

# **THE ISRAEL PROJECT**

**PRESS CONFERENCE WITH AMBASSADOR GABRIELA SHALEV**

**SPEAKER:  
GABRIELA SHALEV,  
FORMER ISRAELI AMBASSADOR,  
UNITED NATIONS**

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MR. : (In progress) – this is basically my first public appearance, as it were. Our guest today is Ambassador Gabriela Shalev, who has recently completed her tenure as Israel’s 14th permanent representative to the United Nations. She’s served since September 3, 2008, and she was the first woman to hold the post.

Ambassador Shalev is a leading expert in Israel in fields of contract law and procurement contracts. She was a full professor of law at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She has written 11 books and more than a hundred articles about contract law – I can’t wait to read them – and she was formerly a president of the academic council and the rector of the Ono Academic College in Israel.

Ambassador Shalev was also a visiting law professor at universities in the U.S., Europe, and Canada including Harvard Law School, Temple University, and Boston College, and she just recently told me that she is returning to her teaching activities in a town of Kiryat Ono and looking forward to going back to that.

What I think we will do is Ambassador Shalev will give an introduction, you will be served – and please feel free to continue eating – and then after that, we’ll throw it open to questions.

I just want to say a couple of words about The Israel Project. I think most of you are familiar with our organization and what we do. Our aim is to provide good, factual information to journalists about Israel and the Middle East.

Last night, we were honored to host an event with the president of the Palestinian Authority – sorry, the prime minister, Prime Minister Fayyad. And you can see details about what ensued there on our website.

Also, yesterday, just to demonstrate the scope of our activities, we hosted an event in Jerusalem with the deputy prime minister, Dan Meridor, and we also conducted two media tours to the West Bank for journalists; one in English and one in Arabic.

We are active on the Internet at [theisraelproject.org](http://theisraelproject.org). We are also tweeting @Israel Project. Please feel free to follow us and shoot questions to us any time in any medium. And with that, I am going to give the floor to Ambassador Shalev.

AMBASSADOR GABRIELA SHALEV: Thank you very much. This is your first public appearance; I think this is my last before going back home to my home country. And I can say country-home.

I live in Israel, and I urge you all that have not been there to come. As you know, Israel is a tiny country. You can describe it as a woman with a very slim waist. And I live in a place –

it's called Even Yehuda. And you take the car and drive 10 minutes west; we will reach the beach of Netanya of the Mediterranean Sea. If we drive from my home to the east, within 10 minutes, we are in Kalkilya, which is the West Bank. So it only shows what a small country Israel is. And I really look very much forward after two years in New York to go back to my country, to my friends, to my family.

These have been troublesome and hectic years for Israel in the global arena. I was appointed by the Kadima government – Olmert and Livni. And at the time that I had my first General Assembly, which was exactly two years ago, President Bush came after Lula was speaking. This is the tradition, as you know, at the U.N. First, the Brazilian president speaks and then the president of the hosting country, which was the United States. So within just a few months after I was appointed, both the administration in the White House – the president – and the government in Israel changed, which, in a way or so, put a hovering cloud over a situation in the presence of Israel in the United States and in the United Nations.

Right away afterwards, the Cast Lead Operation was launched just two days after Christmas 2008. And since then, we have been – we, the Israeli Mission to the United Nations, we've been putting all our dedication, energy, time to the security, the peace and the well-being of the people of Israel. It was the Cast Lead Operation, the situation that evolved in Gaza, the Goldstone Report, lately, the flotilla. There are some more, we heard, underway.

But the eve of my returning to Israel, we had what I was really looking for all the time, the beginning, or, the relaunching of the peace process. And I told my successor and the people in the mission, this is going to change, hopefully. If it will work, this is going to change the atmosphere not only in Israel, not only in the Middle East, but definitely in the world. And also, it will enhance the presence and situation for Israel at the U.N., and we really look forward.

