

Administration of Barack Obama, 2016

Statement on the Death of Former President Shimon Peres of Israel

September 27, 2016

There are few people who we share this world with who change the course of human history, not just through their role in human events, but because they expand our moral imagination and force us to expect more of ourselves. My friend Shimon was one of those people.

Shimon Peres once said that, "I learned that public service is a privilege that must be based on moral foundations." Tonight Michelle and I join people across Israel, the United States, and around the world in honoring the extraordinary life of our dear friend Shimon Peres, a founding father of the State of Israel and a statesman whose commitment to Israel's security and pursuit of peace was rooted in his own unshakeable moral foundation and unflagging optimism.

I will always be grateful that I was able to call Shimon my friend. I first visited him in Jerusalem when I was a Senator, and when I asked for his advice, he told me that while people often say that the future belongs to the young, it's the present that really belongs to the young. "Leave the future to me," he said, "I have time." And he was right. Whether it was during our conversations in the Oval Office, walking together through Yad Vashem, or when I presented him with America's highest civilian honor, the Medal of Freedom, Shimon always looked to the future. He was guided by a vision of the human dignity and progress that he knew people of good will could advance together. He brought young people from around the world together because he knew they could carry us closer to our ideals of justice and equality.

Shimon was the essence of Israel itself: the courage of Israel's fight for independence, the optimism he shared with his wife Sonya as they helped make the desert bloom, and the perseverance that led him to serve his nation in virtually every position in Government across the entire life of the State of Israel. As Americans, we are in his debt because, having worked with every U.S. President since John F. Kennedy, no one did more over so many years as Shimon Peres to build the alliance between our two countries, an unbreakable alliance that today is closer and stronger than it has ever been.

Perhaps because he had seen Israel surmount overwhelming odds, Shimon never gave up on the possibility of peace between Israelis, Palestinians, and Israel's neighbors, not even after the heartbreak of the night in Tel Aviv that took Yitzhak Rabin. "Dear friends," he told us during my visit to Israel 3 years ago, "after everything I have seen in my life, I earned the right to believe that peace is attainable." Tonight I can think of no greater tribute to his life than to renew our commitment to the peace that we know is possible. Our thoughts are with his children Tzvia, Yoni, and Chemi, their families, and all who loved and admired Shimon Peres, of blessed memory.

A light has gone out, but the hope he gave us will burn forever. Shimon Peres was a soldier for Israel, for the Jewish people, for justice, for peace, and for the belief that we can be true to our best selves, to the very end of our time on Earth, and in the legacy that we leave to others. For the gift of his friendship and the example of his leadership, *todah rabah*, Shimon.

NOTE: The statement referred to Tzvia Walden and Yoni and Nehemia "Chemi" Peres, children of President Peres.

Categories: Statements by the President : Deaths :: Peres, Shimon, former President of Israel.

Names: Obama, Michelle; Peres, Nehemia "Chemi"; Peres, Shimon; Peres, Yoni; Walden, Tzvia.

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