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UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

GENERAL COMMITTEE

Report of the Chairman of the General  
Committee to the Conciliation Commission  
on the question of the cultivation of  
Arab lands in Israeli territory.

As the Commission no doubt recalls, it had, at the suggestion of the Technical Committee on Refugees, proposed to the Israeli delegation in Lausanne, shortly before the suspension of the plenary meetings, that arrangements be made to permit Arabs living in Arab-controlled territory to cultivate their lands which were situated within Israeli-controlled territory. This matter involved a few thousand Arab Palestinians mainly in the Tulkarm area. The Israeli representative in Lausanne had pointed out that this matter was within the competence of the Special Committee set up by the Israel-Jordan Armistice Agreement and had in fact been discussed previously within this Committee. This point of view was confirmed to the Principal Secretary of the Commission by the Israeli authorities in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. The Israeli members of the Mixed Armistice Commissions had stated that not only had they no objection to the matter's being discussed once more in the Committee but that they would be prepared to give it constructive consideration. The Jordanian authorities equally considered that the matter fell within the competence of the Special Committee and informed the Principal Secretary that they intended to request the reconstitution of the Special Committee for the purpose of discussing this and other matters which were pending.

Upon the resumption of the Commission's meetings in New York, the Principal Secretary had reported that he had discussed this question with the Israeli authorities, as well as with General Riley. In his opinion the question was a complicated one, as in some cases a village lay within the Arab lines and its farmlands within the Israeli lines, while in other cases the situation was reversed. During the armistice negotiations the Israeli Government had been willing to alter the frontier so as to reunite the villages

with their lands, on condition that such alteration should be on a compensatory basis, i.e., certain villages being incorporated into Israeli territory and others into Arab territory; the Jordan Government, however, had refused this solution. As regards an arrangement permitting the villagers to cross the lines to cultivate their lands, the Israeli authorities had pointed out that certain complications would arise: it would be difficult in some cases to prove ownership of the land, and in other cases the land was already being cultivated by immigrants who could not now be displaced. It had been decided that the best solution would be to submit the question to the Special Committee created by the Armistice Agreement, which had not met for some months. The chief obstacle lay in the fact that Israel had agreed to submit the question to the Special Committee on condition that the committee should at the same time discuss certain questions in which Israel was interested, e.g., the questions of the Latrun road and of access to Mr. Scopus. In any case both parties had promised to keep the Commission informed.

According to information recently received from the Commission's Secretariat in Jerusalem, the lands in question belong to Arab cultivators living in 17 villages situated in the sub-districts of Jenin, Tulkarm and Ramleh. The discussions on this subject in the Special Committee set up under the Israeli-Jordan Armistice Agreement, with a view to enabling the owners to cultivate these lands, have been abortive. The Israeli representatives maintain that there are other more important questions, such as those concerning Mount Scopus, Bethlehem and Latrun, which should receive prior consideration as laid down in Article 8 of the Armistice Agreement. The Jordan representatives are believed, nevertheless, to have pressed the matter, pointing out that the harvesting of the crops sown before the armistice was involved and that the return of the owners would provide effective protection against marauders and permit the sowing of winter seed. The Israelis are said to have rejected these proposals on the grounds that the question was one affecting the security of the country, and that it was not possible to allow several thousand Arabs to cross the lines at points of strategic importance. These points are near the railway line from Tel Aviv to Haifa and at a distance of only 15 kilometres from the sea.

The General Committee, having considered this information during its last meeting, decided to report to the Commission the developments in connection with this question. The Committee is of the opinion that, in view of the stalemate apparently reached in the negotiations between the Jordanian and Israeli authorities, it would be advisable for the Commission to consider what further action would be appropriate under the circumstances.