

AMERICAN CHRISTIAN COMMITTEE FOR REFUGEES  
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See also  
Refugee Relief Trustees, Inc.  
ACC R - personnel



*Using file: Palestine (UNRWA Bureau)*  
*1. (1) Greece*  
*2. (2) Syria*  
*3. (3) Palestine*

Miss Aroos Benneyan  
American Christian Committee for  
Refugees, Inc.  
139 Centre Street  
New York 13, N. Y.

Dear Miss Benneyan:

We have received from our Middle East Office for forwarding to you the enclosed copy of a report dated June 1945 on the registration of Greek refugees living in Palestine, prepared by Elizabeth Brown, who is in charge of the UNRWA office in Jerusalem.

Sincerely yours,

Paul J. McCormack  
Voluntary Agency Liaison  
Officer  
Welfare Division

Enclosure

MCC:sc  
25 July 1945

NAME: MEO  
ADDRESS: Cairo

DATE OF  
CORRESPONDENCE

42944

3 July 45

REFERRED BY: H. van Zile Hyde

REGARDING:

Agreement between UNRRA & American Council of  
Vol Societies; enc 2 ops report by E. Brown

PERMANENT FILE COPY

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W. A. N.

Sibley in vol. 1. Division office  
17 July 45

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N. A. N.

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## UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND REHABILITATION ADMINISTRATION

8, SHARIA DAR EL-SHIFA, GARDEN CITY, CAIRO.

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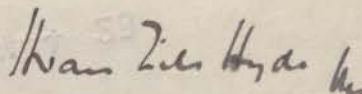
3 July 1945

ATTENTION WELFARE DIVISION

Dear Sir:

In line with the agreement between UNRRA and the American Council of Voluntary Societies, there are enclosed two copies of a report prepared by Miss Elizabeth Brown in charge of the UNRRA Office in Jerusalem. This report is primarily for Miss Brown's agency, the American Christian Committee for Refugees. One copy is enclosed for your files. Will you please transmit the other copy to Miss Aroos Benneyan, Associate Director, American Christian Committee for Refugees, 179 Center Street, New York, New York.

Yours faithfully,



H. van Zile Hyde  
Chief of Middle East Office

Director General  
UNRRA  
Washington

Enclosures 2

42944

8, 18 July



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UNRRA JERUSALEM OFFICE

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Report on the registration of Greek refugees living in Palestine

by ELIZABETH BROWN

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UNRRA Jerusalem Office has registered 1715 refugees who are desirous of being repatriated to Greece. This covers those people living outside of our camp at Nuseirat. It includes roughly 1100 who have been listed with, and in most cases receiving weekly stipends from the Greek Ministry of Social Welfare; and in addition many families and individuals who have been living on their own in various places throughout Palestine. They were residents from the mainland of Greece and from the Greek islands who crossed the water in caiques or trekked through Turkey to search for a haven in Palestine. About half are from the one island of Samos. All have come since May of 1941 when German occupation of their homeland made escape necessary; all are eager, indeed restless and impatient to be on their way home.

The total number of people registered is not large. The eligibility of this group for repatriation seems in many instances to be questioned and therefore needs some explanation. The work of registration is not as simple here as it has been in UNRRA camps, nor is it as simple as it would be in other countries.

Palestine has been a haven for many other peoples during the war years and earlier. Great number of Poles, of Czechs, have come to stay for the duration or to halt in passage to other centres for refugees elsewhere. The country is, as is well known, the land to which Jews from many places have come to escape the persecutions in their own nations. Special provisions have been made by the Jewish Agency to take care of incoming Jews. The refugee groups, sometimes unwittingly, have come under these provisions and have found themselves caught in the activities of the country.

It therefore seems desirable to set down in detail some of the things that have confronted us in dealing with the Greek group and that need clarification if UNRRA's purpose, here, is to be realized.

Greek Ministry of Social Welfare Rolls.

