

Israeli President Katsav addresses the nation, August 10 2005

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Dear Citizens, my brothers, the residents of the Gaza Strip and northern Samaria: We are confronting the most fateful decisions since the Declaration of Independence. In a few short days you will be requested, in accordance with the decisions of the government and the Knesset, to evacuate the Gaza Strip and northern Samaria.

And so we arrive at the difficult moment. The pain of abandonment is too powerful to bear. I feel your pain. Many among the people, regardless of their political identity, surely feel your pain.

We know that you settled throughout Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip because of the dictates of your conscience and in accordance with the decisions of Israel governments. You founded flowering communities and raised generations of children and youth who are the grandeur of the nation and the state.

In the name of the State of Israel, I beg your forgiveness for the demand that you leave after decades of building and sacrifice.

Your love of the nation and the Land are reminiscent of the pioneers of Jewish settlement. The spirit in you is the spirit of the founding fathers of Zionism. We are deeply moved by the fact that you have stood bravely in the face of so many dangers, in the face of thousands of bombs, missiles and shootings. You have risked your lives and your families for your ideals and beliefs. You have known disaster and grief.

You were not broken. You did not threaten. You continued the momentum of building and fought a momentous battle. You have attained historic achievements.

After a year of difficult struggles and sharp debates, the time has come. You must respect the decision of our national institutions, the government and the Knesset, which even passed examination by the High Court of Justice. Once the decision was made, it became the law of the land, which obligates us all.

The Knesset is the symbol of national sovereignty and expresses the will of the people. The voice of the majority is the same as the will of God. The voice of the Knesset is the same as the voice of the majority.

Despite the enormous tension between you and the government, the government is not indifferent to your opinions. The eyes of Israel and the whole world are looking to this struggle; to the ability of the state to make decisions.

The disengagement plan does not end your Zionist mission. We must not speak in terms of destruction and finality.

You said "love will triumph." And you were right. Despite the fractured dream, love must win. The pain, the rage and the disappointment and the criticism cannot replace caution and national responsibility. Despair cannot replace faith.

The opposition to the disengagement must not harm national security, democratic values and the most sacred values of Judaism, such as ahdut yisrael, the unity of our people. Dramatic as the dispute may be, it does not justify a rupture in the nation. Even those who are convinced that this policy is mistaken and dangerous cannot act illegally for its cancellation. The right to

protest and to shout, like the desire to replace the current government, does not justify the use of illegitimate means.

Some of the protest actions were impressive and inspiring. But there are limits to the struggle. We must refrain from extreme statements.

There are those who might draw inappropriate conclusions. There is a great danger in not accepting democratic decisions. The trauma of the murder of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin accompanies us every day. I know you are moral and lawful people, but the actions of extremists weaken your position, hurt the purpose for which you are struggling and turn away public support. The extremists are harming Jewish values and national values and bring about hatred between brothers.

We must strengthen the security forces. They are being compelled to carry out an almost impossible mission. The hearts of our soldiers are torn! Anyone who thinks there is any benefit in refusing orders is making a grave mistake. Refusal can only lead to disaster.

The IDF is carrying out the instructions of the government and the Knesset. It has to fight the existential wars; it did not create the political reality. Please make it easier for our soldiers, who are acting innocently and honestly. Every soldier certainly has his or her own opinion and ideology, but they must fulfil the missions assigned to them by the state. The army is one of the instruments of the redemption of Israel. The coming of our redemption does not depend on the disengagement plan.

My dear settlers: The pioneering spirit that you exemplify is vital to the future of the nation and the state. There will certainly remain scars and anger, bitterness and rage. Nevertheless, we must return to each other and reconnect. We must unite in order to carry out the difficult missions and challenges of Zionism. You must retain your spirit for the main struggles ahead.

We must not let our resilience weaken. Even the supporters of the disengagement understand that the main battle is over the eastern border, which affects every home in Israel.

Our struggle for existence continues. There are Muslim states and organizations that desire the annihilation of Israel. Those who hate Israel are hoping for a schism among us.

We must be aware that we have a shared fate, whatever it may be, and that even after the trauma of disengagement we must go on together.

In Jewish history we have known schisms and baseless hatred that led to national disasters. These days of bein hametzarim (the three weeks of mourning for the destruction of the Temple, which culminate Sunday on the ninth of Av) emphasize for us the danger of schism, zealotry and extremism. We must remain united even at a time of disagreement.

I call on the government, the Knesset, the rabbis and leaders of the Council of Jewish Communities in Judea, Samaria and Gaza (the Yesha Council) and the entire public to protect the unity of the nation, the values of democracy and the welfare of our children.

Citizens of Israel: We must strive for a healing of the wounds, for constructive dialogue and a search for consensus. After all, what unites us is greater than what divides us.

There are a variety of opinions on how to achieve the goal but the goal itself is a common one. Up to now we have remained steadfast in the face of difficult campaigns thanks to our unity, our determination and our faith. Let us continue to do so with increased faith and determination.

Whatever your opinion about the settlements, the pain of uprooting settlers from their homes belongs to us all. The settlers are shining examples of love for the people and the Land,

models of deep commitment and a pioneering spirit. They deserve a great deal of the credit for the achievements of the State of Israel.

Let us all look forward to what awaits us on the day after.

We must and shall fulfil the historical dream. The peace, security and independence of Israel depend on the unity of Israel. Let us turn this hour of crisis into a time of opportunity. We alone can do so.

With God's help, we will be able to overcome the difficulties and achieve the desired purpose: security and peace.