
CABLEGRAM DATED 1 AUGUST 1948 FROM THE UNITED NATIONS MEDIATOR
TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL CONCERNING ARAB REFUGEES

For President of the Security Council:

The resolution on the Palestine question adopted at the 338th meeting of the Security Council on 15 July 1948 "reiterates the appeal to the parties contained in the last paragraph of its resolution of 22 May and urges upon the parties that they continue conversations with the Mediator in a spirit of conciliation and mutual concession, in order that all points under dispute may be settled peacefully".

One of the points under dispute which is particularly acute in terms of human suffering is the number of persons - extremely large for a population the size of Palestine - who have been displaced from their normal places of abode and their communities by the conflict, even though its duration has been short. The vast majority of these displaced persons are Arabs.

In my view, taking into consideration all the circumstances, all of these refugees should be assured of the right to return to their homes, if they desire to do so. I recognize, however, that the strife in Palestine has created conditions which might well make impracticable, for security and other reasons, the return of all or the preponderance of these innocent victims of a needless conflict. Nor am I able to say with any degree of accuracy, at the moment, how many of these persons may wish to return before peace is permanently restored to Palestine.

With these considerations in mind, and following an explanatory conversation on the matter with Mr. Shertok on 28 July at Tel Aviv, I submitted to Mr. Shertok by cable from Rhodes on the same date the following proposal:

"The resolution of the Security Council of 15 July urges the parties to continue their 'conversations with the Mediator in a spirit of conciliation and mutual concession, in order that all points under dispute may be settled peacefully'. As indicated in my conversation with Mr. Shertok in Tel Aviv on 26 July, one of the points under dispute is return to their homes in Jewish-controlled area of Palestine of Arab refugees who fled because of war conditions.

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"I am deeply concerned with the plight of some three hundred thousand Arab refugees scattered in Arab countries and Arab-controlled areas of Palestine. Their suffering will be intensified when winter comes. Most of them left practically all of their possessions behind and have no means at their disposal.

"I recognize the basis for the misgivings which the Provisional Government might have with regard to the return of large numbers of these refugees during the war. These misgivings derive from security as well as economic and political considerations. But I must point out that the existing truce in Palestine is of indefinite duration and that the Security Council resolution has ordered the Governments and authorities concerned to desist from further military action.

"For humanitarian reasons and because I consider the principle sound and the danger to Jewish security slight, I make the following proposals:

"1. That, without prejudice to the question of the ultimate right of all Arab refugees to return to their homes in Jewish-controlled Palestine if they desire, the principle be accepted that from among those who may desire to do so a limited number, to be determined in consultation with the Mediator, and especially those formerly living in Jaffa and Haifa, be permitted to return to their homes as from 15 August.

"2. That, among those who may wish to return, differentiation may be made between men of military age and all others in recognition of security considerations.

"3. That the Mediator undertake to enlist the aid of appropriate international organizations and agencies in the resettlement and economic and social rehabilitation of the returning refugees."

Following is substance of Jewish reply on Arab refugees received 1 August:

"Jews recognize serious plight Arab refugees but are convinced that action on purely humanitarian grounds in disregard military, political, economic aspects might even aggravate problem. Arab refugees are consequence refusal Arab League recognize State of Israel. Problem cannot be considered apart from general settlement. Under truce conditions, return Arab refugees would very seriously prejudice security Jewish State, especially in case of Jaffa and Haifa which mentioned by Mediator. Economic difficulties of accommodation, employment and ordinary livelihood would be insuperable. Jewish

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Government feels itself entitled claim compensations from Arab States for havoc and destruction and should not be asked therefore bear any considerable part cost of Arab resettlement. As long as state of war exists, Provisional Government is not in position readmit on any substantial scale Arabs who fled. When Arab States ready conclude peace treaty with Israel, this question will come up as part of general settlement with due regard to Jewish counterclaims. Provisional Government always ready seek a comprehensive and lasting peace settlement but cannot undertake unilateral peace measures while other side bent on war". Letter signed "Shertok".

Notwithstanding this reply, having in mind the real meaning of the truce, which is that fighting is not to be resumed in Palestine and in the interest of this vast number of peoples who are suffering and will suffer increasingly from dislocation, I am of the firm view that the right of the refugees to return to their homes at the earliest practicable date should be affirmed.

I am now taking active steps to develop a programme of action designed to give prompt aid to the refugee victims of this conflict, and which will call upon all appropriate international organizations and agencies for assistance. A full report on this aspect of my work will be submitted in due course.

Count Folke Bernadotte

