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LETTER DATED 8 SEPTEMBER 1967 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ISRAEL  
TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

I have the honour to refer to the letter dated 1 September 1967 from the Chargé d'Affaires of the Permanent Mission of Syria (A/6791, S/8138) communicating an attempt on the part of the Government of Syria to engage the International Red Cross in obtaining the consent of the Government of Israel for the return of Syrian residents to the area of Syria now under Israel control.

The claim that these civilians were "expelled by force by the Israel invaders" is completely misleading. The fact is that the majority of the inhabitants of that area was evacuated by the Syrian authorities in the course of the fighting in the area, apparently for military considerations. Many of these people had been in the direct employ of the Syrian army, whose camps, bases and extensive fortifications and installations had been the predominant administrative and economic factor in the area. The figure quoted in the Syrian letter, of 110,000 persons who left the area, should be viewed in the light of the liberties which Syrian representatives allow themselves with regard to facts and figures. Authentic estimates put the pre-war population of that area at 90,000. When the cease-fire became effective and cease-fire lines were drawn, the population which remained in the area numbered 6,404. This figure was established by a census which was carried out after the fighting stopped.

With all its deep respect for the International Red Cross and its readiness for co-operation with it, the Government of Israel believes that matters such as the return of the evacuees is in the first place a matter for direct arrangements between the Governments concerned. This was the procedure in the case of the return of residents of the west bank, which was arranged between the Government of Israel and of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

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When Syria is ready to enter into talks with Israel, the Israel Government will be prepared to discuss with them any outstanding issues, including the return of evacuees.

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

Please accept, etc.

(Signed) Gideon RAFAEL  
Permanent Representative of Israel  
to the United Nations

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