

Address by Prime Minister Levi Eshkol at the UJA Study Mission, King David Hotel, October 28th, 1963.

Mr. Chairman, My Dear Friends,

I believe I have met with every Study Mission that has visited Israel, and each time the direct contact and frank exchange has been important and valuable to me. It is my sincere hope that this tradition we have established will continue and be strengthened.

This evening I should like to touch on a few points regarding Israel's foreign affairs, internal questions, and our partnership, which is, to a great extent, represented in this room tonight.

Foreign Affairs:

Let us begin with a number of developments in our international and regional relations: in the last several months, a new wind has been blowing in the skies of international relations. We hope its effect will, in time, be felt in the Middle East as well.

Your first study mission, my friends, came here nine years ago. Those of you who were in this group then, often saw boys and girls in uniform, coming home on leave, carrying on their backs the rifles which they would require, should an emergency arise. Just because this sight is not common today, do not be lulled into complacency.

The Arab leaders do not forego any opportunity of threatening to destroy Israel. At huge rallies, at private meetings, at conferences with Eastern-bloc and Western journalists, on the radio and TV, in the press, the occasion is used to re-echo the threat.

As a result of this constant repetition, the Arab people and youth are being conditioned to hate Israel and to await with eagerness its destruction.

Last week in the Knesset I explained our policies regarding the attitude of our enemies. I emphasized our need of relying on our own strength. I pointed out the responsibility which rests, particularly on the great powers for maintaining peace in the area. I reiterated our desire for peace. The reply of President Nasser, as you may have noticed, was not long in coming. The following day, in a speech at Suez, the President of Egypt said that my Knesset statement had attacked Egypt. He claimed that Israel is a base of aggression and aspires to expansionism.

My friends, any thinking person can but express bewilderment at President Nasser's claims. Israel has consistently advocated a non-aggression pact with Egypt, and complete disarmament under mutual inspection and control. That policy stands!

The reply to our offer has consistently been increased armament and preparations against Israel.

And we note the fact that great quantities of arms, military equipment and financial support are being supplied to Egypt. They enable Egypt to carry out military intervention in Yemen, and if we are to believe the reports, in the Algeria-Morocco dispute as well.

It is time that not just Israel took note that President Nasser claims, on the one hand, that fear of Israel dictates his need for arms; while on the other hand, he puts these arms to use in fellow Arab countries.

As for us, I know of no better course for settling disputes than abandoning aggression and negotiating peace. This is, after all, the basic theme of the U.N. Charter to which both the Egyptian and Israel governments are signatories. It is also, I believe, the prevailing trend in world affairs today.

Would it then not be wiser, if President Nasser desisted from rattling his sabres and instead, entered into competition with me in both advocating and implementing peace in the Middle East? Rather than using such vast sums for weapons with greater and greater destructive power, the Arabs could compete with us in seeking peace. They could liberate these sums for eradicating hunger and disease, poverty and illiteracy from among the peoples of this region.

I feel I can afford to make these statements bluntly and point-blank: I do so because no one can possibly think they are made out of a position of weakness. I do not, for a moment, assume that anyone believes that Israel proposes peace out of lack of strength. President Nasser has himself admitted on one occasion that the Arabs "are not yet ready" to eliminate Israel, and that he requires time for great preparations before this will be possible.

For this reason and confident in the justness of our case, we turned to the Security Council after the Syrian murder of two of our boys at Almagor, a young settlement in the Galilee.

Fortunately, my friends, our foreign relations are not confined to problems connected with war and deterring hostilities. On the world scene, Israel has made a positive contribution with its co-operation projects in developing countries. Our efforts in absorbing new immigrants, developing agriculture and irrigation, settling people on the land, building towns and cities, educating youth, developing institutions of government, science and services, fostering co-operatives, and organizing labour - all these we gladly share with a host of newly independent nations. The experience we have gained - in which you too have a share - is being put to use in co-operation with friendly states on three continents.

As you know, about a thousand Israelis are sharing their pioneering zeal, accumulated experience and sense of mission with friends in many countries. These dedicated men and women, I would call "Israel's co-operation and Development Corps". Similarly, as you may have heard, about 4,500 trainees and students have participated here in studies and seminars. They have learned that Israel welcomes them in friendship, fraternity and equality.

This programme demands great moral and economic efforts. At the same time is a source of pride for us, and in keeping with our Jewish heritage of mutual help, should be a source of satisfaction for you as well.

The Economy:

Ladies and gentlemen, I said earlier that we should not be lulled into complacency about security. Similarly, the apparent "prosperity" visible in our supermarkets and on the main streets of the large cities, in the settled parts of Israel - which is less than half our area - should not mislead you with regard to our overall economic situation.

True, during these nine years, we have made considerable progress. It is also true that the new economic policy which was initiated some two years ago has functioned efficiently. I am sure my colleague the Finance Minister has discussed this with you. (I must say how pleased I am to hand over to Mr. Sapir the "Peckel" of troubles that I carried so long as Finance Minister).

