

Programs with Respect to Relief  
and Rescue of Refugees; Temporary  
Havens

Temporary Havens in Virgin  
Islands

*The App. Committee to Save Refugees*  
*425 4th Ave NYC*  
*U.S. Dept. of Interior Dec 215 0'0 NYC*  
 1237941

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD NOVEMBER 15, 1940,  
 IN THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, WASHINGTON, D. C.  
 ON THE VIRGIN ISLANDS REFUGEE PLAN

The meeting was opened by Assistant Secretary of the Interior  
 Oscar L. Chapman, who presided, at 10:30 a.m.

The following organizations were represented:

<u>Organization</u>	<u>Representative</u>
✓ President's Advisory Committee on Political Refugees (James G. McDonald, Chairman)	122 E 224 St., N.Y.C. George Warren, Exec. Sec
✓ <del>American</del> Catholic Committee for <del>Refugee</del> Catholic Refugees from Germany (Rev. Emil N. Komora, Exec. Director)	265 W 14th St., N.Y.C. Bruce Mohler
✓ American Committee for Christian Refugees, Inc. (James M. Speers, Chairman)	139 Center St., N.Y.C. Clarence Pickett, Member of the Board
Alaskan Development Committee	Erwin H. Klaus, Chairman
American Friends Service Committee	Clarence Pickett, Exec. Sec.
American Jewish Committee	Dr. Max Gottschalk, Director of Migration Studies
American Jewish Congress (Stephen S. Wise, President)	Lawrence Koenigsberger
American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Inc. (Paul Baerwald, Chairman)	Joseph C. Hyman, Exoc. Vice Chairman, Harold F. Linder, Member of the Board
✓ B'nai B'rith (Henry Monsky, President)	Maurice Biegyor, Sec. 1003 K St NW Wash. DC.

REGRADE  
 UNCLASSIFIED

<u>Organization</u>	<u>Representative</u>
✓ Coordinating Foundation ✓	30 Park Avenue 82nd St. N.Y.C. Paul van Zeland, Chairman, Harold F. Linder
<del>The Czech Refugee Trust Fund</del> (Sir Henry BURBURY, K. C. B., Director)	Hermann Field, Representative
Dominican Republic Settlement Association, Inc. (James N. Rosenberg, President)	George Warren, Member of the Board
Hicem	Dr. Max Gottschalk, Chairman
✓ <del>International Catholic Office for Refugee Affairs</del>	<del>11 Madison Ave. N.Y.C.</del> <del>Dr. F. W. Hess, Exec. Sec.</del>
✓ International Migration Service (Mme. Dr. Long-Landry, President)	122 E 2 <sup>nd</sup> St., N.Y.C. Patrick Murphy Malin, Director
The Jewish Labor Committee	Isalah Minkoff, Exec. Sec.
✓ The Jewish National Workers' Alliance of America (David Pinski, President)	45 E 17 <sup>th</sup> St. N.Y.C. Louis Segal, Gen. Sec.
✓ National Catholic Welfare Conference ✓	1312 Mass. Ave., Wash Bruce Mohler, Director, Immigration Division
National Refugee Service, Inc. (Joseph P. Chamberlain, Chairman)	Miss Cecilia Razovsky
Refugee Economic Corporation (Charles J. Liebman, President)	Emery H. Komlos, Asst. Sec.
<del>The Poland-German-American Democratic Society</del> (Erwin H. Klaus, President)	Emanuel Neumann

Also present were the following representatives of the Department of the Interior (in addition to the Chairman):

Lawrence W. Cramer, Governor of the Virgin Islands,  
Felix S. Cohen, Assistant Solicitor,  
Karl E. Lachmann, Assistant Attorney.

APPENDIXMEMORANDUM FOR VIRGIN ISLANDS  
REFUGEE CONFERENCEI. PURPOSE:

Temporary transit station outside war zone for waiting period during completion of permanent immigration arrangements in Western Hemisphere. Clearing house for cases otherwise held up in war zone pending issuance of such visas (Lisbon, Marseilles, etc.)

