

Commemoration of IDF Casualties and Congratulations on Victory in Battle

Introduction

Within six days the IDF gained resounding victories on three fronts. The Egyptian Army and Air Force were smashed and the whole of the Sinai, this time right up to the Suez Canal, was occupied. Jordanian forces were compelled to withdraw beyond the River Jordan. In the last two days before the ceasefire decreed by the U.N. Security Council came into effect the Syrians were pushed back from most of the Golan Heights beyond Kuneitra, the provincial capital. It was in this abruptly changed situation, in a new mood, that the Knesset convened for the first time after the war.

Sitting 183 of the Sixth Knesset

12 June 1967 (4 Sivan 5727)

The Speaker, K. Luz: Knesset Members, I hereby open the first Knesset sitting in united Jerusalem. Congratulations!

Let us remember our glorious dead, who gave their lives that the Jewish nation might live on the soil of Israel.

(The Knesset Members honor the memory of the fallen by standing.)

The blood we had shed till now was not enough to enable us to live in peace in our land. Once again the soil has soaked up the lifeblood of our heroes. Our renewed covenant with our land, a covenant of faith, labor, sweat and blood, is an everlasting one.

The Jewish people will always remember the glory of its heroes and will mourn the splendid youth, joyous courage and dedicated will of its sons who fell in the difficult battle.

Bereaved parents, widows, orphans, relatives of the heroes, no words can express the terrible tragedy of the loss of your loved ones, but no sacrifice has brought salvation as much as theirs has. Be comforted in their victory.

To the IDF, the Chief of Staff, Major-General Rabin, the planner and commander of the campaign, his aides, the IDF's generals, whom I have invited to be present at this sitting, to all the soldiers and officers, we extend the heart-felt congratulations and gratitude of every citizen of Israel and every Jew throughout the diaspora for your fighting strength, courageous spirit and readiness to lay down your lives.

To our Government and the Prime Minister, Mr. Eshkol, who was also Minister of Defense until the outbreak of hostilities, and to his aides, we extend our blessings and our thanks for the perseverance and ability with which they led our Army, by strengthening it, equipping it with the best weapons and creating the conditions for its outstanding military ability.

Since last Monday's Knesset sitting, which was held on the first day of the fighting, we have been as dreamers, for every hour we received news of conquests and acts of heroism. This week, which towers like a mighty peak over the plateau of life before and after it, produced mighty events in the history of our people, the spiritual elevation of the nation in Zion and expressions of volunteering in the diaspora.

May the sparks of spiritual exaltation remain in our hearts as a hidden fire which will move and help us to strengthen the state spiritually and materially, enhancing the life of the nation and renewing the immigration of large numbers of Jews to Israel.

We look forward to the great day when there will be peace with our neighbors and lasting peace in our region and the whole world.

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The Prime Minister's Statement on the Political and Military Campaign

The Prime Minister, L. Eshkol: Mr. Speaker, distinguished Knesset, a week ago the fateful campaign began. The existence of the State of Israel, the hope of generations and the vision which had been fulfilled in our time, was in the balance. Now, a week after the Knesset's last sitting, which was held in the midst of the bombardment, we are gathered to hear that victory is ours.

The enemy's assault has been repelled, most of his strength has been destroyed, his military machine has been broken and the bases of his aggression have been eliminated. The threat of war has been lifted from the country. The skies above our heads are safe. The danger to Jerusalem, the Coastal Plain, the northern settlements, the Negev and Galilee as well as the farms by the Strip has been removed.

The IDF rules the Sinai Peninsula as far as the Suez Canal, the West Bank of the Jordan and the Golan Heights. There is free passage through the Straits of Tiran and the Gulf of Eilat. Jerusalem is united. For the first time since the establishment of the state Jews can pray at the Western Wall, the relic of our Temple and our historic past, and at Rachel's Tomb. For the first time in our generation Jews can pray at the Cave of Machpela in Hebron, the city of the Patriarchs. Indeed, in us has been fulfilled the verse: "For thy work shall be rewarded...and thy children shall come again to their own border."

