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LETTER DATED 13 JUNE 1967 FROM THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
OF THE UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS (A/6717)

Letter dated 28 June 1967 from the Permanent Representative of  
Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour on instructions from my Government to communicate with you as follows:

The Prime Minister of Israel has made two statements in recent days concerning the matter now under discussion in the fifth emergency special session of the General Assembly. I wish to bring to the attention of Member States these two statements which constitute an authoritative expression of my Government's view on some of the problems now being discussed.

On 27 June in an interview with a number of television stations, Mr. Eshkol said the following:

"My country has just passed through a fateful struggle for its very existence. At this occasion I should like to make a statement. So long as our neighbours will persist in their policy of belligerence and will make plans for our destruction, we will not relinquish the areas that are now under our control and that we deem necessary for our security and self-defence. If, on the other hand, the Arab States will agree to discuss peace with us and will forgo their war against us, there is no problem, I trust, we will not be able to solve in direct negotiations, for the benefit of all parties concerned.

"The prospects of direct negotiations are better today than they have been at any time in the last twenty years because the Arab States should be closer than ever to recognizing the need to face realities in the Middle East. They have tried war three times. The time has come for them to try out peace. During the last two decades it has become abundantly clear that the so-called armistice régime which existed from 1949 to 1967 is not conducive to peace and is not, therefore, in the interests of the people of the region - Israelis or Arabs. Past experience has also shown that third-party mediation can be of little help. If the Arabs are ready for peace, there is no reason why they

should not agree to talk about it with us. If they do not want peace, third-party mediation would only serve as a screen behind which the Arab States could pursue their policy of non-recognition of Israel and belligerency towards it. The establishment of peace between Israel and her Arab neighbours will once and for all put an end to the use of the refugees as pawns in a political game and is bound to create conditions for the solution of many problems. I am certain that the international community, together with the countries of our region, including Israel, would then succeed in bringing about a just and truly humane settlement of the refugee question.

"That Jews and Arabs are capable of living together in harmony and co-operation was amply demonstrated in the recent crisis when Israel's Arab inhabitants stood by Israel, as loyal citizens, both before and during the severe military test through which we passed. Many of them volunteered their services in various capacities and played their part in the national effort. Also, a number of Druze units actively and courageously participated in the fighting.

"The same wish for neighbourly relations was the mainspring of the exemplary attitude of our officers and soldiers towards prisoners of war who fell into their hands. Not only were all of the Geneva Conventions fully observed, but there are many instances in which our men went out of their way to ease the lot of these prisoners, their former enemies.

"I am happy to note that life in the areas captured by the Israel Defence Forces is returning to normal. Many regular peace-time services and facilities, interrupted by war, are functioning once again, and steps are being taken to restore the remaining services to normal order. Most of the inhabitants in these areas are co-operating in this effort, and we all hope that the wounds of the past will quickly be healed.

"Every effort was made, in the course of the fighting, to protect and preserve places sacred to the various faiths - at times even at the cost of military expediency. Whoever visits the areas captured by our Forces can see for himself that nearly all places of worship have remained untouched. We have made arrangements to assure free access to the Holy Places to all who wish to worship there - members of all faiths - in those areas and throughout Israel.

"The future of the Middle East now hinges on what the Governments of the region are prepared to do to fashion that future in the best interests of their peoples. There are today indications that at least part of the Arab leadership is aware of the futility of attempting to return to untenable conditions which prevailed in this region for so many years. They - like we - would probably prefer to see a 'new deal' for the peoples of the Middle East. To what extent they will be prepared to translate this awareness into concrete terms will depend, in large measure, on the willingness of other nations the world over to put the full weight of their influence behind direct negotiations between the parties.

"Such negotiations are the only hope of achieving a genuine and enduring peace in the area.

"Our hand is extended in peace to all who are ready for peace."

Also on 27 June the Prime Minister made the following statement to the leaders of the religious communities:

"It is my pleasure to be able to inform you that all the Holy Places in Jerusalem are now open to all who wish to worship there - members of all faiths, without discrimination. The Government of Israel has made it a cardinal principle of its policy to preserve the Holy Places, to ensure their religious and universal character, and to provide free access to them. Through regular consultation with you - the heads of the various communities - and with those designated by you, at appropriate levels, for this purpose, we will continue to maintain this policy and to see to it that it is scrupulously carried out. In these consultations, I hope you will feel free to put forward your proposals on this subject, since the goals I have stated, I am certain, are goals we all share in common. Each of these proposals will be given full and sympathetic consideration.

"In this connexion, I should like to point out that it is our intention to place the internal administration and arrangements in the Holy Places in the hands of the religious leaders to whose communities they belong. As I announced on a previous occasion, the task of carrying out the necessary arrangements in this respect has been conferred upon the Minister for Religious Affairs. I trust they will be completed before long."

I have the honour to request that this letter be circulated as a document of the General Assembly.

(Signed) Gideon RAFAEL  
Permanent Representative

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