

REMEMBERING SHIMON PERES

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, today I wish to honor the life and legacy of a dear friend, a great leader, a pioneer in his own right, someone I admire, and someone many of us have cheered on, President Shimon Peres. President Peres helped build Israel through hard work and tough diplomacy aimed at restarting peace talks, and championed Israel's security and prosperity until his last breath. A giant among statesmen and inspiration to so many, his passing marks an end of an era and is a great loss to Israel, the region, and the world; but his legacy lives on in his unwavering commitment to regional peace and in the future of the Jewish people where generations upon generations will build a better, safer, and more peaceful future.

Last night, we got the very sad news that President Peres passed away after suffering a stroke 2 weeks ago, and I want to come to the floor to speak about him.

We all know the biography. Born in Poland, he grew up in Tel Aviv and spent some time studying in the United States, including at Harvard University and New School for Social Research in New York. Since the mid-20th century, President Peres committed his life to advancing peace and reconciliation in the Middle East and addressing security issues that faced the region. He became the Director General of Israel's Ministry of Defense at the age of 29 and had an impressive political career that spanned seven decades, which included two terms as Prime Minister and one as President. He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994 for his role in negotiating the Oslo accords, along with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. President Obama awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2012. A further testament to his hard work, commitment to his country, and legacy, he continued to engage on matters of importance to Israel after leaving public office in 2014.

I have known and observed President Peres for a long time, in particular, during my almost 40 years in Congress, and I can say that we have much to celebrate in him, starting with one of the greatest achievements of the 20th century—the founding of the modern State of Israel, which followed the most incomprehensible and evil event of the 20th century, when the Nazis, with the complicity of so many others, sought to exterminate a people. Peres, along with survivors of the Holocaust, helped to build modern Israel, and as a result, never again will the Jewish people be dependent on anyone else for their security.

I met with then-President Peres on my last trip to Israel in 2012, and, as with every engagement we have had, I was reminded of his strong commitment to regional peace that I believe changed the course of Israel's history in so many areas—defense, the occupation of the West Bank, the economy,

and the peace process itself. Now, I have been a longtime friend and supporter of Israel, and I also have had the great honor in my years in the Senate to be on the committee that provided billions in foreign assistance and missile defense to Israel and ensured Israel had the resources it needed while enforcing current and potential future sanctions against Iran. So I have been a close observer of Israel and seen Peres up close and personal.

What I can say about him is that, in our conversations, I told him my support for Israel is unabashed and unwavering and that I will continue to be a voice for Israel and a vote for Israel in the U.S. Senate. I said the United States will always stand by Israel since we are bound together by our common values, by history, and by our shared national interests. I said that support for Israel must be unflinching and unflagging and that the United States will continue to make sure that Israel maintains its qualitative edge—the ability to counter and defeat any military threat. We have had good conversations over the years, so I could not be more emphatic when I say that his legacy, along with his status as the last surviving member of Israel's founding generation which we cannot ignore, puts him in his own category among Israel's most iconic political figures.

Israel has had to endure many wars and live in constant readiness for battle under the constant threat of terrorism; yet the people of Israel have remained strong and resolute, a testament to the legacy of Shimon Peres.

Today we honor the life and legacy of our friend Shimon Peres, and all friends of Peres and Israel should recommit ourselves to ensuring the survivability and viability of the State of Israel, now and forever. I will miss my dear friend, but look forward to a future of peace, prosperity, and friendship that will live on.

MONTREAL PROTOCOL 28TH MEETING OF PARTIES

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, today I wish to express my support for a successful 28th meeting of parties to the 1989 Montreal Protocol on substances that deplete the ozone layer, scheduled to take place next month in Kigali, Rwanda. The 28th meeting of parties, commonly referred to as MOP28, is undertaking the incredibly important task of reaching an agreement on an amendment to the Montreal Protocol to phase down the worldwide production and application of hydrofluorocarbons, HFCs, which are incredibly potent, short-lived, greenhouse gases most commonly used as refrigerants in air conditioners and for cold storage. Phasing down HFCs is a critically important step towards realizing the enhanced ambition goals of the Paris Agreement to limit the rise in global average temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

I fully support MOP28's aims of reaching an agreement that is high on ambition and expeditious in its timeline. There is no time to lose if we, as a global community, are to act successfully to stem the causes of the Earth's rapidly changing climate system.

