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American Zionist Emergency Council, Press Council press
conference, 1945.

PROCEEDINGS AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE OF DR. ABRA HILLEL SILVER,
AT THE AMERICAN ZIONIST EMERGENCY COUNCIL HEADQUARTERS,
1720 SIXTEENTH STREET, N. W., WASHINGTON, D. C.,
OCTOBER 23, 1946.

Mr. The conference was opened at 3:05 P. M. by Mr. Sack:

Mr. Sack: Ladies and gentlemen, may I present Dr. Silver, the Chairman of the American Zionist Emergency Council. Dr. Silver called on Secretary Byrnes this morning, and you all have a copy of the statement he left with the Secretary. Now he will probably make some comments.

Dr. Silver: Thank you, Leo. I am grateful to have the opportunity to meet with you and to make a few additional observations on the memorandum which Dr. Wise and I, the joint Chairmen of the American Zionist Emergency Council, presented to the Secretary of State this morning. The memorandum was submitted in view of the statement recently released, on October 18th, by the Secretary of State dealing with American policy with reference to Palestine and referring to the correspondence which the late President Roosevelt had with King Ibn Saud.

Perhaps as a bit of background to the whole subject which is now so very much on the agenda of international thought I might recall to you the fact that in 1939, on the eve of the World War, Great Britain issued a White Paper which defined a new policy with reference to the Jewish national home in Palestine, a policy which was a sharp and radical departure from the terms of the Mandate under which Great Britain was administering Palestine and in many ways the repudiation of the obligations which Great Britain voluntarily assumed when she took over the Mandate over Palestine from the League of Nations. By the terms of that White Paper policy announced in 1939, immigration of Jews into Palestine was restricted to a total of 75,000 over a period of five years, or approximately 15,000 a year, and that thereafter there would be no Jewish immigration permitted into Palestine

without the consent of the Arabs. The White Paper also restricted the right of Jewish settlers in Palestine to buy land in the country to a very small area, thereby introducing racial laws within the Jewish homeland. The Jewish people rejected the White Paper policy, but naturally couldn't do anything about it, and throughout the war they pleaded for the opening of the doors of Palestine to permit some of our unfortunate refugees who had to escape from Hitler's Europe to enter Palestine. But the doors remained shut for all but the few who were permitted under the terms of the White Paper, as a result of which the Jewish people lost during the war close to 6,000,000 people--men, women, and children, civilians, who were slaughtered by Hitler. The explanation given by the mandatory government for maintaining this White Paper policy which British statesmen themselves denounced as morally unwarranted was that conditions of the war made it undesirable to change it. Well, when the war was over, the demand was, of course, immediately pressed, now that these fictitious reasons were no longer valid, that the White Paper policy be immediately abrogated and that the letter and spirit of the Mandate and of the Balfour Declaration be now implemented. The hopes of the Jewish people that that would be done were heightened when the new Labor government came into power in Great Britain, because the British Labor Party, as you well know, was committed by its own resolutions and pledges to the Jewish national home, to the creation of a Jewish majority in Palestine. In fact, they went far beyond the Zionist program, the British Labor Party, and asked for the voluntary transference of the Arab population of Palestine to other Arab lands in order to make more room for Jewish immigrants--something which the Jews of the Zionist movement never asked for. But it seems now that the new Labor government is just as determined to carry on with this policy as the Tory government which preceded it.

Now there remain in Europe today about 1,400,000 survivors of the Nazi extermination program,--Many of them drifting about Europe, living under appalling conditions--a great number of them still in the concentration camps. There are 65,000 of them in the concentration camps in the American zone of occupation with nowhere to go. They can't return to their former lands. There is nothing there for them to return to. They want to flee from the continent of Europe, and have nowhere to go to, and they are pressing as their last chance for survival for admission to Palestine. President Truman, a few weeks ago, after reading the report of Earl Harrison, who studied the situation of the displaced persons in Europe, was deeply moved by the report and impressed by the recommendations--and Earl Harrison recommended that 100,000 certificates of immigration be made immediately available for the Jews of Europe, principally those who are in these concentration camps, so that they may go to Palestine at once. As President Truman indicated in his press conference here a few days ago, it seems likely that this request will be rejected, in place of which there will come some suggestion that 1500 or so be permitted ^{monthly} to come into Palestine--which is a tragic trickle and almost a ghastly joke in view of the million-and-a-quarter whose fate depends so much upon their chance of emigrating and going to the Jewish national home. Now in this memorandum, which we presented this morning to Secretary of State Byrnes, we not only referred to President Truman's request, but we also commented on the correspondence between Ibn Saud and the late President Roosevelt, and our comments on that are in this document which is before you. I would like to call your attention to a few of the paragraphs in this memorandum, and then I will be very happy to answer questions that you would like to ask.

