

UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

GENERAL COMMITTEE

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

held in Lausanne, on Monday
29 August 1949, at 4:15 p.m.

Present: Mr. de la Tour du Pin (France) - Chairman
Mr. Yenisey (Turkey)
Mr. Rockwell (U.S.A.)
Dr. Azcárate - Principal Secretary
Mr. Abdel Chafi El Labbane - Representative of
Egypt
Dr. Mussa Husseini - Representative of the
Hashemite Jordan Kingdom
Mr. Mohamed Ali Hamade - Representative of
Lebanon
Mr. Ahmad Choukairi - Representative of
Syria

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Reunion of Separated Families

The CHAIRMAN stated that the Chairman of the Conciliation Commission had that morning received, and had referred to the General Committee, a letter dated 29 August from the Egyptian delegation, informing the Commission that the Egyptian Government had appointed its frontier representatives authorized to deal with the question of separated families.

The Chairman expressed his satisfaction at that initiative taken by the Government of Egypt which, he hoped, would lead to practical results. He asked whether the delegation of the other Arab States had any similar information to give the Committee.

Dr. HUSSEINI (Hashemite Jordan Kingdom) said that he had received a telegram from his Government stating that the Jordanian representatives on the Mixed Armistice Commission had been authorized to deal with the problem of separated families and to act as their Government's representatives in the matter.

Mr. HAMADE (Lebanon) informed the Committee that the same procedure had been adopted by his Government also.

Mr. CHOUKAIRI (Syria) regretted that he had not as yet received any instructions or news in that connection from his Government. He fully appreciated the fact that the problem was an urgent one and hoped he would be able to inform the Committee of appointments of representatives in the near future.

The CHAIRMAN noted the appointments which had been made with satisfaction, particularly in connection with the Jordanian representatives since many applications would doubtless be received from refugees on Jordanian territory. He expressed his appreciation at the spirit of solidarity and cooperation which the delegations of the Arab States had always shown in their meetings with the General Committee.

Speaking in the name of the French delegation, he said that whatever views were entertained as to whether the plan for the repatriation of refugees was a satisfactory one or not, the essential consideration for the present was to put that plan into effect. His own country was only too acutely aware of the miseries of internment camps and, for that reason, was particularly anxious to fulfill its duty of common humanity and charity and to alleviate the sufferings of the refugees.

Since the memorandum of 18 May had been drawn up by the Arab delegations, every possible effort had been made by all concerned but no concrete achievements had resulted. He had intended to speak in very strong terms on the subject at the present meeting but had been forestalled by the news just received from the Arab delegations. Practical steps were being taken ^{such} as the appointment of Arab representatives to deal with the reunion of families and the establishment of the Mixed Committee of Experts on Blocked Accounts which was beginning its technical study of the problem and the question of orange groves would be discussed very shortly.

In connection with the appointment of the frontier representatives, he wished to stress the fact that such appointments should not be a mere formality, but that everything humanly possible should be done to repatriate the women and children living in the wretched conditions of camp life at the earliest possible opportunity. His delegation felt most strongly that any individual measures, however, small, which could be taken should be put into application immediately. The plight of the refugees was an urgent humanitarian problem which should not be treated as propaganda.

Mr. LABBANE (Egypt) thanked the Chairman for his statement and pointed out that there had been much delay in obtaining the Jewish reply to the Arab memorandum of 18 May.

He would inform his Government of the sentiments expressed by the representative of France and would tell them that the work of the Commission and of the Arab delegations should proceed in that spirit.

Dr. HUSSEINI (Hashemite Jordan Kingdom) supported the Egyptian representative and said that his country was equally anxious to find a solution to the refugee problem.

He did not think the procedure which had been adopted was that most suitable under the circumstances and emphasized the fact that if the Arab countries had been allowed to present names and applications of refugees wishing to return, they would have willingly done so. The Jews had however preferred to ask the Arabs in Israel to make applications for the return of their relatives, and nothing could as yet be done by his Government for no names had been submitted to it by the Jews. The Jordanian delegation had already raised that question in the Commission and had been told that the procedure would be settled in the field.

The CHAIRMAN observed that even if the method adopted were not the best possible one, it was at least the beginning of a solution. He considered that the best way to deal with the flaws in the implementation of the plan mentioned by the Jordanian representative was indeed the appointment of representatives at the frontier posts who could report on difficulties and deal with certain aspects of the question in the field.

Mr. ROCKWELL suggested to Dr. Hussein that a possible reason for the Israeli delay in submitting lists of names of refugees to the Arab Governments was the fact that no representatives had been appointed by the Arab countries to receive those names.

Dr. HUSSEINI (Hashemite Jordan Kingdom) wished to point out however that it had been mentioned by his delegation previously in meetings of the Committee that the Jordanian representatives on the Mixed Armistice Commission had been authorized to receive such lists of names. None had been supplied them up to the present time.

