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THE SITUATION IN KAMPUCHEA

THE SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY

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PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1982-1983

Letter dated 5 November 1982 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

On several occasions in recent months I have registered with Your Excellency my Government's strong objections to publication in the UN Chronicle of material marked by declining professional standards and characterized by blatant bias on various issues relating to the Arab-Israel conflict.

Of late this publication has begun to display an even more tendentious and one-sided approach to Middle East matters, with a marked leaning to the use of pejorative and misleading phraseology in references to my country. The deterioration in the professional standards of this journal has been particularly marked since the June issue of this year.

In September the UN Chronicle reported a situation, clearly the fruit of a feverish editorial imagination, in which much of southern Lebanon "lay in ruins". A month later, moreover, at a time when the real extent of the hostilities had become clear to the world, the October issue of the UN Chronicle reached yet new heights of editorial licence. In its efforts to impugn the reputation of my Government, to present a tendentious, distorted and highly exaggerated picture of events, and to vilify Israel's war against the scourge of PLO terror, the UN Chronicle's editors exceeded all bounds of fair reporting, thus seriously

impairing the standing of the United Nations Secretariat as an impartial organ of the Organization.

Of the numerous objectionable points in the 12 pages devoted, in the October issue of the UN Chronicle, to recent events in Lebanon, I shall limit myself to only a few of the more glaring but typical examples.

The summary story commencing on page 3 of the October issue presents a picture of recent events in which all action from the Israel side is painted in graphically pejorative terms, whereas all action initiated by the terrorists is reported in studiously neutral terms. From page 3 to the top of page 7 alone Israel is reported as committing a "ferocious breach" of the cease-fire; as "closing doors" to options; as turning "indiscriminate violence" on the civilian population; and as "trying to burn out Beirut and massacre its civilian population". Terrorist actions, however, are not credited to any body and are reported as "continued outbreaks of firing and shelling in and around Beirut".

A transparent editorial device is used to devote exaggerated space to summaries from anti-Israel diatribes and communications. Prior to this summer the UN Chronicle reported the words of the speakers themselves, with attribution which enabled the reader to assess the relative merit of what was said. This apparently is no longer the editorial policy of the UN Chronicle. Now a new Orwellian régime of "newspeak" and "double-think" is in force, namely, a new technique of presenting biased, tendentious and self-serving information, without indicating the identity of the speakers.

A further and most reprehensible example of bias is sadly apparent in the caption to the uncredited photograph on page 18, which presents an utterly erroneous picture of the story of Damour. The truth, as is well known, is very different from that suggested by the caption. This town of 15,000 Christians was attacked and destroyed by the terrorist PLO in mid-January 1976. On 21 January 1976, The New York Times correspondent reported that "this once proud town" was "a smoking ruin". On 29 July 1976, The Washington Post reported that Damour had been "gutted" and 500 of its inhabitants massacred.

On 21 June 1982 The New York Times correspondent once again visited Damour and reported that:

"for nearly seven years ... the town was inaccessible to its own people; the PLO made it a stronghold, using the churches as firing ranges and armories."

It is thus a deliberate distortion of historical truth to suggest, even by implication, that the town of Damour was destroyed in the course of the hostilities of 1982, or that the town had a population of 16,000 in early June 1982. Those few hundreds of persons who were in the town at that time were, in fact, members of the various PLO terrorist factions billeted in the town for training purposes.

Since the story of Damour is too well known world-wide for the editors of the UN Chronicle to plead ignorance and good faith, one is led to the inescapable conclusion that they are guilty of deliberate misinformation and "newspeak".

A similar example of misinformation is contained in the again uncredited caption to the photograph on page 16 which describes the city of Beirut in

allegedly "happier days". The reader cannot but presume that those "happier days" were enjoyed by the city prior to June 1982. Again, the truth is well known. By June 1982 Beirut had already endured seven years of bloody civil war, division into confessional strongholds and domination and occupation by the PLO and the Syrian army. During those seven years Beirut was, it may be remembered, the capital of international terrorism. These presumably were the "happier days" to which the caption writer refers.

