

Address of Ambassador Rafael Barak
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ENGLISH only

OSCE Ministerial Council – Madrid, 30th December 2007

Chairman in Office, Your Excellencies the Ministers, distinguished guests, I would like first of all to congratulate the Government of Spain for their superb organization of this event and to commend the leadership you provided the organisation during the course of your presidency.

Permit me also to wish the best of luck to the Government of Finland, the upcoming Chairman in Office of the OSCE for 2008, and thank them for their leadership of the Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation in the past year.

Distinguished Guests,

Over the past thirty two years the OSCE has gained a well-earned reputation for dealing with the different aspects of security, and has shown its determination to build confidence in conflict areas. The OSCE stands for values of democracy, the rule of law and the respect for human rights. This is the fabric this organization is made of. It is on this background that we followed with great interest Kazakhstan's aspirations to become OSCE's Chairman-in-Office. Once again the OSCE found a formula that serves the cause of cooperation among all its Participating States. We in Israel enthusiastically adhere to the principles and values of the OSCE and within these parameters; participate in the various activities that are open to the Mediterranean Partners. We believe that there is much to learn from this organisation. One of the important lessons to be learnt is to keep on going DESPITE existing conflicts.

Israel views the Partnership as an obligation as well as a privilege. Simultaneously with the need to enhance cooperation and CBMs within the Mediterranean Partners framework, all of the partners can and should contribute their part to the OSCE as a whole.

Israel is eager to share its expertise in education, economic and social development, science, and other areas, as part of the work of the OSCE. Our international cooperation programme within the Foreign Ministry stands

ready to promote joint projects within the organization. We look forward to identifying specific projects on which to start our work.

Israel also welcomes cooperation with the OSCE in the economic field. We attach great importance to the economic forum as an additional tool that will increase stability and cooperation. Next month's OSCE Chairmanship/NATO Workshop on "Water Scarcity, Land Degradation and Desertification in the Mediterranean Region - Environment and Security Linkages" is of great importance to all MPCs. Israel will therefore send to Valencia five of its academic experts in these fields. The issue of water scarcity in our region is often seen as a reason for conflict. We thank the OSCE for its effort, together with NATO, to show that dealing with this issue needs cooperation, and can bring peoples closer to each other and to peace.

Dear Colleagues,

The prime example of cooperation between the Mediterranean partners is the annual Mediterranean Seminar. We were happy to participate in all the Mediterranean Seminars, and are especially proud and honoured to host the 2007 Mediterranean Seminar that would concentrate on subjects of prime importance to the Mediterranean region, namely Combating intolerance and discrimination as well as promoting mutual respect and understanding. We urge all OSCE and the Mediterranean Partners to confirm their participation in the seminar. We will be glad to host you all in Israel.

Honoured guests,

Tragically, anti-Semitism in its most vicious form is sadly still highly prevalent in our region, exemplified especially by the President of Iran, a leader who is not only a rabid anti-Semite but also, amazingly in this day and age, a Holocaust denier dedicated to the destruction of the only Jewish State. I use this platform to call upon all the representatives of all the forward-looking states of the region to publicly denounce the hatred espoused by him.

During the past year, continuous incidents of Anti-Semitism have taken place in various OSCE Participating States. Physical assaults, desecration of synagogues and Jewish cemeteries, swastikas stained facades of Jewish institutions are some examples of this ugly phenomena. We are heartened

that the OSCE and many of its participating states recognise this and have begun to take steps to counter it. In April 2004, the OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism in Berlin adopted the "Berlin Declaration" an important milestone in the fight against Anti-Semitism. The Paris and Cordoba Conferences that followed reflected the readiness of the OSCE and ODIHR to maintain the struggle against this scourge. We congratulate the Romanian government and the Spanish chair for convening the High Level conference last June in Bucharest, where issues of Anti-Semitism, xenophobia, discrimination against Muslims and other forms of racism and intolerance were further discussed. For indeed, Mr. Chairman, it is essential that we learn best practices in order to ensure the enforcement of the Berlin and Cordoba principles. We are keenly supportive of continuous cooperation in promoting the values of tolerance and mutual understanding between peoples.

