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1009
July 28, 1965

Ambassador Avraham Harman
Embassy of Israel
1621 - 22nd Street, N.W.
Washington 8, D. C.

Dear Abe:

In re: Dr. Martin Luther King

You will recall that, after my return from Israel in April, I wrote that I had some matters to discuss with you. We had a conference at the Israel Consulate in New York in May shortly before the annual meeting of the American Jewish Committee.

One of the matters we discussed in our conference was the suggestion that an invitation be extended to Martin Luther King to visit Israel as a guest of the Government, but under the sponsorship of the AJC. You approved of this suggestion and it was agreed that the invitation would be extended by me at the annual banquet of the AJC, where I was to make a presentation to Dr. King and would sit next to him on the dais.

At the annual banquet I extended the invitation to Dr. King. He was very much interested and said that he would like to go if possible. Later, both Ambassador Comay and you came up. I presented each of you in turn to Dr. King and each of you seconded the invitation. It was left that I would write a letter to Dr. King confirming the invitation and he would let me know if and when he could make the trip.

The letter was sent by me to Dr. King on June 2, with copies to Ambassador Comay and yourself. Under date of July 12 Dr. King replied, saying that he would be able to make a short trip to Israel in connection with the forthcoming meeting of the Organization of African Unity in Ghana, or possibly a longer trip sometime next spring, or later.

I sent you copy of Dr. King's letter on July 19, at the same time advising that the matter had been discussed by me with Messrs. Arnon and Avidar and we agreed that it would be better to have

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Dr. King visit Israel in connection with his trip to Ghana, even though the time he would then have available might be shorter than if the trip were made at some indefinite time in the future. We also agreed that it would be better to have him go to Israel first.

Subsequently, I received your letter of July 21 agreeing that it would not be wise to postpone Dr. King's visit, and also saying:

"If he is free to come on to Israel from Ghana that would be wonderful, even if it were only for a few days."

Since receipt of your letter of July 21 I have been surprised to receive from Maximo Yagupsky, our representative in Israel, a letter bearing the same date, reading in part as follows:

"As you know, since my return to Israel from the States, I have been trying to come to some conclusion with the men of the Foreign Affairs Department as well as with the Hebrew University in Jerusalem regarding my suggested invitation to Dr. Martin Luther King to visit Israel, as an official guest of the government but under the sponsorship of the AJC. I first contact Shlomo Argov and then, Mr. Aryeh Levavi. They both showed much enthusiasm and promised to meet with me again once they hear from Ambassador Harman.

"In the meantime, I received a letter from Mr. Engel with the wonderful idea of approaching Mr. Elath, president of the Hebrew University, in order to explore whether they would be interested in granting an honorary degree to Dr. King if and when he visits Israel. Mr. Elath was ill the day of the appointment and I discussed the idea with Mr. Cherrick. He also showed great enthusiasm and did not hide from me the fact that such a gesture would have excellent public relations benefits for them in the States. But...he has to talk it over with the Foreign Office.

"Finally, as days were passing and I did not hear from any of them, I telephoned and even wrote to them requesting time for a definite talk. The day was fixed and then postponed. At last, yesterday, I had a meeting with Mr. Moshe Bitan and Mr. Shlomo Argov both, as you know, of the United States Desk of the Foreign Office. Mr. Bitan told me, very kindly, that in the meantime Ambassador Harman

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contacted Dr. King extending to him an official invitation and that Dr. King accepted although without committing himself to a definite date. Mr. Bitan added that in the event Dr. King comes, he will be the guest of the Israel Government 'although they still have to clear the matter with the Histadrut since at an earlier date it also extended an invitation to Dr. King'. In the same quiet and kind way I told Mr. Bitan that from what he says I am forced to understand they consider that our cooperation and intervention in this matter is no longer necessary and that they would prefer that Dr. King come as a guest invited by the Israel Government and without our sponsorship. Mr. Bitan's reply was kind, as follows: When we invite a special visitor we send him a ticket and when he arrives we provide him with full hospitality. Then I reminded him of my earlier conversations on the matter and of my meeting with them before leaving for the States when they told me they would be contacting Ambassador Harman and that we should check with him in America."

The information Maximo received from Moshe Bitan and Shlomo Argov seems to be at variance with the discussions and correspondence which you and I have had.

It will be appreciated if you will clarify this situation for me. So far as I have been informed, the discussions with Dr. King with reference to his proposed trip to Israel, both in person and by correspondence, have been had by me. However, I have no desire to intrude and if it is the wish of your Government that you take over and deal directly with Dr. King, that, of course, will be entirely agreeable with me, provided I am informed by you to that effect.

Warmest regards.

Sincerely,