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THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Letter dated 19 August 1971 from the Permanent Representative of Israel
to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Upon instructions of my Government I have the honour to refer to the letter addressed to you on 16 August 1971 by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Republic (A/8357, S/10293) concerning the situation in the Gaza area.

As indicated in my previous letters, the most recent of which was dated 9 February 1971 (S/10107), the United Arab Republic and other Arab States have instigated and supported a campaign of indiscriminate terror in the Gaza area. The main victims of this campaign have been local Arab inhabitants. Terrorist activities have involved the throwing of bombs into crowded streets, the killing of innocent women and children and the murder in hospitals of Arabs wounded in previous terrorist attacks. These acts are aimed at spreading violence and insecurity amidst the local Arab population so as to prevent improvement in its situation and to keep it in the conditions of misery and congestion created during Egyptian occupation.

Since June 1967, Arab terror organizations have killed 219 Arab residents of the Gaza area, including 51 women and 29 children, and wounded 1,314 local Arab inhabitants, including 118 women and 239 children.

The following recent examples throw light on the nature of the terror attacks and the methods employed in them:

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- On 2 April 1971, at 1300 hours local time, a mine laid by Arab terrorists on a sand track used by local farmers near Rafiah exploded under a cart. Four Arab residents, a man, a woman, a girl aged 17 and a baby girl 3 months old, were killed.
- On 10 April, at 1130 hours, a 7-year-old girl and her brother, aged 13 (years), were killed and their two sisters and mother were wounded by the explosion of a charge placed by terrorists near their house in Rafiah.
- On 27 April, at 0700 hours, 18 local Arab residents, including seven children and a man 80 years old, were injured by a hand-grenade hurled by a terrorist in a crowded street in Gaza.
- On 11 June, two local Arab residents were killed and 79 injured by three hand-grenades thrown by Arab terrorists in Gaza. At 0500 hours, a grenade was tossed into a civilian bus filled with local inhabitants on their way to work. The grenade exploded inside the bus. Some twenty minutes later two other grenades were thrown in a central square in Gaza at a group of workers awaiting transportation to work.
- On 18 July, at 1045 hours, nine pupils, two teachers and the janitor of the Falastin municipal school in Gaza were injured by a hand-grenade hurled by terrorists into the school while the children were taking their examinations.
- On 5 August, at 0815 hours, a 3-year-old child was killed and three others between the ages of 5 and 12 were injured by two hand-grenades thrown by terrorists in the Jabaliya refugee camp.
- On 16 August, the very day when the aforesaid United Arab Republic letter was dispatched to you, 23 local Arab residents were wounded by a terrorist's hand-grenade in the Sajia quarter of Gaza. Of these, four, including a child, were seriously injured.

In an interview on Israel television, on 23 February 1971, the Deputy Commander of the so-called Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in the Gaza area, Mohammad Moussa Yassin, also known as Abu Nimr, arrested by the Israeli authorities, said that many of the murders were carried out to "settle personal accounts".

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Even he was stirred by one of these killings. Yassin described the murder of an Arab couple, husband and wife, by his terrorist organization as follows:

"The man was killed but the woman survived and was taken to the hospital. Headquarters then told us that we should kill her in the hospital - which we did. It was a very cruel deed. In the past", he continued, "we used to warn people once or twice. But now we kill immediately, without any real proof."

Such murderous crimes cannot be tolerated. It is Israel's responsibility, as stipulated also in Security Council resolution 237 (1967) of 14 June 1967, to ensure the safety, welfare and security of all the inhabitants in areas under its control.

Because of overcrowding, the congested layout of houses and other circumstances, such as the large number of dilapidated structures, refugee camps have offered especially convenient conditions for terror operations. Indeed, refugees residing in camps have constituted a large part of the victims of terror attacks in recent months. In view of this situation, Israeli authorities have been compelled to take the necessary measures to ensure safety and security in refugee camps. This has necessitated the construction of access roads within the camps, involving in certain places the demolition of houses.

All possible safeguards have been taken to avoid undue hardship to inhabitants of the houses thus affected. No demolition takes place unless alternative housing, of at least equal standard, is provided to the occupants of the house. In most instances, the new accommodations are of a higher standard. If the occupants prefer new housing of their own choice to accommodations offered by the authorities, they are free to avail themselves of such housing. The evacuees receive compensation for any expenses incurred by them on the structures evacuated and a financial grant to defray the cost of moving into the new accommodations. Arrangements are made to enable the evacuees to continue in their old employment. Whenever necessary, new employment is provided.