Mr. CHOUKAIRI (Syria) stated that the Arab countries had always appreciated the Commission's attitude towards the humanitarian aspect of the Palestine problem. He thought however that the statement made in the course of the present meeting by the Chairman called for some observations on his part.

Without in any way wishing to imply any criticism of the Committee, he failed to comprehend why the Chairman had intended to speak energetically to the Arab delegations at the present meeting. Surely only the evasive attitude adopted by the Jews could call for censure. In their efforts to solve the urgent problem before them, the Arab delegations had shown an open mind and had made many sacrifices, even accepting that the refugee question be sub-divided into various categories.

With regard to the question of the orange groves, he emphasized the fact that they represented the sum total of Arab wealth in Palestine and that if immediate measures were not taken, all would be lost and the refugees who were allowed to return would thus have been deprived of their means of livelihood.

He had considered it necessary to make such a statement in order that the situation should appear in its true light. He did not wish however to belittle in any way the activities of the General Committee and the sincere sympathy they had always shown with respect to the refugees.

Replying to Dr. Husseini, Mr. ROCKWELL explained that the Commission had sent a telegram to General Riley asking whether any instructions had as yet been issued by their Governments to the Arab members of the Mixed Armistice Commissions concerning their participation in the repatriation of members of separated families. The reply had been in the negative, and had further stated that the Hashemite Jordan Kingdom was still considering the possibility of appointing special representatives, not members of the Mixed Armistice Commissions, to a joint Arab-Israeli Committee to study the question of the definition of the family. This telegram was the basis of the Committee's impression that no instructions had as yet been issued to the Arab members of the Mixed Armistice Commissions.

Dr. HUSSEINI (Hashemite Jordan Kingdom) pointed out that it was not for technical personnel in the field to determine such questions as the meaning of the word "family"; those matters lay within the competence of the General Committee, which had

endeavoured to have an alternative definition accepted by the Israeli Government, and had failed.

Replying to Mr. Choukairi, the CHAIRMAN observed that the General Committee's aim was to attain the greatest possible solidarity with the two parties, but also to achieve a beginning of practical action to relieve the refugee situation. He recognised that the operation would affect only a relatively small number of the refugees, but reiterated his firm belief that the saving of even so small a number was not only important but essential. If there were misunderstandings regarding procedure, it was in the meetings of the General Committee that such misunderstandings could and must be dissipated. Since it was impossible for the Commission to meet with both parties simultaneously in order to clear up such misunderstandings, he appealed to the Arab delegations to cooperate with the Committee in furnishing arguments which it could use with the other party.

Mr. YENISEY felt sure that the delay of the Arab Governments in appointing representatives could not be laid to negligence or lack of good faith, but had resulted simply from administrative difficulties. In the case of Syria, those difficulties were easy to understand. He thought no useful purpose could be served by further discussion of the matter at present, he thanked the Arab representatives for their cooperative spirit, and hoped that practical measures could now go forward rapidly.

Mr. HAMADE (Lebanon) observed that he had always opposed the present procedure, which he felt would be psychologically harmful. A practicable working method must be found, and he therefore renewed his former request that the General Committee should appoint a representative to centralise the lists of names and circulate them to the proper governments, which would make the necessary inquiries.

The CHAIRMAN took note of Mr. Hamade's suggestion; he thought for the time being the operation should begin on the basis of the present procedure. If that failed or too many difficulties arose, the Committee could then study another method, such as that proposed by the Lebanese representative.

Mr. LABBANE (Egypt) supported the Chairman's view. He felt that the chief difficulty which would arise under the present procedure would be the matter of special "compassionate" cases, owing to the fact that the two parties had not agreed on

the definition of the family. He therefore proposed that applications the legitimacy of which was contested by Israel should be transferred to the Commission for examination and further discussion.

Mr. HAMADE (Lebanon) made the further suggestion that if the Israeli authorities would agree to submit the lists of names to the General Committee for transmission to the Arab delegations in Lausanne, the latter would undertake to transmit the lists to their Governments and to give a reply within five days.

Dr. HUSSEINI (Hashemite Jordan Kingdom) had an observation to make concerning the orange groves. The report of the Technical Committee had stated that 25% of the groves could still be saved if immediate measures of conservation were applied. In his opinion, if such measures had been taken at the time the Arab delegations had first requested them, the proportion which could have been saved would have been nearer 50%. The Israeli authorities had deliberately delayed those measures, and the Commission in all good faith had been forced to acquiesce in that policy. He wished it noted that this delay, for which the Arabs were not responsible, had caused the loss of a great amount of the wealth of Arabs in Palestine, and that any further delay would result in still further losses and more suffering to the refugees. He wished to draw attention to the responsibility of the Jews in this matter.

The CHAIRMAN expressed the sympathy of the General Committee toward the Arabs in this matter. He pointed out that the Commission considered the matter so important and so urgent that it had decided to deal with the question itself, and it would in all probability be included in the agenda of the next meeting.