

September 13, 1972

**South Africa Department of Foreign Affairs, Letter
from South African Consul General in Tel Aviv C.B.H.
Fincham to on the Opening of Israeli Diplomatic
Missions in Botswana, Swaziland and Lesotho**

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Summary:

The Consul General of the South African Embassy in Tel Aviv describes a conversation with Lt. Col. Pinchas Gonen regarding the opening of Israeli diplomatic missions in Botswana, Swaziland and Lesotho. Gonen described the job training and military-to-civilian transition programs Israel had assisted in creating in several African countries. They discuss Israeli foreign policy in Africa in general.

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SOUTH AFRICAN CONSULATE-GENERAL,

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(Original plus two copies)

The Secretary for Foreign Affairs,
P R E T O R I A

OPENING OF ISRAELI DIPLOMATIC MISSION TO BOTSWANA,
SWAZILAND AND LESOTHO

I to-day received a call from Lt. Col. Pinchas Gonen, who has been nominated to open the new Israeli Diplomatic missions to Swaziland, Botswana and Lesotho. He will have the title of Chargé d'Affaires ad interim and will have his residence at Mbabane.

Hitherto Israeli representation in the three countries has been by means of a double or triple accreditation. Mr. Gad Alron, the Israeli Ambassador in Lusaka, was accredited also in Swaziland and Botswana while Lesotho was covered by the Ambassador in Blantyre. The establishment of a full-time office, which Col. Gonen expects to build up into an Embassy, can only be regarded as a step forward in Israel's relations with the African countries. The step is an interesting one, particularly in view of the undercurrent of criticism which has appeared of late against the Government's aid programmes.

This will be Col. Gonen's first diplomatic post. Until now he has been serving in the Department of International Co-operation and Foreign Liaison of the Israeli Ministry of Defence. In this capacity, Col. Gonen took a prominent part in a "briefing session" which General Zvi Zur, assistant to the Minister of Defence, arranged for me a month ago. (The briefing was not reported because at that time we did not have the security of an ordinary safe.) The theme of the briefing was the successes and failures of that part of the Israeli technical assistance programme which is administered by the Armed Forces.

It transpired in the course of the briefing that Col. Gonen was the man responsible for the establishment of the "young pioneer" movement in Malawi, which is regarded as one of the Army's more successful efforts in the Africa field, and for setting up a number of other Israeli aid programmes in African countries.

The Department will be aware that of the 31 countries in Africa in which Israel has diplomatic representation, there are technical aid programmes in

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14 of them. The Role of the Army teams in these countries is not - with one exception - to provide military training as such, but rather to transfer to the recipient countries some of the experience which Israeli officers have acquired in organising social-welfare programmes for the troops under their command. Every able-bodied young Israeli of either sex has to give military service - three years with the militia for men, 2 years for women, prolonged by a year in both cases if the draftee opts to go on an officer's course. Such a long period of compulsory service gives rise to problems of justification, the draftees must be trained or engaged in hostilities, the draftees would be kept busy both in the interests of their health and morale and for the sake of the national economy which will need them, together with such skills as they have been able to acquire, on their return to civilian life.

A similar problem exists in the developing countries, where an increasing number of young people come onto the labour market every year. The infrastructure is not such as to provide the jobs which would absorb them. The Israeli programme in Africa, while it is adapted to the circumstances of each country, is basically the same. It is aimed at

- (a) keeping young people constructively busy and out of mischief, and
- (b) teaching them such skills (agriculture, carpentry, mechanics, handicrafts etc.)

as would broaden the economic base and increase the opportunities for gainful employment. The combination of discipline, meted out in a voluntary organization, and basic training is one which seems to meet a real need in African countries, and it would seem that the Israeli Army has hit upon the right formula. Earlier attempts to introduce a Kibbutz-type social organization for African peasants had proved abortive - the Kibbutzim did not thrive in African tribal soil and had to be abandoned.

