



ISRAEL MATTERS!

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At Shimon Peres's Funeral, World Leaders Gathered for a Final Farewell

Israel Furious After Jerusalem Resolution by UN Agency

UNESCO member states have renewed a resolution criticizing Israel for restricting Muslim access to a Jerusalem holy site, angering Israel's government by referring to the area only by its Muslim names, the al-Aqsa compound or Haram al-Sharif. As a result, Israel has frozen cooperation with UNESCO.

"The theatre of the absurd at UNESCO continues and today the organization adopted another delusional decision which says that the people of Israel have no connection to the Temple Mount and the Western Wall," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in Jerusalem after the decision.

The resolution, which is renewed periodically, condemns Israel for restricting Muslims access to the site, and for aggression by police and soldiers.

"To declare that Israel has no connection to the Temple Mount and the Western Wall is like saying that China has no connection to the Great Wall of China or that Egypt has no connection to the Pyramids," Netanyahu said.

Nabil Abu Rdainah, a spokesman for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said: "This is an important message to Israel that it must end its occupation and recognise [sic] the Palestinian state and Jerusalem as its capital with its sacred Muslim and Christian sites."

The resolution was voted through with 24 votes in favor, six against, and 26 abstentions with two countries absent, as revealed by sources with knowledge of the vote.

[Huffingtonpost.com/BBC.com]



On a cloudless blue morning, an honor guard brought the flag-draped coffin of Shimon Peres to the Mount Herzl national cemetery as 100 world leaders and dignitaries from 70 countries bid farewell to the former Israeli leader and Nobel laureate whose dream of a lasting peace with the Palestinians remains elusive.

President Obama, who was the last to give a eulogy, said that the contribution made by Peres to Israel was "so fundamental, so pervasive, it can sometimes be overlooked." A younger generation will "probably remember him for a peace process that never reached its end," Obama said, noting that critics on the left wanted Peres to acknowledge Israel's failings, while those on the right believed he "refused to see the true wickedness of the world and called him naive."



"I don't think he was naive. He understood from hard-earned experience that true security comes from making peace with your neighbors," he said, comparing Peres to South African President Nelson Mandela. "He believed that the Zionist idea was best protected when the Palestinians have a state of their own."

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Both Obama and Israeli novelist Amos Oz sought to push forward Peres's goal of an Israel living side by side in peace and security with a Palestinian nation. Both men spoke of the need for a two-state solution and urged current Israeli leaders to fulfill Peres's vision for the region, even after almost 50 years of military occupation. "But where are the leaders with the courage to come forward and bring it to pass?" Oz asked. "Where are the heirs of Shimon Peres?"

Former president Bill Clinton praised Peres as a leader who experienced "crushing setbacks" — in politics, in his efforts for peace — and woke up "to seize the possibilities of each new day." Clinton knew Peres intimately over a quarter-century. Alongside former prime minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, the four of them hammered out the details of the Oslo Accords, the frame that launched the now-stalled peace process. Peres, Arafat and Rabin shared the 1994 Nobel Peace Prize.

Speaking in a rough voice, Clinton said Peres started life as Israel's best student, became its best teacher "and ended his life as its greatest dreamer." The former president said it is not easy to move past defeat. "It must have been hard for him to do this," he said. "First he had to master his own demons, forgive himself for his own mistakes and get over his own disappointments." This "monumental effort required that he grow his heart to be bigger than his brain." Clinton urged listeners to "keep his gifts alive." When the road ahead comes to a dead end, "when the hand of friendship meets only a cold stare, remember his luminous smile." Then Clinton paused. "And imagine."

As the mourners began to take their seats, there was one moment of surprising diplomacy when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas met and shook hands. "Long time, long time," Abbas was quoted as saying to Netanyahu. The Israeli leader responded: "It's something that I appreciate very much on behalf of our people and on behalf of us." The two men, despite nine months of peace talks in 2014, rarely meet face to face. When they do appear on the same world stage, they rarely reach out to the other, maintaining instead a frosty distance. Their last direct encounter was last year.

Netanyahu gave his eulogy in a mixture of Hebrew and English, and said Peres "soared to incredible heights. He was a great man of Israel and a great man of the world. We find hope in his legacy, as does the world." "There is no secret that we were political rivals, but over the years we became good friends," Netanyahu added. "Shimon and I disagreed about many things but that never overshadowed many warm discussions. Our friendship deepened with every meeting. In our discussions of a fundamental issue, security versus peace, Shimon told me: 'Bibi, peace

is the true security. If there will be peace, there will be security.' I told him security is essential for achieving peace and maintaining it."



Netanyahu continued: "We went back and forth for hours. I came from the right, he from the left, I came again from the right, he again from

the left. Like two prize fighters we put down our gloves. I saw in his eyes and he saw in mine the deep-seated beliefs to ensure the future of Israel."

The state funeral for Peres was one of the largest in Israel since the 1995 burial of Rabin, the prime minister who was assassinated by a Jewish extremist who opposed the efforts of Rabin and Peres to make peace with the Palestinians. Peres was buried beside Rabin.

Peres, the former prime minister and president, died at 93 at a Tel Aviv hospital from complications of a massive stroke suffered two weeks earlier. Until the stroke Peres was keeping a full schedule, meeting with visiting U.S. senators, schoolchildren, and high-tech innovators. He was still enjoying the occasional glass of wine and working on a book. On his 93rd birthday, he joined Snapchat.

The ceremony took place on the hilltop, with large television screens set amid the pine trees. Translation was provided for the guests in Arabic, Spanish, French, Italian, and other languages. After the eulogies, his body was lowered into the ground and covered with sand. Peres's three children recited the kaddish, the traditional mourner's prayer. Contrary to Orthodox Jewish tradition in Israel, which dictates that only male relatives recite the prayer, Peres's daughter Tsvia Walden also participated.

As Walden, Peres's oldest child, spoke the verses, she added her own ending. Where the prayer calls to "create peace for us and for all Israel," Walden, a psycholinguist, called for there to be peace for "all people." Following prayers recited by Israel's military rabbi, Netanyahu and other Israeli leaders laid wreaths along the graveside. But it was perhaps the image of Peres's eight grandchildren and three great-grandchildren that was most poignant for Israelis, reminding them that this legendary leader was also a loving grandfather.

From the Arab world, Jordan sent its deputy prime minister and former chief peace negotiator Jawad Anani. Jordan's King Abdullah II sent a note of condolences, but no member of the royal family attended. Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry came, but not the president, Abdel Fatah al-Sissi. [washingtonpost.com]