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*Palestine
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American Friends Service Committee

(QUAKERS)

Twenty South Twelfth Street
Philadelphia 7, Pennsylvania

U. S. A.

MEMORANDUM

Palestine Refugee Relief Unit
8 Sharia Dar el Shifa, Garden City
Cairo, Egypt.
Telephone 49708

*Palestine
General
Repatriation*

CONFIDENTIAL

March 6, 1949

TO : Mr. D. Replogle, Chairman of the Quakers P.R.R.U.
FROM : Dr. Mohamed A. Abbasy, FAO Nutrition Representative in the Near-East.
SUBJECT : Permanent solution of the Refugee problem in the Gaza area.

This memorandum is based on the facts got as a result of interviewing as many refugees as possible in the majority of the camps in the Gaza area, bearing in mind the facts you disclosed to me verbally on my arrival at Gaza. The refugees interviewed in each case were selected to represent as much as possible the various villages, towns and districts of Palestine evacuated by the Arabs; therefore it could be claimed that they form a reliable representative sample of the whole group.

In the next few paragraphs I am going to summarize the main points discussed and the conclusions arrived at as much detail is of no practical value; commenting as I go on these conclusions when necessary.

To start with, this task was rather a delicate and difficult one. At first the vast majority did not understand the real object of my talks with them. It took me a lot of time and effort to explain clearly what I am driving at. This was still more complicated by the fact that I am an Egyptian, and the Egyptian forces still occupy their country, and they felt it necessary to show some pretended courtesy that hid to some extent their real feelings. Again the Quakers arm-band I wore gave them the false impression that I am delegated by the UN or a similar body to negotiate with them some definite proposals, and that is why many of them said "ask our leaders". For this reason when I had the chance to accompany with me some of my reliable highly educated and well known Palestinian friends I did not hesitate to do so. This was very effective in securing the confidence of the people and getting them to express their real feelings.

The results of these talks and discussions could be given in the following points:-

- 1.- The Palestinian Arabs have not the slightest confidence in the Jews, even if they guarantee their safety and security. Their main argument is the "Dier Yaseen" incident. This village had an agreement with the Jews to the effect that none will attack the other, and actually the Jews used to pass freely and safely through that village. Yet before the British Mandate ended, the inhabitants of that village for no obvious reason were brutally attacked and massacred by the Jews. The details of that incident are of course known to you. They hold this incident responsible for the running away of the greater percentage of the Arabs when the Mandate ended, and even before it

did end. They claim that had this did not happen, most of the Arabs would have been now at their homes.

- 2.- Out of sheer misery, the refugees are apt to accept any solution. They think that they cannot be more worse under any other circumstances.
- 3.- Most if not all refugees wish to return back to their homes and land provided their security and safety are guaranteed by the UN and Arab-League. We have to remember that farmers in this part of the world are very closely tied to their land where they were born. They do not like to move away even in the same country. They also in this particular case of Palestine that immigration is an act of treason against their country which need every body to be present to defend it when the necessity arises; and that large scale immigration is a means of destruction to their country.
- 4.- When the question of partial return to their jewish dominated homes was discussed, openions were conflicting. The vast majority stressed firmly that either all returns or none at all. Those who owned land were among this group. They do not want to part with their land for anything.
When it was pointed out that this might be impossible, they remarked that true "Democracy" which is claimed by every body does not allow such a thing. They stated that they must work to this end, and if they fail to achieve this, they cannot help it because it will not be their fault.
A minority declined to express any openion and said that it is the duty of the Arab-League, and we are ready to do what they decide for us. This group is mostly formed of hired farmers.
- 5.- It was difficult to convince this minority with the possibility that some refugees, Godness knows how much, might not be able to return. Then the question how to solve the problem of those who are not allowed to return was discussed. The various alternatives to solve this problem were as follows:-
 - a.- To settle down in the Arab part of Palestine. Those who own land in the jewish controlled zone are to be given instead jewish owned land in the Arab controlled zone, taking into consideration the relative value of land in both zones. It is claimed that land in the jewish zone is worth more than that in the Arab zone. In case no jewish owned land is available in the Arab zone, the owners are given the market price for their land plus a decent compansation for the damage and losses they encountered since they left. Then they are at liberty to buy land in the Arab zone of Palestine, provided this will be available.
 - b.- Their last resort will be to immigrate to an Arab Country. They accept immigration not because they like it, but because there is no other alternative. But they seem to feel secure if they go to an Arab State, provided they are well treated and not exploited.