In the midst of victory we bow our heads in sacred veneration of the memory of those who fell. Many hundreds of soldiers of the IDF and civilians gave their lives for victory. I know that there is no consolation for the grief of the individual and the family. Each person is a whole world. I would like the bereaved families to know that the casualties fell for something than which there is nothing more just or essential. I would like them to know that in their deaths they bequeathed us life. On behalf of the entire nation, the Government and myself, allow me to say that we share your heavy sorrow. We will remember our dear sons, the courageous soldiers and officers of the IDF, who went ahead, who sanctified our nation and our country in their lives and their deaths. They join the chain of heroism and self-sacrifice of those who gave their lives for the country, a chain which will never be broken.

To the wounded we wish a full and speedy recovery and return to an active, fruitful and useful life. Anyone who has seen our wounded men in the hospitals—and I have—cannot fail to be stirred by their courage and endurance. We are eternally grateful to the doctors, nurses, workers and volunteers, and especially to the doctors who came as volunteers from abroad to help in the sacred work of healing the sick. May God give you strength!

Members of the Knesset, these have been days of awe. Our nation will remember them forever. They were days of spiritual exaltation. The entire nation was mobilized to fight for its existence and its hope. Everyone felt that he had to contribute his share, and each person did what he had to.

Over the years, in the face of the continual threat from our enemies, we were obliged to—and did—build the IDF's defensive and deterrent strength, investing enormous resources in readying and equipping it. The IDF is a mighty fighting force, as the world discovered, because of its high standard, because of its first-rate soldiers and officers and, above all, because in the heart of every soldier and officer beats a sense of mission to the nation and the country. The IDF is the army of the nation. When it fights the entire nation fights. When it fights it expresses every period of Jewish history. When our army fights it does so for the redemption as well as the survival of the nation.

The nation withstood the test because it was united, because at the crucial moment it was able to concentrate its efforts and act as one. The nation withstood the test. Hundreds of thousands of youngsters and immigrants, acting in ways both great and small, each one in accordance with his age and abilities, proved that their roots in Israel are eternal. As I travelled the length and breadth of the country, I was very impressed to see children filling sandbags and doing every kind of work they could. It proved that the spirit of the nation derives from the spiritual revival of the state. We saw that we were not merely the in-gathering of the exiles, we were an old-new nation, a united nation,

which has arisen and been forged by fire into one Israel, combining all the tribes, all the communities and groups, those who came from abroad as well as those who were born here. A nation has arisen which is ready to make any effort and sacrifice to assure its mission.

The State of Israel withstood the test, knowing that it bore the hope of the entire Jewish people. The unity of our nation has been forged anew during these days. Jews throughout the diaspora identified with the state, with the heart of the nation. Thousands of our people came to our help, from both near and far. Hundreds of thousands, millions, both Jews and non-Jews, all over the world, were ready to help us in our struggle, in any way. And those who were unable to help were with their country in spirit during the battle. Just as the country was elevated and strengthened, the unity of the Jewish people was reinforced. Jerusalem was united, and all Jews were brethren.

The last four weeks have been a time of tension and trial. The first three were filled with tension, expectancy and searching, while the fourth was one of trial and action.... On Independence Day immense Egyptian forces began crossing the Canal and moving towards the Israeli border. Within three days those forces were drawn up facing our border, and then Nasser demanded the withdrawal of the U.N. Force from Sharm el-Sheikh, the Sinai and the Gaza Strip. On 23 May 1967 Egypt announced the closing of the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping and international shipping bringing strategic cargoes to Israel's southern port of Eilat.

After the Egyptian ruler had annulled the international arrangements which had been in effect for the last ten years, he publicly announced his intention of wiping Israel off the map. As we have since discovered, on May 27 the Commander of the Egyptian Air Force issued a secret battle order to his pilots to prepare for a surprise attack on Israel. Nasser signed a military agreement with Hussein on May 30 and with Iraq on June 4. These agreements, in addition to that between Egypt and Syria, completed the encirclement of Israel which was intended to enable a sudden attack on Israel from all sides.

On June 3 the Commander of the Egyptian forces in the Sinai issued an order of the day to his soldiers ordering them to prepare to attack Israel and describing the expected results "of this special moment" as "of historic importance for the Arab people." How prophetic!