We know this is going to be complicated, full with hurdles, but it is so much better than the freeze that took place for almost two years when Palestinians, I must say, were sitting on their hands and waiting for us and for Americans to do all the concessions. Finally, these peace talks have resumed and I really think that this is the best news that we can go with to the General Assembly.

We still have a few big issues – hi – and problems to deal with. Iran is a big one, and this is the point that I want to thank Jennifer and The Israel Project not only for hosting these kind of events but for being so supportive and so adamant and with such a clear voice regarding Iran, which is, we all know, the biggest threat to the world. And thank you for your friendship and support of Israel in the global arena.

We used to think, and people told me, that everything in the world is connected. They say that when there is a butterfly moving its wings in the Philippines, we can feel – I don't know where – in Israel or in New York and everything is tied together. I believe that the fact that the peace talks have resumed and people now realize that we really – when we said that we want to come to the table, that we want to resume the peace talks and, as our prime minister said we are willing to take political risks, we really meant it. And this, of course, is going to affect

everything, but I still think that we have to be very apprehensive and careful and thoughtful regarding Iran.

Tomorrow, Ahmadinejad is going to speak and we can be prepared for another terrible speech regarding Israel. And as we kept saying, just to think of this terrible regime racing towards having the most dangerous weapon in the world, this is something that is really a nightmare. And we have to do everything that can be done, and was done lately by the Security Council, to avoid, to prevent or to delay the race of Iran to nuclear weapons.

I think the best way to proceed from here on is to answer your queries, questions. I hope that I will have most of the answers. I don't know if I will have all of them, so if you moderate it

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MR. : Yes, I will. Thank you. Thank you, Ambassador. Okay, so well, let's just open up to questions. Okay, please.

Q: Talking about the – going back to the Iran issue, do you think that your experience with the U.N. – there is sincere belief among the key countries dealing with the sanctions, at least, that these sanctions could lead to effective measures? And have you ever – I mean, have you heard people say that this is the best we can do, but in the end, Iran can still reach its nuclear capabilities with or without sanctions?

AMB. SHALEV: When I just started my tenure two years ago, I had, you can say, the pleasure to – not to listen because we were not in the General Assembly when Ahmadinejad spoke. But of course we knew – we were not there, the Americans were not there, but we know exactly what he said. And this was the famous speech when he spoke about Israel as a cesspool. And I think, if I recall, he was also threatening to wipe Israel off the map.

Right afterwards, there was a meeting of the Security Council. And Condoleezza Rice, who was still the secretary of state, said something like, we cannot allow a member-state of the United Nations to threaten and to say that another member-state – meaning Israel – does not have the right to exist. Something like that.

And we were sure that some kind of measures are going to be taken to avoid these kind of wild speeches in the U.N. because we Jewish people, we know that words are to be taken seriously. And when Ahmadinejad keeps saying that Israel should be wiped off the map, maybe he really means it.

But since then, I started to realize what the U.N. is. Just a few months afterwards, Iran was trying to get a seat at the Security Council. At the beginning I could not believe it that Iran – I mean, not Iran, the regime of Iran – they are working and trying to get a seat at the Security Council, which is the most effective and important body at the United Nations.

And came the elections, and they got, if I'm not mistaken, 32 votes. Namely, there were 32 countries that thought that Iran, with its nuclear race and with the things that they say not only about Israel, about the West, about the United States, can have a seat in the Security Council.

And then I realized this was a vote anonymous. You could not know who voted. But it's not only countries that are allies of Iran; there are many countries that get support, money and have some kind of commercial ties and others with Iran, and they realize that this is what the United Nations is about, its interest, its politics, and, may I say, it is also hypocrisy. People do not always say what they mean and do not always vote according to what you would call a conscience or the values of the United Nations.

I think I'm just jumping over to what happened in June 2010, when the Security Council took the hardest measures against Iran for so many years. It was the fourth round of sanctions. They were not crippling sanctions, as Hillary Clinton said at the beginning, but they were very powerful sanctions.

