

The Palestine Question

Palestine Conciliation Commission¹

The Conciliation Commission for Palestine continued to hold itself available, under the terms of General Assembly Resolution 512 (VI) of January 26, 1952, to assist the governments concerned to reach an agreement in the Arab-Israeli dispute. Although it did not receive any specific request for action from these governments, the Commission continued to meet in New York to try to make some headway in the plans for compensating Arab refugees for property they had abandoned in Israel, and for releasing Arab refugee bank accounts which were blocked in Israel. The Commission was able to report gratifying progress on the release of the blocked accounts.

Appointment of Major General Burns

On August 3, 1954 the Secretary-General of the United Nations announced the appointment of a Canadian, Major General E. L. M. Burns, DSO, OBE, MC, to succeed Major General Vagn Bennike of Denmark as Chief of Staff of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization. In this capacity Major General Burns reports to the Security Council on observation of the armistice. He and his international staff have worked assiduously to help in the maintenance of the armistice agreements.

The Palestine question was not discussed by the General Assembly during the period under review. However, it was a topic which at various times came before the Security Council because of incidents and armed clashes which occurred along the borders of Israel and the neighbouring Arab states. In a series of meetings between October 1954 and January 1955, the Security Council discussed the question of the detention at the Suez Canal by Egyptian authorities of the "Bat Galim", a vessel flying the Israeli flag bound for Haifa. The Government of Israel protested against the seizure of the vessel, its crew and cargo. The Egyptian Government accused the "Bat Galim" of having opened fire with small arms on Egyptian fishing boats within Egyptian territorial waters. Subsequently the Egyptian Representative informed the Security Council that Egyptian judicial authorities had set aside criminal charges against the vessel's crew and that the Egyptian Government was prepared to release the seized cargo. During the discussions, the majority of the members of the Security Council reiterated their support of the principles in the Council's resolution of September 1, 1951, which called upon Egypt to "terminate the restrictions on the passage of international commercial shipping through the Suez Canal wherever bound and to cease interference with such shipping". The President of the Security Council observed that it was evident that most representatives regarded the resolution of September 1, 1951² as having continued validity and that they had considered the "Bat Galim" case within the context of this resolution and of the Constantinople Convention of 1888 respecting the free navigation of the Suez Maritime Canal.

In letters dated March 1 and March 2, 1955, the Representative of Egypt complained that Israeli armed forces had engaged in operations across the armistice demarcation line east of Gaza, causing a considerable number of casualties. On March 3 the Representative of Israel submitted a complaint on behalf of his Government against Egypt, alleging continuous violations by Egypt of the General Armistice Agreement by various hostile acts, including attacks of regular and irregular armed force. In a report delivered orally before

¹See *Canada and the United Nations 1951-52*, pp. 31-34.

²See *Canada and the United Nations 1951-52*, p. 35.