

Monday 27 September 2021

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's Address to the United Nations General Assembly in New York:

Thank you Mr. President
Distinguished delegates,

Israel is a lighthouse in a stormy sea.

A beacon of democracy,
diverse by design,
innovative by nature
and eager to contribute to the world –
despite being in the toughest neighborhood on earth.

We are an ancient nation.

Returned - to our ancient homeland,
Revived - our ancient language,
Restored - our ancient sovereignty.

Israel is a miracle of Jewish revival.

Am Yisrael Chai - the nation of Israel is alive,
and the State of Israel is its beating heart.

For way too long, Israel was defined by wars with our neighbors.

But this is not what Israel is about.

This is not what the people of Israel are about.

Israelis don't wake up in the morning thinking about conflict.

Israelis like everyone else, want to lead a good life,
take care of our families,
and build a better world for our children.

Which means that from time to time, we might need to leave our jobs,
say goodbye to our families,
and rush to the battlefield to defend our country –
just like my friends and I have had to do ourselves.

They should not be judged for it.

Israelis remember the dark horrors of our past,

but remain determined to look ahead,
to build a brighter future.

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Distinguished delegates,

There are two plagues that are challenging the very fabric of society at this moment,

One is the coronavirus,
Which has killed over 5 million people around the globe,
the other, has also shaken the world as we know it—
It's the disease of political polarization.

Both coronavirus and polarization can erode public trust in our institutions,
Both - can paralyze nations

If left unchecked, their effects on society — can be devastating.

In Israel, we faced both, and rather than accept them as a force of nature,
we stood up,
took action,
And we can already see the horizon.

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In a polarized world,
Where algorithms fuel our anger,

people on the right and on the left operate in two separate realities,
each in their own social media bubble,
they hear only the voices that confirm what they already believe in.

People end up hating each other.

Societies – get torn apart.

Countries broken from within – go nowhere.

In Israel, after four elections in two years, with a fifth looming, the people yearned for
an antidote:

Calm. Stability. An honest attempt for political normalcy.

Inertia is always the easiest choice.

But there are moments in time where leaders have to take the wheel a moment before the cliff,
Face the heat,
And drive the country to safety.

And that's exactly what we did.

About a hundred days ago my partners and I formed a new government in Israel.

The most diverse government in our history.

What started as a political accident, can now turn into a purpose.

And that purpose is unity.

Today we sit together, around one table.

We speak to each other with respect,
we act with decency,
and we carry a message:
Things can be different.

Even though we harbor very different political opinions we sit together for the sake of our nation.

It's okay to disagree,
it's okay—in fact vital—that different people think differently,
it's even okay to argue.

For healthy debate is a basic tenet of the Jewish tradition and one of the secrets to the success of the start-up nation.

Just enter one of the companies and you'll see that debate going on. Debate is the powers of innovation.

What we have proven, is that even in the age of social media,
We can debate, without hate.

The second great disease we're all facing is the coronavirus, sweeping the world.
To overcome –
we going to need to make new discoveries,

gain new insights,
and achieve new breakthroughs.
It all begins with the pursuit of knowledge.

The State of Israel is on the front lines of the search for this vital knowledge.

We developed a model, which fuses the wisdom of science with the power of policymaking.

The Israeli model has three guiding principles:

One — the country must stay open

We all paid a huge price: an economic price, a physical price and an emotional price
—for bringing life to a standstill in 2020.

But my friends, to bring economies back to growth,
children back to school,
and parents back to work,

Lockdowns, restrictions, quarantines – aren't the way, you can't do it in the long term.

Our model, rather than locking people down in passive sleep-mode,
recruits them to the effort.

For example we asked Israeli families to carry out home-testing of their children so we can keep schools open—and indeed schools stayed open. Now I can tell you that we are going to distribute dozens of these self-tests to all Israeli parents. They can be part of the fight.

The Second Rule—vaccinate early.

Right from the start, Israelis were quick to get vaccinated.

We are in a race against a deadly virus and we must try to be ahead of it.

In July we were the first to learn that the vaccines were waning and getting weaker—that's what brought a surge in Delta cases.

It was then when my government decided to administer a third dose of vaccine—the booster—to the Israeli public.

It was a tough decision, given that at the time the FDA hadn't yet even approved it.

Yet we faced a choice to either drag Israel into yet another set of lockdowns, further harm our economy and society; or to double-down on vaccines.

We chose the latter.

We pioneered the booster shot.

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Now, two months in I can report that it works:

With a third dose, you're 7 times more protected than with two doses, and 40 times more protected than without any vaccine. The booster works.

As a result, Israel is on course to escape the fourth wave without a lockdown,

without further harm to our economy.

Israel's economy is growing, unemployment is going down.

I'm glad that our actions have inspired other countries to follow with the booster.

The third rule – Adapt and move quickly.

We formed a national task force that meets everyday, I lead it. This task force is intended to bypass slow governmental bureaucracy, make quick decisions and act on them right away.

Trial and error is key.

Every day is a new day, with new data and new decisions.

When something works,
we keep it.
When it doesn't, we ditch it.

Running a country during a pandemic is not only about health.

It's about carefully balancing all aspects of life that are affected by corona, especially Jobs and education.

While doctors are important, they cannot be the ones running the national initiative.

The only person that has a good vantage point of all of this – is the national leader of any given country.

