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Mrs. Meir Speech - Oct. 23

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Meir Statement on Cease-Fire

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[Statement to the Knesset by Prime Minister Golda Meir--live]

[Text] Honorable Knesset speaker, honorable Knesset: first of all, forgive me for being late arriving in Jerusalem. There was an urgent meeting and I had to stop on the way.

The Government of Israel decided unanimously on 22 October to respond to the appeal of the U.S. Government and President Nixon and to announce its readiness to accept a cease-fire on the basis of the Security Council resolution that came in the wake of a joint U.S.-Soviet proposal. According to this draft resolution, the military forces will remain in the positions they hold the moment the cease-fire goes into effect. The implementation of the cease-fire is conditional on reciprocity. Our decision was brought to the attention of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, and now to the attention of the Knesset.

On the basis of the U.S.-Soviet draft resolution, the Security Council decided the following:

1. The Security Council calls upon all parties to the present fighting to cease all firing and terminate all military activity immediately no later than 12 hours after the moment of the adoption of this decision in the positions they now occupy.
2. The Security Council calls upon the parties concerned to start, immediately after the cease-fire, the implementation of Security Council resolution No 242 in all of its parts.
3. The Security Council decides that, immediately and concurrently with the cease-fire, negotiations will start between the parties concerned under appropriate auspices aimed at establishing a just and durable peace in the Middle East.

With regard to the second clause in the draft resolution, the government decided to instruct the Israeli representative at the United Nations to include in his speech at the Security Council a paragraph explaining that our acceptance of this clause is given with the definition made by Israel when it decided in August 1970 to respond to the initiative of the U.S. Government regarding a cease-fire and as communicated to the United Nations on 4 August 1970 and as stated by the prime minister in the Knesset on the same day. This has also been conveyed to the U.S. Government,

Israel's acceptance of a cease-fire with Egypt is conditional on Egypt's acceptance, and is not conditional on Syria's acceptance of a cease-fire with Israel and vice versa. The government also decided to clarify with the U.S. Government a series of points closely connected with the substance of the Security Council resolution and the dates pertaining to it. It is our intention to clarify and insure, among other things, that the cease-fire applies to all regular forces stationed on the territory of the country which accepts the cease-fire, including forces of a foreign country, such as the armies of Iraq and Jordan in Syria, as well as forces of other Arab states which are taken part and are taking part in the war.

The cease-fire will also apply to the activity of irregular forces operating against the Israel from territories of the states which pledge to observe the cease-fire. The cease-fire will insure the prevention of a blockade and of interference with free navigation in the Strait of Bab al-Mandeb for ships, including oil tankers, on their way to Elat.

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will insure that the term 'negotiation between the sides' means direct negotiations. It goes without saying that it is also necessary to insure that the procedures, mapping and supervision of the cease-fire will be determined by an agreement.

Knesset members: A subject of great importance which is dear to our hearts is the release of the prisoners of war. The Government of Israel has decided to demand the mutual exchange of prisoners. We discussed this matter with the U.S. Government, which took part in the initiative for the cease-fire. I discussed this matter yesterday with Secretary of State Dr Kissinger. We shall insist on an immediate mutual exchange of prisoners.

On the arrival of Dr Kissinger's plane at Andrews base near Washington, State Department Spokesman Mr McCloskey told journalists--and I quote: "We believe the matter that should be allotted priority after the cease-fire is the exchange of prisoners. We and the Soviet Union have pledged to make efforts to insure that this matter is implemented." And I stress again that this subject is one of the main tests of the cease-fire, and we [words indistinct] that the pledges of the cease-fire initiators will indeed be implemented.

Knesset members: I shall say a few words about our military position on the Syrian and Egyptian fronts on the eve of the cease-fire. The lines we occupy today on the Syrian front are better than those we held on 6 October. Not only do we now have all the area that was under our control in the past, but our position has also been improved greatly by taking the positions on the ridge of Mount Hermon and on the frontline to the east--the line which has moved the former cease-fire line into a better position resting on the strong back of the ridges of Mount Hermon in the north.

On the Egyptian front, the Egyptians indeed achieved a military accomplishment by crossing the canal, but in a daring IDF counterattack, our forces succeeded in taking control once again of a significant part of the eastern canal line and in capturing a vast area west of the canal--an area which opens up both defensive and offensive possibilities if the need arises. This development deprives the Egyptian Army of the ability to threaten Sinai and Israel with an offensive attack. It also deprives the Egyptians of the ability to hit essential installations and areas in our territory.

The IDF forces west of the canal constitute a strong military base for the development of operative operations initiated by us if need be.

With regard to the question of the cease-fire, U.S. Secretary of State Dr Kissinger and his aides came to Israel while en route from Moscow to Washington. The visit was a good opportunity for a thorough clarification of issues which arise on the occasion of a cease-fire, and for an exchange of views in a friendly manner on what is about to happen and what is meant by Israel's response to the appeal of the U.S. Government to accept a cease-fire. During this visit we continued and strengthened the contacts which preceded the Security Council resolution.

