

## **Prime Minister Sharon addresses the nation on the day of the implementation of the Disengagement Plan, August 15 2005**

Citizens of Israel,

The day has arrived. We are beginning the most difficult and painful step of all – evacuating our communities from the Gaza Strip and Northern Samaria.

This step is very difficult for me personally. It was with a heavy heart that the Government of Israel made the decision regarding Disengagement, and the Knesset did not lightly approve it.

It is no secret that I, like many others, believed and hoped that we could forever hold on to Netzarim and Kfar Darom. However, the changing reality in this country, in this region, and in the world, required another reassessment and changing of positions.

Gaza cannot be held onto forever. Over one million Palestinians live there, and they double their numbers with every generation. They live in incredibly cramped refugee camps, in poverty and squalor, in hotbeds of ever-increasing hatred, with no hope whatsoever on the horizon.

It is out of strength and not weakness that we are taking this step. We tried to reach agreements with the Palestinians which would move the two peoples towards the path of peace. These were crushed against a wall of hatred and fanaticism.

The unilateral Disengagement Plan, which I announced approximately two years ago, is the Israeli answer to this reality. This Plan is good for Israel in any future scenario. We are reducing the day-to-day friction and its victims on both sides. The IDF will redeploy on defensive lines behind the Security Fence. Those who continue to fight us will meet the full force of the IDF and the security forces.

Now the Palestinians bear the burden of proof. They must fight terror organizations, dismantle its infrastructure and show sincere intentions of peace in order to sit with us at the negotiating table.

The world awaits the Palestinian response – a hand offered in peace or continued terrorist fire. To a hand offered in peace, we will respond with an olive branch. But if they chose fire, we will respond with fire, more severe than ever.

The Disengagement will allow us to look inward. Our national agenda will change. In our economic policy we will be free to turn to closing the social gaps and engaging in a genuine struggle against poverty. We will advance education and increase the personal security of every citizen in the country.

The disagreement over the Disengagement Plan has caused severe wounds, bitter hatred between brothers and severe statements and actions. I understand the feelings, the pain and the cries of those who object. However, we are one nation even when fighting and arguing.

Residents of the Gaza Strip, today marks the end of a glorious chapter in the story of Israel, and a central chapter in the story of your lives as pioneers, as realizers of a dream and as those who bore the security and settlement burden for all of us. Your pain and your tears are an inseparable part of the history of this country. Whatever disagreements we have, we will not abandon you, and following the evacuation, we will do everything in our power to rebuild your lives and communities.

I wish to tell the soldiers of the IDF, the police officers of the Israel Police and Border Police: you face a difficult mission – it's not an enemy you face, rather your brothers and sisters.

Sensitivity and patience are the order of the hour. I am certain that this is how you will behave. I want you to know: the entire nation stands behind you and is proud of you.

Citizens of Israel, The responsibility for the future of Israel rests on my shoulders. I initiated the Plan because I concluded that this action is vital for Israel. Believe me, the extent of pain that I feel at this act is equal only to the measure of resolved recognition that it was something that had to be done.

We are embarking on a new path which has many risks, but also a ray of hope for all of us.

With the help of God, may this path be one of unity and not division, of mutual respect, and not animosity between brothers, of unconditional love, and not baseless hatred.

I will do my utmost to ensure that it will be so.