And I saw how the American ambassadors, Dr. Susan Rice, and her deputy, Alex Wolff, were working for two months, day and night, to achieve this kind of international umbrella to put the Russians and the Chinese on board. And I don't know if you recall, but this was a great success, I would say, for the free world. Because these sanctions, although they were not as crippling, they were powerful and they opened the way – they paved the way for the United States and for the European Union to have their individual or national sanctions.

We hear now that those, again, thinking about sanctions that will be pointed toward the central bank. As I said at the opening, all these sanctions may not prevent the nuclear race but they will delay it, and we are winning time.

For us, Israel, it's a crucial matter. And I know we share this kind of knowledge, intelligence with our allies, mainly the United States. Iran is financing and training the terrorist groups to our north, the Hezbollah; to our midst, the Hamas. They provide them weapons and money and training.

And just imagine, just imagine, that the time of the Cast Lead, the terrorists would have this kind of terrible weapon that Iran is trying to achieve. And I'm not naïve to think that they are trying to get the nuclear capabilities for civilian purposes.

So do I believe, you know, we have to work towards it? It's not easy. But I know that the American policy of engagement which President Obama and also Ambassador Rice started with; saying, you know, we have to try the diplomatic way and we have to engage with Iran. This obviously failed. It's enough to – I'm sure you'll remember when Obama first spoke to the Persian people; he started it with Farsi. And he was trying and believing that he can reach these people.

But we saw what happened at the revolution, at the elections, and we know that this did not work – the diplomatic avenue. So now, we have to try in other ways, which is the sanctions, in order to avoid the worst option.

And I'm not going to comment on this bad, bad, bad option that I think nobody wants to reach it.

Q: Just to follow up, you said “delay” – that the sanctions will delay. So delay until what point? Are you waiting for the regime to – (background noise) – or for a strike? I mean, if you were just dealing with the delaying, what’s the point? If you see –

AMB. SHALEV: Well, first of all, it’s – we also had – there were gaps of intelligence. We had to prove that it’s not a matter of a few years, like the Russians were trying to say. And I think even Americans were more optimistic than realistic in appreciating how fast they are rushing to their nuclear capabilities.

“Delay” until, you know, either they will come to senses or the sanctions will be more effective. This is, we are winning time. We don’t believe that at that stage, it will prevent because they defy all resolutions and they say that they are going to promote and go own with their nuclear pursuit. So “delay” is the best that I can say now.

MR. : Yes sir.

Q: The U.S. intelligence believes – still believes – that a political decision to go towards a weapon has not been made. Israel feels differently on that?

AMB. SHALEV: Yes.

Q: And what evidence do you have to suggest that the U.S. position is not accurate?

AMB. SHALEV: The evidence that we have has been provided in Washington.

Q: Can you characterize it at all?

AMB. SHALEV: I don’t want to get into intelligence matters.

Q: Then, can you give us an indication as to when the political decision may have been made?

AMB. SHALEV: The political decision to what?

Q: To go forward with the nuclear weapons. Do you think that, that is something that is – the U.S. believes that it stopped in 2003. And Israel believes that it never stopped? Or, is there some sort of a decision that was made that you’re aware of in the interim?

AMB. SHALEV: I am not sure that we know – or, I do not know exactly the date when this decision was made, but we know, for sure, that the kind of declarations that this is not going to be used for weapons or for military purposes are wrong. We just don’t trust it and we have reasons not to trust it.

Q: And the U.S. and Israel disagree on this – about the political decision going forward.

AMB. SHALEV: I am not sure that we disagree on it. I am not sure.

MR. : Yes, sir?

Q: I have a follow-up on sanctions, if I could. China and Russia have increased their trade with Iran. Some sources say Germany has also increased their trade with Iran. You say that sanctions are fine. Have you ever had conversations with the Chinese and the Russians specifically? And what is it that you tell them? And what is their response?

AMB. SHALEV: This is on the record, right?

