

EMBARGO:

Wednesday, 17th November 1976
10:00 pm

40th Jewish World Congress in Geneva
Speech of Federal Councillor Pierre Graber

(Geneva, 17th November 1976)

Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I consider it a singular honour to be allowed to address you on the occasion of the 40th Jewish World Congress in Geneva - city of its founding in 1936 - and to convey the congratulations and best wishes of the Federal Council and the people of Switzerland for this anniversary.

Forty years are a long time for an international organization; in the history of the Jewish people a short and tragic instant, for your congress forty years of trial and hope.

Allow me to briefly greet the men who, during the alarming circumstances before the war, while persecution was just starting, tried to unite Jewish organizations of the entire world into an association which according to the very words of one of its founders, had the purpose "to make a reality of the common resolution of the Jewish people to unite in defence of its rights". One of them, and certainly not the least active, was yourself, Mr. President.

The World Jewish Congress has been established on the eve of one of the most painful calamities in the history of the Jewish people. The emancipation of European Jews, begun by the French Revolution, should normally have led to their integration within the new Nation-States, had it not been for the vehement opposition of certain circles atta-

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ched to the past, justifying their atavistic prejudices with pseudo-scientific "theories". Thus doubts were raised, concerning this integration, especially after the Dreyfus affair which followed the pogroms of Tzarist Russia. These doubts were the basis for a movement to create a Jewish national State, with Theodor Herzl as its initiator.

In the troubled atmosphere of political and economic instability, following the First World War, National-Socialism developed and prospered. On the basis of these so-called "theories", and taking advantage of the war it had unleashed, it attempted to realize the monstrous "final solution". To this day we are unable to supply a rational explanation, in terms of cause and effect, for this insane endeavour, whose incredulous and frightened by-standers we have been.

Confronted by an ordeal without precedent for the Jewish people, yet, so often persecuted in the course of its history, your organization has developed a tireless activity to help, to protect, to obtain justice and compensation. I believe it is my duty to pay here a tribute to that great scholar, humanist and man of action, to Dr. Nahum Goldmann who for so long has been and still is its President.

I have already mentioned Theodor Herzl and the Zionist movement he inspired; it is this movement which obtained the Balfour Declaration on the eve of the conquest of Palestine by General Allenby over the Turks, regarding a national home for the Jewish people in that country. Another contemporary event illustrated the new political context : the "Arab revolt" headed by the Sherif of Mecca.

These two events need not necessarily have led to a conflict, as shown by the unfortunately short-lived contacts established at that time. However, these contacts were not granted, by either side, the consideration they required in view of their utmost importance, as the leaders of the Zionist movement have recognized. Soon, therefore, they were subrogated by confrontation among the communities; a

confrontation with ever worsening consequences. I shall not dwell on the evolution of the Jewish community of Palestine. The creation of the State of Israel by decision of the UN General Assembly in 1947, commenced a new era, marked by a dichotomy : with the creation of a new society based on original concepts of collective cooperation opposed in a situation of conflict to its neighbours.

Wars follow one another, threats, with ever more sophisticated arms, become stronger. These conflicts have resulted in numerous victims and migration movements divesting entire populations of the life circumstances to which they had been adapted. Conflict becomes a deadly habit. A disaster such as happened in Lebanon, reminds us just how deadly.

At present all efforts to resolve the Middle-Eastern conflict again appear blocked, inspite of the substantial progress achieved during these last years. Everyone is aware of the reasons for the deadlock. Even those not directly resulting from the conflict are nonetheless their logical, if remote consequences.

We regret this situation and are full of apprehension about it. We are apprehensive because the confrontation - impassive yet permanent - is extremely dangerous. Should it erupt, the adversaries would be seriously shaken and we would also be implicated. We are regretful, because we dared hope, in these recent years, for some not very clearly defined solution, allowing all peoples to attempt the experience of peaceful coexistence. Do not ask me to be too precise. Mr. Yigal Allon himself, has recently recommended - certainly with sound reasons - that the powers not concerned abstain from formulating propositions.

It appears, however, that certain principles are presently more or less universally accepted : the right to existence and security within recognized boundaries for all states of the region, as precondition for a peaceful and harmonious development and the reduction of tensions and anxieties. At the same time, the need for adequate guarantees of territorial inviolability and political independence for

each of these states, has been understood; here again, confidence must replace deeply ingrained suspicions. Finally, the establishment of a Palestinian national entity in a framework to be defined by the interested parties, in order to allow the Arab community of Palestine to manifest its political and cultural identity. Security has to rest on the recognition of the rights of all parties concerned.

It is admittedly gratuitous to bring forth ideas from the distant position of a permanently neutral State. I do it nevertheless, as this conflict absorbs too much energy which could be beneficial to the immense task of construction awaited by the peoples of the region. I do it too, because of the intense interest we hold for the old land where it is happening, due to our traditions, the past and the present of our civilization. Indeed, I even believe that beyond the formulas devised by Statesmen to satisfy the multiple aspirations of the peoples for whom they are responsible, the true solution must be searched for in these old but ever living sources.

The Jewish community, the eldest of the three families risen from the ancient Orient, is the least numerous, but the one that has succeeded in maintaining its identity, inspite of persecution and dispersion. Towards the road to necessary conciliation I am certain it will take the lead, as it did, long ago, to follow Moses and the other prophets.

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Summary of Federal Councillor Pierre Grabers' speech

Mr. Pierre Graber, Federal Councillor, Head of the Federal Political Department, has today addressed the 40th Jewish World Congress in Geneva.

The speaker, after briefly recalling the establishment of the Congress in Geneva in 1936 and paying tribute to its founders - in particular to Dr. Nahum Goldmann -, proceeded to evoke the destiny of the Jewish people in the 20th century and the terrible ordeal it had to suffer.

Mr. Graber stressed the apprehensions and regrets caused by the deadlock in the efforts to resolve the conflict in the Middle East. The speaker stated that today, some principles are nearly universally accepted, such as the right to existence and security within recognized boundaries for all states of the region, as precondition for a peaceful and harmonious development. He also insisted on the necessity for adequate guarantees of territorial inviolability and political independence for each of these states. Finally - as an element of solution - he mentioned the "establishment of a Palestinian national entity - whose framework must be defined by the interested parties - allowing the Arab community of Palestine to manifest its political and cultural identity". Security has to rest on the recognition of the rights of all parties concerned.

Mr. Graber, concluding, pointed to the historic links among the "three great families risen from the ancient orient" and called for the "necessary conciliation".