

Press Conference for the Arab Ambassadors in New Zealand

on 6 December 2006

Syrian Ambassador: The root cause of the problem in the region is occupation, because all solutions tend to look at issues which are far from the real situation. They want, for example, the Palestinian resistance to cease, and they don't question the Israeli responsibility in this matter. They ask Hamas to recognise Israel, while Israel does not recognise the Palestinian rights. We should put responsibility for all states. Of course the Arab countries have responsibilities to achieve, but also equally, if not more than that because Israel is the aggressor party and Israel has the responsibility for the Palestinian right to return, for withdrawing from the occupied territories according to the United Nations Security Council Resolutions. Israel always dictates itself as being the victim, while the Arabs are the victims.

More than ten thousand Palestinians are in the Israeli jails and they are members of the Parliament and the Palestinian Government. Israel claims that they want good partner for negotiations, and actually ministers from both Fatah and Hamas are in jails, which means that Israel does not want peace. If Israel seriously wants peace then they should grasp the opportunities which were given to Israel many times. In Beirut Summit in 2002, the Arabs collectively and on summit level, not only the Arab countries which are involved directly with the Arab-Israeli conflict, submitted peace to Israel. All Arab countries collectively and on summit level submitted peace to Israel on a tray of gold, and in less than 24 hours, Israel responded with the massacre of Jenin, for which

Secretary General Kofi Annan dispatched Terry Rod Larsen to investigate the crimes.

Israel is practising on the Arabs its state terrorism, as in the last war on Lebanon. This is state terrorism against Lebanon, and one thousand three hundred people were obliterated, aside from the devastation of the infrastructure of the country. We should ask Israel to hold its responsibilities, and we shouldn't continue to treat Israel as above the law. Israel should be subject like all other countries, like New Zealand, like Syria, like Egypt, Lebanon. All countries should be subject to the international law.

Yesterday's meeting with the Prime Minister was very useful and very good meeting, and we highly appreciate, as my colleagues said, the independent position that New Zealand is taking in the international arena, and Syria highly regards the courageous position that New Zealand took regarding the unfortunate incident of the Israeli involvement in New Zealand matters, when the forgery of the passports done by the Israeli Mossad took place last year. We highly regard New Zealand's integrity and New Zealand's independence in resolving this matter and in taking courageous positions, which should be a model to follow by many Western leaders.

Journalist: You are speaking about the Arab Initiative that clearly pre-dates the election of Hamas Government in Palestine. Is Hamas Government committed to this Initiative?

Syrian Ambassador: Of course, I just want to say that Hamas election was done under the supervision of a former US President Jimmy Carter who described it as the most democratic election he has ever seen. I think if we should respect democracy then we should respect the choice

of people. So, if democracy is the choice of people, then we should respect what the Palestinian people chose by electing Hamas as the leader of the Palestinian people and government.

We ask Hamas and other countries to recognise Israel, but at the same time, the same question applies "Is Israel recognising the Palestinian rights and the Arab rights?".

Israel withdrew from Gaza. Of course it went back to Gaze, but withdrew to settle the whole Palestinian question, because they consider Gaza a burden and they didn't declare any intention to negotiate about the West Bank. I agree with you that we should ask Hamas, but we should ask as well Israel whether they are willing for peace or whether they recognise the Arab stolen rights.

Journalist: Was the current situation in Lebanon discussed in the meeting with the Prime Minister? And is there a constructive dialogue between the Syrian Ambassador and the Lebanese Ambassador in this term?

Syrian Ambassador: Lebanon and Syria are part of the Arab group, and it is very normal to have this constructive dialogue. We always have constructive dialogues and on highest levels between our two governments.

What is going on in Lebanon now is an internal affair and we respect what the Lebanese government decides on. Syria's role in the past and still in the future is to support the Lebanese Government and people. Actually the Syrian position on Resolution 1701 was to support the Lebanese approval and reservations. Of course they have their own

reservations. We supported their position in their approval and reservations on the Resolution, which is very normal.

To tell you about Lebanon and the latest assassination of Minister Jmayyel, the only party which benefited from all this is Israel. Because when Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982, their pretext was that there was no order in the south, and they accused the Palestinian factions in Lebanon that they created disorder, and they wanted to impose order; and when Lebanon was free from the Israeli occupation in 2000, the melody of Israel continued by saying that there is no order in the South.

Now, the opposition is represented in the Government and this is a matter for the Lebanese Government to decide on. We should remember that in 1976 when Syria entered Lebanon, it entered not only by a request from the Lebanese Government, but it was an Arab summit decision to have an Arab Deterrence Force to go into Lebanon, and Syria was among other Arab countries, but Syria was the main component of it because of its neighbourhood to Lebanon. And all Arab countries, and Syria in particular, played a role in putting an end to the civil war in Lebanon at that time and in deterring the Israeli aggression from entering.

The only benefit was for Israel, because again the assassination of Al-Hariri in Lebanon was a bad choice for those who killed Al-Hariri, because Al-Hariri himself was the only one who improved the relations between Syria and Lebanon.

Until now there is no proof, and aside from the political statements that we hear from the United States or the other big powers, to take things in the legal process, there is investigation going on, there is a process and Syria is cooperating with the investigators. If a Syrian

happens to be implicated in this assassination or any other assassination he will be tried in Syria, and as the President said this will be considered treason and will be looked at as a crime in nature and will be looked at in its own discredit. So, Syria is cooperating in the investigations and we really wish to reach a stage to hold responsible whomever committed all these crimes.

Again, we should not isolate Lebanon from the spectrum of the crimes happening against our people in Palestine. So, every crime should be taken for its responsibility and should be discovered in the final analysis.

I just want to say briefly, commenting on what my colleague said, when Israel asked Hamas to recognise Israel, actually before the peace process in 1991 Israel used to say that it wants the Arabs to recognise Israel and the Arabs started to recognise Israel in the 1991 Madrid Peace Process and they continued. So, it is not a problem of recognition, because if Hamas said "Ok, we will recognise Israel" then Israel will create another problem, like Israel has been doing since 1991. Because in 1991 all Arabs recognised Israel's existence and it was renewed, as my colleague from Egypt said, in the Arab Summit Initiative in 2002. So, not only Arabs should be asked, Israel should be asked for all its obligations and Israel should be in the picture more than the Arabs because Israel is the stronger party and the aggressor party and has more responsibilities to offer to the Arabs.

Syrian Ambassador: I want to comment on the question of Iran. Israel is the only country that is not party to the Non-Proliferation

Treaty (NPT), and Israel, by recognised Israeli NGOs and the international reports, acquires more than 300 nuclear warheads.

If Syria now announced that we want to build a nuclear reactor, because according to the NPT Article 3 or 4 says that each party to the Treaty is entitled to develop nuclear power for peaceful uses. So, Syria or New Zealand could just say an announcement that we want to build a nuclear reactor for peaceful uses, just simply as the Treaty says, because if there is something wrong with the Treaty, then we ask the big five to change the Treaty.

So, Iran is just like any other country developing nuclear power for peaceful uses, but of course it should be according to the International Atomic Energy Agency. But we again forget that the Security Council, including United States and Britain, has asked Israel in 1981 in the famous Resolution 487, asked Israel by name, because it was the only country – aside from Iraq – that was asked explicitly to "place all its nuclear facilities under the full-scope safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency". And Israel is isolated from this responsibility and the Arabs submitted in the United Nations, and Syria was a non-permanent member of the Security Council in 2002 – 2003, submitted an initiative for Middle East free from nuclear weapons, and this proposal is still on the table and all Arab countries share this view.

"The End"