

Address by Prime Minister of Israel
Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu
before the UN General Assembly, New York
24 September 2009

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Nearly 62 years ago, the United Nations recognized the right of the Jews, an ancient people 3,500 years-old, to a state of their own in their ancestral homeland.

I stand here today as the Prime Minister of Israel, the Jewish state, and I speak to you on behalf of my country and my people.

The United Nations was founded after the carnage of World War II and the horrors of the Holocaust. It was charged with preventing the recurrence of such horrendous events.

Nothing has undermined that central mission more than the systematic assault on the truth. Yesterday the President of Iran stood at this very podium, spewing his latest anti-Semitic rants. Just a few days earlier, he again claimed that the Holocaust is a lie.

Last month, I went to a villa in a suburb of Berlin called Wannsee. There, on January 20, 1942, after a hearty meal, senior Nazi officials met and decided how to exterminate the Jewish people. The detailed minutes of that meeting have been preserved by successive German governments. Here is a copy of those minutes, in which the Nazis issued precise instructions on how to carry out the extermination of the Jews. Is this a lie?

A day before I was in Wannsee, I was given in Berlin the original construction plans for the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. Those plans are signed by Hitler's deputy, Heinrich Himmler himself. Here is a copy of the plans for Auschwitz-Birkenau, where one million Jews were murdered. Is this too a lie?

This June, President Obama visited the Buchenwald concentration camp. Did President Obama pay tribute to a lie?

And what of the Auschwitz survivors whose arms still bear the tattooed numbers branded on them by the Nazis? Are those tattoos a lie? One-third of all Jews perished in the conflagration. Nearly every Jewish family was affected, including my own. My wife's grandparents, her father's two sisters and three brothers, and all the aunts, uncles and cousins were all murdered by the Nazis. Is that also a lie?

Yesterday, the man who calls the Holocaust a lie spoke from this podium. To those who refused to come here and to those who left this room in protest, I commend you. You stood up for moral clarity and you brought honor to your countries.

But to those who gave this Holocaust-denier a hearing, I say on behalf of my people, the Jewish people, and decent people everywhere: Have you no shame? Have you no decency?

A mere six decades after the Holocaust, you give legitimacy to a man who denies that the murder of six million Jews took place and pledges to wipe out the Jewish state.

What a disgrace! What a mockery of the charter of the United Nations! Perhaps some of you think that this man and his odious regime threaten only the Jews. You're wrong.

History has shown us time and again that what starts with attacks on the Jews eventually ends up engulfing many others.

This Iranian regime is fueled by an extreme fundamentalism that burst onto the world scene three decades ago after lying dormant for centuries. In the past thirty years, this fanaticism has swept the globe with a murderous violence and cold-blooded impartiality in its choice of victims. It has callously slaughtered Moslems and Christians, Jews and Hindus, and many others. Though it is comprised of different offshoots, the adherents of this unforgiving creed seek to return humanity to medieval times.

Wherever they can, they impose a backward regimented society where women, minorities, gays or anyone not deemed to be a true believer is brutally subjugated. The struggle against this fanaticism does not pit faith against faith nor civilization against civilization.

It pits civilization against barbarism, the 21st century against the 9th century, those who sanctify life against those who glorify death.

The primitivism of the 9th century ought to be no match for the progress of the 21st century. The allure of freedom, the power of technology, the reach of communications should surely win the day. Ultimately, the past cannot triumph over the future. And the future offers all nations magnificent bounties of hope. The pace of progress is growing exponentially.

It took us centuries to get from the printing press to the telephone, decades to get from the telephone to the personal computer, and only a few years to get from the personal computer to the internet.

What seemed impossible a few years ago is already outdated, and we can scarcely fathom the changes that are yet to come. We will crack the genetic code. We will cure the incurable. We will lengthen our lives. We will find a cheap alternative to fossil fuels and clean up the planet.

I am proud that my country Israel is at the forefront of these advances – by leading innovations in science and technology, medicine and biology, agriculture and water, energy and the environment. These innovations the world over offer humanity a sunlit future of unimagined promise.

But if the most primitive fanaticism can acquire the most deadly weapons, the march of history could be reversed for a time. And like the belated victory over the Nazis, the forces of progress and freedom will prevail only after an horrific toll of blood and fortune has been exacted from mankind. That is why the greatest threat facing the world today is the marriage between religious fanaticism and the weapons of mass destruction.

The most urgent challenge facing this body is to prevent the tyrants of Tehran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Are the member states of the United Nations up to that challenge? Will the international community confront a despotism that terrorizes its own people as they bravely stand up for freedom?

Will it take action against the dictators who stole an election in broad daylight and gunned down Iranian protesters who died in the streets choking in their own blood? Will the international community thwart the world's most pernicious sponsors and practitioners of terrorism?

Above all, will the international community stop the terrorist regime of Iran from developing atomic weapons, thereby endangering the peace of the entire world?

The people of Iran are courageously standing up to this regime. People of goodwill around the world stand with them, as do the thousands who have been protesting outside this hall. Will the United Nations stand by their side?

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The jury is still out on the United Nations, and recent signs are not encouraging. Rather than condemning the terrorists and their Iranian patrons, some here have condemned their victims.

That is exactly what a recent UN report on Gaza did, falsely equating the terrorists with those they targeted.

For eight long years, Hamas fired from Gaza thousands of missiles, mortars and rockets on nearby Israeli cities. Year after year, as these missiles were deliberately hurled at our civilians, not a single UN resolution was passed condemning those criminal attacks. We heard nothing – absolutely nothing – from the UN Human Rights Council, a misnamed institution if there ever was one.

