

Statement in the Knesset by Prime Minister Rabin on the Israel-PLO Declaration of Principles- 21 September 1993

Mister Speaker, Honored Knesset,

The Government has today laid the Declaration of Principles on interim self-government arrangements for the Palestinians in the territories, the letters exchanged between Israel and the PLO and the agenda for negotiations between Israel and Jordan -on the Knesset table. All the documents concerning the matter have been placed before the members of the House and there are no other secret agreements. Everything is open and on the table. The Government seeks Knesset approval and will view the Knesset as an expression of confidence in the Government and its decisions.

Honored Knesset,

In three days, every Jew, in every place, will wrap himself in the sanctity of Yom Kippur, with the coming of the day of national and personal soul-searching. (...)

On the eve of Yom Kippur 5754, the Government of Israel is offering the Jewish people a chance for peace - and perhaps for an end to wars, violence and terror.

Honored Knesset,

The Yom Kippur War taught us, and also - in a different way - our enemies, the limits of military force, as well as the possibilities embodied in a political solution.

After signing the separation of forces agreements with Egypt and Syria, after the signing of the interim arrangement with Egypt, after evacuation of IDF forces from Egyptian territory and from the heart of Syria, we knew - and still know today - long years of peace, quiet and harmony on these two concentrations of fire and war.

Thanks to the determination and initiative of Prime Minister Menachem Begin of blessed memory, [and] the president who now sits here was a full partner, the Israeli Government signed a first peace treaty - of unparalleled importance - with Egypt and, for almost 20 years already, the population of the Golan Heights has enjoyed the quiet and security that prevails on the common border between Israel and Syria.

Mister Speaker, Honored Knesset,

For over 100 years, we have sought to build ourselves a home on earth in the only place that was, is, and will be our home, here in Eretz Israel. For over 100 years, we have sought to live here in peace and tranquility, to plant a tree, to pave a way. For over 100 years, we have sought good neighborliness with those surrounding us - without fear. For over 100 years, we have dreamed - and fought.

In 100 years of settlement, this Land has known great suffering - and blood. We, who returned home after 2,000 years of exile - after the Holocaust that sent the best of the Jewish people to the ovens; we who searched for calm after the storm, a place to rest our heads, we

extended a hand to our neighbors - and it was rejected time after time. And our soul did not tire of seeking peace.

Our lives in this tormented Land have been accompanied by [missile] barrages, mines, and hand grenades. We have planted and they have uprooted; we have built and they have destroyed; we have defended - and they have attacked; daily, we have buried our dead. One hundred years of war and terror have harmed us - but have not harmed our dream. For 100 years, we have dreamed of peace.

Honored Knesset,

This Government which entered office over one year ago has decided to try and put an end to the cycle of wars and terror, to try to build a new world for the country, the home and the family - which have not known one year or one month in their lives when mothers have not wept for their sons. This Government has decided to try to put an end to hate, in order that our children and grandchildren will not again experience the painful price of wars, terror, and violence. This Government has decided to ensure their lives and security, to blunt the pain and the difficult memories, to pray and hope for peace.

Over one year ago, on the day the government was presented to the Knesset, we said: "This Government is resolved in its opinion to adopt all efforts; to force its way; to do everything necessary and possible, and more for the sake of national and personal security, for the sake of peace and the prevention of war."

We said then: "On the road we are travelling, obstacles will arise, crises will erupt, there will be disappointments, tears, and pain. However, after all these, after we will have traveled this road, we will have a strong country, a good country, a country wherein we are all partners in the great effort and proud to be its citizens."

We said then: "The new Government is united in the sentiment, now planted among the people, that this is a propitious hour - an hour of great possibilities and opportunities - and we will do everything so as not to miss [them]."

We said then: "Our obligation to ourselves and our children is to see the new world as it is now, to test the dangers, to examine the chances and to do everything so that the State of Israel will integrate into a changing world. We must extricate ourselves from the sense of isolation that has gripped us for almost 50 years. We must join the campaign for peace, conciliation, and international cooperation that is currently sweeping the entire globe. For, if we do not, we will be the last ones - alone - at the station."

