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EVACUATION OF STATELESS REFUGEES TO NORTH AFRICA

HISTORY

After it had been decided in the Spring of 1943 to evacuate stateless and other unprotected refugees from Spain to the camp at Fedhala in North Africa, an arrangement was made dividing the responsibility of this operation between the British and American Governments through their embassies in Madrid. The American Government was to assemble and transport the refugees in Spain to the port of embarkation, and the British Government was to provide transportation by sea to North Africa.

In a meeting held on January 31, 1944, between representatives of the British and American Embassies, the French Diplomatic Mission, Mr. Beckelman (representing the UNRRA), and myself, it was decided that this office handle the applications made by refugees for admission to the camp, distribute these applications to the screening authorities, advise the refugees concerning the acceptance or rejection of their applications and negotiate with the Spanish authorities the release of the refugees from camp and their exit from Spain. The American Ambassador asked this office to also carry out for the American Embassy its functions of assembling and transporting to the port of embarkation the refugees accepted for entry into the camp.

In this way, three groups of refugees left for the North African Refugee Center:

May 4	-	36	refugees
June 21	-	573	"
July 1	-	21	"
Total		630	

Immediately after the departure of these three groups, the American Embassy requested of Washington and Algiers instructions regarding the expedition to the camp of additional groups of

refugees, asking whether or not this same procedure and division of responsibility should obtain in the future. To several such requests no answer was ever received and it is not known in Madrid whether or not the agreement made by the British and American Governments with the French authorities is still in force and whether the division of responsibility between the British and American Embassies in Madrid should continue.

NEED OF OUTLET TO NORTH AFRICA

In my opinion an outlet to North Africa for stateless and other unprotected refugees is still urgently necessary though the numbers of refugees to whom such an opportunity is attractive has been greatly reduced by the three convoys to Fedhala and by expeditions to Palestine and Canada organized by this office during 1944. There nevertheless remain in Spain roughly one thousand refugees who receive financial assistance from American relief organizations. These are almost entirely refugees who are either legally or practically stateless. For some of them solutions will perhaps be found when return to France and other parts of liberated Europe becomes possible. For others, however, return to pre-1939 places of residence is impossible and they will become a part of the "hard core" of the post-war stateless refugee problem. I assume that the UNRRA or the Intergovernmental Committee is working on some solution to this more or less permanent problem and will make representations in this direction to the United Nations Governments when the plans for the post-war world are being drawn. It seems logical therefore that this group of refugees now in Spain should come as soon as possible under the authority and control of some such organization as the UNRRA.

There are, furthermore, many cases where the transfer to an UNRRA camp is, for humanitarian reasons, urgently desirable. In this category are many stateless and unprotected foreigners, some of them resident for many years in Spain who, because of their participation on the Republican side during the Spanish civil war, are personae non grata with the present Spanish Government. Life for such persons in Spain is extremely difficult because of the impossibility of obtaining legal employment.

Eduardo Dato 20
Madrid

December 27, 1944
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LQ-1229 to AFSC Lisbon
from David Blickenstaff

On Monday December 12 I received a telegram from Ned Kampbell, director of the UNRRA camp at Philippeville, Algeria, asking me to meet him in Tangier between December 18 and 22 for the "discussion of a possible flow of refugees from Spain during next six months to UNRRA Mediterranean area."

After enquiring into the difficulties I would have in obtaining permission to go to Tangier, I replied that I would meet him there on December 20.

It would have been impossible to obtain a safe-conduct to enter Spanish Morocco if a request were made through the normal channels in less than two weeks. The Spanish Foreign Office, however, kindly intervened and I had my permit on December 17.

Since I had just been gone on a trip to France, Janine insisted on coming with me this time and so we decided to make the trip together and take a few days vacation in Tangier before returning.

