



SPEECH NOTES FOR PREMIER NATHAN REES, MP
ISRAEL'S 61st INDEPENDENCE DAY RECEPTION
THURSDAY, MAY 7, 2009

- Check against Delivery -

His Excellency Mr Yuval Rotem, Ambassador for Israel
Mr Robin Margo [President, NSW Jewish Board of Deputies]
Mr Frank Levy [President, State Zionist Council of NSW]
Mr Robert Goot [President, Executive Council of Australian Jewry]
Dr Ron Weiser, representing the President of the Zionist Federation
of Australia
Learned rabbis
Parliamentary colleagues
Members of the consular corps
Distinguished guests

I begin by acknowledging the Eora people as the traditional owners of this land.

And in acknowledging the rights and aspirations of the Australia's indigenous people, we cannot help but acknowledge the rights and aspirations of the Jewish people concerning Israel.

Because at the heart of their common struggle is land

the importance of land the centrality of the homeland in indigenous memory and in the consciousness and identity of the Jewish people.

This is my first opportunity as Premier to address you on Israel's Independence Day.

But I feel I'm no stranger to you or to Israel herself.

As a Minister I had the honour of leading an Australian water delegation to Israel in October 2007

and the week of our visit coincided with the 90th anniversary of the legendary charge of the Australian Light Horse Infantry Brigade at Be'er Sheva.

It is a place of extraordinary significance to Australia and Israel alike

a place where the actions of Australian troops in a breathtaking feat of arms became part of an historical chain of events that was to lead, many years later, to the formation of the Israeli state.

Everywhere during my visit I saw an abundance of history

in Jerusalem, at the Sea of Galilee, in the Jordan Valley, the Dead Sea among the astonishing ruins of Herod the Great's fortified palace in the sky at Masada.

I saw wonderful evidence of Israel's skills in water conservation.

Water shortages have always been a fact of life in one of the world's most arid regions.

I discovered that 75 p.c. of all water used in Israel is recycled

a remarkable achievement in a country renowned for its innovative technologies in using water efficiently.

But even more impressive was the almost palpable spirit of resilience I sensed in the Israeli people.

And that, friends, remains my most lasting impression of Israel

a nation of admirable resilience in the face of enormous odds.

Of course much has changed in the 61 years since the State of Israel was born.

The Israel we honour today is not the same country she was in 1948.

Populations change governments change realities change.

While Israel remains the Jewish homeland ... nearly 30 percent of her population are not Jews.

Many are Arabs Palestinians.

And that diversity is part of her strength as a thriving democracy, unique in her region.

Her 7.4 million people living a nation one-third the size of Tasmania include 5.6 million Jews, 1.5 million Arabs and some 1.3 million people who are neither Jew nor Arab

She is a nation almost as multicultural as Australia.

I also learned that there have been Arab members of the Israeli Parliament elected to every *Knesset* since the founding of the State of Israel.

And more 70 percent of today's Israelis are native-born or, in the little Hebrew I have picked up, "Sabras".

Australians recall with pride that an Australian government the Labor Government of Chifley and Evatt had an important role to play in this great story of achievement.

Under the chairmanship of Dr Evatt, a UN committee drafted the partition resolution proposing the formation of a Jewish state with an

Arab state in Palestine.

It was the progenitor of the so-called two-state solution and underpins the Road Map path to peace.

Dr Evatt worked with the close and considered advice of the late Professor Julius Stone, a hero of the NSW Jewish community.

And my friends that community continues to stand high in the estimation and affection of all Australians.

All of us recognise the Jewish community's reputation as benefactors in the fields of education and the arts as generous contributors to social causes, disaster relief and humanitarian aid.

Jewish men and women have been significant figures in our government and judicial structures for a long time.

Today that tradition is continued by the Chief Justice of NSW, Justice Jim Spigelman, and the New South Wales Treasurer, my colleague Eric Roozendaal.

In every field of endeavour the military, banking, business, education, science, industry and the professions members of the Jewish community have made their mark.

Jews came from around the world to lend their support to the

establishment of the new nation of Israel in 1948

much as Jews from many parts of the world came to Australia to contribute to the establishment of our own multicultural society in those same post-war years.

This year, my friends, we have something more to celebrate.

2009 marks the centenary of the founding of the city of Tel Aviv.

Tel Aviv is Israel's commercial hub much as this city is for Australia.

It expanded rapidly with massive waves of immigration in the 1920s and 30s.

Much of it is built around an urban plan prepared by a Scottish urban planner, Sir Patrick Geddes who presented his concept to the municipality in 1925.

His plan called for a clear separation between main streets, residential streets and pedestrian boulevards filled with trees and flowers.

An important element was the creation of shared public spaces in the form of parks and squares, and within residential blocks.

Few cities in the world can boast a livelier, more congenial, more

attractive urban environment.

Yet with so much to be proud of with so much to celebrate

there is a longing in the hearts of Israelis

a longing for peace

the freedom to live safely and peacefully within secure boundaries in harmony with her neighbours.

So while we celebrate the bonds between us and rejoice in Israel's unique story of success, resilience and survival

we must also unite behind her efforts and those of all other nations of goodwill to secure lasting peace and security for the future.

Peace won't come easily.

It never does.

It will require honesty, goodwill, realism, from all parties involved.

The New South Wales Government supports the bi-partisan position of Australian governments of both sides of politics in the diplomatic efforts to bring a just and negotiated peace to the Middle East.

Independence Day is a celebration not just for Israelis or the citizens of Tel Aviv.

It is a high point in the Jewish calendar all over the world.

By joining the Jewish community on this significant day, we continue a tradition set by my predecessors as Premiers a tradition I intend to continue.

This celebration marks the renewal of the Jewish state in the land of Israel, the birthplace of the Jewish people.

It is a celebration in which I am proud to participate.

I commend the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies and the State Zionist Council of NSW and the co-hosts, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry and the Zionist Federation of Australia, for bringing us together.

On behalf of the people of NSW, I salute the free and democratic state of Israel.

I salute her people with affection and respect and propose a toast to the President of the State of Israel.

L'Chaim!