

## **Address by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Memorial Ceremony for David Ben-Gurion, November 27 2006**

Sde Boker (Translated from Hebrew)

The Honorable President,  
Madam Speaker of the Knesset, Ms. Dalia Itzik,  
Government Ministers,  
Knesset Members,  
The Ben-Gurion Family,  
Distinguished Guests,

Three years ago, in my capacity as Vice Prime Minister for Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, I delivered a speech here, and quoted from David Ben-Gurion's address at a 1949 Knesset debate on the Armistice Agreements, in which he said:

"...when we were faced with the choice between the entire land of Israel without a Jewish state, or a Jewish state without the entire land of Israel - we chose a Jewish state without the entire land of Israel".

This historic choice made by Ben-Gurion at the conclusion of the War of Independence was painful, but courageous, heart-wrenching, but sober. Cherished and beloved parts of our homeland - the cradle of our history - remained beyond the border, but a solid Jewish majority was guaranteed in the State of Israel.

Time passed, Arab animosity and terrorism resulted in more war, and some 40 years ago, Israel was again faced with the difficult choice: many good people advocated the vision of Greater Israel.

David Ben-Gurion, already a retired statesman, ruled that in exchange for true peace, Israel must relinquish a vast majority of the territories occupied in the Six Day War. Much has happened since then, facts were established on the ground, agreements were signed, the international and regional arena changed beyond recognition.

The bloody conflict with the Palestinians has not ended. Ben-Gurion's basic diagnosis remained valid and continues to guide - with the necessary amendments - the position of Israeli governments in our peace policy today. Already at the time of Israel's birth, Ben-Gurion extended his hand in peace to the Arab nations. His hand was rejected, but it remains extended. I extend my hand in peace to our Palestinian neighbors, hoping that it will not be rejected.

I wholeheartedly identify with the statements made by Ben-Gurion regarding the duty of every government in Israel to strive for peace: "I would consider it a great sin, not only towards our generation but towards future generations as well, if we did not do everything in our power to reach a mutual understanding with our Arab neighbors, and if future generations had cause to blame the Government of Israel of missing an opportunity for peace...".

These are not easy times for the State and people of Israel. These days, more than ever, it is natural for us to come to this place, the burial place of the Father of our revived nation, to draw inspiration. If I could seek Ben-Gurion's counsel today, I believe that he would have advised me to make the statements which I intend to make to our Palestinian neighbors today.

You, the Palestinian people, in the south and east, in the Gaza Strip and Judea and Samaria, stand, these very days, on the threshold of an historic crossroads. The terror, violence, murders and incessant attacks against the citizens of Israel are liable to lead us closer to a new and painful wave of terrible violence. The uncompromising radicalism of your terror organizations - the Hamas, Jihad, the al-Aksa Martyrs' Brigade and other organizations - did

not bring you closer to attaining the goal which I am convinced many of you share - the establishment of a Palestinian state, which will guarantee you a future of prosperity and which will exist in good neighborly relations side-by-side with the State of Israel.

On the verge of making decisions which could plunge us into an increasingly escalating conflict, I come today, from here, near the tomb of David Ben-Gurion, to suggest to you a different path - a path which offers a chance for a different future, for you and for us.

We started it the day before yesterday. We embarked on this path - and I hope that it will lead us forward towards the goal we all aspire to - peace, tranquility and mutual trust. We are ready and willing to pursue this path, and persevere until we reach the sought-after solution.

If a new Palestinian government is established - a government which will be committed to the principles of the Quartet, implement the Roadmap and bring about the release of Gilad Shalit, I will invite Abu-Mazen to meet with me immediately, in order to conduct a real, open, genuine and serious dialogue between us.

In the framework of this dialogue, and in accordance with the Roadmap, you will be able to establish an independent and viable Palestinian State, with territorial contiguity in Judea and Samaria - a State with full sovereignty and defined borders. In this framework, the borders of the State of Israel will be defined, in accordance with President Bush's April 14th, 2004 letter to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. These borders will be different from the territories currently under Israel's control.

