

SPEECH OF RICHARD BALKIN
PRESIDENT, ZIONIST COUNCIL OF NSW
AT ISRAEL INDEPENDENCE DAY, 19 MAY 2011

Ladies & Gentlemen,

On behalf of the ZC of NSW it gives me great pleasure to thank Premier Barry O'Farrell for his kind words of support for the State of Israel as she celebrates her 63rd birthday.

It is especially heartening in view of the pressure that the State of Israel finds itself under now.

Hamas and Fatah sign a treaty; Iran continues with its nuclear weapons programme; Egypt talks of opening its border with Gaza; Hezbollah completely rearms in Lebanon under the nose of the UN; Gilad Shalit is held in captivity for the fifth year now without access to even the Red Cross; but the international pressure for Israel to negotiate and maybe even capitulate continues relentlessly.

However, while all this goes on, Israel continues to build its hi-tech industry (second only to the U.S.); continues with its world-leading medical & scientific research; continues with developing its military power and continues to amaze us with what it has achieved in the 63 years since 1948.

The ZCNSW reiterates that despite this pressure, the State of Israel remains committed to a lasting peace with its neighbours and assures the people of NSW of the government of Israel's honesty and integrity as it pursues the peace process.

It now gives me great pleasure on behalf of the ZCNSW and the Jewish BOD to introduce a man who needs no introduction – Ladies and Gentlemen – His Excellency, Yuval Rotem, Ambassador of the State of Israel.