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ISRAEL – A MIRACLE IN PROGRESS

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Sixty nine years ago, a mere three years after the devastation of the Holocaust, Jewish independence was reasserted.

Returning home to the very land which had been the site of Jewish sovereignty since the exodus from Egypt the survivors of the Shoah joined returnees and settlers who had been there for generations. An international community which had in the main shamefully either facilitated, condoned or through indifference and appeasement allowed Jews to be massacred, belatedly suggested a partition of an already truncated territory. Ignoring existing internationally legally binding agreements for the establishment and settling of mandated Palestine the Jewish People were offered scraps. Realizing that something was better than nothing and given the dire condition of most survivors of the European war against the Jews, Ben Gurion and the Jewish leadership accepted what was offered.

As we know the offer of an Arab State was rejected by the Arabs and a war of extermination was launched in order to stifle at birth any sort of Jewish independence. The rest is history and it is vital to remember that the reason the so called Palestinians of today find themselves in such a parlous state is precisely because of their original, subsequent and continuing refusal to acknowledge any sort of valid Jewish presence in the area.

Meanwhile the Jews rolled up their sleeves, drained the swamps, reclaimed the desert, overcame enormous hardships, absorbed millions fleeing further persecution and those fulfilling a dream of generations to create out of nothing a modern and democratic dynamo of a country. All this while at the same time fighting off terrorists and regimes hell bent on their destruction and snuffing out Jewish lives yet again.

Looking back over sixty nine years and surveying the scene today one cannot overlook the inescapable fact that what has been

achieved is miraculous and defies normal logic. It is hard if not impossible to pinpoint another country which in such a short space of time has become a world leader in so many fields of endeavour while facing threats which would have sunk any normal society.

Detractors love to highlight Israel's failings and problems. These critics however fail to acknowledge that despite integrating people from advanced and third world societies alike with vastly different customs and norms, Israeli society has somehow managed to slowly blend and adapt to eventually produce a new type of Jew. Of course there are still problems to be tackled and overcome but far away from the screaming headlines and prophets of doom and gloom a revolution is taking place. Sectors of society which hitherto had resisted integration and preferred to avoid interaction with mainstream society are finding that economic realities and the pull of a modern society are impacting their youth. Slowly but surely there is a merging of traditions and more families than ever now boast Sephardic and Ashkenazi couples as members of their mispoche.

Who could have ever imagined in 1948 that one day the Israeli shekel would be one of the world's strongest currencies? If someone had suggested then that Israel would be launching satellites into space and would become a high-tech super power they would have been accused of hallucinatory science fiction. It was unimaginable that in the fields of medicine, agriculture and science Israel would lead the world and moreover send aid and assistance to less developed countries in Africa and Asia. In almost every field of endeavour we have defied the odds and proven the skeptics utterly wrong.

On the eve of this year's Independence Day Israel's population stands at 8.6 million and demographically it is a stark contrast to the ageing populations of Europe.

Despite all these achievements and successes Israel remains the only nation which continually has its legitimacy challenged and where foreign politicians feel a continual urge to interfere in our internal affairs. Apart from South Korea we are also the only country which faces daily threats from those who refuse to acknowledge our rights to be here. Critics more often than not cannot understand why peace is so elusive. They refuse to recognize reality on the ground and

when it hits them in the face they prefer to pretend it will go away once we have succumbed to terror and incitement.

The current German Foreign Minister visited Israel during the week of Yom Hashoa. Despite being warned he insisted on meeting and giving legitimacy to groups which demonize Israel and work towards prosecuting members of the IDF. He still cannot understand that there is a major difference between those who have a different political outlook and those who actively work to undermine the democratically elected Government by subverting, undermining, spreading lies and being in cahoots with those whose sole aim is the destruction of the Jewish State. Imagine if groups dedicated to destroying Australia or New Zealand were financed and supported by foreign Governments whose representatives then proceeded to meet them. It wouldn't be tolerated. Israel however is expected to smile and cheer when the EU collectively and other European (and Scandinavian) Governments individually fund and support such groups.

The British Government has officially refused to apologize for the Balfour Declaration whose centenary is this year. The Palestinian Arab Authority, those doves of peace anointed by the international community, has condemned this flagrant example of British duplicity. Latest reports make it clear.

Manuel Hassassian, the Palestinian Authority ambassador to the UK, said on Tuesday that unless Britain apologized, canceled planned celebrations and recognized a Palestinian state, the Palestinians would go ahead with plans for a lawsuit against the British government for issuing the Balfour Declaration.

The fact that members of the UN and others still do not "get it" and insist that we really do have a partner for peace only demonstrates the idiotic state of diplomacy today.

Our independence has only been safeguarded by the sacrifices of thousands of Israelis, something we will remember on Yom Hazikaron, the day before Independence celebrations. Only a strong and resolute Jewish State can guarantee our future. Anyone or any

country which plots to repeat another Holocaust will be dealt with in a resolute manner, whether the rest of the world likes it or not. On the 69th anniversary of Jewish sovereignty this year we will remember and rejoice. There is much to celebrate and many more glorious milestones to come.

Chag Ha'atzmaut sameach.