



# **The Role of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

## ***Summary of a joint conference of the Mitvim Institute and the Knesset Lobby for Strengthening Israel's Foreign Affairs System***

**The Knesset  
Jerusalem, Israel  
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Under the current government, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) has been further weakened. Israel currently does not have a full-time foreign minister, and traditional responsibilities of the MFA have been passed on to other ministries.

In light of this reality, [Mitvim – The Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies](#) and the Knesset Lobby for Strengthening Israel's Foreign Affairs System, Chaired by MK Dr. Nachman Shai (Zionist Union), convened on 28 December 2015 a special conference at the Israeli parliament.

The conference was attended by Members of Knesset, diplomats, experts and journalists. It focused on mapping the key problems faced by the MFA, offering solutions and recommendations, and debating the importance of a strong MFA to Israel's foreign policy and national security.

This document summarizes the remarks made at the conference by: MK Isaac Herzog, MK Tzipi Livni, MK Dr. Nachman Shai, MK Dr. Michael Oren, MK Ksenia Svetlova, MK Prof. Manuel Trajtenberg, MK Eyal Ben-Reuven, MK Haim Jelin, MK Ayelet Nahmias-Verbin, Dr. Nimrod Goren (Head of the Mitvim Institute), Colette Avital (former MK and ambassador), Magali Wahaba (former MK and deputy foreign minister), Barak Ravid (*Haaretz* diplomatic correspondent), Victor Harel (former ambassador), Eran Etzion (former director of policy planning at the MFA), Prof. Yossi Shain (Tel Aviv University), Daniel Shek (former ambassador) and Hanan Goder (Head of the MFA worker's union).

In addition, the full conference can be viewed (in Hebrew) on [Mitvim Institute's YouTube channel](#).

## A. Introductory Remarks:

### **MK Dr. Nachman Shai (Chairman of the Lobby for Strengthening Israel's Foreign Affairs System, The Zionist Union):**

The Israeli Foreign Ministry is in a state of deep crisis. It has been stripped of its powers little by little. These have in turn been distributed to various departments and ministers. The MFA has suffered from being sidelined in the past but today's reality is worse than anything it has experienced before. No single entity is currently coordinating and leading the effort to resolve the crisis within the ministry or to strengthen Israel's foreign policy. As a result, the policy debate today puts foreign policy discourse on the periphery. Today, more than ever before, we are becoming aware just how necessary the MFA is and how absent it is from the debate.

This became clear when the Ministerial Committee for Legislation approved the recent [NGO bill](#). We will suffer the consequences of these actions both in the short and the long term. It seems as if no one stopped to ask what impact such a decision has on Israel's foreign relations? Who understands the destructive impact of such a decision? The foreign ministry's employees are not the only ones to pay the price. Indeed, the State of Israel suffers. We are in the midst of battle for the foreign ministry and much work is ahead of us. There are many problems facing the ministry and its employees, such as the need for professional training, a problematic concentration of power and authority, and the need to guarantee professional freedom and prevent politicization. I am committed to continuing to work on behalf of the ministry together with the Mitvim Institute, the MFA's employees and other partners.

### **Dr. Nimrod Goren (Head of the Mitvim Institute):**

2015 was a difficult year for Israeli diplomacy. Content-wise, it was a year of stagnation in the peace process, of a deteriorating security situation, and of growing tensions with the European Union and the United States. This was compounded by a decline in the standing of the MFA – the absence of a full-time foreign minister, the dispersal of the MFA's areas of responsibility among other ministries, and demands for additional budget cuts. The Mitvim Institute's [2015 Foreign Policy Index](#) showed that these are all causes of concern for the Israeli public. Israelis' satisfaction from their country's international standing and the functioning of its government on foreign policy issues is low. These numbers have only decreased when compared to 2014. Moreover, 78% of the public believes that the weakening of the foreign ministry has a harmful effect on Israeli national security.

