

Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett to the Israel Knesset (15 June 1949)

Sharett, Moshe. Israeli Knesset. Jerusalem. 15 June 1949. Address.



Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett (left) pictured with Israeli President Chaim Weizmann (Right). Photo: CZA, Circa 1949

Thirteen months after the state was declared, and three months after the final armistice agreement was signed with Syria, Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett gave an address to the Knesset summarizing primarily Israel's desire and the conditions for peace with her neighbors. He noted that 56 countries had recognized Israel, including 25 countries from eastern and western Europe, 18 from central and South America, Australia, New Zealand, and several from Africa. Israel then had 15 ambassadors abroad, and numerous consulates. He made it clear that Israel was not placing

"responsibility of [Israel's] foreign policy on Jews in other countries. They have no part in its formation. Only Israeli citizens bear this responsibility." He continued, "we cannot ignore the duty that stems from our affiliation with our brethren's communities." He spoke about Israel's relations with the UN, the US, and chided Arab countries for not negotiating a peace. He was quite explicit on the point, "Israel is ready to enter negotiations about its borders with any of the countries that signed an armistice agreement with her. This should be, of course, a part of comprehensive peace negotiations. If the intention is indeed to utilize a realistic approach to comprehensive negotiations, then it should be a direct continuation of the armistice negotiations, which designated the separation lines between the conflicting sides as temporary borders."

The Armistice Agreements can be modified only as part of an agreement, unless they are replaced by consensual peace treaties. Accordingly, the natural borders between Israel, Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria are those that were previously designated by the British Mandate. The same applies also to the border between Israel and Transjordan. As for Egypt, there remains the question of the Gaza-Rafah Strip. However, Israel is willing to seek a solution to this issue through negotiations." And "for the border between the State of Israel and the area west of the Jordan River that is not included in Israel proper, our intentions are for peace and peace negotiations. We have always argued that we prefer to have a separate Arab state in that area, but we never presented our position as an obstacle for future arrangements. This issue, as well, can be subject to negotiation." He made no mention of the Palestinians or how the West Bank or Gaza Strip's future would be resolved. As for the refugees, he said that "without peace treaties with the neighboring countries would be an act of suicide for the State of Israel. It would be like stabbing ourselves in the chest with a knife."

Ken Stein, October 2014

Honorable Knesset! During the past thirteen months of its existence, the State of Israel has made fast and great leaps toward being accepted by the nations of the world.

Our country was destined to emerge into the world with a burst and a storm; to be formed out of the chaos which was inherited from the deteriorating previous regime and emerge while covered in a huge wave of blood; to be a target—from its inception—of a malicious and concentrated attack launched by its neighbors; to be at high risk during its formation and become a state while standing firm against all odds.

Even now, after the passage of few months without casualties, the stable and firm peace is still unattainable and further away from us. The appearance of the State of Israel in the world arena, like an emergence from a womb of consciousness; the war that was launched against us by the Arab nations and the defeat that was inflicted upon them; the arrival of masses of Jews into the country – all have caused a huge tremor in the Middle East. The impact of these occurrences will not easily be eradicated. The storm that engulfed us will not soon subside. Even if we do not have the guarantee in our hearts that a new war won't again erupt, our essential interest requires us to search for a fast and comprehensive peace, and we are obligated to strive for it with all of our strength.

However, even though we desire to hasten it, we should not become impatient and discouraged while its arrival is delayed. If such is the decree, we have the strength to patiently await the arrival of peace.

It happened that we were first able to establish normal ties with nations far from us and no peace relations with those close to us. The shock waves diminish in strength the further the distance is from the focal point of clash and confrontation. The process of our integration into the web of international relations begins at the outskirts and approaches our spot in the world from various directions.

On the face of it, this phenomenon is very strange, but it is quite natural, considering the unusual circumstances that led to the birth of the State of Israel. The first ones to recognize us were countries that were far and distant from one another and from us, such as the USA, South Africa, the Soviet Union and Guatemala, while nations close to us and to each other, such as Greece and Turkey, were among the last ones to do so officially.

Let this not be strange to us. While the process of recognition included the European and the American continents from one edge to the other, the Asian continent, of which we are an integral part, is still largely ignoring us. And even in this continent, the first to recognize us was the farthest one from us—China.

