

PM's Speech at the Begin-Sadat Center at Bar-Ilan University

14/06/2009

Peace has always been our people's most fervent desire. Our prophets gave the world the vision of peace, we greet one another with the word peace and our prayers conclude with the hope for peace.

We are gathered this evening in an institution named for two pioneers of peace, Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat, and we share their vision.

Two and half months ago, I took the oath of office as the Prime Minister of Israel. I pledged to establish a national unity government – and I did. I believe that unity is essential for us now more than ever as we face three immense challenges – the Iranian threat, the economic crisis, and the advancement of peace.

The Iranian threat looms large before us. The greatest danger facing Israel, the Middle East and the entire world is the joining of radical Islam with nuclear weapons. I discussed this matter with President Obama during my recent visit to Washington, and I will raise it again in my meetings next week with European leaders. For years, I have been working tirelessly to forge an international alliance to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons.



Confronting a global economic crisis, the government acted swiftly to stabilize Israel's economy. We passed a two year budget in the government – and the Knesset will soon approve it.

And the third challenge, so exceedingly important, is the advancement of peace. I spoke about this as well with President Obama, and I fully support the idea of a regional peace that he is leading.

I share the President's desire to bring about a new era of reconciliation in our region. To this end, I met with President Mubarak in Egypt and King Abdullah in Jordan to elicit the support of these leaders in expanding the circle of peace in our region.

I turn to all Arab leaders tonight and I say: Let us meet. Let us speak of peace and let us make peace. I am ready to meet with you at any time. I am willing to meet in Damascus, in Riyadh, in Beirut, anywhere – including Jerusalem.

I call on the Arab countries to cooperate with the Palestinians and with us to advance an economic peace. An economic peace is not a substitute for a political peace but an important element in achieving it. Together we can undertake projects that overcome the scarcities of our region, like water desalination, or maximize its advantages, like developing solar energy, and exploiting our geographic location by laying gas and

petroleum lines and establishing transportation links between Asia, Africa and Europe.

The economic success of the Gulf States has impressed us all and it has impressed me. I call on the talented entrepreneurs of the Arab world to come and invest here and to assist the Palestinians and us in spurring the economy.

Together we can develop industrial areas that will generate thousands of jobs and develop tourist sites that will attract millions of visitors eager to walk in the footsteps of history – in Nazareth and in Bethlehem, around the walls of Jericho and the walls of Jerusalem, on the banks of the Sea of Galilee and the baptismal site on the banks of the Jordan.

There is an enormous potential here for archeological tourism, if we can only learn to cooperate to realize it.

I turn to you, our Palestinian neighbors led by the Palestinian Authority, and I say: Let us begin negotiations immediately without preconditions. Israel is obligated by its international commitments and expects all parties to keep their commitments.

We want to live with you in peace, as good neighbors. We want our children and your children to never again experience war: that parents, brothers and sisters will never again know the agony of losing loved ones in battle; that our children will be able to dream of a better future and realize that dream; and that together we will invest our energies in plowshares and pruning hooks, not swords and spears.

I know the face of war. I have experienced battle. I lost close friends. I lost a brother. I have seen the pain of bereaved families. I do not want war. No one in Israel wants war.

If we join hands and work together for peace, there is no limit to the development and prosperity we can achieve for our two peoples – in the economy, agriculture, trade, tourism and education – and most importantly, in providing our children a better world in which to live, a life full of tranquility, creativity, opportunity and hope.

The Root of the Conflict

If the advantages of peace are so evident, we must ask ourselves why has peace eluded us, even as our hand remains outstretched to peace? Why has this conflict continued for more than sixty years?

In order to bring an *end* to the conflict, we must give an honest and forthright answer to the question: What is the *root* of the conflict?

In his speech to the first Zionist Conference in Basel, the founder of the Zionist movement, Theodore Herzl, said about the Jewish national home: “This idea is so big that we must speak of it only in the simplest terms.” Today I will speak about the immense challenge of peace in the simplest words possible.

Even as we look toward the horizon, we must be firmly connected to reality, to the truth. And the simple truth is that the root of the conflict was and remains the refusal to recognize the right of the Jewish people to a state of their own in their historic homeland.

In 1947, when the United Nations proposed the partition plan of a Jewish state and an Arab state, the entire Arab world rejected the resolution. The Jewish community, by contrast, welcomed it by dancing and rejoicing. The Arabs rejected any Jewish state, in any borders.

Those who think that the continued enmity toward Israel is a product of our presence in Judea, Samaria and Gaza are confusing cause and effect.

The attacks against us began in the 1920s, escalated into a comprehensive attack in 1948 with the declaration of Israel's independence, continued with the fedayeen attacks in the 1950s, and reached their peak in 1967, on the eve of the six-day war, in an attempt to tighten a noose around Israel's neck.

All this occurred during close to fifty years *before* a single Israeli soldier ever set foot in Judea and Samaria.

Fortunately, Egypt and Jordan left this circle of enmity. The signing of peace treaties with them brought about an end to their claims against Israel and an end to the conflict. But regrettably, this is not the case with the Palestinians. The closer we get to an agreement with them, the further they retreat from it and raise demands that are inconsistent with a true desire to end the conflict.

Many good people have told us that withdrawal from territories is the key to peace with the Palestinians. Well, we withdrew. But the fact is that every withdrawal was met with massive waves of terror, by suicide bombers and thousands of missiles.

We tried withdrawal with an agreement and withdrawal without an agreement. We tried a partial withdrawal and a full withdrawal. In 2000 and again last year, Israel proposed an almost total withdrawal in exchange for an end to the conflict, and twice our offers were rejected.

We evacuated every last inch of the Gaza strip, uprooted over twenty settlements and evicted thousands of Israelis from their homes. In response, we received a hail of missiles on our cities, towns and children.

The claim that territorial withdrawals will bring peace with the Palestinians, or at least advance peace, simply does not square with the facts.

In addition, Hamas in the south, like Hezbollah in the north, repeatedly proclaims its commitment to "liberate" the Israeli cities of Ashkelon and Beersheba, Acre and Haifa, Ashdod and Tiberias.

Territorial withdrawals have not lessened the hatred. And to our regret, even Palestinian moderates are not yet ready to say the simple words: Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish people, and it will stay that way.

The Principle of Recognition

Achieving peace will require courage and candor from both sides, not just from the Israeli side. The Palestinian leadership must rise and say: "Enough of this conflict. We recognize the right of the Jewish people to a state of their own in this land, and we are

prepared to live beside you in true peace.”

I am yearning for that moment, for when Palestinian leaders say those words to our people and to their people; the path will be opened to resolving all the other problems between us, however difficult.

Therefore, a fundamental prerequisite for ending the conflict is a public, binding and unequivocal Palestinian recognition of Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people.

To vest this declaration with practical meaning, there must also be a clear understanding that the Palestinian refugee problem will be resolved outside Israel’s borders. Clearly, any demand for resettling Palestinian refugees within Israel undermines Israel’s continued existence as the state of the Jewish people.

The Palestinian refugee problem *must* be solved, and it *can* be solved, as we ourselves proved in a similar situation. Tiny Israel, with a speck of land and no natural resources, successfully absorbed hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees who left their homes and belongings in Arab countries.

Justice and logic therefore demand that the Palestinian refugee problem be solved outside Israel’s borders. On this point, there is a broad national consensus. I believe that with goodwill and international investment, this humanitarian problem can be settled once and for all.

So far I have spoken about the need for Palestinians to recognize *our* rights. In a moment, I will speak openly about our need to recognize *their* rights.

But let me first say that the connection between the Jewish people and the Land of Israel has lasted for more than 3500 years. Judea and Samaria – the places where Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, David and Solomon, and Isaiah and Jeremiah lived – are not alien to us. This is the land of our forefathers.

The right of the Jewish people to a state in the land of Israel does not derive from the cascade of catastrophes that befell our people. True, for 2000 years the Jewish people suffered expulsions, pogroms, blood libels, and massacres which culminated in the Holocaust, a chain of suffering which has no parallel in the history of nations.

There are those who say that if the Holocaust had not occurred, the state of Israel would never have been established. But I say that if the state of Israel would have been established earlier, it is the Holocaust that would not have occurred.

The tragic history of powerlessness of our people explains why the Jewish people need a sovereign power of self-defense. But our right to build our sovereign state *here*, in the land of Israel, arises from one simple fact: this is the homeland of the Jewish people, this is where our identity was forged.

As Israel’s first Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion said in proclaiming Israel’s independence: “The Jewish people arose in the land of Israel and it was here that its spiritual, religious and political character was shaped. Here they attained their sovereignty, and here they bequeathed to the world their national and cultural treasures, and the most eternal of books.”

But we must also tell the truth in its entirety: Within this homeland lives a large Palestinian community. We do not want to rule over them, we do not want to govern their lives, we do not want to impose our flag and our culture on them.

In my vision of peace, in this small land of ours two peoples will live freely, side-by-side, as good neighbors with mutual respect. Each will have its own flag, its own anthem, its own government. Neither will threaten the security or survival of the other.

