

UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

GENERAL COMMITTEE

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26 July 1949  
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

SUMMARY RECORD OF A MEETING BETWEEN  
THE GENERAL COMMITTEE AND THE  
DELEGATION OF ISRAEL

held in Lausanne on Tuesday,  
26 July 1949, at 11 a.m.

Present: Mr. de la Tour du Pin (France) - Chairman  
          Mr. Yenisey (Turkey)  
          Mr. Rockwell (U.S.A.)  
  
          Mr. Milner - Committee Secretary  
  
          Mr. Elias Sasson )  
          Mr. Gershon Hirsch ) - Representatives of  
          Mr. Tuvia Arazi ) Israel

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The CHAIRMAN, on behalf of the General Committee, extended a welcome to Mr. Sasson on his return, and to Mr. Arazi, newly appointed to the Israeli delegation; he also expressed the Committee's regret at the departure of Mr. Hirsch and Miss Broza and its appreciation of their cooperation.

Reuniting of separated families ( documents Com.Gen./7, Com.Gen./8, IS/32 )

The CHAIRMAN explained that during Mr. Sasson's absence he had discussed this question with Mr. Hirsch. He reiterated that the Commission attached great importance to the question; while appreciating the efforts so far made by the Israeli delegation, it hoped that the Government of Israel would find it possible to broaden its definition of the family in order to approach more closely the oriental concept of the family as a unit. The present definition, for purposes of repatriation, was considered far too

restrictive, and the Committee had been requested by the Commission to obtain, if possible, further assurances on the matter from the Israeli delegation which it could transmit to the Arab delegations.

Mr. SASSON assured the Committee that he would draw the attention of his Government to the matter. He wished to recall, however, that when his Government had established its present definition, it had taken into account two factors : first, the humanitarian factor-- the urgent necessity for reuniting families, and secondly, questions of security. It seemed necessary to point out that eighteen days had elapsed since his Government had made its declaration on the question, and no reply had as yet been received from any of the Arab States. Even though differences of opinion existed between Israel and the Arab States on the implementation of the programme, such differences need not prevent the immediate commencement of actual repatriation. The Government of Israel had formed committees in various large cities throughout Palestine; it had established rules governing the screening of applications; it had published relevant information in the press. Up to the present, several hundred applications had been received, all of which were receiving careful study. However, actual movement of refugees back to Israel could not begin without the collaboration of the Arab States; and he considered it the duty of the Committee to make it plain to the Arab delegations that if such movement were delayed, the responsibility lay with them.

The CHAIRMAN agreed with Mr. Sasson that the primary objective was the reuniting of the largest possible number of members of separated families at the earliest possible moment. It was the Committee's intention to draw the attention of the Arab delegations to that fact without delay. If, however, the Israeli delegation could bring about an extension of its Government's official concept of the family, for the present purpose, the Committee's task would be greatly facilitated.

Mr. YENISEY reiterated the statement he had made on a previous occasion, to the effect that in the Oriental view the family was a patriarchal unit, and that the present official Israeli definition was therefore far too limitative. In his

personal opinion, the failure of the Arabs to accept the Israeli proposal for frontier committees was the result of their inability to accept the principle of the Israeli definition of the family.

Mr. Yenisey then read the following definition, which he had discussed the preceding day with one of the Arab representatives who had informed him that that definition was acceptable to his and probably to the other Arab delegations :

" Any refugee who was, before the date of the opening of hostilities, financially dependent upon the head of his family, shall have the right to rejoin his family in Palestine, with the exception of all persons who have borne arms against Israel."

Mr. Yenisey expressed the view that such a formula would eliminate the security question which preoccupied the Israeli Government.

Mr. SASSON expressed his willingness to submit Mr. Yenisey's formula to his Government, and to lend it his support. He recalled, however, that<sup>at</sup> an earlier meeting Mr. Hirsch had been asked to submit another definition to his Government, and that the reply from Tel Aviv had been that they regretted but were unable to revise their position since there had been no response from the Arab States; he thought it probable that the same result might be forthcoming in the present case.

Mr. Sasson pointed out that the definition as it stood at present did not prevent any member of a family from submitting an application, which would be carefully studied as an individual case. He himself had seen some of the applications which had been received; in certain cases a family had been recognised to have as many as 22 or 32 members, and in one case an application had been approved which involved repatriation of two children 22 years of age. His delegation had repeatedly emphasized that many such cases were being handled and that many doors were left open to special cases. His delegation did not demand that the Arabs should accept its present definition as it stood; they might make such reservations as they chose. The only logical and practical course, however, was that actual repatriation should be allowed to begin, while in the meantime discussions continued at Lausanne for the settlement of details.

Mr. YENISEY pointed out that the Israeli Government's principal preoccupation in the matter seemed to be of security, and that the formula he had proposed would eliminate that consideration, while at the same time eliminating unnecessary work involved in treating each application as a special case and judging it on its own merits. Agreement by the Israeli Government to broaden its interpretation of the term "family" would be a demonstration of its good will and would certainly induce a more conciliatory spirit in the Arab delegations.

