

AMERICAN CONSULATE*

Subject: Armenian Relief, Dr. Wilson's Report On

Tiflis, Russia, June 14, 1916

The Honorable
The Secretary of State,
Washington.

Sir:

I have the honor to request the Department to transmit to the Rev. J. L. Barton D. D. 14 Beacon Street, Boston, Mass. the enclosed report of Dr. Wilson on Armenian Relief.

I have the honor to be, Sir,
Your obedient servant,

[signed] F. Willoughby Smith
American Consul.

360.

Enclosure: Report of Dr. Wilson.

* Source: NA/RG59/867.48/341

REPORT OF THE CAUCASUS RELIEF COMMITTEE*

What an ideal work it is to repair the ravages of war and restore the refugees to their old homes. This we have been attempting in the wake of the victorious Russian army. Its steady advance along the whole line from Trebizond to Kerind has given us the opportunity. So already there are thousands of sprouting harvest-fields in the districts of Van and Alashgerd, with the promise of food for thousands of families. Since the vernal equinox there has been a small but steady stream of returning refugees, strong, vigorous men, mostly farmers. They wisely left their families in the security of the Caucasus, themselves daring the risk of possible retreat. The Russian Government gave free transport to the refugees on the railway as far as Julfa, the Persian border. Thence they started on feet, via Khoi, a tramp of about 150 miles. The Union of Cities and the Red Cross established a series of hospices on this road, where free lodging and food were given to the refugees, the sick were taken care of and the relief force entertained. Most of these were groups of Kirghiz tents, structures of very thick felt over a light framework of wood. It is with a thrill of joy that one comes in sight of the Red Cross flag in the far-off Persian mountains. Blessed is the service under this banner of sacrifice.

These repatriated Christians had need of everything. All had been swept away in the avalanche of loot and destruction. Many things could wait the return of the families. Before the house was the field. Our first care was given to providing farm-implements, seed and cattle.

I remained in Khoi to make purchases and to be in reach of the money centres, Tiflis and Tabriz, while Dr. Macallum and Mr. Gracey went on to Van to make distribution. Oxen, cows, buffaloes, wagons, plowshares, spades, sickles, grain, and various garden seeds were among our purchases. The accomplishment of such a task is not easy, at present, for Persia and the Caucasus have been and are being drawn on for army supplies to an unprecedented extent. To prevent interference with the army commissariat we were limited as to our markets. Fortunately for the refugees they and the Armenian Committee had no limitations put upon them. Transportation was another difficulty as pack animals were liable to be commandeered for the army. Even the Persians were also dissatisfied with the military export of beef-cattle and held a mass meeting in Tabriz to protest against it as liable to cause scarcity for farm labor and the meat markets.

As an offset to those difficulties and the manifold trials of the refugees there was a remarkable providence. The unreaped harvest of last year remained safe in the fields. This was true in a number of districts of Van. The villages had remained without inhabitant. A few thousands only had gathered in the city of Van. There was a small army of occupation which had foraged on the standing wheat. The winter had passed with unusual mildness. No hail or storms had beaten upon the standing grain.

* Source: NA/RG59/867.48/341

So when in April, the refugees returned, they thrust in the sickles which we put into their hands and reaped abundantly. This grain and the undisturbed wheat stores in the pits in the villages gave bread to many till the harvest time. I should mention that we brought from the Caucasus about 30,000 pieces of bedding and clothing for distribution.

This work of reconstruction has not been without its risks. So in Urumia there has been imminent danger while the Nestorians were rebuilding the homes and reestablishing their altars. The battle raged but a few hours distant between Kurds and Russians and any day might have seen Urumia become the battle field again. Even as has happened to Soujbulak, where the ebb and flow of war has left nothing but ruin and destruction. So it might have been at Van. Indeed when the Turkish force retook Bitlis, the people in Van were preparing for another flight. But thanks to the onward, successful sweep of the Russian army, the danger has more and more receded. The wisdom of taking the risk has been justified, and a harvest will not only furnish food for the people but make the army commissariat easier.

I should not forget to mention how we were entertained at the American Red Cross Hospital in Khoi. Here Dr. Hazlet of Pittsburg assisted by a corps of American and Russian nurses, has charge of Russian and Armenian wounded brought from Bitlis together with more than 100 Turkish wounded soldiers. While Dr. Hazlet is recovering from an almost fatal attack of typhus and pneumonia, Dr. Floyd O. Smith of Diarbekr, the new member whom we have welcomed to our Relief Committee, is assisting in the Hospital especially with the Turkish prisoners whose language he knows. At the same time he has in hand the work of our Committee in Khoi, which he took over from me the day after his arrival.

