

The 4th Conference - 2003

The Herzliya Address - PM Ariel Sharon

Good Evening,

I congratulate the organizers of this conference for the important and interesting gathering which you have held here. During the past three days, you have been discussing Israel's situation. I, as Prime Minister, am responsible for the planning and implementation of the measures which will shape Israel's character during the next few years.

We are all entrusted with the duty of shaping the face of the Jewish and democratic State of Israel – a state where there is an equal distribution of the burden, as well as the acceptance of rights and shouldering of duties by all sectors, through different forms of national service. A state where there is a good and efficient education system which educates a young generation imbued with values and national pride, which is capable of confronting the challenges of the modern world. A country whose economy is adapted to the advanced global market of the 21st century, where the product per capita crosses the \$20,000 line and is equal to that of most developed European countries. An immigrant-absorbing state which constitutes a national and spiritual center for all Jews of the world and is a source of attraction for thousands of immigrants each year. Aliyah is the central goal of the State of Israel. This is the country we wish to shape. This is the country where our children will want to live.

I know that there is sometimes a tendency to narrow all of Israel's problems down to the political sphere, believing that once a solution is found to Israel's problems with its neighbors, particularly the Palestinians, the other issues on the agenda will miraculously resolve themselves. I do not believe so. We are facing additional challenges which must be addressed – the economy, educating the young generation, immigrant absorption, enhancement of social cohesion and the improvement of relations between Arabs and Jews in Israel.

Like all Israeli citizens, I yearn for peace. I attach supreme importance to taking all steps which will enable progress toward resolution of the conflict with the Palestinians. However, in light of the other challenges we are faced with, if the Palestinians do not make a similar effort toward a solution of the conflict – I do not intend to wait for them indefinitely.

Seven months ago, my Government approved the "Roadmap" to peace, based on President George Bush's June 2002 speech. This is a balanced program for phased progress toward peace, to which both Israel and the Palestinians committed themselves. A full and genuine implementation of the program is the best way to achieve true peace. The Roadmap is the only political plan accepted by Israel, the Palestinians, the Americans and a majority of the international community. We are willing to proceed toward its implementation: two states – Israel and a Palestinian State – living side by side in tranquility, security and peace.

The Roadmap is a clear and reasonable plan, and it is therefore possible and imperative to implement it. The concept behind this plan is that only security will lead to peace. And in that sequence. Without the achievement of full security – within the framework of which terror organizations will be dismantled – it will not be possible to achieve genuine peace, a peace for generations. This is the essence of the Roadmap. The opposite perception, according to which the very signing of a peace agreement will produce security out of thin air, has already been tried in the past and failed miserably. And such will be the fate of any other plan which promotes this concept. These plans deceive the public and create false hope. There will be no peace before the eradication of terror.

The government under my leadership will not compromise on the realization of all phases of the Roadmap. It is incumbent upon the Palestinians to uproot the terrorist groups and to create a law-abiding society which fights against violence and incitement. Peace and terror cannot coexist. The world is currently united in its unequivocal demand from the Palestinians to act toward the cessation of terrorism and the implementation of reforms. Only a transformation of the Palestinian Authority into a different authority will enable progress in the political process. The Palestinians must fulfill their obligations. A full and complete implementation will – at the end of the process – lead to peace and tranquility.

We began the implementation of the Roadmap at Aqaba, but the terrorist organizations joined with Yasser Arafat and sabotaged the process with a series of the most brutal terror attacks we have ever known.

Concurrent with the demand from the Palestinians to eliminate the terror organizations, Israel is taking – and will continue to take – steps to significantly improve the living conditions of the Palestinian population: Israel will remove closures and curfews and reduce the number of roadblocks; we will improve freedom of movement for the Palestinian population, including the passage of people and goods; we will increase the hours of operation at international border

crossings; we will enable a large number of Palestinian merchants to conduct regular and normal economic and trade relations with their Israeli counterparts, etc. All these measures are aimed at enabling better and freer movement for the Palestinian population not involved in terror.

In addition, subject to security coordination, we will transfer Palestinian towns to Palestinian security responsibility. Israel will make every effort to assist the Palestinians and to advance the process.

Israel will fulfil the commitments taken upon itself. I have committed to the President of the United States that Israel will dismantle unauthorized outposts. It is my intention to implement this commitment. The State of Israel is governed by law, and the issue of the outposts is no exception. I understand the sensitivity; we will try to do this in the least painful way possible, but the unauthorized outposts will be dismantled. Period.

Israel will meet all its obligations with regard to construction in the settlements. There will be no construction beyond the existing construction line, no expropriation of land for construction, no special economic incentives and no construction of new settlements.

I take this opportunity to appeal to the Palestinians and repeat, as I said at Aqaba: it is not in our interest to govern you. We would like you to govern yourselves in your own country. A democratic Palestinian state with territorial contiguity in Judea and Samaria and economic viability, which would conduct normal relations of tranquility, security and peace with Israel. Abandon the path of terror and let us together stop the bloodshed. Let us move forward together towards peace.

