



B'NAI B'RITH WORLD CENTER - JERUSALEM

At the outset of his address, President Peres said that he believed that everyone present had come to pray together, because today there is so much need for prayer to promote the spirit of hope.

He lamented that so much blood was being shed – “not the blood that comes with birth but the blood that comes with death” and the continued persecution of Christians in many countries.

The President confessed that he was not as optimistic as he has been, although he predicted that the current situation will end “sooner than we think. The period of killing and hatred cannot last.”

He blamed terrorists for the ongoing turmoil and unrest in the region, the shortage of bread and the lack of security.

“Terrorists, fanatics and killers cannot provide bread for their children and are doing a great deal of damage to their own people.

“No one damaged life in the Middle East more than terrorists. They may aim at their enemies but they bring tragedy to their friends. They divide and lose.” said Peres.

The President noted that the tragedy in Syria represents not only a battle between Shi'a and Sunnah but reflects the effects of foreign terrorists trying to take control of the country.

Looking out to the largely clerical audience, Peres said: “We have to give answers – not just prayers. I see you as a community of hope. We have been born on earth but our eyes are always turned upward looking for a better future. We have to bind again with the covenant of light, not surrender to darkness and hopelessness. We may keep our different uniforms but we must stand united against the dark movement of Antisemitism.”

With regard to the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, Peres contended that if the outcome is successful it will not only change the relationship between Israel and the Palestinians but also between the Arab world and Israel and the Arab world and the Jews.

Speaking about the multi-religious nature of Israeli society, the President said “We have more that unites us in Israel than divides us. We remain committed to freedom of religion and free access to holy sites. We have to allow the Holy Spirit to govern the holy sites”.

Commenting on continuing physical attacks against Christian clergy and property in Israel - suspected by Jewish vigilantes and ultra-Orthodox – the President and Interior Minister Gideon Saar who spoke after him, both vowed that the State of Israel will continue to ensure freedom of religion and freedom of religious practice, and that violence against clergy will not be tolerated, insisting that the perpetrators do not

represent the Jewish people or Jewish values.

Speaking on behalf of heads of Churches, His Beatitude Theophilos III, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem, expressed appreciation to Peres “for the determined and strong voice” that he has raised in condemning the wave of "price tag" crimes throughout Israel and particularly in Jerusalem.

Referring to the State of Israel as “our country” Theophilos said: “All such acts are abhorrent, whatever their target, and undermine the efforts of all those in our country who are working for reconciliation and peace. Those intolerable deeds that are directed against Holy Sites and cemeteries are not only intolerable deeds of desecration,” he continued, “they are unworthy of our contemporary, technologically advanced society that seeks to be built on the principles of mutual respect, freedom of worship and peaceful coexistence.”

Theophilos commended the Israeli police and other security authorities for their efforts managing large numbers of people in small spaces during Christian festivals, but noted that more could be done to facilitate access to Holy Places for pilgrims who come from abroad as well as those from local communities.

Pilgrimages by their nature are the best means for building bridges and eradicating prejudices, he said. “Holy Places are neither tourist attractions nor archaeological wonders. They are first and foremost the physical expressions of the divine-human encounter and the marks of our sacred history, and so they are always primarily places of worship that gather people together in the same purpose. Our common task as religious and civic leaders is to maintain this true character of our Holy Sites so that we may drink deeply of their spiritual waters.”

Theophilos called on everyone present to rededicate themselves to the fundamental principles of mutual respects, peaceful co-existence and the equal care of all their people, “that the light of this Holy Land may shine brightly in a dark world and give hope and life to all.”