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Sec. Gen.'s trip to Syria 1956

Jan. 13

Memorandum, C.A. Stavropoulos - to Sec. Gen.

(Conc. Problems of privileges and immunities  
with Syria)

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Secretary-General 13 January 1956

FROM: C. A. Stavropoulos

SUBJECT: Problems of privileges and immunities with Syria

1. As I have already mentioned to you, I am sending you this memorandum to recall to your memory two pending problems with Syria over privileges and immunities. Syria has been a party to the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations since September 1953. It may have a very good effect if during your visit to Syria you say to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and perhaps also to the Prime Minister that it is desirable that matters governed by the Convention should be settled in accordance with its terms.

2. I attach two letters concerning the two cases which have already been sent to the Syrian Permanent Representative. Below are brief summaries of the cases.

3. First case. This involves a tendency on the part of the Syrian Government to interfere in the selection of the international staff of UNRWA. Mr. Asha has transmitted your letter to his Government, but as yet no reply has been received.

4. Second case. The Syrian authorities wish to tax salaries paid by UNRWA to its Syrian and Palestinian employees, wish UNRWA to withhold these taxes and wish to seize the assets of the Organization to enforce these claims. These actions would be violations of the Convention, to which Syria made no reservation entitling it to tax the United Nations salaries of its nationals. It appears, however, that in the Syrian law authorizing accession to the Convention such a power of taxation was reserved, but this did not amount to a reservation, the United Nations was not informed of it at the time, and consequently Syria is bound by the full text of the Convention.

5. I had a discussion of the tax question with Mr. Rafik Sioufi, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Finance. In the presence of Mr. Asha and of Mr. Tarazi, the Legal Adviser, Mr. Sioufi entirely agreed with me that the Syrian arguments are not valid, and he undertook to press his Government to submit a bill to Parliament abolishing the provision of the previous law concerning the power of taxation. He thought the whole matter was a misunderstanding created by the tax authorities.