This achievement should not be overshadowed by what is still missing, and we should not feel contempt toward those that are still missing. We should strive to increase the volume. There should not be an underestimation of the value of this achievement. The net of recognition in Israel has been cast across the world. This network is the most efficient tool for filling in the missing. Sooner or later, those who have not yet done so will follow suit and say amen.

With the Knesset's permission, I'll cite a few numbers: To this day, we have been recognized by 56 countries, including 46 of the 58 members of the United Nations. Forty of the 56 have recognized us de jure, and 16, for the time being, have recognized us only de facto.

The number 56 includes 10 countries in Eastern Europe and 15 Western European countries; all three countries of North America; all 18 countries of central and southern Latin America; two countries in Asia; two of the four independent countries in Africa; and two countries of the Pacific Ocean—Australia and New Zealand.

Seven countries have diplomatic representation in Israel—one by an ambassador and the others by diplomatic emissaries. Three other countries have expressed their intention to send their delegates to Israel, and we approved their candidates. If we add the consulates that are currently operating in Israel, the number of countries that have representation in Israel stands on 22.

Once our own emissaries reach their designated posts, the State of Israel will have diplomatic representation in 15 capitols: an Ambassador in Washington, D.C., and emissaries in Moscow, Paris, London, Warsaw, Prague, Bucharest, Belgrade, Rome and Montevideo. One representative has been assigned to the capitols of the Benelux nations. The emissary to Montevideo will soon be moved to Buenos Aires but will continue to represent Uruguay as well.

Please permit me to especially mention the historic significance regarding the establishment of Israeli representation in Rome. Within the next few days, we will send consul generals to Switzerland, Canada and Australia. There is a general consulate in New York and consulates in Los Angeles, Shanghai, Vienna, Munich, Athens, Rio de Janeiro, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. In addition, there are consulates that act in conjunction with the emissaries. If we are to count all the emissaries and the consulates, plus the ones that are due shortly, we will find out that the network of our foreign representation encompasses 28 centers. We have to also mention our noteworthy, permanent delegation to the United Nations, whose head has been designated as a special ambassador. We have also placed a liaison office in the UN institutions and its agencies in Geneva.

We are a small country, humble and with modest means. The privilege we have gained of having direct representation puts great burden on our financial capabilities and our manpower. But in order to enhance our international status, we are obligated to strengthen and tighten our relations with and understandings of many different countries. The concern over the economic interests of our country and the need to secure the safety of our citizens who travel overseas increasingly preoccupies the concerns of our overseas consulates. Above all, the mission of Israel is to gather the Jews from all Diasporas into the historical homeland that regained its freedom; to serve as an anvil upon which to shape our independent economy and culture. All these obligate us to be represented in every country where there is a concentration of Jewish communities who wish to immigrate to Israel and establish direct and fruitful connections with the land of its people.

We do not wish to place the responsibility of our foreign policy on Jews in other countries. They have no part in its formation. Only Israeli citizens bear this responsibility. But we cannot ignore the duty that stems from our affiliation with our brethren's communities. We will always be concerned with their safety and their good standing. We will always remember that because of them and for their sake we have come this far. We shall always guard the precious treasure that was deposited in our hands.

Therefore, when Israel was accepted as a member of the United Nations, the first blessing that it delivered from this international podium was sent to the Jewish communities in the Diasporas.

Our admission to the United Nations was the apex in the structure of our foreign relations, though this process has not yet been completed. The process of the recognition of Israel received a supreme worldly approval. It was not just a political event. It was a human experience that shocked people to the depth of their soul. Israel is part of the family of nations—the Jewish people are in their own land as equal members of the world's nations. The eradication

of the disgrace of inferiority and the maladies of discrimination occurred in a single wave of the hand. The soul of any human being cannot contain this revolutionary turnover.

I am far from arrogant. But never before did a Jewish representative feel so humbled and demure when privately witnessing this magnanimous event in the annals of his people. It seemed as though the entire UN Assembly was filled with elation at the successful conclusion of a great historic drama. Few hundred Jews from New York witnessed the drama and thousands of Jews throughout the U.S. were attached to their radios and television sets, closely following the procedures. They were all captivated by the long overdue change in the status of the Jewish people.

