

13 Aug. 1967 - 14 Aug. 1967

INFORMATION on EL-ARISH - AUG 1967

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21/8

Visit to the Municipality,
El Arish, 14 Aug, 10.50 a.m.

The Chief Clerk of the Sinai Province spoke, the mayor and the secretary of the municipality being sick. The name of the Chief Clerk is Mohammed Wassif.

He said that there had been quite a movement of population: some had left, some had come; however, he does not know about the figures. The population of El Arish and surroundings before the war was between 30-40,000. Before the war, about 2-3,000 left El Arish out of fear of the war; a similar number of people came from Gaza; he believes these 2-3,000 Palestinians from Gaza are still in El Arish. After the hostilities, everything was closed and the inhabitants were unable to leave. He said they are going through hard times, especially regarding food and the fact that their salaries have not been paid since the end of the hostilities. Israel is only paying those who are working.

He said that Capt. Ronen, of the Israel military government, has a list of all the officials who want to leave: 5,449 names.

Mr. Tekoah said that if there are people who want to go back to Egypt, Israel has no objection. If there are additional people who say they are Egyptian employees and would like to go back to Egypt, they should come forward and say they are Egyptians, so that their names will be added to the list. As several times they have asked to leave, they were simply not looked after from the point of view of subsidy or special arrangements. They were told by the Red Cross that they were about to leave; if it were known that they are going to stay for a length of time, arrangements could be made.

Gow
Regarding the Egyptian officials recruited in Egypt and working in Gaza, who are now awaiting repatriation in El Aish, the Military Commander stated that 300 or so came from Gaza; some 200 are still in Gaza with their families and they want to go back to Egypt; they do not want to work in Gaza now; they say that if they work with Israel they will lose their job in Egypt. If they stay in Israel, he said, they will have to work. The other inhabitants asked the Israel authorities to send the Egyptians away, and then they would go back to work.
back in Gaza.)

Palestinians?
On the question of the Egyptian officials, Mr. Tekoah stated that there were two groups: (1) Those who were working in the area before the war; (2) Those who came over with the Egyptian forces when the Egyptians came to the Sinai and Gaza after UNEF was removed; those were the people who were sent back to Egypt, even if they may have been born here 10 years ago. Mr. Tekoah had no figures of the breakdown by category.

Banks

Banks.

As soon as the post opened, the military government opened the Israeli Postal Bank. The Egyptian Bank of Agriculture and Alexandria Bank are closed. || Mr. Tekoah stated that the moment the Israeli authorities entered El Arish, they sent a representative of the Ministry of Finance to check what the situation was in the bank; the average liquidity was 10 in certain places, 4 in others. || Col. Givoly informed that as from next Wednesday, only Israeli currency will be accepted. The rate of exchange is 6 I£ for 1 E£. The Israel authorities do not mind if customers pay in Egyptian pounds, but the exchange rate will be different and the customers will lose: after Wednesday, the rate will be 3.50 I£ for 1 E£.

El Arish

When visiting El Arish on 14 August 1967, my attention was drawn to the about 1,000 Egyptian Government officials (together with their families the group totals about 5,000 persons) who, as far as I was told, originated from the parts of Egypt west of the Suez Canal, and who had been sent to El Arish and surroundings as teachers, engineers or other experts. They all wished to return to what they considered as their homes. It is not quite clear who had asked for their "repatriation" - one version says that the UAR Government asked that they be sent back, but the UAR Government says that the whole action was initiated by ICRC acting at the request of the people in question. Anyhow, it was agreed by both sides that these about 5,000 people should be transferred to the West Bank of the Suez Canal. One first group of persons also crossed the Canal, but unfortunately some Palestinians had mixed with the group, which made the Egyptians stop the whole project, requesting name lists of all the officials in question before allowing the rest to cross to the West Bank. These lists were immediately delivered to the Egyptians who have told the ICRC day after day that they are still studying and considering the lists.

The 1,000 officials in El Arish were in a difficult position, having received no salaries as former Government officials and not interested in taking any new employment since they were scheduled to cross the Suez Canal any day. Neither the Israelis nor any voluntary agency had taken steps to assist them for the same reason.

On 26 August I discussed this problem in Cairo with Under-Secretaries Fiky and Gohar. They told me that the Government no longer wished any of these people to cross the Canal; they wished them to stay where they are and they keep on telling them so over the radio every day. They hope their presence will bolster the morale of the population in El Arish and, of course, also that their presence will cause difficulties and be irritating for the Israelis (latter they did not say). The strike and resistance in El Arish

last week certainly has played a role in making the Egyptians change their decision on the return of these officials.

Mr. Boisard, of the ICRC, told me later, on 26 August, that also the Israeli approach to this group had hardened. They had told him that if they did not have a positive reply on the return before Sunday, 27 August, they would put all the men in a detention camp, leaving women and children where they are.

A handwritten signature, possibly 'Ngg', is located in the lower right quadrant of the page. The signature is written in a cursive, slanted style.

Haarlem

UNEF

but of 800 400 field staff

UNEF Retained ≈ 24 after war

Placed indemnities to all others
except to 300 who were stationed.

Great rounded up all Egyptians in Gaza.
UNEPW asked Egyptians for
Egyptian doctors to be left in Gaza.

Plan to finish field work 18 Sept.

NOTES FOR THE FILE

Meeting with Mr. Boisard,
of the ICRC, on 13 Aug 67, 6.15 p.m.

El Arish

Mr. Boisard does not think the population is "starving". However, El Arish depended on Cairo for food; they used to import flour, oil, sugar, from Cairo. Vegetables and fruit used to come from Khan Yunis. Since the war they have received no flour from Cairo. CARE is sending food and flour to the people in need. The main problem is that no-one has been paid for three months. If there is food in the market, the population cannot afford to buy it.

Ships

There are many contradictions and nobody knows anything. Egypt wants to send a ship to prove to the whole world that Israel is unable to feed the people in the area. Israel is afraid to get a ship from Egypt because they are concerned over international opinion. They both agreed that this ship be sent through the Red Cross. Gen. Dayan agrees; if it is the Red Cross he does not care where the supplies come from. He wants it to be a Red Cross ship and no political use to be made of it.

Since the beginning it was agreed that the ship will be sent to Ashdot (south of Tel Aviv; between Tel Aviv and Gaza) and from Ashdot it could be sent by lorries to El Arish, etc. For two weeks Mr. Boisard has had no news on this ship. Mr. Gaillard in Nicosia does not know either. Unrwa Ship. Mr. Boisard only knew that UNRWA and CARE were supposed to get a ship in the middle of July from Ashdot also, but he has no further news about it.

- - -

The people in El Arish want to go back to Egypt. The Israel authorities agree that everyone wishing to go back to the Nile Valley will be allowed to do so, through the Red Cross. However, Egypt agrees only to welcome the Egyptians (in El Arish everybody is Egyptian), imported Egyptians from the Nile Valley, but is not ready to receive the people born in Sinai. The ICRC was being careful as they could not send anybody to Egypt if the Egyptian Government was not willing to take them. Egyptians from Egypt are about 5,000. The ICRC has prepared a list for the Egyptian Government

Mr. Tekoah stated that the Israel authorities are employing 700 permanent people who are getting salaries; of these, 400 are being employed by the municipal services; the others in services such as water, police force, etc.

Asked how many of the local population would like to leave, Dr. Ismail stated that less than 500, students included.

Local Production

The people are allowed to go fishing, but it may not be the season now. Israel is ready to send their fish to the West Bank; in the past, their fish was sold in Egypt. Every year 2,500 tons of dates are produced -- there are 5 million square metres of private agriculture and another 5 million square metres of Government farms. Vegetables used to come from the Gaza Strip.

