

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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Israel in Africa

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New York 17, New York

Dear Mr. Nolte:

In the short period of little more than a week that I spent in Israel at the beginning of this month, her relations with Africa and the rest of the underdeveloped world made the headlines daily. Such items as "Israel, Nigeria to Sign Trade, Cooperation Pacts", "Israel to Assist Brazzaville Bloc", and "150 Scholarships for Uganda on Independence" give an indication of just how deep Israel's involvement really is. In effect Africa is a top priority in her foreign relations.

During the past year or so Israel has apparently become a regular stopping-off place for African leaders en route to or from Europe. Fulbert Youlou of Congo (Brazzaville) became the first head of state ever to visit Israel, and Felix Houphouet-Boigny of the Ivory Coast and William Tubman of Liberia have followed. From among the hundreds of East Africans who have visited Israel are Tom Mboya (who spent his honeymoon there), Milton Obote and Mrs. Nyerere. Now that there is a regular weekly flight between Nairobi and Tel Aviv the flow from East Africa is increasing. Tanganyika's erstwhile Minister for Finance, Sir Ernest Vasey, was on the same plane that I was on, as were several returning Israeli experts. There is also a bi-weekly boat service from Mombasa and Dar es Salaam to Israel's port on the Red Sea, Eilat. This inexpensive service is even encouraging Israeli tourism in East Africa as well as providing passages for East African students going to Israel.

Africans have become honored visitors to Israel. For its more important guests, the Government has recently built a luxurious villa just to the north of Tel Aviv and close to the magnificent beach at Herzlia. While VIPs are given royal treatment, even ordinary African visitors are left agape by Israeli hospitality and numerous invitations. Students used to squeaking by all of a sudden find themselves in comfortable single or double rooms with all the modern conveniences. It is no wonder those who have been to Israel return home tremendously impressed.

It is not their reception, however, which convinces most visitors that Israel has something to offer the developing countries. Her own record of settlement and creation of economic resources where none existed before is an impressive one. There are many other reasons too. The pioneering spirit existing in Israel is a vital necessity to developing countries. In bringing settlers from all parts of the world Israel has gained valuable experience in training and educating people from diverse backgrounds and at different cultural levels. Israel is materially a poor country, but Israelis are using every conceivable way to make the most of what they have. Further-

more they are managing their development within the framework of democracy, a stated objective of most newly independent countries.

Again, Israel places a high value on physical work, and her unique type of agricultural organization as well as the form of her industrial enterprises more often parallel the needs and desires of small states than anything they have seen in the industrial giants of the East and West. Israeli experience is far more practical. These things aside, Africans well appreciate the neutrality of Israeli aid, and they don't fear any attempt to involve them in the Cold War.

As a young African student said, "But the main thing is, of course, that they know more or less instinctively what we are up against, because they themselves have been up against it in a practical sense, not merely theoretically."

Although it is easy to see why Africa turns to Israel for aid, it is not quite so easy to see why Israel is so eager to give it. While at some point in the distant future trade relations may reward them amply, there is no indication this is happening at the moment. Israel buys far more from African states, such as raw materials, than she sells, for her manufactured articles can't yet compete successfully with European and American products.

The answer lies elsewhere, and the London Times recently went right to the heart of the matter. First, it enables Israel to leap the barrier set up around her by hostile Arab states. It must surely give her pleasure to have so many friends within the Afro-Asian Bloc, of which Egypt and other members of the Arab League are influential members. At present their African friends can do little to ease relations between the Arab states and Israel, but their friendship helps balance Arab enmity. At the same time there is the paradox, always understood, that in spite of the Middle East's desperate need for technicians, Israel should be unable to supply any from her own vast supply and should instead have to export them outside the region in which she lives.

Second, and perhaps more important, is Israel's natural pride in her accomplishments and the desire to help others who wish to learn from her. I think Israel genuinely enjoys giving this aid. It offers a natural outlet for the pioneering spirit that created Israel and which now can only assist the development of areas outside the Middle East. As the challenge of her own development recedes, Israelis have eagerly accepted challenges elsewhere.

Today Israel has diplomatic relations with nineteen African countries as well as consular relations with several that are awaiting independence. She has long had a special relationship with South Africa not only because of the heavy support she used to receive from the Jewish community there but also because many Afrikaners admire the pluck of Israel in a hostile world and compare it to their own more comfortable lot. In the U.N. last year Israel voted against South Africa for the first time, and the Government retaliated by imposing currency restrictions on the transfer of money from South African Jewish charities to Israel. Israelis

have been led to believe these restrictions will be withdrawn if they abstain this year, but this would place them in an untenable position as far as the rest of Africa is concerned. Only if this year's resolution is intemperate in the extreme, will they be able to abstain with a clear conscience.