It is interesting to note that the senior army officers to whom I spoke on this and previous occasions were passionate about the value of Israel's Africa operation despite the successes achieved for example in Malawi. General Zur, who is very outspoken in his views, went so far as to say that Israel's diplomatic offensive in Africa was a "washout". Israel was too small, and had too many intractable problems of her own, to be able to play the role of philanthropist. Developing countries (like Uganda) had short memories and were not always grateful for what was done for them. The main story would, he felt sure, be repeated with variations elsewhere in Africa. Experience had shown that you could not buy African votes in the United Nations by spending effort and money on aid programmes. Nor was there, in realistic commercial terms, much to be gained in the longer term.

Pinchas Gonen

*Deputy
of
Africa*

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It was one thing to invest money in a country which had the infrastructure for further development, and which in the foreseeable future could repay your investment with increased trade. But what African country was in this position? They would continue to be on the receiving end for a long time to come.

When I asked General Zair how he thought Israeli policy in Africa might develop, he said that it could hardly escape being effected by the widespread feeling of disillusionment, and not only in the Ministry of Defense. Nevertheless he felt that Israel would continue to cultivate the African countries, because the policy was the personal creation of the Prime Minister who remained attached to it. He implied that she was in a minority of one in this respect.

A call on the Foreign Ministry, where I spent over an hour with Mr. Shimon, the Assistant Director-General, gave me the other side of the picture. Mr. Shimon attempted an evaluation of Israel's diplomatic effort in Africa, and I believe it was an honest one.

He admitted that if one tried to measure the success of the policy in terms of votes cast for Israel in the United Nations, it had been a failure. But was this indeed the proper criterion, and could a policy be evaluated by a simple arithmetical balancing of votes and abstentions? Israel was disappointed at the fiasco in Uganda, and there was no guarantee that it would not be repeated elsewhere in Africa. The giving of aid was apt to be a double-edged sword, as the Americans had discovered. On the one hand, there was an immediate gain in goodwill; but this was too often offset in the longer term by resentment on the part of the recipient country which tended to feel that aid underlined its dependency, weakness and inferiority. To complicate matters, there was the inherent instability of the developing countries; goodwill vis-a-vis one leader or political grouping was not necessarily transferred to the successor regime.

Despite this gloomy side to the picture, however, Mr. Shimon felt that on balance and when the subtler and less obvious benefits were taken into account, Israel's African policy must come out on the credit side. There was something to be said for having an Israeli presence in 51 countries of Africa, even if it was not translated into immediate benefits like votes in the United Nations. Even on the score of the latter, he was not sure that Israel's policy of friendship with African countries had not paid off. The proper comparison was not between the number of diplomatic missions established by Israel and the number of pro-Israeli votes cast in the United Nations; a more realistic comparison would be between the votes and abstentions in the present voting pattern, and the pattern which would exist were Israel not represented in so many African states. An Israeli presence in a given country meant that lines of communication were kept open, there was dialogue or the possibility of dialogue, and this

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The polarisation of views on Africa policy between the Armed Forces on the one hand and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs on the other, is a fact of Israeli life to which one has to become accustomed. Perhaps it is a result of the different imperatives to which the two organizations are geared. The armed forces are concerned with the ever-rising question of Israel's survival in a world shared with 300 million Arabs. To the Army strategists, a dependable ally (and it is clear that they regard South Africa in this light) has immediate and tangible value, whereas the hypothetical future goodwill of a whole group of developing countries who can contribute little in terms of trade and do not even vote for Israel in the United Nations, is of marginal importance. It is perhaps not surprising that the Foreign Affairs view and that of the Army leaders should differ: what is surprising and at times even a little disconcerting is the way in which Army leaders will formulate policy and pronounce it, at the drop of a hat. From one point of view, there is much to be gained from this situation.

Additional copies are enclosed for Helani (our Ambassador knows Col. Gonen and will be interested in his appointment), Beirut and Tehran.

C. B. H. FINCHAM

CONSUL-GENERAL

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CHW/TLN