Above all, we're doing everything in our power to provide people with the tools needed to protect their lives.

The ancient Jewish text, the Talmud, says that:
"Whoever saves one life, is as if he saved an entire world",
And that's what we aspire to do.

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Distinguished delegates,
While Israel strives to do good, we cannot lose sight for one moment of what's happening in our neighborhood.

Israel is, quite literally, surrounded by Hezbollah, Shia militias, Islamic Jihad, and Hamas.
On our borders.

These terror groups seek to dominate the Middle East and spread radical Islam across the world.

What do they all have in common?

They all want to destroy my country,
And they're all backed by Iran.

They get their funding from Iran,
they get their training from Iran,
and they get their weapons from Iran.

Iran's great goal is crystal clear to anybody who cares to open their eyes:

Iran seeks to dominate the region — and seeks to do so under a nuclear umbrella.

For the past three decades Iran has spread its carnage and destruction around the Middle East, country after country:

Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Gaza.

What do all these places have in common?

They are all falling apart.

Their citizens — hungry and suffering.

Their economies —collapsing.

Like the Midas touch, Iran's regime has the "Mullah-touch" —

Every place Iran touches —fails.

If you think Iranian terror is confined to the Israel— you're wrong.

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Distinguished delegates,

In 1988, Iran set up a "death commission" that ordered the mass murder of 5,000 political activists.

They were hanged from cranes.

This "death commission" was made up of four people;
Ebrahim Raisi - Iran's new president, was one of them.

Raisi also oversaw the murder of Iranian children.

His nickname is "the butcher of Tehran", because that's exactly what he did — he butchered his own people.

One of the witnesses of this massacre, stated in her testimony, that when Raisi would finish a round of murder, he'd throw a party, pocketing the money of those he just executed minutes ago... and then would sit down to eat cream cakes.

He celebrated the murder of his own people, by devouring cream cakes.

And now Raisi is Iran's new president.
This is who we're dealing with.

Over the past few years, Iran has made a major leap forward,
in its nuclear R&D,
in its production-capacity,
and in its enrichment.

Iran's nuclear weapon program is at a critical point.

All red lines have been crossed.

Inspections — ignored.

All wishful-thinking — proven false.

Iran is violating the IAEA's safeguard agreements — and it's getting away with it.

They harass inspectors and sabotage their investigations —
and they're getting away with it.

They enrich Uranium to the level of 5% which is one step short of weapons-grade
material —
and they're getting away with it.

Evidence which clearly proves Iran's intentions for nuclear weapons in secret sites in
Toorkooz-abad, Teheran & Marivan — is ignored.

Iran's nuclear program has hit a watershed moment;
and so has our tolerance.

Words do not stop centrifuges from spinning.

There are those in the world who seem to view Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons as an inevitable reality, as a done deal — or they've just become tired of hearing about it.

Israel doesn't have that privilege.
We will not tire.

We will not allow Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon.

I want to tell you something:
Iran is much weaker, much more vulnerable than it seems.

It's economy is sinking,
Its regime is rotten and divorced from the younger generation,
Its corrupt government fails to even bring water to large parts of the country.

The weaker they are, the more extreme they go.

If we put our heads to it,
if we're serious about stopping it,
if we use all our resourcefulness,
we can prevail.

And that's exactly what we're going to do.

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But not everything is dark in the Middle East.

Alongside worrying trends, there are also rays of light.

First and foremost the growing ties Israel is forging with Arab and Muslim countries. Ties that began 42 years ago with Israel's historic peace agreement with Egypt, continued 27 years ago with Israel's peace agreement with Jordan, and even more recently with the "Abraham Accords" — that normalized our relations with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Morocco.

More is to come.

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At a ripe young age of 73, more and more nations are understanding Israel's value and unique place in the world.

Some friends have stood with us since our founding.

The United States of America is a long time, trusted friend of Israel, as we saw, yet again—just a few days ago in congress.

Alongside our old friends, we are gaining new friends — in the Middle East and beyond.

Last week this manifested itself with the defeat of the racist, anti-Semitic, Durban conference.

This conference was originally meant to be against racism, but over the years turned into a conference of racism — against Israel and the Jewish people.

And the world's had enough of this.

I want to thank the 38 countries (38!) who chose truth over lies, and skipped the conference.

And to those countries who chose to participate in this farce, I say:
Attacking Israel doesn't make you morally superior,
fighting the only democracy in the Middle East doesn't make you "Woke",
adopting cliché's about Israel without bothering to learn the basic facts, well.. that's just plain lazy.

Every member state in this building has a choice.

It's not a political choice, but a moral one.

It's a choice between darkness and light.

Darkness that persecutes political prisoners, murders the innocent, abuses women & minorities, and seeks to end the modern world as we know it.

Or light — that pursues freedom, prosperity and opportunity.

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Over the past 73 years, the State of Israel — the people of Israel — have achieved so much in the face of so much.

And yet, I can say with full confidence:
Our best days are ahead of us.

Israel is a nation of great hope,

Israel is a nation that has brought the heritage of the Torah to life in modern-day
Israel,

a nation of an unbreakable spirit.

מעט מן האור דוחה הרבה מן החושך.
A bit of light dispels much darkness.

The lighthouse among the stormy seas –
Stands tall,
Stands strong,

And her light shines brighter than ever.

Thank you.