

Ultimately, it is the right and the responsibility of the Israeli Government to make the hard choices that are necessary to protect a Jewish and democratic state for which so many generations have sacrificed. And as a friend of Israel, I'm committed to doing our part to see that this goal is realized. And I will call not just on Israel, but on the Palestinians, on the Arab States, and the international community to join us in this effort, because the burden of making hard choices must not be Israel's alone.

But even as we do all that's necessary to ensure Israel's security, even as we are clear eyed about the difficult challenges before us, and even as we pledge to stand by Israel through whatever tough days lie ahead, I hope we do not give up on that vision of peace. For if history teaches us anything, if the story of Israel teaches us anything, it is that with courage and resolve, progress is possible. Peace is possible.

The Talmud teaches us that "so long as a person still has life, they should never abandon faith." And that lesson seems especially fitting today.

For so long as there are those across the Middle East and beyond who are standing up for the legitimate rights and freedoms which have been denied by their governments, the United States will never abandon our support for those rights that are universal.

And so long as there are those who long for a better future, we will never abandon our pursuit of a just and lasting peace that ends this conflict with two states living side by side in

peace and security. This is not idealism; it is not naivete. It is a hardheaded recognition that a genuine peace is the only path that will ultimately provide for a peaceful Palestine as the homeland of the Palestinian people and a Jewish State of Israel as the homeland of the Jewish people. That is my goal, and I look forward to continuing to work with AIPAC to achieve that goal.

Thank you. God bless you. God bless Israel, and God bless the United States of America. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:56 a.m. at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to Lee "Rosy" Rosenberg, president, David Victor, former president, Howard Kohr, executive director, and Howard Green, national board member, American Israel Public Affairs Committee; Alan P. Solow, chairman, Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations; U.S. Ambassador-designate to Israel Daniel B. Shapiro; Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel; Osher Twito of Sderot, Israel, who was wounded in a rocket attack on February 9, 2008; Richard J. Goldstone, head, United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict; Gilad Shalit, an Israeli soldier held captive by militants in Gaza since June 25, 2006; Mayor Rahm I. Emanuel of Chicago, IL, in his former capacity as White House Chief of Staff; and former White House Senior Adviser David M. Axelrod.

Statement on Tornado and Severe Storm Destruction in Missouri and the Midwest

May 22, 2011

Michelle and I send our deepest condolences to the families of all those who lost their lives in the tornadoes and severe weather that struck Joplin, Missouri, as well as communities across the Midwest today. We commend the heroic efforts by those who have responded and who are working to help their friends and neighbors at this very difficult time. At my di-

rection, FEMA is working with the affected areas' State and local officials to support response and recovery efforts, and the Federal Government stands ready to help our fellow Americans as needed.

NOTE: This statement was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 23.