Upon the advance of the Egyptian troops into the Sinai Peninsula I ordered, with the consent of the Government, the initial mobilization of the IDF's reserves. As the threat grew greater the mobilization was expanded and our preparations intensified. On May 29 I informed the Knesset that the IDF "is ready to foil the enemy's plans on all fronts and borders." I took that opportunity of telling the Egyptian ruler that "this is not the first time he has been carried away by his imagination and seen himself the victor before doing battle." I added that "he should remem-

ber that his illusions were soon dispelled, as we saw." I told the IDF: "By virtue of your steadfastness and ability to defeat the enemy in any conditions the Government of Israel can face the serious decisions it must make calmly and confidently, in accordance with our great and grave responsibility for the peace and security of the state."

Last Monday, 5 June 1967, seven or eight Egyptian divisions, two of them armored, were drawn up along our borders; there were 900 tanks, 200 of them facing Eilat, their object being to cut off the southern Negev; along Israel's eastern border there were 60,000 Jordanian soldiers and 300 tanks; the Jordanian Army was placed under Egyptian command and Egyptian commando units and Iraqi forces had reached its territory. 50,000 Syrian soldiers were ready to attack on our northern border with Syria, and along the whole border there were cannon and mortars, embedded in cement and iron, dug in and entrenched, the result of the work of years. 600 Egyptian, Jordanian, Syrian and Iraqi planes were ready. Egyptian air sorties were flown over Israel during the days prior to June 5.

The moment of decision came. As the Egyptian forces moved towards Israel's border our forces went out to repel the enemy's aggression. Aerial and armored battles began. In a radio broadcast a few hours later, I announced: "We will not attack any country which has not waged war on us, but anyone who attacks us will encounter the full force of our capacity to defend ourselves and defeat his troops." Despite that clear warning, the Jordanian forces, which were under Egyptian command, began attacking and bombarding us all along the line, and especially in Jerusalem. A great deal of blood was shed in Jerusalem. At the same time the Syrians began attacking our northern settlements from their entrenched positions in the Golan Heights. By Friday, June 8, Israel's forces had defeated the enemy in the Sinai, the Gaza Strip, all of Jerusalem and the entire West Bank.

I would like to take this opportunity of noting that despite the fact that the Jordanian forces shelled Jerusalem, killing and wounding many people and causing considerable damage to property, we avoided shelling the city out of consideration for its sanctity and in accordance with our policy of refraining from harming the civilian population. As soon as the city was liberated, and before going to the Western Wall, I summoned the heads of the Christian and Moslem communities and issued the following statement: "Rest assured that no harm will be permitted to befall the holy sites of the various religions. I have asked the Minister of Religion to establish contact with the religious leaders in Jerusalem in order to assure appropriate contact between them and our forces and in order to ensure that they can continue with their spiritual activities unhindered. From Jerusalem—the symbol of peace for generations—from the Holy City, to which calm has been restored, I would like you to join me in calling for peace among all the peoples of the re-

gion and the entire world." Arrangements were immediately made to ensure that the places holy to Christianity would be controlled by Christian religious leaders and the places holy to Islam would be controlled by Moslem religious leaders.

In view of the continued and heavy shelling of the northern settlements by the Syrians, continually endangering men, women and children, and inflicting considerable damage on the settlements, we were obliged to act in order to silence the Syrian positions on the Golan Heights and the Bashan. By Saturday, June 10 the Syrian Heights were in our hands, and the bases of aggression, which had threatened the northern settlements and inflicted heavy casualties and damage on them for nineteen years with the intention of turning them into piles of rubble, had been destroyed.

During the course of the fighting our forces destroyed some 450 enemy planes and many hundreds of tanks. The enemy's forces were defeated in the battles, many of them fleeing or being taken prisoner. For the first time since the establishment of the state the threat to our existence from the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and the northern border has suddenly been lifted. In those battles the tens of thousands of soldiers of the IDF fought with unparalleled courage and heroism. They acted with selfless devotion and the spirit of comrades in arms, displaying resourcefulness and sagacity. Officers led their units and threw themselves into the fray. Many of them were killed or wounded as they led their men, their comrades. Soldiers endangered themselves to rescue their comrades from death or capture, even though they themselves were wounded. Because of that dedication and spirit of comradeship we were victorious. Happy is the nation which has such an army.

From this podium I would like to congratulate the members of the Government, the Minister of Defense, the Chief of Staff, the generals of the IDF in the field and in the General Staff, the commanders of the corps and the regiments, all the officers and soldiers of the IDF on land, sea and air. I am confident that the entire nation and army will gladly endorse my special congratulations to the Air Force, to its present and previous commanders, who prepared that superb airborne force.

