

Friends Feed Exiled Arabs

200,000 Refugees Await Peace Terms

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I have just returned from a two-month trip to the Middle East. My purpose was three-fold; one, to help



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launch the relief program which the American Friends Service Committee is administering for the United Nations in the Gaza area of southern and southwestern Palestine where there are approximately 200,000 Arab refugees; two, to negotiate with governments in the Middle East on current problems relating to the relief program, and three, to talk with them about long-range solutions to the refugee problem.

On the first part of my mission, I can report that the relief program is well underway. Quaker workers are distributing an average of 200 tons of food per day, six days a week. This results in a ration of 2000 calories per day for each of the 200,000 refugees. The food consists of flour, lentils, beans, some rice, sugar, oil, and a little meat for the children, and milk for the children, pregnant women and nursing mothers. The milk is furnished by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund. In addition, we have distributed about 1300 tents which have provided simple, though severely overcrowded, shelter.

We are also setting up a medical program, which will minister to the needs of ill refugees, and will attempt to head off epidemics which will become a more imminent danger as the cool weather gives way to summer.

One need which neither the Service Committee nor the United Nations had anticipated is the need for schools. There are approximately 70,000 children of school age among the refugees, of ages six to 16. Under the administration of the director of the Cairo School for Social Work who has been loaned to us for half-time work, tent schools, using refugee teachers and primers furnished by the Egyptian government, have been set up which will furnish two hours instruction each day to each child. Because there are so few books and tents for schools, the classes must be conducted in shifts—three shifts each day.

There are other needs which we are attempting to meet, such as the need for some religious services for the refugees, 90 percent of whom are Moslems. We are planning to set up prayer tents, so that regular prayers may be conducted for those refugees who wish to attend.

SERVICES TEMPORARY

But all of these services which I have described are definitely "relief" services, hence temporary. Even if all the needs of every refugee were taken care of, they would not be satisfied; they would still want to return to their homes and live their own lives. Aside from that fact, the United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees program is scheduled to last only through August, 1949. So while it is important that the health and welfare of the refugees be guarded now; it is also imperative that a concerted effort be made by the refugees themselves, by the governments of the Middle East, the United Nations, and individuals everywhere to arrive at some workable solution of the refugee problem.

If this effort is to be made in seriousness, we must insist on some standards, some prerequisites for dis-

cussion. First, the refugees must never be regarded as possibilities for political bargaining. They are people who are in trouble and who need help. Secondly, the fact of the existence of the some 700,000 Arab refugees must be accepted by Arab and Jew and honest and sacrificial efforts made quickly to resettle them. This problem does not need to be drawn out as has that of the Displaced Persons and must not be so delayed.

To neglect this chance is to court future wars and retaliation for an indefinite time.

I would like, therefore, to suggest a few points which I believe, if followed, would look toward breaking the vicious cycle in the Middle East and would move toward a solution for the refugee problem.

1. We must help the refugees themselves to view their situation realistically. They must realize that even if they go home, as all of them long to do, their lives can never be as they were before "the circumstances," as they term the Middle East upheaval. Most of the refugees are farmers, and most of them farmed their little plots of land as they were farmed in the days of Jesus. But they will live in a different country now—a new state, a modern state, a state that is becoming more and more industrialized and a state which will insist, for its own material survival, that every plot of land be used to produce the maximum amount possible. The refugees must realize that they are facing an industrial revolution, and must be willing to make the adjustments necessary.

2. Arab refugees as they fled home left behind valuable properties. For those who do not return, there should be prompt and full indemnity for property loss. For those who wish to return to their business or professional life, early agreements should provide for repatriation.

3. A public works program involving simple forms of employment should be devised promptly, pending

development of longer range projects, financed from United Nations funds.

4. Technical assistance in Farm Credit and modern agricultural methods must be made available to the governments of Israel and the neighboring Arab states to train the refugees for a substantial repatriation in Israel or for resettlement elsewhere. The experience of the Farm Security and Farm Credit Administrations in the United States could be of invaluable assistance at this point.

5. Naturally the Arab refugee wants to go "home." And "home" is now in the Jewish State of Israel. It is my conviction that if the above steps are followed there is every reason to urge a substantial repatriation of Arabs into the state of Israel.

TECHNICAL SKILL NEEDED

6. Resettlement programs can be planned and executed successfully in Syria, Trans-Jordan and Iraq. However, these programs will call for great technical skill, planning and time. Large tracts of land will have to be irrigated so that it might become productive enough to support the refugees, but water can be made accessible in these areas for irrigation. Only by the extension of outside financing can these essential developments take place.

I consider it a privilege to work with the American Friends Service Committee and the United Nations in an effort to prevent the continuation of bitterness and threat of future reprisals—and even for a creative peace.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION INQUIRE

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