



Press Release

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Français

SECRETARY-GENERAL SAYS IT IS LONG PAST TIME FOR ISRAELIS AND PALESTINIANS

TO MAKE DIFFICULT DECISIONS TO MOVE OSLO PROCESS FORWARD

Following is the text of Secretary-General Kofi Annan's toast delivered in Jerusalem today, at a luncheon hosted by the Speaker of the Knesset, Dan Tichon:

It gives me great pleasure to be visiting Israel and especially to be here with you at the Knesset, the seat of one of the world's most vibrant democracies.

Parliamentarians such as yourselves are increasingly active and influential players on the world stage. As elected representatives, you, more than anyone else, are in direct contact with the wishes and sentiments of the global public.

And while your responsibilities lie first at the national level, more and more parliamentarians are understanding that there is an international dimension to most of the central issues of our times. As a result, they are making themselves heard at the United Nations, at world conferences and through groups such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union and Parliamentarians for Global Action.

The Israeli Parliament, for its part, represents a remarkable range of views and traditions. I know that, at times, the various parties can seem terribly splintered, while, on other occasions, consensus is the order of the day. Throughout your deliberations, I know you never lose sight of the well-being of the Israeli people and your own commitment to dialogue and compromise.

Israeli security and regional security in general are also abiding concerns of the international community. The troubled peace process between Israel and the Palestinians, ongoing hostilities in southern Lebanon, and the crisis in Iraq each, in very dramatic ways, illustrates the maxim that when peace processes are not moving forward, they are sliding backward.

Horrifying acts of violence against innocent civilians have occurred. The day-to-day reality of too many people in the region continues to be one of insecurity and destitution. I have come to the Middle East to listen, but also to deliver a message: that it is long past time for Israelis and Palestinians to make the difficult decisions needed to move the Oslo process forward to a successful outcome. Progress on all other fronts is likewise

long overdue. We must move from an era of confrontation to one of cooperation; from despair to development; from enmity to amity.

I have appealed to the parties on several occasions not to let themselves be swayed by the actions of those on either side who work against the peace process, but rather to intensify efforts to overcome all obstacles that stand in the way. I will be reiterating that appeal in the talks that I will have with Israeli and Palestinian officials in the days ahead.

What better serves Israel's interest: a mutually agreed peace with your neighbours that gives both peoples the chance to realize their aspirations for peaceful, prosperous lives? Or unilateral acts and declarations by both sides that could throw the process completely off course? At this time of profound uncertainty, I urge you not to lose sight of the gains you have made thus far. Let us not lose the momentum that has been built up so painstakingly.

I would like to take this opportunity to make clear to you the nature, the demands and the promise of the agreement I reached with the Government of Iraq. I went to Baghdad, with the full authorization of all members of the Security Council, in search of a peaceful solution to the crisis. That crisis has, at least for now, been averted.

The mandate of the Security Council has been reaffirmed. The access of United Nations inspectors has been not only restored, but expanded to include any and all sites. The authority of the Executive Chairman of the United Nations Special Commission has been acknowledged and strengthened.

Whether the threat to international peace and security has been averted for all time is now in the hands of the Iraqi leadership. It is now for them to comply in practice with what they have signed on paper.

If they do, it will bring nearer the day when Iraq can fully rejoin the family of nations. In the meantime, the expanded "oil-for-food" programme should help alleviate the suffering of the Iraqi people.

The agreement reached in Baghdad was neither a "victory" nor a "defeat" for any one person, nation or group of nations. Certainly, the United Nations and the world community lost nothing, gave away nothing and conceded nothing of substance. By halting, at least for now, the renewal of military hostilities in the Gulf, it was a victory for peace, for reason, for the resolution of conflict by diplomacy.

Finally, I would like to appeal to the Israeli public to look anew at the United Nations. I know that "oom-shmoom", David Ben-Gurion's catchy rhyme, is used from time to time by Israelis to dismiss a world Organization that some see as either irrelevant or hostile to Israel.

I would hope that Israelis could instead make "room" for "oom", that they could open their minds to the prospect of a new era in relations between Israel and the United Nations. I know that Israel attaches great importance to the spirit and practice of international cooperation. Israel has much to offer, and to gain, through the United Nations. We have put behind us some of the worst chapters in our history; and Israel is on its way to normalizing its presence at the United Nations. In the end, I think you will agree that in today's interdependent world, without "oom", we shall have kloom". ["Kloom" is Hebrew for "nothing".]

In that spirit, I would like to propose a toast: to our host the Speaker of the Knesset and this fine democratic institution; to Israel on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary; to improved ties between Israel and the United Nations; and, most of all, to peace. Thank you.

* Revised for technical reasons.

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