MR. : This is on the record. (Laughter.)

AMB. SHALEV: Right. (Laughter.)

And I don't have any aspirations, you know, to go back to diplomacy or politics, but, still, I want to be very careful. The Chinese ambassador just started a few months ago and I did not have very deep conversations with him.

But I had lengthy talks, formal and informal, with Ambassador Churkin, who is the Russian ambassador, and a very, very effective ambassador. Somebody said that he is going to be like a Lavrov, you know, who was the ambassador and later on became the foreign minister.

I remember the beginning that Churkin, being a Russian and expressing his government point of view, was very, very critical regarding our policies in Israel, in general. And there was even a point of time when he tied together the situation in the Middle East with what happens in Iran, and said, if you will be able to have peace with your neighbors, everything will be better. And I remember – you know, it was, I think, a year ago. And I said, you know, on my shoulder, on Israel's shoulders, you put Iran and the world peace.

Over the time, I think the Russians realized – and I am sure you are aware of it. The Russians realized that the Iranians are playing a game. And they are – I can say they are lying. They even admitted that the plant in Bushehr is – that they do their things that they denied for a very long time.

And, you know, we were not involved in the discussions at the Security Council but we know what happened there. And I think it was a huge achievement for the United States and for Ambassador Rice and her leadership to have the five permanent representatives of the Security Council, mainly Russia and China – to convince them that Iran must stop its nuclear race and this sanction should be very pointed, very powerful.

There was also the vote at the Security Council where I think Tokyo and Brazil – yes, they were against. And Lebanon, to our amazement, were abstaining. That was also something, you know, that this world body had a resolution that was almost in agreement of all the members. So I think now, again, there is a certain (term ?).

I was distressed to find out that the Russians are now supporting the long-range missiles to Syria. We are aware that Syria is enabling a transfer of weapons to Hezbollah, and this is something that we are working to persuade our friends – and we trust that the Russians are not our enemies, not at all – that this is a wrong move.

But to go back to your question, I had discussions, and you are absolutely right that there are so many interests that they represent. For example, China, you know, the oil is a big thing there. So it also shows how this world is not only a world of values but also of many interests.

MR. : Okay. The next question? Yes, sir.

Q: Could I turn to Palestinians and the PA? And when we see constant incitement, even now, coming from the PA. This new law saying the death penalty to Palestinians who settled in – (background noise). Can you talk about that and how there seems to be a disconnect in what's happening?

AMB. SHALEV: This is something that must change. I mean, we cannot allow a situation where children in Gaza but also in the West Bank, where the Palestinian Authority has control, in their books, learn how terrible Israelis are and how they are murderers.

And I think, to say something broader, we said once and again that we are willing to recognize a Palestinian state. Netanyahu said, and he said it in the Bar Ilan speech, and this is something that I ask you even now not to belittle because taking into account where this guy, our prime minister, comes from – his background, his family, his wife, his father, his constituency, his party – the Likud – his cabinet. I mean, for him to state, two states for two peoples living side by side in peace and security and prosperity, this was a huge, huge step. And you cannot live side by side with children that are going to become adults – the third generation of young people that learn to hate the Jews.

So if we are asked and we are willing to recognize a Palestinian state living side by side with us, I think it's only – how shall I say – normal, elementary to ask the Palestinian to recognize the right of the Jewish people to have their own state, a homeland of the Jewish people, living side by side with the Palestinian state. To me, it's so elementary that I don't understand what is the problem in saying two states for two people living side by side.

And, you know, we have – and people get very mixed up. We have, in our minority, and they, in theory, they – (unintelligible). Maybe not always the factor but they are equal citizens in Israel. They have all the rights. Of course they vote; they have representatives. Maybe it's not as equal in the area as it should be but we respect, we honor the rights, the human rights, of everybody that lives in Israel.

