

# ISRAEL

High Level Side Event

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Statement by

Minister Silvan Shalom

Strengthening Cooperation on Migration and Refugee Movements  
in the Perspective of the New Development Agenda

United Nations, New York

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Mr. Secretary General, Excellencies, distinguished guests,

Thank you for convening this important High Level side event. It is an honor to address this audience on a matter that is so close to my heart.

The pain and hardship of being uprooted from one's home is a struggle I am familiar with; not from watching the news and reading magazines, but from my own personal experience.

When I was a young boy, my family was a member of a thriving Jewish community in Gabès, Tunisia, a community that dates back thousands of years. However, by 1958, it became clear that, as in other Arab states, there was no future for the Jews in Tunisia. We were left with no other choice but to abandon everything we had known and to become refugees.

When my family and I finally arrived to Israel, we were greeted with open arms, and immediately felt that we had an integral part in the writing of the Israeli story.

Today, I sit here with you, once a child refugee, now, Vice Prime Minister of Israel, as a living testament to what is possible in a free and open society, in a vibrant democracy that offers opportunity to all.

Mr. Chair,

The Jewish People know what it is to be a wandering and persecuted People. When the State of Israel was established in 1948, our founding fathers made a promise – that Jews everywhere, would always have a place to call home.

The state of Israel kept this promise. In the 1950s, when 900,000 Jews were expelled from Arab nations, Israel opened its doors. In the 1980s, when 80 thousand Ethiopian Jews needed our help, Israel was there to accept them. And, in the 1990s, when the iron curtain fell, Israel welcomed over one million people from the former Soviet Union.

Mr. Chair,

According to the Jewish tradition, “Whoever saves one life, it is considered as if he saved an entire world.”

The tradition also teaches that “Whoever destroys a life, it is considered as if he destroyed an entire world.” We have all seen the horrific images of death and destruction from the Middle East and around the globe. Hundreds of thousands of lives have already been destroyed – and the international community is still not doing enough.

In Syria, more than a quarter of a million people – men, women and children – have already been killed and millions have fled their beloved country to an unknown future. While we convene here today to address the Syrian refugee crisis, Assad's barbaric regime continues to massacre his people in the most brutal of ways.

Make no mistake: Assad could not have survived without the help provided by his friends in Tehran. The weapons, funds and troops that are flowing from Tehran to Damascus are fueling the Syrian war machine. The Iranian regime is the source of instability in the Middle East and is directly responsible for this tragic humanitarian situation.

Mr. Chair,

Today our world is facing a major refugee crisis and providing food, medicine and shelter is only a part of the solution. Humanitarian aid, while necessary, only scratches the surface. We will never stop this catastrophe unless we all admit that the root causes of this crisis run far deeper.

When children are indoctrinated instead of educated – it breeds fundamentalism.

When leaders choose autocracy instead of embracing democracy – it gives rise to desperation.

When states rule by fear, instead of respecting human rights – it leads to oppression.

The millions of people desperately seeking refuge is a result of decades of failure to create free and open societies in the Middle East.

Mr. Chair,

The international community must work together to promote democracy, protect human rights and provide quality education, in order to ensure that future generations enjoy peace, stability, and prosperity.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.