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THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Wider

SECURITY COUNCIL
Twenty-eighth year

Letter dated 31 October 1973 from the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs
of the Syrian Arab Republic addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to communicate to Your Excellency the text of the following letter addressed to you by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic:

"Israel's violation of international conventions, in particular the Geneva Conventions of 1949, ^{1/} has become a permanent feature of Israeli defiance of international law. Since the beginning of the Israeli aggression, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has promptly declared its compliance with the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and also declared its acceptance of a proposal by the International Committee of the Red Cross to apply the draft Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions and informed the International Committee of the Red Cross, as well as the other international organizations, of this decision on 14 October 1973.

"Nevertheless, Israel refused to implement the provisions of the said Conventions and informed the International Committee of the Red Cross, on 20 October 1973, of their refusal while persisting in violating these Conventions. The Israeli violations are manifested in the following acts:

"1. The shelling of civilian quarters, hospitals and schools, which resulted in the killing of hundreds of innocent people, including women, children and the aged, as well as a number of foreign diplomats and United Nations personnel.

"2. The shelling and the destruction of factories and civil economic installations, killing a large number of workers and other civilians.

"3. Throwing time bombs on civilian quarters in order to kill the largest number of civilians following Israeli air raids.

^{1/} United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 75, Nos. 970.

"4. Expelling thousands of inhabitants of Syrian villages, displacing them and killing a number of children and women, particularly in the Village of Beit Jinn Farm, with the purpose of terrorizing the inhabitants and forcing them to leave their homes.

"5. Refusing to respond to the mediation of the representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross to allow the burial of the bodies of the victims, thus defying basic humanitarian principles.

"6. Forcing Syrian prisoners of war to march ahead of the Israeli forces attacking Mount Hermon, in order to guide them through minefields, thus exposing the Syrian prisoners of war to death, as the explosion of mines would kill them first. This information was relayed by the special correspondent of a French daily, Le Monde, on 27 October 1973, as testified by an Israeli soldier who took part in this attack. The least that could be said about this despicable act is that it is indescribable in its inhumanity.

"7. Issuing lists containing names of the Syrian prisoners of war, while inserting the same names on different lists.

"8. Refusing to consider as prisoners of war combatants of the Palestine Liberation Army, which contravenes the provisions of article 4, paragraph A (1), of the Third Geneva Convention and constitutes a grave violation of the said Convention.

"9. Maltreatment by Israel of the Syrian prisoners of war in general and their subjection to contemptuous acts directed against their dignity, in addition to many other practices, which will be revealed in the near future.

"The Syrian Arab Republic, which has undertaken to comply with the Charter of the United Nations and to implement international conventions and which has always treated prisoners of war humanely, would like to reaffirm that it will continue to adhere to the provisions of international conventions and, in particular, the Geneva Conventions, including the provisions regarding the submission of the names of the prisoners of war and the authorization to the representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit those prisoners. However, such compliance is subject to, and cannot be dissociated from, the compliance by Israel with the following:

"1. Israel must declare that it is willing to respect all the provisions of the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Draft Additional Protocols, and it must specifically respect the Fourth Geneva Convention and declare that it is willing to implement all these Conventions in all their parts;

"2. Israel must undertake to implement these Conventions immediately through the intermediary of the International Committee of the Red Cross by specifically returning the bodies of those killed during hostilities and by

permitting the inhabitants of those villages occupied during the hostilities, who were evicted or expelled, to return to their homes, especially as the deportation of civilians, forcing them to leave their villages and homes and their maltreatment are considered flagrant violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

"As we submit these facts to Your Excellency's attention, we appeal to you and, through you, to world public opinion, to exert the utmost of your ability to ensure compliance by the Israeli side with these international Conventions.,

"Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Abdul Halim KHADDAM
Deputy Prime Minister,
Minister for Foreign Affairs
of the Syrian Arab Republic"

It would be greatly appreciated if this letter could be circulated as an official document of the Security Council and the General Assembly.

(Signed) Mohamed Zakaria ISMAIL
Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs
of the Syrian Arab Republic