But this is our declaration of independence: Israel is the homeland of the Jewish people. It means that every Jew can come to Israel and become an Israeli citizen right away. I mean, this is the law of return which is *raison d'être* of the state of Israel. It's part of our declaration of independence.

We are willing and we recognize the rights of the Arab minority that live in Israel to everything. I mean, don't mix up these with the Palestinians that do not live inside the state of Israel. We have problems but this is a minority that Israel respected and that they have equal rights.

There are problems. They don't serve in the army because they do not have to serve in the army. Jewish youngsters must serve in army. There are some exceptions, you know, for conscientious reasons, for religion. But Arabs do not have to serve in the army but there are tens of thousands of Arabs that do serve in the army. They volunteer and they become part of the army.

But anyhow, to go back to the incitement: This must stop. This is one of the things that are basic and elementary; that the Palestinian Authority must educate their own people. They must stop the incitement, they must change the books that they teach with and they must – as we are trying to teach our children that Arabs and Palestinians, they are our colleagues, they are our neighbors. They are human people. You know, one of the Jewish values is that you have to respect and honor your neighbor as yourself. And we are all born in the image of God, b'tzelem Elohim. This is what we teach our children. It's part of – also, of the Zionist dream.

So this is one thing that, in answer to your question, I realize that the incitement is something that must stop. And this is not even a precondition. This is something that is so elementary. Once you asked us to recognize the right of the Palestinian to have their own state, they must recognize that we also want to have our own – after so many hundreds of years, our own country, the only place where Jewish people can live in quality, peace and security.

Q: Don't you fear that we are going to a peace with the Palestinians similar to the peace with Jordan, where the people themselves – the Jordanian people – really don't – I'm told that they're really not – they haven't bought into it like the government has?

AMB. SHALEV: You know, this is something positive about the U.N. This is something positive about the U.N. We keep saying about the U.N. bad things, but at the U.N., you meet people and you have the ability to forgive and forget. It's something – for me – almost unbelievable that Germany is one – now, one of the strongest supporters of Israel.

I'll give you a personal example. My husband, the father of my children, was killed in the Yom Kippur War in 1973. And Maged, the Egyptian ambassador, became a very close friend of mine. Egypt is a very important country in the Middle East and for Israel. And we have with them peace. It's not a (war ?) peace, but it's so much better than what we had before. It's definitely better than war.

It's the same with Jordan. We have many issues that we do not see eye in eye with Jordan, but I remember when the father of the king now, King Hussein, came to Israel, there was an incident – a heart-breaking incident – when a soldier in Jordan opened fire and killed five young girls, teenagers, that came just to visit opposite the Jordan. It just, he shot and killed five young girls from Beit Shemesh, which is a small town near Jerusalem.

King Hussein came to the families. He sat with them. It was, I think, 15 years ago. He was already – he was not very healthy at that time. But I remember people in Israel were almost crying, and they said, you know, he can become our king. We are always looking for – you know. (Laughter.) He was loved, you know. He was embraced.

So I had very good relations with ambassadors, the Jordanian and the Egyptians, but many others that do not have diplomatic relations with Israel. And this is what the U.N. is about. It takes time to educate the people, but, as we say, people do not care so much about the big issues. What they care about, I think, is the livelihood and the work that they can – the bread that they can bring home.

And I don't have to say it again and again, but in the West Bank, the economic situation is good. It's not only good. The GDP there has grown more than in any other western country over the last few years at something like 7-percent gross per year. And I think once people will realize that its economy, law and order and peace on top of everything, this will be a different Middle East.

MR. : Please.

Q: Well, (defying ?) your idea that people don't care about – or, don't care as much, perhaps, about the big issues, the idea of the fundamental recognition of the idea of Israel as a Jewish state for the Jewish people is one that has tremendous resonance with the Jewish people, with Israel. But to what extent do you feel that, for example, yesterday's interaction between Fayyad and Ayalon reflects a much deeper fault line? And to what extent do you think that both the Palestinian leadership and the Palestinian people understand and acknowledge the idea, conceptually, of a Jewish state?

