

Co-Chairmen, distinguished delegates, our meeting here during the past three days in these fabulous surroundings and warm hospitality, graciously provided by our Spanish hosts, has been described as historic and momentous. I have been reflecting upon the real meaning of the Conference. As I looked across this T-shaped Conference table and listened to the different views of the parties, I asked myself, are we on the threshold of a new era in the Middle East, as indeed we should be? The answer is in the affirmative, for whatever the positions of one party or the other, we cannot and we should not continue arguing, trading accusations and recrimination. Old arguments and archaic strategies should be left at the wayside the moment we leave this Conference.

We have listened especially today to some passionate speeches which manifest once again how acute the conflict in the Middle East is and how the change in attitudes, change in content, is badly needed. And I address Israel mainly. Speeches such as the one we heard today does not help the process of peace. This is not the language of peace. We came to negotiate. We came to talk to each other about the future, and we have a responsibility to do everything possible to make this endeavor succeed. Arab nations have come here to achieve peace with Israel. Her status is not questioned, nor in doubt. Israel, we hope, has come to find peace with the Arabs, including and in particular with the Palestinians, a matter which entails by necessity the respect of their rights in territory and in self-determination. This is a sine qua non for peace.

The co-sponsors have committed themselves to continue working together rather than against each other in the Middle East. This is a very important fact and very positive point. Our meeting here, Ladies and Gentlemen, must [inaudible]. Misrepresentation of facts must stop. Wild dreams of expansion must come to an end. Illegal acts, such as building settlements, should be frozen. More than anything else, and as never before, this Conference places an awesome responsibility on the parties to demonstrate that peace has a chance and that coming here was not in vain.

This solemn quest for peace must be pursued, its full potential realized. In the next few days and in the weeks and months to come, different forms of negotiation shall hopefully commence. In the process, there will be continuing difficulties, moments of tension. But we must continue our search for peace, a just and fair peace, not peace at any price, but peace based on legality, on Resolution 242 and 338. Peace at the end must prevail.

Egypt, a nation that has been at the forefront, both in war and in peace, a nation with deep Arab roots and peaceful relations with the Jewish state, knows more than anyone else in the Middle East the agony of war and the virtue of peace; from this unique perspective, an unparalleled experience, at least so far, Egypt shall continue to support the legitimate rights of all the nations in the region and participate in laying down the foundation for [a] stable, secure, and prosperous Middle East. Egypt shall fulfill her role in the upcoming negotiations in order to ensure peace in the Middle East and address regional problems, in particular the arms race and the problem of the proliferation of arms of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons.

Our common objective must be a consensus on how to coexist as equals. This will no doubt entail many difficult decisions for all sides. We must learn to reconcile ourselves with reality.

There cannot be peace if we allow our dreams to cloud our vision. There can only be genuine peace with all its implications when Israel chooses sincerely to live with the Arabs and the Palestinians, respecting their legitimate rights and ending the occupation of Arab lands.

Israel also has rights, and the Arab side has demonstrated readiness to respect those rights, as stipulated in Resolution 242 and 338. There is no escape from Resolution 242 or 338.

We have a long road ahead of us. All of us have a contribution to make in ensuring that we march on. Confidence that all parties are sincerely pursuing peace will have to be continuously reinforced. We may need to reassure one another at each hurdle that there have been no regressions from the achievements of this Conference in Madrid. Palestinian suffering must be alleviated. Many other confidence-building measures must be implemented.

Peace is not a luxury nor an option. Peace is an imperative. We must overcome our differences, and we shall overcome our differences.

Thank you.