



Statement by

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Prime Minister of the State of Israel

High-Level Plenary Meeting of the 60th Session of the
General Assembly

United Nations, New York

15 September 2005

Translation

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon' Speech at the United Nations Assembly
September 15, 2005

My friends and colleagues, heads and representatives of the UN member states,

I arrived here from Jerusalem, the capital of the Jewish people for over 3,000 years, and the undivided and eternal capital of the State of Israel.

At the outset, I would like to express the profound feelings of empathy of the people of Israel for the American nation, and our sincere condolences to the families who lost their loved ones. I wish to encourage my friend, President George Bush, and the American people, in their determined efforts to assist the victims of the hurricane and rebuild the ruins after the destruction. The State of Israel, which the United States stood beside at times of trial, is ready to extend any assistance at its disposal in this immense humanitarian mission.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I stand before you at the gate of nations as a Jew and as a citizen of the free and sovereign State of Israel, a proud representative of an ancient people, whose numbers are few, but whose contribution to civilization and to the values of ethics, justice and faith, surrounds the world and encompasses history. The Jewish people have a long memory, the memory which united the exiles of Israel for thousands of years: a memory which has its origin in G-d's commandment to our forefather Abraham: "Go forth!" and continued with the receiving of the Torah at the foot of Mount Sinai and the wanderings of the children of Israel in the desert, led by Moses on their journey to the promised land, the land of Israel.

I was born in the Land of Israel, the son of pioneers – people who tilled the land and sought no fights – who did not come to Israel to dispossess its residents. If the circumstances had not demanded it, I would not have become a soldier, but rather a farmer and agriculturist. My first love was, and remains, manual labor; sowing and harvesting, the pastures, the flock and the cattle.

I, as someone whose path of life led him to be a fighter and commander in all Israel's wars, reaches out today to our Palestinian neighbors in a call for reconciliation and compromise to end the bloody conflict, and embark on the path which leads to peace and understanding between our peoples. I view this as my calling and my primary mission for the coming years.

The land of Israel is precious to me, precious to us, the Jewish people, more than anything. Relinquishing any part of our forefathers' legacy is heartbreaking, as difficult as the parting of the Red Sea. Every inch of land, every hill and valley, every stream and rock, is saturated with Jewish history, replete with memories.

The continuity of Jewish presence in the Land of Israel never ceased. Even those of us who were exiled from our land, against their will, to the ends of the earth — their souls, for all generations, remained connected to their homeland, by thousands of hidden threads of yearning and love, expressed three times a day in prayer and songs of longing.

The Land of Israel is the open Bible, the written testimony, the identity and right of the Jewish people. Under its skies, the prophets of Israel expressed their claims for social justice, and their eternal vision for alliances between peoples, in a world which would know no more war. Its cities, villages, vistas, ridges, deserts and plains preserve as loyal witnesses its ancient Hebrew names. Page after page, our unique land is unfurled, and at its heart is united Jerusalem, the city of the Temple upon Mount Moriah, the axis of the life of the Jewish people throughout all generations, and the seat of its yearnings and prayers for 3,000 years. The city to which we pledged an eternal vow of faithfulness, which forever beats in every Jewish heart: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its cunning!"

I say these things to you because they are the essence of my Jewish consciousness, and of my belief in the eternal and unimpeachable right of the people of Israel to the Land of Israel. However, I say this here also to emphasize the immensity of the pain I feel deep in my heart at the recognition that we have to make concessions for the sake of peace between us and our Palestinian neighbors.

The right of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel does not mean disregarding the rights of others in the land. The Palestinians will always be our neighbors. We respect them, and have no aspirations to rule over them. They are also entitled to freedom and to a national, sovereign existence in a state of their own.

