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LETTER DATED 15 OCTOBER 1970 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SYRIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

Upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to bring to your attention the following article, published on 11 October 1970 in The Sunday Times of London, concerning Israel's violation of the Geneva Conventions in the Arab occupied territories.

"ISRAEL GUILTY OF GENEVA BREACH, SAYS RED CROSS

"By Philip Knightley and Alan Macgregor

"The International Committee of the Red Cross in an outspoken report released last week accuses Israel of blowing up Arab towns, villages, camps, and houses in its occupied **territories** in defiance of the Geneva Conventions.

"The report is something of a landmark in Red Cross history. Until now the ICRC has declined to discuss publicly details of its protests in cases like this on the grounds that it does not want to be drawn into political controversy or do anything that might imperil its negotiations with the government concerned.

"The fact that in this instance the ICRC has released a report which can only be considered highly controversial suggests that it feels that at the moment it cannot advance any further in its negotiations with the Israeli Government. After two years of protest, a Red Cross spokesman said last week: 'We have not been able to obtain from the Israeli Government a satisfactory response on its attitude to the Fourth Convention.'

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"This is the Convention which prohibits the destruction of property except where made absolutely necessary by military operations and which declares that no person may be punished for an offence he has not personally committed.

"The ICRC report says Israeli Forces have broken this Convention by using three kinds of destruction as measures of punishment: the blowing up of complete villages and towns; the blowing up of individual houses; and 'collective reprisals' (where neighbours of suspected terrorists lose their houses too).

"The report lists the following villages and camps which (according to the former inhabitants in interviews with ICRC delegates) have been destroyed: Yalou, Beit Nuba, and Imwas, in the Latroun area; Surif, Beit Awwa, Beit Mirsem, and Il Shuyoukh, in the Hebron area; and Jiflik, Agarich, and Nuseirat-Jordan Valley.

"The report lists the ICRC protests and the replies from Israel.

"The first reply from Israel said that the relevant articles of the Fourth Convention did not apply. These referred to cases of destruction of property by vandalism, or to 'acts of reprisal properly so called'. The Israeli spokesman claimed, the ICRC report says, that the destruction carried out by the Israeli armed forces as punishment for 'acts recognized as criminal' constituted a relatively mild form of punitive action and had been adopted to safeguard security.

"The most recent reply to the ICRC was in December last year when the Israeli Government said that destruction of buildings at Halhoul and Gaza 'was in keeping with the Government's policy of destroying the houses of persons helping members of Al Fatah'."

Furthermore, in my letter to you dated 30 September 1969 (A/7689, S/9459), I gave you the list of eighteen Syrian villages totally or partially demolished or burnt out by the Israeli occupying authorities between 18 September 1968 and 13 July 1969, which was never denied by Israel.

It is only fitting that on this the twenty-fifth anniversary of the United Nations which created Israel that the international community should be made aware of Israel's continued defiance of the international law of nations in utter cynicism.

I shall be grateful if this letter can be circulated as an official document of the General Assembly and the Security Council.

(Signed) George J. TOMEH  
Ambassador  
Permanent Representative