These two realities – our connection to the land of Israel and the Palestinian population living within it – have created deep divisions in Israeli society. But the truth is that much more unites us than divides us.

I have come tonight to give expression to that unity, and to the principles of peace and security on which there is broad agreement within Israeli society. These are the principles that guide our policy, a policy that must take into account the international situation that has recently developed. We must recognize this reality and at the same time stand firmly on those principles essential for Israel.

The Principle of Demilitarization

I have already stressed the first principle – recognition. The Palestinians must clearly and unambiguously recognize Israel as the state of the Jewish people. The second principle is – demilitarization. The territory under Palestinian control must be demilitarized with ironclad security provisions for Israel.

Without these two conditions, there is a real danger that an armed Palestinian state would emerge that would become another terrorist base against the Jewish state, such as the one in Gaza.

We do not want Kassam rockets on Petach Tikva, Grad rockets on Tel Aviv or missiles on Ben-Gurion airport. We want peace.

In order to achieve peace, we must ensure that Palestinians will not be able to import missiles into their territory, to field an army, to close their airspace to us, or to make pacts with the likes of Hezbollah and Iran. On this point as well, there is wide consensus within Israel.

It is impossible to expect us to agree in advance to the principle of a Palestinian state without assurances that this state will be demilitarized. On a matter so critical to the existence of Israel, we must first have our security needs addressed.

We therefore ask our friends today in the international community, led by the United States, for what is critical to the security of Israel. We ask for clear commitments that in a future peace agreement, the territory controlled by the Palestinians will be demilitarized: namely, without an army, without control of its airspace, and with effective security measures to prevent weapons smuggling into the territory – real monitoring, and not what occurs in Gaza today. And obviously, the Palestinians will not be able to forge military pacts.

Without this, these territories will sooner or later become another Hamastan, something

we cannot accept. Israel must control its security and its destiny.

I told President Obama when I visited Washington that if we could agree on the substance, then terminology would not pose a problem.

And here is the substance which I now clearly state:

If we receive this guarantee regarding demilitarization and Israel's security needs, and if the Palestinians recognize Israel as the state of the Jewish people, then we will be ready in a future peace agreement to reach a solution where a demilitarized Palestinian state exists alongside the Jewish state.

Regarding the remaining important issues that will be discussed as part of a final peace settlement, my positions are known: Israel needs defensible borders, and Jerusalem, the capital of Israel, must remain undivided with continued religious freedom for all faiths.

The territorial question will be discussed as part of the final peace agreement. In the meantime, we have no intention of building new settlements or of expropriating additional land for existing settlements.

But there is a need to enable the residents to lead normal lives, to allow mothers and fathers to raise their children like families elsewhere. The settlers are neither the enemies of the people nor the enemies of peace. They are an integral part of our people, a principled, pioneering and Zionist community.

Unity among us is essential and will help us achieve reconciliation with our neighbors. That reconciliation must begin today by altering realities on the ground. I believe that a strong Palestinian economy will bolster peace. It will strengthen the moderates and weaken the radicals.

If the Palestinians turn toward peace – in fighting terror, in building governance and the rule of law, in educating their children for peace and in stopping incitement against Israel - we will do our part in making every effort to facilitate freedom of movement and access, and to help them achieve prosperity. All of this will help us advance a peace treaty between us.

Above all, the Palestinians must make a critical choice between the path of peace and the path of Hamas. The Palestinian Authority will have to establish the rule of law in Gaza and overcome Hamas. Israel will not sit at the negotiating table with terrorists who seek our destruction.

Hamas will not even allow the Red Cross to visit our kidnapped soldier Gilad Shalit, who has spent three years in captivity, cut off from his parents, his family and his people. We are committed to bringing him home, safe and sound.

With a Palestinian leadership committed to peace, the active participation of the Arab world, and the support of the United States and the international community there is no reason why we cannot achieve a breakthrough to peace.

Our people have already proven that we can achieve the impossible. Over the past 61 years, while constantly defending our existence, we have performed wonders.

Our microchips are powering the world's computers. Our medicines are treating diseases once considered incurable. Our drip irrigation is bringing arid lands back to life in five continents. And Israeli scientists are expanding the boundaries of human knowledge.

If only our neighbors would respond to our call – peace too will be in our reach.

I call on the leaders of the Arab world and on the Palestinian leadership: Let us continue together on the path of Menahem Begin and Anwar Sadat, Yitzhak Rabin and King Hussein. Let us realize the vision of the prophet Isaiah, who said in Jerusalem 2700 years ago: "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, and they shall learn war no more."

With God's help, we will know no more war. We will know peace.