

**Dinner speech by Maxime Verhagen, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, at the 8th Herzliya conference on the Balance of Israel's National Security, 21 January 2008, 8:00 p.m.**

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

**Introduction**

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to be here tonight at the Herzliya Conference.

This afternoon, I watched some young Israeli and Palestinian children playing football at the Herzliya stadium. While I was pacing up and down the field, I was reminded of watching my own sons play. The memory brought to mind one word: normality. All over the world, it is perfectly normal for boys and girls to get together and play football. Why should it matter that some players are Israeli and others Palestinian? This is what children should be doing. And I thought to myself: this is what I am going to wish Israel, on the occasion of its sixtieth anniversary. Normality.

**1. the Netherlands as a dependable ally**

Since the proclamation of the State of Israel on 14 May 1948, our two countries have developed warm relations. Successive Dutch governments have stood by Israel, providing both political and military support in times of crisis. And these exceptional ties have endured. Sixty years on, Israel is a modern democracy, founded on the rule of law. Yours is the only country in the Middle East that can genuinely make such a claim.

I feel a close personal bond with the people of Israel. The suffering inflicted on the Jewish people in the 20th century is one of the blackest pages of human history. This period must never be allowed to fade from our collective memory.

I fully understand Israel's refusal to do business with parties that do not recognise its right to exist and actively seek its destruction. Although I know that the issue is subject to debate, I see no place for Hamas at any negotiating table as long as it refuses to recognise Israel and renounce violence. We should never allow terrorism to assume the veneer of legitimacy. Israel and the Netherlands are united in the fight against terrorism, which is the common enemy of all civilised people.

Like many of you, I believe Iran's support to terrorist groups and its suspect nuclear activities pose a real threat, both to Israel and the world. I am in favour of stepping up the pressure on Tehran by means of sanctions.

Since I have been in office, I have actively pursued a more balanced international approach towards Israel. At the United Nations, censuring Israel has become something of a habit, while Hamas' terror is referred to in coded language or not at all. The Netherlands believes the record should be set straight, both in New York and at the Human Rights Council in Geneva. This approach has already yielded some success and we will continue our efforts.

## 2. How can the Netherlands support the Annapolis Process?

*(Annapolis and beyond: now is the time for decisive action)*

Ladies and gentlemen,

When Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas committed themselves in Annapolis to engage in negotiations aimed at reaching a peace settlement, this was truly an historic moment. For seven years, the peace process had effectively been stalled. Based on past experience, the world may have been sceptical about the meeting and its legacy. *You* may have been sceptical; maybe you still are. But what is the alternative to peace talks, other than a continuation of the violence and suffering of both Israelis and Palestinians?

Prime Minister Olmert showed great courage in Annapolis when he said: “I came here, *despite* the concerns and the doubts and the hesitations, to say: the time has come. We no longer [...] have the privilege of adhering to dreams which are disconnected from the suffering of our people, the hardships that they experience daily and the burden of living under ongoing uncertainty, which offers no hope of change or of a better future.” Time and again, we have seen that it is easier, and politically safer, to stick to a hard line than to take a chance on peace. Maintaining the status quo prevents accusations of selling out on security or other vital interests. The tragedy of Yitzhak Rabin is that the prospect of *ending* the conflict cost him his life. And yet most people in both Israel and the Palestinian Territories want peace.

Achieving a breakthrough is first and foremost in Israel’s own national interest. If things continue the way they are, the two-state solution will slowly but surely render itself irrelevant. Israel would then risk the prospect of one state for two peoples, with a Jewish minority. This, as Prime Minister Olmert has rightly noted, would compromise the existence of Israel as a Jewish state.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, the call for negotiations is all the more timely because of Iran. Israel shares a common interest with its neighbours to curb Iran’s growing influence. A peace settlement between Israelis and Palestinians, and between Israel and its neighbours would certainly put a spanner in the works for President Ahmadinejad.

