28.8.63 אלי'ר פרנסיס - אלנר

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QUESTIONS SUBMITTED TO THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. LEVY ESHKOL, BY FRANCIS AMIR OFNER, CORRESPONDENT OF THE JEWISH CHRONICLE, THE CHRISTIAN MONITOR, ETC.

Q. 1. Enumerating the crucial questions facing you as Prime Minister on July 10, you put economics before security. Does this imply that the danger to Israel's security has receded? If not, what made you reverse the customary order of tasks?

A. Economics and security are inter-related. There can be no security without a sound economy - and vice versa. When I mentioned economics before security, I had no intention of establishing a list of priorities; in my view both problems are complementary and of equal importance.

I did want to stress, from the educational point-of-view, to our people here in Israel, the importance of the economic front - our need to be strong in every way - economically as well as defensively.

Q. 2. Would the Prime Minister welcome or accept the mediation of a third party to bring about direct talks with the Arabs? Has anyone offered himself as a mediator? Do you have the intention of asking anyone?

A. 2. Any constructive and serious effort to promote direct negotiations with our neighbours is welcome. This was our attitude in the past and this continues to be the policy of the present government. As I have already had the opportunity to state, Israel has in the past fully cooperated with third-party initiatives to bring about a meeting between Israeli and Arab leaders.

Unfortunately, the results were completely disappointing, not because of any lack of competence and devotion on the part of the go-between, or any lack of cooperation on behalf of Israel.

Despite this, I feel that we should be alert to new opportunities in that direction and examine any opening towards a peaceful settlement.

Q. 3. Regarding the Israel offer to compensate Arab refugees which, as you said, "still stands" (provided international assistance etc. forthcoming) - would you be ready to recommend or actually recommend the Knesset to budget a certain yearly sum for such a compensation?

Would you be ready to repeat the Israel offer through emissaries who would try to contact directly the refugees, as suggested by Archbishop Hakim?

A. 3. The policy of Israel is to make its contribution in the field of compensation within the framework of a general settlement of the refugee problem.

At the first sign of any real possibility to settle the refugee problem, I am prepared to bring a special budget to the Knesset for approval - even if a special session of the Knesset is required.

We can then find a solution to other questions, taking into consideration the conditions already mentioned.

To your second question, the answer is "yes".

Q. 4. Do you intend to appoint a high-level team for re-appraising, planning and eventually implementing Israel's long-term peace-strategy?

A. 4. We are continuously keeping the international scene under review, in order to adjust our policies, if necessary, to changing circumstances. I feel that we are well equipped for this task both within the Cabinet and in the Foreign Ministry.

It is my desire and purpose to keep developments under permanent review also from the long range point-of-view. I am interested in maintining a dynamic and flexible approach towards this goal.

Q. 6. Would the Israel Government raise at the United Nations the issue of the persecuted Kurdish minority in Iraq? What is Israel's policy towards the Kurds?

A. 6. First, the Israel Government has not decided to put down any item on the agenda of the forthcoming General Assembly.

To your second question, alarming reports have come out of Iraq that the Iraqi Army is carrying out a campaign of genocide against the Kurdish minority in that country. We abhor any persecution on account of faith, race, nationality or ethnic origin.

Q. 11. You foresaw the functioning of the Kinneret-Negev Water Scheme for the spring or summer of 1964. The Arabs, on the other hand, went on record that they will resist the scheme. Is Israel ready to fight to defend her right to develop the Jordan water project.

A. 11. I have already made a comprehensive statement on our policy in this matter at my Press Conference on July 10. I stressed that we are carrying out a project devoted to peace and development. We are doing so in accordance with a unified plan which was devised a few years ago by Ambassador Eric Johnston and approved at the time by all riparian states. The Arab riparian countries are also proceeding with their water development schemes based on the Jordan-Yarmuk river system, in accordance with the same plan. The development of these water resources, which is now proceeding on both sides, is beneficial to the population of these countries. I cannot conceive that Arab countries should act against their own interests by intervening with force against the execution of such life-giving projects.

For us the implementation of the Kinneret-Negev Water Plan is of vital importance to redeem and develop vast tracts of desert and arid land.

Any attempt to obstruct the implementation of this plan will be considered an act of aggression and will be dealt with accordingly.

Q. 12. You spoke warmly of the Zionist movement on several occasions. Do you intend to use it as the main channel for contacts between Israel and the Diaspora Jewry?

A. 12. As you know in 1952 the Knesset passed a law regarding the status of the World Zionist Organisation and in 1954 the Government entered into a Charter with the Zionist Executive.

We have been acting and shall continue in the spirit and letter of these documents.

Besides a unique historic relationship between the Zionist movement and Israel we have very close and friendly relations with many non-Zionist Organisations, groups and individuals. We hope that our links with all our friends will strengthen as time goes on.

Q. 14. You predicted the other day that Mapai will unite with Ahdut Avoda within a year. Do you still stand by this prediction? And if so, why?

Q. 15. What has been your most satisfying and what the most disappointing experience since you became Prime Minister of Israel?

A. 15. The most satisfying experience - how could it be anything else than my interview with journalists? The most disappointing experience - distorted press reports. But seriously...

It has been most satisfying to see the democratic spirit of our people. Though they received the news of Mr. Ben-Gurion's resignation with deep regret, they have closed ranks behind a new Government and have welcomed it warmly. It was gratifying to know that our Government has the confidence of the people.

As for disappointments, it is too soon to speak in such negative terms.

ב"קדר יצר
לבדר אל יקבל
בטלן לרגש נשבר
ישרד שלום.

אף יצר לא שאל
אלהי שלב של אדם.