

60th ANNIVERSARY OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL

House of Representatives
Australian Parliament
12 March 2008

Mr RUDD (Griffith – Prime Minister) (11.58 am) –
by leave – I move:

That the House:

- (1) celebrate and commend the achievements of the State of Israel in the 60 years since its inception;
- (2) remember with pride and honour the important role which Australia played in the establishment of the State of Israel as both a member state of the United Nations and as an influential voice in the introduction of Resolution 181 which facilitated Israel's statehood, and as the country which proudly became the first to cast a vote in support of Israel's creation;
- (3) acknowledge the unique relationship which exists between Australia and Israel; a bond highlighted by our commitment to the rights and liberty of our citizens and encouragement of cultural diversity;
- (4) commend the State of Israel's commitment to democracy, the Rule of Law and pluralism;
- (5) reiterate Australia's commitment to Israel's right to exist and our ongoing support to the peaceful establishment of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian issue;

(6) reiterate Australia's commitment to the pursuit of peace and stability throughout the Middle East;

(7) on this, the 60th Anniversary of Independence of the State of Israel, pledge our friendship, commitment and enduring support to the people of Israel as we celebrate this important occasion together.

Today the parliament of Australia notes the occasion of this year, being the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the state of Israel. The story of the establishment of the state of Israel begins with the unimaginable tragedy of the Holocaust. At the Holocaust memorial at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem the words of the Australian delegate to the 1938 Evian Conference are recorded. He said that Australia could not encourage refugee immigration because, 'as we have no real racial problem, we are not desirous of importing one'. Thankfully, later in 1938 the Australian government took the decision to admit 15,000 Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany. But by the time the war began only 6,500 had reached Australia.

By war's end, six million Jews had been murdered. By war's end, the international community finally began to look again in earnest at the question of a homeland for the Jewish people. Australia is proud to have played a significant part in the international process that led to the foundation of the state of Israel. Australia's then Minister for External Affairs, Dr Evatt, was part of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine, which recommended in August 1947 the termination of the Mandate for Palestine. And he was chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee meeting on the Palestinian Question that proposed the partition of Palestine. He strongly believed that the fundamental right of self-determination for the Jewish people and for Palestinians could only be achieved by each having their own state. The resolution that the United Nations adopted in November 1947 reflected that. It proposed the establishment of two independent states – one Arab and one Jewish. And Australia was the first state in the historic vote of the international community on that resolution to cast its vote in support of the modern state of Israel. On 14 May 1948 David Ben-Gurion declared the foundation of the modern state of Israel.

Prime Minister Ben Chifley, too, was closely involved in Australia's policy towards Israel. In June 1948 he reinforced Evatt's strong support for a two state solution when he cabled British Prime Minister Clement Attlee and urged early recognition of Israel, saying that:

Such [a] declaration would properly indicate willingness to agree in principle to the recognition of the Provisional Government of Israel, and at the same time willingness to recognise de facto the Arab authorities in actual control of Arab Sections of Palestine.

On 29 January 1949 he announced that Australia would become one of the first countries to recognise the new state of Israel, describing it as 'a force of special value in the world community'. As President of the General Assembly 'Doc' Evatt then presided over the historic May 1949 vote admitting Israel as the 59th member of the United Nations. On 11 May 1949 the Chifley Labor government opened an embassy in Tel Aviv. Evatt later said that, when working on the question of Israel, he wanted to ensure that the 'new State of Israel, whose people had in the past done so much for humanity, would be welcomed, not merely formally but with good heart and good conscience' into the international community.

The 60 years since the establishment of Israel have been full of challenges and full of trials. Similarly, the process for the emergence of a Palestinian state has come along a torturous path. There has been too much bloodshed. But over those 60 years there has also been cause for hope.

We think today of Prime Minister Menachem Begin standing with President Jimmy Carter and Egypt's President Anwar Sadat, at the White House on March 26 1979 at the signing of the Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty that followed from the Camp David Accords. Prime Minister Begin used both the Hebrew and Arabic words for peace when he urged: 'No more war, no more bloodshed, no more bereavement. Peace unto you. Shalom, salaam, forever.' We can think, too, of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, shaking hands with his

lifelong enemy Yasser Arafat on the lawns of the White House on September 13 1993, saying:

We, the soldiers who have returned from battles stained with blood; we who have seen our relatives and friends killed before our eyes; we who have attended their funerals and cannot look in the eyes of their parents; we who have come from a land where parents bury their children; we who have fought against you, the Palestinians—we say to you, in a loud and clear voice, enough of blood and tears. Enough!