Mr. ROCKWELL wished to ask, since the local committees had been instructed to be liberal in the screening of applications, why it should be necessary to make the definition so restrictive. He felt that a better impression would be created throughout the world, and especially in the Arab States, if the original basis for screening of applications were made broader.

He asked, in any case, whether the Israeli delegation could at present give the Committee any definite assurances regarding the treatment that would be given to special cases falling outside the general definition, which would constitute a considerable reassurance for the Arab delegations.

Mr. SASSON mentioned another aspect of the question. In Nazareth he had inspected a number of the applications received and had talked with some of the applicants. In one case, upon being questioned, an applicant had explained to him that although his family was a large one, he was applying for the admission of only two members of it because he could not financially support the others. Mr. Sasson felt that this consideration would be brought to the attention of the Arab delegations.

As regards Mr. Rockwell's question, he thought it must be explained to the Arab delegations that extension of the definition and of the numbers of refugees admitted under the present programme would not solve the refugee problem in general. When it became possible to discuss the problem in these terms, the total number of refugees that Israel could admit would be determined; however, it must be made clear that the numbers admitted now would be counted against that final total still to be determined.

In view of the lack of response from the Arab States to the Israeli Government's declaration, that Government had begun to explain to its Arab listeners, by means of radio broadcasts, where the responsibility for delay should be placed. There was now a real danger that when members of separated families learned that they were authorised to return, many might endeavour to re-enter Israel by irregular means; such attempts might well cause border incidents which would be advantageous to neither side. This possibility also should be made clear to the Arab delegations.

Mr. YENISEY remarked that it was obvious that the number of refugees who would enter Israel under the classification of "members of separated families" should be taken into account in the general settlement of the refugee question. He did not feel that the example cited by Mr. Sasson, according to which some heads of families would not want all their relatives to return, could be considered a general rule. He thought the plan he had suggested would circumvent the internal difficulties existing within Israel where public opinion was against a mass entry of refugees, for the very reason that his proposal only included persons devoid of material support, and excluded those who had fought against Israel. Moreover, Mr. Yenisey did not think that a mass return of refugees would result from the definition of members of the family contained in his plan. He therefore urged the Israeli delegation to recommend his proposal to their Government in the hope of thus prevailing upon the Arab delegations to adopt a more conciliatory attitude.

Mr. SASSON reiterated his willingness to submit that definition to his Government and to support it. He repeated his view, however, that while that formula was being considered in Tel Aviv, time should not be wasted; he therefore earnestly requested that the Committee should put forth all its efforts to secure the collaboration of the Arabs in the immediate commencement of actual repatriation, at the same time that discussions continued at Lausanne.

The CHAIRMAN agreed that the humanitarian aspect of the question was one which should be constantly emphasized; it was for that reason that the Committee intended, at its forthcoming meeting with the Arab delegations the following day, to press as firmly as possible for their collaboration, according to the views just expressed by Mr. Sasson.

In reply to a request for clarification by the Chairman, Mr. SASSON explained that the maximum ages specified by his Government for minor children who might be repatriated were 15 years for boys. There was no age limit for unmarried daughters.

Mixed Arab-Israeli working groups for estimation of damages to Arab Property in Israel

The CHAIRMAN explained that, as Chairman of the General Committee, he had discussed with Mr. Hirsch the possibility of constituting mixed working groups, to be composed of Israeli and Arab experts, including representatives of the refugees, to evaluate the damage done to Arab property in Israel. He stressed the fact that the actual question of payment of compensation would not be raised in that connection. An evaluation of the extent of damage must be made sooner or later; if it were done at present, a double advantage would be gained; direct Arab-Israeli contacts would be established, and the Arabs would have the opportunity to ascertain for themselves the exact status of their property as well as present conditions of life in Israel. He assumed that the Israeli delegation had not as yet received a reply from Tel Aviv to the proposal; in the meantime, the Committee would present the same suggestion to the Arab delegations at the meeting the following day.

Mr. SASSON observed that during his consultations with members of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tel Aviv, the question had been discussed even before the Chairman's conversation with Mr. Hirsch, and his Government had reached the conclusion that such a move would be premature at the present moment. He felt that it should form part of the general solution of the refugee problem; if, as he hoped, discussion of that final solution could be begun at an early moment, the Chairman's proposal could be dealt with at the same time. He did not feel that the questions should be separated. His Government had also wished to await the report of the Technical Committee on Refugees.

The CHAIRMAN felt that he must reserve the opinion of the Committee on the matter, at least until the question had been discussed with the Arab delegations. If possible, he thought the Committee would wish to hasten the formation of the mixed committees as much as possible.

Mr. SASSON considered it most desirable that discussion of the entire refugee problem and its final solution should be expedited in so far as possible; he felt that it would be only a matter of days, before such a discussion would begin. The mixed groups could then be formed after a general agreement in principle had been reached.

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