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LETTER DATED 16 AUGUST 1966 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE  
OF ISRAEL ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour, on instructions from my Government, to inform the Security Council of grave acts of aggression committed by the Syrian armed forces on 15 August 1966, against Israel nationals and territory.

At approximately 0400 hours on the morning of 15 August, an Israel police patrol launch drifted aground on a sand-bank in the northeastern part of Lake Kinneret, about fifty metres offshore. As the attempts of the crew to refloat the boat were unsuccessful, another patrol boat was sent to the scene to extricate it.

At approximately 0525 hours, upon the arrival of the rescue boat, Syrian military positions located in the vicinity of the villages of Ed-Douga and Moussadiye suddenly and without any provocation opened fire on the boats with machine-guns, followed by recoilless guns. Two persons aboard the first boat were wounded, and both boats were damaged. At first, the boats refrained from returning the fire, but as the Syrian firing intensified and the crews aboard both boats were in imminent danger, fire was returned by the second patrol boat. At this stage another crew member was wounded, and a recoilless gun projectile made a direct hit on the grounded vessel.

At 0615 hours, an Israel message was transmitted to the Chairman of the Israel-Syrian Mixed Armistice Commission, requesting his urgent intervention with the Syrian authorities. At approximately 0700 hours, firing ceased and the area became quiet.

Water started rising inside the grounded vessel, and the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization was asked to arrange for the rescue work to be carried out at about 1000 hours by civilian boats, with United Nations Military Observers present both in the boats and on the Syrian side of the armistice demarcation line. At 0750 hours, confirmation was received from UNTSO to this effect.

At 0900 hours, while preparations were being made to refloat the stranded patrol boat, four Syrian MIG. 17 aircraft covered by two MIG. 21 planes, suddenly appeared on the scene and made four low-level attacks on the two Israel police launches, strafing them with rockets and machine-guns. One MIG. 17 was shot down by fire from one of the patrol boats and fell into the lake nearby. Israel Air Force planes intercepted the two Syrian MIG. 21's, shooting down one of them, which was seen falling in Syrian territory.

Simultaneously with the Syrian air attack, the Syrian shore positions resumed heavy fire on the patrol boats. The grounded vessel was hit once more, by a mortar shell, and burst into flames. Another member of the crew was wounded and evacuated, and the remaining members jumped into the water. In order to make possible the rescue of the men in the water, planes of the Israel Air Force were then used to silence two Syrian gun positions which were directing intensive fire at the boats.

At 1000 hours UNISO proposed a cease-fire to take effect at 1030 hours. This proposal was immediately accepted by Israel. However, the cease-fire was accepted by Syria only at 1335 hours, more than three hours after it had been proposed by the United Nations representatives, and shortly after a boastful announcement from Radio Damascus by the official spokesman of the Syrian armed forces. That communique claimed that the Syrian Air Force had destroyed three Israel vessels offshore and had set on fire eight other boats on the lake. The broadcast described this as a "punitive action". A second broadcast fifteen minutes later (still before Syrian acceptance of the cease-fire) carried violent threats against the security of Israel.

Altogether five crew members of the two police boats were wounded, with extensive damage to the vessels.

I would draw the attention of the Security Council to certain relevant circumstances:

(a) Lake Tiberias is inside Israel. In this particular area the armistice demarcation line is on the shore parallel to, and at a distance of ten metres from, the water line. The right of Israel vessels to fish in the lake waters, or carry out routine patrols upon them, is beyond question. Any attack upon them is an attack from Syrian territory upon activities in Israel territory.

(b) Such attacks by Syrian gun positions overlooking the lake shore, upon Israel vessels upon the lake, have on a number of occasions in the past caused serious incidents and casualties. This recurrent Syrian conduct has in fact been one of the major causes of tension.

(c) The aggression on 15 August was marked by features which indicate that it was organized and deliberate. That is apparent from the initial violation of the unconditional cease-fire reaffirmed to the Chief of Staff of UNTSO after the incidents of 13-14 July; the co-ordinated attack by Syrian planes and shore batteries two hours after the initial shooting had ceased; the delay of several hours in getting Syrian acceptance of a cease-fire; and the tone and contents of official statements from the Syrian government radio during and after the incident. Reference has been made above to the "communiques" from Damascus Radio shortly before Syrian acceptance of a cease-fire at 1335 hours. Two further Damascus broadcasts last night are significant. In the first, at 2220 hours, an official commentary indicated that after the incidents of 13-14 July 1966,

"Syria had declared that she would not confine herself to defensive action but would attack defined targets and bases of aggression within the occupied area. Syria has waited for a suitable opportunity to carry out this new policy. That opportunity was presented today. ... Syria decided that the attack should be carried out by means of her air force in order to disprove to the Arab people and the whole world the untruth of the Israel claim of air superiority."

The commentary further described the Syrian attack as an "act of reprisal" following on the incidents of 13-14 July... The broadcast continued:

"Citizens, Arab peoples, revolutionary Syria will never complain to the United Nations as from today nor shall she ever be in a defensive position or take the attitude of a complainant."

A further broadcast from Radio Damascus at 0015 hours today (16 August) reported on a Cabinet meeting earlier that evening, at which the Syrian Minister of Defense, Liwa Hafiz Asad, submitted a report on the incidents. According to the broadcast, the Minister of Defense "noted that the nature of the mission order given to the Syrian Air Force was to destroy the Israeli military boats sailing on Lake Kinneret or docked in the harbour on the southern shore of the lake."

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My Government takes a most serious view of these attacks and provocations by Syria, which constitute flagrant violations of the Armistice Agreement. The alarming belligerence and irresponsibility they reveal must jeopardize the peace and security of the area.

I have the honour to request that this letter be circulated as a Security Council document.

Please accept, etc.

(Signed) Michael COMAY  
Permanent Representative

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