Parallel to the security developments, we were subjected to an international political campaign. During the first days of the crisis, between Independence Day and Thursday, May 18, the entry of the Egyptian forces into the Sinai was described in various capitals as a demonstrative act. The Egyptian demand for the withdrawal of the international Force was fulfilled hastily by the U.N. Secretary-General without obtaining the consent of the U.N. Advisory Committee or bringing the subject before the Security Council. The world condemned the withdrawal of the U.N. Force, yet no international institution did anything to prevent the impending aggression or remove the Egyptian troop con-

centrations from the Israeli border. The ineffectiveness of the U.N. may have encouraged Nasser to continue on his aggressive course of closing the Straits of Tiran. Even after the closing of the Straits, the Security Council did not ask Egypt to annul this, although some of its members described it as illegal and dangerous.

After the closing of the Straits of Tiran, the U.S. and Britain began political action designed to ensure freedom of navigation there. Israel attached importance to this international action and to the increased opposition to one of the central aspects of Egyptian aggression. It rapidly transpired, however, that Nasser was not satisfied with closing the Straits of Tiran, and intended to destroy Israel. Thus, while the Powers were seeking a solution to the problem of the Straits in accordance with international law, the land battles began. During the three weeks prior to the battles the world witnessed, perhaps for the first time, the true character of the Arab policy of hostility and the blatantly aggressive intentions of the Egyptian ruler, of which we had warned it for many years.

In my speech to the Knesset on May 29 I noted how much we had been heartened by the "growing support and encouragement for us in the world." In the days that followed, that support and encouragement became a flood, engulfing countries, governments and nations, as well as our own people, the Jewish nation, and indicating the extent to which the vision of the revival of Israel had become an integral part of world culture in our generation. In the days preceding the battles the world's fear for Israel's existence became a mighty phenomenon which strengthened our position and will continue to do so in the political campaign ahead of us. It is not my intention to disprove false propaganda here, but for the sake of historical truth I would like to repeat that Israel stood alone in its battle for survival, aided by no military force of any country in any way.

I should note that throughout the period of preparation for the war by the Egyptian ruler and his allies, as well as during the fighting, one Power not only failed to condemn their aggressive actions but also aided them politically. On Saturday, 10 June 1967, the U.S.S.R. even announced the severing of its diplomatic relations with Israel, and was followed by Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria. Today this may not be of any great avail, but it is our international duty to ask the U.S.S.R. how, as a member of the U.N., its avowed policy of settling disputes peacefully fits with giving large quantities of weapons and military equipment to countries which have publicly declared their intention of using those weapons to destroy a sovereign country, and how it fits with its open support for the aggressor during the fighting.

Perhaps now the Soviet leaders will realize that it is their duty to help in the effort to bring true peace to the Middle East. During the last official contact between us we expressed the hope that there would still be re-

lations between our countries on the basis of a deeper understanding of Israel's problems on the part of the U.S.S.R.

When the State of Israel was born nineteen years ago the Arab armies sought to destroy it. When we fought and defeated them Armistice Agreements were signed. Those agreements stated explicitly that they were to be a stage on the path to peace. That is how Israel, and perhaps not only Israel, regarded them. Over the years, however, it transpired that our neighbors regarded those agreements as a way of gaining time in order to prepare renewed aggression, with the object of destroying Israel. The U.N. chose to ignore that Arab attitude. The U.N. Charter makes it incumbent upon the members of the U.N. to refrain from using force or threatening to use force, and to resolve disputes peacefully. Nevertheless, the U.N. did not condemn Arab hostility towards Israel which persisted over the years. Thus, for nineteen years that unique situation continued....All the nations, leaders and representatives of the world heard the incitement and sabre-rattling of the Arab leaders against us. They heard, saw and kept quiet.

To the nations of the world we say, do not assume that Israel is prepared to return to the situation which existed until a week ago. The State of Israel exists and was established by right, yet nonetheless it has had to fight repeatedly for its right. Alone we fought for our existence and security and we are entitled to determine what the true and vital interests of our country are and how its future is to be assured. The situation which existed till now will not be restored. Israel will no longer be wide open to acts of terror and murder. We have told the nations of the world that we look to the future, and to peace in particular, not to the past. We will observe the ceasefire faithfully, if the other side does so too.

