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"Israel and the Arab Refugees", an Article from Elyas Kusa's Collection

Printed in English, this document features an article found between the collection of Elyas Kusa entitled "Israel and the Arab Refugees" which states that Peace shall remain a document without the value of Israel not realizing that the refugees wish to return back to their homeland, and there is clearly a feeling of hatred between both sides that cannot be unseen and therefore, sign a peace agreement.

ISRAEL AND THE ARAB REFUGEES

One of the most difficult problems impeding peace in the Middle East is the Arab refugee problem. There is no hope for real peace as long as hundreds of thousands of refugees live in a most appalling state on the border of Israel. The Government of Israël has many times declared its willingness to cooperate in a solution of the task, but under two conditions: a) prior conclusion of a peace treaty; b) no return of refugees to Israel who must be resettled only in the Arab States.

In my opinion that is not the right way. To a): We must know that peace can never be attained just by signature on a document. As long as fear, worry and hatred prevail amongst the peoples, as long as there is no readiness for compromises and sacrifices for the sake of peace, there is no hope for normal relations. We must try to prepare the hearts for peace, Arabs and Jews must change their attitude and renounce war in all its forms. Without that there will never be real peace and every treaty will remain a scrap of paper. - To b): Israel must understand the refugees and their desire to return to their homes. Both the State of Israel and the Zionist Movement subscribing to the Motto: "And may the sons return to their land" cannot declare before the whole world: "No refugee shall return!" World opinion would not understand us and it may be that in the long run we shall have to agree under pressure to such decisions which could have been prevented had we been less stubborn. But on the other hand, a responsible and careful approach ought to be demanded of anyone who deals with the refugee-problem or who submits suggestions for its solution. Never before were the nations - and Israel among them - faced with a similar task. We may remember of course such a huge undertaking as the transfer of the Greeks from Turkey to Greece. However, in Palestine we are faced with the problem of refugees who are to be returned to a country conquered by another nation of different religion and culture. Let us not forget that we are dealing with living human beings, both Jews and Arabs, who themselves would have to find the way for neighbouring relations in their own life and not those who - in the U.N. or other places - prepare suggestions or programmes. We know well the difficulties encountered in the settlement of Jewish immigrants in Israel. The conditions in their camps and huts were sometimes worse than those of the Arab refugees. Accordingly, whoever has a sincere and honest belief in the possible resettlement of Arab refugees in Israel, must propose first of all to try the resettlement of a small number - a few thousands - in order to know how to continue with the plan, without fixing the final number. Even this experiment will raise many problems to be solved by experts: (who is to be resettled? who will "live at peace with their neighbours"? where will be his new place? what will be the fate of the Jews living now in former Arab houses and villages? who will pay for the transport? etc.etc.) It is impossible to foresee whether this experiment will succeed and what results may be attained.

Here the Israel Government must take the initiative by a) recognizing in principle the right of the refugees to return, and b) declaring its willingness, with the cooperation of all interested powers and agencies, to start resettling refugees in Israel, without linking this in any way to the conclusion of a peace-treaty or to other conditions. An Israel declaration of that kind would be received with great sympathy by the whole world. It could exert an untold influence on the frame of mind of thousands of refugees and prepare the ground for a real peace in the area. For, even such a limited undertaking, as proposed, would require co-operation of all factors concerned, the State of Israel, the Arab States, the U.N. and the Arab refugees. They will have to meet and to discuss the realisation of the plan and to work together. Perhaps we might experience the establishment of "Mixed Refugee-Commissions" just as we witness today the existence of "Mixed Armistice-Commissions". Nobody who is really, earnestly and honestly interested in peace - not in peace-declarations - will have the possibility to refuse to participate in this great humanitarian work, and who knows where this "start of chain-reactions" will finally lead us by preparing the hearts for true peace.

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