Prior to the Montreal Protocol's implementation, the Earth's ozone, O₃, the thin layer of concentrated O₃ in our atmosphere responsible for regulating the intensity of the Sun's penetrating ultraviolet, UV, light, had developed massive holes near the Earth's poles and had worn dangerously thin around most of the world. A diminished ozone layer poses serious threats to human health by proliferating skin diseases from overexposure to UV light, seriously harms global crop yields and agricultural production, and hastens the useful life of a variety of plastic materials utilized in a variety of outdoor applications.

The Montreal Protocol's incremental approach to phasing out harmful ozone depleting substances, ODSs, is a testament to how inclusive and transparent approaches to multilateral environmental agreements that incorporate constructive inputs from affected industries and the scientific community can achieve positive environmental results. Starting with the phase out of chlorofluorocarbons, CFCs, the worst-of-the-worst ozone depleting substances, followed by the phase out of hydrochlorofluorocarbons, HCFCs, these agreements have the Earth's ozone on track to be fully recovered by 2065.

Hydrofluorocarbons, HFCs, are the chemical refrigerant alternative that replaced HCFCs and CFCs. Unfortunately, HFCs are extreme greenhouse gases. Some HFCs are 4,000 times more potent greenhouse gases than carbon dioxide. The fairly recent expansion of mass production and worldwide use of HFCs, post-HCFC and CFC elimination, are believed to have significantly contributed to the recent worsening of the global climate crisis.

While the Montreal Protocol is designed to address ODSs, not climate change, the decision was made at the Montreal Protocol's 27th meeting of parties in Dubai that the Montreal Protocol provides an effective mechanism to address this family of chemicals effectively.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, EPA, "HFC use and emissions are rapidly increasing as a result of the phase out of ozone-depleting substances (ODS) and growing global demand for air conditioning and refrigeration. The continued emissions of HFCs—primarily as alternatives to ODS and as byproduct emissions of HFC-23—are having an immediate and significant effect on the Earth's climate system. Without further controls, HFC emissions could largely negate the climate benefits achieved under the Montreal Protocol."

The United States has demonstrated exceptional leadership with respect to

phasing down HFCs on all fronts. U.S. chemical producers and the refrigeration manufacturing sector have led the world in developing safe, effective, and commercially viable refrigeration chemical alternatives, namely hydrofluoroolefin, HFO, and hydrocarbon, HC; refrigerants, that neither pose significant threats to the ozone nor the climate crisis. In addition to making these technological advances, the industry has helped bring countries to the table and fully supports adopting an ambitious HFC amendment to the Montreal Protocol in Kigali.

The U.S. is taking bold domestic political action to promote a significant reduction in the use of HFCs in the marketplace by promulgating some of the world's most ambitious domestic HFC abatement policies. This action provides the U.S.'s delegation to the Montreal Protocol with a strong footing to lead by example when it comes to advancing an ambitious agreement to phase down HFCs globally as quickly as possible.

The United States and our North American neighbors Mexico and Canada have put forward one of the most ambitious HFC amendment proposals for consideration at MOP28. Moreover, our amendment has broad support from developing and developed countries on every continent. According to the State Department, more than 120 parties to the Montreal Protocol have expressed support for the policy concepts in the North American amendment proposal.

I want to congratulate the hard-working diplomats, negotiators, and policy experts at the U.S. State Department, the Commerce Department, and the EPA who have masterfully developed and rallied support for an ambitious proposal. While I am confident a deal on a new and effective HFC amendment to the Montreal Protocol is within reach, there is certainly still some diplomacy necessary with some very important parties to the Montreal Protocol, and I encourage our delegation to continue working with these parties in Kigali.

Phasing down the global presence of HFCs is the low-hanging fruit in the global effort to combat climate change. If we are going to be successful in achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement, we need to do the easy things first. So let's act fast and effectively to get potent HFC greenhouse gas reductions as soon as possible. These are noncontroversial steps we can take to abate climate change that should absolutely have bipartisan support from Congress.

Thank you.

