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THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Letter dated 25 January 1973 from the Under-Secretary-General for
Political and General Assembly Affairs addressed to the Permanent
Representative of Tunisia to the United Nations

The Secretary-General has asked me to reply to your letter of 14 December 1972 addressed to him, the text of which was reproduced at your request as a General Assembly document (A/8977).

In that letter you expressed surprise at the fact that a collection of statements mentioned in your speech of 7 December 1972 in the General Assembly during the general debate on the Middle East was not included in the verbatim record of the meeting.

In order to remove any misunderstanding, I should like to inform you of the reason why the text in question was reproduced as an annex to your letter of 14 December, i.e. as an A/- document, rather than as an addendum to the verbatim record of the meeting.

At the beginning of your statement, you said the following:

"Mr. President, I should like to append to my statement on the situation in the Middle East a document which I shall not read out in order to save time. I want to draw it to your attention in the hope that it may appear in the verbatim record of our debate as part of my statement. It is a collection of statements by statesmen, foreign ministers and representatives of some fifty countries each of whom has in his own way spoken in favour of the rights of the Palestinian people /A/PV.2103, pp. 132-133/135/."

In a similar manner, during the session commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the United Nations in 1970, two representatives delivered an abbreviated version of their statements in the General Assembly and requested that the full texts should be reproduced as an annex to the verbatim record (A/PV.1855/Add.1, A/PV.1857/Add.1).

In 1971, the Special Committee on the Rationalization of the Procedures and Organization of the General Assembly considered the possibility of making use of that procedure in order to limit the length of debates. Following a thorough study of the matter, however, the Special Committee declared itself opposed to that course of action. May I take the liberty of drawing your attention to the relevant passage in the Special Committee's report:

"The Special Committee had before it several suggestions to the effect that the length of interventions could be limited by the submission to the Secretariat of written statements which would expand oral statements and would be included in the records of plenary meetings.

"In support of this solution it was pointed out that the submission of written statements would mean a considerable saving of time for the General Assembly.

"The great majority of the members of the Special Committee, however, opposed the submission of written statements, the effect of which would be to alter substantially the nature of the Assembly's debates, to cause difficulties in the exercise of the right of reply and to increase the volume of documentation. Moreover, the Secretariat drew the Committee's attention to the serious technical difficulties and to the substantial financial implications of such a practice.

"The Special Committee considers that the submission of written statements should not be formally instituted with regard to the general debate." 1/

Inasmuch as the General Assembly, in its resolution 2837 (XXVI) of 17 December 1971, approved the Special Committee's conclusions, you will readily understand why the Secretariat was not in a position to annex to the record of the meeting a text which you had not read out.

I sincerely hope that the above explanation will have removed any misunderstanding.

In order that this clarification may be of service if a similar case should arise in the future, this letter will also be circulated as a General Assembly document.

(Signed) Bradford MORSE
Under-Secretary-General for Political
and General Assembly Affairs

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 26 (A/8426), paras. 149-152.