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Letter dated 25 January 1980 from the Permanent Representative of  
Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to refer to the letter of 9 January 1980, addressed to you by the Chargé d'Affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Jordan to the United Nations (A/35/60-S/13732).

It should be borne in mind that Jordan regards itself as being in a state of war with Israel. It has repeatedly attempted to play upon religious sentiments in order to fan the flames of incitement, both religious and political, against Israel.

To that end, Jordan has wilfully distorted the facts of the case in the letter under reference, as it has often done in other instances. There is no connexion between the collapse of the house belonging to the al-Mu'aqit family in Jerusalem and the archaeological excavations being conducted in other parts of the City.

The Walled City of Jerusalem (the "Old City") is literally an old city. Its origins go back thousands of years, and it has been rebuilt time after time throughout the centuries. Many of its ancient buildings rest on unstable founds, and have been weakened over the years by the ravages of time as well as through neglect and improper maintenance. To make matters worse, many of these structures are linked to a dilapidated sewage system which is over 200 years old and which double as a drainage system.

During its illegal occupation from 1948 to 1967, Jordan was guilty of conscious neglect of the general fabric of the Walled City and its infrastructure, even though it was well aware that they were in a sorry state of disrepair. Moreover, when it suited its purposes, Jordan did not hesitate to demolish buildings of immeasurable historical, religious and cultural significance, to the extent that on 5 November 1966 the Jordanian newspaper Falastin (then published in Jerusalem) protested:

"Ancient memorial buildings in the Old City of Jerusalem are destroyed and replaced by modern ones. Commercial competition has even reached the Mount of Olives where construction had been prohibited in the past."

Since the reunification of Jerusalem in 1967, the Municipality has undertaken a major project to renovate the Walled City's infrastructure and preserve it from further deterioration. Many support walls and stone buttresses have been constructed to reinforce ancient buildings and prevent their collapse. A modern sewage and drainage system has been designed. In addition, the opportunity has been taken not only to improve the services and amenities provided to the residents of the City, but also to beautify it. Hence, for example, outmoded and inconvenient electrical and telephone systems have been replaced, and underground cables for central television antennae have been laid, to take the place of the forest of aerials which were allowed to disfigure the view of the Walled City.

The only work carried out in the vicinity of the house belonging to the al-Mu'aqit family was connected with the urban renovation project. The owners were warned a number of times by city engineers that the house was in danger of collapse. They were directed to carry out work to underpin the building, and also to empty the sewage pits beneath the house which were making its foundations crumble. The owners of the house did not heed these warnings. In the end the Municipality was obliged, in the summer of 1979, to evacuate the tenants of the house for their own safety, with the result that when it actually collapsed one night in December 1979 there was no one in it.

The claim that the collapse of this building will damage Islamic Waqf property is equally groundless. Immediately after its collapse, the Municipality of Jerusalem took all the requisite safety measures, and there is now no danger whatsoever to the property owned by the Waqf.

Similarly, there is no connexion between the al-Mu'aqit house and the other buildings and locations indicated in the Jordanian letter. In that letter the reader is invited to use his imagination. This is indeed proper and necessary because the entire Jordanian letter is a test of the reader's imagination. Thus, the impending "historical catastrophe" conjured up in the letter is in fact a complete fantasy.

Indeed, the Jordanian letter is yet another transparent attempt to manipulate the means and machinery of the United Nations in a relentless campaign of political warfare against Israel. It is also an extraordinary example of how an urban and engineering problem of the kind confronting all cities, especially ancient ones, is turning by Jordan into a pretext for political and religious incitement.

I have the honour to request that this letter be circulated as an official document of the General Assembly, under the items entitled "The situation in the Middle East" and "Programme budget for the biennium 1980-1981", and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Yehuda Z. BLUM  
Ambassador  
Permanent Representative of Israel  
to the United Nations