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UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR
PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST

Letter dated 28 September 1971 from the Permanent Representative of
Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to refer to your note of 17 September 1971 and to the special report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA (A/8383) and to enclose herewith a copy of a statement issued on 18 September 1971 by the Permanent Mission of Israel regarding recent developments in the Gaza area.

In this connexion I should like to point out that during the month of June 1971 agents of Arab terror organizations murdered in the Gaza area 29 Arab inhabitants and wounded 153. In July, they murdered 13 Arab inhabitants, and the figure for August was five dead and 36 wounded. Most of the victims were refugees. During the first three weeks of September two persons were killed and three wounded.

The measures taken by the Israeli authorities in the refugee camps of the Gaza area, and referred to in the above-mentioned report, aimed at putting an end to the acts of terror and murder, directed against the local Arab population. It is, therefore, noteworthy that, as indicated by the aforesaid figures, the Israeli measures have already met with considerable success and have, in fact, saved the lives of refugees and other Arab inhabitants who otherwise would have fallen victim to the terror campaign.

I have the honour to request that this letter and the accompanying statement be circulated as an official document of the General Assembly.

(Signed) Yosef TEKOAH
Permanent Representative of Israel
to the United Nations

STATEMENT BY SPOKESMAN OF THE PERMANENT MISSION OF ISRAEL REGARDING
THE UNITED NATIONS REPORT ON RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN GAZA AREA

Egypt and other Arab States have instigated and supported a campaign of indiscriminate terror in the Gaza area. The main victims of this campaign have been local Arab inhabitants. Terrorist activities have involved the throwing of bombs into crowded streets, the killing of innocent women and children and the murder in hospitals of Arabs wounded in previous terrorist attacks. These acts are aimed at spreading violence and insecurity amidst the local Arab population so as to prevent improvement in its situation and to keep it in the conditions of misery and congestion created during Egyptian occupation.

In the period June 1967-June 1971, Arab terror organizations killed 219 Arab residents of the Gaza area, including 51 women and 29 children, and wounded 1,314 local Arab inhabitants, including 118 women and 239 children.

It is Israel's responsibility, as stipulated also in Security Council resolution 237 (1967) of 14 June 1967, to ensure the safety, welfare and security of all the inhabitants in areas under its control.

Because of overcrowding, the congested layout of houses and other circumstances, such as the large number of dilapidated structures, refugee camps have offered especially convenient conditions for terror operations. Indeed, refugees residing in camps have constituted a large part of the victims of terror attacks in recent months. In view of this situation, Israeli authorities have been compelled to take the necessary measures to ensure safety and security in refugee camps. This has necessitated the construction of access roads within the camps, involving in certain places the demolition of some dwellings.

All possible safeguards have been taken to avoid undue hardship to inhabitants of the houses thus affected. No demolition has taken place unless alternative housing, of at least equal standard, was provided to the occupants of the house. In most instances, the new accommodations are of a higher standard. If the occupants preferred new housing of their own choice to accommodations offered by the authorities, they were free to avail themselves of such housing. The evacuees received financial grants to defray the cost of moving into the new accommodations. Arrangements were made to enable the evacuees to continue in their old employment. Whenever necessary, new employment was provided.

The Israeli authorities have informed the United Nations that those refugees who have moved to housing made available at El-Arish and who wish to return to the Gaza area will be able to do so as soon as housing facilities are ready for them in that area.

During the 19 years of Egyptian occupation of the Gaza Strip the area had been virtually a concentration camp: its population subjected to endless restrictions, deprived of freedom of movement, barred from sources of livelihood, terrorized by a military régime of repression. The jails were filled with political suspects and torture was commonplace.

In contrast with the oppression and exploitation of the local population by the Egyptian rulers, the Israeli authorities have followed a policy of consistent efforts to promote well-being and development in the Gaza area.

Ninety-five per cent of job seekers, including refugees, are provided with work, as compared with the extensive forced unemployment under Egyptian occupation. The number of industrial workshops has risen since 1967 from 230 to 600 and the number of workers employed in them has increased from 1,500 to 5,000. A new industrial centre is being constructed in the northern part of the Gaza Strip, which at this stage already provides employment for hundreds of persons, most of them refugees. Six vocational schools have been built providing education for 1,500 trainees, 70 per cent of them refugees. Several hundred other trainees have already completed their studies and have gone into productive work. A modern infrastructure is being established, including networks of roads and electricity. The obsolete water system is being improved and extended. The construction of a wharf has begun in Gaza. It will constitute the beginning of a local port with a capacity to handle about 200,000 tons of cargo annually. A modern central dispensary was recently inaugurated providing medical services of a level previously unknown in the area. There has been a considerable rise in the general standard of living and in the average family income.

The Government of Israel carefully followed the grave developments in other countries such as Lebanon, where authority over the refugee camps passed in fact into the hands of the terror organizations, and Jordan, where the Jordanian authorities, in order to maintain government control in the camps, resorted to extreme security measures including artillery bombardment of refugee camps resulting in the killing and wounding of large numbers of refugees - men, women and children.

Israel on its part has handled the security problem in the camps in a manner which caused to the refugees no more hardship than that which occurs in any area undergoing the process of urban improvement.

It should be pointed out that as a result of the above measures, terror activities in the Gaza area in general, including terrorist activities aimed at Arab refugees, have drastically diminished.
