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Speech by Dr. Jehan Sadat
Middle East Peace: Who Leads? Who Succeeds?
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Thank you very much Ambassador Solomon.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is an honor for me to speak at the United States Institute of Peace, an institution that has been in the forefront of research and public policy in the pursuit of international peace. I take pleasure in knowing how closely the Institute has worked with the Sadat Chair for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland and with its holder, Professor Shibley Telhami, who has served on the board of this great institution.

I would also like to acknowledge Ambassador Sameh Shoukry of Egypt, Dean John Townshend of the School of Behavioral and Social Sciences at the University of Maryland, Professor John Ruppert, the Chair of the Art Department at Maryland, which has graciously co-sponsored the Sadat Art for Peace Program, and Mrs. Suzanne Cohen, who has kindly sponsored this program.

It is also a pleasure for me to open this discussion on the role of leadership in advancing Middle East Peace on the occasion of the release of the Sadat Lectures book which includes speeches by prominent world leaders commemorating the legacy of my late husband, President Anwar Sadat. These diverse lectures by leaders ranging from Nelson Mandela to Mohamed ElBaradei, from Jimmy Carter to Henry Kissinger, among other distinguished leaders, have not only addressed the role of bold leadership in advancing peace and real change in history, but also reflected on a tumultuous decade in world politics, especially in the relations between the

United States and the Middle East. The accompanying art work from the Sadat Art for Peace program is truly stunning.

I know that in a few minutes, we will have a panel that directly addresses the role of leadership in successful diplomacy, but allow me here to make a few observations, both about President Sadat's legacy and about the stalemate we now face in the battle for peace in the Middle East.

When President Sadat surprised the world by announcing his willingness to visit Israel and address its Knesset, the mood that prevailed in the Middle East was one of pessimism and resignation. Israel had just elected its most right wing government to date, led by Prime Minister Menachem Begin, and the negotiating process under way in Geneva was getting nowhere. Suddenly the prospects changed, almost overnight.

Our distinguished panelists will undoubtedly touch on that period. But a few comments are in order here. President Sadat used to say that more than 90% of the cards are in the hand of the United States when it comes to Arab-Israeli peace. Sadat truly believed that proposition, but never used it as an excuse not to act or take risks on his own, as he did in launching the 1973 war to regain control of occupied Egyptian land, and as he did in his courageous decision to visit Jerusalem. I don't know that anyone would disagree that without his bold leadership, Egypt and Israel would not have been able to make peace.

But Sadat's belief that clinching peace cannot be done without a central American role was also true. Even after Sadat's initiative, there were moments when negotiations seemed on the verge of collapse--even at Camp David, Maryland, where a deal was ultimately concluded. There can be little doubt that the difference between success and failure had to do more with the active role of the American President at the time, Jimmy Carter, than anything else.

Today, regional parties, both Israeli and Arab, have to do their part. But after years of formal and informal negotiations, it has become clearer what the parameters of agreement have to be--and leadership is once again needed to clinch a deal. I am particularly heartened by the announced intent of President Barack Obama to elevate Arab-Israeli peacemaking in his

priorities, because without such a central role by the American president, Arabs and Israelis will face nothing but continued conflict and bloodshed.

Egypt paid a heavy price for peace with Israel as the Arab League severed relations with Cairo over the deal. President Sadat paid with his own life for saving the lives of untold numbers of Egyptians and Israelis from certain war. For these reasons, many believed that Egypt's peace with Israel would end after President Sadat. But it became clear almost immediately that this would not be the case. Sadat's successor, President Hosni Mubarak, who was tested almost immediately when Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982, continued the same commitment to peace. Thirty years later the peace agreement remains fully in force.

But for Anwar Sadat, the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty was only a part of the vision that he sought to advance when he spoke at the Israeli Knesset and broke psychological barriers. He expressed his view this way:

"I have not come here for a separate agreement between Egypt and Israel. This is not part of the policy of Egypt. The problem is not that of Egypt and Israel. Any separate peace between Egypt and Israel...will not bring permanent peace based on justice in the entire region. Rather, even if peace between all the confrontation states and Israel were achieved, in the absence of a just solution to the Palestinian problem, never will there be that durable and just peace upon which the entire world insists today."

Those words were uttered more than 30 years ago, and Israeli-Palestinian peace, the anchor of comprehensive peace in the Middle East is still not at hand. President Sadat's formula remains valid today, especially with regard to the status of Jerusalem which has been so much in the recent news. He put it this way:

"There are facts that should be faced with all courage and clarity. There are Arab territories which Israel has occupied by armed force. We insist on complete withdrawal from these territories, including Arab Jerusalem. I have come to Jerusalem, as the City of Peace, which will always remain as a living embodiment of coexistence among believers of the three religions. It is inadmissible that anyone should conceive the special status of the City of

Jerusalem within the framework of annexation or expansionism, but it should be a free and open city for all believers."

Sadat also knew what the Arabs had to do in exchange for Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories. All Arabs would have to make genuine peace with Israel that would end the state of war and usher in a new era.

Ladies and Gentlemen, three decades after President Sadat expressed his vision, comprehensive peace in the Middle East remains unfulfilled. The region has grown weary and many are increasingly doubtful about the prospects of peace altogether. The moment of truth is upon us. This is no occasion for buying time, for postponing hard decisions, for avoiding responsibility. If the prospects of a Palestinian state living side by side with Israel collapse, the next generation of Israelis and Arabs will be sentenced to years of conflict and bloodshed. This is a time for leadership to do what's right, to fulfill a vision that one man articulated on behalf of millions of others--and paid for it with his life.

As the widow of this great man who lived by his principles and died for peace, I stand before you in this Institute of Peace and say that peace in the Middle East is possible.

Thank you very much, and peace be upon all of us.