

Videotaped Remarks to the Israeli Presidential Conference: Facing Tomorrow 2009

October 21, 2009

President Peres, Prime Minister Netanyahu, honored guests: I'm happy to send my warmest wishes to all of you who have gathered for this important conference on Facing Tomorrow. I'm sorry that I could not be there with you in person, but I'm so pleased that our extraordinary Ambassador to the United Nations, Susan Rice, will be participating with all of you.

I'm especially honored to send my greetings to a great statesman, the host of this conference, President Shimon Peres. His life stands as an extraordinary example of how courage and perseverance can help shape the future and turn harrowing challenges into historic opportunities. In his lifetime, he has helped to build and secure the State of Israel, he has faced grave threats and forged peace, and he has always challenged us to seek the promise of a better day.

Shimon has also contributed to the deep and much abiding friendship between the United States and Israel, a bond that is much more than a strategic alliance. The American people and the Israeli people share a faith in the future, a belief that democracies can shape their own destiny, and that opportunity should be available to all.

Through its own extraordinary history, Israel has given life to that promise. We see it in Israel's thriving democracy. We see it in the courage of citizens who go about their lives, even when faced with grave danger. We see it in the prosperity that has been forged and the innovation that has spread benefits well beyond Israel's borders, and we were reminded of that recently when Ada Yonath was chosen as the Nobel Laureate for Chemistry.

But we also see it in the optimism that has brought you together. Our moment in history is filled with challenges that test our will and invite pessimism, from a global economic crisis to a growing danger from climate change, from the spread of nuclear weapons to the obstacles that stand in the way of a secure and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestin-

ians. Faced with these burdens, we can choose to defer action, to sustain a dangerous status quo, or we can meet the challenges of our time head on.

Like you, I believe that now's the time to act. By drawing upon such a wide range of expertise within Israel, President Peres is harnessing the talent and dynamism of the Israeli people in facing the future. And by bringing together such a broad and remarkable group of leaders from around the world, he is underscoring a fundamental truth: We cannot meet the tests of our time unless we meet them together. All of us must accept our share of responsibility for progress.

As we look to the future, consider what can be achieved if we move beyond our differences; if a secure Israel and an independent Palestine are at peace and Arab States commit to genuine reconciliation; if new partnerships were forged across the region to advance health and education, clean energy and innovation; if we overcome the threats posed by weapons of mass destruction; and if global cooperation were founded upon the basis of mutual interests and mutual respect, and we met our responsibility to leave our children a world that is more peaceful and prosperous.

It is easy to grow disheartened. But together, we must keep our eyes fixed on the future that we want to build. History shows us what is possible. Israel's story tells us that impossible odds can be overcome. And Shimon's leadership reminds us that dark moments cannot conceal a path to progress.

I wish you all a productive and successful conference.

NOTE: The President's remarks were videotaped at 4:55 p.m. on October 19 in the Map Room at the White House for later broadcast to the conference in Jerusalem, Israel. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 23.

Remarks at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts

October 23, 2009

Thank you very much. Please, have a seat. Thank you. Thank you, MIT. I am hugely honored to be here. It's always been a dream of mine to visit the most prestigious school in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Oh, hold on a second—certainly the most prestigious school in this part of Cambridge, Massachusetts. *[Laughter]* And I'll probably be here for a while. I understand a bunch of engineering students put my motorcade on top of Building 10. *[Laughter]* Here—this tells you something about MIT: Everybody hands out periodic tables. *[Laughter]* What's up with that? *[Laughter]*

I want to thank all of you today for the warm welcome and for the work that all of you are doing to generate and test new ideas that hold so much promise for our economy and for our lives. And in particular, I want to thank two outstanding MIT professors, Eric Lander, a person you just heard from, Ernie Moniz, for their service on my Council of Advisers on Science and Technology. And they have been hugely helpful to us already on looking at, for example, how the Federal Government can most effectively respond to the threat of the H1N1 virus. And so I'm very grateful to them.

We've got some other special guests here I just want to acknowledge very briefly. First of all, my great friend and a champion of science and technology here in the great Commonwealth of Massachusetts, my friend Deval Patrick is here. Our Lieutenant Governor, Tim Murray, is here. Attorney General Martha Coakley is here. Auditor of the Commonwealth Joe DeNucci is here. The mayor of the great city of Cambridge, Denise Simmons, is in the house. The mayor of Boston, Tom Menino, is not here, but he met me at the airport, and he is doing great. *[Laughter]* He sends best wishes.

Somebody who really has been an all-star in Capitol Hill over the last 20 years, but certainly over the last year, on a whole range of issues, everything from Afghanistan to clean energy, a great friend, John Kerry. Please give John Kerry a round of applause. And a wonderful Member of Congress—I believe this is your district, is

that correct, Mike?—Mike Capuano, please give Mike a big round of applause.

Now, Dr. Moniz is also the director of MIT's Energy Initiative, called MITEI. And he and President Hockfield just showed me some of the extraordinary energy research being conducted at this institute: Windows that generate electricity by directing light to solar cells; lightweight, high-power batteries that aren't built, but are grown—that was neat stuff—*[laughter]*—engineering viruses to create batteries; more efficient lighting systems that rely on nanotechnology; innovative engineering that will make it possible for offshore wind power plants to deliver electricity even when the air is still.

And it's a reminder that all of you are heirs to a legacy of innovation—not just here but across America—that has improved our health and our well being and helped us achieve unparalleled prosperity. I was telling John and Deval on the ride over here, you just get excited being here and seeing these extraordinary young people and the extraordinary leadership of Professor Hockfield, because it taps into something essential about America. It's the legacy of daring men and women who put their talents and their efforts into the pursuit of discovery, and it's the legacy of a nation that supported those intrepid few willing to take risks on an idea that might fail, but might also change the world.

Even in the darkest of times that this Nation has seen, it has always sought a brighter horizon. Think about it. In the middle of the Civil War, President Lincoln designated a system of land-grant colleges, including MIT, which helped open the doors of higher education to millions of people. A year—a full year before the end of World War II, President Roosevelt signed the GI bill, which helped unleash a wave of strong and broadly shared economic growth. And after the Soviet launch of Sputnik, the first artificial satellite to orbit the Earth, the United States went about winning the space race by investing in science and technology, leading not only to small steps on the Moon but also to tremendous economic benefits here on Earth.