

Remarks at Ceremony on Signing of Diplomatic Relations between Israel and Mauritania

Washington, D.C., October 28, 1999

Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright,

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Israel David Levy, and

Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania Ahmed Ould Sid'Ahmed

SECRETARY ALBRIGHT: I am honored, on behalf of the United States, to host Israeli Foreign Minister Levy and Mauritanian Foreign Minister Sid'Ahmed as they announce the decision of their countries to establish full diplomatic relations.

That dry diplomatic phrase can mean a great deal in the daily life of two nations. It opens the door to commerce and cultural exchange and, just as important, to contact and understanding.

It doesn't mean that two nations have settled all their differences. It does not mean that they see eye to eye on all questions.

But it does mean that they have chosen to explore the possibilities of cooperation, and of finding ways to identify and advance mutual interests.

Mauritania's history and culture make it devoutly Muslim. Its geography makes it a bridge between the Arab world and Africa. And today, the vision of its leaders makes Mauritania a force for regional reconciliation and peace.

Mauritanian President Taya and Foreign Minister Sid'Ahmed have shown courage and determination in supporting the Middle East peace process. Those qualities, and this new opening, will bring real benefits to the Mauritanian people.

Israel, too, stands to benefit as walls of fear are replaced by flows of information and commerce. Prime Minister Barak and Foreign Minister Levy, and their Palestinian partners, have done a great deal to renew the momentum for peace and improve the climate for regional cooperation.

The groundwork has been laid for permanent status negotiations, with the goal of reaching a comprehensive agreement next year. But we have a great deal of hard work ahead. The parties must find the courage to make difficult choices, and their neighbors and friends must sustain them in that effort.

This weekend, I will accompany President Clinton to Oslo, where we will remember Prime Minister Rabin and lend our encouragement to Israeli and Palestinian leaders.

One month ago, I met with the representatives of countries from the Middle East, Europe, Africa, the Americas, and Asia at a Partners for Peace Ministerial in New York. I asked those nations to give thought to ways they could contribute to the Middle East peace process.

Mauritania has responded decisively to that call. I hope that today's ceremony is the first of many such openings we will see in the months ahead. I am certain that it will contribute to a better future for these two nations -- and for the Middle East as a whole. And I pledge that the United States will do all it can to see the promise of this moment brought to fruition.

And now I am pleased to yield the floor to Foreign Minister Levy.

FOREIGN MINISTER LEVY (through interpreter): Ms. Madeleine Albright, for the benefit of the two nations and what is broadcast to everybody in the Middle East and every place else, of an era of peace on the moment of willingness that we shouldn't miss.

At this moment, Israel is making great efforts in order to advance the peace with the Palestinians. After the peace has been achieved with Jordan and Egypt, we are looking to

the future and we hope it will not be far away. I hope it will be soon for the beginning of the talks with Syria and Lebanon we are facing peace.

What Mauritania has done today is very wise and courageous and it broadcasts to all the nations of the good spirit that must exist in our region.

We know to appreciate the vision, the wise vision and courageous vision of President Taya, the spirit of peace should not have any limits. The borders, the limits, that were based on alienation and hate, these borders are disappearing in order to bring a meeting between the nations that are committed to look on tomorrow that will be better so that we will no longer know wars.

I would like on this occasion to bring through you to your nation the best regards of the Nation of Israel, which values greatly their relations that we have commenced and, thanks to this common effort -- and thanks to the contribution of the United States and dear Madeleine Albright and the team of her workers, we have reached this moment. This picture should be a broadcast and a message to all the others, the time to shake hands, a time to integrate together the forces.

And we will learn from one another and we will be assisted by one another for what the peace has brought fruits to our nations. And when we have such a partner, the United States of America, with the values that are holy to all of us, which brings about former enemies together to bring us together to be neighbors tomorrow, it is pride to be a friend of this great nation.

Between us there were no borders. We have hope and we have a lot to do together in peace, in full peace, in full relations and common values and mutual respect. I am very happy at this moment. This will be a milestone that we are doing together and others will follow us.

Amen.

FOREIGN MINISTER SID'AHMED (through interpreter): In the name of God the Merciful, the Gracious, may His blessings be on His gracious prophet.

In the framework of the meeting held in New York, on September 24, 1999, at the initiative of Mrs. Madeleine Albright, Minister of the U.S. State Department, in which many Arab and non-Arab countries participated along with the two sponsors of the Middle East process in the Middle East, the attending parties expressed their optimism that the peace track will continue moving on in the new spirit.

They demanded, at the same time, that work would continue seriously to support those efforts for peace. And this is in line with the permanent stance of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, supporting the efforts of the parties directly concerned with the establishment of a comprehensive, just, and permanent peace in the Middle East region, which would guarantee the Palestinian people regaining their full rights and the restoration of all the Arab-occupied lands.

After consultations between the governments of the two countries, with the help of the government of the United States, it has been decided that the diplomatic representation between the Islamic Republic of Mauritania and Israel to be updated to the level of embassy. On this occasion I would like to express my deep thanks to Mrs. Albright for the great efforts made in this regard in order to come to this conclusion.