

for the magnificent music all of you have given us. Let's give them a great hand. [Applause]

Every year, Hillary and Chelsea and I really look forward to this wonderful "Christmas in Washington" evening. Besides getting us into the holiday spirit, it also gives us the opportunity to recognize one of our country's preeminent health care facilities, the Children's National Medical Center right here in Washington.

As always, Christmas is a time for us to reflect on our good fortune in the past year. This Christmas, I have much to be grateful for. But among the things I am most grateful for is the way the people all around the world still look at our beloved land. Recently I returned from Europe, where this was brought home to me ever more than before. People see America as a nation graced by God with peace and prosperity, a land of fundamental fairness and great freedom. And even though it sometimes imposes extra burdens on us, it is wonderful to know that people the world over trust us to work with them to achieve and share the blessings of peace.

So at Christmas, as we celebrate the birth of a homeless child whose only shelter was the straw of a manger but who grew up to become

the Prince of Peace, let us remember that He said, "Blessed are the peacemakers." And let us ask the blessings of peace this Christmas for everyone, from the Middle East to Northern Ireland, to Bosnia, and not only for the children there but, of course, for our troops as well. And let us also as Americans resolve, each of us, to do what we can to be peacemakers, not only to bring peace and reconciliation around the world but also to the most difficult neighborhoods of our own Nation, to every child who deserves to be free from violence and full of hope. That is our prayer for this Christmas.

Hillary and Chelsea and I offer this wish of our season to all of you and to all Americans everywhere: Peace on Earth, good will toward men. Merry Christmas, and God bless you all.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President's remarks were recorded at 6:20 p.m. at the National Building Museum for broadcast at 10 p.m. on December 13. In his remarks, he referred to Kelsey Grammer, Peri Gilpin, Jane Leeves, John Mahoney, and David Hyde Pierce, cast members of the television show "Frazier;" and entertainers Gloria Estefan, Clint Black, Al Green, Dawn Upshaw, and Ian Frazier.

Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With Prime Minister Shimon Peres of Israel December 11, 1995

The President. Good morning, everyone. It's a pleasure and an honor to have the Prime Minister here. We're about to start our talks. And as you know, after we have those talks, we will have a press conference, and we'll be available for your questions. But I'm very much looking forward to continuing our work on the peace process and continuing our strong partnership.

Q. Will you, Mr. President, become actively involved in an Israeli-Syrian track?

The President. Well, we're going to—let us have our talk, and I'll be glad to answer the questions after we finish our visit.

Thank you.

[At this point, one group of reporters left the room, and another group entered.]

The President. Good morning everyone. I want to welcome the Prime Minister here. It's a pleasure to have him here and a privilege to continue our partnership, our search for peace. I'm looking forward to our visit. And of course, after the visit we'll have a press conference and the opportunity to answer your questions.

Prime Minister Peres. May I say the President has changed our hearts and changed our language. He changed our hearts by a very moving appearance at the funeral of the late Yitzhak Rabin. And he changed our language by adding two words that were never in our vocabulary: *Shalom, chaver*. It became a household expression.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:46 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. A tape was not

available for verification of the content of these remarks.

The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Shimon Peres of Israel

December 11, 1995

The President. Please be seated.

Good afternoon. It's a pleasure to welcome Prime Minister Peres back to the White House. For as long as there has been a prospect of peace in the Middle East, Shimon Peres has stood at the forefront, striving to bring a new day of security and harmony to the people of Israel and to all the people of the region.

From his early years as one of the architects of Israel's defense, he has devoted himself to ensuring the security of his Nation. And from his first term as Prime Minister in the mid-1980's, through the negotiations that led to the signing here of the Declaration of Principles with the Palestinians, to the peace of the Araba with Jordan, to the interim accord ceremony just 2½ months ago, Shimon Peres has been a visionary for peace. He has seen the way. He has been a leader on the path to peace. And time and again he has been proven right.

One of the very last things Yitzhak Rabin said was that Shimon Peres was his full partner in forging peace. With those words and the memory of my friend in mind, let me renew now the pledge I first made to Prime Minister Rabin at the beginning of my Presidency.

Mr. Prime Minister, as Israel continues to take risks for a lasting and comprehensive peace, the United States will stand with you to minimize those risks and to ensure your success. And I pledge to you personally, Shimon, that I will be your partner in peace.

Until an assassin's bullet cut short his life, Prime Minister Rabin rose time and again to the challenges of peace. The United States knows that, just as he has in the past, Prime Minister Peres will do so as well. It is a measure of how much has changed in the Middle East that on his journey here the Prime Minister met with King Hussein, President Mubarak, and Chairman Arafat, and that on his trip home he will visit with King Hassan of Morocco.

I have been especially encouraged to hear the Prime Minister talk about the progress in redeploying Israeli forces. He reviewed for me his meeting with Chairman Arafat, who reaffirmed his commitment to building upon and implementing the Declaration of Principles and the interim agreement.

The key to a lasting settlement in the Middle East is achieving peace between Israel and Syria, and Israel and Lebanon. Today Prime Minister Peres and I agreed to redouble our efforts to achieve these goals. We agree that to close the circle of peace it will take more intensive and more practical negotiations. Each side will need to make a greater effort to take account of the others' concerns. The United States stands ready to help to bring the parties together and to work with them in the negotiations. Peace is our mission. And the Prime Minister and I are determined that nothing—nothing—will deter us from this task in the weeks and the months ahead.

Today I have also spoken with President Asad of Syria about our talks here in Washington. President Asad told me he was committed to do his best to move the peace process forward and to reach an early agreement between Syria and Israel. He also agreed to my proposal that Secretary Christopher travel to the region next week to consult with him on the next steps we will take together.

We, of course, recognize that the differences will not disappear immediately. Great hurdles must be overcome. But an Israel-Syria settlement is worth our every effort. It would end the Arab-Israeli conflict. It would establish a comprehensive peace. It could transform the face of the entire Middle East and the lives of all its inhabitants.

That was Yitzhak Rabin's dream. Here at the White House, that soldier of peace said, "Enough of blood and tears." The United States is heartened that Shimon Peres will carry on.