

AHLC

נאום תורמות, ס/שה"ח הנגבי 22.9.14

Mr. Chairman, His Excellency, Mr
Børge Brende, Minister of Foreign
Affairs of Norway

His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-Moon,
Secretary-General of the United
Nations,

Secretary of State John Kerry,

Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah,

High Representative Catherine Ashton,

Prime Minister Tony Blair,

Distinguished Guests,

I am honored to be here today and would like to extend special thanks to the Norwegian Government for their tireless efforts to advance this forum. I also want to thank the donors for their unwavering support over the years.

Excellencies,

Israel wants peace!

We have demonstrated our commitment to peace in the past and will continue to do so in the future!

In his historic speech at Bar-Ilan University, Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu said: "In my vision of peace, in this small land of ours, two peoples live freely, side-by-side, in amity and mutual respect."

This pledge has formed the foundation of Israeli policy. But it has not always been easy.

Israel did everything in its power to avoid the conflict in Gaza. However, Hamas, an internationally recognized terrorist organization, was determined to wage war. We were left with no choice but to act to defend our citizens – the most basic obligation of any state.

To be clear, Israel was fighting Hamas and not the Palestinian people.

In fact, Israel went to great lengths to protect innocent lives. Throughout the conflict, we saw the difference between a culture that celebrates life and one that celebrates murder and martyrdom.

Hamas launched rockets steps from schools, stored its weapons in family homes, built terror tunnels under mosques, and used the basement of a Gaza hospital as their headquarters.

By hiding behind Palestinian women and children while targeting Israeli women and children, Hamas was committing a double war crime.

Excellencies,

Israel is committed to facilitating international efforts to develop Gaza and assist the Palestinians in building a strong and vibrant economy. We believe that development must go hand-in-hand with the demilitarization of Gaza.

Israel is grateful to U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry for his contribution and personal efforts. We welcome his announcement, as well as those of EU Foreign Ministers, to disarm terrorist groups in the Gaza Strip.

Israel is also encouraged by the role played by Egypt and believes its efforts will help to achieve a lasting ceasefire that will pave the way for recovery in Gaza.

In considering the way forward, we must be mindful of the fact that we have been at this crossroads before.

Since Israel disengaged from Gaza in 2005, Hamas has stolen hundreds of millions of aid dollars intended for the development of Gaza to build its terror infrastructure. It is critical that this time, we ensure that there are monitoring mechanisms in place to certify that all funding and construction materials reach their intended destination.

Israel welcomes the United Nations proposal to establish a mechanism for rehabilitating the Gaza Strip under the supervision and control of the UN and in agreement with the Palestinian Authority. The proposed mechanism is efficient and addresses Israel's legitimate security concerns, provides reassurance that construction materials will be directed to rebuilding, and enables Palestinian Authority to play a central role in governing Gaza – all of which are critical to ensuring success.

The Palestinian Authority headed by President Abbas, must play a constructive role in this process – beginning by demonstrating a commitment to bilateral cooperation rather than unilateral actions.

For its part, Israel is a committed partner in this process. We have just approved a three phase plan to address economic needs, construction needs and the access and movement of people and goods.

As part of this plan, Israel has opened the markets between the West Bank and Gaza for agricultural and fishery exports. We also approved the entry of construction materials for 35 international projects and have doubled the number of entry permits for the business sector.

Additionally, all projects submitted by the international community and the Palestinian Authority have been approved and individuals involved in reconstruction will be allowed free access between the West Bank and Gaza.

Excellencies,

Israel is committed to helping the Palestinians build a strong and viable economy in both Gaza and the West Bank.

This is in the best interests of both the Palestinian and Israeli people. While it is critical for us to address redevelopment needs in Gaza, we cannot overlook the needs of Palestinians in the West Bank.

By increasing the flow of goods and people between Gaza and the West Bank, both economies are being strengthened. To this end, Israel recently adopted a number of measures to stimulate economic growth in the West Bank.

First, we developed a new program that allows 20 Palestinian factories in Area C to export directly to the Israeli market without undergoing additional security checks. Second, dialogues between the Israeli and Palestinian Ministries of Finance recently restarted. As an outgrowth of these meetings, Israel and the PA are engaging in real-time information sharing which has resulted in a 30% rise in Palestinian revenues.

Israel continues to invest in upgrading commercial crossings and as a result, we have witnessed a 12% increase in volume of goods transferred in the last 6 months.

The Allenby Bridge is a main gateway for commerce and trade between the PA and Jordan and the rest of the Arab world.

Israel has allocated 35 million shekels for the construction of a scanner compound to enhance the flow of commercial traffic and the access of Palestinian goods to international markets by 30%. The scanner was generously donated by the Dutch government.

Israel supports the involvement of the international community in the development of industrial zones in the West Bank such as the French, Japanese and the planned German-Turkish zones.

In the past year, 250 Palestinians attended training programs on water, women's empowerment and agriculture conducted by MASHAV – Israel's agency for international development cooperation.

In recent years, Israel has dramatically increased the number of employment permits for Palestinians to work in Israel. Just last week, the government approved an additional 5,000 employment permits for Palestinians.

We also increased the number of permits that allow Palestinians to remain in Israel overnight. Finally, we have approved new measures to enable more Palestinians living in the West Bank to enter Israel without an entry permit.

Excellencies,

Israel is committed to cooperating with the Palestinian Authority to support the development of the Palestinian economy.

Your participation is critical to ensuring success.

We look forward to partnering with you and welcome your engagement to bring security, stability, recovery and peace to our region.

Thank you.