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LETTER DATED 18 JUNE 1968 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF JORDAN
TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

Upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to bring to Your Excellency's attention the attached report entitled "Zeita... Beit Nuba... Yalu... and how the Israelis have erased them from the Holy Land". The report was prepared by Michael Adams of the Manchester Guardian and published in the London Sunday Times of 16 June 1968.

This is one more piece of evidence that the demolition of villages and expropriation of property in villages and towns in the areas occupied by the Israeli authorities since 5 June are part of a systematic plan to eradicate the Arab character of certain areas as a prelude to the establishment of Israeli settlements and further Israeli annexation.

I request that this letter together with the attached report be circulated as official documents of the General Assembly and Security Council.

(Signed) Muhammad H. EL-FARRA
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Zeita... Beit Nuba... Valu... and how the Israelis have erased
them from the Holy Land

By Michael Adams

A friend took me the other day to visit the Palestinian village of Zeita. As we were unsure of the road we stopped on the way out of Jerusalem to buy a map. The only one I could find was a pilgrim's map of the Holy Land which contained much tempting information about the biblical sites we should pass on our way through Samaria but little that was relevant for a traveller wanting to find his way about the Israeli-occupied west bank area of Jordan.

It did not mention Zeita. Nor, I found, do many people know much about the place. I believe they should.

Zeita stands on the old armistice line between Jordan and Israel about 30 miles north-west of Jerusalem. The armistice agreement of 1949, which established a de facto frontier, cut the Arab villagers of Zeita off from the lands which they had always cultivated. Their lands, to their bewilderment, became part of the new State of Israel; their village remained in Jordan.

They managed...

The villagers realized that they had to make a new start in life. They cleared the stones from a new area of land east of the village and began to cultivate it in place of the land they had lost. Over the years they managed pretty well. Then came June 1967.

On 9 June, the fifth day of the six-day war, Israeli troops entered the village. There was no fighting but the Israelis fired some mortar shells into the village, after which the surrender was unconditional. For two days an uneasy peace reigned, the village was under curfew and there were no incidents between the victors and the vanquished.

On the evening of the second day, 11 June, the local Israeli commander came to the house of the Mukhtar, the village headman, and asked if he had any complaints. None, said the Mukhtar, but he wondered whether it would be possible to shorten the hours of curfew so that the villagers could go out to cultivate their fields.

The commander agreed to this and after drinking a cup of tea he took his leave. It had been an amicable encounter.

Next morning the villagers set out early for their fields but were turned back by Israeli soldiers. The Mukhtar, thinking there was a misunderstanding, asked to see the commander but was told that he was in a meeting with his superior officer. Instead he was ordered to get all the villagers out and into a field on the eastern side of the village. He was not allowed to go back into his own house to get his shoes on.

When all the villagers were assembled, Israeli guards climbed on to the nearest rooftops and trained their guns on the crowd. It was about 6.30 in the morning. No one was allowed to move and the villagers stayed where they were until 6 in the evening.

No adult could go aside to relieve himself, no child could go and fetch a cup of water. (The sun is hot in Palestine in June.) While they sat there, Israeli soldiers carefully and systematically blew up sixty-seven houses, including a school and a clinic maintained by the International Council of Churches.

At 6 in the evening the commander appeared on a rooftop with a loudspeaker and told them they could "return to their homes". As they did so, the commander approached the Mukhtar and engaged him in conversation.

"Is that the end of it?" asked the Mukhtar and the commander replied that "it was not my wish. I had orders from above."

The Mukhtar replied: "We don't complain about losing our homes in war (referring to the shelling on 9 June), but you asked us to surrender and we did. You asked for our arms and we gave them to you. You made no complaint. You came to my house, you let me receive you (this is significant in the context of the Arab tradition of hospitality), and then you do this. Why?"

Back in Jerusalem I put the same question to the official spokesman at the headquarters of the Israeli military Government. He did not remember the name of Zeita but he telephoned for me to the commander of the area, in Tulkarem.

The answer was that fewer than sixty-seven houses had been destroyed and it had taken place "during the war". Since I knew this was not true, I asked if he could make further inquiries for me, which he promised to do. When I telephoned to him later in the day he said there was nothing to add to the earlier reply.

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In Jerusalem I stayed at the YMCA and one evening towards the end of my stay I picked up the Bible that lay on my dressing table to see if I could find a key to the things that puzzled me about the way the Israelis behaved towards their Arab neighbours.

My eye fell on a verse from Deuteronomy which said: "Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour's landmark, which they of old time have set in thine inheritance... in the land that the Lord thy God giveth thee to possess it."

Tearless misery

The verse stayed in my mind until the time came for me to leave the Holy Land, when another friend drove me down to the airport at Lydda - not by the main road, but following the old road that winds through the hills past Latrun.

Passing through what a year ago was no-man's land on the border between Jordan and Israel, we overtook three women walking along that empty road with the proud gait and in the flowing robes of Old Palestine.

We stopped and exchanged the courtesies of the Arab world. What was their errand, we asked and their reply had the biblical ring that falls so naturally from the lips of the Palestine Arabs, "We go to collect a few sticks", they said. Where from? we asked, looking round at the bare hillsides and the fields of young wheat.

"From Beit Nuba", one of them replied. And all at once the three of them began to wail, with a tearless misery that mocked the sunshine.

A mile farther on, over a ridge, there was a line of cypress trees with, beside it, a patch of earth, newly disturbed. On the other side of the road was another, larger patch, bounded by a cactus hedge.

Beyond it, another - and in the distance a whole series of these patches, half-healed scars on the quiet landscape, with here and there a cistern or a scrap of woodwork, or a twisted piece of metal.

This was all that remained of Beit Nuba and its sister village of Yalu. The Israelis have obliterated them, wiped them off the face of the earth.

For the Arabs whose homes were here, and whose ancestors had lived here for who knows how many hundreds of years, there was nothing left but the hope of scavenging "a few sticks" which the Israeli demolition squads might have overlooked, when they carted away all but the last forlorn evidence that this was Arab land.

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The road we were on was the road to Imwas, or Emmaus. Yet, when we drove on from Beit Nuba and rounded the bend where Emmaus had stood - and where one Jesus of Nazareth, unrecognized by His disciples in those first strange days after His crucifixion, broke bread with them and blessed them so that "their eyes were opened and they knew Him" - we found that Emmaus too was gone, utterly vanished.

It was marked on my pilgrim's map of the Holy Land, but it will never be marked again on any map produced in the State of Israel, for the Israelis, preoccupied with their security, have eliminated it.

Beside you once again are the tell-tale patches of newly bulldozed earth and the few splintered fragments of ancient habitations. The olives have been picked and the fruit trees, bare in the sunshine, will bear fruit again. But the villagers of Emmaus, short of a miracle, will never gather that fruit.

And there is one last detail. From the earth where houses had stood, like maggots crawling from a recent corpse, sprout tiny seedlings of eucalyptus.

In days to come, no doubt, young Israelis in search of a picnic site will take the ancient road to Emmaus and spread themselves under these trees and laugh and take their ease. But there will be ghosts among the branches. For here, if anywhere, stood "thy neighbour's landmark".
