

UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

GENERAL COMMITTEE

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

held in Lausanne on Wednesday,
10 August 1949, at 4:30 p.m.

Present :	Mr. Rockwell	(U.S.A.)	- Chairman
	Mr. de la Tour du Pin	(France)	
	Mr. Yenisey	(Turkey)	
	Dr. Azcarate		- Principal Secretary
	Mr. Elias Sasson	}	- Representatives of Israel
	Mr. Zalman Lifshitz		
	Mr. Tuvia Arazi		

Reunion of separated families

The CHAIRMAN recalled that at the Committee's request, the preceding day, he had unofficially communicated to the Israeli delegation certain information received from the Arab delegations. He had reported that the General Committee had received from all the Arab delegations except Syria a statement that their Governments had issued instructions to the proper authorities to collaborate with the Mixed Armistice Commissions on administrative arrangements for repatriation of members of separated families. It had been reported that contacts had already been established by Egypt and the Hashemite Jordan Kingdom. The Syrian reply was still awaited. The Arab delegations, for their part, had requested certain information from the Israeli delegation; they wished to know, first, the reply of the Government of Israel concerning the request for a broadened concept of the family, and specifically concerning the definition submitted by the Turkish member of the General Committee.

Mr. LIFSHITZ called attention to the fact that although agreement in principle had been given and discussions had been held in the Mixed Armistice Commissions, no actual appointments of representatives had as yet been made by the Arab States. The Government of Israel had appointed a committee composed of a representative from the Prime Minister's office and representatives of the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Immigration, to examine all applications for repatriation. Several hundred applications had been received, which the committee was waiting to transmit to the various national representatives in order to determine the present location of the refugees concerned and the steps to be taken to receive them. Until the national representatives were appointed, the Government of Israel could do no more.

Mr. SASSON explained, as further clarification, that the Arab members of the Mixed Armistice Commissions, with the exception of the Syrians, had informed the Israeli members of those Commissions of their Governments' agreement in principle, but that no representatives had as yet been appointed.

The CHAIRMAN expressed his surprise and regret at this information, which conflicted with his own; he affirmed that the Committee would take the matter up again with the Arab delegations and endeavour to expedite the appointment of representatives.

With regard to the concept of the family, Mr. SASSON said there was no change in the attitude of his Government. It had not yet been possible to begin the implementation of that Government's programme, under which it was estimated that thousand of refugees would return to Israel. Moreover, his Government had made an offer concerning the final settlement of the refugee question; and since it had been stated that the number admitted under the present programme would be deducted from the total figure which it was estimated Israel could allow to return, he did not see the necessity for increasing the number who returned at present.

The CHAIRMAN wished to stress the fact that the alternative definition put forward by the Committee had been suggested as a humanitarian measure which could be taken at once without

waiting for the final settlement. He expressed his regret that the Israeli Government was not able to accept that suggestion, and reserved the Committee's right to return to the question at a later moment.

Mr. SASSON did not consider that there was anything regrettable in his Government's attitude. The Committee had already admitted the logic of the statement that the final total of refugees to be repatriated would be decreased by whatever number were admitted under the present programme. The Israeli Government had made a reasonable offer, which had not yet been accepted by the Arab States. It agreed to give priority, in the later admission of more refugees under the final settlement, to other members of separated families not admitted at present. It seemed to him that his Government had gone far toward meeting the wishes of both the Committee and the Arab delegations. If the Committee's definition were accepted, it would involve the admission immediately of possibly hundreds of people belonging to various branches of the same family.

The CHAIRMAN pointed out that inordinately large numbers of relatives could not be involved since the definition proposed by the representative of Turkey only comprised those members of the family "financially dependent on the head of the family."

Mr. LIFSHITZ stressed the fact that the Israeli Government was guided by humanitarian reasons in dealing with the refugee problem. Even if no solution were reached eventually, his Government was, at the present stage, willing to accept the repatriation of certain members of the family, as it had already agreed to do. Questions of security were, however, involved when other categories of refugees were considered, especially with regard to men of military age. His Government could not therefore at the moment agree to increasing the number of refugees it allowed to return and had indeed only accepted the return of certain members of separated families for purely humanitarian motives.

Mr. de la TOUR DU PIN thought it unfortunate that the Israeli delegation appeared to be stressing the negative side of its own proposal, whereas Mr. Sasson had already pointed to a more

constructive aspect when he said that his Government agreed to give at some later date priority to more distant relatives.

The Committee also had pressed for a solution of the refugee question from a humanitarian viewpoint. It did, moreover, fully appreciate the fact that economic considerations would of necessity arise when the repatriation of large numbers of refugees took place, but that question would be discussed at the appropriate time. It was for the moment imperative to urge the Israeli Government to admit more refugees under a wider definition of the family at the present time, regardless of when a general settlement of the refugee problem might be arrived at. Such a procedure would be fully compatible with the interests of the State of Israel, since not only was it protected by its reservation that those returning immediately would be deducted from the total number eventually to be repatriated, but moreover such a proof of liberality would be advantageous to Israel's position diplomatically and would contribute considerably to the work of the Commission.

