

*Polish Refugee Project in Mexico*

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War Ref  
Pd (Mr. Dehle)

AIRGRAM

FROM  
Tehran (Consulate)  
Dated June 21, 1944  
Sec 12 June 21, 8am

**CONTROL COPY**

[REDACTED]

Secretary of State,  
Washington.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
JUN 22 1944  
DIVISION OF  
COMMUNICATIONS & RECORDS

4410, June 8, 1944, 6:00 am

Referencing Department's telegram No. 415 of August 18, 1943 to the Legation.

Please instruct the Consulate whether the restriction on movements of Polish refugees from Mexico to the United States still exists and whether the Consulate is authorized to document such aliens for entry into the United States. This question has arisen with respect to a number of Polish refugees in Iran, and particularly several wives of American soldiers, awaiting

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State Dept. Letter, 1-11-72  
By R. H. Parks Date **SEP 8 1972**

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-2- June 8, 9:00 a.m. Tehran (C)/A-19  
desiring to proceed to the United States, who wish  
to avail themselves of such transportation as far  
as Mexico.

CALHOUN

JAC:NM

MEMORANDUM FOR THE FILES

February 14, 1944

Summary of the Contents of State Department file, entitled "Refugee Groups--Rabbis and Students in Soviet Union".

The Polish Government is prepared to include a list of rabbis submitted by the Union of Orthodox Rabbis in a contingent of Polish refugees in Russia scheduled for evacuation to Mexico. (Letter of February 16, 1943 from the Polish Embassy in the United States to the Union of orthodox Rabbis). The State Department advised the American Embassy in Moscow that the Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the United States was inquiring of the Department concerning the prospects of evacuation of the above group from Russia. (State cable 1336, dated December 4, 1943). The Embassy replied that no doubt the names of many rabbis in the above group would be included in a list of candidates for evacuation from Russia submitted to the Russian Foreign Office by the Australian Legation, which is the representative of the Polish interests in Russia. The Australian Legation had apparently promised the American Embassy to check the list and submit to the Russian Foreign Office the names not included therein. (Moscow cable 2213, dated December 14, 1943). Apparently only ten percent of the rabbis in the aforementioned group were on the list submitted by the Australian Legation to the Russian Foreign Office. The Soviet Government was unable to <sup>state</sup> what it could do for the rabbis in question until it knows where the individuals comprising the group are located. (Moscow cable 192 dated January 19, 1944).

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*[Handwritten signature]*

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UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND REHABILITATION ADMINISTRATION

FILING AUTHORITY  
TO: Mail & Files  
ANS.....  
ANS. REQ.....  
INITIAL.....  
DATE.....

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

January 20, 1944

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

Dear Miss Hodel:

When I spoke with you early in the week I told you  
I would send you a summary of the Refugee Camp run  
for Poles in Mexico.

This is of course a very meager summary but I think  
it will give you a background which will be helpful.

Very sincerely yours,

*Carolyn A. Flexner*

Carolyn A. Flexner  
Staff Assistant

Attachments:

1 - Summary on Polish Refugee Camp in Mexico

January 5, 1944

To: Mr. James G. Johnson, Jr.  
From: Grace W. Tellier  
Subject: Polish Refugee Camp in Mexico

1. Circumstances Leading to the United States Participation in the Polish Refugee Project in Mexico.

In the early summer of 1942 representatives of the British Government approached the State Department with the suggestion and request that the United States give asylum to approximately 30,000 Polish refugees, at that time in Teheran, having trekked through Russia from Poland. These refugees were the families and other civilian dependents of approximately 44,000 Polish troops whom the British Government was incorporating into military service in the Middle East. A description of these refugees and their experiences is contained in the testimony of Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on November 26, 1943. Excerpts from his testimony on this subject are attached (Attachment "AA").

At the instance of the British Government, the Russian and Polish Governments had agreed that the troops in question should be sent to Iran to aid the British but the agreement on the part of the Polish Government was conditioned on the transfer of the 30,000 civilian dependents along with the troops.

The transfer was in process at the time the British made its first request to the State Department. The State Department advised the British Government that the United States could not accede to its request. The British Government subsequently repeated its request, urging that Iran had already permitted large numbers of refugees of various nationalities to enter its borders; that these people not only presented a serious economic problem but they also constituted a military and political handicap; that the situation had become acute in view of the fact that these persons might possibly interfere with the supply line to Russia; and that the British Government therefore felt it imperative that the 30,000 Polish refugees should be moved on from Iran to some other destination as soon as possible.

