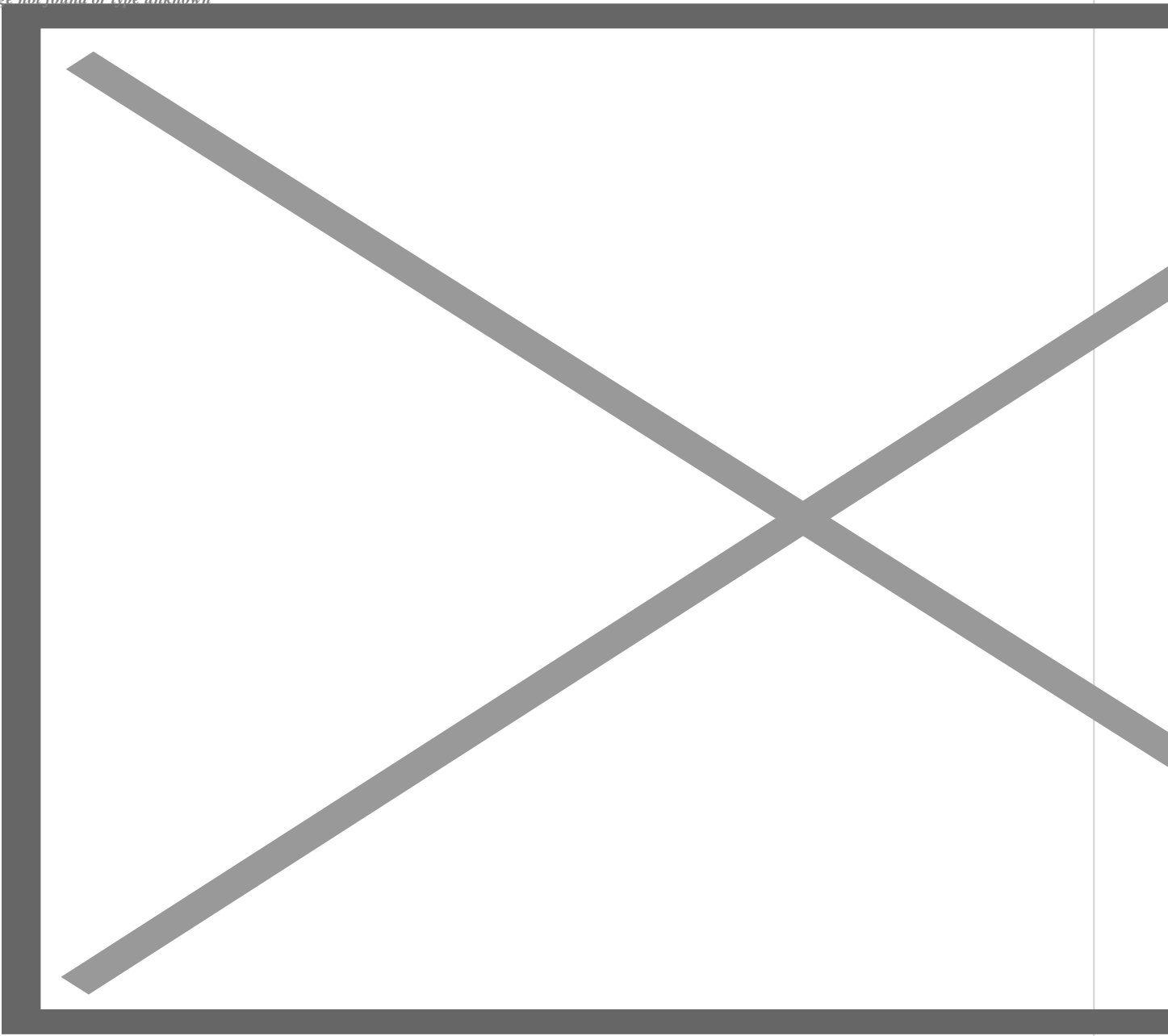


Memorial service held for Saeb Erekat in Ramallah

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Palestinian officials bid their last farewell to late chief negotiator Saeb Erekat as his coffin rests at the courtyard of the Palestinian Presidential Complex in Ramallah. (Photo: Palestinian news agency Wafa)

Ramallah, November 11 (RHC)-- An official memorial service has been held for senior Palestinian official and long-time peace negotiator, Saeb Erekat, in the West Bank city of Ramallah, a day after the veteran politician passed away.

President Mahmoud Abbas took part in the ceremony held on Wednesday at the Palestinian Presidential Complex, commonly known by the Arabic word Muqata'a.

Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh, members of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Central Committee of Fatah movement, as well as members of his family were in attendance.

During the ceremony, the officials watched as two soldiers laid a wreath over the coffin draped in the Palestinian flag, while Palestine's national anthem was playing.

Erekat's funeral convoy then departed the presidential compound and drove to his hometown Ariha (Jericho), where his body was carried in procession to a town mosque for prayers.

The Palestinian president has declared a three-day period of mourning for Erekat's death, with flags flown at half-staff. "The departure of our brother and friend, the great fighter, Dr. Saeb Erekat, represents a huge loss for Palestine and our people, and we feel deeply saddened by his passing, especially in light of these difficult circumstances facing the Palestinian cause," Abbas said on Tuesday in a statement.

Erekat, who passionately advocated the establishment of an independent Palestinian state as a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, died at the age of 65 on Tuesday at a hospital in occupied Jerusalem al-Quds. His death was attributed to COVID-19.

He was admitted in critical condition with coronavirus on October 18, and required immediate ventilation.

Erekat's funeral procession coincides with the 16th death anniversary of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, who died in Paris on November 11, 2004 and was flown back to Ramallah for burial. As the chief negotiator for the Palestinians, Erekat was a confidant of Arafat and his successor, President Mahmoud Abbas.

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