

Sitting 3 of the Ninth Knesset
20 June 1977 (4 Tammuz 5737)

M. Begin (Likud): My dear Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Knesset Members, by the democratic process of which we are so proud, the nation in Israel decided on May 17 that there should be a change of guard in our government. A party which formed the leadership of the Zionist Organization and the governments of Israel for many years has become the second party in the Knesset, while a political body which has served the nation patiently, remaining faithful to the rules of democracy as the parliamentary opposition, has become the leading party and has been asked to form the new government....

The voters have put their trust in us, but we will not be arrogant. We know that the real tests lie ahead of us, and because the government and its policy is new, I ask the House and the nation to give it moral credit, at least for its first year. We will not be able to amend injustices and advance the country in the social, economic and political spheres overnight. We strongly desire to do so, and we will make a supreme effort and work hard in order to implement our positive plans, to undertake those things for which the nation has given us its confidence. But this takes time. I hope that we will be given moral credit and will be able to begin benefiting all the strata of the nation, with national agreement.

Upon taking office, the President of the U.S., Mr. Carter, quoted the Prophet Micah: "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." Those words have been and always will be our guiding light. But Micah the Morasthite also had an apocalyptic vision, one which was remarkably similar to that of Isaiah the son of Amoz. The heart of any man who loves liberty, peace and justice must be stirred by the words: "And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore." We will be guided by that vision too, in the belief and knowledge that that is one of the outstanding contributions of Jewish thought to human culture, and that the day will come when wars between nations will cease, there will be an end to weapons of destruction and all men shall dwell in peace.

After describing his all-encompassing vision, Micah the Morasthite continues: "For all the people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever." By virtue of that ancient heritage of thousands of years I declare that the government of Israel will not ask any nation, whether near or far, great or small, to recognize our right to exist. The right to exist, Mr. Speaker? It would never occur to any Briton or Frenchman, Belgian or Dutchman, Hungarian or Bulgarian, or American to request recognition of his nation's right to exist. Their existence is their right, and the same applies to Israel. We received the right to exist from the God of our fathers at the dawn of human history, almost four thousand years ago, and for that right, which has been sanctified with the blood of Jews in every generation, we have paid a price which is unprecedented in the annals of mankind. That fact neither decreases nor weakens our right. Quite the contrary. I therefore stress once more that we do not expect anyone to request recognition to dwell in the land of our forefathers on our behalf. A different kind of recognition is required between us and our neighbors, recognition of sovereignty and the mutual need for a life of peace and understanding....For that recognition we will make every effort.

The Land of Israel, the pleasant land of our forefathers, is our only land. Throughout the generations we have adhered to it. We never severed our link with it. We prayed for it, prayed for

it, loved it with all our hearts and souls. We did not forget it for a single instant while we were in exile, and our sainted forebears bore its name on their lips even as they were being dragged to every manner of strange death by a cruel and murderous enemy. We were exiled from our land and returned to it in faith, by right and with sacrifices, with praiseworthy pioneering endeavor and a glorious war for our independence. No one gave us our liberty. We gained it with the last vestiges of our national strength in the generation in which one-third of our number was killed and no one came to our aid.

More than seventy years ago Ze'ev Jabotinsky wrote of this country:

Indeed, the true nucleus of our national uniqueness is the pure fruit of the Land of Israel. Before coming to the Land of Israel we were not a nation and we did not exist. On the soil of the Land of Israel the Jewish nation was forged from the fragments of various peoples. On the soil of the Land of Israel we grew and became citizens; we harvested the belief in one god, breathing in the winds of the land, and as we struggled for independence and sovereignty we were enveloped by the winds and our bodies were fed by the grain which grew on our soil. The ideas of our prophets developed in the Land of Israel, and it was there that the Song of Songs was penned. Everything that is Jewish in us was given to us by the Land of Israel. Everything else that is in us is not Jewish. The Jewish people and the Land of Israel are one and the same thing.

We have echoed this in our government's guidelines: "The Jewish people has an eternal historic and inalienable right to the Land of Israel, the heritage of our forefathers."

We will try to deepen our friendship with the U.S. That will be one of the basic tenets of our policy. Not only deep-seated emotions and belief in the values of morals and democracy are shared by America and Israel. We are also linked, in my opinion, by genuine and far-reaching common interests. Israel is an integral part of the free world, but the free, democratic world has shrunk considerably of late. It can be compared to an island upon whose shores crash the stormy waves and murky waters of totalitarianism. A famous nineteenth century slogan should be adapted to our times to say: free men of the world, unite! We must all stand together to repel the danger and preserve human liberty.

