

UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

GENERAL COMMITTEE

RESTRICTED
Com.Gen./SR.36
17 August 1949
Original:English

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE THIRTY-SIXTH MEETING

held in Lausanne on Wednesday,
17 August 1949, at 10:45 a.m.

Present: Mr. Yenisey (Turkey) - Chairman
Mr. de la Tour du Pin (France)
Mr. Rockwell (U.S.A.)
Dr. Azcárate - Principal Secretary
Mr. Lucas - Members of the
Mr. Zorlu Technical Committee
Mr. Kunde on Refugees

General discussion with the Technical Committee

The CHAIRMAN invited questions of a general nature which the members of the General Committee might wish to put to the Technical Committee on Refugees.

Mr. de LA TOUR DU PIN had certain questions to put which he felt might not be covered by the Technical Committee's report. With regard to the statement made by Mr. Lucas at a previous meeting (see SR/89) to the effect that the entire repatriation or resettlement of all the refugees might well cover a long period of time, he recalled that after the second World War some millions of French prisoners of war had been repatriated within a relatively short time. He felt that the difficulty in the present case was merely a matter of organisation.

Mr. ZORLU explained that it would not be a case of returning the refugees to the homes they had left. The Israeli authorities had made it plain to the Committee that they were not considering such repatriation, and that the refugees would be looked upon as new immigrants and resettled in such a way as to fit them into Israel's planned economy. The whole question was one which needed careful study; it was for that reason that the Committee had recommended the establishment of an organ under international supervision, to defend the interests of the refugees.

Mr. de LA TOUR DU PIN asked whether the Committee had any information concerning the type of work to which the Israeli authorities intended to put the refugees upon their return.

Mr. ZORLU replied in the negative. The refugees would be installed in various areas, wherever the authorities considered that there was need of them at the time.

Mr. LUCAS explained that a fundamental point in the problem was Israel's insistence that the resettlement of the returning refugees was purely an internal domestic matter which concerned only Israel, rather than a problem of international concern. Here he thought the Commission might have a function to fulfill, in obtaining Israel's agreement to the sending of a committee which could in some measure supervise the resettlement. The competence of such a committee might be either broad or limited, although he thought it probable that it would not be able to do more than ensure that the returning Arabs were not mistreated.

Mr. de LA TOUR DU PIN inquired whether the Committee had any information concerning the state of plans for the proposed canal which the Israeli delegation had mentioned at one time.

Mr. ZORLU replied that no information was available and that plans did not appear to have advanced to any degree. The project would require a huge financial outlay, and he thought that for the moment it was simply being used as a bargaining point.

Mr. de LA TOUR DU PIN referred to the agreement which had been reached between the parties with a view to repatriation of members of separated families, and explained that the programme was being delayed owing to the failure of the Arab Governments to appoint the necessary representatives to assist Israeli authorities with administrative arrangements. He asked whether the Committee had any information regarding the cause of the delay.

Mr. KUNDE said he had been informed unofficially by an Egyptian official that Arab public opinion was unfavourable to the programme owing to Israel's refusal to adopt the patriarchal concept of the family.

Mr. LUCAS added that from his conversations with officers of the Mixed Armistice Commission he had gathered the impression that some doubt existed as to the role those Commissions were expected to play in the matter.

The CHAIRMAN explained that some of the Arab Governments intended to have their representatives on the Mixed Armistice Commissions serve as their spokesmen for purposes of the repatriation programme, while others intended to appoint special representatives.

Mr. de LA TOUR DU PIN requested the Committee's opinion as to the approximate number of Arabs who would actually be repatriated under the present programme.

Mr. LUCAS explained that the Israeli authorities intended to extend their security control over the applications to the checking of individual identities. Moreover, they insisted that the head of the family in Israel must be able to guarantee the financial support of those whose return he requested; and many of the Arabs now resident in Israel were unemployed. On the basis of the 800 applications so far received, a possible maximum of 4,000 persons could be repatriated, but he considered it doubtful whether that proportion would be reached.