The easiest way to go to Tangier is by plane, for there is direct service between Madrid and Tangier and it takes only three and a half hours. Unfortunately, the plane was booked full until the end of the week and so we left Monday night by train for Algeciras, arriving the next day at two o'clock in the afternoon. The train being late, we were unable to take the boat to Tangier and as there was no boat the next day, we had to take the Ceuta boat. From Ceuta to Tetuan took two hours in a bus. At Tetuan the only transportation available (there is no railroad) was to hire an automobile, the only - though rather expensive - alternative. We arrived in Tangier at 10:30 that night.

Next day, Monday 20th, we met with Ned Kampbell and discussed the problem of the evacuation of refugees from Spain to the UNRRA camp and we were with him several times during the next four days.

There is a legally established Jewish community - Communauté Israelite - in Tangier where there is a local Jewish population of about 8,000 and a Jewish refugee population of around 2,000. Our work in Madrid requires us to be in

constant communication with the Junta of the Community for we often receive refugees here coming to Spain from Tangier for medical treatment, transit in emigration abroad or coming to Spain because of expulsion from Tangier. Also, the process of preparing documentation for Jewish refugees emigrating from Tangier to Palestine is directed from here and this office acts as a sort of intermediary between the British P.C.O., which issues the visas and identity certificates, and the refugees in Tangier.

It was therefore interesting and useful to meet the members of the Community with which we have had so many dealings and to discuss with them our common problems. It would be difficult to exaggerate the extreme kindness and cordiality of the members with whom we met. They made our short stay in Tangier instructive and extremely pleasant.

I also spoke at some length with the American Minister in Tangier. He has been greatly interested in several questions relating to concerns felt by some members in the Jewish Community for the fate of persecuted Jews in Hungary and he has advised with them and been intermediary in certain steps being taken for obtaining Spanish protection for some of these groups in Budapest - steps which have been in some instances in a measure successful. We in Madrid have played a small part in some of these efforts. It was therefore useful and interesting to discuss these questions with the American Minister.

Janine and I both wanted very much to return to Madrid for Christmas and we were able to obtain places in the plane of December 25 which arrives in Madrid about noon. Upon our arrival in Sevilla, however, the plane was grounded there because of weather conditions in Madrid and was not able to leave until the next day when we made a rather exciting flight through bad weather to Madrid.

The trip, in addition to the conversations with Ned Kampbell, was exceedingly interesting and in many ways very useful. I hope that Kampbell will be able to arrange something for the evacuation of more refugees from Spain. I explained fully the situation here and he is much interested in doing something for he feels that it would be worth while from a standpoint of finding long term solutions for stateless refugees. He is going to submit his recommendations on the subject to UNRRA headquarters and is hopeful that UNRRA will assume some official responsibility for getting refugees from Spain to the camp of North Africa. I am sending him a few notes on the points we discussed, a copy of which is enclosed.

Many of them are detained in work camps and prisons release from which being authorized only when immediate departure from Spain can be assured. The conditions of such internment leave much to be desired and the future for such refugees must appear completely hopeless.

NUMBER OF REFUGEES TO BE EVACUATED

Of the one thousand refugees remaining in Spain on the rolls of private American relief organizations it would be difficult to estimate the number that could be evacuated to an UNRRA camp. The following factors must be taken into consideration in making any estimate:

1.- Refugees look upon evacuation to a camp as only a last alternative, something to be avoided if possible. The number of those willing to accept evacuation to a camp increases or decreases as the events of the war cause hopes of return to liberated Europe to rise and fall in the minds of the refugees. The policies that will be followed by the national authorities, especially French and Belgian, will of course determine to a large extent how many refugees will look to an UNRRA camp as a solution to their problem. The French authorities in Madrid have recently been accepting applications for French visas. This has raised the hopes of some refugees that they will soon be able to return to France where many of them had been living for some years before the beginning of the war in 1939.

