



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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STATEMENT ON PALESTINE

A statement by Mr. L. B. Pearson, Chairman of the Canadian Delegation to the Third Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, at Paris, in the First Committee, on November 22, 1948.

The present situation in regard to Palestine represents a logical development in the series of events which began when the Palestine question was referred to the United Nations by the Mandatory Power in the spring of 1947. It is deplorable that this process has been interrupted by unnecessary violence with unhappy and even tragic consequences for the inhabitants of Palestine. By and large, however, the pattern of development has been a coherent, if at times a discouraging one. I think that its existence and the way that matters have been working out up to the present, gives a clue to what we should expect in the future.

The basic recommendation, which was first made by UNSCOP, and then confirmed by the General Assembly on November 29th last, was that the two communities in Palestine should be given a separate political existence. Many of us regretted the necessity of making this recommendation. Our motives in supporting it have been challenged, and our judgment violently attacked. However, so far as the delegation and government for which alone I have the right to speak, are concerned, our decision last year was sincerely and objectively taken after considering all the other possible solutions which had been proposed for this complicated and terribly difficult problem. We were honestly of the opinion that there was no practicable alternative to partition, and with other delegations we felt that this was the advice we should give to those most concerned. Some form of unitary or federal state would, of course, have been preferable, but there was no possibility of forcing political unity on the Arab and Jewish peoples of Palestine in a form which would not have been bitterly resisted by one side or the other. In these circumstances, the only thing we could do was to reconcile ourselves to the necessity of separation as the solution which seemed best in the circumstances. It was not the recognition of this necessity but the necessity itself which has been the source of the difficult situation in which Palestine now finds itself. Let those who charge that this decision was the cause of all the bloodshed and destruction that have degraded the Holy Land in the last 12 months ask themselves whether there would have been peace and order in that area if a unitary state had been forced on the Jewish population of Palestine, or if the Assembly had made no recommendation at all.

The degree of separation and the geographical terms of the separation of the two communities, Arab and Jewish, in Palestine, were both matters of uncertainty when the Assembly first decided in favour of partition. We hoped then (though not blind to the obstacles and difficulties in the way) that it would have been possible for the two communities, though in separate states, to work together through a very considerable measure of economic integration. The resolution of November 29th was based on this assumption, which in turn led to the further assumption that a complicated

distribution of territory which in other circumstances would have been quite unworkable, could be made between the two communities. Whether or not it was wise to make these particular assumptions is now a matter for history, but it is clear that some assumptions had to be accepted or no recommendation could have been made and this would simply have meant that nature would have been allowed to take its course. In any event, it is clear that expectations held last November were too optimistic because the conditions which would have made their realization possible did not exist. In certain respects it is perhaps more accurate to say these conditions were not encouraged or indeed permitted. It followed, therefore, that adjustments in the November plan would be necessary. This process of adjustment has been confused and, all too frequently, violent.

Violence has not, however, been the only force at work in Palestine and that, I suggest, is due in large part to the fact that there was a decision of the United Nations which involved not only the Assembly but the Security Council. Through the truce and mediation procedures initiated by the United Nations it has been possible to bring some external judgment to bear on developments in Palestine.

The situation which we now face is, therefore, a result of both the clash of arms which has taken place on the soil of Palestine, and of the efforts which the United Nations has made to limit and control this conflict.

What should we do now? The Mediator, whose death we all deplore and to whose memory I would like to pay a sincere tribute of gratitude and respect, answered that question in his last report, when he said:

"What is indispensable is that the General Assembly take a firm position on the political aspects of the problem in the light of all the circumstances since its last session, and that its resolution be so reasonable as to discourage any attempt to thwart it and to defy the Security Council order by the employment of armed force".

There are certain basic elements in the situation as we see it which must be recognized if the Mediator's advice is to be taken. There are certain facts which must be accepted, if peace is to be restored and maintained.

(1) The emergence of an independent Jewish state in Palestine as recommended by the Assembly a year ago is one such fact which must be taken into account in the consideration of any further developments.

(2) No indigenous Arab authority has emerged in Palestine which has yet demonstrated its ability to take over authority in areas which are not under the control of the Jewish state.

(3) The additional territorial and political adjustments which must now take place in Palestine must be made, as far as possible, by the people of that territory themselves. The United Nations can and should make available its good offices in a number of forms, but the people who live in that area must bear the main responsibility for working out the terms of their own association. They can do this either directly or through mediation, but they must take responsibility for the decisions which are finally reached. If those who are directly concerned, refuse to participate in such negotiations and decisions, they will take on themselves a very heavy responsibility.

(4) This further process of settlement must be a peaceful one. The whole effort of the United Nations over the past year has been to keep, so far as possible, the peace in Palestine. Unfortunately we have not been able to prevent fighting from taking place. By and large, however, the truce has prevented large scale and continuous war and, in its most recent action, the Security Council has reaffirmed its determination that neither party in Palestine shall renew its efforts to settle this issue by force. The

Security Council has recently gone further, and has pointed the way to peace by directing the parties to change the truce into an armistice.

The acceptance of this analysis of the situation and the decision to proceed on this basis will, of course, place heavy obligations and responsibilities on the Arab peoples of the Middle East. Those peoples will have to admit the futility of continuing to threaten what clearly cannot be accomplished, that is the extinction of the Jewish state, or to insist that they will not negotiate, directly or indirectly, with the representatives of, or on the basis of any recognition of, any Jewish state in Palestine. Whether we like it or not, a large part of the territory of the former Mandate of Palestine is now under the control of the Provisional Government of Israel. There seems to be no likelihood in the foreseeable future that this control will be taken from them. The Arab states may hold, and may sincerely and tenaciously hold, that this is an evil consequence of injustices which took place thirty years ago, but, even if this is the case, they cannot expect the United Nations to right ancient alleged wrongs in the face of recent history, especially when the redress of such alleged wrongs would bring bitter reproaches that new and worse injustices were being created.

