

UNITED NATIONS



GENERAL
ASSEMBLY



SECURITY
COUNCIL

Distr.
GENERAL

A/9689
S/11533
9 October 1974

ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH/FRENCH

GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Twenty-ninth session
Agenda item 109
THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

SECURITY COUNCIL
Twenty-ninth year

Letter dated 9 October 1974 from the Permanent Representative of the
Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the
Secretary-General

On instructions from my Government, I have the honour to transmit to you herewith the statement by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic concerning the treatment of Syrian prisoners of war during their captivity in Israel. On 2 July 1974 my Government submitted an official complaint to the International Committee of the Red Cross relating to serious violations of the Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War of 12 August 1949 ^{1/} committed against Syrian prisoners of war during their captivity in Israel.

The International Committee of the Red Cross has requested the Israeli authorities to carry out an investigation concerning the complaint by my Government and to take all measures provided for in article 49 of the Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field of 12 August 1949 ^{2/} and in articles 129 and 130 of the Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War of 12 August 1949. In addition, my Government is publishing a book containing the testimony and accounts of Syrian prisoners of war that have already been made by these prisoners to journalists and foreign correspondents.

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have this letter and the document annexed to it circulated as an official document of the General Assembly and the Security Council.

(Signed) Haissam KOLANI
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of the
Syrian Arab Republic to the
United Nations

^{1/} United Nations Treaty Series, vol. 75, No. 972, p. 135.

^{2/} Ibid., No. 970, p. 31.

ANNEX

Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
of the Syrian Arab Republic

ON THE TREATMENT OF PRISONERS OF WAR
IN ISRAELI PRISONS

On several occasions, we drew the attention of world public opinion to the inhuman treatment our POWs were subjected to in the enemy detention camps. The world press often published a lot of news about the act of murder, torture, mutilation, oppression and starvation practised against our prisoners of war.

After the return of our POWs to their homeland, and as a result of the investigation we conducted about their conditions during the period of their detention, it has been proven to us that the Israeli authorities have committed against them war crimes which do not differ in their brutality from the Nazi crimes during World War II. This had prompted the world community at that time to formulate and adopt the Geneva Conventions for preventing the recurrence of such crimes in any eventual war.

The Israeli crimes include, but are not limited to, the following:

(1) Premeditated murders

Such murders were substantiated by eye witnesses from the Israeli Army. In its issue of 18 December 1973 the Daily Times of London quoted a statement by Dr. Israel Shahak, the Chairman of the Israeli League of Human and Civil Rights, to the effect that the Israeli armed forces killed 50 Syrian soldiers after having surrendered, following the crash of their helicopter. Dr. Shahak possesses a document signed by an Israeli soldier testifying to this effect. This same incident was confirmed by Eldat Cohen, Israeli soldier, Serial No. 2170402.

(2) Amputation and mutilation

The limbs of some POWs were amputated without any medical justification, while some vital members of certain POWs were damaged.

(3) Brutal torture of POWs

The Syrian POWs were subjected to torture. Their naked bodies were suspended upside down and whipped until losing consciousness. Thereafter the POWs would be splashed with a strong stream of cold water. The POWs were hit on their genital organs.

(4) Preventing the POWs from sleeping and provoking nervous breakdown

Certain POWs were held in cells, 50 x 50 cms. and 180 cms. high. They were exposed to blinding lights and were forced to listen to tape recordings sounding screams in order to break down their nerves and prevent them from sleeping for several consecutive days.

In other instances, the POWs were not permitted to leave their cells except for 10 minutes a day.

(5) Insult and humiliation

POWs were brutally beaten and outrageously insulted in a humiliating manner and were slurred because of national affiliation. They were detained in overcrowded narrow cells, the conditions of which are not different from animal pens.

(6) Deliberate neglect of wounded and sick

Present among us now are some of those prisoners whose wounds have reached an advanced stage of putrefaction.

While our POWs were receiving such brutal treatment, we were affording the Israeli POWs a humane, decent treatment, in accordance with the provisions of the Third Geneva Convention. Representatives of the World Ecumenical Council, on a visit to Damascus, witnessed this fact when they met the Israeli pilots. Their testimony was published in Swiss newspapers on 16 November 1973, whereby they asserted that the Israeli POWs were well treated.

We wish to cite also the testimony of the French journalist Mr. Pierre Demeron, in an article published by the French weekly Paris Match on 5 January 1974. He described extensively his visit to the Israeli POWs in Damascus. Moreover, he substantiated his article with photographs proving the good treatment accorded them by the Syrian authorities.

On 8 March 1974, the French TV showed a film taken in Damascus by Messrs. Michel Tauriac and Roger Pic, in which the Israeli POWs appeared while receiving medical treatment. The POWs stated that they were receiving good treatment.

One of the most important testimonies about the good treatment of the POWs is a testimony made by Mr. Michel Convair, the representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Israel. Mr. Convair, on 4 March 1974, submitted to Mr. Abba Eban a detailed report on the moral and physical conditions of the Israeli POWs in Syria. The French news agency (Agence France Presse) reported this fact, based on sources close to the Israeli Foreign Minister. The AFP said that the moral and physical conditions of the Israeli POWs were fully satisfactory.

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The Herald Tribune reported on 3 June 1974, i.e. after the release of the wounded Israeli POWs, a statement by Dr. Mordechai Shani, an Israeli physician, that "apart from one POW, the POWs are in good condition and it seems the medical treatment they received was reasonably good".

By exposing these facts before the correspondents of the world press and news agencies for informing world public opinion of the crimes perpetrated by Israel, we would like to point out that Israel not only violated the provisions of the Third Geneva Convention and refused to apply the Fourth Geneva Convention, but it went to the extent of directing its soldiers to commit genocide. The Israeli newspaper, Haolam Haze, in its issue No. 1915 of 15 May 1974, published an article proving that the Israeli Military Rabbinate of the Central Region Command distributed a pamphlet inviting the Israeli armed forces to kill Arab civilians during war, or during hot pursuits or invasion. The article describes the pamphlet as an official military pamphlet. This is proven by the fact that the expression "Central Region - General Una Afran" was printed on the pamphlet.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic will take all the necessary measures to bring these facts to the attention of the competent international organizations and humanitarian bodies. It will, in due time, invite some neutral international bodies to send medical teams for examining the conditions of our returning POWs, and for acquainting themselves with the torture and maltreatment our POWs were subjected to.