I might add that some of the educated refugees are at present trying

to find jobs in any of the Arab States. Some of them have succeeded in securing such jobs and went to take office or in their way to do so.

I want to stress another point, that as I stated in (2), the refugee's present condition is an important factor inducing them to accept any solution that might improve their status. It must always be remembered that when such a solution is actually adopted, and the condition of the refugees actually improves, they might lead them to change their mind and ask for what they feel to be better.

The service of an expert on immigration is needed because as it seems this question has to be brought up in one way or another.

I guess this is what you asked me to find out; and I do hope that this will be of value to you in formulating your future plans. If you feel that something else has to be done by me in this line, I will be only glad to do what I can.

M. A. A.
M. A. A. [Signature]

MEMORANDUM

9/12/49

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Palestine General

Repatriation

AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE

20 SOUTH TWELFTH STREET
PHILADELPHIA 7, PA

Date September 12, 1949

To: Colin Bell

From: James Read

Subject: Conversations with Eban

ff.

In mid-August, Don Stevenson and I had a talk with Eban at the U.N. Don has reported on this but for the record I would like to put down a few of my notes.

We talked about the question of the reliability of the Arabs. I said that I was rather sorry to see the statements by Ben-Gurion and Sharrett to the effect that letting Arabs back in the country would mean a great Fifth Column. I said that I thought most ordinary people were not Fifth Columnists by nature and that one only did harm to himself by being so hypersuspicious. Eban agreed only reluctantly and said that after all "people can be stirred up". I admitted that might be so but that the rumors were usually much worse than the actual fact as seen in the case of the Japanese-Americans who were accused of wholesale sabotage at Hawaii on the day of the Pearl Harbor attack. Years later it develops that there was no single act of sabotage and that the whole Japanese-American population there behaved themselves with great loyalty and decorum.

We talked about the proposition of Israel taking over the Gaza strip along with the refugees. He said that the proposition was made in good faith. I said that I understood it had been given to the newspapers first and therefore could not have been a really serious offer. He said that this was not the case but that it had been transmitted by the U.S. State Department to the Egyptians with no result. He also pointed out that it was needed for the security of Israel. I said that we thought it was a fairly good idea but that this kind of reasoning would certainly not make it attractive to Egypt and that some other reason for its acquisition must certainly be available such as the need for more territory if one were going to take in more refugees.

A rather strange part of the information that Eban transmitted to us was the fact that there are a great many Arab villages left which can be immediately reoccupied by the Arabs. I said that I thought that all of them were razed to the ground or occupied by Jewish immigrants. He said that this was not the case.

He felt that a great many Arab refugees had come back into Israel. He said that when he was there last August, there were only 80,000 Arab refugees in the State but now there are 170,000. He admitted that Israel would need help in settling these people in.

JMR/dt

October 12, 1949

UNNUMBERED

Clarence Pickett
American Friends Service Committee
Twenty South Twelfth Street
Philadelphia 7, Pennsylvania

Dear Clarence Pickett:

With the rainy season about to begin, and the nights already growing colder, the Unit in Gaza wishes to write you this special letter about the current attitudes and thinking among the refugees of the Gaza area. It is not, and indeed cannot be a reflection of the attitudes of refugees other than those for whom we work. It is in no way a relection of our own attitudes towards present and coming problems concerned with continuation, participation, registration or diet cuts. Please use this letter in any way you see fit which will help alleviate human suffering. Primarily, however, it is for you to provide background material upon which Committee decisions might partially be based.

Since it is very difficult for refugees here to communicate with the outside world, we feel we have an obligation to convey what we can of their opinions and thinking at the present time. They feel strongly that the United Nations are responsible for their plight, and therefore have the total responsibility to feed, house, clothe, and repatriate them. This is in addition to the feeling of many of them that the Arab governments have also let them down; some even feel that left alone they could have, and even now might reach a solution with the Jews. Accordingly the relief we bring them appears to them to be their right, and in no way an act of humanitarian charity on the part of the United Nations. There is some sentiment that once the United Nations leaves the area, the matter could be finished by war; "therefore, why don't you leave us" - runs this line of thought.

