Ambassador Gilad Erdan’s remarks to the UN Security Council

October 26, 2020

Israel Mission to the United Nations

<https://embassies.gov.il/un/statements/security_council/Pages/Ambassador-Gilad-Erdan%E2%80%99s-remarks-to-the-UN-Security-Council.aspx>

​

Mr. President,

It is an honor to speak before the Security Council for the first time since assuming my role as the Permanent Representative of the State of Israel.

I come to this position after nearly two decades in the Israeli Knesset and government. I have served on Israel’s security cabinet and in several ministerial positions dealing with issues such as counter-terrorism and the ongoing attempts to delegitimize my country.

I believe that the UN as a whole and the Security Council in particular can be a force for good in the world, especially today when the world is facing extenuating health and economic challenges.

In my view, the council should serve as a model for how nations can set aside their differences and unite to tackle international problems and promote peace and security.

In the two months since I arrived in New York, I have witnessed a jarring dissonance between what this council chooses to focus on and what is actually happening in the Middle East. During this short period, I witnessed the council ignoring opportunities to promote peace while simultaneously choosing not to act in the face of grave threats.

I was told by many that the council holds an institutional bias against Israel. Despite these

criticisms, I want to keep an open mind. I want to prove wrong all those who tell me that this

council is a lost cause.

Yet, I have a few considerations I would like to pose to the council in order to better understand the council’s priorities in the Middle East.

In a debate titled “The Situation in the Middle East, Including the Palestinian Question,” one would expect the council to focus on the most important issues facing the Middle East.

However, once a month, for 20 years – over hundreds of debates – members of this council routinely overlook critical issues and focus only on the "Palestinian Question".

Today's debate is a perfect example. Shouldn’t we be discussing the momentum of peace between four countries in a turbulent region?

As the UN body entrusted with developing friendly relations among nations, surely the council should discuss the Abraham Accords, and the most recent peace agreement between Israel and Sudan. And yet, the only debate this council held on the historic peace agreements between Israel and the UAE and Bahrain was an informal one.

To understand how significant these agreements are, consider that it was in Khartoum in 1967 that the Arab League adopted the Khartoum Resolution and the infamous "Three Nos": No peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel and no negotiations with Israel.

On Friday, Sudan replaced three "nos" with three yeses: Yes to peace with Israel, yes to a new Middle East and yes to a brighter future for our children. 53 years ago, Sudan symbolized the Arab world's refusal to accept the Jewish state's legitimacy. Today, it symbolizes the Arab world’s growing acceptance of the Jewish state.

I look forward to hearing the council members’ insights on this unprecedented paradigm shift and how we can build on these agreements.

Perhaps we could discuss today how the Abraham Accords and the new Israeli-Sudanese alliance presents new opportunities for dialogue and prosperity. How these agreements will enhance cooperation in the fields of security, sustainability, technology, innovation, health and more.

These Accords are an important milestone that will serve to advance further agreements with other Arab and Muslim countries. They disprove pre-conceived notions of peacemaking in the Middle East and represent a new, pragmatic approach, that is not held hostage by unrealistic demands of one side.

Maybe that is exactly why the Palestinian leadership opposes them. Instead of viewing the Accords as a new opportunity to kick-start negotiations, the Palestinians have attacked the Emirates, Bahrainis and Sudanese calling their decision to have relations with

Israel a “betrayal” and a “stab in the back”.

Minister al-Maliki, now everyone can see that the Palestinians incite against any country that seeks peace in the region, even its fellow Arab League members. The fact that the Palestinians attack those who make peace with Israel, demonstrates that, for years, the council has been applying pressure to the wrong side.

It isn't surprising that the Palestinians refuse to see the agreements as an opportunity for peace. President Abbas has refused every peace offer made by the State of Israel. Actually, to be more precise: he has refused every offer that he has bothered responding to. Former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert is still waiting for a response to the generous offer he made in 2008.

Instead, the Palestinian representative here calls for a peace conference. Don’t be fooled by this; it is only another distraction. Abbas knows a conference will not bring peace. The only way to achieve real peace is through direct, bilateral negotiations.

Prime Minister Netanyahu has invited President Abbas to Jerusalem many times. He has even offered to go to Ramallah, but Abbas wastes time calling for another useless conference. Instead this council should call on the Palestinians to begin negotiations based on the American vision for peace, which is a good starting point for realistic, sustainable peace.