In general Israeli aid to Africa can be divided into two spheres: Israeli capital and experts abroad, and students and trainees who come to Israel. Another division is between private and Government aid, but this distinction is nowhere as clearly drawn since Government money is often involved in private projects. At the same time the activities of the Histadrut, the General Federation of Labor in Israel, are semi-governmental in nature, and its involvement is widespread throughout Africa.

By far the most important single agency directing aid to Africa is the recently established Department for International Cooperation, a part of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. With a budget of only about \$15 million, this Department has activities in 68 countries around the world, and in Africa alone they have between 250 and 300 technicians under bi-lateral agreements. It is obvious from the amount of money involved that virtually their entire effort lies in making technicians and advice available, rather than in the provision of capital.

Earlier, in West Africa, Israel encouraged the development of cooperative Israeli-African enterprises, such as the setting up of a Ghanaian shipping company, the Black Star Line, and of Ghanaian, Liberian and Nigerian construction companies. The former was done through the Government-owned Zim Lines, and the latter three companies through Solel Boneh, the construction arm of the Histadrut. The Israeli part in these joint enterprises has been mainly organizational and the training, on the spot and in Israel, of African personnel to take over full control. That done, the African Government concerned has bought out the Israeli partners, who have then withdrawn.

This is not the pattern today. Israel is now concentrating on small projects, widely spread over the whole continent, which will reach out and affect many lives. Most are concerned with practical development problems such as irrigation, soil regeneration, the introduction of cash crops, the setting up of rural communities with necessary social services, and the organization of the armed services into a social instrument as well as a security service. Some African countries have Israeli advisors in their ministries.

Israel also sponsors numerous survey and fact finding missions. In Tanganyika alone experts have recently completed studies on medical services, housing, youth training, new settlement and agricultural development. On top of this Israelis are sent around the world at the request of various international organizations, such as the United Nations and its specialized agencies.

Israel's program abroad is supplemented by large-scale training at home. Over the past five years literally thousands of Africans

have attended special training courses in Israel for periods of from a few weeks to full college programs extending over a number of years. The courses cover virtually every subject imaginable from ophthalmology and carpentry to public administration. Besides the courses themselves, Israelis feel, the experience of being in another country and seeing how other people live equally justifies the program.

East Africa appears to be getting the lion's share of Israel's aid. There have been no fewer than eight special courses for East Africans alone. More than ten missions have been to Tanganyika, from an economic survey team to catering advisors for the independence celebrations. A private firm, in partnership with the Tanganyika Government, is building a much needed hotel in Dar es Salaam. There have been missions to Kenya and Uganda too, but large scale assistance will probably begin only after independence. The 150 scholarships given to Uganda on independence bodes well for the future. Numerous Government officials have also visited East Africa. General Yaakov Dori, ex-Army Chief of Staff and head of the Technion, Israel's technical university, has just returned from an eight month's trip. All together more than a quarter of Israel's technicians in Africa are in Kenya, Tanganyika and Uganda.

East Africa's geographical position and her tremendous need largely account for this, but there is perhaps an historical reason too. Soon after the turn of the century the British Foreign Office reversed its position and decided to encourage European settlement in Kenya. Joseph Chamberlain suggested it would provide a home for the Zionists who had been unable to obtain the Sultan of Turkey's approval for the establishment of a Jewish national state in Palestine. For various reasons the idea never bore fruit, but at one point it was seriously considered by the World Zionist Congress. Israelis haven't forgotten, and East Africa has always meant a little bit more to them than most of the rest of Africa.

While visiting Jerusalem I had the opportunity of discussing Israel's aid program with the Director of the Department of International Cooperation, Aharon Remez. He had just returned from East Africa largely impressed with what he had seen and feeling the political situation would encourage genuine cooperation. I mentioned I had heard criticism of Israeli projects on the grounds they were sometimes begun with what some colonial administrators consider inadequate planning, with higher costs resulting. Mr. Remez said he had heard this too but didn't take it very seriously.

"Development can be a very expensive process, but in the end it's more expensive not to do so. Israel had to develop quickly, sometimes with minimum planning, but no one would say we were the losers. In the underdeveloped world speed is terribly important. These countries can't afford to wait around.

