

62nd SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Check Against Delivery

Statement by
Ambassador Dan Gillerman
Permanent Representative

Agenda item 18
"Question of Palestine"

United Nations, New York
29 November 2007

This statement is available on the internet at <http://www.israel-un.org>

Mr. President.

I have just come from a commemorative ceremony at Lake Success, where the General Assembly met 60 years ago. You see, throughout history, nations traditionally have been created through war and conquest. Israel, however, was created by UN decree and by the nations of the world. To be there today – representing my Government and my People – was indeed a joyous occasion.

Mr. President,

Late last night, I returned from Annapolis. It was a memorable occasion, with representatives from over 40 nations – chiefly among them moderate states of the Arab and Muslim world – committed to supporting the bilateral process between Israel and the Palestinians. The air in Annapolis was filled with the hope that by working together we can realize a peaceful and better tomorrow. I have no doubt that this sense of optimism was felt by all those in attendance.

Yet, back here in New York, standing before this august Assembly – in a place so distant from Annapolis in body, mind, and soul – I cannot help but wonder whether today's debate will contribute to the promise of Annapolis.

After all, this Assembly hall is also the birthplace of the annual 21 resolutions defaming Israel – with a litany of predetermined, impractical, and completely biased conclusions – that have only given the Palestinians a fictitious sense of reality and a discourse of rights without responsibilities, both of which render the United Nations completely incapable of playing a meaningful role in addressing the conflict.

Today – 29 of November – is perhaps the greatest example of how this Assembly continues to stifle hope and faith for peace in our region. According to the calendar of the United Nations, today is the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which by definition precludes Israel.

Let me be clear: Palestinian self-determination is a cause Israel wholeheartedly supports. At the Annapolis meeting, just two days ago, my Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Olmert said “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”.

Over the years, however, the proceedings held in this Hall and at UN centers around the world have corrupted the cause of Palestinian self-determination and transformed it into a denigration and defamation of the Jewish state.

For us – for Jews and for Israelis – today is not a bitter day at all. We are not downtrodden or haunted by vanquished dreams. Today is a day of great victory – victory over oppression and tyranny, and victory over the painful tragedies and suffering of Jewish history. Today, we celebrate the resilience of the Jewish people and our eternal

bond to the land of Israel, where after so many years of yearning and longing in exile we merited the return to our homeland.

Travel to any city in Israel, and you will no doubt find a street named for this very day – כ"ט בנובמבר – the 29th of November – a testament to its importance and significance to our people.

The joy felt on 29 November 1947 is recounted by Amos Oz, one of Israel's most celebrated writers:

“There was dancing and weeping ... Bottles of fruit drink, beer and wine passed from hand to hand and mouth to mouth, strangers hugged each other in streets and kissed each other with tears, ... frenzied revelers ... waved the flag of the state that had not been established yet, but tonight, over there in Lake Success, it had been decided that it had the right to be established”.

Distinguished Excellencies, think of the past 60 years, and consider Israel's many contributions to the world in the fields of science and technology, medicine, art, and culture. A country that has discovered ways to stop deserts from receding; a country that has engineered critical advancements in medicine, cures for illnesses and limbs for the disabled; a country that has endowed the world with rich treasures of art and culture, through its Nobel Laureates, poets, artists, and writers.

Think about where the world would be today without the State of Israel – and I know some in this Hall perversely dream about such a question. But Israel is here to stay, to flourish, and to continue contributing to the advancement of man, progress, and human civilization.

It is then the greatest insult to us, to history, and to this Assembly that while Israel celebrates, others at the United Nations mourn.

Some Member States will note my delegation's absence from past 29th of November proceedings. We stopped addressing this session because some Member States hijacked and abused the forum for their own political interests and turned it into yet another venue to demonize Israel. We cannot allow that to happen any longer. Today is our day.

It is high time for Israel and for all those committed to peace in our region, to reclaim this day for what it truly means: the peaceful coexistence of two independent states in the region, a Jewish state and a Palestinian state, living side-by-side in peace and security, each fulfilling the national aspirations of its respective people.

