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THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Letter dated 23 September 1970 from the Permanent Representative of
Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

On instructions from my Government, I have the honour to refer to the letter addressed to the Secretary-General on 16 September 1970 by the Permanent Representatives of fourteen Arab States (A/8063, S/9941), and to state as follows:

The allegations advanced in that letter can only be characterized as a transparent attempt deliberately to mislead the principal organs of the United Nations to which it was addressed. The request to circulate it as an official document of the General Assembly and of the Security Council is nothing more than an effort to harness the United Nations for dishonest propaganda.

On 6 and 9 September 1970, five attempts at hijacking civil passenger aircraft on regular scheduled flights were committed by members of an Arab terrorist organization operating in and from the Arab countries bordering Israel. One of those attempts was foiled. The other four were successful. Three aircraft were forced to land in the desert near Zerka, Jordan, and the fourth in Cairo, United Arab Republic. Two of them stopped first in Beirut, Lebanon, where the hijackers received succour and reinforcements including supplies of explosives and sabotage experts. The plane which arrived at Cairo was blown up immediately with the explosives placed on board at Beirut. The three planes at Zerka were similarly blown up by the hijackers a week later.

* Also issued under the symbol S/9948.

Their passengers and crews were held as hostages under barbaric conditions for the best part of one week. Some of them have since been released, but over fifty remain captive, at a place unknown and without contact with the outside world, apparently because most of them are Jews.

These crimes against mankind have outraged the civilized world. The Secretary-General condemned them in a statement on 8 September as "savage and inhuman".

On 9 September, the Security Council adopted resolution 286 (1970) expressing grave concern "at the threat to innocent civilian lives from the hijacking of aircraft and any other interference in international travel" and appealing to "all parties concerned for the immediate release of all passengers and crews without exception".

Israel, for its part, faced with these crimes, had no choice but to take precautionary measures against threatening further terror activity. On 12 September 1970, the Israeli security authorities temporarily took in for questioning 450 persons suspected to be associated with the terror organizations, particularly that which openly claimed credit for the hijackings. Within two days, seventy-five of these persons were released. The others were freed by 18 September, after their interrogation had been completed.

Israel does not take hostages and does not condone the taking of hostages. On the other hand, if the Arab Governments, signatories of the letter under discussion, do indeed condemn the taking of hostages, they should have done so publicly a long time ago, when air piracy and gangsterism, including the murder of civilian passengers and their detention as hostages, first reared its ugly head. Instead of this, they have repeatedly and publicly glorified and encouraged those who perpetrate these acts and have thwarted attempts in the United Nations and other competent organizations to adopt effective co-ordinated action against them. Several of these Governments have themselves detained and treated the victims of air piracy and gangsterism as hostages. The organization to which the hijackers belong enjoys wide freedom of operations and the active support and collaboration of Arab Governments in their own countries and through their official and public machinery abroad.

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The support given by these Arab Members of the United Nations to perpetrators of crimes against mankind, to air pirates and indiscriminate murderers of innocent men, women and children, is the true measure of their concern for civilian welfare.

No amount of falsification by Arab propaganda can conceal the true situation of the civilian population in areas under Israel's administration. Israel's liberal policy, the freedoms enjoyed by the inhabitants of these areas to a degree unparalleled in most Arab States, the normalcy of life and the economic progress achieved in the last three years are all a matter of record. Basically they remain unaffected by the security measures which the authorities are sometimes compelled to take to combat the terror warfare waged against Israel's civilian population with the participation and support of the Governments signatories of the Arab letter.

This is attested, among others, by the fact, that, during this summer alone, over 55,000 tourists from Arab countries entered Israel and the administered areas to visit relatives and friends. These Arab visitors would not have come had they given any credence to the official Arab propaganda offered from time to time to the United Nations by their Governments in a letter like the one under discussion, or in reports compiled by certain "committees" whose obvious goal is to promote the propaganda interests of Arab States.

It is to be observed that, while the signatories of the above-mentioned letter abuse United Nations machinery to disseminate hypocritical propaganda aimed at diverting attention from their responsibility for barbaric acts of terror, murder and piracy, Jews in certain Arab lands continue to be cruelly oppressed and persecuted in defiant mockery of the United Nations Charter.

It is requested 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