We call attention at first to the traditional attitude of our government toward the problem of the establishment of the Jewish Commonwealth, dating from 1919 when President Wilson said that: "The Allied Nations, with the fullest

concurrence of our Government and people, are agreed that in Palestine shall be laid the foundations of a Jewish Commonwealth," and every President since that date has given his support to the Jewish National Home objective. Most recently, in statements issued by President Roosevelt on October 15, 1944 and March 16, 1945, that is to say, almost contemporaneously with his correspondence with King Ibn Saud, the late President expressed his support for the establishment of Palestine as a Jewish Commonwealth. And on two occasions, in 1941 and 1945, a majority of the members of both Houses of Congress joined in a declaration favoring the establishment of Palestine as a Jewish Commonwealth. A similar declaration was made on July 4, 1945 by the Governors of 40 out of the 48 states of the Union. Further, the legislatures of 33 states, representing 85% of the population of the United States, have recently gone on record in favor of the Zionist platform, and, of course, the platforms of both political parties last year endorsed that project. The Democratic platform, on which President Roosevelt and now President Truman were elected, read that they favor unrestricted Jewish immigration and colonization, and "the establishment there of a free and democratic Jewish Commonwealth."

Now, in paragraph 3, the policy therefore to which our Government and people stand deeply committed is clear and unmistakable. Of this fact, however, neither the letter President Roosevelt nor the statement of Secretary Byrnes take any cognizance whatever. It is true that in neither instance is the traditional American position in fact repudiated. Nevertheless it is deeply disturbing that it should not have been found necessary to make affirmatively clear that American policy on Palestine has already been established by the public pronouncements of the Presidents of the United States and otherwise -- a policy which is predicated upon the right of the Jewish people to rebuild their National Home through free immigration and the close settlement of Jews on the land. That omission can only lead, and has already led, to serious doubts and misunderstandings.

In paragraph 4, President Roosevelt's letter refers to assurances previously given to King Ibn Saud regarding the attitude of the United States with respect to the question of Palestine. The exact nature of these assurances is not disclosed, but it is respectfully submitted that whatever their tenor, they would not be valid if inconsistent with the publicly stated objectives of American policy or with the terms of the Palestine Mandate.

At the same time, it is deeply to be regretted that President Roosevelt's letter, while assuring King Ibn Saud that no action would be taken by our Government that might prove hostile to the Arab people, failed to point out that the policy of the Jewish National Home, envisaging as it does free Jewish immigration into Palestine and the ultimate establishment there of a democratic Commonwealth under the auspices of a Jewish majority, could not be conceived as hostile to the Arab people. The desire of the Jews to live in friendship and good neighborliness with the Arab countries and with the Arab inhabitants of Palestine is well known, and neither Jewish aspirations in Palestine nor the declared policy of this country in support thereof, nor yet the conduct of the Jewish people in Palestine resulting in great good to the Arabs can be construed as hostile to them.

In paragraph 8 -- in general, it is desired to protest against a procedure which seems to accord a right to the various Arab states to be consulted in the affairs of Palestine. The right of our own Government as one of the principal Allied and Associated Powers in the first World War as well as by virtue of the United States-British Convention above mentioned, to participate in the future disposition of Palestine is obvious and unquestioned. The right of the Jewish people to be consulted is likewise clear and undeniable and is legally confirmed by the League of Nations Mandate which, in recognizing the right of the Jewish people to reconstitute their National Home in Palestine, authorized also the recognition of the Jewish Agency for Palestine as representing the interest of all Jews in the

establishment of the National Home. The Arab states are in this matter without legal standing of any kind and we submit that their attitude in recent years is certainly far from giving them a moral voice in this issue.

And I would like to call your attention to paragraph 1 of my statement, which is page 1 of your copies. This is not part of the memorandum. This is my own observations on it. -- Why are the Arab leaders permitted to meddle in the affairs of Palestine? Why are the Arab leaders permitted to threaten the security of the Jewish National Home which has been guaranteed by international law and which is being administered under a mandate which does not recognize the right of any Arab State to determine its status or its progress? These spokesmen of foreign Arab States have been threatening violence and war. The American Government should clearly indicate to them that it does not intend to be intimidated or blackmailed in the carrying out of its own policies. The Arab peoples of the Near East are far more in need of the friendship and help of America than America is in need of theirs. America has become great and prosperous without the aid of these Arab States, while these Arab States are likely to remain backward, impoverished and disease-ridden without the help which friendly America and other free peoples can give them.

