

# Prime Minister's Statement Concerning Jerusalem and the Holy Places

## Introduction

The Jewish Agency for Palestine had accepted the U.N. Partition Plan of November 1947, even though it called for the establishment of a *corpus separatum* in Jerusalem and its immediate environs, realizing that the only realistic alternative at the time would have been the failure to decide on the establishment of a Jewish state in any part of Palestine. The failure of the U.N. in the implementation of its own resolution, the Arab invasion of all parts of Palestine, including Jerusalem, Count Bernadotte's proposal of June 1947 to incorporate the whole of Jerusalem in an Arab state—the latter when Israel was compelled to fight for its creation and survival—all these effected a fundamental change in the situation and Israel's position. When the U.N. General Assembly debated the issue of the internationalization of Jerusalem once more, the Knesset debated the subject in rare unanimity.

## Sitting 96 of the First Knesset

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**The Prime Minister, D. Ben-Gurion:** As you know, the U.N. is currently discussing the issue of Jerusalem and the holy places. The State of Israel is a member of the U.N., not because of political convenience but because of its traditional, deep-seated commitment to the vision of world peace and the brotherhood of nations, as preached by our prophets and accepted by the U.N.

This membership obliges us, from the podium of Israel's First Knesset, to tell all the nations assembled at the U.N. and all those who love peace and justice in the world what has been in Israel's heart since it became a united nation under King David three thousand years ago as regards Jerusalem its holy city and as regards its attitude to the places which are holy to the other religions.

When we proclaimed the establishment of the renewed State of Israel, on 14 May 1948, we declared that, "The State of Israel will guarantee freedom of religion and conscience, of language, education and culture. It will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions. It will be loyal to the principles of the United Nations Charter." Accordingly, our delegation to the U.N. announced that Israel would honor all the exist-

ing rights regarding the holy places and sacred buildings in Jerusalem, assure freedom of worship and free access...to all the holy sites under its control, recognizing the rights of pilgrims of all religions and nations to visit their holy places and assuring freedom of movement for clergymen. We agreed to allow effective U.N. supervision of the holy places and the existing rights.

At the same time we see fit to state that Jewish Jerusalem is an organic, inseparable part of the State of Israel, just as it is an integral part of Jewish history and belief....Jerusalem is the heart of the State of Israel. We are proud of the fact that Jerusalem is also sacred to other religions, and will gladly provide access to their holy places and enable them to worship as and where they please, cooperating with the U.N. to guarantee this.

We cannot imagine, however, that the U.N. would attempt to sever Jerusalem from the State of Israel or harm Israel's sovereignty in its eternal capital.

Twice in the history of our nation were we driven out of Jerusalem, only after being defeated in bitter wars by the larger, stronger forces of Babylon and Rome. Our links with Jerusalem today are no less deep than in the days of Nebuchadnezzar and Titus Flavius, and when Jerusalem was attacked after the fourteenth of May 1948, our valiant youngsters risked their lives for our sacred capital no less than our forefathers did in the time of the First and Second Temples.

...A nation which, for two thousand and five hundred years, has faithfully adhered to the vow made by the first exiles by the waters of Babylon not to forget Jerusalem, will never agree to be separated from Jerusalem. Jewish Jerusalem will never accept alien rule after thousands of its youngsters liberated their historic homeland for the third time, redeeming Jerusalem from destruction and vandalism.

We do not judge the U.N., which did nothing when nations which were members of the U.N. declared war on its resolution of 29 November 1947, trying to prevent the establishment of Israel by force, to annihilate the Jewish population in the Holy Land and destroy Jerusalem, the holy city of the Jewish people.

Had we not been able to withstand the aggressors who rebelled against the U.N., Jewish Jerusalem would have been wiped off the face of the earth, the Jewish population would have been eradicated and the State of Israel would not have arisen. Thus, we are no longer morally bound by the U.N. resolution of November 29, since the U.N. was unable to implement it....

The attempt to sever Jewish Jerusalem from the State of Israel will not advance the cause of peace in the Middle East or in Jerusalem itself. Israelis will give their lives to hold on to Jerusalem, just as the British would for London, the Russians for Moscow and the Americans for Washington.