He urged the Israeli delegation therefore to give the fullest possible consideration to the extension of the definition of the family as proposed by the representative of Turkey, since he thought it might well bring about a favourable solution of the problem.

Mr. SASSON, in reply, explained that the Turkish representative's definition of the family had indeed received careful study by the Israeli Government, which had resulted in the agreement to accord priority to distant relatives when repatriation of a larger number of refugees took place.

He wished to point out to the representative of France that his delegation had made every effort to find a solution to the refugee problem. They had made an offer to the Arab delegations in connection with a general settlement which they hoped had been favourably received. The Arab delegations had, however, not as yet replied and his own delegation could not be expected to wait indefinitely for an answer to its proposal.

Mr. YENISEY considered the Israeli proposal not only lacking in logic but a tactical error which would hinder the Committee's work in the future.

In proposing his definition for an extension of the concept of the family as it was understood in Palestine generally, he had laid stress on the humanitarian aspect of the question since he had sought to make some provision for refugees in foreign countries who found themselves bereft of financial support. The stand adopted by the Israeli Government appeared to him all the more incomprehensible since the number of refugees returning at the present time would be deducted from the total number agreed upon in the final settlement. Moreover, since it might take some time to reach a settlement if both parties concerned persisted in their present attitude, it was essential that steps be taken immediately before the wretched plight of the refugees was aggravated further.

He therefore urged that the Israeli Government reconsider the Committee's proposal without prejudice to its general attitude on the refugee question as a whole.

The CHAIRMAN asked the Israeli delegation whether it could give the Committee any information as to the way in which applications from Arabs in Israel for the return of their relatives was being dealt with.

Mr. LISHITZ stated that, up to the present time, several hundred applications had already been received. None of those had as yet been rejected, but neither had they received final approval since full details as to transportation, financial support and present locality of the refugees had not yet been ascertained. The first step was to establish contact between Arabs in Israel and their relatives abroad and that was at present being done.

It was possible that some percentage of the applications might be refused for reasons of national security but that had not as yet been the case.

The CHAIRMAN thanked the Israeli delegation for the information given which he would transmit to the delegations of the Arab States.

Unfreezing of Arab accounts (document IS/31, point 2).

The CHAIRMAN stated that, as he had informed Mr. Sasson the previous day, the governments of the Arab States had agreed

to reciprocal unfreezing, pound for pound. He wished to point out that, in that connection, the representative of Egypt, which held the greater part of the blocked Arab-Israeli accounts, had said that his Government took the term "Arab resident in Egypt" to include those resident in the Gaza area.

He informed the Israeli delegation that the Committee had transmitted to the delegations of the Arab States the suggestion by which the value of blocked merchandise could be taken in exchange for blocked assets where the country in question possessed none or insufficient assets to make a complete exchange possible, and had asked them to obtain further information on the matter from their Governments. The Arab delegations had in turn requested the Israeli Government to supply any details it might possess as to the existence of such merchandise.

Mr. SASSON said that he was not at present in a position to supply such information but that he would request it from his Government. He wished to know whether he could inform his Government at the same time that the Arab States had agreed to the proposal.

The CHAIRMAN replied in the negative, pointing out that the proposal was at present still under consideration.

He informed the Israeli delegation that the Arab delegations had asked for a precise indication as to the total amount of Arab accounts blocked in Israel.

Mr. LIFSHITZ regretted that he did not yet possess that information but would procure it very shortly from the Ministry of Finance.

The CHAIRMAN said that he had already discussed with Mr. Sasson the Committee's decision, which now had the Commission's approval, to set up a mixed technical working group to implement agreements reached on the unfreezing of accounts. It had been proposed to nominate one Israeli member, one Arab member and one neutral member, and the matter had been discussed with the Arab delegations with a view to obtaining agreement on the Arab member. He wished to know whether the Israeli delegation had any suggestions to make concerning the composition of the Committee and the way in

which it could function most effectively:

Mr. LIFSHITZ asked whether it was proposed to have one committee with one member who would represent all the Arab States or whether there would be one committee for each of the Arab States.

The CHAIRMAN replied that, since the committee was not in any way intended to be a representative body, but a purely technical group, a single committee had been envisaged with one representative for all Arab States.

Mr. LIFSHITZ thought that, since different problems would arise with regard to the various States, it would be preferable for the committee to work on a rotational basis, with an Arab member who would be appointed by each Arab government when the affairs of that particular country were under consideration. He wished to know furthermore whether the committee would establish principles or whether it would actually be responsible for the implementation of certain schemes.

The CHAIRMAN assured the representative of Israel that the Committee would study his suggestion for the composition of the mixed committee of experts. It was his understanding that this committee would principally study the methods of putting agreements for unfreezing into practice and report to the Commission. It had not yet been decided where this committee of experts would execute the plan.

Mr. SASSON thought that if the mixed committee of experts was to be called upon to decide upon general principles, it should meet in Lausanne. If, however, it were to be an executive body, it should work at points on the frontiers between Israel and the Arab States.

Mr. YENISEY agreed that it would be most appropriate for the mixed committee to begin its work in Lausanne. It would make recommendations to the General Committee and would then proceed to points on the frontiers in an executive capacity if instructed to do so.
