

It is the position of Israel that if conditions are created in the Gaza strip which indicate a return to the conditions of deterioration which existed previously, Israel would reserve its freedom to act to defend its rights.

Accordingly, we propose that a meeting be held immediately between the Chief of Staff of the Israel Defence Army and the Commander of the United Nations Emergency Force in order to arrange for the United Nations to take over its responsibilities in the Gaza area.

For many weeks, amidst great difficulty, my Government has sought to ensure that on the withdrawal from the Sharm al-Shaikh and the Gaza area, circumstances would prevail which would prevent the likelihood of belligerent acts.

We record with gratitude the sympathetic efforts of many Governments and delegations to help bring about a situation which would end the insecurity prevailing for Israel and her neighbours these many years. In addition to the considerations to which I have referred, we place our trust in the vigilant resolve of the international community that Israel, equally with all Member States, enjoy its basic rights of freedom from fear of attack; freedom to sail the high seas and international waterways in peace; freedom to pursue its national destiny in tranquillity without the constant peril which has surrounded it in recent years.

In this reliance we are embarking upon the course which I have announced today.

May I now add these few words to the States in the Middle East area and, more specifically, to the neighbours of Israel:

We all come from an area which is a very ancient one. The hills and the valleys of the region have been witnesses to many wars and many conflicts. But that is not the only thing which characterizes that part of the world from which we come. It is also a part of the world which is of an ancient culture. It is that part of the world which has given to humanity three great religions. It is also that part of the world which has given a code of ethics to all humanity. In our countries, in the entire region, all our peoples are anxious for and in need of a higher standard of living, of great programmes of development and progress.

Can we, from now on—all of us—turn a new leaf and, instead of fighting with each other, can we all, united, fight poverty and disease and illiteracy? Is it possible for us to put all our efforts and all our energy into one single purpose, the betterment and progress and development of all our lands and all our peoples?

I can here pledge the Government and the people of Israel to do their part in this united effort. There is no limit to what we are prepared to contribute so that all of us, together, can live to see a day of happiness for our peoples and see again from that region a great contribution to peace and happiness for all humanity.

Mr. Lodge, speaking for the United States, welcomed the decision. He noted Mrs. Meir's "declarations", but these, he said, did not make withdrawal "conditional". Rather they were "restatements of what has already been said by the Secretary-General in his reports, or hopes and expectations which seem to us not unreasonable in the light of the prior actions of this Assembly". Other delegations expressed similar sentiments.

On the following Monday, March 4, Mrs. Meir informed the Assembly that . . . the Chief of Staff of the Israeli Defence Forces, General Moshe Dayan, met with the United Nations Commander, General Burns, to discuss measures necessary to carry out the withdrawal from both areas in accordance with the statement made by me on Friday last.

I am now happy to state that they have come to full agreement as to the technical details of the withdrawal and take-over.

A number of delegations welcomed the further Israeli statement, and—while stressing that withdrawal must be unconditional—pointed to the necessity of solving problems which would arise out of that withdrawal. The United Kingdom representative expressed this general thought in a few words: "... the