

President Shimon Peres meets with US Envoy Mitchell

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Peres: Time is becoming shorter... Postponement may endanger the situation because there are elements who would like to kill the prospects for peace.



Photo: Yosef Avi Yair Angel

(Communicated by the President's Spokesperson)

President Shimon Peres held a state meeting this morning with the United States envoy to the Middle East, George Mitchell. They spent over an hour discussing various ways of promoting peace and bringing about a breakthrough in the political negotiations.

At the start of the meeting, the President told Senator Mitchell, "While the situation is full of problems, it also demands real decisions... Time is becoming shorter, and I do believe all of us have to move ahead. Postponement won't bring any benefits but may endanger the situation because there are quite a few elements who would like to kill the prospects for peace."

President Peres added, "I believe that your visit right now is timely and important. And we have to talk business, to 'talk shop.' We shall try to do our very best to encourage your efforts and endeavors and to see how can we overcome the remaining differences [with the Palestinians]. It is in that spirit that I welcome you full-heartedly, with hope, friendship and expectations."

Senator Mitchell told the president, "As ever, I look forward to your advice, your counsel and your guidance based on your many years of leadership and experience here in the region. As you know better than anyone, there will be problems and difficulties along the road toward a comprehensive peace in the region, but I want to assure you and the government and the people of Israel, and all of the people in the region, that President Obama, Secretary of State Clinton and the U.S. Government remain deeply and firmly committed to achieving comprehensive peace in the region. We believe there is no alternative to that.... That means peace between Israel and Palestinians, between Israel and Syria, Israel and Lebanon, and the full acceptance of Israel and normalization of relations with all of its neighbors in the region.

On a more personal note, Senator Mitchell said, "I received a lot of advice when I accepted this position; and no one ever told me that it would be easy and free of difficulty or problems." He emphasized that the

United States is "going to continue with our efforts to achieve an early re-launch of negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians."

President Shimon Peres: "We are very glad you came, and I think it's timely. It's really a time to move ahead, not to postpone anymore. While the situation is full of problems, it also demands real decisions at the same time.

I would like to welcome Senator Mitchell, who is now in charge of the peaceful negotiations between us and the Palestinians and the Arabs. I think that expectations are becoming higher and time is becoming shorter, and I do believe all of us have to move ahead. Postponement won't bring any benefits but may endanger the situation because there are quite a few elements who would like to kill the prospects for peace.

I think we have full trust in the policies, the politics, of President Obama. I think he's really trying to serve peace in the fairest possible way, listening to all sides and trying to find common ground that will not contradict the expectations of all sides and will be very much in the service of peace. For that reason, I believe that your visit right now is timely and important. And we have to talk business, to 'talk shop,' as you say.

We shall try to do our very best to encourage your efforts and endeavors and to see how can we overcome the remaining differences. It is in that spirit that I welcome you full-heartedly, with hope, friendship and expectations."

Senator George Mitchell: "Thank you, as always, for your courtesy in seeing us, for your generous words of welcome and acceptance. As ever, I look forward to your advice, your counsel and your guidance based on your many years of leadership and experience here in the region.

As you know better than anyone, there will be problems and difficulties along the road toward a comprehensive peace in the region, but I want to assure you and the government and the people of Israel, and all of the people in the region, that President Obama, Secretary of State Clinton and the U.S. government remain deeply and firmly committed to achieving comprehensive peace in the region. We believe there is no alternative to that, if all the people of the region are to be able to live in peace and prosperity and to be able to achieve their aspirations. That means peace between Israel and Palestinians, between Israel and Syria, Israel and Lebanon, and the full acceptance of Israel and normalization of relations with all of its neighbors in the region.

There are, of course, difficulties that arise on a continual basis. I received a lot of advice when I accepted this position; and no one ever told me that it would be easy and free of difficulty or problems. So that's to be expected, and we're going to continue with our efforts to achieve an early re-launch of negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians because we believe that's an essential step toward achieving the comprehensive peace to which I earlier referred.

And I look forward to my visit with the President, with the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister and other officials here in Israel, with the leadership of the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah and in other places in the region."