Registration of the people on the Greek Ministry of Social Welfare rolls was accomplished first. The Greek Orthodox Church has been generous with its premises and buildings and has thereby housed the majority of the people the Ministry has been attempting to help. The Convent of the Holy Cross, a high walled, cavernous old stone building at the bottom of an olive-groved valley on the



outskirts of Jerusalem; a monastery built in Crusaders' times and adjoining the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem; a cloister in Bethany, the dim corridor and rambling old Patriarchate inside the Old City walls - all of these have been visited by our registration team and have been the scene of our visits for interviews and inoculations.

#### Military Status.

Included in the Greek Ministry list are seventeen military who are on active duty, serving the ministry in their various refugee centres here. Some have families also on the stipend rolls. Of the remaining group it is estimated that 90% are families of military personnel elsewhere and on active duty or discharged. There is no way of readily proving these statements. Certainly it would seem that military service by some member of the family has aided them in securing help from their government. In some instances enlistment took place after arrival in Palestine. In others the man had enlisted in Greece, left on duty, and then the family were evacuated as refugees. The Greek Government has known that they are families of military and that they are also refugees - has seen fit to support them other than by soldier's allowances, and has succeeded in getting UNRRA to agree to a repatriation plan. This whole question is so intangible and has so many ramifications it is doubtful whether complete clarification could be achieved without recourse to extensive supervision within a confined camp over a period of time sufficient for thorough investigation.

In the mid-June flight, in which were included a group from Nuseirat, we have since learned that three Jerusalem Office registrants asked the G.C. Greek troops to give them discharge papers on grounds of age. Though they had not been in the military service these discharge papers made them eligible for repatriation through Greek Government channels and together with five women they joined the flight and have gone back to Greece. All eight of these people had Immigration Certificates but no one questioned this point.

A written request to the High Commissioner's Office has been made to determine the status of discharged military in this country. Pending this information and in the meantime it is understood that refugee families of ex-military may be repatriated by UNRRA, but that military on active duty and their families are not eligible for such repatriation.

#### Other registrants.

Since many individuals not enrolled were calling on us and requesting our help to get them home, a notice was then placed in the Wednesday and Friday (weekend) editions of the local newspaper "Palestine Post" which read as follows: "All Greek citizens who have entered Palestine since the war and who desire to return to Greece may register at the UNRRA Office, Jerusalem." Registration of the latter group required much more time than anticipated. For



two weeks the office was busy with people who not only came in from Jerusalem and suburbs but who made the journey from Tel-Aviv and Haifa to request our assistance in repatriating them to Greece. More than 700 registrants were thus enrolled.

This latter group proved to be largely Jewish and exceedingly complex from the point of view of varying status per individual. Some of these people had lived at Nuseirat Camp during the time it was managed by M.E.R.R.A. or more recently since UNRRA had taken over. Others had come down from Aleppo, from Turkey or from various places on the coast to find a haven in Palestine.

#### Immigrant Certificates.

In whatever way they had come there was a common story told by members of the various groups who found themselves in widely scattered centres. Repeatedly we have heard the account of the representative of the Jewish Agency coming among them and asking to see passports. Having handed them over, the people are told they would be returned later and when they were they had been stamped by the Department of Migration "Permission to remain as a permanent immigrant in Palestine." If the people had no passports their photos were taken and clipped to printed pieces of paper, no signature required. This they thought variously was a passport for entry into Palestine, an identification certificate, an instruction, or a pass from say Aleppo to Gaza. These pieces of paper, Immigrant Certificates headed Government of Palestine and worded throughout in Hebrew and English only are unintelligible to persons knowing neither language. We have too many stories, and this seems to be endorsed by recent experience at Nuseirat Camp, of the lack of explanation of what was being done, to believe that they were aware they had received something which was eventually to act as a barrier to their returning home. Frequently the quota of certificates the representative had at hand did not cover the group and some members of a family got them and some did not. Frequently also we have found that members of a family here hold I.C.'s and that there are others in the same family in Greece. The problem of families split by the issuance of I.C.'s is exceedingly involved and very tragic.

