

62nd ANNIVERSARY OF ISRAEL'S INDEPENDENCE

12 MAY 2010

Notes of speech by the President of the NSW

Jewish Board of Deputies, Robin Margo S.C.

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies

And our co-hosts this evening:

- Robert Goot AM S.C., President of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry
- Philip Chester, President of the Zionist Federation of Australia, and
- Frank Levy AM, President of the State Zionist Council of NSW

I welcome each and all of you, to this celebration of Israel's 62nd Independence Day.

We are honoured by the attendance of our special guests

- The Honourable Kristina Keneally MP, Premier of NSW, Minister for Redfern Waterloo, and
- His Excellency Yuval Rotem the Ambassador of the State of Israel.

May I welcome also other dignitaries present with us this evening:

- The Hon Dr Mike Kelly, Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support, Water, NSW Federal Member for Eden –Monaro

- The Hon Eric Roozendaal MLC, Treasurer, Special Minister of State;
- The Hon Phillip Costa MP, Minister for Water, Minister for Corrective Services
- 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 of some twenty five countries 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.

I have spoken elsewhere of the close affinities that exist between Jewish people and the First Australians. A few short weeks ago, the Minister for Community Services, the Hon Linda Burney, launched the book *Hand in Hand*, an initiative of the Board of Deputies and its Social Justice Committee that details some of the many connections, initiatives and social justice projects that have brought Jewish and indigenous people together in Australia from 1937 to the present day, working for the common good.

Before coming to the dual purpose of this evening's gathering, may I mention two other coincidental anniversaries.

The first is that today happens to be Jerusalem Day, the anniversary of the day when the city was reunited and all faiths were guaranteed access to their holy sites.

The second is sadder. In a few weeks it will be 4 years since Gilad Shalit, then 19 years old, was seized on Israeli soil. He has since been held incommunicado as a hostage by Hamas in breach of the Geneva Conventions and all humanitarian norms. We join with many Parliaments and citizens here and throughout the world in calling for his release.

We gather this evening for two purposes:

- to celebrate Israel's 62nd anniversary and
- to honour an Australian citizen, a long time resident of New South Wales, with the highest honour the Jewish people, through the State of Israel, can bestow, for risking her life to save a fellow human being in the darkest days of the 20th Century.

Those purposes are distinct however because the establishment of the State of Israel was not, as some mistakenly think, the result of the Holocaust.

- Zionism, which gives expression to the Jewish people's aspiration for self-determination and statehood, existed long before the Holocaust. It has its origin in the Torah, Judaism's most sacred book, and in more than 3,000 years of Jewish history, not in the important, but superadded, political movement of the 19th and 20th centuries.
- To understand Zionism in historically inaccurate ways is to diminish the determination of the Jewish people through the ages to restore their homeland – not as a reparation, but as a right.

Recognition by the United Nations of the State of Israel was but one example among many in the 20th Century of the application of the Wilsonian principle of self-determination,

- a principle that found its way into international law and eventually into the United Nations Charter
- that was applied in the 20th Century to the creation of many new nation states, including Eire, the Philippines, India, Burma, and Ceylon and, in the Middle East, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen and
- that underpins the right of the Palestinians also to self-determination, hopefully to be realised in our day.

In the case of Israel, the right of the Jewish people to national self-determination in their historic homeland was specifically recognised in international law by the Mandate that was granted by the League of Nations to Britain in 1922, a whole generation before the Holocaust.

- Britain's authority to govern the country included an express obligation to help facilitate the establishment there of a national home for the Jewish people.
- The national home was painstakingly built by the efforts of the Jewish people themselves
- and it matured into sovereign statehood after the Second World War when it was recognized by the United Nations partition resolution and formal acceptance of Israel into the family of nations as a member State of the UN.

Ben Chifley, Australia's then Prime Minister, worked with Attlee in London and Truman in Washington to help build that great post-war consensus in support of the Jewish nation.

Dr Herbert Vere Evatt was responsible for steering the partition resolution through. And as president of the General Assembly in May 1949, he also presided over the historic vote that saw Israel admitted to the UN.

The relationship and friendship that exists between Australia and Israel is thus 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.

Our community is a small one in numbers but Jews have been here since the first Fleet and over the years Australia and New South Wales have given asylum and refuge to many Jews fleeing from persecution and discrimination in other, darker places.

People who have learned, at first hand, or through the direct experience of close relatives, what it means

- to live under circumstances of political oppression, social and religious discrimination and the fear of violence

- feel the deepest appreciation and gratitude every day of their lives for the privilege of living in a society like ours that
 - respects the rule of law and
 - that strives, however imperfectly from time to time, to uphold values of fairness, equality, non-discrimination on grounds of race, gender or belief, and respect for human rights.

Madam Premier,

- We appreciate the many ways in which your Government works closely with our community, and with other communities in our State, to strengthen the fabric of our society.
- You have been a friend of our community and an active member in Parliamentary Friends of Israel and we are honoured by your attendance on this auspicious occasion.

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