We said then: "The new Government has taken upon itself the central goal of advancing the making of peace and taking decisive steps in order to bring the Arab-Israeli conflict to its conclusion. We will do this based on the recognition of Israel, by Arab states and the Palestinians, as a sovereign state, and of: its right to live in peace and security. We believe, with all our heart, that this is possible, that it is necessary, and that it will come."

We then said the following things to members of Knesset: "The Government will offer the Arab states and the Palestinians to continue the discussions about peace, in accordance with the format formulated at the Madrid conference, As a first step en route to a permanent solution, we will discuss the extension of autonomy in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip. We have no intention of losing precious time. Within a short time, we will begin and continue the talks - in order to lessen the flame of hate between the Palestinians and the State of Israel."

And we also said then: "The plan for the extension of self-government - autonomy - to the Palestinians in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip, within the framework of the Camp David

Accords, is an interim arrangement for five years. Discussions will commence on the permanent solution no later than three years after its creation."

And we also said, on the day that the Government was presented: "The conduct of discussions on this matter will arouse concern in the hearts of those among us who have chosen to settle in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip. I hereby inform you that the Government, via the IDF and the other security forces, will be responsible for the security and welfare of the residents in these areas."

And on the matter of Jerusalem, we have said: "This Government, like all of its predecessors, believes that there are no differences of opinion in this House on the eternity of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Greater, united Jerusalem is not subject to bargaining, is and will forever be the capital of the Jewish people, under Israeli sovereignty, the focus for the yearnings and dreams of every Jew."

Members of Knesset,

Fourteen months ago, we submitted an IOU to members of Knesset, to the electorate and to the Jewish people: We promised to try and bring peace to Israel.

In the time that has passed since then, we have not closed any door, we have not missed any opportunity, we have searched for every crack or hint, we have not avoided any chance to achieve peace or an interim arrangement that will allow for normal lives - for both peoples in this country.

We conducted negotiations with Syrian, Lebanese and Jordanian delegations and with the Palestinians. During the course of the negotiations with the Palestinian-Jordanian delegation in Washington, it became truthfully clear over time that the one and only address for decisions was PLO headquarters in Tunis.

It would have been possible to act like an ostrich, it would have been possible to lie -to ourselves, it would have been possible to hide in the sand, it would have been possible to deceive ourselves - to claim that Faisal Husseini, Hanan Ashrawi and others represent residents of the territories, and that we did not know or want to know who stands behind them.

We have decided not to act as such. We are well aware of who stands behind them and residents of the State of Israel are also well aware of this, and we have no interest or desire to deny it: This is an organization of terror and destruction that has known no mercy; an organization that dispatched the murderers of children against us - in Avivim, in Ma'alot; those who shot guests at the Savoy Hotel in Tel Aviv, those who attacked innocent (...) bus [passengers] on the coastal road; [those responsible] for hundreds of terrorist, murder and injurious activities.

The hands of this organization have spilled the blood of hundreds who are dear to us, the blood of the family members of Smadar Haran in Nahariya; the blood of Ofra and Tal, family members of Abie Moses from Alfei-Menashe; the blood of innocent [people] whose only crime was that they were Jews.

Members of Knesset,

We cannot choose our neighbors, or our enemies, not even the cruelest among them. We only have what there is. The PLO fought us, and we fought against them. Today, we are searching for a path to peace therewith.

We can lock every door, thwart every attempt for peace. We are permitted, morally, not to sit at the discussion table with the PLO, not to shake the hands of those who held knives therein, not to stretch a hand to those who pulled the trigger. We had the power to reject,

with revulsion, PLO offers - and to then be unwilling partners in the cycle with which we have been forced to live until now: war, terror and violence.

But, we have chosen another way, that which gives a chance, which gives hope. We have decided to recognize the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people for negotiations, within the framework of the peace talks.

We did not do this light-heartedly. We knew, and know today, about the heavy [weight] of the baggage of the past. We did this only after the PLO took the following commitments upon itself, in letters to the prime minister:

Recognition of the existential right of Israel to live in peace and security. To settle all future disputes via peaceful means and negotiations.