Those among us who were for many years accustomed to roaming the corridors of foreign powers and squeezing themselves into indoor balconies overlooking the procedures of foreign governments; who were forced to be passive and mute while witnessing others controlling the faith of their people without the ability to argue or fight back; those of us were like dreamers when they entered the nations' palace, sitting at a table like all other tables, except that theirs had the name "Israel" printed on it.

With the permission of the Knesset and the Speaker, I would like to praise and thank Israel's permanent delegate to the United Nations, Abba Eban, and his loyal assistants, and the members of our delegation, for their insurmountable effort, their tireless undertakings, and their talents. They have demonstrated wisdom and stamina in all the stages of the campaign leading to the recognition of Israel as a peace-seeking nation fit for membership in the United Nations. They worked tirelessly until they achieved the positive decision of the Assembly—one that culminated in the vote of approval of three-quarters and one.

It was a revolutionary transition not only in historical perspective, but also from the standpoint of practical politics. In an instant, the status of our delegation was drastically transformed. We have changed from people who demanded help and support to delegates who insist on helping others; from seekers of assistance, we have become partners of decision makers. We have entered the circle of both sharing strengths and mutual dependency.

Our foreign policy was instantly embedded with extremely complicated new responsibilities. Our initial steps within the international arena, including voting and abstention with or without reasoning were open to all to observe, and I'll not summarize them here. As the Arab proverb says, "The one who does not ride in danger will not fulfill one's heart's wishes." As our poet said, "All his paths are littered with obstacles, depths of oblivion, and ridges of tall mountains [C. N. Bialik in "Sought and Died"]." Whether we walk right or left or take no step at all, we are faced with complications and dangers. Refrain does always mean continence. At time it has crucial consequences.

In the General Assembly, where every member-state has an equal vote, regardless of its size, a nation's vote can be crucially decisive. Even if it seems proper to be humble and abstain, and we as a small state are expected to be humble, there are at times issues that require us to have a clear cut policy, take a firm stand, and vote according to our best judgment.

In the very first days of our participation in the General Assembly procedures, we have already encountered problems concerning the consequences of taking a stand or carry out a tactical maneuver. There is no doubt that we will encounter similar circumstances in future Assemblies. However we have to accept this process of gradual maturity with love.

We will always be guided by the basic principles of Israel's foreign policy, which include loyalty to the United Nations, promoting and strengthening peace initiatives, cultivating friendly

relations with all peace-seeking nations and with those nations that are inclined to be friendly with Israel and under no circumstances identify with one of the major powers.

This policy does not mean that we don't take a firm stand on issues of principle and make a decision. At times it serves the interests of Israel to offer a vote of abstention. At times we are motivated by issues concerning the Jewish people. In other instances there are issues concerning the countries of the Middle East, or countries in other regions, which require us to take a stand not necessarily based on the current hostile relations we have with such countries, but on projections into the future premised on principles of long-term cooperation.

And above all, there are matters that raise penetrating questions concerning morality, honesty and justice. In such instances, the moral quality of the State of Israel is being tested.

I presume that I would not mislead the Knesset if I allow myself to assert that the State of Israel has a unique moral standing in the eyes of many nations—probably among all nations. This is a precious quality that Israel is forbidden to lose because it is crucial to its existence. For many years we have advocated the moral principles inherent in the Jewish people's political struggle to attain life and liberty. For many years we have fought to reclaim justice in a world that we perceived as evil. For many years we have appealed to the best elements of humanity to promote the notions of moral chivalry and the love of people. We have done so while our fate was subjected to manipulation and cruelty.

Now that we have won the privilege of partnership in the international decision-making process and thereby are capable of exerting our humble and limited influence on the fate of others, we cannot turn our back on these important principles. The State of Israel will not alienate itself from the spiritual heritage of the Jewish people—the principles of love of humankind, the pursuit of peace, and the devotion to justice. Israel will not disregard the heritage of the moral idealism of the Zionist Movement, whose principles are liberty, equality, and social progress. Independent Israel will not be ashamed of its struggle for independence. All these principles and considerations should be our guide when we appear before the other nations.

