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THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Letter dated 15 August 1974 from the Permanent Representative
of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed
to the Secretary-General

Upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to enclose herewith the English translation of an article and an appeal which appeared in an Israeli magazine (annex I) and an Israeli journal (annex II). The article was published by Pi-Haaton, the organ of the students of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, in its magazine issued 1 July 1974, and the appeal was published by The Israel League for Human and Civil Rights, as an announcement in its journal Ha-aretz issued on 7 June 1974.

I do not wish to comment on the above-mentioned article and appeal, since the clear and firm facts which were mentioned in them express themselves the savage acts and barbaric practices pursued by the Israeli authorities against the Arab citizens. These acts and practices are a flagrant violation of the International Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations resolution concerning these rights. Both the article and the appeal are two new documents which condemn the Israeli authorities with firm facts.

I should be grateful if the text of this letter, together with its enclosures, be circulated as an official document of the General Assembly and brought to the attention of the Commission on Human Rights.

(Signed) Haïssam KELANI
Ambassador
Permanent Representative
of the Syrian Arab Republic
to the United Nations

ANNEX I

Translation from Hebrew of an article dated 1 July 1974
published in "Pi-Haaton", the organ of the students of
the Hebrew University of Jerusalem

TORTURES IN ISRAEL

An editorial introduction

The excerpts in the article below, taken from Zu Haderech of 12 June 1974, arrived at our editorial offices on Tuesday, 25 June 1974. Soon after we read them and were shocked by their content, we decided to publish them. Alongside this, the editorial staff decided to turn to the authorities to find out the truth and to see what they would say. On Wednesday morning, we turned to B. Leshem, the Assistant to the Police Minister. His office told us to contact the Police spokesman, Deputy Inspector N. Bosmi. This person was not in his office and we were told that the matter was not being dealt with by the Police, but was the responsibility of Army Headquarters in Judea and Samaria. We immediately called the spokesman there. He too was not present. We spoke to one Chaya who, we were told, was his assistant. We told her, in outline, what the excerpts reported and asked her: 1. What was Souliman Najab arrested for? 2. Why was he being detained in keeping with the Emergency Regulations? 3. Why was not S. Najab given a Court hearing before being detained? 4. Were the facts and particularly the torture claim as reported by the article true? 5. Was it possible to visit S. Najab in order to clarify the matter? The spokesman's assistant promised to give us a reply not later than Friday morning, 28 June 1974. After a further chat with Army Headquarters in Judea and Samaria, we were told that the matter is "delicate and political and therefore we are not dealing with it. Please turn to the Spokesman of the Defence Ministry."

On Friday, 28 June 1974, we called Mr. N. Lavie, the spokesman. When we informed him of the above, Mr. Lavie claimed he knew nothing about the matter nor did he hear of S. Najab. He added that the information was conveyed to the members of the detainee's family in the district in which he was arrested and that information will perhaps also be given to the press. We have not heard a word and the reader is invited to judge.

Gideon Eshet

Thus was Souliman Najab tortured in the Ramallah prison

The lie of "preventive arrests"

The signal was given on 22 April of this year. Claiming they were carrying out "preventive arrests" on the eve of Independence Day events, a wide campaign of night arrests was started. All those arrested, some 150 persons, most of whom were

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detained by administrative orders (in keeping with the Emergency Defence Regulations of 1945) are well-known figures in the Palestinian community: public functionaries, trade union activists, working intellectuals, workers and students.

The occupation authorities did not give out any information on the fate of the detainees, did not reveal where they were imprisoned and what their crimes were. The authorities rejected the requests of the family members and lawyers to meet with the detainees. They imposed a conspiracy of silence on the fate of the 150 men. No doubt remained that, by keeping the detainees isolated from their families and lawyers, the authorities wish to continue their questioning, under torture, of the detainees.

