

Pastor Deedee Coleman at AIPAC Policy Conference 2010

Transcript

Good morning. I want to congratulate and thank David Victor, Lee Rosenberg, and Howard Kohr on a wonderful conference and for giving me this opportunity to share a moment of grace. I am humble today to stand before this policy conference in support of peace in Israel. I stand today with a charge to encourage not only the African-American community, but all communities of faith to join together to support our Jewish brothers and sisters here at home and in Israel to let you know that you are not alone. (Applause.)

I am here as a friend of Israel. I serve on the national council of AIPAC and find it to be one of the greatest experiences of my life. It has deepened my faith, renewed my strength in humanity and has allowed me to show that this pro-Israel movement that I serve in goes way beyond the Jewish community. I am an African-American Baptist female preacher whose origin comes from a deep rooted spiritual truth and faith that Israel is the Holy Land of this world and its people are the chosen of God. (Applause.)

That's what I believe, that's what I know and that's what I preach. From my birth I was taught that God has a special blessing for those of us that protect and pray for Israel. My journey has not waivered nor has it diminished in any way. If anything, since I have joined AIPAC I am more committed to the journey of work and of peace. I grew up reading bible stories of a great Holy Land filled with beliefs in Israel and it stems from being taught the history through the Word of God, about the courage of people, the people who are dedication and their strive to the Jewish traditions and what they know. The Jewish people who have stood steadfast in their faith, who have honored their family traditions and who have carried its culture through the decades remembering that they are a people who are givers of peace.

I was overwhelmed in 2008 when I experienced my first trip to Israel with AIPAC's foundation. It was there that I realized that the quest for peace and the need for security is nonnegotiable. Everything I read about Israel, the reality of seeing the word on paper etched in my heart as it became life my travels to Israel have renewed who I am, flying over a small strip of land cornered by the Mediterranean Sea. My feet touched the ground — holy ground from Tel Aviv to the Mount of Olives to the Old City of the Saints; Jerusalem, the capital of Israel. (Applause.)

Putting my feet in the Sea of Galilee, crying at the Jordan River took me back. In the mountains we went and every step we took it unfolded an awakening in my spirit. Tours that educated my belief system, to put away myths and old wives' tales and learn about a country filled with people who are rich in spirit and all they long for is peace. (Applause.)

My experience in Israel was highlighted when we went to an Ethiopian village and it was there that I saw for the first time black Jews, people who looked like me. I know that my questions were deep as I struggle to understand what and why were they doing in Israel. And then the story was told. Because they declared who they were and whose they were they were airlifted by a country that loved them, because their homeland was where they belonged and needed to be. They had come home. And then we visited the town of Sderot and from there I could look into the Gaza Strip. It was there that I heard the story of people who every day of their lives they wondered whether or not they would get up in the morning.

What I saw and heard touched my heart, mothers telling experiences of bringing their children to school praying that this will not be their last day. No one should have to endure such pain. (Applause.)

There were questions and more questions. There were many governmental agencies where our group had the freedom to ask any question we so desired. They said to me, "Reverend Dee Dee, give us an opportunity to show you the land and tell you of our story. Then you make up your own mind what you think is the right thing to do." Well, today my involvement in AIPAC has gone beyond the words that it read in the Bible. Now more than ever I live by fulfilling a commitment in the work for peace and security for Israel and all of Israel's neighbors. I encourage others, other leaders of faith and anyone who will listen that so goes the peace in Israel so goes the peace in the world. (Applause.)

Many luncheons are prepared by other leaders of faith in the African-American community to spread the news that Israel and its people need our help and our voice. More trips are planned to bring others to see and believe for themselves that peace and security for Israel are nonnegotiable. (Applause.)

It is a must, a necessity, an urgency, an obligation of trust, a stipulation, a need that Israel must be secure and some things are nonnegotiable. Jerusalem, the capital of Israel — nonnegotiable. (Applause.)

Iran must be stopped — nonnegotiable. (Applause.)

Israel must have the right to defend itself — nonnegotiable. (Applause.)

The United States must protect, support, pray for and act on our commitment of support to Israel and its people. We must continue to build a strong bipartisan consensus that has been a part of America's history with Israel to assure that the threats to Israel shall never come to pass. Israel's need for peace and security is not a party issue. It is not an issue of whose side you are on, but it is an issue of the right thing to do.

Together — (applause) — together our job is to ensure domestic political support in the United States for a secure and peaceful Israel. As President Barack Obama said from this very podium, and I quote, "Those who threaten Israel threaten us. Israel has always faced these threats on the frontlines and I will bring to the White House an unshakable commitment to Israel's security." As a proud member of the pro-Israel community it is my privilege and duty to work with our president and our Congress to ensure the vitality of the Jewish state. We must enhance American-Israelite defense cooperation and ensure that Israel has the ability to defend itself always and Iran must not make nuclear weapons for Israel's sake, for America's sake and for the world's sake. (Applause.)

It is incumbent upon us, each of us to work with an administration committed to these goals to ensure that no weapons threaten the existence of our ally Israel. I also believe and know in my heart that the bond between Israel and the United States is well planted with deep roots based on our shared values and faith. It is a relationship that cannot be shaken by a sudden gust of wind. We are too strong for that. We are too deep for that. We are too powerful for that. We are too loving for that. It is a relationship. (Applause.)

It is a relationship that cannot be shaken. Those of us from the African-American community who are here today have come to stand with Israel and to work with AIPAC to strengthen the ties that bind America and Israel together. We have come, because we understand that while Israel needs America it is America that also needs Israel. (Applause.)

We are on a journey together and nothing should shake us from that purpose. Don't get it twisted, don't get confused, don't get perplexed; don't allow the wind to cloud your judgment. At the end of the day, Iran must not make nuclear weapons. (Applause.)

While I know the importance of our political work and that we are blessed in this land of America to have the freedom to act on our beliefs I am thankful for more, but my sisters and brothers of AIPAC, don't ever forget that there is a God factor that we cannot overlook, the God who stood in eternity and declared, "Let there be," and it was. There is a God who sits high and looks down low. There is a God that has never failed his people, the God that took you from the grips of Pharaoh and cross you over into the Promised Land, the same God who was a cloud by day and fire by night, the same God who provided manna from heaven and parted the Red Sea, the God who said, "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt." I don't believe that God has brought Israel and the United States this far to leave us behind. God has a purpose for us. (Applause.)

Each of us are predestined to sit in the seats where we are sitting today, in the very place. You did not wake yourself up this morning. It was the grace and mercy of an almighty God. We are sitting in this place believing that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. Make no mistake, my AIPAC sisters and brothers I am but one voice of many from the African-American community who want to let you

know that you are not alone. You are not alone for we have history together. Our struggles have been your struggles and your struggles are our struggles. Your victory of peace will be our victory for all humanity. We understand all too well discrimination, separation, death and fear and we shall never forget it.

We, the African-American community feel your urgency. We cannot afford to be led astray, but we must stand together believing that all things are possible through the God who loves us. We must stand together, stand as adversity knocks at your door, stand as you seek peace and hold on to your faith, stand onto God's unchanging hand, stand as you walk by faith and not by sight — (applause) — stand and support Israel, stand and tell the story, stand on today as we march on Washington to make our voices heard together that our desire for peace is unmistakable, our support for Israel is unshakable and our bond for freedom and friendship is unbreakable. Thanks be to God. Thank you so very much.