

## Remarks Following a Meeting With President Shimon Peres of Israel in Jerusalem

March 20, 2013

*President Peres.* President Obama, it is a great privilege for me and for the people of Israel to host you here in Jerusalem.

It was a real pleasure to sit with a true friend—very knowledgeable, unfortunately—and see that we can agree and discuss with you openly and freely.

After the meeting we just had, I am even more confident that your vision can be—transform the Middle East. Your vision is achievable. You arrived here already with an impressive record of answering our needs, particularly—and unforgettably—in the domain of security. I want to thank you personally, dear friend, for the long days and for many long, sleepless nights—that we know about them—which you spend caring for our country and for our future.

We live in an age that is both global and domestic, inseparably. Interest may divide people; vision may unite them. There is common vision uniting us to confront the dangers, to bring peace closer as soon as possible. The greatest danger is the nuclear—is a nuclear Iran; so you said, so you do. We trust your policy, which calls to, first, by nonmilitary—to fight by nonmilitary means with a clear statement that other options remain on the table. You made it clear that your intention is not to contain, but to prevent.

We are trying together to restart negotiations with the Palestinians. We already agreed that the goal is a two-state—for the two people—solution. There is no better one or more achievable one. We consider that the President of the Palestinian Authority, Abu Mazen, is our partner in that effort to stop terror and bring peace.

Hamas remains a terror organization that targets innocent people. On our northern border, Iran's proxy Hizballah continues to stockpile arms and threaten our civilians while they urgently—while they target innocent people across the world. Hizballah is destroying Lebanon and supporting the brutal massacre of the

Syrian people by President Asad. Fortunately, the Syrian nuclear capacity was destroyed. But unfortunately, thousands of their chemical weapons remain. We cannot allow that those weapons to fall in the terrorists' hands. It could lead to an epic tragedy.

There is an attempt to bring spring to the Arab world. It is an Arab choice. It is an Arab initiative. It may bring peace to the region, freedom to the people, economic growth to the Arab States. If realized, it can lead to a better tomorrow. We pray it will become a reality.

I believe the real division is between skeptics and those who believe in peace. Your voice will encourage belief. You came to us with a clear message that no one should let skepticism win the day, a vision that says clearly that peace is not only a wish, but a possibility. I fully support your call. There is no other way to make the future better. There is no better leader to make it possible.

Your visit is a historic step in that direction. We shall journey with you all the way. Thank you.

*President Obama.* Thank you so much.

Well, thank you, President Peres, for your very generous words and your warm welcome. It is wonderful to be here once again. I first visited you when I was still a Senator and had the opportunity to visit the lovely garden, and for me to be able to bring a tree from the United States that will find a home in that garden, I think, is symbolic of not only the friendship between our two nations, but between the two of us personally.

Mr. President, you once remarked that a Prime Minister's job is to rule, a President's job is to charm. Well, as with all our visits together, I have once again succumbed to your charms, and I'm grateful to your hospitality.

It is wonderful to be back in Jerusalem, this Eternal City. And I'm pleased to begin my visit with a son of Israel who's devoted his life to keeping Israel strong and sustaining the bonds between our two nations. President Peres

knows that this is a work of generations. Just as he joined the struggle for Israeli independence in his early twenties, he's always looking ahead, connecting with young people. And I'm especially grateful for the time that he allowed me to share with those extraordinary Israeli boys and girls.

Their dreams are much the same as children everywhere. In another sense, though, their lives reflect the difficult realities that Israelis face every single day. They want to be safe. They want to be free from rockets that hit their homes or their schools. They want a world where science and technology is created to build and not destroy. They want to live in peace, free from terror and threats that are so often directed at the Israeli people. That's the future that they deserve. That's the vision that is shared by both our nations. And that is Shimon Peres's life work.

And, Mr. President, Michelle and I have such fond memories of your visit to the White House last spring, when I was honored to present you with America's highest civilian honor: our Medal of Freedom. And that medal was a tribute to your extraordinary life, in which you've held virtually every position in the Israeli Government.

So today was another opportunity for me to benefit from the President's perspective on a whole range of topics: from the historic changes that are taking place across the region to the perils of a nuclear-armed Iran, to the imperatives of peace between Israelis and Palestinians, to the promise of our digital age.

And I should note that one of the advantages of talking to President Peres is not only does he have astonishing vision, but he's also a pretty practical-minded politician and consistently has good advice in terms of how we can approach many of these problems.

I reaffirmed to President Peres, as I work—as I will throughout my visit, that in this work, the State of Israel will have no greater friend

than the United States. And the work we do in our time will make it more likely that the children that we saw today—alongside children from throughout the region—have the opportunity for security and peace and prosperity.

This obligation to future generations, I think, was well symbolized by the tree-planting that we started our meeting with. The Talmud recounts the story of Honi, the miracle worker, who saw a man planting a carob tree. And he asked the man, "How long before this tree yields fruit?" To which the man responded, "Seventy years." And so Honi asked, "Are you sure you'll be alive in another 70 years to see it?" And the man replied: "When I came into the world, I found carob trees. As my forefathers planted for me, so will I plant for my children."

President Peres, I think, understands that story well. And so we want to all thank you for all the seeds you've planted—the seeds of progress, the seeds of security, the seeds of peace—all the seeds that have helped not only Israel grow, but also the relationship between our two nations grow. And I believe that if we tend to them, if we nurture them, they will yield fruit in every hill and valley of this land, not only for the children we met today, but for Israelis, for Palestinians, for Arabs across the region. That's not only good for the children of this region, but it's good for my children and the children of America.

I deeply believe that. And I couldn't ask for a more wise or more thoughtful partner in that process. I'm very grateful for your hospitality, and I look forward to our continued work in the future.

*President Peres.* Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:10 p.m. at the President's Residence. President Peres referred to President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority.