

UNITED NATIONS TEMPORARY COMMISSION ON KOREA

Press Release No. 59

13 May 1948

PRESS STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN, MR. YASIN MUGHIR (SYRIA),
13 MAY 1948

1. The Commission had resolved to observe the elections in the south of Korea provided it ascertained that fundamental freedoms of speech, assembly and press were respected and guaranteed. On 29 April, the Commission decided by a unanimous vote to observe the elections announced by the Commanding General of the United States Army in Korea, noting its satisfaction with the assistance and good-will of the military authorities towards the achievement of these objectives.

2. The Commission is well aware of the fact that these elections are not nation-wide elections in the sense that they do not comprise the South and the North of Korea, and that they do not include all, or most of the existing political parties and organizations. While the members of the Commission have been always unanimous in their concern about the Korean problem, they nevertheless show certain divergences in their appraisal of these elections. Some of them doubt whether the very outcome of these elections will contribute to the solution of the Korean problem, and even if they do not entertain such doubts, they do not want to regard the elections in the South nation-wide. With perhaps some reservation as to the terminology they want to call them "decidedly rightist elections". Other members of the Commission, while not completely satisfied with the achievements of the Commission, are inclined to think that these elections may be one step towards the unification and sovereignty of Korea. They certainly do not like to call these elections rightist elections, and if they do so, they believe that non-rightist elements, or rather those factions of the people which opposed the elections, are a very small minority.

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Still other members are not yet ready to express a final opinion on the situation.

3. With regard to the way in which these elections were conducted, some representatives have noted certain violations of the electoral law and the recommendations of the Commission. For instance, we have observed the presence of members of National Defence Corps in and around ^{some} ~~the~~ polling places. These corps were organized by the police to assist them in keeping peace and order. They may have constituted a certain degree of restriction on the freedom of the voters. In some places the police were inside the polling place. Members of youth organizations, sometimes in uniform, were also in and around some voting offices. Some of us noted lack of privacy and secrecy in some places. On the whole, however, the elections were conducted very smoothly and on a fairly good level of organization and efficiency. In fact the efficiency was so remarkable that the figure of the voting reached a very high percentage in a few hours. This, in my mind, should give rise to a certain degree of caution and reservation in our appraisal of that efficiency. However, a final conclusion about the result of these observations will be made later and will be included in our report to the General Assembly.

4. The Commission is well aware of the fact that observing the election completes only one stage of its mission. It has not yet committed itself to advise the elected representatives to immediately establish a national government. It is our hope that these representatives make all efforts before forming a government to get the support of those elements which opposed the elections, in order to achieve unity for Korea.

5. The Commission regards the observation of the elections as one distinct and clear stage of its work, and it decided, therefore, to write the first part of its report to the General Assembly covering the elections. It decided to write this report somewhere outside Korea in order to be able to concentrate on this phase of its task. At the same time, it has decided to leave a liaison group in Seoul during its absence. The Commission chose Japan,

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but General MacArthur had objections to the presence of the Commission in Japan. Nevertheless, the Commission has reaffirmed its decision to write the first part of its report outside Korea as soon as possible. With regard to the statements made by General MacArthur, the Commission wishes to emphasize that it will give serious attention to the matter through official channels.

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