I understand the importance which the Palestinian society attributes to the issue of prisoners. I hereby declare that when Gilad Shalit is released and returned to his family, safe and sound, the Government of Israel will be willing to release numerous Palestinian prisoners - including ones who were sentenced to lengthy prison terms - in order to increase the trust between us and prove that our hand is truly extended in genuine peace.

I said it before Gilad Shalit was abducted, and I have not changed my position.

I know that many Palestinian families yearn for the day when their loved ones will return home. This day could be very close. I believe that many of you are weary of the dreadful price which you pay as a result of the violent extremism of the terror organizations prevailing in your streets. I believe that many of you yearn for a new chapter which we can open together in the bloody history of our relations.

The cessation of terrorism and violence will enable us to offer you a series of steps, which will be taken in joint coordination, in order to facilitate the improvement of the Palestinian population's quality of living, which was severely affected as a result of our need to take defensive measures against your terrorist actions.

We will significantly diminish the number of roadblocks, increase freedom of movement in the territories, facilitate movement of people and goods in both directions, improve the operation of the border crossings to the Gaza Strip, and release Palestinian funds for the purpose of alleviating the humanitarian hardship which many of you suffer.

We can assist you in formulating a plan for the economic rehabilitation of the Gaza Strip and areas in Judea and Samaria. We can assist you in the establishment of industrial zones - in cooperation with the international community - to create places of employment and the means of earning a decent living, and to relieve you of your ongoing dependence on employment infrastructures in Israel.

We will seek the assistance of those neighboring Arab States which strive for a peaceful solution to the conflict between us, including: the Kingdom of Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, in order to benefit from their experience and receive backing for direct negotiations between us.

The voices emanating from those States regarding the need for recognition and normalization of relations with the State of Israel - including, for example, some parts in the Saudi peace initiative - are positive, and I intend to invest efforts in order to advance the connection with those States and strengthen their support of direct bilateral negotiations between us and the Palestinians.

I have been following with great appreciation the serious efforts made by those States to bring about a cessation of violence in the region, and I respect their sincere desire to create a new atmosphere between us, so as to facilitate a solution to the conflict. The international circumstances which were created, specifically at this time, allow you and us to take a courageous step, which involves the need to make painful compromises and forgo those dreams which were part of our national ethos for so many years, and to open a new chapter offering hope for a better life for all of us.

We, the State of Israel, will agree to the evacuation of many territories and communities which were established therein. This is extremely difficult for us, akin to the Parting of the Red Sea, but we will bear it, in exchange for true peace.

You must stop the terror, violence and efforts to harm Israeli citizens in the south, center and north, recognize our right to live in peace and security next to you, and relinquish your demand for the realization of the right of return. It is a right goal, a natural goal, an attainable goal.

If you demonstrate the necessary determination and discipline, you will find in us a ready partner. The State of Israel is a powerful State. Do not be fooled by our internal differences, our political rivalries or the gloomy atmosphere which we sometimes project. In a violent battle, we will prevail, even if it is lengthy and even if it claims many victims; even if it involves compromises on comfort or quality of living, the State of Israel has proven its strength in the past and is prepared for it today. Do not put us to another test, which will involve many casualties and destruction, and which will lead to total hardship and despair.

The past cannot be changed, and the victims of the conflict, from both sides of the border, cannot be returned. Dictates are futile and mutual accusations are nothing but useless word games. Historic scores cannot be settled and scars cannot be obliterated.

All we can do today is prevent further tragedies and bequeath to the younger generation a bright horizon and hope for a new life. Let us convert animosity and the "honing of our swords" to mutual recognition, respect and direct dialogue.

From here, from the edge of the cliff overlooking the ancient landscape of the Tzin Creek - the site chosen by David Ben-Gurion as a final resting place for him and his wife Paula - the State of Israel's call for peace is heard clearly and decisively. May it echo and be answered positively this time.

May the memory of David and Paula Ben-Gurion be blessed.