Following the pleas of the families to the Supreme Court and after a tiresome procedure, a number of the detainees were allowed to meet with their lawyers but not with their families. This is the situation down to the writing of these lines. And when the lawyers, Hana Naquara, Felicia Langer, Ali Rafeh and others began to meet with the detainees, an atrocious picture of brutal tortures was revealed.

A cry from within the bars

Among the detainees is one Souliman Rashid El-Najab. I will here present what was revealed to me by his lawyer, whom we met a week ago:

I learned of the arrest of Souliman Najab purely by accident. Lawyer Felicia Langer visited the Ramallah prison on 30 April 1974 in order to meet a number of her clients imprisoned there, and Souliman El-Najab identified her from a distance. From within the bars of his cell, he called her by name and waved to her. He asked her where he was and she told him he was at the Ramallah prison. The policemen and gaolers immediately halted the conversation. It was in this manner that the arrest of El-Najab first became known and till I met him at the end of May, no one saw him and none knew of his fate.

I believe that were it not for this accidental meeting at the Ramallah prison, the authorities would have hidden the matter of the arrest and the whereabouts of El-Najab and might have treated him with even greater brutality. The authorities would have hidden him and his fate would have been cruel and bitter.

Following the plea to the Supreme Court of Justice, he said, we received a letter from Dr. Mishael Haseen, the deputy legal adviser to the Government in which he informed us that from 22 May the authorities would lift their prohibition on visits to a number of detainees including Souliman El-Najab. The letter stressed: The visits are allowed provided that: 1. Its date will be co-ordinated in advance with the authorities of the prison in which the detainee in question is held. 2. The meeting will take place in the presence of a representative of the authorities - in other words an investigator.

After some relaxation of tension, a vigorous conversation ensued. Souliman El-Najab, a university graduate, spoke a literary Arabic. First he told

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of the circumstances of his arrest. He was walking along between "the two Jerusalems", as he expressed it, at 5 in the morning of Tuesday, 30 April 1974, in the Bak'a area; two civilian cars wedged him in, their passengers alighted and dragged him into one of the cars. In prison they blindfolded him, beat him and shouted incessantly: "where were you for four years?!"

The tortures did not break him

To my question: How long did they question you, he answered "Eternally". To my question, what did he reveal to his investigators, he answered: "I have nothing to reveal, I will answer all their questions at Court only. All I have to tell them is my name, my I.D. number and my place of birth - everything that is recorded in my birth-certificate."

El-Najab also said that for five days he saw no light. All this time he was blindfolded. His right leg was chained to the iron door of his cell with a 30 centimetre chain. When compelled to stand, he had to do so with body on the door and, when between tortures, he napped, he did so with his body on the door. His questioning was accompanied by tortures. He was beaten at regular intervals, mostly when stripped completely naked, so as to make the beatings most effective. He was beaten with a long and thick rod. At times, one of his feet was bound to the floor and the other suspended in midair.

He underwent another kind of torture. How was this torture perpetrated? One is made to sit on a chair with feet and hands bound. The chair is then arranged so that one's feet jut out vertically. The soles of the feet are then subjected to the beatings of a rod. Every time a rod is so applied, the head, which lies near a wall, is knocked on the wall. After the terrible beating on his soles, he was compelled to walk in the corridor and while so doing was incessantly pushed. In the Nablus prison, I was told that after the beatings on soles, the tortured prisoner is compelled to put on shoes into which salt water is poured, a terrifyingly painful experience.

El-Najab underwent yet another kind of torture. Stripped naked, he was bound to a chair with his hands chained behind to manacles. One of the torturing team would step on the manacles with the entire weight of his body. This had the effect, because of his need to ease the pressure of the manacles on his hands, of raising his entire body. At this point other torturers hit his sex organ. The hitting of the sex organ till it bleeds and the crushing of testicles has become a common method of torture in the prisons under Israeli occupation. The torturers hope that the method will strike at the virility of the tortured. When the torturers tired, they were replaced by others.

