



UNITED NATIONS PALESTINE COMMISSION  
Communication of 9 March 1948 from  
Mr. Azcarate to Mr. Bunche

The following communication from Mr. Azcarate to Mr. Bunche arrived on 13 March 1948 in the first pouch delivery from the Advance Party.

Dear Bunche:

I apologize for not sending you today something more substantial about our work. As you can see by Stavropoulos' note, the problems of accommodations made domestic arrangements have been much more difficult than even the most pessimistic expectation. However, they are now more or less solved, and in two or three we will have some sort of offices in an apartment upstairs. We could not really continue working and, receiving visitors! - in our bedrooms. The word "bedrooms", by the way, takes us back forty years, as they remind me so much of those I used to have as a young student in a provincial university in Spain!

In spite of all these difficulties, I may say that we have not only established a very satisfactory contact, both personal and official, with the British, but the real work has already started in regard to a certain number of questions. The enclosed note by Colonel Lund gives you the framework of the conversation he is holding with the British military and those people dealing with questions of military and security in the Jewish Agency. Mr. Ghosh, also, is at work on currency and other financial matters, as you will see from his own note. Mr. Stavropoulos, apart from the general work of "liaison", is dealing specifically with the question of accommodation of the Commission - which, by the way, does not appear to be easy - and the big problem of the transfer of the public services to the Commission on 15 May.

Regarding this latter problem, I had a general conversation with the Chief Secretary myself three days ago, and it was understood that Mr. Stavropoulos and I would proceed in the discussion of the matter in greater detail with the Directors or heads of the respective Departments. Two days ago Mr. Stavropoulos, together with Mr. Ghosh, saw the General Manager of the Railways, and I spent all yesterday morning discussing the question with Mr. Stubbs, Director of the Public Information Office. I would prefer to wait until I have had further conversations with heads of other services before sending you a report for the Commission.

As far as I can see, the first point should be to try and make a clear distinction between the services which the Commission will be bound to run for some time prior to handing them over to the two States, and those which could be transferred at once. Regarding the first group, the British authorities here seem to be not only willing but anxious to see appointed as soon as possible the future Directors or Managers, and for them to be sent over here to gain the necessary experience and knowledge in order to be able, on 15 May, to take effective control of the services.

My impression is that everybody there is most willing to give facilities in order to prevent the collapse of the essential public services at the end of the Mandate, but during my next conversation with the Chief Secretary in the course of a day or two I will put to him this particular question regarding the future Directors of the essential public services, when I still be in a position to let you know the official attitude of the British Administration in regard to this question.

Closely connected with it is the question of staff. Generally speaking, the position is that all the Jewish staff is quite willing to continue, while the Arab is not (although in many cases, such as the Public Information Office, for instance, and also, I think, the Railways they would be ready to continue but dare not because they are simply frightened). As regards the British, my personal (but very provisional impression) is that a certain number would be ready to continue; but, of course, it will all depend on the general conditions prevailing at the date of the termination of the Mandate and the chances of the Commission to maintain order and security. In this connection, I may perhaps mention that the Chief Justice told me last night that as regards the judicial administration, he had made arrangements for the continuity of the working of the Courts under the Commission. The talk was private, and arrangements are being made for Mr. Stavropoulos and I wish to visit him next Saturday, at the High Court, when we will receive full information about the problem. But, please, do not forget that for a visit of this kind two or three armoured cars have to be provided!

Unfortunately, I cannot yet report any concrete progress as regards contact with the Arab element, but from some conversations held recently with very respectable people who are in close touch with them, I gather that the atmosphere of suspicion and hostility towards the Mission may, little by little, become less tense. Whether or not direct contacts will be possible in the near future, I cannot say, but I will keep you informed in detail about this very important aspect of our work.

This coming we received members of the local Press in our headquarters, and this evening members of the international Press will visit us. In agreement with Mr. Stubbs - Director of the Public Information Office of the Palestine Government, and, by the way, a most helpful and pleasant man, we organized the meeting in such a way that it was three-quarters social entertainment, drinks, etc., and one-quarter Press Conference. I made, in the most informal and friendly way, a short statement at the beginning (copy enclosed) and then ... drinks and private conversation. Stubbs was very happy and well impressed by the whole thing.

