

# Address by Foreign Minister Levy at the Multilateral Talks in Moscow - 28 January 1992

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Mr. Chairman,

Our meeting here, in Moscow, as representatives of countries from around the world, pursuing the specific, declared goal of distancing the menace of war in the Middle East and establishing cooperation between the peoples of the region, is an event marked by the most dramatic symbols of our age.

Only yesterday, no one would have thought possible such a gathering, motivated by a shared international desire for fundamental change in patterns of life and thought, and the creation of an atmosphere of trust on the road to peace. We lived then in an entirely different geopolitical world. Moscow and other Eastern European capitals were ruled by centralized Communist regimes. The Cold War between the superpowers thwarted any attempt to promote peace in the Middle East. Uncompromising hostility reigned between the Arab countries and Israel, fed by six wars in the course of only two generations. Western and Eastern countries alike were helping to arm and encourage Saddam Hussein. A year ago today most of the countries gathered here joined forces against his aggression, but now he is again gaining strength and threatening peace in the region.

The lesson to be learned from these events is that we must build confidence in the need, as well as the ability, to turn the spectre of war into a vision of peace and cooperation, even in the Middle East; confidence that nations and rulers have sobered up after their intoxication with delusive power; a confidence that draws from the desire and determination to begin a new way of life, born of weariness with the agony caused by war and destruction.

Mr. Chairman,

I thank the ministers and delegations who have gathered for this historic occasion. My deepest appreciation goes to our host, the government of independent Russia, and to each of the republics in the Commonwealth of Independent States which want to establish a new way of life.

My special thanks go to the American people and their president for the courageous example of leadership which they have set for the world, and to U.S. Secretary of States James Baker for his contribution and determination in setting the wheels of this historic peace process in motion.

The region to which we want to bring good tidings is the one that gave the world its message of culture, faith, and peace. It gave humanity the Bible, the Koran, and the New Testament. The word peace is the essence of the teachings of the People of Israel and the Arab peoples. Both greet each other with the words "shalom aleichem", "salaam aleikum". This greeting, deeply rooted in our cultures, has withstood all tests of time. How tragic and paradoxical it is that peace itself, like the rainbow, is so close, yet so unattainable and desired.

Mr. Chairman,

The Gulf crisis has taught us many lessons, which have caused accelerated change and coalescence of world views in international relations. The direct relationship between the

danger to world peace and stability and the stores of weapons in the hands of tyrannical regimes, was clearly demonstrated, as was the determination of countries to take a stand against this danger and extirpate it. No less important from Israel's standpoint is the lesson learned regarding the true roots of the problems of the Middle East and the factors connected with them. The fact that Arab countries and Israel faced a common danger from a tyrannical dictatorship which threatened the entire Arabian Peninsula, and that this regime was itself an Arab one, made the world and even most of the Arab countries aware, concretely and clearly, of the need and opportunity to bring the protracted, bitter and fruitless conflict between the Arabs and Israel to an end.

Mr. Chairman,

The Arab peoples and Israel have been in a state of war for two generations. Three times in each generation, full-scale wars have broken out, sowing destruction and harvesting ruin. Nearly 100,000 people, most of them in the prime of their lives, have died in these senseless wars. Among them were over 17,000 Israelis and over 80,000 Arabs. Close to 250,000 have been wounded in the wars: 40,000 Israeli and over 200,000 Arabs.

No price can be put on the loss of life, but the arms needed to maintain a constant state of war have a high, measurable price.

In the past decade alone, Arab countries have allocated over \$500 billion for armaments and other military expenditures. Arms imports to these countries accounted for 35 percent of the world arms trade, and almost twice the cost of arms for NATO and the Warsaw Pact together, which amounted to 22 percent of the world trade.

To better understand the significance of these shocking numbers, let us recall that the price of one tank could pay the annual tuition costs of 1,000 students in institutes of higher education. The price of one state-of-the-art fighter plane is equal to the cost of a year's education for 100,000 schoolchildren.

Israel's National Water Carrier, which transports water from the Sea of Galilee in the north to the Negev in the south, costs \$4.4 million in today's prices.

