



FM David Levy- Address to United Nations General Assembly - October 1996

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Foreign Minister David Levy Address to the 51st Session of the United Nations General Assembly

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Mr. President,

I wish to begin by congratulating you on your unanimous election as president of the fifty-first United Nations General Assembly and to wish you every success. I would also like to thank your predecessor, Diogo Freitas do Amaral of Portugal, for the outstanding manner in which he carried out his duties.

Mr. President,

In keeping with Israel's democratic traditions, the recent elections in Israel brought to power a new government. Part of the international community has deemed this choice by the Israeli people to be impertinent, suggesting that it would work against regional peace.

Against this prejudice I would like to state before you today - the people of Israel are united in their quest for peace. No distinction exists in our country between peace-seekers and rejectionists. Israelis on the left and right, their contrasting perspectives notwithstanding, converge in their quest for peace.

I wish to raise the recent history of the Arab-Israeli peacemaking in order to dispel any ambiguity regarding the actions Israel has taken to advance peace, and to prove that the new majority in Israel should not be disqualified from the efforts to achieve peace.

The founding principle of co-existence between Israelis and Arabs lies in the peace between Israel and Egypt. The Madrid Conference, to which I had the honor of contributing, bears too the special mark of the pioneers of peace, to whom the new majority in Israel is a direct heir.

The firm commitment of the Netanyahu Government to honor the Oslo Accords is also closely tied to the peace process shaped with our near neighbors, Egypt and Jordan. Yet, everything that has been said and done by the government has been minimized and portrayed negatively.

We have faced sarcasm and denigrations of the importance of the meetings held by the Prime Minister, the Minister of Defense and myself with the Chairman of the Palestinian Authority. Those meetings dealt with the substance and the contents of peace. They put in place the necessary means for the accomplishment of peace. They amplified the resonance of the Oslo Accords and extended mutual Israeli-Palestinian recognition to new sections of Israeli society and politics.

It is the will of Israel to reach peace according to the guidelines of the new government.

Mr. President,

The Government of Israel, on its road to peace, is guided by a number of principles in its pursuit of peace which I would like to expound.

- Security is neither an obsession nor a blind belief. It touches upon our very existence in a region where threats and instability still rage. Security must be the cornerstone of the edifice of peace. It cannot, under any circumstance, be held hostage to a process where terrorism, violence or armed conflict have not said their last word.

- The struggle against terrorism, its infrastructure, its financial sources, is not only ours to fight. We call upon the United Nations Organization to relentlessly pursue active cooperation against terrorism and to encourage its unequivocal condemnation.

- Negotiations, through the creative energies they release, allow us to contain these dangers. It is imperative to preserve the Israeli-Palestinian peace process free from violence.

I have just returned from the Washington Summit, held at the initiative of President Clinton. In the name of the Government and People of Israel I wish to thank from this podium the President and the Secretary of State of the United States Of America for their exemplary contribution to peace by bringing the parties together and for their profound commitment to safeguarding the peace process. The role and contribution of the United States remain unique.

This Sunday the Israeli and Palestinian teams will convene for continuous talks designed to resolve the differences between the sides and to implement the agreements. We recognize that we bear a heavy responsibility to our people and to the whole region. We recognize that we all must display good faith and mutual understanding in order to fulfill our mission, and to send out the message that stable peace and durable security can be achieved.

The Washington Summit reconfirmed the basic principles and guidelines for the continuation of negotiations. I accede wholeheartedly to President Clinton's statement which forms the basis of our partnership for peace: direct negotiations in a constructive atmosphere - this is the key to resolving differences - a future free of violence, and the denunciation of the use of force as a means of conflict resolution.

The choice is in our hands.

Shall we opt for cooperation, progress, real peace and security, or will we revert to the somber days of conflict, confrontation and

violence, putting an end to all hope?

Israel, Mr. President, for its part, has chosen hope.

Another major principle in our search for peace is the will and the capacity of the partners to achieve concrete progress.

Regional cooperation and economic development are critical factors in ensuring peace and stability.

Be assured, Israel entertains no dreams of economic hegemony. Rather it wishes to share as a full partner in the creation of regional cooperation. This construction is a basic expression of normalization.

Normalization is the natural product of conflict resolution; it embodies the substance of peace. Peace and normalization are one and indivisible. Consequently, if we are to follow the logic of peace and dialogue, we cannot risk having normalization taken hostage.

Israel makes no secret that normalization of its relations with the Arab world must be fully implemented. Some of our neighbors still view Israel as a body foreign to the region politically, economically, intellectually, and spiritually. Normalization must erase forever the residue of this ideological negation. Normalization is the cement, indispensable for keeping together the edifice of peace.

Mr. President,

One of our immediate goals is the resumption of negotiations with Syria on the basis of the Madrid principles which inaugurated the dialogue between our two countries.

We fully recognize the important role that Syria can play in the shaping of a durable peace in our region. From this podium, we call upon President Assad to resume negotiations.

As to Lebanon, let me state in the most unequivocal manner: we have no territorial claims on Lebanon. We fully support its sovereignty. Lebanon can be fertile ground for the restoration of confidence and the building of peace.