Despite the important political and moral issues that are on the Assembly's agenda regarding other nations, we cannot help but be partially preoccupied by them. Our main concerns should be the problems that directly affect the future of our state and arranging settlements between Israel and its neighbors.

The complexity of these issues is also part of the UN agenda and we can assume with certainty that these matters will feature prominently on the agenda of the next General Assembly.

If direct peace negotiations between us and our neighboring countries have had any consequences, there is no doubt that the majority of the participants in the Assembly would have accepted willingly and with great satisfaction—not to mention enthusiasm—any arrangement that had been agreed upon by the two sides. However, since the prospects of an eminent peace are still foggy, we will not be exempt from reintroducing the pertinent issues for further clarification during the next session of the Assembly. Therefore, we should be prepared to defend our positions against the ensuing obstacles and distortions.

Actually, we have already experienced the first stage of this new battle, when our representative was required to present to the General Assembly's special committee our reasons for requesting acceptance into the UN. This procedure had no precedent. Ordinarily, the right of a nation to be accepted is considered on the basis of whether or not it is peace-seeking and capable of meeting the obligations that may be imposed on by the UN. We, on the other hand, were asked to relate to problems that concern us and to issues that are still awaiting the decisions of UN institutions.

It was not an easy battle. Our representative withstood this demanding experience and emerged from it with respect. He articulated our positions on pending issues in a comprehensive and a decisive manner, adhering to our guidelines. I would especially like to salute the way he presented Jerusalem in his speech. He also related to our official stand on the refugee problem. There were member-states that were not fully persuaded by his arguments and used this issue as the rationale for abstaining during the vote over our admission to the UN. A decisive majority demonstrated in its vote that our arguments were satisfactory. But many questions still remained open, and we have to be prepared for the next stage of the battle.

The issues I am referring to are now in the process of being clarified in the UN. But they stand independent outside the UN framework. They constitute the essence of the peace problem between us and the Arab countries. These issues are on the agenda in Lausanne. They are the subject of discussions between us and the government of the U.S., both of whom are interested in peace and are committed to pursue it.

As for the Lausanne affair, it would be inappropriate to say that it has been handled very slowly. The fact of the matter is that nothing is being handled there. Actually, the agenda is in a deep freeze. [The Lausanne Conference, 1949, was convened by the UN Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP). During the Conference, which was held from April 27 to September 12, 1949, representatives of Israel, Egypt, Transjordan, Lebanon, Syria and Palestinian refugees tried to resolve the disputes that arose from the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. However, no agreement was reached.]

The success of the single UN mediator in reaching three armistice agreements could not be duplicated by a commission that consisted of representatives of three nations. The purpose of settling all questions entailing the roots of the conflict, so that peace agreement could be achieved, has not been achieved.

The Conciliatory Commission that convened the Lausanne Conference derived its authority and inspiration from the decision made at the Paris Conference of December 11, 1948. That decision was reached after heated arguments and the presentation of opposing points of view. Some of the instructions that were part of the first draft of the decision were rejected by the majority of the members of the Political Committee and the General Assembly. Some of the instructions that were left out of the final draft were received with a great degree of reservations by many member states, including the Israeli delegation, which had made clear its position to the Political Committee.

Today the Israeli Government is being accused of not implementing the decisions of the General Assembly. Let us review the real facts. The focal point of the decision is the fifth clause, requiring the two sides “to strive to achieve peace by negotiations that will be conducted either with the Conciliatory Commission, or directly, in order to finalize all the conflicting issues between the two sides.” What ever happened to that clause?

The Government of Israel did not wait for the initiative of the Conciliatory Commission to implement it. The Israeli Government proposed, even during the mediation of the late Count Bernadotte, to conduct direct negotiations with those who fought against her. For a long period of time, even prior to the Lausanne Conference, Israel had made many attempts to conduct direct negotiations for peace with its neighboring states. Israel responded promptly to the summoning of the Conciliatory Commission, and its delegate arrived in Lausanne willing to sit at the same table—under the auspices of the Commission—with each and every Arab delegation, except for Syria, who has not yet signed an armistice agreement with Israel. Even during the affair—also

called the “Lausanne Conference”—Israel continued to explore all possibilities for direct peace negotiation.