This is the first time in this country's history that the state controlling Jerusalem willingly accepts the principle of the international supervision of the holy places. It is no coincidence that it is being done by the nation which made Jerusalem an internationally sacred center and by the first government elected by the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

We hope that the religions which honor Jerusalem's sanctity and the nations which share our belief in the principles of peace and justice will honor Israel's rights in Jerusalem, just as Israel honors those of all the religions in its sacred capital and sovereign state.

### Debate on the Prime Minister's Statement

**J. Riftin (Mapam):** Two dangers threaten Jerusalem today, that of being sundered from the State of Israel through the pretext of internationalization under the U.N., and that of partition by granting a legal-political status to the Transjordanian army which invaded part of Jerusalem. The State of Israel must fight both those dangers.

In the past Israel accepted the plan to internationalize Jerusalem in principle within an overall plan for the economic unification of the State of Israel with an independent Arab country, as a framework within which the integrity of the Land of Israel would be maintained. But despite Israel's readiness to implement this plan, and despite the support of the democratic opposition among the Arab population, this plan was rejected, infringed and undermined by the invasion of the Arab armies and by the actions of imperialist powers.

In these circumstances there is no legal or moral basis for the demand to internationalize Jerusalem. I hope that the forces of progress in the world will support Israel in its fight to stop this being used as an excuse. Israel must equally fight against the attempt to accept the present military situation—which was recognized temporarily through the Armistice Agreement—in which the invading, British-sent, Transjordanian army becomes a basic factor in a political solution for Jerusalem. The partition of Jerusalem threatens the integrity and peace of the Land of Israel and of Jerusalem itself.

Israel must reject this nefarious plan and...must ask the U.N. to accept the only solution which will preserve the peace of Jerusalem and Palestine, which honors the Jewish heroes who fought for Jerusalem through siege and hunger, which rewards the IDF and the Palmach, who defended the road to Jerusalem, and which...guarantees freedom of access to the holy places there.

The U.N. must...decide to give a fundamental reply to one of the thorniest questions of our country and agree to annex undivided Jerusalem to the State of Israel. But whatever the U.N. decides, the Jewish population of Israel...will be united in its decision and its readiness

to act, and no resolution to sever Jerusalem from the State of Israel will ever be implemented.

**M. Begin (Herut):** Distinguished Speaker, knowing that our proposal to restore the status of the City of David as our capital will be discussed at a joint meeting of the Constitution Committee and the Foreign Affairs Committee next Wednesday and will then be brought before the plenum of the Knesset, on behalf of the Herut party group founded by the IZL, I have the honor of announcing that any attempt to impose alien rule on Jerusalem will be smashed on the rock of the resistance of the entire nation.

The youth of Jerusalem, and of all Israel, which has drawn its renewed strength from the eternal sources of the liberators of the homeland and the rebels of Judea, which raised the banner of freedom against the British oppressors, penetrating their strongholds and wreaking havoc among them, which did not recoil from attacking forces far vaster than its own when more than one hundred thousand well-armed soldiers and policemen sought to maintain alien rule over our homeland, and which succeeded in overcoming the oppressors and driving them out of part of the homeland and from Jewish Jerusalem, will thwart any attempt, no matter by whom, to make Jerusalem subservient to foreigners once again.

The Political Subcommittee, which is parallel to the U.N. Assembly, passed a resolution reiterating the U.N. decision of 27 November 1947 to sever Jerusalem from the body of Israel. The official pre-state institutions, regrettably, accepted this, and we are happy to hear from the Prime Minister today that that resolution is no longer valid. We believe that this statement also applies to the Partition Plan. Foreign powers will not determine the borders of our state. The nation that dwells in Zion will decide what the extent of Israel's sovereignty shall be.

...Whatever the outcome of the debate in the U.N., we must decide to put an end to the artificial situation in which we await the decision of other nations regarding the fate of Jerusalem. On the contrary, the representatives of other countries must be told quite clearly that the Jewish nation has made its decision concerning Jerusalem. Our own hesitancy has allowed the present situation to arise. The acknowledgement of the existence of "Jewish Jerusalem," implying that some other Jerusalem exists, has enabled other nations to conclude that some parts of the nation are prepared to relinquish certain sections of the city....