Mr. ZORLU pointed out that the security provision was a vague one. If it were admitted that repatriation was an internal matter concerning only the State of Israel, the Israeli authorities would be free to bar any Arab they wished, on the grounds that his return would be harmful to Israel. Mr. Zorlu considered it essential that the exact conditions governing repatriation must be clearly stated.

As an illustration of the need for such clear definition of terms, Mr. KUNDE remarked that at the Committee's first interview with the Israeli authorities on the subject, the latter had spoken of "reunion of separated families", whereas at a further meeting a week later they had said it would now be necessary to speak of "admission of a certain category of refugees".

Arab orange groves in Israel (Com.Tech./6)

The CHAIRMAN inquired what had been the basis of the figures given in the Delbes report regarding the proportionate causes of destruction of the groves (section IV).

Mr. ZORLU explained that the Committee had been able to visit only a small number of groves in each region, and that for security reasons the Israeli authorities had refused to allow Arab experts to accompany the Committee. Accordingly, the figures given by Mr. Delbes had been based on information obtained from the Israeli authorities and upon his own on-the-spot observation.

Referring to a sentence in the same section of the report, the CHAIRMAN asked whether in the Committee's view the destruction of the hydraulic installations was the direct cause of destruction of the groves.

Mr. ZORLU replied in the affirmative. On the question of who was responsible for the destruction of the hydraulic installations, he considered it virtually impossible to form an opinion or to place responsibility. Israel claimed that the Arab owners had destroyed them before their departure, while the Arabs claimed that the Israeli authorities had allowed them to fall into disrepair. It was certain that the installations were completely disabled, and there were no signs that the damage was due to military operations.

Mr. Zorlu added, by way of information, that the Committee had been informed only the preceding day by Mr. Lifshitz and Mr. Arazi of the Israeli delegation that Israel had now acquired sufficient equipment to save another 3,000 dunums of the groves.

Mr. LUCAS gave it as his personal opinion that Israel intended eventually to conserve only the best and most modern of the groves; certain Israeli-owned groves which were considered of mediocre quality were not being maintained.

In reply to a question from Mr. de LA TOUR DU PIN, Mr. ZORLU affirmed that in the Committee's view the most important step was the establishment of a mixed working group with sub-divisions to deal with the question of the groves and of damage to other real property. Only through the efforts of such a group could measures of conservation be achieved. Moreover, the condition of the groves was not the only imperative problem; the status of certain real property belonging to refugees was also precarious. The Committee had, however, encountered strong resistance from the Israeli authorities on the subject of evaluation of property

damage, although the Committee had not raised specifically the question of conservation of property or of a mixed committee for that purpose. Nevertheless, the Committee considered it essential that such a mixed committee be created at the earliest possible moment, since the matter was most urgent and there would be considerable preliminary work to be done, which would take time. In connection with that preliminary work, Mr. Zorlu mentioned the fact that full lists of Arab real property existed in London; moreover, there existed in Gaza lists of all the citrus groves, with notations concerning the area they covered and their condition. He drew attention to the fact that apparently many of the groves had been in poor condition even before the war.

To a question from Mr. de LA TOUR DU PIN, who asked whether the Committee, during its tour of the groves, had received the impression that any of the plantations were Wakf property, Mr. ZORLU replied in the negative.

Mr. ROCKWELL referred to paragraph 2 of the "Conclusions" of the Delbes report, and asked what sort of immediate maintenance measures were envisaged.

Mr. ZORLU replied that it was a question of acquiring the necessary machines for watering the groves.

In reply to a question from Mr. ROCKWELL concerning the labour situation in connection with the groves, Mr. ZORLU explained that under Arab management labour had been very cheap, owing to family management and working of the groves, whereas under Israeli management labour was expensive. However, the Israeli authorities claimed that they had equalised the situation by means of mechanisation, which had eliminated a large amount of the man-power which had formerly been required;

The members of the Technical Committee on Refugees then withdrew, and the meeting was suspended for ten minutes.

In reply to a question from the Chairman, Mr. ROCKWELL expressed the view that rather than communicating the Secretariat's résumé of the Delbes report to the delegations, the Committee should transmit the report itself, after deletion of certain short sections which were not neutral in character.