Rehabilitating Israeli diplomacy is not contingent only upon struggles over diplomats' salaries, which often make the news. Indeed, there are more important matters than this, including: (1) the need to formulate a national foreign policy paradigm that would define the MFA's missions and strategic goals – today, Israel does not have guiding foreign policy principles. This has created the absence of a clear diplomatic horizon and a difficulty to formulate and oversee the work-plans of the foreign ministry and its embassies around

the world; (2) guaranteeing greater freedom for Israel's diplomats and minimizing their dependence on the political echelon – the MFA suffers from over-politicization, which can clearly be seen in decisions around appointments and promotions, as well as in an organizational culture that discourages providing diplomatic alternatives and uses ministry officials to advance political agendas; (3) returning the MFA to the heart of Israel's diplomatic efforts by bolstering the research and policy planning divisions of the MFA, guaranteeing representation of diplomats in political-diplomatic negotiations and briefings for decision-makers, and strengthening the discourse and oversight of these matters in the Knesset.

It is also important to recognize the connection between the content of Israeli foreign policy – not only the MFA's standing – and Israel's international standing. Improvement in Israel's standing is contingent upon progress in the peace process. Additionally, as long as Israel continues to confront the international community rather than focus on building better relations, empowering Israel's foreign ministry will not help rehabilitate Israel's global stature. In fact, the opposite may be true.

Israel requires a pro-peace foreign policy, one that advances regional integration, embodies greater openness to the world and emphasizes more involvement in matters of international significance.

## **B. Members of Knesset:**

### **MK Isaac Herzog (Leader of the Opposition, The Zionist Union)**

If only we were to listen to the tremendous brain trust that has existed in the foreign ministry for many years, Israel would be in a much different place from a political and strategic point of view. We are here to cry out for and to demand the strengthening of this vital arm of Israeli foreign policy. Everything related to defending Israel among the nations has been trampled upon. Our ability to make our case to the nations is being hollowed out, and our foreign service is being severely damaged. The MFA is being torn apart. Its ability to voice opposing views is being rendered useless. It has no standing and no minister. Its director general is a temporary appointee and its ability to conduct its business is in grave danger. The standing of the ministry's employees, whose morale has taken a turn for the worse, is being continuously undermined. Many cadets who have joined the MFA in recent years are abandoning ship due to lack of interest, poor salary and benefits, and a lack of career prospects.

Those who join the Israeli Foreign Service do so to represent Israel, its wellbeing, its future, and its national might. But no Israeli diplomat can explain the ludicrous NGO bill that the Netanyahu government has tabled. Bills of this nature, which are dismantling Israel from within and are causing greater hatred and bifurcation amongst the Israeli people, are a disaster of the worst kind for Israel's foreign affairs. They serve our enemies and curtail the ability of the foreign ministry and its diligent representatives around the world to work

on Israel's behalf and to claim that Israel is a democratic state, which upholds equality and individuals' freedoms. After all, foreign funding impacts nearly every aspect of our lives – from issues of national security, social cohesion, and women's and minority rights, to culture, the arts, education, welfare, health, academia and sciences. All of these have foreign sources of funding involved. This law is very severe and harmful to Israel's international standing.

### **MK Tzipi Livni (The Zionist Union)**

Anyone who fears for Israel's security must understand that good foreign relations are a prerequisite for our country's safety. Advancing Israel's foreign relations is not about cocktail parties, it is about Israel's security. The foreign ministry is important because any military operation begins with a phone call to the United States, and any UN Security Council decision has the capacity to tie Israel's hands. Our nation's security doctrine is not predicated upon sending citizens to settlement outposts. It is based on the IDF, as well as our relations with the world. There is no diplomacy without security, and vice versa. The MFA is of equal importance to the generals. During my tenure as foreign minister I took steps to strengthen the Foreign Service. At the time, the MFA was involved in all our efforts – both military operations and peace negotiations – and its position was always heard. Today, the ministry has effectively been dismantled, a reality I very much regret.

Bad policies cannot be explained away. Public diplomacy is no replacement for foreign policy and there is nothing one can do about it, even if we send people who speak fluent English in front of the cameras. The current government is harming Israel's democratic values and its international standing, as well as contributing to Israel's international isolation. The NGO bill is destroying Israel from within, while simultaneously harming Israel's relations with the outside world. This is a strike at the heart of the values' system on which the country is based and is being done solely for political reasons. Brazil's rejection of ex-settler leader Danny Dayan as Israel's ambassador is not personal. Rather, it is a substantive stance against Israeli policies regarding settlements. The government should publicly state that Dayan is a classic representative of its policies and the Israeli people must understand the price of those policies. Foreign governments view professional appointees differently than political ones. The former are accepted despite any dissatisfaction that may exist with our policies. The latter are seen as sticking a finger in the eye of the foreign government. Political appointments should be made sparingly.