The State Department informed the British Government that not only were there no available means for transporting such large numbers of people to the United States, but the immigration laws of the United States

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would not permit the acceptance of these people; furthermore, in view of the shipping shortages it did not appear feasible to talk of transporting large numbers of people to the United States when they could be sent to South Africa or other near-by places where they could be cared for by the British Government. The British Government answered with the statement that it could furnish facilities for transporting these refugees to the United States and that South Africa, as well as other British dominions, had already accepted large numbers of refugees and were not in a position to accommodate more.

The State Department again declined to accede to the British Government's request that the United States accept these refugees but did suggest that perhaps the American Government and the American Red Cross would be prepared to give practical and concrete assistance if these refugees were given asylum in South Africa or in some other country with which the British might reach an agreement.

In September, 1942, the British Ambassador notified the State Department that the Mexican Government had indicated a willingness to receive Polish refugees from Iran. The British Government wanted to know what, if any, financial assistance the United States would give so that these people might be cared for after they should reach Mexico. The British Ambassador reminded the State Department that the President had expressed the thought that the American Red Cross would assume a part of the financial responsibility involved.

In December, 1942, on the occasion of the visit of Prime Minister Sikorski of Poland to Mexico, President Camacho of Mexico confirmed the willingness of Mexico to receive Polish refugees. Prime Minister Sikorski, on his return from Mexico, called on President Roosevelt, who agreed to make \$3,000,000 available for the transportation and maintenance of Polish refugees in Mexico for the first year.

As a result of the above discussions and conversations between the British, American and Polish Governments and an agreement reached between the Polish and Mexican Governments, the State Department notified the Polish Government of its willingness to furnish the financial assistance suggested. A copy of the note from the Secretary of State, addressed to the Polish Ambassador under date of February 5, 1943, stipulating the conditions on which this assistance would be made available is appended as Attachment "A". A copy of the note from the Polish Ambassador to the Secretary of State, dated February 22, 1943, accepting these stipulations and conditions is appended as Attachment "B".

Copies of the translated texts of the notes exchanged by the Mexican and Polish Governments containing their agreement are likewise attached (Attachment "C").

The British participation in the project after the agreements were consummated between the Polish and Mexican Governments and the Polish

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and American Governments has consisted in participation, through its Ambassador in Mexico City, in a committee consisting of British, Polish, Mexican and United States representatives, which selected the site of the colony at Leon, Guanajuato. British representatives in Karachi and Bombay, India, also participated in the selection of the refugees to go to Mexico. The British have not, however, participated in the direction of the operations involved in establishing and running the camp.

2. Allocation and Expenditures of United States' Funds for Polish Relief Project.

In January, 1943, as a result of the discussions between General Sikorski and President Roosevelt, and at the request of Governor Lehman, the State Department requested the Bureau of the Budget to allocate the sum of \$3,000,000 to the State Department out of the President's Emergency Fund to be used as advances to the Polish Government for the purpose of providing transportation, reception and care of these Polish refugees while in Mexico. A copy of this letter of request is appended as Attachment "D". This allocation was subsequently made as evidenced by allocation letter dated February 1, 1943, which is appended as Attachment "E". The funds allocated have been and are being used for the purposes for which they were allocated.

In accordance with the agreement that the Polish Government should prepare quarterly estimates of expenses to be incurred in connection with the project and submit these for the approval of OFRRO, estimates are now being submitted for approval by OFRRO, or presumably by FEA as OFRRO's successor. The accounts have been audited through October 31, 1943, by special OFRRO and FEA accountants sent to Mexico for that purpose. The reports which have been filed by the accountants cover the period from May 7, 1943, when construction on the project commenced, to October 31, 1943. A summary showing the total expenses incurred through that period is contained in the accountants' report dated December 11, 1943. A copy of this summary, with further information as to expenses received since that time, is appended as Attachment "F".

A breakdown of these figures by quarters with other detailed information can be had by reference to the report, dated September 24, 1943, made by George V. Fracht of OFRRO and the report, dated December 11, 1943, made by Ben Vargas of FEA.

3. Transportation of Refugee Groups to the Refugee Center in Mexico.

First Contingent. In April and May, 1943, pursuant to the agreement between the Mexican and Polish Governments, OFRRO made arrangements with the United States Navy Department for the transportation of 728 refugees from Bombay, India, to the port of San Pedro, California, as the first contingent to be sent under the agreement which had been made. Arrangements were also made with the United States immigration authorities and the

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Mexican immigration officials to permit these refugees to enter the respective countries and proceed immediately to their final destination in Mexico with a minimum of delay.

On June 25, 1943, 706 refugees arrived at San Pedro. Of these, approximately 350 were women, 200 were children, and the remainder were men. The great majority of this group were of the peasant class with agricultural backgrounds. Several were of the professional class, such as doctors, teachers, nurses, etc. There were also a few tradesmen and skilled laborers among the group. There were only 27 "known" Jewish refugees in the group--5 couples, one with a 17 year-old daughter, and 16 men.

Under arrangements previously made by the Immigration and Naturalization Service of the Department of Justice with the Southern Pacific Railroad, these refugees were disembarked in the United States and after a short delay were put aboard trains and taken to Juarez, Mexico, where the Mexican customs officials took over and the refugees were sent on to Leon, Guanajuato, Mexico, where a refugee center had been prepared for them.

The actual expense of transporting these refugees from India to San Pedro, California, was borne by the Navy. Expense of subsistence en route, as well as cost of transportation from San Pedro, California, to final destination was charged against the \$3,000,000 allocated for advancement to the Polish Government.

Copies of confidential reports and letters relating to the transportation, care and conditions surrounding the refugees en route and their reception on arrival are appended as attachment "G". They are as follows:

Report by the Commanding Officer of the U.S.S. Hermitage, on which the refugees were brought to the United States, made to the Navy Department under date of July 13, 1943.

Report made by the Consul General at Juarez, Mexico, to the Secretary of State, Washington, dated July 1, 1943.

Report made by American Ambassador Messersmith at Mexico City to the Secretary of State, dated July 2, 1943.

Excerpts from report of the Polish Consul General in San Francisco to the Polish Ambassador in Washington, dated June 29, 1943.

Note from the Polish Ambassador in Washington to Governor Lehman, dated June 29, 1943.

Letter from National Committee of Americans of Polish Descent, Inc. to Governor Lehman, dated July 7, 1943.

Letter from Flora S. Levine, Assistant Executive Director,

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Council of Jewish Women, Inc., to Joseph C. Hyman, dated July 2, 1943.

Excerpt from letter written by Pasadena office of American Friends Service Committee to its Philadelphia office, dated September 17, 1943.

All of the above letters and reports are uniformly favorable with the exception of the criticisms voiced to Miss Levine and contained in her report listed above and attached. These criticisms, however, are somewhat off-set by the report of the Pasadena office of the American Friends Service Committee, also listed and attached.

Second Contingent. Pursuant to further arrangements between the Polish and Mexican Governments, concurred in by the United States Government, a second group of 729 refugees arrived at San Pedro, California, on October 24, 1943. Of this group 97 were men, 224 were women, and 408 were children under the age of 16. Upon arrival, these people were sent on to the refugee center in Mexico. The transportation of this contingent, including cost of transportation and subsistence expenses, was handled in the same manner as the first contingent. Copies of confidential reports concerning the arrival and reception of this group are appended as attachment "H". They are as follows:

Report, dated October 24, 1943, made by the District Director, Los Angeles District, to the Assistant Commissioner for Alien Control.

Report, dated November 1, 1943, made by the Pasadena office of the American Friends Service Committee to its Philadelphia office.

No further plans are under way at this time for bringing any other refugees to the refugee center.

4. Colonia Santa Rosa--The Site of the Refugee Center.

Colonia Santa Rosa was selected by a committee of representatives of the Polish, Mexican, British and American Governments as the site for the refugee center. It is situated about five miles from the City of Leon, in the State of Guanajuato, about 240 miles northwest of Mexico City. Leon is a city of some 150,000 population. The site is approximately 20 minutes drive by automobile from the center of Leon and 10 minutes ride by mule-drawn tram from the Leon railway station.

The site selected was at one time an extremely large hacienda, the buildings consisting of a large colonial one-story ranch house containing 39 large rooms and baths, built around three large patios, a large five-story flour mill, ten large wheat storage warehouses, a chapel and other buildings. The property was equipped with electricity and several large artesian wells.

In its original condition the hacienda buildings were found capable of accomodating approximately 1,000 persons. After repairs and new construction and improvements, the project was made to accomodate approximately 2,000 persons. The Polish Government leased this ranch for a period of two years along with sufficient adjoining land to afford agricultural activities for those in the colony. The colony was occupied by the first contingent of refugees a few days after their arrival at Leon on July 1, 1943.

In accordance with the agreement with the Polish Government, OFRRO assigned Mr. Eric P. Kelly to the American Embassy at Mexico City to serve in the capacity as adviser to the Polish officials in charge of the refugee camp. The Polish Government and its representatives had charge of and responsibility for the construction and operation of the refugee colony, but as a result of the failure of the Polish representative assigned to this project to arrive at Leon on schedule, Mr. Kelly, in conjunction with and under the supervision of one of the representatives of the Polish Legation at Mexico City, was obliged to act from May, 1943, until the arrival of the Polish representative in the latter part of July, 1943. However, Mr. Kelly's assignment was as an adviser only and the Polish Government so understood.

Plans for the organization and operation of the camp under Polish administration have been the subject of constant correspondence between the OFRRO office in Washington and the American Embassy in Mexico City. They were also the subject of conferences at the OFRRO office on August 10, 11, and 13, 1943, with Mr. Wisiolowski, Counsellor of the Polish Embassy in Mexico City; Mr. Lepkowski, Secretary of the Polish Embassy in Washington; and Mr. Bzmejko, then en route from London to Mexico to assume charge of the colony as administrator. Similar conferences were held later, in December, 1943, in Washington with Jan Kwapinski, Deputy Prime Minister of Poland, and Emanuel Freyd, Counsellor of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in London, directed by Mr. Kwapinski to visit the colony to review its internal administration.

The housekeeping tasks of the colony, e. g. the services of teachers, doctors, dentists, nurses, electricians, plumbers, painters, cooks, etc., are already being performed by different camp members. Work projects for all employables in the camp are being developed as an aid to morale. The wage rates are still in the process of negotiation with the Polish authorities and in particular with Mr. Emanuel Freyd, of the Polish Government in London, who is now at the colony. A memorandum of conversations on this subject, held in August, 1943, between representatives of OFRRO and of the Polish Government is annexed hereto as Attachment "HH".

5. Difficulties that have been Encountered in the Operation of the Refugee Center.

On arrival of the refugees at San Pedro, they were met by officials representing the Polish and United States Governments, by representatives of

various Polish and Jewish welfare organizations and others. Gifts of various kinds were distributed to them, including candy for the children. Entertainment was furnished during their brief stay in Los Angeles. One Polish organization sent \$7,000 to be used for food but since this had been furnished in abundance this money was held and spent later for other necessary items.

Immediately after their arrival at the colony, representatives of Polish and Jewish welfare organizations, both Mexican and American, called at the camp and brought to the refugees shoes, clothing and other necessities to make them comfortable and build their morale.

Reports from the Polish Government as well as from the American Embassy officials reflect that these people were given every consideration, physical comfort and all necessities.

The agreement (Attachment "C") under which the Mexican Government permitted these refugees to be brought to Mexico does not permit these people to engage in any business activity in competition with Mexican labor or business. As a consequence this colony has become a community in and of itself with a hospital, school, recreational facilities, and other enterprises. Teachers, doctors and others among the refugees have been employed in these pursuits. Others are engaged in cultivating the land. Both women and men work.

Conditions as a whole have been satisfactory but a number of problems have arisen. It was felt many of these were to be expected in view of all the circumstances surrounding the sending of these people, their backgrounds, their mental outlooks as a result of the horrors of war which they had undergone, and the fact that their lives and activities were confined to the colony with only occasional trips outside.

The main source of trouble appeared to be a number of so-called "criminal" characters who had histories as "trouble-makers" in India. These men have been confined to the colony jail, when the occasions have demanded, and have otherwise been punished from time to time in order to prevent recurrences.

Another source of trouble arose in connection with several unmarried couples who were living together. This condition was met by arranging for marriages for those who wanted to marry and separating those who did not wish to marry. Some of the men in this group were discharged disabled veterans of the present war, mentally unstable as a result of shock of warfare.

One other problem was presented by the Jewish people who came in the first group. It appears from the available data in OFRRO's files that some of these people who joined the contingent at Bombay have independent means. It is believed most of these people, as well as many others in the

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contingent, expected to engage in business in Mexico and had hopes of ultimately acquiring residence in the United States. Many of them have close relatives and friends in the United States who are evidently trying to help them. These facts may account for some of the dissatisfaction that these people have shown with conditions at the camp and with their treatment generally.

On the other hand, there have been complaints by the other members of the camp that by reason of the fact that the Jewish refugees had money and friends and were of a higher social plane than the rest of the refugees, they received better treatment than the others. Later reports from the office of the American Embassy at Mexico City disclosed that all the Jewish people had moved into Leon and taken up residence there on their own initiative and at their own expense, but without permission of either the Polish representatives in charge of the colony or the Mexican Government. These reports stated that the situation had been brought to the attention of the Polish Government, which later secured their return to the camp.