2.- The number of refugees who will apply for entry into an UNRRA camp is affected by the policy of the private relief organizations now supporting them in Spain. Increasing needs elsewhere may cause these organizations to try to decrease their obligations in Spain. This will force some refugees to accept evacuation to a camp and will encourage others to do so by shaking the sense of security that they have developed during their stay in Spain with all expenses paid. If financial assistance were at present completely withdrawn, almost all the refugees now being assisted would be obliged to apply for evacuation to a camp. Till now none of the committees represented by this office has intimated that economic pressure should be used to oblige refugees to make such a decision.

3.- Experience has shown that a rather high percentage of applications for admission to the camp in North Africa rejected. The North African screening authorities have dealt with our application lists as follows:

List No.	Date	No. of applicants	Number accepted	Number rejected	Percentage Of rejections
1	Feb. 28	485	368	117	24%
2	Mar. 20	475	410	65	14%
3	Mar. 31	46	25	21	46%
4	Apr. 19	20	17	3	15%
5	May 2	47	19	28	60%
6	May 15	41	18	23	56%
7	June 16	93	60	33	35%
8	July 15	60	34	26	43%
9	July 25	4	4	-	-
10	Aug. 22	44	20	24	55%
11	Oct. 5	25	2	23	92%
Totals		1,340	977	363	
12	Nov. 2	10	}	Report from screening authorities not yet received. 57 applications pending.	
13	Nov. 4	20			
14	Nov. 15	13			
15	Nov. 22	6			
16	Nov. 16	8			
Total		1,397			

Thus, out of a total of 1,340 applicants, 977 or 73% were accepted.

(Note: Discounting lists 1 and 2 of Feb. 28 and March 30, which represent the applications screened for the three convoys that have so far left for North Africa, the percentage of rejections on applications screened after the three departures comes to 45%.)

Furthermore, during the preparation of the three convoys sent to Fedhala, there were many refugees who withdrew after their applications had been accepted. These three convoys, totalling 630 refugees, represented 960 applications of which 778 accepted. The 182 refugees who did not leave though their applications were accepted, withdrew from the convoy for the following reasons:

Release from camp or prison or exit
visa refused by Spanish authorities..24%

Emigrated to other countries, or
evacuated by their diplomatic mission 23%

Remained in Spain with family mem-
ber unable to leave for North Africa
for health reasons or lack of exit
permit.....16%

Health and miscellaneous.....22%

Applications withdrawn - no explana-
tion given -15%

At the present time the situation of
applications, acceptances and rejections stands
as follows:

- 1.- Number of refugees now in Spain
whose applications are accepted...322
- 2.- Number of refugees now in Spain
whose applications are rejected...311
- 3.- Number of refugees now in Spain
whose applications are pending
with the N.A. screening author-
ities.....57
- 4.- Estimated number of accepted
applicants who would be immediate-
ly ready to leave for N.A.....150

THE PRACTICAL PROBLEM

In order that these 150 refugees, and
succeeding groups of refugees, be evacuated to
North Africa, it is necessary that some competent
authority (the UNRRA) undertake to obtain two
things:

- 1.- That instructions be sent to the
French authorities in Madrid for accepted
applicants to be given documents that will
permit them to disembark in North Africa.
- 2.- That permission be obtained from the
competent military authorities to accept
small groups (3 - 5 persons) of accepted,
properly documented refugees on occasional

ships leaving Gibraltar for North African ports: or that a ship be sent to some Spanish port especially to embark this first group of 150, and thereafter whenever a group of, say, fifty accepted applicants can be assembled.

We are prepared in this office to handle for the UNRRA the mechanics of preparing the refugees for evacuation, obtaining the necessary permits from the Spanish Government and arranging for transportation to the port of embarkation.

With regard to No. 2 above, I would very much prefer the first suggestion. It is much more useful to have the possibility of evacuating, say, ten refugees every two or three weeks, than fifty refugees every three or four months. A great deal could be done for many refugees if we could intervene at the Spanish police on their behalf with the possibility of giving assurance of immediate evacuation.