### **MK Dr. Michael Oren (Kulanu)**

The erosion in the foreign ministry's standing has been going on for many years. The reasons for this are many and are rooted in Israeli consciousness and Ben Gurion's view that it does not matter what the nations of the world think, but rather what the Jews do. In reality, what the nations of the world think matters a great deal. Israeli society suffers from the erroneous belief that foreign policy is secondary to security affairs. Moreover, the distinction between the two is artificial and is harmful to our collective security.

In order to return the foreign ministry to its glory days an intensive effort is required in the Knesset and the government, but deep and profound reforms are also required within the ministry itself. To achieve that, however, the cooperation of the ministry is required in order to make organizational changes as well as to redefine its mission and goals. It is inconceivable that key positions at embassies around the world cannot be filled because of poor salaries and other financial considerations. There are diplomats who resign because they cannot make ends meet and others who borrow money from their parents to make it from paycheck to paycheck. Israeli society must understand that this situation has severe consequences for national security and not just for Israel's public image and public diplomacy.

### **MK Ksenia Svetlova (The Zionist Union)**

We need to be thinking about the future generations of Israeli diplomacy. Data on the early retirement of our young diplomats is concerning and I fear that fewer and fewer talented people are attracted to the profession. Moreover, the government's decision to close Israeli missions abroad is a mistake, regardless of which missions are in question.

We are closing embassies while the Iranians are opening more and more. When I was elected to the Knesset, I was warned not to travel abroad often. The Knesset's public image is such that MKs fear that if they travel to represent Israel abroad, and spend time out of the country, their public image will suffer. However, in international fora of parliamentary diplomacy, foreign ministry officials cannot speak. This can only be done by parliamentarians. If an MK is not in attendance – as is often the case – Israel's position cannot be presented. The media's treatment of professional parliamentary delegations abroad must therefore be changed.

### **MK Prof. Manuel Trajtenberg (The Zionist Union)**

There is no one left to fight for the foreign ministry's budget. Despite the importance of the issue, if members of the public are not willing to cry out, take to the streets, and make headlines, no change will occur. The budget cut that the MFA suffers year after year harms Israeli security. This matter must be solved in a far more aggressive way. We are witnessing a structural change in which the prime minister and the National Security Council are those who are responsible for the important issues in the foreign policy realm and not the foreign ministry. This situation has led to the foreign minister being disregarded. Israel needs a powerful foreign minister, but many do not yet understand this. We need to be the ministry's voice and help bring about this process of change.

### **MK Eyal Ben-Reuven (The Zionist Union)**

Today, the foreign ministry has no leader. There is no one who wakes up in the morning and focuses all day long on nothing but promoting Israel's foreign policy. I am a member of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee and we discuss defense issues almost exclusively and rarely do we debate foreign

policy. Even when the foreign minister or the prime minister come in to brief the committee, they discuss defense matters almost exclusively.

There is no more room left to debate which is more important – defense or foreign policy. The two are intertwined. Israel's international standing is not good. This is harmful to our security. Emergency measures are needed to remedy this and the foreign ministry needs to be rebuilt from top to bottom and given substantive assignments.

### **MK Haim Jelin (Yesh Atid)**

Israel has grown accustomed to waging wars based on the knowledge that once the military victory was achieved, the war was won. This is not the case today, because when the battle itself ends, the statesmen begin their work representing the country in the hopes of achieving positive political outcomes. It is precisely for this reason that the foreign ministry's standing is important. Israel's government system suffers from management problems. It is difficult to build good management when political considerations dominate. This is especially true in the MFA, which does not even have a minister at its helm.

The local authorities function at a higher level. During Operation Protective Edge it was the mayors and heads of the local authorities who explained to the world what Israeli civilians were experiencing. The foreign ministry was not there. This was in stark contrast to the Operation Cast Lead when the ministry set up an office in Sderot and matters ran more smoothly. Today, while the MFA is dismembered and its tasks are scattered among other government ministries this can no longer be done. There is no longer one person in charge and this is not a way in which such issues can be managed.

Politics should be taken out of the foreign ministry and a clear foreign policy for Israel should be outlined. We must understand that public diplomacy is part of our security and that it has the capacity to be more beneficial to Israel than purchasing additional planes and tanks. More resources need to be dedicated to this. Otherwise, Israel will lose the diplomatic war.

