

DISENGAGEMENT TALKS

Israel - Syria

Geneva
May 31, 1974

GEN. SIILASVUO: Gentlemen, it is with a feeling of profound joy that I convene today this meeting of the military working group of the Geneva Conference on the Middle East for the purpose of signing the agreement on disengagement between Israeli and Syrian forces and to work out procedures for its prompt implementation. Owing to an exceptional feat of diplomacy unparalleled in the annals of international relations, the foundation has been laid on which a reliable structure of peace could be built and strengthened. We all owe a debt of gratitude to all those who have devoted enormous energy, thought and time in negotiating this agreement.

Although the present agreement is not a peace treaty, no one can deny that it represents a milestone in the unceasing efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. We are all, I am sure, aware of the fact that a good deal remains to be done in the furtherance of this goal, but this agreement gives us encouragement that with perseverance, tenacity, flexibility, understanding and a will for peace, we can dare to express the hope of further progress in the search for a just and lasting settlement. Even though the harsh realities of the problem may yet present us with occasional setbacks in the tortuous and difficult road towards normalization and reconciliation among the peoples of the Middle East, I have the strong conviction that this historical

agreement may well turn out to be that giant and courageous step that brought us to the threshold of a new era of thrust, justice, and peace in the Middle East.

It is in the spirit of these considerations that I now invite the representatives of Israel and Syria to sign this agreement.

(S i g n i n g)

We will adjourn the meeting for 15 minutes, and in the meantime the gentlemen of the press should leave the hall.

(R e c e s s)

GEN. SIILASVUO: On the 31 of May, the agreement on disengagement was signed at 11:45 Geneva time.

I would like to ask the parties two questions, concerning the cease fire and the repatriation of wounded prisoners of war. What instructions have been given to the military forces to observe the cease fire, and from what time?

ISRAELI OFFICER: We gave the order to refrain from all military actions against Syria from 12 o'clock Israeli time.

GEN. SIILASVUO: Today?

ISRAELI: Yes, today.

SYRIAN OFFICER: Mr. Chairman, as far as the Government of the Syrian Republic is concerned, the orders have been given to implement the cease fire starting from 12 o'clock Geneva time.

GEN. SIILASVUO: Then I would like to know what action the parties have taken in order to implement the obligation to repatriate wounded prisoners of war. I understand it should take place tomorrow.

ISRAELI OFFICER: We have made all the arrangements for tomorrow, with the Red Cross, of course.

SYRIAN OFFICER: Mr. Chairman, tomorrow at 12 o'clock Geneva time, the wounded prisoners will be permitted to go.

GEN. SIILASVUO: According to the agreement, we should have the meetings of the military working group within 24 hours of the signature of the agreement. This means that we must have the first meeting tomorrow. I would like to have suggestions as to what time we should convene tomorrow.

SYRIAN OFFICER: Mr. Chairman, the Syrian delegation proposes that the meeting should take place at 4 p.m. tomorrow.

GEN. SIILASVUO: Would you agree? Then let's have the meeting at 4 p.m. tomorrow. I suggest that as this room is not the most practical for the further discussions, that we have the following meetings in the room next door. Is this agreeable to the parties?

ISRAELI OFFICER: Well, I didn't see the room, but I suppose it is all right.

GEN. SIILASVUO: Col. Sion knows it well. Would the parties like to suggest what subjects should be discussed tomorrow?

SYRIAN OFFICER: Mr. Chairman, as far as we are concerned, we suggest that we follow the agreement and that we discuss the

question of the withdrawal according to the agreement, and the other questions.

ISRAELI OFFICER: Since we have a lot of subjects, I would prefer to speak tomorrow about first of all the timing, how to do it. The overall timing. And then maybe about arrangements for repatriation of dead bodies that we have from both sides, and thirdly, arrangements for evacuation of all vehicles that are in no-man's land, so we can use the following days to do it. I think those are the starting subjects.

GEN. SIILASVUO: Is this proposal agreeable to the Syrian delegation?

SYRIAN OFFICER: Mr. Chairman, the question of the deadbodies has already been decided by the agreement, so we would prefer to discuss the question of the withdrawal first, because this other question has been settled already.

GEN. SIILASVUO: And about the evacuation of military vehicles in no-man's land and places where you can start now?

SYRIAN OFFICER: What kind of vehicles?

ISRAELI OFFICER: Destroyed vehicles.

SYRIAN OFFICER: The main question is to elaborate a program for the evacuation, a timing, a calendar.

GEN. SIILASVUO: Having heard now both parties, I suggest we start by discussing the general outline of the disengagement process and if time permits we can also touch on details like the vehicles