Egypt

of 5,550 people, all of them from the Nile Valley. Egypt is checking their names. The answer as to who can go and who cannot is expected shortly from the Egyptian Government. This list was made by the former Egyptian civilian administrator; it is certainly not correct, because everybody wants to leave El Arish, but this is no concern of the ICRC.

The Israel Government is eager for a lot of people to leave El Arish and the Egyptian Government does not want to have too many people, but they do want some important people, such as civil servants, doctors, who went to El Arish before the war.

Mr. Boisard suggest that the Mission meet a doctor at the hospital to explain the situation. Most of these doctors are imported Egyptians.

The CARE man in El Arish told the Military Commander that the situation is good. The military authorities want workers to work for the army but it is difficult to get as many workers as they need: about 400.

Employ

21/8/11

NOTES FOR THE FILE

J. Cambray

Visit to El Arish Hospital
14 Aug, 12.10 p.m.

Dr. Ismail, the Director of the Hospital, stated that the pre-war population was about 40,000 in the city; some people have left before and after the war. The health situation is all right; there are no epidemics: the normal sickness and injuries. The food situation in the hospital is all right also. He believes the shops have enough food for the civilian population; the problem is that some government employees have not received their salaries: those who were working in organizations supervising the whole Sinai area are not working and consequently are not being paid. Almost all the population depended on the salaries of the civil servants. There are 3-4,000 heads of families: 1,000 from Egypt and some 3,000 from El Arish who are without a job or salary. Mr. Boisard, of the Red Cross, said that there is plenty of food in the "souk", but there is no money to buy it with.

Food.

①

Mr. Tekoah requested the Red Cross to establish the number of former Government officials who to-day are not getting any salary because they are unemployed.

Dr. Ismail said that he was seeing all the Sinai Peninsula in the past. Now he has in this hospital all the personnel who used to supervise in Rafah, etc. They are here without work, about 100 persons in the medical services.

The Red Cross delegate stated that the unemployed former civil servants do not want to ask for work because they would feel "degraded". As far as food supplies, CARE and the Government are helping; the Red Cross is ready to do something in the coming days, but it is not urgent, Mr. Boisard said.

Revised

Destruction *Reconstruction*

There was no heavy fighting in town. In the central square there are houses with holes. The local municipality issued a tender inviting people who are capable to carry out the repairs to do so, and the military government will pay them from the municipal budget which is provided by the Israel authorities.

Movement of Population

Only the 1000 families from Egypt wish to leave El Arish; the other 50,000/want to stay? and there are no plans for them to leave.
of Sinai origin

3/...

Col. Givoly said that CARE is the only international organization operating in the area. The food comes from Israel, by railway; the railway is working from El Kantara to Gaza; 250 tons of flour were brought in last week.

Food.

Food.
|
The military commander stated that in the past there was a ration-card system; now the population can buy freely. ~~Also, during the Egyptian times, there was a curfew; there is still a curfew now but not during so many hours.~~ The stock being held for the army was sold to shops before it got bad.

Food Situation

Food.) Col. Givoly stated that there is plenty of food and that people can buy as much as they want. Mr. Tekoah said that the Egyptians had told the Red Cross that the population here was starving and that they would like to send a ship with food; the Israel authorities told them that the population was not starving, but if Egypt wanted to send food they could do so through CARE or the Red Cross (with the Red Cross flag). | ~~So they changed their mind; they wanted to send a ship with the Egyptian flag.~~

2/...

The Egyptian answer, transmitted through the Red Cross, was that they would not send a ship.

2) Life in town is normal, he said; there is food, water, electricity; ← 2
fishing permits were given, but the people are not fishing, perhaps it is
a problem of season. Israel is giving money to the 5,000-dunam agricultural
centre, which is still working. Israel also gave money to the mayor to ← 1
pay his workers; there is a hospital with Egyptian doctors, with 50 beds. ← 3
The Egyptian police are working.

Manus

NOTES FOR THE FILE

21/8/67
J. Cambray

Visit to Military Commander,
el Arish area, 14 Aug 67 10 a.m.