But what was the policy of the Arab countries? Their delegations announced, upon arrival in Lausanne, that they were not sent by their governments to conduct peace negotiations, but rather to discuss the refugee problem. In addition, they refused to meet with the Israeli delegation under the auspices of the Commission, and to this day they have not budged. They refrained from entering into peace negotiations with Israel, even through the mediation of the Commission.

Certain peace proposals submitted by Israel for review by Arab delegations remain unanswered to this day.

Would it be proper under such circumstances to lay the blame for the paralysis of negotiations solely on Israel? Or blame her for the fact that the negotiations did not even commence?

The fourth clause of the December 11th Resolution requires the Conciliatory Commission to “take immediate actions in order to create, as soon as possible, a contact between the delegations and between both sides and the Commission.” Six months have passed since then. It is possible to assume that the Commission has made many efforts to get both sides together. But the results indicate that these efforts were not successful. A clear directive of the General Assembly was not fulfilled because of the stubborn refusal of the other side.

One of the major disputes in Lausanne, regarding peace between Israel and its neighbors, is the issue of borders. On that specific question there is no clear referral in the December 11th resolutions. The Paris Conference rejected any attempt to use the Bernadotte Report, which recommended cutting off the Negev and the southern part of the country, as a basis for further negotiations. An attempt was made in the Paris Conference to renew the discussion on that issue by suggesting that Israel would give up the Negev in return for part of southern Galilee. But this attempt also failed. According to the final resolution, the issue of borders remained open, and any future settlement in this regard would be agreed upon by both sides. This means that any position that Israel has on that issue should not be presented as though it would negate the December 11th Resolutions.

As in the past, Israel is ready to enter negotiations about its borders with any of the countries that signed an armistice agreement with her. This should be, of course, a part of comprehensive peace negotiations. If the intention is indeed to utilize a realistic approach to comprehensive negotiations, then it should be a direct continuation of the armistice negotiations, which designated the separation lines between the conflicting sides as temporary borders.

The Armistice Agreements can be modified only as part of an agreement, unless they are replaced by consensual peace treaties. Accordingly, the natural borders between Israel, Egypt, Lebanon and Syria are those that were previously designated by the British Mandate. The same applies also to the border between Israel and Transjordan. As for Egypt, there remains the question of the Gaza-Rafah Strip. However, Israel is willing to seek a solution to this issue through negotiations.

Israel’s face is toward peace, not toward conquest. But Israel will not accept the capturing of any parcel of land in the Jewish State by invading armies. This is why Israel will not agree, under any circumstances, to leave in the hands of Syria the strip of land east of the Jordan River and the Kinneret, together with Mishmar Hayarden, which is west of there. Israel will not sign an armistice agreement with Syria until the latter removes completely its military from that strip.

As for the border between the State of Israel and the area west of the Jordan River that is not included in Israel proper, our intentions are for peace and peace negotiations. We have always argued that we prefer to have a separate Arab state in that area, but we never presented our position as an obstacle for future arrangements. This issue, as well, can be subject to negotiation.

Opposing our stand are those Arab countries who try to find the solution to the border problems within the lines that were designated to the State of Israel according to the November 29, 1947 UN Resolution. Those countries did all that was in their power to reject the November 29th agreement. They conspired to sink the State of Israel—whose legitimacy was affirmed by that Resolution—under a giant wave of blood, and wipe it off the earth. When their plot failed they tried again to adhere to these same arrangements. It is analogous to a person who wished to uproot his neighbor's fruit tree. But when he failed to do so because his neighbor protected his tree, he now demands some of the fruits and the right to sit under the tree's shade as well.

It would be very strange if these countries were to find support for their unfounded claims in the position taken by the U.S. The U.S. had previously announced, during the Paris Conference, that it stands by the principle of land compensation, or land exchanges, based on the territorial arrangement of November 29th. But it should be emphasized that this principle was not included in the UN resolution of December 11th. It would be unrealistic, misleading and complicated if the U.S. Government were to continue to adhere to that principle. It would be better to let the parties involved seek a solution to this problem through negotiations, so that such a solution would be free of previously fixed principles and of outside support or warnings to either side.