In all our contacts with the United States, I have learned that not only does the United States not have a plan regarding borders and the other components of peace, but also that it believes that those employing their good offices should lead toward a situation in which the parties themselves, and themselves alone, should make proposals and plans regarding the future. Furthermore, I should stress that according to authoritative information reaching me, the Moscow talks did not deal with anything other than what is included in the Security Council resolution.

Knesset members: I must declare that the Syrian Government has not yet responded to the cease-fire resolution. Fighting on this front is continuing, and the IDF will operate there in accordance with its plans.

As for the Egyptian front, the firing against our forces has not yet ceased. The IDF has been compelled to act as necessary as long as the firing continues. At this time I will only say that we are examining the behavior of the Egyptians while maintaining military and political alertness. If Egypt continues combat activity, we will consider ourselves free to adopt any action or move the situation may call for.

Honorable speaker: I will not exaggerate the assessments regarding the political activity which preceded the cease-fire. At any rate, it was not us who made the move for a cease-fire. From the standpoint of the situation on the fronts, there was no reason for such a move on our part. It was not us who initiated the time and the clauses of the Security Council resolution. Our forces on the fronts were not in an inferior combat position. As already stated, we saw fit to respond to the appeal of the United States and its President, since:

First--The State of Israel by nature does not want war and does not want the loss of human life. All the governments of Israel have been convinced that wars will not advance peace.

Second--The proposal for a cease-fire came at a moment when our position was strong on both fronts and at a moment when our gains were valuable and justified an acceptance of a cease-fire despite the enemy's gains east of the canal.

Third--We responded to the appeal of the United States and its President out of appreciation for its constructive policy in the Middle East at this time. Great importance is attached to our response with regard to the continued strengthening of Israel and especially with regard to the continuation of military and political aid in the war that was imposed on us. With regard to the U.S. military aid, I would like to quote President Nixon's statement on 19 October when he submitted to Congress his generous proposal regarding the financing of the military shipments.

I quote: "The steps I have taken reflect my belief that we must adopt these steps which are necessary for the maintenance of the balance of military power and for the achievement of stability in the region. In order to maintain the balance of power, and thus, to achieve stability, the U.S. Government is now supplying military equipment to Israel in order to fill the gaps created in the wake of the fighting. This is necessary in order to prevent the creation of an actual imbalance due to the wide-scale resupply from the Soviet Union to Syria and Egypt. The cost of replacing equipment which is wearing out and equipment which was lost by the Israeli Armed Forces is very high. In the last 12 days of the war, the United States approved shipments to Israel of materials costing \$825 million, including transportation. The expensive items which the U.S. government is now supplying to the Israeli forces include conventional ammunition of many kinds, air-to-air and air-to-surface missiles, guns, crew-operated weapons and personal weapons, and a variety of conventional types of ammunition for fighter planes. The United States is also supplying tanks, aircraft, communications and other military equipment to replace the equipment lost in action."

Knesset Members: The Arab rulers were put to the test by the Security Council resolution. The world will be the witness to learn whether they seek peace or the continuation of war. The attitude of the Egyptian rulers toward war and the loss of human life is different from ours. You all remember the Egyptian president's statement about his readiness to sacrifice millions of his people.

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On 16 October, after the IDF succeeded in establishing a bridgehead west of the canal, the Egyptian president spoke with much bragging and scoffed a cease-fire. He said, among other things--and I quote: "We are prepared to accept a cease-fire on the basis of the withdrawal of Israeli forces from all occupied territories immediately under international supervision to the lines that existed before 5 June 1967."

Knesset Members: Only a few days passed and Egypt accepted a cease-fire. None of the conditions AS Sadat set in his speech was included in the Security Council resolution. The third clause of the Security Council resolution says--and I quote: "The Security Council decides that immediately and concurrently with the cease-fire, negotiations will start between the parties concerned under appropriate auspices aimed at establishing a just and durable peace in the Middle East."

According to the authoritative version given by the U.S. representatives, the meaning of negotiations between the parties is direct negotiations between Israel and its neighbors concerning a just and durable peace. Such a clear statement was not included in Security Council resolution No 242, and it is also not included now in this resolution. But this is the official interpretation obtained from the highest U.S. sources.

Not only this, but the timing of the negotiations was also established in the present resolution. The negotiations should be held immediately and concurrently with the cease-fire. There is no need to stress that we attach great importance to clause 3 of the Security Council resolution (if) our neighbors will, indeed, fulfill it.

Along with the decision for direct negotiations between Israel and Egypt, which has accepted the cease fire, we should also take into consideration the binding aspect of clause 2 of the recent Security Council resolution regarding the cease-fire. It has always been the position of the Government of Israel--and I also explained this in my Knesset statement on 4 August 1973--that the implementation of Security Council resolution No 242 will come after negotiations between the parties and on the basis of an agreement between them.