"Every project is different and we must have an imaginative and experimental approach. All development involves a certain number of calculated risks. Of course I think good planning is an absolute necessity, but it's possible to plan a project to death. It may never get off the ground or be delayed far longer than it should be. We feel the project is far more important than the plan, and our planning

is always with that in mind."

He went on to say his department's emphasis was on projects with immediate practical value. "Poor countries need trained men who can do specific jobs. We not only provide the men but we train their men to do the jobs themselves."

Later in Tel Aviv I visited the Afro-Asian Institute for Labor Studies and Cooperation which was established in 1960 by the Histadrut after a very successful series of ad hoc seminars. The Institute provides courses for African and Asian labor leaders to help them contribute more effectively to the general development of their countries. Its study program is aimed at trade unionists, cooperators and government officials dealing with development and labor. It combines the study of basic theory with practical observation and personal working experience.

The Principal, Akiva Eger, feels the labor movement shouldn't only be a trade union movement. "It has a more decisive role to play in building the national economy as well as moulding its cultural and social structure. This form of organization can make a useful contribution to the developing countries where many problems are similar to our own of a few years ago.

"At the Institute we get people to think about general problems and what they can do to help develop their countries. They also have ample opportunity to see and study what Israel has done. All of our participants spend at least a month visiting kibbuzim, moshavim and regional development schemes as well as the special schemes they are interested in. By the time they return home, they've had a good deal of theoretical and practical experience."

One of the big problems the Institute faced when it began was in trying to bridge the gap between English and French speaking Africans. "Our bi-lingual seminars just weren't a success. We now have separate English and French sessions, each lasting for a bit less than four months. We also have numerous special courses. Not so long ago we had 72 East African labor leaders, and the next English speaking session will be for East Africans only."

Most Israelis feel that their greatest contribution to the developing world can be their type of agricultural producing and marketing cooperatives. A recent study of the kibbuz stated, "The kibbuz movement has a vital role to play, not only in colonizing the southern Negev but in showing the people of underdeveloped territories how primitive peasant proprietorship can be transformed into large-scale modern agriculture without submitting the peasant to the social injustice of either Western industrialism or of the Russian kolkhoz." The moshav, or small-holder cooperative, has a similar function.

There is also a central cooperative society called Tnuva which markets the agricultural produce from kibbuzim and moshavim. These different forms of cooperative activity have much to recommend them to other developing countries. The Afro-Asian Institute considers that its job is to see to it these examples are made known.

My plans also called for a visit to a vocational training center in Natanya, a large town between Tel Aviv and Haifa. This center is one of many technical schools around the world affiliated to the World ORT Union, an organization founded in Russia at the turn of the century by Baron Hirsch. ORT-Israel has the largest network of vocational education in the country. Its mission is to help provide an industrially trained and technologically literate population through a continuing program of technical education. Founded in 1948, it has received much assistance from abroad and now trains 10,000 students annually.

The Department for International Cooperation has arranged for ORT to run a program for African students, and it was this I had come to see. Unfortunately it was a Friday afternoon and since Saturday is the Jewish sabbath, the school had closed early and I was unable to see it in action. Nevertheless the students lived in, as did Michael Meroz, the Foreign Ministry official in charge of the program on the spot.

Out of more than 1000 students at this ORT center, there are 116 Africans including 22 newly arrived Kenyans and 3 Zanzibaris. Each student comes initially for a year, but if he measures up to the standards he can stay another. Those who are qualified can choose whether to study electricity, mechanics, agro-mechanics or carpentry. Mornings are devoted to classroom work, afternoons to practical work.

"This is our second year, and we learned a lot from last year's group," he told me. "We tried to teach them Hebrew in three months but it wasn't much of a success, and so we have lowered our sights. Now they learn a bit of Hebrew when they arrive, but most of it they pick up on the spot. We also have different classes for our French and English speaking students until they can converse together in Hebrew.

"Another lesson we learned was to keep them busy. There was far too much spare time politicking last year, especially among the Ghanaians. This year we told them at the beginning this would be unacceptable, and we give them more to do. On most evenings there is some sort of social event, usually an independence or anniversary celebration. We've had little trouble with politics this year.

"On weekends our fellows either go to Natanga or to Tel Aviv. In a couple of days we're off on our first tiul (trip) of the year, to the Galilee where we will stay in a kibbuz."

