



Mission permanente d'Israël
auprès de l'Office des Nations Unies
et des Organisations Internationales à Genève

משלחת ישראל
ליד משרד האומות המאוחדות
והארגונים הבינלאומיים בג'נבה

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Speech by H.E. Mr. Daniel Ayalon
Deputy Foreign Minister of the State of Israel
Before the UNHCR Ministerial Conference

Geneva, Thursday, December 8th, 2011 PM

Deputy Minister Danny Ayalon's Speech at the
UNHCR's Ministerial Level Event

United Nations High Commissioner for
Refugees António Guterres.

I would like to congratulate the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on the 60th anniversary of the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Your office and the convention are vital tools in dealing with the global challenge of helping people in need who were forced for different reasons to leave their homeland and families and to find a better life somewhere else.

The State of Israel is a country that was established as a shelter for Jewish

refugees from all over the world, including the Holocaust and those forced from their homes in North Africa and the Middle East. Our society is a mosaic of people from around 100 countries who returned to their ancestral homeland escaping the horrors of persecutions and violence.

As a result of our experience, Israel was one of the initiators of the Refugees Convention and one of the first countries to join it. Israel is committed to all its articles.

In addition, we support the application of the general principles governing the treatment of refugees worldwide to apply to those in the Palestinian context. While the UNHCR has found durable

solutions for tens of millions of refugees, the agency created specifically for the Palestinian context, ~~UNRWA~~, has found durable solutions for no one.

This has meant that a peaceful solution to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians remains further away. This is morally and politically unacceptable.

The refugee issue is a core element towards finding a solution to our conflict and in its broader context would have to address both the Palestinians and the Jewish refugees forced to flee from Arab lands.

Jewish refugees also require redress.

Israel's unique history, core values and moral compass are the basis for our sympathy toward those who require shelter and refuge. During the 70's, Israel was among the first countries to accept "Boat People" from Vietnam and decades later we gave shelter to refugees who escaped the ravages in Darfur.

In recent years, for different reasons – climate change, lack of employment, conflicts and a general desire for a better standard of living, we are witnessing an increasing number of population movements from developing countries to the developed world. It is a global challenge and the international community should work together to find

the most effective and humanitarian ways to deal with these challenges.

Israel, as a flourishing democracy with a contiguous land access from Africa is facing a growing number of illegal immigrants and asylum seekers arriving in its territory. In a small country such as Israel, it has severe implications on society, economy, demography and security.

There is increased debate in Israel at all levels on this issue. The dilemmas are not simple and there are no easy solutions.

We cooperate in a full and transparent manner with UNHCR in trying to formulate the best solutions. The

UNHCR has assisted us in training our RSD unit and in developing a unique voluntary-return program to South Sudan based on incentives and vocational training, which we are very proud of.

Israel is committed to continue expanding Government capacity and refugee status determination expertise;

To assuming greater responsibility for refugee status determination;

To reaffirm our commitment to the internationally recognized principle of non-refoulement;

To provide the necessary assistance and medical care to victims of human

trafficking, among them many women who, on their way to Israel, were kidnapped, tortured and raped.

We are committed to continue our policy in encouraging voluntary-returns through incentives and professional training that will enable the returnees to rebuild their future and to start a new life with better tools at their disposal.

I am happy to report that Israel will increase our annual contribution to UNHCR.

And finally, we offer UNHCR the use of Israel's expertise and to work together, through MASHAV – Israel's International Development Agency, to create and

implement professional and vocational training programs in mutually agreed locations of UNHCR's refugee camps around the world, with the aim of uplifting the refugees' standard of living and helping them to obtain a better future. We stand ready to start a dialogue with UNHCR on this matter as soon as possible.

Thank you.