The process launched in Annapolis is therefore an opportunity not to be missed. I pray that Prime Minister Olmert will receive the support he needs in seeing this through.

*(the contours of a peace agreement)*

No one, other than the parties involved, can decide what a peace agreement should look like. But we do have a clear indication of what both parties want and need. There is an emerging consensus on the main points of an agreement. This consensus has been built on the long-propagated, and now widely accepted, two-state solution, which entails a safe and secure Jewish Israeli state and a viable Palestinian Arab state. First of all, any comprehensive settlement will have to include guarantees for Israel’s security. Israel must in principle withdraw to its 4 June 1967 borders, which means it will have to give up a large proportion of its settlements. And the Palestinians will have to be given adequate territorial compensation for the settlements that Israel does keep. As for Jerusalem, a solution could be found along the lines that President Clinton suggested in 2000: Jerusalem would be the capital of two states.

An acceptable solution will also have to be found for the refugee issue, whether through resettlement in the future Palestinian state, rehabilitation in host countries or resettlement in a third country. Large-scale return to Israel by Palestinian refugees is not a realistic option. It would put the two-state solution in question. President Bush indicated two weeks ago that new international mechanisms, including compensation, would have to be created to resolve the refugee issue. I agree with him. Funds will have to be raised to compensate the Palestinian refugees who will not be able to return to Israel.

*(the need for compromise)*

As always, the devil is in the detail. Negotiations will be complex, and painful concessions will have to be made on both sides. But compromise is the only way out of the deadlock. Recently, I read a short essay by Amos Oz. In the most sensible terms, Oz described the meaning of the word compromise. Oz says that, to him, the word 'compromise' means life. He believes that the opposite of compromise is fanaticism and death, and he emphasises that compromise is not the same thing as capitulation. On the contrary, a compromise would allow both Palestinians and Israelis to emerge, *unbowed*, from decades of conflict.<sup>2</sup> Finding the political will to accept and defend such a compromise for the sake of the greater good is indeed a pre-condition for a successful outcome.

*(Israel's responsibilities)*

Israel holds the key to ensuring the success or failure of the Annapolis process. As a mature democracy, it should not compromise the responsibilities that come with democracy. As early as 1917, the Balfour Declaration stated that the civil and religious rights of non-Jewish communities should not be undermined. And of course this still holds true today.

I recognise Israel's right to self-defence. Between 2001 and 2007, almost 3,000 rockets were launched from Gaza and more than 2,500 mortar shells were fired by Palestinian terrorist organisations. So I understand that Israel needs to take measures aimed at curbing clear security threats. But these legitimate measures should be in proportion and not cause further suffering among innocent civilians. The more the population in Gaza is put through the mill, the more alienated and resentful they will feel. Frustration and anger can be important breeding grounds for radicalisation. So in my view, security demands must be met, but measures should be in proportion to the threat.

Let me say a little more about Gaza, as the situation there is very serious. Last night the international media reported that Gaza was dark, in other words virtually without electricity or fuel, and that all the border posts had been closed. These reports may not be telling the true, full story, but they are powerful images, which have a serious impact on world opinion. The people of Gaza are in the dark in more than one way. They must be led back to the road to peace, which is not the road Hamas is taking. We, Israel and its friends, must reach out to the people of Gaza and help them see the benefits of peace. Opening the borders, which enables them to trade and earn a living, is crucial. So these are the lines I want to follow. I plead with Israel to open the borders, allow electricity production, and ensure that sufficient food and medicine can reach the population. And I plead with the people of Gaza to distance themselves from terrorists and Hamas, and to join the peace process. And we have to make clear to Hamas that they will never achieve their goal through terrorism.

Building trust will be impossible if actions on the ground do not reflect the promises of Annapolis. As President Bush said during his visit two weeks ago, this means that any expansion of Israeli settlement should be halted and outposts should be dismantled. I would like to add that developments such as in Har Homa are completely counterproductive and will put Israel's good faith in question.