What he learnt from Nazim Hikmet

Fist blows and slaps were applied as a matter of course by the torturers. These were the conditions he was subjected to in the course of two weeks. To my question: what food he received in the prison he said: "I learned something from

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Nazim Hikhmet: to begin eating from the end. I ate in order to endure the investigations and tortures. I hope you will never know this kind of food. I was offered some kind of mix, some kind of dough consisting of ingredients I couldn't separate."

On 17 May, Souliman El-Najab was transferred from the Ramallah prison to the torture basements of a jail in West Jerusalem. He was brought there blindfolded. Though he saw nothing, he knew that there were two more tortured detainees with him: Adel Bargutti and Khalil Hejazi. All the way, they were beaten and their heads knocked on one another. He does not know what happened to the other two. He told me that here too, he was beaten and tortured so that he fainted. He had apparently lost consciousness for it was only when cold water was thrown on his face that he regained it.

The immunity of the El-Jaffar prison

The tortures and questionings ceased on 20 May. Even after having been returned to the Ramallah prison following three days of torture, his legs continued to be bound to chains. On 25 May, they took him out of his cell and transferred him to a corridor in the cell area. Here too his right leg was chained to an iron door.

To my question: What charges were brought against you, he said: "They claim that I am the top man in the Jordanian Communist Party, that I am No. 2 in the West Bank National Front and No. 3 in an armed organization which was supposedly put up by the former two groups. I made no reply. During the entire course of the torture, I did not once open my mouth. Eight years at the El-Jaffar prison of the Royal Hashemite House of Jordan, between 1956 and 1965 had immunized me."

When I took leave of him, he asked me to give his regards to his wife, his two daughters and the rest of his family. He also requested that they send him underclothes and shirts. Till today, the authorities have not allowed his family to visit him or to send him the things he requested.

The harmful motives

The very fact that the authorities filed no charges against the detainees, but arrested them under administrative orders (in accordance with the Emergency Defence Regulations of 1945) for a period of three-six months, is an indirect confession on their part that the arrests were of political figures whose political positions and struggle are not to their liking.

For a time, the authorities maintained a conspiracy of silence, but later, they embarked on a publicity campaign in which all the detainees were described as members of the Jordanian Communist Party, as members of the National Front in the West Bank and supposedly as members of an armed body set up by the two former organizations.

The authorities and the establishment press are not telling the people in Israel that the Jordanian Communist Party and the National Front in the West Bank

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both of whom enjoy wide popular support, call, in their platforms, for opposing the continuation of Israel's occupation of the Arab areas occupied in 1967 and for their support of a just and stable peace based on the recognition of the national rights of the Arab Palestinian people, for their right to set up a Palestinian state in the areas from which Israel will withdraw and for the participation of the representatives of the Arab Palestinian people in the Geneva Peace Conference.

A policy harmful to the State of Israel

The recent campaign of administrative arrests and the tortures in prisons of the detainees is in direct contravention of the Geneva Convention which the Government of Israel has also signed. The administrative arrests and the tortures sabotage the prospects of peace and cause inestimable damage to the future relations between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. The administrative arrests and the tortures in the occupied areas are a disaster for the State of Israel and it is therefore the duty of every person in Israel to do all to halt it immediately. It behooves us to tell of the atrocities of the occupation to every person. We should not remain silent. Those who know and remain silent will by their silence share in those outrageous acts. (Emphasis in the original)

Leading article, Pi-Ha'aton of 1 July 1974

Torture in Israel

An article on torture in Israel appears on page 2 of this issue. The article was taken from Zu Haderech, the organ of Rakah. On the chain of events that led to the publication of the article see its introductory remarks.

The reaction of the authorities to its publication and the facts it poses are curious and amazing. The spokesman of the Judea and Samaria Headquarters defined the matter as "delicate and political" and he therefore referred me to the spokesman of the Defence Ministry. The latter claimed that he knew nothing on the matter. Most interesting is the affair's political aspect. The assistant to the Judea and Samaria spokesman may have unintentionally defined the matter as political and may not have meant it. Yet, if the arrest of S. Najab is not political, then why did she refer me to the spokesman of the Defence Ministry?

