

Interview with Minister Isaac Herzog
May 24, 2007

The Minister of Social Welfare and Services and Diaspora Affairs, Isaac Herzog is a Member of Knesset from the Labor Party.

Minister Herzog, your father [Chaim Herzog], the former president of Israel, had a unique role during the Six-Day War. Tell us a little bit about what he was called back to do as public service.

My father was a retired chief of intelligence—a Major General. On the eve of the Six-Day war, Israel was surrounded by all of its enemies. There was huge tension over three weeks. People were waiting and were under huge fear. My father was called to broadcast to the people with commentary on the situation and he became the national commentator and spokesman for the people of Israel.

He had a 95 percent approval rating, which is something unique under any circumstances. Of course, during his broadcasts he was extremely calming and he explained [the situation] and delivered a personal sense of security to the people of Israel, which brought him world fame.

You were just seven years old at that time, having been born in 1960. Do you have any memories—you were just a young boy then—of what it felt like to be on the verge of war in Israel at that time?

I was a child during the time before the war started. My father took me—together with my brothers—and we dug a trench in the garden we had around the house. We were bombarded during the war and houses near us were blown up. We were all together in the trench and every time there was a mortar or a canon fired we covered our ears. I was six years old. But it was a very quick war that ended quickly and we felt, of course, a great sense of historical spirit in the air when it finished.

What do you think people should take away as the greatest lessons of the Six-Day War?

National unity, of course, and the feeling that we defended ourselves and we should be original and always prevailing as an army and as a nation. We have gone through many upsets and torments and setbacks in the past including times of fear. It is extremely important for us to learn our lessons and, of course, to trust our just causes.

We are coming up on the 40th anniversary of the Six-Day War, which is a natural time for reflection. As an Israeli, as one of your nation's leaders, what will you be thinking about?

That we have to understand that the world has changed, that circumstances have changed. During the year after the war the Arab league rejected any possibility of compromise and

now the Arab world is offering—through the Arab League—a compromise. We have to know how to be proactive, how to be on the initiating side. We have to make sure our military is strong and our society is strong as well and we have to focus on the strength of our inner society. These are the lessons; and we should try to return to being a beacon unto the world.