

Rehovoth, 24th June, 1949

Dear Mr. President,

The Government of Israel have communicated to me the text of the Note transmitted to them on your behalf on the 29th May, as well as their reply of June 8th. The matters raised in the Note are of such gravity that I feel impelled to address you personally on the subject. You have throughout taken such a warm and helpful interest in the affairs of our young State that I am most anxiously concerned that you, our great and good friend, should be under no misapprehension regarding our position and intentions concerning the issues now at stake. I wish, indeed, it were possible for me to talk matters over personally with you. That is always the best way of removing misunderstanding.

We have all been distressed at the slow progress made at Lausanne. It may be that the device of a Conciliation Commission, consisting not of officers of the U.N., but of delegates of three different countries, with different backgrounds and policies, was not the best way of promoting a speedy settlement. It certainly appears to have been less effective than the mediation of one man pursued in the name of the United Nations as a whole. But be that as it may, we are trying our best to work with this Commission and have submitted to them a number of proposals, to none of which we have so far received any reply from the other side. Indeed up till now the Arab States have altogether refused to sit with our delegates under the auspices of the Commission.

When our Delegation first arrived in Lausanne on April 30th, they immediately announced that they had come with full authorisation to negotiate a comprehensive peace settlement with the delegates of the Arab States covering all the matters referred to in the U.N. Resolution of 11th December, 1948. They specifically stated that Israel was ready to contribute towards solving the Arab refugee problem in cooperation with the United Nations and the Arab States. A few days later they submitted to the Commission a draft preamble and two articles of a proposed peace treaty to serve as a basis for discussion. In this draft they proposed, among other things, the final liquidation of the war, the establishment of normal political and economic relations between Israel and the Arab States, mutual guarantees of the frontiers, abstention from the use of force for the settlement of disputes, and international arbitration in case such disputes could not be settled by agreement.

To this day we have not received any reply to these basic proposals.

Coming to the question of the Arab refugees, our delegation gave repeated assurances to the Commission that Israel was ready to cooperate with the U.N. and the Arab States for a solution of the refugee problem. We pledged ourselves to guarantee the civil rights of all minorities within our territory; we accepted the principle of compensation for land abandoned by Arabs; we declared our readiness to unfreeze Arab accounts in our banks immediately on the conclusion of peace; we set up a Custodian of Absentee Property. Our delegation informed the Commission that the Government of Israel was ready to readmit members of Arab families separated by the war.

in conformity with the General Assembly's Resolution of December 11th, relating to access to ports and means of communication our delegation has offered to create a free zone in the Haifa port for the benefit of Transjordan. Various proposals were made by our delegation for the delimitation of the frontiers of Israel with the Arab States. Our delegation also elaborated our attitude on the Jerusalem question.

All these constructive proposals have not elicited a single reply from the Arab delegations. It would, indeed, appear that these delegations did not come to Lausanne with authority to negotiate a peace settlement, but solely for the purpose of arranging for the repatriation of the Arab refugees to Israel.

Our delegation subsequently proposed the establishment of a number of sub-committees to deal with the general principles and conditions of peace, the territorial settlement, the refugee problem, the Jerusalem question, and the economic development of the Middle East, pursuant to Clause 10 of the U.N. Resolution of December 11th. We have not yet learnt the reaction of the Arab Delegations to these proposals. Finally, when members of the Commission suggested in a spirit of despondency that the Conference be suspended for a time, our delegation strongly opposed this course.

I feel sure you will agree, Mr. President, that in the light of these indisputable facts, we can hardly be charged with having failed to cooperate with the Commission. If so far nothing substantial has resulted from these talks, this is due essentially to the negative attitude of the Arab delegations and their persistent refusal to meet us under the auspices of the Commission. It is a great pity that the Commission failed to dislodge them from that negative attitude.

Permit me to add a few words on the two issues which are in the centre of the discussion: the territorial question and the refugee problem.

We have no aggressive designs against anyone and we are not looking for additional territory. But I think that no fair-minded man will deny us the right to retain that part of our ancient land which has become ours at a terrible cost of blood and treasure in the course of a war forced upon us by others. Most of the country which we hold beyond the boundaries set out on November 29th, 1947 was occupied by our forces during the second military campaign which was the result of the Arabs' defiant refusal to accept the Mediator's urgent plea for a continuation of the first truce. Bitter experience has shown that without that territory we are defenceless. Were we to give up the corridor to Jerusalem, that great city, whose people suffered so much and so heroically last year, would again be exposed to the danger of having its water supply cut off and of being starved into submission. In exactly the same way, Western Galilee holds the key to the defence of Haifa and the Valley of Jezreel, while the Ramleh area assures the safety of Tel Aviv from such menacing attacks as were launched upon it last year. None of these areas was ever allotted to any of the Arab States with which we are now negotiating. All of them are occupied by Israel legally under armistice agreements.

