LETTER DATED 10 MARCH 1969 FROM THE SECRETARY-GENERAL TO THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF ISRAEL

I have the honour to acknowledge receipt of your letter of 5 March 1969 [1] in reply to my letter of 26 February 1969 [2] concerning the attack on an El Al aircraft on 18 February 1969 in Zurich. One point in your letter requires some clarification, and I feel that the episode to which it refers should be described in more detail, since no record of it was made public at the time.

You refer to the request, conveyed to me through the Permanent Representative of Israel, to put two questions to certain Arab Governments and you state that you regret that these questions were not conveyed. Ambassador Tekoah transmitted to me on 19 February, by an informal aide-memoire, the request of the Government of Israel that two questions should be transmitted through the good offices of the Secretary-General to the Governments of Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the United Arab Republic. The questions were as follows:

"1. The Government of Israel desires to be advised whether the Secretary-General can assume that the above Governments, Members of the United Nations and signatories to the international conventions on aviation, firmly dissociate themselves from the acts of violence of the kind that have been committed at airports of countries that are not involved in the Middle East conflict.

"2. The Palestine Liberation Front has announced its responsibility for the acts committed in Rome, Athens and Zurich. It is known that this organization maintains contact with the above-mentioned Governments and enjoys their material and moral support. The Government of Israel desires to know whether these Governments are prepared to take steps against the organizers and perpetrators of the acts referred to above so as to ensure the cessation of such acts."

* Also issued under the symbol A/7326.

1/ A/7523, S/9048.
2/ A/7519, S/9030.

69-04951
I gave my reactions to this request to Ambassador Tekoah at the same meeting on 19 February, and this reaction was embodied in an informal aide-mémoire which I gave to Ambassador Tekoah on 20 February. The text of that aide-mémoire was as follows:

"The Secretary-General has already expressed his deep concern over the Zurich incident and previous incidents of a similar nature. He is giving serious and urgent consideration to the matter and to the steps that may be effective in helping to prevent a recurrence of such incidents in the future. He believes that such steps are more likely to be productive if taken on his own initiative.

"Recourse to the good offices of the Secretary-General is available to all Member Governments, and the Secretary-General will be glad to respond to such a request whenever he feels, in his discretion and judgement, that such action would be helpful. In general, it would not be helpful if the Secretary-General were to transmit questions or messages of a political or controversial nature from one Government to another unless the parties concerned have previously agreed to such a procedure.

"Therefore, the Secretary-General considers that it would not be helpful if he were to act on the request of the Government of Israel that he should transmit certain questions to Arab Governments. The Secretary-General has suggested, however, that a communication from the Government of Israel to the Security Council might be an appropriate method of bringing these questions to the attention of those concerned."

You will understand, I am sure, my desire to have the full background of this matter on the record.

I note your view, Mr. Minister, that the need is "to break out of the semantic and declaratory phase", but I must reiterate my conviction that an essential first step towards a just and lasting peace in the area would be a declared readiness by the parties to implement the Security Council resolution of 22 November 1967. I certainly would not regard such a declaration as a semantic exercise.

Since your letter under reference has been circulated as a document of the General Assembly and the Security Council, I have arranged that this letter be circulated similarly.

(Signed) U THANT
Secretary-General