

GENERAL COMMITTEE

RESTRICTED
Com.Gen./SR.27
27 July 1949
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

SUMMARY RECORD OF A MEETING BETWEEN
THE GENERAL COMMITTEE AND THE
DELEGATIONS OF THE ARAB STATES

held in Lausanne on Wednesday,
27 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. Abdel Chafi El Labbane - Representative of
Egypt
Mr. Edmond Roch - Representative of
the Hashemite
Jordan Kingdom
Mr. Mohamed Ali Hamade - Representative of
Lebanon
Mr. Ahmad Choukairi - Representative of
Syria

Reuniting of separated families

The CHAIRMAN, summarising the present situation, recalled that the Israeli Government had authorised the return of wives and minor children to rejoin the head of the family in Israel. At their last meeting with the General Committee, the Arab delegations had explained that the oriental concept of the family and the reasons why they considered the Israeli programme inadequate; these observations had been transmitted to the Israeli delegation, which had promised to study them. In the meantime, about 800 applications had been received by the special committees set up by the Israeli Government in various parts of Israel. These committees had received instructions to be liberal and sympathetic in their examination of all applications and in the evaluation of special cases; the Chairman cited certain cases which proved that they were indeed carrying out those instructions. It was the Committee's intention, nevertheless, to continue pressing the Israeli delegation for an extension of its basic concept of the family.

The Israeli delegation had asked the General Committee to discuss with the Arab delegations the request which had

been issued to the Arab States by the Government of Israel, acting through the Mixed Armistice Commissions, that each of the Arab Governments should appoint two officials to work with Israeli officials at border posts to make practical arrangements for repatriation. Up to the present no reply had been received from any of the Arab States. The Israeli delegation had stressed the fact that no question of principle was involved; it was simply a matter of making practical arrangements for identification, transport, etc.

The Chairman pointed out that no actual repatriation of refugees could take place until the necessary border posts were set up. Moreover, the Israeli Government had undertaken to explain the programme by radio to its Arab listeners; there was therefore the danger that some refugees, feeling themselves authorised to return, might attempt to do so by irregular means. In view, therefore, of the urgency of the matter, the General Committee strongly urged the Arab delegations to request that their Governments appoint the necessary officials at the frontiers. He stressed the fact that in expressing their agreement, the Arab delegations were free to make any reservations they wished, especially concerning the general principle of return of refugees and concerning the concept of the family. It was understood that while repatriation proceeded on the basis of the present Israeli programme, discussions would continue at Lausanne on the definition of the family and on the refugee problem as a whole.

Mr. LABBANE (Egypt) thanked the Chairman for his explanations, which he considered a strong encouragement to the delegations to enter upon the practical phase of the negotiations. He had not previously been informed that the Israeli Government had contacted the various Arab Governments concerning the appointment of frontier officials; he thought it probable that if his Government had not replied, it was because the request had not been channelled through the Commission in the normal manner. He recalled that his delegation had already accepted the Israeli proposal in principle, subject to certain reservations which had not been intended in any way as obstacles to the carrying out of the programme. His delegation, however, had been awaiting the official declarations regarding administrative arrangements for implementing the programme, which the Israeli

delegation had said its Government intended to publish.

The CHAIRMAN pointed out that the declaration in question had been made by the Israeli Minister for Foreign Affairs on 7 July; he cited certain relevant paragraphs from the text (document IS/32). The Israeli Government had contacted the Arab Governments through the Mixed Armistice Commissions, a procedure which he considered practical and acceptable.

Mr. LABBANE (Egypt) felt that since the Commission was closely concerned in the matter, it should not have been by-passed. In any case, his Government would require his views on the matter before taking action, and valuable time would therefore be lost.

Mr. ROCKWELL stressed the fact that the humanitarian aspect of the question was now the most important one; he hoped that the Arab delegations would consider the possibility of contacting their Governments without delay and urging the appointment of officials according to the request of the Israeli Government.

Mr. HAMADE (Lebanon) observed that the Arab delegations were quite ready to carry out Mr. Rockwell's request; they had already accepted the proposal in principle and were now desirous of seeing the programme put into effect. Some of the Arab Governments, however, in communicating the Israeli proposal to their representatives at Lausanne, had requested clarification of certain points. For example, could an Arab woman resident in Israel request the repatriation of her husband? Mr. Hamade thought that many such specific points should be clarified in discussion at Lausanne.

The CHAIRMAN, in reply, thought that the most practical procedure would be for the refugees immediately to make applications for return. It could then be seen how those applications were dealt with.

It was essential, however, to take into account considerations of economic conditions in Israel and, in that connection, he cited an incident observed by Mr. Sasson during his visit to the special committee in Nazareth. In contrast with other applicants who had requested the return of large numbers of their family, one Arab had applied only for the return of five relatives and had explained that he had not asked for all his relatives to be

repatriated since he did not consider himself in a position to support them adequately. There were some 38,000 unemployed in Israel, as well as 70,000 refugees in camps, and Jewish public opinion was opposed to the principle of the mass return of refugees, for reasons of security in particular. It would appear, moreover, that there was almost total opposition to the Government in the Israeli Parliament on that question. It was imperative therefore to study those factors and to be sure that refugees who returned would have adequate means of support.

