

**Remarks by President Bush, Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas
To Open Annapolis Convention**

**President George W. Bush
President, United States**

Memorial Hall, United States Naval Academy
Annapolis, Maryland, Annapolis Conference
November 27, 2007

<http://www.state.gov/p/nea/rls/rm/2007/95695.htm>

Thank you for coming. Prime Minister Olmert, President Abbas, Secretary General Ban, former Prime Minister Blair, distinguished guests: Welcome to one of the finest institutes we have in America, the United States Naval Academy. We appreciate you joining us in what I believe is an historic opportunity to encourage the expansion of freedom and peace in the Holy Land.

We meet to lay the foundation for the establishment of a new nation -- a democratic Palestinian state that will live side by side with Israel in peace and security. We meet to help bring an end to the violence that has been the true enemy of the aspirations of both the Israelis and Palestinians.

We're off to a strong start. I'm about to read a statement that was agreed upon by our distinguished guests:

The representatives of the government of the state of Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization, represented respectively by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, and President Mahmoud Abbas in his capacity as Chairman of the PLO Executive Committee and President of the Palestinian Authority, have convened in Annapolis, Maryland, under the auspices of President George W. Bush of the United States of America, and with the support of the participants of this international conference, having concluded the following joint understanding.

We express our determination to bring an end to bloodshed, suffering and decades of conflict between our peoples; to usher in a new era of peace, based on freedom, security, justice, dignity, respect and mutual recognition; to propagate a culture of peace and nonviolence; to confront terrorism and incitement, whether committed by Palestinians or Israelis. In furtherance of the goal of two states, Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security, we agree to immediately launch good-faith bilateral negotiations in order to conclude a peace treaty, resolving all outstanding issues, including all core issues, without exception, as specified in previous agreements.

We agree to engage in vigorous, ongoing and continuous negotiations, and shall make every effort to conclude an agreement before the end of 2008. For this purpose, a steering committee, led jointly by the head of the delegation of each party, will meet continuously, as agreed. The steering committee will develop a joint work plan and

establish and oversee the work of negotiations teams to address all issues, to be headed by one lead representative from each party. The first session of the steering committee will be held on 12 December 2007.

President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert will continue to meet on a bi-weekly basis to follow up the negotiations in order to offer all necessary assistance for their advancement.

The parties also commit to immediately implement their respective obligations under the performance-based road map to a permanent two-state solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict, issued by the Quartet on 30 April 2003 -- this is called the road map -- and agree to form an American, Palestinian and Israeli mechanism, led by the United States, to follow up on the implementation of the road map.

The parties further commit to continue the implementation of the ongoing obligations of the road map until they reach a peace treaty. The United States will monitor and judge the fulfillment of the commitment of both sides of the road map. Unless otherwise agreed by the parties, implementation of the future peace treaty will be subject to the implementation of the road map, as judged by the United States.

Congratulations for your strong leadership. (Applause.)

The Palestinian people are blessed with many gifts and talents. They want the opportunity to use those gifts to better their own lives and build a better future for their children. They want the dignity that comes with sovereignty and independence. They want justice and equality under the rule of law. They want freedom from violence and fear.

The people of Israel have just aspirations, as well. They want their children to be able to ride a bus or to go to school without fear of suicide bombers. They want an end to rocket attacks and constant threats of assault. They want their nation to be recognized and welcomed in the region where they live.

Today, Palestinians and Israelis each understand that helping the other to realize their aspirations is key to realizing their own aspirations -- and both require an independent, democratic, viable Palestinian state. Such a state will provide Palestinians with the chance to lead lives of freedom and purpose and dignity. Such a state will help provide the Israelis with something they have been seeking for generations: to live in peace with their neighbors.

Achieving this goal is not going to be easy -- if it were easy, it would have happened a long time ago. To achieve freedom and peace, both Israelis and Palestinians will have to make tough choices. Both sides are sober about the work ahead, but having spent time with their leaders, they are ready to take on the tough issues. As Prime Minister Olmert recently put it, "We will avoid none of [the historic questions], we will not run from discussing any of them." As President Abbas has said: "I believe that there is an opportunity not only for us but for the Israelis, too. We have a historic and important opportunity that we must benefit from." It is with that spirit that we concluded -- that they

concluded this statement I just read.

Our purpose here in Annapolis is not to conclude an agreement. Rather, it is to launch negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians. For the rest of us, our job is to encourage the parties in this effort -- and to give them the support they need to succeed.