*(guaranteeing solutions)*

Ladies and gentlemen,

We, the international community, I, the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, wish to make the painful process of concessions easier for you. I have just stated that the contours of a peace agreement are known. They are known to us, they are known to you, they are known to the Palestinians. The question now is: how can we *guarantee* such a solution? What do you and what do the Palestinians need, in terms of guarantees for a lasting peace? It would mean a great deal if, during this conference, and during my stay here, I could find the answer to that question. The Dutch government has made a commitment to play an active role, and we stand ready to assist where we can. We want to eliminate the risks that a peace settlement poses to you. Please let us know how.

If there is to be a lasting peace, I believe that two essential conditions will have to be met: security and development.

Obviously Israel cannot accept any agreement that threatens its security. Once Israel withdraws to the agreed borders, there can be no security vacuum in the previously occupied territories. The best way to guarantee this would be to deploy a strong international force after a peace agreement has been signed. The United States will be indispensable to ensuring Israel's security. But others can also help. For my part, I can promise that I would do my utmost to ensure a Dutch contribution to such an international force, led, for instance, by NATO, once it has been mandated.

The European Union is already assisting efforts to improve security conditions by training Palestinian police forces through the EU Police Mission on the West Bank. Professional police forces will be an indispensable part of any future Palestinian state and can make an important contribution to Israel's security. But if they are to do so, Israel has to enable the Palestinian police to function effectively.

This brings me to the international assistance that will be essential in creating an economically viable Palestinian state and offering Palestinians the chance of a better life. The sense of urgency, sparked in Annapolis, was re-affirmed at the international donor conference in Paris last December. The amount of financial support that was pledged there – 7.4 billion US dollars – is unprecedented and even higher than the 5.8 billion the Palestinians had been seeking. The Netherlands pledged 10 million dollars, in addition to the 38 million we had already contributed to the Palestinians in 2007. This ready support underlines the international community's strong desire that Annapolis be the stepping stone to a breakthrough in the peace process. In my view, it is also a strong signal to the Palestinians that non-violence pays. But again, a word of caution is in order. If the process fails, the international community may not be willing to donate so generously again. There is a strong sense of 'now or never' attached to these pledges.

*(the involvement of Arab countries)*

The positive engagement of Arab countries is crucial to making Annapolis succeed. Their presence at Annapolis was encouraging, and now they also will have to accept their share of responsibility. I refer, for example, to Egypt, which could do more to prevent the smuggling of arms through tunnels to Gaza.

From here, I will travel on to Damascus. Syria can play either a very constructive or a very destructive role in the Middle East. In my meetings in Damascus, I will emphasise that Syria cannot have it both ways: Syria made the decision to participate in Annapolis. This entails a commitment to reach comprehensive peace and stability in the region via peaceful means. The conference of Palestinian Organisations, to be held in Damascus, will be attended by organisations that do not want peace with Israel but instead choose a path of terrorist attacks and armed struggle. I will urge the Syrian government not to participate in this conference and to renounce its aspirations. The Netherlands believes that Syria's legitimate claim to the Golan Heights should be addressed. But Syria has to live up to its responsibilities. This includes doing its utmost to prevent the flow of arms to Hezbollah across the Syrian-Lebanese border. And as the host country of the Lebanon Tribunal, I will also urge Syria to cooperate fully with the tribunal. Syria also has a constructive role to play with regard to the presidential elections in Lebanon.

*(the relationship between Israel and the EU)*

I would like to make a few remarks on the role of the European Union. I am convinced that there can be no solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict without US involvement. At the same time, I think the EU should enlarge its political role and step up its involvement in support of the new, substantive and credible peace process launched in Annapolis. Recently, I wrote to my fellow European ministers, asking them to consider the EU's involvement.