The subjective perception of the Arab countries encourages them to assume that they can extort land from Israel. To think that they can gain by political pressure what they have failed to achieve by military actions does not serve the goal of peace in the Middle East. It is especially essential to warn against any renewed effort that might infringe on Israel interest in the southern Negev.

Why do the Arab countries deserve land compensation? Is it because they invaded Israel? Is it because they invaded a land that does not belong to them, in a clear violation of the UN Charter and undermining its authority? Is it because their despicable campaign failed?

Whoever wishes to reinstate the territorial principles of November 29th as a basis for Israel's borders' arrangement demonstrates disregard for what happened in the country on the morning following that date up until today. Nothing has occurred in the country to shatter the justification for an inclusion of any area into Israel's territory based on that UN resolution. On the other hand, many things that have occurred in the country have been achieved by blood, fire and clouds of smoke. They have taken place out of the absolute necessity to secure Israel, and the essence of her existence, on the lands that are today included in her jurisdiction outside the November 29th borders.

The historic resolution of 1947 has been engraved with gold in the annals of our people. The contribution of the United States in creating this resolution will never be forgotten, just like the contribution of the Soviet Union and that of many other countries, large and small alike.

But the lessons that emerged from the fate of this resolution and the endeavors that were required to materialize it were carved in letters made of fire. When the State of Israel came into being, convulsing between life and death, the November 29th Resolution was not its savior. The soldiers of Israel did not sacrifice their lives, endowing their state with defense outposts and

security zones, so that the statesmen of their country would abandon this Holy Land that has been saturated with blood.

The second major point of dispute is the problem of the Arab refugees. The deceiving propaganda machines maliciously distort the chain of events and their substance. Statesmen who are not well-versed in that issue arrive at the wrong conclusions. We are witnessing once again the same old ploy: a scheme that has been conceived by Israel's enemies to falsely condemn her. The fear of annihilation that threatened our country seems to be all but totally forgotten, and those who wanted to annihilate us fell victims to their own schemes shed all responsibility to the situation, and assigned us the blame.

We shall not tire from repeating the truth time and again. We were fully prepared in good faith to establish the State of Israel with a provision that it would initially have had an Arab population constituting 45% of our total population. If the Arabs had accepted it, they could have been our partner in implementing the resolution and in keeping the peace. But the Arabs rebelled against the resolution and shattered the peace. They did so from within and from the outside, and we had to fight a war that was launched against us from our fronts and backs. After the war, and as a result of the uprising and the invasion, the Arabs exited the country. Such massive uprooting has occurred a few times in last few decades. What has never happened is a population that left under such circumstances and was duly permitted to return.

Our primary and vital concern is security. The return of waves of Arabs who have left may cause anew an explosion from within the country. Even if their intentions were to be peaceful, they could not be trusted in the context of an eruption of renewed violence. There is no doubt that they would be drawn into a whirlpool of blood when violence re-erupts.

The return of the refugees without peace treaties with the neighboring countries would be an act of suicide for the State of Israel. It would be like stabbing ourselves in the chest with a knife. No other state in a similar situation would take such step.

Even if we had peace agreements with our neighbors, the possibilities of the return of the refugees would be drastically limited, because of a second consideration, which is the economic factor. If the masses of Arabs had stayed in the country, then our life processes and our internal system would have adapted to such a reality. The Arab minority would have then left its impact on the governing nature of the state. Since these masses have chosen to leave, there has been a necessity to adopt new processes and systems in the state. The economy of the uprooted was destroyed. There was no proper transference of property from one authority to another. It was a total abandonment. The country has become prey to impulses of war and its uncertainties. The new Israeli state has fought for its survival and the lives of its people. In the meantime, new waves of Jewish immigration arrived and large portions of the geographical and economic vacuums that were left in the country were filled in. If the return of refugees from Lebanon was to be allowed, it would require a monumental effort of absorbing them, since a new economy reality has been created.

A state that directs its energy and is committed to the enterprise of absorption cannot, under any circumstances, doubly burden itself. The returnees would discover a different country from the one they left— different even from the one in which they would have chosen to stay, had it not been for the insurgencies and the war. They would return to peace and calm and would be far from content.

