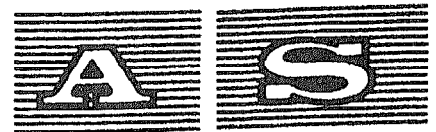


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Item 53 of the provisional agenda*
REPORT OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO
INVESTIGATE ISRAELI PRACTICES
AFFECTING THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF
THE POPULATION OF THE OCCUPIED
TERRITORIES

SECURITY COUNCIL
Thirtieth year

Letter dated 20 August 1975 from the Permanent Representative of Israel
to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

On instructions of my Government I have the honour to refer to a cable addressed to you by the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and transmitted to you by the Chargé d'Affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Jordan on 7 August 1975 (A/10178-S/11799) regarding the new arrangements announced by the Government of Israel with respect to prayer and visits at the Cave of Machpela in Hebron.

The Cave of Machpela is a Jewish Holy Place housing as it does the tombs of the Jewish patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their respective wives, Sarah, Rebekah and Leah, a fact conveniently ignored in the Jordanian démarche. The story of the purchase of the burial plot by Abraham is recounted in the Old Testament (Genesis 23). It is ironical indeed to note that this matter is raised by the Government of Jordan, which behaved with a complete lack of respect for the Holy Shrines under its control prior to 1967.

For 19 years Jews were denied access for prayer to the holiest of Jewish Shrines, the Wailing Wall, by the Jordanian occupation authorities in Jerusalem in contravention of its international obligations. Their troops set fire to and destroyed Jewish synagogues and centres of worship in Jerusalem. The ancient Jewish cemetery on the Mount of Olives hallowed by thousands of years of history and dating back to Biblical times was desecrated by the Jordanian authorities who defiled the graves and tombs, uprooted the tombstones for use in constructing army camps and bulldozed roads across this historic Mount sanctified in Jewish and Christian tradition. Jewish access to the subject of this note, the Cave of Machpela, was forbidden.

* A/10150.

The Jordanian Government's record in respect of Holy Places under its control surely denies it any moral standing in such issues.

The overriding principles guiding Israel's policy regarding all the Holy Places have been and are to guarantee free access to members of all faiths and to ensure orderly conditions of worship to members of every religion. This principle also applies to the Cave of Machpela and the sanctity of this Holy Shrine is strictly observed.

Nothing has been done to minimize in any way the responsibility exercised by the Muslim Waqf over the Cave. The Waqf holds the keys to the Cave, and its personnel continues to be responsible for the daily opening and closing of the Cave, as well as its maintenance. The orderly conduct of Muslim prayers has in no way been interfered with, nor has the public call to prayer been tampered with in any way. It is untrue that prayers for the Muslim dead have been forbidden or restricted in any manner and funeral services continue to be officiated in the large hall of Isaac and Rebekah. The only change made has been one requiring Muslim funeral processions to leave the Cave by the south-western gate in order to spare the feelings of Jewish worshippers praying in the Abraham and Sarah Hall. Muslim religious teachers and personnel of the Cave have in no way been molested as alleged by the Jordanian letter. On the contrary, they have been and continue to be accorded the respect due to them and all the assistance necessary to carry out their duties has been made available to them. Jewish weddings and feasts are strictly forbidden in the Cave. Hence the Jordanian allegation is completely baseless.

Furthermore, there has been no division of this Cave and no physical partition has been erected in this Holy Shrine. As the Cave of Machpela is holy to both Judaism and Islam, arrangements have been made which enable both Muslims and Jews to worship and pray in an orderly manner based on mutual respect. The Isaac and Rebekah Hall, the largest and the most important hall to all religions, which contains the Imam's Pulpit or Mimbar, is kept exclusively for Muslim prayers, and Jewish services do not take place in it.

Israel is proud of its record in respect of the Holy Places of all faiths. Israeli policy will continue to adhere strictly to the fundamental principle of free access for prayer and worship by all believers of all faiths to all Holy Places.

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

(Signed) Chaim HERZOG
Permanent Representative of Israel
to the United Nations