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LETTER DATED 11 JUNE 1982 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to refer to the letters dated 7 and 8 June 1982 from the Chargé d'Affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Argentina to the United Nations (S/15176 and S/15182) and to state the following by way of reply.

The serious allegations of breaches of the Geneva Conventions which are made in the Argentine letters of 7 and 8 June are based on speculation. The facts are as follows.

British forces in the Falkland Islands are under strict instructions to comply with all provisions of the Geneva Conventions. Measures taken include the earliest possible evacuation of prisoners. Prior to their evacuation, prisoners have been detained in secure and clearly marked areas. They have been provided with sufficient food and clean shelter. Sanitary facilities have been to the same standard as those used by British forces. Wounded Argentine prisoners have received the same treatment and priority of evacuation as wounded British soldiers. Funeral arrangements for those Argentine soldiers killed in combat have been conducted by British forces in accordance with the Geneva Conventions. Representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross are now off East Falkland and will, we earnestly hope, be able to inspect not only the arrangements which the British forces have made for Argentine prisoners but also those made by the Argentine forces for the civilian population of the Falkland Islands.

The Argentine letter of 7 June refers to newspaper reports that Argentine prisoners had been compelled to locate and deactivate explosives in the area of Goose Green and Port Darwin. The Argentine letter of 8 June includes the assertion that prisoners were made to clear minefields. My Government knows of no facts to support such reports or assertions but nevertheless are investigating them. The Argentine letter of 8 June also included a sentence (in translation) taken from a message received by Argentina on 7 June from the Government of the United Kingdom sent by way of the Protecting Power. The full message, containing a preliminary report on the accident at Goose Green on 1 June, read as follows:

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"A box of ammunition exploded while it was being moved, killing three prisoners outright and wounding nine. Two of those wounded subsequently died. All the wounded are being given the necessary medical treatment and will be evacuated as soon as possible. Personal details of the dead and wounded will be made available to the International Committee of the Red Cross when we have them. A full enquiry will be carried out in accordance with Article 121 of the Third Geneva Convention of 1949."

This message provides no basis for the suggestion in the Argentine letter of 8 June 1982 that this accident involved a "clear-cut violation" of the Geneva Convention by British forces. It will not be responsible or possible to make a fuller statement until the Report of the Board of Inquiry has been received and considered. Casualty reports received subsequent to the preliminary report and giving further details of the dead and injured indicate four dead and eight wounded. These details have been passed to the International Committee of the Red Cross for notification to the Argentine authorities.

The Government of the United Kingdom naturally regrets the loss of life and injuries which resulted from the accident at Goose Green, as it deplores all the casualties, of whatever nationality, caused by the current hostilities. But it must be remembered that none of these casualties would have occurred but for the Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands on 2 April 1982. Further loss of life can be avoided if Argentina agrees to withdraw forthwith its forces from the Islands in accordance with a firmly agreed timetable.

I should be grateful if you would arrange for this letter to be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) A. D. PARSONS
