

PRESS RELEASE

27 December 1955

Referring to the present state of affairs along the Israel-Egypt border and in particular to the proposals made by the Secretary-General of the United Nations for regulating the situation at Nitzana, the Foreign Ministry spokesman this afternoon (Tuesday) recalled that these proposals had been submitted to Israel and Egypt on 5 November last. The Government now felt, he said, that Egypt's persistent refusal to accept these proposals should no longer be withheld from public knowledge.

The Secretary-General had made the following proposals:-

1. Completion of the marking of the old Egyptian-Palestine frontier, along the Western boundary of the demilitarized zone.
2. Restrictions by Egypt of all checkpoints and defended posts to positions west of the Western boundary of the demilitarized zone and the removal of personnel, obstacles and mines from all positions within the demilitarized zone.
3. Simultaneous removal by Israel of all obstacles and mines and the limitation of Israel personnel in the demilitarized zone to the inhabitants of Kibbutz Kziot and the 30 civilian police allowed for the protection of civilian activities, subject to the reservations made by General Burns in his letter of 29 September 1955.

Israel, the spokesman emphasized, had accepted these proposals in principle. Israel had defined her position as acceptance in principle because, while in fact accepting the proposals unconditionally, she desired to reserve the right of clarifying one relevant point, if and when Egypt joined her in accepting the proposals. The point in question was the Secretary-General's suggestion, made in his letter of 5 November 1955, that his first proposal be implemented by the UNTSO alone. This, in the Israel Government's view, did not correspond with the provisions of the Armistice Agreement and constituted a departure from the method followed in the past, when the international frontier was marked by Israel in co-operation with the UNTSO.

Egypt's attitude, on the other hand, had been tantamount to a rejection of the Secretary-General's proposals. The Egyptian Government had never expressed its readiness to accept them, but had, instead, put forward an entirely new set of demands, which went far beyond their framework. Israel regretted that the UNTSO had so far not seen fit to place Egypt's attitude on record, constituting as it did a clear negation of the Secretary-General's proposals.

The description of Egypt's demands as merely "additional points for consideration in connection with the situation in the demilitarized zone" might well have served as encouragement to the Egyptian Government in its uncooperative attitude. The disregard of Egypt's challenge of United Nations authority had



from Jordan territory had somewhat subsided, violence had flared up again along the Gaza strip where Egyptian positions had renewed their attacks against Israel patrols moving inside Israel territory to protect Israeli villagers working in their fields.

These continued Egyptian acts of aggression had been threatening to develop into a new campaign of violence, undermining the peace and security of the area. It became imperative to secure an end to the Egyptian attacks and obtain Egypt's agreement to an effective cease-fire.

Consequently the Prime Minister had found it necessary, on 5 December, to stress to the United Nations Chief of Staff the importance of persuading the Egyptian Government to accept an unreserved cease-fire. In his conversation with the Chief of Staff on that date, the Prime Minister had defined Israel's position as follows:-

1. Israel desired to ensure a complete cease-fire, such as would bring about a cessation of Egyptian attacks along the Israel-Egypt frontier, as well as attacks organised by Egypt along Israel's other borders.
2. It was the firm desire of Israel to see the General Armistice Agreement implemented in its entirety by both sides. In this connection the Prime Minister had drawn the Chief of Staff's particular attention to certain principal provisions of the Agreement with which Egypt had so far failed to comply. These were: Article I which established the promotion of permanent peace as the objective of the Armistice; Article II (2) which forbade any warlike or hostile act by one Party against the other and determined the inviolability of the Demarcation Line and the international frontier separating Israel and Egypt; Article V(4) prohibiting incursions by civilians from the territory of one Party into the territory of the other Party; and Article VIII(3) according to which there should be no Egyptian defensive positions on the Egyptian side of the frontier, facing the El-Auja (Nitzana) area, that would be closer to El-Auja than El-Quseima and Abu Abuqigila.

The Prime Minister declared that it was Israel's desire to do everything possible to promote peace in the area and that after an effective cease-fire had been achieved and the G.A.A. faithfully implemented by Egypt, Israel intended to propose the convocation of a conference under Article XII of the General Armistice Agreement with a view to contributing to the restoration of peace between Egypt and Israel.

3. The Prime Minister had reiterated Israel's agreement in principle with the Nitzana proposals submitted by Mr. Hammerskjold. He added that if Egypt agreed to ensure an effective cease-fire and to honour fully all provisions of the General Armistice Agreement, Israel would then agree, in a sincere desire to facilitate the United Nations Chief of Staff's task and without further clarification, that the international frontier in the Nitzana area be marked by the United Nations.



4. The Prime Minister had also stressed that Israel demanded the implementation by Egypt of the Security Council's decisions regarding freedom of navigation in the Suez Canal.

The Prime Minister had had a second conversation with the United Nations Chief of Staff on 11 December for the purpose of reviewing the situation after the latter's return from Cairo. To the Israel Government's regret it had transpired that Egypt had not agreed to the Secretary-General's proposals, nor to an unconditional cease-fire. Neither had Egypt given an undertaking to observe, among others, those basic provisions of the General Armistice Agreement to which the Prime Minister had referred specifically on 5 December. Although the Egyptian Foreign Minister had apparently made some vague statement indicating an inclination to comply with the General Armistice Agreement, he had not drawn any practical conclusions from this and had not even agreed to a cease-fire. Attacks from across the border against Israel armed forces continued, and Col. Abdul Nasser had sent a remarkable message to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, serving notice that Egypt intended to use force in dealing with the present situation, the spokesman pointed out.

The United Nations Chief of Staff, on his return from Cairo, had proposed to the Prime Minister that the Egyptian Government be given a few more days to reconsider its attitude - till 15 December, when the British Ambassador in Cairo was to discuss these matters with Col. Abdul Nasser. Mr. Ben-Gurion had concurred, although Israel had already waited long for a sign that Egypt was prepared to abide by her international obligations and to contribute by concrete action to the relaxation of tension in the area.

Nearly two weeks had passed since then, yet the situation remained unchanged. Israel had not heard of Egypt's acceptance of the Secretary-General's proposals, of her agreement to a cease-fire or of her decision to comply faithfully with the General Armistice Agreement. The Armistice Agreement, with its cardinal features of promoting peace and definitely terminating all hostile acts continued to be violated by Egypt as in the past.

The Israel Government regretted that the UNTSO had been unable to obtain Egypt's consent to the Secretary-General's proposals or her faithful compliance with the General Armistice Agreement.

Instead, attacks against Israel continued from Egyptian controlled territory, Egyptian agents in other Arab states pursued the organisation of Fedayin squads, and threats against Israel's security and territorial integrity were publicly voiced by Egypt's rulers.

Under these circumstances, the Israel Government considered it essential to place the facts as they are before the public.