I go back to the memorandum, in paragraph 9, and call your attention to this statement of ours. -- We feel constrained, at the same time, to make a frank statement of our views with regard to the course of action pursued by the Executive branch of the Government and the State Department in particular, over a period of years. Despite the unbroken chain of pro-Zionist acts, promises and pronouncements to which we have referred, the policy they express has not been translated into action. On the contrary, numerous acts and omissions have emboldened the Arab leaders to allege that the American Government was, in fact, withholding its support from the Zionist cause, and that the pronouncements made here from time to time were meant for home consumption. We have consistently disregarded these allegations as unwarranted

aspersions upon the good faith and political integrity of our Government.

We are now compelled to review the situation in the light of the recent correspondence. We must recall that so far as we are aware, the Government took no effective action to protect the interests of the Jewish National Home, at the time of the issuance of the British White Paper in 1939, or to rectify that wrong in the years which followed. The Government did not energetically intervene even when opening the doors of Palestine became an urgent humanitarian necessity because of the wholesale slaughter of the Jews of Europe. It appears further that our Government failed to advise its representatives abroad, particularly in the Near East, that it was definitely committed to the policy of the Jewish National Home and to instruct them to be guided accordingly. The State Department has, on various occasions, appointed to positions of importance in the Near East, persons known as avowed opponents of this policy, and has had to rely in turn, upon reports and advices emanating from them. On two occasions the Executive Branch exerted its influence to prevent the adoption by Congress, of a resolution reaffirming the traditional American Policy on this subject. Above all, our Government has failed to utilize the fluid political conditions created by the war and the process of political reorientation and re-organization under way in the Near East, for the purpose of insuring the status of the Jewish National Home in the context of its Near East policies.

And finally, we refer to President Truman's statement, the one gratifying positive act in relation to Palestine, the outcome of which, however, is still uncertain. We take grateful note that the statement of Secretary Byrnes indicates that measures to facilitate immigration into Palestine of substantial numbers of the survivors of European Jewry should, and can be undertaken forthwith, and that such immigration does not affect the "basic situation" in Palestine. The "basic situation," is in fact that established by the Mandate, which calls for the facil-

itating of the immigration of Jews into Palestine and their close settlement on the land. We therefore earnestly hope that our Government will continue to press for the immediate admission of 100,000 Jews from Europe in line with President Truman's request. But the statement of the Secretary is silent regarding the attitude of the Government in relation to the "basic situation". The only light which it sheds on that issue -- which is the crux of the whole matter -- is the statement that "it would be the policy of this Government not to reach final conclusions without a full consultation with Jewish and Arab leaders." This is a point of procedure rather than a definition of policy. Moreover, the statement indicates an intention to wait until "any proposals emerge", rather than to act on its own initiative in conformity with established American policy.

The point has now been reached, at which ambiguity and delay are no longer feasible. Millions of American citizens, who have a strong moral and humanitarian interest in this problem, look to the Administration for immediate and forthright action, which will once and for all dispel any possible uncertainty regarding its present position and future intentions. We cannot believe that the menacing words of the spokesmen of countries which did not lift a finger in their own defense during the war and which were, indeed, either actively or passively hostile to the democracies, should be allowed to deflect our country from a just course of action. The request is made on behalf of masses of suffering humanity who cannot wait. It would be cruel to deny their last hope for individual and national rehabilitation; but it would be the very refinement of cruelty to keep them further in suspense, or to feed them with promises which turn to ashes in their mouth.

QUESTIONS ASKED AT DR. SILVER'S PRESS CONFERENCE AT
AMERICAN ZIONIST EMERGENCY COUNCIL HEADQUARTERS IN
WASHINGTON, D. C., OCTOBER 23, 1945, FOLLOWING DR.
SILVER'S PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

Q Dr. Silver, did you get any satisfaction from Mr. Byrnes?

A Well, I think we had a long, exploratory conversation in which these points which I indicated to you were gone into with considerable detail.

Q About how long was it?

A We spent 40 minutes with the Secretary.

Q Is the Secretary still disposed to wait until some further word from the British?

A He did not seem to indicate that the matter is closed.

Q Dr. Silver, in the event that some satisfactory solution is not reached on Palestine, have the Zionists given any consideration to other places where the European Jews might be settled?

A There are no other places. Attempts have been made time and again to find other places for settlements for Jews in all these years, and all these attempts have failed.

Q How about Australia?

A It would be very nice for countries to open their doors, but they do not open their doors. I would like to call your attention to what happened in this country when, a few years ago, the ship ST. LOUIS, carrying a cargo of human misery from Europe, refugees, got all through the Caribbean Sea and touched at any number of ports on the Atlantic Coast of our own country and these refugees were not permitted to land, and they had to go back to their countries in Europe where, I am quite sure, they were seized by Hitler's hordes and died in the gas chambers of his concentration camps.

Q When was that?

A Oh, this was shortly before the war. There are no places. And if you take empty places, it takes years to prepare such places for the absorption of large numbers of immigrants, while the urgency of these displaced persons is imminent. And Palestine is there, ready to receive them, if these political barriers were removed.