Knesset members: No distinction should be made between clause 2 and clause 3 of the Security Council resolution. The U.S. ambassador at the United Nations, Mr Scali, explained the position of the United States on the subject--and I quote: "The second clause calls for the implementation of the Security Council resolution in all its parts after the cease-fire. The council members and the parties concerned are very familiar with Security Council resolution 242, and there is no need for interpretations here. The clause is linked with clause 3, which calls for an immediate start of negotiations between the parties concerned under appropriate auspices aimed at establishing a just and durable peace in the Middle East." End of quote from the statement of the U.S. representative at the United Nations.

Knesset members: Israel is taking the latest Security Council resolution with all seriousness. The cease-fire and the holding of direct negotiations between Israel and the states which have accepted and are maintaining the cease-fire--in other words, a cease-fire and the opening of direct negotiations for peace--can be a historic turning point in developments in the Middle East--a turning point from war to peace. The opening of direct and serious negotiations can replace the bloody road imposed on us in the past with a road that leads to peace.

We have accepted the cease-fire not out of weakness but from a position of strength, military initiative and drive. We regard our agreement to the Security Council resolution as an obligation on us to help bring about the change which the region needs so much and which has been sought by the Israeli people and government for many years.

change is possible and imperative and lacks nothing but sincere readiness on the part of our neighbors. However, to my regret I cannot bring you the good news that signs have already been seen that the Egyptian Government will fulfill the pledge it undertook when it agreed to the cease-fire. Hence, the Government of Israel will act as the situation warrants.

I have already said (word indistinct) the government decision regarding clause No 2 of the Security Council resolution which discusses the implementation of Security Council resolution 242. The Arab rulers ostensibly advocate resolution 242, but they undermine every attempt to advance toward achieving the main aim of the resolution--peace. They first did this by their stubborn refusal to negotiate with us without preconditions, and then by distorting the interpretation and the essential implication of the resolution.

Knesset Members: On various occasions the Government of Israel has formally announced its stand regarding Security Council resolution 242. Our declarations were made from international platforms and at diplomatic meetings. We also brought them to the attention of the Knesset, the Knesset Foreign Affairs Committee, and the general public.

In August 1970, when a cease-fire was discussed and when we were asked by the U.S. Government, I said then and I quote: "Israel has announced publicly that out of its right to secure and defensible borders, it will not return to the borders of June 1967, which expose the state to aggression and which grant decisive advantages to the aggressor. Our stand was and remains that in the absence of peace we shall continue to maintain the situation established by the cease-fire [of 1967]. The cease-fire lines can only be replaced by secure, recognized and agreed borders which will be determined in a peace treaty. And naturally it was made clear to all that our firm stand is still maintained regarding the right of uniting Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. By agreeing to the U.S. Government initiative, Israel was not asked nor did it undertake any territorial commitments. On the contrary, the Government of Israel has received support for its stand that no Israeli soldier will return from the cease-fire lines until a reciprocal and binding peace agreement is reached."

Knesset Members, the terrible war which was imposed on us strengthens our realization of how vital are defensible borders, for which we will struggle vigorously.

It is worthwhile to remember that since the outbreak of the war on the Day of Atonement, terrorist activity has also resumed from the Lebanese border. Up to this morning 116 acts of aggression were carried out within 17 days. Forty-four civilian settlements on the northern border were attacked and shelled. Some 20 civilians and 6 soldiers were killed or wounded in these attacks. Residents of border settlements can rest assured that the IDF forces are alert and aware of the situation. Despite the active defensive deployment in this sphere, it has again been proven that defensive activity alone is not sufficient to end terrorism.

Knesset Members, the war we are engaged in started with an premeditated attack on both fronts. The aggressive initiative resulted in initial achievements for our enemies, but thanks to the strength and spirit of the IDF, which leans on the entire nation, the attack was broken, the aggressors were repulsed, large parts of their forces were destroyed, and the IDF broke through and moved beyond the cease-fire lines. From holding actions, our forces moved to the offensive and scored achievements. On both fronts our forces are now beyond the cease-fire lines, holding strong positions, and their spirit is unbroken. The nation is united around its army.

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Israel desires a cease-fire. Israel will honor the cease-fire on the basis of reciprocity and only on this basis. Israel would wholeheartedly like cease-fire negotiations to start immediately to lead to peace. Israel is capable of mobilizing the necessary internal strength in order to advance toward an honorable peace within defensible borders. We shall be happy if such readiness is to be shown among the people and Government of Egypt. However, if the Egyptian rulers seek to resume the war, they will find Israel prepared, armed and strong.

Knesset members, just before I left for Jerusalem I learned that the Egyptian Government has requested a Security Council meeting. It appears it wants to put blame on Israel that belongs to itself. This Egyptian move indicated that the cease-fire was violated premeditatedly. Egypt reminds us that we are in war. Not only peace, but also the maintenance of cease-fire agreements depend on the willingness of both sides. We still hope that Egypt will honor the pledge it undertook only yesterday, but if Egypt continues the fighting, Israel will not be able to remain indifferent.