

MIDDLE EAST RELIEF AND REFUGEE ADMINISTRATION (MERRA)

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UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND REHABILITATION ADMINISTRATION

1734 New York Avenue, N.W.  
Washington 6, D. C.

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Miss Florence Hodel  
Foreign Funds Control  
Treasury Department  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Miss Hodel:

At the request of Miss Flexner, I am sending you a memorandum on the Middle East Relief and Refugee Administration. I hope this contains the information you want.

Very sincerely yours,

*Helen M. Franc*

Helen M. Franc

Attachments:  
1- Memo on MERRA

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NOTE ON THE MIDDLE EAST RELIEF AND REFUGEE ADMINISTRATION (MERRA)

MERRA is a somewhat loose organization, the exact powers and functions of which are hard to define. It dates back to 1941, when difficulties in communication between the Middle East and London led the British Government to appoint a representative or "Minister of State", who was in effect a member of the War Cabinet, with headquarters in Cairo, empowered to act as the spot for the Government. MERRA, responsible to the Ministry of State, was created as the agent of the British Government to deal with refugee problems in the Middle East. Its Director-General is Mr. G. T. Matthews and its Assistant Director-General is Mr. Cyril Rickard.

The principal work of MERRA to date has been the channeling of refugees. Although at the outset these included a large number of Jews, in the past year and a half the refugees have been almost entirely Greek, including some fifteen thousand from the islands of Samos, Chios, and Lesbos. MERRA has sole responsibility for the operation of a refugee camp at Moses Well on the Gulf of Suez. This camp was originally intended for transients en route to resettlement centers elsewhere; however, its population - some twelve to fifteen hundred - has for lack of transportation facilities become virtually permanent, although at various times some four thousand persons have been transhipped to Ethiopia, the Belgian Congo, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanganyika. After leaving the camp, the refugees are no longer the responsibility of the British Government, but of the Greek or other national governments concerned.

In addition to operating the Moses Well Camp, MERRA acts in an assistant or advisory capacity to several other camps in which it has an indirect interest. These include two reception camps, one for men and one for women, at Aleppo, Syria, which is the point of entry for all refugees coming through Turkey and moving southward; a permanent camp for the physically unfit at Souk-el-Charb in the hills of Lebanon overlooking Beirut; and others at Haifa, Teheran, and Karachi. The Beirut and Aleppo camps, like that at Moses Well, have in the past six months assumed a permanent rather than a transient character. They are run by the Intelligence Corps of the British Ninth Army; expenses are charged to the Greek Government-in-Exile, to which the necessary funds are advanced by the British Government. The key personnel of the camps are British officers, aided by non-commissioned officers, frequently wounded soldiers; some personnel from voluntary agencies are also utilized. Food is furnished by the British Army and hence includes certain available Lend-Lease supplies; other supplies are donated through such organizations as the American Red Cross, Greek War

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Relief, and the Society of Friends.

In July 1943, the Civil Affairs Branch of the British Army General Headquarters, Middle East, stated that pending the activation of UNRRA, it regarded MERRA as the authority responsible for the coordination of operations of voluntary societies interested in the relief of the civil population in the Middle East during the initial period of military occupation. MERRA has thus acted as liaison between the British Army and such organizations as the Cairo Council of Voluntary Societies for Balkan Relief, providing the Chairman and Secretary for this group. The Cairo Council, constituted in July 1943 for a group of voluntary agencies, has a dual program: to furnish medical services and supplies, and to recruit and train personnel for relief work. It has been requested by MERRA to collect data on personnel and services available from voluntary organizations and to recruit specific personnel for initial relief requirements. Although MERRA itself is a wholly British agency, the Cairo Council has an international character. It has stated that one third of the personnel it recruits will be from the national societies of the countries concerned (i.e., the Greek Red Cross, the Yugoslav Red Cross); one third from interested American agencies, and one third from British agencies.

At present, a training school for nurses is operated by the Greek Red Cross at Moses Well, and a school for the training of relief workers, largely from the Society of Friends, is located near Cairo.

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#### WAR REFUGEES

There are several war refugees camps in Egypt operated by the Middle East Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, a British organization soon to become a part of UNRRA. The attitude of the Egyptian Government toward refugees is that all refugees are here on a temporary basis only and considered as being in transit. Before entering the country, refugees must be sponsored by some governmental agency, such as UNRRA, which guarantees to take care of them and to transport them out of the country when the war is over.