Attached hereto are reports relating to a number of the problems that have arisen and to the complaints that have been made from time to time by members of the refugee groups. These reports (Attachment "I") also include statements that have been made commending conditions at the refugee center. It should perhaps also be stated that reports from all similar refugee camps throughout the world are to the effect that the members of the camps write many letters to their relatives and friends outside the camps with respect to the conditions in the camp. All of the complaints with respect to the camp in Mexico have been duly investigated by American and Polish authorities.

6. Persons who have been handling the U. S. Participation in the Refugee Project.

The refugee center at Leon is, and has been at all times, the responsibility of the Polish Government represented by Dr. Neuman, the Polish Minister at Mexico City. Representatives of the Polish Legation at Mexico City have control and supervision of the project, assisted by Eric P. Kelly as the OFRRC representative or adviser specially assigned to the American Embassy for the purpose.

The interest of the United States in the project has also been represented by American Ambassador Messersmith and Sidney O'Donoghue, First Secretary of the American Embassy at Mexico City. Since the reorganization in which FEA was established, Mr. Gottfried, the head of the FEA office in Mexico City, has taken some interest in the project but has not yet had a clear instruction as to his responsibilities.

6 In the early stages Mr. A. A. Berle, Assistant Secretary of State, handled the Washington aspects of the United States' participation in the

project. Mr. Philip W. Bonsal, Chief, Mr. Joseph W. McGurk, Assistant Chief, and Mr. John W. Carrigan, Divisional Assistant, all of the Division of American Republics in the State Department, and Mr. Elbridge Durbrow, Foreign Service Officer in Economic Operations, State Department, have also represented that Department in various matters relating to the project. Later Governor Lehman's office, represented by Governor Lehman himself and Mr. Hugh Jackson and Miss Carolin Flexner, members of his staff, handled the matter for OFARO. Subsequently, Mr. Greenstein was appointed Chief of the Welfare Division of OFARO (now FEA) and he and Miss Flexner have been handling the matter for FEA.

The transportation of the refugees from India was under the direction of Captain Pence of the Office of Chief of Naval Operations, Navy Department. Mr. Earl G. Harrison, Commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization Service, Department of Justice, Philadelphia, made all arrangements for the handling of these refugees under the immigration laws of the United States.

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Attachments

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War Refugee Bd (L.H.L.)  
Copy only

PARAPHRASE OF TELEGRAM SENT

FROM: Secretary of State, Washington  
TO: American Consul, Karachi (India)  
DATED: August 16, 1943  
NUMBER: 102  
X

**CONTROL COPY**



At the present time consideration is being given to transportation by the Navy of a second group of Polish refugees from Bombay to Mexico during the first ten days of September. A maximum of 750 persons is to be included in this contingent which will consist mainly of orphans <sup>orphans</sup> children now said to be in Karachi together with an appropriate proportion of competent adults to act as escorts for the children. For all refugees medical and health requirements will be necessary. In view of your helpfulness in securing the cooperation of the Polish and British officials in previous selection of refugees, we would appreciate it if you would check to ascertain as to compliance with all the provisions of this cable. Some refugees who have not proved to be adaptable to their new surroundings were included <sup>among</sup> ~~in~~ the refugees of the first contingent. It is imperative that the following conditions be understood by all refugees who are to come to Mexico: (1) They will live in an especially arranged colony which provides the basic necessities only; (2) The refugees will not be free to proceed to other parts of the Western Hemisphere or to move from the colony to other parts of Mexico; (3) The refugees will <sup>not</sup> be able to carry on business

enterprises

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State Dept. Letter, 1-11-72  
By R. H. Parks Date SEP 8 1972

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enterprises or secure employment in Mexico; (4) The adult refugees will be able to work only on necessary operational and agricultural work within the colony which is incident to the maintenance of the colony; (5) At the conclusion of the War all Polish refugees will be repatriated to Poland.

The children to be chosen for the present contingent should be between four and fifteen years of age. The Polish authorities must provide necessary medical and nursing personnel for the journey and the responsible official to accompany the group. Furthermore for every 25 children it is necessary to have at least one adult. These adults should be persons who can be helpful in providing the children with supervision after the arrival in Mexico of the refugees. A larger proportion of adults may be required by Navy. Further information will be given by us later on this point. It is requested that we be informed as soon as possible whether the above arrangements can be made by the date mentioned above.

The foregoing message was repeated to Tehran and Bombay as the Department's cables numbered 415 and 350 respectively.

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*JTB*  
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6/30/44

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