
Documentation

Amir Peretz: 'I Have a Dream'

Martin Luther King was the inspiration for the speech of Amir Peretz at the Nov. 12 mass demonstration commemorating the tenth anniversary of the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin. Peretz has remoralized the Israeli peace movement, and contributed to bringing 200,000 people to Rabin Square, the biggest peace demonstration of the last decade. Although only former U.S. President Bill Clinton and Shimon Peres were scheduled to speak, Peretz's name was added to the speakers' list at the personal request of Yitzhak Rabin's daughter, Dalia.



Amir Peretz

A large part of Peretz's speech was a direct address to the assassinated Rabin:

"Ten years ago your voice reverberated across this square,

setting new goals for the state of Israel. You have aroused hopes, you made the young start dreaming of a changed country. Yes, your voice echoed and reverberated, until the assassin's bullets silenced it. Ten years ago, on that fateful night, you said that violence undermines the foundations of democracy, not knowing that a violent death awaited you just around the corner. Ten years on, and the violence is still very much with us, Yitzhak. The country is full of violence. We have not succeeded in isolating it. It has spread beyond the areas of confrontation with the Palestinians, it has become rooted among us. . . . If we had left the Territories, stopped the violence which issues from there, at its source, we would have also overcome the violence in our midst."

Peretz called for a Moral Roadmap: "Continued rule in the Territories is a recipe for sinking into a morass, a loss of values and morality in Israel. We need a Moral Roadmap, whose guiding star is respect for human dignity. A Moral Roadmap is ending the occupation and signing a permanent agreement. A Moral Roadmap is defending the value of each and every person in Israel—their dignity, their families, their livelihood. . . . The passage of ten years has in no way lessened the sharpness of longing for you, Yitzhak. You were not a man to boast and make arrogant and fanciful promises, but to take hard decisions, stick to them, and implement them. You are not with us today, but your way is vibrantly alive. Some try to deny it, others decry it in a multitude of ways, but it will not avail them: The way of Oslo is alive, it continues the life which was denied you, cut off. It is alive in every corner, everybody knows that it offers our only hope."

Peretz concluded on a personal note: "I am the child who came to Israel fifty years ago, at the age of four. I am the child who grew up in the time of the Fedayun [cross-border infiltrators of the 1950s], and nowadays lives with his family under the shadow of the Qasam rockets. The children of my hometown, Sederot, have their sleep troubled by the fear of the Qasams, while their contemporaries in Gaza wake up with the sonic booms and the anti-terrorist preventive acts. I have a dream, Yitzhak. I dream that one day the no-man's-land between Sederot and Beit Hanun will flourish. I dream of factories going up there, and recreation areas, and playgrounds where our children and the Palestinian children will play together, and build a common future. When this dream comes true, I could go to your grave, face you, and say: Rest in peace, Yitzhak. You have earned your final, undisturbed rest. You were murdered, yet you won!"

Bill Clinton said of Rabin, at the demonstration, "If he were here, he would say, 'If you really think I lived a good life, if you think I made a noble sacrifice in death, then for goodness sake, take up my work, and see it through to the end.' However many days Rabin had left, he gave them up on this spot for you and your future. He knew he was risking giving them up, and he gave them up, too, for all the children of the Palestinians, who deserve the benefit and the blessings of a normal life, as well."