The Department of Migration of the Government of Palestine authorizes the issuance of immigrant certificates to Jews dependent upon the quota as set forth in the White Paper of 1939. A Jewish resident in Palestine may hold an immigrant certificate indefinitely. Or if he has a passport the above mentioned permission for permanent residence may be stamped therein, and the foreign passport retained indefinitely. It is possible, however, for the individual to elect to become a Palestinian citizen at the end of two years' residence in the country. This it would seem and not the holding of a certificate would be the criterion by which a person's desires for place of residence would finally be judged. If, however, the individual has been given a certificate and been thereby included in the quota of immigrants allowed, then decides to leave Palestine



and accomplishes this, the certificate is lost so far as building up the population of the national home is concerned. For the Palestine Government does not allow the substitution of one individual for another on the same certificate. This is the crux of the Jewish Agency's desire and determination to prevent people holding immigration certificates from leaving Palestine, and it throws into sharp focus the shortsightedness of their method of distributing certificates and of increasing the Jewish population in Palestine. Technically, however, the holding of a certificate, or a passport stamped as stated, denies the holder refugee status in this country. Persons whose passports are stamped for temporary residence only, renewable at intervals, do not lose their refugee status; these are the Christians in the group. They have received asylum in Palestine without being discriminated against as have their Jewish brothers in distress.

#### Jewish other Nationals.

The foregoing statements apply alike to persons holding Greek passports, and to those holding passports of other nationalities. It is believed 1000 Jews have come from Greece since the war. Out of the total of roughly 700 registered for repatriation there are about 217 Sephardic Jews whose families have lived three to five hundred years in Greece and who carry Spanish passports. As is well known these people have been substantial industrious citizens, and their trek from nazism was inordinately long. They look on Greece as their home, and have, like most others, the hope of finding relatives there when they return. There is as well a mixed group of other nationalities among those registered, Yugoslavs, Italians, Portuguese, British, Hungarians, etc. For all of these the claim on the right to return to Greece is technically less strong than for those of Greek citizenship. Sephardics registered for repatriation are being asked - on instruction from the local Greek consul - to apply direct to Athens through our offices for permission to return. Other nationals must also apply for special permission, but these applications are routed through the local consul to Athens.

#### Greek Jews.

Among the Greek Jews there are those who have Greek passports of some years' standing. There are those who have been issued temporary Greek passports - this group includes a number who were taken from Nuseirat to receive special training courses in Jerusalem. There are 19 who have documents but no money to secure Greek passports. There are still others who though having no papers have been able to find four pounds and a friend or two to vouch for their having lived in Greece and who therefore have secured new passports. And there are those who, though they too have had no papers, have been unable to find money enough to make an occasion when friends could vouch for them and help them secure a new passport. The ninety odd in this latter group are among the most tragic people we have encountered.

The Jews who have been registered and here discussed include about 150 on the Greek Ministry list. Some of these have continued



to get stipends from the Greek Government, some have not. In some families members who have no immigration certificates get stipends and those who have do not. Whether the fact that the Greek Government has been supporting families, some members of which have immigration certificates, will assist in repatriation or not remains to be seen.

#### The Greek Government.

In approaching the local Consul General for Greece in Jerusalem about this whole problem, it was revealed that the Greek Government has established certain definite policies in regard to the Greeks in Palestine, and has issued the local consulate with instructions in keeping. These policies developed as a result of the visit of a delegation from the Greek Government to Palestine and discussions with Mr. Ben Gurion and Mr. Mashe Shertok of the Jewish Agency. The policy is in brief that any individual holding an immigrant certificate or equivalent, will not be "facilitated" if he wishes to return to Greece. If he desires a Greek passport and can substantiate his right to it, this the consulate may issue. It is equally willing and ready to issue a visa to all Jews who are holders of Greek passports provided they return to Greece as "travellers" on their own. "Will not be facilitated" means that the Greek Consulate will not visa their DP-2 cards which otherwise would mean recognizing their refugee status and facilitating their return home. But their issuing of repatriation visas for Greece would be defeating the Agency's object of retaining Jews in Palestine. Therefore the Greek Government desirous of maintaining the good will of the Agency has instructed its consulate not to issue these. In the case of foreign nationals an I.C. then acts as an additional if not a greater barrier against repatriation.

