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THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Letter dated 22 January 1970 from the Permanent Representative of Israel
to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

On instructions of my Government, I have the honour to transmit to you a statement made on 20 January 1970 in the Knesset by the Prime Minister of Israel, Mrs. Golda Meir, setting out the facts of the situation of Jews in Arab States.

I have the honour to request that this letter and its enclosure be circulated as an official document of the General Assembly.

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

TEXT OF THE STATEMENT MADE BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF ISRAEL,
MRS. GOLDA MEIR, IN THE KNESSET ON 20 JANUARY 1970

Nine innocent Jews were brought to the gallows and hanged a year ago in the capital of Iraq, Baghdad, amidst scenes of rejoicing. Inflamed masses danced around their bodies. A year after the criminal act, we stand here shaken to the depths of our souls in recalling the atrocity.

Let us rise and commune with their memory by observing a minute of silence.

The names of the Jews executed in the wake of the Baghdad trials on 27 January 1969:

Ezra Najji Zilkha, Faud Gabbai, Yaacov Gurji Namurdi, David Yehezkeel Dalal, Yehezkeel Salagh Yehezkeel, David Ghali, Sabah Hayim, Naim Kadoori Halal, Raphael (Charles) Horesh.

On 25 August 1969:

Yitzhak Eliahu Dala, Yehezkeel Raphael Yaacov.

The rigged espionage trials, in the wake of which the nine martyrs were hanged, continued. During the past year, further "trials" took place in Iraq, and the death sentence was passed and carried out on sixty-two persons - Christians, Moslems and two Jews - without their being accorded the right to a fair trial and to defend themselves, as is customary in courts of law in enlightened countries.

In addition, word has reached us that at least eight more Jews have died in Iraqi jails as a result of torture, or were executed without the matter being announced.

All that is left of the splendid Iraqi Jewish community of 150,000 souls, whose roots go back to the period of the Babylonian exile, is a small and persecuted community of 2,500 to 3,000 souls.

The condition of this community, as of that of the Jewish communities in other Arab countries, Syria and Egypt in particular, continues to be very grave. Following rumours - apparently wantonly circulated by the Baghdad authorities - concerning permission for Jews to leave the country, 1,500 members of the community registered immediately for exit under obvious danger to them and their families.

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But their hope was very soon frustrated, and now the Iraqi authorities are exploiting the exit request as evidence of their lack of loyalty - which further endangers their persons, position and property.

There can be no more impressive or shocking evidence of the fierce desire of Iraqi Jews to leave Iraq than the swarming of heads of families to register for exit, in dire jeopardy to themselves. And there can be no greater disappointment than theirs when they found out that they were condemned to continue to remain there, to continue to suffer.

Intelligence has recently reached us, according to which the heads of the Iraqi régime had no compunction about stating expressly to outsiders that, in fact, they consider the Jews as hostages for any eventuality, and that they do not intend to permit their departure.

The Syrian Jewish community of some 4,000 souls, dispersed in the main in Damascus, Aleppo and the townlet of Kemishli, is under a régime of terror which can be likened only to that of the Nazis. The authorities of that country persist in maltreating the Jews, who have been deprived of all elementary human rights. Their lives in the ghettos, with their identity cards stamped - as was the Nazi custom - with the word "Jew", have become simply unbearable. They must report to the police several times a day, no trading with them is permitted and they are under the strict supervision of the infamous Syrian security police, which for about a year has been conducting a personal investigation of every Jew and Jewess from the age of thirteen upwards.

The small Jewish community of Kemishli in northern Syria is in particularly dire straits, with the Syrian authorities for the past three years or so forbidding any contact between them and the outside world, even to the extent of preventing visits by representatives of recognized international organizations.

Egypt jailed Jewish residents, as did Iraq and Syria, immediately upon the outbreak of the six-day war. To this very day, some 100 Jewish men, heads of families, are still in jail - fathers, sons and others, who, together with their families, constitute about half of the Egyptian Jewish community. They are imprisoned in the Toura jail, known as one of the worst and most repressive in the Egyptian capital. We recently had word again of their plight and the disgraceful conditions under which these Jews are held.

Many worthy men of letters and affairs, various international organizations, friendly Governments and individuals of goodwill have raised their voice in protest against the hangings and persecutions in Iraq, Syria and Egypt and have called for the exodus of the Jews from those countries. But in most cases the efforts of the various bodies met with a blank wall of rigidity, brazenness and disregard of the voice of the international public.

Members of the Knesset,

The blood of our Jewish brethren cries out to us from exile in Arab lands: from the gallows in Iraq, from the Syrian ghettos, from Egyptian jails. Let us not remain silent.

We shall not relax nor keep quiet. We shall not cease sounding the alarm to public opinion, heads of States and international organizations, and especially the United Nations Organization, as to the danger threatening the lives of the Jews in these countries and their plight.
