

Mr. President, Mr. Prime Minister, Mr. Chairman,

On behalf of President Yeltsin, I would like to congratulate you and other colleagues and friends here who made possible, through their committed effort and goodwill, this major step on the long road to comprehensive peace in the Middle East. I think it's really time to rejoice, but no time for euphoria. Unfortunately, this is only the first step, a major but first step, on the long, long road. And I would like to assure you that Russia, as one of the co-sponsors -not only witnesses, but co-sponsors - of the peace process, will spare no effort, together with the United States, with the United Nations and other interested parties, to go on this road and not let this major event fail.

It is only ironic that in a time when the Middle East peace process seems to be on track, and I'm sure it will move towards a lasting peace, there are other forces which threaten security in the region. Three days ago, I was in Kabul, Afghanistan, and on the Tadjik-Afghan border, and even there we can see those forces of subversion, terrorism and extremism - religious and not only religious, political extremism - doing their destructive job. I know that in other parts of this region there are also signs of this new danger.

And I hope that we will not limit our joint effort only to the peace between Israel and its neighbors, not only for the cause of Palestinians to gain their legitimate rights, but also for stability in the whole region. And in this, Russia will be also a true and determined co-sponsor.

Once again, thank you for the effort done by all the distinguished presidents, foreign ministers, actual and former, and I hope that further generations of politicians will not be dealing with peace so much but rather with the peace dividend in the Middle East. It's high time for that. Thank you.