



ISRAEL MATTERS!

Publication of the Israel Affairs Committee of Temple Beth Shalom

Issue Number 40
October 2010

Israel Begins Peace Negotiations; Demands Palestinians Recognize Israel as Jewish State

In remarks at the September relaunch of peace negotiations, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu opened by saying, "I began with a Hebrew word for peace, "shalom." Our goal is shalom. Our goal is to forge a secure and durable peace between Israelis and Palestinians. We don't seek a brief interlude between two wars. We don't seek a temporary respite between outbursts of terror. We seek a peace that will end the conflict between us once and for all. We seek a peace that will last for generations -- our generation, our children's generation, and the next." Continuing, he said, "... a defensible peace requires security arrangements that can withstand the test of time and the many chal-



Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, left, and Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas, right, at the opening session of peace talks hosted by US secretary of state Hillary Clinton.

lenges that are sure to confront us. ... Let us not get bogged down by every difference between us. Let us direct our courage, our thinking, and our decisions at those historic decisions that lie ahead." Concluding, Netanyahu said, "President Abbas, we cannot erase the past, but it is within our power to change the future. Thousands of years ago, on these very hills where Israelis and Palestinians live today, the Jewish prophet Isaiah and the other prophets of my people envisaged a future of lasting peace for all mankind. Let today be an auspicious step in our joint effort to realize that ancient vision for a better future."

Against that background, Netanyahu has maintained the fundamental demand that the Palestinians must recognize Israel as a Jewish state in his remarks ahead of the continuation of the peace talks.

Netanyahu said that a peace agreement is based, first of all, on the recognition of Israel as the national state of the Jewish people. "The conflict between us and the Palestinians, as opposed to other conflicts that were resolved by peace agreements, is over the same piece of ground," he said. The prime minister also stated that "we say that the solution is two states for two peoples, meaning two national states, a Jewish national state and a Palestinian national state. To my regret, I have yet to hear from the Palestinians the phrase 'two states for two peoples'. I hear them saying 'two states' but I do not hear them recognizing two states for two peoples." The demand, which has been repeatedly rejected by the Palestinians, could complicate the negotiations. "This is the true foundation of peace," Netanyahu added.

The two sides relaunched direct talks after months of US pressure but remain deeply divided on the core issues of the conflict as well as the expiration of an Israeli settlement moratorium.

A newspaper close to Netanyahu reported that he wanted to first discuss security arrangements and the issue of recognition before addressing final borders. "The prime minister has demanded a discussion about the recognition of Israel as a Jewish state as proof of the seriousness of the Palestinians' intentions to put an end to the conflict."

The Palestinians refuse to recognize Israel as a Jewish state because of fear it would endanger their claim to a right of return for refugees who fled what is now Israel during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war and their descendants.

As the start of the negotiations, Netanyahu said, "I've been calling for direct talks with the Palestinians for a year and a half and I'm pleased that President Abbas joined me in those talks without preconditions. I believe that we should make every effort to reach an historic compromise for peace over the coming year." "Lasting peace must be anchored in security. And it must be anchored in the recognition of the Jewish state's permanence in this region. Not merely as a fact but as something that our neighbors accept by right."

Israeli Wins “Nobel Prize” of Math

Hebrew University Professor Elon Lindenstrauss has won this year’s highest global math honor, the 2010 Fields Medal. He is the first Israeli to have been awarded the prize. Although the prize is known as the “Nobel” of mathematics, the award, named after Toronto University mathematician and philosopher John Charles Fields, is different in that the winner must prove significant mathematical achievements and show potential for the future.



Lindenstrauss, 40, was awarded the prize for work using probabilistic and dynamic systems for solving problems in number theory, according to a colleague from the Einstein Institute of Mathematics. The Jerusalem resident is a major (res) in the IAF elite Talpiot program and has received the Israel Defense Prize among others, including the Haim Nessler Prize in Mathematics, the 2004 Salem Prize, the 2004 European Mathematical Union prize, the 2009 Erdos Prize of the Israel Mathematical Union and the Fermat Prize for Mathematics of the Toulouse Mathematics Institute.

