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REPORT OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE ISRAELI
PRACTICES AFFECTING THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE POPULATION
OF THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

Letter dated 31 January 1979 from the Chargé d'Affaires a.i.
of the Permanent Mission of Jordan to the United Nations
addressed to the Secretary-General

Upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to enclose an article by Jonathan Kandell which appeared in The New York Times on 21 January 1979.

The article shows another aspect of Israeli inhumane practices against the rights of Arabs who have been under Israeli occupation since 1948. Contrary to what the Israeli leaders have been saying, Mr. Kandell explains the ways and means by which Israeli leaders have made the violation of human rights in Israel and the occupied Arab territories their daily practice since the State of Israel was created in Palestine.

My Government kindly requests the circulation of this letter and the enclosed article by Mr. Kandell as a document of the General Assembly under the item entitled "Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Population of the Occupied Territories".

(Signed) Sami. I. GAMMOH
Minister Plenipotentiary
Chargé d'Affaires, a.i.

ANNEX

Article which appeared in The New York Times
on 21 January 1979

Israeli bars return to two Arab villages

Residents evacuated "temporarily" in 1948 - War
Security cited in rebuff of many pleas

by

Jonathan Kandell

Special to The New York Times

JERUSALEM, 20 January. With the attention of Israelis focused on the raid into southern Lebanon, on Palestinian bomb explosions in Jerusalem and on another American effort to revive the flagging Middle East peace talks, the Government quietly disclosed this week that it had no intention of permitting the return of Arab villagers to two small northern communities they were forced to leave 30 years ago.

The villages - Berem and Ikrit in the Upper Galilee - have caused a sense of guilt in the national conscience for much of the last three decades.

The case has become even more poignant in recent months, because the 2,000 villagers involved are Maronite Christians. Israel has formed a close alliance with Lebanese Maronite Christian militia forces a few miles across the border in a common struggle against Palestinian guerillas.

A "temporary" evacuation

Unlike hundreds of other Arab communities that were uprooted during the 1948 war, in Berem and Ikrit the residents did not fight the Israelis nor did they flee the country. They were told by Israeli troops to evacuate their two villages temporarily and were assured that they could return when the fighting ended.

This, at any rate, was the conclusion of the Israeli Supreme Court, which ruled in favour of the Berem and Ikrit villagers in 1952. The military then intervened and said the villagers could not return for "security reasons". These have never been clearly spelt out.

Before Menachem Begin was elected Prime Minister in 1977, he told the villagers he would do all he could to aid their return. After coming to office, he reportedly told close associates that of all the campaign promises he made, the commitment to the Berem and Ikrit Maronites embarrasses him most nowadays.

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A special committee for issue

More than a year and a half ago, the Prime Minister appointed a special Cabinet committee to study the issue and said he would accept its recommendation.

Two days ago, Agriculture Minister Ariel Sharon inadvertently divulged to Parliament that the Cabinet committee had decided four months ago to oppose the return of the villagers. He did not indicate why the decision had not been made public.

In the committee, two ministers voted against the villagers, one voted in favour and one abstained. A fifth, Gideon Patt, who is the Minister of Housing, did not vote, apparently because he was abroad at the time.

Mr. Patt, who was known as a supporter of the villagers' demands, exploded when Mr. Sharon made his disclosure. "The decision was apparently so secret that even I was not informed of it", he said.

Case is expected to drag on

Prime Minister Begin could ostensibly overrule the committee and still come out in favour of the return of the Berem and Ikrit villagers. But it is considered more likely that he will let the case drag on without a decision.

Spokesmen for the villagers, who now live only a few miles from their old communities, said they would continue their public campaign to recover their properties.

"We have not lost hope", said Yosef Emtans, a member of the villagers' committee. "We still think there is a possibility that the Government will reject the Cabinet's recommendation. After all, Mr. Begin promised us."

Most of the original houses in Berem and Ikrit were dynamited by Israeli military forces after the residents were evacuated. Berem has been declared a national park. And a number of Jewish settlements have gone up on former Maronite agricultural lands.

Most reject compensation

All but a few of the villagers have refused Israeli Government offers of compensation. Spokesmen for the villagers have said they would be willing to forgo claims on properties that have been cleared or cultivated by Jewish settlers if the remaining lands were given back.

But neighbouring Jewish settlements have strongly opposed the return of the Maronites, because they claim such a step would open the door to demands by thousands of other Arabs who lost properties during the 1948 war.

Newspaper reaction has been critical of the Government, not so much because of the merits of the Maronite claims, but because of the secretive methods used by the special Cabinet committee handling the case.

In an editorial, The Jerusalem Post commented that "admittedly the substantive issue is not an easy one to decide", but the committee's action "has all the markings of Government by subterfuge that has become a hallmark of the Begin Government".

Davar, a labour newspaper, said: "These underground methods not only contradict the rules of democracy, they are also inefficient, cowardly and border on the infantile."