Clearly, the editors of the UN Chronicle have once again arrogated to themselves the right to pass value judgements not within their purview. The UN Chronicle, it should be reiterated, is published by the Department of Public Information - not by a department of public relations.

In this connexion, it is worth noting that no single picture has been used, despite the plethora of material, to depict the fear and destruction brought upon south Lebanon by the terrorist occupation, to describe the death and suffering inflicted upon the Christian and Moslem population alike by the PLO, and, not least, to present to the reader some idea of the death, damage and anguish visited upon northern Israel by the bombardments and terror raids of the PLO.

No less conspicuous by their absence are pictures from Damour and from Chekka, scene of yet another of the many massacres perpetrated by the PLO, as well as pictures of the training school of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in Sibliin abused by the PLO. (See the report by the Legal Adviser of UNRWA of 18 October 1982, reported in the press release of the Department of Public Information contained in document PAL/1502 of 27 October 1982.)

Regrettably, the UN Chronicle is not the only case of a decline in professional standards within the Department of Public Information. I would therefore also draw your attention to one other glaring example of the trends noted above which appears in the same Department's booklet UN Today - 1982 (Suggestions for Speakers). Here also the catalogue of abuses is long and I will content myself with but a few illustrations.

On general political questions, more pages are devoted to the Middle East than to any other subject. International crises, such as that in Poland, or the war between Ethiopia and Somalia, are not mentioned at all. My country is consistently referred to in disparaging and insulting terms and there is no mention of that crowning achievement of Middle Eastern diplomacy, the Peace Treaty between Israel and Egypt.

On the other hand, in an exceedingly brief reference to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, it is reported that "the Assembly called for the withdrawal of the foreign troops" from that country. Curiously, there is no mention of the country of origin of those "foreign troops". As indeed United Press International (UPI) noted in a report of 18 October 1982 on the said booklet, "the invasion might have been carried out by Martians". Moreover, whilst Israel "attacked Iraq in the misterminology of the editors, the Soviet "Martians" were only a "party concerned" in Afghanistan.

In a further comment on the booklet in question, the said UPI report notes that

"Dealing with the invasion of Cambodia - known as Kampuchea at the United Nations - almost four years ago, the booklet describes the thrust into that country by several divisions of Vietnamese troops as 'the outbreak of hostilities between Vietnam and Democratic Kampuchea'. Vietnam is championed by the Soviet Union.

"By comparison, the move into Lebanon by 20,000 Israeli troops in 1978 is described as 'a massive invasion'."

Moreover, within the context of human rights violations in the world dealt with in the booklet, there is no mention of countries such as the USSR and radical Arab countries which are regularly named by respected international monitoring bodies like Amnesty International as major violators of human rights.

Clearly, then, the Department of Public Information has recently taken on the task of misinformation and has become a pliant tool in the hands of those practitioners of that art who would exploit the United Nations for their own nefarious ends. Selective and biased editing of publications does not serve either the cause of objectivity in reporting, or the promotion of world peace, of which this Organization should be the watch-dog. One can only presume that these and similar instances are intended as samples of the new world information order contemplated by the Department of Public Information, according to recent press reports (see, for example, The New York Times of 15 October 1982).

In the process, the Department of Public Information, an integral part of the United Nations Secretariat, has once again misused international funds, gravely compromised the integrity of the Secretariat and exposed the Organization as a whole to further criticism and contempt, and to a further erosion of its already shaky reputation.

Whilst emphatically protesting against these and new dangerous trends within the United Nations Secretariat and its publishing channels, I have the honour to request Your Excellency to instruct the Department of Public Information to cease forthwith these dubious practices. Furthermore, I must also request that Your Excellency issue the necessary instructions to ensure that the October 1982 issue of the UN Chronicle be withdrawn from circulation and that a revised issue conforming to acceptable professional standards of fairness and honesty in reporting be prepared and distributed.

I have the honour to request that this letter be circulated as an official document of the General Assembly under agenda items 20, 25, 34, 67 and 103.

(Signed) Yehuda Z. BLUM
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Israel
to the United Nations