We must deal with the fact that a Jewish state has come into existence and has established its control over territory from which it will not be dislodged, and we must address ourselves to the problem of regulating the relations of this community with its neighbours. I do not deny for a moment that this is a difficult circumstance for the Arab states to accept, but it is nevertheless the case, and it does not seem to me that the United Nations would be doing those states any service if it encouraged them, or even permitted them, to continue their efforts to destroy by arms the Jewish state.

On the other hand, the Jewish community must also make difficult decisions which will involve certain concessions. At the moment, its armies seem to be in a position where they could, if they so chose, establish themselves in almost the whole of Palestine. If they did so, they would be openly defying the wishes of the international community. Last year's recommendation clearly indicated that, in the judgment of the world, the territory of Palestine should be divided between two peoples, and that these two peoples should then make arrangements as quickly as possible to work together for their common good. We cannot force them to work together, but we can keep insistently reminding them that this is what was intended, and that if they act in a way which will destroy all possibilities for such co-operation, they will do so without the support of, and indeed, against the will of the United Nations. The Jewish community should realize, therefore, that it cannot have it both ways — it cannot have all the territory which was given it by the November 29th resolution, together with all the additional territory which it has been able to take by force of arms. In the adjustments which must now be worked out in Palestine by which the boundaries of Israel will be defined, the Jewish state itself must, in the interests, not only of its relations with its neighbours, but also of the international community of which it will form a part, place self-imposed limits on its demands. In return for this, the Jewish state has the right to ask for peace and recognition. It can hardly be asked to enter into negotiations for a settlement unless it is given some right to expect that such a settlement will mean peace for itself in Palestine.

The occasion is one which calls for statesmanship, and I am sure that, while there are extremists on both sides counselling rash and disastrous courses, which have nothing to do with wisdom or common sense, there are also resources of statesmanship on both sides through which the issue could be settled on an equitable basis. I hope we shall not be told by anyone that he is prepared to be statesmanlike only if somebody else is, because no move towards political understanding can be successful if it is approached in this way. If, and I know that this is a big "if", wisdom and sense are forthcoming, the Palestine problem can be solved.

The establishment of peace - political and military - in this area is, furthermore, a matter of general international concern, because if present conditions of confusion and disturbance are permitted to persist, the only beneficiary will be those international forces of discord and division who do not want any peace or stability anywhere except through the establishment of their own revolutionary and reactionary rule.

There is a further fact that the people - the great mass of people in Palestine - Arabs and Jews - who are the chief sufferers from the fighting that has taken place, are anxious for peace; especially after the terrors and bloodshed of the last year. Because of what has happened - and in spite of certain statements made in this Committee - there is, I think, a better chance for peace now than there was six months ago. Those most concerned now realize acutely what will happen if peace is not established soon.

So far as the action of this Assembly is concerned, I should like to see a decision taken which would incorporate the following principles, all of which must be taken together:

First, a recognition of the existence of a Jewish state. Possibly we need not wait for this action until the boundaries of that state are precisely and finally defined. I think, however, that we have the right to know that the state which we are recognizing - and this recognition would make it eligible for membership in United Nations - has committed itself fully to the principles of peaceful settlement which are embodied in the Charter and has shown its acceptance of these principles by giving effect to the truce and armistice arrangements which have been laid down by the Security Council.

I hope, in the second place, that the United Nations will establish some body - perhaps a small commission as has been suggested in the United Kingdom resolution - to make available its good offices to both the Jewish state and its neighbours in working out the arrangements by which they can define their geographical and political relations. In establishing this body, I think the Assembly should indicate that a final settlement must now be negotiated in Palestine and that it should take place within the framework of the truce and mediation proceedings which have been worked out since November 29th by the Assembly and the Security Council.

Finally, I think the Assembly should reaffirm the recommendation which it has previously made that there should be international control of Jerusalem, and should call upon both parties to co-operate in implementing this recommendation.

For the purpose of bringing about a decision in the Assembly along the lines I have suggested, the United Kingdom draft resolution which has been placed before us provides, I think, a good basis of discussion. It would probably be necessary, however, as we see it at present, to broaden the functions of the conciliation commission which is proposed in Paragraph 5 of that Resolution so that it would become, in effect, a commission of good offices to bring about a settlement through negotiations either directly between parties or through some form of mediation. The negotiations which this commission should initiate or which it may conduct should not, I think, be limited quite so precisely as is now the case in Paragraphs 3 and 5 of the United Kingdom resolution. It should also be stated in the resolution that one of the primary functions of the Commission should be to initiate negotiations, and the negotiations themselves should take into consideration both the November 29th resolution and the Mediator's Report as well as the situation which exists in Palestine under the truce.

I hope that in our future discussion of the United Kingdom resolution, modifications along these lines may be considered.

These, Mr. Chairman, are only general and preliminary considerations; certain principles which should, in our view, be incorporated in any recommendation which comes from this Committee. I realize full well that there is nothing more difficult in a situation such as we have in Palestine, than converting a principle into a practice, into a performance. I venture to hope, however, that, in the light of the decisions which the United Nations have already taken and, above all, in the light of the tragic events of the last year, we can now make such a conversion, and by doing so make an effective and lasting contribution to peace in the unhappy Holy Land of Palestine.
