

President Shimon Peres' Address
Appeal of Conscience Foundation's 2010 Annual Awards Dinner

September 21, 2010, New York

Introduction by Rabbi Arthur Schneier:

Highly respected, throughout the world. And we've known each other since the '60s. His entire life is in pursuit of peace. So remember your speech at the United Nations before Sukkot. And you concluded, praying to God that the canopy of peace be spread upon mankind. That's his life's work. Shimon, you know that, as a new octogenarian, who joined your elitist club, like Cardinal McCarrick, you're an inspiration. Because, you could have retired a long time ago. But you decided to rewire, and become president of Israel. Adored throughout the world, and may God give you just long years to serve, not only Israel and the Jewish people, but of all humanity. Let us welcome the Nobel Laureate, Prime Minister, State of Israel. Shimon Peres.

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Thank you. Thank you very much, my dear friend Arthur Schneier. Your Excellencies, presidents, prime ministers, ambassadors, the religious leaders, ladies and gentlemen. May I make one remark, which is not diplomatic, but I feel I have to say it. If the world is missing today the wisdom of one person, I believe it is Henry Kissinger. God bless him for what he did.

They say Israel is very unpopular in the world. I have breaking news. I think Israel is the most popular country in the world. And let me explain why I'm saying it.

We have a new world. Well, there was a small country by the name of India. What can I do? They support Israel. They are not against us. We have friendly relations. It's not only a meeting of two states and two minds, but also of two cultures. We have the highest respect for the Indian culture, Indian tradition, Indian philosophy.

As a matter of fact, one of the greatest poets of India was Jewish. His name is Nusim Yahuskin, and there were beautiful poems about India, also about the Bible. And there was one line that he wrote that I shall never forget. He said, "You are alone, we are alone. Let's be alone together." So, we are alone together.

Let me also say a word about my dear friends Avesh Nayil, who is very active in the interfaith dialogue. I just saw the Pope a week ago. I told him that I think that, since Jesus Christ, the Jews and the Christians have never had a better relationship than today. It's also not a very large group, a billion and a half Christians. But we have excellent relations today. So we have a billion, 200 million Indians, a billion and a half Christians.

We have a good relationship also with China. I don't know if every Chinese know exactly the history of the Jewish people, but they have their own versions. And I think that fathers of the Jewish, three or four persons. One is Professor Albert Einstein. Another is Karl Marx. This third is Sigmund Freud, and maybe the fourth is Henry Kissinger. And they say, if you have such wise fathers, you must be wise people. And we have excellent relations with China, which is not bad.

We enjoy a profound support in United States of America, and I want to thank the United States, its people, its institution and its president, for his support of about 65 percent. Not many other countries enjoy such a support.

We improved our relations with Russia. If you'll add it together, you have already several billion people. I don't know if there are other countries that have it. So, I really want to express my thanks for a great friendship of great people, and you for celebrating this event today.

We are now in the beginning of a new attempt to make peace with the Palestinians. What's changed today is the Palestinians, also the Arabs, all of us, are having to face a choice. Either a Middle East of independent countries, or a Middle East under the spell of the Iranians. None of us would like to see the Iranians running the Middle East. The Arabs and ourselves.

One way to overcome this danger is really to go for peace. Israel is full-heartedly today for peace. The solution of two states became an agreed solution by the majority of the Israelis. Once, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu represented the right wing of Israel politics joined in the idea of having a two-state solution, actually, we are no longer divided intellectually on that point. I met yesterday Abumazen, and today, Prime Minister al-Fayad.

I'm sure that we are in negotiations for the simple reason, we have crises. If you wouldn't have negotiations, we wouldn't have crises. We have a certain crisis. It looks, for the time being, it's difficult to solve it, but as Henry will tell you that the crisis is also an occasion. And I hope that we shall overcome this crisis. I hope we shall bring peace to our children, to your children, to the Arab children, to all of us. We don't have an alternative but to do it, and we don't have time to waste.

And, our relation with America is a keynote in Israeli strategy, but we are careful never to ask American mothers to send soldiers to defend Israel. But we ask the United States to offer its great diplomatic experience and value to overcome those crises. If we shall do it, Israel will be no longer a sort of a shelter for the Jewish people, but a sort of an attraction to each of us and all of us. And our relations will be based on two foundations, a mobile call and a scientific development. I would like to see Israel as old as the Ten Commandments and as new as the nanotechnology. Then we can make a living too, to our early days and answering the new demands.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me wish you a new year, Shana Tova, to all the people from all faith. And let's hope and sing that we shall seek peace in the very near future. Thank you very much.