In light of recent developments, some have suggested that now is not the right time to pursue peace. I disagree. I believe now is precisely the right time to begin these negotiations -- for a number of reasons:

First, the time is right because Palestinians and Israelis have leaders who are determined to achieve peace. President Abbas seeks to fulfill his people's aspirations for statehood, dignity and security. President Abbas understands that a Palestinian state will not be born of terror, and that terrorism is the enemy standing in the way of a state. He and Prime Minister Fayyad have both declared, without hesitation, that they are opposed to terrorism and committed to peace. They're committed to turning these declarations into actions on the ground to combat terror.

The emergence of responsible Palestinian leaders has given Israeli leaders the confidence they need to reach out to the Palestinians in true partnership. Prime Minister Olmert has expressed his understanding of the suffering and indignities felt by the Palestinian people. He's made clear that the security of Israel will be enhanced by the establishment of a responsible, democratic Palestinian state. With leaders of courage and conviction on both sides, now is the time to come together and seek the peace that both sides desire.

Second, the time is right because a battle is underway for the future of the Middle East -- and we must not cede victory to the extremists. With their violent actions and contempt for human life, the extremists are seeking to impose a dark vision on the Palestinian people -- a vision that feeds on hopelessness and despair to sow chaos in the Holy Land. If this vision prevails, the future of the region will be endless terror, endless war, and endless suffering.

Standing against this dark vision are President Abbas and his government. They are offering the Palestinian people an alternative vision for the future -- a vision of peace, a homeland of their own, and a better life. If responsible Palestinian leaders can deliver on this vision, they will deal the forces of extremism a devastating blow. And when liberty takes root in Iraqi soil of the West Bank and Gaza, it will inspire millions across the Middle East who want their societies built on freedom and peace and hope.

By contrast, if Palestinian reformers cannot deliver on this hopeful vision, then the forces of extremism and terror will be strengthened, a generation of Palestinians could be lost to the extremists, and the Middle East will grow in despair. We cannot allow this to happen. Now is the time to show Palestinians that their dream of a free and independent state can be achieved at the table of peace -- and that the terror and violence preached by Palestinian extremists is the greatest obstacle to a Palestinian state.

Third, the time is right because the world understands the urgency of supporting these negotiations. We appreciate that representatives from so many governments and international institutions have come to join us here in Annapolis -- especially the Arab world. We're here because we recognize what is at stake. We are here because we each have a vital role to play in helping Palestinians forge the institutions of a free society. We're here because we understand that the success of these efforts to achieve peace between Israelis and Palestinians will have an impact far beyond the Holy Land.

These are the reasons we've gathered here in Annapolis. And now we begin the difficult work of freedom and peace. The United States is proud to host this meeting -- and we reaffirm the path to peace set out in the road map. Yet in the end, the outcome of the negotiations they launch here depends on the Israelis and Palestinians themselves. America will do everything in our power to support their quest for peace, but we cannot achieve it for them. The success of these efforts will require that all parties show patience and flexibility -- and meet their responsibilities.

For these negotiations to succeed, the Palestinians must do their part. They must show the world they understand that while the borders of a Palestinian state are important, the nature of a Palestinian state is just as important. They must demonstrate that a Palestinian state will create opportunity for all its citizens, and govern justly, and dismantle the infrastructure of terror. They must show that a Palestinian state will accept its responsibility, and have the capability to be a source of stability and peace -- for its own citizens, for the people of Israel, and for the whole region.

The Israelis must do their part. They must show the world that they are ready to begin -- to bring an end to the occupation that began in 1967 through a negotiated settlement. This settlement will establish Palestine as a Palestinian homeland, just as Israel is a homeland for the Jewish people. Israel must demonstrate its support for the creation of a prosperous and successful Palestinian state by removing unauthorized outposts, ending settlement expansion, and finding other ways for the Palestinian Authority to exercise its responsibilities without compromising Israel's security.

Arab states also have a vital role to play. Relaunching the Arab League initiative and the Arab League's support for today's conference are positive steps. All Arab states should show their strong support for the government of President Abbas -- and provide needed assistance to the Palestinian Authority. Arab states should also reach out to Israel, work toward the normalization of relations, and demonstrate in both word and deed that they believe that Israel and its people have a permanent home in the Middle East. These are vital steps toward the comprehensive peace that we all seek.

