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DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER AYALON EXPLAINS ISRAEL HAD TO END THE SETTLEMENT FREEZE TO AVOID SEEMING WEAK

Admits that Gaza withdrawal was an excruciatingly painful mistake

October 5, 2010 (Fort Lee, NJ) -- In the aftermath of Israel's decision on September 26 to end its ten-month construction freeze within existing West Bank settlements as originally scheduled, one of Israel's leading diplomats, Danny Ayalon, deputy foreign minister and the number two man in Avigdor Lieberman's Yisrael Beiteinu Party tells Shalom TV President Mark S. Golub that Israel had no choice but to end the settlement freeze in order to retain any credibility in the Arab world and in international circles.



In an exclusive interview conducted with Minister Ayalon in New York City, Israel's Deputy Foreign Minister makes his government's position clear.

"I'll tell you Mark, the international scene is cruel. There is no real mercy for the weak and there is no second chance for people who cannot sustain themselves. It's very cynical, it's very hypocritical. And that is why we have to stand by our word, so our word will mean something--not just for us but for the international community in the future as well."

Asked if the recent talks between Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas gives him hope or confidence that a real peace process is underway,

Minister Ayalon answers, "Unfortunately at this point I don't see the light at the end of the tunnel--or if I see the light it is an oncoming train. There is one thing we asked the Palestinians to recognize--that Israel is a homeland of the Jewish People. They refused."

Mr. Ayalon also makes reference to his meeting with Salam Fayyad in which the Palestinian prime minister walked out of a joint press conference at the United Nations rather than sign a statement saying that the "two state solution" was for "two separate peoples."

For Mr. Ayalon, Israelis don't need the Palestinians to acknowledge that "Israel is a Jewish state" for their own self-identity; rather, Israel needs the Palestinians to say it in Arabic "so there will be a finality of conflict and an end of claims."

"We don't want a settlement with Palestinians whereby the children of the Palestinians are still taught that Haifa is theirs, Tel Aviv is theirs, Jaffa is theirs; this is what we mean by their recognizing Israel as the "Jewish" state."

Ayalon, who was one of the chief proponents for Israel's evacuation of Gaza when he was part of the Ariel Sharon government, is also asked by Golub whether, in retrospect, he feels the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza was a mistake.

"Yes, it was," says Ayalon candidly, "and in hindsight we shouldn't have done it because it was excruciatingly painful."

But, for Ayalon, it is an event from which Israel can learn.

"We have a lesson that we cannot cede territory without a full agreement without a full commitment of the other side--and with enforcement to make sure that no terrorism and no violence can come out of any territory that we will ever leave in the future."

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