

UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL MEETING IN SUPPORT OF ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE

The two-State solution: a key prerequisite for achieving peace and stability in the Middle East

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

PLENARY II International efforts to achieve the two-State solution

Paper presented by

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Honorable Chairperson,
 Excellences – Ambassadors,
 Distinguished Delegates,

Firstly, let me express my warm sentiments of gratitude for being invited to this UN forum, and for the opportunity to speak to you from this challenging podium. It is a great honor to me.

Let me introduce myself. I am a scientist, an immigrant from the Former Soviet Union, from South – East of Ukraine.

I am not a politician, but from my first steps in Israel, I was and still is a dedicated member of Israeli left camp.

In a year 2003 I was a part of Israeli delegation in Geneva where the Geneva Accord was presented and symbolically signed by two sites. This agreement was and is the most detailed and practically most welcome by both sides, as we heard yesterday in excellent talk by Mr. Nidal Foqaha.

It is hard to describe by words the atmosphere and the excitement of people during this only ONE day of the virtual peace!

At this day we did not know yet, that Geneva Accord, like many others that followed and preceded it, like Clinton Parameters and Annapolis Agreement, The Road Map etc. will become a memory.

From the year 2003 I served as a member of the Public Board of the Geneva Initiative. Between the years 2005 until 2011 - as an elected member of the Board of B'Tselem, a re-known NGO which observes and records human rights violations on the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

In the year 2007, I, together with my friends - leftist Russian speaking Israelis, and prominent Israeli public figures, established the first NGO to work with Russian speaking Israelis, to instill peace and democracy values among this influential Israeli community, who immigrated to Israel from the year 1990. " The Million Which Changed the Face of the Middle East", as the recently published by the re-known journalist Lily Galily and Former MK Roman Bronfman book says, " The Million Which Changed the Face of the Middle East". And indeed it did.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year the humanity pays tribute and celebrates 75th Anniversary of the Second Great War, for us, in the former Soviet Union, it was a Great Patriotic War.

There was no single family in the former Soviet Union which was left unwounded by this war. The brothers of my two grandmothers were killed on the battlefields during the first months of this war; one of them never saw his daughter, born after his death. Nazis killed the great part of my mother's family. My grandfather went through the whole war and survived.

The days of remembrance hold in all countries this year were the open message to the world: **Never Again!**

However, what we see all over the globe and particularly in the Middle East is different from what the world declared 75 years ago.

What we see in practice is lots of injustice.

What we see in reality and it is very unfortunate, that Israel is a part of one of the longest and the most unjustifiable, considering our own tragic Jewish history, conflict and Israel must take a responsibility for this, too.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It was the winter of 2002, when I first visited Qalandia Check-point, where Palestinians were passing to Israel, some to go for work, some to see the doctor, some to go to school, young and old, pregnant women, small kids, sick persons. They were waiting hours, in cold weather, carrying heavy parcels, humiliated and tired. I was shocked and shaking. I felt like I am sleeping. Few days later, I wrote a short story "Am I dreaming".

This visit changed my life..... to see the life of Palestinians. Among them Russian speaking Palestinians (more then 10.000 in the West Bank), many of them are our friends, those who studied in the former Soviet Union, those who could help us to reach out to the soul of Israeli Russians. Unfortunately the atmosphere of anti- normalization and the lack of resources had seriously affected our activity, which is of an utmost importance and should be continued!

Since that time, I found a deep commitment to the peace in the Middle East, and a sincere concern for the destiny of the Palestinian people and the Jewish state.

The collective attitude, adherence to the Two State Solution and the creation of the State of Palestine alongside with Israel, as the final and ultimate manifestation of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination, sovereignty and statehood.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is now more than 48 years since Israel occupied the "Territories" and it is high time to end the occupation! 3 out of 4 Israelis were born during the occupation, and perceive it as a normal state of life without considering the harshness of the military rule, which subjugates millions of people, without any rights.

While at the same time the settlers, their neighbors enjoy all the rights. They live in democratic conditions, whereas millions of Palestinians suffer every type of harassments, with the violation of the freedom of movement or voting rights.

Netanyahu's Government is perceived as holding fast to the status quo and dismissing as superfluous any effort to achieve a permanent agreement based on the principle of 'territories for peace' and a negotiated termination of the occupation and the conflict.

Since the swearing-in of the government, its spokespeople have reiterated consistently its reservations on the demand of the international community to withdraw from occupied territories, it's side-stepping of the "Annapolis Joint Declaration", it's ignoring of the "Road Map" and its repudiation of the "Arab Peace Initiative" for a comprehensive peace in the Middle East". Netanyahu's last moment pre-election video, placed on You tube, on the day of election does not need any commentaries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In recent opinion polls conducted both in Palestine and in Israel, long-standing findings are reiterated: a majority, in both societies desire peace

through a negotiated agreement along the "Two State Solution" paradigm, based on the 1967 borders.

The results of the most recent poll conducted jointly by the Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in Ramallah indicate that compared to the findings in June 2014, support for the two-state solution decreases among Israelis from 62% to 51% and among Palestinians from 54% to 51%.

At the same time - consistent with previous results - each side perceives the other side as constituting a threat to its very existence. 56% of Palestinians think that Israel's goals in the long run are to extend its borders to cover all the area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea and expel its Arab citizens. 25% think the goals are to annex the West Bank while denying political rights to the Palestinians. 43% of the Israelis think that the Palestinian aspirations in the long run are to conquer the State of Israel and destroy much of the Jewish population in Israel; 18% think the goals of the Palestinians are to conquer the State of Israel.

