

**STATEMENT OF CONSCIENCE ON THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN  
CONFLICT BY SOUTH AFRICANS OF JEWISH DESCENT  
OCTOBER 2001**

We the undersigned are compelled to express ourselves on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict as a matter of conscience and concern for the safety and well being of the Israeli and Palestinian Peoples and for world peace.

**1. The Fundamental Causes of the Conflict**

We assert that the fundamental causes of the current conflict are Israel's suppression of the Palestinian struggle for national self-determination and its continued occupation of Palestinian lands.

We do not dispute that certain sectors of the Palestinian population have resorted to terror and we condemn innocent killings of civilians from whatever quarter. Yet this is not the root cause of the problem.

The state of Israel was founded as a homeland for the persecuted Jews of Europe. It came into being as a result of a war of independence. The action of the British in assuming that Palestine was theirs by colonial mandate to dispose of, inflicted a great injustice on the Palestinian people. This was compounded by the subsequent Israeli rule of the Occupied Territories and the denial of the legitimate claims of the Palestinian refugees.

Recognition of the fundamental causes of the ongoing violence does not constitute anti-Semitism. Rather, it constitutes an urgent call on the Israeli government to redress injustice, uphold human rights, and satisfy legitimate claims, without which peace negotiations will fail. Nor does it amount to a denial of Israel's right to exist. It recognises that such negotiations require that the Western Powers, the Arab States and the Non-aligned States through the aegis of the United Nations guarantee the mutual security of the state of Israel and the state of Palestine.

**2. Our History Compels Us to Speak Out**

All Jews live in the shadow of the Holocaust. For some of us, the lesson of that tragedy has been that survival is the highest morality. For others of us, the lesson is that Jews must support justice and freedom from persecution for all people. Many feel torn between these two. But we believe that Jewish survival and the fulfillment of Palestinian national aspirations are not mutually exclusive goals. We believe that the path forward is through championing the legitimate desires of the Palestinian people, and we reject an approach that is guided by existential fear and which sacrifices principles of justice in the name of collective survival.

**3. Repression Intensifies Resistance**

In light of the suffering that we Jews have experienced ourselves, especially in the past century, we object to the ruthless security methods employed by the Israeli government against Palestinians. These include the deployment of bulldozers, tanks, helicopter gunships, and fighter planes; the use of lethal force, as a matter of policy, even against civilians armed with stones and slings; the targeted assassination and extra-judicial killing of political leaders and activists; the "collective punishment" of Palestinian communities; the demolition of homes, destruction of farms, and uprooting of olive groves; and the stringent curfews and

roadblocks that make normal life impossible and create a daily ritual of control and humiliation. These intolerable practices, together with the expansion of illegal Israeli settlements, invite condemnation of the Israeli government and give rise to further resistance against it.

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 honor 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."

We take note of the fact-finding report by members of South Africa's Parliament who visited the Middle East in July 2001. The 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.

The struggle against apartheid also demonstrated that successful resistance to oppression depends on a coherent non-violent strategy alongside the armed struggle. Palestinian intellectual and activist Edward Said recently wrote: "The answer to our needs is in principled resistance, well-organised civil disobedience against military occupation and illegal settlement, and an education system that promotes co-existence." We also note that the key to successful resistance in South Africa was a commitment in good faith by the resistance movement to the suspension of the armed struggle once negotiations had begun. This commitment has also recently been made by the Irish Republican Army in Northern Ireland.

We note that Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat has repeatedly condemned terrorism. We also hope that the situation in the Occupied Territories improves to the point where the Palestinian leadership can offer security guarantees to the Israeli people. But this will be impossible to achieve in the context of current Israeli policies\_\_ especially the expansion of settlements, the aggressive and pointless reprisals, and the collective punishment of the Palestinian people for individual acts of terror.

#### **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 inseparably intertwined. Neither group will be secure as long as the other is insecure. There is consequently no 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 have it, the better neighbour we shall have." We fully agree, and stress that it is incumbent on Israel, the dominant force and power over the Palestinians, to demonstrate its serious intent in this respect.

We also call attention to the insecure status of Palestinians and non-Jews living within Israel's 1948 boundaries. We insist that Israel take steps to guarantee the full and equal rights of all who dwell within its borders - Jews and non-Jews alike.

## **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 President Bouteflika of Algeria and President 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 which the September 11 terrorism in the USA has so horrifically demonstrated.

## **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 - Resolutions 242 and 332 in particular - and expanding on the proposals tabled at negotiations in early 2001.
- To conduct its security operations with restraint and in accordance with humanitarian law.
- To work in partnership with the Palestinian leadership and the international community to build a lasting peace on the basis of reconciliation and realising the solution of two independent states living side by side in friendship and cooperation.

**Note:**

The above is from an address to the South African National Assembly by Ronnie Kasrils, MP, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry on 23 October 2001. The statement was co-authored with Max Ozinsky, member of the Western Cape Legislature.

We appeal to South Africans of Jewish descent to join us in signing this statement. Please provide your professional/work designation and contact particulars for follow-up activities.

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NAME	SIGNATURE	DESIGNATION	CONTACT NUMBER (phone, e-mail, etc.)

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**Dear Friends**

**Please note that we have made a few amendments to our original statement, after receiving useful comments from friends.**

**RONNIE KASRILS MP**

**MAX OZINSKY MPL**

**9 November 2001**