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LETTER DATED 17 MAY 1982 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
LEBANON TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF
THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I wish to refer to the letter dated 10 May 1982 from the Permanent Representative of Israel addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/15066), not to answer the usual allegations but principally to state, in the most unequivocal terms, that Lebanon can in no way be held accountable in this context.

I am instructed by my Government to clarify, more particularly, that contrary to what is claimed by the Permanent Representative of Israel in his letter, there is no "agreement" that was reached "between the Governments of Israel and Lebanon on a cessation of hostilities ... through the good offices of the United States Government envoy Mr. Philip Habib, last July".

When resolution 490 (1981) was adopted, Lebanon welcomed the cessation of hostilities and declared its support for the consolidation of the cease-fire, and continues to do so. Yet, it has been made clear, in more than one instance, that Lebanon was not a party to the cease-fire, not having been a party to the hostilities that preceded it.

It is important for us all to set the record straight. In this perspective, I am instructed by my Government to make the following observations:

1. When the Security Council adopted resolution 490 (1981) on 21 July 1981, calling for "an immediate cessation of all armed attacks", I addressed the Council, pledging "full support for the efforts undertaken by the Secretary-General, and by Governments that are in a position to influence developments in the area, to achieve not only a cease-fire, but a just and lasting peace" (S/PV.2293).

Nowhere in the records are we found to have said that we were a party to an "agreement", or were we described as one.

2. It was clear from the debate that took place in the Security Council and from consultations, that the Government of Lebanon was seeking a full implementation of resolution 425 (1978). Indeed, the second paragraph of resolution 490 (1981) reiterated the terms of resolution 425 (1978) and ensuing resolutions as follows:

"Reaffirms its commitment to the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence of Lebanon, within its internationally recognized boundaries".

3. In the report of the Secretary-General of 24 July 1981, in pursuance of Security Council resolution 490 (1981), which contained the text of the announcement of the cessation of hostilities, the attitude of the Government of Lebanon was described as follows: "the Lebanese Government welcomes the above announcement" (S/14613/Add.1). Nowhere was it stated that my Government was a party to any "agreement".

However, it was clearly stated that "the PLO abides by the undertaking to respect Security Council resolution 490 (1981)".

4. On more than one occasion, both within and outside the Council, my Government has made it clear that we only viewed resolution 490 (1981) and the ensuing cessation of hostilities as a transitional measure. This position was stated comprehensively in our address to the General Assembly on 5 October 1981, from which it may be useful to quote the following:

"the cease-fire called for by the Security Council in resolution 490 of 21 July 1981 is not an end in itself. Indeed, we cannot allow it to be considered an end or to become a goal. ... our concern that hostilities not be resumed is no less intense than the concern of others. For, although we have not been a party to the hostilities ... the majority of those killed and wounded have been innocent Lebanese civilians. Our attitude is dictated by our belief that a cease-fire is only a temporary measure. If a cease-fire is allowed to become permanent, or semi-permanent, it can only serve to add to the plight of the victims of aggression. ... Our case against Israel in the Security Council should remain whole. What we are seeking is the total withdrawal of Israel, an end to its current attacks against us and the full and unconditional implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978) and subsequent resolutions. Thus, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) must be deployed fully and effectively, and our internationally recognized borders should become secure and respected again, as stipulated in the provisions of the General Armistice Agreement of 1949" (A/36/PV.26).

5. Since the cessation of hostilities, there have been innumerable Israeli, as well as American statements, of varying degrees of officiality, speaking of "an agreement on cease-fire between Israel and the P.L.O.", but never of an agreement with the Lebanese Government. To illustrate this point, the following most recent quotations may be of particular relevance:

(a) In its 22 April 1982 issue, the Jerusalem Post quoted the Israeli Chief of Staff, General Eitan, as having said:

"If the P.L.O. is prepared to abide by the terms of the ceasefire, then there will be quiet. If they want conflict, that is what they will get."

(b) On 23 April 1982, the Jerusalem Post again reported:

"In Jerusalem yesterday, Premier Begin met with Under-Secretary of State Walter Stoessel and assured him that despite Wednesday's bombing, Israel was prepared to maintain the cessation of hostilities with the P.L.O."

(c) In his daily press briefing, Mr. Fischer, the United States State Department spokesman, made the following statement on Monday, 10 May:

"We welcome the announcement by the P.L.O. that they want to keep the cease-fire" (Washington Post and New York Times, 11 May 1982).

(d) On 11 May 1982, the New York Times also reported:

"Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig, Jr., said today that the United States was 'very concerned' over the latest breakdown in the ceasefire between Israeli and Palestine Liberation Organization forces in southern Lebanon, and was actively trying to 'shore up' the 10-month truce."

(e) At a breakfast of the French Diplomatic Association, held in Paris on 11 May, Deputy Secretary of State Walter Stoessel declared the following:

"Both sides, both Israel and the P.L.O., have reiterated their intention to observe the cease-fire in the future; we hope that they will do so and that this will not develop into a large engagement on either side and that the peace process can continue."

6. In conclusion, we wish to reassert that the only "agreement" that governs Lebanese-Israeli relations is the General Armistice Agreement of 23 March 1949, affirmed by Security Council resolution 73 (1949) of 11 August 1949.

The validity of this agreement has been reaffirmed and confirmed over and over again, particularly since the creation of UNIFIL in March 1978 (cf. report of the Secretary-General, document S/12611, approved by resolution 426 (1978) of 19 March 1978).

The latest such confirmation came in resolution 501 (1982) of 25 February 1982, paragraph 4, which called upon the Secretary-General "to renew his efforts to reactivate the General Armistice Agreement" and "in particular, to convene an early meeting of the Mixed Armistice Commission".

7. It may be relevant, at this point, to bring again to your attention and to the attention of the Security Council that the Foreign Minister of Israel wrote to the Secretary-General on 3 August 1978, requesting "a reaffirmation from the Government of Lebanon that it abide by all the provisions of the General Armistice Agreement".

The Government of Lebanon replied to the Secretary-General on 10 August 1978, stating that it had "never ceased to confirm the validity of the said agreement, to ask for its application and to act accordingly".

Our position remains unchanged.

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I have the honour to request that the above letter be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Ghassan TUENI
Ambassador
Permanent Representative