We are interested in the normalization of the relations between Israel and the U.S.S.R. There have been three periods in the relations between Zionism in the Land of Israel and the U.S.S.R. From the time of the Bolshevik Revolution, for almost thirty years, there was implacable hostility which originated from Moscow. During the late 1940s came the great turning-point. Under the influence of the War of Independence against British rule, Moscow began to regard the aspiration for the revival of the Jewish state as one for human progress, and we all remember the speeches of Gromyko and Charapkin about the urgent need to establish the Jewish state.

In the 1950s there was a turn for the worse once more, and Moscow supported our enemies, equipping them with destructive weapons, knowing full well that they would be turned against the surviving remnant of the Jewish people, whose annihilation its leaders had seen with their own eyes on the soil of their land and elsewhere.

When the Six Day War broke out the U.S.S.R. severed diplomatic relations with Israel. The renewal of these relations depends, by the nature of things, on Moscow's initiative. If such an initiative comes we will demand that an end be put to the persecution of and incitement against Judaism and Zionism, that all the prisoners of Zion be released and that all the Jews of the U.S.S.R.

who so wish will be enabled to immigrate to Israel or, as our brethren in the U.S.S.R. term it, the historic homeland of the Jewish people.

Our overriding concern is to prevent a new war in the Middle East. I hereby call on King Hussein, President Sadat and President Assad to confer with me, whether in one of our capitals or on neutral ground, whether in public or out of the public eye, to discuss making true peace. Much blood, too much blood, both Jewish and Arab, has been shed in this region. Let us put an end to the bloodshed, which we hate. Let us sit down sincerely and seriously at the negotiating table. If this call meets with a refusal, we will take note of Arab intransigence. It will not be something new. Five Prime Ministers who preceded me-David Ben-Gurion, Moshe Sharett, Levi Eshkol, Golda Meir and Yitzhak Rabin called for meetings of this kind and there was no answer from the other side, or there was a negative reply. But we will not tire of making our appeal, not for propaganda purposes but for the essential needs of our people and our country.

And now we must appeal to ourselves, to our people. I call on those citizens of Israel who have left the country to come home. In the past our enemies said that a Jew's homeland was wherever he prospered. We will take no heed of them, but let us prove to ourselves that with the renewal of our independence and freedom Jews act on the maxim that it is good to live in their homeland, however hard it may be. The government will do what it can to make things easy for returning families. We will not call them names. Insults do not solve any problem. We will simply tell them: it's time to come home.

We call on the younger generation, in the homeland and the Diaspora, to arise, immigrate and settle the land. Come from the west and the east, from the north and the south, to build the Land of Israel together. There is room for millions of people in the Land of Israel. We do not want to, neither shall we, dispossess a single Arab inhabitant of his land. Jews and Arabs, Druse and Circassians can live together in this country, and they must live together in peace, mutual respect, with equal rights, freedom and social and economic progress.

The government intends to bring before the Knesset bills for universal health insurance, compulsory arbitration in essential services, a minimum wage, pension rights...and housing rights. We will also submit proposals for laws intended to put an end to violent crime. We must all make an effort to return to the sublime tradition of the Jewish people...when crimes against the person were unknown among us. We must build a just Land of Israel, but we must also see to it that our nation is beautiful, honest and pure, imbued with respect for one another, law abiding and able to set a good example to others.

Not a few people have committed economic crimes, whether because of the severity of our restricting laws or for other reasons. The government will consider striking the sins of the past off the record and making a fresh start in that sphere too. We look to the future. If the state respects the individual, the individual will respect its laws.

We will all educate the younger generation on the basis of the human and Jewish values to which the spirit of the nation has always adhered: love of mankind, love of freedom and justice, and love of the homeland. We have a wonderful, serious, devoted and loyal younger generation. We have seen it at various testing times. It has withstood them all with honor and dedication. All our concern and love is directed to it, and we hope the day will come when, with God's help, we will hand to the younger generation a country and state of which we and all free men can be proud.