Q Doctor, your request seems to be for 100,000?

A The request of President Truman is for 100,000 as a first step.

Q In what period?

- A We could take care of them in a period of a year--in 15 months, if shipping were made available immediately.
- Q What happens to the other 1,300,000?
- A We would like to take them all out.
- Q You are only dealing with 1/14 of your problem. What happens to the other 1,300,000 in the meantime?
- A Your answer is as good as mine.
- Q Is there any scheme to deal with the other 1,300,000?
- A The only scheme is to give them as much material relief as possible, wherever they are, and to tide them over until such period as they can re-establish themselves elsewhere. Our conviction is that there will be no opportunity for these people to establish themselves elsewhere except in Palestine, and while we should like to take them all out, ^{at once} it is a physical impossibility.
- Q How would you select them?
- A Well, the recommendation of the President was that the first people to be moved are those in concentration camps.
- Q How many are those?
- A Well, there are 65,000 in the American zone alone. I don't know the exact figures--perhaps another 25,000 in the British zone of occupation.
- Q Then how would you decide who to send?
- A We would take the most miserable, those in greatest need, to emigrate at once. There are 90,000 Jews in Poland, the last survivors of the 3,000,000 who lived there before the war, who are living in a condition of insecurity and terror, and conditions of pogroms--now, after the end of the Hitler war. You have seen that in your own newspapers. Nearly all of them want to get out. I ask on page 2, if I may draw your attention to this simple question: "Who will suffer by the admission of one hundred thousand Jews into Palestine? Not the present Jewish settlers of Palestine." (Many of them are their own relatives) "They are prayerfully waiting to receive them. Not the Arabs of Palestine. Their conditions have been bettered and their standard of living has been greatly improved with every influx of Jewish settlers into the country. There is room in Palestine for at least another three million people. But who will suffer if the President's request is rejected? The hundred thousand innocent men, women and children who have gone through the several hells of Europe in recent years, who are doomed to an inescapable fate if they remain in that war-ravaged and hate-ridden continent, and whose only hope for survival is Palestine."
- Q Are you taking this up with the British government?

- A Yes, representations have been made and are being made with the British government constantly. We have appealed to them directly to Prime Minister Attlee, to Bevin. The great organized body of public opinion in America have appealed to Great Britain--Mr. William Green of the American Federation of Labor, Mr. Murray of the CIO. I understand that nearly 50 large national labor organizations, the unions, have sent cablegrams to the British Labor Government endorsing this request of the President and asking for the opening of the doors of Palestine. Christian organizations, not to speak of the Jews of America.
- Q Dr. Silver, could you give us any enlightenment on what Mr. Attlee told President Truman?
- A I haven't the faintest idea, sir. The only thing I know is what Mr. Truman indicated in the press conference the other day, that his request has been rejected and that a small quota will be permitted. The figure of 1800 was quoted, and the President thought that Attlee's figure approximates that. Perhaps Attlee's figure is a little higher. Beyond that, we have no information whatsoever.
- Q Isn't it possible that Mr. Attlee said more than that in his letter?
- A Quite possible. We have no way of knowing.
- Q Is that information being kept secret until the negotiations are completed?
- A I don't know. We haven't got it. Whether the ^{British} government has it or our government has it, I am in no position to know.
- Q Did you ask the Secretary of State for a copy of the letter?
- A I did not. The President referred in his press conference to voluminous correspondence between himself and the Prime Minister on the subject. Are there any other questions you would like to ask, ladies and gentlemen?
- Q What is the attitude of Moscow toward the reception of displaced persons. Has that been looked into?
- A No, we have no way of knowing what Moscow's position is. There are 180,000 Polish Jews who fled during the war to the Soviet Union, many of whom have survived the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union and are still there, but beyond that we do not know.
- Q How are they being treated?
- A So far as we know, as well as Jews are treated anywhere under modern post-war conditions in Europe.
- Q Would Russia give assent to more Jewish immigration?
- A There has been no indication that it would.
- Q Care to say what your date at the Capitol is?
- A Oh, seeing some of our friends in the Congress and Senate. I want to say that the attitude of the Congress and Senate has been wonderful. A kind spirit there, and a desire to be helpful.

Q Do you feel that President Roosevelt sold the Jews out in this correspondence with the Arabian king?

A Let me put it this way: I think his letter to the Arabian king is very ambiguous and his subject^{to} most unfortunate interpretations.

Q What interpretation do you put on it?

A The interpretation that the President did not say in the letter all that he might have said. The omissions in the letter are what make it extremely damaging, as I point out in this memorandum. He could have referred to his commitments and to the commitments of the government and the party.

Q Do you have any reason for why he might have made those omissions?

A I have no reasons.

Q Do you think that letter can be reconciled with the letter to Senator Wagner?

A He might have.

