

[courtesy translation]

**Speech by PD Dr. Tamara Or,
Director of the German-Israeli Future Forum Foundation,
on the awarding of the Shimon Peres Prize 2024
Berlin, October 31, 2024**

Dear Minister of State Tobias Lindner,
Dear Ambassador of the State of Israel Ron Prosor,
Dear Peres family,
Dear Mayor Stefan Evers,
Dear Members of the German Parliament and the State Parliaments,
Dear Ms. Zypries and Mr. Simon,
Dear Members of the Board of Trustees and the Jury,
Kvod harabbanim,
Dear Award Winners,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the German-Israeli Future Forum Foundation, I would like to welcome you to the award ceremony for the Shimon Peres Prize.

We are delighted that you have come here today to celebrate this evening with us, an evening dedicated to the memory of former Israeli President and Nobel Peace Prize winner Shimon Peres.

Shimon Peres once said, "Peace cannot be won with empty words".

Since the brutal massacres by Hamas and its allies on October 7, and the subsequent and ongoing war against the terrorist organizations in the south and north, many of us have found it difficult to find words,

- Words for the many and never-ending sufferings in Israel, in Gaza and now also in Lebanon.

When Uri Grossmann, the son of the well-known writer David Grossmann, was killed in the last Lebanon war, many famous writers in Israel came to David Grossmann and apologized to him for not being able to find words of comfort for him.

The great writers and artists of words were at a loss for words in the face of the suffering of a father who had lost his son in such a brutal way.

How are we supposed to find words?

- Words for hundreds of people murdered on October 7 in the burned kibbutzim?
Words for the peace activist Vivian Silver, who was burned to death in her house in Kibbutz Beeri?
- Words for the women's rights activist Tamar Kedem Siman Tov, who was murdered in Kibbutz Nir Oz with her husband Johnny and whose four-year-old son Omer suffocated in the flames of the house together with his two six-year-old sisters Shachar and Arbel?
- How are we supposed to find words for the more than 360 mostly young people who were brutally murdered at the Nova music festival? Words for the murdered Shani Louk, who learned German in Freiburg and Weimar?
- Words for paramedic Awad Darawshe, who treated the wounded on October 7 before he was murdered? Words for Agam Naim, a paramedic doing her military service in Gaza who died in an explosion in Rafiah last month?
- How are we to find words for 251 people who were abducted to Gaza on October 7, of whom Kfir Bibas was the youngest at nine months and Iraqi-born and Farhud survivor Shlomo Mantzur the oldest at 85?
- How to find words for Agam Berger, Liri Elbag, Naama Levy and all the others who are still being held in the tunnels in Gaza?
- Words for the families of Carmel Gat, Eden Yerushalmi, Alex Lobanov, Ori Danino, Almog Sarousi and Hersch Goldberg-Polin, who were brutally murdered after months of imprisonment and starvation in a tunnel where they could not even stand upright?
- How can we find words for the survivors of the massacres, who are still severely traumatized today? Words for Shirel Golan, who survived the Nova Festival and took her own life last week on her 22nd birthday?

And:

- How can we find words for the thousands of dead children in Gaza? Words for four-year-old Omar Bilal al-Banna, who was playing outside his family's tent in Zeitoun, east of Gaza City, when he was killed by an airstrike?
- Words for five-year-old Hind Rajab, who was shot dead while fleeing Gaza City together with her 15-year-old cousin Layan Hamadeh and her uncle's family?
- Words for the 19-year-old Sha'ban Al-Dalou, who had just started studying and was burned to death in front of his family by the bombing of Al-Aksa Hospital?
- Words for Yousef Abu Jadallah, who worked as a doctor in Germany and died in an air raid together with his wife Ayah and their young children Salah al-din, Mohammad, Abdulrahman and Omar?

How are we to find words for the many people we do not name today, but who all have a name?

How are we to find words when the darkest hour is always followed by the next darkest hour?

We have good reason to struggle to find words for the deaths of so many innocent people and

for the fact that sometimes we just want to hide away in silence.

But in view of the many deaths, we must not remain silent,

In the face of great human suffering, we must find words.

- Words- in memory of all those who were murdered and are no longer here today.
- Words- for all those who survived.
- Words of responsibility for all those who come after us and to whom we will have to report.

We need words that allow us to mourn, to remember and at the same time to build a bridge to another tomorrow.

We need words that break the silence and allow us to talk to each other again.

We have just heard Tamar and Akram from the Revolution Orchestra singing a song together in Hebrew and Arabic entitled "I will speak to you".

