

Prime Minister's Statement; Report of the Foreign Minister

Introduction

After several delays, the truce decreed by the Security Council on 29 May 1948 came into effect on all fronts on June 11, and was limited to four weeks. Count Folke Bernadotte, who had been appointed U.N. Mediator for Palestine on May 20, was charged with establishing and directing the Truce Supervision Organization, while at the same time searching for a mutually-acceptable solution to the Palestine problem.

Sitting 4 of the Provisional Council of State

17 June 1948 (20 Sivan 5709)
JNF Building, Tel Aviv

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Prime Minister's Statement

The Prime Minister, D. Ben-Gurion: This sitting is taking place in the first week of the truce. In a broadcast to the nation on the eve of its inception I announced the terms which the Provisional Government had presented, and there is no need to repeat them here. Four weeks passed between the establishment of the Jewish state and the inception of the truce, representing a wonderful and noble achievement which is virtually unparalleled in the history of Israel, and perhaps the world. A small, young country, the youngest in the world, was attacked on the day of its establishment by five neighboring countries forty times its size, for no reason. A nation with a population of 700,000 was attacked by countries numbering over 27 million, assisted by weapons, funds, commanders and political aid from a Great Power. Rarely in world history has a country so heavily outnumbered endured so heroically and successfully.

I will not dwell on the events of the first four weeks, but we cannot pass in silence over the battle for Jerusalem. For centuries the entire Christian and Moslem world claimed that that city, which was sacred to the Jews, was holy for them too. By virtue of the claim that the city was holy to the three great religions of the world it was decided that, upon the establishment of the Jewish state here, the city would come under international rule. Yet the Holy City was bombarded for four weeks by Moslem forces, with the help of British artillery and commanders, in a

savage, barbaric and cynical way, desecrating the sanctity of the city and destroying synagogues, while the Christian world looked on in silence. The Anglican Church, the artillery of whose mother country inflicted humiliation and murder on the Holy City, looked on mutely. The other churches saw, heard and remained silent. The sanctity of Jerusalem was forgotten, as were the memories binding this city to the great religions. Only one small and isolated nation, which had been left defenseless by the Mandatory Government, persevered, enduring immeasurable suffering and exhibiting immense heroism. Thus it was proved to whom this city is truly precious and holy, and to whom the sanctity of Jerusalem is just an empty phrase.

With regard to that battle, I will note only one of our military operations...that of the Seventh Brigade at Latrun. At the end of May the Seventh Brigade was sent to a crossroads linking Jerusalem with the west. Not only was Jerusalem bombarded for weeks, but an attempt was also made to cut it off from the rest of the country and besiege it in order to starve its inhabitants. This base plot almost succeeded, with the aid of the Mandatory Government and, later on, the British mercenary commanding the Arab Legion. The Seventh Brigade did not succeed in its attack, and we did not capture Latrun. Our forces entered Latrun and set fire to the police station, but were not strong enough to hold the position. Two villages, Beit Jiz and Beit Sussin, were captured...before the height of the battles at Latrun, whereupon the Supreme Command was requested to send not only military reinforcements but also a steamroller, in order to secure an alternative road to Jerusalem. While the battles at Latrun continued, engineers and laborers, guarded by our soldiers, built a new road, bypassing the old route to Jerusalem. Thus, we have a road to Jerusalem even though Latrun remains in foreign hands.

We have assembled on the sixth day of the truce which obliges us to be prepared for both peace and war. Our preparations for peace do not require great efforts, since we have always been a peaceful nation. Since our third return to our homeland from exile we have sought peace with the inhabitants of this and the neighboring countries. We will extend every possible assistance to the U.N. emissary of peace, though we are not prepared for peace at any price. Perhaps it was unwise to present conditions for peace before any talks were held, and before we even knew if there would be talks, but in order to save precious time for the U.N. Mediator, the Arab rulers...and ourselves, it was advisable to make our conditions clear. If the Arab leaders' demands for the abolition of the State of Israel and the restriction of the Jewish people's right to immigrate to our land are a precondition for talks, then the U.N. emissary had better not waste his time....

We are prepared for peace as an independent and sovereign nation, the basis of whose existence is immigration unhindered by anyone else.

If there is true peace among equals, based on the principles of reciprocity and cooperation, we are ready for it. We do not know if that is what the Arab rulers and their foreign advisers want. It is not even clear if the truce will last 28 days. We have heard that the British Army plans to evacuate Haifa even before the end of the month...and that will probably serve as the green light for a renewed attack on the State of Israel, and Haifa in particular, from land, sea and air. We must be prepared for the renewal of hostilities, perhaps with even greater vigor. We must be ready, mustering all our strength, resolve, preparedness and mutual responsibility, to persevere with the war and be victorious.

This war determines the destiny not only of the country, but of the Jewish people. The truce obliges us to be ready for both peace and war. We must rely only on ourselves, not on any external aid. I find no expression more appropriate for our situation than the one spoken thousands of years ago by Isaiah the son of Amoz: "Wherefore art thou in thine red apparel and thy garments like him that treadeth in the wine-fat? I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me....For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come. And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold; therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my fury, it upheld me" (Isaiah 63: 2-5).