The students I met appeared an enthusiastic group. Most of those from Kenya had had some high school education and then been employed by the Government, until being given this chance. They were obviously enjoying every minute of it, although one homesick fellow asked me if the rains had come to Kenya yet.

I met other East Africans in Israel too. Hilda Otieno, who had played an important role in the First Kenya Women's Seminar last spring, had left her children with her husband and was attending a special accelerated six months course for kindergarten teachers

in Haifa. Amuli Abedi, a Tanganyikan architectural student, was in his third year at the Technion. And so on! All are flourishing and all will return to Africa the better for their experiences.

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Israel is turning increasingly towards Africa. The press is filled with articles on African affairs, and a sizable number of young people with technical training are talking about working in Africa at some stage in their careers. No doubt much of this interest is generated from above. The Government has taken an active role in seeing to it Africans are well-treated, and they have also made much general information available on African nations. Nevertheless, interest there is and I can only see new and enlarged programs to take advantage of it.

Israel, however, wants to contribute to the development of new nations in her own way. Recently a Foreign Ministry spokesman suggested that an Israeli Peace Corps would soon be formed. Aharon Remez immediately denied this and said it was only being discussed. There is great reluctance to follow an American lead too closely and Remez's reaction is indicative of this. Israel can't compete with the size and scope of American programs, and neither does she want to. She prefers her own way.

It would be difficult not to be impressed by the number and variety of Israeli technical assistance programs. In practically every respect they are carried out with efficiency and a professional aplomb which would do credit to the most affluent of nations. Israel's accomplishments are all the more remarkable in Africa where these qualities are not generally in evidence. From my observations, Israeli Government officials are extraordinarily well informed about events in Africa, especially in East Africa. In short they are doing a first class job.

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What do the Arab states think of all this? Not much, from what I can gather. There are, of course, numerous African students scattered about the Arab world. According to Jordanian authorities, twelve recently arrived at the Tulkarem farm school. There are also a good number in Cairo, but the total Arab effort is understandably much smaller than Israel's.

In general it can be said the Arab-Israel conflict hasn't substantially affected Israel's relations with Africa. Countries with large Muslim elements have had fruitful relationships with Israel (such as Nigeria, Zanzibar, Mali), and a number of Muslims are actually studying in Israel. There are occasional complications, however. The Mali Ambassador to Cairo recently stated that his Government had abrogated all its agreements with Israel, but it later turned out he had no authority to speak. But it was admitted that, in comparison with Israel's cooperation with other African nations, the agreement had from the start been implemented with something less than vigorous enthusiasm.

Recently the Northern Nigeria Government rejected any form of aid from Israel. The Regional Premier, Sir Ahmadu Bello, said in a special statement, "We do not want in any way the Israeli Government to participate in any aspect of our development program." He was immediately jumped upon by the Lagos press. The pro-Government Pilot said his statement was "uncalled for". "While he may not intend it, his statement about aid from Israel has clearly involved us in Middle East politics." Israel is the most modern state in the Middle East, it continued, and the only one well equipped to meet the needs of developing countries. "Most of Africa recognizes this...Even Ghana, with all her commitments to the Casablanca group which is dominated by Arabs, recognizes the need for close association with Israel."

In East Africa there is a one man anti-Israel campaign being waged by the representative of the World Muslim Congress, Sheikh Yahya Hussein of Zanzibar. He tried to get Muslim students in Israel to switch to Cairo. This move came at a time when there was a great deal of publicity about East African students who had been in Cairo for up to a year and who hadn't been able to enroll at any university. They also complained they had to learn Arabic before they could even begin their studies. To this Sheikh Yahya retorted: "Those who consider the learning of Arabic to be unsuitable are living in a fool's paradise, for is it not the knowledge achieved through Arabic instruction that guided scientists in the U.A.R. who manufactured a rocket?" None of the students in Israel answered his letters.

At the moment Israel is in a strong position in Africa, if only because of the benefits which Africans receive from her assistance. As a result efforts such as Sheikh Yahya's will have little or no influence until Arab states can offer similar help on a similar scale. Up to now they have been unable to do so.

In 1898 Theodor Herzl, the founder of political Zionism, wrote that only a Jew could comprehend the African problem, the tragedy of people cruelly served because they were black, not white. "Once I have witnessed the redemption of Israel, my people, I wish to assist in the redemption of the Africans." He lived to see neither, but surely he would have approved of Israel's initiative in Africa today.

Very sincerely yours,



Ian Michael Wright