

UNITED NATIONS

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Ad Hoc Committee on Palestine
17th Meeting

(PM) Summary
Press Release GA/PAL/20
17 October 1947

AD HOC COMMITTEE ON PALESTINE HEARS STATEMENT BY MR. MOSHE
SHERTOK OF JEWISH AGENCY

At this afternoon's meeting the Committee heard a statement from Mr. Moshe Shertok, Head of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency for Palestine.

Mr. Shertok first drew attention to the fact that the point of view of the Arabs of Palestine had been presented many times by those within the United Nations who were so linked to the Arabs by culture and tradition as to have an identity of view. The Jews, on the other hand, could express themselves only through the Jewish Agency in the Committee and not at all in the Assembly. This very disparity said Mr. Shertok, illustrated one of the fundamental issues involved in the Palestine question - that on the one hand the Jews, lacking at present national status, looked to Palestine as the only country in which the Jewish people could hope to attain a secure home and national status. On the other hand, the Arabs of Palestine were only a small part of the Arab peoples who, on the whole, enjoyed national sovereignty throughout very considerable territory in the Middle East.

Mr. Shertok said that this situation had been recognized by the victors of World War I and had been the premise which had resulted both in the declaration that the Arabs would be helped to achieve freedom and national sovereignty and the premise that a National Home for the Jews would be created in Palestine. He adduced several arguments to support his view that the two statements had been intended to be complementary, Palestine not being included among the territory in which the Arabs were to realize their national sovereignty.

Noting that 57 of the present Members of the United Nations had been Members of the League, Mr. Shertok pointed out that the Balfour Declaration had become a recognized international instrument following its adoption by the League and endorsement by the United States. It was therefore included as "part of the Law of the United Nations" under Article 80 of the Charter - a fact which Mr. Shertok said was well recognized by the Arabs at San Francisco, where they made unsuccessful attempts to have Article 80 deleted.

Mr. Shertok quoted from the Charter the sentence reaffirming faith in

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fundamental human rights, and he asserted that it applied to the case of the Jewish claim for statehood.

Mr. Shertok declared that Arab activity increased in the measure as Jewish development progressed, and he denied that the Jews are driving the Arabs from their lands. He pointed out that a large part of the land acquired by the Jews had originally been given up as incapable of cultivation and had to be reclaimed at a heavy cost.

Mr. Shertok said that the sacrifices involved in the partition plan cannot be exaggerated. He added that the Jewish Agency does not regard the Economic union of the proposed Arab and Jewish States as essential for the latter.

Concluding, Mr. Shertok acknowledged the importance of implementing the United Nations decision but added that complications arising from a settlement of the Palestine Question will be smaller in the event of a United Nations decision than without it.

The Committee will reconvene tomorrow, Saturday 18 October, at 3:30 p.m.

(A chronological account of this meeting is given in Takes #1 through #3 which follow this Summary).

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AD HOC COMMITTEE ON PALESTINE
17th meeting

(IM) TAKE #1
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17 October 1947

PALESTINE (IM) TAKE #1

Mr. Moshe Shertok, Head of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, was the first speaker at this afternoon's meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Palestinian Question.

Mr. Shertok began by saying that the Jewish Agency, ^{found} itself at a serious disadvantage in relation to its Arab counterpart, because it alone represented the Jewish people in the face of the fifty-seven nations assembled in the Committee, whereas the Arabs of Palestine had brothers, several Members in the Committee, with whom they were united by the closest bonds of kinship and identity of outlook. This disparity in status, said Mr. Shertok, between the representation of the Arab and the Jewish case at the Committee was still more obvious at the assembly from which the Jewish Agency was completely debarred.

Mr. Shertok then declared that in the question of Palestine, the United Nations were faced with two main issues: first, that Palestine is the only country in which the Jewish people can hope to attain a secure home and a national status on equal footing with other independent nations; and second, that the Arabs of Palestine are not a people in themselves but a fraction of a much larger unit, amply secure in the possession of vast areas and in the enjoyment of full-fledged sovereignty and independence.

This dualism, said Mr. Shertok, was clearly reflected in the international instruments of the time: the purpose of the Mandates for Syria and Iraq was to prepare those countries for independence; the primary purpose of the Palestine Mandate was to promote the establishment of the Jewish National Home.

Mr. Shertok then went on to say that an attempt had been made in the Committee to invalidate the part of the settlement concerning Palestine and to extend to Palestine the validity of the other part. In this regard Mr. Shertok referred to the arguments put forth at a previous meeting by the Representative of Pakistan. Mr. Shertok quoted statements by the late King Hussein of the Hedjaz and by his son, the late King Feisal of Iraq, to the effect that Palestine was the homeland of the Jews, and that Jewish immigration into that country was worthy of encouragement.

(MORE)

Mr. Shertok then turned to the question of the international validity of the Palestinian settlement which resulted from World War I. Of the McMahon promises and the Hogarth message which the Pakistan Representative had cited as proofs that Palestine was not excluded from the plans for independence of the Arab countries, Mr. Shertok said that both documents were at best instruments regulating the relations between Great Britain and a certain Arab dynasty, but that no amount of legalistic casuistry could avail to undermine the overriding authority of the Palestine Mandate.

Mr. Shertok declared that under Article 80 of the Charter, the Mandate, as long as it had not been replaced by any other instrument, was part of the law of the United Nations. Mr. Shertok also stated that as many as 47 out of the present 57 members of the United Nations had been members of the League of Nations, and among the 47 were also Egypt and Iraq. The delegate for Egypt, he said, declared during the Special Session of the Assembly, that when his country joined the League of Nations it made a reservation regarding the Palestine Mandate, but a scrutiny of the records of the League of Nations revealed no trace of such a reservation. Iraq, added Mr. Shertok, joined the League under a declaration that it would fulfill all the obligations which membership of the League involved; this certainly included respect of the Palestine Mandate, said Mr. Shertok.