Finally, the international community has important responsibilities. Prime Minister Fayyad is finalizing a plan to increase openness and transparency and accountability throughout Palestinian society -- and he needs the resources and support from the international community. With strong backing from those gathered here, the Palestinian government can build the free institutions that will support a free Palestinian state.

The United States will help Palestinian leaders build these free institutions -- and the United States will keep its commitment to the security of Israel as a Jewish state and homeland for the Jewish people.

The United States strongly feels that these efforts will yield the peace that we want -- and that is why we will continue to support the Lebanese people. We believe democracy brings peace. And democracy in Lebanon is vital, as well, for the peace in the Middle East. Lebanese people are in the process of electing a president. That decision is for the Lebanese people to make -- and they must be able to do so free from outside interference and intimidation. As they embark on this process, the people of Lebanon can know that the American people stand with them -- and we look forward to the day when the people of Lebanon can enjoy the blessings of liberty without fear of violence or coercion.

The task begun here at Annapolis will be difficult. This is the beginning of the process, not the end of it -- and no doubt a lot of work remains to be done. Yet the parties can approach this work with confidence. The time is right. The cause is just. And with hard effort, I know they can succeed.

President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert, I pledge to devote my effort during my time as President to do all I can to help you achieve this ambitious goal. I give you my personal commitment to support your work with the resources and resolve of the American government. I believe a day is coming when freedom will yield the peace we desire. And the land that is holy to so many will see the light of peace.

The day is coming when Palestinians will enjoy the blessings that freedom brings -- and all Israelis will enjoy the security they deserve. That day is coming. The day is coming when the terrorists and extremists who threaten the Israeli and Palestinian people will be marginalized and eventually defeated. And when that day comes, future generations will look to the work we began here at Annapolis. They will give thanks to the leaders who gathered on the banks of the Chesapeake for their vision, their wisdom and courage to choose a future of freedom and peace.

Thanks for coming. May God bless their work. (Applause.)

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert

Prime Minister, Israel

Memorial Hall, United States Naval Academy

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<http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/History/Modern%2BHistory/Historic%2BEvents/Nov-2007.htm>

(Translated from Hebrew)

The Honorable President of the United States, George Bush, My colleague, President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, Heads of delegations, Distinguished guests,

I came here today from Jerusalem at your invitation, Honorable President, to extend, on behalf of the people of Israel and the State of Israel, a hand in peace to the Palestinian people and to our neighboring Arab states, many of whose representatives are here with us in Annapolis.

I had many good reasons to refrain from coming to this meeting.

The memory of the failures of the near and distant past weighs heavy on us. The dreadful terrorism perpetrated by Palestinian terrorist organizations has affected thousands of Israeli citizens, destroyed families and attempted to disrupt the lives of all the citizens of Israel. I witnessed it personally during my term as Mayor of Jerusalem, at times of bombings at cafes, buses and recreational centers in Jerusalem and other cities in the State of Israel

The continued shooting of Qassam rockets against tens of thousands of residents in the south of Israel, particularly in the city of Sderot, serves as a warning sign – one which cannot be overlooked. The absence of governmental institutes and effective law-enforcement mechanisms, the rule of Hamas in the Gaza Strip, the ongoing activity of murderous organizations throughout all the territories of the Palestinian Authority, the absence of a legal system which meets the basic criteria of a democratic government – all these are factors which deter us from moving forward too hastily.

I do not ignore all the obstacles which are sure to emerge along the way. They are right in front of me. I came here, despite the concerns and doubts and hesitations, to say to you, President Mahmoud Abbas, and through you, to your people and to the entire Arab world: it is time. We no longer, and you no longer, have the privilege of clinging to dreams which are disconnected from the sufferings of our peoples, the hardships they experience daily and the burden of living under ongoing uncertainty, with no chance for change or hope.

We want peace. We demand an end to terror, incitement and hatred. We are willing to make a painful compromise, rife with risks, in order to realize these aspirations.

I came here today not to settle historic accounts between us on what caused the conflict and hatred and what, for many years, stood in the way of compromise and peace.

I wish to say, from the bottom of my heart, that I know and acknowledge the fact that alongside the constant suffering which many in Israel have experienced because of the history, the wars, the terror and the hatred towards us – a suffering which has always been part of our lives in our land – your people have also suffered for many years, and some still suffer.