The professor will receive the prize at a ceremony to be held at the International Mathematical Union Congress in India. Lindenstrauss said he was surprised when he heard about the honor. “It’s an exceptional feeling. I know many brilliant, exceptional mathematicians,” he said. “It’s very surprising to be chosen out of all these brilliant minds.”

Report: Egypt to Buy Back Gas from Israel

In the wake of reports of a shortage of natural gas in Egypt, a report in the Egyptian daily Al Shaab said that the Egyptian government is seeking to buy back 1.5 billion cubic meters of natural gas that was sold to Israel as part of a deal signed by Egyptian Petroleum and Mineral Resources Minister Sameh Fahmy and Israeli Infrastructure Minister Benjamin Ben Eliezer in July 2005, under US pressure. The price of the gas sold to Israel was significantly lower than the market price. One-third of Israel’s natural gas is provided by Egypt under this deal.

The newspaper quoted anonymous sources who said that internal discussions in Egypt’s Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources determined that at least half the natural gas sold to Israel under the deal would have to be repurchased at \$14 billion, even though it was sold for \$2 billion.

In January, officials in Egypt’s Petroleum Ministry suggested importing natural gas from Iraq. Opponents of gas exports to Israel suggested that the government cancel the sales rather than importing gas. Israel’s Ministry of Finance has so far declined to comment on the issue.

Large deposits of natural gas found off Israel’s shores recently may make purchasing gas from Egypt unnecessary in the future.

Amnesty Int’l Finland: Israel “Scum State”

The head of Amnesty International’s Finnish branch, Frank Johansson, told The Jerusalem Post that he stands by his recent statement that Israel is a “scum state.” Writing in his blog, which appears on the Web site of Finland’s third largest newspaper Iltalehti, Johansson wrote that he reached the conclusion from his own visits to Israel during the 1970s and for the last time in the 1990s.

Asked why he termed Israel a “scum state,” Johansson told the Post that it was because Israel has “repeatedly flouted international law,” and due to his “personal experiences inside and outside of Israel with meeting Israelis.” The Amnesty International official said he was writing the blogs in his capacity as a private person, not as an Amnesty International official. However, Iltalehti’s Web site provides readers with his title as “director of the Finnish branch of Amnesty International,” which appears above the blog.

The head of the watchdog organization that tracks anti-Israel activity among NGOs (non-governmental organizations), such as Amnesty International, told the Post that “Amnesty International has promoted an intense anti-Israel ideology, resulting in statements like these. Such one-sided ideological campaigns, with false allegations of war crimes, are entirely inconsistent with Amnesty’s claim to support ethical principles and universal human rights.”

A spokeswoman for Amnesty International’s headquarters in London, Susanne Flood, told the Post that “Amnesty would never use an expression like this toward the State of Israel, or any other state.” Flood said that Johansson used the phrase “creep state” to describe Israel, rather than “scum,” as the initial English translation of the Finnish word.

The deputy head of Mission for the Embassy of Finland in Israel, Anu Pulkkinen, told the Post that Johansson “is responsible for his own comments, and we are not commenting on blog writings of individual Finnish citizens. Finland has traditionally good bilateral relations with Israel in various fields. “There is a wide freedom of press in Israel and the government respects that. The same goes for Finland, and that’s why it’s probably easy to understand that a representative of the government does not comment on individual blog writing. “Finland strongly condemns anti-Semitism. One indication of that is, among others, our recent decision to join the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research,” she said.