There has been, in recent weeks, an increasing tendency on the part of the Spanish authorities to intern foreigners who are thought to be dangerous or unfriendly to the present regime and to maintain in concentration camps refugees who should ordinarily have been released upon our assumption of financial responsibility for them.

For these refugees especially evacuation to an UNRRA camp is urgently desirable, for two reasons:

1.- Internment in Spain is, at best, under conditions that are sub-standard, and in company with interned Spanish criminals and Nazi Gestapo and military personnel.

2.- No progress toward finding an eventual solution to the cases of these internees can be made while they are in Spanish camps and prisons. Contrary to what their situation would be in an UNRRA camp, they are not, in Spain, the subjects of efforts on the part of the interning authorities, to find a solution to the "displaced persons problem". Internment in Spain is "time lost" - under conditions of moral and physical suffering.

February 20, 1944

MEMORANDUM

For the purposes of discussing the refugee problem in North Africa one must begin as far back as the early part of 1939 when large numbers of Spanish Republicans came across the border from Spanish Morocco to get away from Franco's troops. A good number also came by ship to the Department of Oran and into Morocco and Tunisia. Figures on these can only be estimated, but from subsequent developments it is believed that there were some three or four thousand Spanish Republicans in Morocco; perhaps more than that number around Oran; about 1,500 or 2,000 around Algiers; and about a thousand (mostly Spanish naval personnel) reached Tunisia. Besides these it is estimated that about 5,000 joined the French Foreign Legion early in 1939. It is expected that these may be released from the Legion at the end of their five year period of enlistment during the first half of 1944 and so will be added to the Spanish refugee community in North Africa, unless they re-engage in the Legion, immigrate to Mexico, go back to Spain or some other disposition is made of them. A good number of Spaniards also went across the Pyrenees into France about the end of the Civil War and subsequently managed, individually or in small groups, to get to North Africa after the fall of France. At the time of writing, by far the greatest part of these Spanish refugees have been incorporated, temporarily at least, in one way or another into the economy of North Africa, either working for French industry or for the Allied armies. In the latter case they may be used either as civilians or as members of the British Pioneer Corps. For the miscellaneous refugees who need charitable assistance, there have been established in principal centers, i.e., Algiers, Casablanca, Oran and Tunis, amicales, or mutual aid societies under the auspices of the Joint Commission for Political Prisoners and Refugees in French North Africa, which have been receiving funds from the United States under Treasury licenses to help needy Spanish refugees.

There is also a group of stateless refugees, most of them former enemy nationality, the greatest part of whom are Jewish. It is estimated that there are perhaps 5,000 persons in this group in all of North Africa. Some of these people had served in the French Army during the war and had been interned following the fall of France. They were later transferred to internment camps in North Africa and were subsequently released after the Allied landings, largely through the activities of the above-mentioned Joint Commission. Since that time most of these people have secured employment with the American or British armies, and approximately 900 of them are enlisted in the British Pioneer Corps. Early in 1944 a group of about 125 of these persons were sent to Palestine through the efforts of the Joint Distribution Committee.

A small number of persons in this stateless group, who are unemployable, are being maintained through funds made available by the American Joint Distribution Committee. Included in this group are former Poles, Czechs, Rumanians, Hungarians, Germans, Yugoslavs and Greeks. The majority are in Morocco and Algeria with a small additional group in Tunisia.

There is in North Africa another group of refugees, most of them Jewish, who came from Libya, and were expelled by the Italians in 1940. by virtue of the fact that they were French subjects. Of the 2,500 persons in this group, approximately 1,000 have been living in Tunisia

under

under the most primitive conditions, the rest being scattered throughout the back country in Algeria. Recently it was arranged with the French authorities and the British to transport approximately 1,000 of these persons from Tunisia back to their homes in Tripoli. It is expected that this transfer will be effected within the next few weeks. It is hoped, too, that the balance of this group will be returned to their homes in the near future. These Libyans have been assisted during their stay in Tunisia by the Secours National and the American Joint Distribution Committee.