For dozens of years, many Palestinians have been living in camps, disconnected from the environment in which they grew, wallowing in poverty, neglect, alienation, bitterness, and a deep, unrelenting sense of deprivation.

I know that this pain and deprivation is one of the deepest foundations which fomented the ethos of hatred towards us.

We are not indifferent to this suffering. We are not oblivious to the tragedies you have experienced. I believe that in the course of negotiations between us we will find the right way, as part of an international effort in which we will participate, to assist these Palestinians in finding a proper framework for their future, in the Palestinian state which will be established in the territories agreed upon between us. Israel will be part of an international mechanism which will assist in finding a solution to this problem.

The negotiations between us will not be here in Annapolis, but rather in our home and in yours. It will be bilateral, direct, ongoing and continuous, in an effort to complete it during the course of 2008.

It will address all the issues which have thus far been evaded. We will do it directly, openly and courageously. We will not avoid any subject, we will deal with all the core issues. I have no doubt that the reality created in our region in 1967 will change significantly. While this will be an extremely difficult process for many of us, it is nevertheless inevitable. I know it. Many of my people know it. We are ready for it.

The negotiations will be based on previous agreements between us, UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, the Roadmap and the April 14th 2004 letter of President Bush to the Prime Minister of Israel.

On conclusion of the negotiations, I believe that we will be able to reach an agreement which will fulfill the vision of President Bush: two states for two peoples.

A peace-seeking, viable, strong, democratic and terror-free Palestinian state for the Palestinian people.

A Jewish, democratic State of Israel, living in security and free from the threat of terror – the national home of the Jewish people.

It is clear that the implementation of an agreement will be subject to the implementation of all obligations in the Roadmap, on all its phases and according to its sequence, as concluded between us from the very beginning. WE will abide by all our obligations, and so will you.

The agreement with you and its gradual implementation, cautiously and responsibly, is part of a much wider complex, which will lead us, hopefully, to peace with all the Arab states. There is not a single Arab state in the north, east or south with which we do not seek peace. There is no Muslim state with which we do not want to establish diplomatic relations. Anyone who wants peace with us, we say to them, from the bottom of our hearts: welcome!

I am pleased to see here, in this hall, representatives of Arab countries, most of which do not have relations with Israel, The time has come for you as well. You cannot continue to stand by indefinitely and watch the peace train go by. It is time to end the boycott and alienation towards the State of Israel. It is not helpful for you, and it hurts us. I am familiar with the Arab peace initiative, which was born in Riyadh, affirmed in Beirut and recently reaffirmed by you in Riyadh. I value this initiative, acknowledge its importance and highly appreciate its contribution. I have no doubt that it will be referred to in the course of the negotiations between us and the Palestinian leadership.

The Arab world represented here by many countries is a vital component in creating a new reality in the Middle East.

The peace signed between Israel and Egypt, and subsequently between Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, is a solid foundation of stability and hope in our region. This peace is an example and a model of the relations which we can build with Arab states.

My close relations with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan are extremely significant from the process of building trust and understanding with the Arab states.

However, these relations, as important as they may be, are not enough. We aspire for normalization with those Arab states which eschew, as much as we do, radical and frantic fundamentalism, and which seek to grant their citizens a more moderate, tolerant and prosperous world.

This is a common interest of all of us. There is a lot which separates us – memories and a heritage which do not emanate from the same historic roots, different ways of living, different customs, and our emotional, spontaneous sense of solidarity with our neighboring Arab countries, which have long been trapped in this age-old bloody conflict between us.

However, there is also a lot which brings us together. You, like us, know that religious fanaticism and national extremism are a perfect recipe for domestic instability, violence,

bitterness and ultimately the disintegration of the very foundations of coexistence which is based on tolerance and mutual acceptance.

We are a tiny country with a small population, but rich in good will and with a significant ability to create a partnership which will lead to prosperity, growth, economic development and stability for the entire region.

The prospect of a new political horizon, and renewed hope, not only for Palestinians and Israelis, but also, together with you, for the entire region, can come from here, from Annapolis.

Honorable President of the United States, my colleague Mahmoud Abbas, distinguished guests,

Almost two years ago, under very sad circumstances, Prime Minister of Israel Ariel Sharon was no longer able to carry the heavy responsibility of leading the State of Israel, and this responsibility was passed on to me – first, as a result of formal procedures and subsequently on the basis of an election in Israel's democratic system of government.