(END OF TAKE #1)

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(PM) TAKE # 2
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AD HOC COMMITTEE ON PALESTINE - (PM) TAKE # 2

Continuing, Mr. Shertok said that it was the exertions, sacrifices and final victory of Allied armies which resulted in the liberation of Palestine and the Arab provinces. It was to that victory, he said, that most independent Arab States of today owed their existence. If they accepted the boon of independence which fell into their lap like a ripe plum, he added, they must accept its price. The pledge to grant the Arabs independence in large areas and the setting aside of Palestine for the Jewish people were organic parts of the same war settlement.

It was, Mr. Shertok went on, Allied victory again in World War II which saved that independence. To that second victory, he said, the Arab States contributed nothing. The only community, he declared, in the Middle East which really fought in the war and had its heart in the fighting were the Jews of Palestine.

Mr. Shertok quoted from the opening passage of the Charter the sentence reaffirming "faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small."

The dignity and worth of a Jew as a human person, he said, could not fully assert itself, nor could Jewish men and women attain equal rights with others, unless the people to which they belong were placed on a footing of complete equality with other peoples -- that is, unless its national existence were secured and unless it were enabled to enjoy, at least in one corner on the face of the globe which it could call its own, the dignity and effective protection of statehood.

Regarding the Arab contention that the Jews are not a people and have no valid connection with Palestine, Mr. Shertok said the Jewish people was born in Palestine and shaped by it, and that it was an untruth and an irrelevancy to suggest that the Jews of Europe were not Jews at all but descendants of a Mongolian tribe.

Mr. Shertok was equally critical of the Arab contention that most Jews are not Zionists.

Much had been made of the fact, he said, in Jewish enterprises, as a rule, Jewish labor was employed. But, he said, the main criterion by which the value of Jewish development to the Arab population stood or fell was not how many Arabs were employed by Jews, but whether the total volume of employment available to the

(MORE)

Arabs rose or dropped as its result, and one of the most conspicuous trends in Palestine's economic life, he said, was the constant increase of Arab employment in the measure as Jewish development progressed.

Of the allegation that the Jews are driving the Arabs off their land, Mr. Shertok said that with the progress of farming, Arab peasants were becoming more rooted in the soil, not less, and that the Jews have, so far, managed to acquire less than seven percent of the land area of Palestine. Furthermore, he said, a large part of the land acquired by the Jews had not been withdrawn from Arab farming at all. It had originally been given up as uncultivable and had to be reclaimed at a heavy cost.

It was important to remember, he added, that the bulk of the country's land area -- 18,000,000 dunams (1 dunam equals 2½ acres) out of a total of 26,000,000 -- were today classed as uncultivable. The Arabs, he said, had no incentive to develop the largest part of that derelict total, and unless the Jews were given the freedom of experiment and reclamation, those large tracts would remain for generations to come, if not forever, in the present state of stagnation.

(END OF TALK #2)

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AD HOC COMMITTEE ON PALESTINE (RM) TAKE #3
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AD HOC COMMITTEE ON PALESTINE (RM) TAKE #3

Mr. Shertok then went on to say that if the Jewish people had been given a proper chance, in terms of time and administrative facilities, for conducting large-scale immigration and settlement in the true spirit of the Mandate, then the whole area of Palestine would in a not-too-distant future have become a Jewish State, that is, an independent state with a Jewish majority. But, he said, the defection of the Mandatory in the White Paper of 1939, its refusal to revert to the status quo ante after the war, and the apparent absence of a practicable alternative to the Mandatory regime, such as would render possible the continuation of large-scale Jewish immigration and settlement in an undivided Palestine over a period of years, faced the Jewish Agency with the imperative necessity of seeking a short-cut to independence.

Mr. Shertok then stressed the "frightful urgency" of a provision for an immediate substantial increase of immigration to Palestine if mass suffering was to be alleviated and tragedies were to be avoided.

Continuing, Mr. Shertok stated that the sacrifices involved in the partition plan for the Jewish people could not be exaggerated, and that in view of the far reaching effect of every aspect of the scheme on the Jewish future, the Jewish Agency trusted that it would be given full opportunity to present and defend its case at such sub-committee or sub-committees as the Ad Hoc Committee might decide to appoint.

Of the proposed Economic Union he said that the Jewish Agency had accepted it, but that since sharp criticism of the idea was voiced by some Arab spokesmen, and sinister designs on the Arab State were imputed in this connection to the Jewish Agency, he would make it clear that the Jewish Agency did not in the least regard the Economic Union as essential for the well-being of the Jewish State. Rather on the contrary, he said, it entailed a heavy burden on its finances, and some curtailment of its sovereignty.

(MORE)

Declaring that the earliest possible grant of independence to Palestine might now be regarded as a foregone conclusion, Mr. Shertok said that in a unitary State the position of the Jews would be very unequal. Mr. Shertok added that the Jewish Agency was greatly heartened by the statements made by the Representatives of the US and the USSR, as well as by the statements made by other delegations.

Concluding, Mr. Shertok stated that the implementation of the United Nations decision was admittedly a serious problem. The Jewish Agency, he said, was anxious to assist in its solution in the sub-committee and would have practical proposals to make. Anyway, he added, the practical difficulty and international complications which might arise from a new political settlement in Palestine would be smaller and less serious in the event of a United Nations decision than without it.

Mr. Jamal Hussein, Vice-President of the Arab Higher Committee intimated that he would make a statement at tomorrow's meeting.

The Committee adjourned at 4:45 and will reconvene tomorrow, Saturday, at 3:00 P.M.

(End of Take #3 and of Press
Release GA/PAL/20)

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