Above all else, they desire to go home- back to their lands and villages which, in many cases, are very close. Apparently they do not hesitate to go back to the changed culture which is growing in Israel. This desire naturally continues to be the strongest demand they make; sixteen months of exile has not diminished it. Without it, they would have nothing for which to live. It is expressed in many ways and forms every day. "Why keep us alive" - is one expression of it. It is as genuine and deep as a man's longing for his home can be. In the minds of refugees resettlement is not even considered.

They realize that their skills are deteriorating. They recognize the erosion of the soul which their situation is fostering. No daily run of reports or statistics can adequately convey the harm and injury done to family life, to young people with no normal hope of work or school. A culture just on the threshold of progress - by western standards - has been set back a generation. Violence and criminality, always close to the surface here, move closer. One of us was told the other day upon leaving, "Remember us in your heart" - the implication being that no concrete help would be forthcoming.

It takes no expert to notice that their living conditions are becoming worse. Tents are ripping and burlap roofs rot. They see that they are being barely kept alive in a world that, apparently, has no place for them. The marginal diet which we administer is resented by them, and we are gravely concerned by talk of lowering it. Babies of a year and under do not receive the kinds of nourishment which might give them reserves of health for the winter. They appreciate the health services, and increasingly use the camp clinics. Clothing, never adequate by our standards, is a constant item requested by them of us, but unfortunately we have no stocks of clothing sufficient for a distribution to those in need. As they become colder and more hungry, the refusal of the outside world to make decisions which would relieve their suffering creates more and more bitterness. Their hope for help is more pathetic because they cannot see who is their real friend. They feel that the bigger nations have created a situation which they are now abandoning in some part.

Through you, we hope this interpretation may be brought to those whose duty it is to make the necessary rapid decisions, as well as in an indirect manner, before the conscience of the public. The refugee asks not for long range solutions, important as we know them to be, but for some practical token of justice and good will in the immediate future.

American Friends Service Committee

Gaza Unit

[10/49] A
Proposed draft of Letter to Trygve Lie

Palestine
General
Repatriation

Hon. Trygve Lie
Secretary General
United Nations
Lake Success, New York

Dear Friend:

We are moved to address you by a deep concern for the present plight of the Arab refugees from Palestine for whom we have been administering relief under UNRPR, and thus as the agent of the United Nations Organization.

After sixteen months of exile, these people are steadily deteriorating. The rainy season is again upon them. Their morale declines as they see no prospect of an end to their distress. Their skills atrophy from disuse. Above all things, they want to go home.

Our workers in the field have jointly sent us a most urgent plea from which we know you will recognize that they who went out to give their service are suffering, too.

and work?
"They recognize the erosion of the soul which their situation is fostering. No daily run of reports or statistics can adequately convey the harm and injury done to family life, to young people with no normal hope of work or school. A culture just on the threshold of progress -- by western standards -- has been set back a generation. Violence and criminality, always close to the surface here, move closer. One of us was told the other day upon leaving, 'Remember us in your heart' -- the implication being that no concrete help would be forthcoming.

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The extraordinary urgency of the situation demands extraordinary means for its solution.

We appeal to you to use your great influence to lift the entire consideration from the plane of political expediency to the level of high humanitarian regard for people caught in the backwash of conflict.

Through you we would appeal to the State of Israel to allow without delay the return of a number whose acceptance would amount to real sacrifice, in view of the other problems of the new State. The moral quality of such action would do much to restore confidence.

Through you, too, we would appeal to the Arab States to look at this situation from the viewpoint of human need alone and to make on their part a sacrificial effort to receive and help restore to productive status these people of their own blood and language.

Such action taken unilaterally by both parties might improve the atmosphere for the solution of other pressing issues and enhance the recognition of the great purpose of the United Nations.

We are at your service to assist in any way within our power.

Respectfully,

Clarence C. Pickett
Executive Secretary

November 1, 1949