Egypt's tremendous Aswan Dam was built, about thirty years ago, at a cost of \$5 billion. The price of the construction of a huge tunnel under the English Channel, which will one day connect Britain to the European continent, is estimated at \$10 billion.

These examples illustrate the magnitude of the loss to the peoples of the region, who, for two generations, have pledged their funds, treasuries and human resources to this incessant arms race, a race lost from the start, purposeless and hopeless. Not only the wars themselves, but the mere continuation of the state of war, causes the destruction of infrastructure, arrests progress and perpetuates suffering and frustration. The peoples of the Middle East, who enjoyed a "Golden Age" of progress in architecture, mathematics, and the exact sciences, are now on the losing side of the profit and loss ledger.

Mr. Chairman,

Our region is satiated with arms, hungry for progress and thirsty for peace. This situation should no longer be thought of as a fait accompli. It was not decreed by nature. Heaven forbid that we should pass through the gate beyond which one abandons all hope. Therefore, we see great importance in the fact that the agenda for the multilateral talks includes monitoring and reduction of the arms race, coupled with confidence-building measures as an essential component in the coalescence of regional defence agreements.

We are living in the dawn of an age in which democracies are gradually disarming and using their resources to work together for the good of their peoples. The consolidation of the

European Communities into a powerful commonwealth is a good example of this. Countries which spilled the blood of millions in dreadful wars are today opening their borders to free passage of people and goods, and the exchange of information and culture. Yesterday's enemy has become today's neighbor and partner.

Mr. Chairman,

From the town where I live in the Jordan Valley, I behold with my very eyes how the vision of cooperation, as a way of reinforcing peace, advances to fruition. This valley is the border between Israel and Jordan. For years, Israel's side of the valley was green and blooming, whereas the Jordanian side was desolate and barren. This period of time was marked by incessant shooting and attacks against Israel from the other side of the Jordan River. As the years passed, the Jordanians learned from their Israeli neighbors how to raise crops; they built greenhouses and flourishing communities on the eastern bank of the river. They learned how to utilize the resources of the Dead Sea. Since then, the Jordan Valley has become a quiet place, where citizens of both countries exchange information instead of fire. Another example is the farms set up in Egypt in recent years with advice from Israeli experts; crop yields and the quality of the produce have been excellent. The Good Fence policy on the Lebanese border, and the open borders policy on the Jordan River are further evidence of cooperation between Israel and its neighbours and the contribution of this cooperation to stability and calm on the borders. From these micro examples, we can learn about the macro.

Israel proposes to its neighbours extensive cooperation which can lead to revitalization and prosperity in many areas of life. We can create a new Middle East, not in the end of days, but today. Israel is speaking of practical, feasible plans. Most of the Middle East is and and thirsty. Israel has accumulated vast experience in water-saving frugal irrigation methods which produce some of the best agricultural yields in the world. We will share information about the desalinization of sea water, about transporting water from place to place within the region, about the enhancement of groundwater. We will give all countries access to the technologies Israel has developed in the field of solar energy.

We will work to eradicate disease in plants and animals, the causes of which are ignorant of national borders. Neither does ecological damage know of geographical concepts. Only one year ago, the entire world was shocked at the death of cormorants in the Gulf waters, and trembled at the sight of the pillars of black smoke emitted from Kuwait oil wells, polluting the air as far away as Iran in the east and the African coast in the west.

Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt lie on the breathtakingly beautiful shores of the Gulf of Eilat/Aqaba, which attracts thousands upon thousands of tourists. These countries share a pressing interest in preserving these waters and shores from ecological damage.

Let us work together to rehabilitate the refugees, whose suffering is the price of rejection of peace. Let us also cope with the challenges of disease and low life expectancy which mark our region. Israel has thousands of doctors and scientists, arriving from the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States. May all states in the region share in the great blessing which comes with the knowledge and human resources of this massive immigration. May they see it as we wish it to be: as a corps of peace and healing for the ills of millions among our neighbouring peoples. All these and more will be the building blocks, the stones paving the road to peace. They will also be the nuts and bolts of this peace once it is established.

Let us all work to beat our swords into plowshares, to replace the cups of bitterness with fountains of life, and the grapes of wrath with the fruits of peace.