Well, we can all derive satisfaction from this progress. But my friends, I ask you to look about you - to use your eyes, not to see what has been done, but to see what has not. Lift up your eyes to the North and South, East and West. See for yourselves that over half our land is empty and desolate.

This is, as you know, the Decade of the Negev, and we have invested great efforts in that area. We have now decided, for many reasons, which I cannot go into tonight, to turn to the Galilee in a great project of development and settlement. You have seen some of the Galilee's forsaken stretches, barren hillsides and rocky slopes. I regret that the blessing of rain prevented you from seeing the heart of this area. These lands were ravaged by conquerors: Byzantine and Arab, Crusader and seljuk, and must be redeemed from their shame and nakedness.

All this - the development of the Negev and of the Galilee will be more difficult than development of the first half of Israel. Let us take just the question of water, which is so precious and scarce.

Yet we must bring the water to the desolate land. Huge sums have been invested and are being invested for this. And I think we may be privileged with the honour of being the first to unlock the salt seas and sweeten water for irrigation and other commercial purposes. It is a costly and weighty honour.

As you have visualized the needs of the land, so too, I hope you will be able to imagine for yourselves and hear the outcry of our people whom we must yet bring to Israel.

The tens of thousands who come each year arrive desolate as well, lacking everything - almost a reflection of the land. I cannot disguise a better note in this regard: the people with means stay behind, and send us the poor, without a penny, and all too often broken in body and spirit. Some of you have seen this face to face at Shderot and other centres. Were it not for the children of the new olim, the precious Moshelech and Shlomelech, my heart would be heavy indeed. But it is for them that we are prepared to endure and struggle and strive, until they grow up and reach the "huppa and ma'asim tovim" - huppa and good deeds. The young ones must be brought up properly - to have schools and education, with all the efforts and investment in facilities and teachers and equipment.

By coupling these two deserts, the desert of land and the desert of man - of our people - we can make this land blossom as we have already done in the Centre of Israel and in the Jezreel and Jordan Valleys. It may take a decade or two, and it will not be easy, but then you will be able to come and see that the neglected Negev and Galilee have become development and settled. What demands this makes on us, you all can realize: manpower, know-how and budgets.

The Jewish Agency Treasurer has warned about the possible return to the Maabara. You may know that I was instrumental in those good old days - in putting up the Maabarot, and in the feverish and dedicated work of mass settlement and housing programmes which enabled us to empty them. I confess I grumble when I hear that Jews in Israel, men, women and children may need to live again in camps. The rainy season is upon us and I can see them before my eyes, as only a few years ago, poor confused people in tents and tin shacks, shivering in the cold, as the rain leaks in and the earth floor becomes mud.

My friends, your belief and mine is that Israel does not exist for its present population alone. And so, Israel has assumed great responsibilities, not just for her citizens of today - and let us recall that many of these arrived just yesterday - but for all who are yet to come. These responsibilities were placed on us by Jewish history and Jewish fate. They are indeed truly heavy

responsibilities - financially and otherwise. Just the cost of security and defence - which falls completely and solely on our shoulders - is staggering. No moral power on earth can absolve Israel of these responsibilities for the security and well-being of its citizens of today and for the preparation and preserving of a home for the hundreds of thousands and even millions yet to come.

My friends, will you be offended if I ask, what moral power can absolve Jews in the free world of their responsibilities towards the Jewish people seeking refuge and returning home?

During the past years, the amount of UJA funds reaching Israel has been declining. It is as if the overseas partners felt that the problems are all solved, "after all, there is a State and more and more can be pladed on its shoulders",

There is, though no doubt in my mind that these tasks are the responsibility of overseas Jewry.

My friends, you are concluding the Ninth Study Mission and beginning the 26th year of UJA's existence. There is no objective reason for the decline of UJA activity - individual and collective. The general half of Israel, I referred to, cries out at you, makes demands on you. The Jews who are yet to come, and Israel, in their name, voice their silent but deafening cry: These tens of thousands of children of new immigrants, call out to you for homes, for schools and study facilities.

On their behalf, Israel demands your participation and partnership.

You will soon be back in your homes - back in the greatest Jewish community in the world. Remember, and remind your fellow Jews, of what you have seen and heard. Instill into your communities new spirit and new heart.

This year, we have rejoiced with you in the half-way mark towards UJA's jubilee. UJA has to its credit great deeds: a great tide of volunteering spirit, of participation which matched the situation.

Now let there be deeds - in the next 25 years as well. It is your responsibility, to see that the coming years will not fall short of your past glorious record. When we celebrate the full jubilee - and I hope many of us will be here then - Israel may well be a prosperous land of five or six million, whom you have helped bring and rehabilitate.

My dear friends and colleagues, I hope and believe that you will undertake this covenant with the people of Israel tonight. Lustre and greatness will again redound both to the name of UJA and to that of the American Jewish Community, and great deeds will be done for the good of the Jewish people.