This must be stopped....The world must be told that Jerusalem is ours, all of it—the Temple Mount, the Western Wall, Jerusalem inside and outside the walls—and that it is our capital, both in practice and in theory. This is a decision which the Knesset must make.

We no longer have pre-state institutions which must meet at times of danger and pass resolutions protesting the decisions made by foreign nations. We are a state, a sovereign state, and Jerusalem is ours. Jus-

tice, history, emotions and faith favor undivided Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. We no longer meet in order to protest. We will decide and implement our decision....We must make it clear to the world that all of Jerusalem is our capital.

**A.H. Sha'ag (Zwebner) (Religious Front):** The representatives of religious Jewry wish to make the following statement:

Jerusalem, the site of the kings and the Temple, is the eternal capital of the Jewish people, to whom this country was promised by virtue of the nation's valor.

The Law of the God of Israel bears witness to this covenant between the nation and its capital.

Celestial and earthly Jerusalem have always formed the focal point of our nation's essence. The oath of loyalty to the holy city, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its cunning," which our exiled forefathers swore by the waters of Babylon, has always been our general and individual motto.

This oath, the deepest expression of the nation's yearning for its land, brought us back to Zion.

Because of our adherence to Jerusalem our sons and daughters sacrificed themselves for it. We fought seven nations, defeated them, with the help of God, and established the State of Israel.

The city of the kings and the prophets, the very breath of our life, was and will be the capital of Israel.

We are jealous for Jerusalem and Zion with a great jealousy.

**J. Sapir (General Zionists):** For us, Jerusalem as the capital of Israel is an established fact. The attempt made recently...to sever its heart and head from the body of the state has met and will meet with the united resistance of the nation in Zion and the diaspora.

On various occasions our party has declared its uncompromising stand on Jerusalem. We maintain that Jerusalem is not merely a political object or a territorial concept, it is the symbol of the nation and the state....Neither the nation nor the state can exist without it, with all its significance for the nation's past, present and future. Any attack on Jerusalem as the capital of Israel is an attack on our national existence.

Ever since we have been a nation Jerusalem has been on our lips, in our hearts and prayers, in the desires of the entire nation, daily and hourly, the summit of the nation's aspirations and yearnings. Millions of oppressed, persecuted members of our nation dreamed of our return to Jerusalem throughout our long and miserable dispersion.

Generations of our children were brought up on the concept of Jerusalem as the banner of our nation; for it we shed our blood unhesitatingly.

Our right to Jerusalem is not a partial matter. Just as the name of Jerusalem cannot be changed, our relationship to undivided Jerusalem cannot be altered.

Our party has never made its stand on foreign policy contingent on special relations with one country or another, and anyway the particular concentration of forces seeking to undermine our right to Jerusalem and Israel is not a cause for surprise, disappointment or concern. Whatever the forces which oppose us, they will find us united, without a crack in our ranks, both old and young, man, woman and child, from Dan to Eilat. We will stand together and defend our capital and our holy city, being deterred by nothing.

Let this united front, which is reflected in the First Knesset today, serve as a warning to anyone who seeks to prevent us from fulfilling our age-old aspiration, whether by resolutions or by force.

**I. Cohen (Progressives):** During the first few weeks of the Provisional Council of state my colleagues charged me with the task of proposing that Jerusalem be decided on as the site of Israel's sovereignty. There is no need to proclaim Jerusalem as the eternal capital of Israel—both nation and state—just as it is unnecessary to proclaim that the Land of Israel is the land of the Jewish people. Its name reflects this.

Jerusalem is what it is in the minds of the nations solely because of the Jewish people. The sanctity of Jerusalem derives from the depths of Jewish history; it will not be controlled by depriving the Jews of their sovereignty over it....We respect the fact that Jerusalem is sacred for others too, and we look forward to the day when the world will also regard it as the city of peace...but there is no reason to expect that the one hundred thousand Jews of Jerusalem will voluntarily divest themselves of their independence and agree to let their city become the arena of international conflicts, intrigues and plots between mutually-hostile forces. There is no basis for the...assumption that any Jew in Jerusalem will agree to serve under the supposedly international rule of foreigners.

