

Remarks by FM Livni on 30th anniversary of Israel-Egypt peace

25 Mar 2009

The event this evening pays tribute to the 30th anniversary of the peace treaty between Israel and the Arab Republic of Egypt.

Remarks by Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs at reception marking the 30th anniversary of the Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty Jerusalem, 25 March 2009

H.E. the 5th President of the State of Israel Mr. Yitzhak Navon

H.E. the Justice of the Supreme Court Mr. Elyakim Rubinstein

H.E. Deputy Foreign Minister Mr. Majalli Whbee

The Director of the Begin Heritage Institute Mr. Herzl Makov

Excellencies, the Ambassadors of Egypt, the United States and Israel

Acting Director General Mr. Yossi Gal

Members of the Israeli and Foreign Diplomatic Corps

Ladies and Gentlemen

The event this evening pays tribute to the 30th anniversary of the peace treaty between Israel and the Arab Republic of Egypt.

When we think about peace with Egypt, there are two images before our eyes. One of them is the late President Sadat's landing in Israel. The second one is the late Prime Minister Begin and the late President Sadat joining hands together with former US President Jimmy Carter in a promise to change the Middle East.

There is also a voice that we hear, the voice of Menachem Begin declaring, "No more war, no more bloodshed."

President Sadat's visit to Jerusalem and afterwards the signing of the peace treaty were not just two moments in time, two photo opportunities. Those were specific points in time that were part of a long-term process.

Especially today, I think about what is required of a leader in order to bridge the deep gap between nations, to extend a hand in peace, and to pay a price on a national level, territorial or otherwise.

First of all, we need to deeply understand that the status quo on the ground, even if non-violent and apparently convenient, can suddenly explode in our faces. This can lead to fierce expressions of feelings of hostility and hatred, existing between peoples that are not yet at peace with each other, especially those who have been in conflict which, in the past, has led to bloody wars.

Leadership should first of all aspire to peace not just as a slogan, but as a genuine personal and national aspiration. Only afterwards should a leader look deeply into himself and realize the price that will be required to live in peace and understand that the price is lower - much lower - than the benefits of peace.

Long before peace receives applause at home and abroad, long before it is translated into candidacy for the Nobel Peace Prize, it is a struggle inside the country. A leader should be

willing to confront his or her supporters, even risk their becoming opponents, be willing to deal with criticism, but do the utmost to try and convince them.

The struggle for peace is an internal one, the debates and disagreements do not mean that the people do not want peace; every people desires peace. Especially we here in Israel, who have not known a moment of calm in our country before the establishment of the State of Israel or afterwards. It is a struggle because the people do not believe it is possible, because the price is too high, because there are major risks.

All these are good, logical and persuasive reasons for those who are not sufficiently convinced themselves and are ready to give up.

In this region, we cannot afford ourselves a leadership that gives up peace.

While the historic images and voices of the Israel-Egypt peace treaty are those of leaders, I would wish to see that the associative context of the words "peace with Egypt" would not relate just to voices from the past. I would also like to see that for every Israeli "peace with Egypt" would connect with images of Egypt today, voices of conversations with Egyptians, tastes and aromas of dishes, and sights and sounds of places. Likewise, I would like to see that "peace with Israel" for the Egyptian people would connect with images of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, and phone numbers of their friends in Israel.

Regrettably, we are not there yet.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Peace between Israel and Egypt, the leader of the Arab world, and the relations between the two countries are of strategic importance - for both sides. I strongly believe that despite some difficulties over the last 30 years the fact that our relations are solid and stable speaks for itself.

There is still a lot to be explored and accomplished in our relations, above all, the desire of the Israeli public to witness the opening up of the great Egyptian people toward us. We wish to maintain normal, friendly and proper relations between two neighboring peoples, relations which will complement the good and friendly ones that exist between the two official establishments and leaders.

At the regional level, there is no doubt about the important and pivotal role Egypt is playing regarding the efforts to achieve peace between Israel and the Palestinians and the entire Arab world.

Ladies and gentlemen,

At the end of the day, there is no doubt that the overall interests shared by Israel and Egypt are much greater than the differences that separate them.

We still need to work to consolidate our cooperation and make the best of the existing potential for the benefit of our countries and peoples. The Israeli commitment to this is total.

Let us not forget for a single moment that when looking back, we can and should be very proud of what has been achieved, but at the same time we must strive to achieve more.

Thank you.

Shalom, Salaam.