Mr. President,

In a debate titled “The Situation in the Middle East, Including the Palestinian Question,” shouldn’t this new era of peace, which has a huge impact on the region, be discussed?

In addition to discussing opportunities for peace, the council must also discuss the destabilizing forces in the region. Namely, Iran. It's surprising, but I actually want to thank Iran. I want to thank the regime for the role it has played in bringing the moderate forces in the region closer together. Ironically, Iran's extreme and murderous ways have contributed to the historic agreements.

Nevertheless, Iran and its terrorist proxies remain the biggest threats to peace and security in the region. Its stated aim of using violence to create a Shia hegemony in the region, should top the agenda in all debates on the Middle East. Iran’s continued aggression threatens to take many more innocent lives: Muslims, Jews, Christians.

Opposing Iran’s nuclear ambitions, while allowing it to buy and sell other lethal weapons, puts the entire region in grave danger. The fact that almost all members of this council were willing to let the arms embargo expire, calls into question this body’s commitment to international peace and security.

The sanctions on Iran, which were reinitiated by the US-triggered snapback, remain in full effect. We fully support the American initiatives in this regard.

Iran is also one of the biggest human rights violators in the world. One example is its excessive and illegal use of executions. During President Rouhani's tenure, Iran has executed over 4,300 people, including minors, women, members of the LGBT community, journalists, and antigovernment protesters.

Should this not be discussed in a debate on the situation in the Middle East?

This council must unite in a maximum pressure campaign against Iran. It must prevent the regime in Tehran from continuing to develop its nuclear capabilities, obtaining advanced weapons and violating human rights. For Israel and other Arab countries, this is an existential threat. One day many more countries will realize it threatens them, too. Let's hope it isn’t too late.

Mr. President,

When discussing security in the Middle East, there is another Iran-related threat that is barely discussed by the council. It has been nearly a month since Prime Minister Netanyahu revealed new intelligence about a Hezbollah arms depot embedded in Beirut’s Janah neighborhood. The terrible explosion last August at the city’s port killed two hundred people and injured thousands. This has not stopped Hezbollah from putting Lebanese lives at risk of another, similar disaster.

This is not the first time that Hezbollah has used Lebanese civilians as human shields. Hezbollah acts in complete disregard of human life and of UN Security Council Resolutions 1559, 1680, and 1701.

If the council truly cares about the future of the Middle East, how is it possible that not all council members have designated Hezbollah in its entirety as a terrorist organization? Should this not be discussed in a debate on the situation in the Middle East?

Mr. President,

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is also, of course, an important issue and should be a part of the debate. Yet, while discussing it every month for the last 20 years, key elements have been neglected. If you are looking for the real obstacle to peace, look at the Palestinian's long record of incitement and hate. PA textbooks incite to violence and promote terrorism and antisemitism. Through its “Pay to Slay” program, the PA rewards terror attacks against Israeli civilians. Maybe part of the answer to the Palestinian question can be found here.

The PA spends hundreds of millions of dollars a year on its "pay to slay" program. Just think how that money could have been spent this year fighting COVID-19.

The UN regularly produces one-sided, distorted reports about alleged Israeli violation of

Palestinian rights. Perhaps a discussion should be held about the Palestinian Authority’s violation of its own people’s rights, including the basic right to choose their own leaders. Israel, as you know, has held more elections in a year than the PA has held in the last 15.

For decades, many in the international community have fixated on a single solution to the conflict. They vote for the same anti-Israel resolutions, recycle old talking points and ignore issues that are crucial for ending the conflict. They also ignore the fact that this approach has only emboldened Palestinian rejectionism.

Perhaps the council members are too accustomed to the ritual of these debates to see that they have been completely ineffective in answering the Palestinian question. We all know what Einstein said about trying the same thing over and over and expecting different results.

Mr. President,

While the council's talking points have not changed for decades, the Middle East has. Three historic agreements considered impossible to achieve were reached in just two months. This council should embrace the Accords and use them as a catalyst to promote peace and security in the region. It can facilitate the next round of agreements.

I am committed to proving wrong all those who say that the Security Council is a lost cause.

However, ignoring the most pressing issues in the Middle East and expressing bias when

discussing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, makes it hard to do.

The council must recommit itself to pursuing peace and security, and not let politics dictate its actions in the Middle East.

I remain optimistic that the council can fulfill its mandate and I look forward to working with you all in that noble pursuit.

Thank you.