned from continuing firmly to maintain their respective points of view on the various questions outstanding between them. The task of bringing them closer together for the purpose of conciliating these divergent points of view will not be an easy one.

8. These preliminary conversations, and the canvassing of the interested Governments with regard to the conditions under which sincere peace negotiations could be undertaken, have further persuaded the Commission that it would be useful to continue them in order to arrive at a greater clarification of views regarding the method of approaching and solving the refugee problem. It would also be necessary to determine the position that this problem would take in the final peace negotiations.

9. It should be noted that the importance and the extreme urgency of this question, both from the humanitarian and the political points of view, were recognized from the outset by the Commission and were greatly stressed by the Arab Governments. But, owing to the practical impossibility of continuing negotiations by repeated visits of the Commission to the various capitals, the Commission decided to invite first the Arab States to hold meetings for the purpose of exchanging views on the refugee problem with the Commission. These exchanges of views could eventually be extended to other questions should the desire be expressed in the course of the conversations. Invitations to this effect have been addressed by the Conciliation Commission to the Governments of the Arab States, asking them to meet in Beirut on 21 March 1949.

(Signed) Mark F. ETHRIDGE

(United States of America) - Chairman

Claude de BOISANGER
Hussein YALCHIN

(France)
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* S/1080.

** General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948, paragraphs 8, 7 and 11.