



Translation

November 27, 2007

Address by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert at the International Meeting in Annapolis

The Honorable President of the United States, George Bush,
My colleague, President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas,
Heads of delegations,
Distinguished guests,

I came here today from Jerusalem, at your invitation, Honorable President, to extend, on behalf of the people of Israel and the State of Israel, a hand in peace to the Palestinian people and to our neighboring Arab states, many of whose representatives are here with us in Annapolis.

I had many good reasons to refrain from coming to this meeting.

The memory of the failures of the near and distant past weighs heavily on us. The dreadful terrorism perpetrated by Palestinian terrorist organizations has affected thousands of Israeli citizens, destroyed families and attempted to disrupt the lives of all the citizens of Israel. I witnessed it personally during my term as Mayor of Jerusalem, at times of bombings at cafés, buses and recreational centers in Jerusalem and other cities in the State of Israel.

The continued firing of Qassam rockets against tens of thousands of residents in the south of Israel, particularly in the city of Sderot, serves as a warning – one which cannot be overlooked. The absence of governmental institutes and effective law-enforcement mechanisms, the Hamas rule in the Gaza Strip, the ongoing activity of murderous organizations throughout all the territories of the Palestinian Authority, the absence of a legal system which meets the basic criteria of a democratic government – all these are factors which deter us from moving forward too hastily.

I do not ignore all the obstacles which are sure to emerge along the way. They are right in front of me. I came here, despite the concerns and doubts and hesitations, to say to you, President Mahmoud Abbas, and through you, to your people and to the entire Arab world: it is time. We no longer, and you no longer, have the privilege of clinging to dreams which are disconnected



from the sufferings of our peoples, the hardships they experience daily and the burden of living under ongoing uncertainty, with no chance for change or hope.

We want peace. We demand an end to terror, incitement and hatred. We are willing to make a painful compromise, rife with risks, in order to realize these aspirations.

I came here today not to settle historic accounts between us on what caused the conflict and hatred and what, for many years, stood in the way of compromise and peace.

I wish to say, from the bottom of my heart, that I know and acknowledge the fact that alongside the constant suffering which many in Israel have experienced because of the history, the wars, the terror and the hatred towards us – a suffering which has always been part of our lives in our land – your people have also suffered for many years, and some still suffer.

For dozens of years, many Palestinians have been living in camps, disconnected from the environment in which they grew, wallowing in poverty, neglect, alienation, bitterness, and a deep, unrelenting sense of deprivation.

I know that this pain and deprivation is one of the deepest foundations which fomented the ethos of hatred towards us.

We are not indifferent to this suffering. We are not oblivious to the tragedies you have experienced. I believe that in the course of negotiations between us we will find the right way, as part of an international effort in which we will participate, to assist these Palestinians in finding a proper framework for their future, in the Palestinian state which will be established in the territories agreed upon between us. Israel will be part of an international mechanism which will assist in finding a solution to this problem.

The negotiations between us will not be here in Annapolis, but rather in our home and in yours. It will be bilateral, direct, ongoing and continuous, in an effort to complete it during the course of 2008.

It will address all the issues which have thus far been evaded. We will do it directly, openly and courageously. We will not avoid any subject, we will deal with all the core issues. I have no doubt that the reality created in our region in 1967 will change significantly. While this will be an



extremely difficult process for many of us, it is nevertheless inevitable. I know it. Many of my people know it. We are ready for it.

The negotiations will be based on previous agreements between us, UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, the Roadmap and the April 14th 2004 letter from President Bush to the Prime Minister of Israel.

At the conclusion of the negotiations, I believe that we will be able to reach an agreement which will fulfill President Bush's vision: two states for two peoples.

A peace-seeking, viable, strong, democratic and terror-free Palestinian state for the Palestinian people.

A Jewish, democratic State of Israel, living in security and free from the threat of terror - the national home of the Jewish people.

It is clear that the implementation of an agreement will be subject to the implementation of all obligations in the Roadmap, in all its phases and according to its sequence, as concluded between us from the very beginning. We will abide by all our obligations, and so will you.

The agreement with you and its gradual implementation, cautiously and responsibly, is part of a much wider complex, which will lead us, hopefully, to peace with all the Arab states. There is not a single Arab state in the north, east or south with which we do not seek peace. There is no Muslim state with which we do not want to establish diplomatic relations. Anyone who wants peace with us, we say to them, from the bottom of our hearts: welcome!

I am pleased to see here, in this hall, representatives of Arab countries, most of which do not have relations with Israel. The time has come for you as well. You cannot continue to stand by indefinitely and watch the peace train go by. It is time to end the boycott and alienation towards the State of Israel. It is not helpful for you, and it hurts us. I am familiar with the Arab peace initiative, which was born in Riyadh, affirmed in Beirut and recently reaffirmed by you in Riyadh. I value this initiative, acknowledge its importance and highly appreciate its contribution. I have no doubt that it will be referred to in the course of the negotiations between us and the Palestinian leadership.



The Arab world represented here by many countries is a vital component in creating a new reality in the Middle East.

The peace signed between Israel and Egypt, and subsequently between Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, is a solid foundation of stability and hope in our region. This peace is an example and a model of the relations which we can build with Arab states.

My close relations with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan are extremely significant for the process of building trust and understanding with the Arab states.

However, these relations, as important as they may be, are not enough. We aspire to normalization with those Arab states which eschew, as much as we do, radical and fanatic fundamentalism, and which seek to grant their citizens a more moderate, tolerant and prosperous world.

This is a common interest to all of us. There is a lot which separates us – memories and a heritage which do not emanate from the same historic roots, different ways of living, different customs, and your emotional, spontaneous sense of solidarity with our neighboring Arab countries, which have long been trapped in this age-old bloody conflict between us.

However, there is also a lot which brings us together. You, like us, know that religious fanaticism and national extremism are a perfect recipe for domestic instability, violence, bitterness and ultimately the disintegration of the very foundations of coexistence which is based on tolerance and mutual acceptance.

We are a tiny country with a small population, but rich in good will and with a significant ability to create a partnership which will lead to prosperity, growth, economic development and stability for the entire region.

The prospect of a new political horizon, and renewed hope, not only for Palestinians and Israelis, but also, together with you, for the entire region, can come from here, from Annapolis.

Honorable President of the United States, my colleague Mahmoud Abbas, distinguished guests,



Almost two years ago, under very sad circumstances, Prime Minister of Israel Ariel Sharon was no longer able to carry the heavy responsibility of leading the State of Israel, and this responsibility was passed on to me - first, as a result of formal procedures and subsequently on the basis of an election in Israel's democratic system of government.

Prior to my election I stated that my heart's desire, and that of my people, was to achieve peace, primarily with the Palestinian people. This is what I believed then and it is what I continue to believe now, with all my heart.

The past two years have been difficult for all of us. The hardships have not been alleviated, the terror organizations have not weakened, the enemies of peace have not disappeared, and we are still anxiously awaiting the return of our missing and captive sons who are held by terror organizations. I long for the day when I can see Gilad, Eldad and Udi back with their families, and I will not falter in my efforts to achieve their release.

I believe that there is no path other than peace. I believe that there is no just solution other than the solution of two national states for two peoples. I believe that there is no path which does not involve painful compromise for you, Palestinians, and for us Israelis. I want to thank you, President George Bush, an ally in the path of peace, for your willingness to assist in the historic process of peace and reconciliation between us and our neighbors.

I believe it is time. We are ready. I invite you, my friend Mahmoud Abbas, and your people, to join us in this long, tormenting and complex path, for which there is no substitute.

Together we will start. Together we will arrive.