The Legation has sent an aide-memoire to the Egyptian Government, asking for its cooperation as a member of the United Nations in the work of helping persecuted minorities. As an Arab state, Egypt will probably not agree to the permanent settlement of Jews in Egypt until the whole Arab-Jewish question in Palestine has been resolved. There will probably be no difficulty in obtaining permission for the entry of Jews into Egypt for duration residence in camps. Mr. Archer, the chief American UNRRA representative here, told me that if Jews or other refugees can be gotten out of occupied Europe UNRRA will find a way to take care of them. Refugees in considerable numbers are coming over from Yugoslavia now via the Italian mainland through the cooperation of the Partisans. There is a camp for them at El Shatt (near Suez) which now contains about 12,000 refugees, and it is expected that it will have 25,000 by the end of March. Large numbers of Greeks are escaping by the Aegean and Dodecanese Islands. I have enclosed a table showing the number of Greek refugees in various camps. I have also enclosed two reports on Polish refugees which may be of interest. I intend to get more information on the war refugee situation in the near future.

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GREEK REFUGEE STRENGTHS AS

OF DECEMBER 31st AS REPORTED BY M.E.R.E.A.

<u>ALEPPO &amp; ATHLIT</u>	Constant movement of refugees in transit	
<u>SOUK EL KHANE</u>	.....	835
<u>MUSERAT</u>	.....	5,000 approx.
<u>JERUSALEM</u>	.....	350 "
<u>MOSES WELLS</u>	.....	2,000 "
<u>CYPRUS</u>	.....	5,000 "
	(normal refugees)	
	(ex Dodecanese) recently arrived. . . .	2,431 "
<u>ABYSSINIA</u>	Dire Dawa)	
	Addis Ababa . . . . .	750
<u>TANGANYIKA</u>	(Kigoma) . . . . .	513
<u>BELGIAN CONGO</u>	Total of . . . . .	2,432
	as follows:-	
		<hr/>
		19,311

<u>STANLEYVILLE</u>	Bunia & Iruuu	641
	Djadju	98
	Muhaji	130
<u>COTTENDREKESVILLE</u>	Beni	175
	Lubero	168
	Uvira	138
<u>RWANDA URUNDI</u>	Kitega	237
	Nyanza	135
<u>ELIZABETHVILLE</u>	Ruachi	487
	Shituru	231

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Translation of the Polish Minister Delegate's Report

on

Polish Refugees

In answer to your request for information on December 31st I wish to report that Polish Refugees evacuated to the Middle East, Africa, and Asia are cared for in two different ways:

1. Refugees (1800 people) evacuated to Palestine, most of them via the Balkans originally, receive monetary assistance as follows:

LP 12.00.0	monthly	per	person
LP 23.00.0	for	a	family of two
LP 33.00.0	"	"	" " three
LP 40.00.0	"	"	" " four
LP 47.00.0	"	"	" " five or more

With this allowance, they meet all their subsistence expenses. However, in addition, the Government furnishes them periodically with clothing, medical and dental care. Restaurants serve meals at low prices. They also benefit from cultural and educational instruction in schools and libraries, such as educational courses, lectures discussion groups, etc.

2. On the other hand, refugees evacuated beginning in the spring of 1941 from Russia to Iran, and from there to British East Africa, Rhodesia, and India, received Government subsistence. They are gathered in refugee camps and receive living quarters, food, and to a certain extent clothing. Furthermore, the refugees living in camps receive a certain amount of pocket money. In the camps in Iran, this amounts to 180 rials monthly per person for those persons over 16

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years of age who are not regularly employed. Children under 16 years of age receive 90 rials a month. Pocket money increased since our last report, due to increased cost of living according to Polish Government. In India, this monthly allowance amounts to ten rupees per month for persons not employed, who are over 16 years of age, and 5 rupees per month for children from twelve to sixteen years of age.

In all camps refugees are required to perform all house-keeping duties. In India, the minimum hours per week for such work is twelve, while in Africa, the minimum is three hours per day.

