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LETTER DATED 2 FEBRUARY 1968 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE UNITED ARAB REPUBLIC ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

Pursuant to my letters dated 13 January (A/7039, S/8344) and 31 January 1968 (A/7048, S/8373) which contained information regarding Israel's cruel practices against the civilian population in the Arab territories they occupy as a result of their aggression committed on 5 June 1967, I have the honour to refer to an eye-witness account, published in The Guardian of 26 January 1968 (annex I). The author of this report stressed two significant conclusions:

1. That the measures which the Israel authorities are taking against the civilian Arab population in the Gaza Strip constitute an utter disregard of the provisions of the Geneva Convention of 1949 for the protection of civilians in time of war.

2. That Nazi Germany during the Second World War never treated the prisoners of war as harshly as the Israelis are treating the Arabs of the Gaza Strip, the majority of whom are women and children.

Another report (annex II) published in The Observer of 28 January 1968 confirms the same information about the Israel acts of intimidation, terror, collective punishment, reprisals, etc., pursued against the civilian Arab population in the Gaza Strip.

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

Please accept, etc.

(Signed) Mohamed Awad EL KONY
Permanent Representative of the
United Arab Republic to the
United Nations

* Also issued under the symbol A/7051.

ANNEX I

THE GUARDIAN
26 January 1968

ISRAELI INTIMIDATION OF ARAB REFUGEES IN GAZA STRIP

From MICHAEL ADAMS: Jerusalem, 25 January

In the measures it is now taking against the civilian Arab population in the Gaza Strip, the Israeli army of occupation is disregarding the provisions of the 1949 Geneva Convention for the protection of civilians in time of war.

In response to a series of minor incidents in the past three weeks, the Israeli army has imposed collective punishments on the population (mainly refugees from Palestine) regardless of age and sex. They include curfews lasting several days during which no proper provision is made for the distribution of food and water, arbitrary arrests, and the random demolition of houses and property belonging to civilians in no way connected with incidents.

When I left Gaza this morning three refugee camps housing 100,000 Palestine refugees were under day and night curfew, and there was sporadic shooting in the streets of Gaza city which served no apparent purpose beyond the intimidation of the civilian population. UNRWA, which is responsible for the welfare of refugees in the Gaza Strip, is not told in advance of the curfews which have been succeeding each other for the past two or three weeks.

The reasons given for the measures look curiously inadequate. No reason was forthcoming for two of today's three curfews: an army spokesman, Colonel Mart, told me that the third curfew which was imposed from yesterday morning at Jabaliyeh camp (holding about 40,000 refugees) was a reprisal for the mining of a civilian car containing three Israeli smugglers with a contraband cargo of cigarettes and figs. The incident, in which the smugglers were injured, had taken place the previous night a few miles from the Jabaliyeh camp on the way to the Israeli village of Mafalsim.

VAGUE TRACES

The spokesman said that "traces" had led from the scene to the camp over open fields and citrus plantations. He agreed with me that "you and me might find it hard to follow them but experts can".

Shati (Beach) camp on the outskirts of Gaza, which was also under curfew today, suffered a similar fate a fortnight ago for five days and nights. For the first twenty-eight hours no one was allowed on any pretext to leave his house - which in refugee camp means one or two small rooms without a latrine.

On the second day the curfew was lifted for an hour at UNRWA's urging to allow refugees to collect water. The refugees were still forbidden to leave camp and no distribution of food was allowed; not many managed to get water since with the limited number of water points, supplied by hand pump, it takes time to serve the camp's population of 35,000.

During the break all men between sixteen and sixty were ordered on to the compound on the seashore where they were held for seven hours during one of the winter's severest storms while Israeli guards repeatedly fired with small arms over their heads.

This form of collective punishment is characteristic of the present series of curfews; at Jabaliyeh camp the male population was held on a stretch of marshy ground for twenty-five hours without food or water; during much of the time at Shati camp there was heavy rain and four days passed before the Israelis allowed UNRWA to distribute food, and even then the curfew was reimposed before the distribution was completed. Relief workers found many of the women in the camp, particularly those with small children, in a state of near hysteria.

EXPLOSION

The reason given for the five-day curfew at Shati was the explosion of a tiny home-made petard (the official Israeli account said that it consisted of half a pound of TNT in a Pepsi-Cola tin) near Gaza fish market, causing no casualties. The culprit was said to have run along the beach in the direction of the refugee camp. Failing to identify him the Israelis, besides imposing the curfew, blew up nine fishermen's storehouses in which they kept their nets and tackle, and destroyed a number of fishing boats.

In a similar incident in Wahda Street, in Gaza, Israeli soldiers demolished four houses (the explosion brought down eight more) after a fire-cracker had been thrown near one of the houses. The inhabitants were given ten minutes to evacuate their families, including small children, and can still be seen picking among the rubble to see if anything is salvageable.

