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LETTER DATED 16 MARCH 1971 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
ISRAEL TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

On instructions of my Government I have the honour to refer to the letter addressed to you on 9 March 1971 by the Permanent Representatives of Indonesia, Jordan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Tunisia and the United Arab Republic (A/8297, S/10152) and to state the following.

The allegations contained in that letter are incorrect, gratuitous and misleading. The letter reflects, to a great extent, the belligerent policies being pursued by the Arab States against Israel.

Notwithstanding the abnormal state of affairs in the region and the security problems caused by that policy, the Moslem institutions in Jerusalem and its Moslem residents and visitors enjoy the fullest possible liberty and facilities to pursue their normal activities and promote their religious interests.

The maintenance and improvement of the Moslem holy places, as well as the whole range of Moslem communal life, are traditionally regulated and administered by the Moslem religious authorities.

Furthermore, with the removal of political barriers imposed by the Jordanian Government for nineteen years, hundreds of thousands of Moslem citizens of Israel now enjoy free access to their holy places and religious institutions in Jerusalem.

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Despite the absence of peace Israel permits the citizens of Arab countries, whose Governments consider themselves to be at war with Israel, to visit their holy places in Jerusalem and many tens of thousands have taken advantage of this liberal policy during the past year.

Jerusalem, and particularly the Old City and its immediate neighbourhood, contains places and religious shrines which are sacred to three religions. The sacredness of Jerusalem has its origin in Judaism. That holy quality was subsequently adopted by Christianity and later by Islam. Reverence and attachment to Jerusalem are deeply rooted in the consciousness of the Jews no less than in that of the adherents of any other faith. Jerusalem has always been and will remain the single and only world centre of the Jewish people.

In the period of Jordanian usurpation in Jerusalem, the entire Jewish population of the Old City was uprooted and a destructive campaign was waged completely to eradicate what was left of the Jewish houses of worship and institutions of learning which flourished there for centuries. It could have been expected that the Governments signatories of the letter of 9 March would advocate mutual respect between the different religions. Therefore it is a matter of regret that when the armed forces of Jordan and Egypt wantonly attacked the city of Jerusalem in 1948, those Governments did not take any measures to prevent the sacrilege and later the crimes against the sacred sites of that religion which had been the first to recognize the holiness of Jerusalem. It is even more astonishing that they are now challenging the efforts being made by Israel to remedy those criminal acts by rebuilding the Jewish Quarter in the Old City. It is particularly grotesque to find in the letter under discussion an accusation that Israel is "Judaizing" that very City in which the Jewish ethos is so deeply marked and where Jews have constituted the majority of the populations for generations.

Jerusalem is a city with hundreds of thousands of people who are entitled to enjoy ordinary conditions of life, including the standards of public services and amenities customary in every well-developed city.

The Israeli authorities, dedicated to the welfare and dignity of the city, are treating with proper reverence all that is related to the holy places of all faiths, and the maintenance of their surroundings and decorum. They devote great

efforts and many resources to the improvement of these places and their safety. At the same time the authorities promote the construction of housing and roads, and the development of economic resources, these taking place mainly in areas at a distance from the Old City.

The aim of the Government of Israel is to respect the interests of all religions in Jerusalem and it aspires to meet them through consultation and understanding with their representatives.

I have the honour to request circulation of this letter as official documents of the General Assembly and the Security Council.

(Signed) Yosef TEKOAH
Permanent Representative of Israel
to the United Nations