For my work in Khoi met with an unexpected interruption. On May 7th I was called by the Division Commander and informed that the Commander-in-Chief, Gen. Tschernazubeff, had telegraphed an order for me to leave Khoi for Tabriz inside of 24 hours. I afterwards learned that Dr. Packard of Urumia who was in Sulduz transferring wheat to Urumia for the refugees, was placed under arrest by the Commander, to be conducted to Tabriz. He was afterwards permitted to remain in Urumia. Whatever misunderstanding or misinformation may have led to the steps, it has all been cleared away and we are assured by the superior authorities in Tiflis that the request to leave was only temporary, that there is absolutely nothing against me or any of our relief workers. Gen. Tschernazuboff has telegraphed that I have permission to return to Khoi whenever I wish. While here, I have been able to set drovers in motion to buy cattle. I have been welcome with the utmost cordiality by the Armenian community, who is honoring me with a banquet, are but expressing their gratitude and appreciation of the generous American supporters of our Committee.

Our Committee has appreciated the able and arduous work of Mr. Hill, especially in the difficult shipping department at Tiflis. He has put in an efficient winter's work and can tell you at first hand about our efforts.

Consul Smith is now about to leave us. He has entered heart and soul into the work of the Committee and spares no time nor trouble to make our task easy. I hope you may all have the pleasure of seeing him in America and hearing him personally about the relief work which you have so generously supported.

Yours respectfully,

[signed] S. G. Wilson

Tabriz, Persia, June 6, 1916

TELEGRAM RECEIVED*

IHM

GREEN

From Constantinople via (Copenhagen)

Dated July 21, 1916

Recd. July 25, 10 p.m.

Secretary of State,
Washington.

1974, July 22, 10 a.m.

CONFIDENTIAL

My 1948, July 15, 10 a.m.

Peet desires Barton and Crane to be confidentially informed:

“That he has word from his German Relief Agents at Aleppo, sent through German Embassy, who report visits of their helpers to wide districts including Deir Zor and other places on Euphrates and in Desert. They have seen thousands of deported Armenians under tents in the open, in caravans on the march, descending river in boats and in all phases of their miserable life. Only in few places does Government issue any rations and those quite insufficiently. People are therefore themselves forced to satisfy their hunger with food begged in that scanty land or found in the parched fields. Agents found them eating grass, herbs, and locusts and in desperate cases dead animals and human bodies are reported to have been eaten. Naturally death rate from starvation and sickness is very high and increased by brutal treatment of the authorities whose bearing towards exiles as they are being driven back and forth over the desert is not unlike that of slave drivers. With few exceptions no shelter of any kind is provided and the people coming from cold climates are left under scorching desert sun without food or water. Temporary amelioration can only be obtained by the few able to pay officials.

Misery and hopelessness of the situation is such that many are reported to resort to suicide. Illustrating methods employed agents report gathering group of one hundred of children whom they placed in care of educated young widow from Hadjin. Two weeks later these children were deported and from two survivors found further down caravan route it was learned the rest had perished. House mother crazed by (*) of her charges was among deported moving on. Boat loads sent from Zor down the river arrived at Ana, one thirty miles away, with three fifths of passengers missing. There appears in short steady policy to exterminate these people but to deny charge of massacre. Their destruction from so-called natural causes seems decided upon.

* NA/RG59/867.48/356. Copies sent to Charles Crane and James L. Bryce.

In view of the fact that conditions are growing rapidly worse through continued scattering of people through diminishing vitality and decreasing resources, attention is most earnestly called to the suggestion in my above telegram. I firmly believe that only through committees composed of foreigners can relief work now required be adequately performed in these extended areas. Moreover, very presence of such commissions among deported would act as powerful deterrent upon this inhuman business which thus far found no check.

PHILIP

AMERICAN MINISTER
COPENHAGEN

(*) apparent omission

TELEGRAM RECEIVED*

IHM GREEN

GREEN

From Constantinople via (Copenhagen)

Dated July 26, 1916

Recd. August 1, 6:30 p.m.

Secretary of State,
Washington.

1987, July 26, 2 p.m.

CONFIDENTIAL

Your 2784, July 7, 2 p.m.

My 1930, July 15, 10 a.m.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs has up till today met my requests for a reply in the matter of the desired permission to relieve the inhabitants of Syria and the Lebanon with the statement that the Government was awaiting a report from Djemal Pasha. Today in the course of a long conversation, he informed me that the Government would not permit the importation of supplies for distribution by a neutral commission among these people. He stated that Djemal denies the facts as reported to the Embassy and represents that he has sent to Beirut and the Lebanon up to the present about three and a half million bushels of wheat apart from that sent through private sources and that this year's crops have been better than for half a century past. Djemal has also applied to the Government for ten thousand pounds for distribution among the poor of the above districts. The Minister admits there is some suffering in Syria and the Lebanon as is also the case in Constantinople or Smyrna but denies that anyone has died of starvation. He and his colleagues, he says, believe that alarming reports are spread in the United States by the Entente powers for double purpose; firstly on the supposition that Turkey will refuse the distribution of relief and thus become embroiled with the United States, secondly that if Turkey should consent Entente Powers would manipulate the matter so as to be considered by the inhabitants of Syria and the Lebanon as the real benefactors. He therefore professes to believe that the whole [outcry] has been raised by the Entente Powers who desire to cause a similar revolt in Syria to that which they have lately brought about in Mecca and basis of the refusal to allow the distribution of relief by neutral commission on this ground as well as the denial of the existence of famine. In the latter connection he remarked that both the German and Austrian Embassies considered the situation in Syria and the Lebanon as normal. In a previous interview