Despite of all this, we said in the past and reiterate today: This is not a problem that can be ignored. We are interested in peace, tranquility and stability around us. We are touched and affected by human suffering. Therefore we will assist in the resettlement of the uprooted. That is

why we will not learn from precedents of other nations. We shall pay compensation for every piece of land that has been deserted. Maybe there are not that many precedents for such an undertaking, but we shall do it nonetheless. We will also not decide a priori that no one will be allowed to return. We will assist in the reunification of families that have been torn apart by the upheaval. We will also make an additional contribution, by allowing certain numbers to return. But we will not do these things in an effort to provide a solution outstanding of an overall solution. The war created that problem, and only peace will solve it. The return of the refugees will not precede peace; it is inconceivable that our attackers will hold both edges of the stick—refuse to enter into peace negotiations and at the same time demand that we welcome the refugees, whose misfortune is a result of their acts.

And once again we are being confronted with the December 11th resolution. But even that resolution, which seems to require that we welcome the return of those refugees who so desire, is limited by two conditions. First, only those with peaceful intent will have the right to return. But who will evaluate their sincerity? And who will guarantee the stability and the duration of their peaceful intent? Second, their return is required to be carried out “on the closest date that it is practical.” Who decides when the “practical date” has arrived?

We are pressured to immediately allow the return of large number of refugees and commence it with reasonable numbers. Let us assume that the intention here is to appease the Arab countries and motivate them with such an act to enter into peace negotiations. Why do they deserve this conciliatory act—because they misled the Arabs of Israel? Because they urged them to leave? Because they made them believe that they would return and throw the Jews into the sea and then distribute their properties and possessions among themselves?

There is no certainty that any conciliatory act will bring peace. Who will guarantee this to a state that emerged from rivers of blood and flames of fire? Who will guarantee this to a state that turned upheaval into an orderly situation? Who was there to extend its hands in help? The United Nations stood there helplessly. The United States imposed an embargo on providing weapons to both sides. As of today, Egypt has increased its military budget significantly. It purchases arms in growing volumes. The Arab countries are being informed publicly by Britain of its willingness to renew their arms supplies. At the same time, Israel is not being informed that this arms supply is conditioned on the signing of a peace treaty between her and these countries.

The radio stations in Arab countries broadcast poisonous propaganda and promise the renewal of the war against us. Under such circumstances, what are the moral and the political justifications for making demands on us? No one even suggests committing real assistance to Israel if and when hostilities erupt.

Equipped with experience, Israel would not even demand such commitment. Since such is the case, let nobody propose that we jeopardize our national security with our own hands. The friendship of great and enlightened nations is crucially necessary and important to us, but we shall not accept it at the risk of our security and survival.

At the core of the matter, Israel firmly recognizes that allowing the refugees to settle in the neighboring countries is not only necessary according to the situation, but is justified as well because of the circumstances that led to its evolution. This solution bears a long-term advantage to the refugees themselves, to the absorbing countries, and to their relations with Israel.

At the same time, no one should be mistaken and assume that Israel is void of Arabs. Their numbers in Israel have increased significantly. According to the census that was conducted on November 8, 1948 there were 92,000 Arabs in Israel. It is estimated that the Arab population today is approximately 155,000. It is possible that even during the period that the first census

was conducted there were actually more than counted because some areas were not yet included in the survey.

Since then more Arabs were added to the country as a result of the inclusion of new areas and as result of border adjustments made by the armistice agreements. In addition, thousands of refugees were permitted to return and stay. These permits were granted both to families that were separated and to individuals who proved loyal. The State of Israel will treat favorably requests of Arabs who reside in Israel and wish to reunite with their wives and young children. At the same time, Israel will take measures to secure its borders in order to prevent illegal entry. Anyone who would try to create a fact by violating the law will be promptly punished. The state's security will not be compromised and the government will not refrain from every necessary measure to ensure that our security will not be compromised.

The hatred that is directed against us in the refugee camps is interwoven with hatred of a different sort that has recently intensified. This has to do with the Holy Sites. The refugee problem preoccupies the public opinion in various countries, but in order to recruit the sympathy of the Christian world to the plight of the refugees, it is entirely inappropriate to spread horror stories about the impending dangers to Christian Holy Sites under the hands of the State of Israel. For that matter, no rationale justifies such distortion of truths.