He pointed out to Mr. Hamade that the instance he had quoted where the head of the family was outside Israel, would fall under the category of compassionate cases. He also stressed the fact that representatives of the Mixed Armistice Commission at frontier posts would be able to deal with compassionate cases as they arose.

He asked the Arab delegations to communicate any knowledge they would have of the results of applications for repatriation, which could then be discussed with the General Committee. He thought much useful work could be done if the problem were dealt with simultaneously by the Mixed Armistice Commissions and discussed in the Conciliation Commission.

Mr. ROCH (Hashemite Jordan Kingdom) was glad to hear that preliminary measures for the return of refugees had already been taken and informed the Committee that his Government had already set up an office for this purpose in Jerusalem. He hoped that those measures would progress satisfactorily and that formalities would be reduced to the minimum. He assured the Committee that his Government would cooperate in every way towards the implementation of the programme, and he also expressed the hope that the Israeli concept of the family would be broadened and would not thus limit repatriation to a comparatively small number.

Mr. LABBANE (Egypt) reiterated his statement to the effect that the principle of the Israeli proposal had already been accepted and said that he would therefore communicate with his Government in order to request the appointment of Egyptian representatives at frontier posts. He wished to make it clear that the reservations he had made regarding the general return of refugees and the broader concept of the family were not in any way intended

to hinder the implementation of the Israeli proposal which was the first step towards a practical solution of the refugee problem. He noted that it had been agreed that special cases could be studied by the delegations with the Committee.

Mr. CHOUKAIRI (Syria) associated himself with the statements made by the representatives of the other Arab States in expressing satisfaction at the progress achieved in the practical implementation of the General Assembly's resolution of 11 December 1948. He emphasised the fact, however, that the return of refugees was being unduly restricted by their division into an excessive number of categories. The Jewish concept of the family itself was now being limited further by them since the whole plan of return was to center around the breadwinner who was already in Israel and other members of the family who were close relatives, were classed under the special heading of compassionate cases. It should be borne in mind, moreover, that such a restrictive policy with regard to the reunion of separated families might well dissuade certain refugees from returning since they could not be sure of having all their family with them.

He was pleased, nevertheless, to see that the plight of some of the refugees at least was being alleviated and stressed the fact that internal considerations of security and economics should not be allowed to impede the implementation of the General Assembly's resolution.

Unfreezing of Arab accounts

The CHAIRMAN asked the Arab delegations whether, after consultation with their Governments and after receiving expert advice, they agreed to the principle of reciprocity outlined in point 2 of the Israeli replies to the Arab nine-point memorandum of 18 May, as set forth in the General Committee's Memorandum of 2 July 1949 to the delegations of the Arab States. (document Com.Gen./7).

Mr. ROCH (Hashemite Jordan Kingdom) stated that his Government saw no objection to the principle of reciprocity.

Mr. LABBANE (Egypt) had not yet received instructions from his Government in that connection but hoped that he would be in a position to state his delegation's views at the next meeting with the Committee.

Mr. CHOUKAIRI (Syria), whilst accepting the principle of reciprocity, thought it would be useful if point 2 of the memorandum of 2 July could be elucidated further. It was essential, in his opinion, to know whether reciprocity would entail the release of equivalent amounts or whether the amount released would be unrestricted. Only the latter solution seemed acceptable.

Mr. HAMADE (Lebanon) agreed that only unconditional unfreezing of accounts could be accepted. He suggested that since the Arab Bank and the Al-Umma Bank were subsidiaries of Barclays Bank and of the Ottoman Bank, the accounts in those former banks could be released if the Jewish authorities unblocked the funds held by the latter.

Mr. ROCH (Hashemite Jordan Kingdom) supported the view of the representatives of Lebanon and Syria. He thought that the Committee could assume, however, that assets belonging to Arabs at present in Jewish-controlled territory and blocked by the Arab States would amount to very little.

The CHAIRMAN pointed out that the Committee had not as yet discussed banking details with the Israeli delegation. He thought, however, that, as in the question of refugees, an urgent humanitarian measure was involved and that reciprocity should be accepted even on a limited basis for the time being, so that some help could be granted individuals without in any way compromising the principle of the matter as a whole. It would be desirable therefore to discuss arrangements with the Israeli delegation in the interests of the refugees themselves. He also proposed to ask that delegation for information as to total amounts blocked; it would be helpful if the Arab States would also try to supply those statistics. In reply to a suggestion from Mr. Roch to the effect that the authorities of the banks themselves should be requested to give the necessary information, he gave the assurances that the Committee would bear in mind that possibility. He also stated that the Committee would take into account the point mentioned by Mr. Roch regarding individual holdings in companies whose assets were also frozen.

In reply to a question from Mr. Choukairi as to whether sterling exchanges were to be discussed at the present meeting, the Chairman said that discussion of that point would have to be postponed until the matter had been raised

with the appropriate United Kingdom authorities.

He requested the Arab States to give the Committee any information they had as to the actual sums in Arab States belonging to Arab Israeli citizens which had been blocked.

Mr. HAMADE (Lebanon), supported by Mr. ROCH (Hashemite Jordan Kingdom), assured the Committee that their Governments had not blocked any such accounts.

Mr. Hamade wished, furthermore, to point out to the Committee that his Government had not sufficiently studied the question of blocked sterling, since it had been raised, not by the Governments of the Arab States, but by representatives of the refugees.