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LETTER DATED 24 JULY 1967 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ISRAEL
TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

On instructions from my Government, I have the honour to bring to your attention the case of the Israeli Jacob Mashiah, who was kidnapped by Syrian soldiers and murdered later in Syria.

On 16 September 1966, Jacob Mashiah was kidnapped from Israel territory by two Syrian soldiers who had crossed into Israel in the area of the Hasbani River. On 22 September inquiries were made through the Chairman of the Israel-Syria Mixed Armistice Commission whether the above-mentioned, together with two other missing Israelis, had been found in Syria. On 10 October, the Chairman of ISMAC informed the senior Israeli delegate as follows:

"Reference your S/6-4668. Senior Syrian delegate reports that as a result of his enquiries he now can say that there is no trace of Jacob Mashiah and his two companions in Syria."

As Jacob Mashiah was suffering from a chronic heart ailment, the United Nations representatives in Israel were provided with medical certificates concerning his condition for transmission to the Syrian authorities, and medication was sent through them too, for Jacob Mashiah. However, the Syrian authorities persisted in their denial that Mashiah had ever been in their custody.

Mashiah's family, in their anxiety over his condition and in despair, approached international humanitarian organizations such as the International Red Cross, "Amnesty International", and the United Nations Commission for Human Rights, as well as other well-known personalities, with appeals for their intervention with the Syrian authorities so that medical treatment would be given to him and his release secured. All these appeals were in vain.

During the months of December 1966 and January 1967, discussions were held with you and your representatives on this subject.

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At the same time, General Bull was in communication with the Syrian authorities, who repeatedly denied that they ever had Jacob Mashiah in their custody.

On 11 April 1967, the following letter from the Acting Chief of Staff of UNTSO was received at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Jerusalem:

"As you know General Odd Bull has brought to the attention of General A. Soueidani, the Chief of Staff of the Syrian Arab Armed Forces, the case of Jacob Mashiah and has requested him to help trace the missing youth.

"By a letter dated 31 March 1967, which has just been received here, General Soueidani replied to General Bull as follows:

'Reference to your letter of 17 January 1967, concerning a missing Israeli person by the name of Jacob Mashiah.

'I am very sorry to inform you that we have no knowledge of this person, as there is not any Israeli arrested in the Syrian Arab Republic.'

On 18 May, I took the matter up with the Secretary-General. He showed his keen human interest in the case.

After the end of the hostilities in June 1967, Israel army authorities found documents at the Syrian army headquarters in Kuneitra which prove that Jacob Mashiah had been detained and interrogated there at least on 16 to 18 September 1966, and that the report of his interrogation had been submitted by the "Syrian Front Command" to the Ministry of Defence in Damascus. Copies of these documents were given to General Bull, and on 28 June he was again requested to render his good offices in renewed efforts to locate Jacob Mashiah and for his release.

On 19 June 1967, negotiations were commenced with the representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. Marti in Israel, and Mr. Morillon in Syria, for the exchange with Syria of prisoners of war and other detained persons. The name of Jacob Mashiah was mentioned in the negotiations; however, the Syrians again denied any knowledge of him.

On 5 July 1967, the documents found at Kuneitra were presented at the negotiations. Only then did the Syrians admit that Jacob Mashiah had died in Syria on 8 October 1966, about three weeks after he had been kidnapped.

The body of Jacob Mashiah was returned to Israel on 17 July, during the exchange of prisoners of war with Syria, described in my note verbale to you of 18 July 1967.

This is another example of the inhuman treatment by the Syrian authorities of Israelis who fall in their hands.

You are also aware of previous instances in which Israel citizens were kept incommunicado for many years in Syrian prisons at Damascus and Palmyra, suffering the most brutal and inhuman physical and mental torture.

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

Please accept, etc.

(Signed) Gideon RAFAEL
Permanent Representative of Israel
to the United Nations

