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Agenda items 69 and 83

ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

PRESERVATION AND FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL VALUES

Letter dated 17 December 1976 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 submit an English translation of a communication addressed at the beginning of December 1976 to the President of the State of Israel by 92 Soviet Jews in protest against official attempts to sabotage a symposium devoted to Jewish culture in the Soviet Union, due to be held in Moscow from 21 to 23 December.

In accordance with the wish expressed by the signatories, I have the honour to request that this letter and its annex be circulated as an official document of the General Assembly under agenda items 69 and 83.

(Signed) Chaim HERZOG  
Permanent Representative of Israel  
to the United Nations

ANNEX

Communication addressed to the President of the State of Israel

Unusual circumstances have forced us to turn to you. Together with 34 other countries, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics committed itself, in Helsinki, to enable the national minorities to develop their cultures. On the basis of this agreement, and taking into consideration the ever-growing interest of the Jews in their own culture and heritage, a group of people has taken the decision to convene a symposium, to be held from 21 to 23 December 1976, dedicated to the situation and possibilities of developing Jewish culture in the Soviet Union.

This purely national-cultural initiative raised a favourable echo amongst Jews in the Soviet Union, as well as those of a number of other countries, including Israel. Many papers were received from all these countries. The preparations for the symposium were conducted in an entirely open and legal manner. Invitations to the symposium were sent out to a number of Soviet institutions and cultural personalities.

At a press conference, held on 17 November 1976, the programme of the symposium was made public. This programme includes 54 papers, more than 30 of which were written by Soviet citizens. Later on, as news of the symposium was broadcast by several radio stations, including the Israel Radio and "The Voice of America", thousands of Jews in the Soviet Union began to reveal a hopeful interest in its preparations.

However, the Soviet authorities, in spite of all their own commitments and of the purely national-cultural and legitimate character of the symposium, initiated, on 23 November, a massive action aimed at preventing the symposium from taking place. To this end, members of the KGB and of the State Prosecution searched at night the apartments of the organizers of the symposium: Professor V. Rein, Dr. L. Volvovski, Dr. I. Begun, P. Abramovich (engineer), V. Prestin (engineer), V. Lazaris (advocate), I. Essas (mathematician), L. Vilenskai~~a~~ (psychologist), and V. Bogomolnii (mechanical engineer).

All the material for the symposium was confiscated, including papers, theses, programmes, the findings of a sociological survey and similar material.

In addition, they confiscated everything relating to Jewish culture, such as textbooks of the Hebrew language and Jewish history, as well as other books on Jewish subjects, even including rare Soviet editions, prayer books, and notations of Jewish music.

Many of the organizers of the symposium are under KGB surveillance day and night. Consequently, the convening of the symposium, which might have become an important precedent for Jewish revival in the Soviet Union, came under the threat of being vitiated. All these measures constitute, in our opinion, a clear infringement of the rights of the Jewish national minority in the spheres of culture and tradition.

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In this connexion, and taking into account the fact that the State of Israel is the spiritual centre and, as such, the obvious representative of World Jewry, we express our hope that you will help us.

We assume that you will find it appropriate to instruct your representative at the United Nations to raise the question of the violation of the cultural rights of the Jewish national minority in the Soviet Union and to circulate this letter as an official document of the United Nations.

Moscow

V. Fein, L. Volvovski, V. Prestin, P. Abramovich, E. Lieberman, L. Vilenskaia, I. Begun, I. Essas, A. Mai, V. Lazaris, V. Bogomolnii, F. Mandel, S. Rosanskaia, V. Slepak, M. Kremen, B. Beilin, V. Furman, M. Novikov, I. Beilin, B. Chernobilski, I. Kosharovski, L. Menes, L. Shabashov, L. Ulanovski, A. Bolshoi, V. Elistratov, I. Elkind, M. Gorbатов, A. Polischiuk, D. Shiglik, A. Swarzman, G. Vigdorov, V. Brailovski, M. Azbel, E. Orleanskaia, M. Andriuhin, L. Vitshtein, E. Nizhnikov, A. Druk, A. Krujlov, A. Gvinter, A. Lerner, V. Broiter, M. Liublinski, V. Olxov, S. Spekiorova, Leizerman, I. Kogan, V. Lesskis, P. Einbinder.

Minsk

I. Goldman.

Tbilissi

G. Goldstein, I. Goldstein.

Tallin

B. Gurfel.

Vilna

N. Salanski, D. Drot.

Vinnitza

M. Mager, B. Dehovich.

Kishinev

P. Roitberg, I. Shehtman, P. Shehtman, L. Iakubovic, R. Iakubovich, E. Abramovich, S. Abramovich, K. Weinshtein, L. Weinshtein, M. Mamontlivi, L. Mamontlivaia, I. Shneider, T. Starkman, M. Starkman, I. Swarzman, L. Swarzman, M. Rois, V. Balbarer, M. Margulis, I. Vanshtuk, Z. Vanshtuk, D. Vatzman.

Tiraspol

G. Levitt.

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Riga

D. Arieu, H. Shur, D. Gordin, H. Frumkin, S. Zabrodskaja, A. Zinober, B. Rauhman,  
V. Kaminski, F. Lemberg, I. Minkina, B. Ziterman.

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