### **MK Ayelet Nahmias-Verbin (The Zionist Union)**

When I was young, I was a member of a foreign ministry youth delegation. This was a formative experience for me. The fact that the youth programs in the foreign ministry were shut down due to budget cuts is most unfortunate. This project connected many people to the ministry's work and probably helped the MFA with its actual work. The ministry's situation in recent years is a great tragedy and one we must change. While this is not perceived by many as an issue that is critical to managing the state's affairs, it is exactly the type of issue with which we must engage.



## **C. Experts:**

### **Former MK Colette Avital (Former Ambassador and a Board Member at the Mitvim Institute)**

The foreign ministry has been broken into six parts that are disconnected from one another and do not coordinate between each other. Each one does whatever comes to mind. It is a mess. The foreign ministry and the State of Israel have no foreign policy. Kissinger once claimed that Israel has only domestic policy, but I think that in fact Israel only has domestic politics. This is most concerning. When was the last time a foreign minister arrived at the government's weekly meeting and presented a coherent foreign policy strategy with clear goals? There are no priorities and no system to consider various options. There are no thoughtful discussions or analyses of alternatives and the risks and costs of continuing down the current path are not being properly assessed.

Despite the fact that the current government is strong, it has a zig zag foreign policy and is incapable of reaching agreements on the subject. Today, there is only one person calling the shots – the prime minister. He, of course, has the right to set policy. But a serious, holistic, thoughtful policy is called for and it is not being formulated or implemented. The Iranian issue is a perfect example of this. The prime minister was correct to sound the alarm about the Iranian nuclear program but the way he conducted himself embarrassed Israel, leaving it on the sidelines of international diplomacy and creating a crisis with the United States and other allies.

In order to deal with such challenges, Israel needs a foreign ministry but it also needs a foreign policy. Currently, one does not exist. Passing a foreign service bill, as is being discussed for many years, can help rehabilitate Israeli diplomacy. Splitting the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee can also be helpful, creating one committee that will focus on defense and another that will deal with foreign affairs.

### **Former MK and Deputy Foreign Minister Magali Wahaba**

A central weakness of Israeli foreign policy is Israel's absence from the Mediterranean diplomatic sphere. Since 2013, I have been serving as a roving ambassador on behalf of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, which includes 28 member states and 10 observer states. Some of these are friendly to Israel. Others are hostile. In the past, during my tenure as an MK, I also served as a vice president of the assembly.

I will serve in my current role until 2018. Every member state is entitled to five representatives, all of whom must be parliamentarians. Over the last two years, Israel has not participated in the assembly's deliberations. Despite the fact that the decisions made by this forum are important to Israel and the region, the MKs chose not to partake. Does our region not interest the government? Are issues such as monitoring of Syria's chemical weapons arsenal – which was debated in the Mediterranean assembly – not important

to Israel? Is it not important what other countries in the region think of us? Even Egypt, whose parliament is dysfunctional, has a representative there. The Palestinians are involved there as well. And what about Israel?

At times, anti-Israel decisions are passed in the forum simply because Israel is absent. This is a task of national importance in the foreign policy realm, which is being neglected by the MKs, and we are losing much as a result. As a non-Jewish Israeli, I have had to explain to this forum why I am protecting Jews who do not even bother to show up and defend themselves. In December 2015 an Israeli was elected as vice president of the assembly – MK Amir Peretz. This should lead to increased engagement of the Knesset and the MFA with the Assembly.

**Barak Ravid (Diplomatic Correspondent, *Haaretz*)**

Parliamentary oversight of the foreign ministry is necessary but non-existent today. Such oversight should include bureaucratic and budgetary matters, appointments and policy, and the extent of the ministry's influence over foreign policy. There are various reasons and excuses for why there has been no oversight, but the bottom line is that there has been no such effort – public or otherwise – in recent years. This applies to the crisis with Turkey, the appointment of our new ambassador to Brazil, the activities of our ambassador to the US and the crisis in Israeli-US relations.

In the US, for example, ambassadors must appear before the Senate before their nomination is confirmed. They go before parliamentarians and answer questions. This applies even after their term has begun – as the US Ambassador to Israel Dan Shapiro does regularly. Conversely, Israeli Ambassador to the US Ron Dermer has not appeared once before the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee. Nor has he been required to answer questions.