Prior to my election I stated that my heart's desire and that of my people, was to achieve peace, primarily with the Palestinian people. This is what I believed then and it is what I continue to believe in now, with all my heart.

The past two years have been difficult for all of us. The hardships have not been alleviated, the terror organizations have not weakened, the enemies of peace have not disappeared, and we are still anxiously awaiting the return of our missing and captive sons who are held by terror organizations. I long for the day when I can see Gilad, Eldad and Udi back with their families, and I will not falter in my efforts to achieve their release.

I believe that there is no path other than peace. I believe that there is no just solution other than the solution of two national states for two peoples. I believe that there is no path which does not involve painful compromise for you, Palestinians, and for us Israelis. I want to thank you, President George Gush, an ally in the path of peace, for your willingness to assist in the historic process of peace and reconciliation between us and our neighbors.

I believe it is time. We are ready. I invite you, my friend Mahmoud Abbas, and your people, to join us in this long, tormenting and complex path, for which there is no substitute.

Together we will start. Together we will arrive.

President Mahmoud Abbas
President of the Palestinian Authority
Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization

Memorial Hall, United States Naval Academy

Annapolis, Maryland, Annapolis Conference

November 27, 2007

<http://americantaskforce.org/inmedia.php?type=speeches&id=6521>

In the Name of God, the Most Gracious Most Merciful

President Bush

Prime Minister Olmert

Ministers and Representatives of Participating States Distinguished Guests,

Peace and the Grace of God be Upon You

Allow me Mr. President to thank you in my capacity as Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the sole representative of the Palestinian people, and on behalf of the Palestinian people, for inviting us to this international conference. This conference symbolizes the crystallization of the entire world's will in its march towards achieving a comprehensive and lasting peace in our region and in bringing long-anticipated justice to our country where oppression, wars, occupation and violence have prevailed in the previous decades.

Today, Your Excellency, you stress the need to make the most difficult choice-the choice of making peace and ending a dark era marked by hatred. It is an era for which the peoples of the region have paid a dear price with the lives of its youth, the future of subsequent generations and the prosperity, advancement and liberty of millions of us all.

Therefore, I thank you Mr. President. By calling this historic conference, you have sent a very clear and strong message to the peoples of the entire Middle East, who now watch with great hope as well as tremendous fear of losing yet another opportunity. The intent of your letter of invitation is not obscure: It expresses your personal commitment and the commitment of your great nation to attaching the highest priority to negotiations to achieve a long-awaited peace between both Palestinians and Israelis and the broader Arab world and Israel. We hope that this will be the culmination of your legacy for the world-a world more free of violence, persecution and fanaticism.

I must commend you, Your Excellency, on choosing this gorgeous city of Annapolis as the site for the conference. In addition to its beauty, Annapolis symbolizes liberty, the most exalted value of all. Freedom, for Palestinians is perhaps the most evocative word-the word that captures the collective hope of Palestinians and their aspiration for future generations. It is their sun and the light of their future. It is the last word of their martyrs and victims and the daily hymns of their prisoners.

I would also like to express my deep gratitude to Secretary Rice and her team. Without

their persistence and perseverance-and without their ability to grasp all aspects of the conflict in our region-we would not have been able to gather here today. Secretary Rice took important strides in her quest to emphasize that the path to peace through negotiations is the only path-and that this path is irreversible.

I must also stress that the exceptionally broad participation of our brothers and sisters from Arab and Islamic countries, the Quartet, the G8 and the Permanent members of the United Nations, in addition to many European and Asian countries, as well as members from the Non-Alliance block and the African continent, in a conference unique in the conflict's history is a driving force that helps imbue the conference with added legitimacy. This broad participation also demonstrates strong support for Palestinian and Israeli negotiators to persevere in their quest to reach the Two-State solution, which is based on ending the occupation and establishing a sovereign State of Palestine living side by side with the State of Israel by resolving all of the permanent status issues in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the broader Arab-Israeli conflict, which will prove indispensable to forging peaceful and normal relations in the region. I am proud of this broad Arab and Muslim contribution and the broad international participation because it shows the support of sister countries for the Palestinian people and their leadership to establish peace. Such support endorses our approach, which calls for an historic and balanced settlement that will ensure peace and security for our independent state, for Israel and for the entire region.