I would like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation to the three Special Representatives for their important work in combating Anti-Semitism and, crucially, the growing intolerance especially towards Islam but also towards Christianity. There must be a coordinated effort in the fields of education, law enforcement and legislation, to combat these ethnic and religious hatreds not only in the OSCE area but in the Middle East and Mediterranean area as well.

Distinguished delegates,

Sixty years and one day have passed since the United Nations resolved to settle the Arab-Israeli conflict by creating two homelands for two peoples. The failure to achieve this two-state solution has meant decades of suffering for both peoples, yet the justness of this solution remains valid. The two-state solution is the best way for Israelis and Palestinians to establish peace and security for themselves and for one another. This week's Annapolis conference a timely and opportune initiative of President Bush and Secretary of State Rice, was meant to revive this peace-making effort. It is a new beginning for a long-overdue process.

While no core issues or timetables were negotiated at Annapolis, the fundamental commitment to a peaceful solution was reestablished. This is to be followed by intensive talks on all outstanding issues, with the aim of finally putting an end to mutual suffering and beginning an era of mutual

building. In this regard, it is well to remember the guiding vision of "two states for two peoples" - a new Israeli-Palestinian reality in which two nation-states will exist side by side in peace and security. Just as Israel is the homeland of the Jewish people, so Palestine will be the homeland and the embodiment of the national aspirations of the Palestinian People.

The burden of solving the Israel-Palestinian issue lies with the parties, and the compromises that must be made in the negotiations ahead will be difficult and challenging. Many complex core issues must be addressed, while at the same time, the situation on the ground cannot be ignored. For this reason, while negotiations on the shape of the two-state solution move forward, the actual implementation of the vision remains dependant upon fulfillment of the Quartet's performance-base Roadmap as accepted by both sides. In the first phase the Palestinian Authority (PA) has obligated itself to stop all terrorism against Israelis. These commitments must be completed before the establishment of the Palestinian state.

While for Jews and Arabs alike Annapolis represents the hope, Gaza represents the nightmarish alternative. Within Hamas-controlled Gaza, the Palestinian population is subjected to tyrannical religious oppression, Christian minorities are beaten and murdered, and women in violation of the extremist dress-code are harassed on the streets. Additionally, since the Hamas takeover in June 2007, over 350 missiles and 500 mortar bombs have been fired at Israeli civilians from the Gaza Strip, causing scores of casualties, widespread destruction, and an atmosphere of constant terror at the town of Sderot and its surroundings

It is therefore incumbent upon organizations such as the OSCE, the moderate Arab world and indeed Israel, to support the pragmatic elements within Palestinian society, headed by Mahmoud Abbas. Israel stands ready to play its role and hopes that this will be the approach of those Arab states interested in bringing an end to the conflict. Such readiness includes the release of numerous Palestinian prisoners, including ones sentenced to lengthy prison terms for their role in terror. Yet any move forward must be precluded by the release of the abducted Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit.

The Annapolis meeting has the potential to restart the process, to change the face of the Middle East. Israel hopes that all parties involved will seize this opportunity, and do everything possible to help clear the path towards peace.

The OSCE and its practices of dealing with conflicts should be a beam of hope for all those aspiring for peace in our region.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our region is moving towards a new strategic alignment of the moderates against the radicals. The moderate camp will draw strength from the developments at and after the Annapolis Conference. On the other hand, the radicals such as Iran, Hizbollah and Hamas have been isolated.

Syria must make up its mind, whether it chooses to join the camp of those who look for a negotiated solution of the conflicts in the region, or to continue sheltering terrorists' organizations in Damascus and fermenting instability in Lebanon through its proxy Hizbollah.

This terrorist group is still holding on to the two abducted Israelis Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev. To date their families have not even been given a sign of life by their kidnappers. We call upon you here to help bring about their release without any further delay.

Mr. Chairman,

I hope that, next year's OSCE Ministerial Council will take place in an atmosphere of reconciliation in the Middle East and confrontation will find itself wending its way to the dust heap of history.

Finally, I would like to thank the Secretary General and the Secretariat of OSCE for their good work in facilitating the dialogue between OSCE and its Mediterranean Partners. We look forward to working closely with Greece as Coordinator of the OSCE Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation.

Thank You