#### Exceptions.

There are, however, among those registered, Jews who hold foreign passports and I.C.'s and who have been granted visas for return to Greece. These are more often than not selfsupporting individuals who though refugees have adapted themselves more quickly and have established themselves here but still want to return to Greece. In one instance, however, one of these people quite frankly admits he now has business in both places, Palestine and Greece, that he wishes repatriation for himself alone, and not for his wife and two children, to re-establish himself there, and that he plans to return here in four to six months and then to decide when conditions are more equitable here and there, whether to stay here or return to Greece to live. It might seem that UNRRA would have reason to decline repatriating such an individual, yet with the Greek Government having, in spite of the general policy, facilitated his re-entry, and with his status as a refugee established except for the technicality of the I.C. there is no valid reason for refusal. His frankness and honesty very likely make him an exception in a very small minority, and are not grounds for a penalty. But to quote such an instance endangers our consideration of the group as a whole. Beyond question



the Sephardics and other nationals who are asking our help speak only of Greece as their home and have developed no fondness for Palestine that would indicate a return journey.

#### Palestine Government.

The attitude of the Palestine Government toward the findings of our registration is as it has been to individuals who have found themselves in similar circumstances previously. They do not believe that anyone should be forced to live in any place he doesn't wish. They know that the many Jewish refugees who were in Turkey were given immigrant certificates by border officials as a means of expediting mass entry into Palestine. And they point out that people who have spent their lives in any given country and who are displaced because of war are entitled under international law to return thereto when hostilities have ceased. As Mr. Mills, Commissioner of the Department of Migration & Statistics says "this is a tough enough world at best and a person should at least be allowed the choice of where he'd like to spend his life." Under the Mandate the role of the Palestine Government must adhere to a strictly unbiased and impartial line. It is clear, however, that in UNRRA efforts to help these people, endorsement and assistance in our negotiations with the Greek Government may be counted upon. They are prepared, indeed, to assist in diplomatic pressure on the Greek Government.

#### Composition of the Group.

The economic status of the Jewish group as a whole is exceedingly wide in scope. There are people who have not only had and brought with them considerable means, but there are many who have found work and a living here and still do not feel at home in Palestine. There are people who have had steady work, little work or no work here and the latter have lived with friends or relatives and scraped along as best they can.

Frequently the language difficulty has stood in the way of employment. To be sure many have learned at least a little Hebrew, but it is to be observed that the desire to learn which would facilitate this, in its absence tends to prove their earnestness in wanting to go home.

Many speak neither English nor Hebrew, are not used to living on a mainland, to the economics and culture of this country, and have had no reason either at home in Greece to be aware of their Jewishness, nor since coming here to be persuaded to Zionism. It is a blatant anachronism that as Jews they are presently suffering their first taste of discrimination and fascism at the hands of the Jewish Agency.

#### Support.

How different the picture would be had the Jewish Agency seen fit to approach the problem by different means, there is no way of knowing. Certainly if there were more care and conscience in the



method of distributing certificates there would have been no substantial problem. Further if any sustained financial assistance whatsoever, any guiding hand had been offered these people to fit into this foreign land the percentage now wishing to leave could not help but be less. In our questioning we have found repeated stories of no help from the J.A. other than an initial small amount of money. And we have found the holding of an I.C. serving as a reason for the Greek Ministry not to take responsibility.

Conclusion.

These people have had an extraordinarily difficult time owing first to their circumstances as war refugees, but further complicated by their having been included in, or duped into, immigrant status which has denied them inclusion in any arrangements made for refugees. They are people most needy of UNRRA's help. Our hand can certainly be strengthened by recourse to international law covering such circumstances. And we are fortunate in having the Government of Palestine willing to assist us in getting them home.

Two points remain for clarification or accomplishment before complete repatriation of the Jerusalem group can be achieved.

1) The answer from the Palestine Government in regard to discharged military will clarify the position in which those on active service with the Greek Ministry here find themselves.

2) The review and restatement of policy by the Greek Government in regard to the status of persons who have always lived in Greece until evacuated during the war, who wish to return there, and who have by various means lost their refugee status. A general policy or sanction on this point will facilitate not only Greek nationals but also other nationals whose lot has been identical but who fall into different technical categories.

If both these points are cleared and repatriation to Greece accomplished, a precedent will be made which will facilitate our work if and when we can embark on the job for the Czechs and the Poles.

Jerusalem

June 1945