Yesterday, I received a visit from the French Consul-General. He knew the Near East very well, and gave me some very interesting general information, particularly about the background of the Arab attitude. He is, on the whole, rather pessimistic about the possibilities of a compromise, or even of finding some practical solution of the situation in the Old City, where a group of 1,800 Jews are besieged by the Arabs and in extremely difficult conditions regarding food, etc. He was very familiar with this case because among these Jews are more than one hundred French subjects.

The Belgian Consul is coming to see me this afternoon.

I realize now that I have not said anything about my conversation with the High Commissioner. The conversation was, of course, of a very general character. He assured me very strongly that the British Administration, within the limits of the policy of non-collaboration in the implementation of the [partition plan](#), would be most helpful, and the truth is that, as far as we can see from our first contacts, that is the case. He invited me to stay for lunch. The Chief Secretary and his wife were also present, as well as some other high officials and the Dutch Consul, who happens to be an old friend of mine from my Geneva days.

The Chief Secretary has also been most courteous and kind, but I have the impression that those from the Colonial Service are a little more reserved and try to press us with a rather dark picture of the situation both at present and in future. I cannot help thinking, for instance, that the picture about the Arab attitude was a little darkened. I do not mean by that that the situation is good; far from it; but being bad, very bad indeed, it is not so bad as could be expected. At the first place, our arrival has not provoked any sort of strong reaction against us; the situation in Jerusalem has certainly not worsened since our arrival; continually, we hear of Arab elements which *regret* being unable to get in touch with us; the most recent example is the Arab journalists who, in refusing the invitation to come to our Press Conference, told Stubbs that personally they would have been delighted, but could not accept in view of the policy of the Arab leaders, etc. I do not want to exaggerate the significance of all these details - such as the one mentioned in Stavropoulos' note concerning the Arab workers in the house - but taken as a whole, it

shows, in my opinion, that the situation is not as desperate as could be believed.

Will you tell Barnes I have given his memorandum to Stubbs, who is preparing the answer to the different points in collaboration with the Post-Master-General and the Director of the Broadcasting Service. I have also seen Miss Monica Dehm. Stubbs recommends her very strongly.

I apologise for writing you in such a hurry. The bag has to be handed tonight or very early tomorrow morning. I expect in a few days to be able to write a paper more readable and comprehensive.

This letter is, of course, personal; but I just leave it to you to use it as you think proper. At any rate, I have no objection to its being shown to the Chairman, Sobolev, etc., if you think they may be interested in reading it.

Yours very sincerely,  
(Signed)  
P. Azcarate

INFORMAL STATEMENT MADE BY MR. AZCARATE AT A PRESS CONFERENCE  
FOR MEMBERS OF THE LOCAL PRESS HELD IN JERUSALEM ON TUESDAY  
9 March 1948

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Before we offer you some drinks, let me explain to you in two words what is the character and the object of our mission.

As you know very well, we have been sent over here by the Palestine Commission of the United Nations. But let me add at once, even running the risk of disappointing you, that we are not a *political* body and that we have not been entrusted with a mission of a *political* character. All the political aspects of the Palestinian question are dealt with at Lake Success by the Commission itself or by the Security Council.

Our mission is chiefly administrative and technical. We are here to study, examine, discuss and consider, in collaboration with everybody concerned, and as much as possible to prepare the immense amount of work required by the transfer of the present Administration to the new regime at the end of the Mandate. Our main job consists of facilitating by these studies and preparations the continuity of the functioning of the public services; in one word, to prevent the collapse, at the wend of the Mandate, of the railways, the postal service, the health services, the financial administration, and so on and so forth; what is obviously a matter of vital interest for the whole population of Palestine.

As you can see, there is nothing in it very sensational or particularly interesting for you, as journalists. Moreover, a rather long experience has persuaded me that for the success of this kind of job the less fuss and publicity the better. You are surely as such interested as we are in the success of our mission; therefore, please, try this time to help us by your silence. I realize how unusual a thing it is to invite journalists and then to ask them to write nothing, but I am sure you all realize the exceptional circumstances in which we are working; and, believe me, the best way to help us is to forget our presence in Jerusalem. At least, as journalists. As friends, I do not need to say that my colleagues and I would be always most happy to meet you as we are doing today here.

And now let us have some drinks and see talk.

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