I believe the EU should follow a two track approach. First of all, the EU should take the lead, coordinating with Quartet Representative Tony Blair, in assisting the creation of a viable Palestinian state. The EU is already the largest donor to the Palestinian Territories. We should continue that active involvement and we should build on it. For example, by adding the water sector to the list of final status issues the EU should focus on. Water is a high priority for Israelis and Palestinians alike. It is an issue that calls for cross-border cooperation and solutions, including with other countries in the region. Here, the Netherlands has a great deal of experience to share. We currently support cooperation in the strategic water sector between Israel, the Palestinian Territories and Jordan.

Second, the EU should intensify its relations with Israel. Israel's association with the European Internal Market could be deepened, as well as its involvement in various European agencies, programmes and working groups. Part and parcel of this process would be strengthening the human rights dialogue between Israel and the EU. I would like to make real progress in the months to come, taking into consideration developments in the post-Annapolis process. Any mistrust that may exist among my fellow EU ministers could be mitigated by the resolute implementation of Israel's obligations under the Road Map. As I have said, halting the expansion of settlements and dismantling outposts would make a great difference in this respect.

### 3. The need for dialogue: without either anger or zeal

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me take you back to the first century for a brief moment. At that time, both our countries were part of the Roman Empire. We were both on the outskirts, but still firmly under Roman rule. It is interesting to note that we both revolted against the Romans at the same time – and we were both unsuccessful in defeating them. The Batavian revolt of Julius Civilis, in my part of the world, coincided with the Jewish uprising and the destruction of the Temple in the year seventy CE. The Roman historian and Senator Tacitus described these events in his *Histories*.

Tacitus' motto, *sine ira et studio*, or, 'without either anger or zeal', could usefully be applied to the Middle East peace process. For there is too much anger and zeal in this region. Restraint – as practised by Tacitus – is needed. Can Israelis and Palestinians enter into the negotiations without prejudice? Over the years, a deep mistrust has developed. Palestinians, and the wider Arab world, have accused Israel of not fulfilling its promises. And vice versa: the Palestinian leadership has failed you, and its own people, in the past.

Yet the past should not overshadow the future. I'm reminded of Spinoza, that famous philosopher, the son of Portuguese-Jewish immigrants who came to Holland in the early seventeenth century. He wrote that peace is not merely the absence of war, but that it is a *virtue, a state of mind, a disposition for benevolence*.<sup>3</sup> This state of mind, this benevolence, must prevail on both sides if peace talks are to succeed. Parties will need to come to terms with each other's history and recognise one another's suffering. I found it extremely encouraging that in Annapolis, Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas showed that they were aware of each other's needs, concerns and fears. If people are to live together in mutual respect, dialogue is an indispensable tool. This applies to political leaders as much as to ordinary citizens: mutual understanding can only be achieved by getting to know each other better and showing empathy for one another's situation.

This does not imply that you should lose sight of your vital needs: recognition and security. Those two needs will have to be met, but as the *result* of the process and not a *prerequisite*. And the same goes for your Palestinian interlocutors. For negotiations to take place in good faith, both parties should abstain from locking themselves into positions that they know cannot be readily accepted by the other side. Both parties should be reasonable, not fanatical, in their demands and expectations. Both parties should also persevere. They should not allow their political dialogue to be derailed because of isolated incidents, however disappointing these may be. Setbacks on the ground are part of every process, yet everyone concerned should keep their eyes on the prize, the ultimate goal of a peace settlement.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As a friend of Israel, I have delivered an honest message. I would like to close by assuring you that I intend to further strengthen the relations between our two countries. One way to do this is through a political dialogue. Such a dialogue should enable us to continue our discussion in a structural manner, and it will help me find an answer to the question of how I can help to guarantee a lasting peace. Only peace will bring about the normality we all yearn for.

Thank you.

- [1](#): In interview in Jerusalem Post, 1 January 2008
- [2](#): Amos Oz, 'Between Right and Right' in: How to Cure a Fanatic, Princeton University Press, 2006.
- [3](#): Tractatus Politicus, Chapter V, fourth paragraph