We view Egypt and President Hosni Mubarak as our partners in the future of peace. They are the authors and actors that have always been engaged in conciliation at all stages of the peace process.

Since the signing of our peace, Jordan has also played a pivotal role in the peace process, as exemplified by King Hussein's important contribution towards the success of the Washington Summit held yesterday.

On the long path to peace, Mr. President, the country of Morocco, where my identity was shaped, has always walked and lightened the path for Israeli-Arab reconciliation. The vision displayed by His Majesty King Hassan II has left its mark on the entire Arab-Israeli dialogue. It is the Moroccan King who will no doubt continue his essential role and breathe into peace the remarkable inspiration of his solidarity.

I would like to pay tribute also to the active support of Tunisia. Oman

and Qatar, too, and Mauritania more recently, have all taken tangible steps to build towards peace.

The peace process has benefited from the considerable support of the co-sponsors, the United States and Russia, and from the active and positive contribution of the European Union, of Norway, and of powers such as Japan and Canada.

Once again, from this great podium, I wish to reaffirm Israel's irreversible commitment and determination to pursue the path of peace.

Mr. President,

At the dawn of history our region was a meeting point of civilizations and different cultures, a vibrant wellspring of progress for all of humanity. At the crossroads of continents and countries, the Middle East must in times of peace discover again the genius of this place and the richness of its edifying civilizations. Jews and Arabs, with their knowledge and wisdom, must regenerate their vocation as the promoters of life and humanity.

Through its programs for international cooperation, Israel shares with countries from Africa to Asia, from Latin America to China, its achievements and assets in the fields of agriculture, health, science and other areas. These projects are models of cooperation which contribute to development, on the basis of achievements already reached in the region.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We hope that the day will come when a regional security framework will be established to provide a cooperative multilateral response to all the security problems of the Middle East. The advantages of the regional approach - based on direct negotiations between all the states of the region as a means to build confidence, in the first stage, and thereafter putting arms control and disarmament mechanisms into place - outweigh the global approach which cannot provide a response to the unique security problems in general and of Israel in particular. For this reason, Israel welcomed the establishment of the Working Group on Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) as part of the multilateral talks. We hope that in the future this framework will encompass all states of the Middle East, as the region will be defined.

In its approach to the process, Israel is guided by the need to set ambitious objectives, the pursuit of which should be in a pragmatic and realistic manner. After peaceful relations and reconciliation have been established among all states in the region, Israel will endeavor to establish in the Middle East a zone free of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, as well as ballistic missiles, based on mutual and effective verification.

Negotiations to establish such a zone will commence following the signing of bilateral peace accords between Israel and all states in the region.

Until such time, Israel will strive to implement, as a first step, confidence building measures that will increase openness and transparency and thereby make a significant contribution to ease tensions and prevent armed conflict.

Despite our clear preference for regional arrangements which attempt to provide an answer to the security problems in our region, Israel believes that regional security, arms control and disarmament arrangements could be complemented - where appropriate - by international arrangements. Accordingly, Israel signed the Convention on Conventional Weapons, adopted a moratorium on the export of anti-personnel land mines, and recently signed the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

By adopting these steps, Israel has demonstrated its willingness to be involved - where appropriate - in the efforts of the international community to prevent the spread of conventional as well as non-conventional weapons.

Mr. President,

Israel strongly desires to become an active and fully-fledged member of the family of nations represented in this organization. As members of a people which suffered in this century the horrors of the Holocaust, we can only share in the great hope of the Charter of the United Nations for a better future for all of humanity.

We have a broad common denominator with many members of this organization; in our struggle for independence and sovereignty, and thereafter in our efforts for economic development and social progress. We note with regret and deep disappointment that the question of our membership in a regional grouping has not been resolved. The fact that we have not been admitted to a geopolitical grouping denies Israel the right, available to all members of the United Nations, to play an equal role in the Organization's activities, and infringes upon the principle of equality between sovereign states, enshrined in the United Nations Charter. I hope that this injustice will be remedied and that Israel will be able to act in this organization like all other member states.

With reference to the Middle East, the role of the United Nations and, likewise, of the international community, must continue to be to assist in the settlement of conflicts and seeking solutions while guarding the principle of direct negotiations between the parties.

I would like to voice our call that this principle be respected and preferred to any temptation to seek to internationalize the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Mr. President,

It is on the subject of Jerusalem, whose name evokes so many prayers for peace, that I wish to conclude.

Jerusalem is the cradle of the three great monotheistic religions. We reaffirm this status daily by respecting and ensuring total freedom of worship and spiritual expression for all believers. This is an entirely shared religious reality to which Israel has made a profound contribution.

Jerusalem, the horizon of our dreams and prayers, has throughout our exile and dispersions constituted the summit of our collective being.

Capital of Israel, both in ancient and modern times, never has Jerusalem been the capital of any other countries.

Rarely, if ever, has any sovereign country been denied the right to freely determine its capital. Israel, the people of peace, resuscitated to sovereignty after two thousand years of exile, has returned to the city of peace, Jerusalem.

Thank you, Mr. President.