The text begins with the words: "I will speak to you when you hide in your silence, pale with grief."

The walls of silence seem to protect us from this seemingly hostile world in which many of us now feel lonely.

- Lonely when there are so few of us at solidarity demonstrations that we know almost everyone standing with us.
- Lonely when there are more police officers guarding us than people supporting us.
- Lonely when Jewish parents report that they are afraid to send their children to schools.
- Lonely when students are afraid to go to their universities and acts of violence are followed by general explanations but no solidarity.
- Lonely when the growing antisemitic violence in Germany is explained by the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza.
- Lonely when anti-Muslim racism is justified with the terror of Hamas.
- Lonely when we are divided into camps not because of our beliefs, but because of our names, origins or religions.

In this loneliness we have built walls for ourselves,

Walls that protect our souls from violence,

but also walls that keep us trapped in pain.

Walls that sometimes no longer allow us to see that we may feel alone, but that we are not alone,

because when we look again,

there are quite a few of us who are standing up against violence and for a different tomorrow and

that this other tomorrow will come when we find a language and an eye for each other again.

When we look at how many thousands of people have stood up for each other in solidarity since October 7,

People who are also in this room today and who we want to honor today:

People like Hadar, whose organization Sunflowers has helped 800 children who have lost their parents since the start of the war.

People like Zeev, who does not cover up the pain with his art, but gives us other colors in addition to the many red colors of the rocket alarms.

People like Alona, Doron and Dita from Shomrim, who have set up an emergency fund to help traumatized journalists who documented the murders on site and are now receiving therapeutic support.

People like Lena, Nelly, Amal, Perry and Roy from the PowHer project, which ConAct supported, who brought Muslim, Druze, Christian, Jewish, Israeli, German and refugee women into conversation with each other.

People like Avraham and Anat from Sahi, who give hundreds of evacuated young people the feeling again that they are seen, that they matter, that each and every one of them can make a difference. And who have written their motto on these ribbons: namely that the greatest thing in the world is to do something good for another person.

And people like Nils, Diana, Vered, Salin and Roni from Link Bridge, who, despite the many barriers they encounter in their inclusion project, have created impressive works of art with the most important message of all at their core, namely that, despite all our differences, we are all first and foremost humans.

We received so many applications this year from so many different initiatives and people who are all working together and for each other.

This is the message of the Shimon Peres Prize, which we celebrate every year and especially in this difficult year:

Today we are celebrating our award winners and we are also celebrating the fact that we are not alone in our commitment to respectful coexistence.

We celebrate that we are many, for whom standing together and for each other are not *just empty* words.

We celebrate that each and every one of us, and all of us together, can bring these words to life through our actions,

that we can tear down the walls and break through the silence if we learn to see each other again in our pain, if we don't allow ourselves to be divided into camps and if we stick together.

On behalf of the entire Future Forum team, I would like to thank

- The patron of our prize, Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, Minister of State Tobias Lindner and the entire Unit 609, Carsten Wilms, Joel Polak and Matthias Wätjen for their commitment.
- I would like to thank the Governing Mayor Kai Wegner, Mayor Stefan Evers and the staff of the Senate Chancellery for their great hospitality.
- Thank you to the whole Peres family who come all the way from Israel every year, thank you Tsvia, Raphi, Joni and Sigal for your years of guidance and support and your wise counsel - without you the award would not be what it is.
- I would like to thank our Board of Trustees, our moderator Andrea Kiewel and the jury of the Simon Peres Prize.
- I would like to thank the entire Future Forum team for their great team spirit and commitment over the many difficult months of the last few years and especially Miriam, Daniel and Madlen, who have worked day and night to make this award ceremony possible.
- And last but not least, thank you all for coming here today.

Here today are representatives of all democratic parties, members of Israeli and German ministries as well as activists from so many different

German-Israeli projects, foundations, associations, organizations and human rights NGOs,

I would like to thank you all for your commitment and for always finding words and building bridges that will take us to another tomorrow.

Before I introduce you to Prof. Tsvia Walden, we would like to show you a video that Tsvia brought us:

It is the latest recording of a group that gathered people from all social groups and classes in Israel to sing together on the occasion of the anniversary of October 7.

They are amateur singers: including the injured, survivors, relatives of the murdered and families of hostages.

Together they have set to music the words sung by the great Naomi Shemer, which begin with the line "Out of the darkness we ask to rise and begin again".

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-P0Gnvk5Kmk>