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Tekoah, Y. (Dir. of Armistice Affairs, Israel)

- 3 messages to Gen. Burns, Chief of Staff, UNTSO.

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MINISTRY FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
JERUSALEM, ISRAEL

17 June 1956

Dear Colonel Hommel,

I am directed by the Foreign Minister to forward the following reply to General Burns' letter of 15 May 1956:

"I have read carefully the exchange of letters between yourself and Mr. Tekoah and should like to assure you that our undertaking with respect to patrolling along the Gaza strip will be carried out as stated in the Aide-Memoire of 3 May 1956. I am glad to note that it was not your intention to make a complaint regarding the approach of an Israel military vehicle to the Demarcation Line. I also appreciate the spirit in which you brought the above case to our notice; On the other hand, I hope that the security policy we intend applying along the Gaza strip has been clearly defined and it must be left to our discretion as to how best it should be implemented."

Sincerely yours,

Y. Tekoah  
Director of Armistice Affairs

Colonel R. E. Hommel  
Assistant Chief of Staff  
UN Truce Supervision Organization  
Jerusalem

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MINISTRY FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
JERUSALEM, ISRAEL

Jerusalem, 17 June 1956

Dear Colonel Hommel,

I wish to refer to your letter of 16 April 1956 in connection with the hoisting of the Israel flag on the Hebrew University School of Agriculture.

I should like to observe that there is no mention of any "neutral zone" in the Israel Jordanian General Armistice Agreement. We find that there is nothing untoward in the Israel flag being raised on our buildings in the area known commonly as the "area between the lines."

Sincerely yours,

Y. Tekoah  
Director of Armistice Affairs

Colonel R. E. Hommel  
Assistant Chief of Staff  
UN Truce Supervision Organization  
Jerusalem

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MINISTRY FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
JERUSALEM, ISRAEL

Jerusalem, 18 June 1956

Dear General Burns,

I am instructed by the Foreign Minister to reply to your letter of 15 May 1956 in the matter of certain Israel complaints concerning incidents in the Gaza area and I should like to offer some observations on a number of points.

With reference to the incident of 7 May, mentioned in paragraph (1) of your letter, some Israel workers did in fact cross in error into Egyptian controlled territory to a depth of approximately fifteen metres. As soon as the nature of this technical breach of the General Armistice Agreement had become known to us, the Israel complaint to the Mixed Armistice Commission was withdrawn, and a public correction of the first report made. The very fact that this inadvertent penetration was made by a grader should have assured the UNTSO of the eminently peaceful character of the crossing.

I regret that your letter tends to ascribe but little importance to the crossing of Arab farmers from the Gaza Strip into Israel. Unfortunately, recent history of border incidents along the Gaza Strip and other Israel frontiers proves only too conclusively that infiltration for purposes of illegal cultivation far from being a relatively harmless breach of the General Armistice Agreement has frequently brought in its wake a dangerous

Major General E. L. M. Burns  
Chief of Staff  
UNTSO  
Jerusalem

deterioration of the border situation. It was in fact just this type of incident which led to the murder by Egyptian infiltrators of the villager of Nahal Oz on 29 April 1956. The incident of 10 May 1956 near Nirim as a result of which an Arab farmer was killed must be viewed against the exacerbation of the border situation caused by the recrudescence of infiltration from the Gaza Strip at the time, and particularly in the light of the murder of the Israel villager on 29 April which took place at the same spot.

As you have referred to the question of publicity in general, I cannot but observe that of late, the UNTSO has upon occasions entered into public discussion with regard to items that have appeared in the Israel press, and even with regard to official statements. I feel sure that the UNTSO would not wish to dispute the right of the free press of Israel to evaluate the border situation as it deems fit. We do of course regret inaccuracy of reporting whenever this occurs. At the same time the strong reaction of the press is entirely understandable when a chain of incidents takes place.

When the UNTSO has reservations concerning items in the press, it would seem appropriate that these be made directly to the newspaper concerned rather than by public controversy. This is particularly true of official statements, the public disputing of which inevitably creates an atmosphere not conducive to cooperation with the UNTSO.

In this connection I should like to draw your attention to the frequent distortions in the state controlled press of Egypt, Jordan and Syria of the reports of incidents, United Nations investigations and decisions of the Mixed Armistice Commission. I am bound to remark that we cannot recall any United Nations

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statement taking issue with these misrepresentations which, unlike the occasional inaccuracies in the Israel press, bear the unmistakable mark of official guidance or inspiration.

Sincerely yours,

Y. Tekoah  
Director of Armistice Affairs