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LETTER DATED 12 AUGUST 1948 FROM THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT OF ISRAEL TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
CONCERNING REFUGEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS

Sir:

With reference to the letter of the Assistant Secretary-General of August 3, 1948, I have the honor to transmit the replies of the Foreign Minister of Israel to the four questions discussed at the 343rd meeting of the Security Council.

I have the honor to be, Sir,

Yours sincerely,

(Signed) Aubrey S. Eban
AUBREY S. EBAN
Representative of the
Provisional Government of Israel

/LETTER DATED

LETTER DATED 10 AUGUST 1948 FROM MR. M. SHERTOK, FOREIGN MINISTER
IN THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT OF ISRAEL TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
CONCERNING FOUR QUESTIONS ON REFUGEES RAISED AT 343RD MEETING OF
THE SECURITY COUNCIL

Sir:

In reply to the cable of the Assistant Secretary-General dated August 3, I beg to request that you convey to the President of the Security Council the following information regarding the four questions contained therein:

1. Question of Displaced Persons of Jewish Nationality in Europe

The number of displaced persons of Jewish nationality in Europe dependent upon Jewish charitable support totals approximately 250,000 in camps and other places in Germany, Austria, Italy, France, Belgium, Holland, Cyprus, Switzerland, Spain, Portugal, Tangiers.

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee expends nearly two million dollars every month for their maintenance, relief, vocational training, education and other requirements. Despite this vast expenditure, three years after the war these persons remain utterly uprooted and frustrated, living the demoralizing life of camp inmates and social outcasts, for the most part in places evoking tragic memories of the mass slaughter of their kith and kin and amidst a population which is only prevented by the presence of Allied occupation armies from venting an inveterate hatred against the Jews.

The most recent investigations of this problem were made by Mr. Earl B. Harrison on behalf of the President of the United States; by the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry appointed by the Governments of the United Kingdom and the United States (April 1946); and by the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine appointed by the General Assembly (September 1947). All these reports advocated substantial Jewish immigration to Palestine as the only solution affording immediate relief and responding to the wishes of the people concerned. At its second regular session, the General Assembly, in the Resolution on Palestine, recommended that substantial Jewish immigration to Palestine should begin in February 1948 under the full control of the provisional Jewish governmental authorities. It was, however, not possible to comply with this recommendation until Israel became an independent sovereign state on May 14, 1948.

/Efforts made by

Efforts made by the British and American Governments during the past three years to find suitable areas outside Palestine for the resettlement of Jewish refugees have produced no tangible results. The Provisional Government of Israel which, since the proclamation of the State on May 14, has absorbed 28,551 immigrants, has decided to continue and even enlarge this rate of absorption during the coming months and years. The economy of the State of Israel is urgently in need of working hands - for existing agricultural settlements, industrial enterprises and public works, as well as for the execution of a comprehensive development program in the coming years.

2. Question of Arab Refugees in Palestine and Neighboring Countries

The number of Arab refugees in Palestine and the neighboring countries is estimated at about 300,000. Most of them left Palestine during recent months in the wake of the war of aggression launched against Israel by neighboring Arab States. They left partly in obedience to direct orders by local military commanders, and partly as a result of the panic campaign spread among Palestinian Arabs by the leaders of the invading Arab States.

The primary responsibility for the havoc wrought among the Arab population by the war thus rests with the five Arab States who first actively promoted the anti-Jewish disturbances which followed the decision of the United Nations General Assembly of November 29; and then, upon the termination of the British Mandate, unleashed a full-scale war of aggression against Israel, without any declaration of war, in flagrant violation of their obligations under the Charter, and in defiance of the decision of the General Assembly.

The Provisional Government of the State of Israel did not force these masses of Arabs to leave their homes. Indeed the great majority of them fled before the State of Israel came into existence, at a time when the United Kingdom as Mandatory Power was responsible for the maintenance of law and order and the welfare and security of the population. However, while the invasion of Palestine territory by Arab armies continues and before a peace settlement is reached, the State of Israel is unable to readmit them, apart from exceptional cases on compassionate grounds. Their return would create a most acute security and economic problem, saddle the young State with an incalculable economic and financial responsibility, and affect the balance of military advantage which the present truce is supposed to

/maintain by

maintain by directly benefiting the aggressor States, whose lawless invasion of Palestine is the sole cause and origin of the Arab refugee problem.

In the view of the Provisional Government of Israel, the responsibility for providing immediate relief for the Arab refugees should primarily be borne by the Arab States. Only when the aggressors are ready to conclude peace with Israel can the refugee question in its entirety come up for a permanent constructive solution as part of the general peace settlement and with due regard to Jewish counterclaims for the destruction of life and property caused by Arab aggression as well as to the position of Jewish communities in Arab countries and other relevant considerations.

The Provisional Government of Israel is ever ready to enter into negotiations towards such a settlement and has recently asked the Mediator to transmit its proposal in this regard to the Arab Governments concerned. A full statement of the attitude of the Provisional Government of Israel in this matter is to be found in my letter to the Mediator of July 30. (Document S/949).

3. Question of Relief and Assistance to Above

The reply to this question is implicit in the previous replies.

4. Question of Jewish Refugees Detained on Cyprus

The number of prospective Jewish immigrants detained on Cyprus today totals approximately 12,000, but will be reduced this week by the arrival in Israel of 750 small children, invalids and men above military age, to about 11,500.

The United Kingdom Government is ready to release another 4,000 women, children and old people, but not men between the ages of 18 and 45, who number about 7,500. This refusal is contrary to the express terms of the Security Council Resolution of May 29, which allows men of military age to enter the country provided that they are not conscripted nor trained for military service. It has also been certified by the Mediator to rest on no authority or discretion of his and not to have been requested by him as essential for the maintenance of the truce. The consent of the British authorities to admit the 4,000 dependents has no practical significance, as the wives and children will not leave without their husbands and fathers. Among those still detained are many who have already been held prisoners in Cyprus camps for fourteen months, having previously been in German concentration camps and post-liberation DP camps for a total of several years.

/Food rations

Food rations provided by the British authorities are utterly inadequate and the position is only slightly improved by the efforts of Jewish charitable organizations. The continued detention for an indefinite period of thousands of able-bodied people, dooming them to enforced idleness and the impossibility of normal family life, is causing bitter resentment among detainees, their relatives in Israel and the population of the State of Israel generally. It is moreover contrary to the definite pledges given by the United Kingdom Government prior to the termination of the Mandate that immediately thereafter the Cyprus detainees would be enabled to proceed to Palestine.

The Provisional Government of Israel takes this opportunity of reiterating its most emphatic protest against this lawless procedure which causes gratuitous human suffering and constitutes a breach of the truce agreement. A full statement of the views of the Provisional Government of Israel on this subject may be found in the letter addressed to the Security Council by the representative of Israel at the United Nations on August 4 (document S/946).

(Signed) M. Shertok

