

WELCOME TO THE PRIME MINISTER BY ROBIN MARGO S.C. – 3 DECEMBER 2009

The Honourable Kevin Rudd MP, Prime Minister of Australia

The Deputy Prime Minister of Israel, Mr Silvan Shalom MK,

His Excellency the Israeli Ambassador, Mr Yuval Rotem

The Honourable Tony Abbott MP, Leader of the Opposition

Honourable Ministers and Members of the Australian Parliament, the Knesset and the Parliament of New South Wales

Mr Robert Goot, President of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry

Mr Albert Dadon, Founder and Chairman of the Australia-Israel Cultural Exchange and Leadership Forum

Mr Mark Lennon, Secretary of Unions NSW

Communal Leaders

Other Distinguished Guests

Mr Prime Minister, I welcome you to Sydney today, as a delegate to the Leadership Forum and on behalf of the Jewish community of New South Wales.

The NSW Jewish Board of Deputies is the elected representative roof body of the Jewish community in this State, with 63 communal organisations as its constituents. It is financed by the community through the Jewish Communal Appeal and, in addition to the Australia-Israel Cultural Exchange, works closely with:

- the United Israel Appeal
- the Jewish National Fund
- the State Zionist Council and Zionist Federation of Australia
- the Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council

- and our colleagues in other States and the ACT.

We are also a foundation member of the Sydney Alliance, a coalition of unions and religious, community and other civil organisations that is seeking to build enduring cross-cultural relationships and to promote fairness and social inclusion in the Sydney region.

Among the many achievements of your Government, Mr Prime Minister, what has resonated for us has been your encouragement of bipartisan support on matters of deep conscience and of great national and international importance.

Time permits only one illustration, but it is apt for today's gathering. I refer to the bipartisan motion of Apology to the First Australians, for their past mistreatment and for the laws and policies that inflicted on them such profound grief, suffering and loss.

We Jews know too well the silence that follows atrocity but your initiative, Mr Prime Minister, broke that silence and allowed men and women across the breadth of our country to enter into a state of feeling that made porous those membranes through which empathy passes, so that we could move, as far as it is given to each of us to do, into the pain of this ancient community, our fellow Australians.

As Jews, we have a deep understanding also of the importance to the First Australians of their connection with the land. Because we are a people united, not only by our religion, but also by our attachment to a holy land.

The Jewish passion for Israel - expressed in this and the last two centuries as Zionism - long pre-dates the Holocaust. It has its origin in the Torah, Judaism's most sacred book, and in our daily prayers.

Last Sunday, the 29th of November, we celebrated the anniversary of the 1947 United Nations partition resolution and, in the presence of his daughter and other members of his family, recalled with deep gratitude the key role that Dr Herbert

Vere Evatt played in drafting and securing the passage of that resolution, which envisaged the establishment of a Jewish State and an Arab State in Palestine, and was the progenitor in international law of what is today referred to as the two state solution, of the rebirth of the Jewish homeland as the modern State of Israel, and of Israel's admission as a full member state of the United Nations.

Those were not acts of reparation. They were an expression of the Wilsonian principle of self-determination, as a natural right of all nations, including both the Palestinians and the Jewish people. It is a right that all Australian governments have long recognised – through their principled support for a two state solution, to be negotiated and not imposed – as the only viable path to peaceful coexistence between Israel and a new state of Palestine.

We thank you, Mr Prime Minister, for your Government's principled adherence to that position, and we thank you for coming to Sydney today to address us.

Please welcome - the Prime Minister of Australia.