

SECURITY COUNCIL ARRIA FORMULA MEETING

UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK – 7 MAY 2002

STATEMENT BY TERRY GREENBLATT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF BAT SHALOM

I would like to begin by saying thank you to the Security Council for providing us this audience and to Ambassador Kolby for hosting our delegation today.

I represent Bat Shalom (Daughter of Peace), the national Israeli feminist peace organization. I also represent Israeli women and mothers who are famished for peace. We are women working for a genuine peace grounded in the just resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, respect for human rights, and an equal voice for Jewish and Arab women within Israeli society. Since 1994, Bat Shalom has been part of a bi-national institution called The Jerusalem Link, and the joint declaration that I will read at the conclusion of my talk was developed with our sister partner, a Palestinian women's NGO, the Jerusalem Center for Women. We work in coalition with more than one hundred women's peace and anti-corruption initiatives around the world that have mobilized in response to the insufferable situation in our region.

I stand before you this afternoon, in the presence of the enormous power you represent, and with the terrible awareness of how dangerous that power can be. As a woman and as an Israeli, I know that anyone, with even the smallest advantage over another, is capable of abusing or misusing power. I stand here as an ally and advocate of those women in Israel, Jewish and Arab, who ask of you to use your power wisely and with a moral compass whose needle is uncompromisingly pointed toward justice.

We ask of you just this - that you fulfil your responsibility as set out in the United Nations Charter. You are mandated to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war - for until you do, we women living in a militaristic Israeli society are destined to continue raising our children to perpetrate war and to become messengers of hatred, and of racism, and of destruction.

You are mandated to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights - for until you do, the soul of our society will never heal, neither from our fear of global anti-Semitism, nor from the inhumanity of our 35 year subjugation and dehumanization of the Palestinian people. For until you do, the extremists on both sides will rejoice, both those who talk of the transfer of indigenous populations and an eternal occupation, as well as those who walk into a coffeehouse or a supermarket, and blow themselves and others up, leaving our joint future smoldering in the rubble. For until you do, those of us who are struggling to promote a human rights agenda inextricably embedded in an effective political solution, cannot possibly further our mission.

You are mandated to establish conditions under which justice and respect for international law can be maintained. This includes ensuring the security and well being of Israelis. But it also includes insisting on a standard of behavior and compliance to international law on the part of Israel, be it a fact-finding mission to Jenin, or the dismantlement of illegal settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. For until you do, we Israelis will continue to be driven by our fear and mistrust, and insist that this war we are waging is for our very survival as a nation, even though it is not.

And lastly, you are mandated to promote social progress and better standards of life, for until you do, until there is the degree of humanitarian aid for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the devastation of Palestine and her people, neither nation will be able to begin to address the ultimate challenge of creating a culture of peace in our region.

Next year we will commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Oslo Accords. Few remember anymore the exhilaration of daring to believe that we could possibly be nearing the end of this hundred-year conflict. For us, Israeli and Palestinian women, and the international community of hundreds of thousands of women who

along with us have remained steadfast in their solidarity for and commitment to a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, there will be no celebration of this anniversary. There will be no candles lit in jubilation - rather, a collective global mourning for a region that is burning, wreaking destruction on a magnificent land and her 2 peoples, and leaving the most dangerous ashes in its wake - ashes of profound fear, hopelessness and despair.

This month Israeli and Palestinian women have once again jointly declared what a just and sustainable peace must look like. I look around this room and, but for ourselves I do not see any women or see too few women. And I cannot but be aware of the failure of both our local leadership as well as you, the international community, to productively navigate our peoples on a path towards peace. How much of the reason for this is the absence of women in this room, in the countless rooms where decisions are made that affect the daily lives of Israeli and Palestinian men, women and children? I cannot help but be aware that the slim glimmers of hope in this terrible situation have consistently been provided by the grassroots women's peace activists on both sides. Given this dismal history of past performance, it is unthinkable not to include women, large numbers of women- 50%women- in the upcoming peace process.

You need us, because if the goal is not simply the absence of war, but the creation of a sustainable peace by fostering fundamental societal changes, we are crucial to everyone's security concerns.

You need us, because wars are no longer fought on battlefields. You have brought the war home to us. Many more civilians than soldiers are being killed in ours and other conflicts around the world. The wars are being waged now on our doorsteps and in our living rooms and in our sacred houses and ceremonies of religious worship, and women have a vested interest in keeping families and communities safe.

