



Det Udenrigspolitiske Nævn
UPN FT-del - Bilag 37
Offentligt

יושב-ראש הכנסת

Speaker of the Knesset

Jerusalem, 1st November, 2004
17th Heshvan, 5765

The Honourable Christian Mejdahl
Speaker of the Folketing
Folketinget
Christiansborg
1240 Copenhagen K
Denmark

Dear Colleague,

I would like to share with you some of my thoughts and feelings regarding the political events of the last week in Israel since, in my opinion, they touch on experiences that many of you might have shared as Speakers in your respective parliaments. In the future, I may take the liberty to share with you thoughts and feelings regarding various global issues that are of common concern to us all. Of course, similar communications from you will be most welcome.

Last Monday and Tuesday, we had an exceptionally turbulent session in the Knesset regarding the plan to dismantle Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip and several settlements in Samaria, within the context of the disengagement plan initiated by the Prime Minister. Presiding over this session, which reflected the divisions prevalent today in the Israeli body politik, was no easy task for me. It is difficult to maintain decorum when a sensitive political issue is being passionately debated in plenum. However, this time I was particularly torn between the need to remain impartial and objective, and my own strong ideological and political feelings regarding the issue under debate.

As you must be aware, over the past four years the citizens of Israel have experienced incessant indiscriminate violence perpetrated by Palestinian terrorist organizations following the unsuccessful summit at Camp David between Palestinian and Israeli leaders in July 2000. More than a thousand Israelis have been killed in this period, and thousands have been wounded and maimed. The Palestinians have undergone great suffering as well, as a result of the decision of their leaders to resort to violence rather than pursue the path of negotiations whose goal is to resolve our deep political differences by peaceful means.



יושב-ראש הכנסת

Speaker of the Knesset

In recent years we in Israel have come to feel that there is no credible partner on the Palestinian side - a partner we can trust to comply with repeated written commitments to resolve disagreements by means of negotiations rather than violence, to stop incitement, to arrest terrorists, and to confiscate illegal weapons. The Palestinian leadership has been unable or unwilling to meet these commitments. Under these circumstances, the Israeli Government, led by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, decided to follow a different track - unilateral disengagement from Gaza and part of the West Bank. Sharon first brought the plan to the Government for its approval, and after a majority in the Government voted in its favor, presented it to the Knesset for debate and a vote.

Last week's debate, in which all the advantages and disadvantages of this plan were weighed, was heated. To summarize the main positions in this debate, those in favor of the disengagement plan pointed to the need to physically separate Israelis from Palestinians, especially in a sensitive area like the Gaza Strip, and expressed the hope that starting this process would bring with it more security to Israel and a gateway to the renewal of negotiations between us and our neighbors, once a credible leadership on the Palestinian side emerges. Those opposing the disengagement pointed to the absence of an effective partner able to ensure that terrorism against Israel from the areas to be evacuated will cease, feared that the disengagement will be viewed merely as a first step leading to further demands for territorial concessions by Israel, and viewed it as a reward for terrorism. The debate culminated in a vote that approved the plan.

As I have already implied, I found myself in one of the more difficult dilemmas of my political career. I am an admirer of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon for everything he stands for, have maintained a close working relationship with him, and supported him in full. However, when he presented his current plan to the public and to the Knesset, I found myself as one of a sizable group of Knesset Members from his own party that did not see eye to eye with him on this issue, and considered it a mistake. Therefore, I publicly criticized the plan, and drew much fire, both from the Prime Minister, and from the media. At the same time, I also received much sympathy from those who shared my point of view.

Nevertheless, when I presided over the proceedings in the plenum, I maintained strict neutrality, letting every Member express his position without interruption, while exercising my right to vote against the program as an individual Knesset Member. I was the only Knesset Member present who refrained from taking the floor to address the plenum. In light of emotionally charged demonstrations outside the compound by those opposed to the plan, and more subdued demonstrations by those favoring it, it was not an easy task to ensure that decorum



יושב-ראש הכנסת

Speaker of the Knesset

be maintained. I consider the fact that we were successful in this endeavor a tribute to the resilience of Israel's democracy.

The political ramifications of the vote have not yet crystallized. There is still strong opposition within the ruling party, the Likud, to which I belong, to the plan, and insistence that despite the results of the Knesset vote, a referendum be held. However, the holding of referenda is not part of the Israeli system, and, as Speaker of the Knesset, I object to a referendum that in my opinion would weaken the validity of the current Israeli political system under which the will of the people is expressed by means of elections to the Knesset. Several leading members of the Government have conditioned their remaining in it on the Prime Minister's agreement to hold a referendum, something to which he strongly objects. Unless the current political crisis is resolved in the near future, the result might be a Government reshuffle, a change in the make-up of the coalition, or even early elections.

I have decided to share my thoughts about these developments with you, both because you might have experienced similar parliamentary conflicts, and because I am proud of the fact that we have managed to conduct the whole decision-making process with the utmost regard to upholding the principles of democracy, enabling Arabs and Jews, the religious and the secular, Right-wingers and Left-wingers alike to speak openly in our parliament, express their divergent views, and then participate in the final democratic vote.

Dear colleague, I thank you for your attention, and hope that this communication, that comes from the bottom of my heart, will be the beginning of an ongoing, and frank dialogue between us.

Yours Sincerely,

Reuven (Ruby) Rivlin
Speaker of the Knesset

Folketingets formand
Speaker of the Danish Parliament

KOPI



The Honourable Reuven Rivlin
Speaker of the Knesset

AFSENDT

17 December 2004

Dear Reuven Rivlin,

Thank you for your letter on recent developments in the Knesset. I appreciate that you offered to share your thoughts on the challenges you have faced during the past months' difficult political deliberations in the Knesset on the plan to dismantle Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip and Samaria.

I have forwarded you letter to the Foreign Policy Committee for its consideration.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Christian Mejdahl'.

Christian Mejdahl
Speaker of the Folketing