Mr RABIN (Prime Minister of Israel).– Mr President, Secretary General, members of the Council of Europe, members of the Knesset, observers to the Council of Europe, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

I would like to thank you, Mr President, for the invitation which was extended to me to address today this esteemed forum, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. It gives me much pleasure to be here nearly two years after Chaim Herzog addressed you, while serving as President of the State of Israel.

May I take this opportunity to salute the Council of Europe for the central role it has played in promoting the European integration process based on the values of democracy and freedom, as well as for its present contribution toward the architecture of Europe and the safeguarding of human rights and values.

Israel follows with much interest your efforts to create a stronger and more united continent, and the reshaping of modern Europe.

Although Israel is not an integral part of your continent, we, as a democratic and western state, feel a profound and strong affinity for Europe, one which we believe is mutually shared by you. Our long-standing and steadfast commitment to democratic values is illustrated by the fact that the special status of observer in the Council of Europe was given to members of the Knesset, Israel’s parliament.

Israel fully shares the values which this Council represents. Therefore, it is incumbent upon all democracies and especially the nations of the Council of Europe to lead the fight and renounce the resurging plague of racism, anti-Semitism and intolerance, in every form, and at every opportunity. In this context Israel cannot but condemn the growth of neo-Nazi movements, and calls upon you, the Council, vigorously to oppose it.

It gives me much satisfaction to praise the ongoing and fruitful dialogue between Israel and the Council of Europe. We are delighted to open the doors of the Knesset to periodic working sessions of various committees of the Assembly. In March 1992, the Committee on Culture and Education conducted in Jerusalem its hearings on religious tolerance in a democratic society. Later we hosted the Committee on Science and Technology under the same auspices. This year we expect to host two more committees: the Committee on Parliamentary and Public Relations and the Committee on Agriculture which will discuss the topic of desertification.
I come from Jerusalem, the eternal capital of the Jewish people, the city where the prophets proclaimed their visions of peace, to tell you that the Government of Israel knows that the eyes of many millions in the world look towards it in prayer, in great hope, and in the expectation of a new path, a new momentum. I come from Jerusalem to tell you that the Government of Israel yearns for peace and is willing to make peace.

I also want to tell you that we know that obstacles will arise, that crises might erupt and that we will face disappointment, tears, and pain. But in the end, we shall arrive at peace. Supported by your blessings, concern and assistance we will do it.

In the last decade of our 20th century, walls of hatred have fallen, peoples have been liberated, and artificial barriers have disappeared; powers have crumbled and ideologies have collapsed.

It is our sacred duty, to ourselves and to our children, to see the new world as it is now, to note its dangers, to explore its prospects, and to do everything possible so that the state of Israel will fit into the changing face of this world. I think that in recent years the world has shrunk and no nation can solve its problems alone, and no country should think that it is isolated. Each nation should overcome those feelings and act in world and regional co-operation. We wish our region also to join the movement towards peace, reconciliation and co-operation that is spreading over the globe these days.

I have committed myself and my government to the present peace process and I have expressed on many occasions my hope that 1994 will be a year during which a peace agreement can be reached with our Arab neighbours. We believe with all our hearts that peace is possible, that it is imperative, and that it will come.

For much of my life I was a soldier. I took part in Israel's wars, as well as in Israel's march for peace. As one who has been a soldier, I can still see - as though it were just yesterday - the rows of fallen comrades lining the road to Jerusalem in our war of independence; the skeletons of the burnt-out vehicles; the burning trucks and the thousands of besieged Jerusalemites coming out towards us to get their sacks of sugar, and rice, and jerry cans of water.

As one who was a military commander, I know that before we decided - before I decided - to go into battle, we always saw before us - and will always see - the eyes of the soldiers asking whether this is vital, or whether there is not some other choice.

Only one who, year after year, stands facing the thousands and tens of thousands of silent mourners in the cemeteries on Memorial Day, only one who has seen worlds destroyed and families devastated, knows just how important peace is to us and to our neighbours.