We wish to speedily advance implementation of the Roadmap towards quiet and a genuine peace. We hope that the Palestinian Authority will carry out its part. However, if in a few months the Palestinians still continue to disregard their part in implementing the Roadmap – then Israel will initiate the unilateral security step of disengagement from the Palestinians.

The purpose of the “Disengagement Plan” is to reduce terror as much as possible, and grant Israeli citizens the maximum level of security. The process of disengagement will lead to an improvement in the quality of life, and will help strengthen the Israeli economy. The unilateral steps which Israel will take in the framework of the “Disengagement Plan” will be fully coordinated with the United States. We must not harm our strategic coordination with the United States. These steps will increase security for the residents of Israel and relieve the pressure on the IDF and security forces in fulfilling the difficult tasks they are faced with. The “Disengagement Plan” is meant to grant maximum security and minimize friction between Israelis and Palestinians.

We are interested in conducting direct negotiations, but do not intend to hold Israeli society hostage in the hands of the Palestinians. I have already said – we will not wait for them indefinitely.

The “Disengagement Plan” will include the redeployment of IDF forces along new security lines and a change in the deployment of settlements, which will reduce as much as possible the number of Israelis located in the heart of the Palestinian population. We will draw provisional security lines and the IDF will be deployed along them. Security will be provided by IDF deployment, the security fence and other physical obstacles. The “Disengagement Plan” will reduce friction between us and the Palestinians.

This reduction of friction will require the extremely difficult step of changing the deployment of some of the settlements. I would like to repeat what I have said in the past: In the framework of a future agreement, Israel will not remain in all the places where it is today. The relocation of settlements will be made, first and foremost, in order to draw the most efficient security line possible, thereby creating this disengagement between Israel and the Palestinians. This security line will not constitute the permanent border of the State of Israel, however, as long as implementation of the Roadmap is not resumed, the IDF will be deployed along that line. Settlements which will be relocated are those which will not be included in the territory of the State of Israel in the framework of any possible future permanent agreement. At the same time, in the framework of the “Disengagement Plan”, Israel will strengthen its control over those same areas in the Land of Israel which will constitute an inseparable part of the State of Israel in any future agreement. I know you would like to hear names, but we should leave something for later.

Israel will greatly accelerate the construction of the security fence. Today we can already see it taking shape. The rapid completion of the security fence will enable the IDF to remove roadblocks and ease the daily lives of the Palestinian population not involved in terror.

In order to enable the Palestinians to develop their economic and trade sectors, and to ensure that they will not be exclusively dependent on Israel, we will consider, in the framework of the “Disengagement Plan”, enabling – in coordination with Jordan and Egypt – the freer passage of people and goods through international border crossings, while taking the necessary security precautions.

I would like to emphasize: the “Disengagement Plan” is a security measure and not a political one. The steps which will be taken will not change the political reality between Israel and the Palestinians, and will not prevent the possibility of returning to the implementation of the Roadmap and reaching an agreed settlement.

The “Disengagement Plan” does not prevent the implementation of the Roadmap. Rather, it is a step Israel will take in the absence of any other option, in order to improve its security. The “Disengagement Plan” will be realized only in the event that the Palestinians continue to drag their feet and postpone implementation of the Roadmap.

Obviously, through the “Disengagement Plan” the Palestinians will receive much less than they would have received through direct negotiations as set out in the Roadmap.

According to circumstances, it is possible that parts of the “Disengagement Plan” that are supposed to provide maximum security to the citizens of Israel will be undertaken while also attempting to implement the Roadmap.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My life experience has taught me that for peace, as well as for war, we must have broad consensus. We must preserve our unity, even in the midst of a difficult, internal debate.

In the past three years, the Palestinian terrorist organizations have put us to a difficult test. Their plan to break the spirit of Israeli society has not succeeded. The citizens of Israel have managed to step into the breach, support each

other, lend a helping hand, volunteer and contribute.

I believe that this path of unity must be continued today. Whether we will be able to advance the Roadmap, or will have to implement the "Disengagement Plan", experience has taught us that, together, through broad national consensus, we can do great things.

Let us not be led astray. Any path will be complicated, strewn with obstacles, and obligate us to act with discretion and responsibility. I am confident that, just as we have managed to overcome the challenges of the past, we will stand together and succeed today.

We will always be guided by the words of Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, who said, on the day after the Declaration of Independence:

These days, our purpose is only to build the State of Israel with love and faith, in Jewish brotherhood, and to defend it with all our spirit, and as long as necessary. We are still in the midst of a difficult battle, one that has two fronts: political and military. Let us not embellish our deeds and, of course, our words, with grandiose names. We must remain humble. We achieved what we have achieved by standing on the shoulders of previous generations, and we accomplished what we have accomplished by preserving our precious legacy, the legacy of a small nation which has endured suffering and tribulations, but which is, nevertheless, great and eternal in spirit, vision, faith and virtue.

I am also a great believer in the resilience of this small, brave nation which has endured suffering and tribulations. I am confident that, united in the power of our faith, we will be able to succeed in any path we choose.

Thank you very much, and happy Hannukah.