All peoples of goodwill yearn for that vision to be realised. It has not been realised yet. To borrow again from former Yitzhak Rabin, a man who tragically paid the ultimate price while pursuing peace 'The risks of peace are preferable by far to the grim certainties of war'.

We firmly believe the establishment of an independent and economically viable Palestinian state must remain a key objective in the Middle East peace process. This is important for the future. It was important in the vision of 1947. It remains the vision today, just as our objective must be for Israel to exist within secure and internationally recognised boundaries.

Today, we in Australia support the ongoing negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority towards a final status agreement by the end of 2008, as launched at the Annapolis Conference in November last year. To support the establishment of a viable and sustainable Palestinian state Australia pledged a \$45 million assistance package at the donors conference for the Palestinian territories in Paris on 18 December. Australia remains, as we have in the past, committed to an effective two-state solution.

Over the past 60 years Israel has preserved its robust parliamentary democracy and has built a vibrant society and economy. If anyone wants a dictionary definition of the term 'robust' they should spend an afternoon in the Israeli Knesset. That is where you see the definition of 'robust' at work. By contrast we are a pack of pussycats in here!

Over the past 60 years governments from both sides of politics in Australia have supported our strong relationship with Israel. That relationship is strong and it is deep—and it will remain so. Because we are both democracies, as democracies sometimes we will agree and sometimes we will disagree. That is in the nature of strong relationships. But the underlying friendship between us does not alter.

Australia offers our congratulations to the government and people of Israel on this the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the modern Israeli state. We acknowledge our special history and relationship and we look forward to its continued strength and development into the future.

I commend this motion to the House.

Dr NELSON (Bradfield – Leader of the Opposition)
(12.06 pm) –

I rise on behalf of the alternative government to provide our very strong support for this motion and to support the remarks on the historical circumstances of the development of the state of Israel, the role that Australia played in that, the relationship between our two countries, the initiatives that are being taken by the current Australian government and indeed those taken by the most recent government to further the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians.

Jewish identity over the last 100 years has been shaped by three things. The first is anti-Semitism, which remains a virulent and repugnant force still in far too many parts of the world and in the dark recesses of some people's hearts. The second is the holocaust, which saw the systematic extermination of more than six million Jews through the course of the Second World War. The third is the continued threats to the very existence of the state of Israel, which is constantly embattled and, every single day, every week and every year, needs to struggle to defend its very existence.

In a region of the world that is characterised more by theocracies and autocracies, the state of Israel is the custodian of the most fragile yet powerful of human emotions, and that is hopeful belief in the freedom of man, freedom of speech, freedom of religion and freedom of assembly. There are many things for which Israel stands and which characterise the modern state of Israel, but included amongst them is the celebration of knowledge for its own sake and knowledge as the driver of economic development and emancipation from human poverty. Israel also stands for personal independence, a free parliament and an independent judiciary. It is a nation where Christians, Baha'is, Muslims and Arabs enjoy equal rights. Israel, like all democracies, is far from perfect, but it is, in every sense of the word, on the front line of the struggle for the things that we hold dear, not only as Australians and free people but as human beings. And it is far too frequently on the front line of the struggle against all the things that are repugnant to universal human ideals.

On 14 May 1948, the day that the British mandate expired, the Jewish People's Council gathered at Tel Aviv Museum and approved the Declaration of Independence of the State of Israel. It read, in part:

THE STATE OF ISRAEL will be open for Jewish immigration and for the Ingathering of the Exiles; it will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Israel is home to many things that are spiritual, but it is home in the end to the human spirit of resilience, of confidence, of determination and of respect for one another irrespective of political, religious or other affiliations. It is a land that boasts many ancient buildings, but its people are firmly focused on building the future. That it is difficult to achieve a peaceful resolution to the tensions surrounding Israel's

existence should only strengthen our resolve to reach out not only to Israel but also to Palestinians of good heart who genuinely seek and should achieve a two-state solution. No Australian who believes in the dignity of man, in freedom and in democratic principles should ever, through neglectful indifference, allow Israel to be a stranger. To do so would be to diminish ourselves and our own true security.

To any Australian who has not done so already and who has the privilege and the opportunity to visit Washington: I urge you to visit the Holocaust Memorial Museum. There is a very large sign out the front of the museum that says: 'Never forget what you have seen here'. There are piles of shoes that were worn by Jews exterminated, photographs of men and women and children looking out into lives that were never lived, and many other things to remind us of why our relationship with Israel and our respect for the Israeli cause and the two-state solution is so important to our own beliefs, our own values and ultimately our own freedoms and security. Shabbat shalom forever.

Question agreed to.

Hansard Reference

<http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard/rep/latesthansard/rhansard.pdf>