The United States Army has made available a campsite near Casablanca to be administered by UNRRA, this camp to house and care for 2,500 refugees. An agreement had been reached with the French authorities to allow 2,500 stateless peoples now in Spain to enter Morocco and to be housed temporarily in these quarters. We find that comparatively few of this 2,500 will avail themselves of this opportunity (the latest information we have is between 600 and 800 are prepared to come to the camp). The reason given for this much smaller number is that (1) the refugees now in Spain have either heard of, or have had bad experiences with the French, and are fearful of their future in North Africa, even though the camp is to be run by the United Nations' personnel; (2) inasmuch as change of situation which is being offered does not seem to be sufficiently different from that to which they have been subjected and because no assurances can be given them as to their ultimate destination or fate they seem to prefer to remain where they are. However, our Madrid Embassy and Mr. David Blickenstaff, the representative of American relief organizations in Spain, can doubtless provide more specific information on the present attitude of the refugees in Spain.

The above group totals about 3,000 persons of which probably more than 95% are Jewish. Because of the geographic location of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, only infrequent calls upon this office for assistance have been made to bring displaced persons out of Europe.

By and large the French Committee of National Liberation has neither encouraged nor discouraged the entrance of displaced persons but rather has put the whole question on an individual case basis subject to the real decision being made by American, British and French military security offices, working in cooperation.

With regard to refugees being turned back at borders, this is not currently likely to happen inasmuch as the decision as to whether or not a given individual is going to be permitted to enter is usually made in Algiers and transmitted to the point where the visa is, or is not, issued. Mr. Blickenstaff, representative of American relief organizations in Madrid, may better be in a position to indicate cases where permission to enter North Africa has been refused.

It is believed that in order to encourage the French Committee to allow people or displaced persons to enter North Africa more freely, a plan must be established by which we can tell the displaced persons, as well as the French Committee, what their ultimate destination is: i.e., how long displaced persons will be allowed to remain in French territory after the cessation of hostilities. Will they be allowed to return to their native lands? Will they be allowed to immigrate to the United States or some other country of their choice? It is understood that the ultimate destination of many of these refugees, and particularly the stateless,

will

will be the responsibility of the Intergovernmental Commission for Refugees of which Sir Herbert Emerson in London is Chairman. It should be mentioned at this time that Mr. Patrick Murphy Malin, Vice-director of the above committee is in this theater making a survey of the conditions of the refugees in this part of the world. At the moment it is not known what the I.G.C. has been able to develop in the way of places for these refugees ultimately to settle.

Inasmuch as the Mexican Government has offered to accept immigrants from the Spanish Refugee Community in North Africa, it is felt that the French authorities would be more willing to receive additional refugees in French North Africa if this Spanish refugee emigration project is expedited and carried through as soon as possible. Lists of those who have expressed a desire to go have been sent to Mexico City through our own State Department channels and are now being considered by the Mexican Government. If similar arrangements for certain refugees can be arranged with other countries, the attitude of the French Committee of National Liberation would probably be correspondingly more receptive to additional refugees.

The French administration, whenever asked, has expressed a desire to cooperate in all matters pertaining to rescue and relief, but because of the limited supplies and because of the internal strife which always exists in a country that has been drained by the Axis Armistice Commissions, they find themselves today in a reluctant frame of mind insofar as additional persons to feed, house and clothe are concerned. Very little can be done to change this state of mind until sufficient clothing, food-stuffs, etc. are either sent into the country or the economic life of the country has been restored.

It should be pointed out that one of the great difficulties that the Department is faced with is the question of the French administration's policy on internment of refugees. There have been several cases brought to the attention of the Department where refugees had been previously interned, by the French under Axis pressure, and had been liberated, and who now are either re-interned or threatened with re-internment, even though demonstrably anti-Axis. The reasons given by the French authorities when these cases have been discussed with the, have either been that the individual dossier contains some often nebulous charges which we are unable to verify, or simply that the individuals in question were once enemy nationals.

PHW:mcm