Regretfully, we have to admit that various Catholic circles and newspapers were captivated by this propaganda, which aims to discredit our country. Newspapers publish horrifying tales about Israel infringing on Churches' rights and privileges, arresting clergymen and high-ranking religious officials, invading monasteries, and desecrating holy places. Such malicious propaganda cannot but anger our own people. It may lead to tension in our public attitude toward the Church. In such case, no side will benefit.

Matters of Christianity in general and the Catholic Church in particular are not abandoned or neglected in Israel. Our Ministry of Religious Affairs stands firm in guarding these interests with the utmost priority. In addition, leaders of various denominations who are stationed in Israel and who look after the interests of their churches enjoy many benefits, while maintaining close relations with the Ministry and local authorities.

These methods of defamation will not prevent the Israeli authorities from continuing to fulfill their duties and obligations. However, it should be noted with sorrow that it leads to the creation of an unnecessarily negative atmosphere.

It should be hoped that His Holiness the Pope, whose prayer for peace in our land deeply resonated with us, will see fit to clarify the real facts and decimate this information to all concerned, so that religious and holy matters will not be exploited as a basis for spreading lies and distortions.

The government of Israel took it upon itself to secure freedom for all religious institutions, in order to provide them with the opportunity to carry out their duties. Israel also assumed the responsibility for guarding and respecting the Holy Sites and the privileges of all denominations. Israel hopes that it will be able to achieve a solution under the auspices of the United Nations to all open questions that are of interest to Christianity, and first and foremost the issue of Jerusalem.

It is impossible to maintain the freedom of Jewish life in Jerusalem without the State of Israel, and it will not be possible for the State of Israel to exist without Jerusalem. We have learned this lesson after a heavy toll of massacres, the suffering of the masses, the danger of annihilation that hovered over the City, and the martyrdom of the best of our sons and daughters. Hence, we are determined to guarantee full supervision of all the Holy Sites in the city with the

backing of the United Nations. To serve that end, we will provide full cooperation with the United Nations and all the relevant churches and religious leaders.

Honorable Knesset! I'm somewhat concerned that my presentation has been too lengthy, and I'm about to conclude. I will end with my opening remarks. It is imperative and urgent for us to achieve a comprehensive and stable peace. But despite its decisive significance to us and to the world, we will not pursue it at any price. There are tolls that we will not be able to pay if we are interested in true peace. We shall persevere and struggle to achieve recognition of our just standing, but not by endangering our security and our future. We shall strive persistently to reach a viable peace, stability and security. We shall not remain passive. We shall continue to extend our hand to the other side in all possible and dignified fashions. We recognize the existence and the interests of every political entity that surrounds us. We demand reciprocation. Only on the basis of real understanding of the essential interests can real peace be obtained.

We are certain that the firm reality, though new and revolutionary, of the State of Israel has left its impression on the consciousness of the Arab and non-Arab world that is around us. We are convinced that most leaders are reaching the logical conclusions of this reality and observing with open minds the necessity of establishing relations that will allow the Middle East to not only have peace but commence a new era of cooperation, real independence and progress.

The question of peace between Israel and the Arab states is first and foremost an act of civil courage in which the leaders will be required to demonstrate their true convictions. It is also a question of discarding disturbing external influences and adopting positive attitudes. All these will assist in creating a spirit of realism among the influential circles in the neighboring countries and provide them with the opportunity to rid themselves of illusions and old slogans.

From our standpoint, we have to do all that is possible to convince the world around us, in which we are destined to live forever, that we don't aspire to benefit from the destruction of others, but have a tremendous desire to build a common structure. The State of Israel is a servant to no one, but an essential tool to save the Jewish people and to serve as a catalyst to promote independence throughout the Middle East.

There will come a day in which the current vacuum will be filled with active reciprocal relations. By then, the network of world recognition of Israel will be complete and the focal point of our diplomatic relations will move from outer reaches to the center.

In addition to our representations in Moscow, Washington, London and other capitol cities, there will be added new emissaries in Cairo, Damascus, Beirut and Amman. Then, a new era will begin in Israel's foreign relations. It will also be a new period in the political and economic development of the whole Middle East. Though we are not there yet, this day will surely arrive.