You need us, because to honorably comply with your own legislation, Resolution 1325, we must be included.

You need us because we continue to hold human rights and the sanctity of life as paramount values, and unfortunately today, they are too easily being bartered away as either obstacles to security policies or as incongruent with national liberation aspirations.

You need us because we have developed a process and socio-political fluency that keeps authentic and productive dialogue moving forward, even as the violence escalates and both sides continue to terrorize one another. Women's characteristic life experience gives us the potential for two things: a very special kind of intelligence, social intelligence, and a very special kind of courage, social courage. We have developed the courage to cross the lines of difference drawn between us, which are also the lines drawn inside our heads. And the intelligence to do it safely, without a gun or a bomb, and to do it productively. And most importantly, we are learning to shift our positions, finding ourselves moving towards each other, without tearing out our roots in the process. Even when we are women whose very existence and narrative contradicts each other, we will talk - we will not shoot.

You need us because we women are willing to sit together on the same side of the table and together look at our complex joint history, with the commitment and intention of not getting up until - in respect and reciprocity - we can get up together and begin our new history and fulfil our joint destiny.

There is much talk now about an International Peace Conference. Colin Powell has already prepared us for the outcome, when he said this week that no one should have high expectations from the conference. Women in the peace and anti-occupation movement in Israel are recommending that expectations must remain higher than ever before, because we cannot afford them not to be. We suggest now just might be the moment to realize how critical our contribution is. We have never had a voice or power at these tables, and quite possibly we will get it wrong the first few times. But we would come with what we believe are innovative

and creative strategies, grounded in democratic and feminist ideology and experience, and exemplified by what women have managed to accomplish in civil society with little resources and insignificant power.

We would change the discourse from the 'for or against' model, pro-Israeli/anti-Palestinian or pro-Palestinian/anti-Israeli. This kind of inadequate and restricted thinking would be appropriate if we were rooting for a football team, but we are not playing a game any more. More than 2000 people have been killed during the past 20 months, and countless more disabled. Negotiated positions, conditions, policies, and decisions must be evaluated as being pro/anti-justice, pro/anti-life, and pro/anti-dignity. Participating partners must be challenged to conduct a moral impact analysis of their positions, and a new and critical dimension of transparency must be introduced into the negotiation process. What gets said and decided upon in negotiation sessions gets documented, and what is documented gets disseminated to both peoples, to be discussed and debated uni-nationally in town meetings, and then serves as a basis for civil society bi-national dialogue.

The upcoming peace conference, if it is to be held, must be international, not regional. The international community shares responsibility for the deterioration of the situation, and must be our partners in fashioning and implementing a solution. My country, Israel, has a long-standing fear of international intervention, because we Jews have had a long and bitter experience of suffering as the world stood by, not noticing. Now the Palestinians, unfortunately, have come to share that kind of experience. My government fears that international intervention will prevent it from carrying out its agenda. We, the peace activists of Israel, are insisting that you do just that.

We women would determine that the ultimate goal of the peace conference is a final status agreement and an end to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. A long-term intermediate agreement can translate into only one thing – continued occupation and prolonging the status quo. Both sides must commit to a series of meetings, with the understanding that while 100 years of conflict cannot be satisfactorily resolved immediately, each stage of the agreement gets implemented without delay. Changes in the realities on the ground will serve as “acts of honor”, each side demonstrating to the other that while each is most certainly paying a “price” for peace, each also most certainly has a trustworthy partner for peace. These “peace facts” on the ground are a necessary condition for re-building trust, for creating the climate in which the people on both sides will choose and support leaders who can bring them to peace and not to war.

We women don't have all the answers. In fact, all we have is the one that comes with demonstrated efficacy, durability, and integrity. But at this next step, a step that might potentially move us forward rather than backward, one that comes with demonstrated efficacy, durability, and integrity. But at this point, that does seem to be a lot more than your various governments have. So, if this body is genuinely committed to bringing some sort of peace and security to the Middle East, you need to bring us women to the very center of all your deliberations.

Should we continue to be ignored (which is quite different than ignorance, because one really has to work at it), we shall all be held responsible for the evil we may have prevented.

I thank you for your time, and your attention. I would like to leave you with the Bat Shalom & Jerusalem Center for Women Joint Declaration, published 3 weeks ago in Israel and in Palestine.