In the previous Knesset, former MK Dr. Ronen Hoffman (Yesh Atid) embarked on a comprehensive review examining these issues. He did so as part of his work in the subcommittee for foreign policy and public diplomacy and compiled a report about the challenges facing the foreign ministry vis-à-vis the other actors in Israel's foreign and defense policy establishment. His report was not finished because the elections took place ahead of schedule. In the current Knesset, the subcommittee should complete this work and publish the report and the accompanying protocols. Moreover, the current Knesset needs to pass the foreign service bill. This is an important initiative that the coalition, not the opposition, should be promoting.

Beyond suffering from losing responsibility to other ministries, budget cuts, and a disparaging attitude from the prime minister, other ministers and the defense establishment, the MFA also suffers from an internal challenge. Israeli diplomats do not take themselves seriously enough, they do not take their mission seriously enough, and they do not stand up for themselves.



Poor employment conditions and salaries are not the whole story. Often, the foreign ministry does not provide the country's leaders with the tools they require. This was clear in the case of the MFA's failure to resolve the issue of transferring African migrants to a third country, which caused the prime minister to give the task to others. If the foreign ministry continues to fail to deliver, its powers will continue to diminish, it will not receive a full-time minister, and it will continue to be perceived as a ministry responsible for consular affairs, protocol and aiding Israelis around the world. And if Israeli diplomats don't understand this, stand up for themselves, confront officials from the Ministry of Defense and the National Security Council, and speak to the media when necessary, nothing will change, and they will continue to quarrel with finance ministry officials over funding for staff holidays.

**Victor Harel (former Ambassador and MFA Inspector General):**

The foreign ministry should take the same approach as the IDF. Once a year, it should present its work-plan to the government. Beyond that, it should facilitate regular discussions by the government on foreign policy issues that fall within its purview. After all, the goal of the foreign ministry is not just to issue passports and come to the aid of Israelis in distress abroad. There is no need for addition political oversight of the foreign ministry. As things currently stand, the ministry is already over-politicized. What the ministry lacks is substantive oversight. To achieve this, the inspector general and legal advisor of the MFA should not be subordinate to the ministry's director general. They should be independent in order to guarantee that they can conduct their business faithfully.

The MFA is blessed with talent. I do not believe that another ministry has as many academics among its ranks. Moreover, becoming a diplomat requires going through a highly selective screening process. Yet what these individuals lack is the courage to stand up and speak their minds, creativity, thinking outside the box, the willingness to confront politicians and the capacity to propose unconventional political ideas. All of this does not happen because of one problematic institution within the ministry: the appointments committee. Once a year, a third of the ministry's staff appears before the committee, which determines their professional fate and has significant impact on their family. This is an internal committee, as it should be. However, its composition should be changed. For example, it should include more than one representative of the public. Today, the ministry's senior management has an automatic majority, allowing it to force its preferences on the rest of the members. This must be changed. It is also worth considering the number of Israeli missions abroad and to think about whether we really do need as many as 106 embassies and consulates.

**Eran Etzion (former Director of Policy Planning, MFA):**

The foreign ministry suffers from three core weaknesses: (1) the historical heritage of the disagreement over security vs. diplomacy as it manifested itself between David Ben-Gurion and Moshe Sharett. This is not just history. It is a deep-rooted asymmetry that shapes the formulation, planning and

execution of national security policy to this day; (2) an institutionalized distortion, which, on the one hand involves the political echelon sidelining the professional foreign policy advice based on political, partisan, or personal reasons. On the other hand is the tendency for security and military considerations to crowd out diplomatic ones. Another element of this is the heavy involvement of military officials in diplomatic negotiations while MFA officials are regularly excluded; (3) finally, the organizational culture of the ministry itself also requires attention. Some of the ministry's weaknesses stem from the two aforementioned flaws. The others stem from the fact that the MFA is a "normal" ministry and lacks the capacity to act in a meaningful way, as opposed to the other national security bodies (the Mossad, the Israeli Security Agency - ISA, and the Atomic Energy Commission). Other internal problems originate in poor norms and practices that have become more pervasive over the years, leading employees to focus on their personal advancement at the expense of standard operating procedures, professionalism, and preparing and advocating for unbiased views.

