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Dear Mr. President:

During my absence from this Headquarters, receipt of your letter concerning the problem of displaced persons was acknowledged. I was then on a trip during which I made an inspection of a number of the installations in which we have displaced persons. This letter deals primarily with my own observations and will be supplemented, either immediately or in the near future, by a more extensive report comprehending the findings of subordinate commanders and staffs and of a special Jewish investigator.

As to the seriousness of the problem, there is not the slightest doubt. The hopelessness of the ordinary displaced person comes about from fear of the future, which involves questions, always of international politics, and from the practical impossibility of participating, at this time, in any useful occupation.

To speak very briefly about the psychological attitude of these people, I give you a few impressions gained by direct conversations with them. A very large percentage of the persons from the Baltic States, as well as from Poland and Rumania, definitely do not want to return to their own countries at this time. Although such a return represents the height of their ultimate ambitions, they constantly state, "We cannot go back until there is a change in the political situation - otherwise we will all be killed." They state that the governments of all these states will persecute them to the point of death, although they insist that they bitterly opposed German domination of their respective states just as they opposed domination by any other government.

With respect to the Jews, I found that most want to go to Palestine. I note in your letter that you have already instituted action in the hope of making this possible. All of these matters are, of course, distinctly outside any military responsibility or authority and there is nothing whatsoever that I or my subordinates would be justified in promising or intimating in regard to them. However, the matter draws practical importance for us out of the possibility that caring for displaced persons may be a long-time job. Since I assume that most countries would be unwilling to absorb masses of these people as citizens in their respective countries, the only

cc - Gen. Smith
- Gen. Marshall

alternative is that of hoping they will gradually voluntarily disperse in the areas of Western Europe and try to establish them in a self-sustaining life. To this end we encourage everybody to go out and get a job if he possibly can, and have been trying to explore the possibilities of agriculture and small business in the hopes of establishing small colonies of these people near their present locations. One great difficulty is that they do not desire to look upon their present location as any form of permanent home. They prefer to sit and wait rather than to attempt, as they say, "forcing themselves into a population where they would never be welcome".

With regard to actual living conditions; I personally visited five camps, two of which were exclusively Jewish and a third largely so. Two of the camps were villages taken from the Germans. Two others were city suburbs which had been taken over and occupied, one by the Jews, one by the Poles. In one camp, which was Jewish, I found conditions less than satisfactory, but found also that the camp and local authorities were taking over additional houses in the immediate vicinity, throwing the Germans out of these houses in order to provide more and better accommodations for the displaced persons. You will understand that to provision these people adequately they must be housed in the same general vicinity; an impossible administrative problem would be presented if they were scattered indiscriminately throughout the German population. All feeding of displaced persons is under military or UNRRA control, whereas, with few exceptions, the German population has to look out for itself. You will understand, also, that when we speak of "camp" we do not mean either a tent camp or one made of huts. Speaking generally, every displaced person is in a permanent building of some sort, either an ordinary dwelling or building that was once used for other purposes. In the camp where I found conditions unsatisfactory, there were still guards on the entrance and passes were required for visits to any distant spot. This practice is stopped, but the Jewish leaders within the camp itself insisted that some form of control was necessary in order, as they said, that "all of us do not get a bad name." I found no instances of displaced persons still living in the old "horror" camps.

In one camp we have experienced, on the part of a considerable minority of the displaced persons, a distinct lack of cooperation. I am still reporting on evidence given me by these people themselves. The most simple of sanitary regulations were constantly violated to a degree that in some instances could be termed nothing less than revolting, although this has much improved.

The voluntary police begged me to permit them to have arms. Upon my flat refusal to entertain such an idea I received the reply, "We have some very mean men here and they can get us all in trouble". However, I am certain that since these people are completely dependent upon us for food, the necessary standard of conduct can be maintained without any resort to harsh methods

At no place did I find any timidity on the part of any officer to throw a German out of a house in order to give better accommodations to displaced persons, but as before mentioned, problems of feeding, distribution and medical care for this completely helpless group, make it imperative that they be sufficiently concentrated in order that these services can be performed. In those instances where I believe officers have over-emphasized the administrative difficulties, vigorous steps are being taken and improvement will be prompt.

When it is realized that the Army in this area has been faced with the most difficult types of redeployment problems; has had to preserve law and order; furnish a multitude of services for itself and for the thousands of people it employs, and on top of this has had this question of displaced persons with unusual demands upon transportation, housing, fuel, food, medical care and security, you can well understand that there have been undeniable instances of inefficiency. Commanders of all grades are engaged in seeking these out and I am confident that if you could compare conditions now with what they were three months ago, you would realize that your Army here has done an admirable and almost unbelievable job in this respect.



Respectfully,

The Hon. Harry S. Truman
The White House
Washington, D. C.