

Speech by His Majesty to the European Parliament, Strasbourg - December 12, 2007

Bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim,

Mr. President,
Members of Parliament,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thank you for your warm welcome. On behalf of the people of Jordan, I am honored to come before this distinguished institution again.

My friends,
A changing Europe and a changing Middle East are here today.

A Europe of expanding membership and a visionary mission: for cooperation across borders and growth without barriers.

A Middle East of new horizons and growing hope: for peace among neighbors, opportunities for its people and a future for our youth.

These trends do not take place in isolation. The hopes our regions achieve will advance stability and create new possibilities for security and prosperity worldwide. It is deeply in our interest to succeed. And a critical opportunity is before us.

Two weeks ago, with the support of the European Union and nations from both our regions, Israelis and Palestinians met at Annapolis. They pledged all-out negotiations toward a peace treaty in 2008 and immediate steps to implement their obligations under the Road Map. For the first time in years, we see movement toward a permanent settlement and an independent, sovereign, viable Palestinian state.

This progress is the work of many friends of peace, including leaders in Europe and the Arab states. We believed that, after years of worsening crisis, a change of strategy was required. We urged a new commitment to the two-state goal and a targeted process that could achieve it – with tight timelines, measurable requirements and milestones for action.

Second chances are rare, but I believe we have come to one. Very real challenges lie ahead, but Annapolis has created a new spark of hope. We can and must fan that spark into a blaze of confidence, action and tangible results.

As our near neighbor, Europe shares our interest in solving this, the central crisis of our age. All sides respect Europe's neutral role and model of regional progress and peace. For years you have been our partner in the search for solutions. And you will be our partner, too, in the benefits of success: a vibrant zone of peace and prosperity throughout our shared hemisphere.

These realities give Europe an important and prominent role in the future of peace. I speak especially of the European Union, and you, the voices of Europe, here in the European Parliament. And I have come here today to urge your active engagement, to seek your specific, practical skills and investment in the future, and to offer Jordan's own commitment in the days of work that lie ahead.

My friends,
There are major areas where action must begin now.

The first is support for the negotiations and their goal: a final settlement, creating an end to conflict, security for both Palestine and Israel, and at long last, a sovereign, independent and viable Palestinian state.

We must not underestimate the difficult days ahead. The issues are complex and decades-old. Real grievances must be faced – and left behind. On the positive side, Israelis and Palestinians understand their deep, shared stake in ending the conflict. And a great amount of work has already been done. From Oslo, through the Road Map, through the Geneva Accords, and other initiatives – the parameters of the solutions are in focus. I believe the parties can get to the endgame.

But for this to happen, it is vital that the international community be engaged. Europe has a unique experience with the mechanisms and process of post-conflict recovery and reconciliation. This includes creating a security framework that can offer assurance to both sides. European peacekeeping forces have played a constructive role in Lebanon. Your commitment can help bring great trust to a Palestinian-Israeli settlement.

On the ground, there is a need, not only for resources, but for partnership – to boost economic opportunities, create confidence that the political process works, and help create the conditions that will sustain peace. Both Palestinians and Israelis need to see tangible results, and quickly. That means security from violence and an end to occupation; but it also means better conditions of life. In the occupied territories, the humanitarian situation for Palestinians remains dire. People need access to jobs and education, effective public services and more. Such action will provide a major infusion of hope – and be a powerful counter-argument to extremist predictions that nothing can change.

Next week, donor nations and institutions will meet in Paris to make commitments and plan the way forward. European nations and the European Union are already providing help, a commitment respected by people throughout the region.

A second and related imperative is to understand and articulate the potential of peace. We must begin now to re-envision the future: a region where conflict has given way to cooperation, where a regional economy brings together the capabilities and resources of 22 countries – more than 300 million people, from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean – and where cross-border partnerships advance development, health, the environment and more. It is a future that empowers people to be full participants in global progress. And it will unleash a new scope for partnership with our European neighbors, in science, technology and trade.

This promising future is why we must move swiftly on a comprehensive settlement, with action on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks. Indeed, the entire Arab world has

recognized the importance of moving forward. The Arab Peace Initiative was affirmed, unanimously, last spring. And it has received the support of Muslim countries beyond the region. The opportunity is here, at long last, for a sovereign, independent, and viable Palestinian state, and full, normal relations between Israel and 57 Arab and Muslim nations. This means acceptance; acceptance by key countries, with billions of citizens, representing almost a third of the membership of the United Nations. And that opens a shared future of security, peace and new partnerships.

Achieving such a peace will also make a substantial impact on other issues. Within the region, it will create new strategic space, allowing the resolution of other serious issues, from poverty to proliferation. Aggressive forces will no longer be able to exploit the Palestinian cause to serve their own ambitions and interests. Resources and attention will be freed to advance the region's potential through development and reform.

We in Jordan are ready to meet that future. We have pressed forward with our reform program, despite regional instability. In the last decade, we have achieved significant gains: strong economic growth, rising per-capita incomes, and a model educational system. And Europe has been an important partner, through private-sector investments, as well as official assistance. Allow me to say, we deeply appreciate the support and friendship of this Parliament and the European Union. And we believe that in the days after peace, our partnership can only soar higher.

My friends,

Today, we can think of a larger neighborhood, one that stretches from north of the Baltic Sea to south of the Mediterranean, one that is shared by Europe and the Middle East. It is the basis of the Euro-Med Partnership, our region-to-region platform for cooperation and development. It is a relationship with great shared interests and unlimited potential. And it is up to us to develop our partnership to its fullest.

Today, young Europeans are coming to adulthood, who never knew a divided Europe. Their young counterparts, Palestinian and Israeli, have no such positive experience; they have grown up in a world of division and conflict. Now, together, we have an opportunity to remove the barriers to their future, and leave the past behind.

Today, the European Parliament has significantly more member countries than when I spoke before Parliament only five years ago. That's the result of a region-wide commitment to grow the zone of partnership and progress. The Middle East is tackling the same important task. Now, together, we can help that work succeed.

Today, a renewed peace process has begun. We have seen such beginnings fail in the past. But this time, a unique confluence of events has created new openings for success. Now, together, we can, we must, fulfill the promise of peace.

Friends,

We in Jordan know that when an olive tree takes life, planting is only the first step. A hundred processes then go active to create the cells and structures of life. Roots emerge, growth occurs, and a core of strength ensures survival. From outside comes water and support to sustain life and create new fruit.

In the arena of the Middle East, a new olive branch has just been planted. Now the real work must begin. It is in our hands to create the process and structures that will give peace roots, help it grow, and sustain it into the future.

I urge you to share in this effort. Our partnership can create an historic transformation, and a rich harvest – years of peace and prosperity, that will benefit our peoples and our world.

Thank you very much.