AMB. SHALEV: It's something that has to be discussed. It's something that – I can't even say. It's not material. It's not something that you can point your finger. It's more a matter of atmosphere, education, values. I don't want to refer to this kind of – I think it was a petty argument because you don't have to go into words here. I am not a diplomat at that point.

And I think the easiest thing is just, you know, to break the plates and get out of the room. We have to try much harder. I'm not the kind of person that puts all the blame on the other party. I think we also – we make mistakes in the way that we treated this kind of discussions, conversations, meetings with people.

But I think that, also, the Palestinian leaders have to be educated. I think some of them do not realize how entrenched and how important it is for us, for us Jewish people, to feel that we have this homeland and we have the right to live there in peace and security.

I think once this enters another matter of security, which I did not get into but I'm sure that you are aware that this is also one of the things that have to be discussed: the demilitarized zone and the kind of assurances that we have to get that the Hamas will not take control after we, you know, evacuate or we leave the areas that will go back to the Palestinians. But if this will be

understood and if there will be a good spirit and people will be really willing to believe that the other party is going with clean hands into these discussions, I think it can work.

But I can quote the former President Clinton who said yesterday, the chances are better than 50-50. I don't know exactly what it means, but let me say that it's better than 50-50 because it's so much better than what happened at the last two years when nothing happened - and this is the worst. A stalemate in the Middle East is, I can say, dangerous.

MR. : Next question? Yes, please.

Q: A two-part question. You mentioned something about central bank sanctions. What timetable do you see and do you care to comment on Israel's relationships with Turkey and how they may be best dealt with in the future?

AMB. SHALEV: Okay. About the timetable, I don't know. I just don't know. I must admit that for the last three weeks, I made a point not to go back to the U.N. or to the mission. I think this would be wrong for me and for the new ambassador if I were to come and breathe on his neck. He should be there; he's doing what he should do. We have our leaders coming - Peres, Barak, Ayalon. Foreign Minister Lieberman is coming next week. So he has his hands full, and I am sure he knows much better about the timetable.

But I want to answer your other question which is very, very important. Turkey, as you know, is a neighbor and a state that has millions of Muslim people. And we used to have - I can even say "excellent" relations with Turkey. Turkey was trying to break peace between us and Syria at the time of the Olmert government. We had tens of thousands of Israelis going every summer to Turkey.

We have a Jewish community in Turkey - mainly in Istanbul - which has very good ties with Israel. We have commerce. We have military maneuvers we used to have with Turkey. But it was tainted and damaged, and I must say, it started with Erduan. I don't know if you recall. In Davos, he was sitting on the podium there together with Peres, and he spoke -

(Off-side conversation.)

AMB. SHALEV: He spoke, I don't know, badly about Israel. And then one of them left - I think Erduan. When Peres started to speak, Erduan left. I can see it as, one, a -

MR. : At Davos, right?

AMB. SHALEV: At Davos, yes. Since then, the big - there were also statements that we Israelis did not like very much. And then there was this incident which got all the press where the deputy foreign minister put Celikkol, who was the Turkey ambassador to Israel, on a lower chair. It was a mistake. A big fuss was made of it because the Turkish people - like all of us, they are very sensitive. And Celikkol said that he cannot go on serving Israel and he was sent to Rome.

But then what happened was the flotilla, the Turkish flotilla. I think it was three months ago about. And this really created, I can say, a crisis between us and Turkey. And there, I was a little involved in the process, so I can say, from my perspective.

The Turkish ambassador – and this is, again, about how important is the U.N. The Turkish ambassador, Apakan, is a person – I can say because he said it. I do not want to cause him any damage but he said that I can say it. He is a personal friend of mine. We are very, very close. I have been at his place with my husband; he came to our place. And at the time of the crisis, we used to have almost daily discussions over the telephone and in meetings.