In 2005, hoping to advance peace, Israel unilaterally withdrew from every inch of Gaza. It dismantled 21 settlements and uprooted over 8,000 Israelis. We didn't get peace. Instead we got an Iranian backed terror base fifty miles from Tel Aviv. Life in Israeli towns and cities next to Gaza became a nightmare. You see, the Hamas rocket attacks not only continued, they increased tenfold. Again, the UN was silent.

Finally, after eight years of this unremitting assault, Israel was finally forced to respond. But how *should* we have responded? Well, there is only one example in history of thousands of rockets being fired on a country's civilian population. It happened when the Nazis rocketed British cities during World War II. During that war, the allies leveled German cities, causing hundreds of thousands of casualties. Israel chose to respond differently. Faced with an enemy committing a double war crime of firing on civilians while hiding behind civilians – Israel sought to conduct surgical strikes against the rocket launchers.

That was no easy task because the terrorists were firing missiles from homes and schools, using mosques as weapons depots and ferreting explosives in ambulances. Israel, by contrast, tried to minimize casualties by urging Palestinian civilians to vacate the targeted areas.

We dropped countless flyers over their homes, sent thousands of text messages and called thousands of cell phones asking people to leave. Never has a country gone to such extraordinary lengths to remove the enemy's civilian population from harm's way.

Yet faced with such a clear case of aggressor and victim, who did the UN Human Rights Council decide to condemn? Israel. A democracy legitimately defending itself against terror is morally hanged, drawn and quartered, and given an unfair trial to boot.

By these twisted standards, the UN Human Rights Council would have dragged Roosevelt and Churchill to the dock as war criminals. What a perversion of truth. What a perversion of justice.

Delegates of the United Nations,

Will you accept this farce?

Because if you do, the United Nations would revert to its darkest days, when the worst violators of human rights sat in judgment against the law-abiding democracies, when Zionism was equated with racism and when an automatic majority could declare that the earth is flat.

If this body does not reject this report, it would send a message to terrorists everywhere: Terror pays; if you launch your attacks from densely populated areas, you will win immunity. And in condemning Israel, this body would also deal a mortal blow to peace. Here's why.

When Israel left Gaza, many hoped that the missile attacks would stop. Others believed that at the very least, Israel would have international legitimacy to exercise its right of self-defense. What legitimacy? What self-defense?

The same UN that cheered Israel as it left Gaza and promised to back our right of self-defense now accuses *us* –my people, my country - of war crimes? And for what? For acting responsibly in self-defense. What a travesty!

Israel justly defended itself against terror. This biased and unjust report is a clear-cut test for all governments. Will you stand with Israel or will you stand with the terrorists?

We must know the answer to that question *now*. Now and not later. Because if Israel is again asked to take more risks for peace, we must know *today* that you will stand with us *tomorrow*. Only if we have the confidence that we can defend ourselves can we take further risks for peace.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

All of Israel wants peace.

Any time an Arab leader genuinely wanted peace with us, we made peace. We made peace with Egypt led by Anwar Sadat. We made peace with Jordan led by King Hussein. And if the Palestinians truly want peace, I and my government, and the people of Israel, will make peace. But we want a genuine peace, a defensible peace, a permanent peace. In 1947, this body voted to establish two states for two peoples – a Jewish state and an Arab state. The Jews accepted that resolution. The Arabs rejected it.

We ask the Palestinians to finally do what they have refused to do for 62 years: Say yes to a Jewish state. Just as we are asked to recognize a nation-state for the Palestinian people, the Palestinians must be asked to recognize the nation state of the Jewish people. The Jewish people are not foreign conquerors in the Land of Israel. This is the land of our forefathers.

Inscribed on the walls outside this building is the great Biblical vision of peace: "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation. They shall learn war no more." These words were spoken by the Jewish prophet Isaiah 2,800 years ago as he walked in my country, in my city, in the hills of Judea and in the streets of Jerusalem.

We are not strangers to this land. It is our homeland. As deeply connected as we are to this land, we recognize that the Palestinians also live there and want a home of their own. We want to live side by side with them, two free peoples living in peace, prosperity and dignity.

But we must have security. The Palestinians should have all the powers to govern themselves except those handful of powers that could endanger Israel.

That is why a Palestinian state must be effectively demilitarized. We don't want another Gaza, another Iranian backed terror base abutting Jerusalem and perched on the hills a few kilometers from Tel Aviv.

We want peace.

I believe such a peace can be achieved. But only if we roll back the forces of terror, led by Iran, that seek to destroy peace, eliminate Israel and overthrow the world order. The question facing the international community is whether it is prepared to confront those forces or accommodate them.

Over seventy years ago, Winston Churchill lamented what he called the "confirmed unteachability of mankind," the unfortunate habit of civilized societies to sleep until danger nearly overtakes them.

Churchill bemoaned what he called the "want of foresight, the unwillingness to act when action will be simple and effective, the lack of clear thinking, the confusion of counsel until emergency comes, until self-preservation strikes its jarring gong."

I speak here today in the hope that Churchill's assessment of the "unteachability of mankind" is for once proven wrong.

I speak here today in the hope that we *can* learn from history -- that we *can* prevent danger in time.

In the spirit of the timeless words spoken to Joshua over 3,000 years ago, let us be strong and of good courage. Let us confront this peril, secure our future and, God willing, forge an enduring peace for generations to come.