Members of the Knesset, a new situation has been created which can serve as a point of departure in direct negotiations for a peace settlement with the Arab countries. The historic contribution which the nations of the world, led by the Powers, can make to bringing peace to the region is clear and unequivocal. They must direct their appeals to the Arab countries, which have made the Middle East a point of tension and a constant battleground for twenty years, rather than to Israel, which has always aspired to peace....Justice, logic and morality demand that after almost twenty years the Powers should muster their courage and tell the Arab countries that the U.N. Charter requires them, as it does every other member of the U.N., to solve disputes peacefully.

Today our region is at a crossroads. One road leads to peace and true cooperation deriving from the genuine desire and true interests of the peoples of the region. The other leads to the danger of continued hostility and all that is implied by the lack of a stable peace. The international community faces not only a moral test but also one of political sense. As soon as the arms race in the region ends—and we have seen what military equipment was prepared and built over the years by our

neighbors—the more that is done to bring peace in the Middle East nearer, the greater will be the contribution to reducing international tension in general.

To the Arab nations I would like to say: we were not eager for the fray. We acted because we had no choice but to defend our lives and our rights. Just as you have rights to your countries, we have rights to ours. The Jewish people's roots in this country are as deep as the ocean. Throughout the generations the Jews in the diaspora maintained their spiritual and material ties with this country, and were never cut off from it. Similarly, this country remained true to us, and never gave itself to any other nation. It continued to wait for its sons and the ingathering of its exiles. Today the whole world has seen that there is no force which can drive us out of this land.

This uniqueness of our nation and its ties with this country are unparalleled among the nations of the world. Perhaps our victories in the three wars which were forced on us will finally convince those who refused to acknowledge this basic truth that our ties with this country are deeper than the sea, because without it our nation has no life. Perhaps now, when the false hopes of destroying Israel have been dashed, the Arab leaders will reconsider their approach to Israel and reflect on the tremendous suffering and losses they have inflicted on their peoples and which we regret just as we regret our own losses; perhaps they will realize what precious resources have been wasted on instruments of war instead of being used for the economic and social advance of their peoples; perhaps they will ponder the benefit which will accrue to all the peoples of the region from sincere cooperation between them. It is only through this that the Middle East will take its rightful place in the network of world culture and human progress.

Mr. Speaker, when the state of emergency reached its height the Government was expanded and a National Unity Government established. I would like to note that the expanded Government, and within it the Ministerial Committee on Defense Affairs, has stood and is standing up to the test of national leadership. I am sure that through national unity we will come through the trials ahead of us, being prepared for the political campaign and seeking peace. May the days to come deepen the sense of dedication and unity, spiritual exaltation and the bond between the generations and the entire House of Israel. Israel has emerged from the trial of fire and blood stronger than before, true to ourselves and awaiting the future confidently. With the help of the Rock of Israel and its Redeemer Israel will dwell in safety.

Permit me, Mr. Speaker, to say a few more words. As I stand before you now I do not feel that I am a representative of my party, even though it is the largest in the Knesset, but that I am the Prime Minister of a Government which has conducted a war and achieved victory. The wings of victory may bring us a new era of changed values, relations and bor-

ders. Victory in war may lead to victory in bringing permanent peace. May we witness great times and be worthy of them. In our hearts we bear concern for all, not only for the individual.

Much has been said of late about the fact that we have forgotten the day we set out on our great battle. We thought that it was over and that we could each sit beneath our grape vine and fig tree in peace and security, and we demanded more for ourselves than we could and should have. We are on the threshold of a new era, albeit one full of difficulties. We were victorious only on the battlefield, the political battle is still before us. Nor have we yet won the economic battle to enable hundreds and thousands of immigrants to come. I believe that the period we have been through will speak to their hearts and bring them to us from all the corners of the earth, with their knowledge and initiative, out of a love for the country and an overwhelming desire to contribute to expanding our ability, increasing our population and bringing our number to millions in this country.

The Speaker, K. Luz: The Knesset sitting devoted to reviewing the war and commemorating the memory of the IDF's glorious dead is ended.

(All rise and sing the national anthem, "Hatikva.")