Refugees working in East Africa on farms receive wages from one to one and a half shillings per day, in addition to their board and lodging in the camp. Specialists receive in addition to this basis subsistence, remuneration for work done, as follows:

Firemen in Bombay receive thirty rupees monthly  
Chauffeurs receive from 75 to 150 rupees monthly

Specialists receive better pay. For instance, personnel on the transport which left in September last year from India to Mexico, received in addition to their food as follows:

Doctors - 220 rupees per month  
Nurses - 100 rupees per month  
Female teachers - 100 rupees per month  
Nursery school aides - 65 rupees per month

Unskilled workers on the same transport were paid a wage of 25 rupees per month.

In Iran, unskilled workers engaged by the Polish Legation

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receive from 400 to 500 rials monthly. In addition, the Government furnishes food, clothing, lodging, medical and dental care. The skilled worker or specialist is paid better. The monthly wage of a nurse, public school teacher, and nursery school aid amounts to 800 or 900 rials. Head nurses and assistant doctors earn from 1200 to 1300 rials per month, and a doctor earns 2800 per month.

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Translation of Memorandum from Polish Minister  
of State dated February 10, 1944

As a rule, all expenses for the upkeep of the refugees and the construction of shelter for them is paid by the Polish Government. An exception to this is a group of 400 refugees in North Rhodesia known as the "Cyprus Group" which is financed by the British Government, and a group of 500 children in India, supported by Maharajah Nawagaru.

All Polish administrative, medical, hospital and educational personnel, are being paid by the Polish Government.

The cost of transporting refugees to their destination, as well as the expenses connected with the upkeep of transient camps is assumed by the British Government.

British personnel are engaged in the administration of the Polish Refugee camps; and the commandants of the camps and other administrative personnel are paid by the British Government.

In territories where Polish refugees are located the financial arrangements are as follows:

1. Palestina, Syria, Lebanon -- about 5000 refugees. All funds needed for the upkeep of the refugees are supplied by the Polish Government which remits for this purpose monthly allowances. At present, the amount remitted for this purpose is about 70,000 pounds monthly. This amount may be increased because of increases in the number of refugees due to demobilisation of some of the Polish soldiers from active duty, such as invalids.

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2. Iran -- About 10,000 refugees. The cost of upkeep of Polish Refugees in Iran at present amounts to 130,000 pounds monthly. This amount is advanced by the British Government which is then reimbursed by the Polish Government in London.

The British Government covers expenses connected with the transportation of refugees to Iran as well as to the transient camp at Ahwaz and Karachi.

3. India -- About 4,000 refugees. The Government of India advances the cost of upkeep in refugee camps, settling these amounts later with the Polish Government in London. The average cost of the upkeep of refugees per month in India is about 34,000 pounds.

4. East-Africa -- About 16,000 refugees. Detailed information about the cost is not in our possession. The Governments of various colonies advance the needed supplies for the upkeep of our refugees submitting at a later date, an itemized statement. At this time, we estimate the expenses for this territory and about 100,000 pounds monthly.

Aside from the above mentioned amounts necessary for food and lodging for the Polish refugees, the Polish Government has expended a large amount for the purchase of clothing, as well as special foodstuffs (for children) and medical supplies.

Moreover, for certain definite purposes, i.e. educational help, and clothing for children, the Polish National Council in the U.S. contributes certain funds.

5. South Africa -- A camp for about 500 orphan children situated in Oudtshoorn near Capetown is being supported by the Polish Government. Local philanthropic organizations contribute certain assistance to this camp.

Summarizing: Polish refugees in all areas number 36,400 of whom all but 900 are financed by the Polish Government at about 330,000 pounds sterling monthly. The 900 are in Rhodesia and India and are financed by the British government.

**GREECE & PRICES (Food)**

USAFIMN intercept dated Feb. 15, 1944

Source: A refugee

Here are listed some of the chief food prices on the basis of 3,000,000 drachmas to one gold pound as of January 7, 1944.

Olive oil	450,000 drachmas per cke		
Bread	60-70,000	"	" "
Vegetables	25-30,000	"	" "
Dry beans	120-130,000	"	" "
Sugar	250-300,000	"	" "
Meat	400,000	"	" "
Small Fry (maridhes)	200,000	"	" "
Fish	350,000	"	" "
Corn	50,000	"	" "
Wheat	70,000	"	" "

The sub-source has had information since the beginning of January that the value of one gold pound has increased to 4,000,000 drachmas, and food prices have gone up in proportion. Ordinary people cannot afford to pay these extremely high prices, but the Red Cross "Popular Soup Kitchens" (laika sivistia) are improving every day, and now one can hardly say that people are dying of starvation.

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