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Note by the Secretary-General

This is to inform the members of the Security Council of a letter which I have addressed to the Permanent Representatives of the States whose nationals are serving as United Nations Military Observers in the Suez Canal sector. This letter was dated 5 June 1970 and was delivered to the respective Missions on that date. It is self-explanatory.

The text of the letter, which was in identical terms to each of the Governments concerned, is as follows:

"It is because officers of the armed forces of your country are serving as United Nations Military Observers (UNMOs) in the Suez Canal Sector in the Middle East that I address this letter to you. Permit me to say at the outset that the Government and people of [name of country] may take much pride in the dedicated and courageous service to the cause of peace rendered by the Observers of your nation along with those of other nations. They are making a unique and most distinguished chapter in United Nations peace-keeping history.

As you know, the Suez Canal Sector Observation Operation was instituted in response to a Security Council action, and, in the absence of any contrary action by the Council, is being maintained to the extent possible.

The physical safety of the personnel serving in United Nations peace-keeping operations is always a foremost consideration in my thinking, and this is more than ever the case under the hazardous conditions now prevailing in the Suez Canal Sector. In this regard, I would call especially to your attention the statement in my report to the Security Council of 27 May 1970 (S/7930/Add.734, para. 2) as follows:

'2. The Secretary-General has agreed to the actions proposed by the Acting Chief of Staff of UNTSO. As stated above in the report from the Acting Chief of Staff and as has been indicated on previous occasions, representations and protests concerning firings on or close to United Nations personnel, installations and equipment

have been of no avail in reducing the number of such incidents. On the contrary, there has been recently an increase in such firings from the UAR side. The Secretary-General recognizes the difficulties involved in limiting and controlling firing in what amounts to a war situation due to the breakdown of the cease-fire as previously reported to the Council, but he cannot fail to register his deep concern at the constant and increasing danger to which United Nations personnel are exposed in the Suez Canal sector and his distress over the fact that, far from a reduction in that danger, the risks being experienced by them are now even greater than at any previous time.'

The main significance of this statement is in its public recognition of the fact that, because of conditions beyond my control, I am no longer able to guarantee, to any reasonable degree, the physical safety of the men engaged in the observation operation in the Suez Canal Sector. This, of course, has been abundantly evident from the daily reports on military activity in that Sector which I have been submitting to the Security Council in recent months. You may be assured that the Acting Chief of Staff of UNTSO and I will continue to take every possible precaution for the safety of the UNMOs, such as the closing of Observation Posts (OPs) when they become too exposed. I am painfully aware, however, in the present situation where near misses are an almost every day occurrence at United Nations Observation Posts on the Canal, it is something of a miracle that casualties among the Suez Observers have not been much higher.

I feel obliged to write to you frankly on this matter, so that your Government may be in no doubt as to the situation in which its officers are serving the United Nations with such courage and distinction."
