

Address to the SI Council in Istanbul

11/11/2013

Colette Avital

President Papandreou,  
Secretary General Luis Ayala,  
Our hosts in the CHP,  
Members of the Presidium,  
Member Parties in the SI,  
Comrades,

The Middle East always provides us with a measure of drama. Two years ago the Arab Spring was in bloom. President Obama declared that promoting democracy in the Middle East would be a "top priority" of the U.S. "We know that our future is bound to this region by forces of economics and security, by history and by faith", Obama said.

That was then – and this is now.

The ensuing years, alas, produced little more than a list of broken dreams. Egypt's democratic revolution was hijacked by the Muslim Brotherhood, and then by a military coup. At the moment we do not see any democratic changes in sight, yet eagerly await the promised civilian constitution. Libya has turned into a chaotic mess divided in regions according to tribal allegiance. It is true that the popular uprising was against Colonel Khadaffi, but then it is also reflected Beghazi's quest to separate from Tripoli. Tribes are different from each other, and so Libya may devolve into two or three separate pieces.

Syria has turned into a civil war. The world knows what Assad has done with his chemical weapons, indiscriminate bombings, arbitrary detentions, rapes and torture against his own citizens. What is far less known and equally intolerable is the systematic denial of medical assistance, food supplies and other humanitarian relief to huge parts of the populations. There are reports of starvation, malnutrition and we hear that in the north of the country people are forced to eat stray dogs. True, by all counts, Assad has agreed to dismantle his chemical weapons arsenal and progress is underway. But how can we support an agreement that prohibits one horrible weapon that killed relatively few, while leaving untouched the conventional weapons responsible for 115.000 deaths? Millions of refugees have left their homes – there are more than two million in neighboring countries and over four million displaced in Syria itself. The pictures we all have watched on TV are too horrible for words to tell and very few people in my country could remain indifferent to the carnage. Even though a wall of hostility has separated us from Syria for six decades, many Israelis have mobilized and brought some relief through third countries. Wounded Syrians are treated in our hospitals and new Syrian babies are born in our country. Perhaps this will help set the basis for different relations in the future.

Comrades,

Two days ago we marked the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kristal Nacht, that dark night when the Nazis burst into the homes of almost all German Jews, broke and destroyed everything in their way, murdered many and sent others to the concentration camps. That night marked the beginning of a long night for my people , six million were murdered in gas chambers, or perished of torture, hunger and disease. So we know something about human suffering, and ,yes, we know something about the use of lethal gas and this is precisely why we do not wish and should not inflict suffering upon others. So we do not need to hear unfounded accusations.

Let me remind you that our conflict has not started in 1967 with the occupation of the West Bank. It is, now, almost 100 years old. During these years there have been many wasted opportunities by the Palestinians, by ourselves and by the international community. There have been moments in our history when a Palestinian state could have been established , but these opportunities were not seized.

We all know the contours of a possible solution, we all want to live in two national states, one Israeli, the other Palestinian. We know that this calls for difficult decisions, painful compromises and the giving up of dreams.

Almost then years ago, in December 2003, after two years of negotiations, a group of Israeli and of Palestinian leaders flew to Geneva where they signed an agreement. The "Geneva Agreement" is a blueprint and puts forward solutions which take into account the national interests of each side.

So we know that there is a solution, we know that peace based on justice and dignity is possible. And each side knows that we have serious partners for peace.

The Arab League has also put on the table, more than ten years ago, a good and constructive peace plan. We should all support it

And yet in Israel despair and indifference have replaced hope. When hundreds of thousands of Israelis demonstrated on the streets two years ago, protesting Government policies, no one referred to peace with our neighbors. The subject was taboo. You may ask why ? It is because most Israelis, those who believe in the two-states solution, have grown weary and simply have lost faith. They, too ,think that they have been let down by the leaders. The leaders on both sides.

Secretary of State John Kerry has just completed his eighth trip to our region trying to keep the talks on track. His efforts must be supported by all of us. The status quo cannot and will not last indefinitely.

Comrades,

The international community must play a role this time. For years we have been telling you: let us settle our differences by ourselves, do not interfere. Today I say to you: peace will come only if the Peace Camp in Israel is active and vocal, and is encouraged by your support. Peace will come if your voices are heard .

This is an hour of opportunity. We know what efforts it has taken to get the two sides together – let us not waste it.

Time does not work in our favor. Every day that passes, new facts are created on the ground which may not be reversible. Every day that passes, new generations of Israelis born after 1967 do not understand why they should be uprooted from what they consider their homes. Every day that passes, the frustration of the Palestinians grows.

So time has come to act. We must push for a just and permanent solution, one that respects the rights and the dignity of both sides. I turn to all of you, our Sister parties and ask that this time we do not be satisfied with mere declarations. Time for action has come. The international community has a role to play.

Let this be a real step on our long road to peace.