

Joint Statement by the United States, the United Kingdom and France following the nationalisation of the Suez Canal (London, August 2, 1956)

Caption: On 2 August 1956, the USA, the United Kingdom and France issue a joint statement condemning the nationalisation of the Suez Canal by the Egyptian Government.

Source: Documents on American Foreign Relations. 1956. Dir. of publ. Zinner, Paul E. 1957. New York: published for the Council on Foreign Relations by Harper & Brothers. "Joint Statement by the United States, the United Kingdom and France (London, August 2, 1956)", p. 292-294.

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Last updated: 01/03/2017

Joint Statement by the United States, U.K. and France, Issued at London, August 2, 1956.

The Governments of France, the United Kingdom and the United States join in the following statement:

1. They have taken note of the recent action of the Government of Egypt whereby it attempts to nationalise and take over the assets and the responsibilities of the Universal Suez Canal Company. This Company was organised in Egypt in 1856 under a franchise to build the Suez Canal and operate it until 1968. The Universal Suez Canal Company has always had an international character in terms of its shareholders, directors and operating personnel and in terms of its responsibility to assure the efficient functioning as an international waterway of the Suez Canal. In 1888 all the great Powers then principally concerned with the international character of the Canal and its free, open and secure use without discrimination joined in the treaty and Convention of Constantinople. This provided for the benefit of all the world that the international character of the Canal would be perpetuated for all time, irrespective of the expiration of the concession of the Universal Suez Canal Company. Egypt as recently as October 1954 recognised that the Suez Canal is "a waterway economically, commercially and strategically of international importance," and renewed its determination to uphold the Convention of 1888.

2. They do not question the right of Egypt to enjoy and exercise all the powers of a fully sovereign and independent nation, including the generally recognised right, under appropriate conditions, to nationalise assets, not impressed with an international interest, which are subject to its political authority. But the present action involves far more than a simple act of nationalisation. It involves the arbitrary and unilateral seizure by one nation of an international agency which has the responsibility to maintain and to operate the Suez Canal so that all the signatories to, and beneficiaries of, the Treaty of 1888 can effectively enjoy the use of an international waterway upon which the economy, commerce, and security of much of the world depends. This seizure is the more serious in its implications because it avowedly was made for the purpose of enabling the Government of Egypt to make the Canal serve the purely national purposes of the Egyptian Government, rather than the international purpose established by the Convention of 1888.

Furthermore, they deplore the fact that as an incident to its seizure the Egyptian Government has had recourse to what amounts to a denial of fundamental human rights by compelling employees of the Suez Canal Company to continue to work under threat of imprisonment.

3. They consider that the action taken by the Government of Egypt, having regard to all the attendant circumstances, threatens the freedom and security of the Canal as guaranteed by the Convention of 1888. This makes it necessary that steps be taken to assure that the parties to that Convention and all other nations entitled to enjoy its benefits shall, in fact, be assured of such benefits.

4. They consider that steps should be taken to establish operating arrangements under an international system designed to assure the continuity of operation of the Canal as guaranteed by the Convention of October 29, 1888, consistently with legitimate Egyptian interests.

5. To this end they propose that a conference should promptly be held of parties to the Convention and other nations largely concerned with the use of the Canal. The invitations to such a conference, to be held in London, on August 16, 1956, will be extended by the Government of the U.K. to the Governments named in the Annex to this Statement. The Governments of France and the U.S. are ready to take part in the conference.

Annex to Statement Parties to the Convention of 1888

Egypt
France
Italy
The Netherlands

Spain
Turkey
United Kingdom
USSR [sic]

Other Nations largely concerned in the use of the Canal either through ownership of tonnage or pattern of trade.

Australia
Ceylon
Denmark
Ethiopia
Federal Republic of Germany
Greece
India
Indonesia
Iran
Japan
New Zealand
Norway
Pakistan
Portugal
Sweden
United States