There are holy places in Jerusalem. They are holy because of the Jews who lived there. The nations regard one grave in Jerusalem as being holy, while the Jews have thousands of holy graves there, and no international rule—if such a concept exists—can guarantee to preserve our sacred graves. If Jerusalem is the center of the world, only the Jewish nation can guard it.

**A. Almaliyah (Sephardim):** The inhabitants of Jerusalem made their views clear to the U.N. yesterday. Anyone who did not see the terrible but glorious sight yesterday has never seen glory. Tens of thousands of Jerusalemites, young and old, men and women, schoolchildren and adults, all ascended the high hill where the great visionary is buried

and, raising their hands, swore the traditional oath, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its cunning."

The U.N. heard what Jerusalem had to say yesterday, and we will repeat it today. The residents of Jerusalem, who have known siege, hunger, thirst, suffering and bombardment from all sides, when the commanders of foreign armies controlled the city, know what their fate would be if this eternal city were placed under foreign rule. The residents of Jerusalem have never accepted this, and never will.

When the Conciliation Commission came to Jerusalem I had the opportunity of talking to two of its members and telling them: If you are able to walk freely about Jerusalem today, if we could come to you today, it is only because of the blood of our sons and daughters, which was spilled like water in order to liberate all these places when you abandoned us to hostile hands. Your dream of making Jerusalem an international city is wrong, and will not become reality!

That is why we reiterate today: till now Jerusalem has been the spiritual capital of Israel; henceforth it will be the eternal and political capital of the State of Israel!

Let our tongues cleave to the roofs of our mouths if we do not remember thee, O Jerusalem!

**M. Wilner (Maki):** Distinguished Knesset, in the cruel and crucial battle fought by the Jews of Jerusalem, facing the criminal onslaught of the Arab armies led by British officers and partly equipped with American arms, the Jewish population of Israel and Jerusalem stood united, and won.

In the most critical days of the battle for Jerusalem, for the welfare of its Jewish citizens, when many of the best of our youth fell, we received precious and very important aid from the U.S.S.R. and the popular democracies. Through the combined efforts of our courageous youth and the IDF, and the significant aid proffered by our natural and unquestioned allies, we were victorious in the battle for Jerusalem and for the State of Israel.

We are all anxious today as we confront the schemes being prepared for Jerusalem and the attempt to turn Jerusalem into a base for imperialism, in accordance with its aggressive designs in the Middle East, and its plans to prepare a new world war. We have rejected all these plans. At first there was the American scheme to make all Palestine a "trusteeship" in April-May 1948, when the U.S. summoned a special meeting of the U.N. in order to prevent the establishment of the State of Israel; then there was the wicked Bernadotte Plan to hand Jerusalem over to Abdullah's British Transjordan.

Once again, by the combined efforts of the Jewish population in Israel, with the weighty support in the U.N. of our faithful friends—the U.S.S.R. and the popular democracies—we repelled the American "trusteeship" plan and the scheme to hand Jerusalem to Abdullah.

But the enemies of Israel's independence, the enemies of the Jews of Jerusalem, did not give up. The memory of the many sacrifices, of the hunger and suffering of Jerusalem, does not interest them, just as these things do not interest them in connection with other countries and nations. They did everything, and are still doing everything, to prepare another military round, in addition to the economic and political pressure against Israel and Jerusalem. Throughout this period we demanded—and continue to demand—that the Knesset refuse to accord explicit or implicit recognition to the rule of Abdullah, i.e., Britain, in the rest of Israel and of Jerusalem. This is in the interests of peace, of Israel's independence and of the security of the Jews of Jerusalem.

In order to clarify the situation it should be stressed that during the debate on Jerusalem the Soviet delegation to the U.N. directed all its criticism against Abdullah's rule in Jerusalem and Palestine against the policy of Britain and the U.S.A. and against the criminal plan of the Conciliation Commission, which would have harmed both Jews and Arabs. The Soviet government (only those who wish to distort its statements refuse to acknowledge this) has always sought the peace, security and independence of Israel and the rest of Palestine, as well as the welfare of all the Jews of Jerusalem....

I would like to remind you that when the Knesset met in Jerusalem it was the American representative who demonstratively declined to participate, while the Soviet delegation attended it. When certain Ministries were moved to Jerusalem the U.S.S.R. did not protest, though the American-led Conciliation Commission did.