ENSURING JUSTICE FOR DISAPPEARED PEOPLES IN MEXICO

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, today I wish to observe the second anniversary of the forced disappearance of 43 students in the Mexican state of Guerrero, a tragedy that continues to haunt the

students' families and friends. I also rise to speak to the endemic challenges posed by cases of missing and disappeared persons across Mexico and to appeal to President Pena Nieto and Mexico's political leaders to be more responsive and transparent on this critical issue.

On the evening of September 26, 2014, in a series of events that the New York Times has characterized as a "night of terror," local police from the town of Iguala turned their weapons on the civilian population and colluded with the criminal organization known as the Guerreros Unidos to target and terrorize students from the Escuela Normal Rural Raul Isidro Burgos, which is a teachers' college. By the end of that night, 6 people were killed, 25 were injured, and 43 students were forcibly "disappeared" in a tragic story that has echoed around the globe.

As links between the U.S. and Mexico abound and given the more than 33 million Mexican-Americans and Mexicans residing in the United States, the disappearance of the 43 students has been felt deeply throughout our country.

Whether it is in California, Texas, Arizona, Illinois, New York or Maryland, almost all of our States are home to large, dynamic Mexican-American communities that remain in contact with friends and families throughout Mexico. Many of our constituents have direct and personal ties to the tragedy that took place in Iguala and the broader crisis of unresolved disappearances in Mexico.

In the 2 years since the disappearance of the 43 students, it is important to recognize that there have been critical advances in the investigations. Moreover, I want to recognize the Government of Mexico's decision to work with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, IACHR, to create an Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts, GIEI—by its initials in Spanish—which has provided invaluable technical assistance for the investigation, as well as key recommendations to strengthen ongoing investigative efforts.

It is imperative to note, however, that the GIEI faced repeated obstacles such as restricted access to key documents and individuals and found significant inconsistencies in the Mexican Government's investigation, including incidents of mishandled evidence.

It is also important to note that the experts found evidence which indicates that members of the federal and state police may have joined the local police in colluding with the criminal organizations involved in the disappearance of the students. In addition, members of the Mexican Army's 27th Battalion were discovered to have been at the scene of the crime and closely involved in the fatal events of that night. And we cannot overlook the fact that 2 full years after the students' disappearance, there has not been a single criminal conviction in the case.

For these reasons, I urge President Pena Nieto and his administration to

take all necessary steps to make operational a special follow-up mechanism for the investigation the IACHR established in July. This follow-up mechanism will include two IACHR-appointed advisors responsible for working with Mexican authorities and monitoring further action on the group of experts' recommendations.

Continued progress on this case is critical. My staff has met directly with the families of the 43 students, and we cannot let their call for justice end in impunity. So whether it includes pursuing new leads, discarding flawed theories, granting broader access to case files, or removing officials who have obstructed the investigation, I appeal to President Pena Nieto and his administration to ensure that the investigation has the full political backing and sufficient resources to achieve the needed results.

I also want to speak to how the case of the 43 students is representative of the endemic challenge of missing and disappeared peoples across Mexico. According to its own statistics, since 2007, the Mexican Government has documented more than 28,000 cases of missing and disappeared people. In fact, in the months after the students' disappearance, as investigators and families of disappeared persons fanned out across Guerrero state, they encountered numerous mass graves of victims of unknown crimes and carnage. So the resolution of this case is particularly symbolic as it would give hope to the thousands of Mexican families who have relatives who have disappeared.

I want to recognize President Pena Nieto's decision to submit draft legislation last December for a general law to prevent and punish the crime of disappearances, which would establish obligations for federal, state, and local authorities and improve coordination across jurisdictions. I appeal to members of the Mexican Senate and Chamber of Deputies to pass this important legislation. By prioritizing this issue and providing increased budgetary, forensic, and technological resources, Mexican authorities can ensure justice for the tens of thousands of Mexican families who have suffered the disappearance of a friend or loved one.

Finally, I want to call upon the State Department and our Embassy in Mexico City to use their diplomatic discussions with the Mexican Government to offer all relevant assistance and to underscore the importance of learning the truth about the disappearance of the 43 students and the broader issue of missing and disappeared people. We must stand ready to support our Mexican partners as they pursue justice in these critical cases, which have touched the lives of too many Mexicans and, in turn, our constituents here in the United States.