Cases fall into two categories:

- a) Destination U.S.A. Quota cases with limited waiting time.
- b) Destination Latin America. Settlement visas in Mexico, Peru, Chile, etc. on basis of concrete projects or visa negotiations agreed to by governments concerned.

II. BASIS OF ADMISSION:

- a) Affidavit of full support while in Virgin Islands on basis of computed cost per head given by:
  1. Individual.
  2. Recognized Refugee Organization.
- b) Indication of ability to proceed within defined period from Virgin Islands under either (a) or (b) of heading I. Full particulars, including financial ability to do so, of projected immigration to be available to the Department of the Interior.
- c) Limited period of residence. Conditional on likelihood that can proceed within defined period to destination.

III. EXECUTION OF PROJECT:

Set up Virgin Islands Refugee Committee with advisory board representing the Department of the Interior, leading refugee organizations, and the President's advisor on Refugees.

This to act as:

- a) Initial organizing body and liaison between the Department of the Interior and refugee organizations.

- b) Administrative organ of project in Virgin Islands on behalf of above, handling financing, housing, feeding.
- c) Handling of case work and contact with refugee organizations in New York, facilitating the departure of refugees to their destination.

IV. FINANCING:

To be handled by Virgin Islands Refugee Committee on behalf of above.

- a) Initial loan to prepare for reception of refugees on Virgin Islands.
- b) All refugees to be supported on hostel basis by Virgin Islands Refugee Committee on basis of affidavit payments to it by guarantors on fixed monthly basis per person, covering cost of housing, feeding, plus amortization of loan under (a).
- c) Not responsible for transport or visa or settlement costs borne by refugee organizations independently.

V. PROCEDURE:

- a) Preliminary conference on project with refugee organizations, enlisting their support, Fund raising.
- b) Preliminary survey on spot to determine:
  - 1. Existing housing and feeding facilities on Virgin Islands.
  - 2. Possibilities of self-help (farming, etc.).
  - 3. Type and quantity of additional housing required. Possible U. S. housing aid with barrack types like in T.V.A. project.
  - 4. Best method of organizing living arrangements: hostel or individual.
  - 5. Number of refugees for initial scheme.
  - 6. Cost of starting project. Cost of maintenance.
- c) Setting up of Virgin Islands Refugee Committee on basis of above to organize and administer project.

For Conference at Department of the Interior  
November 15, 1940

Hermann H. Field

In opening the meeting, the Chairman announced: We have called this meeting in order to discover how far and in what ways the organizations which you gentlemen represent can cooperate with this Department in our endeavor to establish a temporary refugee haven in the Virgin Islands. We must for the present present our problem in somewhat general and hypothetical terms since we are at the present time negotiating with other interested departments on details of the proposed plan. While conducting these legal negotiations with other departments, we hope that we may have your help and cooperation in working out the practical and physical aspects of the problem. I should like to ask Governor Cramer to start off the discussion by giving us a statement of the difficulties that we have to face, assuming that all the legal technicalities are taken care of.

Governor Cramer explained that, housing facilities being limited, new construction would be a necessary prerequisite for any refugee plan. Such construction would be about as expensive as in continental United States. Local food supplies, he explained, are ample and can be expanded. Refugees would have first to go to the United States or travel in special chartered boats, because since the outbreak of the war direct lines to the Islands from Europe have been abandoned.

Replying to questions by Mr. Pickett and Mr. Warren, Governor Cramer declared that something might be worked out to provide for small-scale agricultural retraining programs by expanding existing local training facilities but that as far as the Islands were concerned they were mainly interested in specialists capable of expanding the local hotel and tourist industry and in a certain number of skilled artisans. He also pointed to the fact that the Virgin Islands' special exemption from import tariffs made it likely that new industries might be developed there. Turning to general information, he pointed out that 23,000 of the 25,000 people in the Islands are Negroes; that the language and customs in the Islands are English; that economically St. Croix is mostly agricultural, while the main business of St. Thomas is the servicing of ships. Attention was called to a Government booklet, "The Virgin Islands of the United States," containing historical, economic and statistical materials.

