

Security Council Open Debate on the Situation in the Middle East, Including the Palestinian Question
25 July 2012, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. Waxman, Representative of Israel

Allow me to express Israel's appreciation to you, Mr. President, for your able stewardship of the Security Council this month.

It has been 18 years since a bomb ripped through the Argentine Jewish Community Centre in Buenos Aires, killing 85 people and injuring hundreds of others. The Islamic Republic of Iran — a State Member of the Organization — was responsible for that act, along with its proxy, Hizbullah. Last week, a suicide bomber exploded his bomb on a bus carrying Israeli tourists in Burgas, Bulgaria. Six were killed, including a pregnant woman. More than 30 were injured. The victims were mostly young people on vacation. Again, Iran and Hizbullah were responsible.

In recent months, Israelis were targeted in terrorist attacks and attempted attacks in India, Azerbaijan, Thailand, Kenya, Turkey and, most recently, in Cyprus. Iran and Hizbullah were responsible for each and every one of those acts. That is just one part of a bigger picture. Iran and Hizbullah's most recent terrorist plots span five continents and at least 24 countries.

It should be clear to everyone in the Chamber that those horrific events are not isolated. A clear line of terror runs from the bombing in Argentina to the attack in Bulgaria. It begins and ends in Iran.

The Iranian campaign of terrorism is a plague that threatens not only Israelis and Jews, but innocent people all over the globe. The time has come for the world to put an end to that campaign of terror, once and for all.

One must not underestimate the significance of the present moment. The Middle East is perhaps at its most important crossroads since the end of First World War. There are two main roads that the region can take. One is the road of fundamentalism. Today, the Iranian regime is trying to move the region down that road. Its ideology does not empower people to build a brighter future, but enslaves them in a medieval past. Instead of opening minds with honest discourse, it clouds them with conspiracy and hate.

Last month, Iran's Vice-President, Mohammad-Reza Rahimi spoke in the presence of United Nations officials at an event in Tehran. He said that the teachings of the Talmud, one of the holiest books in Judaism, were responsible for "inciting the global drug trade and addiction in a bid to annihilate non-Jewish communities". He added that "gynaecologists around the world kill 'black babies' on the orders of the Zionists". Those statements were yet another example of the vile anti-Semitism that is part of the core ideology of the Iranian leadership.

But Iran's leaders do not just spread their hate with words; they advance it with actions. Hizbullah and Iran are an integral part of Al-Assad's killing machine.

Just a few days ago, Hizbullah's leader gave a speech praising the Al-Assad regime, calling it "a real military partner". Hizbullah and Iran provide Al-Assad with weapons, ammunition, training, intelligence, logistical equipment and more. They offer their unique expertise in the business of terrorism, monitoring people on the Internet and bypassing international sanctions. Iran and Hizbullah, Al-Assad's allies in this trio of brutality, will cross any line to keep the Al-Assad regime in power and to make sure that the Syrian people's quest for freedom is suppressed. And as we watch these events unfold, Iran continues to advance its military nuclear programme. The international community should ask itself a very simple question: If this is the way Iran behaves without nuclear weapons, how will it behave when it possesses the most dangerous weapon of all?

Israel continues to monitor the events in Syria closely. We are horrified by the humanitarian disaster taking place, and greatly concerned about the wider implications for regional stability and security. Last week, Syrian soldiers crossed into the area of separation set up according to the separation-of-forces agreement between Israel and Syria, in blatant violation of that agreement. This week, Syrian officials acknowledged the existence of their stockpiles of chemical weapons and stated clearly that they are ready to use them. That vast stockpile of chemical weapons is a potential disaster. The international community cannot stand idle. Al-Assad must know that he will be held accountable for using these weapons, and he must understand that transferring chemical weapons to Hizbullah or other terrorist organizations

is a red line that he cannot cross.

Iran represents one road — a road of hatred — but there is another road that the Middle East can take, a road of peace, progress and prosperity. Moving down that road will require the region to push back against the fundamentalists and deal with the fundamental problems facing our region. Yet in this debate and indeed across the United Nations, one hears very little about such fundamental issues. I am sure that today's debate will be no exception. I am sure we will hear the same old criticisms of Israeli policies, but very little about the core challenges facing our region.

The United Nations Development Programme has sponsored five Arab human development reports since 2002. The reports reveal the crippling deficits of freedom, educational opportunities and women's empowerment that have long afflicted the Arab world. I ask: Is Israel responsible for the fact that gays are hunted down and hanged in Iran; that bloggers in the West Bank are jailed by the Palestinian Authority; that artists in Lebanon are ruthlessly censored by their Government; or that women in Gaza are arrested and tortured for daring to leave the house without a headscarf? Are we responsible for the Christians and other minorities who are fleeing the Middle East these days in droves because Islamic extremists attack their communities? Is Israel responsible for the fact that 25 per cent of Arab young people are unemployed and that many others are desperate to find a decent job? Maybe it is time to stop using Israel in this debate to sweep such important issues under the carpet. It is certainly time to finally deal openly and honestly with the basic deficits that cripple the Middle East.

A lot is said during these debates about Gaza. Much of it is disingenuous. Some in this Chamber claim that the situation in Gaza is deteriorating; however, the International Monetary Fund reports a gross domestic product growth of 20 per cent per capita in Gaza for 2011. Some here speak of a so-called Israeli blockade, although there is not a single item of civilian goods that cannot enter Gaza today. Let me be clear. There is a crisis in Gaza, for Israelis and Palestinians alike, and it is called Hamas.

The crisis in Gaza is that Hamas attacks the crossings used to transfer humanitarian aid and then complains about shortages and delays. The crisis in Gaza is that global terrorists have found fertile ground from where they can operate and destabilize other parts of our region, including the Sinai peninsula. The crisis in Gaza is that Hamas uses Palestinian schools as launching pads to fire rockets at Israeli schools, and uses Palestinian hospitals to fire rockets at Israeli hospitals. More than 200 rockets have been fired into southern Israel in the past two months alone. Just yesterday, a rocket was fired into the major city of Ashkelon.

Yet even as rockets fly out of Gaza, Israel continues to work with the international community to make sure that humanitarian aid, medicine and goods reach the inhabitants of Gaza. How many other Governments provide essential assistance to the very areas from which their citizens are being attacked?

As we stand at this critical crossroads, the leaders in our region should look in the mirror and finally take the road less travelled in the Middle East — the road of tolerance, compromise and moderation; the road that condemns terrorism and promotes understanding of the other; the road of peace.

The Palestinian leadership should do the same. They can start by dropping their preconditions and rejoining Israel in direct negotiations that deal with all final status issues. They can take that road by ending incitement in their schools, mosques and media, and by naming their town squares after peacemakers, not suicide bombers. They can take that road by finally acknowledging that the Jewish people have a historic connection to the land of Israel.

The Government of Israel is prepared to work hard to achieve lasting peace with the Palestinians through direct negotiations. The people of Israel are prepared to make painful compromises to reach that noble goal. Yet, as we wait for them to return to the negotiating table, the Palestinians continue to take unilateral steps that will not bring us one inch closer to peace.

The moment is critical. It is time for the leaders of the Middle East to make the right choices. The people of our region have already sacrificed so much. They deserve nothing less.