Anyone who wishes to see things as they really are, who is truly interested in Israel's independence, sovereignty and integrity and who honestly seeks the welfare and freedom of Jerusalem and the Jews who live there, must see that the practical significance of the Soviet proposal was to establish the rule of the inhabitants of Jerusalem over the city, under the temporary supervision of the Trusteeship Council. All the attempts to distort this approach, and to identify the attitude of the imperialists in the U.N. with that of the U.S.S.R...serves the interests of neither the Jews of Jerusalem, the independence of Israel nor peace in general.

The Soviet proposal is not directed against Israel or the Jews of Jerusalem; it is in the interests of both Jews and Arabs. It is directed against Abdullah and the British army in the rest of the country and of Jerusalem. The U.S.S.R. rightly regards the armies of Transjordan and Britain as a continual threat to the peace of Israel, Jerusalem and the entire Middle East. That is why the imperialist plans to impose foreign rule on Jerusalem must not be confused with the Soviet plan for the independent rule of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, under the official supervision of a Trusteeship Council. Even those who do not agree with the Soviet peace plan, which is identical with the basic interests of the State

of Israel, must not distort the U.S.S.R.'s position. (From the floor: Do you agree to this plan?) I have seen how people connected with British imperialism interrupt the enemies of imperialism in other parliaments!

The negotiations being conducted with Abdullah by Israel's representatives concerning the partition of Jerusalem, thereby recognizing British-Transjordanian rule over part of Palestine, and the policy of suppressing the democratic Arab forces which are fighting to establish their independent state and drive the invaders and the British army out of the rest of Palestine, complicate the situation and enable the American "Conciliation" Commission to propose plans to obtain control of Jerusalem and undermine Israel's sovereignty.

The obvious conclusion is, therefore, that Israel should see the issue in its entirety, regarding it as our main task to implement a policy which will foil the schemes to annex the rest of Jerusalem to Transjordan and Britain and will help to establish an independent Arab state in the rest of Palestine. This policy alone will bolster the security of the Jews of Jerusalem and remove the British cannon which threaten the city.

That is the problem. We must fight the Government's policy, which is based on the possibility of making an alliance with Abdullah and British and American imperialism....We must fight the plans of the Conciliation Commission and of imperialist control over Jerusalem. We must fight for a solution which will prevent a "second round" and will bring peace between a free Israel and an independent, peace-loving democratic Arab state in the rest of Palestine....The two countries will decide in the final event whether Jerusalem is to be divided between them or governed jointly, for the mutual benefit, prosperity, peace and welfare of the two countries.

Only a far-seeing plan will lead to the removal of the invading and British armies from the gates of Jerusalem and all of Israel; only a plan of this kind is in the interests of peace in Israel, the freedom of the country, the security of the Jews of Jerusalem and their connection with the State of Israel.

**Z. Aharonowitz (Mapai):** Distinguished Knesset, I would like to refresh your memories with two points:

A. At the time of the commotion over our acceptance into the U.N., our representative, Mr. Abba Eban, was summoned before the U.N.'s "ad hoc" political committee and asked, amongst other things, about Israel's attitude to Jerusalem.

At the conclusion of Mr. Abba Eban's reply, he made the following statement: "The incorporation of Jewish Jerusalem within the State of Israel was a natural historic process resulting from the circumstances of the war, a power vacuum created by the ending of the Mandate and the refusal of the U.N. to accept direct administrative responsibility for

Jerusalem. The incorporation of Jewish Jerusalem within the State of Israel cannot be combined with the international rule of Jerusalem. The Government of Israel recommends that international rule be created solely to supervise and protect the holy sites."

On the basis of these explanations, which satisfied the committee, it decided on 9 May 1949 to recommend that the State of Israel be accepted into the U.N., and this resolution was adopted by the U.N. Assembly on May 11.