Mr. de LA TOUR DU PIN suggested the deletion of the second paragraph on page 2 (section I) and the third sentence of the first paragraph of section V (page 7).

Mr. ROCKWELL thought the report should be examined carefully with a view to further necessary deletions, before it was transmitted.

The Committee adopted Mr. Rockwell's suggestions:

Report by the Principal Secretary on the first meeting of the Mixed Committee of Experts on Blocked Accounts

The PRINCIPAL SECRETARY reported that the first meeting of the Mixed Committee had taken place in an atmosphere of cordiality and informality. Both parties had agreed to consider the first meeting as purely procedural and not to begin the consideration of the substantive question until the second meeting. Statements had been made by both the Arab and Israeli members stressing their pleasure at taking part in this joint humanitarian work. Mr. Labbane had insisted on the purely technical character of the Committee which he considered to have no political implications whatsoever. The Committee had then discussed and adopted a brief and general statement of its terms of reference, which would be communicated to the General Committee and would become the first document of the Mixed Committee.

The Principal Secretary had then submitted the text of a draft press communiqué. Mr. Labbane had requested that it should be specifically stated in the communiqué that the matter being dealt with was blocked Arab accounts. Mr. Lifshitz had objected to this interpretation; but upon reference to the original Israeli proposal it had been clearly established that Mr. Labbane's understanding was correct, and the text of the communiqué had been approved with the addition of the word "Arab".

With regard to the Committee's programme of work, Mr. Labbane had requested that technical discussions should not begin until the arrival of an expert of his Government from Cairo, a member of the Ministry of Finance, who was expected within a week and would bring with him full information concerning accounts blocked in Egypt. In the meantime, the Secretariat would proceed with the necessary preparatory work.

Future work of the General Committee

The CHAIRMAN expressed the view that the suggestion of the Technical Committee regarding the establishment of a second mixed working group was one upon which the General Committee must take a decision. He himself thought it desirable that as many such committees as possible should be established in order to bring about the maximum practical rapprochement between the parties.

Mr. ROCKWELL considered it essential that the Technical Committee should put into writing, for the information of the General Committee, its ideas concerning the composition and functions of such a committee.

The CHAIRMAN thought that the Principal Secretary might be asked to draw up a statement of the functions of such a committee, after consultation with the Technical Committee.

The PRINCIPAL SECRETARY called attention to the political aspect of the question, and wished to know whether a wide or a limited field of action was contemplated for the new committee.

The CHAIRMAN thought it essential that the competence of the committee should cover damage to all types of Arab property, both the citrus groves and other real property. In reply to a request from Mr. de la Tour du Pin for clarification of exactly what sort of body the General Committee desired to create, the Chairman suggested the creation, first, of a committee which would study the best way of saving the groves and, eventually, evaluate the damage to them. Later, if the General Committee succeeded in having the creation of such a body accepted by the two parties, a second mixed group should be set up or the functions of the existing one should be extended to deal with the damage to and conservation of other forms of real property.

Mr. de LA TOUR DU PIN felt that in view of the present attitude of the Israeli delegation on the subject of evaluation of damage to property, it would be difficult to achieve acceptance of such a mixed committee; however, he thought it should certainly be discussed with all delegations.

The Committee approved the Chairman's proposal, and the Principal Secretary was asked to prepare draft terms of reference for a mixed committee on the orange groves.

Reunion of separated families

Mr. de LA TOUR DU PIN stated that he considered it unthinkable that the repatriation of members of separated families should be delayed and allowed to drag out over a long period of time. He suggested that a cable should be dispatched to General Riley, asking whether or not the Arab members of the Mixed Armistice Commissions had received definite instructions to collaborate in the programme. As soon as a reply was received, the Commission should take a firm stand with the Arab delegations on the question. Such action was particularly important since the Commission was already in an embarrassing position as regards the Israeli delegation, in view of the concrete measures taken by the Israeli Government to begin the repatriation.

The Committee agreed to the suggestion of Mr. de la Tour du Pin that a cable should be dispatched to General Riley.

- - - - -