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Mr. Ó Allighinn
To see, please. Could we
have a word?
HS/4

Mr. Swift
This may be of
interest to your
side.

A.M.D.
18.10.79.

Strictly Confidential

Visit of Dr. E. Makhlouf,
Iveagh House 10th October 1979

Dr. Makhlouf, accompanied by Rev. J. Chisolm, Chairman of the Irish Arab Society, visited the Department on 10th October 1979 and met with Messrs. T. Lyons (who could be present only for part of the meeting) N. Holohan and A. McDaid of the Middle East section. In a letter requesting a meeting with the Minister, Fr. Chisholm had described Dr. Makhlouf as "an accredited representative of the PLO in Beirut". In view of the risk of undesirable publicity, it had been decided not to agree to such a meeting at present.

Dr. Makhlouf began by saying he had come to make three points. Firstly there had been some talk of PLO assistance for the IRA. Chairman Arafat however had declared that there was no link between the organisations. He wanted to reassure the Irish Government that this was not the policy of the PLO. Secondly he wondered whether there could be further contacts with the Irish Government leading to better relations between Ireland and the PLO. For example the Irish Defence Minister Molloy was currently in Lebanon and it might have been possible for him to have contacts with local Palestinians. If the Palestinians could help to further improve relations between the Irish battalion and the local population this could be discussed locally and perhaps it might be useful to appoint a Palestinian Liaison Officer who could maintain regular contacts with the Irish contingent. Thirdly he enquired whether Ireland could recognise the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. He was aware of the Government's position on a homeland for the Palestinians and of our reluctance to go further than the EEC global attitude but he hoped Ireland could take this step.

Mr. Lyons felt that if the Government were to contemplate any position on the PLO the question of alleged links with the IRA would be of great importance. These links remained a matter of considerable press speculation and made the Government's position extremely difficult. As for UNIFIL the suggestion of a Liaison Officer was very interesting. As a general observation Ireland operated strictly within UN rules and did not exercise national control over Irish troops under UN command.

Dr. Makhlouf said the idea of a Liaison Officer was only put forward to help. At times there were misunderstandings or misbehaviour on one side or the other in Lebanon. Both the French and Norwegians had found such contacts useful. There had been certain misunderstandings between Irish troops and local people particularly with regard to Israeli attacks. These could be removed by liaison with the PLO either directly or through the UN.

Mr. Holohan again referred to the difficulties facing Government as a result of press speculation on links between the IRA

and PLO. This was a matter on which we were very sensitive. Reports of IRA men at PLO training camps have appeared in the press and if the PLO could establish that this is not true or if it could do any more to ensure any previous connection was finally broken, it would help the Government. As for Lebanon, the army have some good contacts already. Perhaps these contacts could be consolidated via our Charge in Beirut e.g. if Irish troops were having problems in the South they could get him to make representations.

Dr. Makhlof considered that there already is some contact in Beirut but that it was sometimes a long way to go about solving local problems in the South where direct contact might be more useful. He undertook to meet our Charge and to ensure he had proper contacts. As for any co-operation, the PLO were ready to go as far as the Irish Government saw fit. He could not categorically deny that IRA men had trained with Palestinian fringe groups in Lebanon. That country had become a training ground for all sorts of weapons and people but he wanted to assure us there was no connection between the PLO as such and IRA.

Mr. Holohan then took up the problem of recognition of the PLO. Ireland was fully committed to the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and felt its representatives should play a full part in negotiations leading to a comprehensive settlement. As for recognising the PLO as the sole legitimate representative, however, this we could not do. We do not recognise any liberation organisation anywhere in the world on the grounds that such a movement has not been elected. Nevertheless we do accept the PLO to be an important political force.

Dr. Makhlof pointed out the impossibility of elections either in the occupied territories or outside but argued that there were still ways of knowing how the Palestinian people felt. The Palestine National Council has 300 members nominated or elected through various syndicates, doctors, lawyers engineers etc. There are also representatives from the occupied territories. Even those who have been elected to municipal offices have declared that it is the PLO who are the representatives of the Palestinian people. If the Palestinians can agree on this then it is not for outsiders to say who should represent them. No government in the world can claim to represent the whole of its people yet the PLO is representative of all factions of the Palestinian movement. If any Arab body is representative it is the PLO.

Mr. Holohan accepted that the PLO had a large measure of representativity but there could still be groups or individuals among the Palestinians who did not feel represented by the PLO and this would be sufficient to deter us from recognising that organisation as the sole legitimate representative.

Dr. Makhlof claimed no other groups or individual had come forward. Until they do they cannot be taken into consideration. There was a considerable range of opinion within the National Council which was a democratic body and abided by the majority view. The more the PLO is recognised as the representative of the Palestinians the less it would have to use the gun. The PLO prefers to have a dialogue without the gun but if

it is not recognised how can it have a dialogue?