They were offended, and more than that because as you know, there were nine casualties – people that were killed on board the Mavi Marmara, which was one of the six vessels. But that was the only vessel where we had – where the Israeli army encountered force.

I'm not going into the details; maybe there were mistakes. I think there were mistakes on our side. Probably our intelligence was not good enough. But we know, for sure, that the IHH, the – so said, the philanthropic body that is behind this, is not really dealing with humanistic matters. We know that they are financed by terrorists. Some ministers even were behind it. We know that they came – and they said it: They came in order to break the blockade on Gaza. And people that really want to help the Gazans and to provide food and medical – which, by the way, there is no shortage of these materials – they can do it in other avenues, which the U.N. provides.

But the secretary-general worked very hard on creating a panel – an international panel – to deal with this incident. Let me say – and it was created at the end and we have an Israeli representative and a Turkish one, and it's headed by the new – Palmer from New Zealand, and he's the co-chair – no, not the co-chair – the deputy chairman is Uribe from Colombia. So this panel was created in order to look into what happened there.

But one of the reasons that the United States was involved behind the scenes and the Turks were so interested in the U.N. was to amend and make better a remedy the relationship between Israel and Turkey. And we agreed to it.

It was not easy for us to agree to this kind of international panel for many reasons. One of them is, we don't think that the U.N. should be involved in these methods. We always believe that we should solve our problems bilaterally and not – we do not need the big brother, the U.N. or even the U.S. We believe we need all the support, all the help, but we believe that this should be solved between us.

I want to remind you that once this incident occurred, it was the Memorial Day. Memorial Day, right. In a panic, the Security Council was convinced. Ambassador Rice was not there but Ambassador Wolff was there, and they had a presidential statement regarding the Mavi Marmara incident. And Ambassador Wolff, who represented the United States, came out. And of course, a journalist asked him, what do you say about the inquiry? He said, that was at the eve – the same evening. After many hours of discussion of this incident, he said, we trust that the Israelis can investigate their own affairs. This was at that date.

A few days later, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton already mentioned something like “international component”. All at once, we needed an international component, after Ambassador Wolff said that we can investigate.

And let me tell you, our judiciary, our army, the code of ethics, they are – I don’t want to brag but they are one of the best in the world. And we really – we can look into our own affairs,

But anyhow, then we – we, in Israel, we had the state comptroller looking into this incident. A general from the army in Ireland looked into this incident and provided his report to the Turkel Commission. The Turkel Commission is headed by a former supreme court judge, composed of a few very prominent figures and two international experts; one from Canada and one from Ireland, I think. So we had there – at this Israeli commission, we had already the international component.

On top of everything – it’s four or five inquiry, or, investigation panels – now we have this international panel only to show that we really – and this is a long answer to a very good question regarding Turkey – because we are very concerned with our relations with Turkey. We think it’s very important to have Turkey as an ally. We are working towards it. And this is one of the main reasons that we agreed to this international panel created by Ban Ki-moon, by the secretary-general.

In other words, that we do not feel that there is anything that we have to hide. Maybe if there were mistakes – there were mistakes made; we are willing to admit them. But by the way, we are not going to – not yet – to apologize. And this is why I think the reason that our President Peres did not meet with the President of Turkey – with Gül – because he wanted as a precondition that Israel will apologize. We’ll wait and see what the panel created by Ban Ki-moon and headed by Geoffrey Palmer will decide.

MR. : I’m a firm believer that press conferences ought to last around an hour, and then after that, you get to the law of diminishing returns. But if there is one more question?

Q: I’d love to ask – (inaudible). Sorry I’m the – this is – (inaudible). So I have one more sanctions question for you. It’s quick, though. Will the central bank of Iran be sanctioned? Is that going to be on the next list?

AMB. SHALEV: Sorry, say it again?

Q: Will the central bank of Iran be hit with sanctions?

AMB. SHALEV: That’s what –

Q: Will it go through?