The Palestine Arab State contemplated in the U.N. Resolution of 29th November 1947 has not come into being - not through any fault of ours - and there is no reason whatever why the neighbouring Arab States who invaded Palestine in flagrant defiance of their obligations under the Charter, should be appeased by territorial "compensation" at our expense. Incidentally, all these demands for compensation in the end boil down to the same old question on which you took so firm a stand last year - the Negev. It is the Negev, particularly the southern Negev, which appears again to be demanded from us. The reasons against it are just as potent as they were last year when you so strongly opposed our being deprived of that area which contains the country's sole mineral resources and which, in addition, is our only gateway to the East. What importance attaches to our having direct access to the Red Sea has been brought home to us strikingly by Egypt's closing of the Suez Canal to all ships - even British ships - carrying, or suspected of carrying, goods to Israel. Because of such closure we are compelled to bring vital supplies (wheat, etc.) from Australia and the Far East all the way via the Cape and Gibraltar. With the coast of Eilat in our possession and the Negev opened up by transport roads, we shall have free access to the sea routes which are vital to our existence.

Now as to the refugee problem. It is a grave issue, but it was not created by us. It was not the birth of Israel which created the Arab refugee problem, as our enemies now proclaim, but the Arab attempt to prevent that birth by armed force. These people are not refugees in the sense in which that term has been sanctified by the martyrdom of millions in Europe - they are part of an aggressor group which failed and which makes no secret of its intention to resume aggression. They left the country last year at the bidding of their leaders and military commanders and as part of the Arab strategic plan. But in spite of all this we are, for humanitarian reasons, ready to contribute as far as we can towards a solution of this problem. We have, in fact, done a good deal more under this head than could, for obvious reasons, be published. Your Ambassador has been given details under this head. We have been steadily re-admitting Arab refugees during the last few months. The number of those who have returned exceeds 25,000. We are ready to re-unite Arab families separated by the war, and we are now approaching the various Arab States through the Mixed Armistice Commissions for setting up special machinery to facilitate their return in organised form. We are prepared to re-admit more as part of a peace settlement. There are, however, two overriding considerations which limit what we can do in this sphere: we dare not again endanger our hard-won independence and security and, with all the good will in the world, we cannot undertake tasks which are economically beyond our strength.

So many malicious charges have been levelled against us in connection with this Arab refugee question, that I cannot help drawing attention to the basic realities of the situation. We are a small State, nine hundred thousand Jews wedged in between forty million Arabs. We held our own last year by a terrific effort and at very heavy sacrifices, losing some of our finest youth and suffering heavy damage. The Arab States are making no secret of their intention of resuming war whenever they are ready for it. Only two days ago Faris el Khoury, the former Syrian member of the Security Council and Chairman of the Syrian Chamber, declared that the war against us "remains the corner-stone of Arab policy". Not a week passes without our being warned by authoritative Arab spokesmen of the coming "second round". The Arab States are rearming on a big scale, building up modern armament industries



of their own and purchasing the most deadly modern weapons. A few weeks ago squadrons of British Vampire jet fighters were flown to the Suez Canal Zone - half an hour's air flight from our frontier - ready for instant delivery when wanted, while Egyptian pilots are being trained in their use close by. Egypt has also ordered British destroyers with 4" and 6" guns and submarines, while there is hardly any secret about the French rearming the Syrians. This rearmament, Mr. President, constitutes a direct threat to the peace of the Middle East and thereby also to the peace of the world. With this open threat of war hanging over us, can we ignore the security aspect of the admission of a large Arab population who, whatever their individual feelings might be, are likely to turn against us if war restarts?

Apart from the security question, which to my mind is paramount, there is the economic difficulty. When the United Nations in November 1947 voted in favour of a Jewish State, it was motivated pre-eminently by the purpose of solving once and for all the Jewish question in Europe, to get rid of the concentration camps and of the aftermath of Hitler's holocaust. I know, Mr. President, that this purpose was uppermost in your mind when you gave us your staunch and steady support in those critical days. We are now doing exactly what we were expected to do. We are liquidating one camp after another and have already brought over many thousands of their former inmates. Can we be expected at the same time to build up, alongside this big effort of reconstruction, a new Arab economy to absorb undreds of thousands of Arabs? For let there be no mistake about it: the Arab economic and social structure as it was prior to last year's exodus has ceased to exist. The Arab refugee question can be solved in a big way only by a comprehensive effort of reconstruction. The crucial question is: is that effort to be undertaken in Israel, with all the political, security and economic stresses and strains arising therefrom, or in the neighbouring Arab countries where vast fertile areas are available for such resettlement and where these people can find a home in the congenial surroundings of an Arab society?

Our policy, as I stated before, is not one of absolute refusal to readmit Arabs and we may, if real peace is established, be able to do more in this respect than if the present atmosphere of latent war and hostility continues. But an all-round solution can only be found as part of a general development scheme for the benefit of the Middle East as a whole. Towards such a development scheme Israel is ready to make its contribution; I hope it will be a significant contribution. But to achieve all this there must be negotiation, agreement and peace. The most vital need at the present hour is for Arabs and Jews to enter into direct negotiations and hammer out an agreed settlement. I plead with you, Mr. President, that you may use your unique influence to induce the Arab States to face the realities of the situation and to take that decisive step.

With affectionate greetings,

Yours very sincerely,

/s/ Ch. Weizman



The Hon. Harry S. Truman,
President of the United States,
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