The charges contained in the United Arab Republic letter are particularly ludicrous in the light of Egypt's notorious record during the nineteen years of Egyptian occupation of the Gaza Strip. During that period, the area had been virtually a concentration camp; its population subjected to endless restrictions deprived of freedom of movement, barred from sources of livelihood, terrorized by a military régime of repression. The gaols were filled with political suspects and torture was commonplace.

On 10 March 1962, Radio Mecca described the oppression of the Arab population of the Gaza area by the Egyptian rulers as follows:

"These are the very methods which the dictator Hitler used in the countries that he occupied during the World War."

On 12 October 1961, Radio Damascus bluntly declared that Egypt was exercising tyranny in the Gaza area.

Thousands of Gazaites tried to flee from this inferno. On 15 October 1955, Subhi Sayd Al-Kilani wrote in the Jordanian daily Hawl al-Alam that these people were "escaping the disgrace of living under Egyptian domination in the Strip".

The Egyptian authorities reserved particularly cruel treatment for the refugees. On 19 May 1950, the Jordanian daily Falastin interviewed a group of 510 refugees who had escaped from Gaza. "The shabbily-clothed and undernourished refugees", it wrote, "said that they were ill-treated by the Egyptian authorities. Every refugee had a card issued by the Egyptians which said: bearer is prohibited from employment with or without wages."

On 27 June 1957, Radio Baghdad denounced the treatment of refugees by Egypt. It reported that 80,000 refugees in Jericho protested against the fact that Egypt was the only Moslem country which had forbidden refugees to work in its territory.

The Foreign Minister of the United Arab Republic chooses to criticize the construction of roads and the demolition of certain refugee dwellings necessitated by such construction when this is undertaken to prevent violence and ensure the safety and welfare of the population. However, the world remembers well how the Egyptian authorities demolished hundreds of Gaza houses not for purposes of peace and security, but in the name of war and bloodshed. Indeed hundreds of houses on the eastern approaches to Gaza were bulldozed by the Egyptians to cut a military road for tanks in the direction of Israel. Unlike the care of the Israeli authorities to provide alternative housing and compensation, the Egyptian administration rejected all pleas of the evacuees for compensation.

In contrast with the oppression and exploitation of the local population by the Egyptian rulers, the Israeli authorities have followed a policy of consistent efforts to promote well-being and development in the Gaza area.

Ninety-five per cent of job seekers, including refugees, are provided with work, as compared with the extensive forced unemployment under Egyptian occupation.

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The number of industrial workshops has risen since 1967 from 230 to 600, and the number of workers employed in them has increased from 1,500 to 5,000. A new industrial centre is being constructed in the northern part of the Gaza Strip, which at this stage already provides employment for hundreds of persons, most of them refugees. Six vocational schools have been built providing education for 1,500 trainees, 70 per cent of them refugees. Several hundred other trainees have already completed their studies and have gone into productive work. A modern infrastructure is being established, including networks of roads and electricity. The obsolete water system is being improved and extended. The construction of a wharf has begun in Gaza. It will constitute the beginning of a local port with a capacity to handle about 200,000 tons of cargo annually. A modern central dispensary was recently inaugurated providing medical services of a level previously unknown in the area. There has been a considerable rise in the general standard of living and in the average family income.

The obvious aim of the campaign of terror against the local Arab population in the Gaza area, as well as of the propaganda of incitement and recrimination carried on in this connexion by the United Arab Republic and other Arab States, of which the aforesaid United Arab Republic letter of 16 August 1971 is an example, is to disturb and hinder Israel's policy and efforts to maintain tranquility and encourage progress and development in the Gaza area. The United Arab Republic is evidently unhappy with any improvement in the conditions of life of the local population, which it cruelly suppressed for nineteen years. It would rather see the people of Gaza linger in stagnancy and discontent and become helplessly subjected to the terror and victimization operated from the outside by the United Arab Republic.

Israel, on its part, is resolved to continue its policy and efforts for the security and welfare of the Gaza area and its inhabitants.

I have the honour to request that this letter be circulated as official documents of the General Assembly and the Security Council.

(Signed) Yosef TEKOAH
Permanent Representative of Israel
to the United Nations