Fr. Chisolm wondered whether Ireland's position on recognition would change if a number of European governments were to explicitly recognise the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinians.

Mr. Holohan replied that we placed great importance on the solidarity of the EEC countries in regard to foreign policy matters but our view with regard to recognition of the PLO is similar to that of the rest of the Nine and it would be difficult to see other countries recognising that organisation as the sole legitimate representative. Even if recognition were forthcoming from some other countries, Ireland might still have problems owing to our present world political view regarding liberation movements.

Dr. Makhlof again referred to the difficulty of holding elections since the PLO were outside their homeland. This however should not be a barrier. General De Gaulle was in London for much of the Second World War yet he was recognised as the leader of France. If France today had a monopoly of friends in the Middle East what gain would this be for Ireland? By recognising the PLO Ireland had much to gain and nothing to lose.

Mr. Holohan enquired whether the PLO would accept recognition as "a", rather than as "the sole", representative.

Dr. Makhlof saw certain problems in this. Other Arab states or Israel could produce groups of people and claim they too were representatives who had to be consulted. At the moment there was one single body - the PLO. There were many factions within the organisation from extreme right to extreme left but it was a single body. Dr. Makhlof then raised the question of a PLO information office in Dublin or a PLO representative without diplomatic status.

Mr. Lyons pointed out the problem of security of embassies and the extra security problem that would be posed by such an office. In the past this aspect had always been the major consideration. There was also the difficulty that a PLO presence in Dublin would in all probability increase the pressure from other sources for similar representation (Dr. Makhlof appeared to have been under the impression that Israel already had a resident Embassy in Dublin) Mr Lyons then raised the more general point of PLO recognition of the existence of Israel.

Dr. Makhlof claimed that the PLO does recognise Israel de facto. They have said they would be ready to form a homeland in any part of the occupied territories evacuated by Israel. The concession they ask is that Israel limits her boundaries; but does Israel have any boundaries? The Law of Return suggests Israel will need more land. Let them accept the boundaries of 1948 or 1967. The Palestinians are in greater need of secure frontiers than the Israelis. In any case why should the PLO be the first to make concessions? It was high time that Israel made concessions.

Mr. Holohan felt the world still believed the PLO was refusing to recognise Israel's right to exist. The PLO placed too much emphasis on its own recognition which really was only a legal formality. Most Western countries were unable to have closer relations with the PLO because by not accepting UN Security Council Resolutions affirming Israel's right to exist that organisation had placed itself outside the internationally accepted peace framework.

Dr. Makhlof considered that the PLO could not be expected to take on option on something from which they were excluded. Resolution 242 did not refer either to the PLO or to the Palestinian people, only to refugees. The PLO had no military economic or diplomatic strength. Full recognition of Israel's right to exist was their only trump card and if they gave that up where would it lead them?

Mr. Holohan accepted that Resolution 242 was not adequate but until a new resolution could be agreed it had to be accepted. Security Council resolutions were important. The PLO would be denied the essence of legality while it refused to accept 242, with or without reservations. Acceptance of the resolution would be a major step forward and would put Israel under great pressure. It would also make a great difference to the PLO's standing in the international community. By their unwillingness to recognise Israel publicly the PLO were preventing Western countries from having closer relations with the organisation.

Dr. Makhlof then enquired about the possibility of an invitation to Yasser Arafat to visit Ireland.

Mr. Holohan saw two problems. Firstly the press might make connections with the terrorist activities of the IRA. This would apply particularly in the case of Mr. Arafat who is seen as a military as well as a political leader. Secondly, there remains the stumbling block that the PLO had not accepted, even with qualifications, binding Security Council resolutions. He felt therefore it would be difficult to foresee such an invitation being issued.

Fr. Chisolm agreed that the doubt about links between the IRA and the PLO remained. The leader of the Labour Party Mr. Cluskey had only recently alleged that IRA members were being trained by the PLO and the newspapers constantly referred to this aspect. It was perhaps difficult for outsiders to appreciate fully Irish sensitivity on this matter.

Dr. Makhlof said he was fully aware of the importance to the Irish Government that there should be no connection between the PLO and the IRA and he again denied there was any link. He felt the Irish people might be misinformed about the PLO and perhaps a PLO Information Office could be useful in correcting this but he did not press the point. He suggested that it might be useful if he were to make a press statement disassociating the PLO from any connection with the IRA. However, in view of the delicacy of the meeting and of

the dangers of possible press speculation, it was agreed that it would be preferable if no publicity whatsoever were attached to the visit.

A. McDaid

12 October, 1979

c.c.

PSM

PSS

Dep. Secretary

Mr. Swift (Anglo Irish)

Ambassador, Jeddah

" , Cairo

" , Berge

" , Athens

" , Washington

" , Paris

" , Madrid

PMUN, New York

Perm Rep., Brussels

Charge d'Affaires, Beirut

" " , Tehran