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Thirty-first session

REQUEST FOR THE INCLUSION OF AN ADDITIONAL ITEM IN THE  
AGENDA OF THE THIRTY-FIRST SESSION

DRAFTING OF AN INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION AGAINST THE  
TAKING OF HOSTAGES

Letter dated 28 September 1976 from the Vice-Chancellor  
and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic  
of Germany to the Secretary-General

On behalf of the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany, I have the honour to request the inclusion in the agenda of the thirty-first session of the General Assembly, as an important and urgent matter, of a separate item entitled "Drafting of an international convention against the taking of hostages".

In accordance with rule 20 of the rules of procedure, an explanatory memorandum is attached.

(Signed) Hans-Dietrich GENSCHER  
Vice-Chancellor and Minister  
for Foreign Affairs  
of the  
Federal Republic of Germany

ANNEX

Explanatory memorandum

1. In recent years the number of cases in which persons were taken hostage, deprived of their personal liberty and threatened with death with a view to impelling others to do certain acts against their will has assumed frightening proportions all over the world. Such acts mostly affect more than one State and nationals of several States simultaneously. In almost all cases in which hostages are taken, not only the hostages but also their relatives and friends are subject to great suffering. In many cases the incident ends with the deliberate killing of the hostages. It is in the nature of such acts that they may at any time set off an uncontrollable chain of events, threatening not only the lives of those directly involved but the security of many other people as well and frequently also endangering international peace and transnational relations.
2. Several times hostages have been taken with the aim of forcing the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany to act in a way not consistent with its independent sovereignty. For example, on 24 April 1975 the personnel of the Federal Republic of Germany's Embassy in Stockholm was taken hostage by six criminals with the aim of obtaining the release of 26 persons who were serving prison sentences. Two of the hostages lost their lives during the incident.
3. It is common knowledge that the problem is not limited to the Federal Republic of Germany. As can be seen from many incidents in the past, nobody is immune from being taken hostage. Each individual, each group and even each State Member of the United Nations may suddenly become the target of blackmail through the seizure of hostages.
4. Under the new dimensions of these acts, the evil of hostage-taking can affect equally women, children, members of Governments, businessmen and delegations to international conferences.
5. The dignity and the fundamental rights of every individual are among the basic values upheld by the United Nations. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights proclaim everyone's right to life, liberty and security of person. The Government of the Federal Republic of Germany trusts that, in compliance with these principles, States recognize that certain acts are too abhorrent and inhuman to be undertaken by anyone and that the taking of innocent hostages for whatever purpose constitutes an act which is absolutely intolerable and incompatible with universally accepted standards of human conduct.
6. International concern over the exceptionally reprehensible nature of acts involving the taking of hostages has already found specific expression in the Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949 relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons

in Time of War, 1/ and in General Assembly resolution 2645 (XXV) of 25 November 1970 condemning aerial hijacking or interference with civil air travel.

7. The increasing number of cases in which hostages are taken is proof that the family of nations is confronted here with a problem of international dimensions and of the utmost importance and urgency. This phenomenon cannot be longer accepted by the States Members of the United Nations without reaction; the international community owes it to its own self-respect to fight this evil. Therefore, the General Assembly at its present session should consider effective international co-ordinated measures to put an end to these most dangerous practices.

8. Desiring to promote the solution of this problem, the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany intends to propose to the General Assembly the drafting and adoption, as a matter of priority, of a convention on international action against the taking of hostages and to invite States to become parties to such a convention.

9. Considering the legal importance of such a convention, the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany suggests that the proposed item be referred to the Sixth Committee.

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