Furthermore, the Defence Ministry spokesman claimed that "he knows nothing on the matter". The report in Zu Haderech appeared two weeks previously and it seems to me that it would be the job of the Ministry's spokesman to react to such reports accusing the authorities of torture towards detainees, arbitrary arrests and the like. The fact that the spokesman did not bother either to refute or to relate to the report not only casts doubts on the manner in which he is doing his job but lends greater importance and credibility to the report's content. This entire matter dismays me. As one who is interested in a total denial of the facts in the article, as one who finds it difficult to believe such things do actually occur in Israel, as one who supports the struggle of Prof. Zacharov aimed at halting the political arrests in the Soviet Union, as one who condemns the persecution of Jews and the maltreatment of our prisoners in Syria, I am shocked by the manner in which the authorities are dealing with the matter. (Emphasis in the original)

Gideon Eshet

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Gideon Eshet

ANNEX II

Translation from Hebrew of an advertisement dated 27 June 1974 published in "Ha-aretz" by the Israel League for Human and Civil Rights

APPEALS TO THE PUBLIC TO RESPOND TO THE APPEAL OF THE MOTHERS AND THE
WIVES OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE PRISONERS ON THE WEST BANK

Last week the Israel League for Human and Civil Rights received, together with other Israeli organizations and newspapers, the following text of the appeal of 111 members of the families of the administrative prisoners from East Jerusalem and the West Bank:

"We appeal to you, after two months have passed from the time our relatives were arrested, from 22 April 1974 on hoping that the memory of the millions of Jews killed by the barbarous Nazism, has influenced you against feelings of hate and against all forms of oppression and arbitrariness.

Our brothers, husbands and fathers were arrested first in what was termed a 'preventive arrest' by the authorities of the military government, before the Israeli holiday, but they are still held in prison, without any charge being imputed to most of them. Part of them were tortured, as we were told by their lawyers, and they are still subjected to strong tortures, both in body and mind.

We are most distressed by the fact that we are prevented from visiting them, even when the legal time of interrogation is ended. The authorities are even preventing us from the knowledge of the place of imprisonment of the prisoners Suleiman A-Hajab, Muhammad Jarbiye, Abdallah A'Sayirat, Hushi Hadad and others.

The authorities of the military government are trying to justify their arbitrary behaviour before the Israeli public opinion, by claiming that those prisoners 'had founded terroristic organizations', using that generalizing expression without distinction.

But the truth is that those prisoners, as known to the military government authorities themselves, and as is known to the democratic circles in Israel, are in favour of a just peace, are struggling consistently against any evidence of chauvinism in every place where it appears, are supporting consistently the solution of the Middle-East conflict based on the international decisions, and on the principle of honouring the right of all the peoples of the area to live in secure borders, including the Israeli people and the Arab-Palestinian people.

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The arrests, the tortures, prevention of us to visit them, and keeping the place of imprisonment of some of them in secrecy, are not serving the cause of the establishment of the just peace, and are against the true desires of our peoples, and in addition they are clearly against the internationally recognized Human Rights.

We appeal to all those who desire the victory of justice, wisdom and realism in the solution of the Israeli-Arab conflict, to all supporters of the principles of democracy and justice without difference of race and color, to all those we appeal, to express their solidarity with us, protest against the continuation of the imprisonment and the tortures of our relatives and demand their immediate release."

The above is the text of the appeal of the families of the administrative prisoners, who have begun this week a sitting-strike in the municipality building of Beit-Sahur.

The Israel League for Human and Civil Rights appeals to the Israeli public to support the appeal of the relatives of the administrative prisoners and to demand from the authorities of the State of Israel:

To free the administrative prisoners!
To stop the tortures in prison!

The enforcement of the law, the justice, and the keeping of human rights is essential for the future of the State of Israel.

The Israel League for Human and Civil Rights
P.O. Box 14192, Tel-Aviv.