[The Palestinian sample size was 1200 adults interviewed face-to-face in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza Strip in 120 randomly selected locations between June 3 and 6, 2015. The margin of error is 3%. The Israeli sample includes 802 adult Israelis interviewed in Hebrew, Arabic or Russian between June 2 and 14, 2015. The margin of error is 3%.]

At the same time in both societies, we have high level of skepticism if a negotiated agreement is feasible at all and a hawkish contingent that is pursuing a maximalist end, at a price of a shattered peace. The hawks on both sides enjoy popularity largely due to fear of the adversity and in objection to the necessary painful compromise a final peace agreement entails for both the Palestinians and the Israelis.

Recent events, showing violent attacks and criminal acts, blamed by Palestinian authority, but conducted either spontaneously or by non-organized Palestinians, are showing that people's patience and trust in Palestinian Authority dedicated to the non-violent resistance come to the end. And this is a great danger which may end up by spreading the fire from on the land of Israel and Palestine. This should be prevented by all means. We have to ensure that this will never happen.

We have a Government that is putting security, which is self-reliant, as the first priority, but from our point of view its activity only endangers Israel. Jerusalem is preoccupied primarily with the nuclear program of Iran and its ramifications for Israel's defense. Its leadership is building barriers, suspending and destroying any advance on the peace process, as a reflection of the fear and mistrust prevalent amongst the Israeli public in the ability, or the intention and the will of the Palestinian leadership to assure for adherence to commitments taken.

For a peaceful future, ultimately such commitments towards the "end of conflict" are imperative.

In the course of its short history, Israel has been exposed to consistent condemnation, isolation and de-legitimization on international platforms, such as the UN organizations.

The global narrative of anti-colonialism skipped Israel, even though we too fought for our independence against British colonial rule, with a high toll. At that, our national struggle narrative had been denied access to the pantheon of global liberation narratives.

The Six Day War of 1967 brought us a historic opportunity to reconcile both narratives, that of Israel and that of Palestine. In November that year the world majority of countries adopted UNSC resolution 242 binding lasting peace in the Middle East with an Israeli withdrawal from territories conquered in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. This has become the international axiom for peace in our troubled area and a reiteration of the principle, which was encapsulated in the UNGA resolution 181 of November 29 1947, the Two State Solution.

The UN is being regarded in Israel as a cynical "automatic majority" played against us under any circumstances. Being denied the privilege of any other member of the family of nations, on equal grounds, is a predicament for our ability to take political and security risks, essential in any solution pursued in our region. It seems that the Israeli electorate votes for hawkish governments for several reasons, of which the fear of being left exposed to the dangers of total isolation internationally is not to be overlooked.

Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished delegates,

I am sure that there are some experts in non-violent conflict resolutions among this audience. We all know that broken family are going to psychologist. Why I am talking about this. I recall last historic visit of President Obama to Israel. Mr. President took the opportunity to speak to us, Israelis, beyond the heads of our Government. Amongst other messages to the Israeli constituents, the American president said to us in Hebrew: ATEM LO LEVAD, which in our language means, "You are not alone, in isolation". He added: "I believe that you do have a true partner in President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad. Over the last few years they have built institutions and maintained security on the West Bank in ways that few would have imagined a decade ago".

In contrast, the absence of ATEM LO LEVAD towards Israel on the world stage of the UN is a predicament leading to stalemate in the Middle East.

This notion was probably in the minds of Arab leaders, when discussing in the Beirut Arab Summit of March 2002 a Saudi proposal for a regional peace initiative, which was adopted in its closing resolution as the Arab Peace Initiative. In essence, it sends a message to Israel: once you complete the peace negotiations with the Palestinians and sign a peace treaty that settles all disputes, all Arab League countries will make peace with Israel, normalize the diplomatic, and trade relations with it.

I should remind you what Mr. Baltiansky, in his yesterday speech, suggested - not to wait, but instead make it in parallel, one step here, versus one step there. (blame game should be finished, it should be win win, and the entire word will benefit from this). Citation.

The Government of Israel failed so far to respond to this challenge for few years already. That is very unfortunate.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished delegates, and with this I am finishing,

The world, with its rich heritage of struggle against colonialism, can assist us and the Arab world, which fights extremism, particularly. Its objective would be to assist the parties in the Middle East conflict to remove the barriers holding back the inalienable rights of the Palestinian People to self-determination, sovereignty and statehood, through a peace agreement in accordance with UNSC 242/338.

We all understand that to stop the Occupation will be costly. Mr. Netanyahu has to understand that the two states solution is the best and the only practical solution to the long lasting conflict between the two parties, which considers the rights of both contenders by a reasonably fair compromise. It acknowledges the rights of the Jews to return to their ancient homeland and the rights of the Palestinians who lived there for centuries.

Meretz party calls upon the Governments of Israel and Palestine to complete the peace negotiations and achieve a Peace Agreement, which will end the occupation and the conflict in the Middle East. On the background of Israeli policy's which certainly evoked anti-Israeli and, sometimes, anti-Semitic movements, UN can extend its hand to Israel, as President Obama did, with a message of acceptance and recognition, saying: ATEM LO LEVAD, you are not isolated, undermined, de-legitimized.

We will help you! This is the only way to defeat THE FEAR and TO CAPTURE THE HEARTS of Israeli people again.

Let them hear again, ATEM LO LEVAD, PEACE IS POSSIBLE!

I hope that catastrophe will be prevented. The life will provide us with the answer.

Thank you very much.

Moscow, July, 2015