It committed to condemn and halt terror and violence in Israel, the territories and all other places. I want to report that, since the signing of the agreement, the PLO has not executed even one attack.

It committed to enforce the cessation of terror and violence among its members, and to put those who violate this commitment on trial.

It committed to view the sections of the Palestinian Covenant which counter the right of Israel to exist and the peace process as void, and to bring about their formal invalidation by the appropriate institution.

In Washington, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres signed - in the name of the Government of Israel - the Declaration of Principles agreement for the interim period only. In this agreement, wherein the Palestinians are permitted to manage their lives, the following elements were ensured by Israel:

United Jerusalem remains under Israeli rule, and the entity that will manage the lives of the Palestinians in the territories has no authority in this regard.

The Israeli settlements in Judea, Samaria and Gaza will remain under Israeli rule without any change in their status.

The jurisdiction of the Palestinian council will not extend to any Israeli in the territories of Judea, Samaria and Gaza.

The IDF will continue to bear comprehensive responsibility for the security of the settlements, the Israelis in the territories, the security of every Israeli while he is present in the territories and for external security - that is, the defense of the current confrontation lines along the Jordan [river] and the Egyptian border.

The IDF will be deployed - in accordance with these missions - in all territories of Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip.

All matters related to the permanent solution will be left for negotiation to begin two years after the date fixed in the agreement, while maintaining the freedom of the Israeli Government to determine its positions as to the image of the permanent solution. That is to say, that the Declaration of Principles leaves all the options open in this respect.

The realization of an agreement in the interim period will be advanced in Gaza and Jericho, for the establishment of the elected Palestinian council which will conduct the lives of the Palestinians in the territories of Judea, Samaria and Gaza. The creation of the council will be effected only after we and the Palestinians agree upon its structure, composition and tasks. The target for the holding of elections is nine months from when the Declaration of Principles agreement goes into effect.

Israel will view the Gaza and Jericho first phase as a quasi-test of the ability of the Palestinians to implement the document of principles agreement.

In Washington last week, I said - and I want to repeat these words here: "We are destined to live together, on the same soil in the same land. We, the soldiers who have returned from battle stained with blood, we who have seen our relatives and friends killed before our eyes, we who have attended their funerals and cannot look into the eyes of their parents, we who have come from a land where parents bury their children, we who have fought against you, the Palestinians - We say to you today in a loud and clear voice: Enough of blood and tears. Enough."

We have no desire for revenge. We harbor no hatred towards you. We, like you, are people who want to build a home, to plant a tree, to love, live side by side with you - in dignity, in empathy, as human beings, as free men. We are today giving peace a chance and again saying to you: Let us pray that a day will come when we will say, enough, farewell to arms."

Mister Speaker, Honored Knesset,

We have no intention or desire to conceal the truth from members of Knesset or the people of Israel. Alongside the great advantages, the anticipated peace - great risks for us are also hidden. Our eyes are not blurred from seeing the risks, and we will do everything necessary in order to reduce these to a minimum.

At the same time, we believe that the risks are calculated and that they will not affect the security or existence of the State of Israel. In any event, the strength of the IDF - the best military in the world - stands at our disposal, if and when we should be tested, God forbid.

We are today looking toward the good chances; toward days without fear and nights without trepidation; toward a growing economy and a society which wants for nothing. If and when the peace which we so desire comes here, our lives will be completely transformed. We will no longer live by our swords alone.

On the brink of a new year, after 100 years of violence and terror, after wars and suffering, there is a great chance today for a new chapter in the history of the State of Israel; there is hope for an end to tears. New horizons are opening before us in economics and society, but - above all else - I want to tell you: This is the victory of Zionism, which has also won the recognition of its most sworn and bitter enemies. There is a chance that we will merit good neighborly relations, the end of the bereavement which has existed in our homes, the end of the wars. I call on all members of the House to give us an opportunity to exhaust this great chance.

Members of Knesset,

Let the sun rise. A happy new year to you and to the entire House of Israel.