The Arab and Islamic presence also demonstrates that the Arab Peace Initiative was never a move without a definite goal but rather a courageous strategic choice aimed at changing the nature of relations in the region and beginning anew. This historic Arab and Islamic shift and quest for a regional peace should now be a similar willingness to engage by all as it will lead to ending the occupation in all the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem, as well as the Golan Heights and parts of Lebanon and as it will also lead to resolving all the other permanent status issues. Chief among these is the plight of Palestinian refugees which must be addressed holistically-that is, in its political, human, and individual dimensions in accordance with UNGA resolution 194, as emphasized in the Arab Peace Initiative, and with the participation of sister Arab countries who have borne the heavy burden of hosting the refugees for decades.

It is no exaggeration to say, Your Excellency, that today marks a juncture in the history of our region-a juncture between two eras: The Pre-Annapolis era and its aftermath. In other words, the exceptional opportunity that the Arab, Islamic and international presence brings today coupled with overwhelming Palestinian and Israeli public opinion in support of Annapolis, must be seized in order to be a launching pad for a negotiations process. The possibilities offered by today's conference must not be wasted. This window of opportunity might never open again and if it does, it might never claim the same consensus or momentum.

Mr. President,

What we face today is not only the challenge of peace but also a test of the credibility of

all involved: The credibility of the United States of America, members of the Quartet, the entire international community, Israel, the PLO and the Palestinian National Authority, as well as the Arab and Islamic group. It is a test that will draw deep marks in the future of the region and the relations among its peoples on the one hand and on the international forces that care about the region's peace and security on the other.

With this outlook, we come to Annapolis today. We therefore recognize the weight of responsibility upon our shoulders and the burden that we will have to bear. We recognize, and I believe that you share our opinion, that the absence of hope and the infiltration of desperation into the hearts of peoples is what feeds extremism. It is therefore our joint duty to allow for real hope to thrive. This way, we hope that with your full support and involvement we might achieve a complete transformation and that a genuine peace can be achieved soon, before the end of your term, Mr. President.

Tomorrow, we embark on a serious and comprehensive negotiations process on all the permanent status issues including Jerusalem, refugees, borders, settlements, security, and water, as well as others. We must support such negotiations with tangible and direct steps on the ground, which will be taken as proof of having embarked on an irreversible track towards a negotiated, comprehensive and full peace. Such steps must involve freezing all settlement activities including natural growth, reopening institutions in Jerusalem, removing settlement outposts, removing checkpoints, releasing prisoners and facilitating the mission of the Palestinian Authority in restoring law and order.

With all frankness and without any hesitation, I have to defend the right of my people to open their eyes to a new dawn free of occupation, settlements, apartheid walls, prisons full of prisoners, targeted assassinations, and the siege of checkpoints around villages and cities. I look forward, Your Excellency, to the day when our prisoners are free and to the day when they can assume their roles in supporting peace and building their homeland and state. It is also my duty to say that the destiny of Jerusalem is a key issue in any peace treaty we reach. We want East Jerusalem to be our capital-a capital where we will have open relations with West Jerusalem and where we will guarantee for believers of all religions the freedom to practice their rituals and to have access to the holy sites without discrimination and in accordance with international humanitarian law.

In this context, I would like to emphasize that we will continue to carry out our responsibilities in accordance with the Roadmap in fighting lawlessness, violence and terrorism and in restoring law and order. The government of the PA is working tirelessly in extremely difficult conditions to achieve this noble cause. We do this for our own people because we must, not because it is a political requirement imposed upon us in previous accords or the Roadmap.

Our people clearly understand the difference between the threat posed by terrorism versus using terrorism as a pretext to maintain an intolerable situation. Our civil, security and economic institutions must be given the opportunity to function and this process must be sponsored by the international community until our authority and government are able to fully assume their responsibilities. I must also stress that our determination to end

occupation stems from our vision that by doing so we destroy one of the most important excuses for terrorism in our region and in the world. I say this without undermining the necessity to fight terrorism regardless of time, conditions or source because it is a danger that threatens the future of all peoples and can doom civilization and destroy its accomplishments.

Here, I would like to praise Mr. Tony Blair for his distinctive and meticulous role in building Palestinian institutions and promoting major economic projects to improve the conditions of daily life and consequently prospects of peace. He is amazing in presenting creative ideas that contribute to inspire political movement and promote security. In this regard, the role of the European Union, Japan and our Arab brothers who provide ongoing support for economic projects and institution building is also highly appreciated.