Mr. President,

In this regard, it is all the more bewildering that of late the Jewish character of the State of Israel has been called into question. Last week, as Israelis and Palestinians set out for

Annapolis, a veteran Palestinian negotiator said “the Palestinians will never acknowledge Israel’s Jewish identity”.

The resolution that gives the 29th of November significance – General Assembly resolution 181 – speaks of the creation of the “Jewish State” no less than 25 times. Even before that, the notion of a Jewish state in the land of Israel was cemented in the 1922 League of Nations British Mandate on Palestine, which put into effect the Balfour Declaration of 1917 to establish a national home for the Jewish people.

The Arab refusal to recognize the existence of our Jewish state has been at the core of the Palestinians’ inability to achieve a state of their own. When the Jews accepted the UN partition plan, the Arabs made a fateful – and indeed fatal – choice to reject it and invade the newly borne Jewish state, rather than coexist with it.

Had the Arabs accepted the UN’s decision, there would have been two states, one Jewish and one Arab, all this time, for the past 60 years. Had the Arabs not rejected the decision, my Palestinian colleague who spoke earlier would have been introduced as the “Permanent Representative” of the Palestinian state – not with the caveat of “Observer”.

The wrong choices did not end in 1947. We saw them again in 1967, 1973, 2000, and 2005, when Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip only to have the Palestinians bring the Hamas terrorists to power. The wrong choices of the Palestinians continue until this very day, when, on average, Hamas terrorists in the Gaza Strip fire rockets at Israel every three hours.

For their brutal violence, arrogance, and intransigence, Israel has paid an enormous price: with the lives of our people – the Israeli victims of Palestinian terrorism: men, women, and children, young and old, doctors and lawyers, artists and scientists, all who would have contributed so greatly to life in Israel and to the betterment of the entire world.

The terrorism we still see today stems from an innate refusal to recognize Israel, a refusal to recognize the Jewish state, and a refusal to recognize the value of our lives. So long as there is a denial of the existential issues, I fear, there can never be an agreement on the territorial ones.

Mr. President,

Annapolis – I hope and believe – represents a new wind of change. Moderate Arab and Muslim states today recognize that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not the cause of instability in our region and that the conflict can and will end. They also recognize that the real dangers come directly from Islamic extremism and its champion Iran, who sponsors terrorism around the globe, tries to attain nuclear weapons, denies the Holocaust while preparing for the next one, relentlessly defying the will of the international community.

The Coalition for Peace, which the world saw assembled in Annapolis just two days ago, will support the process between Israel and the Palestinians. But it is also a coalition that will counter and confront the extremists in Teheran.

I hope that the winds of Annapolis will blow to the north, to this very Hall. For there could be no better time for the nations of the world – and in particular the moderate Arab and Muslim states in this Hall today – to show their commitment to the Israeli-Palestinian process. And there could be no better place than here at the United Nations –where for decades Israel has been discriminated against and singled out, contrary to the fundamental principles of the UN Charter – for Members States to tell Israel and the Palestinians that they support our dialogue.

Mr. President,

Allow me to take you back once more to sixty years ago, to 2 October 1947, when David Ben-Gurion, founding father of the State of Israel, two months prior to the General Assembly's historic vote, said in Jerusalem:

“We will not surrender our right to free Aliyah, to rebuild our shattered Homeland, to claim statehood. If we are attacked, we will fight back. But we will do everything in our power to maintain peace, and establish cooperation gainful to both. It is now, here and now, from Jerusalem itself, that a call must go out to the Arab nations to join forces with Jewry and the destined Jewish State and work shoulder to shoulder for the common good, for the peace and progress of sovereign equals”.

Mr. President, sixty years later, Israel's message to the Arab nations and the Palestinians has not changed. Shoulder to shoulder for the common good. Now, more than ever, with the winds of change blowing strong from Annapolis, to New York, to the Middle East, to all corners of the earth.

Thank You.