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LETTER DATED 28 JULY 1961 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
OF TUNISIA TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

In its letter published on 23 July 1961 under symbol number S/4887, the French delegation drew your attention to "the action of the Tunisian authorities, who are systematically arresting French nationals". There followed a list of names and a protest against what the French delegation claimed were "reprisals ... against French civilians in defiance of the most elementary rules of international law".

I am authorized by my Government to make the most categorical denial of those serious allegations and charges.

In order to set the facts in their true light, I wish to state that when the Tunisian Government was faced with a clear armed aggression against a part of its territory, it was compelled for imperative, legitimate and understandable security reasons to take security measures against certain nationals of the aggressor State whose subversive activity had been duly established.

Within the context of that action, it took the following measures:

(a) Expulsion measures

Decisions to expel twenty-nine French nationals from Tunisian territory were adopted and carried out on 23 July 1961 at 2 p.m. and, in the case of two French nationals on 25 July at 8 p.m.

(b) Persons placed under surveillance in the interest of their personal safety

162 French nationals affected by those decisions were thus prevented from continuing their subversive and provocative activities with respect to the Tunisian population.

The French community in Tunisia consists of 60,000 French nationals.

(c) Arrests

Eight (8) French nationals were arrested and are the subject of judicial proceedings for possession of military weapons, munitions and explosives and even for causing injury by the use of firearms. They will appear in accordance with normal procedure before the appropriate courts.

(d) Finally, sixty-two French nationals who were called for questioning were released after consideration of their situation and investigation.

The Tunisian Government declares itself ready to provide any information concerning the situation of these persons and to allow the fact that they are receiving proper treatment to be verified at any time.

My Government did not prevent French nationals from leaving Tunisia, except, of course, for those against whom there were grounds for serious suspicion or who were the subject of proceedings for activities liable to threaten the security of the State.

By contrast, on 23 July, our Consulates in France informed us that the French Government had taken measures prohibiting the departure of Tunisians from French territory; as a result, a large number of Tunisian nationals - men, women and children - were prevented from leaving for Tunisia from French ports and airports. On this same day, 23 July, two aeroplanes left Tunis for France with 130 passengers.

It was not until 5 p.m. that the Tunisian Government took similar measures.

On 24 July, the French Consul informed us that his Government had rescinded its decision of 23 July, and the Tunisian Government is now discussing with the French Consul its own position with respect to the similar measures adopted by it, because of one very specific fact, which throws a peculiar light on the meaning and real content of the French Consul's message.

To my regret, I have to inform you of my Government's serious concern regarding the position of the 150 young Tunisians who are students or trainees at French military schools and academies. An oral request for their repatriation was made through the French military attaché, who indicated his Government's agreement; this oral request was confirmed by a diplomatic note on 19 July.

These young people, however, have been removed from the military schools and placed under surveillance in two camps at Châlons-sur-Saone and Orléans.

The Tunisian Government wishes to emphasize that these young people, who are resident students at their schools, cannot be suspected of reprehensible activities and that since their status is "hors rang" (unestablished), they are not combatants and do not belong to established units. This attitude seems to my Government to be prompted by the practice of taking "material surety or hostages".

I would ask you to arrange for this letter to be distributed as a United Nations document and I have the honour to be, etc.

(Signed) Habib BOURGUIBA, Jr.
Acting Permanent Representative