AMB. SHALEV: I hope so because this will really do harm to the Islam – to the guardian and to the regime. And this is something that, again, can prevent and delay – or, delay and prevent the nuclear race of Ahmadinejad.

Q: Is that being pushed by the EU and America or just by – (inaudible, cross talk) –

AMB. SHALEV: As far as I know it's pushed by both. Yes, yes. And regarding the sanctions, you know, it was the P-5. But it was P-5-plus-1 because Germany is also very much involved in the sanctions and very effective.

Q: You do also – you devoted so much attention to the recognition of the Palestinians of Israel as a Jewish homeland. They say that if we do that, it precludes the right of return of the Palestinians. Do you think there's more to it than that?

AMB. SHALEV: The right of return is something that will be discussed definitely, you know. And I don't know if you read – but, you read papers as I do. I'm still addicted but it will pass. Not for you, but for me, I hope. (Laughter.) I need time to read books. But, I read in the newspapers that remind me – I was thinking of Shakespeare but –

Q: Is it more than just a matter of their right to come back to Israel or is there more to it than this?

MS. : Right of return.

Q: The Right of return. And that's why – (background noise) – recognize Israel as a Jewish homeland.

AMB. SHALEV: Yeah, no, there was something that I wanted to refer to. But anyhow, this is going to be – yeah, I know what Olmert said. Our former prime minister is writing down his memoirs, which is painful because he now attacks his former colleagues – the defense minister, Foreign Minister Livni. But he is in a lot of pain because of what happened to him and to Kadima.

But anyhow, he said that in his discussions with the Americans, with Bush administration, towards some kind of peace process, the Americans – I don't know if it was approved or denied. Americans were willing to take – and Bush promised him that they will take hundreds of Palestinian refugees into the United States. This is the first time that I heard and read about it. It's in the newspapers. I'm sure that the right of return will come to the table.

I want to remind you that at the same time that so many Arabs became refugees because of the '48 War, 800,000 Jewish people had to leave their homes and they became refugees from Arab countries and they came back to Israel with nothing with them. From Iraq and from Yemen and from many Arab countries, Jewish people had to leave their home, and some people say that there was some kind of an equilibrium between the Jewish refugees. But this is something that is definitely going to be discussed and I think that there are some creative solutions to this problem.

Q: So once that is resolved, then, do you think they will recognize Israel as a Jewish homeland?

AMB. SHALEV: I don't think this is something that is a precondition. I mean, this is one of the things that will be discussed. But, I mean, how can you have peace without recognizing Israel – this is, as I said, the *raison d'être*.

I really don't understand the Arab standpoint, but I'm not involved yet in this process and negotiations. But I want to understand what is the problem? We are willing to recognize a Palestinian state – full rights and a state that will be definitely also become a member-state of the U.N. And why shouldn't they recognize us after so many years that we have been living according to our declaration of independence, which states that Israel is the homeland of the Jewish people? After 2,000 years, we finally had this home.

Q: I have – (inaudible) – this creative solution to the refugees.

AMB. SHALEV: Okay.

Q: (You're ?) not creating that solution. It was the right of return; you said there's a creative solution.

AMB. SHALEV: You have a creative solution?

Q: No, you said it.

AMB. SHALEV: No, I say I'm sure that this was something that hit me, you know, that the Americans were so much willing, wishing, for the peace process to move forward that they were willing to take Palestinian refugees.

There are some solutions in the books, but this will have to come to the table and be discussed.

MR. : Okay. Thank you Ambassador Shalev. I think you've provided us with a very clear and very profound view with your personal insights of the U.N.

Thank you, everyone, for coming on such a busy, busy day. And please do follow us; keep up with us. Our website is becoming much more fast-moving. We are updating it all the time. We are tweeting; you can tweet us. We'll follow you if you follow us.

And feel free to stay and schmooze and finish your desserts, but at this point, I'll declare the news conference at a close. Thank you. (Applause.)

AMB. SHALEV: Thank you very much.

(END)