Mr. President,

I want to use this opportunity to speak to every mind, heart and conscience of every Israeli citizen, based on my full recognition that without undermining the importance of international and regional backing, the determining element for making peace and sustaining it are the public opinions in Palestine and in Israel and the commitment of their legitimate leaderships.

I would like to begin by saying that in spite of our differences over some of the most difficult issues in the Conflict, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has shown a desire for peace that I felt during our bilateral meetings. This desire for peace has genuinely contributed to our reaching this important step that we inaugurate today. Mr. Prime Minister, I would like to continue working closely with you until we are able to complete this historic long-awaited mission together. It is essential that each one of us uses his weight, experience and determination to overcome the difficulties that will face us and to bridge the gaps between our two positions so that we can achieve a resolution. This is how we will end occupation and long years of suffering for our refugees; this is how we will ensure neighborly relations, economic cooperation and people-to-people relations, all of which are the strongest guarantees for a sustainable peace.

I would also like to speak to the citizens of Israel on this exceptional occasion to tell them: Our neighbors on this small piece of land, neither you nor we are begging for peace from one another. Peace is a common interest of yours and ours. Peace and freedom are our rights just as peace and security are your rights and ours.

It is time that the cycle of bloodshed, violence and occupation end. It is time to look into the future with confidence and hope. It is time for this aching land that is called the land of love and peace to live up to its name. Peace is not impossible if we have the will and the good intentions and when each side realizes its rights.

He who says that making peace between Palestinians and Israelis is impossible wants only to prolong the duration of conflict and to propel it into the abyss of the unknown. This unknown is unfortunately very known to us: it is more decades of bloodshed, after

which we will not arrive to a solution different from what is offered today-the contours and the essence of which is known to each one of us. The continuation of the conflict might also lead to the death of the idea of peace in our minds, hearts and consciousness. Peace is possible. It requires, however, a common effort to achieve it and to sustain it. Today we extend our hands to you as equals and the world is our witness and support. We must not lose this opportunity that might never be repeated. Let us make the peace of the brave and guard it for the sake of both our children and yours.

To our friends all over the world: members of the Quartet, participants in this conference, and other countries and nations who are not present here today who supported us in the past and who continue to be willing to help us, I would like to tell you that our people will not forget your support under the most difficult conditions. We are looking forward to your continued political presence with us after the conference is over to ensure the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations process achieves its goals. We hope that the work of this conference will be enhanced by the success of the Paris Economic conference that will be held in a few weeks.

The continuation of the negotiations and their success is the real key to changing the face of the entire region.

The Almighty God says in the Holy Quran: O Ye who believe! Come all of you into peace and follow not the footsteps of the devil. He is an open enemy for you. Al-Baqra 208

And if they incline to peace, incline also to it, and trust in Allah. He is the hearer, the knower. Al-Anfal 61

I also would like to recall what President John F. Kennedy said: "Let us never negotiate out of fear, but let us never fear to negotiate."

To my Palestinian people, to all Palestinians in Gaza, Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the refugee camps in the Diaspora, I would like to share these words with you: I recognize that each and every one of you has their personal pain and special tragedy stemming from this conflict and years of al-Nakbeh and bitter occupation. Do not lose confidence or hope. The entire world is extending their hands to us to help end the years of our everlasting Nakbeh. The world is trying to help us end the historic injustice that was inflicted on our two peoples. We will be ready as individuals and as a people to overcome the pain and tragedy when we reach a settlement that will give us rights that are equal to people elsewhere on this world: the rights to independence and self-determination.

And to Palestinian mothers who are awaiting the return of their jailed sons; to the children who are dreaming of a new life and a prosperous and more peaceful future; to our brave prisoners and to all of my sons and daughters wherever you are: Have faith in tomorrow and the future because an independent Palestine is coming. This is the promise of the entire world to you today. Trust that the dawn is coming.

To my people and family in the Gaza Strip: You are in my heart and the hours of darkness will vanish before your determination does and our determination to the unity of our people in the West Bank and Gaza as a unified and unbreakable geographic and political entity will overcome. Your suffering will end. Justice and peace will prevail.

Mr. President,

I would like to end with a quote from President Abraham Lincoln, which he wrote during one of the most difficult moments in American history: "Let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to do all that we may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

Thank you Mr. President and Peace and blessings of God be upon you.