There are three main solutions to these problems: (1) on the conceptual-historical level – a foreign policy that will rebalance the diplomatic and security elements of a national security strategy; (2) on the structural level – passing a comprehensive and meaningful foreign service bill. Such a law would clearly define the responsibilities of the MFA, especially on critical national security matters, and would require the government and defense establishment to consult with the foreign ministry on issues of war and peace; (3) on an organizational level – enacting profound reforms within the MFA, which will result in systematic organizational and managerial changes to the ministry, revamping it and turning it into a national security entity with similar reach and influence to those of the Mossad and the ISA. Among other things, this would mean canceling tenure for ministry employees, increasing output capacities, raising salaries and improving employment conditions.

All three of these proposals were already in the process of being implemented in recent years but were blocked by opposition from senior politicians, defense establishment officials, and MFA employees. Therefore, the road to implementation will require building a strong coalition in favor of these reforms, which focuses on the public interest and the country's national security interest. This will be a long and arduous process, but one that is necessary given the current situation.

**Prof. Yossi Shain (Tel Aviv University):**

We must differentiate between the discussion about the foreign ministry and its structure and the discussion about Israel's foreign relations. These are two totally separate topics. One pertains to Israeli politics and the other to Israeli bureaucracy. The Israeli government need not have a foreign policy. Why? Because today's world is rapidly changing and the policies of today may prove irrelevant tomorrow. We must avoid having a fixed foreign policy in an era of such dramatic and rapid changes and threats. At the same time, we must be thoughtful and engage in planning that preserves flexibility without defining too rigid a plan. This is the practice in other countries, such as the US and the

United Kingdom. Israel's foreign policy was always based on one key element – Israeli-US relations – and on this issue the foreign ministry and even the Israeli ambassador in Washington are completely cut out of the loop. I oppose stripping the MFA of its responsibilities, which in my mind constitutes a bad decision from a bureaucratic standpoint.

In Israel, every discussion about national foreign policy is affected by the political stance vis-à-vis the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There is an overlap and a mixing of political and foreign policy matters. And yet, despite the fact that the conflict is not solved, Israeli foreign policy is not at a low point today, as it was forty years ago, for example, when the United Nations equated Zionism with racism, or in 2001 during the UN Durban Conference. Recently, Israel has had a number of foreign policy successes, specifically developing its ties with countries such as China and India. The claim that today Israel is in the midst of an unprecedented crisis with regards to its legitimacy is without foundation.

Israel's foreign service today has many faces, including a parallel network that deals with Israel's foreign relations comprised of students, NGOs, media outlets and more. Yet, the public discourse on this topic will always focus on security issues, as it should be. Security is also the issue that dictates foreign affairs. In light of this, I do not believe that the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee should be split into two committees – one for defense policy and one for foreign policy. If that were to happen, foreign affairs would become even more irrelevant.

**Daniel Shek (former Ambassador):**

Israel's ambassadors around the world have lost the assets that previously imbued them with special standing amongst their colleagues: motivation, reliability and relevancy. The absence of a clear foreign policy and the stripping of the MFA of its responsibilities have left them helpless and unable to conduct business with their colleagues. The latter quickly realize that our diplomats are irrelevant and seek out other contacts. Who would have thought that the foreign ministry – the elite of the civil service – would decline into a welfare case that requires a parliamentary lobby?

Despite this situation, Foreign Service officers should not become accustomed to complaining and, alongside their struggle to rehabilitate the ministry, should continue their work. From my experience, those who continue to think creatively and seize the initiative will find the way to make a difference. The paradox is that a country that is so obsessed about its image internationally treats its foreign policy as if it was unnecessary rather than a critical component of its national security. The goal should be to remove foreign policy from the grasp of little politics and return it into the realm of the national interest.

**Hanan Goder (Head of the MFA Workers' Union):**

The foreign ministry is not functioning properly and Israel cannot afford to turn a blind eye to that. This is not an issue for the coalition or the opposition. Rather it is a matter that requires attention across the political spectrum. The number of Israel's diplomatic missions, which is itself declining, is not enough to meet the many challenges Israel is facing. The number of diplomats serving at these missions is low and the ministry cannot fill a large number of positions at central locations around the world. If the State of Israel does not wake up soon, we will soon be waking up for a diplomatic disaster.