In the general discussion following the Governor's statement the organization representatives present gave expression to their sympathy with the objective of establishing in the Virgin Islands a transit station for refugees who would eventually settle in other lands. It was

also generally agreed that no publicity whatever should be given to the project until all inter-departmental negotiations had been satisfactorily completed.

In answer to various legal questions that were put, Mr. Cohen stated that in the view of the Interior Department the project, considered as establishing only a temporary haven, did not require new legislation since existing legislation gave a wide scope of discretion to administrative authorities in the admission of temporary visitors. He stated, however, that the question of whether persons so admitted to the Virgin Islands would lose their place on the quota lists was one of several questions on which other departments would have to pass, and that on this issue he could express only a hope that the other departments concerned would accept the view that a temporary stay in the Virgin Islands should not prejudice one's position on the quota waiting list. The whole problem of long waiting periods, he reported, might be considerably affected by the plan of the State Department's Visa Division to make quota numbers available to practically all prospective immigrants now able to secure transportation from Europe.

Replying to a question of Mr. Segal whether this is a test project for possible larger projects in the future, the Chairman emphasized that while it would be worth the effort if only 500 people were taken in, it is indeed hoped that other people will try to extend the project if it works out in the Virgin Islands.

In response to the Chairman's general invitation for suggestions on the part to be played by private organizations in carrying out the stated objective, Mr. Field submitted a memorandum, which is attached as a special appendix.

In reply to a question by Miss Razovsky, Governor Cramer pointed out that while, depending upon the standard of living, monthly living expenditures today generally amount to anything between \$50 and \$100, and hotels and boarding houses vary from \$60 to \$150, he would suggest that a representative of the organizations come down and make a field survey in the Islands.

Mr. Hyman emphasized that the project would first have to consider the many people whose support can be assured by friends or relatives. He proposed that a committee be appointed to make such a survey of the local conditions of the Islands and of the cost per capita, after which, he felt, one could approach the interested

agencies and groups with definite requests, which might justify the beginning of this enterprise. He suggested that Mr. Warren and Mr. Pickett be charged with selecting such competent representatives, after Mr. Linder and Mr. Van Zeeland had suggested that the Coordinating Foundation probably would be in a position to provide the funds for such a survey. Without dissent, the group agreed to the selection of Mr. Pickett and Mr. Warren as a committee to represent the groups present in further dealings with the Department until the completion of such investigations.

Mr. Pickett suggested that Mr. Warren would act as chairman, and offered the Department the committee's cooperation in its inter-departmental conferences. He urged, however, that the survey, which would necessarily result in publicity, should be postponed until all questions still pending among the departments had been solved.

Mr. Warren suggested that the nature of the survey and thus the composition of the committee would depend on the type of persons mainly to be considered for admission: endangered persons, persons with means of support, specialists of value to the economy of the Islands, or agricultural retraining groups, and that it would be advisable to decide on the basis of selection before appointing a committee.

Dr. Gottschalk offered the services of the Hicom, which had previously done similar work, notably for the Bolivian Government, in the selection of suitable refugees.

Also on the question of selection, Miss Razovsky pointed out that to take persons without means of support would require a survey of the possibilities of the organizations to help finance them.

The Chairman and Mr. Hyman observed that because of the present lack of facilities in the Islands one would necessarily have to start with those who are able to support themselves, preferring, however, within this group those who are in greatest danger. Mr. Hyman added that this would be especially necessary because of the present lack of funds available, without special contributions growing out of a successful start of the project.

Mr. Pickett then suggested that the group meet again when the survey report was completed. The meeting adjourned at 12:40 p.m.

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