

61ST ANNIVERSARY OF ISRAEL'S INDEPENDENCE

7 MAY 2009

President's speech

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies

And our co-hosts this evening:

- Frank Levy AM, President of the State Zionist Council of NSW
- Robert Goot AM S.C., President of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry
- Dr Ron Weiser, representing the President of the Zionist Federation of Australia, and

I welcome each and all of you, to this celebration of Israel's 61st Independence Day.

We are honoured by the attendance of our special guests

- the Honourable Nathan Rees MP, Premier of NSW & Minister for the Arts, and
- his Excellency Yuval Rotem the Ambassador for the State of Israel.

And may I welcome also other dignitaries present with us this evening:

- The Hon Justine Elliott MP, Federal Minister for Ageing;
- Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells, representing The Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP, Federal Leader of the Opposition;

- The Hon Eric Roozendaal MLC, Treasurer;
- The Hon Michael Daly MP, Minister for Roads;
- The Hon John Robertson MLC, Minister for Corrective Services, Minister for Public Sector Reform, Special Minister of State;
- Barry O'Farrell MP, Leader of the State Opposition, Shadow Minister for Western Sydney
- Other members of the Federal and New South Wales Parliaments
- Other representatives of Political Parties

- Consuls General, Honorary Consuls General, Consuls, Vice-Consuls and other diplomatic representatives who have honoured us by their attendance

- Justices of the Federal Court of Australia, the Supreme Court of NSW, and other members of the judiciary

- Distinguished leaders and representatives of
 - Local Government

- the Federal and NSW Police
 - Government Departments
 - Academic and Educational Institutions
 - Indigenous Australians
 - Our Partners of other faiths, ethnic communities, cultures and traditions
 - Trade Unions
 - Welfare Organisations and service clubs
 - Business and industry
 - Arts and Culture and
 - the Media
- learned Rabbis and leaders and members of the NSW Jewish community

We value our relationships with all of you.

On this day, when we celebrate the return of the Jewish people to their ancestral homeland, we also gratefully acknowledge, and pay respect, to the elders and people, past and present, of the Gadigal Clan of the Eora Nation, traditional owners of the land on which we gather this evening, and which, with other lands of the First Australians, has afforded our community refuge and a home.

Last week 70 Australian trees were planted in Jerusalem to honour an Aboriginal Australian, William Cooper.

Our community will always remember that on 6 December 1938, less than a month after the Reichspogrom or Kristalnacht, William Cooper, then aged 77, led a delegation from the Australian Aborigines League - which he founded - to the German consulate in Melbourne, carrying a petition calling for an end to the "cruel persecution" of the Jewish people by Nazi Germany.

That act of protest and moral courage took place at a time when Australia's Jewish population was less than 30,000 and 29 years before Australia's indigenous people would be recognized as citizens in their own homeland. It contributed to a relationship of mutual respect that was to widen and deepen and that eventually saw Jewish leaders, lawyers and politicians playing leading roles in the fight for Aboriginal land rights and national reconciliation.

Relationships matter.

Our CEO, Vic Alhadeff, and I returned from Washington this morning.

- **While there we heard a major address by the President of Israel, Shimon Peres, who had come to meet President Obama, and another, by live satellite link, from Benjamin Netanyahu, the new Prime Minister of Israel, who will be meeting President Obama in the near future.**

- **Both unequivocally reaffirmed** Israel's strong desire for peace with all its neighbours and especially with the Palestinians and that it will pursue a triple track towards peace with the Palestinians and fulfilment of their right to self-determination -
 - **a political track**, including the resumption of peace negotiations without delay and without preconditions
 - **a security track**, continuing to support the program led by General Dayton in cooperation with Jordan and the Palestine Authority, to strengthen the security apparatus of the Palestinians and
 - **an economic track**, not as a substitute for political negotiations but as a boost to them, to remove as many obstacles as possible to development of the Palestinian economy, to create jobs, career paths, more relationships between the two economies and a future of hope for Palestinian youngsters and their families.

Relationships matter.

And the true test of relationships is when the going gets rough. Recent months have seen a truly alarming worldwide increase in antisemitic attacks and criticism of Israel - despite the informed statement of an independent observer, British Colonel Richard Kemp, a former military adviser to the British Cabinet, that never in the history of warfare had an army gone to such extraordinary lengths to minimise casualties as the Israel Defence Force did during the Gaza operation.

But the relationship and friendship that exists between Australia and Israel is woven into the history of both countries. It has withstood the test of time and will continue to do so, despite the increasing pressures and challenges that face all democracies.

The State of New South Wales is a key part of that deeply valued relationship, and we are honoured to have the Premier of NSW address us on this auspicious occasion.

Nathan Rees' first trip abroad as a Minister was on a trade mission to Israel in 2007 with the Australia-Israel Chamber of Commerce when he was Minister for Water Utilities,

- he was able to see first hand Israeli innovation in water recycling, desalination and water technologies - important also for NSW and Australia.
- he also visited Be're-Sheva on the exact 90th anniversary of the charge by 800 men of the 4th Australian Light Horse Brigade that overran entrenched Turko-German defences. The Australians' remarkable and decisive victory created a legend and changed the history of the Middle East, hastening the end of Ottoman Rule and the beginning of the British Mandate in Palestine, events that led in turn to the reestablishment of Israel as a Jewish state.

Please join me in welcoming the Honourable Nathan Rees, Premier of NSW, who will now address us.