

Secretary Kissinger's Statement At the Opening
Session of The Geneva Conference

"Mr. Secretary General, distinguished Foreign Ministers, Delegates.

"As one of the co-chairmen of this conference, let me express my gratitude to the United Nations and to you personally for providing such excellent facilities for the conference, for convening it, and for doing us all the honor of presiding at this historic moment.

"We are convened here at a moment of historic opportunity for the cause of peace in the Middle East, and for the cause of peace in the world. For the first time in a generation the peoples of the Middle East are sitting together to turn their talents to the challenge of a lasting peace.

"All of us must have the wisdom to grasp this moment to break the shackles of the past, and to create at last a new hope for the future.

"Two months ago what we now refer to as the fourth Arab-Israeli war was coming to an end. Today, there is the respite of an imperfect ceasefire, but the shadow of war still hangs over the Middle East. Either we begin today the process of correcting the conditions which produced that conflict, or we doom untold tens of thousands to travail, sorrow and further inconclusive bloodshed.

"When the history of our era is written, it will speak not of a series of Arab-Israeli wars, but of one war broken by periods of uneasy armistices and temporary ceasefires. That war has already lasted 25 years. Whether future histories will call this the era of the 25-year Arab-Israeli War, or the 30-year war, or the 50-year war, rests in large measure in our hands. And above all, it rests in the hands of the Israeli and Arab Governments, not only those whose distinguished representatives are seated around this table, but also those who are absent and who we all hope will join us soon.

"We are challenged by emotions so deeply felt -- by causes so passionately believed and pursued -- that the tragic march from cataclysm to cataclysm, each more costly and indecisive than the last, sometimes seems preordained. Yet our presence here today in itself is momentous accomplishment -- is a symbol or rejection of this fatalistic view. Respect for the forces of history does not mean blind submission to those

forces. There is an Arab saying, eli fat mat, which means that the past is dead. Let us resolve here today that we will overcome the legacy of hatred and suffering. Let us overcome old myths with new hope. Let us make the Middle East worthy of the messages of hope and reconciliation that have been carried forward from its stark soil by three great religions.

"Today there is hope for the future, for the conflict is no longer looked upon entirely in terms of irreconcilable absolutes. The passionate ideologies of the past have, in part at least, been replaced by a recognition that all the peoples concerned have earned, by their sacrifice, a long period of peace.

"From two recent trips through the Middle East I have the impression that people on both sides have had enough of bloodshed. No further proof of heroism is necessary; no military point remains to be made. The Middle East -- so often the source of mankind's inspiration -- is challenged to another act of hope and reconciliation -- significant not only for its own peoples but for all mankind.

"What does each side seek? Both answer with a single word: peace. But peace has of course a concrete meaning for each. One side seeks the recovery of sovereignty and the redress of grievances suffered by a displaced people. The other seeks security and recognition of its legitimacy as a nation. The common goal of peace must surely be broad enough to embrace all these aspirations.

"For the United States, our objective is such a peace. I cannot promise success, but I can promise dedication. I cannot guarantee a smooth journey towards our goal. I can assure you of an unswerving quest for justice.

"The United States will make a determined and unflagging effort.

"President Nixon has sent me here because for five years he has endeavored to build a new structure of international peace in which ties with old friends are strengthened, and new and constructive relationships replace distrust and confrontation with adversaries.

"But world peace remains tenuous and incomplete so long as the Middle East is in perpetual crisis. Its turmoil is a threat to the hopes of all of us in this room. It is time to end it.

"The question is not whether there must be peace. The question is how do we achieve it. What can we do here to launch new beginnings?

"First, this conference must speak with a clear and unequivocal voice: The ceasefire called for by the Security Council must be scrupulously adhered to by all concerned. Prior to last October the United States did all it could to prevent a new outbreak of fighting. But we failed because frustration could no longer be contained.

"After the fighting began we, in concert with the Soviet Union, helped bring an end to the hostilities by sponsoring a number of resolutions in the Security Council. The six-point agreement of November 11 consolidated the ceasefire. It helped create the minimal conditions necessary for carrying forward our efforts here. All these resolutions and agreements must be strictly implemented.

"But regardless of these steps, we recognize that the ceasefire remains fragile and tentative. The United States is concerned over the evidence of increased military preparedness in recent days. A renewal of hostilities would be both foolhardy and dangerous. We urge all concerned to refrain from the use of force, and to give our efforts here the chance they deserve.

"Second we must understand what can realistically be accomplished at any given moment.