The party was accompanied by Lt-Col. Zvi Bar, who joined in Beer Sheva.

- 1) The Military Commander, Lt-Col. Shaul Givoly, said he believed there are 50,000 men and women in El Arish, but they have not been counted. There are also 1,000 Egyptian families of administrators who came from Egypt and want to go back to Egypt; Egypt's agreement is being awaited; Israel agrees to let them go.

2/8/84

Visit to a camp where 289 Egyptian men are being held, El Arish, 14 August, 11.30 a.m.

Mr. Ahmed Habib, a former teacher in Gaza, speaks on behalf of the 289 detainees, Egyptian employees who were working in Gaza. They were brought to the camp on 3 August; until 3 August they were in Gaza, in their own houses, when the Israel authorities moved them to this camp for 3 or 4 days and they would then have been housed in a better place. Accommodation here is inconvenient. The Israel authorities are doing their best, he said, but it seems to be beyond their capacity to provide better accommodation.

X The detainees' families were repatriated last Thursday, 10 August.

The food supplies which were being issued to them had been kept in stores which were bombed; the stuff is bad inside the tins and bags (a swollen tin and bad bread are produced). The military commander stated that it had been a mistake to give the detainees such foodstuffs and this will not happen again.

Mr. Tekoah stated that Mr. Gussing will go again to Cairo in the near future and the Israel authorities have no objection to his transmitting exactly what was said. He regretted about the accommodation here and hoped that with the departure of the other civilians the latter's accommodation will be freed; it all depended on the attitude of the Egyptian authorities in Cairo.

Mr. Habib stated that night before yesterday there had been firing. The military commander informed that this was due to thieves coming at night ; one of them was shot dead. He hoped this will not happen again. Regarding accommodation, he said that the military police should be near them, for security reasons. If another place is found near the Israeli forces, with water and electricity, he will be glad to transfer them there.

The party then proceeded to visit the compound. Mattresses have not yet been provided. 34 former UNEF staff members are among the detainees, allegedly hired in Egypt and who claim the UN should repatriate them to Egypt.

~~Some 300 Egyptian men were brought to El Arish from Gaza; their families were sent to Egypt; the Israel authorities are ready to consider releasing them as soon as the Jews interned in Egypt are released.~~ At present they are in an Egyptian camp, where they are fed or given money to buy what they want; they are not under military guard: only a local policeman stands at the gate. Up to 20 of them can go to town to buy food.

El Arish

Arish

On 14 August I visited in El Arish a former UAR military camp in which were kept nearly 300 Egyptian Government officials from Gaza whose families had been sent over the Canal to Egypt. Mr. Tekoah made no secret of the fact that these 300 men were kept detained and would remain so until the Egyptians would release the about 300 Jews they kept imprisoned since the outbreak of the war. We saw the detainees and heard some complaints concerning food, lack of mattresses, bad quarters and no letters from their families. We discussed the matter with ICRC and the other complaints with the Israeli Governor who promised to look into it to try to make improvements. On 26 August Mr. Boisard, of the ICRC, told me that improvements had been made.

On 26 August, at my meeting in Cairo with Under-Secretaries Fiky and Gohar, they showed great interest for this particular group of 300 Government officials. It was felt very strongly that they tried to get me to declare that they were kept as hostages for the Jews. I consistently did not connect them in any way with the Jews and stressed repeatedly that, as far as I knew, they were detained according to Article 35 of the Fourth Convention, which gives the occupying power certain right to refuse repatriation if that would be against the interest of the state. The Egyptians said that if this was true the detainees would, according to the same Article, have the right to appeal to a court. This is right and we must talk to the Israelis about it.

AE

The Commander believes the population before the war and the present one are quite the same; not many people left. [The 1,000 Egyptians were employed in El Arish: electricity, water, members of the mayor unit, doctors, post, banks, etc. They live in their normal quarters and are all working, including the mayor, although perhaps not very willingly.]

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Strike!

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§

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strike!

by