

The One Hundred and Twenty-First Session of the Eighteenth Knesset

Monday, twenty ninth of Adar, 5770 (March 15, 2010)

Jerusalem, the Knesset, 4:03pm

President of Brazil Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva

(The speech was delivered in Portuguese.)

Your honor, Shimon Peres, President of the State of Israel; your honor, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu; Mister Rubi Rivlin, Knesset Speaker; Tzippy Livni, head of the Opposition; the ambassador; Celso Amorim, Foreign Minister of Brazil—and I would like to praise all the ministers of the delegation; the governor of Brazil, who came, businessmen who arrived here as part of the Jewish community in Brazil and who came on this tour with me as representatives of the Jewish community in Brazil and who will come to the Knesset; Ladies and Gentlemen, Members of the Knesset, honored ambassadors, dear friends, a great honor is given to me to be the first Brazilian president to visit Israel, and I have the privilege of addressing you in Parliament. I return to this country, which I visited in 1993 as a party chairman, the Labor Party. From that visit I retain memories which cannot be forgotten. And now I speak as the President of the Republic of Brazil and also as a former member of parliament who in the 80's participated in Congress, and also in the reestablishment of the constitution after twenty years of dictatorship. I also speak here as a person who followed the birth of the State of Israel—how can I ever forget that United Nations Assembly session that approved the establishment of a state in 1948, and the session headed by Osvaldo Aranha—and I speak, as a friend of Israel.

I come from a country which warmly accepted thousands of Jews that fled from their countries, from religious and ethnic intolerance. Many of them came to Brazil thanks to two members of the public who respect the Brazilian Diplomacy: Ms. Arsi from the consulate in Hamburg and Ambassador Souza Dantas, a member of our delegation in Paris. The contribution of these immigrants and their descendants is well known: Jews are present in our literature, with Clarice Lispector and Moacyr Scliar. They also reign in art - Lasar Segall, Carlos Scliar; and in film, through Leon Hirszman. It becomes even more clear in the fields of science, culture and business—and also politics. Jews contribute in all of these areas.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Members of the Knesset, a visit such as this strengthens our bilateral relations, which have had no small degree of improvement in the last few years; I hope they will only grow stronger in the future. I also consider the numbers of our foreign trade. Today we have moved forward, though Brazil and Israel could reach a trade balance far greater than the one we have today, if only our mutual potential were unleashed.

I also believe in the technological side, with scientific and cultural cooperation; I look at the area of free trade, the "Merkosur" Agreement. This is the first country outside of Latin America with whom we have such an agreement, and this, despite the resistance to it shown by some.

But this is an opportunity first and foremost to discuss more general subjects, and plumb their depths. We ask that they be discussed with respect, but also with candor, the same candor which must characterize the relationship between friends. The foreign policy of my country has a universal purpose. We are committed to values. We respect the self-determination of nations. We support human rights. We want a world that is politically, socially and economically more just.

We ask for and seek peace, and therefore we suggest a solution, after give-and-take, to the conflict. Over the course of decades, the Middle East has seen painful clashes to which thousands of victims have given up their lives. Beyond the statistics of the dead, of the wounded, of those who passed away, there are so many traumas; we must refer to them with sensitivity.

For the sake of solutions to difficult situations we must act again and again. But it is not enough that you utilize your mind; you must also utilize your heart. Compassion is also essential in order to overcome what may appear an insurmountable antagonism.

In my journey as a labor leader and a politician, I experienced many types of conflict and strife. I did not bypass them; I decided there would be a dialogue. A dialogue is the best way, even if it sounds simplistic, almost impossible. I sought a dialogue with the opposition, and indeed I reached the presidency through dialogue, I governed through dialogue. I acted through democracy and strived for democracy, even if I thought it was something that could not be achieved.

In this way we repeated the historical position of our diplomacy: We support the existence of the State of Israel as a secure, sovereign state which seeks peace. The State needs to live side by side with the State of Palestine, which will also be a sovereign state, living in peace and security, and this also refers to their borders. With this purpose we arrived at Annapolis and are sorry that the matter has become mired and incomplete.

We cannot waste more time and bilateral efforts, especially when we see your great potential; therefore at Annapolis we repeated our position that there is a need for coexistence between the State of Israel and the Palestinian State; we have given our opposition to terror at every turn, from whomever it comes. This position is doubly necessary when we see the stagnation in negotiations, when we see a variety of one-sided initiatives which make it difficult for both sides, such as the announcement of new housing construction in East Jerusalem, on the eve of the dialogue that should have been renewed.

Therefore we see the worsening conditions in which the Palestinians live; it feeds fundamentalism of every type, and is likely to exacerbate the bloody strife. We would wish for Israelis and Palestinians to live in harmony, and end the suffering of those who lost their loved ones in the decades of conflict. Some of them, victims from both sides—I will meet with them, listen to their feelings and aspirations. But this desire for stability is a desire that a regional conflict will not expand to other places and threaten world peace. What hangs in the balance is not only the future peace of the region, but the entire world's stability.

I come from a continent that has natural resources and wealth, but also social inequality. This situation is unacceptable, and therefore many governments in Latin America in the past few years have begun a process of social and economic change, bringing peace and democracy to the region. We are very proud that we can say that Latin America and the Caribbean Isles have no nuclear weapons or weapons of mass destruction. In our country, we have a clause which forbids the production and use of nuclear weaponry. We would like the example of our country to be taken up by other regions as well. In Brazil we understand that it is impossible for us to be a rich and just country if we are surrounded by poverty and inequality, which only bring resistance and bitterness.

Honored Members of the Knesset, in my land there are ten million Arabs who live in peace, side by side, with thousands of Jews. We would wish this to be used as a metaphor when we seek a deep understanding in this part of the world. Geographically you are far away, but close to us in our hearts and minds. Arabs and Jews are wonderful people. They have wonderful and glorious traditions; people who again and again rebuilt their identity over the course of history, despite the suffering. This suffering, to which the Yad Vashem museum testifies—which I visited in 1993 and which I will visit again tomorrow—this suffering I referred to recently in my visit to the oldest synagogue in Latin America, in Recife, and I condemned the barbarity of the Second World War, which left her mark on humanity in general and the Jewish nation in particular. Never again. We must say it anew: Never again.

In order that this cry—never again—be more than a mere cry, we must break every stagnation with courage and determination, through the gestures of men and women that we continually see and who are ready to sacrifice and make concessions. They ask to renew the intent, to further the desires, and those who are interlocutors must also do so. We must consider the words of Albert Einstein who said, "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results."

Brazil wishes to help bring about this change, these different results. This is what we did with ourselves, on our continent, with other countries, with countries in the Caribbean and in Latin America, when we used the same effort to solve conflicts and threats to peace. Our reward will be that the Palestinians and Israelis will live in happiness. This same stagnation that the Middle East is experiencing indicates the great difficulties facing the governments of the world. The same stagnation can be seen in the United Nations. In 1948, as I mentioned before, the creation of the State of Israel was under the auspices of the United Nations. Perhaps today the United Nations could more actively search for peace.

Dear friends, when I speak to the Members of the Knesset I know that I speak not only to the highest institution in Israel, but through it to the mothers, the fathers, the women and children of those who passed from this world because of this conflict which could have been prevented. The time has now come to open the circle of negotiation, to overcome the mistrust and misunderstanding. This, for higher values. History will reward those who walk this path.

I wish to conclude again using the words of that enlightened man of the twentieth century, Albert Einstein, when he stated, and I quote, "Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding." Shalom, and thank you.