These are a few of the many cases which I have checked and verified with neutral witnesses; indeed, they have been reported in the Israeli Press. When I asked Colonel Mart how he reconciled them with his Government's signature on the Geneva Convention he showed interest.

"What is this convention?" he asked, and when I explained that it outlawed collective punishment against civilians and the destruction of civilian property even in time of war, he shrugged his shoulders. "Our soldiers don't like this work", he said. "But you must understand they have to protect security."

After last June one would have thought the Israelis would have needed less of a sledgehammer to crack such an insignificant nut - if there is a nut at all. More of the non-Arab, non-Jewish population of Gaza is unconvinced that there is any serious resistance movement in operation in the area; they find it hard to believe that one of the few serious incidents - where a bomb in Gaza market injured thirty-five Arabs - could knowingly have been caused by an Arab.

They believe that the only danger to security in Gaza comes from the present determined and often brutal attempt by the Israeli army to "persuade" the Arab refugees to leave the Gaza Strip, thus opening the way to its annexation by Israel. My observations confirm this view.

I had my ups and downs during four years as a prisoner of war in Germany but the Germans never treated me as harshly as the Israelis are treating the Arabs of the Gaza Strip, the majority of whom are women and children.

ANNEX II

THE OBSERVER

28 January 1968

GAZA STRIP

From IRENE BEESON

ARABS CLAIM: ISRAELIS ARE DRIVING US OUT

Inhabitants of the Israeli-occupied Gaza Strip are convinced that Israel plans systematically to drive the Arabs out of the area.

That this fear is very real and widespread was evident in conversations and interviews with local inhabitants and foreign residents of the strip and in refugee camps - where Israeli pressure appears to be strongest.

"The Israelis are seeking, by direct and indirect pressure, to break our spirit and force us to leave the Gaza Strip", the Arab inhabitants told me repeatedly in the course of a four-day visit to the area. Several foreign, neutral observers felt that Israeli reprisals and collective punishment against the Arab civilian population had all the appearances of a campaign of intimidation.

As well as the emotional voices of frightened refugees and dazed homeless people whose houses had been dynamited in reprisal for acts of resistance, the reasoned voices of this city's men of substance - lawyers, teachers and businessmen - described Israel's so-called security measures as a well-thought-out plan to "empty the strip". They explained that the methods used by the military authorities included: breaking into houses at night, allegedly to search for arms and ammunition, rounding-up men for questioning and often detaining them without charges for long stretches, the destruction of civilian houses and round-the-clock curfews sometimes lasting a week or more.

HERDED INTO LAKE

They estimated that between 30,000 and 35,000 people had left the strip partly as a result of these measures. Most have crossed the Jordan and are now in refugee camps on the east bank.

Curfews in refugee camps are often accompanied by the rounding-up of all the male inhabitants between the ages of sixteen and sixty and compelling them to spend hours - in some cases up to three days, I was told - in open compounds. In one case, at least, they were herded into a shallow lake.

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During curfew hours there are bursts of rifle or sub-machine-gun fire to discourage people from leaving their houses or approaching the area under curfew from outside.

For the strip's 210,000 refugees in camps, these repressive measures are particularly painful. They depend entirely on UNRWA for food and welfare services. During curfew, the distribution of rations is disrupted or stopped, as access to the camp is prohibited and UNRWA staff must request special permission from the military authorities to enter compounds. When Gaza beach camp was under curfew for six days recently there was no food distribution for five days.

There is no running water in camp houses and 75 per cent of the latrines are in the camp streets. Refugee families, which are usually large, are compelled during curfew to remain in their hutlike houses day and night with a break of one or two hours after the first day. This is not sufficient to allow them to collect water, use latrines and - when permission is granted - receive their rations.

"BREACH OF CONVENTION"

These collective repressive measures are taken in reprisal for acts of terrorism which, from all accounts, are usually amateurish and ineffectual - hand-made grenades thrown in a street or at an Israeli army car with little or no harmful results.

Non-Arab residents of the strip share the Arab view that punishment is meted out to tens of thousands of people who could not possibly be implicated in the incidents: the destruction of houses whose inhabitants' only crime is to be living at or near the spot where a bomb explodes is out of all proportion to the acts committed. They point out also that these measures contravene the Geneva Convention (article 53) of 12 August 1949, relative to the protection of civilian persons in time of war. Article 53 prohibits the destruction by an occupying Power of personally or collectively owned property, and collective punishment.

But at army government headquarters in Gaza City, Colonel Mart, whom I saw in the absence of the Governor, said he did not know about the Geneva Convention. In any case, he said, measures taken by the occupying forces were aimed solely at ensuring security in the area.