In order to attain economy and efficiency, I intend to make changes in the structure of the government. We will cancel some ministries and combine others. For example, we will cancel the Ministry of Police which has no parallel in any other democratic country, and transfer its activities to the Ministry of the Interior; we will combine the Ministry of Tourism with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry...; we will establish a new ministry, to be known as the Ministry of Social Welfare, which will combine the activities of the Ministries of Welfare and Labor and also the National Insurance Institute; for the immediate future we will keep the Ministry of Health, but if there is a change in the composition of the government and it is necessary to join this ministry with that of Social Affairs we will consider that possibility favorably; we will transfer to the sphere of responsibility of the Minister of Housing, henceforth to be called the Minister of Construction, areas connected with construction which are currently dealt with by the Ministry of Labor; we will merge the Ministry of Transport with the Ministry of Communications; we will set up a new Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure whose spheres of responsibility will encompass, amongst other things, subjects associated with energy which are currently dealt with by the Treasury and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, etc....These are just a few examples of the changes we intend making in the structure of the ministries....

The guidelines of the government are: 1. we recognize the unity of fate and joint struggle for existence of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel and the diaspora; 2. the Jewish people has an eternal historic and inalienable right to the Land of Israel, the heritage of our forefathers; 3. the government will plan, establish and encourage rural and urban settlement on the soil of the homeland; 4. the government will place the encouragement of immigration at the forefront of the nation's missions; 5. the government will set the aspiration for peace at the head of its concerns and will endeavor actively and steadfastly to attain permanent peace in the region; 6. the government will invite each and every one of Israel's neighbors, directly or by means of a friendly country, to conduct direct negotiations with the object of signing peace treaties with them, without preconditions on the part of either, side and without formulae prepared by outside elements. Each side shall be free to make any proposal, and every subject shall be open to negotiation; 7. the government declares its readiness to participate in the Geneva Conference, when it is invited to do so by the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. on the basis of Resolutions 242 and 338; 8. prior to the Geneva Conference and direct negotiations, the government announces Israel's readiness to conduct negotiations to attain a contractual, practical and genuine peace which will lead to the normalization of life in the region; 9. in the absence of peace treaties, the parties will be bound by the agreements signed by the previous governments; 10. the Knesset has authorized the Government by law to impose the law, jurisdiction and administration of the state on the entire area of the Land of Israel to be determined by an order; this Legal and parliamentary authority is at the government's discretion, and will not be implemented while negotiations for a peace treaty are being conducted by Israel and its neighbors. It will be connected with choosing the appropriate time, the government's political considerations, a special debate in the Knesset and its authorization by the latter; 11. there shall be equal rights for all citizens and inhabitants, without distinction of creed, race, national affiliation, sex or ethnic group; 12. the government will ensure individual liberties and freedom, encourage free enterprise and equal opportunities, and promote the possibility of progress and prosperity for the individual; 13. there will be a continual campaign to bring home to Zion from the U.S.S.R. all those Jews who wish to leave, and to rescue the Jews of Syria and the other Arab countries; 14. inflation will be checked, the currency stabilized and a decent standard of living assured to all the inhabitants of the country; 15. action will be taken to eradicate poverty and help large families, particularly in the areas of housing and education.

C. Biton (Democratic Front for Peace and Equality): How? By appointing MK David Levy?

M. Begin (Likud): 16. a continual effort will be made to increase foreign investments and renew economic growth; a particular effort will be made to construct rental accommodation; 17. the government will endeavor to guarantee employment, the joy of production and labor ethics; 18. the government will encourage and stimulate an increase in productivity in an attempt to achieve a rapid growth in the gross national product and to increase exports; 19. the government will act to improve labor relations and reduce disputes, introducing legislation for compulsory arbitration in essential services; 20. the government will act to encourage and expand agriculture and settlement of every kind; 21. steps will be taken to prevent emigration, bring Israeli citizens home and increase immigration from both the West and the East; 22. the government will act to increase respect for the law and eradicate crime and violence; 23. a long school day will be introduced and education will be based on the values of Judaism and Zionism, love of the Jewish people and the homeland; 24. the government will guarantee freedom of conscience and religion for everyone, providing public religious services and religious education for all children whose parents so desire; 25. the status quo will be maintained as regards religion; 26. the government will honor the international agreements signed by the previous governments.

Y. Allon (Alignment): Ha, ha, ha. (From the floor: Mocking the poor!)

S. Aloni (Citizens Rights Movement): Have you read the-Coalition Agreement?

M. Begin (Likud): Everything will be clarified in the debate.

S. Aloni (Citizens' Rights Movement): With God's help, of course.

M. Begin (Likud): Mr. Speaker, I have presented my government and brought its guidelines before the Knesset for its approval, and I now respectfully request the confidence of the House in the government.