

ADDRESS

of Mrs. Golda Meir, Minister for Foreign Affairs
At the Official Opening of the Seminar

Your Excellency, the Mayor of Haifa, Friends,

Only those who will write history many years hence will, I think, be able to evaluate what is happening to the world in this decade. We are too close to these events to put our thoughts and emotions into words which can fully relay what we feel and think, and give a real appreciation of the importance of what is happening to millions, tens and hundreds of millions of people who have been under foreign rule, and who were placed in a class by themselves. We, and you, were seemingly fated not to be independent but to be ruled by others, and be different from others. And only ten, fifteen, twenty-five years ago, for some of us only five years ago, or less, it was almost unthinkable that we all would enjoy this fundamental right of human dignity, individually and as nations, to share the privileges and duties of being independent and ruling ourselves. And that the shaping of the fate of each one of us should be in the hands of the people themselves and not in the hands of anyone else. I say this irrespective of whether this or that foreign power ruled well or did not rule well.

Let us say a foreign power ruled well and wanted to do well by the people and the country it ruled. Still, there cannot be a people that has any self-respect - and we all have - that would choose to live an easier and more comfortable life under foreign rule and the responsibility of some other power, rather than a life of difficulty and hardship in carrying out its own responsibilities.

I don't think there is a people in the world that would voluntarily give up its freedom and independence, no more than an individual that has self-respect would give up his individual liberty. We all of us are the privileged generation living in an age where the dreams and aspirations of hundreds of millions of people have come true, as they reach independence. How many tears have been shed, and in some places, how much blood has been shed, how much heartache, how many disillusionments we all of us had, each one in a different way, until each in turn reached that day of magic, when with a very simple pronouncement it was recognized that from this day on we are an independent people, and our country is free, and belongs to us and to us only.

All of us here have only been independent a few years, or a few months, and some are just on the verge of independence. There is at least one country represented here for whom congratulations are in order, although it is still three days until it will officially and formally be independent. To our friends of Sierra Leone who on the 27th of April become independent, we extend our wishes in the name of the Israel Government and people, and in the name of all of us who are gathered here. We wish them well, and are happy with them.

But we all know, those who have gained their independence, that after the day of joy, rejoicing and merrymaking is over, come the days of difficulties, hardships and responsibilities. A people that does not know that, and that does not immediately settle down to tackle the difficult problems confronting it, which until that day could be put off, because it could be said that somebody else is going to solve these problems, is a people for whom political independence will not really mean very much. From the very day of independence, from this midnight, from this noon, it is we, and we only, who must do the job.

The first task in order to insure equality among nations as well as independence is to develop the human skills as well as the resources of a country.

Some of your countries are not at all poor countries; some of them are very rich. I know that from having visited some of your countries. There is practically nothing that you haven't got. All the natural resources that any people can hope for and pray for you've got. And yet people are poor. The reason is you do not always know how to get the natural resources out of the earth in the most efficient manner. Wealth and poverty may depend not so much on a country's wealth of resources or lack of them, but on the skills of people to use them. Inequality is not only material; there are people who have the best health services at their disposal and people for whom malaria is still a danger, and typhoid is a danger, and eyes diseases are a danger, diseases that in modern developed countries are easily cured. Tuberculosis is not a dangerous disease any more. It can be cured. And yet I know that in certain African countries tuberculosis takes a terrible toll of young and old. So it is not only a question of those who have and those who haven't the material goods, but a question of those who have the knowledge and the scientific ability to develop their countries, their natural resources, the schools, the health services, the housing, the building of a modern society, and those who still have to acquire this knowledge. This is the problem of all of us. And if I may say so, no people, no nation can expect to solve any of these problems if the women in that nation, in that society, are not going to be very active in all fields, whether it is education, whether it is health, whether it is social services, whether it is the building of a society and the shaping of the character and the nature of society in a free and independent state.

With all my respect to the men in any nation, they alone cannot do it. I will grant that we women, alone, cannot do it either. Men and women must face the problems of their own society together. The problems that are to be faced together are so immense, so frightening. Will we make good, we new people? Will we make good or will we, God forbid, fail? And if we fail, what happens? Somebody will surely say "Well, it's all a mistake. Maybe we should never have asked for this independence". And this is so frightening, so important, because so much depends upon it. Not only the fate of us,

new people, but the fate of the whole world, of all humanity, depends upon us, the new independent peoples, to make good.

The world will not know peace, and there will be no real happiness until we, the new peoples of the world, reach a standard of living and education that is comparable with that of the old and wealthy nations. It is as important for them as it is for us. And since the problems are so great, fifty per cent of the people, that is only the male population by itself, cannot solve it. Let's work together. Every one of our nations needs every drop of energy, every drop of ability, that anyone has. Let's pool it together in order to make good.

Even then, the task is a difficult one, and the path is a very long and strenuous one. But we women are not just a part of the population. We are much more than that. We are responsible not only for the population of today. We are responsible, in the main, for the population of tomorrow. It is not only that we, living in this generation, can contribute to the development of our countries and our people for happiness and for peace, but in our hands lies the future of our people. It's the babies that we bring into this world, the children and the youth that we raise, it is what they will be that will be our future. What are we going to educate them to?

