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LETTER DATED 1 SEPTEMBER 1980 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
OF MALTA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE
THE SECURITY COUNCIL

In accordance with Article 35 of the Charter of the United Nations, I have the honour to request an urgent meeting of the Security Council, in view of an illegal action taken by the Libyan Government which also constitutes a threat to regional and international peace.

As far back as 23 May 1976, after protracted negotiations, the Libyan and Maltese Governments signed an agreement to submit the question of delimitation of the continental shelf area between the two countries to the International Court of Justice.

In April this year, at the highest level, it was reaffirmed to the Maltese Government that the Libyan People's Congress would by June 1980 ratify the 1976 Agreement.

This ratification was not implemented by the Libyan authorities as promised.

In the circumstances, the Malta Government could no longer postpone drilling operations, but prudently advised the concessionaires to refrain from drilling in a band 15 miles wide north of the median line between the two countries. The Malta Government received no written objection from the Libyan Government following Malta's notification on 21 November 1979 of its intention to commence drilling operations.

On 20 August 1980, without any word to the Maltese Government, and without explanation, Libyan warships surrounded the oil rig, ordered the Italian Captain to terminate drilling operations, threatening him otherwise with the use of force. The representative of the drilling company resident in Tripoli, a person of Italian nationality, was arrested and threatened with dire consequences unless drilling operations were to cease.

The rig was flying an Italian flag. The company under licence is American. The crew of the rig consisted of various nationalities, principally Maltese, American, Italian and German.

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The incident is therefore potentially serious, with wide-ranging international implications. The Maltese Government refrained from responding to the use of force, but is taking action to defend its legitimate interests.

Malta is acting in accordance with the principles of international law. From her action Libya is determined to avoid recourse to legal procedures and to rely on the use of force.

In view of the potential danger to peace and security in the region the Security Council is urgently requested to ask Libya to desist from making further provocative threats and from taking any menacing actions.

I would be prepared to provide further details of the illegal, unwarranted and provocative action taken by the Libyan Government as soon as the Security Council meeting is convened.

I have the honour to request, as a first step, that this letter be urgently issued as a Security Council document.

(Signed) V. J. GAUCI
Permanent Representative
of Malta to the United Nations
