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President Peres meets with French Prime Minister Fillon

(Communicated by the President's Spokesperson)

Israel President Shimon Peres arrived today on an official visit to France. In the coming days, the President will meet with government leaders and attend several events. The President began his visit by meeting with French Prime Minister François Fillon.

At the start of the meeting Prime Minister Fillon said: "Welcome to France. The French people take pleasure in hosting you on our land and we are very excited about the inauguration of the Ben Gurion Promenade in Paris. Your visit comes during a decisive moment in the peace process. France will continue its positive involvement in the process between Israel and the Palestinians. We must push and give new life to the peace process between Israel and the Palestinian Authority and France stands at the disposal of both sides to further assist any negotiations."

The French Prime Minister added that France is ready to participate in major regional economic conferences and cooperate with Syria, Jordan, and the Palestinians: "I just returned from Damascus and Amman and I can say to you that the gaps between the sides are not large. Therefore, it is worthwhile to renew the peace process and return to the negotiating table."

On the Iranian threat the Prime Minister said that France is a partner in the fight against Iran's nuclear ambitions and that the global community must take a decisive stance on the Iranian issue.

President Peres told the French Prime Minister: "I would like to thank France for the warm reception of which I am not worthy. There is no question that we stand at a decisive moment in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The conflict spills over borders and has clear implications for the entire region."

The President discussed the Syrian threat: "Syria continues its doublespeak - on the one hand it speaks about peace and on the other hand it passes sophisticated Scud missiles to Hizbullah that threaten Israel. The transfer of arms from Syria to Hizbullah and Syria's support of terrorist organizations does not square with its declarations of seeking peace. We will not allow Syria to play this double game. The transfer of weapons reveals Syria's true face."

On the Iranian threat the President said, "As Jews who experienced the Holocaust, the people of Israel cannot remain indifferent to Iran's desire to develop nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons in the hands of a fascist government like Iran present a tangible threat to global peace. If Hitler had nuclear weapons we would not sit here today. I stand by President Obama, President Sarkozy, and other European leaders in the fight against Iran's nuclear ambitions."

On the peace process with the Palestinians the President said, "There is no question that at the end of serious negotiations a Palestinian state will be established alongside Israel. The final positions in negotiations will be totally different from the starting positions and Israel is willing to go the long way for the Palestinians. That is how we acted when we granted the Palestinians authority for security in Jenin and that is how we will continue to act in other cities in the future. There is no doubt that we must return to the negotiating table. The gaps between the sides have narrowed significantly, especially on the area on which a future Palestinian state will be established. There is no downside to entering serious peace negotiations on issues in which there does not yet exist an agreement."