B. During that session of the U.N. Assembly, Israel's Foreign Minister addressed its Policy Committee on the subject of Jerusalem, concluding by proposing the following resolution:

The General Assembly, referring to its previous resolutions expressing its concern over Jerusalem because of the holy sites there, notes that Israel's Proclamation of Independence of 15 May 1948 guarantees to protect the holy places of all the religions which aspire to maintain existing rights, particularly those which were in effect until 14 May 1948, and consequently resolves:

- a. To authorize the Secretary-General to sign an agreement with the Government of Israel in the name of the U.N. regarding the protection and supervision of the holy places in Jerusalem.
- b. To ask the Secretary-General to give the fifth session of the U.N. Assembly a progress report regarding the signing and implementation of this arrangement.

That is all.

Although the U.N.'s original resolution regarding the internationalization of Jerusalem was adopted only two years ago, we have gone a long way away from it since then; and meanwhile a different decision has been made, one that has been engraved on the hearts of the Jews of Jerusalem and of the entire State of Israel.

That decision was made during days and nights of siege, hunger, thirst, death, sorrow and heroism, when Jerusalem, its inhabitants and its holy sites were abandoned.

Those who were charged with the fate of Jerusalem abandoned it. History cannot abide a vacuum, and the vacuum of Jerusalem was filled. Jerusalem as an organic part of the State of Israel underwent a baptism by fire, concluding with the victory of the Jews of Jerusalem, aided morally, militarily, politically, economically and administratively by the State of Israel. That fact cannot be altered.

The internationalization of Jerusalem, for whatever reason, means, simply, abandoning the Jews of Jerusalem to the danger of destruction, as occurred after the "demilitarization" of Jerusalem during the British Mandate. It means cutting Jerusalem off from the process of the ingathering of the exiles. It means depriving the inhabitants of Jerusalem of their independence and their right to self-government as an

integral part of the State of Israel. It means introducing foreign rule into the heart of the State of Israel, with all that this implies. We demand to be left alone.

The U.N. Assembly cannot pass this unjust and impracticable resolution. The fate of Jerusalem and its inhabitants, of the State of Israel and of the U.N.'s honor impel us to identify totally with the statement made in the Knesset today by the Prime Minister.

**N. Yellin-Mor (Fighters):** In making this statement I am the representative of a public which is small in numbers but has considerable specific weight. I speak in the name of soldiers who are alive today and of many who did not survive, and on behalf of soldiers who raised the banner to free the homeland several years ago. For them Jerusalem was not merely a holy symbol, but a sacred objective in the endeavor to substitute Jewish for alien rule.

For them Jerusalem was a principal objective of the war and also a testing point. Dozens of my colleagues spent many years in prisons in Jerusalem, in the Russian Compound. There they appeared before the courts of the foreign ruler, asking them: "Who are you to judge us here, in Jerusalem, the capital of the Jewish homeland?" For their independence they were sentenced to many years in prison. But they went to jail joyfully, knowing that even by doing so they were undermining the oppressor's rule.

In the solitary confinement cells in Jerusalem my colleagues wore the red garb of those who had been condemned to death, and Moshe Barazani, together with Feinstein, a member of the IZL, tore their hearts out on the eve of their execution, not wanting to fall at the hands of foreigners.

My colleagues fought on the walls of Jerusalem in the summer months of 1948; there they shed their blood, and they were buried in Jerusalem's soil.

...Consequently, there is no power in the world which can deprive the Jewish nation of Jerusalem, which was conquered by fire and blood. It will not be abandoned at the arbitrariness of those who raise their alien hands to vote, no matter who they be. The shame of foreign oppression will not return to Jerusalem! Foreigners will not order those who dwell in Jerusalem to deny the blood that was shed for the city's freedom!

If the sanctity of graves is a political reason there are thousands of fresh graves which are more sacred to us than anything else, and they command us to fight for our capital. Every soldier will defend Jerusalem, and if additional sacrifices are required Jewish youngsters will willingly shed their blood.

Let the foreigners who are discussing the fate of Jerusalem take note of our call: Remove your hands from our capital! Jerusalem will be Jewish forever, and its government will be only Jewish!

**The Speaker, J. Sprinzak:** Knesset Members, we have heard the Prime Minister's statement and those of all the parties, all of whom spoke clearly on the question of Jerusalem.

Despite the differing views, I declare that the entire Knesset is united in stating that Jerusalem is an inseparable part of the State of Israel and cannot be placed under foreign rule of any kind. This is the view of the First Knesset of the State of Israel.

(The members rise and sing the national anthem.)