Researchers from Hebrew U. Develop Treatment to Kill HIV Cells

A team of researchers from the Hebrew University has developed a treatment that completely destroys HIV-infected human cells in laboratory cultures, according to an article published last month in the scientific journal, *AIDS Research and Therapy*. The therapy, developed by scientists from the university's Alexander Silberman Institute of Life Sciences and the Institute of Chemistry, destroys cells infected with HIV without damaging adjacent healthy cells. There has so far been no therapy that completely destroys HIV-infected cells.

Current treatments involve inhibiting the replication of the virus, which delays the development of AIDS, making AIDS a chronic, yet managed disease. But if treatment with the so-called AIDS "cocktail" is halted or the virus develops immunity to the cocktail, it can begin infecting other cells again. The new treatment is based on the fact that when the virus infects a cell, its DNA penetrates the cell, which then manufactures new HIV viruses that infect neighboring cells.

When the treatment was applied in the laboratory to human cell cultures it caused the infected human cells to disappear within two weeks. The cells did not reappear in the culture for another two weeks, "so it can be concluded that they were destroyed," said Dr. Abraham Loyter, of the life sciences institute.

The researchers registered a patent this year on the therapy and are now seeking a commercial partner to continue developing the treatment ahead of the next phase of experimentation, on animals, and later, if its efficacy is proven, on humans.

Jewish Birth Rate in Israel at Record High

A Hebrew University demography professor has announced there were more Jewish births in the past year in Israel than any other time in the history of the State. According to data released by the Central Bureau of Statistics on the eve of the Jewish New Year 5771, the State of Israel has now reached a population of 7.645 million.

Professor Sergio Della-Pergola, who holds the Professor Shlomo Argov Chair in Israel-Diaspora Studies at the university, said that the survey he conducted indicates the Jewish population has seen a moderate increase in fertility rates in the past year (2.9 children), with the largest number of births of Jews in the nation's history. Della-Pergola attributed the increase to various factors, including the high birth rate in the Hareidi religious community and the increase in the general public due to "life satisfaction."

In addition, said the professor, despite the global economic crisis, Israel has enjoyed a relatively positive economic status compared with other countries, which impacts on the fertility rate both in Israel and abroad. Moreover, immigration to the state is another factor affecting the increase in the population, he said. "While in Israel this year we recorded an increase of 1.7% in the Jewish population, in the Diaspora there was a corresponding decrease of 0.2% in the number of Jews," said Della-Pergola.

After Israel, the largest concentration of Jews is found in the United States, with a population of 5.3 million, according to the CBS data. However, the professor notes, this depends on how one defines who is a Jew. The number of Diaspora Jews in other countries is considerably less: France: 485,000; Canada: 375,000; Russia: 205,000; Argentina: 182,000; Germany: 119,000; and Australia: 108,000.

NBA Stars Travel to Israel as Ambassadors of Goodwill



NBA greats, both past and present, traveled to Israel recently on a goodwill mission. Among them were Allan Houston, Omri Casspi (at right in photo), an Israeli who plays for the Sacramento Kings, and Dwight "Superman" Howard, who led a basketball clinic for teens. Said Allan Houston, "We've been honored to be here and show our support for not just these wonderful kids and students out here, but just for all the Israeli people that have embraced us."

The Israeli delegation met with Shimon Peres (center in photo), who received a signed basketball. Later that day, Casspi participated in the Twinned Peace Sports Schools Project, a part of the Peres Center for Peace which brings Palestinian and Jewish children together.

The "twinned" refers to the fact that students have pen-pals and counterparts, or "twins" at the school across the border. During the school year, Jewish students learn Arabic and Palestinian students learn Hebrew, but its on the court that they come together as one. Children from both sides of the border meet once a month with their "twin" school or kindergarten and participate in sports activities (including mixed-groups of basketball games), acquaintance games, and peace education activities. Other collaboration activities include language instruction, arts and crafts, and theater.

"My experience has shown me that basketball has the power to bridge language, cultural and religious differences and I am happy to be able to share my experience with the children from the Peres Center for Peace's Twinned Peace Sports Schools Project in Jaffa," said Casspi.