"The separation of military forces is certainly the most immediate problem. Disengagement of military forces would help to reduce the danger of a new military outbreak; it would begin the process of building confidence between the two sides.

"Based on intensive consultations with the leaders of the Middle East, including many in this room today, I believe that the first work of this conference should be to achieve early agreement on the separation of military forces, and that such an agreement is possible.

"Serious discussions have already taken place between the military representatives of Egypt and Israel at Kilometer 101. It is important to build promptly on the progress achieved there. And on the Jordanian and Syrians fronts a comparable base for the lessening of tensions and the negotiation of further steps toward peace must be found. Progress towards peace should include all the parties concerned.

"Third, the disengagement of forces is an essential first step -- a consolidation of the ceasefire and a bridge to the 'peaceful and accepted settlement' called for in Security Council Resolution 242. Our final objective is the implementation in all its parts of Resolution 242. This goal has the full support of the United States. Peace must bring a new relationship among the nations of the Middle East -- a relationship that will not only put an end to the state of war which has persisted for the last quarter of a century, but will also permit the peoples of the Middle East to live together in harmony and safety. It must replace the reality of mistrust with a new reality of promise and hope. It must include concrete measures that make war less likely.

"A peace agreement must include these elements, among others: withdrawals, recognized frontiers, security arrangements, guarantees, a settlement of the legitimate interests of the Palestinians and a recognition that Jerusalem contains places considered holy by three great religions.

"Peace will require that we relate the imperative of withdrawals to the necessities of security, the requirement of guarantees to the sovereignty of the parties, the hopes of the displaced to the realities now existing.

"Fourth, we believe there must be realistic negotiations between the parties. Resolution 338 provides just such a process. It is on the parties that the primary responsibility rests. The United States intends to help facilitate these talks in very feasible way, to encourage moderation and the spirit of accommodation. We are prepared to make concrete suggestions to either side if this will help promote practical progress. But we must always remember that while a Middle East settlement is in the interest of us all, it is the people of the area that must live with the results. It must in the final analysis, be acceptable to them.

"Peace, in short, cannot last unless it rests on the consent of the parties concerned. The wisest of realists are those who understand the power of a moral consensus. There is a measure of safety in power to prevent aggression, but there is greater security still in arrangements considered so just that no one wishes to overthrow them. As we open this conference we take a momentous step. We are challenging a history of missed opportunities, of mutual fear and bottomless distrust. Our backdrop is a war that has brought anguish and pain, death and destruction, a war that has been costly on both sides, that has brought neither victory nor defeat, that reflected the failure of all our past efforts at peaceful solutions.

"Mr. Secretary General, fellow delegates, President Nixon has sent me here with the purpose of affirming America's commitment to a just and lasting peace.

"We do not embark on this task with false expectations. We do not pretend that there are easy answers. A problem that has defied solution for a generation does not yield to simple remedies.

"In all efforts for peace the overriding problem is to relate the sense of individual justice to the common good. The great tragedies of history occur not when right confronts wrong, but when two rights face each other.

"The problems of the Middle East today have such a character. There is justice on all sides, but there is a greater justice still in finding a truth which merges all aspirations in the realization of a common humanity. It was a Jewish sage, who speaking for all mankind, expressed this problem well: "If I am not for myself who is for me, but if I am for myself alone, who am I? "

"Fellow delegates, in the months ahead we will examine many problems. We will discuss many expedients. We will know success ~~expand~~ and I dare say we shall experience deadlock and despair.

"But let us always keep in mind our final goal: we can exhaust ourselves in maneuvers or we can remember that this is the first real chance for peace ~~there~~ the Middle East has had in three decades.

We can concentrate on our resentments or we can be motivated by the consciousness that this opportunity, once past will not return.

"We can emphasize the very real causes of distrust, or we can remember that if we succeed our children will thank us for what they have ~~been~~ spared.

"We can make propaganda or we can try to make progress. The American attitude is clear. We know we are starting on a journey whose outcome is uncertain and whose progress will be painful. We are conscious that we need wisdom and patience and good will. But we know, too, that the agony of three decades must be overcome and that somehow we have to muster the insight and courage to put an end to the conflict between peoples who have so often ennobled mankind.

52/20/81/22

"So we are here to spare no effort in the quest of a lasting peace in the Middle East, a task which is as worthy as it may be agonizing. In the words of the poet:

"Pain that cannot forget
Falls drop by drop
Upon the heart
Until in our despair
There comes wisdom
Through the awful
Grace of God." Bassin