May I just very sketchily convey to you what I see as the main problem in our countries? We want education. What percentage of our population knows how to read and write? How many men? How many women? How many children are out of school? Never been in school? How many people have not got the elementary knowledge that is so necessary, merely to read and write, to be able to communicate with others and benefit from what others wrote or said? Educating a people cannot happen overnight. No magic wand places people in schools overnight, and turns them out properly educated. There is also the question, how are we mothers going to raise our sons and daughters? Are we going to raise them in a spirit of pioneering, so that their generation, and maybe their children's like ours, are ready to develop their country, in order to insure the independence of its people? This is possible if the better favoured section of the population sees itself duty-bound to share all it has with others. Young boys or girls who have the privilege of going to school and getting an education must be raised by us in such a way that the advantages derived from this education must not be used only for personal interest. The advantages they have must be shared with and benefit the whole people. If children are taken out of villages and sent to the capital's schools, the question is: will they remain in the capital or will they go back to the village? Will they find themselves duty-bound to go back to the village, not to the life they left, but to bring to the village the benefit of their education, of their knowledge, so that they, together with the others, may raise the village's standard?

I know it is the instinct of every mother to want her child to have a better, an easier life; and it is easier for a youngster to remain in the capital and get some clean work that does not soil the

hands. But we are mothers not only of our children, but of our people. We must ask ourselves, "Do we want our youngsters to continue living in a world where only a few have the advantages of knowledge, and the masses are illiterate? A few who have the advantages of health and happiness and the masses sick and dying? What stories are we going to tell our children, what ideals will we hold up for them? An easy life, no matter how that life comes? Or a life of difficult pioneering, devotion and service to the people, which will give the real joy?"

Mothers have to be very wise. Maybe in highly developed countries it is permissible for mothers not to be so. But we, the mothers of new countries, and newly independent peoples, we must be wise, and think things out to the very end. Not what is good today, what is good today may be danger and a calamity for tomorrow. We must think out at full length what is going to happen to our children, in what kind of society we want our grandchildren to live. And mothers can do it much better than anybody else.

I do not think that we, in Israel, have solved many problems. I can say, however, we know the problems facing us, and have begun to tackle them.

We have become independent in a country where about seventy per cent of the land was barren and waste. Desert, stones and rocks. Experts and tens of commissions have come to this country and told us "Nothing can grow in the desert... Nothing can grow on rocks." And do you know, my friends, what our attitude used to be to experts? It still is, to a certain extent. If an expert commission came to the country and said "This is how you should do things", they were very welcome, and we studied the reports carefully. If an expert commission came and said "No, this you cannot do", we said "Thank you very much," and the report went to the wastepaper basket. This is our country, we have no other. And each one of you, you have no other country but your own. If it is a rich country, good for you, you are fortunate. If it is a poor country, it is still your country, and you have to do the best you can. The greatest natural wealth of any country is not the gold, the diamonds and the iron ore, but the people you have. A people that has a pioneering spirit, that is devoted, can make a poor country rich. A people that is neither pioneering nor devoted to serving the country, can make a rich country poor. It depends entirely upon the people.

This gathering and others that we have had in this country, but this one to me has a special significance, is important not only for the practical results that we will have by exchanging views, by mutually learning from the experiences of others, but it is symbolic that we all get together in one place, not in order to discuss about how we should oppose somebody, but in order to be together for everybody.

In this Seminar you will not be asked to pass any resolution against anybody nor to demonstrate against anybody. Nor will you be asked to sympathize with a desire to destroy anybody. No. In this

Seminar, we want to learn how to live better, how to help our children live better.

We all have a tragic past. Not the same: some for colour, some for religion - for different reasons. This we all have in common. We have travelled a long path. discrimination, sorrow, pain, and no people that respects itself forgets its past, nor should it. But the past should be put in its proper place: to be remembered, to be told to our children. They must know. None of us has anything to be ashamed of. But let us put it in its proper place, and not dwell upon it too long.

You know, it is easy sometimes, when things are difficult, to run back to our past because we have somebody to blame, somebody who harmed us. It is nice to have somebody to blame. But the past is gone, and now we are on our own. We have to live in the present and plan for the future.

Since the challenge is so great, we must help each other, I know that all of us need help and get help from old, developed countries. That is not enough. We, among ourselves, can help one another a lot. We are similar; our needs are similar. If we put all our experience and all our effort together, we can make it, we can reach the point we are all hoping for.

I cannot tell you how happy and proud we all are that you have come here. It is a colourful gathering, with each national dress expressing, I am sure, something of the character of the people. You have all come here, not knowing each other, and when you leave we shall have gained something which is the dearest of all - mutual understanding, friendship and knowledge of other people.

We know that this world is troubled and torn, and planning for peace depends partly on us women. Nobody can afford war, but new people even less than others. And perhaps if all peoples of the world, East and West, North and South, would sit together to discuss child welfare - I mean even the Heads of States, supposing they would get together at a Seminar to discuss child welfare, and health problems, and the place of woman, and the place of man, and what to do with youth - I am sure they would speak a common language.

So getting together in friendship and understanding, with a sincere desire for mutual aid - this is the great thing of this conference. We are happy that you found it important to come to a conference of this kind, anywhere, and that you have been sent by your Governments to Israel. All of you are very welcome here.

I sincerely hope that you will find this Seminar instructive and that you will also enjoy your stay here. This is a tiny and poor country. We are a small people and have a long history, a tragic history. But we are also an obstinate people, who just refused to go down. We prayed, wept and fought, and lived to see the great day of freedom and independence. Therefore do not be

surprised that we understand and look for friendship among your peoples. It is customary in the world now to say "no strings". No strings, except friendship and understanding. And cooperation.

So welcome to Israel. Our mayor has already welcomed you to this beautiful city, ringed by mountains and sea. The heights and horizons you find in this city may be symbolic of people who dare to dream and plan. Sometimes the dreams and plans come true.

May you be happy while you are here, and return back to your people, able to give something of the experience gathered through this conference, in order to help your people in this great forward march of humanity, in which the new countries are called to play so important a role.

I shall say "shalom", which means peace, peace to all of us, peace to the world, and good luck to all of you.