This week, the last Israeli soldier left the Gaza Strip, and military law there was ended. The State of Israel proved that it is ready to make painful concessions in order to resolve the conflict with the Palestinians. The decision to disengage was very difficult for me, and involves a heavy personal price. However, it is the absolute recognition that it is the right path for the future of Israel that guided me. Israeli society is undergoing a difficult crisis as a result of the Disengagement, and now needs to heal the rifts.

Now it is the Palestinians' turn to prove their desire for peace. The end of Israeli control over and responsibility for the Gaza Strip allows the Palestinians, if they so wish, to develop their economy and build a peace-seeking society, which is developed, free, law-abiding, transparent, and which adheres to democratic principles. The most important test the Palestinian leadership will face is in fulfilling their commitment to put an end to terror and its infrastructures, eliminate the anarchic regime of armed gangs, and cease the incitement and indoctrination of hatred towards Israel and the Jews.

Until they do so — Israel will know how to defend itself from the horrors of terrorism. This is why we built the Security Fence, and we will continue to build it until it is completed, as would any other country defending its citizens.

The Security Fence prevents terrorists and murderers from arriving in city centers on a daily basis and targeting citizens on their way to work, children on their way to school and families sitting together in restaurants. This Fence is vitally indispensable. This Fence saves lives!

The successful implementation of the Disengagement Plan opens up a window of opportunity for advancing towards peace, in accordance with the sequence of the Roadmap. The State of Israel is committed to the Roadmap and to the implementation of the Sharm El-Sheikh understandings. And I hope that it will be possible, through them, to renew the political process.

I am among those who believe that it is possible to reach a fair compromise and coexistence in good neighborly relations between Jews and Arabs. However, I must emphasize one fact: there will be no compromise on the right of the State of Israel to exist as a Jewish state, with defensible borders, in full security and without threats and terror.

I call on the Palestinian leadership to show determination and leadership, and to eliminate terror, violence and the culture of hatred from our relations. I am certain that it is in our power to present our peoples with a new and promising horizon, a horizon of hope.

Distinguished representatives,

As I mentioned, the Jewish people have a long memory. We remember events which took place thousands of years ago, and certainly remember events which took place in this hall during the last 60 years. The Jewish people remember the dramatic vote in the UN Assembly on November 29, 1947, when representatives of the nations recognized our right to national revival in our historic homeland. However, we also remember dozens of harsh and unjust decisions made by United Nations over the years. And we know that, even today, there are those who sit here as representatives of a country whose leadership calls to wipe Israel off the face of the earth, and no one speaks out.

The attempts of that country to arm itself with nuclear weapons must disturb the sleep of anyone who desires peace and stability in the Middle East and the entire world. The combination of murky fundamentalism and support of terrorist organizations creates a serious threat that every member nation in the UN must stand against.

I hope that the comprehensive reforms which the United Nations is undergoing in its 60th anniversary year will include a fundamental change and improvement in the approach of the United Nations, its organizations and institutions, towards the State of Israel.

My fellow representatives,

Peace is a supreme value in the Jewish legacy, and is the desired goal of our policy. After the long journey of wanderings and the hardships of the Jewish people; after the Holocaust which obliterated one third of our people; after the long and arduous struggle for revival; after more than 57 consecutive years of war and terror which did not stop the development of the State of Israel; after all this – our heart's desire was and remains to achieve peace with our neighbors. Our desire for peace is strong enough to ensure that we will achieve it, only if our neighbors are genuine partners in this longed-for goal. If we succeed in working together, we can transform our plot of land, which is dear to both peoples, from a land of contention to a land of peace – for our children and grandchildren.

In a few days time on the Hebrew calendar, the New Year will begin, the 5,766th year since the Creation. According to Jewish belief, the fates of people and nations are determined at the New Year by the Creator – to be spared or to be doomed. May the Holy One, blessed be He, determine that this year, our fate and the fate of our neighbors is peace, mutual respect and good neighborly relations.

From this distinguished podium, on behalf of the people of Israel, I wish all the people of the world a happy New Year.