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THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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Letter dated 15 January 1986 from the Permanent Representative of
Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

My Government totally rejects the gross distortions contained in the letter dated 9 January 1986 of the Permanent Representative of Jordan concerning recent events in Jerusalem (A/41/82-S/17727).

Here are the facts about what really happened in Jerusalem: Several members of the Interior Committee of the Knesset were on a routine visit to the Holy Places of the Temple Mount. Israel, after all, insures free access to these places to everyone, including of course to its own elected representatives and legislators. Nevertheless, out of customary courtesy the visits were co-ordinated in advance with the Waqf, the Moslem religious authorities. During both visits, a handful of extremists incited a near-riot by attempting to turn a peaceful tour into a religious confrontation, thereby threatening the safety of the Knesset members.

The Israeli authorities acted with the greatest restraint in the face of this provocation. They prevented bloodshed and the spread of violence. No one was hurt and no property was damaged. If a complaint should be lodged at all, it is against the incitements from outsiders who seek to upset the peaceful co-existence that has characterized religious life in Jerusalem since the re-unification of the city in 1967.

Such co-existence and tolerance, alas, did not prevail during the Jordanian occupation. The Jordanian authorities denied Jews and Christians unhindered access to their holy places. They systematically destroyed and desecrated Jewish cemeteries and synagogues, a practice since perfected by the PLO which directs its murderous attacks on synagogues throughout the world, from Copenhagen to Paris to Rome.

* Reissued for technical reasons.

Israel, in contrast, is committed to freedom of religion and guarantees the rights of all denominations, including the right of free access. It enables the various religious authorities to administer their holy places on their own. Under this arrangement, the Waqf administers the Temple Mount with its own watchmen, while public order and security are the responsibility of the police. Where else in the Middle East can one point to such co-existence between the various religions?

There is thus no foundation, either in the general record or in this specific instance, for the mass hysteria that some are attempting to generate here. We find a curious resemblance between this extraordinary campaign of incitement to religious hatred and the accusation three years ago that Israel allegedly poisoned girls in Arab villages, an accusation that proved to be equally fabricated.

I have the honour to request this letter be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under the item entitled "The Situation in the Middle East", and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Benjamin NETANYAHU
Ambassador
Permanent Representative