* NA/RG59/867.48/362

Minister for Foreign Affairs had mentioned the fact that the Government had intercepted a number of letters addressed to the United States by Palestine Jews who he believed were responsible for spreading alarmist reports in order to get relief supplies. I replied that I have received much reliable information which convinces me of the existence of very different conditions from those reported by Djemal and insisted in the name of humanity on the necessity of relieving the sufferings of the Syrians as well as of the Armenians which I said the American people wished to do at once and with no political reasons in view. In regard to Armenians I said that there could be no suspicion of Entente political aims there and urged that immediate permission be given for the importation of relief for these people whose terrible situation cannot be denied. The Minister stated that the Government would positively refuse to consider the distribution of relief by neutrals as it considered that all its troubles with certain of its subject races have been brought about owing to foreign propaganda and foreign interference with the internal affairs of Turkey. On my insisting that it would be necessary to inspire confidence on the part of the American donors who would certainly be entitled to representation and to detailed report he said that possibly some way might be found to satisfy them as well as the Turkish Government in the matter of outside relief measures and it is understood that I will make further proposals in this respect.

The Spanish Minister and the Papal delegate have both received instructions lately to suggest the Department's request concerning Syrian relief. The former has received an additional instruction to request in the name of the Queen certain privileges for the inhabitants of Syria and Lebanon including permission to import supplies in Spanish vessels and for aged and infirm inhabitants to leave the country in Spanish vessels, et cetera. These colleagues promised to make verbale representations today but I doubt if the result will be important.

The Minister stated that he would shortly ask me to forward a reply to the telegram of the Chargé d'Affaires in Washington which would be based upon information received from Djemal Pasha.

VERY CONFIDENTIAL

Certain evidences lead me to believe that whereas all open distribution of relief by neutrals will be opposed during the period of military ascendancy, any serious defeat or set-back in the eastern or western war theatre would, in all probability, render such opposition much less obdurate.

PHILIP

AMERICAN MINISTER,
COPENHAGEN.

TELEGRAM RECEIVED*

RC

GREEN

From Constantinople (via Copenhagen)

Dated August 12, 1916

Rec'd August 15, 3:05 P.M.

Washington, September 22, 1916

Secretary of State,
Washington.

2029, August, 12, noon.

My 1987 July 26, two p.m. and 1971 July 21, four p.m.

Minister for Foreign Affairs informed on seventh instant that he had again discussed with his colleagues the administration of relief in Syria and the Lebanon by a neutral committee and that it had been decided definitely that this could not be permitted. He added that such relief was not judged essential, twenty thousand pounds having been placed at the disposal of Djemal Pacha for that purpose, which sum would be increased if necessary. I inquired if the susceptibilities of his Government concerning foreign relief might be overcome by an arrangement which would provide for the distribution of American supplies by agents of Red Crescent Society acting conjointly with American Red Cross delegates. The Minister seemed to think that this might be arranged provided the Americans did not come from abroad and were people favorably known to (?), though he thought it would be preferable if the American Consular officers were to act as sole intermediaries. I said the Consuls were necessarily obliged to remain at their posts and would not therefore be able to follow the details of the undertaking and tentatively mentioned the presence in Beirut of American Red Cross delegates. I also suggested the possibility of furnishing the destitute Armenians with relief supplies in the same manner. Halil promised to discuss with his colleagues the question of American relief in this aspect and inform me of the result.

Although I am strongly opposed to relegating to Ottoman Red Crescent or other Turkish officials the actual control or disposition of American relief supplies yet under existing circumstances I think that some such arrangement as the above will be necessary in order to insure the receipt of relief by the destitute within a reasonable time should the means suggested in my 1948 July 15, 10 a.m. not prove efficacious.

PHILIP

AMERICAN MINISTER
COPENHAGEN

* NA/RG59/867.48/390

TELEGRAM RECEIVED*

WSB

GREEN

From Constantinople via (Copenhagen)

Dated September 7, 1916

Recd. September 13, 1:45 p.m.

Secretary of State,
Washington.

2073, September 7, 9 a.m.

CONFIDENTIAL

My 1948, July 15, 10 a.m., and 1974, July 22, 10 a.m.

Deported survivors are being re-expelled especially from Aleppo and Der Zor, forced conversions continue, provincial authorities seeking to hinder distribution of relief and threatening those engaged in such distribution, mortality from starvation and exposure generally increasing. Strong action required immediately. Has department obtained response from Germany?

PHILIP

EGAN

* NA/RG59/867.48/420

TELEGRAM SENT*
DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, September 22, 1916

Amembassy,
Constantinople.

Your confidential 2073. September seventh. Report further details on this matter. What if any action by Department in your opinion would alleviate conditions?

[Signed] Lansing

867.48/420
3 AHP/RBP

* NA/RG59/867.48/420

