Herzog asks foreign diplomats to urge their nations to boycott Durban Conference

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President Isaac Herzog on Thursday urged foreign diplomats stationed in Israel to ask their nations and governments to boycott the upcoming Durban IV conference scheduled to take place in late September, around the same time as the opening of the 76th United Nations General Assembly.

Herzog was speaking at the annual state reception hosted just ahead of Rosh Hashanah by the president of Israel and the Foreign Minister for the foreign diplomatic corps.

Several countries with which Israel has diplomatic relations have already opted out of the conference, realizing that it will be used as a platform for antisemitism and Israel-bashing. Delving into a little family history, Herzog spoke of his father who, as Israel’s ambassador to the United Nations, in 1975, famously tore up the resolution equating Zionism with racism. He mentioned his uncle Abba Eban, who had been Israel’s longest-serving foreign minister, and his other uncle Yaakov Herzog who had been Israel’s ambassador to Canada, where he had verbally wrestled the forces of antisemitism.

With this background, said Herzog, he knows very well what it means to be a diplomat and how complicated it is.

Antisemitism, which should have been fossilized by now, he said, is again rearing its ugly head and spewing hatred and incitement.

Turning to developments in the Middle East, Herzog said that the countries in the region have a choice between good and evil. Israel is always ready to be a friend to those who choose the path of peace, he said, but unfortunately evil continues to permeate the Middle East, with hate, incitement and war.

In this context, he assured his guests that Israel will stand firm in its efforts to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

Herzog was particularly pleased that among his guests were the ambassador of Morocco and the newly arrived [ambassador of Bahrain.](https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/bahraini-ambassador-to-israel-arrives-in-tel-aviv-678222)

Regarding everyone in the capacity-filled hall as a friend of Israel, he voiced the wish that their countries might find as many avenues as possible for continued cooperation with Israel.

Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, who temporarily escaped the boisterous Knesset debate on the national budget, arrived late and spoke very briefly, explaining the reason he was popular was because his speeches were so short.

Like Herzog, his focus was largely on friendship and cooperation, because friendship, he said, was to do things together.

In wishing everyone a happy New Year, Lapid said, “If the [budget](https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/key-knesset-budget-vote-to-go-down-to-wire-678405) passes within the next 12 hours, I’ll wish myself a happy New Year.”

Zambia’s Ambassador Martin Chungu Mwanambale, who is dean of the Diplomatic Corps, brought the goodwill greetings of the diplomatic community and commented that the past year had been eventful and marked by changes and challenges, most notably, a new president and a new government. He congratulated Herzog, Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and Lapid

He also congratulated the Israel government on its ability to confront the economic and social changes resulting from the pandemic, and said that the government’s actions in this regard were also beneficial to the diplomatic community.

Herzog introduced a new-old tradition of a reception line. The reception line – the shaking of hands with the president and posing for a photograph with him – had been abolished when Shimon Peres took office in deference to his advanced age. There was likewise no reception line during the term of Reuven Rivlin, who was also a somewhat senior citizen when he took office. But scores of diplomats were quite happy to line up beneath the pergola at the entrance to the main hall in the presidential building, to come forward to meet and greet the president.

Herzog already knew many of them, and in most cases, engaged in brief chit-chat. He had a much longer conversation with Khaled Yousif al-Jalahma, the ambassador of Bahrain, who had arrived in Israel only two days earlier, but who was very gung-ho. When one diplomat asked Herzog whether he was tired after standing so long for all the hand-shaking, Herzog replied that he’s never tired.

After the formalities, everyone again went outside for a New Year toast with wine or orange juice, with Herzog wishing a sweet, healthy and peaceful year to all of Israel, to all the people in the region and all the people in the world.