

**ADDRESS TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
CAPE TOWN
BY
MR RONNIE KASRILS, MP
MINISTER OF WATER AFFAIRS AND FORESTRY
23 OCTOBER 2001**

1. The Fundamental Causes of the Conflict:

Successive Israeli governments and the world Zionist movement have consistently denounced their critics as anti-semites and blamed the Palestinians for the failure to reach a negotiated settlement. We emphatically reject these assertions. We do not dispute that sectors of the Palestinian population have resorted to terror and we condemn indiscriminate killings of civilians from whatever quarter. Yet this is not the root cause of the on-going violence. The fundamental cause of the conflict is Israel's occupation of Palestine, and the suppression of the Palestinian struggle for national self-determination.

In November 2000 the Israeli cabinet considered a document prepared by the Prime Minister's office on alleged transgressions by the Palestinians. The Acting Foreign Minister, Shlomo Ben-Ami, opposed the distribution of the document on the grounds that no one would be surprised that a people under occupation had failed to honour its agreements with its occupier: "Accusations made by a well-established society about how a people it is oppressing is breaking rules to attain its rights do not have much credence".

Henry Siegman, former Executive Director of the American Jewish Congress, observes correctly that this statement "goes to the very heart of the conflict and extracts the poison buried there". The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 inflicted a great injustice on the Palestinian people, compounded by the subsequent Israeli rule of the Occupied Territories and denial of the legitimate claims of the Palestinian refugees.

A recognition of the fundamental causes of the on-going violence does not constitute anti-semitism. Nor does it amount to a denial of Israel's right to exist. Rather, it constitutes an urgent call on the Israeli government to redress injustice and satisfy legitimate claims, without which peace negotiations will fail.

2. The Holocaust Compels us to Speak Out:

All Jews live in the shadow of the Holocaust. For some of them, the overriding lesson is that survival is the highest morality. They seek to justify Israel's intransigence in peace negotiations and application of excessive force against the Palestinians on these grounds. Other Jews believe that the Holocaust compels them to support justice and freedom from persecution for all people, regardless of their nationality, ethnicity or religion. We stand firmly in this camp.

3. **Repression Intensifies Resistance:**

After the suffering experienced by Jews in Europe during Nazism we are utterly appalled at the ruthless security methods employed by the Israeli government against Palestinians. These include the deployment of bull-dozers, machine guns, tanks and helicopter gunships and the use of lethal force, as a matter of policy, even against civilians armed with stones and slings; targeted assassination of opponents, the doctrine of “collective punishment” of Palestinian communities, demolition of homes and olive groves, the stringent curfews, and roadblocks making normal life impossible; the ritual of control and humiliation. These intolerable strategies together with the growing number of provocative Jewish settlements in the West Bank, undermine the legitimacy of the Israeli government and its negotiating position and give rise to intensified resistance that will continue to grow.

We take note of the fact-finding report by members of South Africa’s Parliament who visited the Middle East in July 2001. Their report observes: “It becomes difficult, particularly from a South African perspective, not to draw parallels with the oppression experienced by Palestinians under the hand of Israel and the oppression experienced in South Africa under Apartheid rule”.

We are committed to justice and freedom for pragmatic as well as ethical reasons. Oppression almost always gives rise to rebellion and thereby threatens the security of the oppressor. Repression and reprisals in response to rebellion provide no relief. They only deepen, broaden and prolong the cycle of violence and counter-violence. The notion that security can be achieved through reliance on force is demonstrably false as the struggle against Apartheid testified.

4. **The Security of Israelis and Palestinians is Inseparable:**

We understand the fears of Jews in Israel and their longing for security. The security of Israelis and Palestinians, however, is inescapably intertwined. Neither group will be secure for as long as the other is insecure. There is consequently no viable alternative to a negotiated settlement that is just, that recognises both Palestine and Israel as fully independent sovereign states, and that provides for peaceful coexistence and co-operation between these states. It is only on this basis that peace and security can be achieved. Shimon Peres recently stated: “We want to see an independent Palestinian State successful, flourishing. We think that the better the Palestinians will have it, the better neighbour we shall have”. We fully agree, but it is incumbent on Israel, the dominant force and power over the Palestinians to demonstrate its serious intent in this respect.

What is more if Israel is to become a respected society it must grant full, equal rights to all who dwell within its borders – Christians, Muslims and non-believers alike who are victims of discriminatory treatment and laws.

5. A Call for Peace and Security:

Israel carries a great responsibility to improve the dangerous state of affairs, in the Middle East and internationally, by recognising the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and creating the basis for peace and stability.

We fully support the joint call to the international community by Presidents Bouteflika of Algeria and Mbeki of South Africa in October 2001 to ensure that peace be restored to the region through dialogue and negotiations. We support their call for the withdrawal of the Israeli forces from the Palestinian Territories.

We call on South Africans of Jewish descent, and Jews everywhere, to raise their voices and join with all governments and people in support of justice for Palestine and peace and security for all in the Holy Land. This is a vital step towards reducing the grave threat of international disorder and anarchy.

6. As an immediate step toward peace we call on the Government of Israel:

- * To resume and sustain negotiations with the Palestinian authority in good faith.
- * To conduct negotiations within the framework of the relevant resolutions of the United Nations Security Council, and of Resolution 242 of 1967 in particular.
- * To conduct its security operations with restraint and in accordance with international humanitarian law.
- * To work in partnership with the Palestinian leaderships to build a lasting peace on the basis of reconciliation.

Note:

The above is from an address to the South African National Assembly by:

Ronnie Kasrils, MP, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry

The statement was co-authored with Max Ozinsky, member of the Western Cape Legislature

They appeal to South Africans of Jewish descent to join them in signing this statement.

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